

Practice Teaching Amidst the Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract— Practice teaching is an integral part of the teacher-education curriculum to prepare student-teachers to become full-fledged teachers. Through this, students-teachers experience becoming true teachers. Not only is this important in the teacher-education program because of the first-hand experiences it provides to student-teachers, but it is also an excellent opportunity for them to apply what they have learned regarding their profession and their field of specialization. This study aimed to determine what problems practice-teachers face in their practicum during the pandemic. Moreover, this study sought to determine what opportunities practice-teachers have achieved or seen in continuing their internship even though they are in the midst of a new normal caused by the pandemic. In the light of the findings obtained, the identified challenges were an amalgamation of teaching-related and personal-related challenges. Since the respondents had to adapt and adopt the learning delivery modality of the university, actual teaching experiences were limited only to almost three hours out of the prescribed 18-week practice teaching duration. Hence, their knowledge of teaching essentials, including lesson planning, students' discipline management, and students' differences, was not reinforced. Also, this pandemic intensified personal-inherent challenges like allowances and stress management.

Keywords—Teacher Education, Practice Teaching, Pandemic, Challenges, Opportunities

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is essential in nation-building. It is a solid foundation of development. However, the quality of education depends on teachers' professional competence [1]. More reliable curriculum and learning experiences are needed to develop competent teachers. Above all, student-teachers are required to undergo rigorous learning experiences such as practice teaching.

Practice teaching is an essential aspect of the teacher-education curriculum because it helps student-teachers learn to become full-fledged educators. Through this, students-teachers experience becoming true teachers. Not only is this important in the teacher-education program because of the first-hand experiences it provides to student-teachers, but it is also an excellent opportunity for them to apply what they have learned regarding their profession and their field of specialization. According to [2], the practicum provides a unique opportunity for students to learn about the natural environments, complexity, and difficulties that can obstruct school curriculum, knowledge formation, and skill growth.

Further, practice teaching is more of a process than a product. Albeit it is the final culmination of the skills and knowledge that student-teachers gained in their four years of training as future teachers, it is a process of further learning and deepening their knowledge and skills and

recognizing teaching as one of the noblest professions in the world. Here, student-teachers can demonstrate their mastery of the concepts and theories they have learned from their professional subjects and how they can be fully applied to the reality of teaching. Although this spans for few weeks to months, it is an excellent opportunity for practice-teaching supervisors to fully assess their practice-teachers' readiness to become trustworthy and competent teachers of the future.

Although there is ample time to prepare practice-teachers in this aspect of their learning, it remains a complex and challenging experience [3]. The advent of COVID-19 has made it even more difficult as it probed limitations and concerns. As a result, face-to-face classes were banned, and all educators were encouraged to embrace paradigm shifts. Although the concept of online distance learning is no longer new to education, its broader implementation remains new to everyone. Many are not aware of this as a learning delivery modality.

Adopting new learning delivery modalities that are, if not, or otherwise rarely taught in universities and colleges that offer teacher-education programs has posed a challenge for new breeds of teachers to undergo their practicum. The fears and apprehensions of how practice-teaching can be done now that the current education system has changed and that various community restrictions exist caused by the current pandemic are intensified. Hence, practice-teachers must be supported as much as possible [4].

This study aimed to uncover the challenges faced by practice-teachers in their practicum amid the pandemic. Moreover, this study sought to determine what opportunities practice-teachers have achieved or seen in continuing their internship even though they are in the midst of a new normal caused by the pandemic.

II. RELATED WORK

Education is one of the most important tools for human resource production. The number of educated people and the standard of education are important factors in a country's growth. In the long run, proper and high-quality education will contribute to poverty eradication, good government leadership, high-quality public health, and a more environmentally-friendly climate [5].

However, to realize this, it is necessary to ensure that the learning institutions have sufficient capacity to meet the demand for quality education, including competent, able, and skilled teachers. According to [1]), the need for professionally competent teachers needs to be recognized and addressed to move the country forward in the national educational objectives. Imperative for that action is developing and producing teachers by exposing them to rigorous and responsive learning and hands-on experiences as the practice-teaching. This is supported by [6], which claims that offering intensive, content-rich, and collegial learning opportunities will increase teaching and student learning.

As a result, teacher education organizations that promote teachers' well-designed and rich professional development can provide students with similarly comprehensive and engaging opportunities, which have been a cornerstone for student success in school and beyond [7]. A fundamental shift in teacher practice is needed to improve student learning both within and outside the classroom [8]. Further, professional growth is not simply exposing teachers to a concept in a one-time lecture, conference, or providing basic information about a teaching technique.

Meanwhile, some reports say that teacher education is in crisis around the world. This is attributed to several issues, including the quantity and consistency of applicants entering teacher education, attaining essential competencies, and student-teacher readiness for entry and retention in the profession. There is also a "theory-practice divide," which refers to the disconnect between the essence of teacher training programs and teachers' interactions as full-fledged professionals. It was concluded that new teachers are underprepared for the job and have concerns about their professional identity [9]. As a result, the practicum is an essential part of primary teacher education since it is in the classroom where the possibilities and limitations of the teachers' personality are first braved. The practicum not only improves teachers' experience and expertise in teaching, but it also teaches them life skills, including problem-solving independence, community work with coworkers, and improving optimistic attitudes about teaching and career values [10].

For the academic year 2020-2021, the Commission on Higher Education released an unnumbered memorandum on current normal policies and recommendations for the deployment of pre-service teachers for field research and teaching internship, with all these underlying concepts probing that practice teaching is indeed pivotal in developing more competent teachers. As stipulated in this memorandum, "TEIs are enjoined to implement the necessary modifications in the Teaching Internship and Field Study delivery given their context and available resources. Field Study and Teaching Internship programmes, on the other hand, must be experiential, incorporating a variety of new standard learning modalities, developmental by coaching and mentoring, and consistent with the Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) and the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs).

TEIs and Cooperating Schools shall follow the Student Internship Program provisions in the Philippines, as outlined in CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 104, series of 2017, as well as the Guidelines on the Required Health Standards in Basic Education Offices and Schools, as outlined in DepEd Order No. 014, series of 2020. This benefits students' health, ensures their learning and visibility and ensures their protection while on internship. The challenge now is to know the difficulties that practice-teachers face in their teaching practice under the new normal despite the efforts and policies put in place by CHED and by various universities and colleges. The study expands on multiple researches regarding the challenges encountered by practice teachers in different parts of the world. This study is distinct because the context is linked to the prevailing global health crisis. It also identifies the opportunities posed by the pandemic while practice-teachers are at the height of their practicum.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed the mixed-method as an approach vis-a-vis descriptive-correlational design. Mixed-method was used since both qualitative and quantitative were implored. Meanwhile, descriptive-correlational was mainly used because the study was concerned with describing both the independent and dependent variables. According to [11], a correlational analysis method is the method of gathering data to assess when and to what degree two or more independent variables and dependent variables have a relationship.

The respondents of this study were the 32 practice teachers from the Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology Papaya Off-Campus Program during the academic year 2020-2021. Total enumeration was used to give all practice-teachers equal chances to take part in the study.

The researcher used a three-part survey questionnaire. The first part of the instrument solicited the respondents' personal information such as their age, sex, marital status, the field of specialization, and cooperating teacher's

present position. The instrument's second segment was an accepted questionnaire called Questionnaire on Challenges During Teaching Practice Exercise (QCTP), created by [12]. It detailed the perceived difficulties that student-teachers are likely to encounter. The student-teachers were asked to answer to 21 issues on a four-Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. An open-ended question in the third section of the instrument asked respondents to list their perceived opportunities obtained or envisioned during their practice teaching.

The profile of the respondents was numerically evaluated using the occurrence count and percentage. The respondents' answers to the difficulties they faced during their practicum were analyzed and interpreted using the weighted means. For the study's qualitative side, an open-ended question was asked, asking the respondents to state in sentence form or enumerate the opportunities they gained or envisioned during their practicum in the new normal. The inductive method, specifically thematic content analysis, was used where responses are annotated, coded, and segmented into themes before they are analyzed.

The researcher adhered to proper research protocol before proceeding to the data gathering. Communication letters were sent to the authorities' office concerned to secure permission for the conduct of the study. That included a letter forwarded to the campus administrator, the program heads, and the practice teaching supervisor. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter informing the respondents of the study's goals and providing them with some context information. Since the researcher had close contact with the respondents, the questionnaires were personally handed to them. However, the respondents were allowed to bring home the questionnaire and have it returned the next day.

For ethical considerations, consent and assent letters were secured to ensure that the respondents' participation in the study was not compulsory and with the authorities' knowledge, including their critic teachers

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents as to Age

Age	f	%
18-20	0	0
21-23	9	28.13
24-26	5	15.63
27-29	10	31.25
30-32	5	15.63
33 above	3	9.38
Total	32	100

The data revealed that nine respondents or 28.13 percent belonged to the age bracket of 21-23 years old; 5 or 15.63 percent belonged to the age bracket of 24-26 years old; 10 or 31.25 percent belonged to the age bracket of 27-29 years old; 5 or 15.63 percent belonged to the age bracket of 30-

32 years old, and lastly, 3 or 9.38 percent belonged to age bracket of 33 years old and above. It was found out that most of the respondents were in the age bracket of 27-29 years old.

Table 2. Distribution of the Respondents as to Sex

Sex	f	%
Male	7	21.88
Female	25	78.13
Total	32	100

Table 3 displays the distribution of respondents according to their sex. It can be gleaned that 25 or 78.13 percent female respondents and 7 or 21.88 percent male respondents. The data revealed that female pre-service teachers dominated the study.

Table 3. Distribution of the Respondents as to Marital Status

Marital Status	f	%
Single	25	78.13
Married	7	21.88
Widow/Widower	0	0.00
Total	32	100

Given in Table 4 is the distribution of respondents according to their marital sex. It can be gleaned that 25 or 78.1 percent were single, and 7 or 21.9 percent were married, implying that most of the respondents were single.

Table 4. Distribution of the Respondents as to Field of Specialization

Field of Specialization	f	%
English	6	18.75
Music Arts Physical Education and Health (MAPEH)	17	53.13
BEEEd-General Education	9	28.13
Total	32	100

The distribution of respondents by area of specialization is seen in the table above. It can be noted that there were 17 respondents or 53.1 percent whose field of specialization is MAPEH, nine or 28.1 percent were General Education majors, and lastly, six or 18.8 percent were English majors. Most of the respondents were specializing in MAPEH.

Table 5. Subjects Taught by the Respondents

Subjects Taught	f	%
English	9	28.13
Mathematics	5	15.63
Science	2	6.25
Filipino	2	6.25
Music Arts Physical Education and Health	9	28.13
Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies)	1	3.13
Others	4	12.50
Total	32	100

Given in Table 6 were the subjects taught by the respondents during their practicum. As shown, nine students handled English classes; another nine handled MAPEH classes respectively; five conducted Mathematics classes; 2 handled science classes similar to those who handled Filipino classes, while only one handled Araling Panlipunan or Social Studies classes. The other four practice teachers dealt with subjects such as National Service Training Program and Field Study Courses,

Table 6. Distribution of the Respondents as to their Cooperating Teachers' Present Position

Position	f	%
Teacher I	4	12.50
Teacher II	3	9.38
Teacher III	5	15.63
Master Teacher	8	25.00
School Administrator	7	21.88
Lecturer on Hourly Basis	5	15.63
Total	32	100

Presented in table 7 is the distribution of respondents according to their cooperating teacher's present position. It was given that there were 8 or 25 percent Master Teachers. It is followed by 7 or 21.9 percent whose critic teachers are School Administrators, 5 or 15.6 percent Lecturer on Hourly Basis, 4 or 12,5 percent Teacher I, and lastly, 3 or 9.4 percent Teacher II. Data showed that most of the respondents' cooperating teachers are master teachers.

Table 7. Mode of Learning Delivery Adopted by the School

Mode of Learning Delivery	f	%
Modular Printed	1	3.13
Modular Digital	1	3.13
Modulat Printed or Modular	4	12.50
Purely Online	3	9.38
Blended	23	71.88
Total	32	100

The mode of learning delivery adopted by the school where the cooperating teachers and the pre-service teachers are housed was given un table 8. It can be noted that there was 23 or 71.88 percent in blended mode, 4 or 12.50 percent in Modular Printed and Digital mode,3 or 9.38 percent in Purely Online mode,1 or 3.13 percent in Modular Digital mode, and lastly 1 or 3.1 percent in Modular printed. During their practicum, the majority of the respondents had experience teaching using mixed learning delivery modalities.

Table 8. Challenges Encountered by the Practice Teachers

STATEMENTS	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
1 Time for the Teaching Practice exercise is short	2.59	Agree
2 Lack of co-operation from the	2.00	Disagree

3 subject teachers or school-based supervisors Lack of accommodation during the teaching practice program	2.28	Disagree
4 Lack of Instructional materials and resources in schools	2.16	Disagree
5 No allowances for student teachers during a teaching practice exercise	2.50	Agree
6 Inadequate teaching practice orientation before the commencement of teaching practice exercise	2.47	Disagree
7 Difficulty getting transport to school posted to	2.25	Disagree
8 Poor relationship between student-teachers and school-based teachers	2.16	Disagree
9 Secondary school students not receptive to student teachers	2.28	Disagree
10 Poor interpersonal relationship between faculty supervisor and student-teachers during supervision	2.25	Disagree
11 Lecture periods on campus clashing with the students teaching practice exercise	2.38	Disagree
12 Lack of provision for field trip or excursion when necessary	2.31	Disagree
13 Rejection of student-teacher to schools posted	2.06	Disagree
14 Too much workload or responsibility for student teachers in schools	2.19	Disagree
15 Student teachers are not formally introduced to permanent teachers, thus making them feel inferior and not part of the school teachers	1.94	Disagree
16 Lack of respect for student teachers in the schools posted.	2.19	Disagree
17 Student teachers excluded from the	2.28	Disagree

18	Difficulty in planning lesson notes	2.63	Agree
19	Difficulty in managing students with different skills	2.56	Agree
20	Student teachers were faced with a poor learning environment and overcrowded classrooms	2.38	Disagree
21	Teaching practice is a period of stress for student teachers	2.53	Agree

The challenges encountered by the respondents are shown in table 9. As shown, item number 18 that reads "Difficulty in planning lesson notes," was the top challenge among the respondents with a weighted mean of 2.63 and a verbal description of Agree. It is followed by items number 1 with the statement "Time for the Teaching Practice exercise is short" with the weighted mean of 2.59 and a verbal description of Agree; item number 19 that says "Difficulty in managing students with different skills" with a weighted mean of 2.56 and a verbal description of Agree; item number 21 "Teaching practice is a period of stress for student teachers" with a weighted mean of 2.53 and a verbal description of Agree and item number 5 "No allowances for student teachers during teaching practice exercise" with the weighted mean of 2.50 and a verbal description of Agree.

Based on the given data, it was determined that practice teachers had difficulty preparing lesson plans and dealing with students' diversity. Likewise, the respondents believed that their practice teaching exercises were short, however, stressful. Not having allowances was also perceived as a challenge.

To dig into these challenges encountered by the practice teachers, they were interviewed. When asked about what particular aspect of lesson planning they had difficulty with, most of them said they had difficulty designing lessons for asynchronous distance learning. Given the limited time and some technical issues on both the end of the teacher and the students, several concerns must be considered. BSED4 said: "We are used to making lesson plans for the face-to-face classes; that is why writing one for online distance learning is a challenge." It is supported by BEE7, who claimed that "It is difficult to think of activities for our lesson because some of our students did not have a stable internet connection."

The respondents were also asked why the duration of the practice teaching exercise was viewed as a challenge. BSED15 claimed: "We only had few chances of doing the actual Teaching. Most of us only experienced Teaching once and twice. Some did not even handle a class." That claim was supported by BEED4, who said, "Most of our

time were devoted to accomplishing our portfolios and reflections. In terms of actual teaching, the time is not enough," and BEED3 saying that "When I teach, I only teach for 45 minutes because the students cannot stay online for a long period. I only experienced thrice, which I think is not enough for me to acquire and practice my teaching skills."

As to managing students' diversity, the respondents said they did not have the chance to actually and personally meet and know their students. Hence, they could not design a lesson that best suits their students. When asked about how this affected their teaching experiences, they responded by saying that they only design lessons with generic strategies appropriate to all. As stated by BSED4, "Teaching has become a challenge. We do not know whether our strategy and activities suit our learners. We could not cater to our students' different learning styles and multiple intelligences."

Meanwhile, practice teaching was also a stressor among the respondents. When asked how it gave them stress, they exclaimed that practice teaching required them to accomplish many portfolios. BSED5 said, "Deadlines are so stressful. We have to meet the deadlines set by our critic teacher and our practice supervisor." BSED2 said, "I thought what other students were saying about practice teaching is a myth. I found out that they were true."

Since most classes were held online, and teachers work from home due to community quarantines, the practice teachers were required to register and subscribe to different internet promos, requiring them to spend about 50-100 pesos for limited data promo. Likewise, since they stay at home, their parents seldom give them allowances. As claimed by BSED8, "It is very costly on my part because my parents could hardly give me allowance because they do not have stable jobs. I only get my allowance to form my online selling."

Opportunities Brought by this Pandemic to Student Teachers

Table 9. Opportunities in the Height of Pandemic

Advanced Digital Literacy Skills
Boosted Self-confidence
Practiced Lesson Planning
Encouraged Resourcefulness
Enabled Self-reflection
Tested Flexibility
Developed Compassion
Learned New Skills

When asked about the opportunities brought by this pandemic to the practice teachers or what opportunities they had envisioned or experienced during their practicum, the respondents' answers were themed, as shown in the table above.

Advanced Digital Literacy Skills. Most respondents said that shifting learning delivery from face-to-face to online

learning delivery mode has made them more acquainted with the technology. The respondents claimed to have improved in using technology in Teaching. This also provided them with opportunities to explore several software and applications to use as educational tools. One respondent said, "This pandemic help me to be resourceful, especially in using different apps related to my teaching practice." The other one claimed that "Para po sa aking nalatulong Yung pandemic na ito para improve ko yung kkayanan ko pagdating sa digital literacy skill ko po Kasi po alam ko sa sarili n dapat ko pagmatututo para makasunod ako sa pagaaral ko ngayong pandemic dahil ang naging paraan ng pagaarl nting ngayon ay online learning kaya tlaga na improved ko yung kkayanan ko sa digital literacy." The same thought was expressed by other respondents, "In this time of pandemic na improved ko yung digital literacy skills tulad ng pagtuturo ng online na dati ay hindi naman namin ginagawa. Na improved dito Yung critical thinking ko na kung paano ba gagawin yung isang bagay o ano bang strategy ang gagamitin sa pagtuturo ng online, na improved din dito Yung pagiging resourceful ko."

Boosted Self-confidence. One respondent said, "Yung pagpapRACTICE teaching namin kahit may pandemya ang nagtulak sa kin para mas iimprove ko ang sarili ko at maging confident. Hindi man ako mahusay sa mga technology, nakaya ko padin at nakaharap ako sa klase ko ng mahusay." The other one said, "This pandemic helped me improved my self-confidence, most especially talking with someone without any hesitation or nervousness. And this pandemic also helped me to be braver in every aspect of the situation I encountered".

Practiced Lesson Planning. A respondent said, "Natuto ako sumulat ng lesson plan na iba iba ang format. Merong Daily lesson Logs, Merong traditional format at meron ding prototype na akma sa online classes." Another respondent claimed, "Yung lesson planning talaga yung challenge. Pero dahil naipush yung pagpapRACTICE teaching kahit may pandemic, natuto ako na sumulat ng lesson plans at kung paano maeexecute."

Encouraged Resourcefulness. A respondent said, "This pandemic help me to be resourceful, especially in using different apps related to my teaching practice." Another

respondent had the same experience saying, "In teaching and learning context, Digital literacy helps my ability to become more creative, productive and useful student-teacher." One respondent said, "This pandemic taught me to be resourceful and gain knowledge from different webinars I have attended."

Enabled Self-reflection and Compassion. This pandemic has also been a chance for the practice teachers to reflect and ponder becoming teachers. In this regard, one respondent said, "This pandemic help me to understand the essence of face-to-face teaching and learning process." Another one said, "During this pandemic, I have learned that being a teacher is not just about Teaching. It is also about the passion that you have in your heart to serve not just the students but also the parents. I have learned that there is a big picture of being a teacher, especially during this pandemic."

Tested Flexibility. Although most of the respondents were trained to teach in a face-to-face classroom setting, they have exuded flexibility in teaching in a very different setting, such as online distance learning through various platforms. As one respondent claimed, "This pandemic helped me become a flexible student teacher.". The other one said, "This pandemic expands my knowledge on online learnings or webinar communications and makes me a stronger person to face challenges on these difficult pandemic situations."

Learned New Skills. Not only has this pandemic improved their teaching skills, but it also helped them acquire new skills. As one student said, "Yes, actually, this pandemic helps me a lot, natuto ako gumamit ng RISO. I know this may sound nakakatawa but totoo, from 6 am in the morning na ako ang mag bubukas ng gate kasi mahabang pila ang aabutan kapag tanghali dumating, I mastered to print, print, print. But what I master most is patience. I master my patience, sa mga panahon na nag cheheck ako ng gabundok na modules, na walang pangalan. Namaster ko ang inner peace ko sa tuwing mag tatanong ako sa gc na walang sasagot pero na seen naman nila lahat, i master to be calm." Another one said, "I am more capable of learning and exploring new things. I also discover to myself that I have hidden talents which I have not shown."

Table 10. Correlation Analysis between the Profile of the Respondents and the Challenges They Have Encountered

	Age	Sex	MarS.	FoS	CTPP	ST	MLD
1. Time for the Teaching Practice exercise is short	0.51	0.63	0.34	0.17	0.41	0.08	0.10
2. No allowances for student teachers during teaching practice exercise	0.13	0.38	0.04	-0.04	0.11	-0.01	-0.01
3. Difficulty in planning lesson notes	0.13	0.39	0.19	-0.01	0.11	0.14	0.19
4. Difficulty in managing students with different skills	0.04	0.30	0.01	-0.02	0.18	0.20	0.19
5. Teaching practice is a period of stress for student teachers	0.32	0.36	0.60	-0.03	0.26	-0.02	0.32

The correlation analysis between the profile of the respondents and the challenges they have encountered during their practicum is shown in table 11. Based on the given data, it is shown that the respondents' profile had no

relationship to the challenge they faced in terms of the duration of the practice teaching exercise. Meanwhile, the results of the correlational analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between age and difficulty in

managing students with different skills (0.04), marital status, and their perceived challenge relative to allowances during their practice exercise (0.04), the field of specialization is statistically correlated to all the challenges faced by the respondents (-0.04, -0.01, -0.02, -0.03); subjects taught are statistically correlated to challenges relative to allowances (-0.01) and stress (-0.02) during their practicum while the mode of learning delivery is significantly correlated to allowances as a perceived challenge (-0.01).

In terms of age having significantly correlated to difficulty in managing students with different skills, it is noteworthy that the respondents had their practicum within the university system where they handled minor subject classes at the tertiary level with students who are at their age. Hence, dealing with them must have been a challenge, given that they were trained to deal with the needs of students who are way younger than them. Their strategies and approaches were pedagogical rather than andragogical.

With marital status correlated with having no allowances for student teachers during a teaching practice exercise, most of them were single and depended solely on their parents and relatives. Further, the field of specialization showed a negative correlation to all the identified challenges except for the duration of the practice teaching exercise being not significantly correlated. This implied that expertise in their field lessens or decreases the occurrence of such challenges.

As to subjects taught having a negative correlation to the challenges relative to allowances for student teachers and stress during a teaching practice exercise, it can be said that being able to master teaching the subjects within or outside their field of expertise would lessen their stress and the need for more allowances for lesson preparation. With higher expertise in teaching different subject areas, teachers can be resourceful in devising their lesson materials and not worrying much about their teaching practices.

Lastly, the mode of learning delivery was negatively correlated to the challenges relative to their allowances, implying two things, the use of technology-driven teaching tools must be more expensive or cheaper than using teaching aids we usually employ during the face-to-face teaching encounter.

V. CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings obtained, the identified challenges were an amalgamation of teaching-related and personal-related challenges. Since the respondents had to adapt and adopt the learning delivery modality of the university, actual teaching experiences were limited only to almost three hours out of the prescribed 18-week practice teaching duration. Hence, their knowledge of teaching essentials, including lesson planning, students' discipline management, and students' differences, was not reinforced.

Also, this pandemic intensified personal-inherent challenges like allowances and stress management.

As previously mentioned, the conduct of the teaching internship at the height of the pandemic served as avenues for practice teachers to learn to improve themselves with a lot of new skills and self-discovery. Their teaching skills might not have been fully enhanced, but they have acquired soft skills that are equally important in succeeding in Teaching or the workplace in general.

In preparing future teachers, they must be equipped with the knowledge and skills integral to being a teacher, such as a lesson preparation, student discipline management and lesson development, and various teaching strategies that suit the differences of the students.

To this end, they must be trained in their junior years of college so that practice teaching will no longer be a period of acquisition but of practice and reinforcement. By the time the students enrolled in various professional education courses, they must experience that all of their learned concepts, such as individual differences, multiple intelligences, objectives formulation, and teaching approaches and strategies, can be applied in a classroom setting.

It is also vital for the university to provide them with the support to help them cope with the stress caused by their internship. Amid the ongoing pandemic, practice teachers must ensure they are mentally fit and emotionally stable to succeed in their teacher-education journey.

It has been a big challenge for courses with laboratory and practical exercises to continue and ensure sufficient knowledge, skills, and readiness in the workplace despite the pandemic. In this study, it was proven that the pandemic posed challenges to practice teachers. It also paved the way for some opportunities. This is proof that there are still learning opportunities amid the pandemic that is common to associate with challenges.

Since the study involved quite a few respondents, it is suggested the study may be expanded by future researchers involving a larger number of respondents and additional variables that may be explored to describe the challenges faced by the practice teachers.

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Dr. Albert Bulawat is a former English teacher from DepEd Nueva Ecija. At Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology – Papaya Off-Campus Program, he is the College Department Head and concurrently the Program Head for the BSEd program. Dr. Bulawat earned his Doctor of Education majoring in Educational Management with academic honors from Wesleyan University Philippines in 2019, as well as a Master of Arts of Education majoring in English, Magna Cum Laude, from the College of the Immaculate Conception in 2017 and a Bachelor in Secondary Education majoring in English from the same institution in 2014. He also holds a Master of Arts in Education with a concentration in Educational Management from Good Samaritan Colleges, where he taught in the College of Education and worked as an in-house examiner for the Licensure Examination for Teachers. Dr. Bulawat has shown himself to be an experienced teacher with a demonstrated history of serving in the higher education sector after six years of teaching.



He has also worked as a research and feasibility mentor, a member of the panelists, and the chairman of the panelists in numerous undergraduate research defenses at various schools in Nueva Ecija. He's also been a guest speaker at a number of workshops and training sessions on journalism, science, and personal growth. Dr. Bulawat has also worked as a freelance proofreader, critic, and reviewer for graduate students' manuscripts. He is a regular peer reviewer and manuscript editor for a number of international publications, where he has reviewed several scientific papers by academics from various countries. He was hailed as a three-time most outstanding teacher in his school for his deep love of his career.