

EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Problems during Teaching Assistance of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* Program

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Abstract: Teaching English was not an easy task. Therefore, pre-service teachers needed sufficient experience before becoming true teachers. The teaching assistance program was designed for aspiring teachers to gain that experience. However, during the implementation of this program, pre-service teachers undoubtedly encountered several problems. This study aimed to analyze the problems faced by pre-service teachers during the teaching assistance program. Three participants from the same university but different schools participated in the study. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. The result showed that various problems were faced by pre-service teachers during teaching assistance. Almost all pre-service teachers encountered different problems compared to their peers during teaching assistance. However, some of them also shared similar problems. All the problems faced by pre-service teachers during teaching assistance could be categorized into two main factors. Internal factors such as inappropriate teaching method, material, media, classroom management and pre-service teachers' proficiency. Then external factors such as problem related to students, disconnection between expectation and reality, school facility, and lack of relatedness between teaching practice alongside lectures. This was considered important to discuss so that in the future, pre-service teachers could be better prepared when they would teach directly to students at schools during teaching assistance.

Keywords: pre-service teacher; teaching assistance; teaching english

Abstrak: Mengajar bahasa Inggris bukanlah tugas yang mudah. Oleh karena itu, guru pra jabatan perlu memiliki pengalaman yang cukup sebelum menjadi guru yang sesungguhnya. Program praktik mengajar dibuat untuk guru pra jabatan agar mereka dapat memperoleh pengalaman tersebut. Namun, selama pelaksanaan program ini, guru pra jabatan akan pasti menghadapi beberapa masalah. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis masalah yang dihadapi oleh guru pra jabatan selama program praktik mengajar. Tiga partisipan dari universitas yang sama tetapi sekolah yang berbeda berpartisipasi dalam studi ini. Daftar pertanyaan dan wawancara digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa berbagai masalah dihadapi oleh guru pra jabatan selama praktik mengajar. Hampir semua guru pra jabatan menghadapi masalah yang berbeda-beda dibandingkan dengan teman-teman mereka selama praktik mengajar. Namun, beberapa di antaranya juga mendapati masalah yang sama. Semua masalah yang dihadapi oleh guru pra jabatan selama praktik mengajar dapat dikategorikan menjadi dua faktor utama. Faktor internal seperti tidak tepatnya metode, materi dan media mengajar, manajemen kelas, dan kecakapan guru pra jabatan. Lalu faktor eksternal seperti masalah yang berhubungan dengan siswa, perbedaan ekspektasi dengan realita, fasilitas sekolah, dan kurangnya kesesuaian antara praktik mengajar dengan materi kuliah. Hal ini dianggap penting untuk dibahas agar di masa depan, guru pra jabatan dapat lebih siap ketika mereka akan mengajar langsung kepada siswa di sekolah selama praktik mengajar.

Kata Kunci: guru pra jabatan; praktik mengajar; mengajar bahasa inggris

INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teachers (PSTs) are students who are currently undergoing a program where they will receive direct teaching experience in schools and interact with students. The program carried out by PSTs is known as the Teaching Practicum or Teaching Assistance. Zeichner (1986) defines the practicum as crucial for prospective teachers to gain new knowledge, skills, and experience. This definition highlights the importance of the practicum in teacher education, emphasizing its role in enhancing the learning and professional development of student teachers. This practice is one of the most important aspects of education for aspiring teachers.

The goals of a practicum course, regardless of its name or level of responsibility, are consistent across different settings. The primary objectives include providing opportunities for student teachers to gain hands-on classroom experience, apply theoretical knowledge and teaching ideas from previous coursework, learn from observing experienced teachers, enhance their lesson planning skills, and develop skills in selecting, adapting, and creating original course materials (Gebhard, 2009). Additionally, the practicum aims to encourage student teachers to set personal goals for improving their teaching and reflect on their own teaching philosophies, which include an amalgamation of assumptions, beliefs, values, educational and life experiences. Furthermore, the practicum helps student teachers question, articulate, and reflect on their own teaching and learning philosophies, and teaches them to make informed decisions about their teaching through systematic observation and exploration of their own and others' teaching assistances. These goals collectively aim to equip student teachers with the skills, knowledge, and perspectives necessary to become effective educators.

Teaching assistance is a mandatory program for universities, especially for students of the Faculty of Education. In this program, students will undertake teaching assistance as pre-teachers for several months. They will directly interact with students and perform their duties as teachers in general. They will teach subjects according to their respective study programs, starting from preparing materials, determining teaching methods, to assigning tasks and exams, in agreement with the teachers at the school. This program is very important for pre-teachers to gain direct teaching experience and to prepare themselves before becoming teachers.

The teaching assistance, a crucial component of teacher education, is often a transformative experience for pre-service teachers. It is a period where they transition from being students to becoming educators, and it is essential for them to develop the skills and confidence necessary to effectively teach English. However, this transition can be challenging, especially when faced with the complexities of teaching English, a subject that is often perceived as difficult to master.

Teaching English is more challenging than other subjects in the school. There are some aspects we need to be concerned about as a teaching teacher. Based on the law of the Republic of Indonesia number 14 of 2005 article 8, there is four competence that should have had by a teacher, which is:

1. Personal competence

Personal competence is an ability where a teacher should act like a teacher itself. A teacher should have a stable personality and act under applicable societal norms. Next, mature personality with a high work ethic as a teacher. Then, a wise personality, as a teacher, should think with an open mind before acting. Last is an



authoritative personality, where the teacher should give a positive example to the students.

2. Pedagogy competence

Pedagogy competence is the ability of a teacher to do his job. A teacher should understand every student; surely, each student has a different level of understanding. Before starting a lesson, the teacher should make a learning design and a teaching strategy. A teacher should keep the class situation conducive. When the teaching process has done, the teacher will evaluate the lesson to increase the students' completeness grades.

3. Social competence

The ability of a teacher to communicate with other teachers, students, student's parents, and society around the school is the meaning of social competence. A teacher should not be discriminative, communicate politely, and adapt according to the teaching area.

4. Professional competence

Professional competence is an ability to understand teaching materials deeply. Besides materials, teachers should understand the curriculum, standard competence, and basic competence used. A teacher also needs to develop himself in teaching using technology.

As foreign language teachers, besides must understand the language and materials that will be learned, we also need to have class management abilities. Class management is important for all teachers to ensure the students understand what they have just learned. Especially in teaching English, commonly just a few of the students in the class who has a fast understanding of the language. The learners' effectiveness is influenced by their aptitude and the level of effort they put into overcoming challenges (Mohammed, 2018). Educators are motivated to select suitable instructional methods and learning approaches for students, as well as instruct them on comprehending learning strategies, in order to enhance their capacity for independent learning (Shi, 2017).

The English language, as a subject, poses unique challenges for pre-service teachers. It requires not only a strong understanding of the language itself but also the ability to adapt teaching methods to cater to diverse learners, manage classroom dynamics, and address the cultural and linguistic differences that may arise. Furthermore, the ever-evolving nature of the English language, with its constant changes in vocabulary, grammar, and usage, adds an extra layer of complexity to the teaching process.

Despite these challenges, pre-service teachers are expected to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to teach English effectively. However, the lack of adequate preparation, support, and guidance during their teaching assistance can lead to difficulties in implementing effective teaching strategies, managing classroom behavior, and addressing the diverse needs of their students.

The students will face some problems during their teaching assistance. Moreover, this is their first time directly facing students and teaching them. To find out what these problems are, the researcher conducted this study. In several previous studies, the problem was found in teaching English. A study conducted by Lestari (2021) found that problems come from two factors: students and school facilities. The limited learning methods, overcrowded students in class, and the lack of facilities in a class are the problems of the school facility factor. Then, from the



student factor are the lack of vocabulary mastery, low concentration, lack of motivation, and speaking issues. In another study, there is also the same problem with overcrowded classrooms. Putra (2022) found that the teacher is difficult to focus on all of the students in the class, which consists of 36 to 38 in each class, and the teacher should teach nine classes a week. There are also some naughty students that make teaching challenging to control and discipline their behavior.

Utomo (2020) found seven problems faced by novice teachers. Teaching material became the first problem because they were still confused about making teaching material. Secondly, the lack of student motivation because they did not learn English in their first or primary school. Third is teaching design, the difficulties in making a fun and exciting teaching design. They are classroom management, administration of curriculum, job loaded, and the last lack of facility or even the media in the class that can support teaching progress.

In another study, Songbatumis (2017) found that there are three main problems for teachers in teaching English. First is from the students' side, which are lack of vocabulary mastery, lack of student concentration, lack of student parents' support, lack of discipline, student boredom, and speaking issues. The second is from the teacher side, consisting of a lack of training, limited teaching method mastery, unfamiliarity with technology, and lack of professional development. Last is from the facility side, which is the lack of LCD Projector and lack of books that are suitable for the current curriculum.

The challenges faced by participants included difficulties in classroom management and teacher competency. Lacking prior teaching experience, they encountered numerous issues in maintaining order in the classroom. They struggled to capture students' attention, with initial teaching attempts resulting in an inability to control the class. The environment became noisy, with students standing, moving around, and engaging in side conversations, causing disruption to nearby classes. Fellow teachers frequently intervened, reminding them to regain control of the class.

RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this research is to identify the problems faced by pre-service teachers during their teaching assistance in schools in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan. Three pre-service teachers who have recently completed their teaching assistance from different schools were selected by the researcher. This study is descriptive qualitative. The researcher used a Google Form questionnaire to collect data and semi-structured interviews to obtain more detailed answers. The data collection process involved several steps: first, the researcher prepared a Google Form containing 40 questions and sent it to the respondents. Second, the researcher waited until all respondents had filled out the questionnaire. Third, the researcher analyzed the answers from each respondent and identified which questions were still not meeting the criteria. Fourth, the researcher met with the respondents directly and asked some questions again to obtain more detailed answers. Finally, the researcher analyzed the results obtained through the questionnaire and interviews.

Table 1. School of The Respondents

Respondents	Place of Teaching Practice
PST 1	Islamic High School



PST 2	Junior High School
PST 3	Junior High School

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the respondents' answers obtained by the researcher, the problems faced by pre-service teachers during teaching assistance can be categorized into two factors: internal and external factors.

Internal Factors

Two out of the three pre-service teachers (PST 2 & PST 3) encountered issues when using the small group discussion method during teaching assistance. This was due to the students still being in junior high school, making it difficult for them to apply the method effectively. Teaching strategies and methods are integral components of the learning system, closely intertwined with other essential elements such as learning objectives, teaching materials, students, facilities, time, and teachers, which are all influenced by various factors (Arvind & Kusum, 2017). On the other hand, PST1 used a teacher-centered approach and faced difficulties in engaging male students to pay attention. She stated:

"I explain more, for example, I ask questions related to the material, such as 'Have you ever experienced this?' There is interaction with students. However, the boys sometimes have difficulty paying attention, and some may argue or play with their phones." (PST1)

During the listening lesson, all pre-service teachers who became respondents faced the same issue. The inadequate learning materials in the classroom became a barrier during teaching, making it difficult for students to listen clearly. PST2 said: "Besides the inadequate learning materials in each class, which makes the learning less optimal, students also struggle to grasp what the speaker is saying well and clearly due to the lack of English vocabulary."

All pre-service teachers faced the challenge of limited student vocabulary during reading lessons. The rigid content in the textbook and the lack of illustrations made students quickly bored. PST3 said:

"The limited vocabulary of the students makes me sometimes need to translate the entire text so that students can understand the text and be able to answer related questions."

PST3 faced challenges during writing lessons. Junior high school students often made mistakes in spelling English words and grammar, which was a significant issue. On the other hand, PST1 and PST3 did not encounter issues during writing lessons as they only worked on exercises. PST2 noted:

"Students often make mistakes in spelling English words, and their understanding of basic grammar according to the curriculum is still lacking."

During the teaching assistance, all pre-service teachers used the same media. The media used included PowerPoint, audio recordings, and videos. However, each pre-service teacher faced different challenges in using these media. PST1 encountered issues with a slow laptop, PST2 lacked a projector, and PST3 faced noise in the classroom while using audio recordings. PST3 said:

"The problem I faced when using audio recordings was the noise in the classroom that made it difficult for students to listen clearly."



When giving instructions to students, the three pre-service teachers received different responses. PST1 and PST3 had to explain several times because many students did not pay attention. PST2 found that students only paid attention at the beginning. PST1 said:

"I had to explain several times because many of them did not pay attention to me."

The interaction between each pre-service teacher and students was generally good. Students would start interacting with the teacher at the beginning of the class when starting a lesson. Then, student-to-student interaction occurred while they worked on group tasks. To get the students' attention, some pre-service teachers used different methods. PST1 and PST3 asked students to focus by coming to their seats. PST2 drew students' attention by doing pre-activities related to the material to be learned. PST2 said:

"If it was a special listening day, the teacher would draw students' attention by listening to music or native speaker dialogues."

In forming students into groups to work on tasks together, PST1 and PST3 faced challenges, while PST2 did not. PST1 faced issues where female students refused to be in the same group as male students. PST3 faced issues with students who needed assistance in forming groups. PST1 said:

"The male students wanted to be in a group with female students, but the female students refused."

In managing time, almost all pre-service teachers did not face issues, whether it was ensuring that time did not run out before the material was finished or the material was finished before time ran out. Only PST3 faced issues with running out of time while teaching descriptive text material.

All pre-service teachers faced issues with noisy classes. PST1 faced a noisy class at the beginning of the lesson. PST2 faced a noisy class when the teacher left the classroom. PST3 faced a noisy class while explaining the material. PST3 said:

"When explaining the material, sometimes some students would talk to their friends."

The three pre-service teachers experienced challenges in teaching English. PST2 faced issues with spelling and pronunciation. PST1 and PST3 faced issues with determining or constructing sentences. PST1 said:

"I was confused when giving instructions, constructing sentences, at the beginning, but after a few days, it became more fluent."

When asking students to listen to English conversations, PST1 and PST3 faced the same issue, which was the limited vocabulary of the students. On the other hand, PST2 faced issues because students were not familiar with English conversations. PST2 said:

"They are not used to listening to native speakers or English conversations."

During the teaching process, PST1 and PST2 used English more frequently. However, PST3 used Indonesian more often because many students had limited vocabulary. This made it somewhat difficult to use English during teaching. PST3 said:

"Because of the limited vocabulary of the students, I couldn't use English much during teaching."

The pre-service teachers tried to be close to the students to be more connected. However, this did not make the students respect them as much as they respect regular teachers. PST3 said:



"When they walk past me, they bow down like they do when they walk past regular teachers.

Each pre-service teacher had their own reasons for struggling to teach English. PST2 struggled with classroom management. PST3 faced difficulties due to students' below-average abilities, limited school facilities, and an uncooperative classroom environment. According to Brown (2007), language teachers often face challenges such as feeling anxious, managing disruptive students, dealing with unpredictable questions, handling unexpected situations, lacking experience, and struggling with time constraints. On the other hand, PST1 said that teaching English was actually enjoyable, but there were some challenges. PST1 said:

"For me, it's fun to teach English to my students, but what makes it difficult for me I think they are not really interested and feel motivated enough to learn English, they don't realize what's the importance of learning this language, so I could notice some of my students didn't really put their effort into learning."

External Factors

In addition to noisy classes, several pre-service teachers also found issues with student habits such as students walking around the classroom, talking to their friends, and sleeping during lessons. It is in line with Rozimela (2016), that states Pre-service teachers often face challenges due to students' low motivation, limited English proficiency, and the teachers' inadequate classroom management skills, which collectively contribute to the difficulties they encounter in the classroom. PST1 and PST2 faced issues with students who liked to walk around the classroom, and PST1 handled it by approaching the student and scolding them. PST3 also scolded students when he found them talking to their friends during lessons. For students who fell asleep or slept during lessons, all pre-service teachers asked them to wash their faces. PST3 said:

"If they accidentally fell asleep, I would tell them to wash their face and then return to class."

Every teacher faces the issue of students getting bored in class. PST1 and PST3 said that students became unfocused and stopped paying attention to the lesson again. PST2 said that students became distracted and did not listen to instructions well when they were bored. PST2 said:

"Their attention broke and they did not listen to instructions well."

All interviewed pre-service teachers found that the teachers and school administrators were friendly and good. The teachers and school administrators also always provided support to them and valued them as their partners in teaching. However, some pre-service teachers rarely consulted them, except for PST2, who often met with the teachers and school administrators before teaching. On the other hand, PST1 and PST3 did not consult them every time. PST1 said:

"Rarely, the school administrators would explain what material I would teach, lend me textbooks, and tell me which pages to use."

In aligning classroom learning with the lesson plan created, not all pre-service teachers were free from issues. Only PST1 did not encounter any problems during the implementation of the lesson plan. PST2 faced issues with classroom management, and PST3 faced issues due to a lack of teaching experience. PST3 said:



"As a student who has not had teaching experience, sometimes the lesson plan or teaching module I prepare contains too many classroom activities, so when implemented, not all of these activities can be carried out."

All pre-service teachers agreed that the theory taught in school was very different. They said that what was taught during lectures sounded very easy, because during assistance teaching, they also used their classmates. However, when they actually taught in schools, they faced many problems. PST1 said:

"I don't remember the theory we learned very well, but because when we learned it, it wasn't 100% suitable for the classroom conditions, and the assistance during school was only with classmates, not with real students. So when facing real students, it was like meeting many students, some argued, some didn't pay attention, our voices had to be loud. So when we entered the field, we were not suitable for what we learned and not suitable for the actual situation."

Based on the results above, it can be found that the three pre-service teachers have some common problems. However, there are also problems that are not faced by pre-service teachers due to differences in school education levels they are teaching. Besides the lack of preparation provided by the university, inadequate facilities at the school also cause pre-service teachers to face problems. This shows the importance of the university providing sufficient preparation to pre-service teachers. Additionally, schools should facilitate teachers so that they can teach well and students can understand lessons well.

CONCLUSION

The practicum experience for PSTs is crucial for their professional development, but it also presents several challenges. Internal factors such as teaching methods, classroom management, limited resources, and student abilities can hinder the effectiveness of PSTs. External factors such as student habits, boredom, and support from teachers and administrators also play a significant role. To overcome these challenges, PSTs need to develop effective teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and ways to engage students. Additionally, they should seek support from teachers and administrators to ensure a successful practicum experience.

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