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Pre-service Teachers' Reflections on Prior Experiences of Learning Social Studies

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Abstract. Reflection on prior learning experience is important for the professional development of pre-service teachers. Yet, little attention has been paid to how prior learning experiences influence pre-service teachers' instructional practices. The purpose of this study was to examine pre-service teachers' prior learning experiences of social studies and how they influence their instructional practices. This study involved a sample of 108 pre-service teachers in one teacher education institution in Oman. Qualitative data were gathered through online open-ended surveys and unstructured interviews. The findings indicated that pre-service teachers had been subject to a wide range of positive and negative experiences relating to their teachers, teaching and learning, and the subject. Given some issues in participants' statements on memorization, overloaded content, and limited outdoor activities, it appeared that textbook-centered instruction dominated social studies classrooms. The findings from the interviews revealed that prior learning experiences influenced pre-service teachers' instructional practices in three ways, encouraging them to: implement student-centered approaches, care about student engagement, and develop student interest in the subject. The study showed evidence that although participants associated their teachers with both positive and negative learning experiences, the teacher played a key role in shaping their prior learning experience and instructional practices.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers; prior experiences; reflections; social studies

1. Introduction

Research on teacher education has recognized the importance of prior learning experience. It has been argued that prior learning experience influences pre-service teachers' beliefs, views, and practices (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Martin, 2008). Pre-service teachers who enter teacher education programs possess a range of perceptions and beliefs about teaching and learning and in this context,

reflection is considered to be a key component in teacher education programs (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Nwati & Thuthukile, 2021). It is defined as “a deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement” (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 35). It involves pre-service teachers in thinking about the ways teachers teach, understanding how students learn, and considering ways to improve the quality of their teaching.

Research evidence suggests that prior learning experiences “can prompt insight into practices that promote deep learning, facilitate the integration of the personal and the professional dimensions of teaching and provide a starting point for the development of a vocabulary of critique and evaluation” (Dolan et al., 2014, p. 314). Through reflection, pre-service teachers can also draw on their prior experiences of cognitive and practical skills in ways that enable them to make decisions leading to change and development (Beka & Kulinxa, 2021).

Several researchers have investigated the prior experiences of pre-service teachers in relation to a wide range of school subjects, including mathematics (e.g., Latterell & Wilson, 2016; Lo, 2022) and English language teaching (Yüksel & Kavanoz, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2021). For example, Yüksel and Kavanoz (2015) highlighted the influence of experienced teachers on pre-service English language teachers’ beliefs about teaching. Lo (2020) indicated that pre-service teachers demonstrated a willingness to learn from their prior experiences of mathematics; they also realized the need to develop a better classroom environment for their students in the future.

In the context of social studies, or associated subjects such as history and geography, some researchers have recognized the need for more research on the nature of pre-service teachers’ prior experiences, perceptions, and experiences (Al-Nofli, 2022; Catling, 2017; Dolan et al., 2014; Harte & Reitano, 2015; Morley, 2012; Oppong, 2018; Yang & Chen, 2022). In terms of history teaching, it is considered to be an area of concern for pre-service teachers (Boadu, 2015; Guyver & Nichol, 2004). One reason for this is that many history teachers do not use appropriate teaching methods (Boadu, 2015). Virta (2002) noted that pre-service teachers become interested in history very early, and independently of formal education. The teaching methods adopted during early grades influence pre-service teachers’ attitudes toward the subject and the role of a teacher. Guyver and Nichol (2004) indicated that pre-service professional development for history teachers is a long-term and highly complex process that involves two main influences: prior learning experiences of history and their teacher education program. They concluded that trainee teachers who possess “a well-developed understanding” of history prior to joining teacher education are able to develop many features of teaching. Oppong (2018) highlighted the importance of constructivist teaching in teacher education for pre-service history teachers. He found that trainee teachers’ perceptions of history teaching changed from the transmission teaching model to constructive teaching as a result of participation in a teacher education course.

In geography, Martin (2008) highlighted the importance of formal geographical experiences at school as an influential factor on the development of a geographical knowledge base for trainee teachers. Dolan et al. (2014) found that positive prior

experiences of geography learning were centered on teacher characteristics and active learning approaches. On the other hand, negative experiences focused on the dominance of textbook-based instruction and memorization of content. Preston (2014) noted that trainee teachers had a limited view of geography, which was characterized mainly by general knowledge about the world and locations of features and places on Earth. One reason for this narrow view of geography was identified as being the common integration of geography into the general school subject Studies of Society and Environment.

With regard to social studies, Santoli (2009) analyzed the personal experiences of pre-service teachers pursuing social studies teaching careers. She indicated three influences: family or other important adults, teachers in K-12 education, and professors in post-secondary education. Additionally, the work of Crowe et al. (2012) examined pre-service teachers' memories of their social studies teachers. The findings from interviews demonstrated several approaches to social studies teaching, with teachers characterized as: information providers, expert teachers, character teachers, caring and committed teachers, and powerful teachers. Understanding such experiences helps teacher educators learn more about pre-service teachers' professional needs.

While the literature does address the prior learning experiences of pre-service teachers, research on how they influence pre-service teachers' instructional practices is scarce. Consequently, it is necessary to explore pre-service teachers' reflections on their own learning and practice to inform future practice. Adequate preparation influences how pre-service teachers view themselves as professional educators and the way they teach their students (Nwati & Thuthukile, 2021). Within the Omani context, there has been a growing move towards enhancing pre-service teacher education in recent years, particularly in the areas of teaching experience and practical skills (Al-Nofli, 2022; The Education Council, 2018). Teacher education programs are encouraged to foster reflective teaching practices among pre-service teachers (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2010; Saleh & Omar, 2022). The primary purpose of this study was to explore the prior learning experiences of pre-service social studies teachers. In particular, the following research questions guided the current study:

- What are the positive and negative experiences of pre-service social studies teachers as learners of social studies?
- How do prior social studies learning experiences influence the instructional practices of pre-service social studies teachers?

2. The Place of Social Studies in Omani Schools

The Omani education system is divided into basic education (Grades 1–10) and post-basic education (Grades 11–12). During the basic education years, social studies is taught from Grade 3 through 10 as an integrated subject, with a primary focus on geography, history, and citizenship. The social studies program for post-basic education is organized around two core subjects and four elective subjects. The core subjects include: This is My Homeland 1 & 2, focusing mainly on Omani society. The elective courses are Islamic Civilization (Grade 11), Economic Geography (Grade 11), the World around Me (Grade 12), and Geography and Modern Technologies (Grade 12) (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Over the last three decades, social studies and its associated subjects have undergone important improvements, including an increased focus on student-centered approaches and formative assessment (Ministry of Education, 2006; 2022). Other improvements include the adoption of geotechnologies through the use of, for example, geographical information systems (GIS), global positioning systems, and remote sensing, particularly in the geography curriculum for Grade 12 (Al-Nofli, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2018). Recent developments in the social studies curriculum for early grades include revisions of the learning outcomes, content, and teaching methods. The curriculum has been updated with a focus on four content strands: people, places, and environments; time, events, and change; identity, culture, and society; and production, distribution, and consumption (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Despite these improvements, there are still some challenges facing social studies teachers in schools. One of the challenges is related to limited instructional time for social studies across most grade levels (Ministry of Education, 2022). Additionally, social studies is not a popular school subject among Omani students (Al-Gharibi, 2008; Al-Kharousi, 2014). Al-Kharousi (2014) found that post-basic education students (Grades 11–12) viewed the subject as providing fewer career opportunities than other subjects (e.g., mathematics and science). Similarly, social studies teachers reported that social studies has a low status on the school curriculum compared to some subjects such as science, mathematics, and English (Al-Maamari et al., 2014). As shown in Table 1, there has been a decline in the number of 12th grade students opting for history and geography as elective subjects compared to other subjects such as fine arts, school sport, and music skills (Ministry of Education, 2019, 2020, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social studies teachers faced several challenges that affected the quality of their instruction, including poor Internet networks and difficulty in implementing assessments and hands-on activities (Al-Nofli, 2023).

Table 1: Number of Grade 12 students studying certain elective subjects

Subjects	Academic year		
	2018/2019 (N=40,337)	2019/2020 (N=41,026)	2020/2021 (N=44,337)
Geography	12,490	11,812	11,101
History	2,931	1,782	1,518
Fine Arts	21,328	23,256	24,587
Music skills	19,547	21,130	23,499
School Sport	33,219	34,150	36,785
Biology	13,243	13,173	13,555
Chemistry	16,994	17,114	18,524
Physics	16,727	16,541	17,416

3. Methodology

This study involved gathering qualitative data from pre-service social studies teachers using online open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews. It focused on pre-service teachers' school experiences as learners of social studies.

3.1 Participants

Two groups of pre-service teachers participated in this study. The first group consisted of 120 pre-service teachers in the field one program (primary education), which includes Islamic education, Arabic language, and social studies for Grades 1 through 4. Participants in this group were all female students as this area of specialty is limited to females. They were in their first and second years of the program. The second group consisted of eight pre-service teachers in the higher diploma program (a one-year course which is studied after a Bachelor's degree). They were specialized in social studies for Grades 5–12. They held a Bachelor of Arts degree prior to joining their teacher education program. A total of 128 pre-service teachers participated in this study. Of this sample, 108 pre-service teachers (84.4%) responded to an online survey about their prior learning experiences of social studies. For the interviews, four male pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the practicum were selected purposely to participate in interviews about the influence of prior learning experiences on their instructional practices during the practicum. All the participants had been exposed to social studies instruction from Grade 3 through 12 prior to joining their teacher education program.

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected using online surveys and semi-structured interviews following approval of the study by Sohar University. The online surveys focused on two open-ended questions to capture participants' prior learning experiences of social studies. Participants were asked to share their most positive and negative learning experiences as learners of social studies or associated subjects (e.g., geography and history) in school. The survey also included certain demographic questions about gender, year of study, and program. It was administered during the first semester of the 2021/2022 academic year. As noted above, semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' perceptions of the influence of their prior learning experiences of social studies on their instructional practices. Interviews are flexible data collection techniques and allow response comparisons (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Due to small number of pre-service social studies teachers in the practicum during the second semester of the 2021/2022 academic year, the interviews were conducted with only four participants. They taught social studies to Grades 5–10 in one public school. The interviews covered questions about classes that the participants taught during the practicum, positive and challenging aspects of their teaching, and the influence of past experiences of learning social studies on their instructional practice. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes and explored participants' experiences and perceptions in an open-ended manner. Participants were given freedom and flexibility to add comments and suggestions about their responses. They were interviewed in their hosting school after conducting their teaching classes.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis and interpretation of the data were undertaken in line with the indicative approach. The content analysis of online survey responses began with reading the responses to acquire an overview of participants' experiences and the quality of their responses. In general, participants' responses to the survey questions were brief and included more than one positive or negative experience.

The researchers organized the responses according to positive and negative experiences. They analyzed the responses in terms of similarities and differences to identify the main themes across the data. They held discussions to resolve any differences in the analysis of responses. Some actual examples from participants' responses were included to support the findings. For the interviews, the researchers transcribed each interview and highlighted important responses relevant to the interview questions. By reading each participant's responses, we identified themes that described the influence of prior learning experiences on participants' instructional practices. To ensure credibility of the responses, participants were invited to review what they had said in interview.

4. Findings

In this section, participants' responses to the open-ended surveys are presented in the section on prior experiences of learning social studies. Findings from the interviews are presented in the section on influences of prior experiences on instructional practices.

4.1 Prior Experiences of Learning Social Studies

The participants described a wide range of positive and negative learning experiences of social studies. Their responses were organized into three themes: social studies teachers, perceptions of social studies, and engagement in teaching and learning.

4.1.1. Social Studies Teachers

The majority of participants (50.9%) associated their positive experiences with their social studies teachers. They referred to teachers' professional practices that had positive impacts on their learning, including the ability to instruct effectively, integrate educational media and technology, and support student learning. Examples of instructional approaches given in students' responses were: concept mapping, lesson outlines, summarizing, explaining with the support of technology, hot seating, telling stories, and linking lessons to previous experiences. In a few instances, participants used certain terms to describe their teachers, for example: "competent", "active", "respecting of students", "positive", and "close to students". Below are typical examples of positive experiences:

The teacher used media and technologies to explain and clarify the lessons.
(Participant # 99)

The teacher used interesting methods to convey information to students, such as concept maps, and simplified the lesson using a map, thus making it easier for us to understand the entire content of the lesson. (Participant # 18)

There was a variety of explanation techniques used by the teacher and various teaching methods and interesting topics. The teacher dealt positively with the students and delivered information in a correct and interesting way. (Participant # 68)

Although participants valued certain teachers' qualities as having positive experiences of learning social studies, 26 participants (24.1%) associated their teachers with negative experiences. The negative experiences included the use of

traditional instruction, such as recitation, relying heavily on textbooks, boring presentation, and limited interaction with students. The following are typical examples of students' negative experiences related to teachers.

Negative experiences like the way the teacher explains lessons in a traditional way as in the Pharaohs lesson for the sixth grade. (Participant # 23)

In the social studies subject, I do not remember the exact year, the subject was boring because the method of delivering the lesson was only talking without doing any activity, and this thing really resulted in boredom and did not motivate and excite the student for the class. (Participant # 3)

4.1.2. Perceptions of Social Studies

The second theme related to participants' perceptions of certain aspects of social studies. Overall, students' statements included a holistic view offering insights into how students view the subject. Within this theme, 19 participants (17.6%) expressed positive perceptions of social studies. Examples of positive terms included descriptions of the interesting subject/topics (8.3%) and that it was a useful subject (3.7%). Some participants (4.6%) highlighted the importance of geography, particularly in Grade 12, which focuses on maps and GIS. In addition, other participants referenced specific topics such as earthquakes, volcanoes, world discoveries and developments, while others appeared to value topics related to Oman, world history, and cultures. The following are typical examples of students' positive experiences.

I had many positive experiences while studying social studies subjects in school, including the interesting topics included in the curriculum and their connection to life, as well as my teacher's use of attractive educational media. (Participant # 2)

I benefited from simplifying the lessons through PowerPoint. Among the interesting topics that I studied in the social studies curriculum was the study of earthquakes and volcanoes in 6th grade, and the study of maps in Geography and Modern Technologies in 12th grade (Participant # 23).

While the comments above indicate some positive experiences, there were negative experiences of social studies expressed by participants too (42.6%). It is worth noting that the negative experiences outnumbered the positive experiences in participants' statements. Twenty-six participants (24%) associated their negative experiences with overloaded social studies textbooks (e.g., in terms of facts and dates). Some participants described social studies as boring (6.5%), difficult (2.8%), and an unimportant subject (2.8%). Other participants commented on the content, including irrelevant topics on the social studies curriculum (3.7%).

The amount of content is large with a lot of memorization (This my Home Country – Grade 12). (Participant # 39)

The history subject was full of information and contained a large amount of dates, and the student must memorize them in an orderly manner. (Participant # 44)

The topics are difficult, and the amount of memorization is huge. (Participant # 90)

4.1.3. Engagement in Teaching and Learning

The final theme that emerged from students' responses was centered on engagement in teaching and learning. This included comments on teaching and learning approaches and activities which students experienced in social studies classes. Within this theme, 28 participants (25.9%) commented on positive experiences, including working with maps (e.g., drawing and locating places) and using technologies. Other comments focused on modes of teaching that involved students in active learning and helped them to understand the content, including concept mapping, creative strategies, and lesson reviews. Below are examples of positive experiences in this theme:

Using maps and identifying each country or region on the map helped me to understand the map more, and constructing summaries that facilitated the study process (This is my Home Country – Grades 11 and 12). (Participant # 29)

Among the positive experiences that we gained in studying Geography and Modern Technologies was knowledge of the developments that the world has witnessed and the development of satellites since their inception and other experiences. Among the positive things that we gained was knowledge of modern teaching methods and techniques that allowed easy access to information, including educational boards and innovative strategies and the use of simple games. (Participant # 77)

In contrast, 32 participants (29.6%) made comments about negative experiences. The most negative experiences that stood out in students' comments were centered around memorization of content (20.3%) and limited hands-on activities (3.7%). A few of the participants referred to instances associated with difficulties in map work (2.8%). The following comments illustrate the negative experiences in this theme.

Unable to memorize, a lot of information included. (Participant # 26)

Because of the nature of the subject abounding with many dates, this constituted a burden and difficulty for us in remembering the dates. Also, the teacher provided us with external information and resources, and demanded that we memorize them because they were part of the test. (Participant # 18)

It should be noted that some negative comments in this category were linked to specific subject areas such as geography and history.

In geography: not using tangible tools to make maps and not applying the content in real practice. (Participant # 20)

The subject of the World around Me in 2021 depended on the student and his memorization. It did not come with a fun approach in the book. We found that the lesson included many paragraphs, from which the student deduced the important points, and this is not recommended at all. Rather, mind maps must be included to facilitate understanding and memorization. (Participant # 6)

4.2 Influences of Prior Experiences on Instructional Practices

This section reports on pre-service teachers' views on how prior learning experiences of social studies have influenced their teaching practices during the practicum. As indicated earlier, the participants were four male interns who taught social studies during the practicum. Reflecting on past experiences as learners in social studies classes, the participants indicated that past experiences had informed their teaching practices in three ways they had encouraged them to: implement student-centered approaches, care about student engagement, and develop student interest in the subject.

4.2.1. Implementing Student-centered Approaches

All the participants claimed that their prior learning experiences of social studies had strongly informed them in terms of implementing student-centered approaches. They reflected on examples of active learning experiences used by their teachers in social studies instruction. This included teaching social studies in the learning resource center and involving students in fieldwork. In addition, two participants clearly sought to challenge the view that social studies focuses on memorization, by emphasizing active learning and research skills. It is clear from the responses that past experiences of learning social studies have influenced participants' current teaching practices. Some typical comments are given below:

Social studies in the past focused on memorizing information. Therefore, I do not focus in my teaching on memorization, but rather on linking information to previous experiences and the centrality of the student and his activity in the classroom. Previously, we were negative in learning situations; the student was just receiving information. Therefore, this motivates me to change my teaching practices for the better. (Interviewee 1)

The teaching method used by one of my teachers at the beginning of classes was asking questions about what we had studied in the previous class. In addition, one of the teachers used the learning resource center and field trips to discover some antiquities. This is what I focus on in my teaching. (Interviewee 2)

Conducting a lesson outside the classroom, like the school environment or the learning resource center, is better than in the classroom. Using many learning resources is more enjoyable for the student. (Interviewee 4)

4.2.2. Caring about Student Engagement

The second theme was centered on caring about student engagement in the classroom. Three participants expressed concern about certain ineffective teaching practices used by their own teachers, such as not paying attention to all the students and not using the class time effectively. They felt that a teacher should consider all the students and involve them in class activities. While three participants cited examples of ineffective teaching practices used by their teachers, one participant praised his teacher for being considerate of students' answers. Thus, the past experiences of the participants as learners of social studies have influenced them to support all their students. Some typical responses supporting this theme are given below:

The teacher's style of dialogue is not to favor any student over other students. The teacher must pay attention to students' answers and the importance of considering any answer offered by students, not belittling any answer, and showing credibility of students' answers. For example, the teacher forgot the location of Brunei – whether it is in Africa or Asia. I said that it is in the continent of Asia while he said Africa. In the next class, the teacher pointed out to all the students in the class that Brunei is located in Asia, and he thanked me for that. This affected my interest as being credible and confirmed to me that the teacher was attentive to students' answers. (Interviewee 2)

The focus of the teacher was on the distinguished students, but low achievement students did not receive much attention in the classroom. Therefore, I avoid this practice in my teaching. All students must be given significant attention and equal opportunities. (Interviewee 3)

Based on my previous experience, some students, especially in the back seats, were not paying attention, and the teacher was also not paying attention to them. Based on this experience, I rotate seating places and involve students at the back in class activities. This affects students' enthusiasm and motivation to participate in the class. One student came out to me and took the initiative to participate in class activities. He also asked me if I could continue teaching his class. (Interviewee 4)

4.2.3. Developing an Interest in Social Studies

Finally, conversations with the participants indicated that past experiences of learning social studies had influenced them to develop students' interest in the subject. Typically, the participants claimed that their teachers fostered an interest in social studies by using a wide range of engaging class activities and showing respect for students. Additionally, one participant shared his own enthusiasm for teaching social studies because of its importance in students' lives and futures.

My teacher helped me to like the subject, and this has affected my teaching in developing an interest in the subject among the students. I studied in the United Arab Emirates, where a Syrian teacher taught me history. His teaching styles were very appropriate; he used stories, was close to the students, and enthused the students by implementing appropriate teaching methods. (Interviewee 3)

In social studies, I learned useful knowledge and experiences about my country in terms of its history, geography, culture, etc. I enjoyed my social studies classes, particularly geography that contained practical activities. As a student teacher, I assist my students in realizing the importance of the subject in their own lives. I make connections between theoretical topics and practice, such as the study of weather and social work. I really want my students to enjoy the subject and learn it in an interesting way. I try different learning activities using multimedia, Google Earth, and the Internet, which have now become available in schools. (Interviewee 2)

My love for the subject is reflected in my interest and motivation for teaching. (Interviewee 1)

5. Discussion

We conducted the current study to explore pre-service teachers' reflections on prior learning experiences of social studies. In particular, the study examined the participants' positive and negative learning experiences of social studies and how these influenced pre-service teachers' instructional practices. The findings demonstrated that positive and negative learning experiences were clustered around three themes: teachers' characteristics, perceptions of social studies, and engagement in teaching and learning. Overall, most participants valued the positive impacts of teachers on their own learning, and in particular their use of effective teaching approaches. This finding confirmed the critical role of the teacher in facilitating students' learning (e.g., Dolan et al., 2014; Kitchen, 2013). As Kitchen (2013) indicated, teachers have a profound influence on students' perceptions of geography. She pointed out that "the teacher can impact on the depth and detail of students' perceptions by selecting content or activities that are engaging" (p. 112).

While pre-service teachers were positive about certain aspects of social studies, there was a lack of mention of enjoyment of outdoor education, field trips, and inquiry-based learning which are often cited as positive learning experiences in social studies and associated subjects (Catling et al., 2010; Dolan et al., 2014; Heffron & Downs, 2012; Parker & Jarolimek, 2016). In addition, the findings suggested that participants experienced difficulties in learning social studies because there was too much content. This finding confirmed Al-Nofli's (2018) findings that key geography topics and themes appeared repeatedly across social studies textbooks for some grade levels, including certain topics like earthquakes and volcanoes, weather/climate, and population studies. Given this challenge, it is important to review the scope of social studies and the sequence in which topics are taught.

Although social studies enjoys the status of a compulsory subject in most grade levels in the Omani educational system, a considerable percentage of participants (42.6%) held negative perceptions of the subject. For example, they associated the subject with memorization of information. In some cases, they viewed the subject as irrelevant and boring. Unsurprisingly, negative perceptions of social studies were consistent with other research findings in the Omani educational context (Al-Gharibi, 2008; Al-Kharousi, 2016; Al-Mammri et al., 2015). With evidence of issues relating to too much content and rote learning, as identified in participants' responses, there have been calls to develop school curricula based on high learning standards aligned with best international experiences (e.g., Ministry of Education and World Bank, 2012).

As is evident in this study, prior learning experiences influenced participants' instructional practices in three ways, by encouraging them to: implement student-centered approaches, care about student engagement, and develop interests in the subject. Analysis of the responses revealed two important factors that shaped participants' instructional practices. The first factor was instructional methods used by teachers. Participants in the practicum tended to use active instructional methods, like their own teachers, to keep students engaged in teaching and learning. On the other hand, participants tended to avoid ineffective instructional

methods and practices used by their own teachers. The second factor that emerged from past learning experiences was participants' own beliefs and perceptions about social studies. For example, participants sought to develop students' interests in the subject because they viewed it as important. Clearly, a key implication of the current study is that student teachers should be provided with opportunities for reflection on their own prior learning to help them articulate useful and insightful teaching experiences.

One limitation of this study was that the influence of prior experiences on participants' instructional practices was limited to the experiences of four pre-service teachers who participated in the practicum for one semester. If they had spent a longer period in school during the practicum, they could have provided a wider range of examples and accounts of the influence of prior learning experiences on their own instructional practices. Another limitation of the study related to limited representation in the sample which could be overcome by including a representative sample from other teacher education institutions in the country.

6. Conclusion

This research study offers insight into prior learning experiences of social studies and how they influence pre-service teachers' instructional practices. As is evident in this study, pre-service teachers had a variety of positive and negative experiences relating to their teachers, teaching and learning, and the subject. Given certain issues apparent in participants' statements such as the focus on memorization, overloaded content, and limited outdoor activities, it appeared that textbook-centered instruction dominated social studies classrooms. Additionally, the study indicated that although participants associated their teachers with both positive and negative learning experiences, the teacher plays a key role in shaping the prior learning experience and instructional practices of pre-service teachers.

In light of the findings, there is a need for further research on the prior learning experiences of pre-service teachers. For example, comparisons need to be made between pre-service social studies teachers and pre-service teachers of other subjects such as science and mathematics, regarding the influence of prior experiences on instructional practices. In addition, quantitative research is also needed to clarify the extent of the impact of prior learning experiences on pre-service teachers' instructional practices.

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