

“Not Trained, Yet Teaching”: ELL Students’ Identity and Competence Development in Teaching Practicum

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ABSTRACT: Teaching practicum (TP) is an essential element of teacher education programs; however, how it is implemented in English Literature and Linguistics (ELL) study programs is still insufficiently examined. ELL students are not formally trained to be teachers like education majors are, but in many places, like Indonesia, they are still expected to teach English after they graduate. This study examines the experiences of ELL students regarding their teaching practice and their development of pedagogical competence despite insufficient training. Conducted as qualitative research, this study gathered data from 36 ELL students via reflective essays, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, which were subsequently analyzed thematically. The results show five main themes: student engagement, classroom management, adaptability, teaching anxiety, and peer support. These themes reflect challenges encountered by education majors; however, the analysis indicates that ELL students experience them in unique ways due to their disciplinary background. Specifically, they relied heavily on peer support as an informal community of practice, negotiated teaching anxiety linked to their perceived lack of legitimacy, and shifted from linguistic to pedagogical and finally to adaptive competence during TP. This study makes a theoretical contribution by introducing the ELL TP Experience Framework, which conceptualizes transformative pedagogy as a process through which students transition from linguistic competence to pedagogical and adaptive competence while negotiating their teacher identity. The study also has practical implications for curriculum reform in ELL programs, mentorship structures, and TP design in contexts where non-education majors are anticipated to join the English teaching workforce.

Keywords: English literature and linguistics, teaching practicum, teaching competence.

ABSTRAK: Praktik mengajar (Teaching Practicum/TP) merupakan elemen penting dalam program pendidikan guru; namun, pelaksanaannya dalam program studi Sastra dan Linguistik Inggris (English Literature and Linguistics/ELL) masih belum banyak diteliti. Mahasiswa ELL tidak secara formal dilatih untuk menjadi guru sebagaimana mahasiswa jurusan pendidikan, tetapi di banyak tempat, seperti di Indonesia, mereka tetap diharapkan untuk dapat mengajar bahasa Inggris setelah lulus. Penelitian ini menelaah pengalaman mahasiswa ELL dalam praktik mengajar serta pengembangan kompetensi pedagogis meskipun dengan pelatihan yang terbatas. Dilakukan sebagai penelitian kualitatif, studi ini mengumpulkan data dari 36 mahasiswa ELL melalui esai reflektif, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan observasi kelas, yang kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan lima tema utama: keterlibatan siswa, manajemen kelas, kemampuan beradaptasi, kecemasan mengajar, dan dukungan rekan sejawat. Tema-tema ini mencerminkan tantangan yang juga dialami oleh mahasiswa jurusan pendidikan; namun, analisis menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa ELL

memiliki pengalaman yang berbeda karena latar belakang disiplin ilmu mereka. Secara khusus, mereka sangat bergantung pada dukungan rekan sejawat sebagai komunitas praktik informal, menghadapi kecemasan mengajar yang terkait dengan persepsi kurangnya legitimasi, dan beralih dari kompetensi linguistik ke pedagogis dan akhirnya ke kompetensi adaptif selama TP. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis melalui pengenalan ELL TP Experience Framework, yang mengonseptualisasikan pedagogi transformatif sebagai proses di mana mahasiswa bertransisi dari kompetensi linguistik menuju kompetensi pedagogis dan adaptif sambil menegosiasikan identitas mereka sebagai guru. Penelitian ini juga memiliki implikasi praktis bagi reformasi kurikulum dalam program ELL, struktur bimbingan, dan desain TP di konteks mahasiswa non-pendidikan.

Kata kunci: kompetensi mengajar, praktik mengajar, sastra dan linguistik Inggris.

INTRODUCTION

The demand for high quality English teachers continues to increase globally, especially in contexts where English is taught as a second or foreign language. Effective English teachers are often defined not only by their linguistic knowledge but also by their pedagogical, interpersonal, and reflective skills (Carmel & Badash, 2021; Nurie Bogale & Wale, 2024). Teacher education programs are therefore should be designed to balance theoretical coursework with practical training, and the teaching practicum (TP) has been widely recognized as a critical site for the development of teaching skills, professional identity, and reflective practice (Abdullah & Mirza, 2020; El-Sawy, 2018; Koşar, 2021).

Existing studies have examined TP extensively, focusing on benefits such as increased practical teaching strategies (Atmaca, 2023; Hardiyanty et al., 2021), technology integration (Hardiyanty et al., 2021; Ilmi et al., 2023), and reflective teaching and critical thinking (Lu & Xie, 2024; Z. Wang et al., 2022), as well as challenges including gaps between theory and practice (Jin et al., 2020; Z. Wang et al., 2022), classroom management (Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2024; Li, Xie, et al., 2023), and teaching anxiety (Alrashidi, 2022; Li, Xie, et al., 2023). However, most of this research has centered on students enrolled in education faculties, who are explicitly trained to become teachers. Far less attention has been given to students from English Literature and Linguistics (ELL) programs, whose academic focus lies in literary and linguistic studies rather than pedagogy. Nonetheless, ELL graduates are often employed as English teachers, especially in Indonesia, where institutional and market demands frequently compel them to take on teaching positions without comprehensive pedagogical training.

Therefore, this study seeks to narrow the gap in the literature by looking into the experience of ELL students in TP. The fact that ELL students often go into TP with a strong linguistic proficiency but limited pedagogical knowledge might significantly influence their adaptive strategies, challenges, and perceptions in contrast to education majors. The main research questions guiding this study is: how do the ELL students perceive their TP experience? Specifically, this study examines the obstacles they encounter, the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles, and the types of support that shape their pedagogical practice. Theoretically, this study proposes the ELL TP Experience Framework, which conceptualizes teaching practice as a transformative process of identity

negotiation and professional learning which in turn calls for practical improvement in the curriculum and mentorship within ELL programs.

Literature Review

Teaching practicum (TP) has long been recognized as a central component of teacher education programs, providing student teachers with opportunities to integrate theory and practice. Research indicates that TP improves pre-service teachers' lesson planning, classroom management, and technology integration, while also promoting reflective teaching methodologies and professional development (Anderson, 2020; Ataş & Daloğlu, 2024; Kuswandono, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2021). Furthermore, TP empowers student teachers to select teaching strategies and technologies, enabling them to explore innovative approaches in actual classroom settings (Sari et al., 2023; Zheng, 2022). While these studies are valuable, they focus heavily on the practical aspects of teaching, often underexploring how such experiences shape teachers' emerging identities.

Reynolds, et al (2021) conducted a case study involving 63 pre-primary preservice teachers in Macau claiming that most participants believed that learning EFL should be an enjoyable experience, resembling a game rather than traditional language study. In fact, 88.89% of them emphasized the importance of creating a "fun environment" where learners engage in activities that feel playful. Another practical skill that pre-service teachers develop during TP is their competence in using technology in their classroom. Hardiyanty et al (2021) investigated how pre-service English teachers in Indonesia make use of various online learning platforms to run their classes during the Covid 19 pandemic. Their study shows that the participants amidst the challenges faced, successfully planned, adapted and executed their lesson. Moreover, participants developed their sensitivity in recognizing the challenges their students were facing during the online classes thus came up with strategies to ease the learning process. Qiu et al (2021) added that TP plays an important role in altering pre-service teachers' belief about some practical aspects in teaching such as classroom management and learning process. In their study, the participants, 142 student teachers in a Chinese university, reflected on their TP claiming that an effective classroom management involves structure and clear authority to ensure the smooth learning process. This is different to their initial belief which prioritizes the democratic aspect of classroom management. Taken together, these studies illustrate how TP reshapes teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, an important precursor to teacher identity development.

Beyond practical skills, TP is also recognized as a crucial site for teacher identity formation. Teacher identity is understood as the dynamic process through which individuals come to see themselves—and are recognized by others—as teachers (Barkhuizen, 2017; Donato, 2017; Fauziah et al., 2025; Yan & He, 2021). Practicum is often the moment when pre-service teachers begin to align their self-concept with the professional expectations of teaching. Research suggests that reflective practice, mentorship, and classroom experiences contribute significantly to shaping teacher identity (Fauziah et al., 2025; L. Wang, 2018; Yildiz

et al., 2016). For education majors, TP typically mediates and nurtures an emerging teacher identity. However, for students outside teacher training programs, such as those in English Literature and Linguistics (ELL), TP may function differently.

In contrast to those from education degree programs who throughout their study experience formative teaching training programs, ELL students draw teaching skills from their learning experiences. This lack of formal training in teaching could nurture solidarity amongst the ELL students during TP. This solidarity could be understood from the concept of community of practice (Wenger, 1998). This concept describes how learning is socially constructed through participation, collaboration, and shared practice. Furthermore, in the context of TP, pre-service teachers often learn not only from mentors and supervisors but also from peers who share the practicum experience. Peer support has been shown to provide both practical assistance and emotional reassurance, helping student teachers to build confidence and resilience (Väättäjä, 2025; Wullschleger et al., 2023). For students with limited pedagogical training, peer collaboration may serve as a substitute for more formal mentorship structures, making the concept of communities of practice particularly relevant for understanding their experiences.

Although extensive, much of the literature on TP focuses on students enrolled in teacher education programs, where the curriculum is explicitly designed to prepare graduates to teach. Within this context, TP functions as a site for consolidating pedagogical knowledge and refining teaching identity (Fauziah et al., 2025; Yan & He, 2021). However, little is known about the experiences of students from English Literature and Linguistics (ELL) programs, whose academic training emphasizes literary analysis and linguistic theory rather than pedagogy. Despite this, ELL graduates frequently enter the teaching profession in contexts such as Indonesia, where they are expected to teach English as a foreign language without the same formal pedagogical training as education majors. Therefore, this study adopts teacher identity theory and communities of practice as its theoretical lens, in order to explore how ELL students navigate TP and negotiate their professional identities through peer learning, collaboration, and situated practice.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the teaching practicum (TP) experiences of English Literature and Linguistics (ELL) students. A case study approach has been used widely to study how TP is experienced across numerous different contexts. Arguably, case study is suitable because it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, challenges, and adaptive strategies in a specific context (Silverman, 2020). Moreover, case study offers a naturalistic approach to understanding a phenomenon as it does not intervene with the phenomenon under studied (Yin, 2017).

Participants and Context

The participants were selected following purposive sampling as they represent a group relevant to the research objectives. Therefore, the participants consist of 36 undergraduate students enrolled in an ELL program at a private university in Indonesia. Unlike education majors, these students had limited formal training in pedagogy. The students were divided into six teaching groups, and each group conducted two TP sessions in two contrasting primary schools. School A was a small suburban school without a designated English teacher, while School B was a larger, more established institution with English teachers on staff. This contrast provided variation in school context, facilities, and student backgrounds.

Data Collection

Data was collected using three instruments:

1. Reflective essays written by students after their TP experience, allowing them to articulate challenges and learning retrospectively.
2. Semi-structured interviews with 15 students (at least two per group), which provided deeper insights into individual and group experiences. Interviews lasted between 6–11 minutes and were conducted within two weeks of TP.
3. Classroom observations, conducted by the researchers during TP sessions, which offered direct evidence of teaching practices, classroom management, and student engagement.

Data gathered was then triangulated to provide holistic and rigorous evidence to understand the participant's TP experiences. Such methodological triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) enhanced the credibility of findings by cross-checking self-reported data with observed behavior.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to identify recurring patterns across participants' reflections, interviews, and observed practices. The thematic analysis in this study follows Kiger and Varpio (2020) recommendation which involves six steps: data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and producing the report. The data gathered from all of the data collection instruments were processed separately up until the theme generation where they are cross-instrumentally examined to define the themes of the study.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. First, data triangulation across sources was used to minimize bias that might arise from relying on a single perspective. The triangulation in this study was done by clarifying the themes mentioned in the teaching reflection journal in the semi-structured interviews. By doing so the participants were given the opportunity to elaborate or clarify some of the ideas they put in their reflection. Thus, improve the clarity of the findings. In addition, peer debriefing was conducted with

colleagues in the English Department to validate coding decisions and theme development thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings. Moreover, thick description of school contexts and teaching experiences was included to allow readers to assess the transferability of findings. Finally, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, with the researchers acknowledging their dual role as observers and interpreters of student experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of reflective essays, interviews, and classroom observations revealed five dominant themes: (1) student engagement and enthusiasm, (2) classroom management, (3) adaptability and flexibility, (4) teaching anxiety, and (5) peer support and teamwork.

Student Engagement and Enthusiasm

One prominent theme is the high level of enthusiasm and engagement displayed by students in both schools. At School A, the students responded enthusiastically to the warm-up games “Hot Seat” and actively participated in the activities such as finding hidden papers with hobbies and matching words to pictures. Similarly, students at School B showed enthusiasm in the “Story Time” warm-up game and demonstrated good attentiveness during the presentation and practice stages of the lesson. T1 said that the students were so happy to participate in the games, “they said that the games were so much fun” (T1, interview). The participants from group 1 and 2 noticed the differences in the student’s behavior in each school. T6 said that “School A students were more active and engage in the lesson than students at School B” (Interview).

Classroom Management

The participants reported that they encountered challenges in managing student behavior during the warm-up game although they effectively regained control using gestural cues. The participants also noticed the differences between the students’ behavior in school A and B. They mentioned that students at B school tend to be more orderly than those in A school. Despite this, the participants still struggled to maintain students’ attention at B school. The participants also mentioned the importance of having clear instructions in order to better manage the class. Some of the participants wrote down their instructions in their lesson plan which they claimed helped them give clear instructions. During the class observation it was observed that most students had to translate all their instruction into Indonesian language to ensure student’s understanding. T12 said, “I translated all my instructions into English otherwise the students did not understand. They have no English.” (Interview)

Adaptability and Flexibility

The participants highlight the importance of being adaptive and flexible during teaching. They encountered situations that required quick decision making, such as modifying instructions and explanations that they gave to the students.

Having no experience in teaching, the participants could not accurately predict the level of English of their students leading them using high-level English or lengthy instructions. The participants claimed that there are differences in their assumptions about their student's ability in English which forced them to alter their language of instructions to ensure the smooth run of the lesson. T11 mentioned that when they wrote their lesson plan, they assumed that the students would be able to understand the word 'pair' or 'partner' which proved to be a wrong assumption as the students did not know what to do during pair work activity.

Another situation which required them to alter their plan is related to the communicative approach that the participants used. They thought that the students would engage in a communicative lesson in contrast to a grammar-focus lesson. However, some participants reported that the students were too shy to participate in role play which forced them to cancel the activity. In the second meeting, the students switched their teaching method to a grammar-based lesson which was better received by the students. T6 claimed that the students seemed to be more relaxed when asked to do grammar exercises than to do role play.

Moreover, the participants also needed to alter their activities due to lack of facility in the classroom. They claimed that School B is better equipped than School A enabling them to be more creative in using the technology in teaching. These differences challenged the participants to be flexible and adaptive to various teaching conditions. Another difference relates to the curriculum and learning materials that the students have in each school.

Anxiety and fear of teaching

The participants in several groups express feelings of anxiety and fear about teaching 'real' students. They were afraid if they had not prepared themselves for the task. The participants reported the feeling of experiencing stomach discomfort and excessive sweating. They said that it was probably because of the hot temperature in the classroom but also because they kept thinking of various scenarios if they failed to teach effectively. Some of them also mentioned that they skipped breakfast and had a deprived sleep the night before the teaching practice.

Moreover, the participants mentioned various emotions while doing the teaching practice. They felt happy, sad, challenged and exhausted. The participants felt so tired after teaching. They said that they were not tired because of presenting the materials but more from trying to manage the students. At the end of the teaching practice, the participants felt relieved because they were nervous about teaching a real class. T9 said, "omg, I am so tired teaching that class. Plus, the students were a bit naughty, they just wanted to play." (Interview)

Peer support and teamwork

The participants recognized the importance of getting support from their group. They mentioned that each individual in the group acknowledges individual contribution to the teaching practice. Furthermore, all participants claimed such

support they received from the other members of the group making them feel more confident when teaching. T2 confessed that he was not well one week prior to the teaching practice and missed the school visit. He said that, "My friends shared the information about the school and students with me, so that I could plan my activity." (Interview).

In addition, T8 said that her teammates were really helpful to cheer her up when she felt that she did a poor job controlling the class. She said, "I think my part was not really good, I mean the students did not listen to my instruction. But, after teaching one of my friends came to me and said that what I did was okay. It uplifted my spirit" (Interview). Some of the participants felt that their team provides the support that they need such as in preparing the materials, the instructions, and helping during the activities.

Discussion

The findings align with existing literature on teaching practicum while also highlighting the distinctive experiences of ELL students, who entered TP with strong linguistic knowledge but limited pedagogical preparation. Each theme can be situated within the proposed ELL TP Experience Framework, which conceptualizes TP as a progression from linguistic competence to pedagogical and adaptive competence.

Student Engagement and Enthusiasm

Consistent with Othman and Kiely (2016) and Reynolds et al (2021) where participants observed that games and interactive activities were effective in sustaining learners' interest, especially with young learners. However, unlike education majors who often enter practicum with strategies for classroom management (Crețu, 2021; Linh et al., 2020), ELL students reported struggling to balance engagement with maintaining order. Their reliance on translation into Indonesian to clarify instructions points to a gap between linguistic knowledge and classroom pedagogy. This finding confirms earlier observations of a theory–practice gap (Vu, 2017; L. Wang, 2018) but adds a new dimension: for ELL students, the gap lies not between theory and practice, but between linguistic expertise and pedagogical competence.

Classroom Management

The challenge to maintain order in the classroom echoes some of the participants in Qiu et al (2021) study where the pre-service teachers struggled to gain control over the class. Consequently, the lesson did not go as effectively as it was planned. The participants however, learned something through this experience about the importance of having a structured lesson and authoritative teacher. This does not mean that the students did not have any space to express themselves or to take the responsibility for their learning. Instead the teacher should establish their authority to enable the students to contribute effectively and equally.

Adaptability and Flexibility

The use of L1 in EFL is inevitable. In fact, L1 can facilitate deep understanding of the meaning of L2 vocabulary (Balıkçı & Seferoğlu, 2023). The participants explained the varying level of English language proficiency among the students at both schools. At School A where the English proficiency was lower, the participants translated most of their instruction to L1 whereas at School B the participants used examples or explanations in English. Classroom observation further affirmed this as most of the participants used Indonesian language in their interactions with the students at both schools. Additionally, the participants from group 2 and 4 claimed that the materials they used are better suited to teach students at School B compared to school A. As a result, the participants can cover more materials when teaching students at school B.

Another adaptation that the participants did was related to the teaching strategies where they switched from using a communicative learning approach to grammar-based instruction. This is similar to Adam and Berkessa (2022) study where the Communicative Language Teaching which focuses on developing student's fluency in speaking was challenged by the learning habits and requirement of the learning context. Qui et al (2021) added that learning and teaching style should take into consideration the government regulations and goals which could hinder the practice of more communicative teaching strategies.

The need to adapt to real-time classroom conditions echoes findings from El-Sawy (2018) and Abdullah & Mirza (2020), who noted that student teachers often adjust lesson plans to learners' needs and available resources. What distinguishes the present study is the basis of such adaptation. Participants' misjudgments—such as assuming students would understand terms like partner or pair work—reflect their background in linguistics rather than pedagogy. This shows that ELL students enter TP with different assumptions about teaching and learning, and their flexibility emerges not from pedagogical training but from trial-and-error improvisation. This extends previous research by showing that adaptability can serve as a bridge between linguistic and pedagogical competence.

Anxiety and fear of teaching

Anxiety has been a common issue in TP such as in Li et al. (2023) where participants reported high levels of anxiety prior to and during TP, often linked to fear of failure and lack of experience. However, while education majors typically frame anxiety as a stage in professional growth, ELL students interpreted it as evidence of being “unqualified” teachers. This distinction highlights a novel contribution: anxiety among ELL students is not merely performance-related but also identity-based, rooted in their disciplinary background. In this sense, anxiety functioned paradoxically as both a barrier to confidence and a motivator for over-preparation, which in turn fostered adaptive competence.

Peer support and teamwork

The literature emphasizes the role of mentors and supervisors in supporting pre-service teachers (Aksoy, 2022; Hyland & Lo, 2006). While mentorship was valued in this study, peer collaboration emerged as the primary

coping mechanism. Participants described teamwork as essential not only for lesson preparation but also for emotional reassurance. This reliance on peers can be interpreted through Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice, where knowledge and confidence are co-constructed. The novelty here is that ELL students, lacking pedagogical training, appear to depend more on peer communities than formal mentorship, suggesting an alternative pathway for developing professional competence.

Theoretical Contribution

The findings of this study indicate that the teaching practicum (TP) for English Literature and Linguistics (ELL) students can be conceptualized as a process of competence-shifting, moving through three overlapping domains: linguistic competence, pedagogical competence, and adaptive competence. This process is illustrated in the ELL TP Experience Framework below.

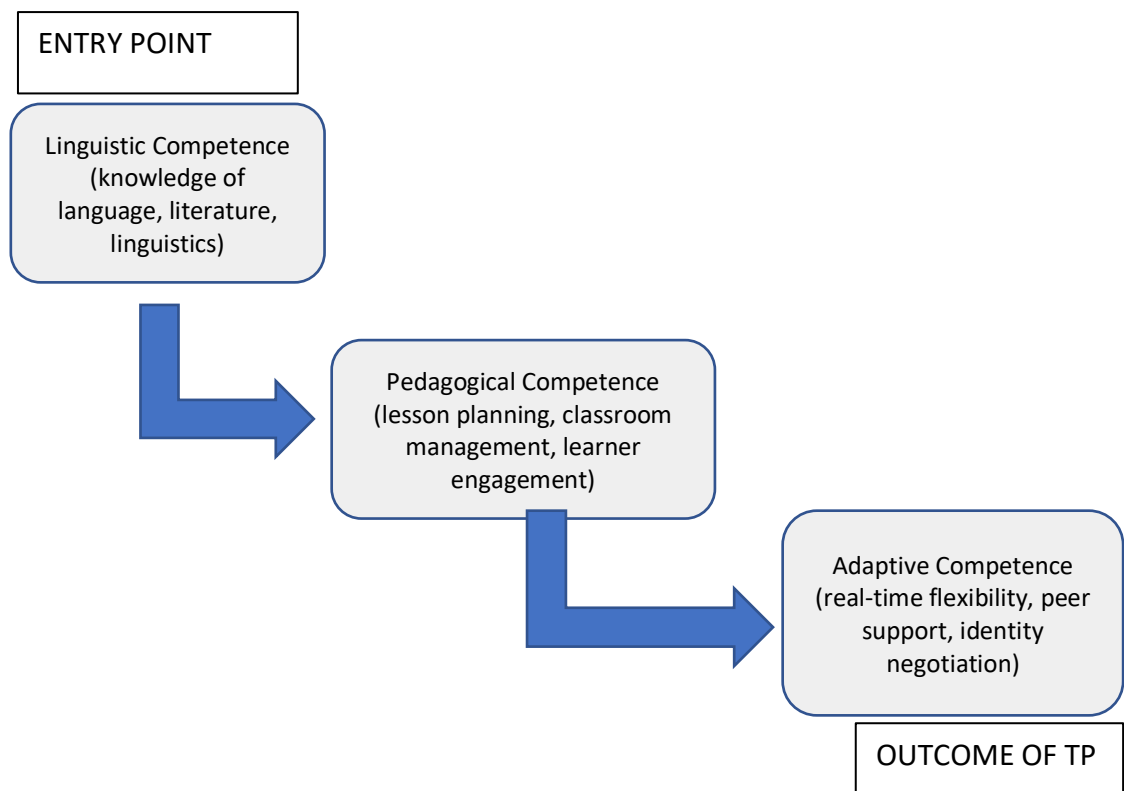


Figure 1. ELL TP Framwork

At the beginning of the TP, ELL students depend solely on their English linguistic competence such as knowledge about English grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and literary analysis. While this expertise provides strong subject knowledge, participants quickly realized that it did not automatically translate into teaching effectiveness. Faced with pedagogical challenges such as in constructing lesson plans, managing classroom, giving instructions and nurturing student's engagement, the participants realized their lack of pedagogical competence. This realization initiates the creative and collaborative process of developing teaching skills. Another important skill that the participants developed is their adaptability

to changes. This skill is crucial in teaching as things can change as the teaching process progresses.

Moreover, this framework adds to the discussion around TP by showing that for ELL students, TP is not the consolidation of pedagogical training but the starting point of teacher identity formation. Secondly, it emphasizes the transition from linguistic to pedagogical competence as neither automatic nor linear; instead, it requires adaptive strategies developed under classroom pressure. Thirdly, it argues for the significance of communities of practice in shaping competence and confidence. The ELL TP Experience Framework offers a novel perspective on how individuals with non-education backgrounds transition into teaching roles. It provides pragmatic recommendations for curriculum reform that ELL programs must deliberately construct coursework and practicum frameworks that facilitate the transition from linguistic proficiency to pedagogical and adaptive skills. This framework not only enriches theoretical discussions of teacher identity (Barkhuizen, 2017; Donato, 2017) but also informs curriculum design for ELL programs in Indonesia and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This study explored 36 Indonesian ELL students' TP experiences. The findings show that the participants entered TP with solid knowledge of English language but with very limited teaching skills. Five main themes emerged from the analysis namely student engagement, classroom management, adaptation skill, teaching anxiety, and teamwork.

The participants experienced a push to shift from relying on their linguistic competence to developing pedagogical competence. They developed pedagogical skills through collaborative work as a community of practice.

Learning from this transformational process, this study proposed a new framework in looking at the ELL student's TP experience. The framework highlights how non-teaching students develop relevant skills through overcoming the challenges in TP. The transformation is more than just a problem-solving cycle but deeper than that an identity formation as an English teacher.

Recommendation

This study recommends the following to better prepare ELL students to TP thus maximize the learning experience.

- More teaching related subjects should be included in the ELL program. These subjects should focus on the practical aspects of teaching to enable the students to anticipate various potential problems, to plan for solutions, and to be ready to adapt in real-time teaching time.
- Mentoring should be structured effectively to ensure sufficient and timely support for the students.
- The concept of community of practice should be introduced in TP to nurture and encourage collaboration between the ELL students. It is through this collaboration do they develop professional awareness of the teaching profession.

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