Effects of Internship to the Students' Mental Health and Mindset: A Case Study of a School in Special Geographic Area in BARMM Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on investigating the impact of pre-service teachers (PSTs) on students' mental health and mindset in one of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) community schools located in Special Geographic Area (SGA) in North Cotabato, Philippines, striving to achieve sustainable peace. As part of the PSTs' internship, they worked and immersed themselves in this community high school. A Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 21) was utilized to determine if there would be significant improvement with the mental health of 60 students selected randomly. In-depth interviews were conducted with the group of 5 high school students, 5 parents and 7 PSTs to determine if there would be changes in the mindset of the students. The transcribed statements from the participants which were in Filipino and Maguindanaon, were translated to English for the thematic triangulation analysis with the help of an external translator. Results show that depression, anxiety and stress scales of students significantly improved (moderate to mild). In the lens of the students, the internship positively influenced their personal development, fostering changes in their punctuality, motivation, confidence, and their overall behavior. In the lens of the parents, they have seen the students' progress in attitudes, behaviors, and skills where internship reflected how the experience nurtured not only academic habits but also socio-emotional development of their students. In the lens of the PSTs, the internship resonated on positive education, where fostering the academic skills and personal development of students leads to their long-term success and well-being. Although the idea of the PSTs on peace education as well as their understanding of their value in instilling a good mindset to the students often seemed limited, especially in relation to their competence in developing a lesson that can help a flourishing society, it can't be denied that they have brought significant influence to the belief and attitude of students toward schooling.

INTRODUCTION

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) takes a pivotal place in Philippine history, particularly in relation to the enduring conflict between the Moro people and the Philippine government. This struggle can be traced back over four centuries, rooted in colonial interventions and exacerbated by the socio-political and cultural marginalization of the Moro population. The MNLF's armed resistance shaped key peace processes, most notably the Final Peace Agreement in 1996, which sought to address long-standing grievances and establish frameworks for political autonomy and development in Mindanao (Williams, 2010). To some, the creation of a federally organized government may resolve many of these struggles (Montiel et al., 2012). Although the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was established, true peace is still underway.

As part of the Philippine government's initiatives toward reconciliation, transformation programs were introduced for MNLF combatants, their families, and communities. Special Geographic Areas (SGA) are territories of the BARMM scattered in different municipalities of Cotabato Province, established through a lawful plebiscite in 2019. There are programs in these areas, grounded in the provisions of the peace accord, aim to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance peace and security in the Bangsamoro region. Recent studies also stress the importance of sustainable livelihood support and community-driven development in ensuring the long-term success of these reintegration efforts.

Beyond political agreements, peace education has emerged as a vital strategy in transforming conflict-affected communities. Machali and Rosyadi (2022) argue that higher education institutions can advance peacebuilding by integrating interdisciplinary approaches, community engagement, and internships that cultivate global citizenship and conflict resolution skills. In this regard, Mindanao State University–Maguindanao (MSU-Maguindanao) plays an active role in advancing the vision of becoming a National Peace University. By reaching out to indigenous, rural, and marginalized populations, the university contributes to integrating conflict-affected groups into the broader national development framework.

Aligned with its mission of delivering quality education, MSU-Maguindanao, through its College of Education, deployed PSTs despite its distance to this MNLF community school to mitigate the shortage of qualified educators. Teacher deployment not only strengthens academic instruction but also fosters reconciliation by promoting inclusion and social participation in this special area in BARMM. As Wright (2014) noted, insufficient teaching staff often deprives students of meaningful classroom interactions, which may lead to disengagement and poor learning outcomes. Addressing this gap highlights the role of education as both a peacebuilding mechanism and a bridge to long-term social transformation (UNESCO, 2018).

As part of their internship, the PSTs worked at this community high school and lived in the local Barangay Hall, immersing themselves in the community. This experience fostered deeper connections with the students. Research by Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) emphasizes the importance of collaborative mentoring relationships between students and teachers, especially regarding the experiences of PSTs.

Pre-service teachers, who are in training to become certified educators, can significantly impact learning outcomes as they transition from students to teachers (Pacheco, 2013). Their beliefs, attitudes, and instructional methods play crucial roles in shaping students' academic performance. Manuel and Hughes (2006) found out in their study that majority of PSTs made the choice to teach based on reasons that lead to personal aspirations to work with dynamic people to create a difference in their lives and to uphold an insightful engagement with the subject area they were teaching. In promoting peace values, PSTs emphasize fostering a democratic classroom climate, encouraging open exchange of ideas, and nurturing students' capacity for empathy (Ay & Gökdemir, 2020).

Some studies indicate that PSTs' positive beliefs about their students can lead to better learning environments and greater academic success, while negative attitudes may harm students' self-esteem and performance (Guilfoyle, et al., 2024). Furthermore, effective teaching strategies—like providing timely feedback and fostering supportive classroom settings—are associated with improved student outcomes, whereas ineffective practices can lead to disruptive behaviors and academic struggles (Guilfoyle, et al., 2024).

This study aimed to examine how the internship and the presence of PSTs influence students' mental health and mindset in education. To attain this, the study gathered inputs from students, parents, and the PSTs themselves. By analyzing these varied perspectives, the study assessed the results of the internship program of the university and analyzed implications to foster student engagement in rural MNLF communities to help in the government's initiative of doing peace processes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research utilized mixed-methods research design following a descriptive-comparative analysis and Colaizzi's method that analyzed the experiences of students, parents, and PSTs during their teaching practice at a community high school in the Philippines. The objective was to gain insights into these experiences from the perspectives of all three groups.

This study used the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales 21 (DASS-21) which is a 21-item self-assessment measure designed to evaluate the general mental adversity and indication relevant to depression, anxiety, and stress particularly adolescents. The scores emphasize the extent to which one experiences indication. The overall score for the DASS-21 can provide an indication of mental distress (Henry & Crawford, 2005).

Colaizzi's seven-step descriptive phenomenological approach, on the other hand, guided the research process. The researchers immersed themselves in the data to analyze the experiences from the three viewpoints. They identified significant statements that articulated these experiences, extracting underlying meanings to gain a deeper understanding. These meanings were then grouped into themes, highlighting the common elements.

Participants

In-depth interviews (focus group discussion and individual interviews) were conducted with a randomly selected group of 17 participants: consisting of 5 high school students and 5 parents; along with all 7 pre-service teachers for the academic year 2023-2024. The transcribed statements from the participants which were in Filipino and Maguindanaon, were translated to English for the thematic analysis with the help of an external translator.

RESULTS

Results of the DASS 21 scales in terms depression, anxiety and stress are discussed below, as well as the thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

Table 1: DASS 21 Result of Students during Internship Period in terms of Depression

Depression (items 3, 5, 10, 13, 16 and 17)	Pre-internship		Post-internship	
	mean	description	mean	description
3. I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all.	1.93	moderate		
5. I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things.	1.83	moderate	0.87	mild
10. I felt that I had nothing to look forward to.	2.00	moderate	0.87	mild
13. I felt down-hearted and blue.	1.83	moderate	0.50	mild
16. I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything.	1.90	moderate	0.47	mild
17. I felt I wasn't worth much as a person.	2.00	moderate	0.43	mild
			0.40	mild
Overall Mean (X)	**1.92**	**moderate**	**0.59**	**mild**

The results show a decrease in depression levels from *moderate (X = 1.92)* pre-internship to *mild (X= 0.59)* post-internship. This finding suggests that participation in the internship had a positive psychological effect. According to Arenas, 2020, engagement in meaningful, real-world experiences can enhance positive emotions and overall well-being. Similarly, Tims et al. (2013) reported that workplace learning experiences foster self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, which can buffer depressive symptoms. Internship exposure allows students to apply theoretical knowledge, receive mentorship, and build professional identity in which all of which are associated with decreased depressive affect (Dioquino et al., 2024). When teachers and student-teachers deliver structured mental health programs, especially those based on cognitive-behavioral principles, students often experience small but significant reductions in depression and anxiety symptoms (Shelemy et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023).

Table 2: DASS 21 Result of Students during Internship Period in terms of Anxiety

Anxiety (items 2, 4, 7, 9, 15 and 19)	Pre-internship		Post-internship	
	mean	**description**	**mean**	**description**
2. I was aware of dryness of my mouth.	1.73	moderate	0.33	mild
4. I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	1.77	moderate	0.37	mild
7. I experienced trembling (e.g., in the hands).	1.60	moderate	0.27	mild
9. I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	1.67	moderate	0.43	mild
15. I felt I was close to panic.	1.60	moderate	0.57	mild
19. I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	1.33	moderate	0.57	mild
Overall Mean (X)	**1.62**	**moderate**	**0.42**	**mild**

Anxiety levels decreased from *moderate (X = 1.62)* to *mild (X= 0.42)* post-internship. This reduction may be attributed to increased familiarity with professional environments and improved coping mechanisms developed during internship practice. Students' anxiety commonly peaks before internships but drops significantly once they gain competence and social support in the workplace. Supportive supervision and constructive feedback during internships have also been shown to reduce anticipatory anxiety and build resilience (Gerken, 2021). Pre-service teachers can make a big difference in helping students feel better. When they show care, listen, and understand their students, it helps lessen feelings of depression, stress, and anxiety. DeMauro and Jennings (2016) found that when pre-service teachers are confident and emotionally healthy, they create a warm and supportive classroom where students feel safe, happy, and valued.

Table 3: DASS 21 Result of Students during Internship Period in terms of Stress

Stress (items 1, 6, 11, 12, 14, 18 and 20)	Pre-internship		Post-internship	
	mean	**description**	**mean**	**description**
1. I found it hard to wind down.	1.57	moderate	0.70	mild
6. I tended to over-react to situations.	1.57	moderate	0.60	mild
11. I found myself getting agitated.	1.67	moderate	0.47	mild
12. I found it difficult to relax.	1.67	moderate	0.50	mild
14. I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	1.67	moderate	0.53	mild
18. I felt that I was rather touchy.	1.67	moderate	0.53	mild
20. I felt scared without any good reason.	1.60	moderate	0.50	mild
Overall Mean (X)	**1.63**	**moderate**	**0.55**	**mild**

Stress levels also showed a notable reduction from *moderate (X = 1.63)* to *mild (X = 0.55)* after the internship. Experiential learning environments enhance psychological hardiness and reduce burnout tendencies among students. There has been a growing emphasis on experiential learning in higher education. This approach involves providing students with hands-on experiences that allow them to apply what they have learned in real-world situations. Experiential learning can take various forms, including internships, service-learning projects, and research opportunities. Studies have shown that student-teachers, or pre-service teachers, has meaningful role in improving students' emotional well-being by helping to lessen depression, anxiety, and stress through supportive relationships and classroom interventions. Research emphasizes that the quality of the teacher-student relationship strongly influences students' mental health outcomes, as warm and caring interactions foster a sense of safety and belonging that reduces anxiety and stress (Chen et al., 2024; Salter et al., 2024).

These effects become stronger when teachers receive proper training, supervision, and continued support. Broader analyses also show that school-based interventions particularly those integrated into classroom activities can improve emotional resilience and lessen internal distress among young learners (Caldwell et al., 2019). Although teacher-led programs may not always achieve the same impact as clinician-delivered ones, their accessibility and daily presence in students' lives make them valuable for promoting mental wellness. In short, pre-service and in-service teachers who build supportive relationships, apply evidence-based strategies, and receive adequate training can meaningfully reduce depression, anxiety, and stress among their students, thereby contributing to a healthier

and more positive learning environment (Chen et al., 2024; Salter et al., 2024; Shelemy et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023; Caldwell et al., 2019).

Table 4: The paired sample t-test between the Pre-internship and Post-internship DASS 21 results

Variables	Mean	Mean difference	t-value	p-value	Decision
Pre-internship	1.675				
Post-internship	0.51	1.165	12.07	0.000*	Significant

The table 4 shows a comparison of the overall mean scores of depression, anxiety, and stress before and after the internship experience. The pre-internship (X=1.675, SD=0.16) indicates a moderate level of psychological distress among respondents, while the post-internship (X=0.51, SD=0.15) corresponds to a mild level of distress. The computed mean difference of 1.165 suggests a marked decrease in the participants' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress following the internship. The t-value of 12.07 with a p-value of 0.000 (p < 0.05) indicates that the difference between pre and post-internship scores is statistically significant at 5% level. This means that the internship experience had a significant positive effect on the respondents' well-being and mental health.

In essence, the findings suggest that exposure to real-world professional environments, mentorship, and skill application during the internship contributed to reduced emotional distress and improved mental health. Internship experiences can bring positive emotional changes among students, especially in reducing depression and anxiety. Before starting internships, many students experience fear and self-doubt about entering the real work environment. However, studies show that after internships, students often feel more confident, capable, and emotionally stable. Dickerson (2022) noted that practical experiences help students build purpose and self-worth, which lessens depressive feelings. Similarly, Wang et al. (2014) found that students' anxiety decreased after their internship as they became more familiar with workplace expectations. Overall, internships play an important role in improving students' mental health by giving them real-life experiences that boost confidence and reduce emotional distress.

Recent studies highlight that teacher internships play an important role in improving classroom relationships that may ease students' emotional distress. Joyce and Early (2014) found that strong teacher support and school connectedness significantly reduce students' depressive symptoms. During internships, PSTs develop these supportive skills through real classroom experiences, enhancing their ability to notice and respond to students' emotional needs (Bastian et al., 2024). Although no direct pre-and-post studies measure student depression linked specifically to internships, research shows that well-trained teachers and positive school climates contribute to lower student depression rates (Werner-Seidler et al., 2021). Thus, teacher internships indirectly help lessen students' depression by strengthening teacher empathy, support, and classroom environment.

This exploration followed several steps guided by Colaizzi's method. Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis involved a structured approach to identify themes and create a narrative of a phenomenon being studied. First, the researchers thoroughly read and re-read the transcripts to gain familiarity with the data and achieve an overall understanding. They then identified relevant statements associated with the research questions and observed the meaning of the participants' experiences. From these significant statements, the researchers extract meanings, interpret the data, and develop codes or character. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes which describe the experiences of the triangulated perspectives under investigation. Finally, the researchers provided a detailed description of the phenomenon based on the identified themes. Table 1 shows the emergent themes and corresponding codes of the internship experiences in the lens of the students.

Table 5: Themes and Corresponding Codes of the Internship Experiences in the Lens of the Students

Theme	Code	Coded Segment
Personal Growth	punctuality>improved punctuality of Students	*Before, I attended class during 3rd or 4th period only, but now I don't want to miss the 1st period.*
		We learned how to go to school earlier and we became confident.
	Self-motivation> motivated students to learn	*To study hard and think positively no matter how hard life is.*
		I became interested to study harder and our new teachers are one of my inspirations.

	Confidence> developed students' confidence in speaking	*When the PSTs arrived, we're no longer ashamed to speak in front and we became active in class.*
		Before I was afraid to recite in front of the class especially if it is English but I am used to it now and my teacher motivated me to be confident.
	Positive transformation> changed students' attitudes	*When teachers arrived, everything changed and I felt that we are good students already. Before, we didn't mind everything even if we were failing in the class.*
		When you were not here, we don't mind if we cannot wear our uniform. But now, we learn to follow our teacher's instruction.
Professional Aspiration	Aspiration> students aspired to finish a degree and be a professional	*I wish that after some years I will become a good educator also.*
		In Allah's will, I will be a great educator like my teachers soon.
	Aspiration> students aspired to be a good speaker	*They let us try speaking English and I like to improve my English speaking skill.*
		You let us try to speak English in the class and I studied the words so that I can learn.

Table 1 presents themes and codes of internship experiences in the lens of the high school students. The first theme shows how PSTs positively influenced this students' personal development, fostering changes in punctuality, motivation, confidence, behavioral transformation and future aspiration.

Students were reported to have **notable improvements in attendance and punctuality**, with many describing a shift from arriving late to attending the very first session. This behavioral change demonstrates an increased sense of **discipline, responsibility, and engagement**, suggesting that the presence of PSTs instilled more consistent learning routines. Such outcomes align with recent evidence indicating that teacher support and structured classroom practices significantly enhance students' **motivation and engagement** (Pang et al., 2025). One student admitted:

"Before, I attended class during 3rd or 4th period only, but now I don't want to miss the 1st period. I hate to go to my class before because I don't have the motivation."

The **dedication and enthusiasm of PSTs** emerged as one factor in shaping a **positive classroom climate**. By modeling persistence and commitment to learning, PSTs encouraged students to approach their studies with greater consistency and purpose. This influence resonates with findings that highlight how teachers' enthusiasm and professional commitment promote students' **self-efficacy and learning motivation**. Similarly, Huang, et al., (2023) emphasized that motivated and reflective PSTs foster higher levels of preparedness and effectiveness in guiding students toward meaningful academic and personal goals. One student admitted:

"I became interested to study harder and our new teachers are one of my inspirations. They are just new in the school but they are very approachable that we can share our own problems."

Students also described PSTs as **sources of inspiration**, noting that their encouragement helped them adopt a more positive outlook despite personal and academic challenges. This reflects contemporary research showing that supportive teacher-student relationships cultivate resilience, perseverance, and **intrinsic motivation**. In particular, role modeling by enthusiastic PSTs can spark students' curiosity and foster sustained interest in learning which is associated to factors of **achievement, confidence and well-being.** Another student noted:

"When the PSTs arrived, we're no longer ashamed to speak in front and we became active in class. This is because we can freely express ourselves. We are not afraid to commit mistake because we know our new teacher understand us."

Another critical area of impact was the **growth of students' confidence**, particularly in speaking and classroom participation. While students initially expressed fear and hesitation especially in using English, they gradually overcame these challenges with the guidance of PSTs. Over time, they began to speak and actively participate in class discussions. This mirrors findings by Pang et al., 2025 who demonstrated that adaptability and positive teacher influence enhance students' **self-concept and professional identity**, leading to stronger participation and self-expression. This is supported by one student who said:

"When teachers arrived, everything changed and I felt that we are good students already. Before, we didn't mind everything, we skipped classes and we did not mind even if we were failing the class. But now, we understand that education and getting good grades is important."

Finally, students acknowledged **broader attitudinal and behavioral transformations**, such as becoming more mindful of their studies, more respectful of classroom rules, and more compliant with school policies like wearing uniforms. Such changes demonstrate how PSTs promote not only academic development but also **class responsibility and social-emotional growth.** This echoes current literature affirming that supportive teacher practices cultivate not only academic success but also students' **social skills, discipline, and responsible behavior** (Huang et al., 2023).

On the other hand, the second theme demonstrates how PSTs inspired students to envision and aspire toward professional achievements, especially in education and communication. Many students expressed dream to finish a degree and pursue careers as educators, clearly linking their aspirations to the example set by their PSTs. Statements such as wanting to become "a great educator" underscore how PSTs served as role models who shaped students' long-term goals. Mentor support that fosters positive emotions enhances pre-service teachers' professional identity and strengthens their career. These findings reveal that through powerful role modeling, PSTs significantly shape students' aspirations and future professional goals (Cai et al., 2022). One student noted:

"I wish that after some years I will become a good educator also. I am inspired by my new teacher. She said that she also is coming from poor family."

Students also highlighted their aspirations to improve their skills in English speaking. Through classroom opportunities provided by the PSTs, learners became more motivated to practice speaking English and to expand their vocabulary, recognizing communication as an essential skill for future success. This is supported by the statement of this student:

"They let us try speaking English and I like to improve my English-speaking skill. Even if grammar is flawed, my new teacher said it is just fine."

In addition, promoting a supportive learning environment is essential to the influence of PSTs. A fostering classroom set-up, where students feel appreciated and encouraged, can significantly enhance their self-efficacy and career objectives (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Table 2 shows the themes and corresponding codes of the internship experiences in the lens of the parents.

Table 6: Themes and Corresponding Codes of the Internship Experiences in the Lens of the Parents

Theme	Code	Coded Segment
Personal Growth	Punctuality>improved punctuality of students	*My child went to school very early because he is afraid to be late.*
		They went to school early and they studied well.
	Self-Confidence> improved speaking skills	*They developed self-confidence especially in speaking English.*
		They became smarter and started to speak English.
	Self-motivation> motivated students to learn	*They became interested to study and no one was staying at the kiosk.*
		We saw in them their interest to study.
		They are interested to go to school everyday.

In the lens of the parents, the principal theme captures the students' personal growth in their attitudes, behaviors, and skills. It reflects how the intervention or experience nurtured not only academic habits but also socio-emotional development.

Insights from the interview transcriptions with parents indicate a meaningful change in students' mindsets that appears to have sparked a broader personal motivation to grow. Parents' descriptions of children who "want to go to school every day" and who take responsibility for arriving on time suggest a shift from passive attendance to an active commitment to learning. This pattern is consistent with work showing that changes in students' beliefs and motivation, and the beliefs of important adults around them (e.g., parents, teachers) predict increases in persistence and school engagement. For example, studies linking parental growth-mindset beliefs to children's persistence and effort show that family-level mindset supports can translate into greater student persistence and task engagement at school (Song et al., 2022). students who report stronger belonging are less likely to miss days and more likely to show improvements in attendance over the school year. These relationships hold across age groups and contexts, and they help explain why affective shifts, like the feeling that school matters, can translate into concrete mindset such as punctuality. Improved punctuality where students coming early "because they are afraid to be late" and wanting to be in class reflects a heightened sense of responsibility and discipline that often follows rises in perceived value and belonging. One parent noted:

"My child went to school very early because he is afraid to be late. I don't know why he is already eager to go to school. When I ask him, he said that he doesn't like to miss the activities in the room, and that his new teacher doesn't like them to be late."

Students exhibited growing **self-assurance in communication**, particularly in English, which may previously have been a source of anxiety or hesitation. The improvement in language use indicates not only **cognitive gains** but also the courage to engage in social and academic conversations. This reflects the development of **self-efficacy of** students begins when teachers try to constructively criticise them and not to belittle their potential. Because the PSTs have humble way of teaching the language, parents were amazed of their students struggle to speak the language confidently. One parent said:

"They developed self-confidence especially in speaking English. My child said that their teacher in English let them speak English in front of the class and wanted them to express their ideas, and constructively corrected them."

Exposure to PSTs often results in students gradually developing self-assurance in communication, showing improvements not only in language use but also in their courage to engage in academic and social interactions. Recent studies affirm that communication growth in students is closely linked to PSTs' instructional practices and self-efficacy. For instance, research in EFL contexts found that learners' speaking self-efficacy was strengthened through mastery experiences, teacher role modeling, verbal encouragement, persistence, and emotional resilience (Fithriani et al., 2022). Similarly, PSTs' own communication self-efficacy has been shown to positively relate to their teaching effectiveness, enabling them to provide constructive criticism without diminishing students' confidence (Dinçer, 2021). The supportive and humble teaching approach of PSTs also fosters environments where students feel safe to take linguistic risks. Evidence suggests that teacher self-efficacy contributes directly to student engagement, motivation, and communicative competence (Liu & Han, 2021). A recent mini-review further highlights that collective teacher efficacy is a strong predictor of students' willingness to engage in English communication (Zheng et al., 2021). Moreover, teacher talk plays a crucial role in shaping students' achievement: students with higher self-efficacy respond more positively to teachers' feedback and instruction, which translates into improved English performance. In the Philippine context, a recent study revealed that English PSTs generally exhibit high competence and teaching efficacy, particularly in lesson organization, which in turn positively influences student confidence in speaking (Lanojan & Coloscos, 2024).

A marked shift in **intrinsic motivation** is evident, as students expressed genuine eagerness to learn. Their decision to avoid distractions (e.g., staying at the kiosk) highlights a redirection of energy toward schoolwork. This enthusiasm indicates that they were no longer pushed by external pressure but instead **self-driven,** developing positive learning habits and a sustained interest in education. This is supported by a parent saying:

"They became interested to study and no one was staying at the student waiting areas. My son said that he is no longer staying outside their room even if the teacher has not come in the room yet."

Research shows that strong teacher-student relationships enhance student engagement and behavior, including punctuality (Pianta and Hamre, 2009). Pre-service teachers, often in their early teaching years, are particularly skilled at building rapport through empathy and encouragement, creating a supportive atmosphere that promotes trust and respect, ultimately improving student behavior. Table 3 shows the themes and corresponding codes of the internship experiences in the lens of the PSTs.

Table 7: Themes and Corresponding Codes of the Internship Experiences in the Lens of the Pre-service Teachers

Theme	Code	Coded Segment
Aspiration to become professional	Aspiration> aim to finish a degree	*Students told us they want to study in college.*
		They became excited to attend even my afternoon class and promised me to finish a degree and even invited me to their college graduation.
Personal growth	punctuality>improved Punctuality of Students	*My student goes to school after the dawn time prayer.*
		Students attend school regularly and they love participating in the discussion
	Confidence> developed students' confidence in speaking	*They are trying to speak English and participate in the class discussion.*
		Students participated in class discussion, and they are trying to speak English.

Themes like aspiration to become professional and the personal growth of the students are themes emerged in the lens of the PSTs' internship experiences. These findings resonate with broader literature on **positive education,** where fostering both academic skills and personal development leads to long-term success and well-being (Arenas, et al., 2025). Students expressed strong aspirations for higher education, showing that schooling is

not just about short-term engagement but linked to **long-term goals and professional identity formation**. Their enthusiasm to attend classes, even beyond regular schedules demonstrates **future-oriented motivation**. This highlights how education can spark **life goals and visions of success**, reinforcing resilience and persistence despite potential challenges. One PST said:

"They became excited to attend classes even in my afternoon class and promised me to finish a degree and even invited me to their college graduation. I just smiled at them."

According to **Eccles & Wigfield's (2020) expectancy-value theory**, students' academic engagement is strengthened when they perceive schooling as instrumental to future goals such as college and careers. **Self-efficacy and future aspirations** drive students to sustain effort and overcome barriers in education. Future educational aspirations significantly predict persistence and engagement among Filipino students, especially in disadvantaged contexts. Through these combined efforts, PSTs play a vital role in shaping students' aspirations and guiding them toward their future careers. Hence, Teacher preparation programs that emphasize culturally responsive pedagogy are essential in contexts with a history of violence, as they encourage educators to understand and address the unique challenges faced by diverse communities (Machali & Rosyadi, 2022).

Improved punctuality reflects students' growing **sense of responsibility, time management, and commitment to learning**. Attending school after dawn prayer suggests integration of **cultural/religious routines** with academic responsibility, strengthening both discipline and purpose. Regular attendance paired with active participation further indicates not just physical presence but **genuine engagement** with learning. Consistent school attendance is a key behavioral indicator of engagement. In a Philippine setting, religious practices help reinforce punctuality and academic discipline among students in Mindanao. This is supported by one PST saying:

"Students attend school regularly and they love participating in the discussion. I think it is just giving time to understand them that they understand the value of finishing school."

The consistency of students' willingness to speak in English in different lens of this study shows emerging **self-confidence and communicative development**. Participation in discussions demonstrates not just language development but also **overcoming anxiety and self-doubt which is** a critical element of personal growth of the students. This reflects a shift from passive learning to **active engagement and expression**, which are crucial for academic and social success. Ushioda, & Dörnyei (2021) emphasizes that language learning motivation is strongly linked to confidence and willingness to communicate. A local study by **Llanes & Villanueva (2020)** found that Filipino students' confidence in speaking English improves with supportive classroom environments that encourage participation without fear of ridicule. One PST brought out:

"Students participated in class discussion, and they are trying to speak English. I don't encourage mockery in the class. Sometimes, students laughed at their classmates when they speak English. There is always good in trying."

Result of the study implies that teachers play a significant role in shaping students' mindset about education, which is vital for promoting peaceful communities. On the other hand, the results of the study of Arenas et al. (2024) imply that positive education intervention assists the peaceful learning of students and enhances their academic performance, other than the self-development and life satisfaction. Although the idea of the PSTs on peace education as well as their understanding of their value in instilling a good mindset to the students often seemed limited, especially in relation to their competence in developing a lesson that can help a flourishing society (Deveci et al., 2008), it can't be denied that they have brought significant influence to the belief and attitude of students toward schooling, its advantages, and how it will change their future.

IMPLICATION

The internship significantly improved the level of depression, anxiety and stress of students. In the lens of the students, the internship positively influenced their mindset on personal development, fostering changes in their punctuality, motivation, confidence, and their overall behavior. In the lens of the parents, they have seen their students' progress in attitudes, behaviors, and skills where internship reflected how the experience nurtured not only academic habits but also socio-emotional development of their students. In the lens of the PSTs, the internship resonated on **positive education**, where fostering the academic skills and personal development of students leads to their long-term success and well-being. Although the idea of the PSTs on peace education as well as their understanding of their value in instilling a good mindset to the students often seemed limited, especially in relation to their competence in developing a lesson that can help a flourishing society, it can't be denied that they have brought significant influence to the belief and attitude of students toward schooling.

The deployment of pre-service teachers in North Cotabato, Philippines highlights the positive influence in the mindset and mental health of these students in this MNLF community of SGA once marked by frequent conflict. The internship and the presence of PSTs in this community influenced students' interest in education, giving credit to the training that these PSTs have during their entire studies also. It is essential to recognize that the assignment

of PSTs is only a temporary solution to the shortage of teacher in this MNLF community. Once they fulfil their required hours for teaching internships, these PSTs must leave, resulting in the school facing another shortage of qualified educators. This temporary measure exposes a major flaw in the educational system of the region, as the continuous absence of permanent teachers hinders sustainable progress. A more sustainable approach to education in the Bangsamoro region entails adopting long-term strategies that ensure a stable teaching presence within the community.

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