KEY SUPPORT AREAS FOR PRACTICE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: *This study explored key support areas influencing the professional growth of practice teachers during teaching internships. The study examined six key support areas: administrative support, mentorship, students, co-practice teachers, assigned tasks, and learning environment. Data were collected through a 52-item survey questionnaire conducted among the 80 secondary education practice teachers and interviews with 15 practice teachers, focusing on the challenges faced and experiences during in-campus teaching. The findings revealed that, generally, the practice teachers experienced No Difficulty (ND) in the six key support areas, which led to strengthened classroom management skills, improved teaching strategies, professional relationship development, personal and professional growth, and a supportive learning environment. However, the practice teachers experienced slight difficulty in terms of students' attention or focus in class, and students' attitudes and behaviors. The study highlights the importance of well-structured teaching internship support areas in practice teaching programs, emphasizing their role in preparing competent practice teachers.*

Keywords: *practice teachers, mixed-method, professional development, classroom management*

1. INTRODUCTION

Practice teaching is an integral part of teacher education programs that give practice teachers the experience of a real teaching and learning environment [1]. This is the bridge between theory and practice and prepares the practice teacher for the reality of the teaching profession. At this stage, practice teachers are fully inducted into authentic teaching experiences, bringing student teachers further into the professional work of teachers [2]. It is an invaluable opportunity to refine and improve their teaching skills in the actual school setting [3]. Under the supervision of supervising instructors (SI), who monitor and mentor practice teachers through observations, conferences, and discussions, practice teachers gradually develop the skills needed for effective classroom management and instructional practices.

Moreover, practice teaching is considered one of the most important aspects of any teacher training. However, previous researches show various problems faced by practice teachers in their internships. It was found that practice teachers are not confident in their ability to teach [4], adapt professionally and socially [5], and resources and content knowledge [6]. In addition, a lack of support from the supervisor, motivational problems, and misunderstandings between the mentor and the student can be major concerns [7]. These reflect inadequacies in the teaching internship programs that demonstrate that teaching interns should be provided with more integral support in critical areas related to practice teachers' experiences in the classroom.

Considering these challenges, the study aimed to determine the difficulties experienced by secondary education practice teachers in the key support areas to improve professionally and succeed in the classroom. The study explored six critical support areas: administrative support, mentorship, students, co-practice teachers, assigned tasks, and the learning environment. Further, the study explored the actual experiences of the practice teachers to provide insights that bridge the persistent divide between theoretical preparation and classroom realities. This research provides findings on using these key support areas for the improvement of practice teaching programs.

Objectives of the Study

This research determined the challenges experienced by the secondary education practice teachers during their in-campus internship at Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, in the School Year 2023-2024.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:
1. What is the extent of difficulties experienced by practice teachers in the following support areas:

a. administrative;
b. mentorship;
c. students;
d. co-practice teachers;
e. assigned tasks, and
f. learning environment

2. What are the experiences of practice teachers during the in-campus teaching?
3. How can the key support areas influence the experiences of practice teachers?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a convergent-parallel mixed-methods design, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then integrated to offer a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Quantitative data provides broad, generalizable findings, while qualitative data offers deeper insights into participants' experiences [8].

The participants of the study were eighty (80) secondary education practice teachers in Bukidnon, Philippines, during the second semester of the school year 2023-2024, comprising the following specializations: English,

Mathematics, Science, and Physical Education. These practice teachers were surveyed and interviewed after the in-campus teaching. Out of the 80 secondary education practice teachers, 15 were randomly selected for the interview. This modality provided qualitative data about the practice teachers' experiences during the in-campus teaching.

A questionnaire by Abas (2016) with modifications, having a reliability coefficient of 0.86, was used as a survey questionnaire to obtain data on the challenges faced by practice teachers during their internship program. The questionnaire includes 52 indicators reflecting critical support areas such as administrative support, mentorship, students, co-practice teachers, assigned tasks, and learning environment. These areas are assessed for the extent of difficulty experienced by the practice teachers using the rating scale: (1) No Difficulty; (2) Slight Difficulty; (3) Moderate Difficulty; and (4) Great Difficulty. A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather the qualitative data, focusing on the experiences of practice teachers in the in-campus teaching internship.

The table below presents the scoring procedure used in the study. Specifically, it highlights the ranges of mean scores, equivalent qualifying descriptions, and qualifying statements as the basis for interpreting the data.

Mean	Qualifying Description	Qualifying Statement
1.00-1.75	No Difficulty (ND)	experienced no significant challenges or obstacles, indicating a smooth and manageable experience
1.76-2.50	Slight Difficulty (SD)	experienced some manageable challenges, but these did not significantly hinder progress or outcomes
2.51-3.25	Moderate Difficulty (BD)	experienced considerable challenges that affected their ability to complete tasks effectively, though they were still able to make progress
3.26-4.00	Great Difficulty (GD)	experienced significant and overwhelming challenges, severely impacting their ability to proceed or achieve the desired outcomes

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study obtained from the 80 practice teachers. These findings focused on the challenges they experienced in the key support areas, their actual in-campus practice teaching experience, and a framework showing the interconnectedness of the key support areas and practice teaching experiences.

Challenges Experienced by Practice Teachers During Internship in Terms of the Different Support Areas

The study determined the challenges experienced by practice teachers in the different key support areas, such as administrative support, mentorship, students, co-practice teachers' assigned tasks, and the learning environment.

Table 1. Difficulties Related to Administrative Support

Items	Mean	SD	Description
The Office of the Principal's work relationship between cooperating teachers and practice teachers.	1.11	0.42	No Difficulty
Provision of security and safety for practice teachers.	1.13	0.36	No Difficulty
Participation in the personal and professional development of practice teachers.	1.43	0.59	No Difficulty
Involvement of pre-service teachers in activities in and out of the school.	1.44	0.63	No Difficulty
Access to school facilities (library, computer laboratory, instructional devices, etc.).	1.53	0.67	No Difficulty
Overall	**1.33**	**0.53**	**No Difficulty**

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 (No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 (Slight Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 (Moderate Difficulty);3.26-4.00 (Great Difficulty)

Table 1 presents results for practice teachers' difficulties with administrative support. The overall mean score revealed that the participants experienced *No Difficulty (ND).* The result suggests that practice teachers experienced no significant challenges or obstacles, indicating a smooth and manageable experience. The No Difficulty (ND) response across all items indicates that administrative procedures, policies, and resources were smooth and effective throughout their practice teaching internship. The results imply that administrative support was a strong area for the practice teachers, enabling them to carry out their teaching duties without unnecessary challenges. School administrators played a crucial role in providing the necessary resources and support, promoting a positive relationship between practice teachers and the school administration.

Table 2. Difficulties Related to Mentoring

Items	Mean	SD	Description
approachability and availability of cooperating teacher	1.19	0.45	No Difficulty
interpersonal skills of cooperating teacher	1.23	0.52	No Difficulty
punctuality of cooperating teacher	1.26	0.52	No Difficulty
teaching competence of cooperating teacher	1.26	0.52	No Difficulty
coaching or mentoring of practice teachers	1.29	0.55	No Difficulty
patience towards practice teachers	1.29	0.57	No Difficulty
work relationship with practice teachers	1.29	0.62	No Difficulty
instructional materials	1.34	0.52	No Difficulty
student evaluation	1.41	0.70	No Difficulty
communication skills	1.43	0.63	No Difficulty
teaching approaches/methods/techniques	1.51	0.71	No Difficulty
classroom management	1.61	0.81	No Difficulty
Overall	**1.34**	**0.59**	**No Difficulty**

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 (No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 (Slight Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 (Moderate Difficulty);3.26-4.00 (Great Difficulty)

The administrative support area included ensuring access to school facilities, safety measures, and professional development opportunities. The statements of the participants, such as *"Just continue the excellent service and guidance to the practice teachers,"* and *"The admin facilitates the practice teacher well,"* highlight their satisfaction with administrative services. The administration significantly impacts student achievement, teacher well-being, instructional practices, and school organizational health, emphasizing the need for further investment in leadership development [9]. Supervisors who engage in frequent and clear communication foster a supportive environment for novice teachers, significantly reducing anxiety and promoting professional growth.

Table 2 presents mean scores for the mentoring support area. The results indicated *No Difficulty (ND)* across all items related to mentoring, such as the approachability of cooperating teachers, mentoring strategies, classroom management, and communication skills. The result suggests that practice teachers experienced no significant challenges or obstacles, indicating a smooth and manageable experience. The items assessing interpersonal skills, communication, and teaching competence all scored within the no-difficulty range, indicating that supervising instructors (SI), who served as mentors to the practice teachers, were approachable, available, and effective in providing the necessary support during the teaching internship. As evidenced by the participant statements, such as *"Continue the excellent job in guiding the practice teacher to deliver good lessons,"* the practice teachers recognized and valued the support offered by their mentors, which played a key role in their professional growth and success. Mentor support in field schools fostered the development of pre-service teachers' professional identities, highlighting that their sense of belonging is primarily shaped by the quality of relationships with supervising teachers and their integration into the teacher community [10]. Studies have found that mentorship has positive effects on motivation [11] and the well-being of practice teachers [12].

Practice teachers acquired integrated teaching skills with the appropriate guidance and support from school subject teachers and supervisors [13]. The critical role of mentoring in shaping their instructional practices is that mentors who provide timely and constructive feedback help mentees develop essential teaching skills more effectively. The positive mentoring experiences in this study reflect that when approachable and skilled mentors support practice teachers, they are more likely to thrive and succeed in their roles.

Table 3 presents the results related to students, with a general mean indicating *No Difficulty (ND)*. This suggests that practice teachers experienced no significant challenges or obstacles, indicating a smooth and manageable experience for most items related to student interaction, participation, and motivation.

In items such as students' attention or focus, attitudes, and behaviors in class, the practice teachers experienced *Moderate Difficulty (MD)*. These challenges are typical for practice teachers, who often find classroom management to be one of the more difficult aspects of teaching [14]. The feedback from participants, such as *"It is hard to catch the students' attention and cooperation during class,"* further illustrates the struggles with keeping students focused and maintaining discipline in the classroom.

Table 3. Difficulties Related to Students

Items	Mean	SD	Description
students' social interaction in class	1.40	0.58	No Difficulty
students' participation in class activities	1.53	0.69	No Difficulty
students' motivation to learn	1.68	0.68	No Difficulty
students' level of understanding of lessons	1.70	0.73	No Difficulty
students' performance of class responsibilities	1.74	0.88	No Difficulty
students' attention or focus in class	1.76	0.75	Slight Difficulty
students' attitudes and behaviors	1.84	0.78	Slight Difficulty
Overall	**1.66**	**0.73**	**No Difficulty**

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 (No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 (Slight Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 (Moderate Difficulty);3.26-4.00 (Great Difficulty)

Classroom management concerns of practice teachers arise from managing noisy, talkative students and overcrowded classrooms [15]. Practice teachers report feeling underprepared to handle challenging behaviours in the classroom, noting specific behaviours as particularly difficult and expressing only moderate confidence in their classroom management abilities [16].

The practical aspects of classroom management urge student teachers to gain experience and broaden their skill set through independent teaching [17]. These studies support the current findings, strengthening the fact that classroom management remains a key area where practice teachers require more support and training to overcome the moderate difficulty that they face in engaging and managing student behaviour.

Table 4. Difficulties Related to Co-Practice Teachers

Items	Mean	SD	Description
moral support to peers	1.26	0.54	No Difficulty
concern and understanding	1.36	0.64	No Difficulty
interpersonal relationship	1.40	0.64	No Difficulty
attitudes towards peers	1.43	0.67	No Difficulty
teamwork	1.51	0.79	No Difficulty
Overall	**1.39**	**0.66022**	**No Difficulty**

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 (No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 (Slight Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 (Moderate Difficulty);3.26-4.00 (Great Difficulty)

Table 4 presents the results for difficulties related to co-practice teachers, all within the *No Difficulty (ND)* range. This suggests that practice teachers experienced no significant challenges or obstacles, indicating a smooth and manageable experience. Items such as moral support, teamwork, and interpersonal relationships were rated positively, indicating that practice teachers experienced a supportive and collaborative environment with their co-practice teachers.

The absence of significant challenges in these areas suggests that practice teachers were able to rely on their peers for moral support and cooperation, which are critical factors in

creating a productive teaching experience and working environment. The participants' feedback, such as *"Be professional all the time, step aside those misunderstandings inside the school,"* and *"Co-practice teachers are cooperative and helpful,"* highlights the importance of professionalism and teamwork in maintaining a harmonious work environment during practice teaching.

The findings of this study align with research results that emphasize the importance of peer support and collaboration in teacher development. Effective collaboration among co-practice teachers revolves around clear communication, defined roles, mutual respect, and shared accountability [18]. Co-teaching experiences enhance collaboration among preservice teachers, fostering mutual learning and professional support, although challenges like competition and dependency may arise [19].

Collaboration among preservice teachers fosters shared insights, enhances peer teaching experiences, and deepens understanding of lesson preparation, ultimately benefiting their development as educators [20]. These studies collectively affirm that peer collaboration and positive relationships, as found in this study, are crucial in nurturing a conducive learning and teaching environment for practice teachers.

Table 5. Difficulties Related to Assigned Tasks

Items	Mean	SD	Description
guidance of cooperating teachers in fulfilling the tasks	1.24	0.50	No Difficulty
topic assignment for teaching	1.38	0.66	No Difficulty
amount of class or school tasks	1.40	0.66	No Difficulty
management of tasks	1.54	0.69	No Difficulty
completion of tasks	1.56	0.69	No Difficulty
skills needed to perform the tasks	1.56	0.69	No Difficulty
amount of time to fulfill the tasks	1.63	0.70	No Difficulty
Overall	**1.47**	**0.65**	**No Difficulty**

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 (No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 (Slight Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 (Moderate Difficulty);3.26-4.00 (Great Difficulty)

Table 5 shows the difficulty level experienced related to assigned tasks, all within the *"No Difficulty" (ND)* range. This indicates that practice teachers experienced no significant challenges or obstacles, indicating a smooth and manageable experience. The results suggest that the workload and tasks assigned to practice teachers were manageable and well-suited to their developmental level. Participants' feedback, such as *"Tasks help hone responsible teachers, and should also entail the same amount of appreciation"* and *"everything was smooth and organized,"* highlights the value of appropriate and purposeful tasks that contribute to the overall growth of practice teachers.

The results are supported by several studies that emphasize the importance of assigning appropriate, meaningful tasks in teacher education programs. Assigned tasks enhance practice teachers' understanding of teaching [21]. Assigned tasks are

crucial as they enhance cognitive, professional, social, and value motivations, promoting a deeper understanding of future roles and responsibilities [22], ensuring a beneficial and focused experiential learning environment [23]. Further, assigning appropriate tasks ensures alignment between organizational needs and student competencies, enhancing learning outcomes and maximizing the effectiveness of the internship experience [24]. Practice teachers were able to complete their assigned tasks, indicating that they were provided with appropriate responsibilities that aligned with their skill sets and readiness.

Table 6. Difficulties Related to the Learning Environment

Items	Mean	SD	Description
security and safety	1.16	0.43	No Difficulty
classroom size	1.35	0.59	No Difficulty
ventilation	1.40	0.68	No Difficulty
classroom facilities	1.41	0.63	No Difficulty
student-teacher ratio	1.45	0.65	No Difficulty
classroom atmosphere	1.48	0.72	No Difficulty
lighting or illumination	1.49	0.65	No Difficulty
Overall	**1.39**	**0.62**	**No Difficulty**

Interpretation: 1.00-1.75 (No Difficulty); 1.76-2.50 (Slight Difficulty); 2.51-3.25 (Moderate Difficulty);3.26-4.00 (Great Difficulty)

Table 6 shows mean scores related to the learning environment, showing that all indicators are within the *No Difficulty (ND)* range. This indicates that practice teachers experienced no significant challenges or obstacles, indicating a smooth and manageable experience. Key areas such as classroom size, safety, ventilation, and student-teacher ratios were rated as causing no significant difficulty. These findings indicate that the practice teachers' learning environments were well-organized and equipped to facilitate teaching and learning.

A positive learning environment is crucial for enabling teachers to focus on instructional delivery and classroom management. Participants' feedback, such as *"Everything is good and organized as well as accessible,"* reinforces the notion that the practice teachers experienced minimal obstacles related to their physical teaching environment. An effective learning environment, characterized by adequate infrastructure, supportive management, and a collaborative culture, significantly impacts learning success [25].

Key factors include a structured course curriculum, empowered students, flexible classroom settings, and enabled teachers, all of which foster engagement and facilitate effective learning environments [26]. The quality of the physical learning environment, including ventilation and classroom organization, directly impacts the comfort and performance of both teachers and students [27]. These studies affirm the current findings that a well-structured, safe, and supportive learning environment plays a significant role in the success and satisfaction of practice teachers.

Experiences of Practice Teachers during In-Campus Teaching
The analysis of qualitative data revealed five major themes as outcomes of the practice teachers' internship experiences: (1) Enhanced Classroom Management Skills; (2) Improved Teaching Strategies; (3) Professional Relationship Development; (4) Personal and Professional Growth; and (5) Strengthened Supportive Learning Environment.

Theme 1: Enhanced Classroom Management Skills
Practice teachers reported notable growth in their ability to manage classroom dynamics, gaining confidence in addressing student behavior and maintaining engagement. One participant responded,

"Managing students, especially when they misbehave, is challenging," but noted that, with experience, they developed more effective strategies. Another shared, *"I noticed some students were disengaged, so I facilitated more interactive discussions."* These reflections illustrate the developmental journey in classroom management skills, highlighting the importance of experience in helping practice teachers expand their strategies and approach independent teaching with confidence [28].

Theme 2: Improved Teaching Strategies

The hands-on experience enabled practice teachers to refine their teaching strategies and adapt to diverse student needs. One participant noted, *"I learned about appropriate lesson planning, classroom management styles, and various teaching methods."* Another shared, *"I learned to make my discussions more engaging and enjoyable for students."* These experiences highlight the impact of practical teaching in honing pedagogical approaches. Effective teaching strategies bridge theoretical learning and practice, fostering deep conceptual understanding over rote memorization, thereby enhancing educational outcomes [29][30]. Developing strong teaching strategies is essential as it enhances lesson organization, efficiency, and overall teaching impact, driving educational excellence [31].

Theme 3: Professional Relationship Development

Engaging in positive relationships with supervising instructors (SI), peers, and students significantly shaped practice teachers' experience. One participant stated, *"Our supervising instructor taught us to be punctual and manage our time,"* while another mentioned, *"Our supervising instructor was approachable and helped us improve our teaching skills."* These statements highlight the role of mentorship and collaboration in professional growth. Mentorship founded on shared goals, open communication, and mutual commitment is vital for practice teacher development [32]. The presence of supportive mentors contributes to higher job satisfaction and self-efficacy, fostering a positive experience for new teachers [33].

Theme 4: Personal and Professional Growth

Participants reflected on how the internship experience contributed to their personal and professional development. One noted, *"This experience was transformative; I encountered diverse learning styles and behaviors among students."* Another shared, *"It developed my confidence and strengthened my interpersonal skills and patience."* Such reflections underscore how internships contribute to shaping professional identities and enhancing teaching competencies. Internships allow practice teachers to apply their knowledge, enhance technical skills, and engage in problem-solving and teamwork, promoting profound growth in both personal and professional areas [34].

Theme 5: Strengthened Supportive Learning Environment

A conducive physical learning environment emerged as a key factor influencing the teaching experience. One participant stressed, *"Classrooms should be better equipped to meet student needs, like window shades to prevent glare and overheating."* Others emphasized the benefits of well-maintained classrooms on student participation, with one noting, *"The students were more engaged, and many completed tasks on time."* These responses highlight the role of physical and supportive environments in nurturing effective teaching. Studies confirm that supportive, comfortable learning spaces increase engagement and satisfaction for teachers and students alike, impacting educational outcomes [35][36].

Influence of Key Support Areas on the Practice Teachers' Experiences

The Teaching Internship Support (TIS) Framework in Figure 1 begins with a central focus on Teaching Internship Support Areas, which include key components: administrative support, mentorship, students, co-practice teachers, assigned tasks, and learning environment. These support areas are essential because they directly influence the practice teachers' experiences and outcomes during their internship. As the key support areas are strengthened, practice teachers gradually achieve essential professional outcomes, as highlighted by the five outer elements: (1) Strengthened Classroom Management Skills; (2) Improved Teaching Strategies; (3) Professional Relationship Development; (4) Personal and Professional Growth; and (5) Strengthened Supportive Learning Environment.

Figure 1. Teaching Internship Support (TIS) Framework

The Teaching Internship Support (TIS) Framework was crafted as a result of this study, which used both surveys and interviews to better understand the experiences of practice teachers. The survey results helped identify which areas of support were most important, while the interviews gave a clearer picture of how these areas affected the practice teachers' growth and performance. This combination of data allowed the researcher to build a framework based on real situations and challenges faced during the internship. To make sure the framework was useful and accurate, it was presented to a group of experts in teacher education. Their feedback confirmed that the framework was clear, appropriate, and helpful in improving the way practice teaching is planned and supported.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the significant role that key support areas play in the professional growth of practice teachers. The findings reveal that practice teachers at Bukidnon State University experienced no difficulties in six key support areas, such as administrative support, mentorship, students, co-practice teachers, assigned tasks, and learning environment during their in-campus teaching. These areas contributed to strengthened classroom management skills, improved teaching strategies, professional relationship development, personal and professional growth, and a strengthened supportive learning environment. The positive outcomes achieved in this study suggest that when practice teachers receive sufficient support, they are better equipped to meet the demands of the teaching profession and transition into full-time roles with confidence and competence.

It is recommended that institutions strengthen teaching internship programs, ensuring consistent and constructive mentorship, strengthened administrative support, and conducive learning environments that will equip practice teachers for the complexities of the teaching profession. Further, it is suggested to provide in-service training on class management practices to better prepare practice teachers in this challenging aspect of instruction.

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