

## Research Article

# EXPLORING EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' MENTORING PROCESS AND THE CHALLENGES IN THEIR PRACTICUM

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## Abstract.

This study examined pre-service teachers' mentoring processes and challenges. The interview protocol was used to collect qualitative data. Five pre-service teachers were investigated. Pre-service teachers experienced different mentoring processes. The five pre-service teachers' mentoring frequency, content, support, and feedback varied. Most pre-service teachers were mentored on a regular basis. Mentoring usually occurs before and after the teaching practice. The content of mentoring covers the pedagogy, teaching materials, and limited technology for teaching. They faced five issues: lack of feedback, mentee exploitation, having compelled to emulate the mentor's style, no guidance, and lack of time for mentoring. The findings indicate the need for a mentoring course or mentoring manual for mentor teachers to provide quality mentoring.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum is an important part of training to become a professional English language teacher. Trent (2013) stated that it is one of the most important and significant phases of teacher education. Teaching practicum provides pre-service teachers (PSTs) with real-world teaching and learning experience. It gives PSTs the opportunity to practice the art of teaching before entering the teaching profession. By carrying out classroom tasks and teaching under the supervision of mentor teachers, pre-service teachers can improve their teaching knowledge and skills while also exploring and reflecting on their values and beliefs. This experience can contribute to their cognitive learning and development (Cheng, Cheng, & Tang, 2010). Barry and King (2002) added that teaching practicum provides the opportunity to apply the principles of teaching and learning that have been studied during coursework in the university. Teaching practicum has played a significant role in enhancing the pedagogical or teaching skills of the PSTs

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(Qazi, Rawat, & Thomas, 2012). It is during teaching practicum that PSTs require a role model who can mentor them to become professional teachers.

Mentor teachers play important roles in guiding the PSTs during teaching practicum. Ellis, Alonzo, and Nguyen (2020) define the term "mentor" came to mean "wise advisor" and was associated with someone who could serve as a role model, provide assistance, or act as a guide, advisor, or counsellor. Furthermore, a mentor was wise and would share knowledge over time with younger or less experienced colleagues. The roles of the mentors in the teaching practicum are to provide some form of guidance, advice, support, and/or feedback to a novice about a task or job in order to assist the novice in reaching some level of competency (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Ellis et al. (2020) claimed that a quality mentor teacher should: collaborate with the university; develop a disposition and professional knowledge in mentoring; establish an effective relationship with the PSTs; facilitate the PST's learning; model effective teaching and make connections between theory and practice; provide direction and support, and; adopt a progressive mindset and support the PSTs to nurture a teacher-identity. Rozelle and Wilson (2012) claimed that mentor teachers impact hugely on PSTs' future careers.

Mentoring is defined as the interaction or relationship between a more knowledgeable person (the mentor teacher) and a novice (the PSTs) in which the primary purpose is the overall growth of the novice toward the desired level of competency (West, 2016). Mentoring has been the interest of research. For example, West (2016) identified a traditional mentoring process where the mentor explains the purpose and sequence of supervision to the PSTs. Before formal observation, the PST plans and discusses a lesson with the supervisor. The supervisor and PSTs meet after the observation to discuss the lesson, decide on changes, and plan their implementation.

On contrary from traditional mentoring, the humanistic processes require the mentor to help PSTs adjust to teaching by reducing conflict between their personal and professional lives (West, 2016). Thus, helping PSTs transition to teach culture by developing a healthy professional identity and self-esteem is more important than teaching content and strategies. The mentor advises PSTs on issues as they gain confidence as teachers. Mentors must listen, assess, and boost PST confidence.

Other researchers such as Bonavidi (2013) emphasizes five aspects in exploring the process of mentoring: frequency of mentoring, time of mentoring, the mentors' support, the content of mentoring, and types of feedback given during mentoring and framework. The frequency of mentoring refers to how often the mentor provides mentoring to the mentees, whereas the time refers to when the mentoring is done. The time of mentoring may happen differently. The content is the topic discussed in the mentoring that may

cover pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, or technological knowledge. The support includes emotional and psychological aspects given to the mentees and the last aspect is feedback which may take the forms of comments, suggestions, and directions. Iqbal and Nuraeni's (2017) study revealed that PSTs experienced different frequencies of mentoring, time, content, support and feedback of mentoring

Previous studies also have revealed that not all mentor teachers are ready for the role of mentoring (Hudson, 2013; Ambrosetti, 2014). Hudson (2013) mentioned that mentor teachers usually are classroom senior teachers assigned by the principal to guide the pre-service teachers. They are not well prepared for mentoring. Many of them have not been trained to become effective mentor teachers. One reason for this situation is that mentoring preparation has not been prioritized in many pre-service teacher education programs. Hudson (2013) recommends that if Higher Education Institutions are to rely on classroom teachers to mentor pre-service teachers, they must provide specific training or preparation courses so that they can meet PSTs' needs and overcoming some of the challenges that PSTs may face when entering the teaching profession.

As a result of this unpreparedness of mentor teachers to function as a role model, PSTs experienced various challenges in the mentoring process during practicum. Iqbal and Nuraeni (2017) identified PSTs were forced to emulate the mentor, were exploited, were given lack of constructive feedback, and were feeling distrust by their mentor teachers. Meanwhile, Mutlu (2014) revealed that mentor teachers seemed to be passive and did not provide feedback and mistreated the mentees. According to Mutlu, this appears to be a result of extra workload they have and unsatisfying financial support. Other studies also recorded that PSTs felt exploited by a mentor to support them with their workload (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). Sathappan and Gurusamy (2019); and Yunus, Hashim, Ishak, and Mahamod (2010) reported that mentor experienced an excessive workload, a breakdown in coordination with the institution supervisor, difficulty guiding PSTs who lack sound pedagogical skills. Other studies have highlighted issues such as tension between mentors and PSTs in their mentoring relationship (Albakri, Abdullah, & Jusoh, 2017) and mentors' lack of knowledge on current teaching strategies and technology (Albakri et al., 2017; Leshem, 2012).

This current study explores the experience of the PSTs of Higher Education Institution in the Indosian context especially in East Java. It focused on their process of mentoring and challenges they faced. Therefore, the research questions addressed in the current study are:

1. How are the mentoring process experienced by the PSTs during the teaching practice in Teaching Assistance Program?

2. What kind of challenges do the PSTs face in mentoring process during Teaching Assistance Program?

This study is important since the actual mentoring process between mentor teachers and their mentees is under-researched, especially the subjects are PSTs who were enrolled in the teaching Assistance Program. The Teaching Assistance Program was a program initiated by the Ministry of Education and it is defined as a form of collaborative learning activities carried out by students under the guidance of teachers and supervisors in formal education units. The aims are (1) to provide opportunities for students who have an interest in the field of education to participate in learning and deepening their knowledge by being a teacher assistant at school. (2) Helping to increase the distribution of education quality and relevance primary and secondary education with higher education according to development science and technology (Sobri et al., 2021). The results of the study will benefit the Teacher Education Institutions and the Ministry of Education in preparing an effective mentoring program.

## 2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design to investigate pre-service teachers' mentoring experiences with mentor teachers and the challenges they faced during their teaching practice. Five pre-service teachers from an English Education Study Program at a state university in Malang who enrolled in the Teaching Assistance Program in 2022 participated in this study. The researchers employed convenience sampling to select the participants. In other words, the researchers used the non-probability sampling method where participants are selected for inclusion in the sample because they are the easiest for the researcher to access and are willing to participate in this study (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The participants had to undergo 14 weeks of practicum in selected secondary schools in Malang as part of the requirements to complete their degree program. The pre-service teachers were assigned mentors who were selected by their respective schools. Table 1 displays the research participants.

TABLE 1: Background Information of the Research Participants.

Research Subjects	Gender	Teaching Context	Length of Practicum
PST 1	Male	State Junior High/ Suburb	March – July 2022
PST 2	Male	State Junior High/City	March – July 2022
PST 3	Female	State Junior High/ City	March – July 2022
PST 4	Female	State Junior High/City	March – July 2022
PST 5	Female	State Junior High/City	March – July 2022

Data for the study was collected using an interview protocol. By using the Interview Protocol, the researchers can gain a deeper insight into specific answers. Researchers often use open-ended questions in qualitative research, as the respondents are able to answer as much as they wish, and are particularly suitable for investigating complex issues, to which simple answers cannot be provided, which fits the objectives of this study. Tavakoli (2012).

The interview questions follow the guidelines recommended by Bonavidi (2013) on the process of Mentoring. It covers 5 aspects: frequency, time, content, support, and feedback. There are 6 questions in the Interview Protocol. The first question related to the background information of the research subjects, the results of which are presented in Table 1. Question 2 finds out the frequency of mentoring. Question 3 asks about the time when they did the mentoring. Question 4 is intended to obtain information concerning the content of the mentoring. Question 5 examines the feeling of support they received from the mentor teachers. Question 6 explored the feedback they received from the mentor teacher; whereas the last question examines the difficulties they face in the mentoring process. The interview protocol was validated by an expert in ELT prior to being used in data collection.

To facilitate a better data collection mechanism, we developed the following interview procedure. First, we asked the participants if they were willing and consenting to participate in the study. We scheduled the interview for their convenience. Second, the one-on-one interview lasted 45-60 minutes in Bahasa Indonesia, and we audio recorded with the interviewee's permission. Third, the interviews concluded with clarifications on any confidential notes. During this section, participants were given time to reconsider their comments if any of them were deemed inappropriate or were not permitted to be published. Fourth, the audio recordings and notes from the interviews were transcribed before moving on to data analysis and coding. The data from the interview were qualitatively analysed to find out the patterns of commonalities in the research subjects' responses.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of what issues are faced by the pre-service teachers during the mentoring practise were discussed based on the five aspects proposed by Bonavidi (2013) on the process of Mentoring. It covers 5 aspects: frequency, time, content, support, and feedback.

### 3.1. Process of Mentoring

TABLE 2: Frequency of Meeting and Being Observed When Doing Practice.

PST1	PST2	PST3	PST4	PST5
We had a regular meeting more less once a week. I was observed three times.	I met my mentor twice a week. My mentor sit in my practice class in the first 3 weeks of my teaching practicum.	I met my mentor once a week. My mentor sit in my class three times.	I only met my mentor five times as long as I did the Teaching Assistance Program. He sat on my class once only for 15 minutes.	I met my Mentor twice a week. I was observed three times.

From the table above, it could be concluded that the pre-service teachers had a different frequency of mentoring process. PST2 and PST5 have the most frequent mentoring session as they had the session twice a week. PST1 and PST3 had a similar frequency that is once a week; meanwhile, PST4 had the least frequency that is only five meetings over the duration of 14 weeks of teaching practice. This is also supported by the comments from PST5 in the interview related to the frequency of mentoring:

*“In my opinion, my interactions with my Mentor Teacher are quite regular. I can see my Mentor Teacher twice a week. I also have his WhatsApp number making it easier for me to communicate. B*

TABLE 3: Time of Mentoring.

PST1	PST2	PST3	PST4	PST5
Mentoring was done before the teaching practice, the Mentor teaching materials and the students that I would teach. The after-teaching mentoring was done after I completed 3 teachings. and evaluated me after the practice teaching.	Before the teaching, my mentor discussed the teaching materials and how to deliver it. The reflection was done two or three days after I did the teaching.	We discussed the teaching materials before we did the teaching and I was observed during the teaching and my mentor noted down the mistakes. The mentoring after the teaching was done after a few days.	At the beginning of the Program, I was given a model Lesson Plan. Mentoring was done before my teaching practice, and it was about mapping the basic competencies. There were no mentoring sessions after the practice teaching.	Before the teaching, we discussed the Lesson Plan, after the teaching my mentor provided feedback and it was given at the same day .

Concerning the time, from the table above, it could be concluded that all participants held the mentoring session before they did the teaching practice. However, there are some differences in the time when they did the post-teaching mentoring. PST 5 held the post-teaching mentoring at the same day as her teaching; while PST 2 and 3 a few

days after they did the teaching, PST 1 conducted the mentoring after he completed 3 lessons and PST 4 did not conduct a post-teaching mentoring session at all. This is supported by PST5 statement in the interview:

*“When I did online classes, mentoring was very minimal. Similarly, when I did offline classes there was no mentoring at all after my teaching”.*

TABLE 4: Content of Mentoring Related to Pedagogy.

PST1	PST2	PST3	PST4	PST5
I discussed mentor how to handle students with disability, students who were frequently absent in the class.	We discussed teaching models, Lesson Plan, how to apply the New Curriculum, how to manage the class and students' characteristics, and other things related to teaching in the class.	We discussed the teaching materials and the method of teaching that I implemented and gave me suggestions to improve my teaching.	We discussed the schedule and the basic competencies and teaching materials for each class that I was going to teach.	We discussed the teaching methods, classroom management, Lesson Plan, student tasks, and assessment.

From table 4, it could be concluded that the focus of the discussion covered the pedagogy and the teaching materials. For example, PST4 concentrated on the schedule of the teaching, while PST1 was concerned with the students' needs and behaviour. The teaching method was a common topic discussed by PST2, PST 3, and PST5 in their mentoring sessions. In addition, PST2 also discussed, Lesson plan, new curriculum, and student characteristics, while PST5 talked about the classroom, management, student tasks, and assessment. PST5 commented that:

*In my opinion, the focus of the Teaching Assistance is Effective Teaching, therefore it is important to discuss lesson plan, syllabus used in the school, and creating tasks to make the students active and how to assess their performance”*

From table 5, it could be concluded that the initiative to use the technologies for teaching originated from the pre-service teachers. For example, PST1 and PST2 used recording player and speaker for teaching songs, as “Songs” is one of the genres that should be taught in junior high school level. PST3 introduced a website for teaching extensive reading and a reading journal as a post reading stories activity, while PST4 used quizzes for tests and PST5 used different media and platforms.

Table 6 displays the respondents' feeling about the support they obtained from their mentor teachers. It can be concluded that four pre-service teachers (PST1, PST2, PST3 and PST5) received continuous support from their mentor teachers for their teaching practice. As PST5 commented:

TABLE 5: Content of Mentoring Related to Technology.

PST1	PST2	PST3	PST4	PST5
The discussion on technology is limited, there is not much technology used in the classroom. It was only once I initiated to use of the technology, when I taught about the song to the seven graders. my mentor received it well.	The discussion concerning the technology for teaching was for listening only. There was a speaker installed in the classroom that I can use to teach songs. I sometimes used Google Forms dan Quizizz for tests and PowerPoint presentations for explanation.	We discussed a reading website that I would use to teach an extensive reading. I assigned students to read stories from this website and to fill in a reading journal.	I used Quizizz, but my mentor preferred to use hard copies for students' assignment or tests.	I discussed on various media and platforms that I would use for my teaching and my mentor would welcome my use of the technology as my mentor would use student textbooks only.

TABLE 6: Support of Mentoring.

PST1	PST2	PST3	PST4	PST5
I feel I was supported throughout my four months practice teaching, although there were some obstacles.	Yes, my mentor supported me. I feel confident in teaching and creating Lesson plans.	My mentor supported me to do the teaching well.	I feel I did not get sufficient support. My mentor should have fulfilled his mentoring role.	My mentor always supported and trusted me in my teaching practice.

*“I am very satisfied with the support because my mentor always provided suggestions and evaluations that made my teaching process better”.* Unlike the rest of the respondents, PST4 feels that her mentor teacher did not provide the support for her teaching practice and was in the opinion that the mentor teacher did not function as a role of a mentor teacher.

TABLE 7: Feedback of Mentoring.

PST1	PST2	PST3	PST4	PST5
My mentor always provided feedback on how to manage the classroom, and handle students' misbehaviour.	My mentor gave me feedback on effective English teaching methods and how to handle troublesome students	My mentor provided feedback on how to speak clearly and loudly to attract students' attention as students like to talk among themselves.	My mentor did not provide any feedback. I was fully given the responsibility to handle my practice class.	My mentor asked me to understand reading texts fully before teaching. Therefore, I can answer students' questions about the texts.



Table 7 displays the respondents' responses to the question related to the feedback that they received during the teaching practicum. The feedback focus varied from one another. For example, the PST1's mentor teacher focused on classroom management and controlling students' behaviour. PST2 received feedback concerning the teaching methods and classroom management. PST3 also received feedback related to improving her voice so that she can manage the classroom. PST4 did not receive any feedback, while PST5 obtained feedback concerning her mastery of texts that she would teach. PST3 says that:

*“My teacher evaluates the way I teach like I have to speak loudly when teaching in front of students, because kids nowadays like to talk a lot with their friends, so I have to get their attention”.*

### 1. Challenges in the Process of Mentoring

TABLE 8: Challenges of Mentoring.

PST1	PST2	PST3	PST4	PST5
The mentoring process was not smooth as my mentor's workload is heavy. He had a lot of assignments apart from teaching duty. I was also assigned to develop the lesson plans for the whole semester as my mentor was not so skilful at developing Lesson Plans.	I have to emulate my mentor's teaching style. I had to restrain myself from doing my own initiative as my mentor is temperamental. I had to ask permission for everything concerning my teaching practice.	My mentor's workload is heavy. It is difficult to get feedback from my mentor.	I was assigned with many teaching hours but I did not get sufficient guidance. There should be clear communication between my mentor and the Teaching Assistance Program Coordinator about the mentor role.	Limited time for mentoring as problems often arose and the time was not permitted to discuss it with my mentor. I should have been given permission to consult the problems outside working hours.

Table 8 shows the challenges that the pre-service teachers experienced during their teaching practicum. The first challenge related to the difficulties to get constructive feedback due to mentor teachers' heavy workload (PST1 and PST3). The second problem related to having difficulties in getting feedback because the mentor teachers had a heavy workload at their schools. PST1 faced mentee exploitation as he had to develop all lesson plans for the whole semester for the mentor teacher. The third problem experienced by PST2 with her mentor teacher's personality, in which he wanted the pre-service teacher to emulate his teaching style and should always ask permission if the pre-service teacher wanted to try different methods. PST2 reports that:

*“Sometimes, we get stuck because we can’t take any initiative without his permission. We have to follow exactly as he said, can’t change anything”.*

The fourth problem was experienced by PST4 where she did not receive any feedback. She reports that:

*“My mentor only came once to my teaching practice class and sat at the back of the class for about 15 minutes and left the class. After that, I was never observed again and was never given constructive feedback on my teaching.”*

The fifth problem was the lack of time for mentoring process as experienced by PST5. She claimed that there were always problems that appeared with the practice teaching process. For example, she reports that:

*“I followed my lecturers who taught English Curriculum Course in my University regarding the Lesson Plan format, so I made a lesson plan in several sheets, containing core competences, basic competences, indicators, teaching and learning procedures, students’ worksheets, assessment sheets, and assessment rubrics. My Mentor teacher said it was not required. He explained that a short lesson plan was enough. He said the thing that makes a good lesson plan is a lesson plan which is clear and concise. That doesn’t mean it has to be too detailed and lengthy”.* Therefore, she feels that she needs more time to discuss the problems which appeared during the mentoring process.

This study investigates the mentoring process and the challenges that PSTs face while mentoring during their teaching practicum. The findings revealed that the PSTs went through various mentoring processes concerning the five elements: frequency, time, content, support, and feedback. In term of frequency, Four PSTs had regular meeting for mentoring, while 1 PST had the least frequent mentoring activity. It can be concluded that not all mentor teachers are fulfilling their roles as an effective mentor. This finding is line with Hudson (2013) and Ambrosetti (2014) that not all mentor teachers are well prepared to be mentor teachers.

Concerning the time, it can be concluded that, PSTs conducted the mentoring before and after the PSTs did the teaching practice. The lesson plan was discussed with the mentor teacher before beginning to teach in the classroom. Following the conclusion of the class, the mentor provided advice and commented on the errors made during the teaching-learning process. The findings support the model of traditional mentoring identified by West (2016), in which he stated that in this traditional supervision the PST plans and discusses a lesson with the supervisor. The supervisor and PSTs meet after the observation to discuss the lesson, decide on changes for the next teaching session.

The content of mentoring discussed between PSTs and mentor teachers during the mentoring process include pedagogical knowledge for examples: writing lesson plans, teaching strategies, classroom management, assessments, implementing the new Curriculum. This study also discovered that PSTs initiated the technology for teaching and welcomed the use of technology for PSTs' practice teaching. The data indicates that many PSTs discussed mainly pedagogical knowledge, but they were no discussion related to clear information on system requirements within the school context. Past studies have shown that mentors need to articulate the school organization, policies, and school curriculum documents to the PSTs in order to help them understand the school culture and plan their lessons effectively (Hudson & Hudson, 2018).

In terms of supports, most of PSTs received emotional supports from their mentor, except one PST who did not have regular basis of meeting. He felt disappointed with her mentor teacher and did not feel supported emotionally. Regarding the feedback it can be concluded that most PSTs obtained feedback based on their weaknesses in the teaching practicum. However, the feedback was limited to one or two aspects of pedagogical knowledge. This may be explained by limited numbers of mentors' observation in the classroom when the PSTs did their teaching practice. According to Ellis et al. (2020), a mentor should provide constructive guidance by sharing teaching experiences and giving clear advice, model effective teaching and make connections between theory and practice; provide direction and support, and; adopt a progressive mindset and support the PSTs to nurture a teacher-identity.

Concerning the difficulties encountered by PSTs, it can be concluded that they complained of the difficulties to get the feedback for their teaching performance, being forced to emulate the mentor teacher's style, being exploited and did not receive guidance at all during the teaching practicum. The finding supports the previous studies. Previous studies also recorded that PSTs felt exploited by a mentor to support them with their workload (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). Sathappan and Gurusamy (2019); Yunus et al., (2010) reported that mentor experienced an excessive workload, a breakdown in coordination with the institution supervisor, difficulty guiding PSTs who lack sound pedagogical skills. Other studies have highlighted issues such as tension between mentors and PSTs in their mentoring relationship (Albakri et al., 2017) and mentors' lack of knowledge on current teaching strategies and technology (Albakri et al., 2017; Leshem, 2012).

## 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research has two purposes: 1) to investigate PSTs in mentoring during teaching practicum and 2) to identify the difficulties faced by PSTs during the mentoring process. The findings revealed that the pre-service teachers encountered different processes of mentoring: different frequencies of mentoring, time, content, support, and feedback of mentoring. The other findings showed that the pre-service teachers consulted the lesson plan with the mentor teacher before they were teaching in the classroom. The mentor provided feedback, how to handle the students, how to manage the classroom teaching materials and teaching strategies. In the light of difficulties in the mentoring process, the pre-service teachers faced five aspects 1) being compelled to emulate the mentor, 2) mentee exploitations, 4) lack of constructive feedback, and 5) did not receive guidance at all.

The findings of this study contribute to the preparation of PTs for teaching practicum. The Teacher Training Institution and the Ministry of Education should provide a training for mentor teachers who would mentor students who are going to do Teaching Assistance Program. The training should cover the information related to the role and responsibilities of a mentor, how to conduct mentoring sessions, topics to be discussed and also updated teaching strategies and technology for teaching English.

This study sheds light on teacher-training institution-coordinated school-based mentoring. This study involved pre-service teachers from one teacher training institution who were placed in several secondary schools in Malang, East Java. Thus, the data did not represent all pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences. The study had a few mentors. This study's participants and context limit the findings. Future studies can examine mentors' mentoring practices and conceptualizations. To understand mentoring practice, studies should compare mentors' and pre-service teachers' experiences.

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