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Urban Pre-service English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) Teachers' Challenges During Teaching Practicum in Rural Schools: A Photovoice Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

While many previous studies focused on English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) teachers' teaching practices in urban schools, little study has been indulged regarding pre-service English teachers' (PSTs) challenges and experiences to practice teaching in a rural school. This study aimed to explore various difficulties encountered by urban PSTs during teaching practicum (TP) in rural schools. A total of seven PSTs enrolled in urban universities were voluntarily involved in a study that involves people's senses and perceptions, rather than scientific evidence, also known as a phenomenological study. Data were collected through multiple semi-structured interviews, followed by a photovoice approach through which the participants were asked to take emotional photos. The results revealed that the PSTs encountered four main challenges during TP in rural schools, including changes in teacher identity construction, intercultural sensitivity barriers, a lack of supporting resources, and limited teacher professional development. Each challenge was accomplished by photographs representing PSTs' emotions and feelings, such as a collection of dolls, natural scenery, old-printed books, and blank paper. In conclusion, integrating emotional photos into descriptive exploration is paramount evidence of how the challenges were encountered, managed, and solved for better future teaching and learning practices.

Introduction

Every English pedagogy department in Indonesian universities requires its PSTs to attend a Teaching Practicum (TP) as a graduation requirement, which is formally supported by a recent curriculum called Independent Learning—Independent University Curriculum, issued in January 2020 by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia (Apoko et al., 2022; Nafisah et al., 2023). This requirement has been integrated into one of the curriculum

programs, which allows PSTs to implement the teaching practice for six months or during one semester. Meanwhile, the importance of TP in the curriculum has triggered every teacher candidate, including those with an English pedagogy major, to spend a large amount of time developing theories adopted in university into teaching practices in the field.

Interestingly, for most English pedagogy departments, PSTs are asked to teach English to young learners in rural schools. A rural school, as the term implies, refers to a school that is located around farming areas and is far from cities (Cedering & Wihlborg, 2020). Academically, the learners are considered to have lower achievement, as compared to those in urban schools. That is the basic reason why these young teachers should implement such teaching practices in these locations. Furthermore, it is noticed that TP is mostly registered and participated in by PSTs who live in a city or urban area. Many of them are originally from urban areas with higher social mobility, completed infrastructure, dynamic development in various aspects, and multicultural citizens. In this case, problems may appear, such as anxiety or negative emotions, during the teaching practice. This is due to a greater difference between urban atmospheres and rural school experiences (Ai et al., 2022). In fact, the TP was conducted mostly in urban schools, and it did not result in any greater academic, social, cultural, or psychological barriers (Ledger et al., 2021; Sulistiyo et al., 2023).

It is necessary to reveal what has or has yet to be identified through previous studies regarding teaching practice by urban English teacher candidates. Although the recent studies (Atmaca, 2023; Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2023; Choi & Park, 2022; Kanat Mutluoğlu & Balaman, 2023; Li et al., 2023; Sulistiyo et al., 2023) were undertaken regarding English TP, each study revealed different focuses, such as teaching-practice anxiety, online TP, practicum management, PSTs' preparedness, professional teaching identity, TP belief change, and emerging aspects of international teaching practice. Nevertheless, little study has been focused on the TP undertaken by urban English teacher candidates in rural schools.

This study was proposed to explore urban PSTs' experiences in dealing with teaching challenges during TP in Indonesian rural schools. It was different from the previous studies in terms of participants, location, approach, and targeted program. To begin with, the participants were those who lived in a city and experienced the city atmosphere for years, starting from kindergarten to the higher education level. Real-life experiences in the urban environment or atmosphere were also considered to impact life transformation in the rural area in which the schools are located. Second, rural schools remain unique and interesting for educational research. There are still various components that need to be explored in rural-school experiences. Third, a photovoice phenomenological study was used to explore PSTs' challenges and the structure of their experiences, supported by related photos, and to explore new phenomena. Lastly, TP was allocated for six months, and it was considered sufficient time for experiencing new educational and intercultural occurrences.

The question of this study, addressed to limit researcher's coverage, was stated as follows: "How do urban pre-service EFL teachers experience challenges during TP in rural schools?"

Challenges in teaching English in rural schools

Historically, the task of attracting and keeping English-teacher candidates in remote locations has proven to be challenging. The quality of English education in rural schools is declining, due to the ongoing difficulties of recruiting and maintaining highly-skilled instructors (Ai et al., 2022). The geographical remoteness of rural schools, and the socio-economic circumstances surrounding them, provide significant obstacles to recruiting, retaining, and

supporting highly-skilled PSTs. The subpar academic achievement of learners in rural schools comprised the issue of inadequate retention of highly-skilled PSTs in those institutions. A qualified teacher candidate is characterized by the capacity to generate targeted learner achievement. The absence of well-trained and competent teachers leads to inadequate instruction in rural schools, as research indicates that only competent and professionally trained PSTs can foster high-quality teaching in educational settings (Donkoh et al., 2023; Nawab & Sharar, 2022). Quality teaching has resulted from first-rate PSTs, and a substantially desirable position that just about any individual assigned to educate may attain. This study aimed to reveal the hurdles that excellent teachers encounter, similar to any other profession.

The existence of sufficient training is a crucial factor in determining the achievement of learners in rural schools. This training is necessary to develop competent teacher candidates who can provide high-quality instruction. Competent PSTs possess a distinct array of professional attributes that qualify them for the teaching field (Dewi & Fajri, 2023; Lian et al., 2023). These attributes are garnered through rigorous training. More training leads to more competence, since the teacher's failure to adequately explain the subject's pedagogical topic knowledge leads to rural learners failing to achieve ideal learning outcomes, because of inadequate teaching. The migration of highly skilled teachers from rural to urban schools is unavoidable, leading to untrained professors in rural educational institutions (Ledger et al., 2021). The absence of academic competencies among rural school teaching professionals' results in reduced teaching standards, since the ability of teachers to effectively manage teaching issues in rural schools depends on their professional training and competencies.

Teacher preparation programs often need more instruction on teacher proficiency in rural schools (Alrashidi, 2022; Ledger et al., 2021). Several teacher preparation institutions are situated in urban locations, where learners frequently engage in teaching practice at schools located in those areas. However, rural school environments differ from those that these teacher candidates experience, so when these individuals are placed there, they are ill-prepared.

Some learners practice teaching in rural societies, which may be their hometowns. However, upon finishing school, these new teachers may not return to their hometown for work, as they view their education as an indicator of social advancement, and prefer to relocate to urban areas. This leads to a need for more skilled and capable educators in rural settings, resulting in a decline in the quality of education (Donkoh et al., 2023; Ledger et al., 2021; Yarrow et al., 2020). To better prepare PSTs for rural schools, it is necessary to enhance their practical competencies to align with the unique situations encountered in these sites, as the current teacher training program needs to address these realities adequately. Teachers require comprehensive professional training as part of their initial instructor education program, covering all the relevant information and contextual challenges that they may encounter in rural schools. These context-dependent challenges may include distance from necessary commodities and services, collaborating and residing with learners from impoverished families, inadequate educational resources, and a lack of leisure activity facilities (Donkoh et al., 2023; Ledger et al., 2021). Properly preparing for the various subject and contextual challenges can enhance teachers' proficiency in rural areas and facilitate successful teaching, resulting in improved learner performance.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

This study employed Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (henceforth EST) as the framework for comprehending how various environmental structures impact the human developmental system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory represents the interconnection between individuals and the environment with which they interact, and how such composite interplays significantly impact development (Crawford, 2020). According to EST, various interrelated systems constitute an individual's environment, each of which interconnects to determine and affect how other individuals expand and return—the sudden rules and the extensive customs that individuals follow influence the development. Ecological Systems Theory (EST) emphasizes the interplay and interconnection between individuals and the environment where they settle. It is believed that individuals who receive more external motivation, advice, and caring result in more significant developmental impacts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Haleemunnissa et al., 2021).

Bronfenbrenner organized EST into five nested structures: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1981). This framework of EST in Figure 1 depicts that EST is applied by visualizing individuals at the core point of a ring, surrounded by five parallel outer circles which begin from the first ring (i.e., microsystem) and expand away from the centre to the farthest ring (i.e., chronosystem).

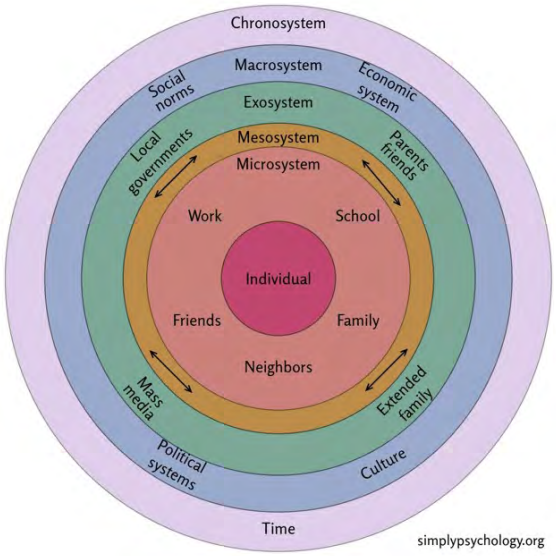

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Guy-Evans, 2024).

First, the term microsystem relates to an individual's immediate environment, which includes family, school, peers, neighbourhood, and childcare settings. Interactions within this system directly impact individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1981). For example, a supportive family can boost individual self-worth, while a negative school experience impedes intellectual advancement. Second, the mesosystem is conceptualized as the relationships between microsystems. Such interactions between individuals, their community, and the link between their family and teachers are examples of such interconnectivity. Positive development can be reinforced by consistent and supportive interactions across different microsystems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For example, parents involved in their children's teaching and learning process can boost their children's educational experiences. Third, the exosystem refers to

larger social structures that do not directly include the individual, but impact development, such as parents' workplaces, extended family, and community services (Tudge & Rosa, 2024; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Events that occur within this system may indirectly influence human development. For example, a parent's stressful job may influence parenting style, affecting the child. Fourth, macrosystem refers to the more excellent cultural and social environment in which the other systems are entrenched (Weissbourd et al., 2013). Cultural values, economic conditions, political institutions, and cultural conventions are all components of the macro system. These broad impacts shape micro, meso, and exosystems (Crawford, 2020). For example, a society that values education would influence the resources available to schools and the significance put on learning. Lastly, chronosystem refers to the dimension of time that includes changes across a person's lifetime and sociohistorical settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Life transitions, such as relocating to a new city, parental problems, or substantial societal changes, like economic downturns or technological developments, all influence time fluctuation, which has a direct impact on how one approaches environmental challenges (Tudge & Rosa, 2024; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). These temporal shifts can have a long-term effect on development. For instance, parental problems as a youngster may impact adult relationships.

Meanwhile, Bronfenbrenner's theory is frequently used in education, psychology, and social work to comprehend the intricate interaction between individual environments and development (El Zaataari et al., 2022; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For example, in educational settings, knowing these systems can aid in creating supportive learning conditions that respond to students' differing requirements. Using Bronfenbrenner's EST to investigate and analyze the difficulties urban PSTs encounter during their TP in rural schools provides a complete knowledge of the many factors in the field.

Regarding microsystems, rural students' participation is identified as an instructional problem. PSTs may need help to engage students with diverse cultural backgrounds and learning requirements. It can be remedied by addressing the necessity for culturally appropriate educational materials and methods that appeal to rural students (Peterson & Montfort, 2004). When cooperating teachers need more support, or have different teaching beliefs (Shelton, 2019), they may find it challenging to complete the TP. To bridge the gap between urban and rural teaching contexts, mentorship and advice from experienced rural teachers must be emphasized. Another issue for PSTs is improving their ability to adjust to various classroom management styles and expectations (Freeman et al., 2014). In this scenario, adaptive classroom management strategies benefit rural educational contexts.

In the mesosystem, a lack of cooperation between metropolitan PSTs and rural schools resulted in conflicting expectations and assistance. This difficulty can be met by enhancing communication and collaboration between universities and rural schools (Hoppey, 2016; Sundeen, 2022), resulting in coordinated aims and support mechanisms. Pre-service teachers (PSTs) need help integrating their personal life with the responsibilities of the TP, especially if they are required to relocate temporarily. Fortunately, if stakeholders give tools and assistance for PSTs to handle the transfer and adapt to the rural setting (Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2024), such as counselling services, practicum teachers may be able to balance their personal and professional lives better (Farrell, 2020; Noakes & Hook, 2021).

Exosystem issues include limited resources and community attitudes. Rural schools frequently need more resources, including technology, instructional materials, and professional-development opportunities. Equitable resource distribution and increased investment in rural education should be promoted to ensure that PSTs have the tools they need to succeed (Nera &

Nyikadzino, 2023). These upcoming teachers may meet communal attitudes that devalue education or oppose foreign influences. They must connect with the community to foster trust and illustrate the importance of education, possibly through community involvement projects and culturally relevant teaching approaches (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022).

Regarding the macrosystem, cultural differences and socioeconomic inequities appear to be the primary instructional problems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Urban PSTs, for example, need help adapting to rural communities' cultural norms and expectations. They need cultural competence training to comprehend and respect their rural students' cultural backgrounds (Jones et al., 2019). In contrast, economic disparities between urban and rural areas might impact the availability of educational resources and support networks. It demands that PSTs address broader structural concerns by campaigning for legislation that minimizes educational gaps, and increases funding for rural schools.

In the chronosystem, PSTs are challenged to adapt and evolve professionally throughout time. They may need help adjusting to ongoing changes in the educational context, like moves to digital learning or new educational regulations. These situations can be addressed by offering ongoing professional development opportunities that keep PSTs current on educational trends and best practices (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The limited time of the practicum may not allow PSTs to build the requisite skills and relationships properly. The duration of practicums, or follow-up support, must be expanded to ensure that pre-service teachers have the time and resources to develop professionally.

Materials and Methods

Study design

The study was led by transcendental phenomenology, which emphasizes the exploration of people's subjective experience with a specific occurrence (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994). In their work, Boulden and Henry (2023) and Yağan Güder (2019) believed that phenomenology is a convenient methodology for rural-school-exploration research, since it develops a theoretical comprehension of various minority identities, based on the viewpoint of the individuals involved. Therefore, this approach enabled the researcher to reveal the way urban PSTs of many backgrounds perceive their sense of inclusion, while considering various intercultural identities in rural schools.

Site

For this current study, rural, private, and government-owned schools, predominantly located in traditional areas in Indonesia, served as this study’s site. Each school received a teacher practicum program from an urban university, which allowed PSTs to engage in comprehensive teaching and learning theories and practices in English pedagogy. The theories were not only kept in PSTs’ minds, but should also be disseminated through a six-month teaching practice. An intensive micro-teaching course was initially offered to help them develop knowledge of how English is taught and learned. When PSTs passed the course, they were formally permitted by faculty committees to attend the TP in rural schools for the annual TP.

Interestingly, for those in rural schools, it was noticed that each of them shared culture, natural surroundings, and other traditional activities. Meanwhile, PSTs from urban areas and universities had to adapt to both rural school cultures and habits to succeed in the TP. Integration

between academic life and rural-school life in these institutions remained challenging for urban PSTs. As a result, the sites challenged this researcher to comprehend the essence of EFL teaching practices at rural schools that were influenced by the environment.

Participants

The participants were recruited through criteria and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling enabled the researcher to identify PSTs who fit predetermined criteria. The study plan was informed regarding the teacher-training faculty, English pedagogy department, PSTs' organization newsletters, and functional boards of PSTs affairs. Pre-service teachers were eligible to participate under the following criteria:

1. Being registered as a senior EFL learner ranging from 18 to 23 years of age.
2. Being in teacher training and education faculty from an urban area university.
3. Being an EFL learner living in an urban area with a longer distance from a rural school area.
4. Being an EFL learner and citizen with strong beliefs in urban culture and modern life in urban areas.

Table 1: Demographic profiles of urban PSTs.

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	City of Birth	Urban University Location	TP Location
Nabil	Male	20	Jambi	Jambi province	Jambi province
Tina	Female	21	Palembang	Jambi province	Jambi province
Mona	Female	20	Pekanbaru	West Sumatera	West Sumatera
Dino	Male	20	Jambi	West Sumatera	West Sumatera
Weli	Female	22	Padang	Jambi province	Jambi province
Afin	Male	21	Medan	West Sumatera	Jambi province
Pinda	Female	22	Medan	Jambi province	West Sumatera

Note. Total N = 7

Along with participant recruitment employing faculty, departments, boards, and newsletters, EFL learners perceived this current study through a snowball sampling technique. Having interviewed an urban EFL learner, the researcher requested that they share recruitment information with peers who may be able and eligible for this current study. Such a strategy was effective in selecting more participants, as the information was distributed via online group networks, such as WhatsApp groups, by the urban EFL learners. Employing the snowball sampling technique in a study on urban PSTs' challenges in teaching English to learners in rural schools allowed the urban learners to determine their availability and readiness. It convinced their peers of the interviewer's target. Out of nine urban EFL learners who decided to participate, seven signed an informed consent and formed the participant pool. Table 1 presents information about the participants involved in the study.

Data collection

Multiple semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data from the participants. The interviews were conducted for three months. Each interview resulted in an adequate chance

for the urban PSTs to share their experiences on the topic being researched. The interviews mostly lasted 65–95 minutes. Through the interviews, each participant was asked several main questions, including: "What kinds of problems do you notice during EFL TP in this rural school?"; "How do you define EFL identities as an urban PST who teaches rural-school learners?"; and "What beliefs are you engaged in while practicing theories in a rural academic atmosphere?"

Following the earlier interviews, PSTs devoted a further stage by using a photovoice project, which enabled the urban PSTs to express their feelings in the form of a unique photo (Barry & Beighton, 2021). The researcher provided them with some guidance (e.g., "Take a photo of where you experienced every kind of challenge during this TP."), which led to focused photography. Such a picture was a topic discussed prior to the further interview. Evans-Agnew and Strack (2022) believed that photovoice becomes a useful method for participants who have access limitations, an overwhelmed feeling, or a focused object to be revealed. The photovoice method is a proper medium for urban PSTs to express their lives and feel integrated into their lived experiences. Therefore, as the interviews and photovoice project offered PSTs a better opportunity to mention TP challenges regarding their perspectives, both methods resulted in ample data to analyze, which is in line with the tradition of phenomenology.

Data analysis

There were several steps for analyzing data from a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). Firstly, the researcher focused on epoche, which is holding back any assumptions or conclusions, leading to and engagement in existing knowledge of what urban teacher candidates experience in English-teaching practice in a rural-school context. In this case, reflexive journals helped approve the assumptions, influences on the study process, and biases (Dado et al., 2023). The researcher recognized his preconceptions and notions that may have influenced how the data were interpreted. This awareness enabled the researcher to approach the data more objectively. Reflexivity allowed the researcher to consider multiple perspectives and interpretations of the qualitative data, leading to a richer and more nuanced understanding of PSTs' experiences in TP. In addition, the researcher critically examined self-interpretations, questioning how his views and experiences shaped his understanding of the data. Through high transparency on the reflexive process, the trustworthiness and credibility of these study findings were expected to be dynamically enhanced. Reflexivity fostered the researcher's empathy, helping to understand better, and connect with PSTs' emotions and experiences.

The following step was bracketing such ideas from disseminating the current study, and the phenomenon remained open to being described in many ways. In doing this, the researcher's own experiences and judgments were set aside to understand participants' insights without any undue effects properly. Having finished with the epoche and idea bracketing, the researcher began annotating interview results, which revealed related utterances regarding urban PSTs' experiences in rural schools. From there, a number of codes were eventually enlisted, and these codes were referred to as "horizons of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The interview results were then perused and clustered with overlapping perspectives, and this stage was defined as multiple constituent thematizations.

Meanwhile, reflexivity played a prominent role in determining several themes. The researcher collected and stored a detailed reflexive journal throughout the phenomenological study, noting insights, emotions, biases, assumptions, and reactions to the data and participants. The journal entries were organized consistently and chronologically, providing a comprehensive record of experiences during the study. Regular reading of the reflexive notes led to familiarizing

himself with self-reflection. Similar to coding participants' data, the researcher coded the reflexive entries. A further step was vital phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that capture important insights, emotions, and realizations. An initial code was determined, based on personal and professional impressions on the study process and data understanding. When several codes were found to be similar, they were grouped to form a more general category. These categories captured common themes in the researcher's reflections, such as biases, emotional reactions, methodological adjustments, and ethical considerations. These categories were refined through iterative review, ensuring that they accurately represented the nuances of the researcher's reflexive data. Reflexive themes were cross-referenced those derived from participants' data. The researcher explored how personal reflections intersected with, influenced, and were influenced by the participants' experiences.

Having determined several themes, the researcher engaged in both textural and structural descriptions. As for the first, it is noted that the participants uttered particular meanings, stating their self-attitudes in exploring the phenomenon being investigated. Meanwhile, through the structural description, the researcher interpreted the utterances produced by the participants using the researcher's words. The last stage was that the researcher was concerned with describing the phenomenon from various perspectives, which led to imaginative insights. This strategy allowed an observation of urban PSTs' activities in teaching English in rural schools. In addition, the last stage helped for reflection on subjective awareness that had an impact on the data-analysis process. In addition, regarding the photovoice approach, the first step was to integrate an emotional photo and its description from the interviews. The results were categorized into each theme that resulted from phenomenological data analysis. The photovoice approach was stated to support the emergence of various themes from the interviews. Each emotional photo was enriched with some interpretation to reveal its clarity.

Furthermore, the photovoice phenomenological study was not only a matter of how participants expressed their emotions derived from oral interviews by taking a photo regarding internal feelings, but it also revealed how reflexivity, or being careful not to allow personal assumptions to influence initial reactions, helped the researcher to make perceptions when engaging with these submissions. To add rigour to the study, the researcher felt deeply empathetic, since the photos vividly depicted the participants' emotions and lived experiences. These visuals provided a more nuanced understanding of the participants' emotions, helping the researcher to grasp the depth and complexity of PSTs' experiences in rural school TP. Engaging with the emotional photos that aligned with the interview results validated the findings. The researcher affirmed that the themes and insights derived from the interviews were accurately capturing the participants' experiences. The photos were also used as a form of data triangulation, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Moreover, a sense of discovery was unearthed, as the researcher gained new insights from the visual data, adding richness to it and providing a more holistic view of the participants' lived experiences. The emotional impact of the photos prompted the researcher to reflect on his own experiences, biases, and emotional responses, fostering greater reflexivity in the study process. More importantly, the pictures inspired the researcher to advocate for the urban PSTs' needs and issues. The visual and emotional impact of the photos strengthened a commitment to using the research for social change.

Results

Findings from this current study conveyed several challenges that indicated urban PSTs' experiences during TP in rural schools. The findings revealed the following about the challenges facing EFL teacher candidates when teaching English to young learners: changes in PSTs' identity construction, intercultural sensitivity barriers, a lack of supporting infrastructure, and limited teacher professional development (see Figure 1).

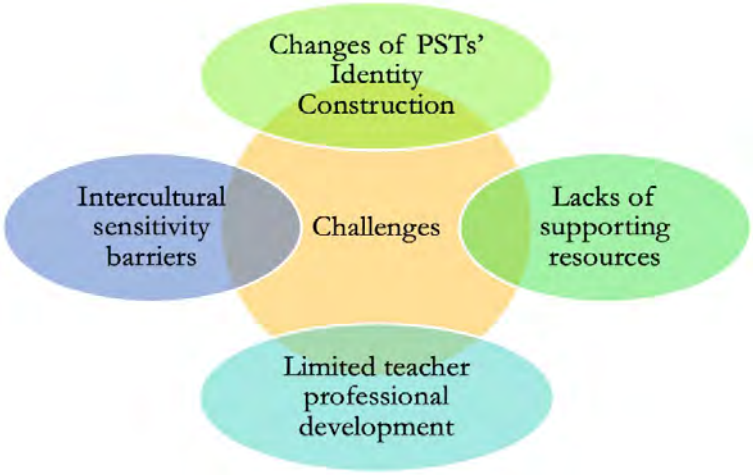

Figure 2: Urban PSTs' challenges during TP in rural schools.

Changes of PSTs' identity construction

The first challenge experienced by urban PSTs during TP in rural schools is sudden changes in identity construction as an English teacher. When these pre-service teachers came to the rural schools, they began changing their minds about teaching English in real life. The participants had different thoughts about school life, classroom atmosphere, and those who were involved in the school. What they used to see in mini-teaching practice in urban schools was somewhat different here. Their beliefs towards the general term, "school," changed as they compared both rural and urban school atmospheres.

> [The] rural school atmosphere is totally different from that in urban schools. Here, I find that the school is not too crowded with learners or teachers. Some teachers are civil servants, but some others are honourary. When I entered an English class, there were only several learners there. (Mona)

A similar point of view was also revealed by another PST who attended TP in another rural school. Nabil believed that teaching practice in rural schools changed his views on classroom atmosphere. His readiness to teach English was affected by some factors in the classroom, such as learners' readiness and material availability.

> I have prepared well for teaching English in this rural school. Hence, I have to adapt to the classroom atmosphere. I provided colourful and interesting materials integrated with the game. They looked happier with my English lesson. I have learned a new life which I cannot find in the city. This is the real teaching practice. I have many of the best chances to boost learners' passion for English. (Nabil)

Meanwhile, it is noted that teaching English in rural schools is about more than just how competent PSTs are in terms of academic matters. It is more about how creative they are when facing school life with different situations, as those in rural schools. Psychological competence is more eligible for those who are engaged in rural EFL classrooms. Both academic and psychological competencies are paramount to developing younger learners' English skills in rural-school contexts. Although it is more complicated for teacher candidates to balance both competencies, they must prove that academic competence is not reliable, without psychological competence.

> The first time I entered a classroom, I felt happy, due to my better achievement and sufficient teaching preparation. Now, I realize that the way I treat young learners is as important as the pedagogical theories I have. Now, I identify myself as a teacher with various adaptable strategies. It worked well, as more and more learners kept smiling in English lessons. (Dino)

During the teaching practice, commitment to future improvement emerged as each participant experienced various phenomena. The commitment was the result of problem mapping based on repeated occurrences. English development of young learners in rural schools was considered to be an important goal to be managed, either by the EFL teacher or stakeholders. The participants were concerned with strategies to improve learners' English learning quality and overall rural school atmosphere. Pinda, for example, is committed to improving English-learning strategies for future teaching practice. It can be noticed by writing a guidebook on teaching and learning English for young learners in rural contexts. What has been considered by this participant was helpful, as other English teachers may benefit from the book while planning and implementing a lesson. Unlike Pinda, Weli believed that internalizing English language awareness to young learners through daily habits is more convincing to improve future learning. It is because repetitive habit leads to need and interest.

> As I love writing in English, I decided to write a book about how to learn and teach English to young learners. It still needs to be finished. I believe this guidance helps to increase EFL teachers' self-confidence. (Pinda)

> …English looks easier when learners bring it into their dreams. By the TP, repetition for language awareness, motivation, and best practice has led me to successful results. I believe that once a teacher makes learners smile or even laugh at an English lesson, the following lessons will be more exciting. (Weli)

As it is challenging to construct identities in the rural school context, the participants were asked to take a picture describing their current feelings about the change of identity construction as PSTs in rural schools. However, four participants needed to learn about the picture, while two of them needed clarification with the photos they had. Fortunately, Dino was able to photograph a collection of dolls (see Figure 3), which represented his feelings about the teaching practice challenge.

Figure 3: Participants' emotional photo - Collection of dolls.

In the second interview, Dino believed that the reasons for taking the picture were as follows. First, dolls were produced in a variety of forms, such as art, action, fashion, paper, and baby dolls. Its variety resembled the educational context, which consisted of teachers and learners with various backgrounds and abilities, schools with various environments and locations, and learning resources of traditional or advanced types. PSTs who teach young learners in rural schools should be aware of its variety and uniqueness. They need to adapt to such differences, even if each type is not common for them.

> Similarly, as the dolls imply, different EFL teachers and learners have their own identities and ways of identity construction. Each of them has particular strengths that support each other to achieve the learning objective. (Dino)

> …dolls are of many colours, shapes, sizes, and prices. We, as EFL teacher candidates or in-service teachers, identify ourselves with specific aspects. Without such identity, we cannot be functional, but amusing, like dolls. (Dino)

To sum up, teaching English in rural schools is challenging for PSTs who are faced with a rural school atmosphere in their first real teaching experience. Fortunately, this experience teaches them how to adapt to such a rural atmosphere, develop rural school learners' English skills, and identify themselves as an EFL teacher candidate who can engage in a rural-school academic atmosphere.

Intercultural sensitivity barriers

Cultural awareness hindered PSTs from understanding the values, customs, and habits of teachers, learners, or even parents in rural schools. Although school is a formal institution for the teaching and learning process, it is undeniable that local culture is internalized in school's daily activities. Afin admitted that his awareness of habits in rural schools was lower than in urban contexts. It was not easy for him to recognize why parents got involved in learners' school activities. More parents of the young learners visited the school at almost every school meeting, and interacted with teachers during a lesson. It looked unique and interesting, but for some reason, the participant was not aware of what and why the parents visited the school to wait for their children to learn.

> I was shocked when many parents of my learners came to school and. …they stood near a classroom during an English lesson. They paid attention to my presentation as well. I found that a learner was enthusiastic about speaking English in my class. … lately, I was told that beginner learners' parents will come to school almost every day to smile, talk, and say, "Hello" to their children. (Afin)

Another barrier was experienced by Tina, who participated in TP across a rural village surrounded by forest and farming areas. In her English classrooms, young learners were reluctant to attend the course, as they did not like any English culture. Their problem with cultural understanding was due to a need for more English-language exposure. It is reported that the young learners preferred going to rice fields or gardens, rather than attending extracurricular activities, such as English clubs offered by PSTs. Moreover, some learners tended to miss English lessons or other classroom meetings, as they went to work in farming areas. For Tina, such preferences prevented the learners from becoming culturally responsive to English as a prospective consideration for their better future.

> … going to a garden or rice field is fascinating for young learners. They do not hate English. They need to be more engaged in English academic cultures. I am certain that if they motivate themselves to learn English, they will love it forever. We offer an English club in the school and village, but it is not overwhelmed with young learners. (Tina)

Similarly, Mona admitted that a lack of parental and environmental supports reduced young learners' enthusiasm to learn English and its related culture. Further distance from urban areas has prevented them from intercultural development. They tended not to encourage themselves to learn new cultures, such as English. For most parents, English was a foreign language used for foreigners. Although a smaller number of learners, their parents, and society were open to new cultures like English, a majority of them did not pay attention to its benefits. Consequently, this phenomenon challenged PSTs to teach English to young rural-school learners. Internalizing the importance of English and its culture for learners' academic achievement remains complicated among those who have lower cultural beliefs and understanding.

> Learners' parents do not attempt to allow their children to engage in new cultures for a better future. … they remain skeptical about a foreign language and culture. They do not want them to watch English-learning videos, read English stories or novels, or speak like a foreigner. Yeah, it remains forbidden for them to try new stuff like English, which, I think, is much fun. (Mona)

Furthermore, scenery photographs by Nabil (see Figures 4 and 5) represented PSTs' feelings about intercultural sensitivity barriers in teaching English to rural-school learners. He described some reasons for this picture. First, it contained rice field, forest, and traditional villages in which the rural school is located. The learners were too close to traditional routines and cultures. Going and working in a garden or rice field was considered local wisdom for many villagers, such as school learners. Spending hours or days in farming areas indicated not only how they earned a living, but also how previous generations maintained traditions. The PSTs believed that natural scenery was attained with natural traditions, cultures, or habits. It is not an easy task for PSTs with different urban traditions to adapt to traditional culture in rural schools and their surroundings.

> When I saw the beautiful scenery with [the] rice field and green forest, I suddenly loved it. It is the answer to an intercultural problem that I encountered during TP in this rural school. The beauty of this scenery distracts [a] new incoming culture from the outside world. (Nabil)

Figure 4: Participants' emotional photo - Ricefields.

Figure 5: Participants' emotional photo - Forest.

In conclusion, it is noticed that intercultural sensitivity can be a problem for both PSTs and young learners. Such challenges result from strong habits and traditions maintained by learners, their parents, and society. Their beliefs about cultures and traditions must be focused on other new cultures that come through, either newcomers or technology.

Lack of supporting resources

It is undeniable that resources in the educational context help an English-teacher candidate to prepare better, implement, and assess English lessons. Supporting resources such as learning tools, internet signals, and learning resources are necessary for successful learning achievement. Although it is not the main indicator of learning success, its availability will benefit both teachers and learners by encouraging enthusiasm.

Practically, PSTs' experiences during TP in rural schools proved that the importance of supporting resources for learning English should become the main concern of other English teachers. Pinda and Weli experienced limited internet access due to a weak signal. This limited online access did not allow them to deal with online resources, such as English learning materials, journals, or books. Young learners depended on manual materials for years. However, such problems were not considered by most English teachers, since the manual materials were believed to be complete, even though simple. Unfortunately, it is unknown whether online materials are dynamic, comprehensive, up-to-date, and freely accessible.

> Online materials, such as journals or books, are better solutions for English learning problems in rural schools.… when learners read it, they will find out how English is used worldwide, and, of course, they will know what they do not know in English. (Pinda)

> It is almost impossible to boost learners' enthusiasm to learn English without good internet access. Hence, I rely on printed books, due to bad internet access. Let us imagine if they had better internet access and accessed free online materials whenever and wherever they expected. (Well)

Having taken a photo, Pinda chose to photograph old, printed books (see Figure 6) to represent feelings about the lack of learning resources in EFL classrooms. The photo was taken as she perceived the old, printed book as the main English-learning resource. It also revealed both teachers' and learners' enjoyment of using the book, even though it needed supplemental instruction to give more dynamic and up-to-date knowledge. Seemingly, the book has been used for many years, and there has been no effort to replace it. Furthermore, another English-teacher candidate, Mona, mentioned that the old book was suitable, as it helped English teachers deliver the lesson.

> Teaching English here is labourious when I used a similar printed book wherever I entered an EFL classroom. I need more interesting material. I do agree with the old-book picture. It helps me [to] reveal my current emotions about English teaching material. (Pinda)

> The atmosphere in rural English classrooms is natural, and no new foreign learning tradition has contaminated it. It is like the old-book photo. It is irreplaceable, and many feel it is effective for learning English. I do not think it is good for learners' future English development. (Mona)

Figure 6: Participants' emotional photo - Printed books.

Limited teacher professional development

Participants' experiences as PSTs are valuable for both current and future career development. Each participant agreed that TP enabled them to practice teaching English to young learners in a rural school setting with its uniqueness. English teachers in rural schools, in which Afin attended, for example, did not pay much attention to their professional development. The term, professional development, can be said to teach learning, not only teacher change. During TP, he found that the English teachers relied on the knowledge they possessed, but did not attempt to develop such knowledge for better future practice. Their self-efficacy in teacher development was lower, as they did not raise any initiative to reveal such development. Another negative attitude towards such professional development was carelessness towards self-learning and self-regulation as English teachers.

> … even English teachers in rural schools have to engage in every activity that may develop teacher competence. However, it seems that the teachers do not indicate that they want to learn more. (Afin)

Lack of understanding towards professional development was considered the main factor of teachers' negative attitude and attention. Some English teachers admitted that they did not have sufficient ability to undertake self-learning, such as writing a scientific paper, compiling a module, or writing a manual book for learners. Meanwhile, other English teachers were not aware of how important it is for a teacher to attend a seminar, webinar, or workshop. Although there was an English-teacher community, it was considered not very effective in developing teaching competence. As a teacher candidate who experienced how urban English teachers dealt with professional development, Dino viewed active learning and self-development awareness as important to support qualified teaching proficiency.

> If they want, they can attend seminars or workshops conducted by nearby universities. If they have a good internet connection, they can attend webinars. It is about passion, not [only] more [training]. Paper writing can be learned. It is impossible for English teachers in this 21st century to keep calm and do nothing. Let us do something for ourselves, for learners, and for their future English. (Dino)

To complete the findings, Tina, a participant who was interested in showing experience through a visual mode, took a photograph (see Figure 7). The blank paper was integrated into the theme for several reasons. To begin with, blank paper was viewed as a scientific paper without any content. It needed to be modified, filled in, and drawn by using the teacher's ideas. However, the paper remained clean, and no content was added. Another reason was that blank paper represented the English teacher's basic knowledge. It had not been fulfilled with a variety of other knowledge from various sources. Such blank paper was not a source of pride, but it went unnoticed by the English teachers who did not realize the potential of their professional development.

> … not becoming an EFL teacher with many new experiences remains unpredictable, as no motivation emerges among the teachers. It is a blank paper that reveals what is happening

to them. They should be aware of utilizing ideas and experiences to fill in the blank space inside their professional development. (Tina)

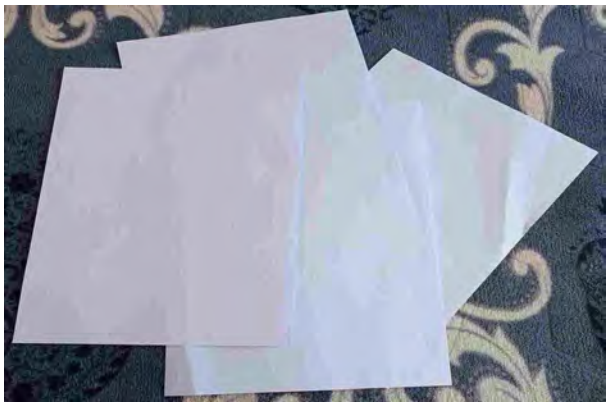

Figure 7: Participants' emotional photo - Blank paper.

Discussion

This current study reveals four main themes regarding urban PSTs' challenges during English TP in some rural schools. These themes include changes in PSTs' identity construction, intercultural sensitivity barriers, a lack of supporting resources, and limited teacher professional development. Each main theme is supported by some subthemes, which lead to the complexity of the PSTs' challenges. It is interesting to focus on these challenges when coming up with this discussion, as they have positive and negative impacts on both current and future practice for English teaching and learning. First, for most English-teacher candidates, the term, identity construction, has been widely defined as the theoretical and practical development of teachers in determining their insights toward teaching competence throughout a particular context (Ai et al., 2022). Identity construction has an important role for PSTs, as it helps to identify teaching weaknesses, and transform competence into pedagogical strengths.

Nevertheless, it is noted that PSTs usually struggle to construct identities in their first teaching experience (Ai et al., 2022). A challenge, then, is serious when PSTs encounter an EFL classroom atmosphere in a rural-school context. Those who are used to experiencing an urban academic atmosphere with its organized lessons, up-to-date materials, and unlimited resources need some intensive adaptation. For example, PSTs must modify teaching strategies to adapt to learners with lower English skills. There is no fixed strategy that is suitable to cope with the rural-classroom atmosphere. The more PSTs can figure out various strategies, the easier it is for learners to develop their English skills. PSTs with lower adaptation abilities find it difficult to cope with rural-classroom encounters. This problem affects their positive identity construction as beginner teachers (Gholami et al., 2021; Lin & Wu, 2021). Some PSTs may feel that they are manipulated by unexpected pedagogical situations that cannot be easily managed and confronted through direct teaching responses. Conversely, PSTs' identity transforms into pedagogical strength for better future teaching practice. It enables PSTs to be adaptive and responsive to every challenge in rural English classrooms (Dewi & Fajri, 2023; Wang, 2023).

The English-teacher candidates are not only challenged with pedagogical problems, but also cultural issues in foreign-language teaching. It has been noticed that intercultural sensitivity remains challenging for PSTs who conduct TP in rural school contexts. Several factors may reduce

PSTs' sensitivity toward existing culture, habit, or tradition (Boudouaia et al., 2022). One of them is resistance to foreign culture, which can influence pedagogical competence. The findings of Soutter (2023) revealed that social-emotional skills are paramount to determine successful learning. The students who learn English, and do not attempt to integrate its positive culture into their learning, suffer from becoming inadequate culturally (Miao & Lepeyko, 2023). PSTs, on the other hand, encounter difficulty engaging in cross-cultural understanding in rural-school areas, because strong local habits challenge them. For example, English is believed to be a language that does not have any positive implications for learners' current and future lives. Such assumptions lead to intercultural denial and rejection, which affect the way learners treat English as a global medium to develop unlimited access to knowledge (Boudouaia et al., 2022; Mohammadi et al., 2023). To deal with this challenge, PSTs must help to encourage learners' language awareness through intensive exposure to English use and usage. PSTs need to be culturally responsive to the various social influences experienced in rural-school contexts. Their abilities to accept, adapt, and integrate a particular local habit allows them to determine proper strategies in teaching rural-school learners.

Lack of supporting resources has become an influential factor in rural schools' successful teaching and learning processes. The supporting resources must be acknowledged, considering that integrated tools simplify teachers' abundant duties and intensify young learners' active learning (Bui, 2022; Ledger et al., 2021). However, it is believed that English learning may lead to failure when neither EFL teachers nor learners employ any supporting resources in the classroom. Printed books are unquestionable for most English lessons, but online resources are more effective, because of their updated content and comprehensive material development (Selvaraj et al., 2021). Creative English teachers compile material modified from online sources to ensure that learners receive up-to-date lessons. However, PSTs in rural schools are challenged by weak internet signals, which reduce the frequency of online interaction (Donkoh et al., 2023; Yarrow et al., 2020). Both English teachers and learners are expected to strengthen their understanding of English language skills through various materials provided by online sources.

Meanwhile, technological advancement for today's educational development has unleashed predetermined barriers that prevent English teachers and learners from unlimited access to learning resources. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been designed for general and specific purposes, such as in educational contexts (Hockly, 2023). However, integrating AI into EFL rural classrooms is not easy for PSTs, as rural schools have limitations regarding internet connections, not to mention intercultural sensitivity issues. In this case, two ways of solving these challenges are building infrastructure to improve signals, and becoming open to incoming cultures and their positive-knowledge effects. A lack of concern for these difficulties may lead to hampered learning experiences for rural school learners, because they are not equipped with useful, advanced learning tools. The basic principle of 21st-century educational goals is to increase learners' thinking quality, and provide them with an undemanding learning process. Therefore, it is paramount that rural school learners benefit from technological advancements during their knowledge development(Ledger et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The challenges of teaching English to young students in rural schools have effects on the success or failure of PSTs as teachers. It is undeniable that PSTs should always be aware of the possible challenges that may emerge during teaching practice in a rural school, but these experiences can benefit urban PSTs, because changes in identity construction mainly occur if compared to other

challenges. However, this is not to say that there are other factors that influence PSTs' teaching quality. Depending on the circumstances and environment in which they struggle for high-quality teaching practice, different PSTs face different challenges. These young teachers can describe their teaching difficulties through a photograph, which enables them to deal with visual emotion and feeling. It is important for them to rely on such visual expression, so that they can manage experiences with controlled emotion or attitude. In this way, they will solve problems encountered during their teaching practice in rural schools.

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