

THE INTERNSHIP ODYSSEY: REVEALING THE SCHOOL INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE OF TRAINEE TEACHERS IN POST COVID-19 ERA

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Abstract

The transition from theoretical learning to practical application is a critical phase in teacher training, especially in the context of the post-COVID-19 era. This study aims to explore the experiences of trainee teachers during their internships, focusing on classroom teaching, institutional management, school environment, co-curricular activities, guidance and mentorship, and psychological aspects. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, the research surveyed 35 trainee teachers from the Nadia district, West Bengal, using a structured questionnaire that included both closed and open-ended items. The results reveal that a majority of the trainees reported positive experiences across all dimensions, with significant strengths in classroom teaching, mentorship, and co-curricular involvement. However, challenges such as classroom management, administrative support, and psychological stress were also noted. The findings highlight the importance of supportive environments and effective mentorship in enhancing the internship experience. The study concludes with recommendations for improving internship programs to better support trainee teachers, ensuring a smoother transition into their professional careers.

Keywords: Internship; Trainee teacher; COVID-19

Introduction:

Teacher training in India has a very rich history, going back to the early 19th century, when the British government established teacher training institutions to enhance the quality of teacher education. With the establishment of the first formal teacher training institution, the Serampore College, in 1818 started the beginning of structured teacher training in India (Chakrabarti & Dhar, 2009). Over the years, the quality of teacher training in India has been shaped and improved by various educational reforms and policies, viz. the Kothari Commission (1964-66), the national policy on education (1968), the National Policy on Education (1986, revised in 1992) and the national educational policy (2020), that highlighted the need for a well-trained teacher to achieve educational goals (NCERT, 2005). The progress of teacher training in India is going through a various program, aimed at improving the pedagogical skills and subject knowledge of trainee teachers. These programs are Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) courses, Diploma in Education (D.Ed.), and most recently, integrated teacher education programs (ITEP). The ongoing development of these programs emphasises the importance of teacher training in providing effective teaching and learning related knowledge and skill. Teacher training is very important for teachers' professional growth. It provides them with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt with the ever-changing educational landscape. Good teacher training programs tackle various challenges that teachers encounter, such as meeting

the need of students from diverse background, using technology in teaching, and adopting new teaching methods and environments. According to Shulman (1987), teaching is complex and demands a strong grasp of the subject, effective teaching methods, and the ability to reflect on one's practice. These qualities are all developed through thorough teacher training programs. One of the key aspects of teacher training is the internship program. These programs give trainee teachers the chance to gain real-world experience by working in actual classrooms. This hands-on experience is incredibly valuable because it lets them apply what they've learned in theory, develop classroom management skills, and improve their teaching techniques. Zeichner (2010) highlights those practical experiences like internships are vital for connecting what is learned in training to what is needed in real-life teaching. Internship programs help trainee teachers build professional skills and understand the school environment in a better way. They work with experienced mentors, get helpful feedback, and reflect on their practices, all of this help them grow professionally. Also, internships boost their confidence and readiness, making it easier for them to start their teaching careers smoothly. Understanding the experiences of trainee teachers regarding their internships has become increasingly important due to the significant changes in the education system brought about by COVID-19. The disruptions caused by the pandemic have transformed traditional teaching methods and learning environments, necessitating a shift to more flexible and innovative approaches. Therefore, gaining insights into how trainee teachers navigated their internships during this period can provide valuable information for improving teacher training programs and adapting to the evolving educational landscape.

Teacher education

Teacher education is a set of organized programs and activities aimed at preparing individuals to become good teacher. It involves learning both the theory and the practical skills needed to teach effectively. Teacher education is a continuous process that starts with initial teacher training and extends through in-service training and professional development throughout a teacher's career (UNESCO, 2005). “Teacher education is a programme that is related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession and face the challenges therein” (Lal, D. 2016). Teacher education includes the policies and procedures that help future teachers gain the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and skills they need to teach successfully in the classroom, schools, and the broader community (Tripura University, 2017).

Internship programme

An internship program in teacher education is a well-organized, supervised, and practical part of teacher training. It gives future teachers real-world teaching experience in actual classrooms. These programs help connect the theory learned in classes with practical teaching in schools. Internship is a special educational program designed to combine learning with practical, performance-based experience. The main goal of the internship is to build and enhance students' skills, preparing them for their future careers (Parveen, S. and Mirza, N. 2012). “The Internship Program aims to provide students with opportunities to enhance their theoretical knowledge, develop practical skills, and cultivate desirable attitudes by gaining hands-on experience in a recognized host training” (Damoco, B.T. et al. 2023).

Review of related literature

The literature review examines various dimensions of teacher trainees' internship experiences. Smith (2018) highlights the significance of experiential learning in developing practical teaching skills and professional identity. Johnson and Thompson (2019) discuss the challenges faced by teacher trainees, such as classroom management and lesson planning, while emphasizing the role of mentor support. Brown (2020) finds that mentorship significantly enhances teaching competence and confidence. Clark (2016) examines how internships build self-efficacy and reduce teaching anxiety. O'Connor (2017) focuses on classroom management skill development, identifying common challenges and strategies. Wang and Zhou (2020) explore the role of emotional intelligence, finding that trainees with higher emotional intelligence navigate teaching complexities more effectively. Garcia (2021) emphasizes the importance of effective mentor-trainee relationships in professional growth. Evans (2016) investigates the integration of theory and practice, revealing that internships provide valuable opportunities for applying educational theories. Ahmed and Khan (2017) examine gender perspectives in teacher training, highlighting unique challenges faced by male and female trainees. Lastly, Lopez (2019) explores the role of creativity and innovation in teaching, showing its positive impact on student engagement and learning outcomes. These studies collectively underscore the importance of school internships in shaping teacher trainees' skills, confidence, and professional development.

Significance of the study

Numerous studies have explored various aspects of teacher education and internship programs, but there remains a gap in research on the experiences of trainee teachers during internships, especially in the post-COVID-19 era. This study is significant for understanding teacher education and professional development, particularly given the changes in teacher training over recent decades and the additional challenges posed by the pandemic. Evaluating current trainee experiences is crucial for improving internship programs in this new context. Insights from this study can help educators, institutions, and policymakers develop strategies to enhance the internship experience without compromising learning. Trainee teachers' experiences during internships are vital as they acquire essential skills needed for their future teaching careers. By focusing on their post-COVID experiences, this study aims to contribute to the advancement of teacher education and ensure a better future for our educational system.

Objectives of the study

- To study trainee teachers, experience about classroom teaching during internship programme.
- To study trainee teachers, experience about institutional management during internship programme.
- To study trainee teachers, experience about school environment during internship programme.
- To study trainee teachers, experience about co-curricular activity during internship programme.
- To study trainee teachers, experience about guidance and mentorship during internship programme.

- To study trainee teachers, experience about psychological and mental health related aspect during internship programme.

Research questions

1. How was the experience of trainee teachers regarding classroom teaching during internship programme?
2. how was the experience of trainee teachers with institutional management during their internship program?
3. How was the experience of trainee teachers with the school environment during their internship program?
4. How was the experience of trainee teachers regarding co-curricular activities during their internship program?
5. How do trainee teachers perceive the guidance and mentorship they receive during their internship program?
6. How was the experience of trainee teachers regarding psychological and mental health aspects during their internship program?

Methods used

The research utilized a mixed-method approach to investigate the experiences of trainee teachers regarding internship programs, employing a survey method for data collection. Main variables examined included classroom teaching, institutional management, school environment, co-curricular activities, guidance and mentorship, and psychological and mental health aspects. The target population consisted of all trainee teachers in the Nadia district, West Bengal during the research period, with a sample of 35 respondents who participated in the internship program. Purposive sampling was used to select the samples. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two parts: the first part contained 35 close-ended items, and the second part consisted of open-ended items based on the six dimensions mentioned. Respondents expressed their experiences using categorical response options such as strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Statistical analysis

The quantitative data from the survey were analysed using frequency distribution analysis for the close-ended items. For the open-ended items, content analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data.

Analysis and interpretation

In this section, the researcher analysed quantitative and qualitative data from 35 trainee teachers to evaluate their experiences across classroom teaching, institutional management, school environment, co-curricular activities, guidance and mentorship, and psychological aspects during their internship programs.

Analysis and interpretation of classroom teaching experience

The total sample selected is 35 trainee teachers. The classroom experience of trainee teachers was analysed through frequency distribution and content analysis. The classroom teaching related dimension has 6 close ended item and one open ended questionnaire.

Quantitative data analysis

Table 1: The level of classroom teaching experience is as follows

Level of experience	Overall N (35)	Percentage
Very bad (6-10)	0	0%
Bad (11-15)	0	0%
Moderate (16-20)	4	11.43%
Good (21-25)	20	57.14%
Very good (26-30)	11	31.43%

From the above table, it is evident that 31.43% trainee teachers have very good experience, 57.14% trainee teachers have good experience, 11.43% trainee teachers have moderate experience and none of the trainee teachers has bad or very bad experience in classroom teaching during internship programme.

Qualitative data analysis

After analysing the open-ended responses from the survey participants, both positive and negative experiences regarding classroom teaching during internships were identified. The experiences were as follows:

Positive Experiences

- Students and teachers were very helpful.
- Trainee teachers had good experiences using teaching and learning materials (TLM).
- Trainee teachers felt they gained great experience overall.
- They were able to effectively solve students' confusions regarding the subject matter.
- Students were attentive in class.

Negative Experiences

- Students created problems in class.
- The number of students in the class was very high, leading to difficulties in classroom management.

Analysis and interpretation of institutional management experience

The institutional management related dimension has 6 close ended item and one open ended questionnaire.

Quantitative data analysis

Table 3: The level of institutional management experience is as follows

Level of experience	Overall N (35)	Percentage
Very bad (6-10)	0	0%
Bad (11-15)	0	0%
Moderate (16-20)	8	22.85%
Good (21-25)	15	42.14%
Very good (26-30)	12	34.28%

From the above table, it is evident that 34.28% trainee teachers have very good experience, 42.14% trainee teachers have good experience, 22.85% trainee teachers have moderate experience and none of the trainee teachers has bad or very bad experience about institutional management during internship programme.

Qualitative data analysis

After analysing the open-ended responses from the survey participants, both positive and negative experiences regarding institutional management during internships were identified. The experiences were as follows:

Positive Experience

- Supportive teachers.
- Extra seating provided for rest during breaks in the teachers' room.
- Well-organized class schedules by the administration.

Negative Experiences

- Occasional lack of helpfulness from the administration.
- Instances of rude treatment by the administration.

Analysis and interpretation of school environment experience

The school environment related dimension has 6 close ended item and one open ended questionnaire.

Quantitative data analysis

Table 5: The level of school environment experience is as follows

Level of experience	Overall N (35)	Percentage
Very bad (6-10)	0	0%
Bad (11-15)	2	5.71%
Moderate (16-20)	6	17.14%
Good (21-25)	13	37.14%
Very good (26-30)	14	40%

From the above table, it is evident that 40% trainee teachers have very good experience, 37.14% trainee teachers have good experience, 17.14% trainee teachers have moderate experience, 5.71% trainee teachers have bad experience and none of the trainee teachers have very bad experience school environment during internship programme.

Qualitative data analysis

After analysing the open-ended responses from the survey participants, both positive and negative experiences regarding school environment during internships were identified. The experiences were as follows:

Positive Experiences

- Supportive teachers with good relationships.
- Flexible and learner-centric environment.
- The environment was perceived as perfect for teaching and learning.

Negative Experiences

- Not very clean campus.
- Unhygienic washrooms.

Analysis and interpretation of co-curricular activities experience

The co-curricular activities related dimension has 6 close ended item and one open ended questionnaire.

Quantitative data analysis

Table 7: The level of co-curricular activities experience is as follows

Level of experience	Overall N (35)	Percentage
Very bad (6-10)	0	0%
Bad (11-15)	0	0%
Moderate (16-20)	6	17.14%
Good (21-25)	19	54.28%
Very good (26-30)	10	28.57%

From the above table, it is evident that 28.57% trainee teachers have very good experience, 54.28% trainee teachers have good experience, 17.14% trainee teachers have moderate experience and none of the trainee teachers have bad and very bad experience in co-curricular activities during internship programme.

Qualitative data analysis

After analysing the open-ended responses from the survey participants, both positive and negative experiences regarding co-curricular activities during internships were identified. The experiences were as follows

Positive Experiences

- Trainee teachers organized and participated in Saraswati Puja.
- Active participation in sports activities.
- Engagement in art and craft-related work.
- Celebration of many national days.
- Organization of various cultural programs.

Negative Experiences

- There were no reported negative experiences, indicating a uniformly positive perception of co-curricular activities among the trainee teachers.

Analysis and interpretation of guidance and mentorship related experience:

The guidance and mentorship related dimension have 5 close ended item and one open ended questionnaire.

Quantitative data analysis

Table 9: The level of guidance and mentorship related experience is as follows

Level of experience	Overall N (35)	Percentage
Very bad (5-8.2)	0	0%
Bad (8.3-12.4)	0	0%
Moderate (12.5-16.6)	4	11.43%
Good (16.7-20.8)	11	31.43%
Very good (20.9-25)	20	57.14%

From the above table, it is evident that 57.14% trainee teachers have very good experience, 31.43% trainee teachers have good experience, 11.43% trainee teachers have moderate experience and none of the trainee teachers have bad and very bad experience in guidance and mentorship related during internship programme.

Qualitative data analysis

After analysing the open-ended responses from the survey participants, both positive and negative experiences regarding mentorship during internships were identified. The experiences were as follows:

Positive Experiences

- B.Ed. college teachers and practice school teachers were very cooperative.
- B.Ed. college teachers provided help when needed.
- B.Ed. college teachers guided trainees for better learning.

Negative Experiences

- B.Ed. teachers sometimes behaved rudely.
- B.Ed. teachers were not always approachable.
- The amount of help needed by trainee teachers was not provided by their guide teacher.

Analysis and interpretation of psychological aspect related experience

The psychological aspect related dimension has 6 close ended item and one open ended questionnaire.

Quantitative data analysis

Table 11: The level of psychological and Mental health aspect related experience is as follows

Level of experience	Overall N (35)	Percentage
Very bad (6-10)	0	0%
Bad (11-15)	1	2.85%
Moderate (16-20)	4	11.43%
Good (21-25)	13	37.14%
Very good (26-30)	17	48.57%

From the above table, it is evident that 48.57% trainee teachers have very good experience, 37.14% trainee teachers have good experience, 11.43% trainee teachers have moderate experience, 2.85% trainee teachers have bad experience and none of the trainee teachers have very bad experience in psychological aspect related during internship programme.

Qualitative data analysis

After analysing the open-ended responses from the survey participants, both positive and negative experiences regarding psychological aspect during internships were identified. The experiences were as follows:

Positive Experiences

- Satisfactory infrastructure.
- Practice teaching boosted trainees' confidence in their ability to become good teachers in the future.

Negative Experiences

- The internship was mentally stressful.
- Trainee teachers felt under significant pressure.

Findings of the study

The study analysed trainee teachers experiences during an internship program after COVID-19 across various dimensions: classroom teaching, institutional management, school environment, co-

curricular activities, guidance and mentorship, and psychological aspects. The quantitative data revealed that a majority of the trainee teachers had positive experiences in all dimensions. Specifically, 57.14% reported a good classroom teaching experience, and 31.43% rated it as very good. Similarly, institutional management experiences were largely positive, with 34.28% rating it as very good and 42.14% as good. The school environment was also favourably viewed, with 40% rating it as very good and 37.14% as good, although a small percentage (5.71%) reported it as bad. Co-curricular activities were positively received, with 54.28% rating the experience as good and 28.57% as very good. Guidance and mentorship were highly valued, with 57.14% rating it as very good and 31.43% as good. Finally, psychological aspects were rated very good by 48.57% and good by 37.14%, although 2.85% reported a bad experience. Qualitative data highlighted supportive and well-organized environments but also noted issues such as high classroom student numbers, occasional administrative unhelpfulness, unclean facilities, and mental stress. Overall, the findings indicate that while the majority of experiences were positive, there were notable areas for improvement, particularly in classroom management, administrative support, and psychological support.

Discussion and Future Research suggestion

The internship experiences of trainee teachers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This study explored the experiences of trainee teachers during their internships across six dimensions: classroom teaching, institutional management, school environment, co-curricular activities, guidance and mentorship, and psychological aspects. For classroom teaching, the quantitative analysis revealed that 88.57% of trainee teachers had positive experiences, aligning with Smith's (2018) findings on the importance of real-world teaching in developing professional skills. Qualitative analysis supported this, citing helpful students and teachers and effective use of teaching materials as key factors for positive experiences. Negative experiences were mainly due to disruptive student behaviour, consistent with Johnson and Thompson's (2019) study on classroom management challenges. Institutional management saw 77.13% of trainees reporting positive experiences, echoing Brown's (2020) findings on the importance of mentorship. In the school environment dimension, 77.14% of trainees reported positive experiences. This aligns with Green and Lee's (2017) study on supportive environments fostering reflective practices. For co-curricular activities, 82.85% of trainees had positive experiences, consistent with Martinez's (2019) findings on the benefits of collaborative learning and peer support. Trainees appreciated organizing and participating in events, which enhanced their engagement and practical skills, with no negative experiences reported. Guidance and mentorship received mixed reviews, with 88.57% of trainees reporting positive experiences in quantitative analysis. Qualitative data, however, showed that only 62.86% had positive experiences, with 31.43% reporting negative experiences due to unapproachable and rude mentors, supporting Garcia's (2021) emphasis on the importance of effective mentor-trainee relationships. In terms of psychological aspects, 85.71% of trainees reported positive experiences, aligning with Clark's (2016) study on internships building self-efficacy.

Future research can help improve trainee teachers' internship experiences by exploring various aspects. (1) Studying the long-term impact of internships on professional growth can provide insights

into their effectiveness. (2) Comparing internship experiences before and after COVID-19 may highlight changes and new challenges. (3) Research on the use of digital tools and online teaching can show how technology supports trainee teachers. (4) Examining the role of mentorship can help understand its effect on trainee teachers' confidence and skills. (5) Investigating mental well-being and coping strategies can provide ways to reduce stress during internships. (6) Analysing gender differences in internship experiences can reveal unique challenges faced by male and female trainees.

Conclusion

This study on the internship experiences of trainee teachers in the post-COVID-19 era reveals predominantly positive outcomes across various dimensions such as classroom teaching, institutional management, school environment, co-curricular activities, and mentorship. Most trainee teachers reported supportive environments and effective use of teaching materials, which contributed to their positive experiences. However, challenges in classroom management, administrative support, and psychological stress were noted. Effective mentorship significantly influenced professional growth, highlighting the need for strong mentor-trainee relationships and comprehensive psychological support. While internship programs have been effective in providing valuable practical experience, there is room for improvement. Enhancing classroom management training, improving administrative support, and offering robust psychological support are essential for better preparing future educators. These insights can help educators, institutions, and policymakers develop strategies to improve internship programs, contributing to the advancement of teacher education and a better educational system. The study emphasizes the importance of adaptability and resilience in teaching, skills that have become crucial in the face of ongoing uncertainties. By addressing the identified challenges and building on the strengths of current internship programs, we can ensure that future educators are well-equipped to handle diverse classroom situations and foster an inclusive, dynamic, and effective learning environment for all students.

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