



## Research Article

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# An Exploratory Research on Korean Pre-Service Teachers' Field Experiences in a Teacher Preparation Program

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## Abstract

Field experience is fundamental to preparing pre-service teachers (PSTs) for in-service teacher roles. Although many studies have explored the impact of field experience, few have examined PSTs' comprehensive experience for field practicum. This study explored Korean PSTs' experience regarding expectations, satisfaction, and evaluations through field experiences. The data was collected from a teacher education program in Korea in the 2022 academic year. The survey was conducted after the field experience (n=44). Study results showed that the PSTs reported various expectations for field experience. For example, PSTs responded that they want to meet an exemplary teacher who can serve as a role model and hope to receive help when they have any difficult problems related to field experience. Second, PSTs had high satisfaction after the field experience. They also responded that the contents (theory, method) learned from the university coursework were very helpful for their field experience. Third, PSTs responded with high ratings for the effectiveness of the field experience. Finally, PSTs reported improving their teaching ability (guide plan, teaching method, progress, teaching tools) and gaining teaching confidence. Several suggestions are provided to build an effective field experience practicum in the teacher education program.

**Keywords:** Pre-service teachers, Field Experience, Teacher Education, Theory into practice, Self-efficacy

## 1. Introduction

Implementing field-based experiences in teacher education programs has effectively prepared pre-service teachers (PSTs) in teacher education courses. Previous studies have shown that school-based practicums can promote PSTs to align coursework with the field, link theory to actual practice, and allow PSTs to apply techniques for experiences with diverse students (Cohen et al., 2013; Malinen et al., 2013). In addition, these field experiences provide PSTs the opportunity to impact student learning and critically reflect on their teaching practices (McDonough & Matkins, 2010).

Many studies have found several benefits of PSTs' field experience. First, field experience allows

PSTs to develop teaching skills, such as lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment (Ma & Cavanagh, 2018). Also, the field experience enables PSTs to observe experienced teachers and learn from their methods and techniques. Lastly, it can help PSTs better understand the diverse student population and some students' challenges (Flores, 2015).

The structured environment allows PSTs to engage in field experiences that support the development of self-efficacy. Increased self-efficacy allows PSTs to be more open to diverse teaching methods, provides more certainty in planning and organization, and provides PSTs the ability to manage random difficulties that manifest in the classroom (Colson et al. 2017). Likewise, field experience allows PSTs to develop self-confidence in specific subjects such as math, science, history, and other disciplines that require nuanced approaches to a specific learning environment (Cirillo et al., 2020). Although many studies have explored the impact of field experience, few have examined PSTs' comprehensive experience for field practicum. This study explored Korean PSTs' experience regarding expectations, satisfaction, and evaluations through field experiences.

## 2. Literature Review

Many studies indicate that the PSTs' field experience can improve academic learning with opportunities to link educational theories to practice while engaging in various activities that address diverse students learning needs. For instance, Wagler (2011) investigated the impact of field experience on PSTs' science teaching efficacy. The results showed that field experience could encourage PSTs to equip themselves with knowledge better using the techniques needed to meet the diverse needs of their students. In addition, Peebles and Mendaglio (2014) examined the impact of a field experience on PSTs' self-efficacy for inclusive classrooms. The results indicated that participants with field experience had substantially higher levels of self-efficacy than those without field experience.

Various scholars argued that field experience could positively influence PSTs' instructional practices (Holtz & Gnambs, 2017; Varma et al., 2009). For instance, Bhattacharyya et al. (2009) examined the effects of an extensive inquiry-based field experience on PSTs' capability beliefs related to teaching science. The study findings suggested that field experience promotes PSTs to implement multiple instructional strategies. Similarly, Varma et al. (2009) indicated that inquiry-based experiences understand PSTs' science instruction and develop an appreciation for the benefits of teaching and learning science in a constructivist environment.

In another study, Holtz and Gnambs (2017) analyzed the improvement in the instructional quality of PSTs from a German university during a 15-week internship at a local secondary school. The results identified a significant increase in instructional quality during the practicum semester. These studies have shown that field experience enhances PSTs in implementing new instructional strategies in various disciplines, such as integrating inquiry-based learning and educational technology.

Overall, the literature review of field experience on PSTs suggests that it can positively impact their development as educators. Field experience allows PSTs to apply the theoretical concepts they have learned in their education courses and develop their teaching skills and strategies (Yilmaz & Koca, 2017). It also enables them to observe experienced teachers, learn from their methods and techniques, and help PSTs understand the cultural and social context of the schools and communities where they will teach (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014). Additionally, field experience can increase PSTs' self-efficacy and confidence in their teaching ability. It can also help them better understand the diverse student population and some students' challenges. Studies have also shown that field experience can positively impact student learning (Sciuchetti & Yssel, 2019). However, it's important to note that the quality and type of field experience can affect its effectiveness. For example, a well-structured and supervised field experience with experienced mentor teachers is likely to be more beneficial than an unstructured or poorly supervised one (Osborne et al., 2019).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Context

The current study was conducted in the teacher education program at a private university in South Korea. The university has a teacher education program that shares courses with various departments. The course is offered for PSTs every academic semester. It was one of the mandatory courses for PSTs to receive a teaching certificate after graduation. Therefore, PSTs must take this course during their senior years as a graduation requirement.

In the School-based Teaching Practicum course, the instructor invited several guest speakers to discuss how to make lesson plans for diverse students. These guest speakers are in-service teachers currently teaching and working with students. During the field practicum, university faculty visited several school sites and had a seminar with mentor teachers and school principals to guide PSTs for their field practicums. These seminars and workshops, including stakeholders, helped PSTs work effectively with mentor teachers and students in the school. After field experience, all PSTs had to write personal reflections and submit them to the university's College of Education.

#### 3.2 Study Participants

60 Korean PSTs in their senior year enrolled in the School-based Teaching Practicum during the 2022 academic year. Due to attrition, opting out, and incomplete surveys, 44 were used for data analysis. PSTs used a unique identifier (birth month and year) during surveys to keep track of student assessments after the field experience. Of the final participants, 12 identified as male and 32 as female. PSTs' majors varied, including special education(9), early childhood education(6), Math Education(6), Music Education(2), Korean language Education(2), and other majors. See Table 1 for a brief description of the survey participants.

**Table 1.** Survey participants

Category	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	12	27.3
Female	32	72.7
<b>Grade</b>		
Senior year	44	100
<b>Major</b>		
Special Education	9	20.5
Early Childhood Special Education	6	13.6
Mathematical Education	6	13.6
Korean Language Education	2	4.5
Music Education	2	4.5
Education	1	2.3
Taekwondo	3	6.8
Psychology	5	11.4
Child Welfare	4	9.1
Nursing	2	4.5
Health and Medical Management	1	2.3
Performing Arts and Musical Arts	1	2.3
Hotel Catering Culinary Arts	1	2.3
Food Biotechnology	1	2.3

### 3.3 Data collection and analysis

The data was collected in the 2022 academic semester. This study implemented the survey from previous studies (Hancock & Gallard, 2004; Potthoff et al., 2000). The survey explored PSTs' expectations, satisfaction, and evaluations of the field experience in the teacher education program. Informed consent forms were collected before conducting the exit surveys. SPSS 26.0 was used for quantitative data analysis to carry out descriptive statistics.

## 4. Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of survey results.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of survey results

Questions	M	SD
<b>Expectations for teacher experiences</b>		
1. I want to see a lot of good classes.	4.70	.594
2. I would like to have the opportunity to observe all classes for each grade level.	4.52	.876
3. I want to experience various aspects of the actual school site.	4.84	.370
4. I want to have a lot of teaching experiences, such as observation and research classes.	4.50	.665
5. I want to know about building the right relationship with parents.	4.27	.924
6. I look forward to teachers' encouragement, warm advice, consideration, and advice.	4.80	.408
7. I want to meet an exemplary teacher who can be a role model.	4.89	.387
8. I want to have a good relationship and communicate a lot.	4.82	.446
9. I want to experience the various teaching methods of many teachers.	4.75	.488
10. I want to know about class management, attention, and creating a class atmosphere.	4.77	.476
11. I would like to have space for pre-service teachers.	4.43	.950
12. I hope that the teaching materials, teaching aids, and media of the practice school will be used to the fullest.	4.48	.927
13. I hope you will share your previous practice experiences and information.	4.70	.553
14. In advance, I would like to know the practice school and school information (academic calendar).	4.55	.926
15. I hope you kindly help me if you have any practice-related problems.	4.80	.462
<b>Satisfaction with teacher experiences</b>		
1. The PSTs were cared for in many ways at the practice school.	4.82	.446
2. The contents (theory, method) learned in college classes were helpful.	4.16	.888
3. I experienced what I expected to learn through field experience.	4.52	.731
4. My thoughts on education have changed a lot through field experience.	3.82	1.105
5. Overall, I am satisfied with this field experience.	4.70	.632
<b>Evaluation of teacher experiences</b>		
1. I learned specifically what the teacher's role was.	4.68	.518
2. I felt pride and attraction toward teachers.	4.55	.697
3. A view of the teaching profession was formed, and I felt confident about the teaching profession.	4.27	.899
4. I gained confidence by taking the class myself.	4.41	.726
5. My teaching ability (guide plan, teaching method, progress, teaching tools) has improved.	4.43	.695
6. It gave me a chance to reflect on the class.	4.68	.740
7. I realized the importance of ideas that make classes fun and happy.	4.80	.408
8*. Overall, there was not enough time to properly understand the school site.	3.82	1.225
9*. It took too much time to make the parish.	3.18	1.325
10*. Due to the class observation schedule, I was neglected in the homeroom class.	2.09	1.158
11*. It costs a lot to make parishes.	2.36	1.296
12*. It was inconvenient to print and copy because textbook equipment was prohibited.	1.68	1.157
13*. The relationship with the practice teacher was uncomfortable.	1.48	.952

Questions	M	SD
<b>Expectations for teacher experiences</b>		
14*. I experienced a non-ideal teacher who fell into mannerisms.	2.23	1.379
15*. The feedback from practice teachers was very negative, and they were not encouraged.	1.34	.776
16*. The gap between theory and reality seemed very large.	2.89	1.351
17*. There was no restructuring of textbooks with a focus on specific subjects.	1.68	.776

The survey results are as follows. First, the PSTs reported various expectations for field experience. For example, PSTs responded that they want to meet an exemplary teacher who can serve as a role model (4.89±.378), and they hope to receive help when they have any difficult problems related to field experience (4.80±.462). In particular, PSTs want to gain many different experiences, including various aspects of the actual school site (4.84±.370), the diverse teaching methods (4.75±.488), and many actual teaching experiences (4.50±.665). PSTs mentioned the expectation of observing many excellent class sites (4.70±.594) and reported that it would be nice to have the opportunity to observe all classes by grade (4.52±.876). PSTs also reported that they need specific information about their field experience (4.70±.553) and the school information (academic calendar) in advance (4.55±.926). In addition, PSTs reported that they expected to have a smooth and good relationship, communicate a lot (4.82±.446), and expect encouragement, warm advice, consideration, and advice from the guidance teacher (4.80±.408).

Second, PSTs had high satisfaction after the field experience (4.70±.632). In particular, PSTs felt they were cared by many ways in the practice school (4.82±.446). In addition, they experienced what they expected to learn through field experience (4.52±.731). They also responded that the contents (theory, method) learned from the university coursework were very helpful for their field experience (4.16±.888).

Third, PSTs responded with high ratings for the effectiveness of the field experience. For example, PSTs reported that they improved their teaching ability (guide plan, teaching method, progress, teaching tools) (4.43±.695) and gained teaching confidence (4.41±.726). They also responded they formed a view of the teaching profession and felt confident about it (4.27±.899). In particular, PSTs reported that they learned the teacher's role (4.68±.518) and felt pride and attraction towards teachers (4.55±.697). In addition, PSTs reported the teacher experiences gave them a chance to reflect on the class (4.68±.740) and realize the importance of ideas that make classes fun and happy (4.80±.408). These results showed that PSTs showed high satisfaction after the field experience.

## 5. Discussion

Field experiences, such as student teaching or internships, can positively impact PSTs by providing them with hands-on experience in a classroom setting. This experience allows them to apply the theoretical concepts they have learned in their education courses and develop their teaching skills and strategies. Field experience allows PSTs to observe experienced teachers and learn from their methods and techniques. Additionally, field experience can help PSTs understand the cultural and social context of the schools and communities where they will teach, which can inform their teaching practices. Field experience can help PSTs become more effective and confident educators (Hancock & Gallard, 2004; Potthoff et al., 2000).

First, the PSTs reported various expectations for field experience. For example, PSTs responded that they want to meet an exemplary teacher who can serve as a role model and hope to receive help when they have any difficult problems related to field experience. In particular, PSTs want to gain many different experiences, including various aspects of the actual school site, diverse teaching methods, and many actual teaching experiences. PSTs also reported needing specific information about their field experience and the school information (academic calendar) in advance. These results are consistent with previous studies that PSTs bring various expectations during the field experience

(Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014; Yilmaz & Koca, 2017). The literature has shown that meeting the needs of PSTs for field experience is the key to success in the teacher preparation program. Therefore, exploring the needs of PSTs via needs assessment during field experience is the responsibility of a university faculty and teacher education program. In addition, understanding PSTs' needs for field experiences can guide them to build effective field practicum for teacher education programs.

Second, PSTs had high satisfaction after the field experience. In particular, PSTs felt they were cared by many ways in the practice school. In addition, they experienced what they expected to learn through field experience. They also responded that the contents (theory, method) learned from the university coursework were very helpful for their field experience. These results are consistent with previous studies that the PSTs receive the opportunity to connect the theory they learned from the university coursework to real practice in the school (Cohen et al., 2013). Also, it is stated that examining PSTs' satisfaction with field experience is one of the key factors in creating a strong and effective teacher preparation program (Almazroa, 2020).

Third, PSTs responded with high ratings for the effectiveness of the field experience. For example, PSTs reported improving their teaching ability (guide plan, teaching method, progress, teaching tools) and gaining teaching confidence. They also responded they formed a view of the teaching profession and felt confident about it. In particular, PSTs reported that they learned the teacher's role and felt pride and attraction towards teachers. These results showed that PSTs showed high satisfaction after the field experience. These results are consistent with previous studies that the PSTs increase self-efficacy in instructional strategies (Holtz & Gnambs, 2017; Varma et al., 2009). Also, the PSTs felt confident about becoming in-service teachers and felt responsibility for the teaching profession after the field experience (Eutsler & Curcio, 2019). They critically reflect on their teaching role in real school due to field experience (Hancock & Gallard, 2004; Potthoff et al., 2000).

## 6. Conclusion

This study provides several benefits of PSTs' field experience. Firstly, field experience allows PSTs to apply the theoretical concepts they have learned in their education courses and gain hands-on experience in a classroom setting. Second, it allows PSTs to develop teaching skills, such as lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment (Sciuchetti Yssel, 2019). Third, it enables PSTs to observe experienced teachers and learn from their methods and techniques. Fourth, field experience can increase PSTs' self-efficacy and confidence in their teaching ability. To conclude, field experience can prepare PSTs for the realities of teaching, such as dealing with challenging students and classroom management (Webster et al., 2019).

## 7. Recommendations

Previous literature on field experience for PSTs has generally shown that it can positively impact their development as educators. Studies have found that field experience can help PSTs better understand the realities of the classroom and develop their teaching skills, such as lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment. Field experience has also increased PSTs' self-efficacy and confidence in their teaching ability. Research has also shown that field experience can help PSTs understand the cultural and social context of the schools and communities where they will be teaching, which can inform their teaching practices and make them more effective educators. Additionally, studies have found that field experience can help pre-service teachers better understand the diverse student population and the challenges some students face (Eutsler & Curcio, 2019).

Some studies have also shown that field experience can positively impact student learning. For example, research has found that student teachers with more field experience are more effective in the classroom and have a greater impact on student achievement than those with less field experience (Yilmaz & Koca, 2017). However, it's worth noting that some research suggests that the quality and type of field experience can make a difference in its effectiveness (Lastrapes & Negishi,

2012). For example, a well-structured and supervised field experience with experienced mentor teachers is likely more beneficial than an unstructured or poorly supervised one (Hojeij & Baroudi, 2021). Thus, it is recommended that teacher education programs should structure the field experience effectively so that PSTs receive valuable experience during their field practicum (Keefe, 2020). A well-structured program is key to PSTs' success during the field experience.

## 8. Limitations

The findings from this study showed that field experience could positively influence pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching. However, in the covid-19 environment, it is also suggested that future research should collect data on the different experiences to understand if self-efficacy is impacted more by the environment of PSTs' field experience, such as F2F vs. synchronous online field experience (Ersin et al., 2020). In addition, larger-scale studies with a longitudinal research design can provide additional data and insights related to this field experience research. When future researchers include questions about PSTs' level of academic achievement and personal efforts during teacher education courses, studies could show additional findings and suggestions associated with PSTs' sense of preparedness and self-confidence in future teaching.

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