

Challenges and Adjustments in Undertaking Teaching Practice Across Countries in Disruptive Era of Education

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<https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v17i4.16206>

Received: 16 August 2021

Accepted: 30 September 2021

Date Published Online: 31 October 2021

Published: 31 October 2021

Abstract: This article disseminates a small part of the result of a research project in relation to teaching practice across countries. Specifically, it investigated the challenges & adjustments of EFL pre-service teachers' experience in undertaking international teaching practice. The empirical research has been conducted in an interpretive qualitative paradigm underpinned by a complexity theory conceptual framework. Convenience sampling has been used in this study. This study employed interviews and questionnaires to collect the data. Pre-service teachers' perspectives offered further depth of understanding and highlighted unforeseen difficulties during international internship. The findings of the study revealed challenges faced by pre-service teachers that ranged from designing - Lesson plans, preparing teaching media, and learning material, managing teaching time allocation, adjusting a new environment and culture, adjusting a new education system, adjusting high demand of teaching material (level of complexity, understanding the new country context) and facing students' criticality. From this study, some meaningful insights are presented that can further provide the discussion of professional practice in the context of teacher preparation, not only nationally but also globally. Field based learning and teaching experience across countries are important components in constructing distinctive English teacher identities and achieving international recognition.

Keywords: Adjustment, Education Disruptive Era, Flexibility, Lesson Plan, Internship, Pre-Service Teachers, Teaching Practice.

1. Introduction

Now people live in a disruptive era which challenges nations around the globe to adjust. This world has faced great challenges from technological disruption to constrain movement of people which widen the gaps in our society (UNESCO, 2020) The unpredicted "Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed and deepened these inequalities and the fragility of our societies" (UNESCO, 2020) p.7). This incident implies that issues to quality education are still high for education actors, such as teachers, learners, policy makers, education agencies and stakeholders.

As one of the prominent actors, teachers play critical roles in educating society to build strong foundation of knowledge and skills. Therefore, improving teacher quality is imperative to achieve quality education (EFA Report, 2014). Improving teacher quality involves policies concerning recruitment, early preparation and professional development and as advised by UNESCO through Education for All (EFA), the key to improving education quality is to recruit the best teacher candidates (EFA Report, 2014). In regard to early preparation, Teacher training institution is the one which is responsible to produce prospective teachers. This institution is to be adaptive to the challenges. Therefore, it is always responsive to the current policies. As stipulated in Indonesian Ministry Regulation no 55/2017 on Teacher Education Standard (Permendikti, 2017), Teacher training education institution should provide preservice teachers with internship program on teaching practice in their undergraduate curriculum of the study program. It is compulsory for pre-service teachers to undertake teaching practice called *Pengenalan Lapangan Persekolahan (PLP)*-Introduction to school field in undergraduate program. Teacher education institutions normally conduct the internship in lab-schools. However, to prepare pre-service teachers at undergraduate program to have more competitive quality globally, many universities conduct internship program collaboratively with other networking institutions across the islands of Indonesia and the neighboring countries. Many references acknowledge that practicum is a key component of initial teacher education programs and the most important factor in preparing for teaching profession (White & Forgasz, 2016). However, there are still limited number of studies investigating international teaching practice across countries.

The teacher training and education faculty that the researchers used for the research site is one of the institutions that carry out the international internship. This international internship conducted is in line with one of the SEA Teacher Projects under Southeast Asia Minister Education Organization (SEAMEO). This project serves Pre-service teachers exchange in Southeast Asia with a goal to provide opportunities to have teaching experiences (practicum) in schools in other countries in Southeast Asia. It also aims to improve the quality of education as mentioned earlier in regard to UNESCO imperative and meeting the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2020). The international teaching practice at studied institution has been implemented in this research site since 2017 with subsequent reviews seeking sound recommendations towards achieving optimal results and to minimize any future problems. The main activity in this international teaching practice reflects the domain of professional practice that is reflected in detail in National Education Standard stating that graduates can plan and implement effective teaching and learning. Therefore, this paper offers an important contribution to existing contemporary teaching practices in the preparation of quality teachers and addressing SDGs 4 which envisions everyone to have access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

2. Methodology

This study focusses on the challenges and adjustment strategies in the international experience of prospective EFL teachers who undertook international internship program on teaching practice. This study is informed by principles of qualitative research: it attempts to understand the overall complexity preservice teachers experience in undertaking international internship as the early stage of their teaching profession. The researchers here are also interested in understanding the social experience of participants as they lived in a particular social setting – in this case the teaching environment within foreign countries (Ary et al., 2010). In general, this study covers issues in professional practice domain during the practicum experience.

The research site in this project is an Islamic University in Surakarta, Indonesia. With Carspecken's understanding of what comprises a 'site', this institution is selected on the following grounds. Aside from the relatively easy access to the site where the researcher maintained and which facilitated this researcher's time management, the institution, which I called by its pseudonym Sun University, has a large teacher-training faculty in Surakarta. It has an English department within which Pre-service EFL teachers are trained.

Participants were selected from English Department students who were undertaking international internship program on teaching practice in the Pre-service teacher education. There were 60 participants initially participated in this study but finally the number decreased due to the participants' commitment to participate in this study till the end to provide the information. Data in this

study were collected from interviews, documents, and google forms. In this research project, the interviews included group interviews and individual interviews. Data from google forms were only used as a secondary evidence source to further facilitate the process of ‘triangulation’ (Cohen et al., 2020) regarding producing reliable findings.

In collecting data, initially the researchers identified the participants joining internship program on teaching practice. Then, they were offered whether they were willing to involve being participants in this study or not. After that, the researchers managed them for group interviews and individual interviews. At the same time, the researchers also collected data from questionnaires which were distributed through google form.

In organizing and analyzing the data, the researchers reduced, simplified, and categorized the data to reveal patterns. The lead researcher organized related material from the transcripts through coding so that the emerging patterns and ideas could be easily viewed and efficiently retrieved. While coding is essential for qualitative analysis, it does not represent the goal. Coding is a purposeful step in providing direct access to participants’ statements (Bazeley, 2013). The lead researcher initially read the transcripts several times to ‘gain a feel’ for the general content and meaning of each passage, then coded the sources by identifying themes and creating a corresponding code. The codes created were based on the themes that arose from the focus of the interview questions and the focus of this study to reveal the challenges and adjustment strategies in undertaking international teaching practice.

3. Results

The focus of this study is to investigate the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers and the adjustments strategies they did to survive in doing teaching practice across countries. Based on the data analysis, there are at least three important points that reveal the findings. These were reflected from the EFL Pre-service teachers’ experience after undertaking their teaching practice. They include challenges during teaching practice, kinds of adjustment they faced and adjustments strategies to survive. These findings are described below.

3.1 Challenges during teaching practice in other countries

Different education system exposes and demands different School expectations. In the country of destination where preservice teachers conducted their teaching practice, they encountered challenges in accomplishing their tasks. The challenges ranged from designing - Lesson plan (the applicability of the home country lesson plan), teaching media, preparing learning material, time allocation and adjusting to a new environment, new education system, high demand of teaching material (level of complexity, understanding the new country context) and facing students’ criticality. The table below reflects four main challenges encountered by pre-service teachers based on the analysis of data from google forms.

Table 1. Challenges during practice teaching in other countries

Challenges encountered	%
Designing Lesson Plans	27.91
Learning Media	16.28
Learning Material	11.63
Time Allocation	44.19

The table 1 above shows that 27.91% challenges faced by pre-service teachers manifest in designing lesson plans. Preparing learning media is another challenge that occupies 16.28%. Selecting learning material reaches 11.63% and the highest percentage of the challenge, 44.19% is in the form of managing time. This implies that before undertaking the training on teaching practice across countries, pre-service teachers need to be exposed to those four main challenges and prepared with some anticipations to encounter. The ability to design learning and to manage time is the key to facing global education disruption (Suleiman, et al (2019).

In terms of designing lesson plans, preservice teachers are challenged with new rules, new context at lab schools because they must adjust to a new lesson plan design used in the schools. Here is the quote from the participant in a Group Interviews (GI):

“Untuk lesson plan yang pernah diajarkan di kampus...tidak saya terapkan baik dalam hal penyusunan maupun pelaksanaan sewaktu saya melaksanakan kegiatan mengajar di sekolah ..., karena baik dari sistem penyusunannya maupun pelaksanaannya sangat berbeda dengan lesson plan Indonesia” [I didn't implement the lesson plans that I learnt from campus either in designing or implementation at schools because both designing system and implementation are very different from Indonesian lesson plan](GI).

Other participants commonly expressed the above quotes in this study. They acknowledged that they should be adaptive to the school's expectation in the destination country. Moreover, they must adapt to the socio-cultural context in preparing the teaching material to accomplish their plans. It is very challenging for them because they just arrived in the country of destination in which they are still in cultural shock; but at the same time, they have to prepare teaching material which should be appropriately used for the context of destination country.

This is a challenge for them, and they have to survive. Below is a quote from one of the participants and mostly agreed by other participants in this study (taken from data in the Group Interviews-GI).

“Untuk materi sendiri, sangat berat karena mereka sudah belajar mengenai literature bahkan sampai world literature yang mana materi tersebut kita pelajari (sebagai mahasiswa pendidikan bahasa Inggris) [for the teaching material, it is very hard because students at schools in that country have learnt world literature of which that material is learnt by university students] (SL-PS- GI)

The participants acknowledged a high demand for learning material, high level of complexity, and high demand understanding of the new country context. It implies that pre-service teachers' content knowledge is challenged. The flexibility in adjusting the expectation in the country of destination is very needed to survive. To meet the expectation pre-service teachers, struggle to find alternative solution by asking the student buddies, frequently asking mentor teachers and searching the material from google. It is in line with the 21st century learning framework that it essential for the 21st century learning to use a range of digital technologies (Kereluik et al., 2013).

While a new approach to teaching practice calibrated for the 21st Century directs us to integrate ICT in teaching, the real condition does not always support due to restricted available school infrastructure. Integrating IT is fraught with frustration in such circumstances (Sabiri, 2020). Here is the quote from one of the participants taken from Individual interviews (II).

“Terkadang, kita harus siap ketika didalam kelas tidak ada LCD, Televisi atau perangkat lain untuk menyampaikan pembelajaran padahal kita sudah menyiapkan ppt untuk dipresentasikan.” [Sometimes, we must be ready when there is no LCD, Television or other media in the classroom to deliver learning. In fact, we have prepared Power point to present](II)

The above quote shows a disjuncture between what is idealized and reality. However, the industrial revolution demands change in the way of human life and work processes fundamentally, where the advancement of information technology can integrate in the world of life with digital. But the socio economic of a country varies that in some cases it is almost impossible to apply ICT in teaching as expected. Pre-service teachers should be adaptive to the available facilities and be creative and innovative to create teaching media enabling them to conduct effective teaching. This condition implies that their technological pedagogical content knowledge is challenged.

Another challenge faced by student teachers found from interview data is facing students' criticality. Students were engaged with the explanation of pre-service teachers; they paid attention to them and caused them more critical to raise many questions. The following is a quote taken from Group Interview (GI).

“...Siswa lebih memperhatikan guru menyebabkan siswa lebih kritis hingga banyak pertanyaan yang muncul...Dan jika dalam pembelajaran tidak menarik, maka siswa tersebut hanya diam” [students paid attention more to the teachers [and this] caused students to be more critical so that many questions were raised] (GI).

3. 2 Types of Adjustments and Strategies of Adjustment

Pre-service teachers learnt many lessons from doing practicum overseas. The first thing deals with creativity. Due to facing student’s criticality, pre-service teachers were fostered to be creative and innovative. They said “*Solusi saya adalah dengan membuat suasana belajar semenarik mungkin agar siswa tertarik untuk belajar*” (My solution is by making the learning atmosphere as interestingly as possible in order that the students are engaged). Several ways have been done to conduct effective teaching, such as creating interesting learning atmosphere, searching for appropriate teaching material, actively asking for guidebook via student buddies, and inserting the students’ native language in delivering the material. The adjustment strategies done by pre-service teachers depended on the types of adjustment encountered. There are four main types of adjustment faced by pre-service teachers, namely adjusting to a new environment, to a new education system, to the demands of teaching material and students’ criticality. The table below reflects the types of adjustment faced and adjustment strategies done by pre-service teachers (the data were taken from google form).

Table 2. Types of adjustment faced by pre-service teachers

Types of Adjustment	%
A new environment	42.86
A new education system	28.57
The demands of teaching material	10.71
Facing students’ criticality	17.86

The table 2 shows that 42.86 % participants considered that they need to adjust to the new environment. Adjusting to a new education system is another type encountered 28.57 participants. Adjusting to the demands of teaching material reaches 10. 71 % and adjusting to students’ criticality faced by 17.86 % participants. The ability to adapt and communicate with broader environment become the main needs in this global communication era (Fatma, et al., 2019).

The strategies of adjustments applied by pre-service teachers varied. Four types of adjustment strategies were created, namely creating pleasant leaning atmosphere, searching for appropriate teaching material, actively asking for guidance books from peers and mixing learners’ native language in delivering the material. They were shown in the table 3.

Table 3. Adjustment Strategies

Adjustment Strategies	%
Creating pleasant leaning atmosphere	26.67
Searching for appropriate teaching material	50.00
Actively asking for guidance books from peers	6.67
Mixing learners’ native language in delivering the material	16.67

The table 3 shows that 26. 67% participants created pleasant learning atmosphere as the adjustment strategies. 50% participants showed their adjustment strategies by searching for appropriate teaching material dependent on the country context. 6.67 % participants asked their students buddies to lend them the guide books used. 16.67 % participants mixed the language of instruction in delivering

the material. These strategies reflected their struggles to survive their teaching practice in other countries.

4. Discussion

It is not always easy to perform a teaching practice in a new environment for novice teachers, moreover in other countries where novice teachers are not used to living. It is inevitable that they encounter some challenges and need some strategies to apply, and this case possibly causes them to produce creativeness to adjust to the new system. Overall, the findings above are in line with the objectives of SEA Teacher project which enables pre-service student teachers to develop their teaching skills and pedagogy. The experience also “encourages them to practice their English, allows them to gain a broader regional and world view and exposes future teachers to diverse teaching and learning situations and opportunities and the value of flexibility” (<https://seateacher.seameo.org/>).

International student teachers struggled a lot across various dimensions while doing practicum, such as negotiating the applicability of the Lesson Plans, preparing Learning media and learning material selection which should be appropriate with the new country context, managing time, facing students’ criticality and language problems. Such findings are inline with the results of a study by Felton & Harrison that international student teachers faced some issues in practicum such as English language competence and cultural competency in their workplace (Felton & Harrison, 2016). English language competence is crucial to possess as a language of delivery in the classroom. Also, cultural competence reflected in selecting appropriate teaching material and pedagogical content knowledge is another important point that preservice teachers need to have.

The challenge that pre-service teachers faced in using media as mentioned in the finding reflects insufficient availability of school infrastructure in the new country context so that the implementation of Internet Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching could not be afforded optimally by pre-service teachers. Misra and Koehler’s new framework for teaching integrates technology, named as Technological Pedagogical Content knowledge (TPACK) (Kereluik et al., 2013). It refers “to knowledge about the complex relations among technology, pedagogy and content that enable teachers to develop appropriate and context-specific teaching strategies” (2014: 102). This framework is the extension of Shulman’s (1986) framework on Pedagogical Content Knowledge. The TPACK framework suggests that teachers need to have deep understanding on technology, pedagogy, and content into teaching. The integration of ICT in teaching Learning process has been highly recommended since 2000 (Education Forum, 2000) UNESCO, 2015). Additionally, the national and institutional policies eventually also demand pre-service teachers to design innovative online learning media. It is also advised that pre-service should use digital artifacts as integral part of their pedagogical content knowledge; They need to be also aware of the implication for teaching and learning strategies (Jansen & Merwe, 2015). Actually, regarding facilitating pre-service teachers in teaching practice, they had been prepared to integrate ICT in teaching during their learning at campus in their home countries before they left, however the school facilities in the destination countries do not always enable them to integrate technology in teaching. So, they must be adaptive and creative to find other ways adjusting the use teaching media available at schools without integrating ICT in their teaching.

Preservice teachers found it challenging to handle critical thinker students because they tended to less experience with this type of students in their home country. Learners tended to depend on their teachers in making decision as the former education system encouraged rote learning instead of critical thinking (Mohamad, 2008). In fact in this disruptive era, critical thinking is one important skill addressed in 21st century learning. Critical thinking is essential for framing any responses to any cases (Yamin et al., 2021). Furthermore, critical thinking is an important cognitive skill that influences students’ horizons on events, insights, and decision (Tosuncuoglu, 2018). Therefore, preservice teachers should be exposed with such critical thinking skill and be familiar with students having critical characteristic. Hutchison (2016) advised that learners need to be exposed to a type of project-based learning in order that they are engaged in and allowing them to enhance communication, ethical and critical thinking skill (Hutchison, 2016).

The ways of adjustment in a new country environment that pre-service teachers have done in relation to facilitating conducive learning environments for learners is in accordance with what has been mentioned on Indonesian National Education Standard (NES) that requires graduates to create

pleasing learning strategies that similarly, this emerging idea is present in the NES as “*Pendidik berkewajiban menciptakan suasana pendidikan yang bermakna, menyenangkan, kreatif, dinamis, dan dialogis*” [the teacher is obliged to create meaningful, pleasing, creative, dynamic, and dialogic educational atmosphere] (Republik Indonesia, 2003). Therefore, it implies that the learning process is orientated to active learning that develops learners’ potential (Republik Indonesia, 2003).

In terms of adjusting to the need for preparing material appropriate to the context of country of destination, they acknowledged that in constructing material content, they tried to translate the material by asking the teacher and translate it into the students’ native language to make the students engaged. Such creativity appeared in emergent situation when they were challenged to perform effective teaching during their practice.

Creativity is one of the essential skills for the success in the 21st century. They must acquire the 21st century skills that include learning, literacy skills, and life skills. Learning skills include critical thinking, creative thinking, communicating, and collaborating. Literacy skills cover gaining knowledge through reading, using media and technology; through writing, developing media and technology and Life skills involve flexibility, initiative, social skills, productivity, and leadership (Kereluik et al., 2013; Sahin, 2009).

Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution Society 5.0 emphasized the readiness to think more critically and develop creativity. Therefore, institutions need to prepare prospective teachers to welcome and carry out the education of the industrial revolution 5.0 with a way of thinking that must always be introduced and accustomed to. It is a way of thinking to adapt in the future, namely analytical, critical, and creative. In the development of the history of human civilization, a change is something that cannot be denied.

The findings in this study reflect the domain of professional practice that ensures learning to be engaging and valued. It captures the elements of planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning, creating supportive and safe learning environment. Pre-service teachers learned some cultural values from doing teaching practice across countries. Pre-service teachers perceived students whom they taught were good at communication using good and clear English. They also respected and were obedient to teachers. For example, they said “*Saya juga sangat bersyukur karena mereka sangat hormat dan patuh kepada guru. Sengantuk ngantuknya murid disana mereka tidak ada yang tidur di kelas...*” [I feel thankful because students are respectful and obedient to teachers. How sleepy they are, they did not fall asleep] (SL-PS- II).

Although they were respectful and obedient to teachers, they were critical. When they did not understand the explanation from pre-service teachers, they directly raised their hands to ask questions for clarification or argue in a good manner.

This is a new thing that preservice teachers learnt from conducting international internship on teaching practice. They perceived it as a positive value they gained as they rarely find it in their home country.

As mentioned earlier, the international teaching practice program at laboratory schools is one of the curricular activities that constitute a culmination point for the whole teacher education program that has been internalized and experienced by the pre-service teachers. The program facilitates the EFL pre-service teachers training to apply various knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the process of becoming a professional teacher. This emphasizes the domain of professional practice, which focuses upon ‘planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning’.

The above statements indicate that EFL pre-service teachers, like other teacher education graduates, are required to obtain the mandated competencies associated with professional practice. This approach to ensuring graduate teacher quality, in so far as graduates must demonstrate achievement both content knowledge and in the practice of teaching in ways aligned with the pedagogic, professional, personal, and social competencies which (Hollins, 2011) and others otherwise associate with the notion of the ‘quality teacher’.

In the earlier part of this section, it was mentioned that the domain of professional practice appears in two points, that focuses on planning and implementing effective teaching and learning. Consistent with those two points, creativity and autonomy appear because of challenges in implementing effective teaching. This is one of the benefits in conducting teaching practice across countries. It is in line with what Thomas (2017) suggests that beyond-the classroom learning such as teaching practice in another country expose preservice teachers to real life situation which are significant to develop their

interpersonal skill, independence, creativity, and ability to tackle uncertainties (Shanti & Jaafar, 2021; Thomas, 2017).

The domain of teaching in relation to professional practice mentioned above is also advised and reproduced in Indonesian National Education Standards. It is mentioned that in building the learner's autonomy, encouraging student's creativity, and providing a pleasant learning atmosphere, appear to be the main ideas in the National Education Standards (Peraturan Pemerintah RI Nomor 57, 2021). This implies that in preparing preservice teachers, it is compulsory to provide opportunities for them to be autonomous and creative. Facilitating them to do international teaching practice encourages them to obtain what has been advised in the government regulation.

5. Conclusion

In this disruptive era, there are many challenges faced by pre-service teachers in doing international teaching practice. Therefore, it is critical for pre-service teachers to be concerned with some values of adjustment and flexibility. To face future uncertainty, they must be always developed, adaptive and flexible. Acquiring the 21st century skills such as learning, literacy skills, and life skills, is important. Learning skills that address critical thinking, creative thinking, communicating, and collaborating must be emphasized. Literacy skills such as gaining knowledge through reading, using media and technology; developing media and technology and Life skills that involve flexibility, initiative, social skills, productivity, and leadership should be optimally afforded.

The international teaching practice carried out at the research site in this study is in line with the SEAMEO agenda on revitalizing teacher education which facilitates Pre-service student teachers to develop their teaching skills and pedagogy, to encourage to practice their English, to gain broader regional and world view and expose future teachers to diverse teaching and learning situations and opportunities and value of flexibility.

However, undertaking teaching practice abroad need a great bravery, initiatives, and great commitment. Pre-service teachers must be adaptive to the new situation which might be very different from their home country. This is really a great challenge. But they must adjust and are driven to learn to carry out their teaching tasks.

5. Suggestion for Future Research

This research can be a basis for further research on International Teaching Practice Program in the post-pandemic situation.

6. Co-Author Contribution

Koesoemo Ratih is the first author who coordinated all activities, compiled article outlines, compiled theories, and analyzed data; Fitri Kurniawan is the second author who designed methodologies, compiled research instruments, and analyzed data; Nurhidat is the third author who collected data, tabled data, and presented analysis and results reports; Harun Joko Prayitno is the fourth author who collected data; and Amelia T. Buan is the fifth author who edited this article.

7. Statement of Gratitude

Great gratitude is addressed to the Research and Community Service Office of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta for providing the financial support to accomplish the research and to the research reviewers for giving feedback for betterment of the article.

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