

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER EDUCATORS' INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES: A CASE STUDY OF A TEACHER EDUCATION COLLEGE IN SOUTHERN TANZANIA

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Abstract

This research aimed at investigating the impact of teacher educators' practices on pre-service teachers' during their teacher preparation program. The study focused on practices such as preparation of teaching and learning materials, instructional strategies, leadership as well as the incorporation of gender, inclusion and diversity in teaching and learning. Data for this study was collected from longitudinal research which employed a mixed-method design, following a pragmatic philosophical worldview. Fourteen teacher educators and 108 pre-service teachers were purposively selected from one public teacher education college in southern Tanzania. The findings indicate that teacher educators' practices have an impact on pre-service teachers' pedagogical practices. The pre-service teachers' experiences focused is rooted all the way back to their previous levels of

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education such as pre-primary and primary, which in turn motivated some of them to opt for a teaching career. Based on the given findings, teacher educators play a role in shaping pre-service teacher educators understanding about teaching and learning.

Keywords

Pre-service teachers' experiences, educators' practices, teacher preparation program, teaching and learning environment, teacher education

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' competences rely on the teacher educator's efficacy and continuous teacher's professional learning. Therefore, it is critical to showcase how significant the teacher educator's practices influence novice teachers in building their competencies in the teaching profession. This study is based on the intervention designed and carried out by the Aga Khan University Institute for Education Development East Africa (AKU-IED-EA) through the Foundation for Learning (F4L) project. F4L program, among other things, conducted workshops and seminars to build teacher educators' capacity in inclusive education, gender sensitivity and diversity pedagogy. The intervention was tailored to equip teacher educators with knowledge, skills, and dispositions that would enable them to implement pre-primary and primary education programs for pre-service teachers to become effective in their pedagogical and instructional practices.

Apart from the intervention, the F4L project has a longitudinal study research component that was designed to document the nature of the interventions and the kind of observable pedagogical changes in both the teacher educators and the pre-service teachers. This study examines how the F4L interventions influenced changes in the pedagogical practices of teacher educators, and how these modifications

in teaching approaches affected the experiences and practices of pre-service teachers. In Tanzania, the F4L project interventions were implemented in the Lindi region, located in southern Tanzania, where teacher educators underwent re-training. Data for this paper was gathered from the long-term study of the F4L program.

The process of educating learners ought to be implemented by competent teachers who went through effective teacher preparation programs. What matters most is not just how long the program lasts, but the entire experience of how the program is carried out. The teaching and learning materials, as well as instructional and pedagogical strategies used by teacher educators in teacher preparation programs, have a great influence on student teachers' (pre-service teachers) knowledge, attitudes and skills concerning their teaching career. The aforementioned aspects can be observed through pre-service teachers' teaching and learning practices. It is clear that if pre-service teachers are proficient, they are anticipated to excel in their teaching careers, thereby enhancing the significance of teacher education (Feuer et al., 2013). The role of teacher educators is crucial in training teachers who can significantly influence the education system as a whole, by demonstrating strong learner performance that assists students in navigating the challenges they face in everyday life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher preparation programs

Teacher preparation programs serve as foundational spaces where pre-service teachers acquire pedagogical knowledge, subject mastery, and initial classroom experience (Denuga & Nkengbeza, 2022). These programs are

crucial in shaping competent teachers for pre-primary, primary, and secondary education.

Scholars emphasize the need to integrate crosscutting issues such as gender, inclusion, and diversity into teacher preparation (González-Gil et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2015). While these elements are increasingly acknowledged as fundamental, their implementation remains inconsistent. Botes and colleagues argue that inclusive teaching should be central to general teacher education rather than treated as an add-on (Botes et al., 2022). This resonates with the social constructivist perspective, which underscores that learning occurs within social contexts and that pre-service teachers develop their teaching identities through interactions with their educators and peers (Shah, 2019). Thus, teacher education must move beyond content delivery and embrace experiential learning that fosters critical reflection on real classroom challenges.

A critical examination of existing literature reveals a persistent gap between theoretical coursework and practical application, a challenge that practicum components in teacher preparation programs aim to address (Akyeampong, 2017). However, practicum experiences often remain constrained by institutional limitations, leading to a disconnect between pre-service teachers' training and their real-world teaching expectations.

Additionally, the contemporary teaching landscape necessitates that teachers stay abreast of global trends, including digital innovations like artificial intelligence (AI) and environmental education (UNESCO, 2015). While teacher preparation programs acknowledge these needs, their curricula often fail to equip pre-service teachers with the requisite skills to integrate them effectively into classroom practice. Theoretical discussions on lifelong learning and

competency-based education should be matched with concrete pedagogical strategies that enable teachers to adapt to changing educational demands.

Teacher educators' practices

Teacher educators play a pivotal role in shaping the pedagogical and professional identities of pre-service teachers (Feuer et al., 2013; Namamba & Rao, 2017). Their instructional approaches, feedback mechanisms, and modeling of best practices significantly influence how pre-service teachers internalize and apply teaching strategies. Yet, the effectiveness of teacher educators varies widely, often influenced by their own training, institutional policies, and available resources.

While studies suggest that teacher educators should exemplify innovative teaching practices such as learner-centered pedagogy and inclusive education, research reveals that many still rely on traditional, didactic methods (Mufidah, 2019). Theoretically, social constructivism posits that learning is mediated by social interactions (Seel, 2012), meaning that pre-service teachers are more likely to adopt pedagogies they observe in action rather than those merely discussed in lectures. Kihwele and Mtandi (2020) emphasize that teacher educators who advocate for inclusive and gender-responsive pedagogy must also model these approaches in their own teaching. The failure to do so results in a superficial understanding of these concepts among pre-service teachers, reinforcing traditional teacher-centered practices in schools.

Moreover, assessment practices in teacher education remain an area of concern. Feedback provided during practicum is critical for professional growth, yet research indicates that many pre-service teachers receive generic or

inconsistent feedback, limiting their ability to refine their teaching strategies (Zhao & Zhang, 2017). Constructive feedback, grounded in reflective practice, is essential for developing adaptive teaching skills, yet it is often sidelined in favor of summative evaluations. A shift toward mentorship-driven assessment, where teacher educators engage in ongoing professional dialogue with pre-service teachers, is necessary to foster deep learning and skill acquisition.

Pre-service teachers' experience

Pre-service teachers enter training programs with preconceived beliefs and expectations about teaching, largely shaped by their prior educational experiences (Denuga & Nkengbeza, 2022). Social constructivist theory suggests that these beliefs influence how they assimilate new pedagogical knowledge and navigate their professional identity formation (Shah, 2019). However, studies highlight that pre-service teachers often struggle to reconcile their initial perceptions with the realities of classroom teaching (White & McSharry, 2021).

Zhao and Zhang (2017) assert that pre-service teachers undergo a complex transformation during their training, often oscillating between adopting new methodologies and reverting to familiar, traditional practices. This process is compounded by the tendency of pre-service teachers to validate rather than critically examine their preconceived notions of teaching (Denuga & Nkengbeza, 2022). Consequently, if teacher educators fail to engage in reflective and interactive teaching methodologies, pre-service teachers may leave training programs ill-equipped to implement innovative pedagogies in their own classrooms.

Furthermore, mentorship plays a crucial role in shaping pre-service teachers' pedagogical development. Studies

show that effective mentorship fosters professional confidence and instructional adaptability (Florian & Camedda, 2020; Mufidah, 2019). However, when mentorship is inconsistent or overly directive, it can stifle the critical thinking and autonomy needed for sustained professional growth. Thus, teacher education programs should prioritize mentorship frameworks that encourage dialogue, reflection, and gradual independence.

A critical review of the literature reveals that while teacher preparation programs, teacher educators' practices, and pre-service teachers' experiences are interconnected, significant gaps persist in their alignment. Social constructivism underscores the importance of interactive and experiential learning, yet much of teacher education remains rooted in traditional, transmission-based methods. The evidence suggests that for meaningful improvements in teacher preparation, there must be a deliberate effort to integrate reflective practice, contextualized mentorship, and adaptive pedagogical training. Without such shifts, pre-service teachers risk perpetuating outdated teaching models rather than engaging in transformative education practices.

Statement of the problem

Teacher educators play a crucial role in teacher preparation, teacher education, and the overall education system. However, on a global scale, limited research exists on teacher preparation practices which directly impacts pre-service teachers' learning experiences. For instance, a study conducted by Stutchbury (2019) found a disconnect between theory and practices in teacher educators' preparation, which affected their professional practices. Similarly, in Uganda, O'Sullivan (2010) observed that the quality of

initial teacher education was inadequate, further hindering their effectiveness.

The professional practice of teacher educators has a lasting influence on pre-service teachers' teaching experiences and professional growth. In Tanzania, like any other countries in Africa, and particularly with the East African region, teacher educators face similar challenges (Chambulila, 2013; Namamba & Rao, 2017). According to Hamilton and Margot (2019), teacher educators are a key driving force in preparation of quality teachers. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of teacher educators' practices on pre-service teachers' learning experiences, focusing on a teacher preparation college in Southern Tanzania.

Theoretical framework

The study was underpinned by the social-constructivist theory (SCT) invented by Lev Vygotsky in 1968 (Seel, 2012; Shah, 2019; Thomas et al., 2014) which postulates that learners construct their knowledge through social interactions of what they believe and already know (Shah, 2019). They also learn through events and activities which they come into contact with (Thomas et al., 2014). The SCT stresses education for social transformation and positions the individual learner in a socio-cultural learning situation (Shah, 2019). Although the SCT is not a theory of teaching, its emphasis on learners' active participation in constructing knowledge and creating meaning through interaction; makes it relevant to the proposed longitudinal study which intends to investigate how F4L interventions have impacted teacher educator's practices, to the extent of influencing pre-service teachers learning experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and approach

This section outlines the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, and data analysis used in the study where a mixed-methods design in the form of (QUAL + quant) was employed (Reid et al., 2014); taking a pragmatic philosophical view (Festl, 2021; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The mixed method approach enabled confirmation of the information obtained through triangulation (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). In addition, the combination of the two approaches enables the development of the analysis framework which provides richer information (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Further, the quantitative aspect of the study will provide measurable patterns, trends and statistical validation to complement its qualitative aspect providing generalizability while enhancing thematic interpretation with statistical evidence. Nonetheless, the study was carried out in two circles in the first circle we collected data from fourteen teacher educators and in the second circle from the pre-service teachers. The two circles of data collection represent the first data collection phase in the longitudinal study of the foundation for the learning project. This data collection phase was conducted from August to December 2022.

Research objectives

This research study intends to achieve the following objectives as it explores the impacts of teacher educator's practices on pre-services teachers' experiences:

1. Examine various teaching practices and methodologies employed by educators in training pre-service teachers.
2. Determine how these practices affect pre-service teachers' experiences, development, and preparedness.

3. Provide recommendations for educators on improving their practices to better provide support and prepare pre-service teachers for their future careers.

Research questions

1. How do teacher educators' practices impact pre-service teachers' learning experiences?

2. How do pre-service teacher's learning experiences inform their pedagogical practices?

3. What teacher educator's practices can yield better outcomes for pre-service teacher's experiences?

Research participants

A total number of fourteen teacher educators and 108 pre-service teachers were involved in this research. Out of the selected pre-service teachers, 54 (27 females and 27 males) were selected from pre-primary pre-service teachers and 54 (27 females and 27 males) were selected from primary and pre-service teachers. Both sets of participants involved in this study were purposively selected (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Data collection procedures

Data were gathered at a time that was convenient for the research participants, during which both teacher educators and pre-service teachers completed questionnaires followed by interview sessions. Furthermore, all the selected teacher educators completed questionnaires followed by interview sessions. In addition, all the selected pre-service teachers filled out the questionnaires. Additionally, from this group, twenty student teachers were chosen for interviews based on their gender and courses they taken (i.e., pre-primary and primary). The questionnaires and the interviews for

both the teacher educators and the pre-service teachers were filled out using the CSEntry App. Both quantitative data from the questionnaires and qualitative data from the interviews were coded and uploaded to OneDrive for data security and organization.

Data analysis procedures

According to Nowell et al. (2017), qualitative data analysis involves identifying, assigning codes, organizing data into themes, describing and reporting themes generated from decontextualized, and recontextualized data. Therefore, qualitative data was thematically analyzed to obtain themes and sub-themes while the questionnaires were descriptively analyzed to obtain the percentages and frequencies. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and thereafter the transcripts were read through to obtain themes and sub-themes. Additionally, the information was categorized and organized into clusters of statements that conveyed consistent concepts. Next, an analysis of the data gathered for each theme and sub-theme was conducted. The quantitative data analysis was gathered through questionnaires and structured observations employing IBM SPSS software version 26 and Microsoft Excel to calculate descriptive statistics that generated tables and charts relevant to a particular parameter. The interpretation of the quantitative findings was conducted in accordance with the literature (Pallant, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section gives a summary of the results which answers the two stipulated research questions as follows:

Impact of teacher educators' practices on pre-service teachers' learning experiences

Most of the responses extracted from respondents indicated that pre-service teachers have had experience in teaching and learning strategies and the content learned. The majority of the pre-service student teachers who were involved in interviews, and who attended pre-primary education when they were young, highlighted learning strategies that were used by their pre-primary teachers to include songs, plays and games. Additionally, the pre-primary teachers noted that their teachers used teaching and learning materials to facilitate their learning and development of literacy skills (reading, writing and arithmetic). These experiences were evident in pre-service teachers' interview responses to a question that asked them about their pre-primary experiences: "...the experience I have had is teacher teaching practice using various activities like singing while learning how to write different letters of the alphabet and being able to pronounce letters" (ST 30).

The above response implies that pre-service teachers developed literacy skills when they were engaged in pre-primary learning through songs and games. This kind of experience forms a basic foundation which improves pre-service teachers' attitudes and opinions on aspects like lesson preparation and presentation skills (Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020). Additionally, the experiences increase pre-service teachers' general interest in teaching (Denuga & Nkengbeza, 2022; Paris et al., 2010). This is because it is not all pre-service teachers join teacher preparation programs out of the intrinsic motivation that comes from within (Feuer et al., 2013). The implication of this finding may inform the kind of strategies that pre-service teachers might be using when

engaged in real classroom practice just because they saw their teachers modelling.

Furthermore, the pre-service teachers admitted to being involved in teaching and learning, and other extra-curricular activities based on gender. The data on their experiences show how males and females are engaged in answering questions during the classroom teaching and learning process. Such strategies have been demonstrated by Al-Samarrai and Tamagnan (2020) to be successful in improving educational outcomes, especially for girls. In addition, pre-service teachers highlighted that they were involved in extracurricular activities such as sports, gardening, and general cleanliness. Their experiences explain that males and females were equitably engaged during classroom teaching and learning. This is because in any effort to address the factors that contribute to gender disparities in the implementation of teacher preparation curricula must adopt a diverse strategy since these factors are complex (Mrutu et al., 2022). There is hope that by growing a comparable strategy and learning from these experiences, education results can be greatly improved, and gender gaps can be closed (Al-Samarrai & Tamagnan, 2020). Likewise, in sports, some games and plays were specifically for males and females. This was evidenced through the pre-service teachers' responses during interviews as one commented:

My experience as a learner and the way our teachers treat males and females is as follows. First, we learn through sharing. For example, when the teachers formulate groups during teaching, they divide in a sense of equality. If males were five, females were also supposed to be five. Even in a seating arrangement, for example, the desk must seat three people, then there will be two males and one female. This can be the other way round based on the number of boys and girls in the class. (ST 84)

... in groups, our teachers divided the groups based on gender and group leaders were also chosen based on gender for example, if the chairman is male and then the secretary is female. So, the teachers considered gender in terms of learning, also all assignments were given based on gender equality, and we were also given advice for the benefit of all of us. (ST 82)

Notwithstanding, profound changes that are supporting the changing and diverse requirements of humankind are noted in teacher preparation programs. These changes are impacted by the reforms, which call for modifications to the structures that are now in place for the delivery of education (Campbell-Barr, 2017). Although the impact was noted not to be profound, F4L project interventions conducted had a significant impact on the teacher educators' practices which later influenced pre-service teachers' practice. This was perhaps because the project was still in its foundational stage when this study was undertaken. The impact of F4L interventions was evident by having a peek at the open-ended questions of a survey administered to teacher educators which indicated how the intervention impacted their practice and mentioned these practices, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The teacher educators' responses showed that the training they received from Aga Khan University has been very helpful and has transformed their instructional practice. Teacher educators stated to have great improvement in the implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy by 50%, curriculum interpretation and analysis by 37.5% and identification of students' needs for intervention by 37.5%. Besides, the results depict that teacher educators still need more professional assistance on the issues related to the development of quality and balanced tests as well as improvement in their pedagogical leadership skills. In the context of

this view, therefore, teacher educators are seen to have made a notable improvement in their instruction and pedagogical practice except in the aforementioned areas that still need intervention.

Similarly, some of the teacher educators' interview excerpts confirm the quantitative results as follows:

...I can now say that I have better knowledge in the three courses that I mentioned earlier. This has helped me due to the training that has been run at work by Aga Khan, they have helped us a lot in building and creating techniques that will increase our implementation and those that helped us, especially us who have not learnt about pre-primary education, through the workshops conducted recently, we got various instructional strategies and more knowledge to improve our teaching practice. (TE9)

Before the training, it was very hard as we used to rely on the summative examinations to assess our students. For instance, these days student teachers are more involved in practical activities than it was before. The daily practical activities help us to continuously assess them on the lesson content. Assessment has become part of teaching and learning, not waiting on the summative examination but rather from the beginning through practical activities. (TE4)

The results from the student teachers and teacher educators established that both the prior experiences from pre-primary and primary teachers and the experiences induced by the teacher educators have a great impact in shaping teacher educators' professional practices. This is why students' teachers should be involved in all steps of their learning process from the preparation, implementation and assessment stage (Kihwele & Mrandi, 2020). This is because pre-service teachers must demonstrate proficiency in time

management, subject content, teaching techniques, behavior control over students, personal attributes, and the use of teaching resources during actual classroom presentations to manage classroom teaching and other activities. In addition, the interaction between student teachers and teacher educators with the environment should involve a mentorship aspect that will enable their professional growth (Mpate et al., 2023). This interaction provides pre-service teachers with an environment where they can learn approaches, methods, strategies, and experiences that encourage them to develop and solidify their competencies.

How do pre-service teacher's learning experiences inform their pedagogical practices

Pre-service teachers' experiences contributed to the improvement of both their instructional and pedagogical practices. For instance, it was noted that there are experiences acquired by the pre-service teachers after engaging themselves within the teacher preparation program and those gained due to teacher educators' practices as seen in Table 1. Pre-service teachers admitted that they were very conversant in engaging themselves in various forms of students' motivations by 61.1% and identification of student's social-emotional development by 60.2%. About 62% of the pre-service teachers highlighted that they were conversant in applying different types of instructional strategies according to the needs and abilities of the learners. This is in line with the findings by Kihwele and Mtandi (2020), that student teachers' competencies in teaching are strengthened when they are engaged in the actual selection and application of instructional resources, designing of teaching and learning materials that are suitable for certain classes and for building learners competencies based on their

diversities. On the other hand, student teachers' ability to implement multiple teaching strategies requires to be given more attention as it was seen to be low. Instructional strategies that range from hands-on with locally made materials to the use of digital tools in teaching and learning ought to be the point of focus by the teacher educators (Paris et al., 2010). Moreover, other aspects of the pre-service teachers' instructional and pedagogical practices were seen to be moderately impacted by the experiences acquired.

Generally, the findings show that there is a need to give student teachers enough time for practice to enable them to consolidate their teaching skills. This is because student teachers' experiences are seen to be strengthened when exposed to the environment where practice is more than memorization kind of learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section gives the conclusion to the study findings and then presents the corresponding recommendations. The study concludes that pre-service teachers' experiences improved despite the study being conducted and reported within the short period after they joined the teacher education program. The conclusion goes with the assumption that pre-service teachers' experiences may continue to improve within the course of project implementation. The relationship between pre-service teachers and teacher educators strengthens the pre-service teachers' experiences which in turn improve their instructional and pedagogical practices. Teacher educators act as mentors and coaches to pre-service teachers by impacting them with good practices in both pre-primary and primary education. Pre-service teachers learn through experiences and gain various skills, knowledge, and competencies such as interpretation of

curriculum, lesson design, setting lesson objectives and goals as well as setting learners' learning outcomes. Furthermore, they gained experiences in measuring learners' competencies, creating a conducive learning environment, identifying the individual and social-emotional differences among individual learners and implementing various motivation skills. Moreover, the application of various instructional strategies based on learners' abilities, use of ICT and media in teaching and learning as well as identification of individual learners' special learning needs. Lastly, pre-service teachers gained experiences in the use of gender-responsive teaching methods, managing clouded classes, providing career guidance to learners as well as engaging learners in peer learning and support.

The study recommends that the host institution of the foundation for learning i.e., AKU-IED should continue to monitor the implementation of the knowledge acquired from the foundation for learning interventions by the teacher educators to continue to strengthen the pre-service teachers' experiences. The interventions should continue to encourage mentorship and coaching relationships between teacher educators and pre-service teachers to enable them to work together with one another for the maximization of the desired project and intervention outcomes. Further, a similar study should be conducted to assess how the pre-service teachers implement the gained instructional and pedagogical practice in real classroom settings.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1
Aspects of teacher educators' practices

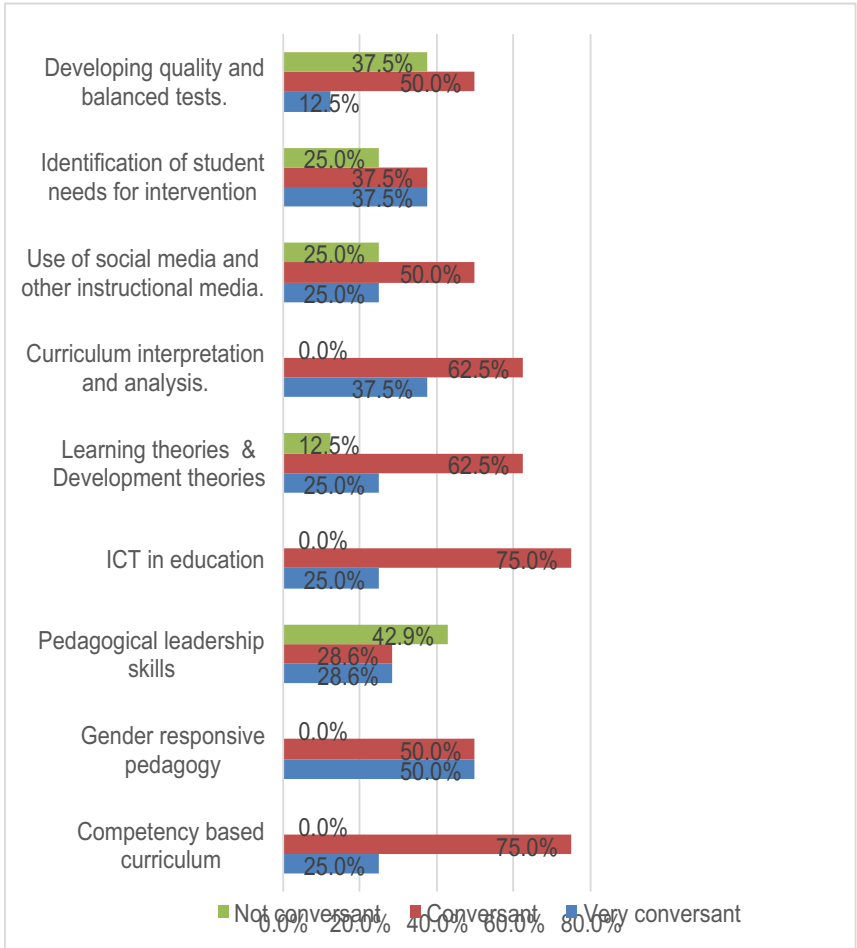


Table 1*Pre-service teachers improved instructional and pedagogical practices*

Aspect	Very conver-sant	Conver-sant	Not conver-sant at all
The interpretation and analysis of the curriculum to suit the teaching and learning needs of my class	50.0%	46.3%	3.7%
Lesson design	54.6%	42.6%	2.8%
Setting lesson objectives and goals	45.4%	47.2%	7.4%
Setting student learning outcomes	56.5%	41.7%	1.9%
Measuring student competencies	57.4%	42.6%	0.0%
Creating a learning-conducive classroom climate	55.6%	43.5%	0.9%
Identifying individual differences among students	42.6%	55.6%	1.9%
Identifying student's social and emotional development	60.2%	38.9%	0.9%
Engaging various forms of student motivation	61.1%	37.0%	1.9%
Applying different types of instructional strategies according to the ability of the learner (differentiated learning)	26.9%	62.0%	11.1%
Using ICT in a lesson	36.1%	59.3%	4.6%
Using media in a lesson	53.7%	45.4%	0.9%
Identifying learning difficulties in students	38.9%	54.6%	6.5%
Different communication styles among the students and between teacher and student (classroom discourse)	49.1%	46.3%	4.6%
Identifying students with special learning needs	42.6%	51.9%	5.6%
Integrating the learning styles of students with special learning needs in a lesson	38.0%	52.8%	9.3%
Using gender awareness and responsive teaching methods	38.0%	56.5%	5.6%
Managing a class with more than 80 students	29.6%	52.8%	17.6%
Providing career guidance to students	49.1%	46.3%	4.6%
Engaging peer review and peer support	28.7%	48.1%	23.1%