

<https://doi.org/10.69639/arandu.v12i4.1649>

## The Role of Emotions in the Practicum Experience of Ecuadorian Pre-Service English Teachers

*El Rol De Las Emociones Durante Las Prácticas Pre Profesionales En Profesores De Inglés Ecuatorianos En Formación*

**Karla Nohelia Macías Sánchez**

[kmaciass2@uteq.edu.ec](mailto:kmaciass2@uteq.edu.ec)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3204-2771>

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo  
Quevedo – Ecuador

**Jardel Coutinho dos Santos**

[jcoutinhod@uteq.edu.ec](mailto:jcoutinhod@uteq.edu.ec)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8626-7229>

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo  
Quevedo – Ecuador

*Artículo recibido: 18 septiembre 2025 - Aceptado para publicación: 28 octubre 2025*  
*Conflictos de intereses: Ninguno que declarar.*

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the emotional experiences of EFL pre service teachers in Ecuador during their professional practice, emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional support in their development. Using a mixed-method approach, it combines a quantitative method (survey) and two qualitative methods (interviews and visual narratives such as memes) to understand how emotions affect their performance, motivation, and professional identity formation. The results show that students face a variety of emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant, related to pedagogical challenges, uncertainty, and pressure, aspects that can influence their well-being and teaching effectiveness. The research shows that developing EI is key to managing these emotions, reducing stress, and strengthening resilience, aspects that are limited by the lack of emotional support spaces in internships. In addition, it reflects the necessity to incorporate strategies such as peer support, creative reflective activities, and training in social-emotional skills into teacher training programs.

*Keywords:* emotions, practicum, EFL pre-service teachers

### RESUMEN

Este estudio explora las experiencias emocionales de futuros docentes de inglés en Ecuador durante su práctica profesional, destacando la importancia de la inteligencia emocional (IE) y el apoyo emocional en su desarrollo. Utilizando un enfoque mixto, combina un método cuantitativo (encuesta) y dos cualitativos (entrevistas y narrativas visuales como memes) para entender cómo

las emociones afectan su rendimiento, motivación y formación de identidad profesional. Los resultados evidencian que los estudiantes enfrentan una variedad de emociones, tanto positivas como negativas, relacionadas con desafíos pedagógicos, incertidumbre y presión, aspectos que pueden influir en su bienestar y eficacia docente. La investigación subraya que el desarrollo de IE es clave para gestionar estas emociones, reducir el estrés y fortalecer la resiliencia, aspectos que se ven limitados por la carencia de espacios de apoyo emocional en las prácticas. Además, se destaca la necesidad de incorporar estrategias como el apoyo entre pares, actividades reflexivas creativas y formación en habilidades socioemocionales en los programas de formación docente.

*Palabras clave:* emociones, prácticas, profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera (en formación)

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the importance of emotions in the teaching and learning process has gained considerable attention in educational research. Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) presents not only linguistic and pedagogical challenges but also emotional demands, especially for pre-service teachers who are still developing their professional identity. Teaching a language, specifically in the EFL context, is one of the most demanding and difficult tasks that can arouse teachers' stress and burnout (Yin et al., 2013). During the practicum stage, future English teachers are often exposed to emotionally intense situations that can significantly influence their motivation, confidence, and teaching performance. Pleasant and unpleasant emotions emerge constantly in the classroom, shaping how pre-service teachers interact with their students, manage their responsibilities, and perceive their growth. Emotional intelligence (EI), which refers to various emotional skills, has the potential to reduce unfavorable, destructive aspects of teacher experiences and improve teachers' well-being (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2016).

However, despite the emotional complexity of teaching, there is still a lack of research exploring the emotional experiences of EFL pre-service teachers in Latin American contexts, particularly in Ecuador. Most studies have focused on in-service teachers or on cognitive aspects of teacher training, leaving aside the emotional dimension. As noted by Santos et al. (2022), until early 2020, little attention had been given in Ecuador to how emotions influence the English language learning and teaching process, showing a significant gap in local academic research. As Yin et al. (2013) point out, concentrating on the emotional aspects of teachers has grown in the educational field, as emotional factors are at the core of academic success. Furthermore, Hagenauer and Volet (2014) argue that teachers' emotional experiences deserve more attention in research, particularly during early career stages such as initial training.

Therefore, the general objective of this study is to explore the role of emotional factors in shaping the practicum experiences of Ecuadorian pre-service English teachers. To accomplish this, the research aims to: (1) identify the key emotional factors influencing pre-service English teachers during their practicum, and (2) analyze the strategies they use to manage emotional challenges in real classroom contexts. By giving voice to fifteen pre-service teachers through qualitative and quantitative methods, this research seeks to raise awareness of the need to integrate emotional support and training in teacher education programs, contributing to a more effective approach to teacher preparation.

### Literature Review

#### Emotions

Emotions are dynamic and continuous processes that arise when individuals interact with their environment and determine how they interpret and respond to experiences (Barrett, 2006). They represent a fundamental role in guiding behavior and decision making, while being

influenced and regulated by internal cognitive processes and the social context (Cole et al. (2011). Depending on the situation, emotions can be adaptive, helping people adjust and thrive, or maladaptive, overwhelming their ability to cope with situations (Cole, 2018). Emotions consist of multiple components, including subjective feelings, physiological responses, expressive behavior, and action tendencies (Frijda et al., 2000). Throughout life, as people encounter new experiences and social contexts, their ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions develops, shaped by changes in neurobiology, cognitive abilities, and social relationships, making emotional growth a lifelong process (Thompson, 2011).

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate one's own emotions and those of others. Goleman (1995) Emotional intelligence is the capacity to identify, comprehend, and regulate one's own emotions, while also perceiving, understanding, and effectively responding to the emotions of others. Salovey and Mayer (1990) also defined EI as the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and use this emotional information to guide thinking and behavior. Based on this, Derakhshan et al. (2019) conceptualize EI as the capacity to understand and manage both personal emotions and those of individuals in roles such as teachers or students, which is particularly relevant in classroom settings.

MacCann et al. (2020) argue that individuals with high levels of EI are more skillful at processing emotional information, allowing them to regulate their cognitive processes and behavior more effectively. In the educational context, this implies that emotionally intelligent pre-service teachers are more likely to manage classroom challenges constructively and maintain supportive learning environments. Rastegar and Memarpour (2009) further support this by suggesting that teachers with higher EI are better able to regulate their emotions in the classroom, which positively influences their interactions with students. Similarly, Soanes and Sungoh (2019) found that a strong understanding of EI contributes to more effective teaching, improved student behavior, and greater job satisfaction, which are all critical factors in teacher development.

In the EFL context, emotional demands may be intensified due to language barriers, cultural diversity, and communication challenges. Chen et al. (2024) point out that EI, along with self-efficacy, constitutes an indispensable part in preventing burnout among EFL teachers, emphasizing the protective function of emotional competence in high-stress teaching environments. The role of emotions in teacher development extends beyond classroom management. Barcelos (2015) emphasizes that teacher emotions deeply influence professional identity, teaching effectiveness, and overall well-being. She also underscores the interconnection between emotions and beliefs, arguing that these elements must be considered together to understand pedagogical decisions fully. In line with this, Orlova and Kamenická (2024) stress the importance of addressing emotional challenges during the practicum period, noting that emotional awareness and regulation are essential for resilience and for building a strong teaching identity.

By developing EI, pre-service teachers acquire the ability to recognize, regulate, and reflect on emotional experiences both their own and those of others. These competencies enable them to respond effectively to classroom challenges, create supportive learning environments, and increase both teacher satisfaction and student achievement. As Borg (2006) affirms, understanding the affective dimensions of teaching is key to cultivating inclusive, empathetic, and effective educational spaces.

### **The practicum as a formative experience**

The teaching practicum serves as a formative experience for student-teachers, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world context. According to Yuan and Lee (2016), this practical stage provides an opportunity to implement pedagogical theories and methodologies learned during their training. Through this hands-on experience, student-teachers can test their strategies and adapt them based on students' needs, contextual factors, and real classroom dynamics. Pre-service teachers experience a range of emotions that play a crucial role in shaping their professional identities; this is the reason why Golombek and Dorian (2014) affirm that it is essential to understand and manage these emotions for their professional development. By exploring their feelings, student-teachers gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the teaching profession, ultimately contributing to their identity formation (Yuan & Lee, 2016).

### **The emotional support in practicum stage**

Emotional support includes guidance and encouragement to help individuals face challenges. In education, it assists pre-service teachers in managing practicum demands, building confidence, and teaching effectively (Murray-Harvey, 2010; Zembylas, 2003). The gap between expectations and teaching realities can impact their performance and sense of identity, and strong support systems help close that gap. The emotional climate of schools also matters; teachers' emotions and self-efficacy influence collaboration and student-centered practices (Pan et al., 2024). Because of this, communication is essential; narrative inquiry offers a space to process emotional and cognitive dissonance (Golombek & Johnson, 2004).

Support from mentors and peers is essential. Mentor guidance shapes how pre-service teachers learn to teach (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021), while peer support, based on mutual respect, fosters emotional resilience (Solomon, 2004). Sharing fears, achievements, and concerns promotes well-being and builds a sense of community (Harrison et al., 2023; Kontak et al., 2022).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach to explore the emotional experiences of Ecuadorian English teachers during their practicum. A transversal design was used. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows a comprehensive understanding of how emotions influence teaching practices and the development of future English teachers in Ecuador.

## **Context and Participants**

This study focused on 87 students enrolled in the 5th to 8th semesters of a teacher training program at an Ecuadorian university. All participants had already completed their teaching practicums at the time of data collection. Their ages ranged from 19 to 40.

To inform them about the study, the researcher personally visited each class, explained the purpose of the research, and invited students to participate voluntarily. Of the 87 students who responded to the survey (Quantitative Phase), 15 agreed to participate and signed an informed consent form before providing their responses and materials for the study (Qualitative Phase).

## **Data Collection Instrument**

The primary data collection tools included questionnaires, interviews, and visual narratives through memes. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to gather quantitative data on the frequency and intensity of preservice teachers' emotions that participants experience during their practicum. This data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to explore patterns and relationships between emotions and factors like teaching performance. Semi-structured interviews provided qualitative insights into participants' emotional experiences, with a focus on the causes, effects, and management of emotions during teaching. The interview data was analyzed thematically to identify recurring emotional themes.

Additionally, participants were asked to create memes to express their emotional experiences. These visual stories were analyzed to identify symbolic representations of their emotions and the coping strategies used. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provided a thorough understanding of how emotions influence teaching practices and the development of future English teachers in Ecuador. It is important to note that only the students who were interviewed and those who were randomly selected to create memes needed to give informed consent. This requirement ensures that ethical guidelines were followed while focusing on the participants directly involved in providing detailed qualitative insights or creative visual stories.

## **Survey**

The survey included fifteen questions based on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Totally agree to 5 = Totally disagree), along with additional items about gender, age, and time spent learning English. It was distributed via Google Forms to ensure accessibility and easy response. The questionnaire was written in Spanish, the participants' native language, to ensure clarity and accuracy. To improve the instrument's reliability, it was first reviewed by a research-expert professor before being administered.

## **Visual narrative**

Visual narratives have gained significant attention in educational research as meaningful tools for both data collection and reflective practice (Santos et al., 2025). These narratives can take a variety of forms, including drawings, collages, paintings, and digital media such as memes,

the latter serving as one of the central focuses of the present study. As a visual and arts-based method, the use of memes offers a creative, accessible, and engaging alternative to traditional written reflection, particularly for student teachers (STs).

From a methodological perspective, visual approaches provide valuable insights into the evolving professional identities of preservice teachers, as well as their beliefs and assumptions about language teaching (De Laurentiis Brandão, 2018, 2019; Kelly, 2018; Melo-Pfeifer, Brinkmann, & Gerwers, 2024). When employed as a form of reflective practice, visual methods have proven effective in supporting preservice teachers' exploration of practicum-related challenges (Mitchell et al., 2010), pedagogical understanding (Swierzbis & Reimer, 2019), linguistic identity (Ibrahim, 2022), and emotional experiences (Weng & Troyan, 2023).

Incorporating memes into reflective activities provides a way to capture preservice teachers' emotional experiences during their practicum, highlighting the growing influence of digital visual culture in teacher education. By creating memes, participants can visually represent and communicate their emotions, offering insights into their reflective processes and the emotional dimensions of teaching (Vázquez-Calvo, Paz-López, & Rey-Godoy, 2025). In this study, 15 student teachers who voluntarily signed a consent form were asked to create a meme that represented the emotions they experienced during their internship. Additionally, they were instructed to provide a brief written explanation of their visual representation. Participants were given one week to complete the task, allowing time for thoughtful engagement with both the visual and reflective dimensions of the activity.

### **Interview**

Semi-structured interviews, as described by Gill et al. (2008), represent a qualitative research method that integrates a predetermined set of open-ended questions with the flexibility to explore emerging topics during the interview process. This approach enables researchers to obtain rich, detailed data and gain deeper insights into participants' experiences and perspectives. It is particularly effective when the objective is to explore participants' thoughts, emotions, and motivations in depth. By offering a balance between the consistency of structured interviews and the adaptability of unstructured ones, semi-structured interviews serve as a valuable tool in qualitative inquiry.

As the final phase of data collection in the present study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen student teachers. Each participant responded to six guiding questions designed to elicit reflections on their emotional experiences, personal anecdotes, suggestions, and overall perspectives regarding their teaching internship. This method facilitated a deeper understanding of the nuanced emotional dimensions associated with their practicum.

### **Data Collection Analysis**

The data collection process was carried out through Google Forms, the submission of visual narratives (memes) and semi-structured interviews. After completing the survey, the



memes and interview was conducted only with the participants who agreed to take part in the study by signing the informed consent.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research followed ethical considerations to ensure the protection and respect of participants. Before data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Those who agreed to participate signed an informed consent form.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants in the presentation of the results. These parameters were intended to keep the privacy of participants and ensure that they could share their experiences openly.

## **DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

### **Quantitative data**

To explore the emotional experiences of eighty-seven Ecuadorian pre-service English teachers during their practicum, a survey was administered to students from the fifth to eighth semester of a teacher training program. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items (1 = Totally Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Totally Disagree) to measure key emotional aspects related to their emotional journey and teaching performance during this period stage. In this section the results are presented in terms of percentage.

**Table 1**

#### *Institutional preparation and support*

| Institutional preparation and support   |       |       |       |       |      |        |           |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|-----------|
| Statement   | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5    | Mean   | Std. Dev. |
| I felt sufficiently prepared for my tasks in the pre-professional internship.   | 17.24 | 35.63 | 37.93 | 8.04  | 1.15 | 20.00  | 16.37     |
| The training I received prior to the practicum provided me with the necessary skills to handle the challenges in the classroom. | 27.58 | 42.53 | 17.24 | 12.64 | 0    | 19.998 | 16.02     |
| I felt supported by my tutors and supervisors during the practicum stage.   | 42.53 | 39.08 | 11.49 | 6.90  | 0    | 20     | 19.47     |
| I felt that the teaching staff of the school valued my contributions  | 34.48 | 48.28 | 11.49 | 2.30  | 3.45 | 20     | 20.43     |



|   |       |       |       |       |      |        |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|-------|
| I had access to resources that helped me manage stress during the practicum stage.  | 18.39 | 24.14 | 25.29 | 26.44 | 5.75 | 20.002 | 8.55  |
| I received constructive feedback that helped me improve my teaching skills.         | 41.38 | 40.23 | 14.94 | 1.15  | 2.30 | 20     | 19.75 |
| Note: 1 = Totally agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Totally disagree |       |       |       |       |      |        |       |

As shown in the table, a total of 52.88% of participants agreed that they felt sufficiently prepared for their tasks during the practicum. Although a considerable number remained neutral, this suggests that most pre-service teachers began their practicum with a fair level of confidence in their abilities. In terms of academic preparation, 70.11% agreed that the training they received before the practicum provided them with the skills needed to manage classroom challenges. This indicates that the university coursework was perceived as a valuable foundation for real teaching contexts.

Furthermore, support from mentors and school supervisors was also rated positively. A strong majority, 81.61 percent, felt supported by their tutors and supervisors, and 82.76% felt that the school's teaching staff valued their contributions. These findings emphasize the importance of guidance and professional recognition in shaping a positive practicum experience. However, perceptions regarding emotional support were more divided. Only 42.53% agreed that they had access to resources that helped them manage stress during the practicum. This result highlights a potential area for improvement in the support systems available to pre-service teachers. Regarding feedback, 81.61% reported receiving constructive input that helped them improve their teaching skills. This suggests that ongoing feedback was a significant component in their professional development during the practicum.

**Table 2***Emotional Management*

| Emotional Management   |  |  |  |       |       |       |       |       |        |           |
|--|--|--|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-----------|
| Statement  |  |  |  | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Mean   | Std. Dev. |
| I felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities of teaching.                              |  |  |  | 21.84 | 28.74 | 36.78 | 8.05  | 4.60  | 20.002 | 13.61     |
| Dealing with the pressure of teaching was more difficult than I thought it would be. |  |  |  | 29.89 | 44.83 | 16.09 | 6.89  | 2.30  | 20     | 17.43     |
| I was able to manage my emotions effectively throughout the practicum stage.         |  |  |  | 26.44 | 40.22 | 22.99 | 9.20  | 1.15  | 20     | 15.26     |
| There were times during the practicum when I questioned my career choice.            |  |  |  | 26.44 | 25.29 | 11.49 | 22.99 | 13.79 | 20     | 6.88      |
| Note: 1 = Totally agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Totally disagree  |  |  |  |       |       |       |       |       |        |           |

The table shows that 50.58% of pre-service teachers agreed that they felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities of teaching. Although a significant portion maintained a neutral position, this result suggests that emotional overload was a common experience during the practicum. Regarding the challenges of classroom pressure, 74.72% of participants agreed that dealing with the demands of teaching was more difficult than they had anticipated. This reinforces the notion that the practicum often presents realities that exceed initial expectations and preparation. Despite these difficulties, 66.66% of respondents stated that they were able to manage their emotions effectively throughout the practicum period. While a portion of participants reported otherwise, the majority felt capable of exercising emotional self-regulation during this formative stage.

One of the more concerning findings was that 51.73% of pre-service teachers admitted there were moments during the practicum when they questioned their career choice. Although this does not necessarily indicate long-term doubt, it highlights the intensity of the emotional challenges faced by pre-service teachers during this stage of their professional development.

**Table 3***Positive experience and professional growth*

| Positive experience and professional growth   |       |       |       |       |      |        |           |  |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|-----------|--|
| Statement   | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5    | Mean   | Std. Dev. |  |
| I often felt joy and enthusiasm while teaching English to my students.  | 35.63 | 43.68 | 17.24 | 3.45  | 0    | 20     | 19.28     |  |
| I feel that I have grown professionally as a result of my internship experience.  | 41.38 | 49.43 | 9.20  | 0     | 0    | 20.002 | 23.66     |  |
| The pre-professional practicum experience strengthened my desire to be a teacher.   | 29.89 | 32.18 | 21.84 | 11.49 | 4.60 | 20     | 11.82     |  |
| I felt a sense of accomplishment at the end of the pre-professional practicum.  | 56.32 | 34.48 | 9.20  | 0     | 0    | 20     | 24.73     |  |
| My experience during the pre-professional practicum has made me more confident in my abilities to manage the classroom effectively. | 39.08 | 42.53 | 16.09 | 2.30  | 0    | 20     | 20.00     |  |
| Note: 1 = Totally agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Totally disagree   |       |       |       |       |      |        |           |  |

As it is shown previously, a large majority of participants, 79.31%, agreed that they frequently felt joy and enthusiasm while teaching English to their students. This represents the positive emotional engagement that many experienced during classroom interactions. When asked whether they felt they had grown professionally as a result of their practicum, 90.81% of participants responded affirmatively. This strong agreement demonstrates that the practicum served as an opportunity for development, reinforcing the value of experiential learning in teacher training.

Additionally, 62.07% agreed that the experience strengthened their desire to become a teacher. Although a smaller proportion expressed uncertainty or disagreement, the overall response suggests that the practicum reaffirmed vocational interest for most participants. A strong sense of accomplishment was also reported, with 90.80% indicating that they felt a sense of achievement at the end of the practicum period. This points to the importance of personal validation and goal fulfillment in shaping a positive perception of the experience.

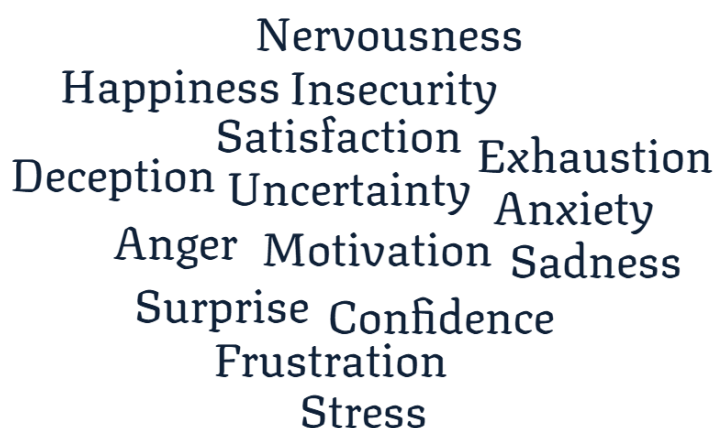
Moreover, 81.61% agreed that the practicum helped them feel more confident in their ability to manage a classroom effectively. This increased sense of competence emphasizes the practicum's role in building essential teaching skills and classroom preparation.

### Qualitative Data

Aligned with the objectives of this study, the qualitative approach provided valuable insights into how future educators experience their practicum. The following section presents an image illustrating the most common emotions reported by participants during the interviews.

**Figure 1**

*Participant's emotions mentioned in the interview*



As part of the qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen pre-service English teachers to explore in depth the emotions experienced during their practicum stage. After transcription and content analysis, a variety of recurrent emotions were identified, confirming the practicum as an emotionally intense and formative period, as proposed by Yuan and Lee (2016).

The most dominant emotional responses were anxiety, nervousness, stress, frustration, and happiness. These emotions discover the duality of emotional experience in teaching practice. While unpleasant emotions were mainly triggered by the pressure of classroom responsibilities and fear of making mistakes, pleasant emotions arose from successful teaching moments and meaningful interactions with students. This finding confirms what Barcelos (2015) says; she explains that emotions not only influence teaching effectiveness but also shape the construction of professional identity. Satisfaction and fear were also frequently reported. Satisfaction typically emerged when participants perceived progress in their professional development, while fear appeared from the pressure of leading classes without feeling fully prepared. These emotional fluctuations reflect what Golombek and Dorian (2014) describe as key moments in shaping teacher identity, where confronting and managing emotions play a crucial role. Emotions such as insecurity, motivation, exhaustion, anger, or uncertainty were also identified, and their intensity

varied depending on the context, reinforcing the idea of practicum as a dynamic, emotionally charged experience, as noted by Orlova and Kamenická (2024).

In the next part we will present the visual narratives in the form of memes, accompanied by the interview responses of three participants. The memes reflect the emotions and situations they encountered during the practicum, while the excerpts provide personal points of view of their experiences. These examples have the purpose of giving a closer perspective at how individual participants expressed their challenges and feelings within the broader study.

### **Julia**

In the interview, Julia expressed that their initial feelings were fear and stress, mainly due to the behavior of her students, who were perceived as disruptive. “At first, I was very afraid that just because I was an intern, they (students) would disrespect me (Interview).” This made her feel vulnerable and lacking authority, especially as a trainee. These initial reactions are consistent with what Murray-Harvey (2010) describes as the mismatch between expectations and real classroom conditions, which can cause emotional instability if not properly supported. Fortunately, Julia received support from her institutional mentor, whose presence and guidance helped her somehow to gain confidence and regulate her emotional responses gradually.

Her experience reflects the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in pre-service teacher development. According to Rastegar and Memarpour (2009), teachers with high EI can better regulate their emotions, which enhances their performance and relationships in the classroom. Julia acknowledged that her emotions significantly influenced her interactions with students. When she felt frustrated or overwhelmed, her tone and behavior changed, which often led to undesired reactions from students. This supports Salovey and Mayer's (1990) concept of EI as the ability to monitor and regulate one's own and others' emotions to guide actions effectively.

Julia's journey illustrates how pedagogical mentoring combined with emotional support contributes to teacher resilience and efficacy. As Derakhshan et al. (2019) emphasize, understanding and managing emotions in roles such as teacher or student is essential, particularly in challenging educational contexts like the practicum.

**Figure 2**

*Julia's meme*



In her meme, Julia represents the emotional trajectory of the practicum in three distinct phases. The first phase, symbolized by the crying cat, reflects her initial feelings of uncertainty, nervousness, and self-doubt. During the interview, Julia explained that she often questioned her ability to manage the classroom and felt overwhelmed by the responsibility of working with real students. That is why she said: “Training in emotional management would be very important because facing the reality of education is very different from what we imitate or assume (Interview)”. This resonates with Golombek and Dorian’s (2014) assertion that understanding and managing emotions is essential for pre-service teachers’ professional development.

The second phase, illustrated by the disheveled bird, shows the process of adaptation. Julia shared that although she continued to feel anxious, she gradually began to gain confidence as she tested classroom strategies, received support from her tutor, and learned to cope with unexpected challenges. This stage reflects how pre-service teachers navigate the transition from theory to practice, slowly adjusting their skills to real contexts.

Finally, the third phase, represented by the joyful embrace, conveys Julia’s sense of pride and accomplishment at the end of the practicum. She mentioned that overcoming her initial fears allowed her to recognize her progress and feel personally and professionally fulfilled. This sequence aligns with Yuan and Lee (2016), who argue that the practicum allows pre-service teachers to test and adapt their pedagogical knowledge while processing the emotional challenges they face. Julia’s visual narrative demonstrates that the practicum is not only a space to apply knowledge but also a critical period for emotional growth and the consolidation of professional identity.

### **Carolina**

Carolina mentioned that for her, it was important to have a positive attitude when entering the classroom. She noticed that her emotional disposition had a direct effect on student

engagement and classroom environment. As she said “I feel that the way you present yourself in front of the students is very imitable. So, teacher has to get there firm, smiling, and let them know “today we are going to learn” (Interview).” This reinforces the view of Soanes and Sungoh (2019), who argue that emotionally aware teachers foster better student behavior and higher job satisfaction. Carolina also emphasized the importance of creativity, particularly in repetitive situations, using innovative strategies to keep students motivated and engaged.

Her ability to regulate emotions and use creativity to manage challenges corresponds with MacCann et al. (2020), who state that individuals with high EI can regulate their cognitive and behavioral responses effectively, even under pressure. However, despite her efforts, Carolina felt that the emotional support she received from peers and mentors was limited. She described it as superficial and not sustained throughout the practicum, showing a gap in emotional guidance during teacher training. This lack of deeper support reflects the need for stronger mentoring systems, as noted by Orland-Barak and Wang (2021), who argue that mentor guidance shapes not only teaching skills but also emotional adaptation. Moreover, the absence of emotional communication among peers supports Solomon’s (2004) perspective, which emphasizes the importance of peer-based emotional resilience through mutual respect and shared experience.

### Figure 3

*Carolina’s meme*



Carolina’s visual narrative depicts her teaching experience as repetitive and emotionally monotonous, leading to boredom and a lack of fulfillment. In her meme, she represented herself with a “thinking face,” reflecting her internal questioning and desire to find more meaningful ways to contribute to their students. This reflects what Pan et al. (2024) discuss regarding how the emotional climate of the school context and unexpected classroom events can deeply affect pre-service teachers’ well-being and self-efficacy.



## Jane

Jane said she experienced both satisfaction and frustration throughout her practicum. While she felt motivated when her classes were successful, she also faced high levels of exhaustion, especially when her role was underestimated by permanent teachers, who often assigned her other activities not related to education or what had expected her to do. This mismatch between her expectations and reality mirrors what Zembylas (2003) describes as emotional tension caused by institutional structures that limit authentic teaching experiences. Her major emotions were fatigue, stress, and moments of anger, especially in response to the lack of recognition and the feeling of being undervalued. Nevertheless, she made conscious efforts to maintain a positive classroom attitude, relying on emotional self-regulation strategies she had developed intuitively. As she shared: “I arrived at school with the best attitude and the most enthusiasm I could muster so that they (students) could learn and understand the lessons in English (Interview).” This awareness of emotional impact is aligned with the findings of Chen et al. (2024), who point out that EI and self-efficacy are crucial for teachers to handle demanding environments without compromising their performance. Jane’s case also confirms the importance of fostering resilience in teacher training, as suggested by Borg (2006), who emphasizes the role of emotions in creating empathetic and effective educational environments.

Despite her strategies, Jane received minimal emotional support and avoided discussing her struggles with peers, knowing they were experiencing similar situations. This reflects a lack of collaborative emotional spaces in her training environment. Harrison et al. (2023) stress the importance of peer connection to promote well-being, and Kontak et al. (2022) add that sharing fears, achievements, and concerns contributes to building a sense of community, which was noticeably absent in her experience. That is the reason why Golombek and Johnson (2004) propose that narrative spaces are essential to process emotional and cognitive dissonance during teacher formation.

**Figure 4**

*Julia's meme*



From her visual representation, we can notice she looks happy and motivated when the classes flow well, and her students reflect those emotions. While in the second part, she represents her tiredness and frustration when the classes are not going as she expected, and when the students exhibit disruptive behavior. This was also mentioned in the interview statements, where she describes feeling happy and motivated during calmer moments, but also experiencing exhaustion and stress during chaotic situations in the classroom.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the emotions experienced by fifteen EFL pre-service teachers in Ecuador during their professional practice, identifying the key emotional factors they experienced and analyzing the strategies they used to manage the challenges these emotions generated. Based on the findings, several relevant conclusions were drawn at both the theoretical and practical levels.

First, it was evident that emotional experiences in teaching practice are intense, dynamic, and diverse. Teachers in training move from feelings of satisfaction and progress to emotions such as fear, frustration, insecurity, and stress. These emotions are closely linked to the process of building professional identity, directly influencing self-confidence, motivation, and responsiveness to classroom challenges.

Secondly, unpleasant emotions tend to emerge when EFL pre-service teachers do not feel sufficiently prepared, especially when faced with disruptive behavior or unexpected situations. However, emotional support from mentors and colleagues is essential to mitigate anxiety and promote the development of resilience. Furthermore, the research shows how fundamental the role of emotional intelligence (EI) is in teacher training. Preservice teachers with a greater ability to identify, understand, and regulate their emotions and those of their students are more effective

in classroom management, prevent emotional exhaustion, and promote a positive educational environment. The conscious use of emotional self-regulation strategies and the strengthening of interpersonal bonds contribute to increasing these levels of EI.

Based on these findings, it is considered crucial that teacher training programs explicitly include the emotional aspect in their curriculum. This can be achieved by adding training modules on emotional intelligence and creating mentoring spaces with psychological guidance. It is also recommended to foster peer learning communities that promote trust, empathy, and shared resilience. Additionally, training tutors and teacher trainers in emotional support skills is important. Likewise, educational institutions should formally acknowledge the significance of this dimension in teaching by establishing support policies that provide specific resources and spaces for emotional reflection within pedagogical practices.

Finally, it is proposed to encourage ongoing research that evaluates the impact of these interventions on teacher training, to adapt strategies based on the evidence obtained. In this way, it will be possible to continue strengthening the professional development of future teachers, ensuring not only their psychological well-being, but also the quality of the teaching they will offer in diverse and demanding educational contexts.

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