

**OFFLINE TEACHING PRACTICUM BY ‘ONLINE’ GENERATION:
INDONESIAN EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS’ VOICES****ATIN KURNIAWATI¹****¹ UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI RADEN MAS SAID SURAKARTA****Abstract**

Teaching practicum is one of the prominent issues in education faculties and many studies explored the implementation of teaching practicum in many regions by focusing on several aspects. However, after the pandemic era, how the ‘online’ generation of EFL pre-service teachers perceived their teaching practicum remains unexplored. This current study shed some light on how the ‘online’ generation of EFL pre-service teachers perceived their teaching practicum, the challenges they faced, and how ‘online’ learning during the pandemic changed their perspectives. Using narrative inquiry, the data of this study was gathered from seven graduates of English language education department who experienced online learning during the pandemic but had their teaching practicum offline. The data was collected through open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interview to elicit the story from their experiences during their enrolment in teaching practicum. The collected data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that the EFL pre-service teachers perceived positively on offline teaching practicum. Despite the challenges, they were more motivated to learn and improve their capability. Online learning during the pandemic has improved their ability in integrating technology in their teaching which boost their confidence. It also changed their belief that teaching can be flexible and adaptable to any condition. For that purposes, teachers should be creative and always improve their capability.

Keywords: *EFL, pre-service teachers, teaching practicum*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum is one of the courses in education faculties in which the pre-service teachers have opportunities to practice their teaching skill at schools. It usually becomes their first experience of teaching in front of class with many 'real' students. It is implemented in many countries, including Indonesia. Student teachers who join teaching practicum should pass certain requirement and performance evaluation during this program. However, the duration, the semester, and the responsibilities and task during the program may vary according to the institution regulations (Ersanli, 2015). Teaching practicum has become one of the concerns in preparing the pre-service teachers before graduating from teacher training faculties. It had been reported to have an important impact on student teachers' professional and personal development (Ozek, 2009). Through this program, they also learn and experience many things beyond teaching in front of the class such as in the aspects of student management, teaching evaluation, and student learning. Their learning process during teaching practicum was influenced and supported by various factor, such as supervisors, the students, pre-service teacher peers, and school ethos (Qiu et al., 2021).

On the other hand, teaching practicum could be challenging and they may find obstacles during the program. According to a previous study, the obstacles pre-service teachers experienced during the program were tension due to teaching practicum activities accompanied by class lectures, classroom management, and lack of supervision (Maharani & Fithriani, 2023). Other challenges occurred were around classroom management, learning materials or resources, teaching aids or media, teaching methods, learners' English skills, choice of language use, slow internet connectivity, learners' motivation, evaluation technique and parental support (Mudra, 2018). In another case, the pre-service teachers lacked conceptual frameworks to aid in translating the national ELT curriculum objectives into practice, did not mention utilising relevant professional literature for additional guidance, and appeared unfamiliar with the school culture at their practicum locations (Lian et al., 2024). Some other problems regarding several issues such as mentor teachers' lack of guidance and support as well as being a bad role model, insufficient feedback, insufficient technological infrastructure in the classrooms, and frequent occurrence of idle classes also have been reported in the previous study (Tekin & Tunaz, 2023). Therefore, it calls the educational institutions to provide adequate support for pre-service teachers during teaching practicum to optimally achieve the goal.

Many previous studies have investigated this topic under various themes, such as beliefs/cognition of pre-service teachers; practicum quality and programme; problems, challenges, and affective factors; mentoring; teacher identity and development; reflectivity; and professional development needs (Cabaroğlu & Öz, 2023). Khatib & Rahgoshay (2021) conducted

evaluation of EFL practicum courses in Iran by involving student teachers and graduated student teachers. Based on their investigation, student teachers who take practicum courses are better prepared for real teaching. They learn the reality of the profession and get over their negative attitudes and thoughts about teaching. On the other hand, it has been discovered that the practicum program requires adjustment with regard to assessment, placement school quality, and mentor-student collaboration. A study to Vietnamese EFL pre-service teachers reported the growth in general pedagogical skills and self-efficacy belief during teaching practicum. Furthermore, it also identified the consistent relationship of L2 proficiency and self-efficacy (Hoang & Wyatt, 2021).

In Indonesian context, EFL teaching practicum also gets much attention. Sulistiyo et al. (2017) studied teaching practicum in Jambi and resulted in policy recommendation. The results showed that student teachers' participation in teaching practicum projects during the program gave them appropriate but insufficient experience to apply what they had learned in college to the actual practice of teaching in classrooms. The role that teacher educators and supervisory teachers play in supporting student teachers throughout their teaching practicum project should be prioritized for future program enhancement. Other studies which focus on self-efficacy (Megawati & Astutik, 2018; Nugroho, 2017) and EFL pre-service teachers' anxiety (Li et al., 2023; Lian et al., 2024; Sari & Anwar, 2021) are found quite a lot representing different regions and school context. The studies reported that the pre-service teachers commonly have medium to high level of self-efficacy during their participation in the program. However, anxiety may still be felt by the pre-service English teachers due to some factors, such as *teaching inexperience, self-perception of language proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, lack of student's interest, and difficulty with time management*.

Several recent studies captured international teaching practicum held by several universities in Indonesia by giving opportunity to pre-service teachers to teach in several countries in ASEAN (Hasymi & Nurkamto, 2023; Megawati et al., 2023). Those studies reported the growth of pre-service teachers' confidence and teaching skills in addition to their emotional trajectory. The program also fostered their sense of cultural identity and education in multicultural context. Further, those studies provide implications for multicultural education and improvements in the organization of the programs. Meanwhile, another study paid attention on blended teaching practicum during and after the pandemic (Miftah et al., 2024). The study revealed that the students perceived positively about blended teaching practicum despite the need of some improvements in the implementation.

Despite many studies about teaching practicum, less had captured the 'online' ELF pre-service teachers' teaching experiences after the pandemic. While they were joining lots of online courses at university during the pandemic, they eventually have the teaching practicum offline.

The current study tries to unleash their perception and experience about teaching practicum after the pandemic through the following research questions:

1. How do 'online' generation of EFL pre-service teachers perceive teaching practicum?
2. What challenges did they face during teaching practicum?
3. How did their online learning during the pandemic influence their perceptions on teaching?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed narrative inquiry by using the stories from past experiences of the informants as the research data. Narrative inquiry combines storytelling and research, using stories as research data or a tool for data analysis and presentation. According to Barkhuizen et al. (2014), narrative inquiry encompasses story-based research as a whole. The study invited seven graduates of an English Language Education department in a state university in Indonesia as informants. Two informants had their teaching practicum in 2022 and five informants had it in 2023. All the informants experienced online learning at the university during the pandemic and had their teaching practicum after the pandemic. The teaching practicum was conducted in four weeks in total in junior high school or senior high school levels either in public or private schools. In the first week, they did observation and then they learn about teaching administration in the following week. In the last two weeks, they practiced teaching.

The story was elicited through an open-ended questionnaire and then it was followed by -semi-structured interviews. Both the data collections were in Bahasa Indonesia to avoid misunderstanding. Then, the transcripts were translated into English. The narrative data were subsequently analyzed by employing thematic analysis which involved coding and categorizing excerpts and organizing them within thematic headings (Benson, 2014a). Finally, the identified themes from the questionnaire and in-depth interviews were discussed under each research questions to interpret the data and draw conclusions.

FINDINGS

EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions on teaching practicum

The expectation of having intensive teaching experience in a real school context

All the informants had positive expectations about their teaching practicum at school. They expected that they would learn many things at school, from the teachers, the students, as well as the school environment, but the experience of teaching the real students was the one that made them excited as revealed in the following data.

My expectations are to gain a practical understanding of school dynamics, get to know the educational environment, and develop teaching and classroom management skills. (ABS)

They were confident enough with their English skill equipped with teaching knowledge they had learned from the university. Moreover, having observation and preparing to develop teaching administration helped them to get ready for their teaching. The first two weeks of the teaching practicum are enough for them. Their supervisors at school guided them in preparing the teaching administration and gave them feedback.

However, not all informants experienced the similar situation. Some informants reported that they did not enough time allotment to practice teaching nor assistance from their supervisors as expressed in the following statements.

During teaching practicum, I did not teach at all, and only observed the teacher teaching, or maybe I was like a teacher's assistant in class. (MAW)

She reported that she was not guided by her supervisor during the program to develop teaching administration and was proposed to look for the example and detailed information from the internet. It turned out the importance of effective communication as well as monitoring among the university, the school, the supervisors to ensure that the pre-service teachers gain the expected knowledge and experience from the program, or at least experience the minimum criteria of teaching practicum.

Teaching is not merely “teaching”

The second theme of the EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions was about their insights that being a teacher is not merely about delivering lesson and preparing the administrative stuffs, but also managing the classroom, understanding the students, and other additional tasks. Understanding the students is quite challenging for them and it becomes a part of classroom management. As they observed the class, they recognized that students were very diverse. They had different characters, learning styles, and attitudes. As teachers, they would deal with those diversity to help the students achieve the learning goals. It caused them spend much time to design and prepare their teaching to meet the student' needs. It implies the need of different teaching methods or activities as well as the learning media they will use in the classroom as can be seen in the following excerpt.

My memorable experience is that I have encountered many things starting from the diversity of student characters; how to simplify the learning material to make it easy to understand and many more. I can also learn to develop interactive learning

media in order to attract students' interest in learning and be more enthusiastic.

(AEG)

The EFL pre-service teachers also experienced preparing teachers' administrative tasks, teaching tools, and completing other additional tasks. Sometimes they were overwhelmed with the task while they also still have regular course at the university as indicated by RHN.

I was often not optimal in preparing the learning because I didn't have much time to create teaching modules and prepare teaching media. (RHN)

However, they still feel positive with their activities since they learn something new and in the real context. In spite of the never-ending tasks of a teacher, all the informants said that they still want to be a teacher since it was their passion.

The need of using technology

Having observed the school and classroom environments and the students' characteristic, the informants strongly recommend the integration of technology in the class. Students today are very close to technology in their daily life, and therefore learning in the classroom by using technology could engaged them better as stated by ABS.

I am increasingly convinced to adopt a more interactive and technology-based approach to teaching English. (ABS)

The use of technology in the class also demand improvement and more challenging activities for the students. Monotonous activities could be boring for the students, and flat PowerPoint presentation could fail in maintaining students' attentions. Therefore, they feel it quite challenging to successfully integrate technology and it motivated them to improve their capability as confessed in the following data.

I feel that I still need to continue learning to develop myself and explore my abilities because along with technological developments, teachers must improve their knowledge and abilities in order to achieve satisfactory results. (AL)

As can be figured out from the findings, the EFL pre-service teachers were excited and perceive positively about their enrolment in teaching practicum program. They experienced being a teacher in a real school context. The program design which allocated two weeks for observation had helped them to prepare for their teaching practice which take place in the following two weeks. Sending the pre-service teachers earlier prior to teaching practice was strongly recommended to let them observe the dynamic of the school and classroom situation (Azkiyah & Mukminin, 2018). It will also give opportunities for the pre-service teachers to engage with the school's cultural norms and localised social (Buckworth, 2017) and because one of the

determining factor in the quality and success of teaching practicum program depend on both the mentor and the support and culture of the site (Kırkgöz et al., 2023). Even though not all students get the same teaching opportunities, some did not teach at all, they still find this program very beneficial for them. They also propose to make teaching practicum longer, especially for the teaching practice, so that they can gain more knowledge and insights along with standardized minimum activities.

EFL pre-service teachers' challenges during teaching practicum

The school implemented different curriculum

During their involvement in the program, Indonesia was still in the process of shifting curriculum. Some schools implemented Kurikulum 2013, and some others used Kurikulum Merdeka. A school also may implement both curricula for different grades. For private schools, they may have additional curriculum as well, such as adopting international curriculum, and have inclusive class in which students with special needs are learning together in general class, assisted by a shadow teacher. These facts did not get enough anticipation in their preparation and, as an informant said, did not get enough attention from the department since they only learned one curriculum. Hence, they needed to accelerate their adaptation process as evidenced in the following statements.

Actually, what I learned at campus was only knowing about the learning tools (such as lesson plan, learning media). The curriculum can always change, and I didn't get knowledge about international curricula, for example Cambridge. (GA)

The most memorable experience for me was... the school was an Islamic school with international standards and was an inclusive school that used a moving class system during learning, and used 2 curricula, namely the Kurikulum Merdeka and the international curriculum or IB (International Baccalaureate). (MAW)

For Indonesian curricula (Kurikulum 2013 and Kurikulum Merdeka), even though there were some different terms, they could adapt quickly with the school situation. Meanwhile, for international curriculum practice, they did not have any background knowledge so that they have to learn fast from their supervisors.

Limited teaching opportunities

With two-weeks of time allotment for teaching practice, some students felt that was not enough. In two weeks, they had only 1-3 times of teaching depending on their supervisors' schedule and the number of EFL pre-service teachers at the school. Even, one informant reported

that she did not teach, but she only observed the teachers. She felt sorry since she expected that she could practice teaching. For school administration and teaching media, pre-service teachers could learn from many sources, but to experience teaching in a real classroom situation can only be experienced at teaching practicum sites. She also questioned the monitoring from the university toward the pre-service teachers' activities at school as revealed in the following data.

In my opinion, maybe the target can be equal even though we had teaching practicum in different schools. In my opinion, the time allotment of the teaching practicum is also not enough because in 1-2 weeks is very lacking. (MNW)

Managing the students

Managing the students with diverse characteristics became the challenge for EFL pre-service teachers. They reported that sometimes the students didn't pay attention and were sleepy during the class. It encouraged them to think about fun and motivating learning activities in the class.

Students in high school grades are more difficult to focus on the teacher, while those in elementary school grades can still focus and are willing to pay attention to their teachers. (GA)

Complying with this challenge, they emphasized the importance of classroom management and the use of technology in the classroom which they believed would be able to engage the students better.

In my opinion, the courses that need to be added or deepened are educational technology and classroom management. Both are important for optimizing teaching and managing diverse classroom dynamics. (ABS)

Even though they have already joined microteaching course prior to teaching practicum program, it turned out to be different when they met the real students and classroom context. They needed time to recognize the students' characteristics and formulate the effective teaching method, whereas the time allotment of teaching practicum was very limited, especially for teaching practice.

During their teaching practicum, they face some challenges dealing with the curriculum, time allotment and managing the class and the students. Despite the challenges, it makes them have a stronger desire to be a teacher and it motivates them to learn and practice more. The challenges during teaching practicum commonly occur as it is discussed in the previous study. Pre-service teachers were responding to classroom reality shock and feeling overwhelmed by its complexity. When they recognized the obstacles they faced, they used both their idealistic notions

of being a teacher and the survival methods they were obliged to apply. Those pre-service teachers who participated in the study and had a strong desire to become teachers had a positive attitude regarding unpleasant events (López, 2020). Teachers' ability to be creative and innovative as well as time management and classroom management, are critical components of the teaching process. Therefore, teachers must not only build their professionalism, but also their abilities, creativity, and understanding of what students require during a teaching practicum (Astuti and Drajiati, 2022).

Prior to the program, the EFL pre-service teachers had joined microteaching course. Even though, it felt different from the real classroom context, they perceived this course very beneficial for them, especially in preparing the teaching tools and managing the class. However, during the teaching practicum, some schools implemented different curriculum and it makes them overwhelmed at first but find it beneficial in the last since they get extra experience and knowledge. The support and guidance from the supervisor were very meaningful. In this case, the effective mutual interaction and relation between the pre-service teachers and their supervisors would bring positive outcomes for the pre-service teachers (Hyland & Lo, 2006), and poor communication with supervisor and mentor during teaching practicum can become the source of stress (Mahmoudi & Ýzkan, 2016).

How their online learning during the pandemic influence their perceptions on teaching

Teaching should be adaptable and flexible

Through the pandemic situation, the EFL pre-service teachers experienced online learning with all the challenges and opportunities. Along with their online learning process during the pandemic, it changed their point of view about learning and it influenced their perspective about teaching. An informant said that the pandemic has taught him that teaching and learning process should be adaptable with any changes that happened and as a teacher, he should be creative in designing learning activities to help his students learn better as indicated in the following statement.

“Learning during the pandemic taught me the importance of flexibility and adaptability in teaching. It showed me that using technology effectively can keep students engaged, no matter the situation.” (ABS)

Technology helped teachers work more effectively

Experiencing online learning during the pandemic had forced them to be technologically-literate since the teaching and learning process was conducted online. With this prior knowledge

and experience, they improved their skill in using technology for teaching and learning purposes. Eventually, they could implement it in their class during their teaching practicum.

The use of digital technology/media really helps me in compiling and delivering materials, and students are also more interested in receiving the materials. In the sense that the atmosphere of teaching and learning activities is not boring (AL).

Gaining insights from the pandemic learning experience, they believe and feel optimistic with their teaching. They are confident enough with their skills and the use of technology in teaching also boosts their confidence. During the pandemic, they had more time to practice their English proficiency through informal learning and it helped them improve their proficiency. Teachers' general proficiency significantly affects the way they use language in the classroom to promote learning (Hoang & Wyatt, 2021; Van Canh & Renandya, 2017). As it is reported in a previous study, the integration of technology in the classroom, equipped with teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge, had a positive impact on English pre-service teachers in terms of solving the problems and learning value (Drajati et al., 2021)

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

EFL pre-service teachers who went through the campus life during the pandemic perceived positively in their enrolment in teaching practicum. They were very excited to learn from the real school context while practicing their teaching skills. They were confident enough with their capability even though most of their learning at university were conducted online. It gave them opportunity to be more autonomous in exploring knowledge and improve their proficiency as important factors that support their success in teaching practicum. During the program, they faced some challenges dealing with the curricula implemented at schools, limited time allotment, and managing the class and the students. However, those challenges do not change their belief and motivation to be a teacher, yet it motivates them to learn more. Online learning during the pandemic has improved their skill in integrating and using technology for teaching. It also changed their believe about teaching, that teaching can be flexible and should be adaptable to any situation.

The current study has limitation in the number of participants and qualitative method that cannot be generalized. Further studies may involve more number of participants, use more complex and comprehensive method, or investigate in details about the impact of online learning during the pandemic on EFL pre-service teachers' teaching practice.

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