

**PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' ONLINE TEACHING CHALLENGES AT THE TEACHING PRACTICUM PROGRAM AMIDST COVID-19 OUTBREAK AND HOW THEY COPE WITH THEM:
A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This narrative research aims to explore pre-service EFL teachers' online teaching challenges at the teaching practicum program amidst COVID-19 outbreak and how they cope with them based on the experiences of four pre-service EFL teachers' in the internship program. Based on semi-structured interview data, the researcher found that there were several challenges encountered by pre-service EFL teachers' in teaching online at the teaching internship program during COVID-19 pandemic. The main challenges are unstable internet networks, lack of knowledge about online learning platforms, low self-confidence, lack of support from practicum-mentor, and lack of participation from students. Fourth participants used the similar way of implementing the strategy in which they were look for a nearby place with a good signal; upload teaching materials the day before; note the steps for teaching; go to the house of the practicum-mentor for consulting; and give a warning to students who are not cooperative. This study emphasizes the importance of strategy readiness in dealing with unexpected challenges during the internship program, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *Pre-service EFL teacher; practicum program; challenge; strategies; narrative case study*

PRELIMINARY

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic all over the world has impacted on various sectors. One of them is in the educational sector where all universities and schools were physically closed, students and teaching staffs are forced to stay at home during the crucial time. This happens unpredictable and 'pressured' shift condition from face-to-face to online teaching has brought with it a number of challenges and limitations (Carillo and Flores, 2020). For example, when the teacher explains, there are students who have difficulty concentrating and even do other things that have nothing to do with the lesson. Kundu (2020) stated that anecdotally, lack of concentration, focus, and attention span are regarded as the more potential challenges in a virtual environment, especially in younger children. Another example is internet limitations in some remote areas. Not all teachers and students have a good signal to be able to take lessons online. Even if they can be connected, there is still the possibility that the signal will be cut off in the middle of the lesson or the teacher's voice will stutter when students hear it through their devices. Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) emphasis that as online learning is completely dependent on high tech equipment and the internet, teachers and students with low internet connections may had limited access to online learning. The necessity of online learning on technological equipment, as well as the availability of such equipment, posed a significant challenges for institutions, teachers, and students. These various challenges certainly require the right strategy to be adapted quickly. For this reason, further understanding is needed through real experiences from student teachers. In seeking understanding related to online learning in the amidst of COVID-19, many researchers have studied it (Carrillo and Flores, 2020; Joosten and Cusatis, 2020; Kim, 2020; etc). However, research that focused on pre-service EFL teachers' online teaching challenges at the teaching practicum program amidst covid-19 outbreak and how they cope with them is still very limited.

The learning to teach process plays an important role in the individual experience of pre-service teachers. It is well known that teaching practice exposes student teachers to the actual process of teaching (Abongdia, Adu, and Foncha, 2015). There will be many unexpected challenges that pre-service teacher will encounter in the process and this is a great opportunity to learn how to adapt the right strategies to overcome it. Dhawan (2020) points out that teachers must dedicate a considerable amount of time to developing effective strategies for providing online teaching. This strategy is then expected to help if something similar happens again at a later time. Of course, the strategy used cannot be adapted carelessly. Must consider to several factors that support learning process. According to Dhawan (2020) the five most important factors for an educator when giving online learning are instruction, material, motivation, connections, and mental health. By paying attention to these five factors, it is hoped that teachers can find out how to cope with the existing challenges.

The shape of the challenges that will be experienced by student-teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic cannot be estimated. In consequence, the researcher conducted this research to provide an overview and explore the challenges and strategies of English teacher students during the internship program at the COVID-19 pandemic as a reference for future learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a narrative inquiry design (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004) to capture pre-service EFL teachers experiences or real stories in teaching English at the practicum program during COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Savin-Baden and Niekerk (2007) state that the principle of narrative inquiry is that stories are gathered from people as a way of interpreting reality as lived and informed. This present study explores how the pre-service EFL teachers experience the challenges in teaching English in at the teaching practicum program during COVID-19 outbreak and what their useful strategies to overcome the teaching problems at the program in the difficult situation.

Participant and Setting of the Research

This study involves four pre-service EFL teachers who are studying at a private university in South Kalimantan. They are four women. Their names are under pseudonym to consider an ethical issue in this study; they are Lea, Lily, Shita, and Yumy. Their ages range between 20 and 21 years old. Currently they are in the seventh semester and taking the teaching internship program as a compulsory course in the department of the English language education. They are required to take an internship program for four months at certain schools. Two of the participating student teachers reside outside the city; one of them in one of the district of the South Kalimantan province and another one in one of districts of Central Kalimantan province. The rest of participants live in Banjarmasin City. In addition, four of them are students of the study program of English language education at a private university in South Kalimantan.

The recruitment of the voluntary participants is based on the main criteria in this study: (1) The participants have undergone an internship program as an English student-teachers and have experienced various challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic (2) There are factor of personal and emotional closeness between participants and the researcher as students of English language education, (3) The participants have willingness and readiness to take a part in this research. All of the criteria enable the researcher to get an access easily in conducting the study.

Procedure of Collecting Data

In collecting the narrative data, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to obtain more in-depth data. This interview aims to capture participants experiences or their real stories in teaching English at the internship program during COVID-19 pandemic. Before having the interview, the researcher contacts first each participant via Whatsapp application to explain the objectives and procedures about collecting data for the research. After the participants are willing to involve without coercion or pressure, the participants and researcher negotiate the time and place of the interview.

However, because not all of the participants are staying in Banjarmasin, The interview process is conducted by facilitate with virtual interview via WhatsApp voice record to applying health protocols

guidelines and keep social distance among researcher and the participants. Harrell & Bradley (2009) claims that an interview can be conducted by phone or face-to-face meeting, by modifying the type of study and making it easier to communicate with participants.

Each participant interview for approximately 30 - 45 minutes. Researcher asks participants permission to record all of conversations by using handphone recorder. Therefore, the language that use in this study is Indonesian to facilitate participants to more easily express what they experience. Participants are interviewed separately at different times and place, so that researcher can more easily explore the thoughts of each participant.

Procedure of Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the recorded interview data to facilitate the process of data reduction and coding. To conduct a more detailed analysis, researcher read the transcription results of the interview data repeatedly to find the main finding themes. To facilitate this process, researcher used thematic data analysis. It is one way to recognize, analyze and identify patterns or trends within data collected by researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004) argued that thematic analysis is a valuable strategy for analyzing the points of view of distinctive inquirers about participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and producing unforeseen experiences. Thematic analysis is additionally useful for summarizing key features of a vast information set, because it strengthens the analyst to require a well-structured approach to dealing with information, making a difference to deliver a clear and organized final report (King, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The internship program is an important practicum for pre-service EFL teachers. In this program, pre-service teachers encounter a variety of unpredictable challenges. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the online learning policy implemented by the government greatly influences the forms of challenges that arise in the internship program. Based on the findings in this study, the main challenge felt by pre-service EFL teachers when teaching online is an unstable internet network. Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) emphasize that as online learning is completely dependent on high tech equipment and the internet, teachers and students with low internet connections may have limited access to online learning. To minimize this challenge, the participants made different strategies. To overcome the unstable internet network, two pre-service teachers implement a strategy by finding the nearest place with a strong signal. Meanwhile, another pre-service teacher prefers to send her teaching materials one day before the D-day to avoid teaching delays due to an unstable internet network. Dhawan (2020) stated that preparing study material beforehand, testing the content, and always having a Plan B on board can all help to ensure that the online teaching-learning process is uninterrupted.

In order to overcome another challenge such as lack of knowledge about technology, two pre-service teachers work on it by digging up more information about the relevant online teaching platform. They also learn through hands-on practice independently or with the help of teachers and staff. Ngampornchai and Adams (2016) emphasize that pre-service teachers' preparation for online learning is also important, for example, how technology is used and how online learning is perceived. Pre-service teachers must prepare themselves as well as possible with knowledge of technology as well as good classroom management methods so that learning activities can achieve optimal targets. Moreover, Partlow and Gibbs (2003) claimed that online programs should be structured to be innovative, interactive, relevant, student-centered, and group-based. The same two participants also overcome another challenge, namely their low self-confidence, in a similar way. They try to calm down, then go back and write down what they have to do in class. Several authors have emphasized the importance of teacher confidence in successful teaching, particularly the feature known as "self-efficacy" (Czerniak & Schriver, 1994; Ginns & Watters, 1996). Their main message is that teachers must have confidence in order to effectively communicate their own understanding.

One pre-service EFL teacher has a different challenge, namely the lack of support from the practicum-mentor. She overcame the challenge by trying to ask permission to visit her practicum-mentor's house and consult her concerns there. Aldhafeeri and Khan (2016) points out that to be successful, e-learning

strategies, like any other major innovation, require extensive upfront investigation, development time, money, technical resources, and mentor support.

Another participant face the challenge of lack of student participation during the teaching-learning process. She overcomes this challenge by reminding them of their obligations and taking assertive action if the students are still not cooperative in attending class. Dhawan (2020) mention that the learning process cannot reach its full potential until students practice what they learn.

CLOSING

This present study allows researcher to explore pre-service EFL teachers' online teaching challenges at the teaching practicum program amidst COVID-19 outbreak and how they cope with them through their narrative. Researcher found that there are various forms of challenges faced by pre-service teachers when teaching online, namely unstable internet networks, lack of knowledge about online learning platforms, low self-confidence, lack of support from practicum-mentor, and lack of participation from students. All of these challenges have a very crucial effect on the online teaching and learning process that takes place. So that pre-service teachers cannot remain to do nothing, they haste to implement strategies that are expected to minimize existing challenges. These include look for a nearby place with a good signal; upload teaching materials the day before; note the steps for teaching; go to the house of the practicum-mentor for consulting; and give a warning to students who are not cooperative.

The researcher would like to propose some suggestions based on preceding conclusion as follows.

- 1) Other pre-service EFL teachers to be able to better prepare themselves during the process of teaching English in the practicum program during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the challenges that will come can be more diverse and unpredictable what kind of situation will be faced in the future.
- 2) The role of practicum-mentors and supervisors are very important in the success of pre-service teachers' internships. It is hoped that in the next internship, practicum-mentors and supervisors can work together to support and provide advice to English student teachers who are facing challenges in teaching online.

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