PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN DOING TEACHING PRACTICUM AT PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata, and to investigate the influence of the challenges on the EFL pre-service teachers' professional identity construction. The method used was a qualitative approach with lived experience, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 4 EFL pre-service teachers who had conducted teaching practicum in the two schools. The results showed that the participants faced various challenges, including difficulties in applying appropriate teaching methods, difficult classroom management, and limited facilities. These challenges had a significant impact on their professional identity formation process, with most participants feeling insecure and pressured by expectations of being an ideal teacher. Nonetheless, the experience during teaching practicum provided opportunities for them to learn, adjust to the environment, and develop strategies to overcome problems that arose. Adequate support from educational institutions and mentors is crucial for pre-service teachers to face challenges and build a strong professional identity. This study opens up opportunities for further research related to efforts to develop pre-service teachers' professional identity in various diverse contexts, and emphasizes the importance of adapting the curriculum to meet specific needs in remote areas.

Keywords: *Teacher Professional Identity, EFL Pre-service teachers', Challenges in Teaching Practicum.*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' professional identity refers to how educators perceive themselves and their roles within the educational dynamics. According to Schellings et al., (2023), it involves the reflective ability to self-identify, shape, and sustaining one's identity as a teacher. Beijaard, (2019) argues that teachers' identity is formed as part of their professional learning process. Hence, when teacher learn, they are also constructing their identity, which ultimately explains what it means to be a teacher according to Richards, (2016). Thus, the formation of teacher' professional identity occurs dynamically through an ongoing professional learning process.

The identity theory proposed by Burke & Stets, (2009) is the main foundation in understanding how teacher professional identity is formed. Individual identities are shaped through social interaction and experience, which is very relevant in the context of a teachers' professional identity.

Teacher's professional identity is the way a teacher understands his or her role as an educator. Ke Lomi & Mbato, (2020), state that many teachers decide to leave their profession after the first year of teaching due to the challenges they face and the disappointment in the process of forming and developing their professional identity. Zhang & Wang, (2022), revealed that this issue will remain a prominent topic despite being widely researched. Richards, (2023) added that it refers to the process of teachers understanding who they are in relation to their social context throughout their careers, which impacts their professional growth. This highlights the importance of fostering a positive professional identity to improve educational outcomes.

A study by Dewi & Fajri, (2023) said that several factors that influence the formation of EFL teachers' professional identity including initial motivation, teaching practicum experience, environmental influences, personal reflection, previous learning experiences, and support from mentors and colleagues. It is a process that involves experience, reflection, and interaction with the work environment, which help teachers understand their role. Therefore, the development of teachers' professional identity begins as they engage in teaching practicum, which is shaped by personal experience and dynamic of the ever-changing educational environment (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Beltman et al., 2015; Rahmawati, 2022). The formation of EFL teachers' professional identity is not an instant process, various factors play a crucial role in its development through real-life experience in the dynamic world of education. However, in this study, the researcher will not adopt all the factors identified by Dewi & Fajri, (2023), but will focus on some factors that are relevant to the theory by Mutlu, (2014) regarding the challenges faced by pre-service teacher during the teaching practicum, including aspects of teaching methods, attitudes, classroom management, practicum duration, and ineffective feedback. Therefore, recognizing and addressing these factors is crucial to support the development of teachers' professional identity during the teaching practicum.

To create professional pre-service teachers, a private University in West Kalimantan organizes teaching practicum for students in the education study program. The teaching practicum guidebook of Universitas Katolik Santo Agustinus Hippo states that teaching practicum is an advanced program from micro teaching. teaching practicum activities carried out by students in schools directly aim to improve and deepen students' knowledge and skills related to teaching practicum. The implementation is carried out through classroom observation in schools, training in the development of teaching materials, and directly training teaching skills in the school environment. Thus, students who have gone through direct experience in teaching practicum are expected to be ready to become professional pre-service teachers. Vähäsantanen, (2015) said that teaching practicum is a basis for students to reflect on their experiences and develop a deeper understanding of their professional identity. According to Brouwers & Tomic, (2016) The experiences gained during teaching practicum are crucial in shaping students' perceptions of their role as educators and their overall professional identity. Thus, teaching practicum not only provides teaching skills but also strengthens students' understanding of their role as educators. Research

by Zhao & Zhang, (2017) states that if pre-service teachers have good teaching practicum experience, EFL pre-service teacher will be more passionate about the profession. In addition, Day, (2018) added that teachers will stay in their jobs if they have a strong professional identity. Therefore, if pre-service EFL teachers' professional identity is weak during their teaching practicum, they are likely to lose motivation to continue their career in education. Positive experiences strengthen their professional identity and enhance their teaching and passion as educators.

Many researchers have highlighted the challenges faced by student teachers in carrying out teaching practicum, especially EFL pre-service teachers who often experience difficulties such as lack of experience in managing diverse classes and pressure to meet curriculum standards (Bibi & Aziz, 2024; Gu et al., 2022; Massod et al., 2022). Numerous studies have addressed how student teachers' professional identities are formed (Ke Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Lestari et al., 2024; Linh et al., 2024), Indicating that experience and support from the environment play a crucial role in the formation of EFL teachers' professional identity, the limited number of participants in the study reduces the generalizability of the findings. There is still a lack of research that specifically explores the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers in forming their professional identity during teaching practicum in primary schools. This suggests the need for further research to understand how the difficulties faced by EFL pre service teachers serve not only as obstacles, but also as important factors in building a stronger and more adaptive professional identity. Therefore, this study will focus on the challenges faced by EFL pre- service teachers at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata.

This research is important because there are several factors that can lead to professional burnout experienced by pre-service teachers in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This could potentially make them decide to leave their jobs Diasti, (2021). Therefore, EFL students need to understand how to adjust to the school environment. It is important to identify and understand the difficulties faced by EFL students, especially at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata, which are areas with limited educational facilities and do not English teachers. With these conditions, the challenges faced by pre-service teachers become even more complex, so it is hoped that this research can contribute to educational institutions in preparing pre-service teachers through the development of teaching practicum programs in the school environment.

EFL teachers' professional identities develop through their teaching experiences, which are influenced by the various challenges faced during teaching practicum. There are several issues that are the main reasons for this study. First, there is a lack of research on the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers during their practicum in primary schools, especially in rural areas such as SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata. The limitations of this research have resulted in a lack of understanding of the various factors that influence the professional identity formation of EFL pre-service teachers. Secondly, a number of pre-service EFL teachers face professional burnout due to pressures arising from a lack of teaching experience, demands to meet

curricular standards, and limitations in terms of resources and training. In light of findings highlighting a number of factors that lead to professional burnout among pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, which may result in their decision to leave education (Diasti, 2021).This shows the need for increased support for pre-service teachers. Therefore, this study focuses on the challenges faced by pre-service EFL teachers at Seluang Danau and Semata primary schools in building their professional identity during their teaching practicum, and emphasizes the importance of adequate support and resources, especially in rural areas.

This study focuses on the challenges EFL pre-service teacher faced in building their professional identity during their teaching practice at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata. The focus of this research includes aspects of adjusting to the school environment, teaching experiences, reflections on challenges, and how these experiences affect pre-service teachers' professional identity. The aspects to be explored include challenges faced by pre-service EFL teachers related to teaching methods, attitudes, classroom management, practicum duration, ineffective feedback, and personal reflection. Thus, the research question is formulated as follows:

1. What are the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum at SDN Seluang danau and SDN Semata?
2. How do challenges effect the formation of EFL pre-service teacher professional identities during their teaching practicum at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata?

METHODS METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative fenomenology design to explore the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for gaining deep insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and social interactions Creswell, & Poth, (2018). Recent research, such as that conducted by Smith & Osborn, (2015), highlights the importance of the phenomenological approach in exploring one's lived experiences, especially in education. This approach the details of personal experiences and how they contribute to the formation of professional identity.

The research was conducted at two elementary school in rural area, especially SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata, selected for their diverse social and cultural contexts. The interaction among teachers, students, and EFL pre-service teachers from varied backgrounds provides a unique perspective

on English language teaching. Interviews were conducted after the practicum to allow participants to reflect on the experiences and challenges they faced, which was crucial to the development of their professional identity.

Participants in this study included EFL pre-service teachers who had completed their teaching practicum. Purposive sampling focused on those who could provide insights into the challenges faced during their teaching practicum.

Data collection involve semi-structure interview to explore experience related to teaching method, attitudes, classroom management, practicum duration, ineffective feedback, and personal reflection. The data analysis techniques designed by Sugiyono., (2022) will be used, and the design includes the following steps: first, data reduction, were researchers will select, focus, simplify, and transform raw data into more structured information. Researchers will eliminate irrelevant information to concentrate on key data that directly addresses the research questions. Next, data presentation stage, the reduced data will be organized and presented in a clear format, such as matrices, charts or other visuals. This structured presentation aims to facilitate a better understanding and analysis of the data that has been selected. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification: finally, researchers will draw conclusions based on the presented and check the validity of these conclusions. This process is important to ensure that the results obtained are relevant to the research questions asked.

To enhance the validity of interpretation, the researcher verified it by Member checking. this method is commonly used in qualitative research to increase the accuracy and credibility of research result Creswell & Poth, (2018). The result presented in the form of a clear narrative, accompanied by direct quotes from the interviews to support the findings. Therefore, this presentation aims to provide an overview of the challenges in teaching practicum and their impact on professional identities formation. By following these steps, the researcher ensure that the data is valid and credible, leading to a deeper understanding of how these challenges affect the professional identity of EFL pre-service teachers at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS
Finding

This section presents the findings from the interviews, which focus on the challenges experienced by the pre-service EFL teachers during their teaching practicum at Seluang Danau and Semata primary schools. The findings of this study show that the pre-service EFL teachers experienced various challenges including classroom management, engagement with students and the environment, application of appropriate learning methods, as well as limited

facilities and technology support, and difficulties in fulfilling the expectations of being a desired teacher. The efforts they made in overcoming these

challenges included personal reflection, seeking advice from their mentor teachers, and asking their peers' opinions and students' responses to the lessons they had implemented to understand and find solutions to the challenges they faced. The following will describe these findings in more depth based on empirical data that has been obtained in the form of a summary of the interview result below.

Teaching Method

The teaching methods applied during the teaching practicum were a major concern for participants, as they perceived that the methods used during the teaching practicum had influenced their readiness to face real teaching challenges in the field.

a. Expectations before teaching practicum.

Before joining the teaching practicum, participants have a variety of expectations that reflect their purpose and drive in joining the program. These expectations are important to know how they prepare themselves to face future challenges. Participants had diverse expectations before PLP, ranging from simple assumptions about teaching (P1), specific expectations related to practicum placements (P2, P3) and self-development (P4). P1 revealed, "when I went down to the school, I really didn't expect it". while P2 hopes to be placed in the countryside because "the countryside is fun, and we can get a lot of experience there". However, the reality in the field was often significantly different from initial expectations, especially the complex teaching challenges and adjustments that had to be made. "

b. English language teaching challenges

During the implementation of teaching practicum, especially in the process of teaching English, the participants faced various challenges that were quite heavy. These challenges have an impact on their journey as teachers, this is not enough for teachers but also affects the ability of students to understand English well. The participants agreed that the major challenges they face in teaching English include unruly students, diverse student characteristics, language barriers, and limited facilities and resources such as books, internet access, and access to schools. P1 highlighted, "besides the students are difficult to manage. then they are if we explain it a bit difficult to understand. especially English, it's difficult". P3 also added about the facilities, "the room facilities have holes. it's not supportive".

c. Self-perception as a Pre-service Teacher

In the context of self-development as pre-service teachers, it is important to understand how participants perceive themselves before joining the teaching practicum. This view can affect their strategies in teaching and building relationships with students. Before teaching practicum, participants had different self-images as a teacher, ranging from wanting to be a humble but firm teacher (P1), friendly and pleasant (P2), firm

and caring (P3), to responsible and creative (P4). P1 stated, "I want to be a teacher who is humble, but also firm." On the other hand, P2 admitted, "I think I myself am kind of the opposite (of a humble teacher)." P3 wants to be a "strict teacher... considered grumpy but very caring towards students".

d. Teaching challenges used

During the English language teaching activities at the teaching practicum site, the participants faced a number of obstacles that affected the strategies they used. most of the participants (P1, P2, P4) revealed that they were forced to use traditional learning methods due to limited facilities and resources, making it difficult for them to implement more interactive and interesting learning methods. Only one participant (P3) specifically mentioned using the singing teaching method. P3 "During my practicum, I mostly taught English by singing".

e. Differences between campus and PLP methods

In the teaching experience during teaching practicum, the participants found significant differences between the English teaching methods they learned on campus and those they applied in the field. The participants (P1, P2, P3, P4) revealed that students' readiness was still low to accept modern learning methods, in addition to the limited technology and media available were also factors that influenced the teaching approach. this resulted in the teachers having to adjust the approach used according to the needs and abilities of students at the teaching practicum location. P4 specifically mentioned, "the teaching methods I learned on campus are different from the ones I used during my practicum. during my practicum on campus, I always used visual methods and also multimedia.

f. Difficulty determining appropriate methods

During the learning process, the participants experienced challenges in selecting appropriate and effective teaching methods for students' needs. these challenges were mainly due to limited resources as well as unruly student behavior. (P1, P2, P3, P4) revealed that this condition made them feel hampered to create a learning environment that meets their expectations. P1 revealed, "I have thought about finding effective and fun ways to teach them but I find it difficult to implement. As I explained before, materials, books, the internet are also difficult."

g. Perceptions of method differences

This difference in teaching methods is generally regarded as a challenge that must be faced by the teacher (P4), but some participants regard this as normal and its effectiveness depends on the motivation or enthusiasm of the students (P1, P2, P3).This view suggests that there is potential to achieve good results if students are actively involved in learning, despite the challenges in the process. P4 considered, "I think it's a challenge that I have to overcome." While P1 argued, "whether it is effective or not depends on their learning intention and ability again." P2 also stated, "the challenges faced, such as the character of students who

are difficult to understand, make me have to maintain patience in teaching."

h. Ineffectiveness of teaching methods

The participants agreed that teaching methods are ineffective when students are not enthusiastic about learning, this is often caused by learning that lacks variety due to the inability to print visual media. In addition, students' previous habit of traditional learning methods also triggers students' reluctance to participate in unfamiliar learning. P4 felt, "I feel that my lessons are not effective when I am seriously teaching, they are not enthusiastic, they are bored." P1 also mentioned, "Because when we enter the class, there are students who want to follow, there are students who don't want to follow. That's the most difficult."

Attitudes from Environment

Participants' interactions and attitudes towards the school environment were an important part of their experience during the teaching practicum. Participants shared their perceptions of the relationships with those around them that contributed to their learning experience and the development of their professional identity.

a. Relationship with the school environment

Understanding the dynamics of relationships within the educational environment is important for the overall success of the teaching and learning process. Participants' relationships with peers, students, and the school community as a whole were good and harmonious. However, (P4) had experienced discomfort due to an attitude of being underappreciated by a teacher and criticized by students. P1 stated, "The relationship with the people around me during PLP was fine." P2 also felt, "the relationship with friends and the surrounding environment is well established and harmonious." However, P4 had an unpleasant experience, "There was an unpleasant experience that I encountered, at that time there was one teacher... he told me to write, but also asked me about it... he seemed to answer me in a mocking tone." P4 was also criticized by a student, "he then said that I was not teaching according to what was in the book."

b. Attitudes towards students and parents

The experience of interacting with students and their parents contributes a more positives learning environment. During the teaching practicum, participants faced challenges in building relationships with students, especially in dealing with student delinquency. However, they still try to be professional and treat all students fairly without discriminating. P1 mentioned, "In elementary school, we often encounter disrespectful words from students, for me, I consider it normal because they are also children and if I find something like that, just reprimand them." P3 also felt "it's all wrong when you want to reprimand. in a firm way, I'm afraid they are not happy, in a gentle way they don't listen." P4 emphasized, "As a teacher, we have to be

professional ... as much as possible, we have to be normal in front of them, without having to differentiate them from other students."

c. Teacher roles and responsibilities

Through the teaching practicum experience, participants increasingly understood the role of teachers which is not only limited to teaching material, but also includes the responsibility of shaping students' character and behavior, as well as acting as a "second parent" for them. P1 felt that, "being a teacher is not only about delivering the material and being responsible for making them understand the material I deliver, but it is also my duty to tell them how their attitude and behavior should be." P4 also stated, "I feel that my role as a teacher is a lot. It turns out that being a teacher is not only teaching the material, but also other things, for example I have to teach them about what is right, what is wrong, about their attitude, manners."

Classroom Management

Classroom management was also of great concern to the participants, as they expressed their experiences with various challenges during teaching practicum, especially when dealing with diverse student behaviors and how they could maintain student participation during the learning process.

a. Classroom Management Challenges

During the teaching practicum, all participants faced difficulties in managing the class, especially when dealing with students who were difficult to manage, lacked enthusiasm, and were reluctant to actively participate in the learning process. These challenges illustrate the difficulty of classroom management in real-life situations and emphasize the need to develop effective strategies. P1 revealed, "students who are difficult to manage, there are students who are eager to participate in learning but there are also those who have no interest in learning." P2 also experienced, "students who are difficult to manage... where these grade 1 students we know that they are the smallest and difficult to manage." P3 mentioned, "students who are difficult to get involved in learning. To be invited to ice breaking or learning with games so they are difficult to move." P4 added, "They are practically wild. They cannot focus on the lesson."

b. Strategies to increase student engagement

To address these challenges, participants implemented various strategies to increase student participation and motivation, through negotiation, patience, games, and the use of songs. These efforts show the participants' ability to design learning to increase students' interest in learning. P1 tried to "invite students who do not want to follow the lesson to talk like negotiating." P2 emphasized, "What I do is always have patience with the children." P3 used "the method that I use to attract their attention, bring it to the game." P4 also used "games in English" and "songs" to keep

students from getting bored.

Practicum Duration

The duration of the teaching practicum was an important concern for the participants, who expressed views on the adequacy of the practicum in preparing them for the demands of the teaching profession.

a. Handling difficult situations

All participants felt that the teaching practicum period, which was carried out for approximately 6 months, was not enough to prepare themselves to become an ideal teacher. P1 stated, "For me the PLP time that we have carried out is still lacking." P2 also felt, "I feel that the Field Training (PLP) time that I have undergone is still lacking." P3 argued, "As for the duration of PLP time, I think it is still lacking for me to prepare myself to become a teacher." P4 explicitly said, "I think it is very, very insufficient because it is only 6 months."

b. Duration of practicum

Although the teaching practicum provided valuable experience, the participants felt that they still needed more training, practice, and guidance in order to become teachers who are truly prepared to deal with various situations in the field. P1 hopes, "If the PLP time is increased again, I want to improve my teaching again and again so that in the future I can be even better." P2 also wants to "continue to improve my teaching so that I can become a better teacher." P4 felt that, "the preparation to become a teacher in the future is still not enough. So I still need guidance from other teachers."

Ineffective feedback

Providing feedback during the practicum is an important aspect that contributes to the development of participants as future educators. Most of the participants (P1, P2, P3) rarely or never received formal feedback, which was one of the things that hindered their development. In contrast, P4 who received frequent feedback found it very helpful in dealing with students and improving teaching. P1 said, "As for feedback, I don't think there is any... Pamong teachers also rarely give input so I mostly teach with my own ideas." P2 also stated, "For feedback. I don't think there is anything like that." P3 added, "For feedback, I rarely get it, not even from the student teacher." In contrast to P4 who said, "If it's with the supervising teacher and PLP friends, it's quite often... they really help me."

Personal Reflection

Self-reflection is an important element in the participants' learning process, helping them to understand their teaching experience and identify opportunities for improvement. Participants conduct personal reflections on their teaching experiences, often by soliciting student opinions or self-

evaluating after teaching, to identify areas of improvement. P1 reflects with "the help of students, sometimes I ask students' opinions" and also "often flashback after teaching if there is something I feel is lacking the next day I try to remember and improve my teaching methods." P2 feels that "reflection is rare, but even though I feel that there is not much reflection done, the teaching experience still comes to my mind." P3 found that "the feedback I received from students motivated me to continue to innovate." P4 reflects "usually after teaching, and sometimes at night."

Discussion

Based on the interviews, the pre-service EFL teachers had a variety of experiences during the teaching practicum program at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata. The results of this study showed that EFL pre-service teachers faced significant challenges during the teaching practicum, which affected the development of their professional identity. The participants expressed various difficulties, including classroom management, student engagement, and the application of effective teaching methods. These challenges align with previous research on EFL teachers' professional identity development, which states that the challenges faced by EFL pre- service teachers are crucial to their professional identity development (Ke Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Linh et al., 2024). This includes classroom management, where they strive to maintain order and engagement among unruly or disengaged students. Building rapport with students and adapting to the school environment also proved challenging, especially in addressing the diverse needs of students. In addition, participants also faced obstacles in implementing appropriate learning methods, as they faced limited resources and facilities that hampered their ability to implement effective teaching strategies. Lack of access to teaching materials and technology further complicates this situation, hampering their ability to deliver lessons effectively. In addition, participants felt pressure to meet expectations for learning outcomes, which added to the overall pressure during the practicum. These differences suggest that teacher education programs need to set more realistic expectations and prepare students for the challenges they will face in the field. Linh et al. (2024) also stated that EFL teachers' teaching experiences have significantly shaped pre-service EFL teachers' self-perceptions as educators. This research emphasizes the importance of being flexible, empathetic, and committed to learning in the process of developing teacher identity.

Furthermore, the challenges related to student behavior and engagement, as well as the participants' effort to manage these, highlight a crucial aspect of a teacher's role beyond mere instruction. The pre-service teachers recognized that their responsibilities extended to shapping students' characters and acting as "second parents." This aligns with the broader understanding of a teacher's multifaceted role, which often involves guidance

and counselling. In this regard, the findings resonate with Upa & Mbato, (2020) who noted that "The teacher also played a role as a counsellor to the students when the students experience problems, especially in the learning process." This counselling aspect was evident in the pre-service teachers' attempts to negotiate with students, show patience, and understand their needs to foster a more conducive learning environment particularly when dealing with unruly or disengaged student. This demonstrates an emerging professional identity that encompasses not just pedagogical skills but also a nurturing and supportive role.

Generally, the teaching practicum experience with various challenges significantly influenced the formation of teachers' professional identity. this is in line with the expression of Beijaard, (2019), who asserted that teachers' identity is formed as part of their professional learning process. Each participant showed how the challenges they faced encouraged self-reflection and professional growth. Each participant showed how the challenges they faced encouraged self-reflection and professional growth. The EFL Pre-service teachers realized the responsibility of more than just delivering learning materials, learned extraordinary patience in classroom management, adapted between assertiveness and creative approaches, and developed an identity as an educator who is able to develop the potential of students as a whole, including aspects of thinking, emotional, social, and spiritual values with a personal and adaptive approach, by upholding professional ethics in educating and guiding students. it can be said that the difficulties in the field forced them to reflect on their roles and abilities.

The process of adapting to unruly students, limited facilities, as well as the need to be more creative in teaching methods, encouraged the participants to reshape their understanding of themselves as strong, responsible educators, and able to create innovative solutions. This finding is in line with Vähäsantanen, (2015) who states that teaching practicum is a basis for students to reflect on their experiences and develop a deeper understanding of their professional identity. In addition, this is also in line with Brouwers & Tomic, (2016) who assert that The experiences gained during teaching practicum are crucial in shaping students' perceptions of their role as educators and their overall professional identity. Thus, the experience of the teaching practicum influences EFL preservice teachers to reflect on and shape their professional identity. the process confirms that the teaching practicum has a crucial role as a foundation in the development of a more mature professional identity. hands- on experience is key in shaping their perceptions as resilient and adaptive educators.

In addition, most participants revealed that the lack of feedback received hindered their development. These findings show similarities with the

findings of Ke Lomi & Mbato, (2020), revealing that support from coworkers and the school environment was crucial to helping these teachers develop their professional identity. This means that when they receive help and support from those around them, they are better able to face the challenges that arise. The importance of a supportive environment, including colleagues and mentors, is paramount for pre-service teachers to navigate the complexities of their initial teaching experiences. The absence of formal feedback, as reported by the majority of participants, represents a significant gap in their professional development support system. This contrasts sharply with the positive impact experienced by the EFL pre-service teachers, who benefited from consistent feedback, underscoring its value in refining teaching practices and building confidence.

Moreover, the emphasis on the need for further training and practice is in line with the conclusion of Lestari et al., (2024) highlights the importance of support and guidance for pre-service teachers to improve their confidence and skills before entering teaching practicum. The participants' feeling that a six-month practicum was insufficient points to a need for more extended or intensive practical experience, coupled with structured mentorship. This extended exposure would allow them to encounter a wider range of teaching scenarios and receive more comprehensive guidance, thereby solidifying their professional identity and practical skills.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of understanding the specific challenges faced by pre-service teachers in rural areas, as this provides insight into developing more effective teacher education programs. By addressing these challenges such as providing more realistic expectations, enhancing support system with consistent feedback, and offering more extensive practical training that includes a focus on the teacher's role as a counsellor and character developer it is hoped that it can help pre-service teachers to develop a stronger professional identity and improve their teaching skills, thereby contributing to the improvement of education in the area.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers during their teaching practice at SDN Seluang Danau and SDN Semata played a crucial role in the development of their professional identity. The results show that these pre-service EFL teachers are faced with challenges, including difficulties in classroom management, interaction with students, application of effective teaching methods, and limited resources. These challenges affect the success of the teaching and learning process, as well as the formation of their professional identity. The EFL pre service teachers revealed that their expectations before entering the

teaching practicum had significant differences with the reality they experienced in the field. This situation shows that teaching in a complex environment requires strong adaptability and professional identity. In addition, inadequate feedback during PLP is an important factor that hinders the growth of their professional identity. therefore, it is important to have support from mentors and peers in the practicum process, especially when facing challenges in teaching.

In addition, this study highlights the importance of additional training and practical experiences to prepare pre-service teachers to be better prepared for the demands of the profession in the future. the experiences expressed by the participants are in line with the findings of previous literature which shows that challenges during the teaching practicum are crucial for the constracting of teachers' professional identity.

Based on these findings, educational institutions need to understand and address the specific challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers, especially in rural areas. the provision of adequate support, adequate resources, and appropriate training and teacher education programs can contribute to strengthening the professional identity of pre-service teachers, thereby realizing the improvement of the field of education in these areas. therefore, a conducive and engaging learning environment, along with effective mentoring, is necessary to maximize the development of pre-service EFL teachers' skills and better prepare them for their future responsibilities as educators.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several suggestions are made to relevant parties who play a role in the development of pre-service EFL teachers:

1. Educational Institution

    Educational institutions should pay attention to the development of teacher education programs by integrating more practical training and mentorship opportunities. This could include providing structured feedback mechanisms during the teaching practicum, so that pre-service teachers can reflect on their experiences and improve their teaching skills.

2. Mentors and Supervisors

    Mentors and supervisors have a crucial role in supporting the development of pre-service teacher. Therefore, consistent mentoring or delivery of constructive feedback is needed so that teacher candidates feel comfortable and can express the challenges they face. In addition, mentors can understand the difficulties of teacher candidates, and can help them by sharing effective classroom management strategies and innovative teaching methods.

3. Policymakers

Policymakers are expected to pay attention to the specific challenges faced by pre-service teachers, especially in rural areas. It is important that they design policies that provide adequate support and relevant resources to strengthen teacher education programs. This includes providing better access to modern technology and learning tools in schools, as well as expanding professional development opportunities for pre-service and current teachers.

4. Future Researchers

Future research should conduct long-term studies that monitor the development of EFL teachers' professional identity over time, especially in the context of rural schools. In addition, it is important to explore how certain interventions, such as the application of collaborative or technology-based teaching methods in learning can help overcome the challenges faced by pre-service teachers and improve the quality of teacher education programs.

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