



Exploring Online Teaching Strategies and Implications

A Narrative Study Of Pre-Service Efl Teachers During Teaching Practicum

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Abstract. *This study explored the instructional strategies employed by pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers during their online teaching practicum and examined their implications for student learning and teacher development. Adopting a narrative qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field notes involving four pre-service EFL teachers and analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that participants implemented a range of instructional strategies, including discovery learning, expository learning, inquiry learning, contextual teaching and learning (CTL), cooperative learning, brainstorming, and thinking skills-based learning. Strategy selection was influenced by instructional objectives, students' learning needs, and the demands of online teaching. Participants perceived that these strategies promoted students' cognitive engagement, critical thinking, collaboration, participation, and comprehension by encouraging active interaction and connecting learning to authentic contexts. The findings also indicated positive implications for pre-service teachers, including enhanced pedagogical competence, classroom management, instructional organization, reflective practice, and confidence in online teaching. Furthermore, the practicum enabled participants to integrate theoretical knowledge with authentic teaching experience under mentor guidance. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening teacher education programs by integrating diverse pedagogical approaches and digital competencies to prepare future teachers for effective technology-mediated instruction.*

Keywords: Digital Competence; Instructional Strategies; Online Teaching Practicum; Pre-Service EFL Teachers; Teacher Development.

1. BACKGROUND

The rapid digital transformation of education has fundamentally reshaped teaching and learning practices, compelling schools and universities worldwide to shift from conventional face-to-face instruction to online learning. This transition required educational institutions to redesign curricula, adopt digital technologies, and ensure learning continuity in virtual environments (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Consequently, teacher education programs were challenged to prepare prospective teachers for technology-mediated instruction while maintaining the quality of professional preparation. Research has shown that teacher education institutions responded by integrating digital learning platforms, redesigning practicum models, and promoting online pedagogical practices (Bao, 2020; Ferdig et al., 2020). These developments emphasize that effective online teaching requires not only technological competence but also sound pedagogical strategies, meaningful student engagement, and well-designed instructional planning (Hodges et al., 2020).

Teaching practicum remains a fundamental component of teacher education because it enables pre-service teachers to connect theoretical knowledge with authentic classroom practice. Through practicum experiences, they develop pedagogical competence, instructional decision-making, classroom management skills, reflective practice, and professional identity

(Ahonen et al., 2015; Mattsson et al., 2011; Saariaho et al., 2016). However, the transition to online learning substantially transformed practicum experiences, requiring pre-service teachers to teach through digital platforms while managing virtual classrooms, maintaining student engagement, and adapting instructional strategies to technology-mediated environments.

Previous studies have documented that pre-service teachers frequently encounter challenges in managing classroom interaction, sustaining student participation, and selecting effective instructional strategies (Claessens et al., 2016; Allas et al., 2016). These challenges become more pronounced in online settings, where successful instruction depends on pedagogical flexibility, effective integration of digital technologies, and continuous learner interaction (Ní Shé et al., 2019; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Despite increasing research on online teaching and digital competence, limited attention has been given to how pre-service EFL teachers strategically adapt their instructional practices during online teaching practicum, particularly in remote school contexts characterized by limited technological infrastructure and unstable internet access (Ali & Nath, 2023; Lopez-Paez, 2024; Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2024). Addressing this gap, the present study explores the instructional strategies employed by pre-service EFL teachers during online teaching practicum in remote schools and examines how these strategies support student learning and their professional development. By adopting a narrative qualitative approach, this study offers insights into adaptive online pedagogy and informs the design of teacher education programs for diverse technology-mediated learning environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching practicum is a fundamental component of pre-service teacher education because it enables prospective teachers to integrate theoretical knowledge with authentic classroom practice. As the most intensive stage of teacher preparation, the practicum provides supervised teaching experiences in which pre-service teachers apply pedagogical theories, develop instructional skills, and receive guidance from university supervisors and school-based mentors. Graham and Thornley (2000) describe the practicum as a critical bridge between university coursework and classroom realities, allowing prospective teachers to transform theoretical understanding into professional practice. Through these experiences, pre-service teachers develop pedagogical competence, classroom management skills, instructional decision-making, reflective practice, and professional identity, all of which are essential for effective teaching.

The growing complexity of contemporary classrooms has further reinforced the importance of teaching practicum in preparing competent teachers. Consequently, many teacher education programs have strengthened practicum experiences by extending field placements and increasing opportunities for authentic teaching (Brush & Saye, 2009). Beyond implementing instructional theories, practicum enables pre-service teachers to experiment with diverse teaching strategies, evaluate instructional effectiveness, and critically reflect on their professional growth (Yan & He, 2010). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that practicum enhances professional readiness, employability, and confidence while facilitating the transfer of theoretical knowledge into classroom practice (Ingersoll, 2004; Goh & Matthews, 2011). These benefits are further strengthened through collaborative partnerships among universities, schools, mentor teachers, and supervisors, which provide coherent mentoring, continuous feedback, and sustained professional support (Graham & Thornley, 2000; Loughran, 2007).

Despite its benefits, teaching practicum also presents significant challenges. Pre-service teachers frequently encounter demanding workloads involving lesson planning, classroom instruction, assessment, and administrative responsibilities, often limiting opportunities for reflection (Mtika, 2011). These challenges have become more pronounced with the expansion of technology-mediated education, where practicum increasingly includes virtual teaching experiences requiring competence in digital pedagogy, online classroom management, and technology integration (Goodson et al., 2019). Such contexts demand adaptability alongside pedagogical expertise.

The effectiveness of teaching practicum is strongly influenced by mentoring quality and institutional support. University supervisors and mentor teachers play a vital role in facilitating professional learning through instructional coaching, constructive feedback, and collaborative reflection rather than solely evaluating performance (Burns et al., 2016; Picus et al., 2012). This perspective aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning through scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development, and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which highlights observation, modelling, and reflective practice as key mechanisms of professional learning. Accordingly, recent teacher education standards emphasize that high-quality practicum depends not only on authentic field experiences but also on meaningful mentoring, reflective practice, and well-designed university-school partnerships that effectively connect theory with practice (CAEP, 2020; Beaten & Simons, 2016; Cretu, 2017).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative narrative design to explore pre-service EFL teachers' experiences of implementing online instructional strategies during their teaching practicum. A narrative approach was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, pedagogical practices, and preparedness to teach in technology-mediated classrooms during a period of educational disruption (Creswell, 2012). The participants were four seventh-semester undergraduate students enrolled in an English Education program at a private university in Banjarmasin, Indonesia. All participants were female, approximately 21 years old, and undertaking their teaching practicum in secondary schools. To ensure confidentiality, they were assigned the pseudonyms Siti, Rina, Wati, and Yeni. Participants were recruited voluntarily, and informed consent was obtained before data collection.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field notes. Interviews, conducted face-to-face or via Zoom or Google Meet, lasted 30–40 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' permission. They were subsequently transcribed verbatim, translated from Indonesian or Banjarese into English, and cross-checked against field notes to enhance accuracy. Data were analyzed thematically through iterative reading, coding, categorization, and theme development (Greenfield et al., 2007; Mukminin, 2012). To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted, allowing participants to verify the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations (Bell, 2009; Yin, 2009).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Strategies Perceived as Valuable by the EFL Pre-Service Teachers

The transition to online learning required pre-service EFL teachers to adapt their instructional practices to technology-mediated environments. During their teaching practicum, participants employed various pedagogical strategies based on instructional objectives and students' learning needs. Siti, for example, implemented discovery learning through Zoom by guiding students to explore descriptive texts using questioning and discussion rather than direct explanation. She believed this strategy enhanced students' engagement, critical thinking, participation, motivation, and overall understanding.

During my online teaching, I adopted the discovery learning strategy to teach English in my placement school. I used this strategy to encourage students to identify and describe the characteristics of texts, objects, and places, and to discover the key ideas in descriptive texts through pair work and discussion. As a result, most students became cognitively, behaviorally,

and affectively engaged because the strategy matched the learning materials I was teaching (Siti, Zoom interview).

Siti further explained that the discovery learning strategy not only enhanced students' understanding of the learning materials but also made online instruction more meaningful and manageable for her as a pre-service teacher. Although implementing the strategy required careful planning and facilitation, she considered it highly effective because it promoted active learning and sustained student engagement despite the constraints of remote instruction (Slavin, 2000).

In contrast, Rina adopted a combination of expository and inquiry learning during her Zoom-based teaching practicum. She initially employed an expository approach to present new learning materials in a clear, systematic, and structured manner, ensuring that students acquired the essential concepts before engaging in further activities. Subsequently, she implemented inquiry learning through question-and-answer sessions to assess students' understanding and encourage critical thinking. When students were reluctant to ask questions, Rina initiated the discussion herself by posing reflective questions, enabling students to analyze the lesson, clarify misconceptions, and actively construct their understanding through guided interaction. Amel told that:

"During my Zoom lessons, I usually explained the material before conducting a question-and-answer session. If students were reluctant to ask questions, I initiated the discussion to assess their understanding. Later, I realized that this combination of structured explanation and guided questioning reflected the integration of expository and inquiry learning" (Rina, WhatsApp Voice Note).

Rina further explained that integrating expository and inquiry learning created a systematic and well-structured instructional process in the online classroom. She perceived that the expository strategy enabled her to present learning materials clearly and efficiently, ensuring that students acquired the essential concepts before engaging in deeper learning activities (Derry, 2013). The subsequent inquiry-based questioning sessions allowed her to assess students' understanding, identify misconceptions, and provide further clarification when necessary. According to Rina, the combination of these strategies effectively balanced teacher guidance with opportunities for student participation, resulting in a more organized and interactive online learning experience. Moreover, the strategies enabled her to monitor students' progress continuously and evaluate whether the intended learning objectives had been achieved.

Similarly, Wati employed inquiry learning to encourage students to think critically and demonstrate their understanding through guided questioning. However, she complemented this approach with contextual teaching and learning (CTL) and cooperative learning to enhance students' engagement and comprehension. Wati explained that CTL enabled her to connect English learning materials with students' daily lives, making abstract concepts more meaningful and easier to understand. For example, when teaching expressions related to daily activities, she encouraged students to discuss familiar experiences, such as making plans, completing homework, or spending time with friends. She believed that relating learning to authentic contexts reduced students' confusion and increased their participation during online lessons. In addition, Wati implemented cooperative learning by organizing students into small groups to complete collaborative tasks. This strategy encouraged students to exchange ideas, solve problems collectively, and develop a sense of shared responsibility while allowing her to observe their communication skills, participation, and teamwork. Overall, Wati regarded the integration of CTL, inquiry learning, and cooperative learning as highly valuable for creating meaningful, interactive, and student-centered online English instruction. She explained:

"I combined Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), inquiry learning, and cooperative learning in my online classes. CTL connected lessons to students' daily lives, inquiry learning encouraged critical thinking through questioning, and cooperative learning promoted collaboration, making assignments more manageable while helping me observe students' participation and shared responsibility" (Wati, WhatsApp Voice).

Thus, Wati perceived that integrating CTL, inquiry learning, and cooperative learning created a more engaging and meaningful online learning environment. She explained that CTL enhanced students' understanding by connecting English learning materials with authentic situations from their daily lives, making abstract concepts more relevant and easier to comprehend. Inquiry learning complemented this approach by encouraging students to think critically through guided questioning, while cooperative learning promoted collaboration, shared responsibility, and active participation in completing group tasks. As stated by Wu and Yen (2011), these strategies encouraged students to become active participants in the learning process and enabled Wati to achieve her instructional objectives more effectively during the online teaching practicum.

Another participant, Yeni, identified brainstorming as a valuable strategy for initiating online lessons because it activated students' prior knowledge, encouraged idea sharing, and increased participation and confidence. She complemented this approach with *Strategi Pembelajaran Peningkatan Kemampuan Berpikir (SPPKB)* to develop higher-order thinking

skills by engaging students in analyzing information, justifying responses, and solving problems using factual evidence and personal experiences, thereby promoting active knowledge construction during online learning. As Yeni reported:

"I began each lesson with brainstorming to encourage students to share their ideas and experiences, creating an engaging learning atmosphere. During the main activities, I implemented the Thinking Skills-Based Learning Strategy (SPPKB), which encouraged students to analyze information, solve problems, and develop critical thinking using factual evidence and personal experiences" (*Yeni, Zoom interview*).

Yeni further explained that brainstorming was particularly effective in online learning because it increased classroom interaction and encouraged students to express their ideas more confidently. Combined with *Strategi Pembelajaran Peningkatan Kemampuan Berpikir (SPPKB)*, the strategy promoted critical thinking, constructive feedback, and confidence in articulating opinions.

Implications of the Teaching Strategies for Online Teaching Practicum

The instructional strategies employed by the pre-service EFL teachers during their online teaching practicum had positive implications for student learning. Siti, for example, explained that implementing discovery learning enabled students to develop the ability to identify, investigate, and independently discover information from the learning materials, thereby fostering more active and meaningful engagement in the online classroom. As she stated:

"I used the discovery learning strategy to train the students to identify, investigate, and find information about the learning material being taught" (Siti, via Zoom).

Rina explained that integrating expository and inquiry learning enabled students to understand the learning materials more effectively through systematic instruction and guided questioning. The expository approach provided clear explanations, while the inquiry sessions allowed her to assess students' comprehension, clarify misconceptions, and reinforce learning through interactive discussion (Al-Thani & Ahmad, 2025). As she stated:

"By combining expository and inquiry learning, students understood the material more easily because it was presented systematically. The question-and-answer session also enabled me to identify misunderstandings and re-explain concepts that students had not fully understood" (Rina, WhatsApp Voice Note).

Similarly, Wati explained that integrating CTL, inquiry learning, and cooperative learning produced complementary benefits. These strategies enhanced students' understanding of the learning materials, promoted critical and analytical thinking, and fostered collaboration and shared responsibility during group activities. As she told:

"The three strategies that I used in online classes were contextual teaching and learning (CTL), inquiry learning, and cooperative learning, each of which has a different purpose that could make students not only understand the material easily but also could make students able to think critically and analytically and foster a sense of shared responsibility in group matters" (Wati, via WhatsApp Voice Note).

Lastly, Yeni reflected on the implications of implementing brainstorming and *SPPKB* during her online teaching practicum. She explained that these strategies encouraged students to become active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. Brainstorming enabled students to generate ideas, express their prior knowledge, and engage in classroom discussions from the beginning of the lesson. Meanwhile, *SPPKB* encouraged students to connect newly acquired knowledge with authentic experiences, think critically about the learning materials, and apply their understanding to real-life situations (Cheng et al. (2010). Yeni believed that combining these strategies enhanced students' motivation, classroom interaction, and higher-order thinking skills during online learning.

"The brainstorming strategy and the Thinking Skills-Based Learning Strategy (*SPPKB*) emphasized students' active involvement in discovering the learning materials. These strategies also encouraged students to connect what they learned with real-life situations and apply their knowledge in everyday contexts" (Yeni, Zoom interview).

Beyond their influence on student learning, all participants highlighted the positive implications of these instructional strategies for their own professional development during the teaching practicum. They emphasized that implementing diverse pedagogical approaches not only enriched students' learning experiences but also strengthened their pedagogical competence, classroom management skills, and confidence as future English teachers.

Siti explained that applying carefully selected teaching strategies enabled her to organize online lessons more systematically and effectively. She believed that the teaching practicum provided authentic teaching experiences that helped pre-service teachers develop structured instructional practices while improving the quality of student learning. As she told:

"The teaching practicum had a positive impact because it helped us become more strategic and organized teachers. Using appropriate teaching strategies made online instruction easier to manage and more effective" (Siti, Zoom interview).

Similarly, Rina reported that integrating expository and inquiry learning enabled her to regulate the learning process more effectively and monitor students' understanding throughout the lesson. She explained that these strategies helped her determine whether instructional objectives had been achieved while providing opportunities to clarify students' misconceptions through discussion.

"Using these strategies helped me organize the learning process, achieve the lesson objectives, and assess how well students understood the learning materials" (Rina, WhatsApp Voice).

Wati also described the practicum as a valuable opportunity to move beyond simply delivering content. She explained that employing multiple instructional strategies encouraged meaningful interaction with students and enabled her to create a more engaging online learning environment. According to Wati, effective teaching involves not only explaining lessons but also facilitating active participation and collaborative learning.

"The teaching practicum had a positive impact because it encouraged us not only to explain the material but also to interact with students through appropriate teaching strategies" (Wati, WhatsApp Voice).

Likewise, Yeni emphasized that implementing brainstorming and *SPPKB* increased students' motivation, promoted classroom interaction, and stimulated critical thinking. She also noted that the teaching practicum provided valuable professional experience under the guidance of practicum mentors, enabling her to develop greater confidence and practical teaching competence.

"The teaching practicum increased students' motivation and classroom interaction while giving me valuable experience and guidance to become a better teacher" (Yeni, Zoom interview).

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study demonstrates that pre-service EFL teachers adapted effectively to the challenges of online teaching practicum through careful instructional planning, mentor consultation, and the purposeful selection of pedagogical strategies. They employed diverse approaches, including discovery learning, inquiry learning, expository learning, contextual teaching and learning (CTL), cooperative learning, brainstorming, and thinking skills-based learning, to address instructional objectives and students' learning needs. These strategies promoted students' engagement, critical thinking, collaboration, and meaningful participation in online learning. The practicum also fostered participants' professional development by

strengthening their pedagogical competence, instructional planning, classroom management, reflective practice, and confidence in technology-mediated teaching. These findings highlight the need for teacher education programs to better prepare pre-service teachers through systematic training in digital pedagogy, online classroom management, and diverse instructional strategies. Strong collaboration among universities, schools, and mentor teachers is equally essential to provide sustained guidance and reflective support. Future research should include larger samples and multiple data sources to deepen understanding of online teaching practicum.

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