

AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT TEACHERS' ANXIETIES AND COPING STRATEGIES RELATED TO THE TEACHING PRACTICUM

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to identify the levels of anxiety experienced by the student teachers about their practicum. Moreover, it is intended to compare the anxiety levels experienced by the student teachers about the practicum activities by gender, age, and year, and to analyze how the student teachers handled their anxieties. The participants were selected using a simple random sampling technique. The sequential explanatory mixed methods design was adopted in this study. As the research instrument, the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003), which consists of 26 items, was applied in this study. This questionnaire is classified into five dimensions: Evaluation anxiety, Class control anxiety, Professional preparation anxiety, School staff relations anxiety, and Unsuccessful lesson anxiety. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) resulting from the pilot study was 0.84. A total of 211 student teachers (77 males and 134 females) from Taunggyi Education Degree College participated in this study. The findings showed that evaluation and class control anxieties were found to be the highest anxieties of student teachers during their teaching practicum. The results showed that the student teachers have felt moderate anxiety in professional preparation and unsuccessful lessons, and low anxiety in school staff anxiety. In this study, a significant difference was found in anxiety during practicum, along with gender and age. There was no significant difference in any of the dimensions across school years. This study also found that there were several ways to cope with the anxieties. The strategies used by student teachers to cope with their anxiety were thinking positively, creating a good learning atmosphere, discussing with their supervisors, mentors, and peers, building good relationships with school staff, and preparing everything well. Thus, this study might help student teachers, lecturers, and mentors prepare for a quality teaching practicum by reducing student teachers' anxieties.

Keywords: Practicum, Anxiety, Coping, Coping Strategy

Introduction

Education Degree Colleges are producing qualified student teachers with the competencies needed to teach effectively in Myanmar's primary and middle school classrooms. The four-year Education Degree College curriculum provides an integrated approach where teaching subject knowledge and understanding educational theories are learned through a supportive learning process of relevant and practical application and experience. The Education Degree Colleges offer student teachers both on-campus and off-campus practice teaching. On-campus practice teaching refers to the time when student teachers are allowed to handle actual classes in their colleges, whereas off-campus practice teaching is conducted by sending the student teachers to the partner schools for them to experience teaching in the actual field. Before the student teachers go to the partner school, the colleges give orientations about the practicum to be comfortable and reduce the anxiety of student teachers. Practicum is an essential element in teacher education. It involves the activities of preparing the lesson plan, teaching in class, assessing the students' achievement, and practicing the art of teaching.

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According to Abdullahi (2010), a good teaching practicum should stimulate student teachers to be greatly committed to the attainment of excellence, and the process should furthermore enable them to be more serious and devoted to work to meet professional expectations. In the teaching practicum, student teachers will present lessons and materials approved by their mentor teachers, who have experience teaching real students in various real school settings. So, they have to master them all. Additionally, their mentors and supervisors will assess and evaluate them during their practicum. Thus, many student teachers felt anxious about the practicum. Anxiety during practicum may have negatively impacted the performance of student teachers. Hence, student teachers need to manage their worries to be successful in their teaching practicum. This research seeks to uncover the anxiety levels of student teachers and identify strategies to reduce them.

Purposes of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to identify the levels of anxiety experienced by the student teachers about their practicum and to analyze how they overcome these anxieties. The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To identify the levels of anxiety experienced by the student teachers during their practicum.
2. To compare the anxiety levels of the student teachers during the practicum activities by their gender, age, and school year.
3. To analyze how the student teacher copes with their practicum anxiety.

Definitions of Key Terms

Anxiety: Anxiety is a part of human emotion that includes fear, uncertainty, uneasiness, frustration, or tension (Brown, 2000).

Practicum: Practicum refers to the course of study in teacher training. It involves the practical experiences that trainee teachers receive before taking up student teaching and other responsibilities as teachers; that is, it is the practical and experiential learning and exploration of the teaching practice under a mentor's supervision (Teachmint, 2022).

Coping: Coping refers to the conscious or unconscious strategies used to reduce unpleasant emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Coping strategy: Coping strategy refers to "how people respond to stress as they contend with real-life problems" (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

Review of Related Literature

Perry (2004, cited in Charisma & Nurmallasari, 2020) asserts that teaching practicum can be both exciting and challenging, resulting in a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement, and apprehension. She also emphasizes that this excitement can be elaborated in two folds: excitement about being part of a real classroom setting, getting to know students, planning and organizing classroom tasks, and having doubts about their ability to cope with unfamiliar situations, such as controlling and managing learners or establishing a working relationship with field-based and faculty-based supervisors. Based on these statements, the teaching practicum can be both more exciting and challenging, evoking emotions of anxiety, uncertainty, nervousness, and eagerness.

Anxiety was a feeling containing tension, nervousness, apprehension, and worries, whose level varied depending on each person (Spielberger, 1983, cited in Andrean, 2017). Several studies have been conducted to investigate the nature of anxiety experienced by student teachers during teaching. It was found that student teachers in Great Britain experience anxiety from factors such as evaluation, pupil and professional concerns, class control, and teaching practice requirements (Hart, 1987). In Canada, Morton et. al. (1997) report that student teacher anxieties were related to evaluation, pedagogical, classroom management, and staff relations factors. Capel (1997) reported in her study, conducted among student teachers in Canterbury, that anxiety was attributed to evaluation, professional preparation, class control, and school staff factors. In a study of student teachers who were attending a faculty of education at a Canadian University, it was observed that females experienced higher levels of anxiety than males before practice teaching (Morton et al., 1997). However, Preece (1979) did not find sex-linked differences concerning class control problems.

In their study of Turkish English Foreign Language (EFL) teacher candidates, Aydin and Bahce (2001) report classroom management as the most cited source of anxiety (43%); other factors that cause anxiety are the teaching process, relationships with the students, and problems caused by the student teachers' status. Evaluation anxiety caused by being observed and assessed by the supervisor is often cited as a major source of anxiety in the practicum (Caple, 1997). Anxiety may also be induced by the reaction of the supervisor to an unsuccessful lesson (Heeralal, 2014). Anxiety related to controlling the classroom, managing and maintaining discipline, and dealing with disruptive behavior may lead to high levels of anxiety (Preece, 1997). Kyriacou and Stephens (1999) identified not being regarded as a real teacher, difficulty in behavior management, and the heavy workload as sources of anxiety for student teachers. Cross-country studies suggest that student teachers in Europe, the Americas, and Asia all experience anxiety while they are deployed for their practicum (Eksi & Yakisik, 2016). While other researchers suggest that anxiety levels could vary individually, as personality plays an important role in how a person experiences or perceives anxiety, other factors could also include gender as well as culture (Heinrichs et al., 2006). Likewise, Ameen et. al. (2002) found that 80% of respondents with teaching anxiety stated that possible causes were non-recognition of materials and students, pre-preparation class, and student evaluation.

Student teachers may experience anxiety during the teaching practicum. This could impact the performance of student teachers in teaching. Hence, some steps need to be taken to address the anxiety to improve performance during the teaching practicum. To cope with the anxiety, people will need to remember that they will undergo anxiety and that they will need to accept it, recognize the level of anxiety, minimize their time around people with anxiety, look for anxiety relievers, utilize off-the-job diversions, look in the mirror, and give themselves time and space to refocus (Mortensen, 2014). In a limited number of studies on the coping strategies (e.g., some anxiety management tactics like self-control, accepting and facing the situation, and setting clear goals) with practicum stress, it was revealed that self-control (Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013) and holding positive attitudes and establishing strong ties with peers and mentors (Lampadan, 2014) are the main coping strategies of the pre-service teachers. There are other types of coping strategies, as mentioned by Costa and Kellick (2000), such as self-reflection,

which may enable student teachers to construct meaning from their work in the classroom and encourage growth and confidence.

Method

Research Method

In this study, a sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used.

Participants

The sample of the study included 211 student teachers from Taunggyi Education Degree College. For gender, there are 77 males and 134 female respondents. In order to get the required sample, the researcher selected the participants by using a simple random sampling method.

Table 1 Number of Student Teachers from Selected Years

Taunggyi Education Degree College	First Year		Second Year		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	211
	41	59	36	75	
Total	100		111		

Instruments

Only two instruments were used to get the required data. The first instrument, the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale (STAS), designed by Ngidi and Sibaya (2003), which consists of 26 items, was applied. The original instruments, developed by Hart (1987) and modified by Capel (1997), Morton et. al. (1997), and Ngidi and Sibaya (2003), were run on the STAS by using factor loading. This questionnaire is divided into five factors: Evaluation anxiety, Class control anxiety, Professional preparation anxiety, School staff relations anxiety, and Unsuccessful lesson anxiety. It was a 5-point Likert scale of very much, moderately, somewhat, rarely, and never.

The second instrument in this study was an interview section. The purpose of the interview was to get in-depth information. For the main questions, this study chose to be concerned about what their anxiety levels were and how they coped with their anxieties. The question for the interviews was, “How do the student teachers cope with their practicum anxiety?” This study presented only five interview data points due to the participants’ limited availability to take the interview section. Each interview lasted 5 minutes. The interview records were translated into English. Finally, this study wanted to combine the two instruments to obtain more accurate and reliable data from the participants.

Data Collection Procedure

The Student Teacher Anxiety Scale, developed by Ngidi and Sibaya (2003), was used in this study. After translating these questions into the Myanmar Version, the experts (teachers from Educational Studies) reviewed the content for validity. Then, after preparing the instruments, a pilot study was conducted with 30 student teachers (Second Year) from Taunggyi Education Degree College. The internal consistency reliability for this study, measured by Cronbach’s alpha, was 0.84 for the whole scale (Evaluation anxiety, Class control anxiety, Professional preparation anxiety, School staff relations anxiety, and Unsuccessful lesson anxiety). So, it was evident that the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale towards teaching practicum has high reliability to measure the student teachers’ anxiety towards teaching Practicum.

After the pilot study, the researcher obtained permission from the head of the school. Then, a 26-item questionnaire was administered to student teachers (Second Year and First Year) during their teaching practicum. In addition, four randomly selected student teachers from Taunggyi Education Degree College were interviewed after their teaching practicum. The interview was comprised of open-ended questions. All the interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the interviewees. The interview records were translated into English.

Data Analysis and Findings

In this study, the findings based on quantitative and qualitative studies will be presented. The questionnaire was requested by the student teachers from Taunggyi Education Degree Colleges to collect their anxiety levels. To obtain the levels of anxiety related to the teaching practicum, mean values and standard deviations were used. The results were described in Table 2.

Table 2 Anxiety Levels Experienced by the Student Teachers along the Various Practice Teaching Activities (N = 211)

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Evaluation Anxiety	211	3.89	.34	High Anxiety
Class Control Anxiety	211	4.34	.29	High Anxiety
Professional Preparation Anxiety	211	3.07	.65	Moderate Anxiety
School Staff Anxiety	211	1.57	.30	Low Anxiety
Unsuccessful Lesson Anxiety	211	2.98	.71	Moderate Anxiety
All	211	3.31	.26	Moderate Anxiety

Scoring direction:

1.00-2.33=low Anxiety 2.34-3.67=Moderate Anxiety 3.68-5.00=High Anxiety

Table 2 shows the anxiety levels experienced by the student teachers during the various practice teaching activities. The results show that student teachers have felt anxiety very much in class control and evaluation, moderate anxiety in professional preparation and unsuccessful lessons, and low anxiety in school staff anxiety, respectively.

To find out the significance by gender, age, and school year, the independent samples *t*-test was used. The results were shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The Results of the Independent Samples *t*-test for Each Dimension of Student Teachers' Anxiety by Gender (N=211)

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Evaluation Anxiety	Male	77	3.83	0.32	-1.871	.063
	Female	134	3.92	0.35		
Class Control Anxiety	Male	77	4.30	0.30	-1.539	.125
	Female	134	4.37	0.28		
Professional Preparation Anxiety	Male	77	3.02	0.72	-.771	.441
	Female	134	3.09	0.61		
School Staff Anxiety	Male	77	1.56	0.32	.615	.539

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
	Female	134	1.59	0.28		
Unsuccessful Lesson Anxiety	Male	77	2.84	0.66	-2.228	.027*
	Female	134	3.06	0.72		
All	Male	77	3.25	0.27	-2.305	.022*
	Female	134	3.34	0.25		

Note: N = number of respondent student teachers.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 indicates that female student teachers had higher mean scores on the overall anxiety scale compared to male student teachers. It can be interpreted that female student teachers have more anxiety in teaching practice than male student teachers.

Table 4 The Results of Independent Samples *t*-test for Each Dimension of Student Teachers' Anxiety by Age (N=211)

Variables	Age	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Evaluation Anxiety	18-19 year	89	3.90	0.34	-.117	.907
	20-21 year	122	3.89	0.34		
Class Control Anxiety	18-19 year	89	4.36	0.31	.859	.392
	20-21 year	122	4.33	0.27		
Professional Preparation Anxiety	18-19 year	89	3.15	0.66	-1.709	.897
	20-21 year	122	3.00	0.64		
School Staff Anxiety	18-19 year	89	1.58	0.31	-.433	.665
	20-21 year	122	1.56	0.29		
Unsuccessful Lesson Anxiety	18-19 year	89	3.16	0.63	-2.510	.013*
	20-21 year	122	2.85	0.73		
All	18-19 year	89	3.36	0.25	-3.26	.001**
	20-21 year	122	3.27	0.26		

Note: N = number of respondent student teachers.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4 shows that the mean scores of student teachers (18-19 years) were higher than those of student teachers (20-21 years). According to Table 4, there were significant differences between the different age groups for the overall anxiety scale by age.

Table 5 The Results of Independent Samples *t*-test for Each Dimension of Student Teachers' Anxiety by School Year (N=211)

Variables	Year	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Evaluation Anxiety	First	100	2.96	0.73	-.567	.571
	Second	111	3.01	0.68		
Class Control Anxiety	First	100	4.34	0.28	-.092	.927
	Second	111	4.35	0.30		
Professional Preparation Anxiety	First	100	3.02	0.68	-1.108	.269
	Second	111	3.12	0.51		

Variables	Year	N	Mean	SD	t	p
School Staff Anxiety	First	100	1.60	0.29	.981	.328
	Second	111	1.55	0.30		
Unsuccessful Lesson Anxiety	First	100	2.96	0.73	-.567	.571
	Second	111	3.01	0.68		
All	First	100	3.30	0.26	-.397	.692
	Second	111	3.31	0.26		

Note: N = number of respondent student teachers.

According to Table 5, the total mean score of second-year students was slightly different from that of first-year students by school year. It can be clearly seen that there were no significant differences in the overall anxiety scale by school year.

Coping Strategies

The question for the interviews was, “How do the student teachers cope with their practicum anxiety?” During their teaching practicum, the student teachers employed various coping strategies to manage their anxiety. The following strategies were discussed:

Table 6 Student Teachers’ Coping Strategies for Their Practicum Anxieties

No	Category	Strategies	Excerpts
1	Evaluation Anxiety	Thinking positively	“I decided to ignore teaching practicum remarks given by supervisors or mentors, and I tried to finish my teaching.” (Male student teacher) “I thought positively that I could do it and avoided negative thoughts, feelings, moods, perceptions, and emotions.” (Male student teacher) “I always considered comments and feedback that came from mentors or supervisors as a tool for professional development.” (Female student teacher) “I tried to benefit from the suggestions of my mentor and supervisors because they are experienced in teaching and learning.” (Female student teacher)

No	Category	Strategies	Excerpts
2	Class Control Anxiety	Creating a good learning atmosphere	“I tried to create a happy learning process, interactive teaching, and a stress-free and relaxing atmosphere in the class.” (Male student teacher) “I used game-based learning to get students’ attention.” (Female student teacher) “I tried to control eye contact, a clear voice, and a smiling face with students.” (Female student teacher) “I did practice several times to get ready for it before my teaching.” (Male student teacher)
3	Professional Preparation Anxiety	Discussing with supervisors, Mentors and peers	“Firstly, I knew the subject matter well, and then I discussed with supervisors and mentors how to use teaching methods and when appropriate assessment methods are used.” (Male student teacher) “I discussed with friends whether lesson plans are good or not, the teaching aids are suitable or not, and the teaching strategies are appropriate or not.” (Female student teacher) “I showed my teachers and mentors to check the lesson plans.” (Female student teacher) I suggested the best ways from peers before doing the teaching practice.” (Male student teacher)
4	School Staff Anxiety	Building a good relationship	“We greeted every staff member in the morning to become familiar with them and participated in cleaning the school campus.” (Male and female student teachers) “We helped school staff in our free time and communicated politely and respectfully during our interactions with them.” (Male and Female student teachers) “I went back after greeting the principal and office staff every day.” (Male student teacher)
5	Unsuccessful Lesson	Preparing everything well	“I tried my best to prepare everything before teaching.” (Female student teacher) “I asked class teachers about students’ conditions to control and change the misbehavior attitude before teaching.” (Female student teacher) “I prepared lesson plans in detail.” (Male student teacher)

No	Category	Strategies	Excerpts
			"I searched teaching resources on the internet, search engines, Google Scholar, and YouTube channels for my topics." (<i>Male student teacher</i>)

Table 6 shows the coping strategies that student teachers utilized during their teaching practicum. According to the findings, it was revealed that five coping strategies were applied by the student teachers to cope with their anxiety during their teaching practicum. For evaluation anxiety, the student teachers replied that they can overcome their anxiety by thinking positively. For school staff anxiety, they built good relationships with the school staff. For class control anxiety, the student teachers responded that they created a good learning atmosphere. For professional preparation anxiety, the student teachers replied that they discussed it with their supervisors, mentors, and peers. And finally, for unsuccessful lesson anxiety, they can overcome their anxiety by preparing everything well.

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the levels of anxiety experienced by student teachers about their practicum and analyzing how the student teachers overcame their anxieties. There are some stress factors involved in evaluation, class control, professional preparation, school staff, and unsuccessful lessons. They were more anxious about evaluation and class control than professional preparation and unsuccessful lessons. There was a low level of anxiety among school staff. In this study, a significant difference was found in anxiety during practicum, along with gender and age. There was no significant difference in any of the dimensions across school years. Female student teachers are more anxious compared to their male counterparts during the teaching practicum.

Overcoming those anxieties, five strategies were applied by the student teachers during the teaching practicum, such as thinking positively, creating a good learning atmosphere, discussing with their supervisors, mentors, and peers, building good relationships with school staff, and preparing everything well. Student teachers' anxiety levels will decrease, and their instruction will become more proficient as they gain more teaching experience.

Discussions

The student teachers experience anxiety during practicum activities. There are many causes of anxiety among student teachers, which include evaluation, class control, professional preparation, school staff, and unsuccessful lessons. According to the findings, the student teachers were high on anxiety related to the teaching practicum. The result showed that the student teachers have felt anxiety very much in evaluation and class control, and moderate anxieties in professional preparation and unsuccessful lessons. Finally, the student teachers never feel anxious around school staff. According to the independent sample *t*-test result, there was a significant difference in anxiety related to the teaching practicum by gender and age in the present study. In the analysis by school year, there was no significant difference in all dimensions. Previous studies do not support this finding, as age, sex, and field of specialization were found not to have any significant effect on student teachers' anxiety (Albasin-Lacaba,

2022). This is also consistent with the study by Kwarteng (2018), which found that age has no association with student teachers' anxiety during their practicum. Ngidi and Sibaya (2003) discovered that as student teachers get older, their anxiety levels increase.

The question is, "How do the student teachers cope with their practicum anxiety?" It was also found that to overcome the practicum anxieties, some strategies were employed by the student teachers during their teaching practicum, such as thinking positively, creating a good learning atmosphere, discussing with their supervisors, mentors, and peers, building good relationships with school staff, and preparing everything well. Charisma and Nurmallasari (2020) pointed out that there are six categories for coping with anxiety: adapting, preparing, building a good relationship with the mentor and the students, boosting self-confidence, developing positive thinking, and keeping calmness and excitement.

This study has several limitations. For the quantitative study, the number of participants was small. To sum up, research studies with a larger sample size from different Education Degree Colleges would be more desirable so that more generalized, reliable, and valid research results would be achieved. For the qualitative study, only four student teachers participated. Moreover, the researcher used and compared the themes identified as a result of the individual analysis of each data point. In further research, the researcher compared the three-step data analysis process: individual analysis, group analysis, and cross-group analysis to ensure the identification of coping strategies. This research could assist student teachers, instructors, and mentors in better preparing for a successful teaching practicum by reducing anxieties among student teachers.

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