



Community-Based Alternative Internship Programme in Pre-Service Teacher Education Programme of Odisha at Elementary Stage — A Case Study

Dhanya Krishnan

Abstract

Bridging the learning gap during school closure due to Covid pandemic was a challenge. Even after intense effort of states, access to digital modes of delivery of content was an issue to many students. Similarly, student teachers undergoing teacher preparation programme had difficulty in undergoing internship programme due to school closure. In this context, the state of Odisha had initiated an Alternative Internship Programme (AIP) for D.El.Ed students of pre-service teacher education institutes with the support of UNICEF. During AIP, classes were held by student teachers focusing on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy at home premise of students under Covid restrictions. Activities were organised also for socio-emotional development of children. Student-teachers studying in teacher education institutes across states were given opportunity to undertake their internship activities in their own villages with support from their immediate community. As the initiative was very unique, it was found interesting to examine the programme with respect to its objectives, methodology and governance by undertaking a case study. Another objective of the study was to study the perception and experience of different stakeholders associated with AIP. Khordha district of Odisha was considered as the sample unit. Three Assistant Directors of SCERT, Odisha, two Principals of Teacher Education Institutes, 21 Teacher Educators and 106 student teachers from DIET, Khordha and ETEI, Tangi were participated in the study. As beneficiary of AIP programme, 10 parents and 14 children of Khordha and Tangi Block were also being considered for the study. Perception scale, semi-structured interview and FGD were employed for data collection. Percentage was used for analysing perception of student teachers and found that they have high positive perception about Alternative Internship Programme. Content analysis of responses of the stakeholders involved in the programme also indicated that AIP could be considered as an effective community based internship programme. The study also identified the challenges of implementing AIP and brought out suggestions for further improvement. The findings may be of help to understand community linkage model in imparting education especially in rural areas. At the same time, this provides insight to other teacher education institutes at different levels to organize community-based internship programmes to understand the grassroot level educational scenario and work towards solution centred teacher education programmes.

Keywords: Alternative Internship Programme, Teacher Education

1. Introduction

Considering rapid changes in the society, building responsible citizens possessing robust value system becomes priority for all nations. The requirement of producing skilled professionals are reflected in educational policies and commissions over the years, however, National Educational Policy 2020 has explicitly argued for the significance of bringing back glory of teachers who mould young generation with strong epistemic perspectives, high in values and with enormous potentials to transform society. In this milieu, teacher preparation emerges as one of the sustainable pre-conditions for bringing changes in schooling. No doubt, immense school experience would help student teachers to sharpen their skills and develop right attitude towards children's learning and this fact is supported by research findings establishing internship as an important process of teacher preparation. Chennat (2014) had done an analysis of experiential understanding of internship programme of India taking inputs from Canada and Finland and suggested for healthy partnership and collaborative dialogue between school and teacher education system. This indicates a need for having a partnership between community, school education and teacher education. In a meta review of researches conducted by Vijayan and Sharma (2019) found the benefit of internship in bridging the gap between conceptual knowledge and practical understanding. Thus internship is to be considered not only as the direct link between teacher education and school education but also as an opportunity to transform what student teachers had learnt in theory classes into realistic environment and do reflect on the process (Tindowen, Bangi & Paralley, 2019; Jogan, 2019; Jedemark, 2019).

2. Context of the Study and Rationale

The Covid 19 pandemic has profoundly made

uncompromised impact in educational field. India, being a country with diversity in terms of socio-economical background, culture, language etc suffered to a larger extent due to school closure during the pandemic period. Government and educational institutes tried its best to provide good quality education through online mode. However, there were millions of children who were deprived of education as they couldn't afford to bear the cost of digital devices or they had to face network issues in their remote places and so digital learning experiences was not fruitful for them. Parents, who by themselves were not educated, found no way to facilitate learning at home as well. Therefore it's almost 'no learning' for many. The children have lost the foundational skills such as reading with comprehension and performing mathematical operations which they have learnt earlier. As envisaged in NEP 2020, quality foundational literacy and numeracy was the priority and unfortunately school closure impacted country's efforts towards it. OECD (2020) identified that "because learning loss will lead to skill loss, and the skills people have relate to their productivity, gross domestic product (GDP) could be 1.5 per cent lower on average for the remainder of the century". The impact is not on learning as well, rather the number of students' chance of dropping out of school especially in low income countries are multi-fold (UNESCO, 2020). A case study was conducted by UNESCO (2021) to assess and estimate the various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector in India and in its report it is mentioned that "children studying in government schools were hit particularly hard, with more than 80 per cent of government school students in Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh not receiving any educational materials during the lockdown". UNESCO (2021) pointed that the number of children unable to read and understand a simple age appropriate text would increase 9.4 per cent points and recommended that unless

countries quickly act, school closure could set back the learning and future prospects of learners. The report also mentioned that “around 32 crore learners are affected in India, of which 15.8 crore are female and 16.2 crore are male students. The bulk of these students are enrolled in primary and secondary schools (86%), followed by tertiary (10%) and pre-primary (4%) level of education”. The study conducted by Azim Premji University among 16067 students in 1137 schools in 44 districts across 5 states also found that 92 per cent of children have lost at least one specific language ability and 82 per cent have lost at least one specific mathematics ability from the previous years across Classes II-VI because of school closure. When we identify the factors contributing to it, there are studies, such as, conducted by Engzel, Frey and Verhezon (2021) which says losses are upto 60 per cent higher among students from less educated homes confirming uneven toll of pandemic on children and family. World Bank report (2021) also observed increase in inequality where certain demographics of students experienced more significant loss than others. The above mentioned studies indicated that there were huge level of learning loss during school closure and also pointed that there were differences in learning loss with respect to demographic variables.

Situation was not different for teacher education as well. Lockdown and subsequent closure of institutes didn't leave any other option than adopting online learning. Though theoretical papers were discussed through online method, internship — the most important component of the programme was a challenge. Soy (2021) conducted a study on impact of Covid 19 on Internship programme of BEd students and explored the problems faced by them due to unavailability of internship programme. 97 per cent of the teachers agreed that their internship programme was badly affected because of which student teachers could not

feel competent to be professional teachers.

In this context, SCERT, Odisha under Department of School & Mass Education, Government of Odisha had planned for an alternative way to reach digitally deprived children by reaching them through student teachers at elementary level so that the learning gap could be minimised at the same time, student teachers get hands on opportunity to develop themselves as teacher professionals. Hence, Directorate of Teacher Education and SCERT in collaboration with UNICEF had initiated an Alternative Internship Programme in 30 DIETs, 04 BITEs, 34 ETEIs of the state. The student-teachers of the DIETs/BIETs and ETEIs were instructed to do their internship in their own village community to facilitate education of the children who have no scope to access digital learning facilities. Student teachers taught school students at elementary level focusing on FLN and activities were organized for socio-emotional development of children along with curricular areas. Around 10000 (Ten Thousand) student-teachers were given an opportunity to complete their internship programme in their community by teaching around 1 lakh students of the state across 30 districts. 400 teacher educators were involved to mentor the alternative approach of doing internship. As this initiative was very unique, it is found exciting to understand the programme by adopting a case study. This study finding may be of help to appreciate the unique community linkage model in imparting education especially in rural areas. At the same time, this may provide insight to other teacher education institutes at different levels to organize community based internship programmes to link the grass root level educational scenario and work towards solution centred teacher education programmes.

3. Objectives of the Research

- To study the Alternative Internship (AIP) Programme in D.El.Ed programme of

Odisha with respect to its objectives, activities and management

- To study the perception and experience of student teachers of D.El.Ed programme towards AIP
- To examine attitude of parents of children who were taught through AIP towards AIP during school closure

4. Research Questions

- How the AIP was planned and executed in alignment with its objectives?
- Are the student teachers adopted the programme with interest and enthusiasm?
- How was the support provided by functionaries, teacher education institutes and community for organizing AIP?
- Are the children of the community benefitted through the programme?

5. Research Design

A case study method has been used to provide a better understanding of the research problem. Alternative Internship Programme of D.El.Ed programme has been considered as a 'case' in the study.

6. Sample

Since the research was of case study, only one district of Odisha, Khordha was considered as the sample unit. Three SCERT functionaries of Odisha, Principals, Teacher Educators and student teachers of DIET, Khordha and ETEI, Tangi were involved in the study. As beneficiary of AIP programme, parents and school children of Khordha and Tangi Block who were involved in AIP programme were also considered for the study. Details of sample selected are given below in the table.

Table 1: Details of Sample

Block	Name of the Institutes	No of Participants		Parents	School Children
		Teacher educators	Pupil teachers		
Khordha	DIET, Khordha	17	55	3	3
Tangi	ETEI, Tangi	4	51	7	11
Total		21	106	10	14

7. Tools

The following tools were developed for the study. The items prepared based on the dimensions such as conception of the idea of AIP, preparation for the programme, processes adopted, activities planned, involvement and collaboration with other Institutes/CRCCs/Agency Community/Education Functionaries, Monitoring Mechanisms, Expectation from the programme, Assessment strategies planned, Scope for Improvement, Support System, Strengths, Concerns and Challenges, Scope for modification were reviewed and

content validated by experts including DIET Principals, teacher educators, SCERT functionaries and experts in the area of teacher education in a workshop mode. The tools used were:

- Perception Scale for student teachers
- Interview with SCERT functionaries, Principals and FGD with teacher educators for eliciting views, experience and challenges of implementing AIP
- Interview schedule for parents and children for seeking the views of parents and children about their experience in Alternative Internship Programme

8. Analysis of Data

Data collected using various tools and techniques was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Document analysis along with content analysis was also done to examine the alignment of the objectives of AIP with its execution as discussed below.

8.1. Objectives of AIP

- To provide an alternative learning opportunity to both student teachers as well as school children during pandemic
- To equip school children with basic numeracy and literacy for enabling them to cope up with physical classes
- To give awareness to community about importance of education and their role in it
- To develop competencies of student teachers to teach children and organize activities for socio-emotional development of children
- To nurture knowledge, skills and values of student teachers to become socially responsible pedagogue

8.2 Key Aspects of AIP

- The focus of the AIP was development of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.
- The three main component of AIP were –curricular, co-curricular and socio emotional aspects.
- Student teachers of the elementary teacher training institutes across the state had taught in their own villages. It was planned as a symbiotic relationship between pre-service teachers and students/parents/ community members.
- AIP intended student-teachers to acquire variety of skills i.e., skill of managing a centre, skills of multi-grade class management, ensuring community involvement and mobilization, etc.
- Community-based internship programme of teacher education institutes with

the collaboration among various stake holders such as educational administrators, faculty members, parents and community

- Student-teachers were supported, monitored and mentored by the TEI faculties on daily basis to improve their practicum skills, record maintenance, etc., in both physical and virtual mode in a blended format
- Collaboration with Institutes/Agency— District Education Offices were requested to monitor the AIP centres, Functionaries such as BEOs, BRPs and CRPs supported the student-teachers in solving local issues faced by the student-teachers in identifying space for AIP, in ensuring support of the parents in running the programme, etc. UNICEF collaborated in providing funds for the programme. Every student-teacher was provided with Rs 700 to purchase safety kits and learning kits (including data pack).
- Monitoring-Google forms were used to get information on attendance of students in the DIETs, ETEIs and BITEs, Weekly review meetings of the Head of the TEIs, Regular visit of the faculty members to the centre, use of technology in documenting the work of student teachers

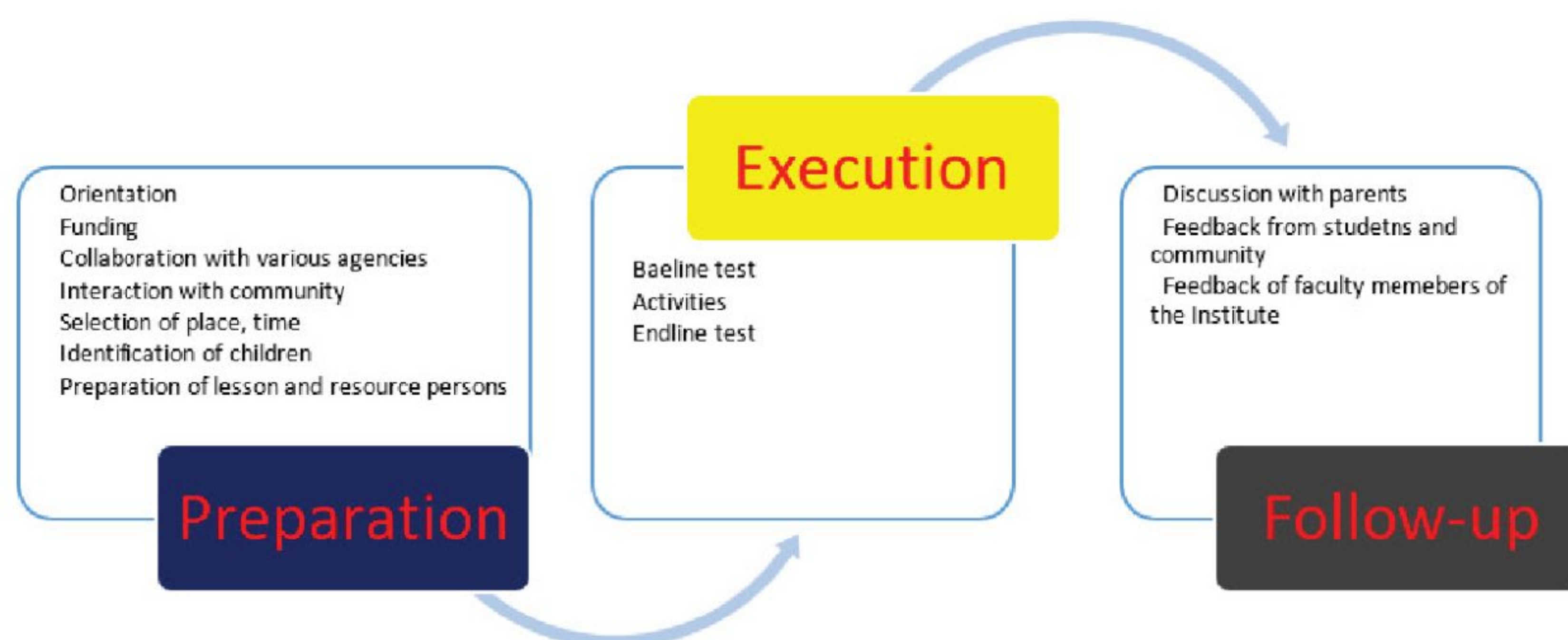
8.3 Phases of AIP

8.3.1 Preparation Stage

- A detailed guideline of the programme (duration, programme structure, implementation, financial support, mentoring, etc.) was developed by SCERT and finalized with the approval of the Department of School and Mass Education, Government of Odisha.
- Small group consultation was organized by SCERT with the teacher education institutes for smooth implantation of the programme.
- TEI faculty members were trained by SCERT, through virtual mode, on

implementation strategies, competencies to be covered in the AIP, how to mentor/provide support to student-teachers, analysis of both base line and end line assessment, etc.

- Student teachers were oriented online about the rationale of the programme, objectives, key aspects and their role in Alternative Internship Programme by their respective institutes.
- A letter/instruction was issued by SCERT to all BEOs/CRCCs of the state to monitor the programme and provide assistance to the student-teachers.
- Funding was ensured with the collaboration of UNICEF
- SCERT also supplied base line and end line question papers to the TELs
- Preparation of database of students of village/ locality of student teachers for AIP i.e name, grade, name of village/area, cluster, block, district, gender, caste, etc.
- Identification of minimum 10 students at Elementary Stage by interacting with community members, CRCs or Head mater of the schools of the village
- Consent from parents through one to one discussion
- Planning of lessons and activities
- Preparation of grade specific local and digital resources



8.3.2 Execution

AIP started in all over Odisha on 15th July 2021 and continued till 18 September 2021. By following strict Covid protocol, execution started with administration of baseline test prepared by SCERT, Odisha. Students were oriented about the AIP programme and rapport building activities were conducted. Student teachers conducted teaching learning activities maximum 120 minutes per day following Covid protocols. Under curricular activities, importance was given to the following elements of FLN.

- Socio-emotional learning— drama, song, drawing, storytelling, Quiz, Yoga, games,

clay modelling, origami, preparation of greetings and art activities, role play, positive self-talk, positive health habits, etc.

- Literacy activities: Language competencies with focus on reading comprehension and writing with understanding.
- Numeracy activities: Number counting, place value, Four fundamental operations and their application in daily life.
- COVID Protocol behaviours: safe distancing, physical distancing, use of mask, frequent hand washing, etc.

As per instruction given, each student teacher had to maintain a lesson diary and some

of the student teachers uploaded the same using Padlet for further collaboration and reflection. Use of innovative approaches and grade specific textbooks, worksheet, story books, self-learning materials developed by UNICEF and digital resources were also suggested to student teachers to make the teaching learning joyful and meaningful. Regular visits of faculty members to the AIP centre were planned with the objectives of providing timely support to student teachers and initiating interaction with community members to sensitize them about the objectives of the programme and extend their support. After conducting the activities, a term line test was also administered and the analysis of data helped them to identify the effect of AIP on achieving FLN of students.

8.3.4 Follow-up Stage

During the follow-up stage, discussion was carried out by the student teachers and faculty members to understand the feedback from the students and their family members. At the same time, state administrators had interacted with the teacher education institutes to understand the innovations, challenges and concerns.

8.4 Perception and Experience of Student Teachers on AIP

The data collected by administering perception scale for the student teachers was analysed using percentage and the table is provided below.

Table 2: Perception of Student Teachers on AIP

S.No.	Items	Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)
1.	Orientation on different activities of AIP helped me to understand my role and responsibilities during AIP	98.11	0	1.89
2.	Objectives and expectations from AIP were clear to me	91.50	7.55	0.95
3.	I was able to prepare lesson plans for AIP	91.50	2.84	5.66
4.	Records of different activities were maintained by me	99.05	0	0.95
5.	Maintaining reflective diary/notes helped me to revise and improve my practice during AIP	95.29	2.84	1.87
6.	AIP helped in motivating students for learning	99.05	0	0.95
7.	My skills in organizing learning experiences using appropriate pedagogical strategies were developed due to AIP	83.96	13.00	3.77
8.	My capability in selecting and executing pedagogical methods as per the situation/context were developed by AIP	77.35	12.26	10.37
9.	My capacity to plan, organize and guide other curricular activities were developed by AIP	95.28	3.77	0.94
10.	I could relate teaching-learning practices with respect to the needs and conditions of the student teachers and the community	80.18	13.20	6.60

11.	AIP helped me in applying theoretical knowledge into practice	90.56	4.71	4.71
12.	I was confident in handling multi-grade teaching during AIP	75.47	13.20	11.32
13.	AIP was an opportunity to establish rapport with community	77.35	14.15	8.49
14.	I found teaching in my own village interesting and motivating	97.16	0.94	1.88
15.	AIP helped in boosting foundation skills in numeracy and literacy of school children who attended the programme	90.56	7.54	1.88
16.	Students enjoyed responding to Baseline test and Term test of AIP	93.39	3.77	2.83
17.	Baseline test conducted helped me to understand the learning needs of children	98.11	0.94	0.94
18.	I enjoyed preparing TLMs for AIP	91.50	2.83	5.66
19.	Feedback from teacher educators/ mentors helped me to improve my teaching-learning processes during AIP	86.79	5.66	7.54
20.	Class duration of two hours per day was sufficient to carry out the activities of AIP	39.62	10.37	50
21.	Peer interaction among school students during AIP helped in improving their learning	92.45	3.77	3.77
22.	Discussion among my classmates (student teachers) helped in reflecting and improving my performance in AIP	84.90	4.71	10.37
23.	AIP helped in sensitizing students and community member towards education	74.52	20.75	4.71
24.	AIP helped me in realizing social responsibilities of a teacher	98.11	0.94	0.94
25.	AIP helped me for my professional development	93.39	6.60	0

98 per cent student teachers have opined that orientation on different activities of AIP helped them to understand their role and responsibilities as teachers. 91 per cent student teachers have opined that they were very much clear about the objectives and expectations from AIP, but 8 per cent student teachers were undecided or disagreed. As most of the student teachers were clear about the objectives and expectations from AIP, so it is expected that the student teachers have

performed their role effectively as they were very clear about the objectives so also what is expected from them.

During AIP, curricular, co-curricular, socio-emotional activities, baseline and endline tests were conducted and it was instructed to record those activities. 99 per cent student teachers have recorded different activities. Reflection note is a very useful document for self-improvement. Around 95

per cent student teachers have maintained the reflection note and they also felt that this exercise helped them to improve their classroom practices. During mentoring process with teacher educators, they shared their lesson plans and reflection notes. Feedback on these documents helped them to think and design the lesson plans in more effective manner.

This can be noted that the student teachers' capacity on developing lesson plans, reflection notes have been built up through this process. As the student teachers have opined that the reflection notes helped them to improve the classroom practices, so certainly the quality of teaching learning process have improved with the progression of time. 99 per cent student teachers felt that through AIP, they could motivate students towards learning. As AIP happened during school closure period and different kinds of child friendly activities were conducted, the students were naturally motivated to learn. 84 per cent student teachers felt that their skills have improved whereas 77 per cent student teachers have opined that their capacity in selecting and executing pedagogical method as per situation has been improved. 12 per cent student teachers have not responded. Through AIP, the student teachers were able to design learning experiences using different strategies, through which student teachers' skill were enhanced. They have learnt different pedagogical approaches in theory papers, AIP has given them an opportunity to apply those skills in the real classroom practices. 95 per cent student teachers expressed that their capacity on planning and organizing other curricular activities had been improved.

80 per cent student teachers could relate their classroom practices with the needs of the students and community though 90 per cent student teachers felt that AIP helped them in applying theoretical knowledge into practice. 75 per cent student teachers have opined that during AIP they were confident in handling multi-grade situation but 12 per cent student teachers were not agree with this

and 13 per cent student teachers have not responded to this item. 77 per cent student teachers felt that AIP gave an opportunity to establish rapport with the community. As AIP was conducted in the community, so student teachers have got ample scope to interact with community members in identifying the students, selecting the venue for teaching learning etc. Student teachers felt that teaching in their own village was interesting and motivating too. As they taught their own community children, so they were very happy and felt motivated to make them learn and enjoy. 90 per cent student teachers felt that through this programme, they have developed the skills of FLN among the children, which is a very positive sign. 93 per cent student teachers felt that children enjoyed while responding to baseline and endline test. The instruction was given to the student teachers to conduct the test in a joyful environment to know the exact learning levels of the children. 98 per cent student teachers responded that baseline test helped them to understand the learning needs of the children. 91 per cent student teachers responded that they enjoyed preparing TLMs.

87 per cent student teachers felt that feedback from teacher educators helped them to improve the teaching learning process. The teacher educators had constantly monitored the activities, gave feedback on improvement in lesson plans/ notes of the student teachers, conduct of varieties of activities. This feedback and mentoring mechanism helped the student teachers to design different types of activities during teaching learning process and build their capacity in doing such kind of activities.

As per the guidelines provided by SCERT, the duration of AIP programme was two hours per day. 50 per cent of the student teachers felt that two hours per day was not sufficient for carrying out the activities. The AIP programme was based on the principles of multi-grade and multilevel. Students from Grades 2 to 5 (mostly) were engaged in the teaching learning process. So, keeping the

learning level of each child, and focusing on attainment of learning outcomes, two hours' time was insufficient as per student teachers. 92 per cent student teachers felt that peer interaction among school children helped in improving their learning. During AIP, the children of same class and children of two different classes were also interacted among themselves, which helped them to learn more and ultimately improved their learning level. 85 per cent student teachers felt that interaction among themselves also helped them in reflecting upon the classroom practices. The student teachers discussed about the lesson plan, classroom management, teaching learning materials etc., which helped them to design better activities.

75 per cent student teachers felt that AIP helped them in sensitizing community. The student teachers motivated the community members about the learning loss of the children and importance of education. 98 per cent student teachers have opined that AIP helped them in realizing the social responsibilities as teacher. 93 per cent student teachers felt that AIP helped them in professional development. Through this Alternative Internship Programme, the student teachers' capacity on developing lesson plans, designing activities, teaching the children, preparation of TLMs, conducting varieties of activities, interacting with community members has been enhanced.

This is evident that AIP not only build the capacity of prospective teachers in different domains but also increase the learning level of the children during this pandemic programme. It helped the socially and economically disadvantaged children to recover the learning loss and motivate them towards learning. Conduct of other curricular activities helped the children to nurture their creativity. The rapport between the student teachers and the community members was established and a sense of fulfilment and joy was experienced by the student teachers.

8.5 Content Analysis of the qualitative data on perception of student teachers

The responses of student teachers, teacher educators and educational functionaries were analysed qualitatively and the responses are discussed under various themes such as Opportunities to develop as teacher, activities conducted, support mechanism, concerns and challenges and suggestions for improvement.

8.5.1 Opportunities to Develop as Teacher

The student teachers viewed that they pursue the course to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge about content-based pedagogy. In this connection, alternative internship program provided them opportunities to practice the skills of teaching learning and specifically in the multi-grade situation. During the program, the student teachers had facilitated learning of children belonging to different socio-economic background and of varied age and cognitive level. Though it was challenging, this helped them to understand uniqueness of each child and design individual plan on the basis of their learning needs. The experience of organizing curricular and other curricular activities along with socio-emotional activities helped them to understand the holistic approach in teaching learning process. They got the opportunity to use and experiment different methodologies by using various teaching learning materials during the process. Mostly self-made low cost or no cost materials were used and also identified the use of local as well as digital resources. The exposure to different aspects of teaching profession i.e. how to assess learning progress; how to manage classroom activities; how to manage student behaviour and how to involve parents as well as community in the learning process, etc., were intended to develop them as professionals. Student teachers also opined that it motivated them to become a

good teacher by understanding their role and responsibility not only for children but also school as well as society.

8.5.2 Organization of Activities

The Alternative Internship Program was focused on holistic approach in teaching learning process. It covered curricular, other curricular and socio-emotional aspects of teaching learning process. The student teachers viewed that they had conducted variety of activities with children for their holistic development. They adopted play-based approach in curricular area to motivate the children towards learning in joyful environment. They mostly designed activities by using locally games for numeracy. Puzzles, riddles, abacus, number cards, daily life situation-based problems were given to solve which helped to develop problem solving skills among the children. Children loved to talk informally with their peers, listen story, poem, song and perform role play. So these participatory activities helped the children to learn different skills of language. Local resources like stones, sticks, sand, water, leaf, flowers, hand-made toys, household things, etc., were used for learning different concepts and that also helped to connect the children to their immediate environment. Yoga, exercise, art and craft, drawing, painting, greeting/invitation card preparation, collage, poster making, dancing, etc., were conducted to develop socio emotional skills of the children. National days were celebrated to understand their role and responsibility towards the society. Additionally, the baseline and end-line administered helped them to assess the learning progress and effectiveness of the activities.

8.5.3 Support Mechanism

The student teachers viewed that the program conducted during the pandemic situation at the village was very important in the context of understanding community as a resource for learning. After an initial glitch, parents were convinced about the objectives of the

program and agreed to send their children to the centre for learning. The school teachers and CRCCs helped the student teachers to identify the children in their local area. The community members had extended their support and provided open space like “Kothghara”, “Bhagabattungi”, temple place, community center or their own house for conducting the program in safe and clean environment by following COVID guideline. The DIET faculty members had created Whatsapp group to mentor each student teacher. They continuously discussed on planning, transaction, approaches, use of TLMs, managing multi-grade situations, process-based assessment and involvement of parents in learning activities. Supporting materials, academic information, sample activities, assessment questions were shared through Whatsapp group and daily learning activities were noted and also filled using apps/software such as, Padlet. Videos and photographs of daily activities were also shared as evidence and for documentation of the work. The DIET faculty members also visited the centres at least twice in a month to observe the activities physically and provided onsite support. The CRCCs and Head Masters also visited the centre physically to provide onsite support. This also motivated student teachers and built up their confidence level to conduct activities.

8.5.4 Concerns and Challenges

- In the initial point of time student teachers had faced some of the issues related to attendance of students with reference to keeping children safe as parents were afraid to send their children to AIP centre during pandemic period.
- Identifying AIP center with ample space was difficult.
- Some of the children didn't have basic understanding of concepts, so teaching them was also difficulty in a multi-grade situation.
- One of the concerns was that of social equity. Some of the parents didn't want to send their children, if house of any person belonging to lower caste was the

AIP centre. Some parents belonging to lower caste were reluctant and scared to send their children to house of student teacher if she/he belongs to upper class. Significance of the concept of 'school' as a space for 'equitable learning' has been reiterated.

- Funding was also one of the major challenges of AIP. Rs 700 provided by UNICEF was not sufficient for pupil teachers to arrange teaching-learning materials.
- Visiting AIP centers due to pandemic situation was an issue for teacher educators to provide feedback through onsite monitoring.

8.5.5 Suggestions for Improvement

The learning environment plays vital role in the learning process so appropriate space is a prerequisite to conduct the activities effectively. The community hall in every village must be equipped to conduct these kinds of activities with children. Onsite support/ mentoring of the student-teachers by the school teachers and CRCCs to be made more structured. Monitoring the activities of each student-teacher could be systematically planned and through suitable indicators. Team teaching should be practiced for its effective implementation. TLM prepared and collected must be displayed in the resource room for further use by the children for learning. TLM from school also could be procured. Opportunities must be given for practicing skills of teaching in mono-grade situation also. Handbook may be developed to be used as reference material for conducting variety of activities. The time duration may be enhanced to ensure holistic development. There is need to develop link between different institutions and community for proper implementation of the program. Hence, collaboration of different ministries in this regard could be encouraged. Support from regular teachers from the schools also to be sought for daily monitoring of the activities. Involvement and mentoring of the local school teacher

may be useful in supporting the prospective teachers.

8.6 Perception of Parents and Children towards AIP

Interview was conducted with children and their parents from Mukunda Prasad village and Ghasisahi village from Khordha and Sundarpur, Tangi for understanding their perception about AIP. Children expressed that they had enjoyed learning through AIP. They learnt subjects and other curricular skills. The parents expressed that since school was closed and students were always at home, they were just watching TV or playing inside home. They said that though sometimes online classes were happening, but children were not interested in that also. So it was a tough time for them thinking about their children's education. In that context, parents felt happy that their children were provided with learning opportunities at AIP centre. One of the parents of a child said that *"When the girl came and said about classes, felt happy as 'something the child would learn' and that too without any fees and I was not scared as the teacher is from our own village"*. They also expressed that children were also very happy as they could meet their friends. One said that *"My child was happy that could meet friends, sing together, dance and do other activities"*. They valued the AIP teachers as sincere and expressed their comfort of sending children to AIP centre as the student teachers belong to their own village. They expressed that children were engaged for more than two-three hours, though the schedule planned was only for two hours. One of the mothers said that they had provided space to conduct the classes. They all expressed that AIP activities should have been continued till the school reopens. They also suggested that if regular teachers also teach in similar way with song, dance, drama, through games etc, students would feel interested to go to school.

9. Findings

Majority of the student teachers expressed that their skills and professional competencies have been improved. Through AIP, the student teachers were able to design learning experiences using different strategies and their capacity on planning and organizing other curricular activities have also been improved. The student teachers have also learnt different strategies for addressing multi-grade classroom concerns. Not all, but majority of student teachers felt that AIP gave an opportunity to establish rapport with the community as they have got ample scope to interact with community. The feedback and mentoring mechanism helped the student teachers to design different types of activities during teaching learning process and build their capacity in doing such kind of activities. It is found that student teachers could sensitize students and community towards education and through this process they realized the social responsibilities of teachers. They expressed that AIP helped them in professional development. Through this programme, the student teachers' capacity of developing lesson plans, designing activities, teaching the children, preparation of TLMs, conducting varieties of activities, interacting with community members has been enhanced.

The collaborative approach which was followed involving SCERT, Teacher Education Institutes, teacher educators and student teachers and the community members suggests a model for a community based teacher education programme.

During school closure, AIP was an opportunity for children especially from disadvantaged sections to deal with the learning loss happened. The Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) skills of students are improved through AIP programme.

Major challenges were finding the right place as AIP centre and convincing parents about sending their children to the programme during Covid 19 pandemic period. However all parents who were contacted expressed

their happiness of sending their children to AIP. Involving regular school teachers in the programme and upgrading financial assistance to the student teachers were the major suggestions for improvement of the programme.

10. Educational Implications

Findings of the research suggests for relevance of a unique community linkage model for internship of student teachers who can be nurtured as professionally committed future teachers. This programme could be an alternative for providing educational experience to students especially who are deprived from mainstream educational experiences. Not only during pandemic time, this has implied the need for thinking an alternative way of schooling especially in natural disaster prone states like Odisha. Village level volunteers, with the support and guidance of the local teachers/ CRCCs can take initiatives for continuation of learning of the students. This also provides input for how community resources could be utilized for imparting education. The findings also suggest that collaboration among different stake holders and their active involvement is highly essential for success of such programmes.

11. Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to one DIET and one ETEI of the state of Odisha. Student teachers who are in 2nd year were considered for the study as they had done AIP in their first year. It was difficult to trace the pass-out batch of student teachers for examining their perspectives about AIP, and so they were not considered for the study.

12. Conclusion

Alternative Internship Programme is an innovative way of connecting teacher education institutes to schools. Especially in the context of covid pandemic, this programme

was a solace especially to digitally deprived students to continue their education. At the same time, it gave ample opportunity for student teachers to grow professionally. This also gave them a reflective space for realizing their responsibilities as teachers in future. Elements of AIP could be considered as a novel model for internship of teacher education institutes with community connects. Also, effort of the state could be appreciated for managing the programme in collaboration with different stakeholders. There is scope for improvement of the programme in terms of duration, place of conducting AIP, better

involvement of schools in the programme etc, however AIP surely stands special in the history of teacher education as a unique way of bringing teacher education institutes close to community and as an excellent model for nurturing future teachers of the country.

Acknowledgement

The study is funded by NCERT under small research scheme and I acknowledge the support of SCERT, Odisha for providing the relevant documents and extending support during the study.

Reference

- Azim Premji University. 2021, February. Loss of learning during the pandemic. *APF Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://cdn.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/apuc3/media/publications/downloads/Learning-Loss-during-pandemicc.f1660288401.pdf>
- Chennat, S. 2014. Internship in pre-service teacher education programme: A global perspective, *International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences*, 2 (11), 79-94.
- Engzell, P., Frey A., & Verhagen, MD. 2021. Learning loss due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*, 27, 118(17). doi: 10.1073/pnas.2022376118.
- Jedemark, M. 2019. A scientific approach in the assessment of the school-based part of the teacher education programme in Sweden, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 51(3), 420-436, DOI: 10.1080/00220272.2019.1567820
- Jogan, S.N. 2019. Evaluating the effectiveness of a school internship. *International Journal for Social Studies*, 5(2), 227-235. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593865.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. 2020. National Education Policy. Government of India. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
- OECD. 2020. The Impact Of Covid-19 On Education Insights From Education At A Glance. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf>
- Soy, S.S. 2021. Impact of covid 19 on internship programme of B.Ed students, *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 9(6), 129-134. Retrieved from <https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2106846.pdf>
- Tindowen, D.J., Bangi, J., & Parallag, C.J. 2019. Pre-Service Teachers' Evaluation on their Student Internship Program. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 18(10), 279-291.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2006. Teachers and educational quality: monitoring global needs for 2015, Montreal: UNESCO. Retrieved from http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/teachers-and-educational-quality-monitoring-global-needs-for-2015-en_0.pdf
- UNESCO. 2021. Covid-19 learning Losses: Rebuilding Quality Learning for all in the Middle East and North Africa, Paris: UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/covid-19-learning-losses>
- Vijayan, K., & Sharma, P. 2019. School internship programme. An analytical review, *Journal of Indian Education*, 65 (3), 19-26.