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EFL Practicum Realities: Challenges Shaping Preservice Teachers' Professional Development

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Abstract

This research aims to discover the experiences of preservice English teachers during their teaching practice in Islamic state universities in West Sumatera Province, Indonesia and the unique difficulties they face. Using a descriptive quantitative design, the researchers gathered data from 150 respondents through the questionnaires in five primary areas: linguistic challenges, teaching difficulties, mentorship and supervision, school support, and school culture. Evidence collected during the research detailed that participants 72% could not explain their lessons in English, and classroom talk was identified to be a significant barrier 68%. Students also experienced difficulties in pedagogy, with respondents reporting low confidence in the use of diverse teaching strategies 61% and a lack of confidence 66% in the use of technology in teaching. In terms of supervision, 70% of respondents did not receive sufficient feedback from their mentors, and 63% of respondents described the lack of dialogues and discussions on teaching and learning strategies. Respondents also described their school as having little support and supervision. Other challenges respondents described included lack of internet 75% and their school was also described as remote (62%). In the area of organizational culture, respondents 78% remarked that the teaching practice was too brief to establish relationships with the teachers, and 67% described the work environment as having little to no participation. These findings highlight significant gaps in language proficiency, pedagogical preparedness, quality of mentoring and institutional coordination which significantly impact the professional growth of preservice teachers.

Keywords: Challenges; EFL practicum; mentorship; preservice teachers; professional development.

Introduction

The EFL practicum is the most important part of every teacher training program because it is the first opportunity for student teachers to apply theories and concepts learned in the course during genuine teaching practice. For student teachers, the EFL practicum is an opportunity to test different teaching theories, develop individual unique teaching styles, and experiment with various approaches to classroom management. In addition to helping build confidence and ease the teaching anxiety, a well-executed practicum helps refine and educate the professional nature and identity of a student teacher as an educator. Yet, despite the many benefits, the practicum phase of teaching training is frequently the most challenging. Although the practicum is intended to support professional growth and ease the transition from student teaching to full-time teaching, many students are unable to clear the practicum successfully.

One of the critical issues in the EFL practicums is linguistic competence, given that some preservice teachers have low English proficiency levels, especially in the areas of reading comprehension, speaking fluency, and classroom English (Farrell, 2017). Deficiencies in the linguistic domain can adversely affect student teachers' performance and their subsequently confidence in interacting with learners. Furthermore, the student teachers' ability to integrate classroom technologies, use various instructional methods, evaluate learners, and address the curriculum gaps required is also central to the pedagogical problems encountered (Farrell, 2017; Richards, 1998). Knowing how to use and modify many teaching strategies is important in EFL settings, and yet most preservice teachers feel that they are inadequately equipped. In addition to the linguistic and pedagogical challenges, the mentorship and supervision involved are also very important in determining the practicum experience. The role of mentor teachers (MTs) is crucial in helping preservice teachers (STs) obtain the needed practical experience, and in helping them improve their teaching skills. Unfortunately, research indicates that many student teachers have minimal contact with their mentors, minimal feedback, or ill-defined feedback concerning their teaching (Nguyen, 2019). Inadequate mentoring can result in frustration, confusion, and lack of opportunities to advance more professionally.

Institutional and cultural factors related to schools contribute to making the EFL practicum more complicated. Collaboration between the university and schools is

vital to creating and sustaining supportive student teacher environments. However, factors like remote locations of practicums, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of essential resources such as internet connectivity are serious barriers to preservice teachers (Gan & Lee, 2016). In addition, the length of the practicum frequently complained about within the preservice teacher community, as many student teachers require additional weeks of teaching to establish adequate wholeness to teaching and develop relationships with students and colleagues. There is more to be understood within the context of Islamic state universities related to the previous studies EFL practicum challenges. Cultural, institutional, and religious factors are likely to shape the practicum more distinctly. It is essential to deal with the mentioned issues to improve teacher education programs to benefit preservice teachers for the betterment of teaching profession challenges.

This research focuses on understanding challenges anchored on preservice EFL teachers' practicum experiences at three Islamic state universities, employing descriptive quantitative methodology to address five classifications of challenges, namely, linguistic challenges, pedagogical challenges, issues related to supervision and mentorship, challenges to institutional support, and school culture. The identification and analysis of such challenges aim at providing relevant information to educators, policymakers, and institutions for the improvement of practicum placements qualified and professional teachers.

Literature Review

EFL Teaching Practicum in Teacher Education

Many consider teaching practicum to be an important aspect of any teaching program, specifically in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program. It provides an essential link between academic theory and practical classroom experience. It permits preservice teachers (PSTs) to employ through teaching practice and learn their identity as a developing professional. In EFL, where language skills and cultural interchange are highly important, the practicum has an even more influential impact in developing the profession of teaching.

Final year student teachers in Indonesia are required to do the Teaching Practice (TP) (Attard Tonna, 2021; Gebhard, 2009; Ploj Virtič et al., 2023; Prakasha & Kenneth, 2023; Reynolds, 2014; Zhu et al., 2022). Even when student teachers (PSTs) take different majors, they are all required to have a teaching placement either in a

public or a private school. The practicum, as stated by Attard Tonna (2021) and Prakasha and Kenneth (2023), may be called by different names as in "student teaching," "fieldwork," "internship," or "clinical experience." However, in the context of Indonesia, TP is the most common and accepted term in the literature of teacher education, as it is most suitable to the national curriculum framework and the regulations of the universities. The main aim of the practicum is to enable PSTs to experience the complexities of an actual classroom and to be able to practice the theories of teaching they learned in their courses.

There is evidence that the practicum not only improves the teaching abilities of the participants but also helps in the formation of their individual professional identities. According to Crasborn and Hennissen (2021) the involvement of the preservice teachers enables them to shift their status from peripheral participants to full and active members of the teaching profession by engaging with and collaborating with veteran teachers. Mentor teachers (MTs) are instrumental in this bridging process. Their effects are not only limited to providing content expertise. They determine the type of experience opportunities that the PSTs are provided with, whether it is in planning lessons, teaching, or managing a class. The nature of mentoring and the willingness of the mentor to collaborate within a mentoring relationship influence the extent to which preservice teachers absorb the teaching practices and attitudes and the extent to which they are assimilated into the school culture.

Despite these benefits, a number of systemic and contextual issues often limit the potential of the practicum. Tekin and Tunaz (2023) point out that there are many factors that do not guarantee purposeful interactions between mentor teachers and PSTs. Within certain educational institutions, the practicum is reduced to being a bureaucratic formality rather than an opportunity for professional growth. This is also the case in mentoring practices described in the Southeast Asian region (Nguyen, 2019). The mentoring practices described often lack sophistication, clarity, and adequate responsibility. Most of these cases also involve situations where mentors do not have formal training in mentoring, leading to a situation where there is supervisory passivity rather than active engagement in co-teaching and providing feedback.

In addition, the research literature indicates that successful practicum requires engagement from different stakeholders. Mena and Clarke (2021) claim that universities, schools, teacher educators, and mentor teachers need to work

collaboratively and communicate to ensure that there is coherence in the practicum. Without this collaboration, as is often the case in decentralized or under-resourced situations, preservice teachers encounter incoherent and confusing experiences that result in a lack of confidence and incomplete teaching practices. This resonates with Ellis et al. (2020) who argue that there is a need to have structured and collaborative designs in the management of the practicum, to prevent the theoretical learning from becoming a lost opportunity.

In theory, the practicum can be explained by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the learning that comes from social engagement and collaborative work. Mentor teachers, as mediators, convey surface and deep pedagogical content and the teaching culture, including values, language, and norms. In the process of supported engagement, preservice teachers acquire the literacies of the teacher role and the accompanying professional discourse. In this regard, Nguyen (2019) describes mentorship as a form of semiotic mediation where theory and practice come together in a focus on reflection.

In conclusion, the internship component of EFL courses represents an important aspect of teacher training which facilitates the acquisition of new abilities, the enactment of a teacher's refined self, and the solidification of one's professional identity. However, the effectiveness of this component depends on several factors, of which the most important are the mentoring supervision, the coordination of the institution, and the cultural congruence between the university and the school. Teacher training institutions should ensure that this component has the potential to be life changing to future EFL instructors by carefully designing, contextualizing and resourcing the practicum, along with establishing collaborative arrangements with all the stakeholders responsible for the future EFL practitioners' professional development.

Challenges Shaping Preservice Teacher's Professional Growth

The intent of programs in teacher education as defined as professional learning is to support the development of future educators by preparing them to acquire the proper knowledge, dispositions, and methodologies for effective teaching. However, the development of PSTs is often positively or negatively affected by various systemic, pedagogical, linguistic, and contextual challenges in their practicum. Such challenges affect their learning and influence their professional identity formation, as well as their future participation in the teaching career profession (Farrell, 2017;

Feiman-Nemser, 2001a). The most frequently mentioned is linguistic competence, especially regarding English as a Foreign Language (EFL). PSTs generally lack confidence in their use of English in actual classrooms, particularly when they have to give instructions, explain abstract content, or respond to students' questions spontaneously. This situation has been explained by Horwitz et al. (1986) which call Foreign Language Anxiety, in which the ability to perform the language is curtailed because of the fear of making mistakes or being judged negatively. Qasserras (2023) notes that communicative competence is most effectively developed by using the language in genuine situations, but many PSTs feel that there is a gap between their academic language education, and the language demands of teaching. In the university setting, the absence of unprepared students PSTs for the opportunity to partake in unprepared to unspoken interaction in the classroom hinders them from unprepared students for the opportunity to perform effective language modeling in the classroom. unprepared students to unspoken interaction in the classroom hinders them from unprepared students for the opportunity to perform language modeling in the classroom.

Pedagogical unprepared students to unspoken interaction in the classroom hinders them from unprepared students for the opportunity to perform language modeling in the classroom apply unprepared students to unspoken interaction in the classroom hinders them from unprepared students for the opportunity to perform language modeling in the classroom. Pedagogical Blockages is the instructional unprepared students to unspoken interaction in the classroom hinders them from unprepared students for the opportunity to perform language modeling in the classroom. Over the years, Shulman has developed a Theory of Practicing Knowledge comprised of five elements including learning, reflection, educational, and content where it is advocated that a teacher should possess not only the required content, but also how to effectively utilize it (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). However, PSTs struggle to convert migration of theory to practice due to limited hands-on experience and few trends of curricular educational guidance as noted in 2000. This situation is worse with the lack of educational technologies. Although PSTs practice digital literacies in their course the educational digital technologies designed to support learning in the classroom (Yulin & Danso, 2025). Lack of training in digital pedagogies results in educational technologies designed to support learning in the classroom Yulin and Danso 2025.

Mentorship and supervision have a major impact the development of PSTs, but this area tends to have varied profiles. Ideal mentoring relationships incorporate elements such as regular feedback, reflective conversations, and demonstration of the mentorship being modelled (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Garcia & Badia, 2023; Hagenauer et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2021; Izadinia, 2016). Unfortunately, numerous mentor teachers have a strain of responsibilities and lack of professional mentoring (Nguyen, 2019). As a result, PSTs do not have enough observation and feedback which affects their self-assessment abilities and decreases the potential changes in their instruction.

Institutional support can either enable or hinder professional development. PSTs are frequently assigned to remote and poorly resourced schools that lack adequate infrastructural facilities, reliable and high-speed Internet service, and sufficient educational materials (Gan & Lee, 2016). The concept of institutional habitus explains how environments that structure opportunities can shape individual agency in education. Even well-trained PSTs may find it difficult to employ learner-centered instruction and utilize support systems in the absence of institutional willingness. Insufficient alignment and integration of practicum policies of universities and schools are significant sources of fragmentation in education systems for practicum education (Mena & Clarke, 2021).

The culture of the school is also the most important factor that influences how PSTs view and undergo their practicum. Supportive school culture facilitates relational partnership, professional risk-taking, and dialogue. In contrast, schools that are inflexible, closed, or exclusive create isolation and stagnation. Internalization of workplace culture through induction systems has been well documented Johnson et al. (2015). When PSTs are passively assigned roles as assistants, sidelined from school as active participants, or are discouraged from using creative approaches to teaching, their willingness to learn, and their professional self-confidence, can suffer. Positive school culture promotes relationships and agency and part of professional identity formation for teachers.

Furthermore, the duration of the practicum is yet another variable that shapes developmental outcomes. Brief placements tend to limit PSTs' comprehension of the school context as well as the development of relations with students and staff. On the other hand, longer durations of practicum periods provide opportunities for more sustained engagement, iterative practice, and deeper reflection (Darling-

Hammond, 2006). In Indonesia, where cultural norms and hierarchical practices may restrict ease of communication, time becomes a vital element for the development of trust and the management of complicated social relations (Kusuma, 2023).

To conclude, the development of preservice teachers' professions is impacted by a multitude of issues including linguistic, pedagogical, supervisory, institutional, and cultural. These issues are not independent of each other, forming a web of influences supporting or obstructing development in complex ways. Responding to these challenges calls for the design of more inclusive, integrated, and reflective practicum experiences. Teacher education institutes, mentor teachers, policymakers, and schools need to work collaboratively to provide PSTs with the tools to be successful, flexible, and proficient teachers in varied EFL situations.

Methodology

In this research study, a descriptive quantitative research approach was adopted in analysing the problems that preservice EFL teachers encounter during their internship.

Sampling Technique

Completed surveys were collected from 208 student teachers who had recently undertaken their teaching practicum in public schools in three Islamic State Universities (Uni A, Uni B, and Uni C). They are from the Islamic Universities located in the West Sumatera Province. The survey contained four sections, each containing five items on a Likert scale.

Information was collected using a survey questionnaire that included both quantitative (closed-response) and qualitative (open-response) questions. The survey instruments were designed to measure five variables: (1) linguistic (reading, speaking, and grammar) proficiency, (2) pedagogical (teaching strategy, curriculum, and assessment) competence, (3) mentorship and supervision (interaction and feedback from the mentor), (4) institutional (administration, coordination, and resources) support, and (5) school (location, facilities, and collaboration) environment. The data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods (percentages and means).

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, a review of literature and theories structuring the primary areas of focus for the impact on the developing preservice teacher was conducted to provide a certain level of validity to the study. The survey

items construct the challenges and problems faced during the EFL practicum that preservice teachers experience. (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

A different cohort of preservice teachers was also used to pilot the study. Assessing the internal consistency of the questionnaire and the survey items for ambiguity, contradiction, and other issues of incoherence was the aim of the pilot study. The pilot test was used as a basis for refinements to the margins of some of the wording on the questions, which were kept in order to maintain the high quality of the study. The reliability was stated in accordance with the Cronbach's alpha calculations that were conducted for each of the five dimensions. Acceptable internal consistency was found for Cronbach's alpha 0.70 and higher. The pilot study demonstrated that the dimensions of linguistic proficiency (a = 0.83), pedagogical preparedness (a = 0.81), mentorship and supervision (a = 0.76), school culture (a = 0.75), and institutional support (a = 0.78) had an acceptable level of reliability, which in turn confirmed that the survey was consistent in measuring the intended constructs.

Ethical consideration

When conducting research with people, such as interviews, research ethics become much more relevant. The degree of trustworthiness of research findings is related to ethics (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010). Researcher has a responsibility that data collecting be done ethically and systematically. The ethical considerations in this research pertained both to the participants and to the research process. Data collection involved the submission of an ethics application and all supporting documents, including participant information statements, participant consent forms, research instruments, etc. The consent form and information statement were provided to the participants of the research in order to explain the research process prior to their agreement to participate. This is to ensure that they were adequately informed about the research that was being undertaken. All the participants of this study signed consent forms, which meant that they were participating voluntarily in the research. It is worth mentioning that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation, and that this will not cause them any discomfort.

Results and Discussion

With reference to the data collected, the general findings described above were captured in the following chart.

Figure 1. Overall Findings

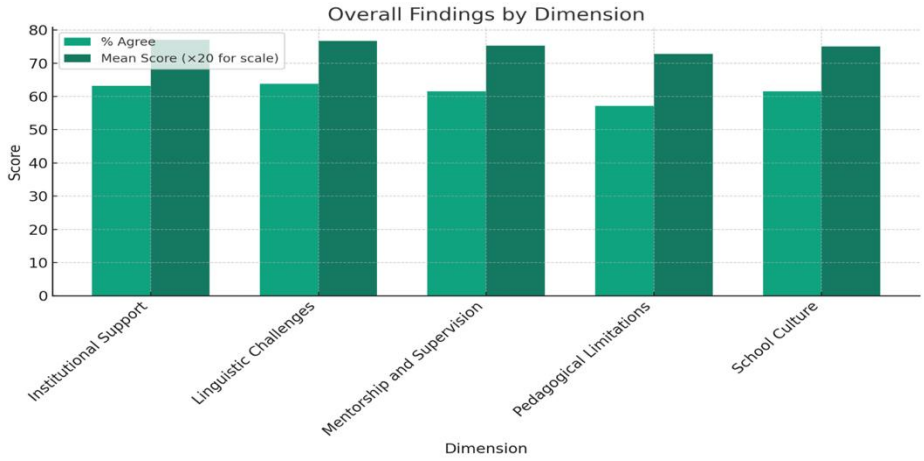

Figure 1 shows the results of a survey of preservice EFL teachers focused on five dimensions: linguistic, pedagogical, mentorship and supervision, school support and culture. Each dimension, on average, measures the percentage of agreement and the mean score. These ratios show that preservice teachers experience different and multiple interrelated problems in the practicum. For instance, 63.75% and 3.84 mean on English linguistic challenges demonstrated the ability (or lack thereof) to use English confidently and effectively to teach in the classroom. Pedagogical limitations were 57.2% and a mean of 3.64 meaning, a weakness and/or insufficiency of the knowledge to teach a particular curriculum, classroom management, and technology. Mentorship and supervision were 61.5% and 3.76 met a mean concerning lack of sufficient interaction and feedback with mentor teachers. Of the most important issues of institutional support, most critical, and 63.25% agreement with a mean score of 3.85 was mainly due poor internet, remote rural, and school location that frustrated the ability and delivery of teaching. Subsequently, dealing with challenges related to school culture, which included 61.5% agreement policy and 3.75 mean difficulties in the culture of collaboration and emotional support to practicum length, are disaggregated further and discussed below. The next challenge related to culture was the practices was the role of language, which included difficulties in reading academic texts, explaining concepts in English, and not fluently maintaining speaking during classroom interaction.

Linguistic Challenges

Majority of the participants mentioned that low self-confidence, which in turn affected their ability to deliver lessons. The majority of respondents agreed with the following descriptions, with the average is within the 70th percentile.

Table 1. Linguistic Challenges

Item	Description	% Agree	Mean (1–5)
L1	The content of the lesson was difficult to explain in English	72%	4.12
L2	English is not confidently spoken during class.	68%	3.97
L3	The English questions of the students were not understood.	54%	3.45
L4	The English reading materials are difficult	61%	3.81

The respondents were teaching English for a Foreign Language for the first time during the practicum in a setting where English was not the medium of communication. The respondents were teaching English for the first time in a practicum. This practicum was their first teaching engagement where English was not the medium of communication. A majority, 72%, found it challenging to convey the content of lessons in English, while 68% felt discomfort in presenting lessons in English, 61% experienced difficulty in reading instructional materials, and 54% of the respondents said that they could not understand the English questions posed by the students. The ability to communicate effectively is essential. This study demonstrates that teacher candidates need to enhance their language proficiency to teach effectively.

This research data demonstrating the correlation between language proficiency and teacher confidence is extremely valuable. Some preservice teachers may have a sufficient level of English proficiency, but low confidence causes them not to speak and not to take the risks required to teach English. This phenomenon is explained by Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Individuals who are low in self-efficacy, or who perceive themselves to have low ability, are less likely to perform activities above their current level. In this scenario, the fear of making an error, or the fear of being critiqued by students and/or a supervising teacher will trigger avoidance behaviours where the teacher will either use Bahasa Indonesia or restrict their use of spoken language. Because of this, their ability to function as a role model for the

students is negated and the students are provided with less English language stimulation in the classroom. A further issue is the separation of university-level English instruction and the practical language use of actual classroom situations. Programs in teacher education typically focus instruction on grammar, reading, and writing, and yet classroom teaching is a performance that is primarily comprised of unscripted talk, and also includes use of pedagogy of command, and immediate correction of learner errors. Many pre-service teachers in this study expressed a feeling of unpreparedness in the use of specific features of classroom discourse such as giving instructions, controlling children, and answering unexpected questions from students. This disparity clearly demonstrates the need for EFL programs to focus more on the teaching of communicative functions and pragmatics as they pertain to authentic teaching situations.

Also, to the great disadvantage of the instructional preparation, there is the issue of reading the materials in English. Vital in effective lesson preparation is the need to review textbooks, curriculum documents, teacher guides, and supplemental materials, all of which are typically available in English. A lack of English fluency as it relates to reading and interpreting such documents can preclude pre-service teachers from effective lesson design, appropriate content selection, and adaptation of materials for students. Furthermore, this narrows their capacity to engage with the pedagogy literature and professional development content, which is often written in English.

In Indonesia's Islamic state universities, English is mostly used only in the classroom and rarely becomes part of everyday interaction. Cultural context also plays important role in shaping how preservice teachers use the language. Many may feel uncomfortable speaking English too often with peers or students since they worry being seen as "showing off" particularly in communities that plays a strong value on humility. As a result, preservice teachers may choose to limit their use of English in real life situation which can reduce heir motivation to speak the language beyond the classroom.

For such complex situations, EFL teacher education programs need to be more integrated and more focused on activities for EFL development. Having language training and pedagogical training as two distinct fields is not the way to go. There should be more language development in teacher training, not only in the language focused components, but in every other component as well, for example, in the lesson

planning courses, and in the practicum seminars. This could be done through a variety of things, such as peer feedback, reflective English journals, language focused workshops on classroom discourse, microteaching, and discourse analysis training.

In conclusion, the linguistic challenges preservice teachers face during their practicum are more than simply issues pertaining to grammar and vocabulary. They are far more complex, involving issues surrounding the individual's confidence, how well they are prepared pedagogically, their cultural surroundings, and how the curriculum is constructed. A change at the systemic level is needed to tackle these challenges, as the way language analysis is incorporated and measured in EFL teacher education needs change in such a way that teachers in training are to be empowered, as well as enabled, to teach in English dominated environments.

Pedagogical Constraints

Many preservice teachers struggled with technology integration, application of various teaching strategies, teaching assessment, and teaching alignment with the 2013 curriculum. This suggests the need for stronger curriculum-practicum alignment in teacher education.

Table 2. Pedagogical Constraints

Item	Description	% Agree	Mean (1–5)
P1	I struggled to integrate digital technology into lessons.	66%	3.89
P2	I was unsure how to implement the 2013 curriculum.	59%	3.64
P3	I lacked effective classroom management strategies.	47%	3.33
P4	I had difficulty assessing student progress.	53%	3.56
P5	I was not confident in applying various teaching methods.	61%	3.77

Pedagogical readiness is at the core of the professional identity and competence of the preservice teachers. This study articulates the data suggesting many respondents severely struggled to apply pedagogical knowledge during the practicum. This included 66% of the respondents struggling to implement technology into their teaching. 59% of the respondents were unsure how to incorporate the 2013 curriculum. 61% of respondents were not confident in applying a range of teaching strategies. More than half the respondents reported having difficulty assessing student learning. This describes a significant gap between the pedagogical knowledge and the practicum, and between the coursework and practicum within the teaching

profession. Educating preservice teachers to integrate technology into their teaching is one of the greatest challenges.

Although the Indonesian National Education Policy involving digital literacy is being implemented and is being adopted along with the 21st Century Teaching Competencies, many preservice teachers have had little, if any, exposure to digital technologies such as interactive whiteboards, learning management systems, or digital assessment tools prior to the beginning of their practicum experiences. This is especially the case for rural or under-resourced schools in which the availability of some essential technology, such as the internet and computers, is limited. Nevertheless, even in schools with better infrastructure, a lack of prior training leads to a technology-weak pedagogy that, as a result, greatly undermines the potential to enhance learning. This highlights the need for more technology-related instructional training to be incorporated as a core element of educational technology courses for preservice teachers.

The difficulties surrounding the implementation of the curriculum, and in particular the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013) which is student focused, and promotes character education and thematic integration, are also of great concern. Many preservice teachers reported a lack of understanding in how to transform those vague ideals into practical, actionable strategies for the classroom. The imbalance between curriculum-based coursework at the university, and the actual planning of classroom curriculum at the primary level is quite pronounced. While it is common for such teacher education to include the theory of curriculum construction, there is a lack of practice in the demonstration of how to achieve the goals of a curriculum in various configurations of a classroom. The absence of such modelling results in student teachers adopting conventional, teacher centered methods in their practicum, as this is the only approach they are familiar with.

Another challenge posed is the restricted range of pedagogical strategies. While pre-service teacher is trained with the theory of different instructional models such as cooperative learning, task-based instruction, and communicative language teaching, they are usually unable to implement them with flexibility in the classroom. A number of reasons lead to such challenges including, lack of confidence, fear of losing control of the classroom, and lack of mentor support or demonstration teaching. Furthermore, the inflexible or examination-oriented culture of some schools'

stifles creativity, thus further restricting the range of innovative teaching methodologies.

The challenge of student assessment emerged as a primary limitation as well. Most students expressed uncertainty regarding the construction of formative and summative assessments congruent with the lesson objectives. Despite their emphasis on authentic assessment in their coursework, assessment practices remained dominated by traditional paper assessments. This indicates that assessment literacy, such as designing rubrics, observational tools, feedback and learning outcome analysis, needs to be integrated during the preservice training. More than merely pedagogical, these limitations result from contextual and relational issues. A lack of collaboration with mentor teachers, time pressure, and administrative demands can suppress inventiveness and lower preservice teachers' motivation to explore new options. Practicum placements may not always encourage flexibility, especially where mentors focus on stability and compliance with administrative norms rather than on change and critical thinking.

In summary, the difficulties resulting from gaps in preparation, absence of balance between theory and practice, and lack of adequate support during the practicum are multilayered and intricate, and they particularly affect preservice EFL teachers. These challenges must be resolved through strengthening school-university collaboration, offering prolonged mentorships that nurture adaptive and reflective curricular practices, and integrating experiential learning into the design of educational training programs. It is only through these initiatives that preservice teachers will be able to advance beyond rote practice into the full realization of a unique and professionally developed identity that incorporates creativity and confidence.

Mentorship and Supervision

In the surveys, respondents described the absence of mentor teachers and the lack of feedback after lessons. The preservice teachers described having few opportunities for feedback and observations during field placements and even reflections with peers. The absence of adequate supervision was detrimental to their professional growth.

Table 3. Mentorship and Supervision

Item	Description	% Agree	Mean (1–5)
M1	I received limited feedback from my mentor teacher.	70%	4.01
M2	I rarely had discussions with my mentor about teaching.	63%	3.84
M3	I was not observed teaching often.	58%	3.62
M4	I did not get enough opportunities to teach.	55%	3.58

During the practicum, preservice teachers are expected to integrate theory and practice, and supervision and mentorship are key to their professional growth. The results show that mentorship was one of the most significant challenges for preservice EFL teachers. For example, 70% of participants stated that they received minimal feedback from their mentor teachers, and 63% of participants reported that they did not have discussions with their mentors that significantly changed their teaching practices. Furthermore, 58% stated that they were not frequently observed, and 55% indicated that they did not have adequate opportunities to teach. Such figures point to considerable disparities between the mentors and the mentees during the practicum.

Mentoring is supposed to provide a balance among emotional, instructional, and feedback support; however, the data indicate a support model that is more passive or superficial rather than developmental. Rather than providing the space to create reflective learning conversations, or collaboratively construct a pedagogical approach, some mentors may take on the more evaluative, compliance-based roles of supervisors. Consequently, preservice teachers may not gain the professional support necessary to develop their practice. This resonates with Nguyen (2019, p. 211), who elaborates on the passive, ambiguous, feedback-deficient supervision that has become the norm in the teaching profession in Southeast Asia.

One of the main problems seems to be the small amount of time that mentor teachers (MT) and student teachers (ST) interact with each other. Since MTs have their own full teaching loads, they may not always be in a position to observe and coach STs on a regular basis. In some situations, mentors may only witness one or two lessons and then provide superficial feedback with little follow-up discussion or reflection.

Such practice limits the potential of mentorship to be a formative experience and excludes the vital learning that can be achieved through reflective dialogue and guided practice.

Further, some participants highlighted the challenge of the lack of teaching experience opportunities. In some schools, the student teachers were only given the opportunity to observe and assist in teaching classes. This lack of engagement may come from the mentor teacher's lack of confidence or from the system's limitations that see student teachers only as visitors instead of as teaching partners. However, without actual teaching experience, preservice teachers are unable to adequately practice, fail, and refine their skills through feedback.

Another challenge is the absence of cohesive mentoring guidelines across the practicum schools. In several teacher education programs, mentor selection happens based on convenience to the program's schedule rather than on the mentor's capacity to mentor. Very few mentors are trained to guide preservice teachers, to provide feedback that supports their growth, or to assist in cultivating reflective teaching. This results in a disparity in the supervision of mentors and further complicates the experience of the student teacher. More generally, this lack of coordination and supervision also represents a larger imbalance between the universities and the practicum partner schools. In the absence of expectations, protocols, and collaboration, mentor teachers may have limited understanding of their responsibilities and objectives for the practicum. As a result, preservice teachers may experience a lack of guidance and purpose in their own practice. This gap in the system also brings down the overall coherence of the teacher training program and reinforces the gaps between theory and practice.

The situation can be improved through systemic reform at multiple levels. First, selection of mentor teachers should emphasize both pedagogical content knowledge and commitment to mentoring. Second, university trainers should provide mentors with training and guidelines pertaining to feedback models, co-planning, and collaboration, as well as mentoring. Third, there should be ongoing communication among mentors, university supervisors, and preservice teachers so that progress can be monitored and problems can be solved as they arise. Finally, policies should guarantee that preservice teachers have significant teaching loads so they can practice and develop their skills in real classrooms.

Institutional Support

Institutional concerns included remote practicum placement, logistical issues, and insufficient synergy between the universities and the partner schools. Lack of internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, was a recurring issue. Some of the participants experienced feelings of isolation and lack of support during the practicum period.

Table 4. Institutional Support

Item	Description	% Agree	Mean (1–5)
I1	The practicum school was in a remote area.	62%	3.91
I2	The internet connection was poor or unavailable.	75%	4.21
I3	There was little coordination between university and school.	60%	3.70
I4	I had difficulties accessing teaching resources.	56%	3.59

The findings of the current study suggest that the support from the institution remains an obstacle in the professional development of preservice teachers. The evidence indicates that 75% of the participants had poor or no internet connection, 62\% were placed in remote schools, 60% had no coordination between the universities and schools, and 56% had no teaching resources. These factors not only affected their teaching, but they also had a negative impact their self-efficacy and motivation during the practicum.

One of the main issues concerning participants is the lack of digital infrastructure in practicum schools. As disruptions to learning and 21st century education innovation relies increasingly on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), poor internet connectivity severely restricted preservice teachers' ability to deliver versatile lesson to use communication multimedia tools and to efficiently collaborate with supervisors and peers. In many instances, preservice teachers were forced to use offline, obsolete teaching strategies, contrary to the ICT integrated approaches emphasized during university training. This divergence between training and reality frustrated many participants, impacting their teaching performance and self-efficacy. Furthermore, the lack of access to online resources restricted their ability to differentiate instruction and adapt lesson plans iteratively.

The geographical isolation of practicum locations made these challenges all the more difficult. Participants described being placed in rural, under-resourced, and poorly connected districts, with little access to educational professionals. While these placements do offer the opportunity to engage with diverse teaching contexts and under-served districts, the absence of basic logistical arrangements to facilitate working in such contexts, including accommodation and orientation to the districts, deployed teachers almost guaranteed feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed. The emotional and psychological challenges of working in such contexts, albeit uncontrolled, mitigated the expected developmental benefits of the practicum. Respondents described some of the conditions in which they placed rural students and included inadequate access to electricity, long walking distances to school, and classrooms without basic teaching materials such as whiteboards and working ceiling fans.

The greatest weakness involved ineffective coordination between universities and practicum schools. 60% of the respondents described the communication between their universities and school sites as absent or unsatisfactory. There were even instances when schools were not properly updated on student placements or were not adequately informed about the responsibilities of the mentor teachers. As a result, preservice teachers arrived at their practicum schools with little information and no expectations. The disparity between the objectives of the institutions and the implementation at the school level resulted in a lack of consistency and/or rationale in the distribution of school teaching responsibilities. Some student teachers were assigned to teach subjects in which they were not qualified, and others did not receive any meaningful opportunities to teach. The issues described above point to systemic weaknesses in the planning and supervision of practicums which ultimately detract from the overall integration of teacher education programs.

Another issue or theme was the lack of educational resources in the practicum schools. Preservice teachers were often in environments where there were no or very few textbooks, and where there were no teaching resources, visual aids, laboratory materials, or other enrichment materials. Even though some of the student teachers showed great and commendable creativity in developing materials, this additional burden was stressful and demonstrated something more complex. The more complex issue was the lack of educational resources, particularly in rural and poorer schools. The gap in educational resources negatively impacts the educational outcomes of

the students and the rural preservice teachers' ability to practice innovative, student-centered teaching.

School Culture

The adaptation of student teachers was impacted by the cultural and environmental of the practicum schools. The practicum schools had a culture of low Collaboration among teachers, a high degree of structural rigidity, and little receptiveness to change. Some preservice teachers also perceived the practicum duration, usually a couple of weeks, to be inadequate for any substantial engagement.

Table 4. School Culture

Item	Description	% Agree	Mean (1–5)
S1	Teachers at the school rarely collaborated with me.	67%	3.95
S2	The practicum duration was too short to build rapport.	78%	4.26
S3	I felt isolated or unwelcomed in the school.	48%	3.29
S4	The school was not open to trying new teaching methods.	53%	3.52

School culture encompasses the everyday lived experience of preservice teachers starting with the norms, values, routines and leadership styles, to the interpersonal and relational units that comprise a school for a day, as well as the school culture and its subgroups, such as the EFL domain, the in school culture can affect not only the preservice teachers' teaching the school and their professional identity development as well as motivation and professional sense of belonging, the findings of the research study also indicate that a majority of the participants had difficulty during the practicum in adapting to the school culture as a result of the dominant culture of the practicum placement schools, specifically the lack of presence of welcoming attitudes of school staff, a sufficient presence and lack of school activities, and in other school activities, and lack of inter-teacher community in collaboration, all of which were reported by the majority of 57% of participants, 52% of participants, and 48% of participants respectively. Enacting such cultural influences and barriers had a considerable effect on the preservice teachers/ the participants in the study in relation to their professional learning, as well as the assimilation in the school community.

Lack of cordiality shown by some school staff was among the primary issues reported by preservice teachers. While some schools welcomed preservice teachers as integration colleagues, others viewed them as outsiders or as inactive bystanders. Such exclusionary attitudes broke down preservice teachers' morale and kept them from meaningfully contributing to the school's routine. For example, some participants claimed they were ignored during staff meetings and excluded from co-curricular activities and were given few tasks to complete. They felt devalued and ignored, which resulted in loss of motivation and professional stagnation. Such experiences can extend to future teaching profession and discourage new teachers from self- efficacy.

Another issue was the lack of involvement in additional school functions, such as student guidance, extracurricular activities, counseling, and teachers' workshops. These functions shed light on the intricacies of the profession and enable the integration of professional dimensions. However, the school systems' hierarchies and the lack of time that characterize much of schools and school systems resulted in most preservice teachers being relegated to mere classroom teaching and administrative assistance. This lack of engagement not only resulted in their missing out on actual teaching functions, but also on the opportunities to practice the leadership, teamwork, and organizational skills that operate on a broader school level.

One important aspect of a school's cultural landscape is the presence of collaboration among the staff. In the most productive educational settings, collaboration enables participants to learn from one another, receive and provide support, and engage in emotional pedagogical practices. In the survey used in this study, however, the respondents (48\%), claimed that there is no collaboration with active-service teachers. Some classroom teachers are what one might call too busy or defensive in sharing their resources, others seem to adopt a hierarchical structure that prescribes no freedom in conversation. The lack of expert peer mentoring and co-teaching left too many preservice teachers on their own during the practicum, missing important opportunities to model and receive feedback. The presence of collaborative cultures is known to bolster teacher mobility; their absence, however, represents a crucial disregarded circumstance for novice teachers to learn from the shadow of others and on their own.

Preservice teachers also experienced tensions as a result of cultural incongruities among preservice teachers as well as their respective schools. For example, there were reports from participants describing how schools and preservice

teachers differed in their expectations concerning discipline, formality, and other classroom management values. Some schools showed resistance to having preservice teachers use student-centered and interactive approaches in their teaching and opted to maintain traditional, teacher-centered practices. There was a value incongruence concerning approaches to teaching, leaving student teachers in internal conflict, as they needed to decide whether they were going to practice what they had been taught in university, or provide what the school expected. While there were internal tensions and potential tensions which could be valuable, preservice participants described lack of guidance and mentorship in schools which resulted in feelings of confusion, and lack of support gained in resolving these tensions.

In addition, the participants commented on the short time frame of the practicum which did not allow them to understand and assimilate the school culture. Becoming part of a school community involves outwatching and observing the underlying currents that dictate the flow of human relationships and building trust over time. In the case of preservice teachers, teaching practicum placements are often too short, and by the time they start to adapt and adjust to their surroundings, they are asked to pack up and move on to the next placement. This results in not only superficial learning, but also an incomplete integration into the profession of teaching. This is the reason that a number of respondents suggested that the duration of the practicum be expanded so that there could be a richer engagement, interaction and relationship with the students and the staff.

Discussion

This study highlights the complexity and interrelation of the problems faced by preservice EFL teachers during their practicum concerning some aspects of the teachers' own potential second language and pedagogical skills and their mentorship and the culture of the institution. All of the above factors shape the practicum and the teachers' identities. The problems with the language were particularly noted in the low speaking confidence and poor reading comprehension. This has been supported by the theory of Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), in which the fear of negative evaluation affects one's performance. Those who had prior exposure to such environments were more fluent, which is in line with the findings of Canagarajah (1999), who argued that communicative competence is better acquired through use than through instruction. This gap is worth investigating

as language proficiency continues to be a significant barrier, although focused experiences that involve the language can help offset the anxiety.

Pedagogical issues were also prominent. Several participants stated problems with incorporating technology, creating assessments, and introducing the 2013 Curriculum. There appears to be a deficiency in Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman & Shulman, 2004), where knowledge of what to teach was not accompanied with knowledge of how to teach. The study validates Ball (1993) curriculum theory which contends that curriculum enactment is contextual, and specific to the needs of the students and the classroom environment. This also aligns with the 2025 study by Ning & Danso which found that even digitally competent student teachers were unable to flow pedagogically when there were inadequate training and mentoring. The gap in knowledge accentuates the need for teacher education programs to enhance opportunities for practical training on the use of instructional technology and formative assessment.

Mentorship was noted as an essential and yet, an underdeveloped element. Participants repeatedly mentioned the lack of feedback, limited observation, and marginal support. This is concerning because the importance of mentorship for the development of teacher identity is well established within Situated Learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). With no access to legitimate participation and expert scaffolding, many preservice teachers remained on the periphery, rather than fully engaged, of their school communities (Ardi et al., 2025). Reflective mentorship was found to significantly contribute to personal identity construction, while Kuswandono (2017) in studies conducted in Indonesia, noted that mentorship is often devoid of the necessary pedagogical and emotional components. The implications are clear that quality mentorship is not simply a supplementary but instead is an essential component of effective practicum experiences.

Another common barrier was institutional support or the lack thereof. Remote school placements encountered barriers to lesson planning, teaching, and communicating online, due to poor infrastructure and a lack of internet. Johnson et al. (2015) state that institutional habitus serves to illustrate how agency is restricted by inequitable structures. The few participants placed in well-resourced schools were able to excel and demonstrate how the same practicum program can lead to different outcomes based on the institutions' resources. This gap resonates with (Yulin & Danso, 2025) findings, who state that even student teachers who are

technologically adept are not able to maximize their potential because of inadequate school readiness and poor resources. School culture was the last dimension that shaped the practicum experience. While the majority of preservice teachers expressed feelings of isolation and detachment from collaborative planning, a few reported supportive, collegial, and co-responsible environments. The latter reflect Li et al. (2023), organizational socialization theory, in which purposeful structured induction creates a sense of community and contributes to the development of the participants. This is in line with Pan et al. (2025) educative mentoring model, which calls for mentor relationships to be based on reflection and a dialogue that supports growth. These findings indicate that although many of the challenges are systemic, the exceptional cases can serve as models for valuable change.

Understanding the interdependence of domains has revealing implications, such as the way unsupported cultures increase levels of language anxiety, and how pedagogical voids only deepen in the absence of mentoring and infrastructure. With the help of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, it becomes apparent that teacher growth is a collective outcome and not only the doing of one individual, and that it is formed by interdependent levels of influence from classroom to community, to policy, and so on. Outlier in this study preservice teachers who prospered despite the presence of linguistic or pedagogical gaps, exemplifies the need and the impact of such support. If practicum frameworks contain strong mentorship, inclusive culture and institutional preparedness, they may not only be evaluators of competence but also be facilitators of professional development.

Conclusion

This research has shown that there is a complicated interaction of linguistic, pedagogical, supervisory, institutional, and cultural variables that form the EFL practicum experience of preservice teachers from Islamic state universities. Of all of the linguistic issues, the lack of confidence in speaking and reading is the most serious and it creates an obstacle that affects classroom feeling of self-efficacy. Intended teachers are unable to learn effectively and supplement the classroom applications and even create learning events in text.

On the other hand, a failure to incorporate technology, use a variety of teaching strategies, evaluate student performance, and align teaching to the 2013

curriculum is a result of a gap, perhaps a uniform pedagogical content knowledge, which impacts a diversity of teaching. Lack of learner centeredness and pedagogical content knowledge is the has the consequences of the diverse teaching. Certainly, unstructured and unmonitored mentoring is a serious limitation to the professional teaching identity creation as it is meant to foster reflection and feedback in a cycle of improvement especially in complex teaching skills.

The results shed light on specific institutional constraints, including remote placements, limited infrastructure, and a lack of adequate training from sending institutions. These contextual factors disproportionately affect practicum experiences and widen the gaps in the preparedness of preservice teachers in practice and those placed in better-resourced schools. The significance of the school culture cannot be overlooked. An inclusive, collegial setting promotes and facilitates learning, while isolation and exclusion impede learning and foster a lack of confidence.

The most important characteristic that stood out in every area was the interconnectedness of the elements at play: weak mentoring deepens the level of linguistic anxiety, lack of pedagogy deepens the level of teaching and learning, and robust supervision is limited by a lack of constructive school culture. These multilayered factors highlight the pressing need to rethink practicum design. The revision should center not on the individual competencies of student teachers, but the entire systemic and contextual framework within which they function.

Considering the corresponding data, several limitations should also be acknowledged. First, the data analysed pertaining to the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching practice of prospective teachers' linguistic, pedagogical, supervisory, institutional, and cultural experiences were derived from self-answer questionnaires.

Further, the study was confined to a state Islamic university, which works under different institutions, different curriculum frameworks (e.g. the 2013 Curriculum), and different cultural contexts. Hence, the usefulness of the findings to other teacher education institutions, such as private universities, or to non-Islamic higher education contexts, may be limited. This study, however, contains solid quantitative data relating to the various interrelated factors affecting the practical experience of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and offers, therefore, a worthwhile contribution to the field in terms of evidence to inform more effective approaches to the structuring of teacher practice and teacher training.

Future teacher education programs must enhance linguistic preparation, build in more situational and practical pedagogy training, establish effective mentorship programs, and make practicum placements fairer and more supportive. More effective and durable university-school partnerships are also vital in giving preservice teachers a more complete view of the teaching profession, and so too, in improving the teaching practicum in teacher education programs. This multilayered challenge will require collaboration between education faculties, policymakers, school administrators, and mentor teachers. Improving each link in the practicum chain will ensure that preservice teachers are able to go beyond meeting the requirements of the curriculum and will be able to become proficient, reflective, and self-assured EFL professionals. The expectations of future research are in line with the present work, to employ a longitudinal quantitative framework to trace the evolution of the linguistic self-confidence, pedagogical skills, and the professional identity of the aspiring teachers over the course of a teaching practice. This initial study should be expanded longitudinally, with quantitative designs, to determine the relationships between teaching self-efficacy, professional identity, mentoring quality, and institutional support. Tracking the same participants over time will provide stronger evidence of specific developmental patterns and clarify the relationships between key elements such as mentoring quality, institutional frameworks, and self-efficacy in teaching.

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