

# Emotional Experiences of Pre-Service EFL Teachers in Practicums: Features and Dynamics

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## Abstract

Teachers' emotions lie at the heart of their professional identity, yet how these emotions evolve during the practicum remains underexplored, especially among EFL pre-service teachers who are preparing for a tenure-track teaching career. This qualitative case study followed four Iranian undergraduate EFL pre-service teachers over two semesters of their practicum to explore the features, sources, and trajectories of their emotional experiences. Drawing on focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and field observations, the study identified several emerging themes: (1) positive emotions such as excitement, joy, and fulfilment when applying pedagogical knowledge and building rapport with students; (2) negative emotions including anxiety, frustration, and insecurity arising from students' misbehavior, lack of support from mentors, and perceived low social value of teaching; and (3) ambivalent emotions reflecting the tension between idealism and the realities of the classroom. Over time, participants' optimism gradually gave way to feelings of uncertainty, disappointment, and weakened vocational resilience. The findings highlight that while pre-service teachers with a strong teaching vocation initially display emotional commitment, their resilience can erode without sufficient mentorship and emotional scaffolding. The study underscores the need to foster socio-emotional competence, integrate positive psychology practices, and recalibrate pre-service teachers' idealism to help them sustain motivation and professional well-being throughout their practicum and future careers.

**Keywords:** Emotional experiences, Pre-service EFL teachers, Practicum, Socio-emotional competence, Vocational resilience

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Teachers' emotions are an indispensable part of their career as they can play a significant role in their emotional well-being (Ketabi et al., 2024; Namaziandost et al., 2023) and their professional beliefs, their effectiveness (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) and even their students' achievement and emotional well-being (Chen, 2021; Nguyen, 2018). Since pre-service teachers have the 'dual identities' (Ji et al., 2022) of both students and teachers, they are more prone to various negative and even conflicting emotions which are very likely to play a key role in teacher burnout and their professional identity development (Bloomfield, 2010). However, the educational models of pre-service teacher training have focused on their content knowledge and have ignored their emotional experiences (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Golombek & Doran, 2014; Harris & Sass, 2011).

Although pre-service EFL teachers may gain valuable hands-on experience in the practicum and consequently experience various types of emotions, few pre-service studies (e.g., Mapfomo et al., 2012; Timoštšuk et al., 2012) have focused on the emotions experienced by pre-service teachers in a practicum, which is part of most teacher education programs (Lawson et al., 2015). Also, apart from few longitudinal studies exploring the emotions experienced by pre-service teachers in practicums (Zhu, 2017; Timoštšuk et al., 2012), others are mainly limited to individual distinct events based on quantitative data and have not tracked the emotional trajectories of pre-service teachers in their practicums.

Teaching practicum, which is a compulsory course in many teacher education programs, is seen as an opportunity for preservice teachers to put their knowledge and skills into emotions (Lawson et al, 2015; Yuan & Lee, 2014) and is a compulsory course in a number of teacher education programs. As teaching settings may evoke different emotional experiences which are particular to that educational environment (Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2012), carrying out research in various contexts can uncover the realities about

emotional experiences of preservice teachers in that particular environment. The teaching practicums in Iran with their own socio-economic characteristics can also call for further investigation to avoid future vocational burnout and feelings of insecurity.

Also, previous studies in other contexts have shown that preservice teachers who have a teaching vocation or the prospect of 'calling for teaching', show more vocational resilience in dealing with their negative feelings (Arizmendi Tejada et al., 2016; Méndez López, 2020). However, no studies have ever been carried out on emotional experiences of pre-service teachers with a tenure track teaching vocation. More particularly, the undergraduate program of this university with tenure track teaching vocation includes four consecutive compulsory practicum courses over its last two years of undergraduate program.

To understand the emotional experiences of preservice teachers, it's very important to note that emotions do not happen in a vacuum and are relational to other factors in the environment. Therefore, the interplay between the psychological sources of teachers' emotions and the contextual factors should be considered simultaneously.

Understanding pre-service teachers' emotions requires looking beyond isolated feelings and recognizing that these emotions are closely tied to how individuals interpret the causes of their experiences. In other words, emotions do not emerge in a vacuum; they stem from how teachers make sense of success, failure, and interpersonal interactions in the classroom. To interpret these meaning-making processes, this study draws on Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1980), which explains how people assign causes to their actions and outcomes whether they see them as internal (e.g., effort, ability) or external (e.g., circumstances, other people).

Applying this lens helps illuminate how pre-service teachers explain and evaluate their emotional responses during their practicum. In this study, Attribution Theory guides the exploration of the participants' causal inferences (Méndez López, 2020) about the sources of their emotions, providing a framework to understand how their beliefs and interpretations

shape their evolving emotional experiences.

The present study tries to find answers to these three research questions:

1. What emotions were experienced by the preservice EFL teachers in practicum courses?
2. What were the emotions experienced by the preservice EFL teachers attributed to?
3. What was the trajectory of emotions experienced by the preservice EFL teachers over the practicum courses?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotions play a vital role in shaping teachers' professional identities, motivation, and classroom practices. In the field of second language (L2) education, teachers' emotions have increasingly been recognized as central to their instructional decisions, relationships with students, and long-term professional well-being (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Chen, 2021). Theoretical frameworks such as the emotional ecology model (Cross & Hong, 2012; Ji et al., 2022) and positive psychology (Mercer et al., 2016) view teachers' emotions as dynamic, socially constructed, and context-dependent.

These perspectives highlight how teachers continuously negotiate their feelings in response to multiple ecological systems ranging from classroom interactions to institutional and societal pressures. Likewise, Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1980) offers a complementary lens for understanding how teachers explain the causes of their emotional experiences and how such causal attributions influence their professional attitudes and resilience.

Within this broad conceptual landscape, pre-service teachers, particularly those in L2 contexts experience emotions that are not only intense but also transformative. Previous studies on the emotional experiences of pre-service teachers have shown the range of emotions they encounter, the strategies they employ to regulate them, and the ways these emotions evolve over time. Typically, pre-service teachers begin their practicum with excitement and

enthusiasm (Zhu, 2017), but as the realities of classroom teaching set in, negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, embarrassment, confusion, and even hostility tend to emerge (Mapfumo et al., 2012; Timoštšuk et al., 2016).

As for the dynamics in their emotions over a practicum, various studies have pointed out that emotional experiences fluctuate and are highly context-dependent (Chen, 2017; Zhu, 2017). For instance, Keller et al. (2014) indicated that pre-service teachers experience anxiety at the beginning of their teaching practices, embarrassment after their teaching practices and regret after the practicum. The study reported 39 participants showed both general (trait) levels of exhaustion and momentary (state) emotions including enjoyment, anxiety, and anger, along with emotion regulation (suppression and faking). Keller et al. (2014), using an experience sampling method, found that higher emotional exhaustion was linked to less enjoyment and more anger, and that anger and anxiety predicted greater emotional labor, highlighting how teachers' emotional states in class influence burnout risk.

The study by Martínez Agudo and Azzaro (2018) highlighted a range of conflicting emotions experienced by preservice teachers such as anxiety, self-doubt, excitement, frustration, and satisfaction along with the emotional dilemmas faced by preservice teachers while dealing with issues like classroom management, student behavior, lesson planning, assessment, and teacher-student relationships. Also, their study investigated how emotions shape the professional identity of second language teachers, focusing on both pre-service and in-service educators in France. It highlights that teaching is not just a cognitive task but an emotional journey that deeply influences how teachers grow and relate to their students. The authors emphasize the use of reflective tools like journals, logbooks, and peer discussions to help teachers recognize and understand their emotions. By engaging in this emotional reflection, teachers can strengthen their self-awareness, resilience, and overall professional development.

Teachers' emotions have long been recognized as a cornerstone of effective teaching and professional identity. In the context of L2 education, emotional experiences are deeply intertwined with linguistic, cultural, and

interpersonal dimensions of classroom life (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Chen, 2021). The emotional ecology framework (Cross & Hong, 2012; Ji et al., 2022) views these emotions as dynamic and relational, shaped by micro-level classroom interactions, meso-level institutional contexts, and macro-level sociocultural factors. Likewise, positive psychology emphasizes teachers' emotional resilience and well-being (Mercer et al., 2016), while Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1980) focuses on how teachers interpret the causes of their emotional experiences whether they attribute success or struggle to internal or external factors. Together, these frameworks highlight that emotions are not isolated reactions but rather ongoing meaning-making processes embedded in teachers' professional worlds.

A consistent theme across prior research is that pre-service teachers' emotions fluctuate significantly throughout the practicum. Early enthusiasm and optimism often give way to anxiety, stress, and frustration as classroom realities emerge (Zhu, 2017; Mapfumo et al., 2012; Timoštšuk et al., 2016). Studies have shown that emotional change tends to follow a predictable trajectory initial excitement, followed by disillusionment or "reality shock," and eventually, cautious adaptation (Furlong & Maynard, 2012; Keller et al., 2014). This dynamic emotional pattern underscores the practicum as a critical period of both vulnerability and growth.

Several studies have explored how pre-service teachers regulate their emotions during this demanding transition. For example, Arizmendi Tejada et al. (2016) found that novice EFL teachers use both preventive and responsive regulation strategies to manage negative emotions, while Méndez López (2020) and Nguyen (2018) emphasized reflection, peer interaction, and mentorship as key buffers against emotional exhaustion. Across contexts, building rapport with students and receiving supportive feedback from mentors have consistently been linked to positive affect, motivation, and professional confidence (Nguyen, 2014; Mercer et al., 2016). However, these studies also point to uneven institutional support and the limited inclusion of emotional training in teacher education curricula.

Despite growing attention to teacher emotion, three main gaps remain.

First, most studies have been context-specific, focusing on short-term experiences in Western or East Asian educational settings, leaving a paucity of research in Middle Eastern contexts such as Iran. Second, little is known about how pre-service teachers with a strong teaching vocation and interpret their emotions over time. Finally, while many studies describe emotional experiences, fewer adopt a longitudinal, theory-informed approach that traces how emotional trajectories evolve and how attributions shape these changes. The present study seeks to address these gaps by examining the features, sources, and dynamics of pre-service EFL teachers' emotions over two practicum semesters through the lens of Attribution Theory.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Although previous research has highlighted the complex and fluctuating emotional experiences of pre-service teachers during their practicums, there is still a lack of in-depth, context-sensitive studies in under-researched teacher education environments such as Iran. Much of the existing literature focuses on Western or East Asian contexts, and often emphasizes single-semester or short-term experiences.

This study responds to this gap by examining the emotional experiences of Iranian pre-service EFL teachers across two consecutive practicum courses through a qualitative case study approach. By using focus group discussions, interviews, and field observations, the study aims to capture both the collective and individual emotional trajectories of these student teachers in real time and in their own settings. The study can contribute new insights into how pre-service teachers' emotions develop within institutional settings which are culturally specific and how they shape early professional identity development.

## **METHOD**

A qualitative case study design (Creswell, 2007) was adopted to explore the complex and context-dependent emotional experiences of pre-service EFL

teachers during their practicum. A case study design was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth investigation of a bounded system. In this instance, a specific cohort of pre-service teachers enrolled in an undergraduate teacher education program with a tenure-track vocation. The “case” in this study comprised four pre-service teachers completing two consecutive practicum courses over one academic year at a public teacher training university in Iran.

This design allowed the researcher to capture the participants’ emotional trajectories as they unfolded in real classroom settings and to interpret their experiences within the unique sociocultural and institutional context of the practicum. By focusing on this bounded group, the study offered a holistic understanding of how emotions evolved, interacted with contextual factors, and influenced professional motivation. Through this approach, the study sought to portray the participants’ emotions not as isolated responses but as part of a dynamic system shaped by relationships with students, mentors, and school administrators.

## **Participants**

The participants of the study were selected from a class of Iranian undergraduate students with a tenure-track teaching vocation in an undergraduate TEFL program at Farhangian Teacher Training University in Kurdistan Province, Iran. The undergraduate EFL teacher education program consisted of four consecutive practicum courses over the last two years of their studies. The present study investigates the emotional experiences of the participants over the first two practicum courses held over their third-year of their studies.

The participants of the study were four undergraduate EFL male student teachers. All were in the third year of their undergraduate studies and were undertaking their first two consecutive practicum courses. None of the participants had formal teaching experience prior to the practicum, although two had occasionally assisted peers or family members with English lessons

in informal settings. Their limited classroom exposure made the practicum their first sustained opportunity to apply pedagogical knowledge in real teaching contexts. This lack of prior experience was particularly relevant, as it shaped the intensity and complexity of their emotional responses during classroom interactions.

The researcher held a meeting with his class of 12 male student teachers who were in the third year of their undergraduate program. They had practicum courses (I) and (II) over two subsequent semesters over an academic year from fall 2022 to June 2023. The researcher explained the objectives of his study, the way he intended to collect data and how their anonymity was assured.

The pre-service teachers were assigned to public schools previously designated by the Education Directorate for practicum purposes. The participants attended the assigned classes over 12 weeks in the fall semester and about 10 weeks in the spring semester. The spring semester was shorter due to the New Year's two-week holiday. The student teachers were assigned to three different schools.

The researcher explained the research objectives to the authorities in the assigned schools and elaborated the way data were collected from the classes. Only one junior high school accepted the experiment. There were four student teachers assigned to this school. The student teachers, along with two 'guiding teachers' and the school officials were given the consent forms to sign. The four student teachers were assigned to two different classes in grade one. Their demographic information is illustrated in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Demographic information of the participants

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Major
amyar	Male	20	TEFL
Hema	Male	20	TEFL
Zanyar	Male	21	TEFL
Kavian	Male	21	TEFL

## Data Collection Procedure

To triangulate the findings, the data for this study were collected from audio-recorded focus group discussions; audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with the participants and finally, the researcher's sporadic field observations in their classes.

As Dörnyei (2007) suggests, focus group discussions are 'the collective experience of group brainstorming, that is, participants thinking together, inspiring and challenging each other, and reacting to emerging issues and points' (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). As each semester lasted about 12 weeks, excluding the final term examinations, and the preservice teachers attended the practicum sessions in the second week of each semester and continued for about ten weeks, the focal group discussions started in the second week of the first semester after the first day of the first practicum session. All in all, ten focus-group discussion sessions were held over the first semester and eight sessions were held in the second semester because of the two-week spring holidays in late March and early April.

The instructor encouraged student interactions in small group discussions each week by providing questions on pedagogical challenges faced by the participants and possible solutions. The questions seemed to help the students initiate the discussions and were a motivation for interaction as they were supposed to express their viewpoints on the pedagogical concepts and the use of their own idiosyncratic experiences over the practicum courses. The audio-recorded small group discussions were transcribed for further analysis over the time span of both semesters. The discussions centered on guiding questions designed to actuate reflection on the participants' emotional and pedagogical experiences.

These questions encouraged the participants to share both positive and negative emotions, to react to one another's experiences, and to connect their emotions with classroom events and mentorship experiences. All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim

for thematic analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were also another important source of data collection. As Drever (1995) suggests, a semi-structured interview is a flexible technique appropriate for small-scale research. Since a semi-structured interview can deal with broad and general topics and avoids pre-empting issues, it can be suitable for qualitative case studies where the researcher tries to gain deep insight into issues under research. The first interview with the participants was carried out at the second week of the study. The second and third interviews were held at the end of each semester.

Five audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted and were transcribed. Member checking of the interviews (Carlson, 2010) was carried out and the participants clarified the ambiguities in the verbatim transcriptions of their answers. The first one focused on their prior beliefs and emotions concerning learning and teaching English in their EFL settings and the second and third interviews on how their perceptions and emotions towards teaching or their practicum changed over the course of practicums and the methodology course.

The study was conducted over two consecutive semesters. Each participant took part in a total of five semi-structured interviews: one preliminary interview at the start of the first semester to elicit prior beliefs about teaching and emotional expectations; two mid- or end-of-semester interviews (one at the end of each semester) to explore emotional changes and practicum reflections; and two follow-up interviews spaced six weeks apart after the second semester to capture post-practicum emotional adjustments. Each interview lasted 30–60 minutes and was conducted individually with every participant.

The five-interview structure was chosen to capture both immediate and evolving emotional experiences. The initial interview elicited baseline beliefs and expectations before classroom exposure. The second and third interviews, held at the end of each semester, explored emotional fluctuations, coping strategies, and reflections on practicum experiences. Two additional follow-up interviews (approximately six weeks apart after the second practicum)

allowed for reflection once participants had emotionally and cognitively distanced themselves from the immediate practicum context. This spacing provided a longitudinal perspective and helped ensure the reliability of emotional recall and thematic consistency across time.

To strengthen credibility, the study employed data triangulation (interviews, focus groups, and field observations), member checking, and prolonged engagement with participants over two semesters. Transferability was enhanced through thick description of the research context, participants, and practicum setting. Data from interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) through both inductive and deductive stages:

Stage 1: Familiarization. All audio-recorded data were transcribed verbatim and read multiple times to gain a holistic understanding.

Stage 2: Initial Coding. Open coding was first applied inductively, allowing codes to emerge directly from the participants' language and experiences.

Stage 3: Deductive Refinement. The codes were then re-examined and categorized according to the theoretical framework of Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1980), focusing on causal attributions related to emotions (internal/external, controllable/uncontrollable).

Stage 4: Theme Development. Codes were clustered into higher-order themes that captured emotional patterns and trajectories.

Stage 5: Validation and Triangulation. Themes from interviews were cross-checked with focus group data and field notes to ensure consistency. Member checking was also conducted to confirm interpretive accuracy.

This iterative combination of inductive and deductive analysis provided both openness to participants' voices and theoretical coherence with Attribution Theory. Dependability was supported by maintaining a clear audit trail of data collection, coding decisions, and theme development. Finally, confirmability was ensured through reflexive journaling, where the researcher

recorded personal assumptions and reflections throughout the process to minimize bias. Together, these procedures enhanced the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings, ensuring that the participants' voices and experiences were represented as faithfully as possible.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis was guided by Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1980) as the overarching theoretical framework, which helped interpret how participants explained the causes of their emotional experiences.

Both deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) approaches were combined to ensure depth and flexibility in interpretation. The deductive phase involved organizing the data according to concepts drawn from Attribution Theory, particularly internal and external causal attributions related to success, failure, and emotional reactions. Simultaneously, an inductive approach allowed new and unexpected themes to emerge directly from participants' narratives without forcing them into pre-existing categories.

This dual approach made it possible to connect the lived experiences of the participants to theoretical constructs while remaining open to contextual nuances. Through iterative reading, coding, and constant comparison, the researcher identified themes related to (1) sources of positive and negative emotions, (2) coping and regulation strategies, and (3) the evolving emotional trajectories across the two practicum semesters.

Both deductive and inductive approaches were utilized in this study to increase the depth of analysis. Thematic analysis was based on a constant-comparative method. After audio-recording the interviews and discussions and then transcribing them, a constant comparative method (Jones et al, 2013) was used by the researcher to analyze the obtained data. The themes which emerged from different data sources were constantly codified and compared

using both deductive and inductive approaches.

In this study, the researcher tried to delineate his interpretations from the interpretations of the participants and maintain reflexivity towards the interpretations of the participants so that neutrality could be preserved and the findings would accurately represent the ideas of the participants in the study. This was carried out through constant comparison of the data, in which the interpretations of the participants towards learning and teaching issues, which were reflected in their interactions, were continuously analyzed and new themes emerged.

By the end of the study, about three semi-structured interviews were conducted, six practicum sessions were observed, and ten group discussions were audio-recorded. The content analysis of the data from interviews and group discussions started from the first week of the study. Pseudonyms were given to the participants and the emerging themes were categorized and constantly modified over the weeks of the study.

## **RESULTS**

Pre-service teachers in the study experienced a wide range of emotions during their practicum. These emotions included positive feelings such as joy, excitement, and satisfaction as well as negative emotions like anxiety, frustration, and insecurity, and even ambivalent emotions characterized by uncertainty and mixed feelings.

Before the practicum began, pre-service teachers felt nervous about their own ability to manage a classroom, deliver lessons, and even how to establish relationships with students.

### **Attribution of Positive Feelings:**

The positive emotions experienced by the student teachers could be attributable to several major themes:

- (a) putting their knowledge and skills into practice
- (b) establishing close relationships with students

(c) enhanced feeling of self-efficacy

**(a) Putting their knowledge and skills into practice**

They were excited about the chances to put their own knowledge into pedagogical practices. The participant teachers showed excitement and satisfaction for their first teaching experiences:

*They were very good at answering greeting and it was so fun. Everybody was so excited and happy. And, Of course, I knew how to role play the characters in the conversation and they learned how to change their voices according to the characters.*

*[Zanyar, Focus Group Discussions]*

Also, the practicum, as the participants reported, was a chance for them to get prepared for the challenges of the classroom including behavior management:

*What you have in your mind is very different from the realities in the classroom. This practicum experience is an eye-opening experience. All in all, I am excited about new experiences. I talked to several of the students with misbehavior and tried to convince them not to disturb the class while I was teaching. And guess what... It worked. But I don't know how long it will last...[laughing]*

*[Hema, Focus Group Discussions]*

Encouraging student engagement in class activities was another skill, which was favored by the participants:

*I downloaded color photos of football players and we had a conversation about the color of their clothes. They were very excited about them. They also made me go into the conversations about football matches. I was very excited. I think a teacher should find what his or her students like. Then, you can have their participation.*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

### **(b) Establishing close relationship with students**

The preservice teachers showed excitement when they could establish closer relationships with their students though doing class exercises as expressed by one of the participant teachers,

*I was excited about teaching first grade junior high school students how to greet each other in English. The guiding teacher also helped me to do it. He had a lot of posters for teaching greetings. The students learned so quickly and showed much interest. Most of them knew everything about greeting in English. They had learned them in English classes in private institutes.*

*[Zanyar, Second Interview]*

The participants' positive emotions acted as a form of emotional scaffolding that helped them sustain engagement despite ongoing frustration and classroom challenges. In moments when negative emotions such as anxiety or helplessness began to surface, small instances of joy, humor, or student connection appeared to restore their sense of purpose and control:

*Although they are sometimes uncontrollable, I feel joyful when they try to roleplay the conversations in their own ways. They are so funny!*

*[Hema, Focus Group Discussions]*

Such playful classroom interactions momentarily reduced tension and reminded the pre-service teacher of the rewarding aspects of teaching. Another participant echoed this feeling of renewed motivation:

*"When my students smiled or asked me to repeat an activity, I felt like I was doing something right. It gave me energy for the next session."*

*[Zanyar, Second Interview]*

These instances show how positive emotions, even brief ones, scaffolded the

participants' emotional resilience. They functioned as small but powerful supports that helped teachers reframe difficulties, regain confidence, and maintain professional motivation in the face of ongoing classroom stress. The participants said they took the time to learn about each student's interests, likes, and strengths. They showed interest in their lives and experiences to build up rapport:

*I think it's important to establish trust. When they find out you are a person like the ones they can talk to in the society, they become more interested in listening to you and even change the behavior of their friends when they misbehave. They only should trust you. I sometimes talk to them about different things in the break between classes. They are so fun!*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

### **(c) Enhanced feeling of self-efficacy**

The participants' growing confidence in their ability to manage classes and facilitate learning reflected an emerging sense of teaching self-efficacy, that is, their belief in their capability to organize and execute teaching strategies effectively (Bandura, 1997). This belief became evident when they described moments in which their actions directly led to student engagement or learning success. For instance, one participant noted:

*"I downloaded color photos of football players and we had a conversation about the color of their clothes. They were very excited about them... I think a teacher should find what his or her students like. Then, you can have their participation."*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

This excerpt illustrates the participant's confidence in using personalized materials to motivate learners, an example of instructional efficacy. Similarly, another teacher reported feeling proud and capable after successfully managing class behavior:

*"I talked to several of the students with misbehavior and tried to convince them not to disturb the class while I was teaching. And guess what... It worked."*

*[Hema, Focus Group Discussion]*

Here, the participant's reflection on cause and effect linking his own actions to a successful classroom outcome demonstrates his behavioral management efficacy. Further evidence emerged when a participant described creative problem-solving in grammar instruction:

*"Last time, to make them understand past perfect tense, I told them a story. I liked my creativity myself."*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

Such comments show how moments of successful teaching performance enhanced their self-efficacy through mastery experiences. Together, these instances indicate that self-efficacy developed not as an abstract belief, but through concrete classroom interactions that validated participants' sense of agency and teaching competence.

They reported satisfaction for their improved self-efficacy feelings when they saw themselves controlling their students' learning activities. Their sense of fulfilment was evident in their group-discussions and interviews:

*You can't say which strategies are good or even better here. It depends on your classes and your students. I think you should come up with one. Something which is good for that moment. I like to devise a way. Last time, to make them understand past perfect tense, I told them a story. I liked my creativity myself.*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

The positive feedback and support they received from their mentors, and

guiding teachers could impact the self-efficacy of preservice teachers:

*I think when my mentor observed one of my classes and then complimented on my class management, I was very proud of myself.*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

Using the color photos of football players was a very good idea. Even the guiding teacher liked it very much and talked to his colleagues about my experience. They suggested there should a box in teachers' room to keep such things for future use.

*I think this encouraged me to surf the net for future class activities. For boys you should focus on football players, cars and celebrities they like.*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

### **Attribution of Negative Feelings:**

The second research question explored the sources or causal attributions of these emotional experiences, drawing on the lens of Attribution Theory. The negative emotions experienced by the student teachers could be attributable to several themes:

- (a) Students' misbehaviors and unwillingness
- (b) Insufficient training and skills,
- (c) Lack of professional inclination, and
- (d) negligence of guiding teachers and school administrators

#### **(a) Students' misbehaviors and unwillingness**

Dealing with undisciplined students was a challenging task for the pre-service teachers in their practicums:

*Students with misbehavior was the biggest challenge I had in practicum at first. Frankly speaking, I was numb at first. I didn't know what to do. The class was out of control sometimes. The root cause was obviously lack of interest. Then, I knew I should pay my attention to it.*

*[Hema, Second Interview]*

By understanding the ‘root cause’ of the issue, the participants tried to better address the issue. They all improvised ways to make the students in the practicum more motivated:

*I knew they liked football players. Even. The difficult students in my class showed interest and participated in the activity to some extent.*

*[Kavian, Focus Group Discussions]*

Building relationship with students was another strategy to deal with their misbehavior. It was a policy that worked for them as they commented:

*You have no choice. You either establish better relationship with them or they become against you. But I should say you should define the red lines for them. They should not degrade you I mean.*

*[Hema, Focus Group Discussions]*

### **(b) Insufficient training and skills**

As expressed by the participants, the student teachers showed negative emotions both about their own skills to teach specific topics and managing their classes. They thought teacher training programs didn’t prepare them for facing the realities in educational settings both in semesters of teaching necessary pedagogical techniques to teach certain topics and class management strategies including strategies to maintain order, dealing with misbehavior of students and contingent events which are unexpected.

*To teach indirect speech, I wrote the dialogue on the board and then tried to report it in an indirect way. But I think it was not suitable. I felt very embarrassed when I found that students didn’t get it. I think I need more training.*

*[Ramyar, Second Interview]*

The preservice teachers unanimously admitted that teaching in real settings was very different from what they had previously envisaged before the practicum and they found out they were not equipped with required techniques to teach specific topic or lacked necessary strategies to deal with pedagogical challenges or even behavioral problems of their students.

*I think our courses were not enough. I mean we didn't learn enough from them. Maybe we didn't learn them well or maybe the books or instructors didn't teach what was necessary. All in all, I can easily obviously realize there are a lot of things we should learn. But the problem is we should not learn everything by trial and error. It takes a lot of time and students may lose trust in us.*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

Lack of hands-on experience along with inadequate teacher education programs, limited mentorship and support was among the reasons mentioned by the participants for their insufficient skills and knowledge.

### **(c) Lack of professional inclination**

The lack of commitment towards their profession as a prospective teacher and showing no resilience in their vocation becomes more noticed when the participant teachers express their negative emotions. This lack of motivation to participate in teaching practices and be more resilient in vocational practices resulted from their prospective financial status as a school teacher. However, the participants experienced ambivalent and mixed emotions and were uncertain about their emotions towards teaching:

*I feel I can't tolerate this job for a life. Some of students are uncontrollable. Even, the principal can't control them. I lose my nerves easily. I am not made for this.*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

The participants expressed their lack of inclination and commitment to the profession as they said they chose to major in teaching English because of its vocational prospect to become a tenured teacher:

*I had no choice. I have no interest in teaching at schools. Either I would be unemployed after I finish my undergraduate program or I would be a teacher. Who likes to be a teacher with such a low salary or such bad conditions at schools? It's only better than unemployment.*

*[Ramyar, Second Interview]*

It seemed their vocational resilience and even motivation were at its lowest when the second practicum course ended in June. The misbehavior of students along with the neglecting behavior of school administrators and guiding teachers made them feel discouraged with the educational setting. There was no more sign of positive emotions in the end of second practicum course.

#### **(d) Negligence of guiding teachers and school administrators**

The pre-service teachers in the study expressed intense negative emotions about teaching practices of their guiding teachers when they criticized the circumstances in the assigned schools.

*I think some of the teachers at high schools don't know how to behave toward their students. It's not right to behave students in such a way. I know some students make problems, but they should know how to manage them. If I were them, I would try to show more care and attention.*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

The behavior of their guiding teachers and school administrators was another source of negative emotions for the participants throughout the practicum courses:

*The guiding teacher found us a bench in the last row of the class. Actually,*

*there was no other lace, he forcefully emptied the bench for us. He shouted at two of the boys and they sat next to their friends.*

*[Hema, Second Interview]*

They felt frustrated and even disappointed with the guiding teacher and the school administrators. They felt neglected by the school administrators and even the guiding teachers.

*Everybody is thinking of himself. They just want to gloss over everything. The guiding teacher was absent for two sessions. I had to teach his classes. It was frustrating. The principal didn't care about how I managed the class or even taught the lessons.*

*[Hema, Second Interview]*

The participants developed negative emotions towards the effectiveness of their practices, and passiveness and negligence on part of guiding teachers towards their own classes and the practices of preservice teachers in practicum. They thought the school environment for sustaining motivation for learning and teaching was inappropriate. As one of the participants stated in his second interview:

*It's very absurd to think that one can keep his positive attitude in such an environment. There are no such help and support from teacher or even school officials. Day by day, you get more frustrated and lose hope. I am sure I can be a good teacher but not in these conditions. It's even difficult to control the students. They are not interested. But I always try to be optimistic. Even if I can have few students who learn from me, it is alright.*

*[Zanyar, Second Interview]*

### **Dealing with negative emotions**

The participant teachers had ambivalent emotions towards the students in the practicum courses. On the one hand, they saw them as the products of their

own poverty-stricken community and on the other hand they tried to have a positive emotion towards them and build a relationship. They thought building positive relationships would help students showing interest, listen to them, and show empathy and thought there were several strategies that could be used to manage and improve the behavior of such students as one of the participants with an uneducated and poor family background described:

*I was one of them. I can't blame them. They are from poor families with uneducated parents. They are brought up with peers in the same neighborhood. They don't like studying. They think its waste of time. But they can change. I think you should make them trust you first and then, they will listen to you. First, they should know that you are one of them.*

*[Hema, Second Interview]*

Although pre-service teachers felt frustrated, discouraged, or even helpless when dealing with unmotivated students, two of the participants thought of it as a challenge and an opportunity to find creative ways to engage and inspire the students. The pre-service teachers thought when undisciplined students feel valued and respected, they were more likely to behave appropriately and respond positively to feedback and guidance:

*You have to resist. They try to mock or humiliate. I know they are teenagers. It's very difficult. But I try to control myself and try to make them say something in English. Then I show my approval by clapping my hands. Then I try to make him continue saying something more and then I continue my approval by nodding until they become a little engaged in class activities. I don't lose my hope. You should be stubborn.*

*[Zanyar, Second Interview]*

The reflection on their previous actions and the way reflection instilled taking liability towards their actions and behavior continued throughout the practicum:

*When I went home yesterday, I thought about what happened in my class. I think I am very inexperienced. There are many things I must learn about how to behave and what to say. It's very important. Children are very sensitive. You should know what to do and what to say. I thought to myself I must motivate them instead of shouting at them or telling them off. I was very wrong. Next time, I will show them several interesting conversation videos. I wish I did it before.*

*[Hema, Focus Group Discussions]*

They thought they could try different teaching methods, offer incentives, or provide extra support to help their students overcome their lack of motivation. Their students felt more engaged, motivated, and valued, as observed in the video-recorded practicums. This led to positive emotions such as happiness, excitement, and enthusiasm for learning. It ultimately depended on the individual pre-service teacher's perspective and philosophy of teaching and learning:

*I found my own way to attract their attention. First, I tried to give them some fictional characters. For example, a taxi driver. The student took the role of a local taxi driver and I took the role of a foreign passenger. I set the stage in front of the class. I prepared some easy dialogues and wrote them on small papers. They first read from the papers. After a while, most students took the role of the driver or the waiter and said the phrases by heart, 'how can I help you?' 'Anything else'?*

*[Kavian, Second Interview]*

Pre-service teacher's attitude and approach in regard with the situation played a key role in dealing with unmotivated students. Their positive emotion towards finding a solution to the discouraged students was of great significance. Although the preservice teachers in the study showed excitement and interest in establishing a better relationship with the less

motivated or unmotivated students, the passiveness and lack of motivation on part of their guiding teachers and lack of scaffolding support and mentorship was disappointing for them:

*I was very motivated at first and even tried to cope with the students and lack of educational facilities, but guiding teachers with no motivations to teach and the students with little motivations to learn were very discouraging. There is an environment of disappointment. I think that is because there is no hope for future for them. Who cares about teachers?*

*[Hema, Third Interview]*

This comment reflects not only discouragement but also the absence of mentorship-based scaffolding, no modeling, feedback, or emotional reinforcement from senior teachers to help the participant maintain engagement. Another participant echoed this feeling:

*“Sometimes I had questions in my mind about how to teach something and I found no answer. My mentor is very busy and he can answer my questions after a long delay. I mean there should be someone in practicum schools I can go to when I face a challenge and need to have a quick solution.”*

*[Hema, Second Interview]*

Together, these excerpts demonstrate that the participants perceived a significant lack of instructional scaffolding (in terms of practical guidance) and emotional scaffolding (in terms of reassurance and encouragement). This lack of support contributed to their feelings of disappointment, isolation, and decreased vocational motivation.

### **Change of emotions over time**

The third research question examined how the participants' emotions evolved over time across the two practicum semesters. The data showed a noticeable emotional shift: while participants began the practicum with enthusiasm,

optimism, and creative energy, these positive emotions gradually gave way to disappointment, frustration, and emotional fatigue as challenges accumulated. This transformation reflected a move from idealism to realism, consistent with earlier models of teacher emotional development (Furlong & Maynard, 2012).

The student teachers expressed their passion for teaching in their first interviews before they started attending the schools. However, their emotions were changing constantly over the internship program. At first, they were more inclined towards coping strategies rather than avoiding strategies. They improvised ways to deal with undisciplined and unmotivated students:

*Last week I couldn't get their attention. They were all talking together. Some of them were arguing and even fighting. I played an English song with my cellphone. The class became silent. They liked the voice. They asked me to play it once more. I did. Quickly, I wrote one of the phrases on the board and asked them to listen how the singer said the phrase. They showed much interest. I continued writing some more phrases. It was about love. They started writing the phrases on the overleaf of their book covers. And they started singing the phrases. We sang together. I was excited very much.*

*[Ramyar, Focus Group Discussions]*

However, their inclination towards passiveness and avoiding strategies was on the rise over the practicum courses until the end of the study. They attributed their dampening motivations to inappropriate teaching methods and misbehavior of students during the first practicum course:

*At first, I was very motivated, as I said, now, I am really disappointed by the teaching methods of these so called 'guiding teachers. They have no motivation to teach and even they don't know how to teach.*

*[Hema, Second Interview]*

The low status of the profession in terms of its future income was frequently

mentioned in their group discussions and interviews, which was aggravated over the practicum as the result of their encounter with passive guiding teachers and negligent school administrators:

*When I see these guiding teachers, I see my future. When I come here, I become more disappointed than before. They say they can't make the ends meet. And they have a lot of financial problems.*

*[Hema, Focus Group Discussions]*

Lack of recognition was another source of discouragement for preservice teachers. They felt their efforts were not appreciated and recognized neither by the guiding teachers nor by the school administrators:

*No one cares about what you do. Sometimes the guiding teachers just compliment you or say encouraging things, but all in all, they just expect you to be a listener than a doer. They want you to say nothing and just watch.*

*[Zanyar, Focus Group Discussions]*

Limited opportunity for growth and better economic status in the profession was also seen as another discouraging factor for preservice teachers:

*Progress or job future is not good at all. I have seen many teachers here who have a master's degree in their fields, but they are still disappointed. Their economic situation is still catastrophic and they have no motivation. They have to deal with the same students.*

*[Hema, Third interview]*

## **DISCUSSION**

The teaching experiences of pre-service teachers showed a wide range of emotions including both positive emotions (such as joy, satisfaction, and excitement) and negative emotions (such as anxiety, frustration, self-doubt), which validate the findings of previous studies regarding the complexity and

dynamic nature of these emotions. (Martínez Agudo & Azzaro, 2018; Méndez López, 2020; Nguyen, 2018; Qu & Wang, 2024; Tao et al., 2024). Although the findings concur with the previous studies on preservice teachers' positive and negative emotions, ambivalent emotions of the participants in this study predominated as they engaged more with the realities on the ground. They were uncertain about their positive emotions, which were highly affected by discouraging external factors in their educational settings.

They were uncertain about their positive emotions, largely because these feelings were undermined by external and uncontrollable attributions they made about their teaching environment. Although moments of joy or satisfaction emerged when lessons went well, participants often explained their successes as temporary or dependent on circumstances beyond their control such as students' mood, lack of school resources, or mentors' disinterest. From the perspective of Attribution Theory, this tendency to assign emotional outcomes to unstable and external causes limited the reinforcing power of their positive emotions.

Attribution Theory provides a powerful lens for understanding how pre-service EFL teachers in this study interpreted and responded to their emotional experiences during the practicum. As Weiner (1980) explains, individuals seek to make sense of events by attributing causes to them, and these attributions whether internal or external, stable or unstable, controllable or uncontrollable shape their emotional responses and future motivation. The theory thus offers a meaningful framework for examining why similar classroom events may elicit different emotional outcomes among pre-service teachers.

The findings of the study showed that positive emotions mainly emerged when preservice teachers interacted with students, especially when they saw the outcome of their teaching practices based on the feedback they received from their students. The findings are in line with previous findings (Nguyen, 2014). Also, the results indicated that such interpersonal relationships fostered student teachers' emotional well-being, which concurs with the results from previous studies (Méndez López, 2020; Nguyen, 2018).

However, the findings from the present study showed that such positive emotions arising from their interaction with students gradually faded over the first practicum and negative emotions arising from the policies of administrators in practicum schools. The interactions between students and preservice teachers were limited to few instances of their micro-teachings in practicum classes and preservice teachers were mostly confined to their seating places in the last row of benches in practicum classrooms over the remaining course of practicum.

They experienced conflicting feelings about their future vocation in similar settings and were uncertain about their career choice. Discouraging external factors which were mainly social and financial prevailed. Although the participants in the study were preservice teachers with a vocation, they also experienced negative emotions, which lowered their motivation and self-confidence. This concurs with the findings by Arizmendi Tejada et al. (2016). However, the participants in the study optimistically attributed most of their negative emotions to their lack of teaching skills, classroom management skills and experiences and they tried to maintain their energy and motivation level.

In fact, the positive emotions of pre-service teachers, as Méndez López (2020) also suggest, acted as a scaffolding source for the participants to maintain their level of motivation. However, the strategies taken by the preservice teachers in the study only were employed when they dealt with negative feelings caused by misbehavior of students. Their negative feelings arising from the behavior of school administrators, university policies, or their vocational prospect remained unaddressed.

Having vocational resilience and showing commitment to profession were two prominent features for preservice teachers to maintain their motivation at the beginning of the practicum course. The findings are in line with the study by Gu & Day (2007) on pre-service teachers who had a teaching vocation and showed further resilience while facing negative emotions in their teaching settings and the findings by Arizmendi Tejada et al. (2016) who indicated that teachers with a vocation were more willing to

be optimistic in their behavior towards negative experiences.

However, low status of teaching profession in the society and the reality that it was not seen as highly valued due to its low income on the one hand, lack of support from school administrators, negligence of guiding teachers, limited opportunities for more growth and development in terms of financial and vocational conditions, and lack of recognition were seen as the reasons which dampened the motivation and vocational resilience of preservice teachers over the study.

When participants faced negative experiences, such as student misbehavior or lack of mentorship, their attributions often shifted toward external and uncontrollable causes (e.g., “students here don’t care,” or “the system doesn’t support us”). These externalized explanations corresponded with heightened frustration, disappointment, and reduced vocational motivation. The more they perceived outcomes as beyond their control, the more their enthusiasm diminished over time. This pattern echoes the principle that external and stable attributions are typically linked to helplessness and emotional disengagement, whereas internal and controllable attributions foster persistence and adaptive emotional regulation.

The participants saw their negative experiences and emotions as events or even phases to go through in order to develop professionally. Interestingly, innovative pedagogical solutions devised by the participants to reverse the negative consequences and influences of misbehaviours in the classrooms could be seen as their efforts to ameliorate the situation (Cross and Hong, 2012). The findings are in line with the findings by Zhu (2017) and Bloomfield (2010) which focus on the dynamic and changing nature of complex emotions experienced by pre-service teachers. However, the strategies which were developed by the participants in the study to overcome their negative emotions were more related to their lack of teaching skills and insufficient training. As for the negative emotions related to external factors such as school administrators and educational policies, their negative emotions increased as they were more engaged in teaching practices.

Pre-service teachers often begin their practicum journey with an

elevated sense of optimism and internal locus attributions—seeing student engagement or lesson success as “because of me, I planned it well.” However, when classroom challenges accumulate and contextual supports such as mentorship or resources remain weak, a shift in attribution patterns becomes visible. When setbacks are repeatedly attributed to external, stable factors (for example, “the school doesn’t value teaching” or “students don’t want to learn”), positive emotions lose their reinforcing power and motivation begins to wane (Lai, Shi, & Xie, 2024). This aligns with recent findings that the genesis of teachers’ emotions hinges not only on immediate events but on the interpretive frameworks they apply to these events shifting attributions from internal/controllable to external/uncontrollable marks a turning point in emotional trajectories.

Furthermore, these attributional shifts correspond with a distinct trajectory: from initial enthusiasm and mastery experiences toward ambivalence or emotional fatigue if internal attributions are replaced by external ones. In online language teaching contexts, for example, positive appraisals of classroom events (aligned with internal/controllable attributions) were associated with creative instructional practices and positive affect, whereas negative appraisals (aligned with external/uncontrollable attributions) led to emotional vulnerability and traditional, less dynamic teaching approaches (Xu, Liu, & Xiao, 2024). Taken together, the empirical evidence suggests that fostering internal/controllable attributions early and interrupting the slide toward external/uncontrollable attributions may sustain positive emotional trajectories and reinforce pre-service teachers’ vocational resilience.

Similar to the previous studies on teachers’ emotions based on emotional ecosystem model (Ji, 2022; Cross and Hong, 2012), the source of the participants’ positive emotions was mainly from their own personal beliefs and interactions with students (micro-system) and their negative emotions were from administrators (meso-system) and social and educational policies (macro-system). However, due to particular characteristics of teaching practicum in each environment, the elements of each system might

differ from one setting to another. The sources of negative emotions of the participants in the study, who had a teaching vocation, were mainly influenced by social and economic policies of the country leading to their feeling of less vocational resilience and motivation and then by behaviors and school administrators which resulted in their feeling of disappointment and frustration at the end of their second practicum course.

Viewed through the lens of Attribution Theory, the practicum emerges not merely as a context for skill development but as a critical period in which future teachers form enduring beliefs about agency, control, and responsibility. If pre-service teachers consistently attribute difficulties to unchangeable external factors, their capacity for emotional self-regulation and professional resilience may weaken. Conversely, guided reflection that helps them identify internal, controllable elements within challenging situations can promote a sense of empowerment and sustain positive emotions.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Although emotions are individual experiences, they are mainly social constructions which are mediated by interactions with various educational policies, school colleagues, official authorities, and most importantly students. Despite the various emotions experienced by preservice teachers ranging from positive to negative or even ambivalent ones, the results show that negative emotions predominated over the practicum courses and preservice teachers needed to learn how to handle them more professionally as the reality shock of their first experiences of teaching might lead to their future burnout or severe feelings of career anxiety and insecurity.

Also, preservice teachers' idealism (Furlong & Maynard, 2012) needs to be readjusted by their mentors and even their 'guiding teachers' in real settings. Such adjustment can be facilitated through focus group discussions of preservice teachers and their mentors in their educational centers or even be held in practicum schools and be supervised by university mentors.

As also discussed by Mendez Lopez (2020), the attributions student teachers assign to their emotions can be considered important and mentors should try to modify them as these attributions can have negative repercussions on their teaching practices. This can be done through the same focus group discussions which focus on more reflection and provision of more effective class management strategies and more fruitful teaching skills on the part of university mentors or more experienced teachers invited to take part in focal group discussions.

Pre-service teachers need scaffolding to minimize the unpleasant emotions (Mercer et al., 2016). The ambivalent emotions experienced by teachers can call for scaffolding sources and mentorship support which can focus on their strengths and resilience. Teacher education programs need to reconsider their educational curriculum and include courses on emotion education that can teach preservice teachers how to handle negative feelings and regulate their emotions to achieve more effective teaching. Special attention can also be given to a follow-up in-service program to maintain their positive emotions over the subsequent years of teaching as novice teachers in various educational settings which can exert miscellaneous socio-emotional influences on their practices.

Additionally, socio-emotional competence of preservice teachers should be trained for various teaching contexts as suggested by Mendez Lopez (2020) and Mercer et al., 2016. Apart from the time for teaching content knowledge or even pedagogical content knowledge to students, there should be courses for teaching socio-emotional skills to preservice teachers. By drawing from the framework of positive psychology (Mercer et al., 2016), pre-service teachers' job satisfaction, motivation and even their sense of fulfilment can be enhanced by teacher educators and their negative emotions towards the educational policies and school administrators can be dealt with to some extent.

As a qualitative case study with four participants from a single institution, the findings are context-bound and not intended for broad generalization. The reliance on self-reported emotions and reflective accounts

may have introduced selective recall or self-presentation bias. Additionally, the study covered only two semesters; a longer longitudinal design might reveal deeper shifts in emotional regulation and attributional reasoning over time.

Future research could adopt mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to examine how attributional patterns evolve over multiple stages of teacher development, from pre-service training to early career teaching. Comparative studies across institutional or cultural contexts could provide broader insight into how contextual supports and mentorship practices shape emotional trajectories. Finally, intervention-based research that integrates attributional reflection or mentoring programs into teacher education could further validate the role of Attribution Theory in fostering emotional resilience among novice teachers.

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