



Practicum Anxiety and English Language Preservice Teacher Preparation in Indonesia: Experiences from the COVID-19 Pandemic

印尼實習焦慮與英語實習教師之培訓:借鑑COVID-19大流行時的經驗

Ania Lian¹ · Syahdan Syahdan² · Camelia Manalu² · MHD Natsir³

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Abstract

The existing literature on practicum anxiety seldom scrutinises the preservice teachers' experiences to uncover potential links between the sources of these anxieties and the conceptual frameworks they bring into their practicum journeys. This qualitative study interviewed five first-year preservice English language teachers in Indonesia amid COVID-19 lockdowns, exploring sources of their anxiety and coping strategies. The analysis revealed that, while their coping strategies align with those documented in prior international research, it also yielded novel insights. The preservice teachers in the study 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. Arguably, these factors are crucial for fostering a sense of ease during the practicum. Although the scope of this study is limited, its findings highlight the significance of this analysis and stress the necessity for more extensive investigations to gain a fuller understanding of the preservice practicum experience.

摘要

焦慮是外語實習教師在學校實習期間普遍經歷的一種感覺。通常，這種壓力會被歸因於過高的自我期望、緊湊的課程、班級經營面臨的挑戰、沈重的工作量及支持不足等因素。然而，現有關於實習焦慮的文獻鮮少仔細審視實習教師的反思，以揭示焦慮的來源和他們在實習過程中所攜帶的概念框架之間的潛在關聯。然而，這類的分析可以揭示實習教師對實習的預備程度，包含他們在應對壓力來源時應用專業知識的能力。在此質性研究中，我們對五名印尼一年級的英語實習教師進行訪談，以探討他們在COVID-19封城期間於學校實習的焦慮來源。本研究分析了這些實習教師的回應，以確定他們是否使

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

用專業知識來幫助自己應對所遭遇的挑戰。研究結果顯示，他們所採用的應對策略範圍與其他研究中的策略範圍相符合，但有一顯著的例外：在實習期間，他們藉由運用英語教學課程的知識、探討相關文獻以獲取額外指引及熟悉學校文化，以培養從容自若的感覺。雖然本研究的範圍有所限制，但研究結果強調了所選方法的重要性。本研究強調有必要進一步展開類似性質的研究，以便提供對實習經驗更全面的了解。

Keywords Initial teacher education · EFL practicum · Causes of anxiety on school practicum · English language teaching in Indonesia · Foreign language teaching in Indonesia

關鍵詞 初始師資培育 · EFL實習 · 學校實習焦慮之原因 · 印尼英語教學 · 印尼外語教學

Introduction

Since the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the countries of Southeast Asia have exerted considerable effort to narrow the disparity in the quality of education service delivery between the developed and developing nations in the area. This undertaking has proven challenging due to the intricate nature of the newly introduced global accountability frameworks. Furthermore, scholars in Southeast Asia lack the research resources and extensive experience necessary to effectively translate these novel policies into practical implementation (Lor, 2021; Nashruddin, 2020). Nevertheless, enhancing the quality of education remains a prominent objective within the ASEAN, encompassing a focus on improved teacher preparation as well (Meiers, 2007).

School practicum stands as the central component within teacher education programs (Makovec, 2018). It provides preservice teachers with the opportunity to make the connections between theory and practice, allowing them to analyse, implement, and evaluate educational policies and theories that they have studied in their teacher preparation programs (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Mirici & Caglar, 2017).

Throughout the school practicum, preservice teachers acquire the skills to operate under the guidance of a mentor teacher, who aids them in comprehending effective teaching methods for learners of varying ages and capabilities (Becker et al., 2019; Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016; Kyndt et al., 2014; Seidel et al., 2021; Sorensen, 2014).

The teaching practicum presents students with a lot of challenges, and preservice teachers find this period very demanding (Afrianto et al., 2019; Charisma & Nurmalasari, 2020; Grudnoff, 2011; Mossaddaq & Barahmeh, 2016; Nguyen, 2018; Trent, 2013). While on practicum at school, they are encouraged to learn to think “like a teacher” (Dang, 2013). In Indonesia, school practicum involves more than lesson preparation and its implementation. Preservice teachers are also expected to demonstrate a broad set of subskills, such as establishing good communication with their students, their peers, and mentor teachers, the capacity to document their teaching, and to document their personal learning (Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018).

In the context of foreign language teaching, preservice teachers feel doubly challenged as they work with students in a language that is not only foreign in form, but also in culture. Frequently, they feel that the task is too overwhelming. This only adds to their stress and makes them doubt their abilities to teach (Caires et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2022; Liu & Wu, 2021; Tum, 2012; Zhang, 2019).

Anxiety is an unpleasant emotion characterised by worry, frustration, and lack of confidence. According to Khoshlessan and Das (2017), anxiety is a sense of uneasiness, incompetence, fear, and nervousness about doing something in a particular situation. Aslrasouli and Vahid (2014) argued that even experienced teachers can feel anxious. The subject of anxiety among preservice teachers has been a recurrent focus in educational research.

More recently, in Indonesia, Charisma and Nuralmasari's (2020) study delved into the prevalent sources of anxiety faced by preservice teachers. They identified factors such as a lack of prior school experience, difficulties in lesson planning, and uncertainties about pedagogical effectiveness. Their research also highlighted the coping strategies employed by these individuals to manage stress. However, their study did not assess the effectiveness of these strategies. Keeping this concern in view, the current study embarked on investigating how preservice teachers articulated their anxieties. The objective was to ascertain the depth of their pedagogical knowledge and their proficiency in effectively applying this knowledge.

Reflecting on practice by integrating disciplinary knowledge is a fundamental criterion within higher education in Indonesia. This proficiency is also incorporated in the National Higher Education Standards of Indonesia (MORTHE, 2015; MORTHE (The Ministry of Research Technology and Higher Education), 2020). These standards highlight the significance, particularly in undergraduate programs, of competencies such as problem identification, its effective communication, and resolution, all while leveraging professional and disciplinary knowledge. These elements are integral components of a graduate's skill set.

A quick look at the international literature on the subject of school practicum demonstrates that preservice teachers tend to forget about theory while on practicum.

In a book by Geng et al. (2016) that documented the experiences of preservice teachers in Australia, numerous education students spoke about their pedagogic struggles, fears, and successes while on practicum. However, in their reflections, they tended to adopt an uncritical perspective on the sources of these struggles and the solutions, which they adopted. For example, McNicol (2016) reported on her success in teaching children the sight words of English (words considered to be most frequently used in English) over the whole term (10 weeks). She described her teaching as a success:

A clear indicator of the success of my practicum is (*sic*) results ... I started at my placement school in week 5 of term 2 ... and introduced a visible learning display—the tricky word wall—in week 1 of term 3. There was a huge difference in how much success my students experienced—every single child had success. ... From the feedback that I received from the parents, it seemed that their children were going home and talked about the tricky word wall. They were desperate to practise their words every night so that they could move onto

the next hat [set of new words] ... I am so happy that I decided to try this approach with this class. (p. 40)

The depiction provided by McNicol (2016) appears optimistic, yet it lacks a thorough analysis encompassing a broader spectrum of concerns than personal sentiment. This absence includes queries regarding the essence of literacy and reading, as well as how sight words contribute to these abilities. In other words, the teaching strategy necessitated articulation within theoretical frameworks and alignment with embedded theoretical constructs that outline teaching objectives.

A parallel observation was presented by one of the book's editors, a distinguished language and literacy expert. The editor remarked:

While it is common to think of just such more frequent words as 'sight words', ultimately, of course, a mature reader should be able to recognise virtually all words as sight words, with no need to consciously work them out from their spelling" (Black, 2016, p. 33)

To elaborate, the intense emphasis placed on sight words, akin to McNicol's approach, required a substantiation that would illuminate their overarching influence on, or relevance to, literacy. This substantiation, in accordance with Australia's education policies, would underscore their role in equipping students to become effective and discerning participants in Australian society (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7).

In his 2021 study, Freebody published transcripts of interviews with Australian teachers across all levels of schooling. The transcripts illustrate that Australian teachers, when talking about practice, tend not to embed their views in theoretical concepts and the national curriculum (ACARA, 2016). For example, in a discussion with the teaching Director of a preschool with children of 3–4 years of age, the Director was asked about the activities that the school created to prepare children to be effective communicators (Freebody, 2021). In his/her response, the Director explained that, for these children, the school had different priorities than addressing their communication skills, "I think with our school readiness program we tend not to focus on those" (p. 27). So, what were the target learning priorities for these children? As the Director explained, for the years 3–4, "it's more of those social skills ... the engaging in conversation ... being heard in those big group settings because that's what's going to happen when they go to school" (p. 27). Yet being an effective communicator is synonymous with the skills mentioned by the Director.

Instances of confusion akin to the one illustrated above are pervasive throughout Freebody's (2021) publication. For instance, a Year 2 educator was queried about the "most crucial literacy skills for them [the students] to acquire proficiency in this year" (p. 31). In response, the teacher delineated skills encompassing automaticity ("automaticity, in terms of, they know it, they write it, they just, they don't sit there and, think about it") (p. 31), self-sufficiency ("ensuring that, whatever they understand, they manage on their own"), handwriting and spelling ("spelling akin to sight words"), and comprehension ("delving into the narrative to enable discourse") (p. 32). However, a more pivotal aspect necessitates attention here—the principle underpinning the selection of these skills. Elucidating and clarifying such

a principle empowers the teacher to elaborate on the efficacy of the selection process that they have employed. Merely listing the skills falls short of achieving this comprehensive understanding.

To summarise, the narratives of the pre- and in-service teachers discussed in this section underscore the importance of instilling in preservice teachers the propensity to contextualise their pedagogical decisions within the frameworks of policy and theory. This cultivation is essential for nurturing well-informed and reflective practice throughout their training period and, subsequently, as educators in-service.

English Language Learning in the Indonesian Curriculum

To appreciate the challenges of the education system in Indonesia, it is important to recognise the recent shifts in intellectual perspectives and policy that it has experienced. These shifts are not unique to Indonesia, but as discussed, their integration into the school culture and teacher education programs is just as difficult in Indonesia as it is in other countries.

Over the last two decades, Indonesia has aligned itself with the worldwide trend towards competency-based education and instructional approaches that facilitate knowledge construction, contrasting the conventional models of knowledge transmission. This new perspective is frequently termed transformative education. Consequently, educators globally embarked on revising their curricula to embody this transformative facet of education. The objective of this global movement was for the new curricula to be *community-oriented*, *student-centred*, and *supportive of analytical learning* (Ministry of Education, Indonesia, 2013; Suparno & Ramadanti, 2019).

Starting from 2004, the English language teaching (ELT) curriculum for primary and secondary students in Indonesia has evolved through successive frameworks. These frameworks progressively integrated traditional macro skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing with higher-order skills. These higher-order skills encompass self- and social awareness (i.e. learning English to broaden one's scope of engagement with the world), intercultural awareness (i.e. learning English to deepen one's understanding of diverse cultures), and collaboration, literacy, and critical thinking as competencies that enable students to engage effectively in the global community, understanding and appreciating diverse perspectives (Widodo, 2016).

The principles of the ELT curriculum are interwoven with the broader competencies and skills outlined in the national curriculum as well (Ministry of Education, Indonesia, 2013). These include (a) *Relevance*: linking ELT education to students' "real-life needs"; having a broad range of interests, readiness for work, and the capacity to utilise one's intellectual potential and interests; (b) *Responsibility*: teaching students to be responsible citizens who act informed by acquiring lifelong learning skills; the ability to live in a globalised society and respect the environment; (c) *Reflection*: teaching students to think clearly and critically; curiosity and creativity, consideration of the moral aspects of a problem; (d) *Collaboration*: teaching students to work in teams and collaborate.

According to Professor Widodo (2016), the ELT learning outcomes need to be integrated into an instructional methodology that underscores the reflective aspects

of the learning process. This includes fostering interactions, conducting explorations, making observations, establishing connections with individuals, and engaging with the environment. Below, these principles for teaching English language are outlined *verbatim* (Widodo, p. 137).

1. Student-centred pedagogy is of top priority. Students are afforded an opportunity to choose what to learn to achieve a particular competency.
2. Interactive pedagogy involves interactions between teacher and students, between students and materials, and between students and their social environments.
3. Integrated pedagogy assists students to explore what they need to learn and to see interconnectedness among a variety of materials through direct observations and mediated observations through the Internet, for instance.
4. Exploratory and engaging learning and teaching are framed in scientific inquiry or discovery learning, which follows these steps: observing, questioning, exploring or experimenting, associating, and communicating.
5. A collaborative principle underpins a learning process.
6. The use of technology enriches learning and teaching process.
7. Students' needs inform pedagogy.
8. Critical and interdisciplinary approaches are adopted to inform the whole pedagogy.

As English emerges as the new *lingua franca* of Southeast Asia, Indonesia established a policy mandating English language education for all school children. This policy added an extra burden on educators, necessitating them to create learning environments that cater to the needs of all children, not just a select few. While the policy is not devoid of some inherent challenges (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017), on a positive note, it has prompted English language educators to move beyond traditional perceptions of language as solely a linguistic system and learning as a process of rote memorisation. Conversely, the policy has introduced the concept of language as an expression of an individual's social identity and the learning process as a framework that empowers individuals to explore and expand their capabilities to engage with local and regional communities.

Widodo (2016) illustrated this conceptual shift in ELT in relation to the key aspects of education: general orientation, epistemology, the role of the teacher, the role of the learner, learning goals, and teacher training. According to Widodo, transformative education supports students in resourcing knowledge for reflective participation in their communities (Table 1).

The Study Context

The present study took place in Indonesia. Typically, in Indonesia, school practicum takes four to six months and is a compulsory component of the Bachelor of Education degree. It is commonly implemented face-to-face. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the nature of the practicum program. Following the guidance of the Indonesian Task Force for COVID-19 Prevention, the school system had to adjust to three modes of instruction: in-person instruction, remote instruction, and hybrid instruction.

Table 1 From the knowledge-transfer model of education to transformative teaching: conceptual shifts (Widodo, 2016, p. 147)

	Instrumental	Developmental
General orientation	Technical rationality	Reflection in action
Epistemological aspect	Objectivism—knowledge as an external entity	Constructivism—knowledge as a subjective construction
Task ownership	Teacher	Student
Teacher's responsibility	To instruct, transfer knowledge	To promote learning processes by providing opportunities for direct interaction with knowledge
Learning goals	Achievements as products of learning	Learning as process
Education of teachers	Training or modeling their acquisition of skills and techniques	Integration of theory and action; developing reflective and diagnostic capacities

In some provinces, once the rate of infections decreased, the authorities accepted a pattern that combined both distance learning and limited face-to-face learning. Where this hybrid mode was implemented, preservice teachers were expected to teach both online and offline. In a normal situation, before COVID-19, teaching duration was 40 min per meeting. In turn, during COVID-19, preservice teachers taught either 40–45 min online or, in a hybrid mode, 20 min face-to-face, and to cover for the remaining 20 min, learners were given homework tasks to complete and submit online to accomplish the learning objectives. Arguably, the pandemic increased the pressure on preservice teachers, especially when considering that Indonesian schools are not experienced in online delivery of foreign language classes.

Three key research questions guided the study: (1) What sources of anxiety did the preservice teachers identify during their school practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) What strategies did the preservice teachers use to cope with practicum anxieties? and (3) How did the preservice teachers make use of their knowledge of the national curriculum and theory while on practicum?

Method

Participating in the current research were five prospective English language instructors, who were enrolled in the English Education Department of a university located on the Sumatra Island. All participants have studied English since elementary school but did not feel very confident about their English, primarily stemming from insufficient opportunities for practice. This was their first practicum experience, and they had not previously engaged in any teaching activities within a school environment. In this respect, the group was homogenous. The participants conducted their practicum teaching English language in different secondary schools on the island. All participants were female.

In preparation for the study, relevant ethical processes were conducted. All participants signed consent forms, and their participation in the study was completely voluntary. They were assured that they were free to withdraw from the project if and when they desired. The study and its methods of data collection were explained to the study participants, and they were assured of safety, privacy, and confidentiality.

The participating preservice teachers conducted their teaching practicum in the academic year of 2021/2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic period. They taught in a hybrid mode, which in Indonesia involved 20 min of online teaching, and to cover for the remaining 20 min, students were given homework tasks to complete and submit online to accomplish the learning objectives. Data were collected at the end of their practicum, through semi-structured interviews. Where needed, the study participants were consulted, and additional documents were requested for clarification.

The interviews were conducted in English and Bahasa Indonesia, and they were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to discern recurring patterns within the gathered data.

The participants' responses were systematically organised in line with the research questions. This involved inquiring about the sources of the participants' anxiety and their coping strategies.

The responses were grouped into clusters according to the specific sources of anxiety and following suggestions from previous studies. Next, the participants' narratives detailing how they managed different anxiety triggers were analysed. This investigation examined their ability to effectively use their professional expertise, relevant literature, and their understanding of the Indonesian ELT curriculum for guidance.

The findings were not associated with individual participants since this was not the study's intended aim, and the study's size was insufficient to facilitate such distinctions. The main emphasis of the study was to identify patterns within the data, which could imply a potential connection between the participants' sources of anxiety, their coping strategies, and the participants' collective readiness for school practicum, rather than on an individual basis.

The study provided the researchers with valuable opportunities to collect substantial information. However, the size of the participating cohort was limited, which restricted the feasibility of making broader generalisations. Nonetheless, the study sheds light on prevalent trends within the cohort, aligning with observations highlighted earlier from Australia. The study underscores the significance of such inquiries and encourages further research to explore these trends more extensively, not only within Indonesia but also across various countries.

The inclusion of an international research team enabled the study to benefit from the accumulated years of international experience, enhancing the study's depth and breadth of insights.

In the sections that follow, first, a summary of the study findings is presented. Next, the interview data are examined through the lens of the pedagogic knowledge they unveil. Lastly, implications of the study are developed for future practicum anxiety research and practicum evaluation goals.

Coping Strategies of Preservice Teachers

Many of the coping strategies shed light on the preservice teachers' comprehension of the job of language teaching, its purpose, and their role in the classroom. They can mirror some of the underlying assumptions upon which the preservice students relied to alleviate stress. Moreover, examining how the preservice teachers addressed their perceived anxieties aids teacher educators in discerning the preservice teachers' capability to draw on their university education when challenged by the real-world school experience. One of the objectives of teacher educators is to cultivate in preservice teachers the ability to continuously learn throughout their careers, encompassing skills such as sourcing knowledge, reflecting, and adeptly seeking and evaluating relevant literature for guidance (MORTHE, 2015; MORTHE (The Ministry of Research Technology and Higher Education), 2020).

Nine sources of anxiety were identified in the participants' data, which included (1) designing teaching plans, (2) developing teaching strategies, (3) personal English proficiency, (4) ZOOM preventing quality interactions in English, (5) maintaining student participation, (6) behaviour management, (7) time management, (8) heavy workloads, and (9) evaluations by the mentor teacher. The preservice teachers resourced various strategies to address these challenges in their teaching. To discern patterns within these coping strategies, a systematic categorisation was employed, utilising the categories proposed by Murray-Harvey (2000) specifically for this purpose.

Murray-Harvey (2000) organised the coping strategies of the students in their study based on previous research. They identified *personal*, *professional*, *social*, and *institutional* coping strategies. *Personal* strategies included techniques for the self-management of anxiety (e.g. positive self-talk, recreation, humour, time organisation). *Professional* coping strategies referred to the ability to draw on professional knowledge and job preparation skills (e.g. the knowledge of and the ability to work with the curriculum, good preparation, and planning). *Social* coping strategies included socialising activities away from the school. *Institutional* coping strategies related to engaging institutional resources to reduce anxiety (e.g. connections with mentoring teachers and the placement office; non-graded evaluations, use of longer practicum). In the present study, the participants offered no data for the social category. The matrix below illustrates the general trends in the data.

Personal coping strategies:

- a. *Positive talk* was used by preservice teachers to build self-confidence and trust in one's capacities despite some drawbacks, "To deal with my anxiety, I encourage myself and keep positive thinking to be more confident and not afraid of making mistakes". Another preservice teacher made comments along similar lines, "I thought positively that I can definitely teach well, and I was always trying to build self-confidence and encourage myself by using the expression [yok bisa yok] like that".
- b. *Being optimistic* was mentioned by preservice teachers as a helpful mindset in order not to panic or give up, "I was optimistic, so whatever [happened], I used it as a lesson. The important thing is [to begin]".

 Professional coping strategies:

- a. *Being reflective* enabled preservice teachers to use reflection on the previous teaching activities to improve their teaching experiences, “I [used] reflection on [the] aspects I was lacking ..., what things I should change, and what things I should improve” and “I was learning [increasingly] more from experience, [and] self-reflect[ion]”.
- b. *Being resourceful* helped the preservice teachers make use of the Internet, which contains plenty of instructional materials and resources teaching how to design lesson plans. As discussed earlier, some preservice teachers used YouTube for this purpose, “The way I dealt with anxiety was by watching YouTube and, Alhamdulillah, it was very easy for me to understand all the lessons from YouTube”. Another study participant commented on the use of Google, “Due to lack of knowledge on optimising learning, I usually search Google to help myself”.
- c. *Being prepared* involved preservice teachers in engaging in strategies of visualisation, transcription, and identification of the relevant materials to alleviate stress and boost self-confidence, “I prepared everything I would teach the next day, including what English words I would use, and a sort of *script*”. Another preservice teacher wrote along similar lines, “I made a scenario [that I would then] perform in front of the class: ... from the greeting until the closing, ..., I also [wrote everything down]”. Another preservice teacher trained in front of a mirror, “I did a simulation too, like standing in front of a mirror simulating my teaching methods”.
- d. *Cooperating with the peers* was found to assist in overcoming anxiety when on practicum in school, “We collaborated..., we were trying to do our best, no matter what the mentor teacher asked for” and “I shared with my friends my views on the [students’] attitude in class. They [my peers] also advised on how to manage the class and deal with students having a bad attitude”.
- e. *Building a good relationship with the students* proved to make classroom environment happier, which, in turn, helped alleviate stress. Some strategies used by the preservice teachers included making their students feel safe and comfortable, “By having a private chat on WhatsApp, they were free to ask anything” and “I always said that they shouldn’t hesitate to ask me if there was something they didn’t understand. Also, if I was wrong, they shouldn’t be afraid to let me know”. This act of granting the students the freedom to ask about anything and inviting them to chat had a positive effect on both, the preservice teachers and the students.

Institutional coping strategies:

- a. *Consulting with the mentor teacher and the university supervisor* helped preservice teachers overcome their anxiety. Preservice teachers asked for advice when designing teaching strategies, creating online resources, or when needing feedback on their progress, “After making the video, I sent it to the mentor teacher first. If something needed to be revised or was wrong, I edited the video again” and “I asked the university supervisor. We asked for his direction on adjusting the strategy with the material we used”. Although the preservice teachers knew

that they had to be pro-active in carrying out their obligations, the interactions with their mentors had a motivating impact and helped reduce anxiety.

As illustrated, the preservice teachers demonstrated considerable resilience and the ability to devise strategies that aided in alleviating stress. A diverse range of professional coping strategies attests to this observation. The preservice teachers were reflecting, collaborating, searching for resources, and engaging their mentors and university supervisors. Some also used self-deprecation strategies, reminding their students that they, too, can make mistakes and were happy to accept corrections and feedback on their performance. These coping strategies were also identified in the Murray-Harvey's (2000) study.

However, when juxtaposed with the study conducted by Murray-Harvey (2000), a contrast emerges within the realm of professional coping strategies. The preservice teachers in the current study made no references to using their understanding of the ELT curriculum. Also, they did not mention drawing on the knowledge of their schools' structural dynamics, organisation, and cultural subtleties to create a comfortable atmosphere for themselves and their students. This finding is particularly concerning, given the demanding nature of their practicum and their relatively limited experience.

The next section illustrates the study findings by delineating the diverse sources of preservice teachers' anxieties. Moreover, it scrutinises their remarks through the lens of the professional expertise they brought to their teaching practicum's environment. This vantage point allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of the quality of their preparedness.

Anxieties and Preparedness of Preservice Teachers During Practicum

The data analysis made it apparent that the preservice teachers encountered a wide array of challenges. The sources of anxieties identified by Indonesian preservice teachers encompassed nearly all facets of teaching. Yet, concerning certain aspects of the practicum, some preservice teachers indicated feelings of unpreparedness, disappointment with the inadequate support of the mentor teacher, or the inability to adapt to changing demands.

In the next step, the study analyses the comments of the preservice teachers to detect a potential link between their sources of anxieties, coping strategies, and the participants' level of preparedness for school practicum. This is a very important concern as exemplified by studies like Murray-Harvey (2000), which highlighted a substantial decrease in stress between the initial and subsequent practicums. This observation, as proposed by Murray-Harvey et al., signifies that the teaching experience in itself could serve as an efficacious strategy. However, it is worth noting that this experience might also lead to the development of counterproductive habits, which successive practicums might unintentionally reinforce rather than rectify.

In the following sub-sections, the preservice teachers' narratives detailing how they managed different anxiety triggers are examined to pinpoint and discuss the requisite knowledge and skills for achieving this objective.

Designing Lesson Plans and the ELT Curriculum

Preparing for instruction is the most effective way to ensure that the lesson is conducted effectively and the learning objectives can be achieved optimally. It is also a process for reflections, enabling preservice teachers to assess what they know. Moreover, once the teaching is done, preservice teachers can go back to their plans and evaluate what happened in class in relation to what they planned to achieve. Overall, as indicated in the previous section, the study participants appreciated the significance of good preparation. However, the reflection process does not take place in a vacuum: it is necessary for preservice teachers to know how to connect their understanding of the curriculum with pedagogic knowledge for effective implementation.

Yet, the study findings show that the preservice teachers experienced difficulties in making such connections, which in turn made them feel anxious. In the context of designing lesson plans, they commented, “I am afraid that what I have done is not right because it is my first teaching plan ever”. The preservice teachers felt disappointed as some mentor teachers did not provide them with teaching syllabi or lesson plans. They had to create their own. Others did not receive feedback on their plans or teaching materials. Some commented that schools required a one-page summary of the plan, which made them anxious as this was different from the regular format of an essay required by the university.

Some preservice teachers looked for lesson plans on the internet. One preservice teacher created a lesson plan (*RPP Satu Lembar*) on the topic of “Offers & Suggestions” but was not sure whether the plan encompassed all the necessary elements aligned with the learning objectives. Seeking guidance, the preservice teacher consulted the mentor teacher regarding this matter. The teaching documentation indicated that, consequently, the structure of the teaching plan devised by the preservice teacher exhibited a systematic arrangement, and the teaching objectives were duly included. The lesson design highlighted higher-order skills, such as literacy and communication skills, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, as its principal aims.

The teaching plan revolved around the theme of giving and seeking information. Critical thinking was conceptualised as inquiring about the visuals presented by the teacher. Literacy was characterised as the act of observing or reading class materials. Collaboration was interpreted as designing group activities or dyads for students to practise language structures. In turn, language was treated as an external entity, existing beyond the realm of students’ personal experiences or cognitive processes and governed by an abstract system of rules, rather than emphasising language as a tool to enrich students’ social engagement opportunities and, in turn, their empowerment.

Thus, upon closer examination, it is apparent that the teaching plan was organised around different priorities than those included in the ELT curriculum, as the preservice teacher prioritised the management of teaching content over concerns about the students, their personal motivations, and goals. This caused the preservice teacher to face difficulties in aligning the learning objectives of the plan with the broader goals of English language learning. Consequently, the lessons regressed to a conventional notion of English learning centring around rote learning of vocabulary and grammar, employing contrived exercises between the students or between the students and the teacher.

Teaching Strategies and Learner-Centred Pedagogy

Another challenge reported by the preservice teachers addressed their lack of confidence that the preservice teachers had about the right teaching strategies. For example, they said, “I was always confused about using the strategy suitable for the material I would teach”, and “I was afraid [that if I chose] a strategy that [did] not fit [the] learning objectives, the students would be even more confused in understanding the material”. This focusing on a prescribed content mirrors the patterns observed in traditional teaching models, which adhere to a rigid sequence of predetermined lesson material and present students with arbitrarily crafted learning tasks to solve. This approach stands in stark contrast with the current ELT curriculum of Indonesia (Widodo, 2016).

As discussed in the “English language learning in the Indonesian curriculum” section, globally and in Indonesia, the tendency is currently for modern approaches to emphasise real-world applications, reflective learning, and the acquisition of transferable skills that empower students to navigate diverse challenges effectively. Along these lines, the objective of the Indonesian ELT curriculum is not to subject students to randomly devised learning tasks, but rather to foster meaningful connections with the world around them. To this end, educators can draw on a wide range of advanced skills outlined by the curriculum, which can support their students’ learning journey.

For instance, they can involve students in inquiries that promote *critical thinking*, encouraging them to reflect on the purpose of their interactions and improve the precision and effectiveness of their communication. Moreover, educators can harness *collaborative strategies* to facilitate students’ exploration of teamwork mechanics, ethics, and its advantageous outcomes in goal achievement. Teachers play a pivotal role in providing students with *access* to tools and quality resources essential for delving into their communication contexts. This encompasses understanding the cultural and contextual norms, discerning communication methods employed, and identifying how students themselves aspire to contribute.

In such an enriched educational milieu, in line with the Indonesian ELT curriculum, students learn by *observing, questioning, exploring, experimenting, associating, and engaging in dialogue* with both peers and the targeted communities. While aspects like vocabulary and grammar remain integral, they no longer take the centre stage in teaching. The ELT curriculum, accentuating higher-order social, emotional, and cognitive skills, serves as a platform for ELT researchers to reimagine traditional concepts of vocabulary instruction and grammar teaching. This re-evaluation is particularly pertinent in light of emerging insights from neuroscience, a development already underway in academic works such as those by Lian and Norman (2017), Lian, 2018), Lian and Norman (2017), and Sudimantara (2021). However, nurturing this paradigm shift requires its integration within mainstream teacher education courses, extending beyond isolated instances of transformation if a comprehensive cultural shift is to be achieved.

Project- and Resource-Based Learning

The preservice teachers were also concerned about their English proficiency. Pronunciation and grammar figured at the top of their concerns, as illustrated in these quotes, “I was afraid of not being able to speak English, afraid of ... mispronoun[cing]; [especially] ... words ... such as *determine, promise...*”. Another preservice teacher wrote, “Of course, I was afraid of pronunciation” and pointed to words ending with ‘-ed’ as the most difficult. Other preservice teachers too felt worried, “I was afraid that I was not ... speaking English [like a true teacher] [and] I found it difficult to pronounce *uncomfortable*”. Other preservice teachers pointed to grammar as an issue, “I was afraid of producing messy grammar ..., ... past and present were frequently [confusing me]”.

These are not unusual apprehensions of second-language teachers; however, the comments demonstrate that the preservice teachers were focusing on themselves as the source of English—a common tendency in Indonesia (Sanjaya et al., 2022)—not on the students and their interactions with language. As specified in the ELT curriculum, language learning serves as a conduit for students to establish connections with a broader community. This purposeful journey is to equip students with the tools required to evolve into increasingly adept and conscientious citizens. This pedagogical objective distinctly positions the community as the primary reservoir of knowledge, casting education solely as a supportive scaffold to this experiential foundation. Pedagogical training should aid preservice teachers in understanding this role of education and help them redirect their attention away from themselves toward the needs of their students. This certainly is a new concept in contexts accustomed to traditions of knowledge dissemination in education.

Project-based learning methodologies, as elucidated by Lian (2004), serve as quintessential pedagogical settings, where this transformative shift in emphasis can take place. Within these environments, it is the very project that assumes the role of the student’s compass, guiding their educational journey instead of relying on a haphazardly chosen subject matter at an arbitrary juncture. A multitude of digital resources such as Google Translate, the freely available Grammarly tool, free text-to-speech and speech-to-text applications (e.g. talktyper.com), and even Microsoft Word (which also can read text aloud) can be valuable aids. Notably, the evolving capabilities of ChatGPT are also increasingly proving to be a valuable asset in this realm.

Pronunciation and grammar were not the only concerns of preservice teachers, as the data show. Preservice teachers also reported about being afraid that their students would not understand them, “The only thing that worrie[d] me was whether or not the students understood the points [I made], when I used English in class”. They also worried that they could not always understand their students, “It was difficult for me to understand the students’ questions. They frequently used Google translate with bad grammatical patterns. So, it was impossible for us to ask for [clarification], wasn’t it?” Once again, the assumption that the class had to be in English for students to learn English worked against the preservice teachers. It made things difficult particularly in the demanding virtual landscape of ZOOM. In contrast, redirecting the focus towards students’ individual projects and addressing the needs arising from those projects could have potentially reduced the stress and given greater control to the

students. This adjustment might have even enabled the class to be conducted almost entirely in Indonesian, without compromising the core objective of teaching English.

Arguably, the curricular shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach could have potentially rendered teaching a more enjoyable experience rather than a source of stress. Embracing exploratory activities like resource discovery could engage students, leading to collective learning where unforeseen and potentially unpredictable facets of language usage emerge during the process. Other strategies could involve reflective analysing of texts, constructing comparisons while exploring the resources of students' own cultural knowledge, recognising its limitations while also discovering comparisons and contrasts that shed light on the challenges they encountered. Room can also be made for more and less structured grammatical activities, integrated into the learning process, without being necessarily the main focus. Utilising free online vocabulary and grammar drills contributes to enhancing the interactive aspect of learning.

Indeed, upon consultation with the mentor teacher, the preservice teachers did look online for free resources. However, these searches focused solely on instructional videos (Fig. 1 in Appendix) pertinent to the specific grammatical structure, around which the lessons revolved, e.g. passive voice, explanation of the descriptive text, ways to complement, to express intention, etc. While these can be very useful, when detached from the specific context of students' individualised learning needs, these resources morph into arbitrary learning waypoints. This is precisely why contemporary curricula advocate for learner-centred pedagogies, which establish a connection between teaching and students' real-life contexts.

Student Engagement in an Online Environment

Online environments may magnify regular pedagogic challenges, as students may feel demotivated due to a lack of face-to-face interaction with their peers. In the present study, the preservice teachers felt that their students were not paying attention, "Of course, it made me anxious. How do I get them to listen and pay attention to me when teaching?" and they were not able to gauge students' progress, "Because they were not active, like in IPS class (social studies), I did not know whether or not they understood the materials. Some students did not [even] collect [feedback on] their assignments".

Student engagement is the key to learning, but triggering this engagement and maintaining it is a challenge not only for preservice teachers. On the other hand, as argued thus far, personalising learning by integrating higher order thinking process identified in the ELT curriculum (Widodo, 2016) in the context of a project-based curriculum could have alleviated some of these concerns. As shown by Buranapatana (2006) and Melville et al. (2006), in the context of a project, students learn work ethic, as they are united and motivated by goals that are important not only to them but also to others in the community.

In Buranapatana's (2006) study, first-year Thai students created a *Thai News Network* website, where they published articles, which they sourced from their community and were subsequently read by the community and commented on. Their reflections upon their learning reveal a diversity of skills that they have acquired in the process. For

example, “Publishing articles online made us think more, and we had to be very careful in writing and using language to express ideas” (p. 180) and “Having a place for the community to express their ideas [about the online articles on the TNN website] is another way for us to listen to opinions of others and use these opinions to improve our work” (p. 180). As evident in these quotes, the goal of the *Thai News Network* project was not to choose a subject for students’ discussion but rather to establish an environment where discussions and meaningful engagements could flourish; learning ensued as a result.

Time Management in Online Learning

In another comment, a preservice teacher complained about the pressures of online learning, which required to reduce the length of their teaching by half, “I conducted the field practice teaching for more than one month [in] the online mode, and the time was 20 minutes. So, there was a significant change from 45 minutes to 20 minutes, so the lesson plan had to be revised again in terms of timing ... It was a bit difficult and caused anxiety”. It is understandable that sudden changes of this kind increased preservice teachers’ stress levels and, probably, also impacted negatively on the quality of their teaching. Further discussion with the preservice teacher revealed that a large chunk of those 20 min was used to take attendance, “I was worried about time management because students spent [a lot of] time fill[ing] the attendance list, for example, 10 minutes, [yet] only three students attended”. Screenshots of classroom discussions confirmed these observations.

The issue of time management not only underscored the preservice teachers’ limited experience but also reaffirmed the challenges highlighted earlier. These challenges encompassed difficulties in formulating lesson plans and effectively engaging students in ways that would align with the learning objectives of the ELT curriculum.

Workloads and Mentoring Issues

Some preservice teachers felt that their heavy workload caused them anxiety. These workloads were managed by the mentor teacher, “The mentor teacher put too much work on us. We also had to help organising library administration and help [with the] mentor teacher’s tasks”. Another preservice teacher wrote, “All the classes of the mentor teacher were given to me. I’m just worried because I had a lot of teaching to do. In a week, I taught 11 classes”.

While the preservice teachers felt overloaded, Grudnoff’s (2011) study showed that once working in schools full time, preservice teachers tend to be shocked at the number of tasks and responsibilities that they are now expected to complete. As Grudnoff explains, practicums tend not to expose preservice teachers to the full range of work demands and responsibilities of teachers. This point highlights the necessity for mentors to familiarise preservice teachers with the broader school culture, its organisational dynamics, and structures. This introduction is crucial in cultivating a feeling of comfort for preservice teachers during their practicum.

Also, evaluations by the mentor teacher caused anxiety, “I was more worried and when the mentor teacher observed me, my concentration immediately disappeared”. Preservice teachers want to pass their practicum, and their success depends on the mentor teacher. However, as the next comment shows, their capacity to perform well also depends on the ethics of the mentor teacher, “When I was teaching, my mentor teacher suddenly corrected me. How could a teacher correct me in front of the students? Since then, I felt the students did not trust me as the teacher”.

Irrespective of the accuracy of the preservice teacher’s assessment of the situation, once again, it underscores the necessity for mentors to familiarise preservice teachers with a school’s administrative structures for preservice teachers to feel safe and confident that they can find advice, when needed.

Implications for Future Studies and Teacher Training

Research

From the standpoint of implications for future research, it is noteworthy that, while focusing on the sources of preservice teachers’ anxieties and their ability to overcome challenges arising during their practicum, the present study deviated from the conventional approach typically observed in this field of research. Typically, researchers examine the correlations between anxiety—an indicator of possible challenges within the practicum context—and its potential influence on preservice teachers’ performance. Instead, the present study explored the quality of the preservice teachers’ preparation for the practicum and, specifically, their capacity to draw on their knowledge of theory and the ELT curriculum (Ministry of Education, Indonesia, 2013) and the associated pedagogy (Widodo, 2016) as a strategy to help them adapt to the online context of their practicum, resolve problems, and reduce stress as a result. Preparation has been recognised as a pivotal factor contributing to practicum-related stress (Murray-Harvey, 2000).

The lockdowns of the COVID-19 era underscored the significance of enhancing preservice teachers’ adaptability to change through improvements in preparation. The online context was universally experienced as a challenge. For example, Koşar’s (2021) study revealed that this capacity for adaptability was also not appreciated by her first-year preservice English language teachers. In fact, she found that they did not perceive the online environment to be adequate to extend their professional learning. Notably, Koşar’s study did not even mention the curriculum, and the analysis failed to delve into the underlying reasons as well as their reluctance to propose recommendations for potential online practicum experiences.

Aspects of preparedness, such as familiarity with and proficiency in handling the curriculum, continue to retain a certain level of vague conceptualisation within scholarly investigations. These aspects are often acknowledged as important, however, without undergoing comprehensive scrutiny (e.g. Aygün, 2019; Çelik & Topkaya, 2023; Marino & Croco, 2021; Sanjaya et al., 2022), a facet that the present study aimed to address.

Arguably, this persistent absence of rigorous pedagogical examination of preservice teachers' perspectives on the challenges they encounter during their practicum impacts on the quality of research reports, leading to studies that overlook the contextualisation of their findings in relation to local education policies and the interpretation thereof by the researchers conducting the study. Consequently, the outcomes often remain confined to abstraction, diminishing the informativeness and efficacy of these studies in cultivating profound insights and valuable takeaways.

The current study's scope in terms of the size of the participating cohort and the breadth of the data collected is relatively limited, which prevents the formulation of generalised conclusions about the landscape of teaching practicums and teacher education in Indonesia. However, its adopted approach effectively underscores its significance for future research and highlights the necessity for studies that delve into the conceptual resources that preservice teachers bring with them into the realm of their practicum. Such an approach is poised to enhance educators' understanding of the perspectives from which preservice teachers evaluate their practicum experiences and their value to their future learning.

Teacher Education

In the present study, the examination of the preservice teachers' comments showed that they struggled to adapt to the online context of their practicum largely due to their unfamiliarity with the curriculum and its transformative concepts. Even in cases where preservice teachers incorporated references to learning outcomes such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and literacy in their teaching designs, they still lacked a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum's conceptual transition—from a transmission-oriented approach to a transformative one. As a result, the preservice teachers reverted to traditional models of teaching, which adhere to a rigid sequence of prearranged lesson material and present students with arbitrary learning tasks to solve, leading to disconnected experiences, unrelated to their lives and lacking clear relevance for their future.

The resulted learning process, as reflected in the preservice teachers' comments, revolved around grammar points sequenced in accordance with arbitrary difficulty scales. The preservice teachers interpreted their job as requiring of them to *somehow* transform these teaching points into students' knowledge, which they found challenging, an approach akin to generating answers to questions that were never asked. They attributed their difficulties to factors such as technology and limited class time. None of the study participants mentioned seeking guidance in relevant literature or study notes. While the participants demonstrated resilience by relying on personal creativity, peer collaboration, or mentorship, they lacked formal preparation on how to address potential challenges. This is an area where further support could have been beneficial.

As previously indicated, Murray-Harvey's (2000) study identified a substantial decrease in stress between the initial and subsequent practicums. It is important to recognise that experience could also cultivate counterproductive habits, which subsequent practicums might inadvertently reinforce rather than correct. The study by

Sofiana et al. (2019) supports this concern. It found that Indonesian in-service teachers also encounter difficulties when it comes to connecting pedagogical practices with educational policies and theories, especially teachers working in public schools.

In light of the findings of the present study, it appears reasonable to propose that the assessment of the initial practicum should prioritise less the specific actions preservice teachers perform in the classroom and place greater emphasis on their overall approach to the experience, which includes their strategies for coping with stress. In essence, especially during the first year, practicum evaluations could be primarily directed towards fostering a well-grounded understanding of the teaching profession as a fundamental steppingstone for progress.

Conclusion

The present study began with the understanding that teacher education is critical to ensuring the quality of education of a nation. School practicum plays a significant role in this process. The study focused on English language education as it recently acquired a heightened importance with the adoption of English as the official language of the ASEAN. The study investigated the sources of anxieties of five preservice English language teachers in Indonesia while on a school practicum in the challenging context of COVID-19 lockdowns.

The comments of the preservice teachers were further examined to uncover any potential correlation between the sources of anxieties they encountered and the conceptual resources that preservice teachers brought with them into the realm of their practicum.

As elaborated by Widodo (2016), the ELT curriculum brought about an epistemological shift in the domain of English language teaching, transitioning from a transmission-oriented curriculum to a transformative one. This shift impelled educators to situate their approaches within larger considerations, encompassing relevance to students' lives and their social contexts of engagement, along with cognitive processes that foster reflective, critical, and creative learning.

The study findings indicated that the preservice teachers displayed resilience and adeptness in devising strategies to alleviate encountered stress. The scope of strategies they employed aligns with those identified in other research, except for one significant divergence: the integration of their knowledge of the ELT curriculum, their pursuit of relevant literature for supplementary guidance, and their familiarity with the school culture to foster a sense of ease during the practicum. Notably, their comments also lacked references to specific theories or principles that could guide their reflections. These findings are disconcerting, as they raise questions about the effectiveness of teacher preparation and highlight the inadequate support that preservice teachers faced during their practicum experience.

In light of these findings, the study proposed that anxiety research should expand beyond the customary boundaries of practicum studies. This expansion should encompass an exploration of preservice teachers' ability to effectively apply their professional knowledge, their skill in seeking pertinent literature for guidance, and their understanding of the Indonesian ELT curriculum as they adeptly navigate a variety of challenges.

The study also recommended that initial practicum evaluations prioritise this facet of the practicum experience, while placing less emphasis on the practical skills of preservice teachers.

Furthermore, practicum preparation should also include a structured process to increase preservice teachers' familiarity with the school culture, aiming to foster a sense of comfort and confidence during their practicum.

Appendix

The figure shows a screenshot of a YouTube channel page for 'Miss Monalisa's Class' (62 subscribers) and a video player displaying an instructional video titled 'ACTIVE & PASSIVE VOICE'. The video content includes:

PATTERNS:

ACTIVE: S + V + O
 Ibu memasak kue

PASSIVE: S + V3 + O
 Kue dimasak oleh ibu

NOTE: Tobe yang di gunakan pada passive voice di sesuaikan dengan tense yang di gunakan pada active voice

The video player interface shows the video title 'PASSIVE VOICE_Present Tense (Grade 10)', 86 views, and a date of 28 Sep 2021. The channel name 'Miss Monalisa's Class' is visible at the bottom of the player.

Fig. 1 Instructional videos compiled by the preservice teachers from YouTube

Author Contribution Ania Lian has written the article.

The second, third, and fourth authors, obtained the ethics approvals, have conducted the study, and compiled the initial bibliography. The fourth author coordinated the research study.

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Data Availability Mr. Syahdan Syahdan is responsible for the data storage and is the contact person in this regard.

Declarations

Ethics Approval The study was a fourth-year undergraduate research project. It followed the internal ethical guidelines of the Universitas Lancang Kuning, and its design and ethics were approved by Dr. Arlian Firda, S.Pd, M.Si, Deputy Rector of Academic and Education, at Lancang Kuning University in Pekanbaru. The approval involved the following:

- The study and its methods of data collection were explained to the study participants, and they were assured of safety, privacy, and confidentiality.
- The participants signed consent forms on their voluntary participation in the study, including their agreement for the data to be collected and published, with all personal information being removed from the data.
- The participants were assured that they were free to withdraw from the project if and when they desired. The raw data was stored according to the confidentiality processes approved by the Universitas Lancang Kuning.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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Authors and Affiliations

Ania Lian¹  · Syahdan Syahdan² · Camelia Manalu² · MHD Natsir³

✉ Ania Lian
ania.lian@cdu.edu.au

- ¹ Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia
- ² Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia
- ³ Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Indonesia