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### Lived Experiences of Early Childhood Teaching Interns in a Flexible Learning Environment

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#### Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECED) student interns navigating a flexible learning environment at Cebu Normal University – Integrated Laboratory School. Employing a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach and Colaizzi's seven-step method, the research uncovers the multifaceted realities of internship under blended learning conditions. Three overarching themes emerged: (1) **Confronting Challenges**, encompassing sub-themes such as inadequate internet connectivity, complexities in delivering the teaching-learning process, and personal time management; (2) **Overcoming Adversity and Acquiring Success**; and (3) **Experiencing Growth**, with sub-themes highlighting the application of learned pedagogies,

meaningful experiences, and the perceived convenience of flexible learning. Findings reveal that pre-service teachers are critically aware of both the benefits and limitations of flexible modalities, which significantly shape their professional growth. The study recommends improved internet infrastructure and the provision of adequate teaching resources to support pre-service educators. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on teacher preparation, particularly in optimizing internship practices within blended learning contexts. Further research across varied educational disciplines is encouraged to deepen the understanding of effective training approaches in the evolving landscape of teacher education.

**Keywords:** Teaching Internship, Flexible Learning, Early Childhood Education, Phenomenological Method

#### The Problem and its Scope

##### Introduction

##### *Rationale*

The pandemic had far-reaching consequences for education, particularly teacher education. Teachers and students were compelled to swiftly adapt to remote instruction due to the closure of colleges and institutions. The requirement to create learning environments for student teachers completing their teacher education preparation entailed decisions, and adaptations to meet not only student expectations, as well as the conditions under which both universities and schools had to operate. Now that the pandemic has gradually fade, the educational system may resume its regular operations but some schools still favor using the blended modality. With this being said student interns now get the chance to put the theories they've learned into practice with the use of blended modality. Internship provide practical experiences that aid in the overall development of aspiring teachers. This study concentrated on the actual internship experiences of early childhood student interns who used a blended learning approach.

Blended learning, or the combination of in-person and online instruction, is becoming increasingly popular in higher education, with some experts referring it as the new traditional model in course delivery (Dziuban, Graham, Moskal, Norberg, & Sicilia, 2018) [5]. It is an approach mixing old and modern learning models, as a result, they can be utilized in conjunction with the traditional method of instruction to assess both a student's performance and that of the teaching team. Alternatives are needed to maintain a high-quality education by implementing a potent blended learning model that is capable of enhancing both students' and teachers' experiences. There have been numerous attempts to develop blended learning models, that includes the students from New Zealand (Adel & Dayan, 2021) [1].

Blended learning is still considered fresh and emerging in the Philippines. Yet, the increased demand for blended learning brings with it issues and obstacles worth investigating, particularly in emerging higher education institutions, which impede effective and efficient delivery of teaching and learning (Alvarez, 2020) [2]. The change of course shows how pre-service teachers handle the experiences, which activities or assignments are better offered onsite or online, and how they view such experiences. That shared best practices and perspectives from pre-service teachers who had completed their blended teaching internship (Hernandez, 2022) [9].

A teacher internship is an opportunity to nurture future teachers. It is the utmost goal of education to produce quality teachers in the field through teacher interns' adequate training in blended learning. The sudden occurrence of Covid-19 suddenly gives a tremendous challenge to educators, especially the private and public schools (Peñeda, Tan, & Ticoy, 2022) [16]. Blended learning has been the modality used by higher education to continue quality education amidst the pandemic in which schools in Cebu City adapted (Ando *et al.*, 2022) [3].

This study aimed to identify teacher interns' experiences using blended learning modalities in the new normal. This helps educators to provide essential online teaching training to have a strong foundation on the strategies and approaches they will use in this type of learning modality. Furthermore, it serves as a basis and prepares student interns to cope with the challenges arises and improve their performance in this learning modality.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

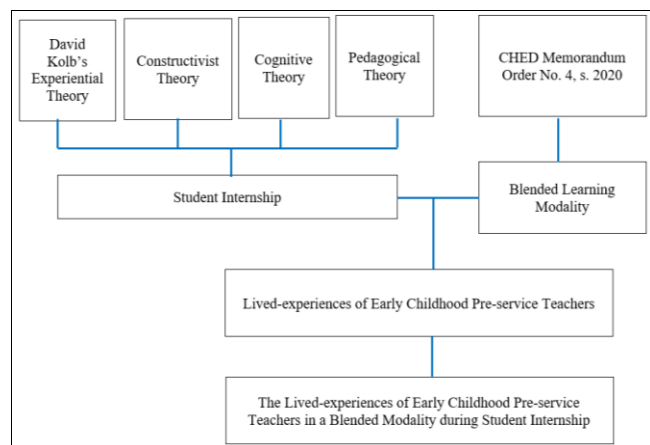


Fig 1:

## Theoretical and Conceptual Background

The Experiential Learning Theory of David Kolb's, asserted that learning is a process through which knowledge is generated by transforming experience that is important in the growth of knowledge creation via discovery and active involvement. As the new normal of education commenced, blended learning was determined as the medium used for teaching and learning. With this new form of learning and teaching, pre-service teachers will be able to examine their own strengths when new things are acquired and develop certain areas, they are weakest.

In constructivist learning theory, learners are active participants in their learning journey, and that knowledge is constructed through experiences. In every education student,

the teaching internship is determined as their output. It serves as their application of their prior knowledge, present knowledge and the future knowledge they will acquire. By this means, it presents the principle of constructivist learning theory of participants being an active participant of their own learning journey such as in teaching internships where they are immersed to new concepts which are combined with their prior experiences that created a whole new and fresh idea.

Cognitive learning theory is focused on how individuals think and how learning requires an understanding of mental processes. Cognitive theory recognizes that learners can be impacted by both internal and external factors (Western Governors University, 2020). This pointed out how early childhood pre-service teachers are affected by the different effects of online learning, may it be in the teaching pedagogies used by the teacher, or on the barriers affecting online learning such as internet connectivity.

Pedagogical theory is being stated as the postulate of how things should be brought, how teaching should be put into practice and how it will be advantageous to the students in honing their competencies and abilities (Rutto, 2017). This presents a specific set of actions that pre-service teachers should utilize in the classroom. By means of preparing themselves well, their instructional strategies and being equipped with the terms of concepts to provide factual knowledge and drive motivation in enhancing learning and skills of teaching in any mode of learning. During the pandemic the Commission on Higher Education had proposed flexible learning as an alternative teaching and learning medium that soon become the new normal of education. Despite of the ongoing problem CHED manages to improve quality of learning amidst the pandemic through experiencing online advancements in teaching and learning as well as in teaching internship program.

All these theories worked together to support and characterize the study's findings, as well as how variables like teaching internship and blended learning modality shows the lived-experiences of early childhood pre-service teachers influenced the outcome of this study. The new normal education has been adapted by these new modes of learning. As the school year 2022-2023 welcomes and opens its doors different modality has been offered and introduced. Schools have shifted to blended learning where students will need to attend two modes of learning at the same time, face to face and online learning.

## The Problem

### Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to identify the lived experiences of Early Childhood Pre-service teachers in a blended modality during student internship.

The study will answer the following research question:

1. What is your experience in your student teaching in a blended learning modality?

### Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the lived experiences of Early Childhood Pre-Service teachers in a blended modality during student internship. This research aims to give students and researchers a choice of options for assessing their experiences in a blended modality. In addition, this research will aid the mentors in their discussion regarding how to teach in a blended learning.

This study may provide the community, especially the student interns, to understand their role as a coach for their learners and guide them throughout the learning process in a blended modality. The outcomes of this study will be a useful reference for the future researchers who would plan to make any related study precisely the Pre-service teachers underlying the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education.

### Definition of Terms

Terms here are conceptually and operationally defined for a clear presentation of this study:

**Blended modality:** Is the strategic combination of online and in-person learning.

**Cognitive theory:** Is about how people's reactions to situations are a result of how they interpret events.

**Constructivist Theory:** Means knowledge is best acquired through a process of reflection and individual's cognitive production.

**David Kohl's Experiential Theory:** Is a learning method where knowledge is obtained by simultaneously acquiring and adapting an experience.

**Early childhood education:** Is a branch of education philosophy that deals with the instruction of young children from birth to the age of eight.

**Early Childhood Education Pre-service teachers:** Refers to the instructions and preparation given to student teachers before they begin teaching young children from birth to age eight.

**Face-to-face instruction:** Is a type of traditional classroom instruction when students and teachers are present in the same space.

**Lived-Experiences:** Is a representation of a person's experiences, as well as the knowledge they have acquired as well.

**Online learning:** Is the practice of teaching and learning in real-time and asynchronous settings through the use of internet-connected devices.

**Pedagogical Theory:** Is the study of teaching and how it influences and is affected by students' social, political, and psychological development

**Pre-service teachers:** Refer to the guided and supervised teaching

**Rogers' Theory of Blended Learning:** Is a process that involves combining several teaching methods, including both online and traditional instruction.

**Student Internship:** Is a learning opportunity that provides hands-on experience in a student's field.

## 2. Review of Related Literature and Related Studies

Student internship is one of the core experiences of pre-service teachers in education. It relates to actualizing theories and concepts as well as pedagogies in teaching before engaging in the actual battle in the field of education. Early childhood education is a crucial stage of teaching and learning for it deals with the early phases of education, which include preschool and early childhood children. Early childhood pre-service teachers are immersed in teaching young minds the basics of education in various aspects such as writing, mathematics, science and etc. Given the current situation in education, teaching modalities begin to expand and therefore unfold diverse teaching strategies and methods of teaching including blended modality of teaching and learning which in turn gives a new phenomenon in student

internship experiences today.

### *Lived Experiences in Student Internship*

Practice teaching or student internship is an essential component of teacher education (Hear Our Voices: Student Teachers' Experiences during Practical Teaching, 2023). Pre-service teachers consistently report that student teaching is the most significant aspect of their pre-service education. Pre-service teachers frequently believe that student teaching is where they "learn to be a teacher" (The Supervision of Student Teaching: A Review of Research: The Teacher Educator: Vol 26, No 4, 2023) <sup>[17]</sup>. As the student proceeds to the teaching internship, one is expected to have gained the necessary pedagogical topic knowledge and abilities for the internship from the previous years. It is for a reason that the learnings affect the actual teaching, "teachers teach in the way they were taught" (Schön, 1987).

### *Early Childhood Pre-service Teachers*

The early childhood stage, is a phase from birth to the age of eight years, which is also considered a period that is crucial for children's social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development. This is also the time when children start to develop character traits, behaviors, and social intelligence (Jale Aldemir & SEZER, 2009) <sup>[10]</sup>. In the early childhood teaching internship, the experience of teaching interns varies from the learnings from college instructors and the actual internship in a classroom (Schön, 1987). Learning to teach in the early childhood internship involves not only acquiring knowledge of standards but also critically examining standards as socially and culturally constructed (Blank, 2010; Brown, 2009; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). With an escalating number of young children with which parents and caregivers work, early childhood education teachers must therefore be equipped with key expertise to examine and respond to all children's learning and developmental requirements (Jale Aldemir & SEZER, 2009) <sup>[10]</sup>.

### *Blended Learning*

Blended Learning is the effective blending of various methods of instruction, educational models, and learning styles utilized in a dynamically meaningful learning environment. Blended learning courses integrate online and offline learning activities while making the most use of resources to improve the performance of students and solve critical institutional concerns (Garrison, 2004) <sup>[6]</sup>. The concept of blended learning integrates multiple various distribution techniques, like collaboration software, Web-based courses, EPSS, and knowledge management practices, which combine diverse event-based activities, such as face-to-face classes, real-time e-learning, and self-paced learning (Valiathan, 2002) <sup>[19]</sup>. According to Watson, blended learning allows personalized learning, meaningful reflection, and tailored instruction from one student to another among a group of students. Simply, blended learning is the spontaneous blending of carefully designed and compatible face-to-face and online methodologies and technologies (Graham, 2006) <sup>[7]</sup>.

## 3. Research Methodology

This chapter reveals the methods of research to be used by the researcher in conducting the study which includes the research design, research environment, research respondents, sample design, research instrument, data gathering procedures, data analysis and ethical considerations.

## Research Design

The researchers of this study are going to conduct a phenomenological design. This type of research aims to determine the lived experiences of Early Childhood Pre-service Teachers in a Blended Modality during Student Internship. This design aims to understand and describe the universal essence of the phenomenon which is the lived-experience of the pre-service student intern in a blended modality. This design examines human experience in daily life while putting aside the researchers' prior notions about the phenomenon. The researchers decide to use phenomenological as a method because it enables the researchers to understand individual situations in detail.

## Research Respondents

The participants who will take part in this study are fifteen (15) selected students in BECED 4A, the participants will be interviewed about their Lived-experiences in teaching using Blended Modality during Student Internship. The participants are carefully chosen as they have accomplished their student internship.

## Sample Design

The researchers will use a convenience and purposive sampling method. It is a method that is accessible for the researchers and a strategy for selecting subjects for study from a sample by picking those persons who might undoubtedly correlate to the aims of the investigation. As the learning modality is still blended, the researcher will employ questionnaires, including but not limited to online interviews, to collect data from respondents in the simplest and most effective manner possible.

## Research Environment

The locale of this study is in Cebu Normal University-Main Campus which is located in Osmeña Blvd., Cebu City, 6000 Cebu. It is a state research university in Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines established in 1902. This study's location was chosen by the researchers because this is the most accessible for the researchers.

## Research Instruments

The researchers will use an online interview to gather data. The structured interview questions will be administered using Google Meet, Zoom or Messenger. There will be one main question to be followed by guide questions for the participants to answer. The duration of the interview varies depending on the participants' responses. But we'll be providing an estimation of 30 minutes to 1 hour per participant.

## Research Procedure

The following parameters served as the researchers' guidance when conducting the study: The researchers informed the participants of the study's intended purpose using a messaging application. After receiving direct message consent, the researchers will ask the appropriate parties for their consent and approval. Following acceptance, the Researchers will use questionnaires and/or guide questions, which will be checked and approved by a qualitative research adviser. Since the learning modality is still blended, the researchers will meet with qualifying individuals in person during face-to-face classes or contact them via the Messenger app to obtain their consent before

beginning the actual data collection. The paper review will take place before data collection.

Henceforth, the researchers will provide the interview question and a comprehensive interview that will be done virtually referred to as open-ended questions. Following, the researchers will obtain data from the selected participants. All the necessary information will be explained thoroughly, and participants will be given a chance to schedule the virtual one-on-one video call on the participant's preferred time and day. Online platforms such as google meet, zoom and messenger will be utilized in conducting the one-on-one interview. The qualified participants' information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. To gather the information, the researchers will take notes and also audio recordings during the whole duration of the interview, with the participants approval. This data will be collected during the year of 2023.

The data will next be analyzed by the researchers using a Colaizzi's method. This method seeks out to interpret interesting or pertinent themes in data, such as patterns. After the analysis, the data and audio recordings will be kept by the researchers, and any traces that could be used to identify the study's key participants will be permanently deleted.

## Data Analysis

This study employed Colaizzi's phenomenological method of data analysis. Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological methodology has as its goal revealing the true experience of the phenomenon being studied (Turunen, Perälä, & Meriläinen, 1994)<sup>[18]</sup>. The following are Colaizzi's steps: 1). each transcript is read and reveals to get the whole concept of the content, 2). getting significant statements for the transcribe, 3). formulate meaning for these meaningful statements, 4). the developed meaning was classified, and clusters of themes, 5). integrate findings of the study into a detailed description, 6). describing the phenomenon of the study, and 7). validity findings with the experiences of participants.

## Ethical Considerations

In this study, the researchers will place great importance on the ethical aspects of the study so that to ensure that the informant's well-being is protected. In following the ethical standards, the researchers were more sensitive to the respondent's rights.

### Privacy and Confidentiality

The researchers will not invade the participant's privacy without permission, and the research will not offend the participant's feelings and emotions. Also, the researcher will keep all disclosed information and records of the participants in a locked device that only the researcher can open. After the termination of the study, the researcher will delete the information and dispose of it.

### Vulnerability of Informants

The respondents in this study were equally treated during the interviews. The researchers will be utmost treated with respect and keep any promise made with the respondents. To disclose the benefits and burdens of the research all of the respondents were given a summary of the study.

### Recruitment

The researcher shall also see to it that the participants shall receive a letter of consent that explains some elements of



this research. Then, all information was confidential for the protection of the respondents.

### Assent

The respondents of the study are under 18, the researcher will give a consent form to the respondent signed by their parents for informing and asking permission from the parents that children were joining this study.

### Benefits

The researcher considered the safety of the information and avoidance of stressful topics. This study will benefit future teachers to consider an interactive quiz game in the lesson.

### Collaborative Study Term of Reference

In case of utilization and publication, the researcher will be acknowledged as a secondary author which the researcher and faculty adviser signed.

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