

Original Article | Received: 04th July. 2025 | Revised: 16th July. 2025 | Accepted: 24th July. 2025 | Published: 10th September. 2025

Teacher Education and the Interns: Exploring the Effectiveness of the Online Internship Program

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper is based upon a survey conducted upon pre-service teachers and teacher educators. The survey was conducted online. The purpose of this study was to comprehend the nuances related to the internship program during online mode and to explore the challenges of the internship program in teacher education as well as to understand its effectiveness. An internship in any professional course plays a significant role as it tries to strengthen the practical understanding of the interns. The Acharya Rammurti Committee (1990), in its review of the National Policy of Education (1986), highlighted that the internship for teacher training should be based on the primary value of actual field experience in a realistic situation and developing the teaching skills by practice over a period of time. Subsequently, an internship during the teacher education program became mandatory, as it provides an opportunity to integrate the theoretical knowledge in a real classroom situation. However, due to the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus-19, the academic institutions were compelled to choose different modes to complete the internship program. Since such a situation was never encountered before by the world of academia, therefore, it was pertinent to understand internships in the above-mentioned contexts. The result of the survey suggests that even though the situation was encountered for the first time, the internship process was smoothly done through different modes so as to achieve the prime objectives of the internship program. Though there were some challenges also, such as non-availability of participants, as even the schools were closed and online classes in many schools were not taking place; less classroom activity; less support from mentors due to network instability; less hands-on experience; teaching students with masks without uncovering faces; and so on.



Keywords: Teacher Education, School Education, Internship, Apprenticeship



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INTRODUCTION:

The school-based activities are designed to enable the student-teachers to connect theory to practice and to help them acquire a perspective regarding the aims of education within which their previously acquired knowledge and practices can be systematised and structured to enable them to teach effectively. To achieve the objective of transforming theoretical understanding into practical understanding, internship programs constitute a backbone of the teacher education program. The internship program in the form of a field apprenticeship is conceived. The intern functions as a regular teacher and tries to get immersed in every aspect of the school and is expected to be creative in their role as a practitioner. To be a creative person, it requires that the intern get an opportunity to accomplish their task in free physical space as well as pedagogical freedom. Thus, it is necessary to negotiate with the school, focusing on the prime motive of the internship. The internship program often remains field-based so that the intern gets to experience the real-world work situation as a practitioner and learns to deal with the situation. Therefore, to achieve the aim of the internship program, the intern needs to integrate their knowledge with their understanding of children and classroom processes, theoretical pedagogical considerations, and the strategies and skills that they developed theoretically in order to become a reflective practitioner.

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Their role as an intern during the internship program in the school is something like an apprentice who works as a regular teacher & participates in all the school activities, including planning, teaching, and assessment; interacting with schoolteachers & children to understand the school in its totality, incorporating its philosophy & aims, organisation & management, the life of a teacher, and the needs of the physical, mental, and emotional development of children. They engaged in school functioning in all its aspects in consultation with the school mentor, like participating in various 'out-of-classroom' activities in school; organising events such as cultural activities, debates, games, quizzes, essay competitions, and dramas; preparing school calendars, timetables, However, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the entire education system, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents (UNICEF, 2020 Report). Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 percent of the world's student population, up to 99 percent in low- and lower-middle-income countries. After observing the coronavirus pandemic situation, the WHO advised maintaining social distancing as the first prevention step. So, every country started the action of lockdown to separate the contaminated people. The education sector, including schools, colleges, and universities, got closed. Classes were suspended, and all examinations of schools, colleges, and universities, including entrance tests, were postponed indefinitely. Thus, the lockdown destroyed the schedules of every individual. Though it is an exceptional situation in the history of education, COVID-19 also provided opportunities to come out of the rigorous classroom teaching model and enter a new era of digital models. This gave a path to transform into online education mode. Initially, the educators and the students were quite confused and didn't understand how to cope with the situation of this sudden crisis that compelled the closure of the educational activities. The pre-service teachers and teacher educators used to get more space to participate in the classroom teaching activities, but the large-scale online education provided the interns and the educational institutions the opportunity to think of different modes to involve interns without diluting their intent and in order to achieve the target of the internship. Even our National Education Policy 2020 also emphasises digitalised education through various modes. These online internships also help pre-service teachers to develop modern pedagogical approaches such as flipped learning and blended learning, which also lead to enhancing the education transaction at each level of society.

Keeping these above-mentioned concerns in mind, the present research paper was conceived to survey pre-service teachers and teacher educators in the context of internship programs. As the situation still has not become absolutely normal, the survey was conducted online with the purpose of comprehending various nuances related to the internship program and understanding the challenges of the internship program that the pre-service interns, teachers, teacher educators, the planners, and others encountered and negotiated. This was also conducted with the purpose of visualising the effectiveness of the internship program as well as the interns involved in it.

Research Question

The wider research question that guided the present research survey was:

- Whether the process of the internship program taken over during the online mode in the context of pre-service teachers and teacher educators has solved the challenges faced by the academicians?
- How far do the interns perceive that the internship program during the online mode was effective?
- What changes can be visualised to make the internship program more effective?

Several similar questions, the present research paper tries to answer.

Objective of the Study

- To understand the internship process in online mode.
- To explore the challenges of internship programs in teacher education
- To find out the effectiveness of the internship program in the context of the online situation.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilised the descriptive survey method so as to gather the data for the study. The survey was based on certain guided questions. The questions were both open- and closed-ended. It had 20 items focusing upon orientation attended by interns, availability of their supervisors, opportunity & experience received as a practitioner during internship, development of necessary skills and strategies, utilisation of theory in actual

classroom conditions, presentation of lesson plans effectively, & difficulty faced by the interns. All the items were duly validated and tried out for checking their reliability. After the validity and reliability check, the online survey questionnaire was served to those students who were working as interns in the form of a Google Form. These interns were both from the B.Ed., B.El. Ed., and M.Ed. programs. The purposive samplings were utilised to choose the samples for the study.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS:

Satisfaction of the Interns:

It is necessary that the internship program be taken under the mentorship of the teachers. The results of the study suggest that 68% (Fig-1) of interns were able to interact with their mentors/supervisors during their internship program, who were constantly guiding them when most of the students were struggling with traumatic experiences and mental stress. Intern satisfaction during their practical experience should be considered as the important degree to which an intern feels a positive association with theories. This suggests that the internship process was smoothly done.

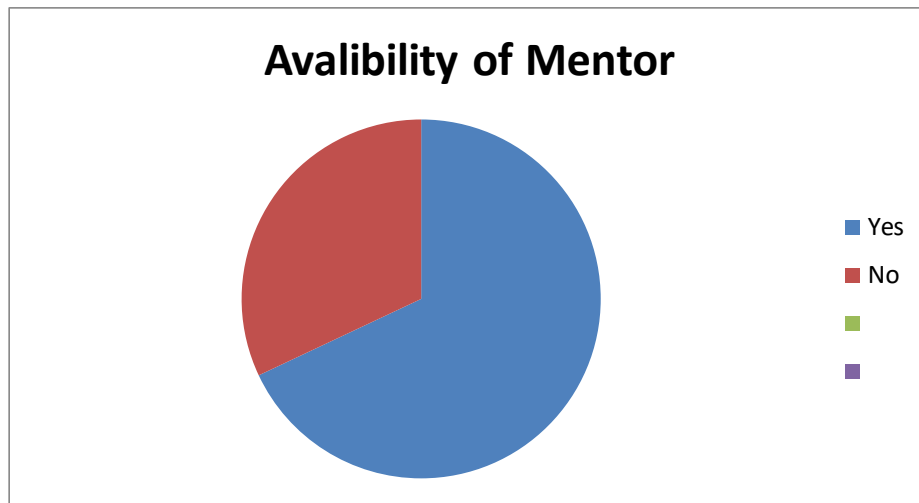


Fig-1

Internship and its effectiveness:

The above pie chart shows the effectiveness of the online internship program. 12% of interns strongly disagree with the effectiveness of their internship program due to the pandemic; the internship was not as per their expectations. Some interns were facing technical glitches during their work; others did not get sufficient experience due to online mode, which somewhat hampered the effectiveness of the crucial period of gaining experience known as an internship. 44% of them are neutral, saying that they have done their level best in working online, while 24% strongly agreed about the development of necessary skills and strategies that they should have developed during the process (see Fig-2).

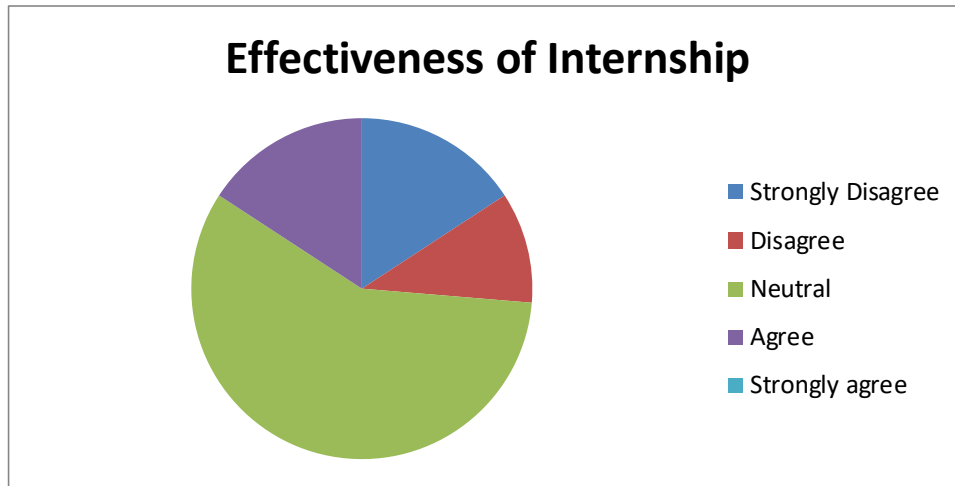


Fig-2

Challenges encountered:

67% of interns met with different kinds of challenges, such as a lesser number of students being present in the class in physical mode, and sometimes trainee teachers had to repeat the same lesson plans twice, which took time and effort unnecessarily.

Doing an internship from home was another challenging task due to the unfamiliarity of students with the trainee teachers and vice versa. Teachers faced an inability to balance the internship work and chores for many female trainees who were doing internships from home, communication gaps due to internet connectivity & interrupted power supply with both the students and mentors, and at some places schools and colleges had not opened till the time of the internship. Trainee teachers were unable to cater to the individual needs, and so on. While 33% did not face any major challenges during their internship.

Remarks for the Improvement:

Getting first-hand experience as an intern of teacher education was not an easy task, but trainee teachers tried to complete this efficiently. Despite having experience teaching offline according to the individual variations amongst students, during this internship they changed their methods and tactics accordingly. Now interns are more technically savvy, have worked with different software, are capable of working from a home environment, and successfully complete their internship during the pandemic. They got the experience, which is different from traditional internships done on the school premises.

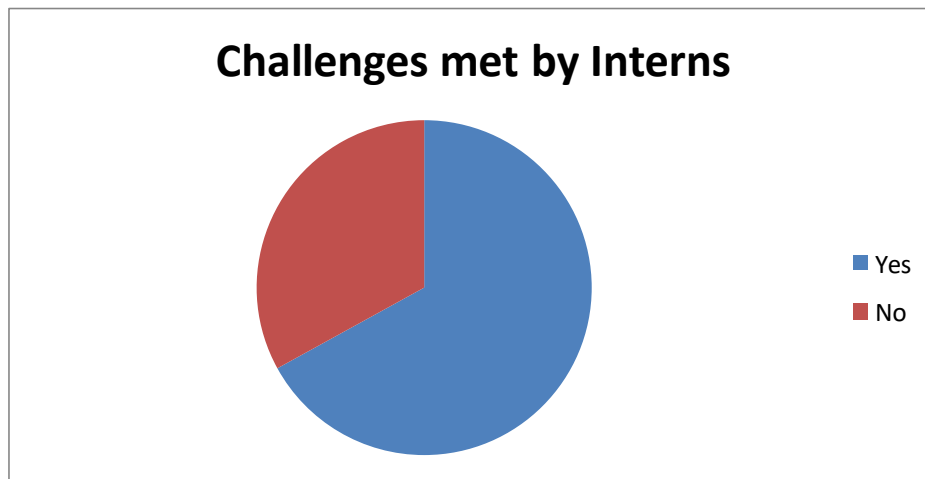


Fig-3

Demand for the involvement:

Trainee teachers felt the need for more involvement of mentors/supervisors during the internship period so that they could get more practical exposure through experienced teachers, as during the pandemic, interns were not aware of the functioning of the online classes or the availability of different software for attendance, making chapters, recording, etc. The theories they learnt and the applicability of the same through online learning were quite challenging. Supervisors may allow them during their classes to get the experience of real challenges faced by them and involve the interns in other school activities apart from the subject classes they got, such as organising extracurricular activities.

Findings

Online teacher education provides opportunities and challenges at the same time to work differently in a whole different classroom scenario. Learning theories in offline mode and applying them online to the students with unstable internet connectivity and poor power supply were challenges faced by the interns. But, they did and took the hands-on experience in the new normal.

Conclusive Remarks

The above analysis of data indicates that interns of various teacher education programs have completed their internship as they expected, but still, due to the online mode or less physical contact, they have been through difficulties. For instance, there was the non-availability of participants, less classroom activity, and less hands-on experience. Some got less support from their mentors due to network instability, and teaching students with masks almost became a challenge for some trainee teachers. Thus, we can conclude that the interns have undergone their internship in the new normalcy and successfully completed the same, faced challenges, and learnt new skills even in a pandemic where things are less functional and classes are almost online.

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