

‘I ALMOST CRIED’: PRE-SERVICE TEACHER’S EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES DURING A TEACHING PRACTICUM

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Abstract: Emotions are closely related to teaching and learning activities, especially for pre-service teachers as beginners in the field of teaching. In the classroom, there is not only an exchange of knowledge but also effective aspects of teaching and learning that might be challenging for pre-service teachers as they are mostly unfamiliar with the real classroom situation. Thus, this study aimed to explore and investigate one of the authors’ as a pre-service teacher’s emotional experiences during a teaching practicum program, chosen through a purposeful sampling technique. The selected participant met the requirements for the study: an EFL pre-service teacher assigned to a teaching practicum program, capable and willing to write diary entries for data collection. To record the emotional experiences, the participant wrote diary entries during practicum. The data collection will be analyzed using categorical content analysis before writing the findings in narrative form. The findings explicate that pre-service teacher experienced both negative and positive emotions as a result of their interaction related to academic activities and their environment. Both emotions were found to affect pre-service teacher’s strategy, motivation, creativity, goals, students’ learning outcomes, and the whole teaching practicum experience.

Keywords: EFL Pre-Service Teacher, Emotional Experience, Teaching Practicum

INTRODUCTION

Emotions have been recognized as the fundamental aspect of human experience that shapes our motivations, behaviors, and perceptions. Emotion in teaching practice had gained more attention from the scholars in the 1990s. Teaching is an emotional profession (Schutz, 2014) because the interaction between students and teachers also focuses on rational activities such as teaching and learning English and exchanging affective experiences throughout teaching and learning activities (Richards, 2022). In the EFL pre-service teacher context, experiencing teaching a foreign language can be very emotionally challenging, especially when the students lack interest in acquiring the language (Anttila et al., 2016; Richards, 2022; Sedana et al., 2023; Kelchtermans & Deketelaere, 2016).

In addition, during teaching practicum, pre-service teachers are new to real-classroom settings, and they get real teaching experience by interacting with students, other teachers, and things related to teaching (Ji et al., 2022; Kelchtermans & Deketelaere, 2016). Since they are new to teaching, pre-service teachers are obligated to engage in a series of teacher training processes to guarantee they are well-prepared to deliver effective instruction as they are required to acquire teaching skills such as classroom management, assessment, teaching methodologies relating to their subject matter (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Goff-Kfourri, 2013). According to Ji et al., (2022), teachers’ emotions influence their behaviors and affect the quality of the lesson and students’ learning outcomes. To understand this concept, we must understand how emotion works and affects one’s experiences. Emotions are spontaneous responses that have evolved throughout human life combined with past experiences and stored in our memories that assist us in helping

us achieve goals, overcome challenges, and responding to various situations in life (Ekman, 1999). For emotions to appear, stimuli both from intrapersonal (personalities, beliefs, perspectives, goals, and motives) and interpersonal (cultures and social or surroundings) are needed (Sutton, 2004; Zembylas, 2007). These stimuli cause bodily reactions and physiological responses, which get interpreted through a cognitive process. This process will help us understand the emotions we experience at the moment (Schachter and Singer, 1962). Those factors also lead an individual to experience diverse emotions, even when facing a similar situation at different times of the event (Nogueira, 2014).

For instance, in a scenario where students pay little attention to the lesson, one teacher may feel sadness, thinking it is their failure to manage the classroom. In contrast, other teachers might feel frustrated and angry. As stated by Krisanti (2024), pre-service teachers and their interaction and relationship with their colleagues could cause stress and negatively affect teachers. The concept of how emotions work leads us to understand that emotions could affect teachers' decisions, responses, and reactions in achieving goals, doing tasks, and solving problems (Ekman, 1999; Alhebaishi, 2019; Ji et al., 2022).

Some previous studies on teacher emotions (Kihwele & Chuma, 2010; Anttila et al., 2016; Stavroulia, 2016; Chen, 2017; Alhebaishi, 2019; Ji et al., 2022) divided emotions into positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions include contentment, amusement, relief, satisfaction, and pride. While sadness, fear, anger, and disgust combined with contempt are considered negative emotions (Ekman, 1999; Ekman & Cordaro, 2011). In academic settings, positive emotions arise when pre-service teacher achieve their teaching goals, objectives, and expectations, students engage in class and appreciate them, positive feedback and support from the school mentor and colleagues, and their success in delivering the lesson (Kihwele & Chuma, 2010; Alhebaishi, 2019). Even in online setting, EFL pre-service teachers experienced positive emotional from institutional support (Gu et.al., 2022). On the other hand, negative emotions happen when students misbehave, negative feedback and lack of support from the school mentor and colleagues, the unfamiliarity with administrative duty, and inadequate resources and facilitation to design teaching materials (Alhebaishi, 2019; Ji et al., 2022). A lack of support from the environment from school mentors and heavy workloads in crowded classrooms are challenges for pre-service teachers (Üney & Dikilitaş, 2022). Negative emotions could affect one's performance in doing an activity, for example, anxiety that can provoke insecurity and make one feel like an outsider, which could be considered impostor syndrome (Fitriyah, 2022). This condition causes someone to underestimate his capability compared to others.

Both types of emotion significantly affect the academic lives of both teachers and students because teacher emotions might determine teachers' abilities to improve in conducting lessons effectively, which later affects students' learning outcomes (Alhebaishi, 2019). Positive emotions emerge from satisfaction with attaining teaching goals will enhance teachers' motivation and creativity, while when students do not engage in class, they could trigger negative emotions, such as disappointment, which could bring down teachers confidence (Bloomfield, 2010; Kihwele & Chuma, 2010; Chen, 2017). Furthermore, these should highlight the importance of acknowledging pre-service emotional experiences, especially during teaching practicum, as it plays a crucial role in shaping the teacher's identities and their commitment to continue to be a teacher in the future. Nonetheless, the emotional experiences of pre-service teachers have frequently been looked out for during teacher training (Harris & Sass, 2011). After all, they were

taught to acquire knowledge and teaching skills, so most might not be emotionally prepared (Harris & Sass, 2011; Ji et al., 2022; Richards, 2022).

In addition, some previous studies explored in-service or experienced teacher's emotional experiences (Frenzel et al., 2016; Chen, 2016; Chen, 2017; Chen et al., 2020; Lomi, 2022). Some previous studies along the same line, such as a study by Anttila et al. (2016), explore the same topic but focus on the range of emotions rather than the causes. Kihwele and Chuma (2010) also investigated the emotional experiences, the causes, and the impacts, but there are still not sufficient studies that delved into EFL pre-service teachers. Moreover, most previous studies employed data collection methods such as questionnaires and interviews with a substantial number of participants, so it is difficult to acknowledge the deeper background stimulating these emotions since we have come to understand that the same emotion could have a very different trigger. Moreover, Ekman (1999) pointed out a problem with surveys in collecting data about emotion. He considered surveys could not record accurate emotional experiences because the participants needed to recall their past emotional experiences. Thus, this current study was conducted using the narrative diary as the data collection method to investigate the research question: What are the EFL pre-service teacher's emotional experiences during teaching practicum, the causes, and how do they impact the teaching practicum experience? The present study's findings could help teacher trainers understand the impact of emotional experiences and regulate proper guidelines to help pre-service teachers identify emotional experiences and further regulate their emotions.

METHOD

This present study employed narrative inquiry as the research design that utilized stories as the primary data source to be analyzed (Lieblich et al., 1998). This design examines stories as the way humans experience life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin, 2006). In selecting the participants, we chose the participant criteria, which would answer the research question. The participant was a pre-service teacher with no experience attending the classroom as a teacher. The participant also had the habit of writing diary entries, which made it convenient for us to collect the data. The data was captured in written narrative diary entries by the participant. The diary was also the data collection method used in a previous study by Ji et al., (2022) for a similar purpose to capturing participants' emotions. This data collection method enables us to record participants' emotions and behaviors (Hyers, 2018). In this study, the diary entries were written in English without a precise format to enable the participant to describe the emotional experiences of her preference. The participant was an undergraduate student of the English Department who joined a 45-day program mandated by the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training at the University of Jember as the mandatory practical course. This program is called KKPLP (Kuliah Kerja dan Pengenalan Lapangan Persekolahan), which motivates undergraduate students or pre-service teachers to enhance their teaching knowledge and skills through a teaching practicum in assigned schools as well as to do community service around the location of the assigned schools during the program. Moreover, it is necessary to know that the participant did not attend classes every day, so the data collection was only related to teaching practicum and academic activities such as the placement process, lesson preparation, classroom activity as well as the interaction with the school mentor, other teachers, colleagues, and students.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the assigned participant was an EFL pre-service teacher at a high school in a rural area of Jember where most students have less to no interest in learning English. The selected school became the research site because the research participant was assigned to the school during the teaching practicum. Before joining the program, the participant had participated in a micro-teaching class during teacher training at university to practice teaching English with her classmates as the 'fake' students. Next, the data gathered was analyzed using categorical-content perspective analysis, which separated stories into contents and treated them based on their types (statistical or descriptive) (Lieblich et al., 1998). We chose this analysis method because these categories helped us understand the meaning of the data and answer the research question. In analyzing the data, we read the diary entries thoroughly and highlighted to code them utilizing predetermined codes from Ekman and Cordaro (2011) and Ekman (2016) of basic emotions: happiness (amusement, pride, (amusement, pride, relief, excitement, contentment, satisfaction, relief, and hopefulness), anger, fear, sadness, and disgust combined with contempt. We sorted the coded sections into predetermined categories adapted from Ekman (1999) that classified the basic emotions into positive (happiness) and negative emotions (anger, fear, sadness, disgust combined with contempt). The sorted data collection was examined and reviewed to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the research problem and objective, and lastly, the result was written by retelling and describing the emotional experiences and their causes in a narrative format.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the participant diary entries based on the analytical frameworks, we could delve into the pre-service teacher teaching practicum and divide them into positive and negative emotions. Some excerpts from the participant's diary entries were provided to describe the emotional experiences and justify the findings.

Positive Emotions

In the analysis of the diary entries, we found that the participant experienced positive emotions apprehended as happiness that involves amusement, pride, contentment, satisfaction, excitement, and relief (Ekman, 1999; Ekman & Cordaro, 2011; Ekman, 2016). In some previous studies in a similar vein (Antilla et al., 2016; Alhebaisi, 2019; Chen, 2017; Ji et al., 2022; Kihwele & Chuma, 2010), emotions that have the proclivity to evoke teacher enthusiasm and motivation in an academic context are recognized as positive emotions. Happiness was also noticed as the most recognizable of teachers' positive emotions (Frenzel et al., 2016). In the present study, we added hopefulness as one of the positive emotions to categorize the situation that made the participant feel hopeful.

Today was my second time teaching as an EFL teacher. However, I was not as nervous as yesterday because I had a good experience in the previous meeting. In the last meeting, students were very engaging during the lesson. They actively answered my questions and quizzes. (Diary Entry: 01-08-2023)

I had already prepared everything to display the PPT, including the laptop and projector... Seeing them (the students) excited by the media I used today made me more excited to use more moving pictures and video in my PPT so that they would be more excited. (Diary Entry: 21-08-2023)

Today was my examination for the teaching practicum. It means I would be teaching while evaluated by the examiner. I was nervous yet confident with my preparation until one of the examiners complained about our lesson plans. I made various teaching media using PPT (PowerPoint) because, in the previous meeting, the students were interested when I used it. (Diary Entry: 28-08-2023)

Students active engagement and enthusiasm during the lesson made the pre-service teacher hopeful and excited to do her best in preparing and conducting the class. These positive interactions resulted in boosting pre-service teachers' motivation, confidence, and creativity by trying to create various teaching media using PowerPoint. The students' enthusiasm was reflected in pre-service teacher emotions as humans can mentally comprehend and even reflect other people's emotional states (Bastiaansen et al., 2009). This statement was proven when she wrote, 'I felt that we had a lot of laughs and smiles today. Many students shared their funny experiences at the end of the lesson.' (Diary Entries: 07 August 2023) to describe the feeling of amusement when the students were appropriately friendly towards the pre-service teacher.

Furthermore, positive interactions with students and pre-service teachers' progress in achieving their goals caused happiness (Alhebaishi, 2019; Kihwele & Chuma, 2010). Every teacher has various teaching goals influenced by various factors, such as the work setting or school, the teacher's years of experience, and the implemented curriculum (Camp, 2017; Sa'dullah, 2023). As for pre-service teachers, setting teaching goals could be challenging as they need to adapt to the school setting that might differ from their teacher training period in the university and match their ideas and capabilities with the existing resources (Kihwele & Chuma, 2010). This finding was also captured in this present study as the participant wrote,

It was harder to prepare materials for real-classroom students because I needed to adjust to the student's capability, the school curriculum, my teacher supervisor, and the facilities. (Diary Entries: 19 -07-2023)

I got worried as the school principal told us to apply the newly implemented curriculum. The Emancipated Curriculum was still new for most of us (pre-service teachers), and during my micro-teaching program, we were only taught to apply the 2013 Curriculum. Fortunately, after discussing the problem, we were assigned to teach using the 2013 Curriculum instead (Diary Entries: 17-07-2023).

The participant was anxious about facing an unfamiliar setting by implementing the new curriculum, and she immediately felt relieved when she could teach using a more familiar curriculum. She was also faced with the 'reality' of teaching as the school did not provide the usual resources she had during teacher training. Aside from overcoming anxiety, the participant reported experiencing relief and contentment when she could solve unexpected problems as she wrote,

I had already prepared everything to display the PPT, including the laptop and projector. But then there were some errors with the screen projector, and the school mentor didn't get me any help to ask the school facilitator. I was running here and there, searching for help by myself. I tried my best to deliver the lesson

and make sure that my plan was going well. As expected, the students were excited about seeing the learning materials I had prepared. It was pretty fun, but we could have had more fun if the error had been solved efficiently. (Diary Entries: 21-08-2023)

The excerpt above shows that the unexpected problem made her anxious, yet she was also content that she could learn to overcome the hurdles and still managed to conduct a satisfying lesson and achieve her goals. She also stated, "I would like to improve my students' behavior and their achievements in the classroom." (Diary Entries: 29 July 2023). It displayed that one of the participant's goals was to improve students' academic achievement. While teacher's motivation could foster students' performance (Nahid et al., 2023), students' improvement in the subject matter also brings out pride and satisfaction for pre-service teachers, which also boosts their self-esteem in becoming a teacher (Kihwele & Chuma, 2010). In the present study, the participant expressed her pride when the school mentor appreciated her effort. "On the same day, the school mentor complimented me because she found a significant improvement in the student's grades for the recent worksheets and daily exams in English class. This experience made me feel more confident in myself."(Diary Entries: 14 -08-2023).

Negative Emotions

Out of the theory of basic emotions (Ekman, 2016), the participant was found to experience negative emotions like anger, fear, and sadness; disgust combined with contempt was an exception. The participant reported that she experienced anxiety and nervousness, which relates to the emotion of fear at the beginning of the teaching practicum placement process. In this program, she was assigned to a group of other pre-service teachers to give proposals to the host schools and get permission to conduct a teaching practicum there.

Today, I felt so anxious. Everything came in a sudden. I didn't know nor expect that my teaching practicum would be conducted soon. The KKPLP announcement came a few days before the D-day in the middle of our semester break. We had to find a school that would accept our proposal, yet it was not easy because some schools rejected us due to the sudden proposal. I didn't have enough time to prepare lesson plans or any teaching media. (Diary Entries: 14 July 2023)

It displayed that unexpected events triggered fear because she felt unprepared, which made her feel unconfident. Further, the pre-service teacher felt clueless and nervous due to their first time being seen as a teacher, and she wrote, "I still felt awkward and was unsure how to act as a teacher when I walked. Should I have walked with pride and confidence? Or should I have walked with complete politeness as a stranger in the school? I was confused between being a teacher or a student-teacher." (Diary Entries: 29 July 2023). This moment was also reported in some previous studies (Kihwele & Chuma, 2010; Ji et al., 2022) since pre-service teachers might experience confusion about their dual identity of being both a student and a teacher, which might cause anxiety as they want to make a good impression. In conducting the lesson, the pre-service teacher described the confusion of implementing knowledge into practice.

During teaching training in my faculty, we were trained to teach using English as the main language. Of course, I could not apply this method because only a few students could understand beginner and intermediate-level English. In this situation, I was not sure how much I could switch to English during the class. (Diary Entries: 19 July 2023)

The bewilderment in implementing language instruction in practice was also commonly reported among EFL pre-service teachers (Kihwele & Chuma, 2010). It would be challenging for pre-service teachers to adjust their usual styles to the school setting. In the current study, the participant faced a situation where the school principal told her to reduce her expectation of improving students' scores and interest in learning English since the school prioritized developing students' good character, which contradicted her teaching goals. This situation made her feel sad and frustrated due to the goal inconvenience (Alhebaishi, 2019). During the first week of practicum, the participant stated that most of the students seemed shy yet actively engaged in the lesson, but as soon as the students got used to her existence as their English teacher, they started to show some misbehavior such as sleeping also playing and talking with their friends during the lesson. These situations prompted the pre-service teacher to experience negative emotions such as sadness and anger (Kihwele & Chuma, 2010; Lomi, 2022). For example, the participant wrote,

It was hard. I almost cried. I didn't know how to handle students who didn't want to pay attention to the lesson. I wanted everyone to study and listen to my instructions. But they just didn't. They were distant to me. I couldn't manage the classroom. Some are sleeping. Some were playing around. I knew most of them didn't understand the lesson, making me feel helpless. (Diary Entries: 14 August 2023)

They (the students) both fell asleep in the middle of the lesson, and I almost cried out of anxiety, anger, and disappointment on the spot. They fell asleep on purpose because they laughed and smiled about it. The examiner warned me about the two students. I had asked them nicely to pay attention, but they always gave me the same response and fell asleep again. (Diary Entries: 28 August 2023)

From the excerpts above, we can see how the same trigger (students' misbehavior) could bring up two different kinds of emotion in the same and different moments. This experience proved how emotions work and identified in various ways depending on the cognitive process, including intrapersonal and interpersonal factors (Ekman, 1999; Sutton, 2004; Alhebaishi, 2019). Moreover, in the current study, the participant came across a language barrier as most of the students spoke Madurese, which made her feel left out and annoyed when the students purposely joked around in Madurese, so she would not understand what they talked about. The way the students joked around sometimes was inappropriate to the point she did not know how to respond as she had never interacted with 'real' students as a teacher. She wrote,

I felt disrespected by the way they joked around. It was inappropriate. I wanted to be a fun and friendly teacher, but when I tried to be a fun teacher, they took it too far. I was angry and wanted to raise my voice at them, but I did not do anything because I was too speechless at the moment. I did not want to make the wrong decision. I had no clue how to respond because I did not expect students to behave that way. It was not easy to set the boundary between teachers and students. I feel like I failed to be a loved and respected teacher. Am I suitable for this job? (Diary Entries: 16-08-2023)

In this situation, the participant was pressured by the idea that teachers should conceal their real emotions (Mbato, 2024). The participant felt that she failed to be a fun and friendly teacher. Later, she expressed her insecurity when she observed her other colleague, who seemed to be able to establish good relationships with the students, even though sometimes the students still crossed the boundary. It even made her question her future career. This experience is similar to impostor syndrome, where someone compares their achievements and capabilities to others, which makes them lack confidence. This experience tends to be triggered by the combination of perfectionism (Fitriyah, 2022).

This situation also highlights the importance of school mentor's roles in supporting and guiding pre-service teachers. It is not an entirely new or uncommon finding reported that the role of school mentor is very vital in building pre-service teacher's experience in their whole process of becoming a teacher (Bloomfield, 2010) as teaching practicum experience has been reported to be one of the reflections of their capabilities as a teacher in the future (Kelchtermans and Deketelaere, 2016; Ji et al., 2022). In the present study, the pre-service teacher conveyed her frustration when her school mentor did not give much help and emotional support, and she received some administration tasks that were unfamiliar to her instead. She described,

“Today's class was supervised by my school mentor, and I was surprised and anxious because the presence of their English teacher did not make the students well-behaved. My school mentor did not do much about it either.” (Diary Entries: 01-08-2023).

The lack of assistance and support from the school mentor resulted in pre-service teachers' anxiety, doubt, and frustration (Bloomfield, 2010; Kihwele & Chuma, 2010; Maundeni & Kahaka, 2022). To be considered a good mentor, he should be able to provide both professional guidance and emotional support for pre-service teachers. Thus, they will have a chance to develop their identities in teaching (Maphalala, 2013). This point validates the statement that teachers' relationships and interactions with their work setting are one of the roots that can bring up stress and negative emotions for teachers (Krisanti, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Emotions are undeniably part of human lives. In interaction and activity, diverse emotions are involved, including teaching and learning activities. As they set into the real classroom and work setting, they earn new experiences while being seen as a teacher by students. During the teaching practicum, the pre-service teacher went through various experiences that triggered positive and negative emotions. These emotions influenced the pre-service teacher's relationship with her work

environment, problem-solving strategies, creativity, goals, motivation, and student learning outcomes. It was reported that both intrapersonal (teaching goals) and interpersonal factors (interaction with students and the work environment) significantly contributed to building pre-service teacher's emotional experiences during teaching practicum. Moreover, satisfaction and excitement enhanced the pre-service teacher's determination and ignited her enthusiasm and confidence in preparing and conducting further lessons. On the other hand, negative emotions prompted by the lack of help and support might inflict the teacher's motivation to participate in a similar situation.

These pieces of evidence emphasize how crucial it is for teacher trainers and school mentors to understand how emotional experiences are meaningful for pre-service teachers. Yet, the findings reported that the participant experienced negative emotions during the placement. Thus, teacher trainers in the institutions are recommended to prepare a proper regulation beforehand, especially by selecting experienced teachers to be the school mentors and guide the pre-service teacher in overcoming challenges during teaching practicum. This study was limited to exploring an EFL pre-service teacher's emotional experiences for 45 days in a teaching practicum program (KKPLP). In this program, the participant did not focus on the academic activity due to the community service. Therefore, we suggest future researchers investigate more participants and explore EFL pre-service teachers' emotional experiences in different settings where they are focused on academic activities for a longer period to gain various emotional experiences among them by using the narrative diary as the data collection method.

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