

# Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus: EFL Preservice Teachers' Voice on Their Pedagogical Competence

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## ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the current study is to analyze the perspectives held by preservice EFL teachers regarding the level of pedagogical competence they possess. The current study tries to fill the gap of previous studies since there is no study concerned with EFL preservice teachers' pedagogical competence in their study. And may improve teacher preparation programs both directly and indirectly. Thus, a questionnaire based on a Likert scale was utilized in order to obtain the required data. The data were obtained from one of the universities in East Sumatra, a total of 31 preservice teachers in English education programs in the university were given the questionnaire and their responses were collected. The findings of the study revealed favorable opinions regarding the level of pedagogical competence exhibited by participants in the teaching assistantship program. In general, a significant proportion of the findings indicated that they had implemented pedagogical competence during the program. With minor obstacles when implementing it.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Student abilities must be educated to be more responsive to the requirements of the times in order to prepare students for changes in the social, cultural, and work contexts as well as quick developments in technology. Connect and complement not only the business and employment sectors, but also the unpredictable future. This means schools need to develop and execute cutting-edge methods of instruction that help pupils acquire the most useful and applicable skills and information possible (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

Moreover, the era of the 4.0 Industrial Revolution has a primary demand, which is mastery of integrated literacy and numeracy elements. To maximize this expertise, a paradigm in education is required, one of which is the Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus (FLIC). This program is expected able to increase graduates' competency, both soft and hard skills, to be more prepared and relevant to the demands of the times, and to prepare graduates as excellent, moral, and ethical future leaders of the nation (Suhartoyo et al., 2020).

However, multiple studies have demonstrated that university graduates have difficulty obtaining suitable jobs after completing their education (Farah & Ali, 2018). According to National Statistics (BPS), the number of unemployed individuals increased by up to 60 thousand in February 2020 compared to the

previous year. As a result, the overall number of unemployed individuals in Indonesia is 6.88 million. This indicates that out of every 100 Indonesians, five are unemployed. It is commonly known that students only master the theory but lack practice. This condition leads to low employment rates, which has an impact on the Indonesian unemployment rate. In this instance, the government should intervene in specific policies to improve graduate employability (Purwanti, 2021). Nevertheless, many university graduates fail to meet industrial or commercial demands because of a variety of problems, including a lack of skills, experience, and the high demands in the employment area due to a lack of coordination between the institution and the users (Farah & Ali, 2018; Hossain et al., 2018).

Thus, FLIC programs are essential to be discussed since the programs embody the connection and synchronization between the university, the community, and primary and secondary education. Schools play an important role in developing qualified students who are prepared for the workforce as one of the links and match objects in the government program (Basri et al., 2021). In line with this, FLIC offers four programs to do. One of them is the right to study outside of a student's department and university for three semesters. Students are further encouraged to develop their competencies, hard skills, and soft skills required in the global job market as a result of this (Purwanti, 2021). FLIC is made up of eight different types of learning activities that take place outside of the department and university, namely (1) internship, (2) student exchange program, (3) entrepreneurship, (4) teaching assistantship in educational institutions or *Kampus Mengajar*, (5) independent project, (6) village development program, (7) research, and (8) humanitarian program (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). In this case, we only focus on the teaching assistantship, the program that allows college students to teach at various levels of schools, such as elementary school and junior high school. This program offers the opportunity to college students, especially in the context of higher education students, to practice teaching real students in the school.

Moreover, to achieve the goals of the teaching and learning process, it is critical to understand the teachers' pedagogical competency since it will be represented in the curriculum implementation and learning process and appears to be closely related to students' attitudes about learning at school (Adegbola, 2019; Emiliasari, 2018; Firman et al., 2019). Trends in teaching, on the other hand, are expected to represent professional teaching strategies in the classroom. Teachers are expected to modify their teaching strategies to improve students' comprehension. Students tend to obtain appropriate knowledge with teachers' pedagogical competence if they can establish a positive attitude toward learning (Adegbola, 2019). Thus, preservice teachers are required to prepare their competence in the education program in higher institutions where students learn both hard and soft skills so that when they finish their studies they are ready to enter the profession (Purwanti, 2021). Again, the FLIC program of a teaching assistantship is expected to polish their pedagogical competence as future teachers before entering the work field.

Furthermore, several studies have been conducted related to the FLIC programs. For instance, Purwanti (2021) in their article discussed the preparedness for implementing the policy of MBKM in tertiary levels of education, particularly in connection to graduates' employability in the industry. They believe higher education institutions (HEIs) must get ready for a variety of activities for the MBKM policy to be successfully implemented. All publications have found FLIC programs promising and innovative, according to the analysis of Sampelolo and Kombong (2022). Journals study FLIC's conceptual basis, application, problems, and perception. The findings include 8 programs and 4 policies. In this article, 8 programs and 4 policies of Freedom to Learn – Independent Campus address the future of English language teaching and learning (Sampelolo & Kombong, 2022). It has been demonstrated to have favorable effects on pupils, such as raising their motivation in learning and enhancing their reading and numeracy skills. In addition, college students can gain interpersonal and leadership abilities by gaining direct teaching experience (Widiyono & Irfana, 2021).

However, based on the researcher's review of the numerous studies, no study put concern about EFL preservice teachers' pedagogical competence completely in their study. Further, several studies (Ede et al., 2022; Kurniawati & Kristianti, 2022; Mardiyati & Hidayat, 2022; Prastha et al., 2022) have employed research using interviews or open-ended questionnaires with limited participants which results have

provided the depth understanding about teaching assistantship program, but the findings cannot be generalized since only cover a few participants in the study. The rest of the study (Purwanti, 2021; Sampelolo & Kombong, 2022; Widiyono & Irfana, 2021) used systematic literature reviews which have not dealt with the empirical data from the field. Thus, the current study aims to investigate EFL preservice teachers' perceptions toward the implementation of pedagogical competence during teaching assistantship programs by using a survey design to cover more respondents to determine the result of the study.

## 2. METHODS

A survey was used to compile data for this investigation. Surveys are employed to determine people's attitudes, views, opinions, and to report their experiences and behaviours (Leavy, 2017). This study employed a survey methodology by utilising a closed-ended Google Form-based questionnaire. This study was conducted at a university located in East Sumatra. A Likert-scale scoring system was used to give twenty-question questionnaires to thirty-one EFL preservice teachers who were in their fifth to seventh semester while enrolled in the teaching assistantship programme. A total of 31 preservice teachers participated in the study, consisting of 26 females and 5 males. The age range of the participants was between 20 and 21 years old. Most of these students had already been enrolled in the College of Education for a minimum of two years or longer.

The questionnaire comprised a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree). This scale was used to prevent neutral responses. The questionnaire was adapted from Ismail and Jarrah (2019) since the questionnaire relates to the pedagogical competence of preservice teachers. The variable was selected based on its significance in both the literature and teacher training processes. The primary components of pedagogical competence are enabling them to design, arrange, and evaluate classes (structure), inspire and support students as well as manage the classroom (motivation/classroom management), cope with varied learner groups in the classroom (adaptivity), and evaluate students (assessment). (König et al., 2011; Voss et al., 2011).

An online survey created in Google Forms was used for the research. In this case, the WhatsApp messaging service was used to disseminate the link to a large number of students. Before the instrument was utilized, its validity was determined. It was handed to a faculty member at a university to review and make comments and/or ideas to the researcher. Thus, the researcher examined and revised the questionnaire in line with the evaluator's remarks and suggestions.

Some similar statements were merged into one statement such as "Interact with students very well" is included in "Create a good relationship with students" Further some statements that were not clear namely "Use numerous learning and teaching resources" expanded into "Use numerous learning and teaching resources such as textbooks, videos, and audio". Some statements also have been omitted from the questionnaire due to the low relationship with the variable, for instance, "Covering classes for absent or busy teacher" and "Doing other activities such as clerical work". The evaluator of the questionnaire concluded that there is a clear relationship between the questions asked in the survey and the study's objective and research questions.

The data were collected through an online survey, since the questionnaire could be practically implemented by both researchers and respondents, it was distributed online via WhatsApp. This system was thought to be practical and accessible. Many individuals have downloaded and installed it on their mobile devices, therefore it is thought that they are adept users who use it for both synchronous and asynchronous communication. Additionally, many users of this platform have sent messages and files in groups. They probably shared and circulated a lot of information or files to various groups of people in a short period.

Furthermore, the data in this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the Google Form feature provides the absolute number of these statistics automatically. These percentages

summarized the survey-requested questions. After determining the percentage of each question in the survey, the data sets are chosen to be reported as the research findings.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This survey study explored the perceptions of EFL preservice teachers towards the implementation of pedagogical competence during the teaching assistantship program. The purpose of this section is to provide the study's results following the research question. A four-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree) is represented in the table.

**Table 1.** The responses of preservice teachers on designing, arranging, and evaluating class (structure)

Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Prepare concrete lesson plans.	41.9	45.2	9.7	9.7
Collaborate with the teacher.	64.5	32.3	3.2	3.2
Creating and/or selecting materials for each lesson.	67.7	32.3	0	0
Struggling to decide the most appropriate learning outcomes.	38.7	51.6	6.5	6.5
Implementing what I have learned in college.	54.8	41.9	0	0

From a purely structural standpoint, the survey reveals that the vast majority of aspiring educators (45.2%) have already prepared the lesson plan before conducting the teaching and learning process, while the others (9.7%) are on the contrary. In designing that, they collaborated with the teachers in the school they were teaching (64.5%) although a few of them were not (3.2%). Moreover, they all showed a positive view in creating or selecting materials for each lesson (67.7%), but none of them responded on the flipped side. Although several discovered the obstacles in deciding the most appropriate learning outcomes (38.7%) during the program and 6.5% of the preservice teachers believed that they were not struggling to decide it. None of them confessed to disagreeing with implementing what they had learned in college during the teaching assistantship program because 54.8% of the preservice teachers strongly believed that they had implemented it.

**Table 2.** The responses of preservice teachers on inspiring and supporting students as well as managing the classroom (motivation/classroom management)

Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Involve students in the learning process.	80.6	19.4	0	0
Create an engaging learning environment.	54.8	41.9	3.2	3.2
Set classroom rules.	38.7	54.8	6.5	6.5
Manage the use of a whiteboard.	51.6	38.7	9.7	9.7
Use diverse questioning techniques.	41.9	51.6	6.5	6.5

Regarding the second issue, motivation and classroom management, 80.6% of respondents expressed support for incorporating students in the learning process. According to the results, no respondents disagreed with this statement. The preservice teachers then told that they have created an engaging learning environment for students (54.8%) only a few of them said on the other hand (3.2%). Also, they (38.7%) claimed to have set classroom rules, although several of them (6.5%) are on the contrastive side. When it comes to managing the use of a whiteboard, (51.6%) answered strongly agree with this statement, representing that most of them used a whiteboard during the teaching assistantship program. However, 9.7% of preservice teachers did not on the same side about this issue. 41.9% of preservice teachers have implemented diverse techniques in asking the questions to students, despite 6.5% of them did not implement it. On maximizing the direction to the students, they all agreed with 67.7% expressing their strong belief about this, thus there was no debate related to this statement among the EFL preservice teachers. Despite the fact, they are English preservice teachers, in the teaching

assistantship program, they taught a variety of subjects (41.9%) even though not all of them did it (6.5%). Furthermore, as responded by 64.5% of preservice teachers, they admitted having organized classroom activities during the program, which is not found responds contrastive with this statement. Further, since the objective of classroom management is to maximize teaching time, they have already employed it. The responses are represented by 64.5% who strongly agreed and none who disagreed.

**Table 3.** The responses of preservice teachers on coping with varied learner groups in the classroom (adaptivity)

Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Use numerous learning and teaching resources such as textbooks, videos, and audio.	58.1	35.5	6.5	6.5
Employ a variety of teaching strategies.	48.4	48.4	3.2	3.2
Create a good relationship with students.	74.2	25.8	0	0

To deal with the diverse students in the classroom, the preservice teachers (58.1%) employed numerous learning and teaching resources such as textbooks, video, and audio, except for 6.5% of students who disagreed. A variety of teaching strategies is also employed during the teaching assistantship program, based on the responses of 48.4% of preservice teachers in this study, even though 3.2% of them stated differently. Moreover, it was found that 74.2% of them claimed that have established a good relationship with students, and there were no preservice teachers against this statement.

**Table 4.** the responses of preservice teachers on evaluating students (assessment)

Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Create activities and/or exercises to check students' comprehension.	54.8	45.2	0	0
Provide students with feedback.	67.7	32.3	0	0
Evaluate the learning outcomes of students.	64.5	29	6.5	6.5

Reaching the last aspect in assessing students, all of them were show positive views in creating activities and/or exercises to check students' comprehension (54.8%). They all agreed to provide the students with feedback in the learning process, even though not all of them evaluated the learning outcomes of the students, represented by 64.5% who strongly agreed and 6.5% who disagreed about this statement.

Based on the findings, it implies that the preservice teachers show a positive attitude towards the Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus teaching assistantship program. These findings are in line with a previous study that stated the great majority of pre-service teachers have mentioned that, before enrolling in the FLIC program, their primary focus was on transferring knowledge to students in order to facilitate the comprehension of the topic at hand and on correcting students' misunderstandings regarding the topic. Then, when they participated in the FLIC program, they began to view themselves as pedagogical teachers who used their communication abilities to decide which instructional strategies were most appropriate for their students (Kurniawati & Kristianti, 2022).

On the grounds that, concerning the teacher education process, they have collaboration and the cycle of lesson study practiced in microteaching lesson study, which also contributes to the conditions that encourage student teachers to share, analyze, and reflect critically and constructively on their ideas and experiences. As a result, this could increase, decrease, or alter their attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning, as shown in their choices of instructional strategies, methods, and teaching media in the classroom (Suryani & Rismiyanto, 2021).

This is also similar to what Ismail and Jarrah (2019) found in their research on pre-service perspectives during teacher education, which enables pre-service teachers to implement instructional practices such as actively involving students in their learning, co-teaching with the teacher of the class, and creating activities related and/or exercises. Pre-service teachers can further their careers by participating in practicums, which allow them to apply the knowledge they have received theoretically and gain experience in actual classroom settings (Lestari, 2020).

According to the findings of the previous studies, the school-based practicum program offered to first-year students is excellent for developing pedagogical knowledge and soft skills. Following the interview with the program's participants, it was discovered that, in general, the program may help them gain pedagogical knowledge, one of which is knowing the teaching preparation a teacher should undergo before teaching (Lestari, 2020). This experience can help them strengthen their sense of pedagogical knowledge, which is crucial knowledge for them to have as pre-service teachers because it is important knowledge they should have (Vo et al., 2018; Firman et al., 2019; Margiyanti, 2022).

Even if some pre-service teachers did not have the authority to design their lessons, they believe that it is still vital to prepare the lesson themselves, particularly when they have limited experience teaching at the elementary school level. They said that when we were in the teaching assistantship program, they were not fully permitted to teach. As a result, they devised a program on their own, and in order to solve the issue of teaching in that particular class, they were only needed when the teacher required our assistance. As a result, rather than developing our lesson plans, they follow the plans developed by the teacher. The instructor had everything ready to go, so all they had to do was follow ahead (Ede et al., 2022).

Moreover, in the current study, the pre-service teachers claim that they struggling to decide the most appropriate learning outcomes. In a similar vein, Ede et al. (2022) point out in their study that designing learning in the classroom presents numerous challenges for pre-service teachers. This is due to a combination of circumstances. One of the things that have a significant impact is that their college-level basic education or majors differ from what they experience when participating in the teaching assistantship program, like facilitating the teaching and learning process in primary schools. Their background is in English, but at the placement school, they were placed in mathematics, especially at the high school level. This is likely the most challenging aspect of the situation. They had difficulty obtaining the resources, especially given the restricted number of resources available (Ede et al., 2022).

However, this issue may arise due to a lack of experience or background knowledge related to designing the learning outcomes for students. Moreover, considering the value of mentoring that is overlooked by the school mentor or university supervisor also encourages this issue to arise. While school mentors must learn about their student teachers' perceptions, needs, and expectations as they learn to teach, they must also view mentoring as a valuable opportunity for their professional development so that they can involve student teachers in various types of work (e.g., student management and classroom teaching), promote them to explore with innovative ideas, and participate in collaboration and mutual reflections (Roberts, 2018; Yuan, 2016).

In addition, most of the preservice teachers believe that they have evaluated the learning outcomes of the students during the teaching assistantship. Thus, this result fit the finding from Margiyanti (2022) which computed there were 56.6% of students believe they are ready with the evaluation to comprehend how other students are progressing. Further, Margiyanti (2022) states to become a competent teacher, one of the most crucial steps is to evaluate the students. It is necessary to have this in order to evaluate the progress of the students as well as the teaching process. As a result, it is essential to have an understanding of the degree to which pupils are prepared for the assessment.

In managing time, they respond positively and agree with this statement. This may as a result of their internship during teacher education at the university. Before joining to teaching assistantship program, they have been involved in school-based internships before, which we recognize as PLP, it stands for Professional Learning Program, and it is a component of the Undergraduate Program in Teacher Training and Education. The overarching goals of this program are to improve student's

academic mastery, cultivate their sense of professional identity as educators, and provide them with foundational experiences in educational learning (Amirulloh et al., 2019). Whereas, this result contradicts Köksal (2019) who claims that the student teachers had trouble finishing the class in the allocated amount of time and making efficient use of the time they had. Student teachers frequently voiced their frustration that there were far too many activities to do throughout the length of a single lesson. In addition, this is caused by a lack of time and inexperienced student teachers' inability to effectively plan out the duration of classes.

One interesting phenomenon in the current study is that all preservice teachers remark on their strong perceptions of the relationship with students. Most of them strongly agree that they have established a good relationship with students, involve students in the learning process, and give clear instructions to them. Rather than simply relying on books, schools require the most recent educational resources. Viewed from the result of the current study, preservice teachers use numerous learning and teaching resources such as textbooks, videos, and audio, and employ a variety of teaching strategies when teaching. This means that the resource and strategies used in teaching are parallel with students' attitudes during the teaching and learning process. This is parallel with Mardiyati and Hidayat's (2022) study that found when teaching in school, teachers have to engage in learning strategies are employed. This is implemented so that students feel happy and comfortable while learning. Therefore, learning innovations were implemented by incorporating media to facilitate comprehension of the learning materials (Mardiyati & Hidayat, 2022).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of the present study was to examine the perspectives of prospective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers about the integration of pedagogical competence in teaching assistantship programs. This study validated the preservice teachers' favourable assessments of their pedagogical ability throughout their teaching assistantship programme. They verified that they had formulated a specific lesson plan for the programme, and they further generated and/or chose materials for each lesson in the classrooms throughout the program. While instructing in the classroom, the EFL preservice instructors claimed they engaged students by utilising a varied questioning method and applying a wide range of learning and teaching resources, including textbooks, videos, and audio, to facilitate the learning process. In addition, they provided feedback on students' work and assessed their learning outcomes. However, it was discovered that the preservice teachers continue to face difficulties in determining the most suitable learning objectives. In summary, the results of this study have the potential to make both direct and indirect contributions to teacher training programs. While this study has provided valuable insights into trainee teachers' opinions of their pedagogical competence, further research is needed to examine their actual teaching practices. Extensive investigations may yield more definitive results.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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