The Experiences of Student-teachers' on VirtualSchool Internship Programme: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The internship is the heart of the teacher education programme. Student teachers understand the role of the teacher in the real situation during the school internship. NCTE (2014) has changed the curriculum and increased the duration of the internship programme as many commissions and committees recommend. As we know, Due to the pandemic situation all colleges and schools were closed. So slowly we adopted online teaching. Student teachers also experienced virtual school internships. So researchers studied the experience of the student teacher in a virtual school internship. This qualitative study also explored the benefits and limitations of virtual school internships and recommendations for the virtual school internship programme. The semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted with a small selected group of final year B.Ed. student teachers at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. The findings of the research will provide rich insights into virtual experiences which in turn will benefit student teachers, school teachers, and educational institutions.

Keywords: Virtual School Internship, Student-Teachers, Experience

Introduction

The internship is an important element of the teacher education programme. It provides real experience to the student teachers for teaching so that they can develop teaching skills. An internship provides opportunities for the student teachers to link and implement theoretical knowledge in a real classroom. It provides a variety of field experiences under the guidance of a mentor and supervisor. It builds confidence among the pupil-teachers. It enhances the student's knowledge regarding different professional ethics. But due to the Covid-19, all schools and colleges were closed. So, teachers and teacher educators found a new way of teaching. Gradually all familiarized themselves with online teaching and adopted it. So that student teachers got an opportunity for a virtual school internship.

Virtual School Internship

A virtual internship is an example of a computer-based classroom simulation. It offers learning tasks that require students to think and act as professionals and simultaneously familiarize them with the culture and community of (teaching) occupation (Shaffer, 2007).

A virtual internship is a work experience that student teachers can do from home or any other place. Students and teachers communicate with each other through email, Microsoft team, and google meet during the internship. The interns can discuss this with their teachers related to assignments and projects. It is also called a remote

internship where interns are not physically present at the location.

Importance of Virtual School Internship

Through virtual school internships, student teachers can teach students who are enrolled in a different district. They can explore the different types of schools. It can lead to various career opportunities. A virtual school internship builds the skills for remote work. They learn how to use different platforms for teaching and evaluation like Zoom, Google Classroom, and Microsoft Teams. Student teachers can arrange their lecture on Sunday for the doubting session. It also saves time and money. Student teachers can also expand their network virtually.

Objectives of Virtual School Internship

The following are the objectives of the Virtual School Internship:

* To Enhance student teachers' awareness of technology

* Provide an opportunity to student teachers to explore online applications for teaching

* Development of the Techno-pedagogy skills

* Understand the role and duties of the teachers

* Apply theory in a real classroom

* Aware of the Online Assessment

Student teachers can develop communication skills because virtual internships are different from face-to-face. So student teachers will have to master the art of conversation. They learn how to write content and give responses through email. They can also build networks with other educational institutions and understand their culture.

Review of related literature

Cheong, A. (2014) conducted a study on Internship Experience: An In-Depth Interview among Interns at a Business School of a Malaysian Private Higher Learning Institution. The objective of this study was to better understand the experiences that the students went through during their internship and to recommend ways in which the educational institution could further enhance this experience. This in-depth interview study was conducted with a small selected group of final year business students at a private university in Malaysia. The findings were: the interns benefitted from their internship experience. They were able to see 'the bigger picture' and can develop their presentation and people skills. They also learn to be more independent. Overall, the participants were satisfied with the support provided by their immediate supervisors and co-workers and also the assistance was given by the university. Jeske, D. (2019) conducted a study on Virtual internships: Learning opportunities and recommendations. The objective was to study learning opportunities and recommend the successful implementation and organization of virtual internships. The present paper draws on the author's online interviews with 13 internship providers as well as interns and the results of several surveys conducted with virtual interns over the span of several years. The interviewees were located across the USA, the UK, Ireland, Romania and India. Interns need to have the opportunity to develop their skills by also receiving meaningful feedback. Virtual internship schemes require a significant organizational commitment in terms of time, resources (staff and remuneration) and careful recruitment and selection efforts. The managers will need to have the required technical, interpersonal and time management skills to provide interns

with clear deliverables, instructions and constructive as well as frequent feedback to support their learning experience

Theelen, H. (2020) investigated to what extent virtual internships in teacher education were able to reduce Pre-service Teachers' (PSTs) professional anxiety and how virtual internships in blended learning environments were evaluated by PSTs in terms of technological, social and educational affordances. A mixed method design was employed. The questionnaire, focus group interviews and individual interviews were used for data collection. The findings were: A significant decrease was found in PSTs'professional anxiety after having followed Virtual Internship 2. PSTs reported that they obtained a more realistic image of teaching and felt better prepared for teaching in practice. Furthermore, regarding technological affordances, system usability was considered between acceptable and good. Concerning social affordances, PSTs appreciated collaboration within the virtual internships. As an educational affordance, it appeared that learning from videos with authentic classroom events is a good preparation for the professional teaching context. According to the PSTs, the scenarios within virtual internships could be improved in terms of authenticity and personalization by offering more details and background information. The results of this study imply that virtual internships can be useful assets for teacher education.

Rationale

The Acharya Rammurti Committee (1990) in its review of the NPE 1986 observed that an internship model for teacher training should be adopted because the internship model is based on the primary value of actual field experience in a realistic situation, on the development of teaching skills by practice over a period of time. As we know due to the pandemic situation we adopted online teaching. So student teachers also experienced virtual school internships. They can learn new applications for online teaching and assessment. So the researcher wants to study the experience of the student teacher in a virtual school internship.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to study the experiences of student teachers who had done the virtual internship.

Research Design

The study utilized qualitative research and specifically thematic analysis to examine the experiences of student teachers who participated in the virtual school internship Program.

Participants

This study drew on the responses of four student teachers (interns) who were experienced virtual school interns. The internship is undertaken in schools of Vadodara, with the interns taking full responsibility for their classes during the four-week term. Each intern is assisted by two support personnel- a mentor and a supervisor. A mentor is a subject teacher appointed by the school and a Supervisor is a university teacher appointed by the Department. Researchers selected student teachers randomly. They were informed about the purpose of the study and that their participation would be entirely voluntary.

Data collection

Researchers sent messages to student teachers related to this study. Student teachers are voluntarily ready for the interview. The researcher took a telephonic interview. It took 45-50 minutes. To ensure the confidentiality of potential participants, I did not

have access to the report at any point throughout or after the study.

Data analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) provided a six-phase guide I used in my study as a foundation for conducting thematic analysis. This research enables the participants to voice out their internship experience through an in-depth interview. From analyzing the interview transcriptions, a few themes emerged.

The themes describe the participants' experience during the internship at their respective schools. A selected sample of the participants' responses is presented with verbatim quotations. The main themes uncovered from analyzing the data are presented as follows:

Figure-1: Provides a Brief Description of the Themes; A Detailed Discussion of the Themes Follows the Figure
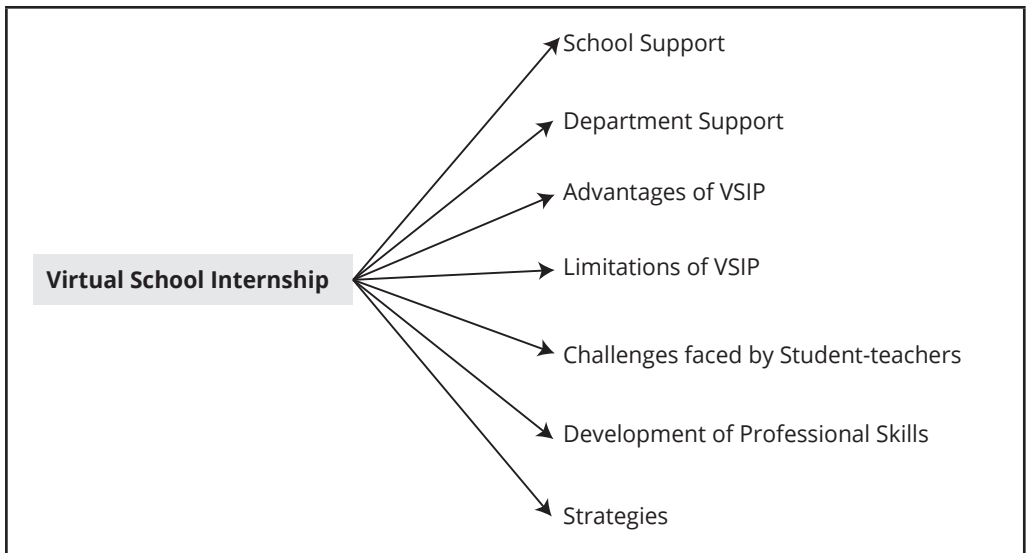
Development of Skills

Students develop skills of techno-pedagogy. They explored different applications for online teaching.

Intern A, developed the following skills:

> "I increased my confidence level and developed presentation skills. I came to know about the different online apps such as quizzes, zoom, and Google meet. I learned to make videos on YouTube".

Intern B, Intern C and Intern D shared similar types of experiences:

> "I came to know about the different online apps such as quizzes apps

and mathematical application geography. I improved my language skill and built up confidence. I built up confidence. In the beginning, I had feared that if I couldn't answer any quarry of students".

Strategies

Intern A, described strategies as follows:

> "I used a probing skill and demonstration method to make an interactive class".

Intern B used different strategies:

> "I taught the first lecture through a simple lecture method and the second lecture through video. After

that, I orally asked questions and realized that they understood the topic. Students in 8th class were more interactive than class 9th students. I made an interactive class through a demo and video".

Intern C who was completed her internship in a government school used following strategies:

"Video on air pollution and a demo were shown to students. I have shown them new videos to make students attend classes regularly. And I also organized a quiz in Google form so students felt it as a game, as a result of that they took interest in class.

Intern D used different strategies as follow:

"I used apps such as eLAB, Colab, padlet, jamboard, quizizz. With the help of these apps, the student's interest and performance were increased. There were few mock students, so I permitted them to respond through the chat box. As a result of that, they began to respond well. I also used 3D video and demonstration strategies. As a result of that, students connect with the study".

Student Support

Intern A described as follows:

"Students regularly attended the class. They gave answers to all the questions but a few students never communicated with me. Only one student gave a response from 11th standard students. They joined the class for the sake of learning and did not learn anything".

Intern B shared her experience:

"They took B.Ed teachers lightly. They did not give a response in the

beginning and left the meeting. And also didn't go on video mode when asked. When I asked a question to "define the particular" in the exam, they wrote "I don't know" as an answer".

Intern D described

"In the beginning, students did not turn on the video but after one month our bond grew so strong that they requested me to teach them regularly. Few students did not answer the questions in the beginning. Probing skill did not work. It seemed time consuming. But they gave a response after being friendly".

Mentor Support

Intern A verbalized the following:

"School teachers joined regularly. But they didn't check the lesson plan regularly and feedback was given only when asked".

Intern B mentioned:

"Mentor was observing lectures but didn't give feedback. As my annual test lessons would be held in upcoming days I messaged him for feedback so that I came to know to improve myself but didn't receive any response from him".

Intern C narrated the following experience:

"Microsoft link was sent from time to time and also added to the whatsapp group. The school teacher joined, observed and gave feedback regularly. Feedback was given on a content basis. Even student teachers can teach through whiteboard and also use lab instruments".

Intern D spoke the following:

"Mentor teacher did not observe any

lecture. I believed that they should give feedback at the end even though they did not observe any lecture. There was no interaction between us".

Department Support

Overall, the participants were satisfied with the support provided by their supervisors and co-workers and also the assistance was given by the university.

Intern A shared following:

"Supervisor joined the meeting for 5-10 minutes because she/he had to observe another student teacher at the same time. He/she gave feedback regularly. He/she said that today you took less content and also told you to use a new tool next time".

Intern B experience with her supervisor is as follows:

"Supervisor gave feedback on a daily basis and properly. The timing was 3 PM to 4 PM for the same".

Here Intern C had shared different experience:

"Supervisor didn't observe and give feedback because her school internship was from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. and my supervisor was in charge of four schools so they gave general instructions related to teaching".

Intern D expressed his positive view on the support provided by the supervisor. She said, "Supervisor observed lectures daily and also took meetings after class and gave feedback regularly".

Advantages of VSIP

Intern A said the following:

"The School allotted to me was far from my home so due to online

teaching, there is no unnecessary stress to reach school timely".

Intern B told that:

"I can deliver innovative content through online teaching".

Similar sentiments told by Intern C:

"I learned new apps such as Kahoot, Quizzes, Google meet and zoom. If I have done offline teaching, I did not get a chance to learn it".

Intern D mentioned:

"Education can be given through 3D models and animation models. Assessment can be done easily and speedy and with PPT, teachers can use it in a better way for teaching".

Limitations of VSIP

Intern A who interned at grant in aid school, spoke the following:

"Few chapters of mathematics were not taught effectively by her although there are many applications for it. She also mentioned that there are only forty minute lectures for teaching. During that time we have to join and give instructions. So sometimes it creates more distraction and is also time consuming. Due to this sometimes I cannot use achieving closure skills. Sometimes students do not switch on their video so I cannot see their expressions and understand them". Students became quite careless during online class".

Similar sentiments were also shared by Intern B, she mentioned:

"There was a network connectivity issue and 9th standard students did not switch on the video so I cannot see their expression. She also mentioned that "when we join school then we have to teach face-

to-face mode so at that time we have to speak in front of 50-60 students without fear that we missed". I faced network issues in the annual test lessons. I couldn't figure out what students were doing, whether students came to know about the topic and see expressions of students. One can see faces if one uses a laptop for online teaching. But, I was using a mobile so I had to use two mobile phone devices to properly interact. Otherwise I had to change the screen again and again to interact and present the screen which is a time-consuming process.

Another student teacher Intern D verbalized the following:

"Sometimes students did not join the meeting and gave responses. Due to online teaching, the interaction between students and teachers was quite less. Many times, they left the meeting".

Challenges faced by Student-teachers

Student-teachers faced challenges related to networking and related to students' responses. Students did not give answers to questions and sometimes left the meeting. They faced problems related to time management.

Intern A, described the challenges faced by her as follows:

"It was difficult to find a teaching app. It was difficult to take a lecture back-to-back after 40 minutes. I couldn't use blackboard work skill as I was using only one device. I couldn't achieve the closing skill as the lecture was automatically over after 40 minutes".

Intern C shared a different experience

"The timing of the school internship was 6 PM to 8 PM so sometimes TV

and other noise disturbed me. Only 10 students joined the meeting because others didn't have mobile or any other instrument to join. Many times, I had to teach repeatedly as their concepts were not clear. As a result of that I couldn't follow the lesson plan accurately".

Intern D narrated her experience

"Few students had network issues. I organized a patriot song competition but students shared funny videos in between. I gave strict warnings to those students but they kept on doing it. So, I left them from the meeting. I did not have data of a total number of students so I did not get an idea about which students did not join the class. School teachers did not respond to us".

Suggestions

In this study, student teachers also provided some suggestions to improve the internship program. After the Internship, student teachers have to prepare an internship report and submit a softcopy online to the university. Intern A commented:

"Offline internship should be conducted in future because we can build up more confidence with it".

"Department should provide laptops. Offline internship should be conducted in future because we can teach through laptops and various other apps". (Intern B)

"Offline internship should be conducted in future because in online teaching only 10 students joined the meeting but in offline teaching 50-60 students can attend. I faced network issues so if the department provided Wi-Fi then I could deliver lectures in a good manner. It is worthless to

do an online internship as Indian education is such that it provides only offline education". (Intern C)

"Online and offline, both internships should be there for future student teachers. Animation can also be shown in online teaching. Generally, only teaching aid and charts can be used in offline teaching. Doubts can be cleared on even Sunday or holidays in online teaching. Schools are time bound but in online teaching, lectures can also be organized after school. The system should be such that the student-teacher can observe the teaching method of other students who belong to different groups. Supervisors should be changed on a rotation basis so that we can receive their feedback also". (Intern D)

Conclusion

In this study generally, the student teachers' responses indicated that they learnt techno- pedagogy skills and benefited from the virtual school internship. Student teachers have said that they explored different applications for online teaching. Supervisors gave proper guidelines and feedback. A few students did not give responses for questions and left the meeting. The student teacher used different strategies for making interactive classes such as animation, 3-D video, and demonstration methods and connected with real life.

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