

Lighting the Path: The Accounts of Cooperating Teachers of Pre- service Elementary Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences, coping strategies, and insights of cooperating teachers in developing pre-service elementary teachers. It was guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, all of which emphasize learning through social interaction, experience, and observation. The research aimed to understand how cooperating teachers help shape future educators. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study involved fourteen cooperating teachers from Maniki Central Elementary School, chosen through purposive sampling. We collected data through in-depth interviews with seven participants and focus group discussions with another seven. Thematic analysis revealed five themes from their experiences: mentoring student-teachers for practical teaching, challenges in managing teaching duties, modeling good teaching practices, different mentoring styles, and effective time management techniques. Coping strategies included fostering open communication with mentees, balancing teaching and mentoring responsibilities, giving feedback after conferences, teaming up with fellow mentors, and providing motivation and support. Participants shared insights about gaining knowledge through experiential learning, acting as catalysts for developing teaching skills, reinforcing key pedagogical competencies, encouraging shared learning in mentoring, and strengthening mentorship through organized support and ongoing development. The findings indicate that cooperating teachers are crucial in nurturing the growth of future educators through meaningful, collaborative, and reflective mentoring experiences.

Keywords: cooperating teachers, mentorship, student interns, professional development, qualitative, phenomenology, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Cooperating teachers play a vital role in shaping the professional development of student interns during their field experiences. However, a common challenge many of them encounter is the lack of formal training and preparation for their mentorship responsibilities. Although they are competent and experienced classroom teachers, cooperating teachers may find it difficult to provide structured and consistent feedback, respond to the varying developmental needs of pre-service teachers, and balance their dual roles as both educators and mentors. These difficulties can result in inconsistencies in mentoring practices, potentially leading to gaps in the interns' learning and professional growth (Hoben, 2021).

In the global setting, various challenges can strain the mentoring relationship between cooperating teachers and student interns, leading to inconsistencies in the quality of mentorship. Among the most pressing issues are the lack of formal mentor training, insufficient time allocated for reflection, and limited opportunities for providing meaningful feedback—all of which may hinder the professional growth of pre-service teachers. These constraints not only affect the depth and effectiveness of the mentoring process but also contribute to disparities in the interns' development across different contexts. In response to such challenges, the University of Prishtina's Faculty of Education in Kosovo has initiated a series of reforms aimed at addressing the evolving demands of teacher professionalism. To equip future educators with the requisite skills, knowledge, and professional dispositions, the Faculty has prioritized the integration of experiential learning opportunities within its undergraduate and graduate programs (Kačaniku et al., 2019; Saqipi, 2019).

In the Philippines, particularly Cagayan State University–Andrews Campus, there is strong collaboration between teacher education institutions and the Department of Education to support mentoring during practice teaching. However, it was highlighted that cooperating teachers often feel overwhelmed by their dual roles as mentors and full-time classroom teachers. The lack of time to conduct proper coaching and reflection sessions with interns' limits opportunities for meaningful professional development. They emphasized that while most mentors are committed, the constraints of time and workload can result in superficial feedback and minimal co-teaching experiences (Andres & Calanoga, et al., 2021).

Considering this, the study needs to be conducted to explore how mentorship influence teaching interns' development must be done. Since there is a growing need for teachers who are highly qualified and skilled, it is essential to establish mentorship for interns during their primary teaching experiences. The goal of this study was to identify the difficulties that mentors and interns have during this crucial time. The study was also identified common challenges, such as lack of formal guidance or time constraints, that impact the mentorship process. Through the examination of these factors, this study can offer valuable perspectives on how cooperating teachers could improve their ability to support interns' professional growth. In conclusion, this research is essential for enhancing programs for teacher education and ensuring the preparation of future educators.

In line with this, several international studies have examined the role of cooperating teachers in the professional development of pre-service teachers at the elementary level. For example, "Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of their Preservice Teacher's Impact on Student Learning" by Kaka (2019) focused on how mentors viewed the impact of interns on student progress, engagement, and classroom environment. Similarly, Eck et al. (2019) explored how mentors communicate their evaluations and



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advice in “An Analysis of Cooperating Teacher Feedback: A Qualitative Inquiry.” Meanwhile, Jita and Munje (2022) studied both the challenges and successes experienced by pre-service teachers during their practicum in “Pre-service Teachers’ Mentorship Experiences during Teaching Practice in a South African Teacher Preparation Program.” While these studies provide valuable insights, they mainly reflect mentorship experiences within their own cultural and institutional settings. Unlike Kaka (2019) and the other studies mentioned, this research highlights mentorship challenges that are specific to the Philippine context, particularly the difficulty cooperating teachers face in balancing full-time teaching with mentoring responsibilities, often without structured support or formal mentor training. These localized insights fill a gap in the literature by emphasizing how cultural expectations, institutional constraints, and workload pressures uniquely shape the mentoring dynamic in the Philippines. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the context-bound realities of mentorship that are often overlooked in international research.

The research findings of this study would be shared with relevant stakeholders, partners, academic institutions, community members by sharing copies of research papers, reports or summaries and publication in research journals and conference presentation. The aim of this dissemination plan is to distribute it to key stakeholders, enabling them to engage actively with significant research findings. The researcher aims to enhance the significance and relevance of the research within a scientific, collaborative, and community setting by circulating printed copies of the research article.

Research Questions

This study explored the lived experiences of cooperating teachers in guiding the professional development of pre-service elementary teachers. It also examined how they coped with challenges in mentorship and the insights they gained throughout the process.

1. What are the lived experiences of cooperating teachers in the professional development of interns in elementary school?
2. How these cooperating teachers cope with the challenges they experience in developing the interns professionally?
3. What are the insights of cooperating teachers in the professional development of interns in elementary school?

Theoretical Lens

The theories of Vygotsky (1978), Kolb (1984), and Bandura (1977) were crucial in interpreting the study’s findings within the Filipino mentoring context and in addressing gaps in existing research, particularly those related to cultural differences in mentorship. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory supports the theme of mentoring for practical teaching, as cooperating teachers acted as more knowledgeable others, guiding interns through social interaction and scaffolded learning—highlighting the importance of relational dynamics often overlooked in Western-centric models. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory explains how interns learned by doing—facing real classroom challenges, managing time, and reflecting on their teaching—addressing the need for localized frameworks that value lived experiences in culturally nuanced settings. Bandura’s Social Learning Theory directly aligns with the theme of modeling effective teaching, as interns developed professional competence by observing how mentors handled instruction and classroom management. This theory also explains how Filipino values such as pakikipagkapwa (shared identity) and hiya (a sense of propriety or shame) influence mentoring, showing that learning is not only cognitive but also social and culturally embedded. Together, these theories help fill the research gap by framing mentorship as a complex, culturally influenced process rather than a universal, one-size-fits-all model.



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Study Design

The methodology used in this study was a qualitative research design. The implementation of this research approach was made possible by the ability to analyze and explore the experiences of Cooperating teachers in the Professional Development of Interns in Elementary School. According to Giorgi (2020), qualitative phenomenological studies offer a descriptive analysis of a particular occurrence in a particular setting. Additionally, Aspers and Corte (2019) explained that this study design involved a systematic process of collecting data through interviews and interactive conversations to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, perspectives, insights, and the specific circumstances they encountered. The method used in this study was a qualitative research design. Through this, the study was able to collect crucial data that aided in understanding the experiences of Cooperating teachers in the Professional Development of Interns in Elementary School. By conducting interviews, describing the experiences, difficulties, and insights of the participants of the specific study, and then analyzing the data, a qualitative design was used to explore and comprehend the unique cases, statements, and insights of the participants. Moreover, a phenomenological study is an in-depth examination of analyzing the perspectives, difficulties, and insights of cooperating teachers regarding their role as mentors of interns, in addition to expressing their experiences. According to Vagle (2018), the design facilitates the gathering of data via interviews, which are subsequently subjected to thematic analysis. This ensures that the distinct cases, assertions, and thoughts of the participants are recorded and construed in a profound manner. Focuses on capturing the lived experiences and meanings attributed to a phenomenon by participants referred to as a phenomenological study, and it involves the researcher looking how these experiences are interpreted and understood. Comparing the likes and dislikes of the many cases contained inside the quintain allows for a more thorough understanding of the cases as a whole (Twycross & Shorten, 2021). In this study, a phenomenological study was the approach utilized for in-depth investigation of a particular issue by using a historical framework and thorough collection of pertinent information and data for in-depth and focus group discussion analysis of each instance. It was frequently employed in behavioral and social sciences to draw out a single set of ideas from a complicated setting. The researcher used this approach to look at many facets of the phenomenon, identify relationships, and grasp the process of the complete environment holistically in order to arrive at a firm conclusion. Furthermore, phenomenological study was also considered a good choice for this study since it considered participants' ideas that they wished to share with others and their experiences, difficulties, and obstacles in developing student interns' professional development.

Population and Sample

The participants in this study were cooperating teachers who mentored pre-service interns in their classrooms. Fourteen participants were selected through purposive sampling. This method is suitable for phenomenological research because it focuses on choosing individuals who can share rich and meaningful insights into a common lived experience (Glaser & Strauss, 2018; Nikolopoulou, 2022). Seven of the participants took part in one-on-one in-depth interviews (IDI), which allowed for a thorough exploration of individual stories. The other seven participated in a focus group discussion (FGD), which provided a space for shared reflection and collective meaning-making.

The number of participants was chosen carefully to ensure enough data while keeping depth and quality. According to Creswell (2012, p. 128), a phenomenological study usually includes 5 to 25 participants to reach saturation. This is the point when no new themes or insights come from collecting more data. In



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this study, repeated patterns and consistent themes across the interviews and group discussion showed that saturation was reached by the fourteenth participant. This confirmed that the data collected were enough to accurately represent the phenomenon being studied.

Specific inclusion criteria were used in selecting participants. Eligible participants were public elementary school teachers who had supervised and mentored pre-service interns during their practice teaching. They needed to have at least three to five years of teaching experience. The criteria applied to cooperating teachers at all grade levels, as long as they had actual mentoring experience. Teachers who had not yet supervised a student intern were not included in the study.

Data Collection

To ensure the ethical soundness and trustworthiness of this study, I took several steps before and during the data collection process. I first submitted the revised manuscript and interview protocols to my research adviser to obtain the endorsement form. Afterward, I sent the materials to the research office for validation, where a three-member research panel reviewed and approved the interview questions. Once approved, I prepared a formal letter of permission and addressed it to the principal of the identified research site.

After receiving approval from the school, I began identifying potential participants—cooperating teachers in elementary schools who were currently mentoring student interns. Using a face-to-face approach, I explained the purpose of the study and obtained their voluntary consent to participate. I ensured that each participant was fully informed about their rights, including the voluntary nature of their participation and their option to remain anonymous. I provided informed consent forms and used pseudonyms to protect their identities.

I divided the participants into two groups based on the data collection method: seven participated in individual in-depth interviews (IDIs), and seven joined a focus group discussion (FGD). This division was intentionally designed to capture both the depth of personal experiences and the richness of collective insights. The IDIs provided detailed, reflective accounts that allowed participants to discuss sensitive topics, such as challenges in mentorship, individual coping mechanisms, and personal mentoring philosophies, in a confidential setting. In contrast, the FGD offered a collaborative environment where participants built on each other's responses, revealing shared mentoring values, common school practices, and collective challenges. This combination of methods allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by comparing unique individual narratives with consensus-based group insights.

Using both methods enriched the data. The interviews revealed unique struggles, philosophies, and classroom contexts, while the focus group brought out collective challenges, coping strategies, and shared mentoring norms. These approaches complemented each other and contributed to more meaningful theme development.

I recorded all sessions using a mobile phone, which allowed for repeated playback to ensure accurate transcription. I later transcribed and translated the responses into English. I conducted a thematic analysis by identifying recurring codes and organizing them into themes related to lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights.

Throughout the research process, I strictly adhered to ethical standards to ensure confidentiality and data protection. Prior to conducting the study at Maniki Central Elementary School, I obtained formal approval from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology (KCAST). The respondents of the study were cooperating teachers who mentored pre-



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service interns during their practice teaching. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were thoroughly briefed about the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To protect their identities, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports. All physical and digital data were securely stored, with access restricted to the researcher and the research office. I remained fully committed to maintaining the integrity, privacy, and ethical treatment of all cooperating teacher respondents throughout the study.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis involves a detailed examination of information. To deepen my understanding of the phenomenon, I carefully examined and organized observation notes, interview transcripts, and other non-textual resources that I had gathered. Analyzing the data was a rigorous and demanding process, especially when considering how cooperating teachers contributed to the professional growth of interns in elementary schools. I aimed to uncover the hidden meanings embedded in the teachers' and interns' interactions and experiences. As the primary instrument in this research, I engaged deeply with the data and participant narratives using established analysis techniques (Ravidran, 2019).

I began by encoding small but frequently connected ideas to identify the main concepts regarding the role of cooperating teachers in developing interns professionally. The rich volume of data from the in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) allowed me to develop preliminary ideas, which I then categorized through coding. These patterns and themes highlighted mentoring approaches, support mechanisms, and strategies that cooperating teachers used to guide interns' growth as professionals.

Following Gibbs (2007), I treated coding as the process of identifying meaningful passages in transcripts and labeling them based on the concepts they reflected. In my study, I used coding to tag and label the content shared by each participant during the IDIs and FGDs. This helped me categorize data related to mentoring strategies, development tools, and challenges encountered during the internship process, enabling a deeper understanding of how cooperating teachers supported interns.

The second step was transcription. I converted the audio recordings of the interviews and discussions into text format to improve accessibility and support further analysis. After transcribing and translating the responses of the fourteen participants, I verified the encoded data with them to ensure that no meaning was lost in translation.

Next, I extracted themes from the qualitative data. I reviewed the transcripts to identify common and differing responses concerning experiences, insights, and coping mechanisms. This helped me sort and organize the answers clearly and develop well-defined themes.

In the fourth step, I performed thematic analysis by encoding the qualitative information into codes, words, or phrases that served as labels for segments of the data. These codes developed into themes, which I analyzed either as a straightforward list or a more complex model that showed relationships between themes, indicators, and influencing factors.

Finally, I reviewed the data multiple times to ensure accuracy and depth of understanding. I encoded the findings in a Word document, read through them carefully, organized similar ideas into categories, and then established logical connections between different concepts and themes.



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RESULTS

Lived Experiences of Cooperating Teachers in the Professional Development of Interns in Elementary School

There were five major themes that emerged in this study: *mentoring student-teachers for practical teaching, difficulties in handling teaching responsibilities, modeling effective teaching, varied mentoring practices, and effective time management techniques*. These themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Lived Experiences of Cooperating Teachers in the Professional Development of Interns in Elementary School

Emerging themes	Supporting statements
Mentoring Student-Teachers for Practical Teaching	<p>My main role is to mentor the student-teacher in teaching. – IDI-1</p> <p>My job is to guide them in the teaching-learning process, especially in handling the school children inside the classroom. – FGD-2</p> <p>I can be a mentor for the pre-service teachers, I will help them bridge theory with real-world teaching experiences. – IDI-6</p> <p>My role is to support student-teachers because they will soon become teachers. – IDI-4</p> <p>I guide student-teachers in the teaching process, especially in managing students in the classroom. – FGD-3</p>
Difficulties in Handling Teaching Responsibilities	<p>The biggest challenge is making sure the student-teacher prepares their lesson ahead of time. – IDI-1</p> <p>One challenge is helping student-teachers adapt to different types of learners, especially those with special needs. – FGD-2</p> <p>Some student-teachers struggle with handling a class, especially when students are difficult to manage. – IDI-5</p> <p>The challenges I encountered, some do not follow their mentor's instructions, while others struggle with accepting criticism. – FGD-1</p> <p>Time management is challenging because of the many overlapping school activities. – IDI-2</p>



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Active and Reflective Mentoring Practices

By modeling best practices in teaching—such as effective strategies, classroom management, and giving constructive feedback—cooperating teachers help pre-service teachers set development goals and encourage continuous learning. – IDI-6

I use modeling in teaching—first I show them, then let them identify the strengths and apply it to their part in order for them be efficient in terms of teaching." – FGD-2

I simply show my way of teaching so that the student-teacher can adapt my strategies. – IDI-4

The most beneficial mentoring process is teaching the lesson—imparting knowledge to learners. – IDI-1

For me, allowing student-teachers to observe regular classes is beneficial as it helps them discover effective teaching strategies, classroom management, and useful methods. Nothing is non-beneficial because everything they do in class contributes to their learning and growth. – IDI-6

Lesson planning and classroom management are the most beneficial practices. – FGD-6

Modeling and showcasing how to interact with learners are essential mentoring practices. – FGD-3

OJT provides valuable classroom experience where student-teachers learn practical strategies that go beyond theoretical concepts. – IDI-5

Effective Time Management Techniques

I balance my time by prioritizing my teaching responsibilities first and mentoring during free time. – IDI-1

Time management is very crucial because of overlapping responsibilities in public schools. Despite the overlapping activities, time management is necessary to ensure that both mentoring and teaching responsibilities are handled properly. – IDI-2

For me, I plan and prioritize tasks by creating a schedule for teaching and mentoring. I also integrate mentoring into my teaching—while I'm teaching, the pre-service teacher can observe and learn from my methods. – IDI-6

For me, creating a to-do list ensures that all targeted activities are completed on time. – FGD-7

Note. IDI = In-depth Interview; FGD = Focus Group Discussion.

Mentoring student-teachers for practical teaching aligns with the broader understanding that mentorship serves as a crucial bridge between theoretical knowledge and real classroom experience. In the context of this study, this idea highlights how cooperating teachers help shape the teaching competence of interns by guiding them in lesson planning, classroom management, and making instructional adjustments based on learner diversity. Melton et al. (2019) support this view by showing how structured mentoring programs prepare cooperating teachers to guide pre-service teachers more effectively through evidence-based teaching strategies and reflective practices. Similarly, Nesbitt and Barry (2024) emphasize that mentorship provides student-teachers with hands-on experience, helping them manage diverse classrooms, respond to real-time challenges, and build professional confidence. Through this guidance, interns not only apply what they have learned in theory but also grow into adaptable and competent educators. It was added by Ca-as and Escandallo (2024) that teachers' feedback helps develop the competence of the students as they were guided on their mistakes and errors.



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Also, the study reveals the difficulty of handling teaching responsibilities alongside mentoring roles. Baluyos et al. (2023) pointed out that cooperating teachers often struggle to manage their time and attention between teaching tasks and mentoring roles, especially when facing classroom discipline issues or dealing with a heavy workload. These challenges can hinder the quality of support provided to pre-service teachers. Likewise, Baylan (2021) emphasized that the overlapping duties of instruction and mentorship lead to stress and fatigue among cooperating teachers, particularly when they lack sufficient institutional support. This supports the present study's findings, which reveal that mentoring, while meaningful, can become overwhelming when paired with the day-to-day responsibilities of classroom teaching.

Moreover, modeling effective teaching plays an important role in successful mentorship. Cooperating teachers not only teach but also demonstrate instructional strategies in real classroom settings, giving pre-service teachers clear examples to observe and learn from. Kapadia Matsko et al. (2020) emphasized that when mentors model both the “what” and “how” of teaching—through classroom delivery, planning, and reflection—it helps pre-service teachers feel more prepared and confident. Similarly, Norville and Park (2021) found that intentional modeling allows interns to understand expert decision-making and classroom management techniques more deeply. These insights support the idea that observing experienced mentors in action is essential for developing strong teaching skills.

In addition, the study highlights the value of using varied and active mentoring practices. Cooperating teachers go beyond simple observation by involving pre-service teachers in hands-on instruction, collaborative planning, and real-time coaching. These dynamic approaches help student-teachers gain practical experience, receive immediate feedback, and gradually build confidence as they co-teach and take on more classroom responsibilities. Guise et al. (2023) found that structured co-teaching and shared planning deepened pre-service teachers’ instructional skills and pedagogical understanding, showing how active involvement fosters meaningful learning. Similarly, Coppola, Rocha, and Woodard (2021) emphasized a bidirectional, co-constructed mentorship model where mentors and interns work as partners—co-planning and reflecting together—which not only strengthens intern development but also enriches the mentor’s teaching practices.

Finally, effective time management is a crucial theme in mentoring, as cooperating teachers must balance classroom teaching with guiding interns. Mok and Staub (2021) highlighted that deliberate scheduling and cognitive modeling—such as shared lesson planning—improved pre-service teachers’ instructional clarity while helping mentors manage their dual roles more efficiently. Similarly, Parker, Zenkov, and Glaser (2021) emphasized the value of intentional time management practices like structured co-planning and prioritization conversations, which reduced stress and enhanced the quality of mentorship. Both studies underscore that when mentors intentionally organize their time, they are better equipped to provide meaningful support without compromising their teaching responsibilities.

Cooperating Teachers Coping Mechanisms in the Professional Development of Interns in Elementary School

The major themes and core ideas for research question number 2 were presented in Table 3. From the answers of the participant, 5 major themes emerged: *cultivating open communication with mentee, balancing teaching and mentoring responsibilities, imposing post-conference feedback, collaborations with fellow mentors, and supporting with motivation and purpose*. These themes are presented in Table 3.



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Table 3. Coping Mechanisms of Cooperating Teachers in the Professional Development of Interns in Elementary School

Emerging themes	Supporting statements
Cultivating Open Communication with Mentee	<p>I establish rapport with my co-teachers, cooperating teachers, and, of course, with the student-teacher. – IDI-1</p> <p>There should always be open communication between the mentor and the mentee. – IDI-5</p> <p>My pre-service teacher and I should have open communication, sharing our strengths and weaknesses with regards to the teaching-learning process. This helps us grow and develop together, especially in their teaching journey. – FGD-2</p> <p>For me, handling challenges with my pre-service teacher requires patience and open communication. This way, there are no hard feelings between us, and we can avoid misunderstandings or resentment. – FGD-6</p>
Balancing Teaching and Mentoring Responsibilities	<p>Balancing my time is important. It's about managing responsibilities properly, ensuring that time is balanced between the learners, the pre-service teacher, and teaching responsibilities. That's how I manage my time. – IDI-1</p> <p>First of all, before dealing with students and pre-service teachers, you need to plan and set your schedule in advance to manage your time and responsibilities effectively. Teaching involves many tasks, so preparing ahead helps you stay organized. – IDI-2</p> <p>Time management is the key. For me, it's not really a burden because both of us benefit—me as a teacher, since I get to take a short break from teaching when my pre-service teacher takes over. – IDI-5</p> <p>I manage my time by scheduling mentorship sessions right after class, providing immediate feedback, especially when my pre-service teacher experiences situations like handling misbehavior or observing strategies. This allows them to reflect on it the same day. – FGD-1</p> <p>I integrate mentoring into daily teaching by involving pre-service teachers in lesson planning, daily attendance checking, and classroom management. This helps them get used to the responsibilities and makes it feel less like an extra task for me. – IDI-6</p>
Imposing Post-Conference Feedback	<p>To overcome the challenges, I provide constructive feedback to help the pre-service teacher improve. – IDI-4</p> <p>For me, feedback is given immediately after the lesson to ensure lapses are corrected promptly. – FGD-7</p> <p>One-on-one discussions are important. Aside from technical aspects, they should be able to share their experiences, and at the same time, the mentor should also share their past and present experiences. Through these exchanges, valuable lessons can be learned. – IDI-2</p> <p>After the lesson or after the pre-service teacher has taught, post-conference feedback should be given immediately—highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement—so nothing is forgotten. – FGD-5</p> <p>I model strategies for them, and when they arrive, I allow them to teach. This helps me assess where they need assistance, identify their weaknesses, and determine the areas they struggle with. After that, mentoring follows so that they can improve next time. – IDI-7</p>
Collaborating with Fellow Mentors	<p>I also seek help from my co-teachers in deciding the best strategies to use, especially for demonstration teaching, to ensure the best results. – IDI-4</p>



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**Supporting with
Motivation and
Purpose**

When dealing with mentoring challenges, we have peer support groups. Connecting with other mentors provides valuable insights. There are also online communities, forums, books, and articles that focus on mentoring, coaching, and personal development. – IDI-3

I ask my fellow mentors for advice since they have more experience than I do. Peer support is very important in dealing with mentoring challenges. We also have workshops and training sessions to improve our mentoring skills for pre-service teachers. – IDI-6

My support system consists of my co-teachers who share insights and suggestions. – FGD-3

For me, what's most important is collaboration with other teachers or experts. – FGD-7

Stay calm and think positively. That's what we always tell our students—'be positive learners.' We must keep this mindset toward both pre-service teachers and learners, with positivity as our constant goal. – IDI-1

When I see my pre-service teacher performing well and producing excellent output in their final demo, that truly motivates me to mentor properly, especially when I have future pre-service teachers. – FGD-3

I need to set realistic expectations, so I focus on progress rather than perfection. Sometimes, it's frustrating, but I always remind myself that pre-service teachers are still learning. I appreciate their small efforts and focus on a growth mindset. – IDI-6

For me to stay motivated, I just think that someday, these pre-service teachers will become the best teachers here in Maniki Central Elementary School. – FGD-7

Of course, salary is a motivation, but it's really the students—their smiles and responses—that inspire me to keep going. Despite challenges with pre-service teachers, I share my experiences and offer advice, treating them as equals so they won't feel intimidated and can learn more effectively. – IDI-2

Note. *IDI = In-depth Interview; FGD = Focus Group Discussion.*

To begin with, the interviews revealed that cooperating teachers cultivated open communication with their mentees. Building a strong mentor-mentee relationship was essential for effective mentorship. Developing rapport between cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers fostered trust, mutual respect, and open communication. A supportive and positive mentoring environment allowed mentees to feel comfortable seeking guidance, asking questions, and reflecting on their teaching practices. Wilson and Huynh (2020) emphasize that open and ongoing communication between mentors and mentees encourages shared reflection and enhances the mentees' professional confidence. Similarly, Richardson et al. (2019) found that when mentors intentionally create a safe space for dialogue and feedback, it positively influences the pre-service teachers' emotional resilience and openness to learning.

Following this, the findings highlight the importance of balancing teaching and mentoring responsibilities. Cooperating teachers often find it challenging to manage both roles, especially when faced with tight schedules and heavy workloads. Smith and Jones (2024) emphasize that allocating structured mentoring time within the school day can help ease this burden and improve the quality of mentorship. Their study found that when mentoring duties are given time and space alongside teaching responsibilities, cooperating teachers are better able to support pre-service teachers without feeling overwhelmed. In the same way, Clarke et al. (2022) suggest that integrating mentoring into everyday



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classroom routines—such as through co-planning lessons or team teaching—can lead to more effective and sustainable mentoring relationships. These findings stress that time management is not only a survival strategy but also a professional competency that enhances both teaching and mentorship experiences.

However, a deeper look shows a contradiction between viewing mentoring as "workload relief" and the reality of stress from having dual responsibilities. While some studies say mentoring can fit smoothly into classroom routines (Clarke et al., 2022), others point out that without proper support, it may feel like an extra burden (Smith & Jones, 2024). This tension reveals that the effect of mentoring on cooperating teachers differs based on the resources available, support from administration, and individual coping strategies. Some teachers manage both roles well through structured co-teaching or scheduled mentoring sessions, while others feel overwhelmed by a lack of time or recognition. It is important to acknowledge and address this contradiction when creating more supportive and sustainable mentoring practices.

In the same manner, the study revealed that cooperating teachers cope with challenges by conducting post-conference feedback sessions, which are essential for guiding pre-service teachers in refining their instructional strategies and improving classroom management. Effective feedback must be specific, actionable, and supportive to help mentees implement changes with confidence. Studies by Tyrer (2022) and Aspfors and Fransson (2019) demonstrate that well-structured mentoring feedback strengthens teaching competence and reflective habits. Specifically, Aspfors and Fransson's meta-synthesis supports how systematic feedback and mentor education enhance learning outcomes through reflective practice. Similarly, Yiğitoğlu Aptoula (2021) highlights that timely, reflective feedback encourages pre-service teachers to promptly address errors and develop self-regulation in their classrooms.

The findings highlight the importance of collaboration among cooperating teachers in professional development and mentorship. When these teachers work together through discussions, lesson planning, and reflection, they support each other and demonstrate collaborative practices for their pre-service interns. Khasawneh et al. (2023) noted that professional learning communities allow cooperating teachers to work on planning, reflection, and decision-making together. This collaboration improves their confidence and ability to mentor. Similarly, Escandallo and Baradillo (2024) found that participating in peer-supported environments gives cooperating teachers diverse perspectives and shared resources. This results in better guidance for interns. These findings reflect Vygotsky's principles of collaborative learning, which state that learning is social. Knowledge is built through meaningful interactions. In this scenario, collaboration among mentors acts as social mediation, helping their professional growth and modeling a community of practice for pre-service teachers. As cooperating teachers share ideas, reflect together, and develop strategies, they create a lively learning environment. This environment supports Vygotsky's view that cognition improves through shared activities. The collaborative culture promotes deeper engagement, reflective practice, and shared responsibility within the mentoring process.

Finally, the study shows that mentorship is not just about giving teaching advice, but also about motivating and emotionally supporting pre-service teachers. This kind of support helps build their passion and long-term commitment to the profession. A study by Katz et al. (2022) found that when mentors gave consistent emotional support, it boosted new teachers' motivation, confidence, and well-being. Likewise, Nikoçeviq Kurti (2022) showed that emotional encouragement from mentors helped



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increase teaching self-efficacy in pre-service teachers. These studies prove that motivational support from mentors plays a key role in shaping confident and committed future educators.

Insights of Cooperating Teachers with Regards to the Professional Development of Interns in Elementary School

From the answers of the participant, 5 major themes emerged: gaining wisdom through experiential learning, catalyst for building teaching skills, essential pedagogical competencies, shared learning experience in mentoring, and strengthening mentorship through structured support and continuous development. These themes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Insights of Cooperating Teachers in the Professional Development of Interns in Elementary School

Emerging themes	Supporting statements
Gaining Wisdom Through Experiential Learning	<p>Of course, experience is the best example you can give. I know that most of the students today are very knowledgeable and creative. In our time, we had many strategies, but when it comes to new teaching strategies, you are much more advanced. – IDI-2</p> <p>Some key insights include reflective practice, confidence-building, classroom management, and work-life balance. Discussing strategies for well-being is crucial to prevent burnout, especially when transitioning to full-time teaching. – IDI-3</p> <p>Setbacks are part of the learning process, and progress often comes in waves rather than a straight line. Achieving our goals isn't always easy—there will be setbacks and downfalls. The important thing is to stay focused on the goal. Confidence comes with experience, and reflection is the key to improvement. – IDI-6</p>
Catalyst for Building Teaching Skills	<p>Field experiences complement theoretical knowledge. – FGD-1</p> <p>Maybe, mentoring student-teachers can enhance their learning and skills through different teaching experiences with learners. It helps develop and improve their teaching skills. – IDI- 1</p> <p>Mentoring helps pre-service teachers build confidence and competence by refining their skills with guidance. As mentors, we help polish what they've learned. Personally, I consult fellow mentors when I have questions and share those insights with my pre-service teacher. – IDI-6</p> <p>This also prepares them for the teaching world, contributing to their growth as future educators. Through classroom experiences, they encounter different student attitudes—an essential step in learning to handle individual differences.” – IDI-2</p> <p>Mentoring helps build the teaching confidence of my pre-service teacher. They might reflect on what I have shared with them as a cooperating teacher and use that for assessments. – FGD-4</p> <p>During pre-service training, they already function as real teachers after a month or two—just without a license. What they learn from cooperating teachers, especially in classroom management, becomes useful once they enter the profession. – FGD-5</p>
Essential Pedagogical Competencies	<p>The most important skills are knowing how to teach children effectively and efficiently. They must also love their work and have a passion for teaching children. – IDI-1</p> <p>One of the most essential qualities is commitment. With commitment, pre-service teachers dedicate themselves to their mission, consistently</p>



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**Shared Learning
Experience in
Mentoring**

reflecting on the effectiveness of their strategies, as shown through assessments. Commitment and dedication are truly vital. – IDI-2

They must be flexible in finding solutions to challenges, and creative and resourceful in learning and applying new teaching strategies. Most importantly, they should never give up, even at their lowest, and remain focused on their goal. – FGD-2

Pedagogical knowledge and content mastery are essential for pre-service teachers. They must design lessons that meet diverse learner needs—engaging, differentiated, and aligned with curriculum standards. – IDI-6

The most important skill is being hardworking while confidently handling responsibilities. They must show self-respect and respect for others, stay humble in success, and, above all, practice self-discipline. – FGD-4

I've learned that mentoring is a give-and-take process. Sometimes, I gain valuable strategies from pre-service teachers, and in return, they learn from me as their cooperating teacher. From experience, I've realized we should strengthen what works and let go of what doesn't. – IDI-1

I realized the importance of giving clear and constructive feedback. Encouraging yet honest feedback builds confidence while helping them improve. As mentors, we should guide pre-service teachers and share better ideas or techniques to enhance their skills. I've also learned new strategies from them, keeping us updated with current teaching practices. – IDI-6

Even if we have been teaching for years, we can still learn new strategies from the younger generation. – FGD-3

It's still the same—mentoring is give-and-take. Pre-service teachers today have more knowledge, especially about technology, and they bring many new ideas. – FGD-6

For me, lesson I have learned from that experience of mentoring pre-service teacher is that the understanding that we all have our strong sight and weaknesses that if would be address properly, that will make everything easy. – FGD-7

**Strengthening
Mentorship
Through
Structured
Support and
Continuous
Development**

By providing regular and meaningful feedback, pre-service teachers can identify their strengths and areas for improvement. Offering both emotional and professional support is crucial. Increasing observation and co-teaching opportunities lets them experience real teaching while learning from others in action. – IDI-6

Proper orientation from the university and school helps set clear goals and expectations for pre-service teachers. – FGD-2

We have a structured mentoring program with specific competencies to develop over time. Regular mentor training, peer mentoring, and peer discussions are conducted to promote shared learning and build a support network. – IDI-3

By providing regular and meaningful feedback, pre-service teachers can recognize their strengths and weaknesses and make necessary adjustments. Offering both emotional and professional support is essential. Increasing observation and co-teaching opportunities helps them experience real teaching while learning from others in practice. – IDI-6

This can be improved if DepEd provides mentors with training and additional guidance on effectively supporting pre-service teachers. Of course, we also make an effort to find new ideas to share, based on our own experiences. – IDI-7

Note. *IDI = In-depth Interview; FGD = Focus Group Discussion.*



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To begin with, gaining wisdom through experiential learning emerges as a vital aspect of professional growth. This theme emphasizes that both cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers develop through real classroom encounters involving trial, error, reflection, and adaptation. Kaldi et al. (2023) explored pre-service teachers' reflections during project-based learning and found that engaging in authentic tasks allowed interns to cycle through stages of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation, deepening their understanding of classroom dynamics and teaching practices. Similarly, McCarthy (2024) examined a social studies mentorship program where teacher candidates valued hands-on experience, peer discussions, and reflection, highlighting how experiential learning shapes their grasp of real classroom realities. These studies affirm this theme by illustrating how experiential learning fuels professional growth, helping future educators transform theoretical knowledge into practical teaching wisdom.

Likewise, mentoring serves as a catalyst for building teaching skills by offering pre-service teachers structured opportunities to apply their knowledge and refine their techniques under direct guidance. Through collaborative engagement with cooperating teachers, student-teachers gain confidence in lesson delivery, classroom management, and differentiated instruction. Gomez Johnson et al. (2020) demonstrated that when mentors provided metacognitive modeling, acknowledged incremental progress, and offered targeted feedback during lesson planning, pre-service teachers experienced significant gains in self-efficacy and instructional competence. Likewise, Pan (2023) shows that structured professional experiential learning enhances teacher preparedness and self-efficacy—key foundations for improved teaching skills—indicating that mentoring experiences directly boost interns' instructional capabilities.

Furthermore, mentoring plays a pivotal role in developing essential pedagogical competencies among pre-service teachers, such as lesson planning, classroom management, content mastery, and reflective practice. With guidance from cooperating teachers, student-teachers are better able to apply these skills in real teaching contexts, improving their instructional effectiveness and responsiveness to diverse learner needs. Cheng et al. (2024) found that mentoring within a Philippine internship program significantly enhanced teacher self-efficacy, which in turn improved classroom management and pedagogical competence. Likewise, Reyes (2023) revealed that cooperating teachers who modeled and guided interns through formative assessment and lesson planning fostered a stronger grasp of instructional strategies and adaptability among future English teachers. These studies affirm that mentoring centered on core teaching competencies equips pre-service teachers with the foundational skills required for effective and responsive classroom practice.

Building on this, shared learning experiences in mentoring highlight that mentorship is truly a two-way street, benefiting both the mentor and the mentee. When cooperating teachers and pre-service educators engage in reflective dialogue, co-teaching, and reciprocal peer coaching, both gain professionally. Golden et al. (2021) found that reciprocal peer coaching among teaching teams led to significant instructional gains, demonstrating that even experienced mentors learn from observing and exchanging strategies with colleagues. Likewise, Duran et al. (2021) showed that reciprocal peer observation in schools boosts teaching practice and fosters a supportive professional learning community, enhancing mentor adaptability and insight. Together, these studies affirm that shared, bidirectional learning enriches both cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers, promoting continuous professional development.

Finally, structured support and ongoing development are essential for reinforcing mentorship and ensuring it adapts to the evolving needs of pre-service teachers. When cooperating teachers receive



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formal training, mentoring tools, and institutional backing, they become more effective and confident in guiding interns. Hudson (2019) emphasized that clearly defined mentoring roles and structured support systems enhance mentor preparedness and build confidence in guiding pre-service teachers. Similarly, Courcy et al. (2024) conducted a cross-context analysis in Ontario and Quebec and highlighted that mentors benefit significantly from structured competence development such as training, reflective dialogue, and institutional support. These findings affirm that when mentoring is backed by clear frameworks and sustained professional learning opportunities, it becomes more purposeful and impactful, fostering growth for both mentors and mentees. please use simple transitional device.

CONCLUSION

The research confirmed the important role of cooperating teachers in supporting the professional growth of pre-service teachers through hands-on mentorship. The study showed that when student-teachers engage in real classroom experiences, they develop essential teaching skills and practical insights that go beyond theoretical learning. Additionally, the investigation found that while effective mentorship builds competence and confidence, it also faces challenges like time constraints, the absence of formal training, and the difficulties of managing dual roles. Given these challenges, the study suggests that the Department of Education (DepEd) should develop structured mentor training programs. Schools and teacher education institutions should also offer dedicated time and proper support for mentoring activities, such as collaborative planning, mentoring conferences, and regular feedback. These steps are crucial for enhancing the quality and consistency of mentorship and creating a supportive environment for the ongoing professional development of future educators.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the study recommends that teacher education institutions and partner schools formalize and improve their mentorship programs by establishing clear frameworks, training initiatives, and sustainable support systems for cooperating teachers. The research confirmed that recognizing mentors' roles in policies, providing incentives, and creating professional development opportunities—especially in coaching, communication, and evaluation—can enhance the mentorship experience. It is also suggested that pre-service teachers learn the importance of collaboration, reflection, and constructive dialogue to make the most of their practicum experience. Finally, future research could examine mentorship practices in different school settings or explore its long-term effects on teacher effectiveness. Overall, a strong and well-supported mentorship system has great potential to improve the quality and sustainability of teacher preparation programs.

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