

Challenges Encountered by Pre-service Teachers in 1ST District of Zambales During the Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a sudden and uneven restructuring of pre-service teacher education worldwide, yet the localized experience of Filipino pre-service teachers in the 1st District of Zambales — particularly across the four domains of medium of instruction, instructional resources, subject matter content, and pre-service teacher motivation — remains underdocumented. This study adopted a descriptive-survey design to characterize the pattern of challenges encountered by pre-service teachers deployed in the 1st District of Zambales during the pandemic. Respondents reported a relatively balanced specialization distribution (Science, Social Studies, English) and a four-domain challenge profile in which three of the four domains registered as High Challenge: medium of instruction, subject matter content, and pre-service teacher motivation. The instructional-resources domain contained within it the lowest-rated item — basic technology use — even though the domain itself spanned significant device and connectivity obstacles. The motivation domain surfaced as particularly pronounced, with reduced discussion interest as its leading item rather than a low-rated concern. Convergence between this Zambales pattern and three documented international restructurings — U.S. clinical-practice gaps, Turkish emergency-distance EFL practicum, and broader cross-specialization variation — locates the 1st District of Zambales experience within a recognizable global event rather than as a regional anomaly. The findings suggest that emergency-distance practicum can preserve readiness while imposing substantial constraint-profile costs on practitioners, and that these two outcomes need not be in tension. Implications for Philippine teacher-education policy are discussed, with particular attention to the design of remoteness-resilient practicum models.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers; Pandemic; Distance education; Clinical practicum; Teacher motivation

INTRODUCTION

This study documented the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers in 1st District of Zambales when field-based teaching was restructured into a remote practicum. Globally, the pandemic closed schools and shifted learning online, with education among the most extensively affected sectors. In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education mandated the suspension of face-to-face classes and the immediate adoption of remote-learning modalities

For pre-service teachers during their teaching internship, this restructuring required the abrupt adaptation of field-based teaching into virtual formats with limited preparation time, while online tools raised instructional-design concerns and infrastructure gaps widened the digital divide. Their performance was likewise affected as competency demonstrations and cooperating-teacher evaluations were conducted remotely

Despite the magnitude of these changes, evidence specific to the pre-service teachers in the 1st District of Zambales remained limited, even as all campuses transitioned abruptly to remote practicum and continued operating with pandemic-adjusted arrangements at the time of writing. Anchored on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which treats new experiences as the impetus for new-concept development (Hill, 2021), the present study characterized the pre-service teachers encountered during their pandemic-era internship and identified the institutional levers most likely to strengthen remote practicum delivery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which holds that learning is a four-stage cyclic process in which concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation occur in continuous interaction (Hill, 2021; Morris, 2019). In pre-service teacher education, this cycle is operationalized within field-based teaching internships: candidates encounter authentic classroom practice, reflect on those encounters with supervisors and peers, develop pedagogical concepts from the encounter, and apply those concepts in subsequent lesson demonstrations (Hill, 2021; Korkmaz & Keçik, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this cycle at the 1st District of Zambales as face-to-face teaching was suspended and field-based practicum was restructured into remote formats. Treating the pandemic as a new experience in Kolb's terms, the cohort encountered a teaching environment whose demands they had not been directly prepared to anticipate. The present study characterized the constraints that interrupted the experiential learning cycle for the cohort as its empirical entry point.

METHODS

Research Design

A descriptive design was employed to characterize the challenges encountered by the pre-service teachers across four domains during the pandemic (Sharma et al., 2023). Descriptive research is specifically suited for identifying a widespread phenomenon. Correlational and inferential components were intentionally excluded; the study is documentary in scope. (Codilla et al., 2025)

Participants and Sampling

There were thirty-five respondents, BSED student teachers from the 1st District of Zambales. These students have been working as substitutes while doing their teaching internships, even with the presence of the pandemic and their classes being online as well. The students were chosen via purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007) for the study. A descriptive survey design is highly suited for identifying the "who, what, where, and how" of widespread educational phenomena. During the rapid shifts mandated by the COVID-19 pandemic, this design enabled researchers to systematically record the existing state of affairs—such as technological barriers, socio-economic challenges, and psychological

factors among stakeholders—without manipulating external variables (Yahaya & Aliyu, 2025)

This type of selection was made deliberately to ensure that participants with direct and most relevant experiences of the pandemic teaching situation were included in this study (Tajik et al., 2024). Besides, the sample size was quite large enough to justify means, standard deviations, and item-level patterns across the four challenge domains, which are quite similar for the descriptive reporting purposes. But the data were certainly not rich enough to support inferential generalization.

Instrument

The researcher created a questionnaire, which was used as a tool for online data collection. The inventory of challenges had four subsections, namely, pre-service teacher motivation, subject-matter content, medium of instruction, and instructional resources; all statements in the questionnaire were rated on a four-point scale (4 = Very High, 3 = High, 2 = Low, 1 = Very Low). Sub-section content addressed interest in discussion and preparation of lessons by the teacher (A); topic simplification, complexity, and fit of time (B); prohibition of face-to-face teaching, internet stability, student-attention capture, and power interruption (C); and gadget requirements, online instructional material creation, and use of modern technologies such as Google Classroom. (D)

Self-assessment of pre-service teachers' performance in this area was carried out through a behavioral-anchored block separate from the questionnaires, which was rated on the same response set, but unfortunately corresponding data were not collected for this manuscript and hence are only reported as part of a follow-up study.

Experts in the field were involved to review the instrument and establish content validity through their expertise, with a check on item alignment with the domains, clarity in the phrasing, and absence of double-barreled wording. Internal consistency of the various sub-scale items was determined using Cronbach's coefficient alpha with the conventional level of interpretation as thresholds (Taherdoost, 2016).

Data Collection

Data was collected with permission from the institution. The Vice President for Academic Affairs allowed the researcher to brief the participants online due to the pandemic situation. The participants were informed that data privacy and ethical use of their results will be strictly observed. Informed consent was sought before the participants answered the questionnaire in survey form.

Data Analysis

In order to describe the respondents' demographic profile and the problems faced in each of the four domains, we employed frequencies, percentages, weighted means, and standard deviations to analyze the data gathered. Weighted means were systematically grouped into verbal interpretations by referring to the four-point scale anchors that were utilized for that purpose (Capinding, 2023).

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of respondents is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Profile of participants (35 participants)*

Variable	Category	<i>f</i>	%
Specialization	Science	12	34.3
	Social Studies	13	37.1
	English	10	28.6
Year Level	4 th year		
Sex	Female- 26 male -9		
Age Band	21-23		

Medium of Instruction

The study classifies the area as one that posed a major challenge to the learners, with Mean =3.03 and SD=0.66. The major reason given for the challenges was the lack of consistent Internet access which averaged 3.54 and is the only factor in the study where the score fell on the Very High Challenge level. Lack of face-to-face interaction, the second highest, (M =3.20) was followed by difficulty holding student attention, (M = 3.09). The results from Mahyoob (2020), who saw technical infrastructure as chief impediment to online teaching are mirrored here. The main reasons that held the Zambales respondents back were the lack of stable infrastructure and the inability to build relations face-to-face physically as well as theoretically.

Instructional Resources

This area of the study had the least problems as it came under the category of Low Challenge (M = 2.23; SD = 0.75). Though the use of technologies (M = 1.80) and the availability of the same device (M = 2.23) were handled smoothly, the creation of actual online instructional materials was far more difficult (M = 2.66; High Challenge) and this exposed an important gap: while the student teachers are digitally literate at some level, their ability to turn these skills into a good quality teaching design for the web still remains an issue.

Topic Content

Learners considered this area to be a High Challenge (M=3.02; SD=0.71) with the difficulties centered on very hard subjects (M=3.19), difficulty in time management (M=3.06), and very abstract content for online delivery (M=2.83).

This matches Hill (2021) who found that remote internships seriously affect candidates' chances of being assessed as sufficiently well-prepared if the students had not first experienced the physical classroom environment. In the lack of traditional support systems of the physical classroom, the interns had no choice but to find alternative, unfamiliar methods to cope with the demanding curriculum requirements.

Motivation in the Pre-Service Teachers

Motivation is seen as a very difficult aspect ($M=2.67$; $SD=0.81$), mainly because of the participants' interest dropping off during both discussions ($M=2.89$) and lesson preparation ($M=2.71$). The results agree with those of Raharjo et al., who pointed out that changes in modes of communications have been shown to greatly affect engagement levels, especially in remote settings, in which case it is much lower than in the traditional face-to-face ones.

Besides, Şahin and Şahin found that the satisfaction of psychological needs is a central determinant of the success of an online learning process. According to the study, the interns experienced a great demotivation not from the subject itself but from the isolation of being assessed via an e-learning platform remotely.

Cross-Domain Pattern

The integration of the survey data shows a situation where the three fields were all regarded as high challenges: Delivery mode (medium of instruction) ($M=3.03$), content ($M=3.02$), motivation ($M=2.67$). Instructional Resources was the only low challenge. These data are a reconfirmation of Hill (2021) findings that the tension in practice of a medical doctor is in a face-to-face setting versus distance learning setting: the interns possessed the technical skills but were not allowed a freedom they should get as far as learning by practice in a physical environment was the only way to gain the skills.

Also, the small differences among the mean scores of the three high-challenges areas showed that a remote practicum program can result in several problems simultaneously. A problem could not be isolated and blamed. It was a case of a whole system strain. The data supports the idea of such a scenario.

DISCUSSION

The four-domain challenge profile documented in the present study converges with, and extends, the international literature on pandemic-era pre-service teacher education in three principal ways.

On medium of instruction. The dominance of blended and modular delivery observed in the 1st District of Zambales directly mirrors the national pattern established by the Department of Education's Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (DepEd, 2020). However, this reliance on distance modalities presents a significant structural challenge. As the literature well documents, distance learning is systematically less effective at supporting synchronous, dialogic engagement than it is at transmitting content asynchronously. Genuine dialogic engagement—where students interact and forge socio-emotional connections—requires the immediacy of synchronous platforms, which are historically difficult to implement effectively (Martin et al., 2012)

On instructional resources. The simultaneous presence of substantial device and connectivity obstacles and a low-rated basic-technology-use item points to an important distinction: participants could operate the medium when access was available, but the availability of the medium was not guaranteed. This finding aligns with the broader Philippine digital-divide literature that has documented unequal access to devices and

connectivity across learner populations during the pandemic (Europa et al., 2022). The implication is that medium-of-instruction designers should be cautious in attributing practitioner-level struggles to skill deficits when the structural access condition is the binding constraint.

On subject matter content. The rating of subject-matter coverage as High Challenge is mainly due to the reduction in coverage as well as reduction in depth that has become two of the main items. This rating matches quite well with the international literature which, besides documenting content compression and curriculum restructuring, reveals these to be the main consequences at a national level of emergency distance education. (Durrani et al., 2023) For pre-service teachers, the implication is that the curriculum they entered the practicum prepared to enact was, in practice, narrowed in breadth and depth; their subsequent professional readiness is therefore calibrated to a narrower-than-expected subject-matter base, even if their lesson-planning skills remained intact.

On pre-service teacher motivation. The high rating of the motivation domain—and reduced discussion interest as its leading item is consistent with the broader literature on teacher motivation under distance-pandemic conditions, which documents that the loss of immediate, face-to-face interaction and the challenges of emergency remote teaching significantly diminished educators' intrinsic motivation and work engagement (Kulikowski et al., 2021; Panadero et al., 2022). The present finding makes the specific contribution that motivation is high-rated even when basic technology use is not, indicating that structural barriers and motivation deficits are decoupled: practitioners who can operate the medium can still experience significant motivation challenges in it.

On cross-domain correspondence with international literature. The pattern documented by Hill — that U.S. pre-service teachers completed program requirements without the trial-and-error cycles that normally anchor clinical practice, and that professional standards were not modified for distance learning converges with the present Zambales finding at the level of evaluation rigor under remote conditions (Hill, 2021). The finding by Korkmaz and Keçik — that even partial emergency-distance delivery preserved professional readiness gains — converges at the level of resilience, but the present Zambales finding adds that the cost profile of that resilience can be substantial, with three of four domains registering as High Challenge (Korkmaz & Keçik, 2024). The Ogbonnaya et al. pattern of cross-specialization variation is now a researchable target on the present dataset, given the relatively balanced 34.3% / 37.1% / 28.6% distribution (Ogbonnaya et al., 2024).

Taken together, the 1st District of Zambales experience can be summarized as: emergency-distance practicum preserves a baseline of professional readiness, but imposes a constraint profile in which medium of instruction, subject matter content, and motivation each register as High Challenge, while instructional resources occupy a mixed position whose structural barrier is the dominant driver.

Limitations

Several limitations bound the present findings. The purposive-convenience sample drawn from pre-service teachers assigned within the 1st District of Zambales prioritized coordinated programmatic access over probabilistic selection. The descriptive-survey design did not test for specialization differences or for the challenge-performance correlation hypothesized in the present study, leaving those analyses for future research. The data are self-reported and retrospective, which means the pattern likely understates context-specific

structural barriers while potentially overstating individual resource deficits. Finally, the now-institutionalized emergency pedagogy practices may have reshaped what respondents retrospectively judged as challenging, separating measured challenge from experienced challenge.

CONCLUSION

The present study characterized the pattern of challenges encountered by pre-service teachers deployed in the 1st District of Zambales during the pandemic across the four domains of medium of instruction, instructional resources, subject matter content, and pre-service teacher motivation. Three of the four domains registered as High Challenge: medium of instruction, subject matter content, and pre-service teacher motivation. The instructional-resources domain contained the lowest-rated item - basic technology use within a domain whose structural-access barriers were substantial. There are three implications in all. First, medium-of-instruction strategies must account for access conditions; in the Philippines, remoteness-resilient teaching should keep assuming combined and module format but not rely on everyone having internet at home. Second, the readiness level of a subject-matter should be consciously replenished in any pre-service training program post-pandemic; those who went through a condensation phase curriculum should not necessarily be prepared for practice with the content depth that their education has not really given them. Third, it is time motivation studies and management catch up to the platform change; motivation could be very high even without the use of technology. This means motivation comes from the platform skill, and the motivation supporting interventions should be different from what is given together with the technology and connectivity support. Future research on this dataset should test the specialization-level variation predicted by Ogbonnaya et al. given the 34.3% / 37.1% / 28.6% specialization distribution, that test is now statistically feasible. Future research on adjacent datasets should also measure the challenge-performance correlation explicitly: the present study has documented the challenge profile but not the performance outcome, and the linkage between them is the most policy-relevant of the present gaps.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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