

Persistent Critical Incidents During Practice-Teaching of Filipino Pre-Service Physical Educators

Josephine Luz S. de Leon-Pineda^a, Julius Ceazar G. Tolentino^b, Mercy D. Pineda^c, ^aPhD, Don Honorio Ventura State University, Philippines, ^bMPES, Don Honorio Ventura State University, Philippines, ^cMPE, Don Honorio Ventura State University, Philippines, Email: ajlsdeleon@dhvsu.edu.ph

Critical incidents are unanticipated challenges experienced in the context of practice-teaching, by teacher-interns which are turning points for prospective improvements later on in the profession. With this in mind, the researchers aimed to identify the common persistent critical incidents experienced by pre-service physical educators (PSPEs) from a certain Philippine higher education institution during their off-campus teaching. One hundred and fifty-eight (158) pre-service physical educators from a teacher education institution in Pampanga, Philippines composed the pool of prospective key informants. From this, they were streamlined to ten (10) to participate in a focus group discussion; particularly those with extreme cases. The transcriptions were analyzed using content analysis and trustworthiness of data was also ensured. The emerging critical incidents dealt within the challenges encountered in terms of instruction, the students, and their cooperating-teachers. However, their coping strategies in managing these incidents included their self-determination, acceptance, motivation; behavior management; and professional guidance. It is of significance that these incidents be explored to improve the delivery of experiential learning courses relevant to the ever-changing educational mainstream.

Key words – *critical incidents, higher education, physical education, teacher education, Philippines*



INTRODUCTION

Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) prepare pre-service teachers for their in-service career practice. One culminating part of their preparations is their practice teaching or practicum. It is the duty of each TEIs to assure support, guidance, monitoring, and evaluation on the experiences of its preservice educators to ensure quality among its graduates. One of the main goals of the TEIs is to create environments that will foster preservice teachers' (PSTs) knowledge, and disposition needed to become effective reflective practitioners. Preservice teachers must know why they employ certain instructional strategies and how they improve their teaching to have a positive effect on students (Mirzaei, Aliah, & Kashefi, 2014). The aim for preservice teachers to develop themselves professionally in their own setting requires reflection (Dewey, 1933) that needs to be fostered in teacher education programs (Yayli, 2009).

Beyond theories and lectures, preservice teachers are confronted with events which they may be considered critical. These are incidents which are unplanned and unanticipated challenges that occur during their practice teaching (Joshi, 2018; Brookfield, 1990, p. 84). As to Joshi (2018), critical incidents, in the context of education, is a “problem or challenge” perceived by a teacher from a personal point of view at any instance within the teaching-learning process. Although, it may be viewed universally and varies from different perspectives of experts. Incidents that happen in the classroom may or may not be critical depending on how the teacher interprets them. They can be considered critical because they allow the teachers to pause and look back about the meaning of the event to improve their teaching. Joshi (2018) further added that these incidents can be both positive and negative which can be framed as turning points in the teacher's career and can lead to changes. However, Farrell (2008) mentioned that negative rather than positive incidents was mostly reported as they found it easier to recall negative incidents more quickly and spontaneously.

Over the years, studies have highlighted the importance of determining the critical incidents of practitioners in education and in various fields to help re-plan and improve their practice (Joshi, 2018; Bruster & Peterson, 2013; Hanuscin, 2013; Farrell, 2008; Griffin, 2003; Danaher, Gale, & Erben, 2000). Despite the studies on critical incidents, the goals of the researchers lead towards the development of reflective practice. This study focuses on determining specifically the critical incidents and experiences of the preservice teachers to provide TEIs on determining possible solutions and inputs that will be beneficial to the preservice teachers. Moreover, it must be highlighted that as years pass, there are obvious changes in educational platforms, modalities and strategies, and students' generation vis-à-vis their behavior and interest. Hence, studies on the critical incidents of the preservice teachers must continue.



Studies on critical incidents among preservice teachers provide a window of their experiences, a view which was not often available to teacher educators (Hanuscin, 2013). This vision is necessary in re-planning or re-structuring TEIs curriculum and instruction to meet the changing needs of future learners and environments of education (Joshi, 2018). As to preservice teachers, inputs on this study help them identify good practices of teaching and practices which are not working well; allow reflection towards a sense of professional awareness; determine and solve problems (Joshi, 2018; Hanuscin, 2013; Bruster & Peterson, 2013).

Farrell (2008) identified the following as the critical incidents on English Language Teacher (ELT) initial training: language proficiency, class participation, behavior, gender, classroom space, lesson objectives, classroom activities, attention spans, and additional classroom assistance. Additionally, a teacher's positive attitude serves as a role model among preservice teachers (Finch, 2010). Critical incidents determined by Hanhimäki and Tirri (2009) were classified in relation to principal, teachers, students and families, and school community.

General Objective

The researchers aimed to explore the persistent critical incidents experienced by pre-service physical educators (PSPEs) during their practice-teaching (teacher-internship) in their respective cooperating-schools.

Specific Objectives:

1. What are the common and persistent critical incidents experienced by the pre-service physical educators during their practicum?
2. How did the key-informants address these critical incidents?

METHOD

This study employed the use of descriptive qualitative research to merely determine the persistent critical incidents of the PSPEs and their ways in addressing these challenges. Irrespective on the simplicity of the research method, the researchers found this method appropriate as it only aimed to gather and describe the narrated experiences of the PSPEs through initial interview, focus group discussion and follow-up validation and triangulation. The data then underwent a content analysis procedure to facilitate the organization of the themes.

Key Informants

Preservice teachers from the Bachelor of Physical Education major in School Physical Education program ($N = 158$) were initially considered in the study during the Second Semester of Academic



Year 2018-2019. Only those who have attended Field Study 5: Learning Assessment Strategies, Field Study 6: On Becoming a Teacher, and EDUC 426: Practice Teaching courses were considered in the study. Among the 158 PSPEs, the practice teaching coordinator and also one of the researchers interviewed them and identified those who had critical incidents. The participants were streamlined based on the commonality of their experiences and selected 10 informants to be part of the focus group discussion. Purposive in nature, the key informants were the study interest to capture data from the perspectives of pre-service teachers who have peculiar experiences as compared to their other counterparts, such as teaching in an outdoor setting rather than a typical classroom and delivery of instruction that is mostly coupled with technical skills in human movement and demonstration. Those with extreme cases were considered in the study. They were identified through consultation with the practice-teaching coordinator.

Instrument

In order to obtain data relevant for the study, a structured interview guide was drafted and underwent experts' face and content validation. It was initially used by non-physical education preservice teachers to evaluate the quality of the questions and whether they are easily comprehended by the participants.

Procedures

Phase 1: Preliminary Interview from the Practice Teaching Coordinator

In order to establish the assurance that indeed, there are probable critical incidents that had emerged, the researchers interviewed the teacher-interns' practice teaching coordinator.

Phase 2: Small Group Discussions

The procedures began with a group discussion per class section which was facilitated by the researchers. Each class was divided into groups composed of 5 to 6 members. Each group assigned a facilitator who will lead the discussion. They were also asked to assign a secretary to take down notes and record the minutes of the entire discussion. Groups were also instructed to use a language that they are comfortable with. Furthermore, they were tasked to make a summary of their discussion in a narrative form. They were asked to consider in their discussions the following: (a) recalling of their teaching experience in the previous semesters by identifying the critical incident/s in their classroom that challenged them, be it in classroom management, planning the lesson or course content, pedagogies used and assessment and evaluation; (b) their feelings about the incidents; (c) the ways of addressing the incidents; (d) assessment of action based on the principles, philosophies, or theories of education that they have learned from their professional education courses; and other matters that may eventually emerge in the group discussions.



Phase 3: Focus Group Discussion

Ten (10) identified PSPEs took part in the FGD facilitated by the researchers. These key informants were coded PSPE 1 to 10 to ensure anonymity. Several confirmatory questions were asked of them specifically on the identified topics that persistently emerged during the conduct of group discussions in the second phase.

Data Analysis

Narratives of the participants were transcribed in the computer via the Microsoft Word© to facilitate the analysis of data. Content analysis was used to analyze the transcriptions after the procedures were conducted with the aid of a hands-on guide particularly in doing content analysis provided by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017). After reading and going through the entire transcriptions, trustworthiness of data was ensured. This provides assurance of the rigor and truthfulness of data collected and interpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

As this study heavily requires the narration of critical experiences of the participants, ethics in data gathering were highly considered. Permission from the University Research and Development Office and Dean from the College of Education were sought prior to the conduct of the study. Consent from the participants were secured assuring them of the anonymity and confidentiality of the data gathered.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the critical incidents encountered by the preservice physical educators during their practice teaching. Based on the qualitative analysis on the responses given by the participants, the following themes were identified as critical incidents:

Persistent Critical Incidents Experienced by the PSPEs

This section presents the persistent critical incidents experienced by the PSPEs. Three categories of critical incidents were found to be related to instruction, students, and cooperating teachers which are similar to the findings of Goodell (2006).

Instruction. During the preservice teaching practicum, the students were expected to have been prepared in handling various classroom challenges. However, results showed that students

remained challenged in delivering content in terms of the medium of instruction used, lack of resources, and student engagement.

A communication barrier in the delivery of instruction was found to be critical among preservice physical educators. Participants said that some of their students cannot focus on the instruction because of the medium used. In the curriculum, physical education subjects are taught in English, a second or third language of most of the students. It was also highlighted that students cannot follow directions easily unless these were being explained to them repeatedly and clearly.

Physical education subjects require necessary material and facilities in order to implement necessary subject tasks. There were students who have found it challenging to teach certain contents where facilities are not available.

“It is hard for me to teach because the school where I was deployed lacks facility and equipment for my lesson,”- PSPE 1

The participants mentioned that they had classrooms which were not well-ventilated and do not have electricity. They believed that these were contributory to students’ focus / students’ attention /attentiveness.

“They (students) can’t focus well because of the hot temperature they are experiencing inside the classroom.”-PSPE 2

“There is no electricity in the classroom, the room is not conducive for learning.”- PSPE 1

Another critical incident under instruction is on engagement. It was claimed that while they were doing classroom activities, some students were not paying attention and focused; and are even playing.

“I’m instructed to conduct a quiz to the students; some of them are not paying attention. They are playing sepak while having the quiz.” -PSPE 7

Based on the interview among students, though they may have experienced various incidents during the instruction, the medium of instruction used, resources, and engagement were the persistent challenges. Similar to the findings of Kilgour, Northcote, and Herman (2015), management issues, communication issues, planning issues, and learning issues were found as their worst lesson experience.

Students. Among the critical incidents encountered by the participants, how students treat their PPEs and behave towards their classmates were the most challenging. Their behavior towards their

student teacher is relative towards the personality of the PPEs. There were also reported disrespectful gestures towards the PPEs.

During the focused group discussion, the participants were one in saying that there were students who were disrespectful with them especially if they found the student teacher to be weak. They referred to 'being weak' as when PPEs cannot handle the group of students. However, when PPEs showed that they have the authority in the classroom, the students tend to be stiff and uncooperative with them.

Here are some of the highlights of PPE's narration:

"Kapag po nakita nila medyo mahina ka, hindi ka po nila pinapakinggan. Kapag naman nakipagclose ka, tinatapik--tapik ka na lang nila. At kapag naman po naging stiff ka, hindi na sila makikipagcooperate. Minsan po 'di mo na alam paano sila i-aapproach." (When they think of you as weak, they won't listen to you. When you make them feel at ease with you, they will tap you disrespectfully. When you establish firmness, they won't cooperate. Sometimes, I can no longer tell how to approach them.)-PSPE 6

"I heard some students talking and saying bad things to their student-teachers. Also, they (students) will not listen if they know their teacher (cooperating teacher) is not around." -PSPE 9

"...they (students) don't respect student-teachers. They don't treat us teachers and they call us ate (older sister) or hoy." -PSPE 2

"They (students) won't listen if you will not shout." -PSPE 10

"When I heard my student's talking to and saying bad to their student teachers, "uhh atin nanaman student teacher" "dapat enala lulub!" it really breaks my heart because their mindset to student teacher's is not good." -PSPE 10.

Cooperating Teachers. During the deployment of the PSPEs, the cooperating schools assigned them with their respective cooperating teachers. The cooperating teachers were in-charge of supervising and mentoring these prospective teachers. The culmination of the PPEs' pursuit of becoming a teacher education graduate was to have enriched experiences and practices of theories. Hence, the role of the cooperating teachers become very significant among the PSPEs.

There were PPE who were fortunate to have supportive cooperating teachers, however, there were some reported cases where PPEs complained to their assigned cooperating teacher to the Practice Teaching Supervisor.

Incidents such as PPEs were scolded;

“I feel so embarrassed when my cooperating teacher scolded me inside the faculty room for several times (sic).”-PSPE 5

overloaded with tasks;

“My cooperating teacher is abusing me.” She always asks me to do things she like...” –PSPE 1
...and replaced teachers who were busy with other tasks, were reported.

Hence, cooperating teachers’ assistance and treatment towards the PSPEs were found to be critical. These findings are problematic and needs attention as it impacts PSPEs performance, and social dispositions. The researchers are on the same side as Finch (2010), a positive impact is reaped among preservice teachers, particularly the positive attitude of the teachers serves as a role model.

Ways of Addressing the Critical Incidents

This section of the findings reports the impact of the critical incidents towards the PSPEs and how they cope with these challenges. One important contribution of this paper is the documentation of how PSPEs dealt with the incidents which they believed are critical.

Impact of Critical Incidents

The PSPEs expressed how these critical incidents made them feel and how they addressed these challenges. There were PSPEs who found these incidents as challenging and an opportunity to improve their craft. Preservice physical educators were negative emotions such as feeling sad, down, disappointed, abused, and degraded were felt by some of the PSPEs. Below are some of the exact words of the participants.

“I feel abused because all my efforts they did not appreciate my efforts.”-PSPE 7

“I felt disrespected.” -PSPE 8

“I felt so sad, challenged, so down and disappointed.” -PSPE 9

However, there were PSPEs who positively embraced their experiences. Despite the challenges experienced, there were students who took their experiences as an opportunity to develop themselves. One example is PSPE 10:

“I was challenged because even there are many students who listens to me still there are few who doesn’t listens to me and I was really challenged to think of what approach I will



use in order that my students to respect me and listen to me, and accept me as their student teacher.”

The impact of the cooperating teacher’s support was also essential in the experiences of the PSPEs. The presence of the cooperating teacher builds or breaks the PSPEs’ motivation and drives their endeavor towards their practice teaching.

“Happy, my cooperating teacher helped me to improve my ways of being a teacher.”-PSPE 6

“But I felt so glad when my cooperating teacher lift me and inspires me with his experiences. He always cheer me that I can do that(sic).” -PSPE 8

According to Kilgour, Northcote, & Herman (2015), PSTs in general must know what triggers their ese emotions, and utilize these emotions positively for the improvement of their teaching.

Coping Strategies of the Pre-Service Physical Educators

When confronted with difficulties, the coping strategies become significant to others who might be encountering the same challenges. Hence, one of the essential contributions of this paper is to determine the ways on how PSPEs addressed the critical incidents during their practice-teaching.

Self-determination, acceptance, and motivation. The driving forces of PSPE to cope with such challenges are their intrinsic motivation, acceptance of the challenges, and self-determination. There were some who have questioned their personal goal of being a teacher while there were some who believed in the purpose of what they are doing and their chosen career. It is their great dreams of finishing their degree that made them patient and moving while experiencing the bumpy moments in their practice teaching.

“When the time I felt down because of what happened, one question entered my mind, “Am I really going to be a teacher?” I really thought about what would be my answer, then said to myself that it is just the start of my career I must stand up and be proud of where I am now. I need to be strong for my students, for them to learn. I was here to make them learned (sic) not to let them alone and learn nothing.”-PSPE 9

Based on the response of PSPE 9, it is clear that the student-teacher already possessed and understood her purpose as a teacher. Her goal towards students’ learning made her determined to cope with her emotions.

While there were also PSPEs who believed that accepting the challenges will make them better. As to PSPE 21 said,

“I take it as a challenge so that next time I will be stronger than before.”
However, despite knowing their goal and role as pre-service teacher, there were PSPE who accepted how others have treated them. Similar to what PSPE 3 said,
“...I know I’m just a student teacher that’s why they don’t participate. I understand their attitude towards me and I accept that.(sic)”- PSPE 9

Behavior Management. Being a student-teacher, PSPEs reported cases where they feel disrespected. There were students who did not listen or pay attention to them. They believed that one way of managing their misbehavior is to confront them with what they have done.

“The time when my students didn’t listen to me, I talk to them personally and made them realize their fault and make them feel guilty.”-PSPE 2

While there were PSPEs who confronted their students, there were also PSPEs who ran into the advisers of the students to report their actions. Some believed that as these students do not respect them, they should seek the help of their advisers.

“ I immediately reported it to my adviser so that they will do something about it.”-PSPE 9

Professional Guidance. In every situation and difficulty one may find ways in coping these by seeking the help of the experts. In the case of practice teaching, a student-teacher is under the supervision of his/her cooperating teacher, who is an experienced and expert in his/her field. Hence, the PSPEs consulted their cooperating teacher on things they need to be guided for.

“ I ask my cooperating teacher what I can do to prove myself and to show more of my knowledge and skills.” -PSPE 7

The PSPEs found it helpful and encouraging whenever their cooperating teachers were supportive. This is evident during the discussion with students who did not experience problems with their cooperating teacher.

As to PSPE 10, *“...happy, my cooperative (sic) teacher helped me to improve my ways of being a teacher.”*

And PSPE 6, “...I felt so glad when my cooperating teacher lift me and inspires me with his experiences. He always cheer me that I can do that.(sic)”

However, there were PSPEs whose critical incidents involved their cooperating teachers. In cases like these, the PSPEs sought the help and advice of their practice-teaching supervisor (PTS). This manifests the PTS’ role in providing consultations with them to ensure that problems are being raised and addressed accordingly especially if it concerns another professional, the cooperating-teacher at that.

These circumstances promote a certain pattern in seeking professional guidance when critical incidents happen. Manageable incidents were being consulted with their cooperating-teacher. Aside from the incidental communication with the PTS, PSPEs were gathered every month to discuss the problems they encountered during the practice teaching and the possible solutions to these problems. According to the PTS,

“During the discussion, opinions, ideas, and advices were given for improvement and encouragement.”

Also, the PTS would visit the school to settle some problems with the head teacher or the principal if their problem is the cooperating teacher. However, if the problem rests on the PSPE, the PTS meets with the students for further sharing and advising.

Professional advice was also extended when students found difficulties on the facilities and resources available in the school. They were instructed to find alternatives whenever there are absences of facilities and equipment.

“On facilities and equipment, PE teachers cannot stop teaching because there’s no court or ball...improvise and be resourceful.”-PTS

Based on the interview with the PTS, the above actions and advices were given during the duration of the practice teaching. As to the extent of PTS’s role, those were the only actions that they can extend to the PSPEs as this practice-teaching experience is a scaffolding situation prior to actual in-service teaching career.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study purports to explore the persistent critical incidents encountered by the PSPEs and determine how they address such challenges. The main goal of the paper was parallel to its essence

among the teacher education institutions particularly in enriching the culmination of preservice teachers' practical experiences. Based on the findings of the study, three main categories were yielded as critical incidents. These are the critical incidents related to instruction, students, and cooperating teachers. Among the experiences related to instructions, it was found out that the persistent challenges include the delivery of the content, lack of resources, and students' engagement. Students' behavior and respect to PSPEs were the reported cases of critical incidents related to students. The main role of the cooperating teachers is significant in the journey of the PSPEs towards their career as teachers. Based on the findings, cooperating teachers' assistance and treatment towards the PSPEs were found to be critical. In the pursuit of determining the ways on how students addressed these challenges, the researchers identified the negative emotions impacted by the PSPEs. However, PSPEs coped with these challenges through self-determination, acceptance, and motivation; managing students' behavior; and seeking for professional guidance.

As instruction plays a crucial role in the teaching-learning process and in shaping the would-be teachers to become ready in the actual practice in the field, it would be imperative that theories and concepts of professional education courses be emphasized by their mentors particularly on relevant courses on Foundation/ Theory Concepts, Pedagogical Content Knowledge, and Experiential Learning Courses. During the teaching immersion, a clinical approach is highly encouraged among cooperating teachers who shall act as their mentors as this would fully guide the teacher candidates in the different domains of the curriculum process. Cognizant to the aim of field study courses, which is to provide meaningful learning experiences among pre-service teachers by allowing them to be immersed in a laboratory school or other cooperating schools, teacher education institutions must ensure that they (PSPEs) have underwent a thorough orientation and preparation to ensure that they are physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially fit to discharge responsibilities expected of them. It must be recognized entirely that the critical PSPEs experiences vary as no classrooms are alike; and individual differences among cooperating teachers and students are evident. Preservice teachers in general, and PSPEs in particular, must be rich with seminars and orientations on the content, pedagogies, and behavioral managements to supplement their years of preparation. It must be considered primarily that these PSPEs are inexperienced in teaching, and thus must be cautious and prepared in handling minds and humans. The role of the cooperating teacher is essential and critical in the experience of PSPEs, hence, the teacher education institutions should ensure that the PSPEs are secured and the cooperating teachers have understood his/her role.

As this qualitative inquiry dealt within the premise of PSPEs' experiences, it could not stand to arrive at a particular generalization among preservice teachers within the Philippine context. Hence, it is recommended that further exploration of critical incidents be considered among other fields of specializations to provide a more encompassing description of the critical incidents



experienced by the preservice teachers. Moreover, different approaches in research may also be used for further investigations to expand the limitations posed in this study.



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