



Exploring the challenges, strategies, and support needed by ELEP pre-service teachers in implementing lesson plan: a study of ELEP students at Universitas Negeri Padang

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by pre-service teachers, the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges, and the forms of support they required in implementing lesson plans during their teaching practicum. The participants consisted of 43 pre-service teachers from the English Language Education Program (ELEP) at Universitas Negeri Padang who conducted their practicum from January to June 2025. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through open-ended questionnaires validated by the thesis supervisor. The data were analysed using thematic analysis guided by three theoretical frameworks: Lampert (2001) on teaching challenges, Hopkins (2008) on teaching strategies, and Zeichner and Liston (2013) on support needed in teaching practice. The findings revealed that pre-service teachers encountered several major challenges, including difficulties in classroom management and teacher–student interaction, adapting to students’ diverse abilities, time limitations, and unexpected classroom situations. To overcome these challenges, they applied strategies based on Hopkins’s models, such as whole-class teaching, cooperative group work, and inductive teaching. Moreover, they required reflective support, professional guidance, and contextual understanding in line with Zeichner and Liston’s framework. In conclusion, the study highlights that while ELEP students demonstrated adaptability and applied appropriate strategies to address teaching challenges, consistent mentoring, reflective feedback, and contextual understanding are essential to enhance the effectiveness of lesson plan implementation and to strengthen teacher education programs in preparing pre-service teachers for real classroom practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum plays a vital role in shaping the professional identity, competence, and readiness of pre-service teachers. It serves as a bridge between theoretical understanding gained in university courses and the complex realities of actual classroom practice. During this stage, pre-service teachers learn to manage students, design lessons, adapt teaching materials, and make pedagogical decisions that reflect real teaching situations. As stated by Darling-Hammond (2006), the practicum period is the most critical phase in teacher education because it allows pre-service teachers to test and integrate pedagogical theories into real classroom contexts. However, this transition is often challenging, as many pre-service teachers face difficulties adjusting their theoretical preparation to the unpredictable and multifaceted demands of the classroom.

In Indonesia, the significance of the teaching practicum has grown with the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes student-centered learning, flexibility, and contextualized instruction. The curriculum encourages teachers to develop independent learners who are capable of critical thinking and creativity. Within this framework, pre-service teachers are required to demonstrate pedagogical competence, classroom management, and adaptability in lesson planning and implementation. However, these expectations are often difficult to achieve due to several contextual limitations, such as limited teaching experience, inadequate facilities, and varying levels of student motivation. The transition from *microteaching* at the university to teaching real students in secondary schools frequently exposes pre-service teachers to challenges that test their ability to apply theoretical concepts effectively.

Teaching, as Lampert (2001) emphasizes, is not a routine act but a continuous process of problem-solving and decision-making. Teachers must constantly balance competing demands—between curriculum requirements and students' needs, between planned lessons and spontaneous classroom events, and between instructional goals and time constraints. For pre-service teachers, this balancing act becomes particularly demanding because they are still developing their pedagogical confidence and classroom management skills. They often struggle to adjust their teaching approaches when students do not respond as expected, or when external factors, such as lack of media, limited classroom time, or institutional regulations, interfere with their planned instruction. Lampert (2001) identifies several key dimensions of teaching challenges: adapting to teaching demands, applying theory to practice, addressing students' diverse abilities, managing the classroom, assessing students' understanding, and responding to unexpected situations. These dimensions provide a useful framework to understand the difficulties that pre-service teachers encounter during their practicum.

Previous studies have shown that such challenges are common among pre-service teachers around the world. Zeichner, K., & Conklin (2008) notes that student teachers often face tension between the ideals of university-based theory and the realities of school practice. Farrell (2016) adds that many pre-service teachers

experience a sense of disillusionment when they realize that real classrooms are far more complex than the simulated environments in microteaching sessions. Similarly, Zeichner, K. M., & Liston (2013) argues that teacher education should not only provide knowledge and methods but also foster reflection and emotional resilience to prepare future teachers for unpredictable teaching contexts. In the Indonesian context, the situation is further complicated by differences in school culture, student readiness, and infrastructure, all of which influence how effectively pre-service teachers can implement their lesson plans.

Lesson plan implementation, which forms the backbone of daily teaching practice, often becomes the most difficult aspect for pre-service teachers. Designing a lesson plan within the safety of a university classroom is very different from carrying it out in a real school environment. The unpredictable nature of student behavior, the diversity of learning abilities, and institutional constraints frequently force pre-service teachers to make immediate adjustments during the lesson. Many of them also face challenges in interpreting and following the school's curriculum format, which sometimes differs from the lesson plan format used in their university courses. For instance, some pre-service teachers reported difficulties when trying to implement project-based learning because the approach required more time, facilities, and student readiness than the classroom could provide. Others found it hard to manage classes where students were less motivated to learn English or lacked the prerequisite knowledge to participate in communicative activities.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, pre-service teachers develop their own strategies to cope with classroom challenges. According to Hopkins (2008), there are three major models of teaching strategies that teachers commonly employ: the *Whole-Class Teaching Model*, the *Cooperative Group Work Model*, and the *Inductive Teaching Model*. Each of these strategies offers distinct advantages and challenges depending on the classroom situation and the teacher's experience. The whole-class teaching model emphasizes direct instruction, where the teacher serves as the central figure in delivering material to all students simultaneously. For pre-service teachers, this model provides structure and a sense of control, making it easier to manage the class and monitor student understanding. However, as Hopkins (2008) cautions, overreliance on this model can lead to passive learning if not balanced with student interaction.

In contrast, the cooperative group work model promotes collaboration among students through teamwork and peer learning. This strategy reflects the constructivist view of learning, which suggests that knowledge is built through social interaction and shared experiences. When pre-service teachers use this model, they often encourage students to discuss ideas, work on tasks together, and support one another. However, implementing group work is not without its challenges. As pre-service teachers, they sometimes struggle to manage group dynamics or ensure equal participation among students.

Meanwhile, the inductive teaching model encourages discovery learning by allowing students to infer rules or concepts from examples. This method aligns well with the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which promotes inquiry-based learning. Yet, this approach requires skillful guidance and time management—two areas where pre-service teachers often lack confidence. As a result, many of them

combine inductive elements with direct instruction to maintain lesson flow and clarity. Farrell (2016) emphasizes that this ability to adapt instructional methods to suit the classroom context reflects the beginning of reflective practice—a key component of teacher professionalism.

Beyond challenges and strategies, support systems are crucial to the success of pre-service teachers during their practicum. Zeichner, K. M., & Liston (2013) identify three forms of essential support for beginning teachers: reflective support in teaching practice, understanding the teaching self, and attending to students and classroom contexts. Reflective support refers to structured opportunities for student teachers to analyze their experiences, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and plan improvements. This kind of reflection transforms difficulties into valuable learning experiences. However, as Zeichner, K. M., & Liston (2013) point out, reflection requires guidance from mentors or supervisors who can help student teachers interpret their experiences constructively.

The second type of support involves developing an understanding of the teaching self. Pre-service teachers need to explore their beliefs, attitudes, and identities as educators. This self-awareness enables them to teach more authentically and confidently. The third form of support is paying attention to students and the classroom context. Pre-service teachers must recognize that each classroom is unique, with different dynamics and learning needs. Mentor teachers and supervisors play a vital role in helping them make sense of these differences and adapt their instructional strategies accordingly. Farrell (2016) also highlights the importance of mentoring and peer collaboration in reducing anxiety and improving teaching performance during practicum.

Despite the growing number of studies on teaching practicum, there remains a gap in understanding how pre-service English teachers in Indonesia experience the process of lesson plan implementation holistically—from facing challenges to developing strategies and seeking support. Most existing research focuses on only one or two of these dimensions, without examining how they interact as part of the learning and professional growth process. Furthermore, few studies have analyzed these aspects within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which demands flexibility and student-centered teaching approaches. This research addresses that gap by exploring the interconnected experiences of pre-service English teachers at Universitas Negeri Padang as they implement lesson plans during their six-month teaching practicum.

This study is grounded in three theoretical frameworks: Lampert's (2001) theory of teaching challenges, Hopkins' (2008) models of teaching strategies, and Zeichner and Liston's (2013) framework of teacher support and reflection. By integrating these theories, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of pre-service teachers' experiences during their practicum. Specifically, it investigates: (1) the challenges pre-service teachers face when implementing lesson plans, (2) the strategies they employ to address those challenges, and (3) the types of support they require improving their teaching practice.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform teacher education programs, particularly in designing practicum experiences that better prepare pre-service teachers for real-world classroom conditions. By identifying the most

common challenges and effective coping strategies, teacher educators can refine training curricula to include more contextualized and reflective approaches. Moreover, the findings may encourage mentor teachers and supervisors to provide more targeted guidance and emotional support during practicum supervision.

Ultimately, understanding how pre-service teachers navigate the complexities of lesson plan implementation contributes not only to the development of effective teaching skills but also to the formation of reflective, adaptive, and resilient educators. As Farrell (2016) asserts, teaching is a profession that requires ongoing reflection and adaptation. The insights gained from this study are expected to enhance both the theoretical and practical dimensions of English teacher education, particularly within the evolving context of the Indonesian *Merdeka Curriculum*.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach design aimed at describing and understanding in depth the challenges faced by pre-service English teachers in implementing lesson plans during their teaching practicum. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore participants' experiences naturally and contextually using non-numerical data, as emphasized by Nazir (2014). The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire, which enabled participants to respond freely and reflectively based on their personal teaching experiences. The study focused on pre-service teachers of the English Language Education Program (ELEP) at Universitas Negeri Padang who conducted their PPLK (teaching practicum) in various schools across Padang City from January to June 2025. The total population consisted of 108 students, and 43 participants were selected as samples using purposive sampling (40% of the population), following Arikunto (2010) recommendation that 10–50% of the population is sufficient for research representation. The sampling criteria included: being active ELEP students, currently participating in the PPLK program, and being placed in schools within Padang City. The research instrument consisted of ten open-ended questions developed from Lampert's (2001) framework on teaching challenges and supported by Hopkins (2008) for teaching strategies and Zeichner & Liston (2013) for support needed. The instrument also contained a brief demographic section to contextualize responses. Before distribution, the questionnaire was validated by the thesis supervisor. Data were collected by distributing the open-ended questionnaires directly to participants, allowing sufficient time for thoughtful and reflective responses. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved several stages: familiarizing with the data, coding, categorizing similar codes, identifying main themes, and drawing conclusions. This method enabled the researcher to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the challenges, strategies, and support encountered by pre-service teachers, thus providing a comprehensive and authentic depiction of their real teaching experiences during the practicum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This section presents the results of the study concerning the challenges faced by pre-service English teachers, the strategies they employed to overcome those challenges, and the forms of support they required during their teaching practicum. The data were collected from 43 participants of the English Language Education Program (ELEP) at Universitas Negeri Padang, who carried out their teaching practicum (PPLK) from January to June 2025. The data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach through thematic analysis, guided by Lampert’s (2001) theory of teaching challenges, Hopkins’ (2008) framework of teaching strategies, and Zeichner and Liston’s (2013) model of reflective teaching support.

Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers

Analysis based on Lampert’s (2001) framework revealed seven major categories of challenges: (1) adapting to teaching demands, (2) applying theory to teaching practice, (3) addressing students’ diverse abilities, (4) managing classrooms and maintaining teacher–student interaction, (5) assessing students’ understanding, and (6) adapting to unexpected situations.

Table 1. The Result Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers

INDICATOR	TOTAL	(%)	(R)	STATEMENT
Difficulty in Adapting to Teaching Demands	30	70%	R2	“I often forget the details of the material and speak too quickly because I am nervous.”
			R11	“It was difficult to implement project-based learning due to limited time, facilities, and students’ varying readiness.”
			R16	“The biggest challenge was balancing teaching with additional tasks assigned by the mentor teacher.”
Difficulties in Applying Theory to Teaching Practice	21	49%	R2	“I once failed to apply the discussion method taught at the university because the students became confused and passive.”
			R6	“I tried teaching fully in English as instructed during microteaching, but the students did not understand and became confused.”
Difficulties in Addressing Students’ Diverse Abilities	37	86%	R1	“My main challenge during the teaching practicum was adapting the lesson plan to students’ diverse abilities in the classroom.”
			R4	“My challenge was keeping advanced students from getting bored while ensuring slower students did not feel left behind.”
Difficulties in Classroom Management and Teacher-Student	41	95%	R3	“I had difficulty maintaining order and calm in the classroom. Students were often noisy, played with balls, walked in and out, and didn’t pay attention.”

Interaction			R21	“I faced difficulties at the beginning of the practicum because many students were not as I expected. I tried to reprimand them, but it didn’t help much.”
Difficulties in Assessing Students’ Understanding	32	74%	R2	“I found it hard to know whether students understood or not because they often stayed silent.”
			R19	“I assessed students’ understanding through group participation, but some were passive and just followed along.”
Difficulties in Adapting to Unexpected Situations	35	81%	R3	“I once dealt with two students who fought in class. After making peace, they fought again.”
			R29	“When teaching, the projector didn’t work, and I panicked because my lesson plan depended on it.”

The findings of this study reveal that pre-service teachers experienced multidimensional challenges during their teaching practicum, as categorized by Lampert (2001). Among these challenges, classroom management and teacher-student interaction was the highest reported challenge (95%), while applying theory to practice was the lowest (49%). Classroom management emerged as the most demanding aspect because pre-service teachers had to maintain discipline, manage disruptive behaviors, and create a conducive learning environment, often in situations where students’ age, peer influence, and varying engagement levels added complexity. In contrast, applying theory to practice was less frequently reported as a challenge because pre-service teachers were generally aware of pedagogical principles, yet encountered occasional difficulty translating these into concrete classroom actions. The lower frequency may also reflect that this challenge is more subtle and emerges in specific situations rather than throughout the entire practicum.

Strategies Used by Pre-Service Teachers

Despite these challenges, pre-service teachers actively applied various strategies to manage their classrooms and enhance learning outcomes. Guided by Hopkins’ (2008) framework, three main instructional models were identified: (1) the Whole-Class Teaching Model, (2) the Cooperative Group Work Model, and (3) the Inductive Teaching Model.

Table 2. The Result Strategies Used by Pre-Service Teachers

INDICATOR	TOTAL	(%)	(R)	EXAMPLE STATEMENT
Whole Class Teaching Model	43	100%	R4	“The group discussion method was less effective. I preferred an open discussion, asking questions directly and encouraging other students to contribute.”
			R19	“At first, I adjusted and approached each student individually, especially those who needed special attention. When giving assignments, I re-explained the instructions so

				they could understand and participate actively. I also gave tasks with varying difficulty levels to match their abilities.”
			R43	“When teaching, I found it difficult to maintain students’ focus, especially in the last period. I handled this by setting strict rules, such as collecting phones and marking the names of noisy students.”
Cooperative Group Work Model	36	84%	R3	“I changed it to regular group discussions with simpler directions that students could easily understand.”
			R17	“To solve this issue, I divided students into mixed-ability groups. The more capable ones helped their peers. I also prepared exercises with varying levels of difficulty so that all students could learn according to their abilities.”
			R20	“Since students’ learning abilities differ, I explained the material using simple examples and formed diverse study groups so students could help one another.”
Inductive Teaching Model	26	60%	R19	“I started the lesson by sharing data and relevant case examples. I didn’t immediately provide the formula but asked students to analyze the data and identify patterns. After they found the pattern, I guided them to formulate the concept themselves. This helped me assess their understanding.”
			R21	“To ensure students’ understanding, I used an inductive approach. For example, when teaching types of texts, I asked students to read several examples and then guided them to identify patterns and differences. This way, they could draw their own conclusions, and I could observe their thinking process directly.”
			R30	“I found it difficult to distinguish students who truly understood from those who were merely following along. I asked them to explain the material in their own words, but the results were not fully effective.”

Regarding instructional strategies, the Whole-Class Teaching Model was the most frequently applied (100%), whereas the Inductive Teaching Model was the least used (60%). Whole-class teaching was prioritized because it allowed teachers to efficiently deliver core content and maintain control over classroom behavior, which is crucial in managing large or diverse groups of students. Conversely, the inductive approach, which encourages students to discover patterns and think critically, was less applied because it requires more experience and skill to monitor genuine student understanding and guide independent exploration effectively. Pre-service teachers often found it challenging to balance providing guidance with letting students explore, which may explain its lower frequency.

Support Needed by Pre-Service Teachers

The third theme concerns the forms of support pre-service teachers require to enhance their teaching competence. Analysis based on Zeichner and Liston's (2013) Reflective Teaching Model identified three major dimensions: (1) Reflective Support in Teaching Practice, (2) Understanding the Teaching Self, and (3) Attending to Students and Classroom Context.

Table 3. The Result Support Needed by Pre-Service Teachers

INDICATOR	TOTAL	(%)	(R)	EXAMPLE STATEMENT
Reflective Support in Teaching Practice	43	100%	R2	“Direct guidance and concrete examples from the mentor teacher on how to start discussions according to students’ levels.”
			R20	“Clear guidance and concrete examples are very helpful.”
			R43	“I often reflect on my teaching, but sometimes I am confused about where to start. I hope there will be a systematic reflection guide or weekly feedback from the mentor teacher to make the evaluation clearer.”
Understanding the Teaching Self	21	49%	R6	“From this experience, I learned that being a teacher is not only about teaching but also about shaping character. I think this should be taught to students before their practicum so they can be better prepared.”
			R28	“The support needed is training on how to balance closeness and professionalism.”
			R39	“I think we need guidance on how to maintain strong mental resilience to become educators, not just theory.”
Attending to Students and Classroom Context	40	93%	R3	“I think there should be a more realistic simulation of learning methods during microteaching before the teaching practicum begins.”
			R23	“For future pre-service teachers, I suggest there should be more detailed guidance on how to adapt teaching methods to different classroom conditions.”

In terms of support needed, reflective guidance from supervisors and mentors was the most emphasized (100%), while developing a professional teacher identity was the least emphasized (49%). Reflective support was highly valued because it provided continuous feedback, modelling, and practical advice that helped pre-service teachers build confidence, improve instructional skills, and apply theory in real classroom contexts. Developing a professional teacher identity, including

shaping students' character and balancing academic and emotional responsibilities, was less emphasized, possibly because pre-service teachers were more focused on immediate classroom tasks and practical teaching challenges than long-term professional self-concept during the practicum.

Overall, these findings highlight that pre-service teachers prioritize strategies and support mechanisms that help them manage classroom realities effectively, while challenges that are subtler or require more reflective practice like applying theory to practice, inductive teaching, or professional identity development are reported less frequently. This underscores the need for teacher education programs to focus not only on practical skills and classroom management but also on developing reflective practices and professional identity for holistic teacher preparedness.

Discussion

The results show that pre-service English teachers encountered several key challenges, applied multiple instructional strategies, and expressed specific support needs during their teaching practicum. The most dominant challenges were Classroom Management and Interaction (95%), and the lowest Applying theory to teaching practice (49%). These findings align with Lampert's (2001) framework, which states that pre-service teachers often face dilemmas balancing theoretical understanding with real classroom practice. Reflection, although crucial for growth, remains difficult because it demands authentic self-evaluation rather than a procedural task. Similar to Oktama, M. Y., Fauziati, E., & Rochsantiningasih (2023), this study found that many Indonesian pre-service teachers treat reflection as a formal requirement instead of an integral part of professional learning.

Classroom management difficulties are consistent with Dube et al. (2023), who noted that English teacher candidates struggle to maintain discipline and engagement, especially with unmotivated learners. Likewise, Sari et al. (2023) reported that beginning teachers face problems in addressing diverse student abilities and implementing differentiated instruction effectively. These results confirm Lampert's (2001) argument that teaching challenges is both technical and conceptual, requiring teachers to integrate pedagogy with contextual decision-making. Thus, structured mentoring and guided reflection are essential to help pre-service teachers connect theory with classroom realities.

In coping with these challenges, pre-service teachers relied on three main instructional strategies: Whole-Class Teaching (100%), Cooperative Group Work (84%), and Inductive Teaching (60%), as proposed by Hopkins (2008). The dominance of the whole-class model indicates that pre-service teachers tend to use structured, teacher-centred approaches to maintain order and deliver lessons efficiently. This supports Junker et al. (2021), who found that limited experience and confidence often lead new teachers to adopt traditional classroom management techniques. However, the frequent use of cooperative group work reflects growing awareness of student-centred learning. Ismail et al. (2023) similarly found that group discussions improve participation and engagement among passive learners. The inductive model, though less common, shows teachers' efforts to promote discovery learning and critical thinking, in line with Hopkins' emphasis on inquiry-based

instruction. Overall, pre-service teachers demonstrated emerging flexibility, though they still preferred structured methods that provide a sense of security and control.

The findings also indicate three main forms of support needed: Reflective Support (100%), Attending to Students and Classroom Context (93%), and Understanding the Teaching Self (49%), which correspond to Zeichner and Liston's (2013) reflective teaching model. The strong demand for reflective support emphasizes the need for continuous guidance, feedback, and concrete modeling from mentor teachers. This finding echoes Oktama et al. (2023), who showed that sustained reflective mentoring improves instructional competence and confidence. The second area, attending to students and classroom context, highlights the importance of understanding learners' characteristics and classroom realities, as emphasized by Antoni (2023). Meanwhile, understanding the teaching self, though mentioned by fewer respondents, remains vital. It involves building professional identity, emotional balance, and resilience—an idea supported by Ardi et al. (2023), who found that identity formation grows through reflection and experience.

In conclusion, the discussion confirms the theoretical relevance of Lampert (2001), Hopkins (2008), and Zeichner & Liston (2013). Pre-service teachers face complex challenges that are not only technical but also reflective and emotional. Their preferred strategies reveal a gradual shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred practices, while their expressed support needs underline the importance of guided reflection, contextual preparation, and identity formation. Therefore, teacher education programs must integrate continuous mentoring, reflective activities, and practical classroom simulations to strengthen pre-service teachers' readiness and professional growth.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that pre-service teachers of the English Education Program at Universitas Negeri Padang faced complex and multidimensional challenges during their teaching practicum. The most prominent difficulty was Classroom Management and Teacher–Student Interaction (95%) and Addressing Students' Diverse Abilities (86%), while other difficulties included Adapting to Unexpected Situations (81%), Assessing Students' Understanding (74%), Adapting to Teaching Demands (70%), and Applying Theory into Practice (49%). These findings indicate that pre-service teachers' struggles were not limited to technical issues like managing the classroom, but also involved emotional, reflective, and pedagogical dimensions that demanded adaptability and resilience. To cope with these challenges, pre-service teachers employed three main strategies based on Hopkins' (2008) framework. All participants (100%) implemented the Whole-Class Teaching Model to maintain control and ensure lesson delivery, most (84%) adopted the Cooperative Group Work Model to accommodate students' varying abilities through peer learning and differentiated activities, and some (60%) applied the Inductive Teaching Model to foster critical thinking and student independence. These strategies were used flexibly depending on classroom conditions, although many still relied on structured, teacher-centered approaches as a means of maintaining confidence and stability. Furthermore, pre-service teachers emphasized the importance of support systems that strengthen their professional

growth. All respondents (100%) expressed the need for Reflective Support, including continuous feedback, modeling, and guidance from mentor teachers to improve instructional quality. A large proportion (93%) also highlighted the necessity of Support in Attending to Students and Classroom Context, emphasizing practical training in differentiated instruction and classroom management aligned with real teaching conditions. Additionally, nearly half (49%) emphasized the importance of Support in Understanding the Teaching Self, which involves developing professional identity, emotional stability, and the ability to balance closeness with professionalism. Overall, these findings demonstrate that pre-service teachers require both reflective and contextual support to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Therefore, teacher education programs should provide structured mentoring, ongoing reflective activities, and contextualized practicum experiences to cultivate adaptive, reflective, and resilient educators prepared for the complexities of real classroom environments.

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