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Enhancing Teacher Education through Experiential and Community-Based Learning

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Image Source: Rowena R Hibanada

This policy brief examines the role of experiential and community-based learning in enhancing teacher education in the Philippines through extension programs. Data were collected from 43 pre-service teachers through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that these programs significantly enhance teaching competencies, community collaboration, and social responsibility, aligning with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Best practices identified include iterative reflection cycles, community members as co-educators, and collaborative resource management. However, challenges such as resource constraints, time management issues, and community readiness variability hinder the effectiveness of these programs. To address these challenges, the policy brief recommends strengthening policy support for experiential learning, enhancing resource allocation, institutionalizing mentorship programs, and leveraging technology for sustainability. By formalizing experiential learning within teacher training policies, policymakers and institutions can better prepare educators to address diverse classroom and community needs, fostering inclusive and quality education in resource-limited contexts.

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Introduction

Teacher education plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of future educators and their ability to address the evolving needs of learners and communities. In the Philippines, experiential and community-based learning have emerged as effective strategies for bridging the gap between theory and practice in teacher preparation. This policy brief examines the impact of extension programs implemented by a Teacher Education Institution (TEI) in the country, highlighting their role in enhancing pre-service teachers' competencies, fostering community engagement, and promoting social responsibility.

Grounded in Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and Community-Based Learning Theory (CBLT), this study employed quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with 43 purposively selected pre-service teachers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to assess how these programs contribute to teacher development and address local educational challenges. While findings underscore the programs' alignment with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), they also reveal critical challenges, including resource constraints, time management issues, and variability in community readiness.

This policy brief provides evidence-based recommendations to strengthen experiential learning in teacher education, enhance resource allocation, and improve program sustainability. By institutionalizing effective extension practices, education policymakers and institutions can ensure that future teachers are well-prepared to navigate diverse classroom environments and contribute meaningfully to community development.

Key Findings

Effectiveness of Extension Programs

The study highlights the significant impact of extension programs in enhancing the teaching competencies, community collaboration, and social responsibility of pre-service teachers. These programs effectively bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, equipping future educators with the skills needed to thrive in diverse and challenging educational settings. By engaging in real-world teaching experiences, participants developed a deeper understanding of the profession and its societal impact.

Alignment with Professional Standards and Global Goals

The findings demonstrate that the extension programs align with the PPST, which emphasize the importance of community involvement in teacher education. These initiatives also contribute to global educational objectives, particularly the SDGs, by fostering inclusive and equitable education.

Participants recognized the relevance of their experiences in addressing both local community needs and broader educational goals, reinforcing the value of these programs in teacher preparation.

Best Practices Identified

Several best practices emerged from the study. First, iterative reflection cycles enabled pre-service teachers to assess and adapt their approaches to community engagement. Second, treating community members as co-educators fostered mutual learning and strengthened trust between stakeholders. Lastly, collaborative resource management proved essential in overcoming challenges such as limited access to materials and time constraints. These best practices offer a transferable model for integrating experiential learning into teacher education effectively.

Professional and Personal Growth

The study reveals that the extension programs contribute significantly to the professional and personal development of participants. A substantial 92% of respondents affirmed the programs' alignment with their university's Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives (VMGO), while 82% reported that the initiatives reinforced core values such as truth, excellence, and service. Participants developed essential skills, including adaptability, critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership, which are crucial in their teaching careers. Additionally, the programs fostered a strong sense of volunteerism, civic responsibility, and advocacy, helping pre-service teachers see their role as educators beyond the classroom.

Community Engagement and Societal Impact

Beyond personal growth, the extension programs also had a notable impact on partner communities. Participants actively contributed to literacy development and ICT capacity-building, addressing immediate educational challenges in local areas. The study found that 88% of respondents recognized the alignment of these initiatives with broader societal goals, particularly those outlined in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, participants acknowledged the role of communities in shaping the learning environment, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive and inclusive teaching strategies.

Challenges Faced

Despite their success, the extension programs encountered several challenges. Resource constraints, including limited funding, materials, and infrastructure, affected the effectiveness of program implementation. Time management emerged as another key issue, as participants struggled to balance their academic responsibilities with community engagements. Additionally, variability in community readiness posed



challenges, as differing levels of engagement required tailored approaches to ensure active participation.

Strategies for Improvement

To address these challenges, the study suggests several strategies for improvement. Strengthening partnerships with NGOs, businesses, and local organizations could help secure additional funding and resources. The integration of technology into extension programs can improve resource efficiency and expand learning opportunities. Conducting preliminary needs assessments and actively involving community leaders in planning processes can ensure that programs align with local priorities. Furthermore, institutionalizing mentorship programs and adopting phased implementation strategies can provide structured support for pre-service teachers, making the extension initiatives more sustainable and impactful.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Strengthening Policy Support for Experiential and Community-Based Learning

The study underscores the importance of integrating experiential and community-based learning into teacher education programs. Policymakers in education, particularly within the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Department of Education (DepEd), should consider formalizing policies that institutionalize extension programs as a required component of teacher training. This could include mandating service-learning credits in pre-service teacher education curricula, ensuring that all future educators gain hands-on experience in community engagement. By embedding experiential learning within teacher training policies, institutions can better prepare educators to address diverse classroom needs and community challenges.

Enhancing Resource Allocation and Institutional Support

The study highlights resource constraints as a significant challenge in implementing extension programs. To address this, education policymakers should prioritize funding mechanisms and grant opportunities for Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) engaged in community-based initiatives. Establishing public-private partnerships with local businesses, NGOs, and international organizations can provide financial support and access to teaching materials, technology, and infrastructure. Furthermore, integrating digital tools and open-access learning platforms into extension programs can optimize resource efficiency while expanding outreach efforts.

Aligning Teacher Training with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers

The study's findings reinforce the relevance of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) in guiding teacher education programs. DepEd should encourage TEIs to integrate PPST competencies into their extension initiatives, ensuring that pre-service teachers develop critical skills such as adaptability and responsiveness to the community contexts, community engagement, critical thinking and problem-solving. This alignment can be strengthened through continuous professional development (CPD) programs, where in-service teachers engage in similar experiential learning activities to refine their teaching strategies.

Institutionalizing Mentorship and Capacity-Building Programs

Given the challenges related to time management and community readiness, institutions should establish structured mentorship programs where experienced educators guide pre-service teachers in navigating extension activities. This approach ensures that newly trained teachers receive practical insights on managing real-world educational challenges while fostering a culture of collaboration between schools, universities, and local communities. Additionally, capacity-building workshops on community engagement strategies, technology integration, and adaptive teaching methods should be provided to both faculty members and students involved in extension programs.

Improving Community Engagement Strategies for Sustainable Development

The study highlights the transformative role of community members as co-educators in extension programs. Educational policies should promote participatory models of learning, where communities are actively involved in designing and implementing programs tailored to their needs. Conducting preliminary needs assessments and engaging community leaders as stakeholders in education planning can enhance the sustainability and impact of extension activities. Moreover, TEIs should develop long-term partnerships with local governments to ensure continuity and alignment with broader development plans, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Integrating Time Management and Workload Balancing into Teacher Education

Time constraints were identified as a common challenge for pre-service teachers engaged in extension programs. To



mitigate this, TEIs should incorporate workload management training into their curricula, helping students balance academic requirements, teaching practice, and community engagement. One approach could be the integration of extension activities into formal coursework, allowing students to earn academic credits while actively participating in experiential learning.

Leveraging Technology to Overcome Resource Constraints

The study highlights ICT capacity-building as a critical component of extension initiatives, particularly in resource-limited communities. Education policies should promote the integration of technology-based learning solutions, such as e-learning modules, mobile apps, and digital literacy programs, to bridge the digital divide. Additionally, TEIs should train pre-service teachers in using digital tools for community education, preparing them to facilitate remote learning and online teaching methodologies, especially in underserved areas.

Conclusion

This policy brief underscores the transformative potential of experiential and community-based learning in teacher education. Extension programs serve as effective platforms for integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application, equipping pre-service teachers with essential competencies while addressing community educational needs. The study highlights the programs' alignment with PPST and global education goals, reinforcing their relevance in teacher preparation. However, resource limitations, time constraints, and community engagement barriers pose significant challenges that must be addressed.

To optimize the impact of these programs, policymakers should institutionalize service-learning credits, increase funding for extension initiatives, and promote collaborative partnerships with local stakeholders. Institutions should also integrate structured mentorship programs and digital tools to enhance sustainability and scalability. By embedding experiential learning within teacher education policies, education stakeholders can produce well-rounded, socially responsible, and adaptable educators capable of addressing the dynamic needs of learners and communities. These efforts will contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable education system in the Philippines.

REFERENCE:

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AI Declaration Statement

This policy brief includes sections that were edited or refined with the assistance of ChatGPT-4o. The AI tool was used solely for language enhancement—such as improving clarity, coherence, and tone—and not for generating original ideas, arguments, or policy recommendations. All AI-assisted content was carefully reviewed and revised by the author to ensure it meets ethical and scholarly standards. The author assumes full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and academic integrity of this work.

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The PNU Educational Policy Research, and Development Office

The EPRDO is a specialized research center in the University focused on policy research and studies on teacher education. It is established to provide research-based policy recommendations to policy makers. It also serves as the clearing house for all data relevant to teacher education in the Philippines and beyond.

Vision

The Philippine Normal University through the EPRDO aims to be an innovation hub of teacher education research and educational policy studies.

Mission

To strengthen the culture of excellence in teacher education research and educational policy studies.

Objectives

The EPRDO shall manage the University's research production, enhance human resource capabilities, and share expertise to other Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the area of teacher education research

Strategies

1. Establish and maintain a web-based university research portal that facilitates automated research management systems, and which also serves as the database of teacher education policies and teacher education research in the country and Southeast Asia.
2. Share research expertise and competence in teacher education research with other TEIs throughout the country;
3. Develop and disseminate the University research agenda
4. Design and implement the research capability program for faculty and staff;
5. Manage University's research production particularly the conduct of educational policy studies in education and teacher education; and
6. Serve as the implementing arm for research incentives and research ethics review.

Values

SYNERGY (Working collaboratively as a team)

EFFICIENCY (Delivering research services efficiently)

EXCELLENCE (Achieving high quality research outputs)

PRODUCTIVITY (increasing research production of the University)

The **Policy Brief Series** aims to provide observations, analyses, and insights by PNU faculty and researchers on various educational policy issues. The views contained in the policy briefs are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the University.

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