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Research Article

Navigating Teaching Practicum in the Real Classroom: Insights from ESL Teaching Practicum Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practicum is one of the compulsory courses that pre-service ESL teachers have to accomplish prior to the completion of their study. Under the lens of experiential learning theory, this study aims to find out pre-service English teachers' challenges of teaching practicum and how they overcome them. Interviews were used as instruments in this multiple case study, focusing on three pre-service English teachers who participated in the AJARMI program during the 2022–2023 academic year. The findings of this study were analyzed using thematic analysis. The PSETs faced challenges related to students' behaviour, preparation of instructional materials, and mentoring. They handled them with organizing lessons, acting as an assertive teacher, devising a backup plan, and adapting to the school system. The implications of this study suggest that teacher education programs should provide more comprehensive training on classroom management, instructional material preparation, and effective mentoring strategies to better prepare pre-service teachers for the realities of the classroom.

Keywords: *Pre-service English teachers, teaching practicum, AJARMI, teachers' challenges, and mentoring.*

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum as one of the required courses that should be enrolled by pre-service teachers has a crucial role for giving field experience. Mahmoudi & ÿzkan (2016) describes that practicum offers an opportunity to learn the nature of reality as a teacher. Pre-service teachers are given the chance to teach English in a real classroom situation through teaching practicum, which helps to improve their attitudes, motivations, and engagement with the teaching profession (Fajardo & Miranda, 2015). Accordingly, Arslan & Ilin (2018) asserted that with teaching practicum, pre-service teachers will receive an opportunity to experience teaching in an actual school environment and learn more about the curriculum, students, teaching context, and teaching resources.

The Indonesian higher education system mandates that undergraduate institutions provide practicum courses known as Field Experience Program, locally labeled as *Program Pengalaman Lapangan* (PPL) to fourth-year students. Additionally, regarding teaching practicum through PPL, Ministry of Education, Culture Research and Technology of Indonesia has launched an alternative for students with a new program, *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM). The implementation of the MBKM program has several forms of learning activities and one of program that can be enrolled by pre-service teachers as teaching practicum experience is Teaching Assistance (AJARMI). AJARMI provides opportunities for education students to develop and deepen competencies by carrying out direct practice in the field, and helping to improve the distribution of quality education, as well as the relevance of primary and secondary education to higher education and the times (Sobara, 2022). Furthermore, pre-service teachers who take part in the AJARMI program can be converted into PPL grades. The English Education study program at Universitas Negeri Makassar requires that pre-service English teachers (PSETs) carry out teaching practice by participating in AJARMI programs in the sixth semester.

Pre-service teachers preparing for the teaching practicum should be equipped with comprehensive training on classroom management, instructional material preparation, and effective mentoring strategies to better prepare pre-service teachers for the realities of the classroom

Certainly, before teaching directly in the classroom, PSETs have obtained teaching preparation in the prior course. The prior knowledge that gained by pre-service teachers in class is connected to the teaching practice at the field school (Abdullah & Basthomi, 2020). However, some PSETs face challenges when practising teaching in a real teaching environment. The PSETs believed there was still some gap between the theoretical knowledge they had learned in teacher education programs and the actual teaching that was taking place in the field school. Inarsih et al., (2021) revealed the challenges experienced by PSETs during PPL were the selection of schools where to practice, pre-service teachers' unpreparedness to teach, and a lack of knowledge and training. Similarly, another study

found that internal challenges in teaching included classroom management and teacher proficiency, while external challenges included student motivation and inadequate facilities (Pakpahan, 2023). Thus, these findings suggest that PSETs confront challenges in teaching practicum. In other words, the prior research has indicated that PSETs faced several challenges in teaching practicum. Thus, this study focuses on identifying the challenges of PSETs while taking part in the AJARMI program and how they overcome them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Practicum

The paradigm of the AJARMI program adopts the experiential learning theories (Kolb et al., 2001). The teacher education department determines teaching practicum as a compulsory program for pre-service teachers. Teaching practicum is a required course of study that prepares pre-service teachers to the teaching profession by providing them to actual teacher training. Pre-service teachers have the opportunity to establish bridges between theory and application for the purpose of implementing their academic knowledge (Nemtchinova, 2018). Moreover, teaching practicum becomes crucial to the English language teacher education program because it allows PSETs an excellent opportunity to apply the pedagogical knowledge they acquired in the classroom by teaching real students (Koşar, 2021).

Teaching practicum is a major component of the education department coursework. The main reason is PSETs' teaching capability will be directly shown in the real-world teaching process. Prabjandee (2019) asserted that a teaching practicum is the time when PSETs implement the theories, insight, and abilities they have learned throughout their previous courses. Subsequently, the teaching practicum contributes a crucial role in preparing PSTs and is the most important component of a pre-service teacher education program. The practicum component has consistently been a significant focus in teacher preparation programs because teacher educators consider it to be a crucial and fundamental aspect of teacher education. Teacher education organizes the implementation of effective teaching practicum for PSTs as their preparation to become qualified teachers.

Teaching Assistance (AJARMI) Program

Teaching Assistance (AJARMI) is a student teaching activity at the secondary education level within a certain period. Schools for teaching practice can be located in urban areas or in remote regions. This program aims to provide opportunities for students who have an interest in the teaching profession to participate and deepen their knowledge by participating as a teacher in an educational unit (Suhaili et al., 2023). In line with this Sobara (2022) pointed out through this program, PSTs can develop a broad perspective through direct interaction with school residents and enhance teaching abilities and assist in resolving issues with instruction in schools. Teaching Assistance gives chances for students to observe,

experience, and solve educational problems by using their scientific knowledge. In addition, Santi et al., (2023) mentioned that students are expected to acquire suitable pedagogical competences through teaching assistance activities that will benefit them in their future careers. Therefore, this experiential learning program will help PSTs gain the kinds of insights and practical skills they will need to succeed in the real world of teaching.

Furthermore, teaching practicum is essential for pre-service teachers to allow them to get insights of the real teaching situation (Jeong, 2017; Richards, 2010). Teaching assistance provides opportunities for PSTs to apply their knowledge and skills in the field of learning and education, as well as gain additional up-to-date information and experience about schools and educational dynamics directly in schools. PSTs also gain experience on how to manage learning in accordance with the characteristics and developmental level of students, develop their ability to identify problems, plan improvements, and implement corrective actions by utilizing their knowledge and experience. For this reason, the teaching assistance program is very helpful for pre-service teachers to fulfill their obligation to practice teaching.

Teaching Assistance Program within English Education Study Program Universitas Negeri Makassar

Universitas Negeri Makassar, as one of the universities providing teachers education in Indonesia, has an English language education study program as one of the favorite study programs. Commonly, the PSETs are required to study teaching and learning theories in the first three years before they are allowed to participate in real teaching activities in a real classroom as part of the PPL program. However, PSTs can accelerate teaching practice by participating in the MBKM program, namely teaching assistance in the sixth semester. This is because Makassar State University (UNM) as an integral part of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) has responded and participated in implementing the MBKM program. In other words, if PSETs have participated in the Teaching Assistance program, then they no longer do PPL during seventh semester. Therefore, PSETs have the opportunity to choose whether to participate in the Teaching Assistance program or PPL.

Moreover, in the English education study program, two batches have carried out teaching practice by participating in the AJARMI program, the class of 2019 and the class of 2020. Moreover, the benefits of the AJARMI program are the policy of recognizing the value of PPL and several relevant courses. AJARMI also become an opportunity for students to learn directly from the real world by practicing all knowledge and experience. AJARMI activities are carried out in educational units including educational planning, implementation, and assessment, and school development, both intra-curricular and extra-curricular.

METHOD

Research design

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is suitable when the study is addressed to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues (Hamied, 2017). This is in line with Creswell's (2012) theory that qualitative research is a type of study that occurs when a researcher gains knowledge through a good experience. Moreover, to gain deeper understanding of the situation under study, the researcher applied multiple case study research. The researcher decided that multiple case study is appropriate since the participants of AJARMI program were conducted their teaching practicum in different school.

Participants

The subjects of the research were three PSETs who matched the criteria and were capable of taking part in this research as participants. In order to maintain their anonymity, the three PSETs as the research participants were named as P1, P2, and P3.

Table 1
Characteristics of the participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Compulsory subjects completed	Targeted school level
Teacher 1	23	Male	Teaching and Learning, micro-	Junior High School
Teacher 2	24	Female	teaching, ELT methodologies, ICT	Junior High School
Teacher 3	23	Female	in ELT	Senior High School

Research Instruments

The interview was organized to gather insights from three pre-service ESL teachers regarding their experiences during teaching practicum. Conducted in a semi-structured format, the interview consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the teachers' experiences, challenges, and reflections. Each participant, who was actively engaged in their ESL teacher training program, provided personal insights into their practicum experiences. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, allowing ample time for in-depth discussion and follow-up questions. The sessions were audio-recorded for accuracy and later transcribed for analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives.

Data Collection

The researcher interviewed three PSETs who had participated in the AJARMI program and conducted their teaching practicum in different schools. Furthermore, the interview obtained to get in-depth information related to what are the challenges in teaching practicum and how they overcome those challenges while participating in the AJARMI program.

Data Analysis

Data from the interviews transcribed and reviewed then the researcher analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative data analysis that focuses with a particular focus on finding, evaluating, and interpreting meaningful patterns in the data from qualitative research studies. Thematic analysis is a method of examining data with the goal of finding themes or patterns through data gathered by researchers, stated by Braun & Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, interview results from each case were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process of thematic analysis in this study consisted of two stages, as stated by (Liamputtong, 2009). First, the researcher comprehended or became familiar with the data from the interview transcripts by observing the patterns or ideas conveyed by the informants, which is also called the coding step. The next stage, the researcher created themes related to the codes and then linked them to the relevant theories.

FINDINGS

Based on the results of the interviews, these were the challenges in the three cases of teaching practicum and how PSETs overcome them.

Challenges of Teaching Practicum from P1's Case

Based on P1's experience when participating in AJARMI program, P1 expressed that the challenge was the difficulty in managing the class and delivering lessons because of the various student characters. P1 mentioned:

> "The challenge is the different characters of the students. In school, it is very difficult to organize the lessons well." Kalau tantangan, karakter siswa yang berbeda. Di sekolah sangat sulit untuk mengatur jalannya pelajaran dengan baik. (Interview with P1, 22/1/2024)

Moreover, P1 explained how to overcome the challenge in her teaching practicum. P1 perceived that the solution was to try to teach by adjusting students' learning styles so that students are interested in learning, hence the teaching process takes place effectively. P1 shared:

> "To overcome this, I tell myself what the students want so that learning takes place well and effectively." Cara mengatasinya, saya kembalikan pada diri sendiri apa yang diinginkan siswa supaya pembelajaran berlangsung dengan baik dan efektif. (Interview with P1, 22/1/2024)

Challenges of Teaching Practicum from P2's Case

In terms of teaching practicum, P2 shared the challenge during the AJARMI program was the use of technology in teaching. The school where she was placed to teach the process prioritized the use of technology. Starting from teaching materials and assignments for students via the internet. Therefore, P2 found it difficult to adjust to teaching English with technology because she herself was not familiar with it. This is based on P2's statement:

> "Another challenge, as I said earlier, is adapting to the learning technology there, and I have not been able to adjust directly how the technology there, such as how we did online attendance, it was not

familiar to me. So, I learned about it. Moreover, in the learning process it must use technology such as, PPT delivered, teaching modules prepared, every material prepared, especially in giving assignments there must be an internet platform or application that must be provided." *Tantangan lainnya itu, seperti yang saya katakan tadi, yaitu beradaptasi dengan teknologi pembelajaran yang ada di sana, dan saya pribadi memang belum…. bisa menyesuaikan secara lansung bagaimana teknologi di sana, seperti bagaimana kita melakukan absen secara online, hal itu belum terbiasa bagi saya. Jadi saya belajar tentang hal itu. Apalagi dalam proses belajarnya itu harus menggunakan teknologi seperti, PPT yang disampaikan, modul ajar yang disiapkan, setiap materi yang disiapkan, apalagi dalam memberikan tugas harus ada platform internet atau aplikasi yang harus disediakan.* (Interview with P2, 22/1/2024)

Furthermore, after facing challenges in adapting to the use of technology in teaching, P2 admitted that she tried to apply digital tools and online platforms when teaching. In addition, based on her teaching practicum experience, P2 was able to increase learning interest and support student improvement by teaching with technology innovation. As P2 reflected:

"I can utilize digital tools and online platforms to make learning more interactive. Through the use of technology, I can increase interest in learning, create a more dynamic learning environment and support student development." *Saya bisa memanfaatkan alat-alat digital dan platform online untuk membuat pembelajaran lebih interaktif. Melalui penggunaan teknologi, saya dapat meningkatkan minat belajar, ciptakan lingkungan pembelajaran yang lebih dinamis dan mendukung perkembangan siswa.* (Interview with P2, 22/1/2024)

Challenge of Teaching Practicum from P3's Case

In the interview session, P3 shared about the challenges she faced in her teaching practicum. P3 conveyed that when joining AJARMI, she experienced challenges related to students' attitudes and motivation. P3 admitted that students were disrespectful and underestimated her when teaching in class. Students' lack of respect for PSETs was related to their motivation to learn, which affected how they organized the class and then taught the lesson. As P3 implied:

"For the students themselves, the biggest challenge is that they could not respect us as they should, they might just see us as students instead of their teachers, that is why they might underestimate us because we are just students." *Untuk murid itu sendiri, tantangan yang terbesarnya di mana mereka tidak bisa menghormati kita sebagaimana mestinya, mereka mungkin cuma melihat kita sebagai mahasiswa pengganti guru mereka, itulah mengapa mereka mungkin menyepelekan kita karena kita statusnya cuma mahasiswa.* (Interview with P3, 22/1/2024)

P3 responded:

"How do I handle it if from the student's perspective I just act as an assertive person, where I utilize this situation into a new way to teach them. Maybe my status that is not too stressful for them, not too scary for them, can make them become comfortable and the process of transferring knowledge in the teaching and learning process might be more effective." *Bagaimana saya mengatasinya kalau dari pihak siswa saya cuma bertindak sebagai orang yang asertif, di mana saya memanfaatkan situasi ini menjadi cara baru untuk mengajar mereka. Mungkin status saya yang tidak terlalu menegangkan bagi mereka, tidak terlalu menakutkan bagi mereka, bisa membuat mereka menjadi nyaman dan proses transfer ilmu pada proses belajar mengajar mungkin akan lebih efektif.* (Interview with P3, 22/1/2024)

Moreover, related to the challenge regarding students' attitude and motivation, P3 revealed how she overcame it. P3 attempted to build closeness with students, in other words, made students comfortable so that they would be motivated and the learning process would be effective.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher provides discussion regarding the information provided in the research findings. Based on the findings of this study, the following are the challenges and that PSETs experienced when joining the AJARMI program. In addition, how they overcame those will also be discussed.

Challenges Related to Student Behavior

The interview results revealed that two PSETs faced challenges related with students' behavior. The first is the student's various characteristics, thus making the pre-service teacher difficult in managing class. Pre-service teacher also conveyed that it is very difficult to deliver lessons because the class situation was not conducive. The relevant studies also found that pre-service teachers are confronted with students of various characters as well as students who were noisy in class (Soleimani & Razmjoo, 2019); (Maulidina et al., 2022); (Pakpahan, 2023). Moreover, the PSETs shared how to overcome this problem by organizing lessons according to students' interests so that they are excited to participate in the lesson and the class is also more manageable.

Additionally, PSETs also deal with students' lack of respect and motivation. They reported that students tend to show disrespect because of their status as higher education students not teachers. This is also related to students' lack of motivation when learning. This was also identical to the findings in study of Shah et al., (2020), Qadri et al., (2022), and Pakpahan (2023) where the students did not accept PSETs as their teachers and did not focus on the lesson. Moreover, the solution to the problem concerning the lack of respect and motivation of students is solved by the PSET was implemented the assertive personality. The PSET admitted that she could position herself with the students, in other words by maintaining closeness to them. According to her experience, this makes it easier for her to motivate the students, and transfer knowledge to them, which makes teaching more effective. This solution was also discovered in previous research that PSETs overcome the problems with being assertive teachers and friendly to students (Qadri et al., 2022).

Challenges Regarding Preparation of Instructional Materials

The first challenge encountered by PSETs in terms of preparation of instructional materials is lack of facilities in school. PSET admitted that facilities provided at school are inadequate, such as lack of Liquid Crystal Displays (LCDs) and difficulty of teaching with technology because of student situations. This problem affected the teaching because it was difficult to display learning material like slides and videos. This is parallel to the findings of Collantes (2021) wherein PSTs find it difficult in applying teaching methods in their teaching practicum because the school lacks essential facilities and equipment. Then, pre-service

teachers handle this difficulty by developing a backup plan, which is for creating enjoyable learning. She tried to make the material applicable in the real world so that students would feel connected to the lesson. In addition, PSET using her cultural capital or the skill possessed in overcoming this problem.

Further, the challenge faced by another PSET was the administration system of the school. The PSET shared that all teaching preparation must adapt to the integration of technology, starting from teaching materials, students' attendance, and evaluation. Although the PSET already learned about the use of technology in teaching, she felt that it was still a challenge because she had rarely applied it. Moreover, she admitted that tried to apply digital tools and online platforms when teaching. Additionally, she tried to adapt to the school system and learn more in applying digital tools and online platforms when teaching. In conclusion, by incorporating technological innovation into her teaching program, she could increase learning interest and help students' improvement.

Challenge in Mentoring

The challenge related to the lack of support from a mentor teacher was reported by one participant in this study. The PSET admitted her mentor teacher did not fulfil her roles, such as showing how to teach, how to manage students, and how to assess. The problems mentioned above were similar with the findings of Maharani & Fithriani (2023) that lack of supervisor support and guidance causes PSTs to struggle with the motivation and direction they require.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the pre-service ESL teachers during the teaching practicum of the AJARMI program. The study reveals several key challenges faced by pre-service ESL teachers (PSETs) during their participation in the AJARMI program and how they addressed these issues. One significant challenge was managing diverse student behaviors, including classroom disruptions and lack of respect or motivation. To overcome these difficulties, PSETs adapted their lesson plans to align with students' interests and adopted assertive teaching strategies to foster respect and engagement. Another challenge was the inadequate facilities and technology at the schools, which hindered the effective presentation of instructional materials. PSETs addressed this by developing creative backup plans and leveraging their own skills to make lessons more engaging and relevant. Additionally, the integration of technology into teaching posed a challenge for some PSETs who had limited experience with digital tools. They tackled this by embracing technological innovations and improving their proficiency with digital platforms to enhance the learning experience. Finally, the lack of support from mentor teachers emerged as a significant issue, with some PSETs struggling due to insufficient guidance on teaching practices and student management. These findings highlight the importance of adequate support, resources, and training for pre-service teachers to effectively navigate the complexities of teaching practicum and improve their overall performance in the classroom.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest reported by the authors

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