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"AM I READY TO TEACH?": EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' MENTAL READINESS TO TEACH AND IMPLICATION FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract
Third-year pre-service teachers in the English language education department in Indonesia may feel uncertain about their mental readiness to become English teachers. Although they have a high-intermediate level of English proficiency, they often fear facing the challenges of managing the class and showcasing mental readiness to become teachers. Therefore, this study explores the third-year Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers' mental readiness to become teachers, and the need to emphasize mental readiness and grit to successful teaching practice. Twenty-three EFL pre-service teachers enrolled a microteaching course, as one of the teaching practice components in the English language education curriculum, participated in this study. They were asked to write structured reflections on their mental readiness, and their reflections were thoroughly examined using a narrative analysis. The results showed that the pre-service teachers expressed concern about their ability to manage the class and their students, which reflects their mental unreadiness to be the person in charge in the classroom. Moreover, the pre-service teachers highlighted the need to be more mentally aware of their attitude and grit in shaping their mental readiness to teach. This study contributes to a larger context-specific understanding of the roles of the English teacher education programs at the university level in assisting pre-service English teachers to achieve mental readiness and grit that can help them address the challenges.

Keywords: EFL pre-service teachers, grit, mental readiness to teach, self-reflection

Introduction

Teacher education programs have undergone significant evolution and numerous changes over the years. In retrospect, the changes have been influenced by, among others, pre-service teachers' (henceforth PSTs) reasons for entering the teacher education program. In this case, EFL PSTs enter teacher education programs for varied reasons (Hadi, 2019). Some have dreams of becoming teachers and, therefore, will enthusiastically apply to teacher-education programs that suit

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their passions. However, there are always those groups of PSTs who enter the programs due to external forces (e.g., family pressure, societal expectations, financial situations). Consequently, during the compulsory teaching practice and class activities, these diverse groups of PSTs face various challenges and employ different strategies to overcome them (Teimouri et al., 2022).

To help the PSTs overcome challenges and strengthen their sense of calling as teachers, learning conditions, learning methods, direct feedback from teacher educators, and offline teaching practices in the classrooms were detrimental to their professional journey. These dynamics became more complex during the COVID-19 pandemic. The world of education, especially in teacher education programs, has undergone massive changes due to shifts in human perspectives on life and interaction. The social distancing took away the essence of having face-to-face interactions. Consequently, classroom interactions were lacking, if not prohibited. Classes were abruptly transitioned to online modes of instruction. Therefore, learners who had attended classes during the pandemic for about two to three years were accustomed to not having face-to-face/social interactions.

At the time this study was conducted, the third-year EFL PSTs in the Indonesian context attended the English language education study programs during the pandemic, in which class activities were delivered in the online setting. However, as they entered their third year, the situation got better. Hence, the online classes were switched to offline ones. The teaching practices or practicums were also switched back to teaching in the offline setting. Unfortunately, having been accustomed to minimal human interactions made them wary of having direct interactions with people in an offline setting. These struggles of re-embracing face-to-face interactions among the PSTs are intriguing to investigate because the changes of human emotion, behavior, and attitude that are influenced by external factors may cause different beliefs and readiness in many aspects, especially in the world of teacher education (Polat, 2010).

Several studies on teacher readiness and preparedness among PSTs in the past 10 years have highlighted the need for them to prepare for teaching in the blended learning era (Tiba & Condy, 2021). Many studies have focused their research on the importance for the PSTs to master English and technological and pedagogical content knowledge (Abbitt, 2011; Sarıçobanet al., 2019) because technology is inseparable from the millennial lifestyle. However, although the 21st-century PSTs are millennials who are technology savvy, it does not guarantee successful teaching. Mental readiness is needed to ensure that PSTs can cope with the potential challenges they may face during their teaching. In this regard, their self-efficacy and grit need to be given a large amount of consideration because they play an important role in ensuring their confidence in teaching (Ma & Cavanagh, 2018).

Having confidence in teaching can mean that PSTs are confident not only in preparing the teaching materials but also in explaining the materials. In this respect, being technology savvy and being an excellent material developer are not enough. Many of them feel that they are ready in pedagogical knowledge, but they are not yet mentally ready to deliver the materials and engage with their students. Furthermore, as English teachers, they often feel that their current English proficiency level does not guarantee their success in managing the class and showing confidence and grit in front of their students (Junker et al., 2021). In the Indonesian EFL contexts, where English serves as the language of instruction and

subject matter, they may feel deflated when realizing that they still struggle with their English proficiency. However, they are expected to prepare the materials and teach them using good English communication skills. Thus, this research aims to further explore their mental readiness to teach. The following questions guide the inquiry of this study:

1. How do Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers perceive their mental readiness in facing the future tasks of becoming a teacher in the aspects of classroom management and grit?
2. In what ways can English teacher education programs help their pre-service teachers to be more mentally ready to become good English teachers?

The results of this study can provide a clear portrayal of how Indonesian PSTs reflect on their struggles and challenges in their effort to be grittier in shaping their mental readiness to become teachers. Furthermore, teacher educators and curriculum developers can obtain valuable insights into the inner struggles that the PSTs are facing, and therefore can develop lesson plans and classroom activities that support them to build their resilience, confidence, and effective classroom management strategies to achieve mental readiness.

Mental readiness in teaching

The concept of teacher readiness among PSTs of any subject is always a sensitive issue to discuss due to its multi-layered challenges, including both internal and external factors. Geng et al. (2017) have pointed out the tasks that a teacher needs to prepare to be ready to meet the students in the classroom. In this regard, not only do these PSTs need to work hard in grasping the pedagogical content knowledge, but they also need to be able to collaborate with other colleagues, mentors, and their students. Even so, these are not enough since they are supposed to have good technological knowledge as well (Li, 2022).

In reality, having good pedagogical and technological knowledge apparently is not enough to ensure PSTs' success in teaching. Suminto et al. (2022) revealed that despite having adequate comprehension of pedagogical and technological knowledge, many PSTs experienced challenges in delivering information to their students. This research highlights that, even though the PSTs from the English language education study program have an upper intermediate level of English proficiency, their proficiency did not guarantee their success in their teaching.

For PSTs who have a low intermediate level of English proficiency, the struggle becomes more evident. Many of these EFL PSTs experience a certain level of foreign language anxiety due to their insecurities about their English language proficiency (Tüfekçi-Can, 2018). The different levels of anxiety should be taken seriously by the teacher education programs because they can affect the PSTs' level of mental readiness. To navigate these challenges, teacher educators and teacher education programs must have a thorough understanding of students' emotional dynamics throughout the micro-teaching classes. As such, the readiness to demonstrate English language teaching competence should be consistently emphasized, both within the classroom and during micro-teaching (Kirmizi & Tosuncuoglu, 2019).

Grit and positive attitude

Despite the existence of anxiety, as human beings, teachers opt to show their survival instincts to succeed in their line of work. Having the necessary grit can be achieved through the act of acknowledging individual differences and their well-being so that EFL PSTs can have a good mentality and attitude towards learning. Keesey et al. (2018) describe that even though they could experience a certain amount of stress due to their intense workloads of assignments, the PSTs are expected to embody a growth mindset and grit. Thus, the success of obtaining good teaching performance requires their involvement in developing a good attitude toward learning.

As grit is defined as "a combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special" (Duckworth, 2006, p. 18), it plays a significant role in EFL PSTs' professional learning achievement. In this sense, grit has a large amount of influence on their effort in coping with the challenges encountered during their professional learning journey. As such, successful PSTs who embody grit can combine passion and perseverance in achieving their goals (cf. Duckworth et al., 2007). Indeed, grit appears when PSTs face challenges that they need to overcome. The process of overcoming these challenges is continuous; thus, they need to have perseverance to achieve the goal. This is a clear view of how grit becomes one of the strongest elements to help individuals persevere through hardships and challenges.

Duckworth et al. (2007) further define the construct of grit as "...trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals and showed that grit predicted achievement in challenging domains over and beyond measures of talent" (p. 19). Although EFL PSTs can achieve success in different domains with the help of special attributes and advantages, grit and perseverance have become one of the prominent indicators to achieve success. PSTs who have grit tend to have long-term objectives and do not lose sight of them even though they face challenges and threats. However, those who struggle with their grit and perseverance can learn to be grittier if they are learning in environments that emphasize the importance of grit and perseverance. Some studies suggest that PSTs or students can obtain grit faster if they are situated in a school culture that gives prominent emphasis on character building and grit (Kramer et al., 2017; Usher et al., 2019). Formal learning environments like schools and universities evidently play a key role in helping their students practice grit and perseverance.

Numerous studies have been conducted on grit or self-efficacy/perseverance among EFL students/PSTs (e.g. Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2020; Hernandez et al., 2020). Those investigations provide a similar result, i.e. grit and self-efficacy do correlate when it comes to learning. Other research focuses on investigating grit or self-efficacy in e-learning platforms (Malureanu & Panisoara, 2021). These two elements can be achieved if PSTs are given numerous critical thinking and problem-solving activities to improve their learning abilities. For educators, these results can provide significant information on how teachers can help their students to be more confident and have a growth mindset in facing challenges (Jachimowicz, et al., 2018).

Reflection writings

The previous review on the issues of mental readiness, grit, and perseverance accentuates the need for PSTs to understand their professional selves better. In general education, Dewey (1933) highlights the importance of reflective thinking for educational professionals to have a better understanding of themselves. In a reflective thinking process, individuals need to understand that, through reflective thinking, they can set their professional goals that need to be reached and believe that the goals will be reached. In other words, reflective thinking is used to reach the goal.

Despite numerous modes of reflection, the use of journal writing to conduct reflective thinking has lately been used intensely by educators to delve deeper into their students' journey in learning (Moghaddam et al., 2019). In a study done by Ahmed (2019) among the university students in Qatar, the students made use of the reflective journal activities in addressing their learning process. The result shows that the teachers receive insightful information on the students' learning preferences, learning challenges in and outside the class. Lindroth (2015) conducted a literature review on the use of reflective journals among PSTs. The research portrays the numerous benefits of using reflective journals to see the students' learning journey. Reflective journals can be a means to conduct self-assessments and dialogs between teacher and student. Teachers or teacher educators can use the students' reflective journals to see their students' thoughts, opinions, and feelings throughout the learning process. Although there is still a huge debate on assessing reflective journals, the benefits of this activity are evident.

In the field of teacher education, similar results have been consistently found across different regions and age groups. Zhang et al. (2023) discovered that reflective writings done by the PSTs gave valuable insights of their inner struggles in their effort to become good teachers, especially when it comes to crafting their skills in classroom management and increasing their mental readiness to face their future students. Kumari and Prakasha (2025) corroborated the result through their research. They found that written reflections have provided clearer descriptions of unseen experiences throughout the learning process, such as how they developed self-awareness, described their doubts, insecurity, and idealism about the concept of teaching.

Based on these studies, PSTs should be provided with reflective activities, such as writing reflections regularly. The writing products, teamed with structured prompts that help them delve deeper into their inner feelings, can be used as self-assessments for PSTs themselves. Teacher educators can also use them as one of the valid sources to help them understand their PSTs' professional learning journey. For instance, the PSTs can use their guided written reflections to self-assess their current mental readiness, grit, and perseverance in their efforts to become good teachers. Hence, the teacher educators can use the written reflections as a tool to help them achieve a better understanding of their PSTs' inner struggles.

Method

Research design

This study employed a qualitative approach using narrative analysis (Saldaña, 2021) to provide the researchers with more room and depth to explore the participants' mental readiness to teach. In this study, the EFL PSTs narrated their

inner feelings based on their personal journeys. The honest and authentic narratives captured the participants' process in embracing their upcoming new life as future teachers.

Participants and research setting

Twenty-three EFL PSTs participated in this study. They were third-year students who attended the department of English language education in a private university in Indonesia, aged circa 21-22 years old, with 8 males and 15 females. As third-year students, they were required to attend a required micro teaching for one semester, a required class considered as a teaching practice in the department's curriculum. Their English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing was between upper intermediate and advanced; thus, writing their thoughts and feelings in English was not a hassle. The EFL PSTs had filled out a consent form to ensure their participation in the research. They were also given the reassurance of confidentiality of their data and written journals; thus, in this research, their names were written using pseudonyms (PST1, PST2, PST3…PST23). The micro teaching course was designed as a 2-credit hour class with 4 meeting hours a week. Therefore, they had two 4-hour classes every week.

Data collection

The reflection journals were used to gain insights about the PSTs' initial feelings, thoughts, and perceptions about teaching and how they see themselves as future teachers at the beginning of the semester. LaBoskey (1993) states that "when novices engage in this reflective process, they must reflect about something; there is a content to their reflection" (p. 26). Thus, to see such a kind of engagement, written documents in the form of written reflections are needed.

The reflection writings for the data collection were written in the fourth meeting of the micro teaching class. In the first 3 meetings, the PSTs learned about the theoretical foundations of pedagogical knowledge, analyzed videos that visualize different types of teachers and how they teach in different settings, and discussed the possible ups and downs of becoming good teachers with their peers and lecturers. In their reflection writings, the EFL PSTs should include the answers to the following questions:

1. How do you know if you are mentally ready to become an English teacher?
2. What have you learned so far about yourself in terms of your readiness to manage the class and your confidence and grit in teaching? Or, what were your big takeaways from how your lecturer described the ups and downs of teaching life?

The 23 reflective writings were written outside the class hours so that the PSTs had the opportunity to write them in their own time and place. Before the submission in the following week, they were allowed to discuss the answers with their peers to help each other brainstorm and organize their thoughts, opinions, and feelings. This step was deemed effective in helping them to have rich, insightful, and thoughtful reflections. Therefore, they had little difficulty in comprehending the guided questions and developing them into reflective writing of 300-500 words.

Data analysis

The reflection writings that the PSTs wrote were considered as narrative data. The data were analyzed using categorical-content analysis from Lieblich et al. (1998). Four steps of data analysis were employed. Firstly, the initial coding was generated by using descriptive codes. The written reflections were read many times and coded based on the emerging common topics. The codes were generated through meticulous line-by-line identification. As an example, one excerpt from the journal, "I honestly felt nervous because I didn't think I was ready to teach. I'm just not mentally ready. My English is still lacking. I still need to learn more before I teach other people," was initially coded as "insecure" because the keywords "don't think I was ready to teach", refers to feeling of being insecure with one's teaching skill. Secondly, after identifying the initial coding, the codes were clustered into common themes and categorized into certain groups. For example, expressions like "mentally ready" and "mental readiness" are grouped as one theme because they were closely related to the participants' experiences in exploring their mental condition. The next step taken was deciding which codes could be merged. Some codes that had a common theme were merged into one and put under one specific theme. For example, expressions such as "I have big doubts about my teaching skill" and "I'm not sure if I can become a good English teacher" were put into one specific theme of "negative emotion" because both referred to the feeling of being too self-conscious.

Throughout the data analysis, the researchers kept in mind how to deal with the trustworthiness of the analysis. First, the lead researcher conducted the initial coding of three randomly selected journal entries and developed the codes, definitions, and themes. For instance, the code "positive emotion" refers to "any expressions regarding positive mindsets, grit, and determination to thrive," which is based on a participant's journal entry: "I must overcome the weakness that I have. I am determined to succeed. I'll do my best". After the initial coding conducted by the lead researcher was completed, the other two co-researchers followed the same steps individually. The three results were then compared to finalize the codes, definitions, and themes. The number of frequencies of the codes determined the ranks of the codes themselves. A high frequency suggested a significant and strong recurring theme. A low frequency, on the other hand, suggested an insignificant and minor theme.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The analysis revealed that there were two main categories that became the highlights of the PSTs' written reflective journals. Based on the two guided questions given, they perceived their image as future English teachers from the two major themes: 1) their mental readiness is based on how well they manage the class, and 2) their current level of grit and attitude to increase mental readiness to teach. Table 1 shows the classification of identified themes and subthemes found in the PSTs' reflections.

Table 1. Classification of identified themes and subthemes

No.	Main Theme	Sub-themes		Descriptors	Frequency of codes
1.	The connection between mental readiness and classroom management skills	a) the importance of understanding the concept of classroom management to build mental readiness	1)	a good comprehension of classroom management to build mental readiness	23
			2)	the ability to manage the students to build mental readiness	4
		b) the importance of understanding the students' psychology to build mental readiness	1)	comprehending the students' psychological needs	3
			2)	creating a comfortable learning environment	6
			3)	creating a positive relationship with the students	4
2.	Personal description of their current mental readiness	a) Negative emotion	1)	having insecurity	8
			2)	Doubting self- ability	19
			3)	having stage fright	7
		b) Positive emotion	4)	having determination and grit	7
			5)	sharing tips and tricks	5

Theme 1: The connection between mental readiness and classroom management skills

In the first theme, two sub-themes emerged: a) the importance of understanding the concept of classroom management to build mental readiness, and b) the importance of understanding the students' psychology to build mental readiness. In the first sub-theme, two descriptors were identified. They were: 1) the importance of understanding the concept of classroom management to build the PSTs' mental readiness 2) the ability to manage the students to build mental readiness.

In the first descriptor, it was found that many of the PSTs agreed upon the importance of classroom management to build their mental readiness. In the first four meetings of the semester, the PSTs had intense and reflective discussions on what makes someone a good teacher. All 23 PSTs agreed that to become a good teacher and mentally ready to become a teacher, they need to have the necessary classroom management skills and awareness of the multiple tasks a teacher needs to cater. This can be seen from an example entry as follows:

> *Even though teachers nowadays are not the center of the class, in my perspective they still have control and responsibility of the whole class and the activities inside the class. So, it is important for the teacher how they manage their classes. It's like being prepared gives me good mental readiness to become a teacher* (PST3, managing the class, week 4)

The second descriptor was the importance of having the ability to manage the students in the classroom to build PSTs' mental readiness. Four PSTs highlighted a more detailed understanding of why classroom management is important in their efforts to obtain mental readiness. They believed that in managing the class, they needed to pay serious attention to how to control their students' behavior in the class. Once they can manage the class, they will feel more mentally ready to teach. From their lecturers' stories and experiences, they both noted the importance of having these two qualities (awareness and sensitivity) in creating a positive, fun, and meaningful learning environment and to increase their mental readiness. An example entry can be seen as follows:

> *From several meetings that I have attended, I have learned a lot about how to manage the class and how to deal with the different personalities of the students at school. It turns out that if I can do this, I can be more mentally ready to face the students. Learn how to open and close lessons in class and how to create an interesting learning atmosphere for students so that they are enthusiastic about learning*. (PST9, managing the class, week 4)

In the second sub-theme of "the importance of understanding the students' psychology to build mental readiness", three descriptors were identified. They were: 1) comprehending the students' psychological needs; 2) creating a comfortable learning environment; and 3) creating a positive relationship with the students.

From the first descriptor, it was evident that the PSTs were completely aware that to become good teachers, they needed to pay attention to their students' psychological needs and characteristics. Three PSTs described that a good teacher should have good knowledge about psychology to be able to deal with struggling students and be aware of the diverse students' needs. An example of an entry can be seen as follows:

> *I learned a lot about how we manage class and time, how we deal with various characters of students with different mindsets. I feel more mentally ready to face the students if I have good knowledge about my students' psychological needs.* (PST14, managing the students, week 4)

The second descriptor of "creating a comfortable learning environment" revealed another important aspect in managing the students' needs. The PSTs realized that it is important for teachers to cater to the students' comfort during the classroom activities. Six PSTs felt this ability was very challenging to master because managing the heterogeneous needs of the students requires a good comprehension of human psychology. However, even though they feel that this skill

is incredibly challenging, they are fully aware that if they can master this skill, they will be more mentally ready to face the students. An example of an entry can be seen as follows:

> *It became clear to me that being a teacher was not an easy thing. It is not only about mastering the subject matter that will be assigned to students, but also about how a teacher can make his/her students feel comfortable in class. I truly believe that this is not easy. But, after listening to my lecturer's story, I if I can have this skill, I can be ready mentally to become a teacher.* (PST21, managing the students, week 4)

Besides providing comfort through interactions, the PSTs realized that in order to have adequate mental readiness to teach, a good teacher should have the ability to establish a positive relationship with his or her students. In this third descriptor, four PSTs stated that for them to create a positive relationship with the students in the classroom, choosing appropriate approaches would be detrimental. An example of an entry can be seen as follows:

> *My plan is to learn how to teach my students to connect with their real lives. Also, I will take fun classes and make a relationship with my students. I will make my students interested in my explanation from the beginning until the end of class. I think if I can do all of this, I can have good mental readiness to become a good English teacher* (PST17, managing the students, week 4)

These findings suggested that the PSTs' level of mental readiness revolved around how much knowledge they had about classroom management skills. They revealed that, to be mentally ready to teach, they needed to equip themselves with good knowledge of classroom management and human psychology. These two sub-themes portrayed how much the PSTs grasped on what they needed to do to become a good English teacher.

Theme 2: Perception of the personal description of their mental readiness

The PSTs reflections also depicted their current individual mental readiness to teach in the micro teaching activities. Their current level of mental readiness reveals two sub-themes: 1) negative emotions and 2) positive emotions. The second sub-theme of "positive emotion" consisted of two descriptors: a) having determination and grit; and b) understanding the importance of sharing tips and tricks in the learning process.

In the sub-theme "negative emotion", three descriptors were identified: a) having insecurity; b) doubting their self-ability; and c) having stage fright. In the first descriptor, eight PSTs highlighted their insecurity about their level of mental readiness to teach in their reflections. After a few meetings in the micro teaching class where they had fruitful discussions with their lecturers and classmates, they became very self-conscious of their pedagogical knowledge and English proficiency, so they considered themselves as lacking the needed mental readiness to become good English teachers. The idea of having the ability to oversee and give

information to their future students increased their insecurity. This situation can be seen from the following entry from one of the 8 PSTs:

> *I honestly felt nervous because I didn't think I was ready to teach. I'm just not mentally ready. My English is still lacking. I still need to learn more before I teach other people.* (PST3, insecure, week 4).

The second descriptor (doubting self-ability) revealed that self-questioning about the PSTs' competence in teaching also contributed to their sense of self-doubt during the teaching practice and feedback. They became overwhelmed knowing that there were numerous things that they would need to learn and master to become a good English teacher. Because of this, they felt that they were not yet able to foresee what awaited in the classrooms. They doubted that they could share information and communicate with their students with ease. Thus, self-doubt arose among 19 PSTs. The following is an example of an entry:

> *I started to feel like "OMG, am I capable enough to do this thing?" and I feel more and more nervous day to day considering there are so many things to understand and the lecturer gives the duration when doing the teaching simulation. On top of it all, the pressure of making sure that I don't give the wrong information gives me stress.* (PST12, self-doubt, week 4)

The third descriptor revealed PSTs stage fright. Some PSTs portrayed self-doubt from a different angle, i.e., from their lack of confidence in speaking in English in front of a group of people. Seven PSTs suffer self-doubt because they were still not ready to stand in front of their peers and teach, let alone teach and communicate in English. They liked teaching, but they were the type of individuals who never enjoyed becoming the center of attention, although this is what a teacher must do. An example of entry can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *When I knew [that] this semester we would have the micro-teaching class that require us to practice teaching skills as a teacher, it made me worried because I'm not really ready to do that. The reason is my public speaking skills, especially in English, are still lacking. I don't like to become the center of attention, but I like the idea of teaching in the classroom. It's weird, but I doubt if I can overcome my fear of speaking in public.* (PST23, self-doubt, stage fright, week 4)

Another interesting opinion that appeared in one of the reflections gave another unique perspective on why some PSTs have self-doubt. Four PSTs admitted that they have been so accustomed to interacting with their classmates and their lecturers through online platforms such as Whatsapp and Zoom during the COVID-19 breakout. They felt comfortable with the concept of social distancing and online communications because of their introverted nature. Therefore, having to have an offline class for the micro teaching was intimidating and awkward. Furthermore, the idea that they will be teaching in schools in the upcoming semesters was

daunting. They had to re-learn how to interact with other people in an offline/physical setting. The following is an example of an entry from the reflection:

> *I was very nervous and not ready to teach in front of the class. This is because I have been taking classes online for 2 years, so the interaction between me and my friends is still very awkward, and rarely talk to other friends, we still don't really know each other. And I also feel that my English and teaching skills are not enough and still very basic.* (PST9, self-doubt, stage fright, week 4)

The second identified sub-theme was positive emotion. Although many PSTs described their mental readiness to teach from a negative emotion perspective, others chose to project a more positive emotion. Their descriptions highlighted two descriptors: 1) having determination and grit, and 2) understanding the importance of sharing tips and tricks in the learning process.

Even though insecurity and self-doubt were the largest themes in the PSTs reflective journals, some of them opted to focus more on building the positive side of emotion, i.e., being determined to face any challenges during the teaching practice in the micro teaching class. Seven PSTs did not shy away from the fact that they were insecure and had high self-doubt about not knowing what to expect during the class. However, they were determined to embrace the challenges and learn to become good English teachers. They showed a positive attitude towards the possible challenges they may face during the teaching practice. However, they chose to work hard to master the teaching skills and become good English teachers. The following is an example entry:

> *To be honest, I was really nervous because it felt like, this time, in this class, I will be prepared to be a teacher (how to teach well and manage the class). I am still struggling with my speaking in public and in this class but, I must overcome the weakness that I have. I am determined to succeed. I'll do my best* (PST19, determined and grit, week 4)

The second descriptor from the positive emotion sub-theme revealed another promising mindset and action, that is, sharing tips and tricks. Five PSTs described that they have learned a lot from their micro teaching lecturers, who shared their difficulties in applying classroom management. They felt that sharing tips and tricks on classroom management could give them some insights and encourage them to learn more. By having a visualization of their lecturers' real-life experiences in dealing with classroom management, both had a better sense of how to deal with such situations. One example entry can be seen as follows:

> *After several Micro Teaching class meetings, I felt better than before because the lecturer provided material and prepared us on how to be a teacher in the classroom, how to handle students, provide good teaching methods, provide examples of interesting class activities, and so on.* (PST6, managing the class, week 4)

To sum up, the second theme provided a clear view of the dynamics of emotional fluctuations experienced by the PSTs, in which they portrayed their current level of mental readiness within the first 4 meetings. Despite the higher frequencies within the negative emotion sphere, the PSTs did not shy away from being more determined and grittier to overcome the challenges.

Discussion

EFL pre-service teachers' mental readiness to teach

In teaching, classroom management is one of the key essential elements in ensuring successful teaching and learning activities in the class. Kaufman and Moss (2010) describe that PSTs' perception of the teaching styles reflects their idea of an ideal teacher. In the written reflection, the PSTs portray their "ideal" way of conducting the class through "their desire to devise student-centered, hands-on, and inquiry-based instructional approaches" (p. 128). Once this desire is fulfilled, they believe they are mentally ready to teach their students. They believe they need to have "a greater understanding of preventative or proactive classroom management" (Jackson, et al., 2013). The written reflections depict the PSTs' realization of how extensive the level of a teacher's responsibility is, but, at the same time, they feel overwhelmed with it. Thus, classroom management is usually the most frequent problem that PSTs face. This situation is depicted in one of the findings on some of the PSTs' negative emotions. On the one hand, they realized that having a good comprehension of classroom management was needed to support mental readiness (first sub-theme). However, at the same time, they felt insecure (negative emotion) about their teaching skill because they lacked classroom management experience and skills. In the end, they felt that they were not mentally ready to become English teachers.

Nevertheless, some PSTs showed positive emotion and grit, which supported their effort in building their mental readiness. They had the grit to minimize this problem by increasing their classroom management skills and collaborating (sharing tips and tricks) with other PSTs, and, therefore, increasing their confidence in teaching (second theme). The newly found confidence, which was gained through continuous practice and reflections, in turn, increased their mental readiness to teach. In other words, their level of grit and perseverance influences their success in achieving mental readiness.

Marzano et al. (2003) state that a good teacher is someone who can "provide an environment in which teaching and learning can flourish" (p.1). They further emphasize the important role of a good teacher, who creates a positive learning atmosphere. Of course, creating such a positive atmosphere can be gruesome and challenging, especially for PSTs who have yet to learn much more about teaching and classroom management. The success of creating such a positive atmosphere requires the PSTs to have the necessary grit and perseverance to stay on track to achieve the long-term goal: creating a positive atmosphere for their students so that they are comfortable learning in their classes. Hence, the PSTs will be mentally ready to face their future students. These PSTs saw classroom management as the use of proactive strategies (Gokalp & Can, 2021) to control the class, because in their view, having good control of the class means they have a good relationship with their future students. The good relationship results in having control of the class. Thus, they can be more mentally ready to teach.

As depicted from the PSTs' reflections, they went further into the details of describing their fears, insecurities, and concerns in managing different student characters. Many of them were concerned with their ability to manage the diverse students in their classrooms and how to cater to their different characters and attitudes. The reflections gave a good glimpse of how they perceived student-teacher dynamics in the classroom and how it affected their mental readiness to become teachers. They believed that their students' roles and attitudes in the class influenced how they see themselves as teachers, affected how they interact with their students, and defined their level of mental readiness to become a teacher, grit, and perseverance. They felt that knowing the pedagogical content knowledge alone was not enough to equip them to achieve mental readiness in teaching. On the contrary, knowing how to deal with and interact with the students could help them control the class. Once they controlled the class, their confidence increased, thus they could be more mentally ready to face the students.

Nevertheless, insecurity and lack of confidence can unfortunately contribute to the pre-service/novice teachers' commitment to become teachers (Tutyandari, 2022). Teachers, even those who are experienced, often face challenges in managing the classrooms. In other words, the challenging nature of managing different characters in one classroom can be overwhelming at times. Because of this, there has been evidence of teacher burnout due to the overwhelming tasks of managing the students every day (Gilmour et al., 2021, Mahmoodi et al., 2022). The PSTs' grit and willingness to do their best in their teaching activities play a significant role in ensuring their readiness in teaching.

From their reflections, the PSTs were aware of the importance of mastering the skills needed to become a good English teacher. They could not help but describe their insecurities and hopes in embracing their future as English teachers. Some of them gave their raw and honest feeling about their insecurities related to having to face different characters in one class and having to be the center of attention and source of information. In their reflections, they highlighted the overwhelming feeling of having to navigate all the necessary skills when teaching their students. They felt that they were unprepared to face those challenges and, in the end, afraid to fail as English teachers.

Nevertheless, despite the negative emotions that they felt at the beginning of the teaching practice activities, many of the PSTs showed their positive emotion by describing how they formed their mindset and grit. Those who had a positive attitude towards the learning process brought about their tenacity to strive and survive. This exemplary attitude is in accordance with the notion of grit, in that a learner can be successful when he or she has the determination to succeed.

In sum, the unseen struggles the PSTs face in their learning journey in the micro teaching class should be taken into consideration. The findings showed that even though these participants were digitally savvy, in their honest opinion, having this trait was not enough. The PSTs felt that once they can integrate these elements, they will embody mental readiness (Li, 2022). The integration between digital literacy, pedagogical knowledge, and mental readiness should be considered.

Implications for EFL education programs

The success of the PSTs in completing their practicum or teaching practice class is not solely their responsibility. The teacher education program has a

significant role in the PSTs' success in shaping their beliefs towards teaching. Teacher education programs in general nowadays insert pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) because teachers should not only know about teaching, but they also need to know how to teach the materials (Sasmito & Wijaya, 2022). The PSTs need to have good subject matter knowledge, which presents another set of challenges that the students need to overcome. However, their lack of experience or knowledge of the complexities of PCK can affect their teaching anxiety, which was evident from the reflections. Teacher education programs are expected to respond to the complexity of assisting PSTs to be up and ready to teach their students. The findings reveal how the PSTs view themselves as teachers heavily influenced their mental readiness in carrying the title "teacher". The research on teacher readiness conducted by Pribudhiana et al. (2021) confirm that indeed teacher education programs should not neglect the importance of mental readiness to support PSTs' successful teaching.

To create a supportive environment for them, teacher education programs in the university setting can emphasize applying a mentoring system that enables the PSTs to do self-reflective practice. This is in line with the reflective model developed by Golder, et al. (2020). The micro teaching lecturers play their roles as the mentors who provide the PSTs with some in-depth questions that encourage them to be more self-aware with their level of mental readiness, their grittiness, and determination to become good English teachers. With this type of mentoring, PSTs' reflective writings will be much more meaningful because they can construct their identities as PSTs (Ardi et al., 2025). With the guidance from their respective micro teaching lecturers, PSTs can analyze their journey in achieving grit and mental readiness to teach. During this practice, PSTs can practice connecting the dots between their journey and the pedagogical theories given.

Conclusion

This small-scale research provided a glimpse of PSTs' struggles, fears, concerns, hope, and determination in their effort to embrace their new role as English teachers. The reflections portrayed small but significant details of their inner struggle that are mostly impossible to see. This single text–context portrays the importance of their apprehension in embracing the responsibility of managing the class influences, and how they describe their mental readiness and regulate their emotions, which gave significant influence in their learning process.

Pedagogically speaking, the English language education study programs in higher education should be more intense in cultivating mental readiness alongside the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) by implementing teaching activities with various simulations. PSTs need to be exposed to different types of structured reflections, mentoring, and activities that require them to explore their grit and mental readiness in shaping themselves to become qualified English teachers. This study provides proof that having good knowledge about TPACK does not always correlate with having excellent teaching skills.

This research does not touch upon the PSTs' readiness in using technology for teaching purposes, although it is a fact that teacher preparation and teacher education programs cannot be separated from technology today. PSTs are mainly technology savvy and use technology for different purposes; thus, exploring their

mental readiness to use technology in teaching wisely and ethically in their teaching practice is worth investigating.

To conclude, it is imperative that teacher education programs address core aspects of learning success, including individual mental readiness, grit, and emotional regulation. The PSTs should be allowed to build their confidence and not be timid in carrying the title "teacher". Their inner self should be provoked for them to have a positive mindset. They should be given an appropriate amount of space to always increase their mental readiness to achieve teaching readiness through self-reflection activities and mentoring.

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