

“HOW DO YOU WORK OUT THIS ZOOM CLASSROOM?”: PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS’ CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS DURING TRANSITION TO ONLINE TEACHING PRACTICUM

Gin Gin Gustine

gustine@upi.edu

Department of English Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

Abstract

The teaching practicum for pre-service teachers is an integral part in many teacher education programs. As the result of Covid-19 physical and social distancing, the challenges and expectations from pre-service English teachers during the online teaching practicum have not been explored well. This qualitative case study research is expected to explore the phenomenon on the expectations and challenges faced by pre-service English teachers who conducted their teaching practicum online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data were generated from individual and focus group interview with nine pre-service English teachers who were all conducting their online teaching practicum period from February-July 2020. Result showed that the challenges that were faced by pre-service English teachers were their lack of pedagogical knowledge in how to teach in online class environment and the lack of knowledge in online assessment. To solve these problems, pre-service teachers believe that support and assistance from both school teachers and university supervisors in terms of improving their knowledge and skills in using appropriate Information Communication Technology in the class are highly needed to succeed in the online teaching practicum.

Keywords: *challenges, expectation, Covid-19 pandemic, online, teaching practicum, pre-service English teachers*

Sari

Praktek Kerja Lapangan atau sering disebut dengan Praktek Mengajar memiliki peran yang sangat penting bagi para calon guru dan merupakan bagian yang tidak terpisahkan dari program yang diselenggarakan oleh Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan. Meskipun demikian, tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para calon guru serta harapan mereka selama praktek mengajar daring, sebagai akibat pembatasan jarak fisik dan sosial selama masa pandemik Covid-19, belum banyak diteliti sebelumnya. Penelitian studi kasus kualitatif berikut ini diharapkan mampu memberikan gambaran nyata tentang tantangan serta harapan para calon guru terkait pengalaman mereka selama melakukan praktek mengajar secara daring. Data diambil dari wawancara individu dan kelompok yang melibatkan sembilan orang calon guru Bahasa Inggris yang melakukan praktek mengajar daring selama periode bulan Februari-Juli 2020. Hasil penelitian

menunjukkan bahwa permasalahan yang dihadapi para calon guru Bahasa Inggris selama praktikum secara daring adalah kurangnya pemahaman metodologi tentang strategi yang tepat untuk mengajar secara daring dan kurangnya pemahaman dalam melakukan penilaian secara daring. Untuk mengatasi hal tersebut, para calon guru Bahasa Inggris mengharapkan dukungan dari pihak sekolah dan universitas terutama dukungan untuk meningkatkan pengetahuan dan keahlian mereka dalam menggunakan Teknologi Informasi di kelas daring.

Kata Kunci: *kesulitan, harapan, pandemik Covid-19, praktek mengajar daring, calon guru Bahasa Inggris*

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Introduction

Since the pandemic of the Covid-19 spread around the globe at the end of 2019, major changes have been taken by in the Indonesian government in almost all sectors of life, including in education. In line with the Covid-19 physical and social distancing, since the middle of March 2020, the Indonesian Ministry of Education in their official website issued a regulation to close all schools and required teachers and students to conduct their teaching and learning from home through the use of the Internet (Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Indonesia, 2020). This abrupt change also brings significant impact to the online teaching and learning including the teaching practicum.

Before the pandemic, pre-service teachers in Indonesia usually conduct their teaching practicum in various public and private schools for approximately 960 hours or during a period of six months. During the pandemic, the teaching practicum is conducted online in most of teacher educations in Indonesia. Teaching practicum is an integral and compulsory program in most of teacher education programs and essential for pre-service teachers to gain hands-on experience and practice their content and pedagogical knowledge they have learnt in the teacher education programs (Allen & Wright, 2014; Barton, Hartwig and Cain, 2015). One of the advantages of pre-service teachers' participation in teaching practicum is their beliefs and practices in teaching can be formed and improved during the teaching practicum as well as their skills in dealing with problems arise in the real classrooms may be developed (Lawson, Çakmak, Gündüzc and Bushe, 2015).

In language education, effective teaching practicum should at least include four criteria (Freeman, 2002) namely knowledge, skills, attitude and awareness. Knowledge refers to pre-service teachers' mastery of the subject matter, the students' behaviors and the school environment. Skills denote pre-service teachers' ability to choose the teaching methods, techniques, including how to manage the classroom. Attitudes mean the way

pre-service teachers engage in their teaching and learning process. Finally, awareness indicates capacity to recognize and observe the environment.

In teaching practicum, the roles of university supervisors or teacher educators, school teachers or referred to as mentor or collaborating teachers are indispensable to the success of the program (Lawson, et.al., 2015; Stanulis & Ames 2009). In this research, the terms university supervisor and school teacher are used throughout the paper as they are closer to the Indonesian context related to teaching practicum. One of the roles of university supervisors is to help pre-service teachers to build their expertise of teaching meanwhile school teaches assist them to transition between university and school (Trumbull & Fluet, 2008).

Intensive research on pre-service teachers' experiences and challenges during the teaching practicum have been centered on specific themes such as linking theory and practice (Allsopp, De Marie, Alvarez-McHatton and Doone, 2006), student teachers' perceptions and beliefs (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008), improving methodological skills and communication and technology support needed (Boz, Ekiz-Kiran and Kutucu, 2019; Caires, Almeida and Vieira, 2012; Hudson & Millwater, 2008; Kirbulut, 2012; Lawson, et. al., 2015; Ng, Nicholas and Williams, 2010; Tin, 2006) as well as frustrations in converting their methodological knowledge into practice (Komur, 2010; König et. al., 2016). Specific challenges have been reported during the teaching practicum such as classroom management, inadequate communication and cooperation with the school teachers and university supervisors as well as difficulties in making the right decisions in teaching (Koksal & Genc, 2019). On the other hand, Celen and Akcan (2017) believe that the development in assessment techniques and the use of relevant technology in the class should also become main concern for an effective teaching practicum.

Despite the vast research on conventional teaching practicum mentioned above, there is a limited number of research on the online teaching practicum conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in Indonesian context where English is spoken as a foreign language (EFL). Therefore, this research is expected to fill the research gaps in this particular field and shed lights on the challenges and expectations from pre-service English teachers during their online teaching practicum.

In this research context, the author, who acted as a pre-service English teachers' supervisor, received many concerns from students who were conducting their teaching practicum online in some designated schools in one of the cities in West Java province, Indonesia. The pre-service teachers, mostly new to the field of teaching, just started their teaching practicum in February 2020 but immediately had to terminate their teaching at schools in March and were 'forced' to online teaching. From this point of view, the researcher decided to delve deeper into their experience during their online teaching practicum and thus specifically address the following research questions:

1. What challenges do the pre-service English teachers face during the online teaching practicum?

2. What supports do the pre-service teachers need to teach English in the online teaching practicum?

Research Method

In line with the research questions, a qualitative case study is relevant for this research for several reasons. First, the aim of this research is to identify and explore deeply challenges pre-service teachers faced in online teaching practicum. Second, this design enables the researcher to explore different contributing factors and encapsulate the intricacy of the object of study (Stake, 1995).

This study employed individual and focus group interviews related to the challenges pre-service students faced and supports they expected during the online teaching practicum. 9 pre-service English teachers (6 females and 3 males) undertaking the teaching practicum at the beginning of February 2020 were involved in the study. These students were interviewed because they were under a direct supervision from author at the time of the online teaching practicum. Being directly supervised, both the students and the author had relatively easier access to communicate and discuss various issues throughout the period of online teaching practicum from February until July 2020. Most of these pre-service teachers were new to the field of teaching. Out of nine participants, two of them had been teaching at local cram schools for limited hours per week and one of them was a private English tutor.

At the data analysis stage, the author did not impose specific theoretical frameworks related to pre-service teachers' challenges and support they needed, rather the use of grounded theory was highlighted (Charmaz, 2014) as the author tried to investigate deeper into the pre-service teachers' voices in their real life. Data from the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed to discover thematic similarities. The interviews were conducted online through voice and video call over the Internet-based chat application, *Whatsapp*, agreed upon between the author and the participants.

Result and Discussions

The objectives of this research are to investigate the challenges pre-service English teachers face during the online teaching practicum and supports they need during the program. Related to the first research question, analysis and interpretation of the interview data were categorized into two themes: first, lack of pedagogical knowledge in online class; second, lack of knowledge in online assessment. Meanwhile, in the second research question, participants identified a major support they from both the school teacher and the university supervisor which is the technical knowledge related to how to teach online using available platforms.

Pre-service English teachers' challenges faced during the online teaching practicum

Challenges identified by pre-service English teachers in this study are categorized into two problems: (1) lack of pedagogical knowledge in online class environment; and (2) lack of knowledge in online assessment.

Lack of Pedagogical Knowledge in Online Class Environment

The following are some interviews excerpts from participants which had been shortened as PSTs (pre-service teachers) 1-9. The first difficulty on choosing the right methodology to teach students online is also added up by a growing frustration as the participants were uncertain whether the online teaching practicum would last until the end of semester or not.

“Of course, the first few months were a total chaos. I don’t know how to teach online. I don’t think we specifically learnt that back at university. The worst part was, I didn’t know how long the online teaching practicum would last, the school didn’t know” (PSTs 8).

“When the first time the school announced that the teaching would be conducted online, I was so confused and worried. I mean, I’m sure we’ve never done this before. So how should I teach them online? The school didn’t seem to give us guidance too” (PSTs 3).

“I was panic in the beginning...maybe until the end of the program as well. Imagine, we were just one month and half when the school decided to close. At that time, we were still adjusting to our teaching. I personally still tried to figure out the students’ behaviors, their English skills, etc. So, I had no idea how to continue teaching them online” (PSTs 5).

“We’re not prepared for this. I was so confused, what is the right way to teach students online?” (PSTs 9)

Pedagogical knowledge refers, but not limited to, different teaching techniques, modifying teaching methods for the diversity of learners, adjusting lesson plans as well as knowledge of how students learn (Schulman, 1987). From these excerpts, it may become transparent that the first thing the pre-service teachers identified as the biggest challenge in the online teaching practicum is the lack of pedagogical knowledge in online class environment. In many literatures on the teaching practicum, lack of pedagogical knowledge or how to link theory into practice is often stated as one of the obstacles faced by pre-service teachers (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). The challenge is further intensified when it comes to online classroom environment.

The source of this lack of knowledge might be from limited opportunities the participants have in observing the school teachers during the online teaching practicum. As stated by PSTs5, the program only ran for a month and half when the school decided to close its door. Apart from that, the formal education, in this case the teacher educations they attended, also takes part in shaping the pre-service teachers’ concepts and theoretical knowledge about teaching (Watzke, 2007).

The pre-service teachers’ apprehension on how long the online teaching practicum would last adds another concern for them. It may indicate their unpreparedness or their unfavourability to teach in online class environment compared to conventional classroom. As stated further by PSTs5, this new mode of practicum has never been practiced before and therefore their lack of experience from previous fellow students creates a new and different challenge for them.

In one of the excerpts above, a pre-service teacher seek help from the school (see PSTs 3). In fact, school teachers are often viewed as the role models for pre-service teachers in their efforts to implement what they have learnt in teacher education program (Roness, 2010). The school teachers are actually not the only one who provide assistance. Interaction with university supervisors is also one of the keys to a successful teaching practicum (Sivan & Chan, 2009). Unfortunately, research shows that the visit from university supervisors are often times limited and less frequent and thus gives little influence for the pre-service teachers (Ssentamu-Namubiru, 2010). Further about supports is elaborated in the next subsection.

Lack of Knowledge in Administering Online Test and Assessment

The second challenge emerged from the data was the lack of pre-service teachers' content knowledge related to online test and assessment. In teaching and learning, assessment is an integral part and often needed as a portfolio to inform students' progress over a period of time. Teachers often use specific measurement in their own school context which may be different across schools.

These challenges are described by the participants during the interview.

“Apart from the problems in how to teach students online, I am completely lost in how to give students test online” (PSTs 1)

“I remember we are still a couple of weeks before the mid-semester examination. The teacher reminded me about the students' grades that I have to start grading students' works. This is so confusing, like, how am I supposed to do that?” (PSTs 2)

“Another thing about online class is we don't know whether students cheat or not during examination. If they did, how should I grade them? I asked the teacher, she wasn't quite sure about it too. She even asked me if I knew things better from my university. So yeah, assessing students' work is challenging for me” (PSTs 4)

“The most confusing thing for me is, we don't meet them in synchronous class so I end up giving them lots of assignments, especially in the beginning. After a while, I even get more confuse, how do I grade their work?” (PSTs 7).

As revealed in the interview, creating tests online and assessing students' work seem to pose a certain level of difficulties. This may stem from the fact that in Indonesian educational context, test is often used by teachers to measure students' mastery on specific skills, therefore teachers are expected to 'test' students periodically. Pre-service teachers' difficulties in creating tests online might be based on two reasons: first, is their unfamiliarity with the online test platforms; second, is their lack of content knowledge in how to construct test items.

The available Learning Management Systems (LMS) often provide platforms for teachers to create and publish tests. Knowledge and skills to navigate these platforms are prerequisite in the teachers' efforts to successfully construct and publish the tests. This problem seems to be multiplied by the pre-service teachers' anxiety on whether students cheat during the online tests or not. This concern may be justified because online tests tend to be more susceptible than offline tests (Harmon & Lambrinos 2008; Munoz & Mackay, 2019).

An increased use of technology in the classrooms indeed creates some risk and potentials to nourish this academic dishonesty (Harmon & Lambrinos 2008; Hylton, Levy and Dringus, 2016). These problems may have been resolved by the educators' strategies in creating test designs which minimize cheating. For example, educators wish to reduce cheating during online tests must include at least three categories to avoid this practice: giving students warnings, limiting the time of each of the test items and evaluating the whole process of the test (Munoz & Mackay, 2019). However, this strategy does not come easily, it requires experience, expertise and support from the school environment and it is highly-driven by the teachers' practice. The pre-service teachers in this study does not seem to have capability to create such tests and thus should be offered assistance in how to design tests to reduce cheating, especially during online tests. On the other hand, the school teachers in this study also seems to be unfamiliar with assessing students' work online and expect the pre-service teachers to share the knowledge they, presumably, learn at university as revealed by the PSTs 4.

Supports pre-service English teachers need during the online teaching practicum

Support pre-service teachers expected during their transition to online teaching practicum centers on the knowledge and skills of using appropriate Information Communications Technology (ICT) they can implement in their online classrooms.

During the interview, all of the participants emphasized their need to develop knowledge and skills in the ICT especially related to how to conduct synchronous class with the students. Although the pre-service teachers participated in this study admitted that they had no difficulties in using basic ICT to communicate with the students and the school teachers such as the use Internet-based chat applications as LINE or Whatsapp, they still yearn for having synchronous classes using available platforms with systematic guidance from both schools and university. These pre-service teachers admitted that at the time the online teaching practicum started, they had never encountered the video conference platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. Only after the program finished, they were exposed to video conference platforms for activities outside their teaching practicum.

“Well, of course we're familiar with LINE, Instagram or Whatsapp to talk to the students. We also use Google Classroom or Edmodo at the university. But we have no experience using Zoom or Google Meet, something like that. I wish they (schools and university) have special sessions to teach us” (PSTs 6)

“Definitely the first thing is to teach us how to use virtual classrooms. I mean, we never used it before. Before the Covid-19 outbreak, we never used Zoom, something like that. How you do work out these Zoom classrooms? School teachers, even university supervisor should have taught us how to use that in online class” (PSTs 3)

“I think the IT Department at university should provide all pre-service teachers some kind of trainings on how to teach students online with the right technology. I ended up using Whatsapp throughout the program. I had no choice” (PSTs 4)

“A couple of weeks after the school closed, I tried my best to use Zoom. It was not only me who was not familiar, the students were also confused.... that was so frustrating. So we decided to use Google classroom, we never had virtual meetings” (PSTs 7)

“I wish we had special sessions on how to use available technology for virtual classes. Could be from school or university. Only after a couple of months after the school closed, we started to be familiar with Zoom or Google Meet or other application. But they are definitely not known in the beginning of the pandemic” (PSTs 9)

The result of interviews showed that these pre-service students are still lacking the knowledge on the different platforms commonly used for synchronous classes but also how to use them in a pedagogical way relevant to their class. This is in line with Mishra & Koehler (2006) who argue that the effective integration of technology in the classroom should be hand in hand with the teachers’ knowledge in using the tools specific to their context. According to participants, at the end of the program, they admitted that they become familiar with online platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet but still have no idea in how to strategically use them for teaching. Data from the interviews also have serious implication that both the pre-service teachers and school teachers seem to lack of technology readiness (Warden, Yi-Shun, Stanworth and Chen, 2020) and resulted in a discrepancy on digital expertise for educators (Goodman, 2015).

Despite the fact that these pre-service teachers lack of knowledge on digital platforms used in online classroom environment, a positive attitude towards technology is reflected in their willingness and desire to engage with technology as disclosed by PSTs 4,6,7 and 9 in the transcript above. Willingness to integrate technology in the class is often an indicator of a success in completing more complicated tasks in technology-mediated classroom settings (Howard, Ma and Yang, 2016; Warden, et.al., 2020). This implies that teacher educators, school teachers and other relevant stakeholders should provide more opportunities for the pre-service teachers to learn with well-structured direction so they improve their engagement and knowledge in technology. Unfortunately, in this research, both the school teaches and university supervisors have not been able to provide this specific knowledge.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Problems arise in conventional face-to-face teaching practicum have already been identified in well-established literature (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Hudson & Millwater, 2008; Pratt, 2008; Trent, 2010). Transitioning from conventional to online teaching practicum, undoubtedly, create different sets of challenges for university supervisors, school teachers and pre-service teachers. Moving on from conventional to online teaching practicum should be supported by adequate and well-structured professional development provided by university or schools. However, time plays a critical role in completing this task. As soon as the pandemic emerges, some educators including pre-service teachers might have been frustrated of not knowing how to handle teaching and learning in a state of emergency. Therefore, university should play a more leading roles in providing more advanced technology-mediated methodology to prepare pre-service teachers and school teachers for any unpredictable circumstances. Intervention during the online teaching practicum may be necessary for improving pre-service teachers’ skills in technology-mediated classrooms.

Pre-service teachers who can be categorized as millennials in this research context are not free from technology-based difficulties in online classrooms. Although millennials

are often considered as digital natives (Presnky, 2010), they still need the most supports in technology-mediated online classrooms.

Strategies in how pre-service teachers handle challenges during online teaching practicum may generate another insight in this field. This study does not explore the problem which can be investigated in depth for future research. Further issue that is suggested to be examined in the upcoming research is the readiness of both students and pre-service teachers in embracing the online teaching practicum, especially in Indonesian rural areas which are believed to be affected the most in the online teaching and learning during Covid-19 pandemic.

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Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest is reported.

Author Biography

Gin Gin Gustine is a lecturer at Department of English Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. She finishes her doctorate degree at Deakin University, Australia. She can be contacted via email to gustine@upi.edu