# BETWEEN THE LINES OF THEORY: THE THEORY TO PRACTICE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE OF PRACTICE TEACHERS IN REAL-CLASSROOM SETTINGS

*(Research artice)*

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## Abstract

The transition from theoretical coursework to actual classroom is a pivotal phase in teacher preparation. This study explored the lived experiences of pre-service teachers as they navigated the shift from academic instruction to real teaching environments. Employing a transcendental phenomenological design, data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 purposively selected practice teachers from a Teacher Education Institutions (TEI) in Mindanao, Philippines. Colaizzi's method guided the analysis of narratives, revealing themes that captured the emotional, pedagogical, and professional dimensions of their journey. Themes generated include; (1) the contrast between expectations and realities, (2) the significant challenges faced in classroom management and adapting to learner diversity, (3) their coping mechanisms, and (4) crucial learnings about flexibility and student relationships, and the role of mentorship, and self-reflection in shaping confidence and teaching identity. Ultimately, the findings highlight that this transition is not merely a technical application of theory, but a deeply personal and transformative journey that shapes the perspectives and identity of these future educators. The study recommends strengthening mentorship, embedding classroom management support, and integrating reflective pedagogical tools in teacher education curricula to better scaffold the transition.

*Keywords:* Practice teachers; internship; teacher education; theory to practice; quality education

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## 1.      Introduction

The transition from theoretical knowledge acquired in teacher education programs to practical application in real classroom settings remains a critical phase in the development of pre-service teachers. This phase, often referred to as the practicum, internship, or practice teaching plays a significant role in shaping the professional identities and competencies of future educators (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Despite rigorous coursework and simulation-based instruction in their tertiary training, many practice teachers face considerable challenges when thrust into the real classroom set-up, which may reveal a potential gap between pedagogical theory and classroom realities (Flores, 2020). Practice teaching, considered the capstone experience in teacher education programs, allows pre-service teachers to immerse themselves in real teaching environments under the guidance of cooperating teachers and supervisors. It provides opportunities for them to apply their theoretical knowledge, manage classrooms, assess student learning, and reflect critically on their instructional practices (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012).

In the Philippine context, TEIs operate under the supervision of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and in partnership with the Department of Education (DepEd) through a practice teaching mechanism that assigns pre-service teachers to cooperating schools. Within this mechanism, practice teachers are expected to demonstrate professional standards outlined in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). However, despite structured supervision, variations in mentoring quality, school contexts, and institutional support systems continue to shape and, at times, hinder the effectiveness of the transition process.

Globally and locally, the practicum experience has been identified as a transformative yet demanding phase for pre-service teachers. Studies highlight recurring difficulties such as classroom management, adapting to learner diversity, balancing expectations with realities, and navigating emotional stress (Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009; Hudson, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). For instance, Zeichner (2010) argues that disconnects between university-based teacher preparation and the realities of school settings can hinder pre-service teachers' ability to apply their learning effectively.These challenges often evoke anxiety and self-doubt but can also catalyze growth when coupled with reflective practice and strong mentorship (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012; Ambrosetti, 2014). Korthagen (2017) advocates for a "realistic approach" to teacher education—one that integrates theory, practice, and reflection to foster holistic professional growth.

Beyond pedagogical challenges, the practicum serves as a socialization process where pre-service teachers begin to construct their professional identity. As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue, teacher identity formation is a dynamic process shaped by experiences, feedback, and values. The lived experiences of pre-service teachers—how they interpret, negotiate, and reflect on their roles—determine not only their teaching competence but also their commitment to the profession (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014).

Despite its challenges, the practicum remains a transformative learning experience that allows pre-service teachers to grow both personally and professionally. Supportive mentorship, collaborative reflection, and strong university-school partnerships have been identified as key enablers of a successful transition (Ambrosetti, 2014; Hudson & Hudson, 2011). While extensive research has examined teaching practicum in various contexts, limited empirical studies in the Philippines explore how practice teachers experience the transition from theory to real classroom practice within the unique mechanisms of TEIs.

## 2.        Literature Review

The transition of practice from theoretical knowledge acquired in university settings to the realities of a real-classroom setting is a pervasive and complex area of research in teacher education.  One key area of focus is the persistent divide between theory and practice that pre-service teachers face. This divide represents a perceived disjuncture where the theoretical principles, pedagogical strategies, and "ideal" concepts taught in university courses feel remote, abstract, or irrelevant when applied in the complex, "real" environment of a school classroom (Allen, 2009; Nilssen & Solheim, 2015).

Practice teachers frequently report dissonance and incongruence between the idealized educational theories and the practical, on-the-ground realities of their field experiences (Nasir & Zafar, 2019; McGarr et al., 2017). This can lead to what is sometimes termed "practice shock," where student teachers' ideals are challenged by classroom realities, sometimes leading them to reject theory as "too abstract" (Voss & Kunter, 2020). Ünver (2014) examined the efforts to connect theory with classroom practice through collaborative planning and reflective thinking activities within teacher education programs. The study highlighted the importance of teamwork, qualified staff, and administrative support to enhance the integration of theory and practice and recommended increasing practice hours and reflective activities to support this transition.

Classroom management and learner diversity represent significant challenges for practice teachers during their transition. Research shows that coping strategies and resilience are important for managing these challenges effectively.  The challenges are often exacerbated by the complexity of the classroom, including large class sizes, disruptive student behavior, rigid administrative expectations, and a perceived pressure to conform to the established, traditional practices of mentor teachers, which may contradict the innovative pedagogies learned at university (Nasir & Zafar, 2019; Allen, 2009; Mark, Lohwasser, & Tasker, 2021). Consequently, practice teachers may struggle with the practical application of pedagogical principles, classroom management, and creating engaging, age-appropriate lessons (Pratiwi, 2020). Van der Kleij et al. (2025) underscored the importance of sustained professional learning and reflection to help  teachers adapt and thrive in classroom settings. Collaborative feedback, peer observation, and data-informed practice are effective approaches to improving instructional strategies and teacher confidence. Additionally, the role of mentorship is also crucial; it facilitates the transfer of knowledge and skills from experienced teachers to novices and supports emotional and professional development. Masalimova et al. (2024) and Kuhn (2024)

highlighted that well-trained mentors improve teaching outcomes and teacher wellbeing, urging structured mentoring programs within teacher education.

Reflective practice emerges as a foundational element in bridging theory to practice. Hatton and Smith (1995) as well as Suphasri (2021) established that reflective practice—encompassing journaling, peer feedback, and action research—enhances teachers' self-awareness, critical thinking, and pedagogical innovation. Reflective supervision combined with mentoring fosters a culture of continuous professional growth and adaptability to diverse learner needs. Reviews by recent scholars suggest that integrating reflective pedagogical tools into teacher training programs significantly benefits the development of teacher identity and instructional efficacy. The success of these models depends on the quality of support received and whether the practicum is a space for exploring evidence-informed practices rather than just an induction into received ways of teaching (Reynolds et al., 2016). Collaborative partnerships between university lecturers, supervising teachers, and student teachers are crucial for co-designing pedagogical approaches and developing a shared understanding of the theory-practice link (Tonna et al., 2017; Pienaar et al., 2023).

Literature converges on the understanding that the theory-to-practice transition is a multifaceted, transformative journey requiring robust support systems. Effective mentorship, embedded classroom management training, reflective practices, and aligned professional learning communities are essential for scaffolding pre-service teachers' successful navigation of real-classroom challenges. These insights underpin recommendations for teacher education programs to restructure curricula and support mechanisms to better prepare future educators.

This study addresses the question: **What is it like for pre-service teachers to transition from theoretical preparation to real classroom practice?**

## 3.       Method

### 3.1.    *Study Design, Setting, and Participants*

This study adopted a transcendental phenomenological design which seeks to capture and describe the essence of participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As a philosophical approach, transcendental phenomenology emphasizes epoche—the process of setting aside preconceptions to allow phenomena to emerge authentically. This design aligns with the study's intent to explore the transition experiences of practice teachers as they move from theoretical preparation to real-world classroom engagement. The study was conducted at a Teacher Education Institution (TEI) in Mindanao, Philippines, which serves as a training ground for pre-service teachers completing their practicum requirements. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring they possessed direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Inclusion criteria included:
a) official enrollment in the teaching internship course;
b) active field placement in a classroom setting;
c) accessibility via mobile or online communication platforms; and
d) willingness to provide honest and voluntary responses.

Participants retained the right to withdraw consent at any stage without consequence. Using these criteria, 16 pre-service teachers qualified and participated in the study. Data saturation was achieved with the 16th participant, indicating that no new information or themes were emerging (Urquhart, 2013).

Table 1. Demographic information about he participants

| Code | Gender | Age | Rural/Urban |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 (P1) | F | 22 | Rural School |
| Participant 2 (P2) | F | 21 | Rural School |
| Participant 3 (P3) | M | 23 | Urban School |
| Participant 4 (P4) | M | 23 | Urban School |
| Participant 5 (P5) | F | 22 | Urban School |
| Participant 6 (P6) | F | 22 | Urban School |
| Participant 7 (P7) | F | 22 | Urban School |
| Participant 8 (P8) | F | 21 | Rural School |
| Participant 9 (P9) | F | 22 | Urban School |
| Participant 10 (P10) | F | 23 | Rural School |
| Participant 11 (P11) | F | 22 | Urban School |
| Participant 12 (P12) | F | 21 | Urban School |
| Participant 13 (P13) | F | 23 | Urban School |
| Participant 14 (P14) | F | 23 | Rural School |
| Participant 15 (P15) | F | 21 | Rural School |
| Participant 16 (P16) | F | 22 | Urban School |

*3.2.   Instruments*

In phenomenological inquiry, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, making a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical underpinnings essential for ensuring the credibility of qualitative investigations (Golafshani, 2003). To uphold the fidelity of the study to its phenomenological orientation, the researcher engaged in a thorough review of phenomenological philosophy and methodology (Bevan, 2014). The main instrument of data collection was an in-depth phenomenological interview, guided by a semi-structured interview

guide aligned with the research questions. To complement this, the researcher kept field notes and a reflexive journal throughout the study. The journal contained reflections, ongoing bracketing activities, and records of methodological decisions and insights emerging during the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 2005).

## 3.3. Data Collection

To gain rich insights into the transition experiences of practice teachers, the researcher conducted phenomenological interviews. Given the restrictions and logistical considerations during data collection, online interviews were employed as an augmented form of data gathering, which is an accepted qualitative approach mediated through digital communication platforms (Salmons, 2014). Ethical procedures were strictly followed. Participants received electronic and/or printed informed consent forms detailing the study purpose, voluntary nature of participation, and permission for recording. Consents were gathered via Messenger or email. The interviews were conducted on platforms preferred by participants (e.g., Google Meet, Zoom, Messenger, or voice call), each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed manually by the researcher to ensure immersion in the data and familiarity with participants' narratives. Manual transcription also allowed the researcher to capture nuances in tone and emphasis, important for phenomenological analysis. The transcriptions were verified against the audio files for accuracy before analysis.

## 3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method in conjunction with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model of thematic analysis, to ensure systematic and rigorous handling of qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis started with the (1) Familiarization of the data where the researcher repeatedly read the transcribed narratives to become deeply acquainted with the participants' lived experiences. (2) Second is generating initial codes where meaningful statements were identified and manually coded. The researcher used Microsoft Word for organizing codes, rather than specialized software, to maintain close engagement with the data. (3) Then the searching for themes followed, where related codes were clustered together into preliminary themes representing shared patterns of experience. (4) The initial themes were re-examined, compared, and merged where overlaps occurred. Irrelevant or weakly supported codes were refined or eliminated to ensure coherence and internal consistency. (5) Each theme was clearly defined, with attention to its boundaries and relationship to other themes, forming an integrative structure of meaning. (6) Finally, a comprehensive description of the essence of the phenomenon was written, capturing the central meaning of the transition experience. After developing the thematic structure, member checking was conducted by returning the summarized themes and interpretations to participants for validation. Their feedback ensured that the analysis accurately reflected their lived experiences. This combination of Colaizzi's phenomenological rigor and Braun and Clarke's systematic thematic process strengthened the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study.

*3.5.      Ethical Considerations*

Since there is human participation required in this study, all ethical guidelines on the data privacy act were followed. The researcher explained important details such as the objectives and methodology of the study to the participants. Informed consent forms were given to the participants to signify who will voluntarily participate in the study. Research participants were oriented of their right to end the interview at any time or withdraw from the study at any point during this study. The names of the participants and the HEIs were not revealed to provide anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were assigned code names and any participant identifiers (e.g. names) were removed. The interviews conducted were facilitated with utmost care and they were informed that all proceedings are recorded.

## 4.      Results & Discussion

During the data collection process, participants shared their feelings, reflections, and lived experiences regarding their transition from college instruction to actual classroom practice. Analysis of the transcribed interviews yielded four major themes that capture the essence of their experiences:

1.   Walking into the Unknown: Expectation versus Reality
2.   Battles Behind the Board: Challenges Encountered
3.   Growth through the Grit: Coping and Learning
4.   From the Front to the Heart of the Classroom: The Transformation

These themes collectively illuminate how practice teachers navigated the dynamic, emotional, and professional shifts from pre-service preparation to real teaching contexts.

*Theme 1. Walking into the Unknown: Expectation versus Reality*

The initial encounter with the real classroom environment was characterized by a flood of mixed emotions. Participants described feeling a complex blend of excitement, fear, doubt, and anticipation. Participants 8 and 12 reflected,

> *"Walking into the real classroom for the first time as a pre-service teacher was both exciting and nerve-wracking... it was real students, a real environment, and real responsibilities." (P8)*

> *"I felt doubt immediately… I started questioning my ability to become a good teacher. It was overwhelming."(P12)*

These emotional reactions are consistent with the findings of Flores and Day (2006), who argued that the transition involves identity construction shaped by both personal emotions and professional expectations. Similarly, Pillen, Beijaard, and den Brok (2013) discussed the tensions and vulnerabilities pre-service teachers face as they encounter the realities of teaching, which often conflict with their idealistic views formed during coursework. Despite this, many

found reassurance through meaningful interactions with learners, with one noting, *"The atmosphere is very welcoming and I can see in the eyes of the children that they are excited to meet and learn from us."*

This positive reinforcement from students plays a key role in the emotional regulation and confidence-building of pre-service teachers. Zembylas (2005) noted that emotional experiences in the classroom can serve as sources of motivation and reflection for teachers, especially when students show engagement and responsiveness.

Participants highlighted the stark contrast between expectations and reality in their early days of teaching. Several admitted to expecting a smooth transition, only to be met with the unpredictable behaviors and learning needs of actual students. *"I thought everything would go according to plan, but in reality, I had to adjust almost every day,"* shared one intern. Another added, *"I expected the classroom to be quieter and more controlled... but the students were lively and at times hard to manage."*

Such observations are supported by Majocha, and Van Nuland (2019) highlighted that novice teachers frequently encounter a disparity between the theoretical knowledge acquired during their teacher education programs and the unpredictable, multifaceted realities of actual classroom settings. Moreover, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998) revealed in their meta-analysis that pre-service teachers carry preconceived notions into the practicum, which are often challenged upon encountering real classroom settings. While participants acknowledged the foundational role of their teacher education coursework, they also expressed that real learning occurred when theory met reality.

> *"My coursework gave me the basics. The real classroom taught me how to actually use them,"* one participant summarized. Another elaborated, *"I learned a lot about child development and strategies, but using them in real time, with real learners, was where I really grew."*

This aligns with Darling-Hammond's (2006) findings that while pedagogical knowledge is crucial, the practicum serves as the crucible where theory is refined through lived experience. Allen (2009) also stressed that professional growth in teaching is deeply experiential, with learning being maximized in authentic, contextualized settings.

Pre-service teachers found a wide gap between their expectations and the real classroom dynamics. They imagined control, calmness, and smooth delivery—but encountered chaos, behavior issues, and the need to improvise.

> *"I thought my lesson plan was good enough, but in reality, I had to adjust every part of it just to make the kids stay focused." (P14)*

> *"I expected kids to just sit and listen—but no, they were loud, diverse, and needed constant attention." (P4)*

These findings echo with Voss & Kunter (2020) which found an increase in emotional exhaustion and a drop in constructivist beliefs among beginning teachers. Similarly, Korthagen et al. (2001) emphasized the emotional dissonance that occurs when pre-service teachers meet the multifaceted nature of real learners, often triggering self-doubt. This dissonance, though challenging, served as a catalyst for growth. While teacher education laid the foundation, participants quickly learned that theory alone was not enough. Adaptation was necessary.

> *"Theory gave me the structure, but real teaching taught me to bend that structure every day."(P7)*

> *"We learned about Piaget and Vygotsky, but the moment I had to scaffold a struggling learner while ten others were shouting—it wasn't in the book!" (P2)*

According to Zeichner and Liston (2013), teacher preparation programs often emphasize ideal scenarios, which can leave preservice teachers unprepared for the nuances of real-world teaching. The gap between theory and practice, as highlighted by Darling-Hammond (2006), underscores the need for stronger clinical experiences in teacher education to bridge these disparities.

*Theme 2. Battles Behind the Board: Challenges Encountered*

The practicum period was fraught with challenges, most notably in classroom management, time constraints, workload, resource limitations, and adapting to learner diversity. Some participants described the physical and emotional exhaustion, with a participants stating,

> *"It was really difficult since some students just refuse to listen no matter how much you scold them or tell them that their points will be deducted." (P8)*

> *"One of the most significant challenges I faced during my student teaching was classroom management. No matter how many strategies I learned in coursework, it was a completely different experience trying to manage a room full of diverse personalities in real time. Finding the right balance between being approachable and maintaining authority was especially tricky in the beginning." (P11)*

Classroom management emerged as a central challenge for practice teachers. The data suggests that the realities of managing a classroom with diverse learners, behaviors, and needs often differ significantly from the theoretical knowledge acquired in teacher education programs. As Darling-Hammond (2006) notes, effective classroom management is crucial for creating a positive learning environment and promoting student achievement. Additionally, many expressed how overwhelming it was to manage student behavior, and balancing time, especially in large, diverse classes.

> *"Classroom management was the hardest. No matter what strategy I used, there were still learners who refused to listen." (P11)*

*"Also, the time allotment for subjects. In the laboratory school, there is 1 hour alloted for each subject. While in the off-campus, there is only 45 minutes. That was why almost all of us sometimes go over the alloted time. The cooperating teachers' comment was always on time management." (P12)*

*"Time management was almost impossible. I had to write lesson plans, create materials, teach all day—and still go home to prepare again." (P15)*

This finding aligns with previous research that highlights the heavy workload and time pressures experienced by beginning teachers (Johnson et al., 2012). The ability to manage time effectively is a critical skill for teachers, but it requires careful planning, organization, and prioritization, which can be particularly challenging for those new to the profession. Meanwhile, others mentioned challenges relating to the task of adapting to student diversity. Participant quotes:

*"The challenges I faced is that before, I cannot imagine myself that I'll be surviving this kind of profession someday knowing that I couldn't handle different sets of attitudes and level of intelligence, most especially the patience because I'm really an impatient type of a person." (P4)*

*"During my internship, I think the most significant challenge that I have faced was the learners' diversity. The difference between the learners' personalities, interests, abilities, and attention-span always affects the class." (P12)*

Practice teachers find it challenging to handle the diversity in classrooms. As P4 and P12 mention, they have to deal with different attitudes, intelligence levels, personalities, interests, abilities, and attention spans. This is supported by research that indicates that new teachers often struggle with differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners (Tomlinson, 2014).

*Theme 3. Growth through the Grit: Coping and learning*

Despite the hurdles, the internship became a transformative experience. It was within the pressures of real classroom settings that they began to discover their own capacities for growth, resilience, and self-efficacy. What began as a space of uncertainty gradually evolved into one of self-realization and empowerment.

These findings also align with Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that mastery experiences—successfully overcoming challenges—are the most effective way to build belief in one's capabilities.

*"Through constant feedback, suggestions, and hands-on experience, I was able to improve... I now see myself as a capable and effective future teacher,"* one participant reflected.
Another added, *"I doubted my skills before, but this experience taught me that I am patient and willing to grow." (P2)*

*"I doubted myself so much at first, but every day in the classroom built my confidence. Now, I believe I can really do this." (P6)*

*"I used to be shy, but I learned to take charge. I'm more confident now—not just as a teacher, but                                 as                          a                               person."*
*(P10)*

Flexibility, responsiveness, and the emotional dimensions of teaching emerged as key learnings. As Mohamed & Rashid (2022), emphasizes that reflective practice becomes triggered by "unexpected and unpredictable moments of surprise and uncertainty that demand our attention" (which matches your phrasing about messy situations). According to Day and Leitch (2001), emotional resilience is a critical component of effective teaching, especially during the early stages of a teacher's career. This is evident in Participant 10's reflection

*"I learned that building a good relationship with the students makes a huge difference in how they respond to learning," said one teacher. Another observed, "Being flexible is important. You can't always follow your lesson plan exactly as you prepared it."*

*"Flexibility is everything. Lesson plans are just guides—you have to learn to read the room and adjust." (P3)*

*"The connection I built with my students made all the difference. They opened up to me, and it changed how they engaged in class." (P16)*

Also, mentorship and support systems played an important role in their transition experience. *(Held by Hands That Know: The Power of Shared Journeys)* Mentorship and peer collaboration were essential supports during the transition. Many practice teachers credited their supervising instructors with guiding their development. "The feedback from my cooperating teacher helped me see what I was doing well and what I needed to improve on," a participant shared. Peer support also played a role in coping with the daily demands. Mentorship and collaboration played a crucial role in the transition. Cooperating teachers and peers offered reassurance, guidance, and critical feedback.

*"My cooperating teacher saw potential in me even when I didn't. Her feedback helped me grow."*
*(P13)*

*"It was our shared struggles and laughs as fellow practice teachers that kept me going."*
*(P17)*

In essence, this theme affirms that coping and learning are interconnected. The challenges encountered within the classroom did not function solely as obstacles but instead emerged as pivotal opportunities for fostering resilience, adaptability, and the progressive development of a professional teaching identity. When situated within a supportive context that includes mentorship and guided reflection, field-based experiences become vital spaces for

bridging theoretical knowledge with authentic, lived practice—enabling the meaningful embodiment of professional competence and pedagogical insight (Korthagen, 2010).

*Theme 4. From the Front to the Heart of the Classroom: The Transformation*

Participants reported a deepened understanding of teaching and learning, shifting from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered philosophy.

> *"I realized that teaching is not just about delivering lessons but about understanding the students' needs and adjusting to them,"* one explained.

This evolution emphasized creating a space where the practice teachers could engage, explore, and grow. There was a clear shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered mindsets. Participants began to see the value of guiding, listening, and collaborating with students rather than simply delivering content.

> *"At first, I thought my job was to teach lessons. Now I realize my role is to connect, guide, and learn with them." (P1)*
>
> *"My classroom is no longer about me—it's about them. Their needs, their pace, their voices." (P9)*

Internship as a hands-on experience transform this practice teachers. It shaped their perspectives and paved their way in traversing reality. Truths forged in chalk dust and late-night lesson plans urged these future teachers to be brave, compassionate, and joyfully human in the classroom. This echoes the work of Noddings (2005), who argues that caring is at the heart of effective teaching, and that pedagogical relationships must be rooted in attentiveness and responsiveness to students' individual experiences. In their reflections and realizations, they shared:

> *"Teach with heart. Be kind to yourself. Learn from every mistake." (P19)*
> *"No lesson plan will ever prepare you 100%. But your passion and adaptability will carry you through." (P21)\\*

Looking back, participants appreciated both their theoretical foundation and the experiential learning that challenged them to evolve.

> *"Theory gave me the map, but practice taught me how to drive. I'm still learning how to navigate, but I'm getting there." (P18)*
>
> *"I learned that teaching isn't just about applying strategies—it's about being there, present and responsive, every day."(P20)*

The practice teaching experience, therefore, served as a transformative avenue where participants could test, challenge, and refine their professional identities. Field-based experiences catalyzed a change in perspective—shifting focus from lesson execution to meaningful engagement, from performance to connection, and from rigid planning to adaptive

responsiveness. These future teachers began to realize that teaching is not merely a technical endeavor but a deeply relational and moral act.

## 5.     Conclusions

This phenomenological inquiry illuminates practice teaching experience not as a simple application of learned theories, but as a transformative, multifaceted and developmental milestone which reshaped the perspectives and identity of the soon to be educators. It revealed that this transition is marked by an initial encounter with the often-unpredictable realities of the classroom, where theoretical ideals bump against the dynamic, vibrant, and demanding world of real learners. Challenges in classroom management, time constraints, and navigating diverse needs were significant hurdles, yet these very struggles served as fertile ground for remarkable growth.  Through the grit of daily practice, the invaluable support of mentors, and a deepening understanding of the student at the heart of learning, these future educators moved beyond the confines of theory. They learned to adapt, to connect, and to discover their own resilience and pedagogical identities. The essence of their transition lies not just in bridging a gap, but in forging a new understanding of teaching – one that is grounded in empathy, flexibility, and a willingness to learn alongside their students. It is the journey "between the lines of the theory", where the true art and heart of teaching are discovered and refined through lived experience.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics

The author declares no conflict of interest. Since there is human participation, all ethical guidelines on the Data Privacy Act were followed and issues raised by the participants were addressed appropriately.  The researchers explained important details such as the objectives and methodology of the study to the participants. Informed Consent forms were given to signify who will voluntarily participate in the study.  The names of the participants were not revealed to provide anonymity and confidentiality. The in-depth interviews conducted were facilitated with utmost care.

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