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DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY PANDEMIC COHORT ENGLISH TEACHERS AND THEIR ADJUSTMENTS IN THE FACE-TO-FACE SETTING

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ABSTRACT
This study explored the difficulties encountered by pandemic cohort English teachers and the implications of virtual teaching internships on their teaching practices. The participants of the study were selected through a purposive sampling technique, which consisted of 10 new English teachers who experienced virtual teaching internships during the pandemic and are currently working in secondary schools in the 3rd Congressional District of Nueva Ecija from 2022 to the present. This research study utilized a Qualitative Descriptive research design. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings of the study indicated that Newly-hired English teachers experience significant challenges with time management due to a combination of heavy teaching responsibilities, leading to elevated stress levels, making it difficult for them to effectively manage and allocate their time. Furthermore, their limited real-life teaching practice during internships has resulted in lower spoken English fluency and confidence, making communication with parents, colleagues, and supervisors difficult at first. Virtual internships, while helpful during the pandemic, did not fully prepare teachers for the realities of face-to-face instruction, especially in creating differentiated lessons for diverse learners. They struggle with issues of classroom management and encouraging students' participation, as students are not willing to engage actively. Also, they find grading and giving feedback a challenging task, mainly because of the time limitation and the need to give personalized, prompt feedback in large classes. It can be affirmed that although virtual internships have been valuable in continuing their internship during the pandemic, they are lacking in fully preparing teachers with the dynamic and complex nature of face-to-face classrooms. The lack of immediacy and real-time interaction of virtual settings limits the capacity to form critical skills like multitasking, classroom management, and communication.

KEYWORDS: *Pandemic cohort English teachers, Virtual teaching internships, implication, time management challenges, Spoken English fluency, Classroom management, Student participation, Differentiated instruction, Qualitative descriptive research, Thematic analysis.*

INTRODUCTION
Student Teaching or Teaching Internship is the culmination of all the forms of experiential learning. It's the prospective teacher's complete absorption into the everyday life of being a teacher, from preparation, actual teaching, and learning assessment. It fosters the application of all theoretical knowledge and competencies the students have acquired throughout the academic years in the teacher education program. To deliver high-quality education in the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) and the CHED jointly issued Memorandum Order No. 39 of 2005, which included criteria for the deployment of student teachers (Department of Education, 2005). Unprecedentedly, the COVID-19 pandemic created major disturbances in education, leading to a rapid shift to online teaching and learning approaches. Consequently, teacher education programs have restructured their instructional strategies regarding practicum components and training for pre-service teachers, typically consisting of classroom observations, peer teaching experiences, and student teachers' placements, as per tradition. The rapid transition to virtual instruction prompted educators to adapt virtual practice teaching as an alternative method to conventional teacher internships.

The transition to distance modality impacted how pre-service teachers acquired their education, minimizing their opportunity to gain practical teaching experience in a classroom setting. As stated by Brillantes et al., (2023), the shift from in-person to virtual classrooms limited the student teachers' practicum experiences to online settings, possibly depriving them of the chance to obtain essential hands-on experience that would help them hone their teaching abilities in the real world.
In the case of the first set of aspiring English teachers who undertook online internships, the move to virtual instruction led to several problems and difficulties. To effectively facilitate language acquisition and literacy development, language teaching highly relies on

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lively student interactions, linguistic scaffolding, and immersive experiences. Digital platforms transition also meant rethinking pedagogical approaches, technology integration, and classroom management issues, among others. Furthermore, developing a favorable classroom climate for novice teachers using digital learning has been an obstacle due to the absence of physical presence and nonverbal indicators in virtual environments that usually serve as cues for students' positive attitudes toward the instructor's lecture introduction and their readiness to participate actively in class.

As a new teacher who experienced virtual internships during the pandemic, the researcher personally encountered transition difficulties. This inspired an investigation into virtual internships' implications on classroom instruction, aligned with DepEd/CHED's mission to ensure quality education. The study aimed to propose solutions for better teacher preparation. Thus, it is imperative to understand the difficulties and implications of virtual teaching internships on the teaching practices of new English teachers. Investigating this phenomenon is critical in facilitating efficient procedures in preparing and mentoring newly hired teachers.

Synthesis of Related Literature and Studies

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) mandates pre-service teachers (PSTs) to complete direct teaching as their culminating experience in actual classrooms. This allows them to completely immerse themselves in teaching and collaborate with more experienced teachers to build topic knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary for effective teaching (Ugalingan et al., 2021; Guerrero, 2024). Teaching Practicum, as defined by Brillantes et al., (2023), is a crucial component of pre-service teachers' education, which serves as a training ground to develop their competencies through hands-on experience in a real-life classroom environment. It develops a deeper understanding of practical applications in an educational setting (Ugalingan et al., 2021; Babanoğlu, 2021). By practice, the student-teachers are required to physically report to the school and assume the responsibilities of a teacher, guided by their cooperating teachers. However, due to the pandemic, student internships transformed into virtual practice teaching in which educators around the world reach out to their students through virtual classrooms, social media platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Facebook, and several online learning management systems. The shift to virtual teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic brought about profound changes in education worldwide, emphasizing the need for digital competence, flexible instructional delivery, and reimagined teacher training programs. Digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and learning management systems became essential tools, enabling real-time interaction and resource sharing between teachers and students (De Gagné & Green, 2024; Maanvizhi et al., 2020). While these platforms attempted to simulate the traditional classroom experience, they also revealed limitations in rapport-building, engagement, and individualized instruction—critical components in effective teaching, especially in language learning contexts (Fansury et al., 2020; Zeeshan et al., 2020).

Virtual practice teaching, while offering flexibility and convenience, posed significant challenges to pre-service teachers. These include difficulties in classroom management, reduced student engagement, limited access to non-verbal cues, and technical difficulties (Brillantes et al., 2023; Babanoğlu, 2021; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). The absence of authentic classroom interaction often hinders the development of core professional competencies, making it harder for future teachers to translate theory into practice (Korucu-Kis, 2021). Furthermore, issues related to content adaptation, individual learner needs, and multitasking capabilities highlighted the gaps in the online teaching practicum model (Kim, 2020; Nel & Marais, 2020; Osman, 2020).

Upon transitioning to face-to-face instruction, newly hired teachers, most of whom were trained under virtual modalities, faced a different set of struggles. These include classroom management, instructional planning, and student engagement (Mananay & Sumalinog, 2024; Carulasan, 2024). With learners accustomed to online platforms, behavioral issues such as lack of attention, boredom, and emotional volatility were frequently reported (Catulpos et al., 2024). Teachers also encountered difficulties in selecting effective teaching strategies and maintaining discipline, revealing a disparity between their training experiences and classroom realities (Syam et al., 2023; Brinia & Psoni, 2021).

In terms of workload and time management, novice teachers felt overwhelmed by lesson planning, grading, and the preparation of instructional materials (Yilmazel, 2023; Ameen et al., 2024). The additional responsibilities of advising, coordinating events, and fulfilling administrative tasks, particularly in rural or underserved schools, compounded their stress and risk of burnout (Paden & Doronio, 2024). These compounded pressures illustrate the critical need for supportive structures within schools, including mentoring and professional development programs.

Communication challenges further exacerbated the novice teachers' struggles. Difficulties in engaging with students, managing expectations from parents, and building collegial relationships were commonly reported (Pedrozo-Acuña, 2022; Khalisa et al., 2022). Furthermore, feelings of isolation, inadequate support from administrators, and a perceived disconnect between their training and real classroom demands hindered their transition into the profession (Brown Taylor, 2020; No et al., 2022).

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Collectively, these findings underscore the need for reform in teacher education programs to bridge the gap between virtual and face-to-face teaching experiences. There is a pressing demand for more immersive, flexible, and context-responsive training models that include hybrid practicum options, structured mentoring, and emotional support systems. Educational institutions must ensure that both pre-service and newly hired teachers are equipped with the essential competencies and skills necessary for today's evolving classroom environments.

Statement of the Problem

The study sought to investigate the implications of virtual teaching internship experiences on the teaching practices of new English teachers in face-to-face settings, especially difficulties encountered by pandemic cohort teachers in teaching English. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How may the profile of the respondents be described in terms of:
    1.1 age;
    1.2 gender;
    1.3 Highest educational attainment; and
    1.4 Number of years in teaching?
2. How do the participants describe their difficulties in teaching English in a face-to-face setting in terms of:
    2.1. Time Management;
    2.2. Communication;
    2.3. Teaching Strategies;
    2.3. Student Engagement; and
    2.4. Student Assessment and Providing Feedback?
3. What are the implications of virtual teaching internships in teaching English via Face-to-face?
4. Based on the result of the study, design a professional development program to address the inadequacies and problems.

METHOD

Research Design

This research study utilized Qualitative Descriptive research to identify and interpret the difficulties encountered by pandemic cohort English teachers in their current teaching practices as New English Teachers.

Participants of the Study and Sampling Technique

The participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Furthermore, inclusion criteria were established to ensure that the participants will provide the pertinent data necessary to accomplish the study's objectives, which include the following: (a) the participant had performed their Virtual teaching internship during the pandemic, and (b) they must be New English Teachers who are currently working in any Secondary School in the 3rd Congressional District of Nueva Ecija starting from 2022 up to present year. Participants were composed of 10 New English Teachers from the Gabaldon, Bongabon, and Palayan districts.

Materials and Instruments

To obtain the necessary data, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview, which is in line with the research questions identified in the study. The instrument was composed of open-ended interview questions to gather information/data based on their virtual teaching experiences and the challenges as New English Teachers

Data Analysis

After the interview, the collected data were transcribed and evaluated using thematic analysis. According to Roldugin (2023), thematic analysis serves as an accessible and flexible method for analyzing qualitative data, facilitating the identification of patterns and themes. The researcher closely examined the participants' responses and identified common themes, sub-themes, ideas, and similar responses.

Professional Development Plan

Based on the findings of this study, the pandemic cohort English teachers often lack real-world teaching exposure, having completed much of their training virtually. As a result, they face difficulties in time management, communication, behavior management, teaching strategies, and assessment in real-time settings. To address the problem, the proponent proposes "ENGAGE", which stands for Empowering New Generation of English Teachers for Active Growth and Engagement.

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Key Areas	Objectives	• Activities/Strategies	Time Frame	• Success Indicators
Rebuilding Time & Workload Management	Enhance newly-hired English teachers' time and workload management skills while supporting their mental health and professional growth to improve teaching effectiveness and reduce stress	• Time-blocking through digital planners per month (aligned with their teaching schedule) • Peer sharing of workload strategies • Mentor-led workshop on sustainable time management • Training on AI utilization in preparing instructional materials to save time • Mindful Monday: Weekly guided meditation and check-in.	6 months 1 day per week of in-person mentoring, training, and workshops	• 100% of participating teachers create and maintain a digital planner • Pre- and post-workshop self-assessments show measurable improvement in teachers' skills in time management
Voice and Confidence in Communication	To strengthen English communication fluency and classroom discourse confidence.	• Intensive speaking workshops/practice using real-life scenarios and dialogues • Training on creating a supportive classroom environment to encourage student talk • Podcasting Practice: Teachers record and share short podcasts on classroom stories. • Peer observation and feedback cycles. • Mentor-facilitated group discussions on workplace communication norms	1 day per week of in-person mentoring, training, and workshops	• Confidence and fluency in English communication
Classroom Management & Student Engagement	Improve classroom management with an emphasis on engaging language learners	• Training on Responsive Classroom language, classroom management, and managing mixed-proficiency learners • Designing a gamified classroom routine • Training on identifying triggers and early intervention. -Designing a consistent reward system. -Practice redirecting behavior privately. • Mentor-led individual coaching sessions. • Class Observation and reflection	1 day per week of in-person mentoring, training, and workshops	• Improved classroom and student engagement as observed by mentors
Inclusive & Differentiated Instruction	Develop instructional strategies suited to diverse learners and English proficiency levels.	• Module and seminar on Learner Diversity and Student Inclusion • Sharing and Adaptation of lessons and strategy for mixed proficiency learners • Training on pedagogy/different teaching strategies	1 day per week of in-person mentoring, training, and workshops	• Application of effective English language strategies in real classrooms •

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Effective Assessment Practices	Equip teachers with authentic, varied, and timely assessment practices in ELT.	• Training on Designing language assessment and Rubric building, and feedback scheduling	Effective Assessment Practices	• Equip teachers with authentic, varied, and timely assessment practices in ELT.
From Online to Classroom Teaching Transition	Facilitate the smooth transition from virtual training to real-world teaching.	• Reflective classroom walkthroughs • Peer sharing of anxieties and affirmations	3-5 hours per week	• Teachers report increased confidence and reduced anxiety in post-session surveys. • Mentor evaluations confirm progressive improvement in classroom management and instructional delivery based on reflections.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

Personal Information of Newly-hired English Teachers

The study sample consisted of ten newly-hired English teachers, who were mostly female (80%) and aged 25-26 (90%), with one participant being 31 years old. They are all pursuing master's degrees, which implies college graduation as their highest level of education. The majority (70%) have more than one year of teaching experience in a public secondary school, while 30% have less than one year.

Difficulties Encountered in teaching English in a face-to-face setting in terms of Time Management

Newly-hired English teachers articulated considerable time management concerns due to being overwhelmed with heavy teaching tasks, such as lesson planning, development of resources tailored for English language learners, and preparation and timely provision of evaluative feedback. Furthermore, supplementary school obligations to include advisory roles, coordination tasks, leadership functions, extracurricular engagement such as student mentorship, and various administrative duties further increase time pressures.

Difficulties Encountered in teaching English in a face-to-face setting in terms of Communication

Teachers struggle initially with spoken English confidence, affected by limited real-life practice during virtual internships. Students' shyness and informal language use hinder communication. New teachers also find it intimidating to interact professionally with colleagues, supervisors, and parents, especially when seeking advice or discussing student progress.

Difficulties Encountered in teaching English in a face-to-face setting in terms of Teaching Strategy

Newly hired English teachers lack pedagogical teaching practices in traditional classroom settings, primarily due to the limitations of their virtual internship experiences in preparing them for the demands of face-to-face instruction. Since they are more technology-dependent during online practicum, they feel less prepared since face-to-face instruction offers different resources, facilities, connectivity, and processes. Moreover, they reported challenges in implementing teaching strategies for diverse learners, specifically, designing differentiated instruction to cater to different styles and proficiency levels of learners. Implementing certain potentially effective strategies is hindered by the pressure to cover the curriculum within limited timeframes.

Difficulties Encountered in teaching English in a face-to-face setting in terms of Student Engagement

The responses provided by the participants suggest that the newly hired English teachers encounter student engagement concerns due to a lack of active participation, shyness, lack of confidence, and varied proficiency. Classroom management is a major challenge, with disruptive behaviors and reluctance to follow rules causing stress and fatigue for new teachers. They feel less prepared for classroom management, overwhelmed by it, and find managing behaviors tiring.

Difficulties Encountered in teaching English in a face-to-face setting in terms of Assessment and Providing Feedback

New English teachers face a major struggle with grading and giving feedback. They experience time constraints to mark essays and written assessments, and the desire to give personal and quick feedback, especially in large classes. These teachers also had minimal practice in making and using different ways to assess various learning needs and were challenged with the originality of student work.

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Implications of Virtual Internship on Face-to-face English teaching

Virtual internships have offered English pre-service teachers the opportunity to learn and practice teaching during pandemic-related shutdowns, however, they do not fully equip new teachers for the demands of the face-to-face classroom. There is an absence of immediacy and spontaneity in online experiences inherent to in-person teaching. Therefore, there is a lack of opportunity to practice multitasking, managing students in a classroom, and communicating in real time, observing a variety of teaching methods and authentic assessment techniques appropriate for the varied learners, and providing feedback within a limited time.

Conclusions

1. Female educators dominate the sample group, but all of them demonstrate commitment to professional growth since they are actively pursuing higher education and professional development. Most participants gained at least one year of teaching experience in secondary public schools.
2. Newly-hired English teachers experience significant challenges and adjustments in their first year of teaching in terms of time management, communication, teaching strategies, student engagement, and student assessment and providing feedback.
    2.1 Newly-hired English teachers experience significant challenges with time management due to a combination of heavy teaching responsibilities and numerous supplementary school obligations. These lead to elevated stress levels, making it difficult for them to effectively manage and allocate their time.
    2.2 The lack of real-life teaching practice during their internships has resulted in reduced spoken English fluency and confidence. Student communication barriers contribute to these challenges. Also, they find it difficult to communicate effectively with parents and initially struggle to communicate with colleagues and supervisors.
    2.3 Newly-hired English teachers struggle to navigate traditional classroom settings because virtual internship experiences did not fully prepare them for the realities of face-to-face teaching. They have difficulty applying effective teaching approaches to diverse learners and face challenges in facilitating student engagement and collaboration.
    2.4 The findings indicate that novice English teachers struggle with issues of classroom management and encouraging students' participation, as students are not willing to engage actively because they are shy, lack confidence, or have differing language proficiency levels.
    2.5 New English teachers struggle with grading and providing timely, personalized feedback, especially in large classes. Their limited experience with diverse assessment methods and concerns about the authenticity of student work add to these challenges.
3. It can be affirmed that although virtual internship has been valuable for enabling English pre-service teachers to continue their internship, they are lacking in fully preparing teachers with the dynamic and complex nature of face-to-face classrooms. The lack of real-time interaction and immediacy limits the development of essential skills like multitasking, classroom management, and diverse pedagogy.
4. These challenges encountered by newly hired English teachers necessitate targeted professional development.

Recommendations

1. Newly-hired English teachers should strive and help themselves adopt effective time management techniques, engage in continuous communication practice, seek mentorship and peer support, and focus on differentiated and student-centered instruction.
2. School administrators should design workshops and training sessions that address specific challenges novice teachers face, such as time management, communication, teaching strategies, student engagement, and authentic assessment techniques. Also, they should provide moral and emotional development support to newly hired teachers.
    2.1 Schools should assign administrative support or reduce non-teaching duties for novice teachers to alleviate workload stress. They may limit advisory, coordination, and administrative tasks for newly-hired teachers to allow focus on core teaching responsibilities.
    2.2 Schools should offer regular professional development sessions focused on improving English proficiency for both teachers and students.
    2.3 Schools should organize workshops on effective communication with parents, colleagues, and supervisors.
    2.4 Novice teachers should be paired with experienced teachers who will serve as their mentors from similar school contexts to provide ongoing, personalized guidance and support, helping them to adapt teaching and classroom management strategies from virtual environments to face-to-face settings.
    2.5 Schools should provide training on varied formative and summative assessment techniques that accommodate different learner profiles and provide timely, personalized feedback.

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