

ESL Employment Of Pre-Service Teachers: Opportunities And Setbacks

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Abstract – This study explores the challenges and opportunities faced by pre-service teachers from a teaching institution during their short-term employment in English as a Second Language. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, an initial of nine pre-service teachers from the institution were selected through purposive sampling and employed Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis to explore their experiences. Several researchers have explored similar experiences in the ESL context, but there is still more to uncover how these affect them. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers experience setbacks, including classroom management difficulties, limited teaching experience, cultural differences, adapting to students' needs, and personal sacrifices. However, pre-service teachers employed various strategies to overcome these challenges, including positive thinking, problem-solving, motivation, and seeking support to manage stress. Despite the challenges, ESL employment contributed to their long-term professional development, particularly in adaptability, classroom and time management, lesson planning, and reinforcement of academic knowledge. This study underscores the importance of understanding how pre-service experience influences pre-service teachers' future careers. Recommendations include improving teaching practices, workplace efficiency, and prioritizing teacher well-being through stress management, hands-on experience, and cultural

inclusivity. This study may aid ESL companies and training institutions in providing better support to teachers for growth and development.

Keywords – English as a Second Language, setbacks, coping strategies, professional development

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, pre-service teachers in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom have appeared as an important area of discourse, especially in the globalization of education and the demand for effective English as an instruction. Previous studies show how such contextual differences can influence English language teaching and learning [1]. This has led to an increased emphasis on the role of ESL teachers in implementing pedagogical practices. In addition, several studies have investigated teachers' experiences and their ability to teach students effectively [2]. However, as can be seen from the findings, there is still more that is unknown about how the pre-service teachers, who may still be at the early stages of professional development, deal with the pressures and demands of teaching English to learners in different contexts. Many undergraduate students seek employment in ESL companies, often while still pursuing their degrees in education. Formative personal experiences influence the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward ESL even before the start of formal training [3]. However, there is a limited exploration of how short-term employment affects pre-service teachers, particularly their pedagogical strategies and professional identity development. These gaps need to be addressed because understanding the experiences of pre-service teachers who have tried working or who are currently working in an ESL company can provide valuable insights into how early professional experiences shape their development as future educators.

Short-term ESL employment refers to the temporary work of undergraduate students or pre-service teachers, particularly during summer vacations. Although pre-service teachers learned about pedagogical skills in university, they are still in the process of learning more about teaching. The three themes of this research are (1) setbacks, (2) coping mechanisms, and (3) professional development and other benefits. Pre-service teachers often feel unprepared due to insufficient hands-on experience, such as managing a classroom [4]. The Republic Act No. 11713 of the Philippines defines pre-service teachers as individuals enrolled in teacher education programs (Section 3), and this law highlights the importance of these programs to meet academic and practical training requirements established by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory explains that such hands-on opportunities allow people to improve their skills through experiences and adaptation [5]. Teaching ESL is a challenge because students have varying language proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles [6]. Short-term ESL-employed pre-service teachers must develop strategies to face this in-class challenge [7]. This can lead to the pre-service teachers' evaluation of their teaching strategies and confidence. While many pre-service teachers felt prepared to teach, a study found that their real performance did not always match their self-assessment [8]. The lack of resources, learners' unwillingness to participate, and the lack of ESL teachers' training are challenges during their employment [9]. Some struggles, such as financial difficulties, work commitments, and emotional stress are also faced [10]. Resources like financial stability and emotional well-being are important for development, and their loss can lead to anxiety and low motivation [11]. Stress from ESL teaching may lead to burnout and impact academic performance. Coping strategies refer to specific efforts to master or reduce stress. These strategies include classroom management, support-seeking, and positive thinking [12]. Coping helps teachers tolerate stress and stay effective. Thirteen coping strategies were identified, including deep breathing and avoiding eye contact [13]. ESL employment helps pre-service teachers construct beliefs and practices that influence student learning [14]. These beliefs, supported by Bandura [15], enhance effectiveness. ESL experience also improves self-esteem and efficiency. Multiculturalism supports professional development and responsive teaching [16]. In the Philippines, DepEd Order #3 s. 2007 encourages professional growth through classroom experiences. A study found that teachers adopted various teaching strategies during activities [17]. A study found that teaching experience leads to consistent student achievement. These professional experiences help build pre-service teachers' professional identity [18]. However, much literature fails to consider the impact of short-term ESL employment on future educators' development. By exploring setbacks, coping mechanisms, and professional development, this study aims to recognize how short-term ESL employment shapes their overall growth for their future career. This study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), which emphasizes inclusive, equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities. It provides insights into how

pre-service teachers adapt their methods to support diverse learners and identify setbacks in ESL employment. The study will contribute to existing knowledge and recommend improvements to teacher education programs.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design to explore the teachers' perceptions, allowing the researchers to gather in-depth information about real-life situations. It effectively captured the lived experiences of pre-service teachers in short-term ESL employment. The study was conducted at a state university in Cebu City, Region 7, known for excellence in teacher education. Data were gathered from students in the College of Teacher Education. Nine (9) participants were purposively selected based on inclusion criteria: (a) an education student, (b) from the chosen university, and (c) with at least 2 months of ESL experience. Exclusion: (a) not from other departments. Participants reflected on their experiences, and data saturation determined the final number. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions. Instruments underwent content validation. After ethics clearance, participants received informed consent forms. Responses were organized through thematic coding to identify setbacks, coping strategies, professional development and other benefits. Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis examined and described pre-service teachers' experiences during their short-term employment in ESL companies. Ethical principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent were observed. Data were anonymized using codes (PS1, PS2, etc.) and shared only with researchers. Accidental disclosures were removed, and findings were shared with participants upon request for transparency.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1 – Setbacks

Short-term ESL-employed pre-service teachers faced challenges due to students' varying proficiency levels and cultural barriers. Most pre-service teachers experienced challenges brought by students' varying English proficiency and cultural differences. Some said they had to adjust their lessons repeatedly due to students' 'low retention and comprehension' (PS4). Another participant had to use a translator because of the 'intellectual gap and communication' barriers between her and her students (PS1). In mini-group classes, some faced difficulty handling learners with 'different levels of understanding' (PS8). This affected classroom management and teaching effectiveness. One also mentioned dealing with students who showed 'mixed behaviors' and who 'didn't pay attention' during class (PS9). These issues made it hard to deliver lessons smoothly, and some had to prepare extra materials or shift teaching strategies (PS4). 'Time management' and 'stress' were common struggles; pre-service teachers shared that they lost sleep, skipped meals, and felt overwhelmed by the workload (PS3) (PS5) (PS7) (PS8). One also mentioned 'spending personal money' to buy materials to ensure effective learning despite the costs (PS2). 'Cultural differences' also became a barrier, making it hard to adjust activities and communicate well with students (PS3) (PS6). These setbacks reflect how real ESL teaching goes beyond what is taught in class and requires flexibility, patience, and emotional effort.

Theme 2 – Coping Strategies

Pre-service teachers face several challenges and they adapt several coping strategies to manage these difficulties effectively. These strategies help manage immediate challenges and contribute to growth and resilience. Positive thinking interventions increase self-esteem, crucial in classroom stressors [19]. Pre-service teachers showed a clear use of 'positive thinking.' They found that accepting difficulties enabled them to face challenges. A study stated that positive emotions change thinking and behavior toward a positive trend [20]. Their 'positive mindset' helped them face difficulties and still give their students a good learning experience (PS1) (PS2). Another coping strategy is 'problem-solving,' an essential skill for teachers to navigate challenges effectively and increase productivity. A study highlights that problem-solving involves thinking critically, especially when facing unfamiliar situations [21]. The use of a notebook to 'plan tasks, and balancing lesson planning, teaching, and personal responsibilities' helps them to 'organize and manage time' (PS3) (PS4). 'Support-seeking' was another strategy used by pre-service teachers (PS5) (PS7). Coping strategies included good interaction with peers and mentors, lesson preparation, adaptation, and a positive attitude [22]. Several pre-service teachers mentioned being 'motivated' by their love for teaching and their desire to help students build their language skills and confidence (PS4) (PS5) (PS7).

Theme 3 – Professional Development and Other Benefits

ESL employment is a huge factor in the professional development of pre-service teachers, especially in adaptability in teaching practices. Pre-service teachers' answers showed that their actual classroom experiences influenced their teaching practices and beliefs. The pre-service teachers stated that the ESL employment helped them to become more 'flexible'. Pre-service teachers used a lot of appropriate and creative visual aids and activities that helped engage the students and create a learning environment where students felt included (*PS4*) (*PS5*) (*PS6*) (*PS7*) (*PS8*). As articulated by Kolb's Experiential learning theory emphasizes a continuous learning process grounded in experience [5]. ESL employment developed their 'time management skills' and made them do multiple responsibilities (*PS2*) (*PS4*) (*PS5*). Balancing between preparing a lesson, teaching, and other personal responsibilities can be overwhelming without good time management, and eventually improving it (*PS4*) (*PS5*). Time management skills helped to learn to adjust teaching and assessments in class (*PS7*). 'Classroom management' is another important skill that pre-service teachers develop because they gain practical strategies to handle various classroom environments and student behaviors effectively (*PS1*) (*PS5*) (*PS7*) (*PS8*). ESL enhances the 'lesson planning skills' that helped the pre-service teachers create effective lessons (*PS4*) (*PS5*) (*PS7*). Also, training and teaching in real-life classrooms from the ESL settings provided the pre-service teachers with drills in English and their 'academic knowledge' were reinforced and will help them in their future career as teachers (*PS2*) (*PS3*) (*PS4*).

IV. CONCLUSION

Short-term ESL employment gives pre-service teachers challenges that test their readiness and resilience. A common challenge is limited teaching experience. Although they acquired knowledge in the university, there was no smooth transition in applying it to the actual classroom. These setbacks hindered classroom management and activity planning for diverse learners. Adapting required more time and effort, affecting their mental, physical, and social well-being. However, pre-service teachers developed coping strategies such as positive thinking, motivation, and support-seeking. Their motivation kept them focused on long-term goals. They modified teaching using visual aids and interactive activities. ESL teaching improved their strategies, time management, lesson planning, and academic understanding of language. These experiences prepared them for future difficulties and contributed to their professional development. Short-term ESL employment bridges theory and practice. Their experiences serve as training for holistic development and prepare them to meet the demands of diverse classrooms. Hands-on teaching opportunities are important in building strong and effective teachers.

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