



# Reflection of Pre-Service Teachers' Challenges during the Teaching Internship Programs at Islamic Schools

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## Abstract

Teaching internships provide essential experiential learning that connects theoretical coursework with real classroom practice. This study examines the challenges faced by pre-service English teachers during a three-month internship in Islamic schools across East Java, from 10 February to 16 May 2025. Using a qualitative design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals from eight English Education students at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. The findings reveal three main categories of challenges: (1) teacher-related difficulties such as limited preparation, low self-confidence, insufficient pedagogical competence, challenges in designing assessments, and limited classroom management skills; (2) student-related challenges, including students' low self-confidence in using English and diverse learning styles; and (3) school-related, including limited technological facilities and curriculum constraints that reduced instructional hours due to religious and institutional priorities. The study emphasizes the need to strengthen practical pedagogical skills, particularly in lesson planning, differentiated instruction, and assessment development, supported by enhanced supervisory mentoring and closer university-school collaboration. These insights underscore the importance of context-responsive teacher education to better prepare future English teachers for diverse educational settings.

**Keywords:** Reflective, Pre-Service Teachers, Teaching Internship

## Introduction

A teaching practicum or teaching internship is a program for pre-service teachers to learn directly in the community by applying what they have learnt at the university. It is usually conducted at the end of their study program. Participating in teaching internships is crucial because it equips pre-service

teachers with practical knowledge of lesson delivery, classroom interaction, assessment development, and professional conduct within a real classroom setting. Research consistently shows that such programs help student teachers become more familiar and better prepared for their future teaching roles because they gain direct experience in managing instruction and navigating authentic classroom dynamics (Rogayan Jr. & Reusia, 2021). The purpose of teaching practice is to apply what students learn from their courses practically in a real classroom environment, so after completing their studies, they are ready to be teachers (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024).

The program is indeed useful for pre-service teachers as they have an in-depth understanding of the teaching, school environment, and supervision from both interned teachers and faculty members (Purba et al., 2025). Teaching internships, therefore, function as a bridge between theory and practice, enabling pre-service teachers to apply what they learn in coursework and develop the practical competencies necessary to enter the teaching profession (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024; Purba et al., 2025). Through the internship program, pre-service teachers are expected to strengthen their abilities in lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, assessment, and reflection, which are essential for their professional growth.

These programs provide valuable opportunities for them to gain real teaching experience, enhance their knowledge and skills, and develop the competencies required to become effective and professional teachers. During teaching internships, pre-service teachers inevitably encounter various challenges and learning experiences, such as overlooking certain steps in the instructional process, as teaching in an authentic classroom context is often a new experience for them. Therefore, engaging in written reflection through a teaching reflection journal is essential.

Previous studies have highlighted the benefits of reflective journaling in exploring teaching experiences, enabling pre-service teachers to analyze their instructional practices, identify areas for improvement, and enhance their overall teaching effectiveness (Albakri et al., 2017). If pre-service teachers can evaluate their teaching methods, their feelings when interacting with students, their knowledge, and their valuable experiences through a reflective journal, this will be one of the advantages that pre-service teachers can gain (Fitria, 2023).

For pre-service teachers, reflecting on their teaching practices is key to improving classroom management because it involves objectively reviewing lesson content and learning processes so that they can apply what they have written in their reflective journals to improve their teaching practices in future lessons (Stefanski & Ibrahim, 2024). In addition to personal reflection, supervising teachers play a pivotal role in guiding pre-service teachers. Their feedback not only addresses instructional techniques but also includes insights into school culture, institutional norms, disciplinary procedures, and curriculum expectations. This border guidance helps pre-service teachers adapt to the teaching environment

more effectively and understand how educational policies shape classroom practices. At this point, it is necessary to consider that the context of teaching also shapes the challenges that pre-service teachers face. Therefore, understanding the specific school environment is crucial.

Reflective journals serve as a valuable tool for pre-service teachers, allowing them to document their thoughts, feelings, and teaching challenges, including issues related to instructional procedures, time management, and student interaction. These journals provide rich and authentic data that capture the complexity and diversity of pre-service teachers' experiences during their teaching internships. In addition to self-reflection, feedback from supervising teachers plays a crucial role in the professional development process. Such feedback assists pre-service teachers in establishing effective classroom management, gaining insight into students' characteristics, and developing and implementing appropriate teaching materials. These efforts collectively contribute to fostering professional growth and promoting innovation in teaching practices.

Moreover, feedback extends beyond instructional activities, encompassing aspects of school culture, regulations, and academic policies. This enables pre-service teachers to better understand the institutional context and adapt their teaching approaches accordingly. The selection of Islamic schools in East Java as the research context was based on their long-standing collaboration with UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers during their teaching internships within this educational context.

Islamic schools are known for their strong religious culture, emphasis on discipline, structured routines, gender etiquette, and integration of Islamic values into school practices. These characteristics shape teacher-student interaction patterns, classroom management expectations, and instructional design choices. For instance, English teaching materials must align with Islamic norms, and technology use may be restricted depending on school regulations. Such contextual characteristics may create distinctive challenges that differ from those found in public or secular schools.

To connect this context with reflective practices, it is important to highlight that pre-service teachers placed in Islamic schools must not only reflect on their instructional performance but also on how they adjust their teaching to align with religious values, institutional expectations, and cultural norms. This creates a unique reflective dimension that previous research has not explored sufficiently. Although many studies have examined general internship challenges, few have investigated how pre-service teachers navigate teaching in Islamic school environments, particularly in East Java, where UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya has established long-term partnerships with local Islamic schools. This gap indicates the need for more context-specific research.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences and challenges encountered by pre-service teachers during their teaching internships in Islamic

schools in East Java. To guide analysis, the study addresses the following research question: "What challenges do pre-service teachers encounter during their teaching internship in Islamic schools, according to their journal reflective and semi-structured interviews?"

## **Method**

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to deeply explore the lived experiences of pre-service teachers during their teaching internship in Islamic junior high schools. The participants consisted of eight pre-service teachers from the English Language Education Department (Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris/PBI) of UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, including the researcher. They were selected through purposive sampling, with the criteria that the participants: (1) had completed a full-cycle teaching internship, (2) taught English in Islamic school settings, and (3) consistently wrote reflective journals during the program. The internship lasted three months, from 10 February to 16 May 2025, during which the participants taught English classes regularly and engaged in school activities under the guidance of supervising teachers. All participants were placed in Islamic junior high schools, located in East Java, primarily within the districts of Surabaya, Sidoarjo, and Jombang.

Reflective journals served as the primary data source because they provided rich personal narratives and detailed accounts of daily teaching practices, challenges, feelings, and classroom interactions. Participants wrote these journals after they taught, following an open-ended format in which they described instructional procedures, student characteristics, classroom management issues, and reflection on their teaching performance. To supplement the journal's, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to clarify and expand on their written reflections. Each interview consisted of 10 guiding questions, lasted approximately 30 minutes, and was conducted face-to-face. The interview protocol focused on deepening the exploration of challenges, coping strategies, supervision experiences, and contextual influences of Islamic school environments.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, with a six-step procedure: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was conducted manually to allow close engagement with the data, and recurring patterns were identified across journals and interview transcripts. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study implemented several strategies, such as member checking (participants verified the accuracy of their interview transcripts), data triangulation (comparing journals and interview data), and peer debriefing with academic supervisors to minimize researcher bias. All participants provided informed consent, acknowledging their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any time. Their identities, school names, and other sensitive information were kept confidential by using pseudonyms.

## Results

### ***The challenges of pre-service teachers in learning***

The results of interviews with eight pre-service teachers revealed three main sources of challenges during their teaching internship. Those related to the pre-service teachers themselves, the students, and the schools. The pre-service teachers mostly struggled with three points, namely a lack of preparation, confidence, and pedagogical competence. Many of them also feel anxious when teaching real students and find it difficult to manage the class and compose assessments.

From the students' side, the main problems were low motivation, limited confidence in using English, and different learning styles.

At the school level, limited facilities and strict school rules also became barriers. In addition, the other challenge is implementing the boarding school and Merdeka curriculum, and limited supervisory support.

Here is the table of results according to the reflective journal and semi-structured interview:

Subject	Challenges
Pre-Service Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Preparation</li> <li>• Lack of Confidence</li> <li>• Pedagogical Competence</li> <li>• Problem in Composing Assessments</li> <li>• Limited Experience in Classroom Management</li> </ul>
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low Self-Confidence</li> <li>• Different Learning Style</li> </ul>
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited Technological Facilities</li> <li>• Curriculum Constraints</li> </ul>

### ***1. Challenges from Pre-Service Teachers***

#### ***1.1. Lack of Preparation***

One of the most dominant sources of challenges during the teaching internship came from the pre-service teachers themselves. These challenges emerged as a combination of a lack of preparation, a lack of confidence, and pedagogical competence. Meanwhile, several participants also faced problems in composing assessments and had limited experience in classroom management.

Six out of eight participants stated that they felt unprepared during the early weeks of teaching practice. Although they created lesson plans in advance, the actual classroom dynamics were often unpredictable and did not always align with what they had planned.

One of the participants expressed this gap between expectation and reality:

*"I prepared my lesson plan very neatly, but when I entered the class, the students reacted differently. I panicked because the activities did not go as planned."*

*It makes me confused how to overcome because I am not well prepared."* (Participant 3, Interview and Journal)

Another participant reflected on the difficulty of anticipating spontaneous disruptions:

*"When I was about to teach, I hoped that there would be no sudden questions that were beyond my ability or that the students would become noisy. I thought everything would go according to the lesson plan, but the class was actually more chaotic."* (Participant 6, Journal)

Pre-service teachers also admitted that some materials were prepared mainly to meet supervision requirements, not to address real student needs. This mismatch often caused disorganized lessons, especially when students' learning pace differed significantly from what had been predicted. One participant wrote:

*"I realized that in class, many students did not understand what they had to do because my material was too difficult. I designed the material based on revisions from my supervisor without considering the students' needs. This made the class more difficult to control."* (Participant 1, Journal)

These reflections demonstrate that insufficient readiness, both mentally and practically, was a major challenge that affected lesson execution.

*Lack of preparation* became one of the main internal difficulties. Feelings of nervousness and low teaching confidence were reported by five participants, particularly during their first encounters with real students in Islamic school environments, which often emphasize discipline and respectful teacher-student interaction. They found themselves overwhelmed during their first few weeks of teaching because the classroom's situation that very different from their expectations. They are less prepared to face situations that may occur beyond prediction. Although they prepared lesson plans carefully, real conditions in the classroom were often unpredictable. Students' different responses and time constraints could disrupt the flow of lessons. Some pre-service teachers also admitted that they prepared materials only to fulfil supervision requirements rather than to respond to students' actual learning needs. This mismatch between planning and implementation made them feel less ready to handle spontaneous classroom events such as off-topic questions, sudden silence, or students losing focus.

### **1.2. Lack of Confidence**

The next challenge was a *lack of confidence*. The first teaching experience in front of real students, especially in Islamic schools with strict discipline, often caused anxiety. Some pre-service teachers felt that they were being constantly observed during the three practical sessions by the supervising teacher. Nervousness led to minor mistakes, such as mispronouncing words, forgetting instructions, or losing track of time. A few of them expressed that they felt inferior compared to senior teachers, thinking that their voices, gestures, and teaching

styles were less convincing. This low confidence sometimes limited their willingness to experiment with creative or interactive methods.

Several participants described a sense of being intensely monitored:

*"I felt like the students and the supervising teacher were watching me every single movement I made. It made me very nervous and feel like being judged."* (Participant 4, Interview)

This anxiety led to minor but impactful mistakes, such as losing the flow of instructions or mismanaging time. One participant recalled:

*"I knew what to do, but I forgot the order when I stood in front of the class. My mind suddenly went blank. And when that happened, all my confidence disappeared, so I became nervous."* (Participant 8, Journal)

Some pre-service teachers also felt inferior when comparing themselves to senior teachers, believing that their voices, gestures, or classroom presence were not strong enough:

*"The students always obeyed their teacher quickly, but with me, they hesitated. I felt like I didn't look convincing as a teacher."* (Participant 2, Interview and Journal)

Low confidence often discouraged them from experimenting with creative methods such as games, role-plays, or group tasks, resulting in lessons that were more lecture-based than initially intended.

### **1.3. Pedagogical Competence**

On the other side, *pedagogical competence* also emerged as a notable challenge. Although pre-service teachers are familiar with student-centered approaches, they often struggle to apply them effectively. Most pre-service teachers admitted that while they had learned various teaching methods and approaches in their university courses, such as Grammar Translation Method, Task-Based Language Teaching, Task-Based Instruction, etc, applying those concepts in a real classroom setting was far more complicated than expected.

The shift from theory to practice created a gap between what they had planned in their lesson design and what actually happened during the lesson. Others found it difficult to adjust the pace of instruction to match the students' level of understanding. This difficulty was especially visible when teaching mixed-ability classes; some students could grasp the material quickly, while others needed more time and simpler explanations. Consequently, pre-service teachers often ran out of time before finishing all planned activities. These experiences made them realize that pedagogical competence is not only about knowing how to teach, but also about being flexible, responsive, and adaptive in the moment.

A participant explained:

*"I tried to use TBLT for the speaking lesson, but the students did not respond well. I did not know how to modify the task to their level."* (Participant 5, Interview)

Another teacher reflected on pacing:

*"Some students finished quickly, but others were still confused, so I felt torn between moving on or slowing down." (Participant 7, Journal)*

This difficulty became more evident in classes with different learning abilities and preferences. Some students prefer visual materials, others rely on repetition, while still others need one-on-one guidance. Managing these differences requires a flexibility that many pre-service teachers are still developing.

Participants also found it challenging to shift from theory to action:

*"Teaching methods and approaches sounded clear when explained in the course, but when I actually tried them in front of the real students, not my friend in the microteaching class, I got confused about what step should come first." (Participant 3, Interview and Journal)*

#### **1.4. Problem in Composing Assessments**

The other results mentioned that the pre-service teachers faced the *problem in composing assessments*. Most pre-service teachers admitted that they tended to create tests or exercises based only on the examples given in their lesson plans or textbooks, without considering the different ways students learn. During the internship, they realized that each student had a unique learning preference; some were more visual and responded better to pictures, while others preferred oral explanation or hands-on practice. That is why, sometimes, most of the lesson assessments were written, but some students who understood the material well still failed to show their comprehension through the test.

Five participants reported challenges in designing assessments. Most pre-service teachers created written tests modelled after textbook exercises, without considering students' diverse learning preferences.

One participant wrote:

*"My test was mostly written. Some students who learned well through speaking could not show their understanding on paper." (Participant 6, Journal)*

Another explained that they struggled to align assessment tasks with the lesson's learning objectives:

*"I realized too late that my assessment didn't match the activities. I asked students to write paragraphs even though the lesson focused on speaking." (Participant 8, Interview)*

These examples show that pre-service teachers need a deeper understanding of assessment literacy, especially regarding different forms of assessment, such as performance-based, oral, visual, formative, and authentic assessments.

#### **1.5. Limited Experience in Classroom Management**

In addition, *limited experience in classroom management* became another internal obstacle. Handling a large number of students with different personalities required not only authority but also sensitivity. Some pre-service teachers found it hard to gain students' attention, particularly when teaching after prayer time or in the afternoon when students felt sleepy. Maintaining discipline without sounding



harsh was another balancing act. The need to respect Islamic values, such as politeness and gender etiquette, made classroom control more delicate. Teachers could not simply raise their voices or use direct commands; they had to manage the class through calm persuasion and moral reminders, which took time and patience.

Seven out of eight participants mentioned difficulties in managing the class. Managing 30–36 teenage students with diverse personalities requires skills that many prospective teachers are still learning.

A common problem that often arises is difficulty in getting students' attention, especially after breaks or prayer times:

*"I have a story to tell during teaching in the afternoon. Right after Dhuhr prayer, the class was sleepy and noisy. I kept trying to call their names softly, but it took so long to start the lesson." (Participant 1, Journal)*

Because Islamic schools emphasize politeness, gender etiquette, and respectful speech, raising one's voice or giving strict commands was discouraged. One of the pre-service teachers explained:

*"I could not raise my voice even when the class was noisy. I had to keep using polite reminders, and sometimes the students ignored them." (Participant 4, Interview)*

Another challenge was maintaining discipline during group activities:

*"When I asked them to work in groups, they became too excited and hard to control. I did not know how to balance fun and discipline." (Participant 7, Journal)*

These cases show that classroom management in Islamic school contexts requires a combination of authority, cultural sensitivity, and emotional patience, skills that typically develop through extended teaching experience.

Overall, internal challenges among pre-service teachers were widespread and interconnected. Lack of preparation and low confidence often influenced classroom management, while limited pedagogical competence and assessment design skills affected lesson quality. Direct experiences in Islamic school settings revealed gaps between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, emphasizing the need for more guided, practice-oriented training during teacher education programs.

## **2. Challenges from Students**

While pre-service teachers brought their own internal challenges, the nature of the students also became an influential factor.

### **2.1. Low Self-Confidence of Students**

The challenge highlighted by the pre-service teachers was the *low self-confidence of students* during English learning activities. Most participants reported that many students in their internship schools exhibited hesitation or anxiety when asked to speak in English, either in front of the class or during pair and group activities. Students tended to avoid volunteering answers, preferring to remain silent even when they understood the question. Several pre-service teachers explained that this lack of confidence might stem from students' fear of making mistakes or being laughed at by their peers. Because English is a foreign language for most of them, students often feel insecure about their pronunciation,

vocabulary, or grammar. As a result, classroom interaction became limited, with only a few active students participating regularly. This situation became one of the most difficult aspects for pre-service teachers to handle, especially those who had designed communicative activities that required student participation. Despite their effort to encourage and motivate students, some learners still appeared reluctant to speak up. A few participants shared that even after creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, students would still whisper to each other in their first language rather than responding in English. It is because the students have a limited vocabulary in English. Many pre-service teachers explained that most students struggled to understand even simple classroom instructions or short passages because they lacked sufficient vocabulary. Some students had difficulty recognizing basic words commonly used in daily conversations. This limitation often made it hard for them to follow classroom discussions, comprehend reading materials, or express their ideas clearly during speaking activities, which can make the behaviour often slowed down the learning process and reduce opportunities for authentic communication in the classroom.

One participant wrote in her reflective journal:

*"When I asked simple questions like 'Where do you go on holiday?' students looked down or turned to their friends. Even those who understood the question did not want to answer. They kept whispering in Indonesian, saying they were afraid their friends would laugh if their English sounded wrong." (Participant 6, Journal)*

Similarly, another participant expressed during the interview:

*"I tried to use games, but only the same three or four students were willing to speak. The rest stay quiet. One student told me privately, 'Miss, I am scared that my pronunciation is bad.' It made me realize how strong their fear of making mistakes is." (Participant 2, Interview)*

The issue was further intensified by students' limited vocabulary. Many pre-service teachers explained that students struggled to understand even simple instructions or short texts, making it difficult for them to follow lessons.

A participant reflected:

*"Some students did not understand basic words like 'roar', 'scratch', or 'admire'. When I asked them to complete a short reading task, they stopped every few seconds to ask for translations. It slowed the entire class and made them reluctant to participate." (Participant 8, Journal)*

## **2.2. Students' Differences in Learning Style**

Another challenge that pre-service teachers face from the students is the *differences in learning styles*. Some learners responded well to visual media such as pictures or videos, while others preferred memorization or translation-based exercises, which are more aligned with the usual learning method. Pre-service teachers needed to find a balance between creative modern methods and the learning habits that students were already comfortable with. If the method felt too

unfamiliar, students became confused or disengaged; if it was too traditional, lessons became monotonous.

One participant wrote:

*"When I used videos and interactive slides, some students were excited and paid close attention. But others looked confused or passive because they were more used to traditional methods like copying notes or repeating vocabulary." (Participant 3, Journal)*

Another added:

*"I tried to combine group discussions with worksheets, but a few students told me they did not understand why they had to discuss. They said, 'Miss, usually we just write the answer, not talk about it.' It was hard to balance creating activities with what they were accustomed to." (Participant 5, Journal)*

Across the data, six out of eight participants mentioned the issue of low self-confidence, seven participants reported problems related to limited vocabulary, and five highlighted the challenge of varying learning styles. These findings suggest that pre-service teachers need to continually adjust their teaching strategies to address the diverse needs and backgrounds of learners in the Islamic school context.

### **3. Challenges from Schools**

#### **3.1. Limited Technological Facilities**

The most obvious issue faced by pre-service teachers in Islamic Schools was *limited technological facilities*. As mentioned earlier, many Islamic schools restrict students from using personal digital devices. This policy is often based on moral and disciplinary reasons to prevent distraction or misuse of the internet. However, it also means that pre-service teachers cannot apply digital-based activities such as online quizzes, virtual vocabulary games, or video-based listening lessons. Some schools only allowed the teacher to use a laptop and projector, but even then, electricity or equipment problems sometimes occurred. As a result, pre-service teachers had to redesign their lesson plans to suit the available tools. Some of them turned to creative low-tech alternatives such as flashcards, printed dialogue strips, or board games, but these alternatives required more time and manual effort.

One participant described this challenge in her reflective journal:

*"I planned to use Quizizz and a vocabulary game on Kahoot, but the students were not allowed to bring their phones. The school told me it was for moral discipline. I understood the rule, but it made my lesson plan unusable." (Participant 7, Journal)*

Another participant echoed the same concern during the interview:

*"The school only let me use a laptop and a projector, but sometimes the projector did not work, so I could not use a video for a listening activity." (Participant 5, Interview)*

Because of these limitations, pre-service teachers were required to redesign their lessons into low-tech alternatives. Several participants mentioned substituting digital quizzes with printed worksheets, handwritten flashcards, or

physical board games. While these adaptations were creative, they required significantly more preparation time.

A participant noted:

*"I spent more than two hours cutting and colouring flashcards because I could not rely on digital tools. It worked, but the preparation was much harder than using online platforms." (Participant 1, Journal)*

In one journal entry, a participant wrote about a lesson that had to be entirely changed moments before teaching:

*"I was about to start a listening activity using a video clip. Right when I connected the projector, it did not work. The students cheered because they thought there would be no lesson. I panicked for a while, but then switched to a role-play activity using printed cards I happened to bring. It was not my original plan, but at least the class continued." (Participant 2, Journal)*

This example illustrates how technological limitations forced pre-service teachers to improvise and adapt quickly in unpredictable conditions.

### **3.2. Curriculum Constraints**

*Curriculum constraints* are also mentioned as a challenge. In many Islamic schools, a large portion of the timetable is dedicated to religious studies, leaving limited hours for English. This reduced the frequency of English exposure and made it difficult to finish the syllabus. Some schools also prioritized memorization of religious texts over communicative skills, which meant that English-speaking or listening activities were sometimes seen as secondary. Five out of eight participants in the Islamic school mentioned this issue. The reduced focus on English required pre-service teachers to compress their lessons and combine several objectives in one meeting, which affected the depth of learning.

One participant highlighted this problem in an interview:

*"We only taught English twice a week, and each meeting was short. I felt rushed, especially when I saw how long the syllabus was. Sometimes, I had to combine more than two competencies in one session." (Participant 2, Interview)*

Another wrote in her journal:

*"The school gave priority to tahfidz and fiqh classes. English felt like an additional subject. When religious events happened, the English class was usually the first to be canceled." (Participant 6, Journal)*

These disruptions demonstrate how curriculum priorities could significantly affect the continuity and depth of English instruction.

## **Discussion**

### **1. Challenges from Pre-Service Teachers**

#### **1.1. Lack of Preparation**

The first and most apparent challenge was a *lack of preparation*. Many pre-service teachers admitted that their expectations before entering the classroom were quite different from what they faced in real practice. They realized that

preparing lesson plans and teaching materials at the university level was not enough to anticipate the dynamic nature of actual classroom conditions. This is in line with previous research, which emphasized that most of the challenges faced by pre-service teachers are a lack of thorough preparation. They have several tasks and obligations to complete, such as developing lesson plans and teaching. This requires preparation, considering their adjustments, and full involvement in the learning process. However, preparation can be challenging because real-world classroom situations sometimes do not align with what was planned (Collantes, 2021).

The researchers conclude that “preparation” should not only be understood as planning lesson content but also as *anticipatory readiness*, the ability to predict possible classroom scenarios and prepare alternative strategies. Anticipatory readiness requires pre-service teachers to develop the ability to prepare contingency activities that can be implemented immediately, anticipate students’ difficulties, and prepare additional scaffolding. For instance, a pre-service teacher may have designed a communicative activity that relies on pair discussion. Still, if the class is unresponsive or the students are too shy to speak, the activity might fail. A well-prepared teacher should have a “Plan B,” such as using written prompts or group modelling. Those could be using guided sentence strips or structured prompts to reduce student anxiety, dividing the class into small groups where shy students feel less pressure, and providing vocabulary banks to support low-proficiency learners.

### **1.2. Lack of Confidence**

The second major challenge was *a lack of confidence*. Teaching in front of real students for the first time can be intimidating. It could be several times they feel nervous. Many participants expressed anxiety about being evaluated by supervising teachers or failing to meet the school’s expectations. This opinion is also supported by previous research, which suggests that a lack of confidence in facing an audience, including students and supervising teachers, is normal and likely to occur repeatedly. Short experience and minimal teaching experience are not enough to foster confidence (Collantes, 2021).

Another opinion also explains the same thing, that most prospective teachers who are undertaking internship programs experience problems with a lack of self-confidence, such as when dealing with student behavior in class and working with students with diverse learning needs (Naylor et al., 2015). When self-confidence decreases, it can affect their ability to remember every detail of the lesson, leading to confusion. Furthermore, their lack of confidence also affects their initial understanding of the lesson. Furthermore, when they are tested by students with questions beyond their abilities, it can naturally make them anxious (Salviana et al., 2021).

Low confidence was not simply caused by a lack of teaching skills, but rather by the sudden shift in roles, from student to teacher. In university, pre-service

teachers learn through simulation and microteaching, where mistakes are tolerated and feedback is constructive. In contrast, real classroom teaching involves immediate responsibility for students' learning. To overcome that issue, teacher education programs must provide systematic mentoring to build pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. Reflection journals, peer teaching discussions, and post-teaching feedback sessions can help them process their anxiety and transform it into self-awareness. Confidence is not an innate trait; it is built through repeated practice, constructive reflection, and affirmation from mentors.

### **1.3. Pedagogical Competence**

The third challenge concerns *pedagogical competence*: the ability to translate teaching theory into practice. While pre-service teachers have been exposed to various instructional methods and approaches, they often find it difficult to implement the methods and approaches effectively. Both must be taught with appropriate steps. Every classroom activity a teacher undertakes reflects a body of knowledge, such as how to teach using the Grammar Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, etc (Zein, 2017). Pedagogical competence involves more than just understanding methods; it also requires the ability to diagnose classroom situations, anticipate students' difficulties, and make appropriate pedagogical decisions. Many pre-service teachers in this study found it hard to adjust their instruction to students' comprehension levels. For example, when students failed to understand a concept, some pre-service teachers simply repeated the explanation.

### **1.4. Problem in Composing Assessments**

Designing fair and effective assessments was another significant challenge. Most pre-service teachers admitted that they created tests or tasks mainly based on the examples provided in their textbooks or lesson plans, without deeply considering individual differences in learning styles. Previous research has also argued that a good test should assess students' background knowledge, encompassing all skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Furthermore, a good test should consist of material students have already learned, the test items should be appropriate for their ability level, and the test instructions and scoring rubric should be clear (Shofiarita, 2020). In fact, other studies also show that assessment does not have to be paper-based with various questions that test their knowledge, but rather only with stimulus questions that test students' understanding and ensure that students achieve learning objectives (Moussaid & Zerhouni, 2017).

In this study, many pre-service teachers realized that written tests alone could not fully capture students' understanding. Some students who performed poorly in written assessments were actually able to express their comprehension orally or through other modes of learning. This realization highlights the importance of aligning assessment with learning styles. The researcher's argument

strengthens the need for *assessment literacy* among pre-service teachers. They must understand that tests are not only for grading but also for guiding learning.

### **1.5. *Limited Experience in Classroom Management***

In addition, *limited experience in classroom management* became another internal obstacle. Handling a large number of students with different personalities required not only authority but also sensitivity. Some pre-service teachers found it hard to gain students' attention, particularly when students felt sleepy in the afternoon. Other research also revealed that the difficulties experienced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice were difficulties in handling their bad behavior, disciplining students, giving instructions to students, and leaving the class, thus disrupting the teaching and learning activities that they had previously planned (Rozimela, 2016). Another problem is students who are rude to teachers, sleep in class, daydream, and use harsh language (Irawati, 2020). Maintaining discipline without sounding harsh was another balancing act. The need to respect Islamic values, such as politeness and gender etiquette, made classroom control more delicate. Teachers could not simply raise their voices or use direct commands; they had to manage the class through calm persuasion and moral reminders, which took time and patience.

## **2. *Challenges from Students***

### **2.1. *Low Self-Confidence of Students***

In this study, two major student-related challenges emerged, including low self-confidence in using English and different learning styles. These issues not only hinder student participation but also force pre-service teachers to adjust, often at the cost of lowering expected learning outcomes.

When students *lack self-confidence*, they often experience language anxiety that prevents them from expressing themselves freely in class. One of the causes of a lack of self-confidence will prevent students from daring to express their opinions in class (Karmida et al., 2024). The pre-service teachers reported that many students were afraid of making mistakes and feared being laughed at by their peers if they mispronounced a word or used incorrect grammar. This fear created an invisible barrier that hindered interaction and classroom participation. They often avoided volunteering answers, preferring silence even when they understood the question.

As a result, classroom interaction became extremely limited, with only a small group of students participating actively. This aligns with previous research suggesting that the barriers to speaking or expressing opinions experienced by students in English include anxiety, articulation, pronunciation, idea elaboration, and vocabulary. Students need to be able to speak English well and critically convey various ideas in their arguments. Some phenomena that occur during the learning process include self-confidence and anxiety, vocabulary selection, and the use of appropriate statements in constructing arguments (Wariyati et al., 2023).

Researchers argue that student confidence is a pivotal mediator between

teaching input and student output. Regardless of how well a teacher designs a lesson, if the students do not dare to participate, the lesson cannot fulfil its potential. In the context of Islamic schools, as in this study, cultural, moral, and communal norms may exacerbate this issue. For example, the participants reported that students feared being wrong in front of peers; thus, their silence served as a protective strategy.

Pre-service teachers shared various attempts to overcome this issue, such as creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere, using humor, giving positive reinforcement, and applying pair or group activities to reduce the pressure of public performance. This opinion is also supported by previous research that teachers can slowly explain how to pronounce English words correctly for students to follow, of course, in a constructive and interactive classroom atmosphere. Therefore, a teacher must provide motivation and stimulate students' opinions. This is crucial for increasing student confidence in learning English, especially in speaking.

Teachers must be able to make the teaching and learning process fun and not monotonous, so students can enjoy learning English (Saragih et al., 2022). However, they also realized that motivation and confidence are deeply personal and cannot be built instantly. One participant, for example, mentioned that when students were praised for using English correctly, even in short sentences, they became more motivated to try again. This demonstrates how small successes can play a transformative role in developing students' self-efficacy. Schools in this context emphasize values such as modesty, politeness, and the avoidance of embarrassment, norms that can heighten students' fear of making mistakes. Nevertheless, low confidence is not unique to Islamic schools. It is a common issue across EFL contexts, where English is a foreign language and is rarely used outside the classroom.

## ***2.2. Students' Differences in Learning Style***

Another major challenge that emerged from the findings was the diversity of students' learning styles. Pre-service teachers reported that students in Islamic schools exhibited a wide range of learning preferences. For example, some were visual learners who responded better to pictures, videos, and written texts, while others preferred auditory explanations or kinesthetic tasks such as games and role-plays. When pre-service teachers introduced activities that required creativity or open-ended responses, some students felt uncomfortable and uncertain about what to do. This often happens in EFL classes, where differences in learning styles become one of the main problems in learning because they can create an imbalance among students and become an obstacle for teachers to deal with (Bhandari, 2022). That is why pre-service teachers need to integrate creative methods such as games, storytelling, or project-based tasks while still maintaining a level of structure that aligns with students' expectations.

Overall, dealing with different learning styles taught pre-service teachers the



importance of differentiation and adaptability. They began to realize that effective teaching does not mean delivering the same material in the same way to every student but rather adjusting the approach so that all learners have the opportunity to engage and succeed. In this way, the diversity of learning styles among students became not only a challenge but also a source of professional growth for the pre-service teachers.

### **3. Challenges from Schools**

From the analysis of reflective journals and interview data, four dominant categories of challenges were identified: limited technological facilities and curriculum constraints. These findings highlight how the structural and policy environment of Islamic schools can either support or hinder the implementation of effective and communicative English language teaching.

#### **3.1. Limited Technology in Facilities**

One of the most frequently mentioned obstacles faced by pre-service teachers was the *limited technology in facilities*. Many participants described that the schools where they conducted their internships did not provide sufficient access to multimedia tools such as projectors, speakers, computers, or stable internet connections. Moreover, the policy restricting students from bringing personal digital devices such as smartphones or tablets further complicated the implementation of digital-based learning activities. This opinion aligns with previous research regarding limited access to technology in Islamic boarding schools, which lack adequate technological facilities. This requires Islamic boarding schools to develop appropriate strategies to adapt to the digital era without sacrificing their core values (Budiharso et al., 2023).

This limitation is not only a matter of material insufficiency but also reflects the gap between teacher education and school reality. At university, pre-service teachers are trained to use modern teaching aids, interactive PowerPoint presentations, online games, video-based instruction, or digital quizzes. But, in this context, pre-service teachers were forced to modify their strategies. They created flashcards, printed dialogues, or board games as low-tech substitutes for interactive digital tools. While this adaptation demonstrates resilience and creativity, it also significantly increased their workload and preparation time. Some teachers admitted they spent more time crafting manual teaching aids than planning communicative tasks. Nevertheless, this adaptation can also be viewed as a form of professional growth. It encourages pre-service teachers to develop problem-solving skills and learn that good teaching is not always dependent on advanced technology. Still, systematic institutional support is needed. Schools should at least provide basic facilities such as projectors, sound systems, and printable materials to bridge the gap between pedagogical ideals and school realities.

### **3.2. Curriculum Constraints**

Furthermore, *curriculum constraints*, related challenges were another major institutional barrier highlighted by the pre-service teachers. In Islamic schools, there are two curricula, including Merdeka Curriculum and Madrasah Curriculum. Madrasah Curriculum is a significant portion of the daily schedule is dedicated to religious subjects such as Qur'anic studies, Fiqh, Aqidah Akhlak, and Arabic. Consequently, English classes are often limited to one or two sessions per week, usually for 80–120 minutes. This is also reinforced by previous research, which also explains that limited learning time is one of the challenges experienced by pre-service teachers because they have to allocate time, especially if the learning is project-based, discussion-based, and activities that involve collaboration (Salim, 2024). Meanwhile, the Merdeka Curriculum focuses on student-centered learning, differentiation, project-based tasks, and flexible teaching approaches.

This limited exposure creates difficulty in achieving communicative competence and completing the required syllabus within the internship period. Furthermore, teachers' lack of understanding of the Merdeka curriculum concept and the limited use of technology-based learning and differentiation hinders its implementation. Furthermore, within the Merdeka curriculum, Islamic subjects such as the Quran, Fiqh, Aqidah, and Arabic are expected to introduce Islamic values relevant to everyday life (Rizki & Achadi, 2024). Very often, participants have to integrate Fiqh and Arabic lessons into English.

They mentioned that they had to rush through several materials and sometimes skipped supplementary exercises because of limited time. They also found it difficult to conduct speaking or project-based assessments, as the focus was more on completing the textbook than on developing interactive skills. Another curriculum-related issue was the lack of integration between English instruction and Islamic content. Some pre-service teachers tried to contextualize English topics using religious themes, for example, teaching descriptive text through “describing the mosque” or “introducing Islamic heroes.” Despite these challenges, the effort reflects an important step toward contextualized learning, showing that English can coexist harmoniously with Islamic values when handled thoughtfully.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study revealed that pre-service teachers faced multiple interconnected challenges during their teaching internship in Islamic schools. These challenges stemmed from three main sources: the pre-service teachers themselves, the students, and the schools. From the pre-service teachers' side, the main difficulties included a lack of preparation, low confidence, limited pedagogical competence, problems in composing assessments, and limited classroom management experience. These internal challenges often emerged because of the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired at the university and its practical application in real classrooms. From the students' side, low self-confidence, limited

and different learning styles created barriers to achieving effective classroom communication. These factors affected students' participation and slowed down the learning process, making it difficult for pre-service teachers to implement interactive and communicative learning methods. At the school level, institutional factors such as limited technological facilities and curriculum constraints also affected the teaching process. These external conditions restricted pre-service teachers' ability to use modern digital tools and forced them to adopt traditional, low-tech approaches while managing time constraints due to limited English-language learning hours.

A comparison with non-Islamic schools indicates that some challenges, such as low confidence or limited classroom management experience, are universal among novice teachers. However, restrictions on digital learning, limited instructional time for English due to religious subjects, and the need to integrate Islamic values into lessons are challenges more specific to Islamic school settings. These distinctions underscore how school type and institutional norms influence the trajectory of teacher professional development. To improve alignment and instructional quality, schools could provide regular curriculum training for English teachers, especially on Merdeka Curriculum principles, and increase or redistribute instructional hours for English, particularly for communicative practice.

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