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Research Article

Exploring Challenges EFL Pre-Service Teachers Experience in Teaching Practicum: A Transformative Learning Perspective

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KEYWORDS

English education;
 Pre-service teacher;
 Teaching challenges;
 Teaching practicum;
 Transformative learning.

A B S T R A C T

This study examines pre-service teachers' experience, especially on challenges they face through transformative learning. Qualitative descriptive research was utilized as a research methodology to explore the teachers' experience during teaching practicum. Five seventh semester students of English education department were invited to be the participants of the study. The data were collected through reflective notes and in-depth interviews and then analyzed thematically. The results show that the pre-service teachers confront several obstacles throughout their teaching practicum. According to the data, the obstacles pre-service experienced were a Tension between vision and reality, teaching practicum, which is accompanied by class lectures, classroom management, and lack of supervision. The obstacles are then explored via transformational learning, which enables teachers to overcome them, particularly in classroom management, enhancing their capacity to choose teaching techniques depending on the needs and skills of students. This study is hoped the difficulties during teaching practicum faced by pre-service teachers can be reduced so that the objectives of teaching practicum can be achieved properly.

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INTRODUCTION

In a broader sense, the teaching practicum is a bridge between theory and practice in initial teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Teaching practicum is one of the important stages in a teacher's education. Thus, it becomes one obligatory course that students of college of education must pass as a graduation requirement. Teaching practicums can contribute to pre-service teachers' professional development, exceptionally professional identity construction (Zhu et al., 2018). For many pre-

service teachers, teaching practicum become their first experience as well as the best way for them to gain pedagogical skills and knowledge as well as professional competence as a teacher (Hascher et al., 2004). This is because the fundamental purpose of practicum experiences is to provide opportunities to familiarize pre-service teachers with the responsibilities of future teaching, construct pedagogical repertoires, and form professional identities (Lawson et al., 2015). The in-service teacher will eventually replace the pre-service teacher, who will do so gradually (Iqbal et al., 2019). Furthermore, pre-service teachers who get helpful feedback and guidance from

experienced educators during their teaching practicum are more likely to remain in the profession after graduation (Grudnoff, 2011).

In teaching practicum, pre-service teachers will be trained to adapt to the modern challenges that present-day educational institutions confront, which are often more varied and complex due to the rapid social, political, economic, and educational changes. Teaching practice will allow them to discover methods to appropriately address the complexity of today's classroom and workplace (Tuli & File, 2010). Pre-service teachers need a teaching practice to produce educators who can think critically, question assumptions, and reflect on their practice. The practicum is helpful as an introduction to the profession since it both improves instructors' skills and expands the corpus of information on good teaching techniques. (Collinson et al., 2009). As a result, it sets the foundation for success or failure in students teaching and what happens during the training phase may define a student teacher's future in education (Yan & He, 2010).

Despite its critical function in pre-service teachers' professional identity constructions, many student teachers experience difficulties and challenges when carrying out teaching practicum. Diverse factors are causing these challenges, including the school environment, instructors, supervision mentors, and other professionals who also contact trainee teachers during teaching practicum placements.

Most teaching institutions carry out teaching practicum at the end of the semester. Although schools are eager to accept trainees, du Plessis et al. (2006) identified some reasons, such as staff scarcity and workload, as well as needed mentoring mechanisms for trainees, who become the source of student teachers' difficulties in teaching practicum. Generally, pre-service teachers need help with the seeming gap between theory and practice in many teacher education settings (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005).

Due to the importance of teaching practicum in the professional development of a teacher, this topic has become a research center for many researchers. The previous study in this teaching practicum has discussed various aspects including, interaction in the teaching practicum (Hyland & Lo, 2006), the influence of teaching practicum supervisors' identity (Ssentamu-Namubiru, 2010), issues and concerns in teaching practicum, and teaching practicum professional development (Allen & Wright, 2014). Despite this, there are still few who focus on the teacher's experience and change that experience through transformative learning. Thus, in this study, the researchers investigate the challenges faced by pre-service teachers through transformative learning.

The purpose of locating the challenges into the transformative learning perspective because the transformative learning has the objective to ensure pre-service teachers are ready to meet their student's needs and encourage critical reflection through transformative learning. Mezirow (1997, 2000) was the first to come up with the transformative learning theory, arguing that adult learning is a process that leads to significant changes in how people think and sees the world (Kitchenham, 2008). Adults who learn something new critically evaluate their current views and beliefs. This transformative learning is a personal, social, and professional change process. Adult learners also realize that they need to change how they think and act, which helps them learn new, more nuanced ways to think and act (Zhu et al., 2020). Through transformative learning, pre-service teachers are expected to be able to think critically and evaluate themselves during the teaching practicum process so that, in this way, it is hoped that in the future, they can become professional teachers.

Through critical self-reflection, transformative learning helps people change how they see things. "Frames of reference," "disorienting dilemma," "critical reflection and dialogue," and "taking action" are the main parts of the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000). The frame of reference is the totality of a person's intelligence that filters and understands all thoughts, experiences, learning, and actions (Mezirow, 1997). The disorienting dilemma is an experience that makes the learner feel uncomfortable and off-balance because it goes against what the learner knows now (Mezirow, 2000). The learner then moves on to self-reflection, critical reflection, and dialogue to develop a new frame of reference that is more integrated, less discriminatory, and freer. In particular, the five-stage transformation constructs used in this study. (Senyshyn & Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2009) The five-stage transformation concept is used in this study to account for the participants' transformative learning: (1) Disorienting dilemma, (2) reflection and exploration of assumptions, (3) gaining confidence in a new role, (4) behavior changes, and (5) integration of new perspectives.

This present study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature regarding experiences and challenges faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practicum from the perspective of transformative learning. The following questions guided the investigation:

1. What are the challenges experienced by the pre-service teachers during teaching practicum?
2. How do the challenges fit with the transformative learning theory?

METHOD

This study seeks to understand the experiences of pre-service teachers, particularly with regard to the obstacles posed by transformative learning. The design of the study was qualitative descriptive phenomenology. The objective of descriptive research is to explain what it is and how it works. It concerns things that already exist, such as situations or relationships, ways of doing things, beliefs, points of view, attitudes, occurrences, and perceived impacts (Balido-Dean, 2010). Furthermore, phenomenological research aims to explain the meaning, structure, or essence of a phenomenon via the lived experiences of an individual or group. Consequently, a descriptive qualitative phenomenological study was deemed suitable because it aligns with the purpose of this research.

Five seventh-semester students (3 females and 2 males) of English education major from an Indonesian public institution in Medan were recruited to participate in this study. The seventh-semester students were purposefully selected because teaching practicum programs in the Indonesian setting are often given in the final semester. The five pre-service teachers were assigned to different junior high schools. This placement diversity seeks to produce comprehensive research results. It is hoped that different teaching practicum venues can represent the challenges and experiences of prospective teachers. The pre-service teachers were in the age range of 20-22 years. They had all consented to take part in the study and were well aware that it was part of an academic research project. They were permitted to withdraw from the study at any point to ensure the study complied with research ethics.

The data were collected using reflective notes and in-depth interviews. During the teaching practicum, the participants were asked to reflect their experiences and critical moments in their teaching diaries after completing their practicum in a weekly basis. The interviews were conducted after the participants had carried out teaching practicum. Each interview was conducted in the duration of 30 to 50 minutes. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed for data analysis purposes. During the interview, the researchers and the participants used Indonesian to understand better and reduce the risk of miscommunication.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the collected data. Transcripts of the interviews were organized into groups based on the topics discussed with each participant. The responses were analyzed to determine their difficulties and the training they get that leads to personal growth as pre-service teachers. The use of conceptual theme codes related to teaching practicum; a wide variety of views were extracted from the data for coding. These were reduced by

establishing fewer interconnected themes that covered related ideas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Challenges

In addition to the experiences they obtained, there were several obstacles they had to overcome. According to the data, the obstacles pre-service experienced were a tension between vision and reality, teaching practicum, which is accompanied by class lectures, classroom management, and lack of supervision.

The Tension between Vision and Reality

According to the findings of the study, the student teachers saw a gap between their vision and reality. They were unprepared for the diverse realities in their practicum institutions. They struggled to adjust to their new surroundings at the start of their teaching practicum. Their assimilation into the educational environment was hampered by recent locations, teaching objectives, teaching techniques, and equipment and facilities, as two participants said:

The initial challenge when I taught in class was that I needed clarification about how I should teach. Even though there was already a book of learning resources, I still had to understand it first. Even though I already understand, I still need clarification about what teaching methods I should use in the teaching process so that the lessons are not dull and can be understood by students. (P1)

The challenge faced during the practicum objective was for me to adapt in class at best, such as adjusting to the students because each student must have characteristics and many talents which affect their character. Besides that, they have many different backgrounds. So, I need time to adjust and prepare methods, media, and teaching materials suitable for them and what school facilities I can use to support the learning process in the classroom. (P2)

According to P1, she had challenges with teaching methods. She had difficulty in applying what she had learned to real-world situations. While the obstacles that P2 had to overcome was instructing the pupils according to their aptitude and competency.

Teaching Practicum along with Classes

While carrying out teaching practicums, the pre-service teachers still have to attend lectures on campus where the subjects are still relatively large. This makes it difficult for them to arrange lecture schedules and teaching

practicum at schools. Sometimes they are overwhelmed because of the many teaching practicum activities coupled with the many campus assignments, as P1 commented:

Suppose another challenge may be in terms of time. Because we still have lectures plus teaching practicum activities, adjusting is difficult. In addition, because it was a hectic teaching practicum, sometimes it was challenging to do my coursework. I was tired of teaching at school and then spent much time doing teaching practicum rather than doing college assignments and all kinds of college activities. (P1)

According to P1, teaching practicum at school takes up a significant quantity of his time because of the many activities that must be carried out besides teaching. It is no wonder that many pre-services complain about this.

Classroom Management

Keeping the class conducive is a challenging thing. The behavior of nosy students disturbs their friends who are focused on studying or those who are disobedient and unmanageable in the classroom. This challenge is, of course, a severe problem for pre-service teachers. as said by the following participant:

I had difficulty managing the class making students who were stubborn and like to disturb their friends who were focused on studying and made noise in the class so that the teaching and learning process was disrupted. (P2)

According to P2, recalcitrant students are her biggest challenge in managing the class because these students are classified as difficult to manage and disturb other students who are studying. While, some student teachers find it difficult to manage classes because they feel treated disrespectfully by students who think they are just 'temporary' teachers, not their real teachers, as said by two other participants:

In terms of the teaching and learning process, that is my main challenge in classroom management because I find it difficult to keep students conducive. Because the students feel we are just pre-service teachers, so they lack respect for us. (P3)

It is challenging to manage the class because of the lack of students' interest in learning English. So, most do not focus in class and think English lessons are unimportant. Apart from that, I think it is because I am still a pre-service teacher that they act like they want and do not respect me. (P4)

when teaching in classes, P3 and P4 feel less valued because their students perceive them only as substitute

teachers. In addition, P4 said that other things that caused him to be underappreciated were because his students felt that learning English was less important.

Lack of Supervision

People who want to be teachers feel like they do not have enough supervision, making them less excited and motivated for practicum. It was found that the effects of teaching practice were made worse because there were not enough supervisors in English teaching methods. Teachers had much work, no experience mentoring, and did not want to mentor student-teacher candidates. Even so, two participants said that the teachers at school are accommodating when they get into trouble and guide them well.

Supervisors usually have their classes to teach and are always busy. So he did not have time or a chance to watch over us. (P4)

Our supervisor gives our group leader control and trust, so I sometimes feel like I am not being watched directly. He was also too busy to watch over us at school because he rarely came (P2)

When carrying out practicums, P4 supervisors always have a busy schedule so it is very difficult to carry out supervision activities. It is different from the P2 supervisor who is also busy but can still control them through the head of the practicum group.

The participants in this study reported to gain valuable experiences from the teaching practicum, however they also encountered a number of challenges. According to the findings, the student teachers' biggest issue was classroom management, where they struggled to keep the class in conducive and purposeful condition.

Based on the data interpretation, most of them do not know how to do classroom activities that help teach. Classroom management is a challenge in their practicum, as this is something that many other studies have also found (Gan, 2013). Since the practicum is the first time the pre-service teacher works with the students, they need to learn how to act around them or what to do if something goes wrong while teaching. The fact that the student teachers were only there for a short time and needed more teaching experience could have been seen as bad for their students' learning. They said that the confusion happened, and they did not know what the students looked like and what was happening in the class. Pre-service Teachers do not know much about their students when they start their practicum, and the classroom rarely meets their expectations (Yan & He, 2010). They do not know enough. It is hard for them to see how much their students learn from their lessons. As a result, they tend to focus more on themselves than their

students. So, what they teach in class is based on what is in the students' books or what they have already been taught. So that the pre-service teachers' classroom learning is doable in their minds. Furthermore, because most future teachers lack real-world experience to cope with these realities, they prefer to teach in ways that do not assist pupils learn but keep the class operating smoothly and in order.

It was also discovered that pre-service teachers must still follow the class on campus when doing teaching practice. Hastings' and Squires' (2002) findings, the duration of the practicum worried the pre-service teachers. Because both groups indicated that the practicum time allowed was insufficient to achieve their goals. It seems like they were having a problem with teaching practicum and classes because it is very hectic and breaks their focus. They were tired after doing teaching practice but still had to attend classes on campus. Ideally, when pre-service teachers carry out their teaching practices they should be free from every class's activity. So that they can prepare and maximize teaching in the classroom. They can also focus on teaching practice and all kinds of teaching practicum activities they must work on.

Besides that, Classroom management was one of the things the student teachers had to deal with during their practicums. Since they were just starting as teachers, they did not have enough experience to handle a large class. Gan (2013), Coskun (2013), and Yusof et al. (2014), stated that all came to the same conclusion in their research. During their actual teaching, student-teachers had trouble with things like controlling the noise of the students and dealing with bad behavior, among other things. They commented that during teaching, they had difficulty controlling the class, especially with students who were noisy or nosy and disturbed their friends who were focused on paying attention, so the class was not conducive. Some student-teachers found it hard to get their students excited about the day's lesson and get them ready because their students were not excited to see them. Student-teachers have trouble running the classroom because they are not taken seriously as teachers (Coskun, 2013). Even though the real teacher of the course was in the room, the students knew that the person running the class was also a student.

Another significant discovery from the research is the lack of supervision by the supervisors. The lack of supervisor support and guidance makes pre-service teachers lack the motivation and guidance they need. No wonder many pre-service teachers are still confused when teaching in the classroom. Furthermore, The supervisors were chosen based on who was available, not on what they were good at (Yan & He, 2010). Because they are busy on and off campus, they only have time to guide and watch over the pre-service teachers. Moreover, the number and quality of

supervision were determined to be inadequate. This might have been caused by a number of factors, including a significant lack of personnel at the institution, enormous workloads for supervisors, and, most likely, a lack of understanding of the purpose of practicum. These variables may contribute to a student's lack of desire and effort during teaching practicum.

Locating the Challenges into the Transformative Learning Perspective

After discussing challenges and issues that pre-service teachers face, the researcher then talks about how the participants' practical teaching experiences fit into the theory of transformative learning, including 1) a disorienting dilemma, 2) reflection and exploration of assumptions, 3) gaining confidence in a new role, 4) behavioral changes, and 5) integration of new perception.

1. Disorienting Dilemma

The disorienting dilemma is felt by the pre-service teaching during teaching practicum. Since the teaching practicum involves a lot of different tasks, like making lesson plans, running the classroom, and talking to parents, it makes sense that the participants feel uncomfortable and off-balance. Two Participants shared the following experience:

Learning that is not conducive or students who do not obey what we tell them to do (P3).

In the first or second meeting, I still need to learn the students' characters because they are something new to me. So, at the beginning of the session, I felt a little uncomfortable (P5).

From the statement above, P1 experienced difficulties, especially because the students were considered unconducive, making it difficult to do what was ordered. Different from P5 who felt the need to adapt to his class environment so that it made him feel uncomfortable at the beginning of the meeting because he had not been able to adapt well.

2. Reflection and Exploration of Assumptions

In this research, reflection refers to participants re-examining their fundamental ideas about the link between theory and practice, emphasizing how to successfully educate students in placement schools. Participant shared the following:

The theory of teaching from the University is quite helpful, so it minimizes the difficulties or challenges encountered when teaching practicum. So that the idea conveyed is similar to the reality in the field. Indeed, not all theories led by the University are influential in class. That is where we have to take a

role to find and provide solutions to ourselves to teach better (P1).

At this stage P1 realized that relying on the theory provided by the charger was not enough to support learning activities at school. Therefore, according to P1 pre-service teachers need to develop and self-reflect.

3. Gaining Confidence in New Role

The participants had obtained more practical experience at the end of the teaching practicum, which made them feel more competent in their new duties. Participant shared the following:

During my teaching practicum, I learned that a teacher must be able to motivate his students to learn and choose learning methods that suit the needs and abilities of students (P2)

According to P2 he learned during the teaching practicum that a teacher must be able to motivate his students to be enthusiastic about learning and know the needs and abilities of his students so that he can choose the right teaching method.

4. Behavior Changes

At the end of the teaching practicum activities, the pre-service teachers get experience that makes their confidence increase because they feel they can master it well and can apply it later.

Previously I used the teacher-centered method in the form of lectures, but then I felt the technique needed to be more suitable. Then finally, I changed it to students centered in the form of game-based learning, which is considered more effective when students are more active, and the response is outstanding when using this method (P5).

Usually, they will get bored if they use the lecture method for too long, so I changed the technique to a demonstration method through paper media and made games so that students learn more creatively and enthusiastically (P4).

During the P5 teaching practicum activities, he changed the teaching method which was initially teacher centered to become student centered using game-based learning which according to him was more effective than the previous method. Likewise with P4 which initially used the lecture teaching method to become a game-based method.

5. Integration of New Perspectives

After getting assumptions and changing the way they teach, pre-service teachers get a new perspective on what a teacher should do and how they teach well.

It turns out that the teacher's job is not only to teach. They also have to have good psychological skills and the ability to motivate and give love to the family and students. Then they must also be able to guide and direct students, helping selflessly (P2).

P2 realizes that the task of a teacher is not easy, besides teaching the teacher must also have pedagogical skills and abilities in teaching and paying attention to his students.

After being evaluated and examined using transformative learning theory, there are several challenges which are the processes they go through when teaching practicum. The first is a disorienting dilemma. Some of the participants mostly felt this early meeting when carrying out teaching practicums. This is because most of them do not have qualified teaching experience so it is only natural that at the initial meeting they feel confused about their duties in teaching practicum. These confusing situations show how one's existing frame of reference can clash with new information (Meziorw, 2000). The second is reflection and exploration of assumption. The main focus of this reflection is the student teacher's basic understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, as well as the focus on the effectiveness of student teaching placements in schools (Allen & Wright, 2014). Self-reflection is very important for pre-service teachers in teaching practicum. By reflecting on themselves, teacher students can overcome the problems they face and find their own solutions with the help of institutional institutions, as well as the school institutions where they teach. so that in this way, the goal of teaching practicum to create professional teacher candidates can be realized. The third is gaining confidence in a new rule. Pre-service teachers had greater practical expertise toward the conclusion of the teaching practicum, which led to their increased confidence in taking on new tasks. (Zhu et al., 2020). After carrying out teaching practicum, it is hoped that teacher students will know what to do to become professional teachers in the future. so that later the difficulties they will face when becoming a teacher can be minimized. the fourth is behavior changes. Participants had more excellent practical experience towards the conclusion of the teaching practicum, which led to their increased confidence in taking on new roles (Zhu et al., 2020). For example, P4 changed its teaching style to focus more on the students, P5 becomes more independent as a teacher when he used the teaching method of his choice. The last is integration of new perspectives. After thinking about the assumptions and changing their actions, the participants got a new look at what teachers do and how they teach. Also, the fact that new ideas were brought in shows that the participants had a broader view of "what they should do" and "what they could achieve" (Zhu et al., 2020).

During the student-teaching period, the participants emphasized knowing the textbook, getting ready, and passing on information, as seen in the observations and interviews. This finding shows that the participants cared most about how well they could teach others in the classroom. For example, as said by P1 that he uses learning methods depending on the teaching material and pedagogical abilities of students. Also, at the beginning of class, they talked about hard things that happened during their teaching practice. They showed how they would teach differently at the end of the practicums.

This empirical study shows that the transformative learning of pre-service teachers is always linked to solving the disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and exploration of assumptions, gaining confidence in a new role, behavior changes, and integration of new perspectives (DeCapua et al., 2018). Moreover, this study reveals that transformative learning necessitates ongoing professional identity development (Illeris, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to discuss all the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practicum and reflect on them through transformative learning. Remember that every teacher-to-be needs to know how to run a class well and focus on what the students need. A pre-service teacher's ability to become a professional teacher in the future depends on how well they know their student's abilities and needs and how well they can handle the challenges they face during their teaching practicum. A well-planned practicum is an essential part of a student teacher's education as a professional and can also help them grow as people. However, this study shows that challenges can happen during the practicum period. According to the data, the obstacles pre-service experienced were a Tension between vision and reality, teaching practicum, which is accompanied by class lectures, classroom management, and lack of supervision. They showed how they would teach differently at the end of the practicums. Furthermore, Participants developed more student-centered, constructivist-oriented pedagogies and professional identities that prioritized students' cognitive and emotional needs.

Although numerous improvements and modifications have been made to teacher education thus far, the results show that practicum studies done in Indonesia have inadequacies. To make teaching practice activities for pre-service teachers better in the future more should be done to help pre-service teachers during teaching practicum. Even though this study shows that pre-service teachers can think about and solve problems at the end of teaching practicum, more needs to be known about what they must do during teaching practicum. This is meant to get qualified future

teachers ready for their jobs. The limitations of this research are the limited scope of research so that the generalization of the research may be questioned. The main focus of this research is to gain a rich and in-depth understanding of the context related to the main issues discussed.

Future research will supplement this study by contacting additional Pre-service teachers in different regions of Indonesia, which is essential given the importance of revealing the challenges experienced throughout the practicum phase. An examination and comparison of the difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers at the secondary and primary school levels have the potential to yield important insights for the design of university practice. To elucidate the specifics of the actual practical procedures, observations are required. Other aspects of practicum, such as dealing with administrators at partner schools, faculty supervisors, and supervisor teachers, appear to be crucial to getting to the bottom of the issues. In addition, policy formulation based on the current requirements of pre-service teachers would benefit from cooperation with existing institutions in Indonesia about the most effective means of addressing the issues pre-service teachers' experience.

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