

THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES FACED BY PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS DURING TEACHING PRACTICUM

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Abstract: The teaching practicum program becomes an initial stage in increasing teacher competence skills for pre-service teachers. The aim of this study is to investigate how pre-service teachers upgrade their professional competence in teaching practicum and to find out professional competence challenges and strategies they faced. This study used a qualitative research design with a case study approach, the researcher selected five people to be participants in this research, with details of 3 women and 2 men. This study used two data collection methods: interviews and documentation. The findings of this study indicated that during teaching practicum, pre-service teacher upgrades their professional competence through reflective actions by taking feedback from tutor teachers related to teaching, which improve their professional competence in teaching. Besides that, they also have taken some courses that led to the teaching practice program on campus. During teaching practicum, pre-service teachers faced professional competence challenges in creating lesson plans, using learning media, and creating a good class atmosphere. The study revealed that most of them used game-based learning in teaching and other strategies, such as developing lesson plans by using the internet to create good learning plans, relying on existing sources, and adding to them from various sources.

Key Words: professional competence, pre-service teachers, teaching practicum.

INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teachers are prospective teachers who undergo training or education before starting a career in the teaching profession (Ülgü & Er, 2016). Pre-service EFL teachers must joint a teaching practicum program before becoming professional teachers. The teaching practicum program is an essential education component that prepares students to become competent teachers (Novitasari, 2016). In this context, the teaching practicum program becomes an initial stage in increasing teacher skills for pre-service EFL teachers. Through the implementation of this program, they can hone communication skills, classroom management, and the application of effective learning strategies, all of which contribute to the formation of the basics of a teacher's professionalism in teaching foreign languages. In addition, universities organize teaching practice programs to prepare competent teachers in the future.

The teaching practicum program becomes an initial stage in increasing teacher competence skills for pre-service teachers. Thus, it becomes one of the mandatory courses that students at educational institutions must pass as a requirement for graduating from university (Maharani & Fithriani, 2023). This program enables pre-service teachers to interact with students directly in the classroom, which is a crucial initial step in developing their competencies as future teacher candidates.

A teacher's quality is assessed by their competence (Arista, Dzulfikri, Mistar & Musthofa, 2022). Competency is a set of mastery qualities that teachers must possess to achieve predetermined standards (Tanjung, 2022). Another definition of competence by Mulyasa (2013) is that it is an association of abilities, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and attitudes reflected in habits of action and thinking. High teacher

competency will positively impact the quality of education and significantly influence learning in the classroom (Acarli & Kasap, 2022). Teacher competency is not limited to knowledge in their field but has exclusive areas such as communication, evaluation of attitudes and values, and personal characteristics. However, before becoming a professional teacher, the teacher must have competencies. According to Law Number 14 of 2005, there are several competencies to become professional teachers such as professional, social, pedagogical, and personality competences.

Therefore, it is essential to ensure that prospective teachers or prospective educators have sufficient competence to face the complex demands of today's educational world. Based on Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel (GTK) 2023 on operational guide to the teacher competency model. Professional competence has three competency indicators. They are: (1) knowledge of learning content and how to do it, (2) characteristics and ways of learning of students, (3) curriculum and how to use it.

Nurhalimah et al. (2022) reveal that in the 21st century, English teachers must fulfill six professional competence aspects. These aspects are current understanding of English subjects, empowering curriculum development, erials according to student and school conditions, conducting research, promoting ICT skills, and understanding and applying educational foundations. Billik (2020) found that teachers who do not master English are because the teachers lack pedagogical competence and have low professional competence. A study by Emita et al. (2021) concluded that the professional competency variable positively affects performance variables. It means the professional competence of a teacher's work dramatically influences the teacher's performance

In an attempt to find out how pre-service teachers master their competence, the professional competence challenges, and strategies for overcoming them during practicum, the researcher formulates the research problems as follows:

1. How do Pre-service teachers upgrade their professional competence during teaching practicum?
2. What professional competence challenges do Pre-service teachers face during teaching practicum?
3. What professional competence strategies are implemented by Pre-service teachers during teaching practicum?

METHODS

This research began with pre-research involving a survey given to 35 pre-service teachers who teach at the high school level. The survey results showed that professional competence is the most frequently chosen competence, with details of 17 people choosing professional competence, 6 pedagogical competence, 8 personality competence, and 4 social competences. Of the 17 people who chose professional competence, the researcher selects 5 people to be participants in this research, with details of 3 women and 2 men from different school locations, which has different conditions to make the data more variative.

The data collection process obtained from two instruments: semi-structured in-depth interviews and documentation. Before conducting the interview, the researcher gave a letter of concern about becoming a participant in this research. After that, the researcher conducted an interview face-to-face with participants in their free time. During the interview section, the researcher recorded all the conversations from beginning to end and transcribed them. Time allocation for interviews was about 15 to 30 minutes and was performed in

Bahasa Indonesia to facilitate understanding between the researcher and participants. The purpose of the deep interview is to collect the experiences of EFL pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum program and also to know the challenges of teacher competence and what strategies they applied.

The second instrument was documentation, the researcher collected their lesson plan as secondary data to support findings in this research. After the data interview and documentation were collected, those data were analyzed using thematic analysis. To ensure the reliability and credibility of the data, the researcher employed triangulation by comparing interview responses by supporting with documentations, ensuring a comprehensive and well-supported analysis.

FINDINGS

The data were collected by conducting interviews with participant and supported by their lesson plan. The researcher mainly focused on the data analysis, which could be answered based on the research objectiveness mentioned above in the research question. There are three points of the research objectiveness, factors increase the professional competence of pre-service teachers during teaching practicum, professional competence challenges of pre-service teachers face during teaching practicum, and strategies are implemented by pre-service teachers during teaching practicum.

1. Factors increasing professional competence of pre-service

This section examines how Pre-service teachers improve their professional competence outside learning activities. Based on the interview results with the participants, the researcher found several factors increase the professional competence of pre-service teachers during teaching practicum such as joining seminars and teacher training classes and discussing or collaborating with the tutors.

a. Joining seminars and teacher training classes

Attending seminars or having teacher training is the first factor that increases the professional competence of pre-service teachers. By attending teacher training, they can increase their professionalism when teaching. Below is the excerpts.

P1: "I took part in training to become a tutor at a tutoring school (more on how to teach students). We were taught how to make students comfortable in class.

P2: ", I got tips and tricks from the lecturers about classroom management and evaluation of the learning process. I have studied the lesson plan itself in the micro teaching course".

P3: In the micro teaching class, we are taught to make a lesson plan, how to convey the material to students and at the end of the semester we are told to implement the teaching to our fellow students."

P4: "I studied in campus because there are how many subjects are taught in lectures, such as how to make teaching modules. We also learned about the curriculum; we were also taught to make assessment rubrics in the assessment materials."

P5: "I once took part in microteaching where participants were required to practice teaching well and interestingly, starting from compiling lesson plans, compiling learning assessments, creating teaching media and many others

The participants revealed that most of them had never attended seminars. When they were in campus, they received microteaching courses which taught them how to make lesson plans, how to use teaching media, and how to convey material to students. Several participants said that through microteaching, they were also trained

to manage the class well, make learning evaluations, and practice teaching techniques directly in front of their classmates. This experience provides an idea for them to prepare themselves before joining the teaching practice program, even though most have yet to experience special seminars on teacher training.

b. Discussing and communicating with another

The next factor indicated that pre-service conduct discussions and collaborate with their partner or teacher to improve their quality during teaching practicum. Taking feedback from another can solve their lack of teaching skills. The following are the answer from the interview session.

P1: "after finishing teaching the tutor teacher usually gives advice on what is lacking in the way we teach."

P2: "Before the 1st day before teaching, we always discuss with the tutor regarding the lesson plan that we have made"

P3: "We discuss the lesson material that will be taught, discuss whether the lesson plan is appropriate or not with the material that will be taught"

P4: "We discussed more about lesson plans, we always made teaching modules which were corrected directly by our tutor."

P5: "I usually discuss several questions with the tutor so that I can adapt to the teaching environment at school."

Most participants showed that discussion and collaboration with tutor teachers and fellow pre-service teachers are essential factors in the teaching practicum program. They consistently consult with tutors before and after training to get valuable input, which helps them improve their teaching techniques and ensure the lesson plans they create are appropriate to classroom conditions.

2. Challenges on professional competence during teaching practicum

This section examines Pre-service teachers challenges during the teaching practicum program. Based on the interview results with the participants, the researcher found several challenges faced by pre-service teachers, including challenges in preparing lesson plans, challenges in using learning media in teaching, and challenges in creating good class atmosphere.

a. Challenges in preparing lesson plan

Many participants faced challenges in creating lesson plans. they like to share their thoughts, starting with the challenges or problems they face in creating lesson plans. The following are the excerpts.

P1: "I have to determine what elements are suitable in teaching such as reading, listening, writing."

P2: "in making the lesson plans sometimes I get confused about looking for activities that are the same as the material to be taught."

P3: "the material in the textbook is less varied, sometimes I also usually add material from other sources on the internet"

P4: " in making teaching modules we need to combine several aspects that must be fulfilled by our lesson plan including listening, listening and other 6K elements."

P5 "I have to consider students' cognitive standards based on Bloom's taxonomy. then adapt it to whatever learning outcomes must be achieved in the material."

P1: "I can only use learning media at most PPT. For other learning media, I lack time so i can't create creative & innovative learning media."

Based on the results of interviews with several participants, the process of creating teaching modules by pre-service teachers involves several important steps that are varied but complementary. All participants start by understanding the material to be taught. They searched for and analyzed lesson materials according to the grade level and topic given, often by referring to lesson package books or materials provided by tutors.

After preparing the final design of the teaching module, they consulted with the tutor and adapt it based on the feedback received to ensure the teaching module is effective and meets standards. Thus, a combination of understanding the material, interactive learning strategies, and feedback adjustments is key in creating teaching modules by these pre-service teachers.

b. Challenges in using learning media in teaching

The second challenge is using learning media in teaching. During teaching, each participant faced a different challenge in using learning media in teaching. Below is the excerpts.

P1: " The challenge is the limited time in creating the media itself so we don't have much time to look for learning media so i can't create creative & innovative learning media."

P2: "The challenge with my use of media is that our tutor asks that English learning in class be more digital."

P3: "because in my class the LCD doesn't work, so I use the media to write everything like on paper for games or quizzes."

P4: "The only challenge is the lack of preparation from the class. When we want to use learning media that supports our learning, sometimes the LCD still has to be borrowed."

P5: "The challenge that I have in learning is adapting to school facilities where LCD or projector facilities are not evenly distributed to explain material in the form of ppt and videos to students."

Based on the results of the interviews above, Pre-service teachers have some problems using learning material, such as the lack of availability of LCD projectors, the lack of time to create teaching media, and the lack of preparation from the students themselves. Overall, most of them use digital learning media to support their teaching activities.

c. Challenges in creating good class atmosphere

The third is the challenge of creating a learning environment. These pre-service teachers faced the challenge of getting students activeness and involvement in learning. Below is the answers from interview.

P1: Usually students like mini-game type learning, so whether we like it or not, we as teachers have to prepare game media that is suitable for the learning material

P2: sometimes when explaining material students easily get bored.

P3: so that students don't get bored when the material I always use is a game that I mix with learning material

P4: The problem I encountered was that many students felt that learning English was boring

P5: To make the conditions for students in class effective, it depends on us as teachers, how we condition students to learn

Most pre-service teachers experienced the same teaching condition: their students feel bored. Therefore, teachers must be ready to prepare innovative learning media, such as educational games that combine learning material with fun. In this way, teachers can make the learning process more interesting and effective so that students do not feel bored and can better achieve the learning goals.

3. Coping strategies on professional competence during teaching practicum

This section examines participants strategies during the teaching practicum program. The third research question concerns the professional competence strategies implemented by pre-service teachers during teaching practicum. Based on the interview results with the participants and supported by the data, the researcher found several strategies used by pre-service teachers in teaching practicum, including the implementation of lesson plans in the learning process and the use of media technology in the learning process.

a. Strategies to develop lesson plan in the learning process

Pre-service teachers adapt the learning steps in the lesson plans, but sometimes, the learning situation does not follow what they wrote in the lesson plans. Here is the strategies applied by the pre-service teachers excerpts.

P1: "I always follow my lesson plan so that learning conditions are more planned because if I don't follow the lesson plan then it won't be so planned."

P2: "Actually, the lesson plan that I use for teaching only helps a little when we are doing the learning. I am 100% sure that it will not be the same as what is in the lesson plan"

P3: "Learning conditions sometimes don't match the steps in the lesson plan, it can change depending on the student."

P4: "I carry it out according to the steps in the RPP. there is only a little improvisation where when we teach

P5: "the students' abilities are not the same, so it takes time and that also makes the steps in the lesson."

Based on the statements from participants, it showed that although lesson plans are important for structured learning planning, their implementation often needs to be adapted to real conditions in the classroom. Overall, although the lesson plan provides an important framework, transmission, and adaptation based on the situation on the ground are necessary.

b. Strategies to use the learning media in teaching practicum

In addition to the strategies previously discussed, pre-service teachers also used media and technology which is essential to support their effectiveness of delivering material. Most of them used digital media as the primary choice to support the delivery of more exciting and varied material. Learning media helped them explain the material and increased students interest and participation in an active and effective learning process. Below is their answers on interview.

P1: "I usually explain the material and intersperse it with short videos related to the learning material so that students don't keep writing and listening."

P2: "I always use ppt to explain learning material and also several game applications such as Quizziz."

P3: "The main media is from book packages and using a laptop and I can also use other media such as YouTube and also several game applications."

P4: "The media I use is facilitated by LCD, projector, sound. And for the learning material itself, I combined textbooks and several sources from the internet."

P5: "The media that I use when working on questions is usually Quiziz and also used several other games."

The participants argued that the use of media in teaching should be creatively chosen. All participants indicated that using varied and innovative media can increase student effectiveness and involvement in the teaching and learning process. The learning media they use include using videos to explain the material and also using application games or quizzes for assignments.

c. Strategies in creating good class atmosphere

Each participant also has a strategies to make the learning situation in class more active. This aims to ensure that students do not get bored easily when learning. Here is the excerpts.

P1: "It depends on the teacher or student. From the students themselves, the thing that children like most is actually teaching in the form of minigames

P2: "I give the same game according to the material so that students can have more fun and enjoy the class and sometimes I also give appreciation to students by giving gifts

P3: "I usually create game-based learning so like it or not every student has to complete it."

P4: the first and most important thing is to make our students like and love the lessons we provide "

P5: "The technique I use is to make the class condition active. because my first goal is how students can enjoy teaching with me."

In summary, the result of interviews with participants regarding their effective teaching method is that most of them use a game-based approach. They use minigames like puzzle or quiz to make good class atmosphere and avoid student boredom.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal about how pre-service teachers upgrade their professional competence, challenges, and strategies face during the teaching practicum program. One of the factors that upgrade the professional competence of pre-service teachers is their experience in participating in teacher training classes either on campus or outside campus. In campus, they took several courses related to teaching, such as TEFL (Teaching English Foreign Language), Micro-Teaching, Curriculum and Language Teaching Preparation, and Language Assessment. In that course, they taught about introducing the curriculum, how to teach well, how to prepare lesson plans, how to use teaching media, and how to evaluate student results. This is certainly a provision for pre-service teachers to teach at school through the teaching practicum program.

The next factor is discussion with other teachers. In teaching practicum programs, pre-service teachers consistently discussed with colleagues and tutor teachers. Some of them are discussed related to making lesson plans for its application in teaching. Apart from that, after pre-service teaching, they also got an evaluation during teaching from the tutor teacher regarding what was lacking in the way of teaching and what needed to be improved at the next meeting.

During their teaching practicum, pre-service teachers encountered various challenges related to their professional competence such as in preparing lesson plans, using learning media in teaching, and creating a good class atmosphere. In creating lesson plans, they faced a problem in adjusting the learning method with the elements of teaching. Most pre-service teachers revealed that they must determine the elements suitable for adapting to learning strategies when making lesson plans like looking for activities that are the same as material to be taught. And this in line with a study Putri (2017) that Pre-service teachers have issues when they have to

integrate a scientific approach into learning activities like consider students cognitive and bloom taxonomy in creating lesson plans. Other challenges encountered by pre-service teachers were grouped into several challenges similar to Khusniyah et al. (2023) that involve student behaviour, managing mixed-ability classrooms, adapting to the school curriculum, effective time management, and school facilities. Moreover, Sunismi et al., (2024) concluded that the learning process and human resources positively influenced the pre-service teacher's competence and showed that academic infrastructure have an impact in teaching This is aligned with research findings, where academic infrastructure or classroom facilities such as LCD projectors play an important role in pre-service in the learning methods that will be used in learning.

To overcome those challenges, pre-service teachers used various teaching techniques and strategies to increase student motivation and interest, one of which is the use and utilization of games and puzzles as learning media. This use aligns with research conducted by Dzulfikri and Azami (2024). That teaching through the use of media games can increase student interest in learning and avoid student boredom. The use and utilization of technology in teaching is the factor that increase teacher professionalism. Masitoh et al. (2023) indicated that pre-service EFL teachers viewed digital gamification as contributing positively to forming their teacher identities. The function of digital gamification is captured within their engaging experiences of becoming modern, tech-savvy, innovative, and updated teachers. Using digital gamification, pre-service teachers created an enjoyable English learning environment and gain students' attention in learning.

In addition, pre-service teachers always consulted with tutors in creating teaching modules, selecting the material to be taught, determining what media is appropriate, and determining which teaching techniques are effective and preferred by students. They also had unique ways of developing learning media. During teaching, most of them used game-based learning materials, such as combining games with learning material, to make learning more engaging and compelling and avoid student boredom. They also utilized technology such as LCD projectors to explain material such as PPT and Video and game-based teaching media such as quizzes and Worldwall. Applying technology by pre-service teachers certainly made learning more effective and active and avoids student boredom.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways of Pre-service upgraded their professional competence during teaching practicum and to find out professional competence challenges and strategies they faced. During the teaching practicum, pre-service teachers always carry out reflective actions, even they have taking part in some courses in campus and attended teacher training seminars before joining the teaching program, but discussing and receive feedback from tutor teachers about what was lacking when teaching and what needs to be improved at the next meeting is the factors that improve professional competence of Pre-service in teaching.

During their teaching practicum, Pre-service teachers encountered various challenges related to their professional competence such as preparing lesson plans, using learning media in teaching, and creating a good class atmosphere. Regarding the strategies to cope with various challenges, they had strategies to counter their problems, such as developing lesson plans using media on the Internet to create good learning plans. Pre-service also used game-based learning by combining the lesson material with learning media like minigames or puzzles to create a good class atmosphere for students.

SUGGESTION

In relation to the findings, however, some suggestions are addressed to some sides. The researcher advise lecturers to pay attention to pre-service teachers by providing them with training before they start teaching at school. Even though they have taken some courses on campus, ensure they understand teacher competence, including an introduction to the school curriculum, how to create good lesson plans according to school facility and student needs, how to choose and use learning media effectively, and how to assess student learning outcomes by doing evaluation. The researcher also appeals to tutor teachers for an important role in guiding and directing pre-service teachers in a school, such as coordinating learning materials and designing lesson plans. Besides that, tutors are also responsible for introducing the conditions of the school environment and students, so pre-service teachers can understand how to plan effective learning. The researcher recommends that future researchers examine other competencies variables not studied in this research, such as pedagogical, personality, and social. It is also suggested to conduct research by adding approaches such as observation and interviewing participants from lecturers and tutors involved in teaching practice activities to obtain more profound and more comprehensive data.

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