

## Teaching Skills of Pre-service Teachers: Basis for Mentoring Initiatives

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### ABSTRACT

This study utilized triangulation approach of descriptive research in determining the teaching skills of elementary pre-service teachers of Bukidnon State University during their in-campus practice teaching. It also determined whether actual teaching experiences of pre-service teachers were effective in developing and improving said teaching skills. Sample pre-service teaching evaluation forms were collected from supervising instructors, computed, compared and analyzed within and across areas of teaching skills. The results revealed that even during their first actual teaching exposures, pre-service teachers had already shown teacher personalities and lesson planning skills but deficient in other areas, namely; classroom management, teaching methods, content knowledge and questioning skills. These weak areas greatly improved during the next grade level assignment of the participants while their best entry skills were the least developed. It can be gleaned from the results that actual teaching experiences are indeed very useful in training future teachers and therefore must be given maximum attention by teacher-training institutions. These findings would help the college faculty and supervising instructors plan out more relevant interventions in order to maximize learning among education graduates. Further studies on the topic using a more comprehensive research instrument, methodology and scope are also recommended.

**Keywords:** Teaching skills, Pre-service teachers, Mentoring

## INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teaching, or commonly called as practice teaching is the most critical component of teacher training program. It is also considered as the most meaningful and influential portion of professional preparation for teachers. In this stage, pre-service teachers are provided with opportunities that help them gain a comprehensive and realistic picture of the instructional system of which a teacher-to-be is a part (Bustos, 1982). The experiences during pre-service teaching give the highest impact of the future teaching behavior and practices of pre-service teachers (Kingen, 2008).

As apprentice teachers, pre-service teachers are under the direct guidance and supervision of their supervising instructors. In the introductory phase of their training, they were required to observe their respective supervising instructors do actual teaching and other classroom routines. Observing experienced teachers is very useful for beginning teachers in stimulating their own ideas about teaching (Kyriacou, 2007). Then, they gradually participate in routine teaching tasks as modeled by their mentors, and eventually do actual teaching demonstrations on their on-campus and off-campus setting.

The elementary pre-service teachers are evaluated along the following areas: teaching-related personalities, lesson planning skills, content knowledge, teaching methods, classroom management, and questioning skills. These are the areas that compose the teaching evaluation forms used by supervising instructors, the results of which are their bases for post-teaching conferences and eventually, the bases for rating pre-service teachers.

For the past years, many pre-service teachers were observed to have unsatisfactory teaching skills. They had difficulty in planning for teaching (Maandig, 2003), in guiding and directing teaching-learning process (Jakosalem, 2004) and in evaluating students' performance. They needed improvement in identifying and meeting students' needs and in the area on classroom management (Beltran, 1992; Cabañez, 2002). Pre-service teachers were also found to be less effective in imposing discipline and control of students' behavior and in their conduct of various classroom routines and the physical set-up of the classroom. To address these issues, Nzilano, (2013) recommended reforms on pre-service teachers' professional development program and cooperation among schools, colleges and other sectors to improve competencies among pre-service teachers.

In Bukidnon State University's Elementary Laboratory School, results of formative evaluation of the teaching performance of pre-service teachers have

not yet undergone consolidation, analysis, interpretation and dissemination. Instead, pre-service teachers were evaluated only for the purpose of computing their summative rating. To address this gap, this study was conducted not only to describe the teaching skills of pre-service teachers in a holistic perspective, but more importantly, to use the findings as bases for a collaborative plan between the elementary supervising instructors and the College of Education faculty in order to produce batches of quality, competent education graduates.

## FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on Kolb's (2014) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) which places experience at the center of the learning process. The theory proposed a cyclical model of learning, consisting of four stages, namely: concrete experience (or "Do"), reflective observation (or "observe"), abstract conceptualization (or "think"), and active experimentation (or "plan"). In the context of teacher training, pre-service teachers begin with actual teaching experiences, then consciously reflect back on these experiences and attempt to conceptualize a personal theory on their own observations. The learning process is completed when the pre-service teachers plan to apply newly created theory or theories in forthcoming experiences.

Pre-service teachers' approaches to learning to teach are influenced by their teacher education experiences and their vision of teaching (Naylor, 2015). Pre-service teachers are expected to have possessed at least some teaching skills already as they start their internship. They must have learned these from their academic instructors and field exposures. As they undergo actual teaching experiences and perform other related duties, more skills are expected to develop among them. Some of these are manifested early while others take time to develop. It is here where the role of supervising instructors comes in and mentoring serves its purpose.

In the context of the present study, the teaching skills of pre-service teachers are categorized as: a) Teacher Personalities, b) Lesson planning skills, c) Content knowledge, d) Teaching methods, e) Classroom management, and f) Questioning skills. These are the main areas of teaching skills that most likely determine the quality and degree of learning students would get from classroom instructions. Although they are distinct from each other, they interplay to affect the whole teaching-learning process.

Teaching skills of teachers are valuable factors that affect students' academic

engagement, their personalities and special qualities level of content knowledge (Olfos et al., 2009) and the kind and quality of their questions (Hamiloglu and Temiz, 2012). These have a profound impact on children's academic and general development. Teachers' classroom management strategies and programs were also proven to affect students' socio-emotional and academic outcomes.

Moreover, effective teaching methods are important in improving students' school performance. In teaching science concepts, for example, discovery method is more effective than lecture and discussion (Femi and Adewale, 2012). Teaching students in small study groups is also very effective and teacher-student interactive method has better effects than both student-centered and teacher-centered methods (Ganyaupfu, 2013). Spaced learning and chalk-talk approaches showed better results than massed learning and multimedia approach.

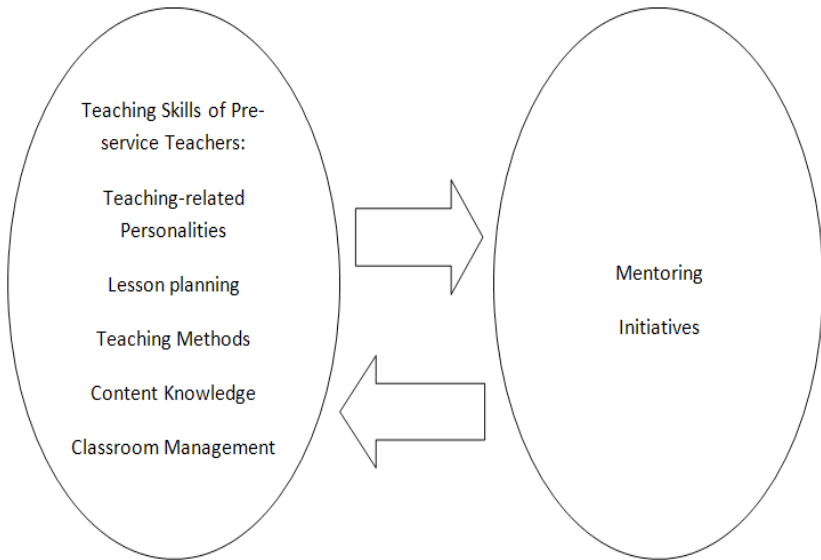


Figure 1. The schematic model of the study

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study were to: (1) Describe the teaching skills of pre-service teachers during their first and second grade level assignments; (2) Compare said teaching skills within and across the six areas, namely: teacher personalities, lesson planning, content knowledge, classroom management, teaching methods, and questioning; and (3) Recommend relevant interventions for maximum development of teaching skills among pre-services teachers.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive method of research both in gathering and in interpreting data. Sample accomplished evaluation forms during teaching demonstrations of elementary pre-service teachers were collected from their respective supervising instructors. These forms contain indicators of different areas of teaching skills that are expected among pre-service teachers of which supervising instructors would assess whether said skills are observed or not observed. Frequency counts were tabulated, summed up and compared. Indicators having higher frequency counts were presumed to be the more developed teaching skills among pre-service teachers.

The above-mentioned procedure was done during the first and second grade level assignments of pre-service teachers. Both results were compared to determine whether or not the teaching skills of the participants improved. Results of focus-group discussions (FGD) with the participants and of the interview with supervising instructors were used to supplement the findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### On Teacher Personalities

Teachers' general personality affects academic achievement of students in various levels and subjects (Garcia, 2011; Ouzts, 1982; Othman, 2009). Among the teacher variables, enthusiasm is the most powerful and unique predictor of students' intrinsic motivation and vitality (Patrick, Hisley and Kempler, 2000). It is an effective predictor of student behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement, and academic self- efficacy (Zhang, 2013).

Table 1. Teaching Personality Skills of Pre-service Teachers

Teaching Personality	1 <sup>ST</sup> Grade Level		2 <sup>ND</sup> grade Level		Difference in Percent
	Assignment		Assignment		
	f (n=37)	%	f (n=37)	%	
1. The teacher is neat and well-groomed.	37	100	36	97	-3
2. The teacher is free from mannerisms that tend to disturb the students' attention.	37	100	34	92	-8
3. The teacher's personality is strong enough to command respect and attention.	26	70	31	84	+14
4. The teacher shows dynamism and enthusiasm.	30	81	33	89	+8
5. The teacher has a well-modulated voice.	33	89	34	92	+3
Mean	32.6	88	33.6	91	+3

Table 1 reveals that pre-service teachers were generally neat and well-groomed. They had well-modulated voice and did not exhibit destructing mannerisms. However, not many pre-service teachers had shown enthusiasm and dynamism in their classes. As beginners, they were typically passive and hesitant to initiate things in their actual teaching and in other related tasks. Very few pre-service teachers showed strong personalities that could command respect and attention among students.

As pre-service teachers started to build rapport with fellow interns, with their supervising instructors and with their students, they slowly gained confidence and improved in this aspect during their second grade level teaching assignment. Other teacher personalities also slightly improved because of their daily classroom experiences and from the comments and suggestions of their supervising instructors during post teaching conferences.

**On Lesson Planning**

Table 2. Lesson Planning Skills of Pre service Teachers

Lesson Planning	1 <sup>ST</sup> Grade Level Assignment		2 <sup>ND</sup> Grade Level Assignment		Difference in Percent
	f (n=37)	%	f (n=37)	%	
1. The lesson plan is well prepared.	28	76	29	78	+2
2. There is congruence between:					
a. Objective and subject matter	37	100	36	97	-3
b. Objective and teaching procedure	34	92	34	92	0
c. Objective and formative test	33	89	31	84	-5
d. Objective and assignment	27	73	31	84	+11
Mean	31.8	86	32.2	87	+1

Results in Table 2 reveal two negative findings. First, not too many pre-service teachers could write well-prepared lesson plans even at the end of their second grade level teaching assignment. Their difficulty in using English as the medium of writing lesson plans was evident in their defective sentences. Second, the overall improvement of the participants in this area was just a single percent. This is a very unusual finding because every pre-service teacher is expected to improve their lesson planning skills especially at the end of their teaching exposures.

Every second semester, there are too many pre-service teachers who are deployed in the elementary laboratory classrooms of Bukidnon State University for their internship training. Supervising instructors have to group them as teams so that the scheduling of their teaching demonstrations is maximized. Team teaching may have limited pre-service teachers’ time and opportunities for a quality lesson planning.

Lesson planning is a fundamental requirement needed to effective instruction (Ayres, 2014). It is a creative process which provides a framework for purposeful learning. A lesson plan helps teachers to think through what they are going to teach and how they are going to teach it. Teachers agree on the importance of its use (Nesari and Heidari, 2014) and for novice teachers, knowing the “what” and the “how” of teaching gives them the starting point from which they can begin their lesson for the assigned course (Villagran, 2014).

In planning lessons, assessments, learning objectives, and instructional strategies need to be closely aligned so that they reinforce one another (Davidovitch, 2013). This study found out that even during their first teaching exposures, pre-service teachers observed congruence in their lesson objectives and the other parts of their lesson plans, namely; subject matter, teaching procedure, practice exercises, formative tests and assignment or homework. This finding implies that they have retained previous learning on how lesson plans should be written. Such finding could be attributed to the lesson planning seminar-workshop initiated by the office of the supervisor of student teaching shortly before their deployment in the laboratory classrooms.

## On Content

Table 3. Content Skills of Pre Service Teachers

Content Knowledge	1 <sup>ST</sup> Grade Level Assignment		2 <sup>ND</sup> Grade Level Assignment		Difference in Percent
	f (n=37)	%	f (n=37)	%	
1. The teacher demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the subject matter	30	81	32	86	+5
2. She/he can relate lessons to actual life situations.	22	59	28	76	+17
3. Keeps abreast of new ideas and understanding in the field.	21	57	25	68	+11
4. Gives sufficient and concrete examples to create meaningful learning experiences.	21	57	28	76	+19
Mean	23.5	64	28.25	76	+12

Table 3 shows that during their first grade level assignment, a good number of pre-service teachers showed in-depth knowledge of elementary lessons. However, almost half of them failed to consider other aspects of teaching content lessons. The teacher's knowledge on the subject content is one important element of teaching skills (Kyriacou, 2007). Theall (1999) claimed that applications of theoretical materials in real-real situations make content learning among students easier and that the relevance of content is demonstrated by real-life examples. However, only about 60 percent of the participants could relate their topics to actual life situations which students might experience in the future. Many pre-service



teachers also failed to integrate current events and updated ideas in teaching Language Arts, Science, Math, and Social Studies. Lesson presentation, including examples and exercises were observed to be too limited and too confined in the textbooks of the students. During their second grade level assignment, pre-service teachers learned to cope with their deficiencies and improved in their content knowledge skills. However, despite an overall 12 percent increase, a quarter of pre-service teachers still needed improvement along this area.

**On Teaching Methods**

Table 4. Teaching Methods of Pre service Teachers

Teaching Methods	1 <sup>ST</sup> Grade Level Assignment		2 <sup>ND</sup> Grade Level Assignment		Difference in Percent
	f (n=37)	%	f (n=37)	%	
	1. Methods used were suited to the capabilities of the students.	36	97	34	
2. The teacher was creative enough to adapt his/her teaching methods to the students' needs.	22	59	34	92	+33
3. Visual and other examples were used to illustrate the lesson.	29	78	36	97	+19
4. The teacher made efficient use of the formative tests after teaching	21	57	28	76	+19
Mean	27	73	33	89	+16

Results in Table 4 reveal that during their first teaching assignment, the teaching methods used by pre-service teachers were suited to the capabilities of their students. This is because most of their instructional activities were taken from the textbooks of the students and were scrutinized by their supervising instructors. However, few of them failed to consider their students' individual differences. There was no variation of their teaching methods as to students' heterogeneous needs, individual differences, learning styles, and their multiple intelligences. It is very difficult for any teacher to adapt his or her teaching styles to the students' learning styles, but if he or she succeeds, the academic performance will rise, gradually becoming stable over time (Lureaet al, 2011).

Students have different learning styles, different attitudes about teaching

and learning, and different levels of intellectual development (Felder and Brent, 2005). The more thoroughly teachers understand the differences, the better chance they have of meeting the diverse learning needs of all of their students. To be effective, teaching strategies or methods should be congruent with students' learning style categories.

There was a great improvement among pre-service teachers in their teaching methods during their next grade level assignment specifically their use of visual aids and formative assessment tools. The percentage of pre-service teachers who utilized relevant visual aids in teaching increased after shifting to another grade level. Supervising instructors emphasize to pre-service teachers the use of visual aids in teaching because they make instruction more effective, they motivate students, and they provide knowledge in depth and details (Rasul, Bukhsh, and Batool, 2011). Improvement on the use of various formative assessment tools or feedbacks was also evident among pre-service teachers.

## On Classroom Management

Table 5. Classroom Management Skills of Pre Service Teachers

Classroom Management	1 <sup>ST</sup> Grade Level Assignment		2 <sup>ND</sup> Grade Level Assignment		Difference in Percent
	f (n=37)	%	f (n=37)	%	
1. The teacher has a systematic way of checking:					
a. Attendance	7	19	16	43	+24
b. Assignment/ homework/ agreement	11	30	18	49	+19
c. Practice exercises	17	46	27	73	+27
d. Group work/projects	6	16	10	27	+11
e. Passing in and out of the room	10	27	23	62	+35
f. Correcting, distributing, and collecting papers	14	38	23	62	+24
2. Order and discipline were present in the classroom	13	35	19	51	+16
Mean	11.14	30	19.42	52	+22

As shown in Table 5, during their first exposures, only very few have shown systematic way of checking students' attendance and group works. They had also difficulty in managing students during checking, collecting and in distributing

their papers. These inadequacies had posed adverse effects in the order and discipline among students because rules dictate behavior.

Classroom management refers to things teachers do and say in order to create conditions conducive for teaching and learning (Ralph, 2004). However, it is identified by teachers of all levels and fields as a major problem and concern in the classroom (Bondy, Ross, Galligane and Hambacher, 2007). Generally, this was also the major concern among pre-service teachers.

During their next grade assignment, the number of pre-service teachers who manifested different classroom management skills increased. They could already control students' behavior by giving short and clear instructions. However, overall results show that only half of them had developed said teaching skills towards the end of their in-campus exposures.

**On Questioning Skills**

Table 6. Questioning Skills of Pre-service Teachers

Questioning Skills	1 <sup>ST</sup> Grade Level Assignment		2 <sup>ND</sup> Grade Level Assignment		Difference in Percent
	f (n=37)	%	f (n=37)	%	
1. The teacher's questioning skill stimulates discussion in different ways such as:					
a. Proving for learners' understanding	33	89	30	81	-8
b. Helping students articulate their ideas and thinking process	24	65	30	81	+16
c. Promote risk taking and problem solving	12	32	18	49	+17
d. Facilitate convergent and divergent thinking	10	27	18	49	+22
e. Stimulate curiosity	17	46	18	49	+3
Mean	19.2	52	22.8	62	+10

Table 6 reveal that only about half of the total number of pre-service teachers was able to demonstrate excellent questioning skills during their first-grade teaching assignment. Most of their questions were convergent and did not promote students' higher thinking skills. This finding was also observed even

among graduate school professors (Itaas, Simbulan, and Ycaro, 2004). They may have difficulty asking divergent questions or they intentionally avoided them because such questions would take time to answer. Moreover, the questions that most pre-service teachers asked during classroom discussions were too objective and could not stimulate curiosity among students. The normal responses of students were limited and contained in their textbooks. They were not able to engage students towards critical thinking, risk taking, and problem-solving. At the end of their second grade assignment, a good number of pre-service teachers had shown improved questioning skills, specifically on questions that help prove learners' understanding of the lesson and questions that articulate students' ideas.

Table 7. Summary Table on Teaching Skills of Pre Service Teachers

Pre-service Teachers' Teaching Skills	Mean Percentage		Percentage of Improvement
	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Level Assignment	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Level Assignment	
Teaching Personality	88	91	3
Lesson Planning Sills	86	87	1
Content Knowledge	64	76	12
Teaching Methods	73	89	16
Classroom Management Skills	37	57	20
Questioning Skills	52	62	10

During their first teaching exposures, many pre-service teachers have shown personalities that are necessary for effective teaching, some lesson planning skills and a few qualities of good teaching methods. However, they needed improvement in their content knowledge, questioning skills and classroom management.

A comparison between their first and second grade level assignments revealed that pre-service teachers improved in all areas of teaching skills. This finding strengthens the theory that teaching skills can be improved by training and practice (Kyriacou, 2007). Remarkably, the weakest skills of pre-service teachers in their first month of practice teaching were the most improved skills towards the end of their teaching exposures while those skills they already possessed in the beginning showed the lowest percentage of improvement. Findings showed

that it is still in the areas of classroom management, questioning and content knowledge that pre-service teachers need more mentoring

## **CONCLUSION**

The Professional Studies Division of the College of Education of Bukidnon State University was effective in some areas of the academic preparation of their future graduates but needed more attention to improve other aspects. These inadequacies were later supplemented by the mentoring practices among the pre-service supervising instructors in the elementary laboratory school of the University. Actual teaching experiences and post-teaching conferences between pre-service teachers and their mentors greatly helped in their learning how to teach. However, even after the teaching exposures of the pre-service teachers in the laboratory classrooms, there are still areas that need improvement.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. A copy of the results of the study will be submitted to the office of the Dean of the College of Education for dissemination. Said results will be considered a priority topic during faculty meetings. There is a need to decide among college instructors on possible interventions for early development of teaching skills among education students even before their practice teaching.
2. All faculty teaching strategy classes, principles of teaching, assessment and methods of teaching will be given copies of both the formative and the summative evaluation forms that supervising instructors use in rating pre-service teachers in order to align their focus on the development of teaching skills among education students.
3. Senior instructors from the elementary laboratory school or other experienced teachers may be invited by college instructors in their respective classes to conduct lectures or demonstration on topics such as: teacher personalities, teaching methods, lesson planning, classroom management and the art of questioning.

4. Require all education students taking professional subjects to compile lesson plans on all elementary subjects in order for them to be acquainted early with the basics of lesson planning. This will be a compulsory requirement for them.
5. Disseminate the results of the study during the orientation program intended for the incoming pre-service teachers to make them aware of and prepare for teaching-related difficulties they might be facing in their practice teaching. Moreover, provide them with copies of the evaluation forms they are to satisfy for their reference and guidance.
6. Aside from post-teaching conferences conducted by individual supervising instructors, a weekly conference with all pre-service teachers will be conducted to disseminate general feedbacks and observations coming from supervising instructors. An open forum will follow in order to discuss teaching-related concerns and how to address them.
7. Writing lesson plans and preparing teaching aids during classes should be discouraged among pre-service teachers. Instead, require everyone to observe and to critique on the performance of the teaching demonstration of their companions using the criteria in their teaching evaluation forms. This will enhance the teaching skills of both the demonstrators and the observers.

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