

“There were Days when I Couldn’t Go On”: The Emotional Roller Coaster of the Practicum

“Había días en los que no podía continuar”:
la montaña rusa emocional del prácticum

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Abstract

Keywords

Pedagogical practice;
teacher training; language
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Introduction: Practicum is one of the most transformative stages of teacher education; for many preservice teachers, it signifies a crucial transition from theory to practice. However, this transition involves mixed emotions influencing teacher identity and professional growth. Based on the hypothesis that emotions significantly affect teachers' developmental trajectories, this narrative inquiry study examined the emotional triggers experienced by preservice English teachers during their practicum. **Methodology:** Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, visual narratives, and journal entries over five months involving a sample of five participants. Data was analyzed using thematic coding. The study employed narrative analysis to scrutinize the documented emotional experiences. **Results and Discussion:** The findings demonstrated that the sources of emotions, such as happiness, pride, excitement, and gratitude, were instructional convergence, favorable student feedback, learning, engagement, participation, and behavior. Conversely, emotions like frustration, sadness, anxiety, fear, and stress were triggered by feelings of unpreparedness, disruptive student behavior, methodology to teach children, classroom management, instructional divergence, limited classroom interaction, and special needs students. **Conclusions:** Research implications underscore the importance of emotional support in teacher training programs, suggesting that understanding and addressing emotional triggers can enhance teacher preparation and resilience. This study highlights the influence of emotional experiences on shaping teachers' professional identities and pedagogical beliefs.

Resumen

Palabras Clave

Práctica pedagógica;
formación del personal
docente; enseñanza de
idiomas; sentimiento;
dibujo

Introducción: La práctica preprofesional es una etapa transformadora de la formación docente, pues marca para muchos futuros profesores el paso decisivo de la teoría a la práctica. No obstante, esta transición suele estar acompañada de emociones diversas que influyen en la identidad profesional y el desarrollo docente. Este estudio de indagación narrativa analizó los desencadenantes emocionales experimentados por cinco docentes de inglés en formación durante cinco meses de prácticum. **Metodología:** Los datos se recopilaron mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas, narrativas visuales y diarios reflexivos, y se examinaron con codificación temática y análisis narrativo. **Resultados y discusión:** Los resultados muestran que emociones positivas como felicidad, orgullo, entusiasmo y gratitud se relacionaron con la convergencia pedagógica, la retroalimentación favorable de los estudiantes, el aprendizaje, el compromiso, la participación y el buen comportamiento. En cambio, emociones negativas como frustración, tristeza, ansiedad, miedo y estrés surgieron por la falta de preparación,



la conducta disruptiva, la enseñanza a niños, el manejo del aula, la divergencia pedagógica, la escasa interacción y la atención a estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales.

Conclusiones: Las implicaciones de la investigación subrayan la importancia del apoyo emocional en los programas de formación docente, sugiriendo que comprender y abordar los detonantes emocionales puede fortalecer la preparación y la resiliencia de los docentes. Este estudio destaca la influencia de las experiencias emocionales en la construcción de las identidades profesionales y las creencias pedagógicas de los docentes.

1. Introduction

Practicum is one of the most transformative stages of teacher education; for many preservice teachers (PSTs), it marks a critical transition from university coursework to the realities of classroom teaching. Teacher-emotion practicum frames this transition as inherently relational and context-dependent: emotions are shaped by institutional expectations, classroom interactions, and the demands of performing emotional labor, forming what Zembylas (2007) calls an “emotional ecology” (see also Keller et al., 2014; Meyer, 2009). Within EFL teacher education, practicum routinely evokes a fluctuating emotional repertoire, such as enjoyment, pride, and gratitude alongside anxiety, fear, and frustration, closely tied to lesson planning, perceived preparedness, and classroom management (Alhebaishi, 2019; Li et al., 2023; Santos & Luque-Agulló, 2025). In this study, we draw on this perspective to examine how PSTs’ emotions are triggered during practicum and how these experiences shape their emerging professional identities (Cheng, 2021).

The intensity of these experiences often influences how future teachers perceive their profession and approach their classrooms. In Ecuador, preservice teachers are required to complete 400 hours of practicum before graduating. These hours are divided into two phases: *prácticas* and *vinculación*. During the *prácticas* phase, students observe an experienced teacher, assist with material creation, and occasionally deliver demo lessons. The mentor teacher provides feedback and shares valuable teaching experiences. Conversely, during the *vinculación* phase, preservice teachers take full responsibility for the classroom, serving as lead teachers without assistance or supervision. In many Ecuadorian universities, students do not receive tutorial preparation for the practicum.

One of the authors of this study is the instructor responsible for supervising and guiding these PSTs. He witnessed students’ emotional challenges firsthand as they navigated the *prácticas* and *vinculación* phases. While undergraduates enter the practicum with high hopes and passion for teaching, their enthusiasm often fluctuates due to the complex realities of managing classrooms, creating lesson plans, and meeting expectations. Through informal reflections and discussions with these PSTs, it became clear that their emotional responses, ranging from excitement to anxiety and frustration, shaped their perceptions of the profession and their classroom confidence. Despite their theoretical knowledge, the intensity of their emotional experiences was sometimes overwhelming, leaving them vulnerable to burnout and self-doubt. Therefore, Santos & Luque-Agulló, (2025) emphasized the urgent need to explore the emotional experiences of PSTs during their practicum.

Research on preservice teachers’ emotional experiences during practicums remains uneven across different contexts. Although some studies have started to document these experiences in Latin America (e.g., Colombia; Ariza-Quñones et al., 2022), empirical research specifically focused on Ecuadorian PSTs’ emotions during practicums is still limited (Santos & Luque-Agulló, 2025). Therefore, this study fills this gap by examining the emotions experienced by preservice teachers during practicums in Ecuador, identifying their main emotional triggers, and exploring how these emotional experiences are described as influencing their professional growth. By highlighting



PSTs' emotional stories, we aim to contribute to the broader discussion of emotions and emotional labor in teacher development within understudied settings of the Global South.

1.1. Literature Review

Conceptualizing Teacher Emotions in Practicum

Emotions are central to teaching and learning because they shape attention, motivation, engagement, and classroom interaction. In EFL settings, teacher emotions can be especially consequential because they influence moment-by-moment instructional judgments (e.g., whether to persist with target-language interaction, modify tasks, or revert to L1 support) and shape teachers' developing sense of professional efficacy (Yin et al., 2017). Importantly, these emotional experiences are not merely private reactions; they shape what teachers notice, how they interpret classroom events, and what they decide to do next.

Within teacher education, the practicum is often preservice teachers' first sustained encounter with these affective demands under real-time constraints and public evaluation. It frequently operates as a "reality shock" where beliefs formed in coursework are tested against classroom contingencies and institutional routines (Meyer, 2009). Because PSTs occupy a transitional status, simultaneously "student" and "teacher", their emotions are entangled with evaluation, legitimacy, and competence claims in the profession. As a result, practicum emotions should be conceptualized not simply as internal psychological states but as experiences produced in interaction with students, mentors, peers, and school norms.

From a sociocultural perspective, Zembylas's (2007) concept of emotional ecology is particularly useful in understanding this relational production of emotion. Emotional ecology conceptualizes teacher emotions as emerging through patterned interactions and institutional structures, including school norms, mentor feedback practices, and professional expectations about what teachers should feel or display in front of learners. This aligns with research on emotional labor, which highlights how teachers manage, suppress, or perform emotions in accordance with professional "display rules" (Keller et al., 2014). For PSTs, emotional labor may involve presenting confidence while feeling uncertain, remaining calm under the strain of classroom management, or displaying enthusiasm despite fatigue. Such regulation can support classroom functioning, but it can also produce emotional dissonance that becomes draining during early professional socialization.

Finally, emotions in practicum are inseparable from identity formation. PSTs frequently interpret emotional episodes as evidence of (in)competence, legitimacy, and belonging in the profession (Abou-Assali, 2015; Cheng, 2021; Ma et al., 2021). In this study, we adopt a non-dualistic view of emotion as constitutive of action and meaning-making (Maturana, 1998). Rather than labeling emotions as inherently "positive" or "negative," we treat them as signals that PSTs interpret and narrate as they learn to teach.

Mapping the Scholarship: Language Teacher Emotions vs. General Practicum Emotion Studies

Research on teacher emotions spans both general teacher education and subject-specific fields. For analytic clarity, this review distinguishes between (a) studies of practicum emotions in teacher education broadly (across subject areas) and (b) scholarship on language teacher emotions (LTE), which foregrounds the emotional demands that arise from language-specific pedagogy and from the institutional positioning of EFL/ESL teaching.

General practicum emotion research has consistently shown that pre-service teachers' emotions are shaped not only by classroom events but also by the quality of mentoring, peer collaboration, and feedback practices. For example, work on team practicums illustrates how emotions fluctuate in relation to social interactions with mentors and peers (Waber et al., 2021), while studies of



practicum anticipation show that emotions begin shaping professional engagement even before teaching starts (Stupnisky et al., 2019). These studies help foreground the relational and institutional nature of practicum emotions, providing conceptual grounding for interpreting PSTs' emotional accounts.

However, LTE research highlights additional emotional pressures that may not be captured in general studies of teacher emotions. Language teaching involves distinctive demands, such as sustained use of the target language, perceived linguistic legitimacy, and anxiety about being evaluated as a language model. These concerns are often conceptualized through constructs such as language teaching anxiety and teacher self-concept (Li et al., 2023; Méndez-López, 2020). As such, general teacher-emotion findings cannot be assumed to transfer directly into EFL/ESL practicum contexts without subject-specific examination.

Recent international research shows that practicum emotions should be understood as developmental and ecological rather than as isolated affective reactions. In a study of 120 Chinese preservice teachers' online emotional diaries, Ji et al. (2022) found that emotional trajectories changed across the practicum, with pleasant emotions gradually decreasing and unpleasant emotions increasing as teaching responsibilities accumulated. Similarly, Orlova and Kamenická (2024), working with preservice EFL teachers in the Czech Republic, showed that anxieties about rapport, language proficiency, lesson design, and group dynamics were transformed during practicum into more concrete concerns related to classroom management, student interaction, and professional identity. Together, these studies strengthen the need to examine emotions over time and within the social ecology of practicum contexts.

Emotions in Language Teacher Practicums (EFL/ESL)

Studies focusing specifically on preservice language teachers report recurring emotional patterns during practicum and emphasize that emotions are highly situated and socially mediated. Across EFL/ELT practicum contexts, fear, anxiety, and stress are frequently linked to perceived unpreparedness, methodological uncertainty, and evaluative pressure from mentor teachers and school norms (Alhebaishi, 2019; Kırmızı & Sarıçoban, 2020; Li et al., 2023). Frustration and sadness are often associated with classroom management strain, student disengagement, and perceived mismatches between planned pedagogy and enacted classroom realities (Martínez-Agudo & Azzaro, 2018).

At the same time, practicum also generates positive achievement- and relationship-based emotions. Enjoyment-related feelings such as pride, satisfaction, excitement, gratitude, and happiness often emerge when PSTs perceive instructional success, receive favorable learner responses, or experience supportive mentoring and feedback (Agudo, 2016; Alhebaishi, 2019; Chen et al., 2022). These moments can serve as identity-affirming episodes that provide evidence of competence and belonging, supporting professional confidence and the development of agency (Cheng, 2021; Ma et al., 2021). Table 1 synthesizes findings from studies of language teacher practicums and related teacher-education research, highlighting the emotions most commonly reported and the situations that tend to trigger them.

More recent EFL practicum studies also connect emotions with well-being, socio-emotional competence (SEC), and identity formation. Fauziah et al. (2025), in an Indonesian narrative inquiry, found that pre-service teachers' emotions during practicum played a central role in confidence-building and professional identity construction. In Turkey, Kızıldağ and Kırmızı (2025) showed that an SEC-infused practicum course helped preservice EFL teachers recognize emotions as part of lesson design, classroom management, intercultural communication, and English as a global language. In Vietnam, Tran (2025) reported that EFL preservice teachers demonstrated strengths in organizing social-emotional learning activities but still struggled to explicitly respond to learners' social-emotional needs, while Hao and Tam (2025) showed that teaching



responsibilities, stakeholder feedback, administrative tasks, and identity conflicts shaped emotional fluctuation and resilience strategies during school-based practicum. Table 1 shows that reported emotions cluster around three recurring trigger domains: a) instructional control and competence (fear/anxiety/stress/frustration) linked to classroom management, method uncertainty, and self-doubt; b) relational evaluation linked to mentor observation and feedback (often experienced as pressure or affirmation); c) instructional success and recognition (happiness/pride/satisfaction/gratitude) linked to student engagement and supportive mentoring.

Table 1. *Emotions Experienced by Pre-service Teachers During the Practicum*

Emotion	Triggered situation	Author
Fear	Teaching approaches and classroom management	Kırmızı & Sarıçoban (2020)
Sadness	Perceived teaching success	Kırmızı & Sarıçoban (2020)
Frustration	Classroom management and student engagement issues	Martínez-Agudo & Azzaro (2018)
Stress	The pressure of the practicum	Alhebaishi (2019)
Anxiety	Ability to manage the classroom, deliver effective lessons, meet the expectations of both mentor teachers and students from the school, and unpreparedness	Li et al. (2023) Keller et al. (2014)
Satisfaction	Positive feedback, mentor support	Waber et al. (2021)
Happiness	Positive teaching experiences, effective classroom management	Alhebaishi (2019)
Pride	Successful teaching outcomes, student progress	Stupnisky et al. (2019)
Excitement	achievement and competence in student-teachers' experience	Chen et al. (2022)
Gratitude	Positive mentorship	Agudo (2016)

Source: the authors

This synthesis supports the view that practicum emotions are tightly coupled with PSTs' appraisals of agency and competence. Crucially, the same classroom event (e.g., noisy group work) may be appraised as productive engagement or loss of control depending on mentoring support, pedagogical resources, and prior experience, underscoring the contextual nature of emotions within an emotional ecology (Zembylas, 2007). However, much of the existing literature remains event-centered (listing emotions and triggers) rather than trajectory-centered (examining how emotions evolve and become narratively meaningful across practicum phases). This points to the need for qualitative work that captures emotional meaning-making over time.

Global South Contexts

Evidence from Global South and under-resourced contexts suggests that practicum emotions may be intensified by structural conditions such as scarce instructional materials, large classes, limited mentoring time, and abrupt transitions from observation to full responsibility. In such settings, emotions frequently index not only classroom events but institutional support deficits and legitimacy tensions.

In Latin American ELT contexts, research shows how practicum emotions intersect with language proficiency, self-concept, and professional vulnerability; “negative” emotions can reveal emotional needs that teacher education programs often leave implicit (Méndez-López, 2020). Similarly, research from other EFL contexts indicates that anxiety is shaped by perceived competence, mentor evaluation practices, and the broader stakes attached to English teaching (Alhebaishi, 2019; Li et al., 2023). These findings strongly suggest that emotions during practicum cannot be separated from broader structural and ideological conditions.



These recent studies from Asia and other EFL settings suggest that Global South and under-represented contexts should not be treated only as locations where existing theories are applied. Rather, they reveal how emotional labor, well-being, socio-emotional competence, and teacher identity are configured by local mentoring cultures, institutional resources, class size, language ideologies, and the social value attached to English. This broader international contextualization supports the present study's focus on Ecuador, where the emotional dimension of practicum remains under-documented despite its importance for teacher preparation.

In Ecuador, despite substantial practicum requirements and the distinctive *prácticas/vinculación* structure, there remains limited emotion-centered research that documents how PSTs narrate emotional experiences as shaping their professional development. Accordingly, this study responds to the need for deeper qualitative investigation into how Ecuadorian EFL PSTs identify emotional triggers and interpret emotional episodes as contributing to professional growth.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What are preservice teachers' sources of emotions during their practicum?
2. How do preservice teachers narrate and interpret the influence of these emotional experiences on their professional development during the practicum?

2. Methodology

This study employed narrative inquiry to explore emotional experiences during the practicum. Narrative inquiry is "systematic exploration conducted by teachers and for teachers through their own stories and language" (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 6). It enables teachers to reflect on and make sense of their experiences, fostering an understanding of the complexities of teaching by emphasizing the significance of personal stories and experiences (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008).

2.1. Participants

The participants consisted of a convenience sample of five preservice teachers (three females and two males) enrolled in the practicum course of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages major at a public university in the Los Ríos province of Ecuador. They had no prior teaching experience before starting the practicum. Their ages ranged from 19 to 21 at the time the data were collected. Each of them chose a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity. The data collection lasted one year (two semesters) because the *prácticas* occur in the 5th semester and *vinculación* in the 6th semester.

2.2. Data Collection Instruments

2.2.1. Semi-structured interview (SSI)

Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore preservice teachers' emotional experiences before, during, and after the practicum. This instrument was selected for its flexibility, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences while also enabling the researchers to clarify and expand on issues emerging from other data collection methods (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The interviews were conducted in three sequential phases: (1) an initial phase focused on eliciting participants' anticipatory emotions before the practicum; (2) a second phase examining changes in



emotional responses as participants engaged in classroom teaching; and (3) a final phase aimed at capturing reflective accounts of their overall practicum experience and its emotional impact.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish at the university to ensure participants' linguistic comfort and depth of expression. Each participant took part in three interviews, each lasting approximately one hour, resulting in a total of 15 hours of recorded data. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then translated into English and subjected to a peer-review and expert-validation process involving two applied linguistics scholars with experience in qualitative research and bilingual data analysis. This procedure aimed to ensure translation accuracy, semantic equivalence, and interpretive reliability. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the process, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, and participants' right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

2.2.2. Visual Narratives (VN)

Visual narratives encompass drawings and photographs (Nikula & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2008), multimodal texts that combine text and images or videos (Menezes, 2008), or collages (Riessman, 2008). In this study, this tool aimed to portray the emotional experiences of preservice teachers while they taught during their practicum. This way, the participants were asked to represent themselves visually during their practicum activities. Each drawing was required to include a brief description or explanation to provide context and insight into the depicted experiences. They had one week to complete this task and send it to the researchers.

The participants were required to follow the metaphor proposed by Murphey (2006) regarding the rollercoaster of language learning. This metaphor effectively captures the emotional journey of learning and teaching, encompassing the highs of achievements and the lows of setbacks. As the same author stated, "Language learning has ups and downs, and understanding why allows us to relax a bit and find ways to change the direction of the roller coaster when it is going down" (Murphey, 2006, p.9). This allows participants to express and analyze their emotions and reactions in ways that simple descriptions might not fully capture.

Although this metaphor was useful for eliciting temporal and affective representations of the practicum, its use also constituted an interpretive frame provided by the researchers. Because participants were explicitly asked to follow the roller-coaster metaphor, their visual narratives may have been partially pre-structured as a sequence of emotional highs and lows. For this reason, the drawings were interpreted not as unmediated or fully spontaneous representations of experience, but as participant-generated accounts produced within a researcher-guided metaphorical frame. To address this limitation, the visual narratives were triangulated with journal entries and semi-structured interviews, and the analysis focused on points of convergence across the three data sources rather than on the visual metaphor alone.

2.2.3. Journal Entries (JE)

This study used diary entries to examine the emotional experiences of preservice teachers during their practicum. This method is valuable because it provides "autobiographical, introspective documents that record the experiences of language learning from the learner's perspective"



(Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p.35); in other words, it allows participants to capture their emotional states, triggers, coping strategies, and the effects of emotions on their teaching performance. The use of journals during practicum is highly beneficial for teacher educators seeking insights into the subjective experiences of preservice teachers, which are crucial for their professional development (Santos & Luque-Agulló, 2025).

Participants were asked to complete their journals after teaching, focusing on the teaching context, their experienced emotions, and the triggers that provoked these emotions. The journals were written in Spanish to help participants feel comfortable expressing their emotions. These journal entries served as a stimulus for the interviews. In total, 20 entries were collected from each participant. After the analysis, the authors translated the journals into English, and then they were double-checked by experts in the field.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data collected from reflective journals and interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a narrative analysis approach (Benson, 2014), which involved thematic coding (Saldana, 2016). This comprehensive analysis identified emergent themes that discursively constructed how the preservice teachers experienced, triggered, and expressed emotions during their practicum. The initial analysis followed a two-phase process to ensure a robust examination of the data. The first phase involved identifying key phrases, concepts, and visual signals related to the participants' emotional responses and the contexts in which these occurred directly from the narratives. These emergent themes were organized into a coherent framework in the second phase. This organization involved axial coding to connect focused themes to the broader data set, exploring relationships and patterns that may explain the conditions and consequences of these emotional experiences. The visual elements were examined for recurring symbols, colors, and arrangements representing different emotional states and transitions. These methods provided a deep, multi-layered understanding of the preservice teachers' emotional experiences.

To make the analytical procedure more transparent, the coding process followed four iterative stages. First, the researchers read the complete corpus several times, including interview transcripts, journal entries, and visual narratives, and generated initial descriptive and in vivo codes directly from participants' accounts. Second, these codes were compared across data sources and organized into a working codebook that included each code name, operational definition, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and representative excerpts. Third, focused and axial coding were used to refine overlapping codes and group them into broader analytical categories, such as agency, classroom realities, and instructional success. Finally, these categories were interpreted narratively to identify how emotional triggers were connected to participants' developing sense of teacher identity and professional learning.

Coding disagreements were handled through discussion among the authors and by returning to the raw excerpts, journal entries, and drawings until consensus was reached. When an excerpt could reasonably fit more than one code, the team examined the surrounding narrative context and the corresponding visual representation before assigning the most analytically appropriate category. Trustworthiness was strengthened through methodological triangulation across semi-structured interviews, journal entries, and visual narratives; peer debriefing with applied linguistics scholars; participant confirmation of the interpretive summaries; and an audit trail documenting



codebook revisions, translation decisions, theme refinement, and analytic memos. Table 2 shows the coding process.

Table 2. Example of the Analytical Movement from Raw Data to Theme

Raw Data Excerpt	Initial Code	Analytical Category	Theme / Interpretive Claim
“They are all yours.” / “I felt a lot of anxiety and fear...” (SSI)	Sudden full classroom responsibility; lack of mentor mediation	Agency / unpreparedness	Anxiety and fear emerged when practicum responsibility exceeded perceived preparation and support.
“The students did not interact... I could not achieve my plans, which frustrated me.” (JE)	Limited interaction; instructional divergence	Classroom realities	Frustration was triggered when planned pedagogy did not correspond to students’ actual responses.
“I felt happy because the results of my methodology... yielded positive outcomes.” (JE)	Perceived effectiveness of methodology; successful planning	Instructional success	Happiness and confidence were linked to evidence that teaching decisions supported learning and participation.

Source: the authors

2.4. Researcher Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Because one of the authors was the university instructor responsible for supervising the participants during the practicum, the study required explicit reflexive control of the researcher’s dual role as teacher educator and investigator. This positionality offered contextual understanding of the practicum, but it also created the possibility that participants might frame their narratives according to perceived expectations or that the researcher might overemphasize experiences already observed informally. To reduce interpretive subjectivity, the researchers kept reflexive notes during data collection and analysis, documented analytic decisions in an audit trail, and compared interpretations across interviews, journal entries, and visual narratives. Preliminary codes and thematic interpretations were discussed through peer debriefing with two applied linguistics scholars familiar with qualitative inquiry and bilingual data. In addition, participants were invited to confirm the accuracy of their transcribed accounts and the meanings attributed to selected excerpts, which functioned as member checking. These procedures strengthened credibility by making the analytic process transparent, triangulated, and critically reviewed.

It is important to clarify, however, that reflexivity was not treated as a way to remove subjectivity from the research. In narrative inquiry, meanings are co-constructed through participants’ accounts, the researcher’s interpretive questions, and the theoretical lens used to read the data. For this reason, the instructor-researcher treated his prior knowledge of the practicum as a sensitizing resource rather than as confirmatory evidence. Interpretations were retained only when they could be supported across more than one data source or when disconfirming accounts were explicitly considered. This reflexive stance helped prevent the analysis from reducing participants’ experiences to the supervisor’s prior assumptions.



3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Experienced Emotions

Throughout their practicum, the five preservice teachers experienced many emotions, including happiness, frustration, pride, anxiety, gratitude, fear, excitement, stress, and sadness. Table 3 summarizes the triggers for each emotion.

Table 3. *Conceptual Framework*

Domains	Analytical Categories	Triggers
Influencing factors	Agency	- Unpreparedness
	Classroom realities	-Students' disruptive behavior
		-Lack of Methodology to teach children
		-Classroom management
		- Instructional divergence
	Instructional success	- Limited classroom interaction
		- Special needs student
	Instructional success	-Instructional Convergence
		-Favorable students' feedback
	Classroom realities	-Students' learning
		-Students' engagement
		-Student' participation
-Students' disruptive behavior		

Source: the authors

The main triggers reported by the participants are related to agency, classroom realities, and instructional success. The following section elaborates on this information through the narratives of each participant from the first day of the practicum to the last.

3.2 Emotional Roller Coaster Story of Each Participant

3.2.1 Malena

She began her practicum with a mix of nervousness and uncertainty. She admitted: "I felt nervous and uncertain about how to teach English to the children." (SSI). This initial apprehension quickly turned into frustration as she struggled to engage the students effectively: "I was frustrated because I did not know how to engage children to motivate them and assist in their learning of the material." (JE). As a result, she felt anxiety about managing the classroom: "On the first day of the practice period, I felt quite anxious about fully controlling the classroom." (SSI).

Her anxiety deepened when recalling her very first interaction with the students. During the interview, she reflected on that moment: "When the bell rang, I expected the teacher to introduce us to the children, but she did not. She said, 'They are all yours.' I felt a lot of anxiety and fear because it was the first time I was responsible for a full classroom of 24 students." (SSI). Beyond the shock, the student's disruptive behavior further fueled her apprehension; Malena stated: "It was a day that required much energy, and at one point, I felt quite anxious about the noise they might create." (JE). The challenges of maintaining control led to repeated moments of frustration: "Some days, I felt frustrated because the children were more restless than usual." (SSI).

The difficulties in managing student behavior also triggered feelings of fear. One incident heightened her concerns: "Today, a girl wanted to paint her lips with tempera. I felt terrified about controlling whether they would eat the paint or not fight among them." (JE). Additionally,

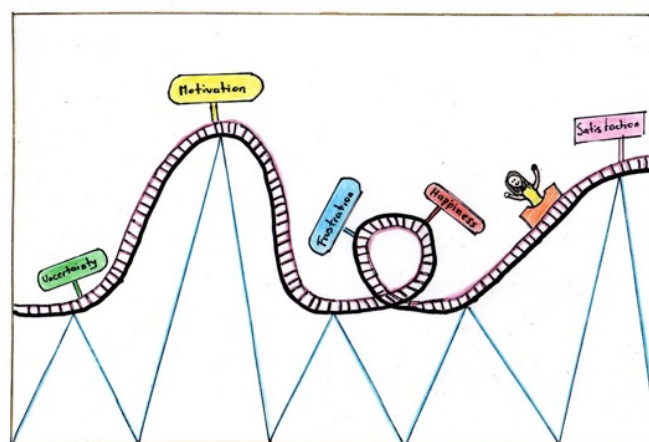


Malena's emotions were influenced by her perception of the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies. For instance, when she attempted to engage students through the hot potato game, she felt discouraged: "To engage the children, we played the game 'hot potato,' but I felt a bit discouraged because I sensed that they did not enjoy or understand it very well." (JE). Similarly, certain activities caused her to feel uneasy, as she recounted: "I felt anxious about the activity we did since we had to cut and paste several figures showing the parts of the body." (SSI). These statements suggest that she initially equated a successful lesson with absolute structure and silence, leading to further doubts about her effectiveness as a teacher.

Despite these challenges, Malena gradually began noticing moments of progress. While she initially felt frustrated when students struggled with vocabulary, she wrote: "I observed that they struggled to remember certain words, so I felt a bit frustrated." (JE); she later celebrated their improvements: "I felt happier knowing they remembered some vocabulary from the unit better." (JE). However, self-doubt resurfaced when she encountered challenges in teaching children with autism: "I did not feel very good because I believe I lack the necessary tools to teach English to children with autism." (JE). This emotional struggle was further emphasized in her interview when she admitted: "I was sad about that situation." (SSI).

Although the practicum presented significant obstacles, it also provided her with rewarding experiences. She expressed genuine happiness when she realized how quickly children learned new knowledge: "I felt happy when I saw how quickly children at that age can understand everything." (JE). Witnessing their progress further reinforced her fulfillment: "I was delighted to witness the children's progress and thrilled by how quickly they absorbed what I taught them." (JE). As her confidence grew, so did her enthusiasm for teaching: "I felt really happy about the children's participation today, especially since it was clear they were enjoying themselves too." (JE). The students' motivation was key to her well-being: "The activity was successfully developed, and I could see they were motivated. That made me very happy." (SSI). Ultimately, she realized that teaching children requires flexibility and an understanding of their natural behavior. By the later stages of her practicum, she acknowledged her personal and professional growth: "I felt more confident about classroom management and child discipline." (JE). Figure 1 portrays Malena's visual narrative.

Figure 1. *Malena Visual Narrative*



Source: the authors



She summarizes this trajectory, moving from uncertainty and frustration to greater confidence as she noticed more student learning and participation. In her final reflection, she expressed great pride after seeing that most students answered the final evaluation correctly.

3.2.2 Francesco

He began his practicum with anxiety, recognizing that teaching children would be an entirely new challenge for him. He reflected on this in his journal: “I felt quite anxious because teaching children presents a new challenge for me as a teacher.” (JE). This feeling was further emphasized in his interview, where he admitted: “The first day of classes was quite complicated because I felt very anxious, as it was my first experience teaching children.” (SSI).

His initial unease intensified when he encountered an unexpected challenge; his students were not engaging as he had hoped, and his lesson plan did not progress as intended. In his journal, he described this frustrating experience: “My new challenge became even more complicated because the students did not interact. This made me feel like my planning was not effective. I could not achieve my plans, which frustrated me.” (JE). The lack of interaction and deviation from his planned activities led him to question the effectiveness of his teaching approach.

However, rather than allowing these setbacks to discourage him, Francesco gradually shifted his mindset. He recognized that, as a preservice teacher, he was still learning and that mistakes were a natural part of the process. This realization allowed him to embrace his growth and, in turn, have more positive experiences. His accomplishment was closely tied to two key areas: his professional development and his students' progress.

A turning point came when he used a song and gestures to teach. Students responded positively, which made him feel motivated and more confident about creating a safe and effective learning environment. From then on, instructional success became closely linked to his sense of competence. As the practicum progressed, Francesco's confidence in his teaching methodology grew. He became more convinced of his instructional approach, noting in his journal: “I felt happy because the results of my methodology, the materials I created, and my classroom planning yielded positive outcomes. I sensed that my skills as a teacher are strengthening, and the communication and management in my classroom are exceptional.” (JE).

He also took satisfaction in students' progress, especially their pronunciation, retention of concepts, and growing willingness to participate. These responses confirmed that his teaching strategies were becoming more effective. His visual narrative (see Figure 2) presents the practicum as a roller coaster of highs and lows. The image captures his growing acceptance that both setbacks and achievements were part of learning to teach.

Ultimately, Francesco completed his practicum with mixed emotions. While he felt an accomplishment, he also experienced sadness as he prepared to leave the classroom. This sentiment was partly due to his strong connections with his students: “Some displayed deep sorrow.” (JE). However, another source of his lingering concern was the lack of classroom resources, which remained an ongoing challenge throughout his experience: “The lack of classroom resources creates various forms of anxiety and fear, primarily because I lacked a deep understanding of how to address this issue during my initial experience as a teacher and throughout the early stages of my practice period.” (SSI).



Figure 2. *Francesco Visual Narrative*

Source: the authors

Despite these challenges, Francesco's practicum was a transformative experience, shaping his perspective on teaching and reinforcing his resilience. His journey reflects the struggles of adapting to a new teaching environment and the rewards of persistence, adaptability, and student engagement.

3.2.3 Rafaela

She commenced her practicum with a positive attitude, eager to put her teaching skills into practice. This phase of her program was something she had anticipated, hoping it would provide valuable hands-on experience. However, her initial enthusiasm quickly gave way to anxiety upon arriving on the first day: "I felt anxious about the number of students arriving since there were 29 on the list." (JE). This feeling persisted into the second day as the classroom dynamics challenged her: "Today, more children arrived, including three who were a bit restless. I felt anxious." (JE). Even midway through the practicum, unexpected changes continued to heighten her stress: "I received a surprise: a new student. This made me anxious due to my previous experiences with other students." (JE).

Beyond adapting to the growing class size, Rafaela struggled with managing student behavior, which sometimes led to frustration. In one instance, she expressed disappointment over being unable to fully implement her lesson plan: "The whole situation meant that I did not have enough time to use the teaching materials I had prepared. Most of them learned, but I am not satisfied with today's atmosphere; I feel somewhat frustrated because I had expectations for Tuesday's classes." (JE). Despite these difficulties, she maintained a problem-solving mindset, recognizing the need to adjust and refine her approach: "I know there was a solution so that I would look for strategies for these situations tomorrow." (JE). This shift in perspective marked a turning point in her practicum experience.



As she adapted to the classroom, Rafaela began to experience more positive emotions. She felt happy when participation improved, when students interacted more naturally with her, and when they showed visible learning, for example by recognizing colors, songs, and English commands. Improved behavior also strengthened her sense of accomplishment.

Rafaela also experienced pride in moments when students connected new knowledge to familiar routines and internalized classroom expectations. For her, these small episodes showed that repetition, modeling, and reinforcement were helping children understand both the language and classroom norms.

Her visual narrative, Figure 3, reflects a movement from early optimism to anxiety, frustration, and, finally, renewed confidence as classroom routines stabilized and she regained a sense of control.

The final upward section of the roller coaster, together with the rainbow and the phrase “I did it!”, represents her sense of accomplishment and the recovery of confidence in her lesson planning and teaching decisions.

Reflecting on her practicum experience, Rafaela ultimately finished on a positive note, recognizing its significant impact on her development as an educator: "The experience has been enriching for my profession; I have seen it from a teaching perspective, which I am so sure helped me to improve as a student as well." (JE). Her journey, filled with initial anxieties, frustrations, and breakthroughs, highlights the evolving nature of learning to teach, one that requires resilience, adaptability, and the ability to find joy in small victories.

Figure 3. *Rafaela Visual Narrative*



Source: the authors

3.2.4 Pepe

He was the first participant to report exclusively positive aspects throughout his practicum. From the very beginning, he approached the experience with happiness and enthusiasm. He expressed joy in seeing his students gradually grasp new concepts: “I felt very happy that they are learning



greetings step-by-step and becoming familiar with the topics.” (JE). His satisfaction also stemmed from his ability to execute his lessons as planned, reinforcing his confidence in his teaching approach: “One thing that brought us great joy when we teach was knowing that the class would be the best it could be.” (JE).

Beyond the successful delivery of his lessons, Pepe found excitement when he could directly support his students. He described a particularly rewarding experience during a class project: “I felt happy to help and contributed my part to this class and made it enjoyable.” (JE). Observing the effectiveness of his teaching methodologies further reinforced his sense of fulfillment. In his journal, he highlighted one such moment: “Everyone had a great time; there was laughter and plenty of enthusiasm from all.” (JE).

However, despite his experience, Pepe did acknowledge one challenge: lesson planning. During his interview, he shared that this aspect of teaching initially felt daunting: “I think one of the most challenging experiences was when I started planning; I felt like I could not cover such topics.” (JE). While this uncertainty introduced a small hurdle in his experience, it did not diminish his overall enthusiasm and accomplishment. This challenge was also reflected in his visual narrative.

Pepe’s visual narrative (see Figure 4) reinforces this positive account. Unlike the others, his roller coaster is smoother and set under clear skies, emphasizing a steady experience of enjoyment, confidence, and success.

By the end of his practicum, Pepe’s emotions had evolved into a profound sense of achievement and belonging. He described his final day in the classroom as a significant moment, emphasizing the strong bond he had developed with both his students and the teaching environment: “My last day sharing this beautiful experience with them of teaching English together with the family we were, teaching and at the same time, learning.” (JE). His words reflect his personal growth and his deep appreciation for the collaborative and supportive nature of his practicum experience.

Figure 4. *Pepe Visual Narrative*



Source: the authors



3.2.5 Violet

She reported the most persistent emotional strain during practicum. She entered the classroom with intense fear and anxiety, describing the first day as a “reality check” and feeling “unprepared” to handle classroom situations (SSI). Early lessons that diverged from her plans quickly generated frustration and sadness, especially when activities did not elicit the participation she expected (JE).

Much of Violet’s distress was connected to perceived unpreparedness for teaching young learners and to classroom management challenges. When she perceived limited learning progress and escalating disruptive behavior, she began to question her competence and the adequacy of her university preparation for this learner group (JE/SSI). These doubts intensified when she compared her students’ engagement with videos and reports from other practicum settings, which amplified anxiety and self-blame (JE/SSI).

A clear emotional turning point occurred when students began addressing her as “Miss Violet,” which she narrated as a moment of recognition that shifted her emotional trajectory toward satisfaction and renewed commitment (JE). Following this validation, she reported greater excitement entering class, increased gratitude, and more enjoyment when learners participated, particularly during hands-on lessons supported by engaging materials (e.g., Mr. Potato Head) that fostered interaction and visible learning (JE).

Overall, Violet’s narrative illustrates how emotional validation and instructional success can interrupt cycles of frustration and rebuild a sense of agency, even after prolonged periods of anxiety and self-doubt.

Figure 5 shows how Violet’s visual narrative mirrors this trajectory: an initial steep drop marked by fear, disappointment, and dark imagery, followed by an upward shift after the “Miss Violet” moment, representing renewed confidence and enjoyment in teaching.

Figure 5. *Violet Visual Narrative*



Source: the authors



By the end of her practicum, Violet expressed nostalgia and attachment to her students, noting that teaching was a reciprocal learning (JE). At the same time, she reported clarifying a professional preference for teaching adolescents, an insight she framed as an important outcome of the practicum experience (SSI).

3.3 Cross-Case Analytical Synthesis

The individual narratives show different emotional intensities, but they also reveal a common analytical pattern across cases. In response to the first research question, the main sources of emotions were not isolated events; they clustered around three interconnected domains from the conceptual framework: agency, classroom realities, and instructional success. Agency-related triggers included perceived unpreparedness, methodological uncertainty, and the pressure to perform competence in front of students. Classroom realities included student behavior, participation, class size, interactional unpredictability, and the presence of diverse learning needs. Instructional success appeared when participants perceived evidence of learning, engagement, recognition, or favorable student response.

In response to the second research question, these triggers became meaningful because participants interpreted them as evidence about who they were becoming as teachers. Anxiety, fear, and frustration were usually narrated as threats to professional agency, whereas pride, happiness, gratitude, and satisfaction were narrated as moments of validation. The cross-case synthesis (see table 4) therefore suggests that emotions functioned as interpretive resources through which participants evaluated their competence, reconstructed their pedagogical beliefs, and negotiated their emerging teacher identities.

This synthesis indicates that the cases should not be read as five separate emotional stories only. Rather, they represent different positions within a shared practicum process: disruption of agency, appraisal of classroom realities, validation through instructional success, and reconstruction of professional identity. Violet represents the most emotionally strained trajectory, Pepe functions as a contrasting positive case, and the other participants occupy intermediate positions in which unpleasant emotions were gradually reorganized through pedagogical adaptation and student response.

Discussion

The results of this study illustrate the emotional fluctuations that preservice EFL teachers experience throughout their practicum. These findings align with previous research characterizing the practicum as a period of significant emotional and professional growth, often accompanied by heightened stress (Meyer, 2009) as well as satisfaction and accomplishment (Alhebaishi, 2019). For the participants in this study, the practicum was an emotional roller coaster, marked by contrasting moments of happiness, pride, motivation, frustration, anxiety, and fear.

The cross-case analysis clarifies the analytical contribution of the study. Regarding the first research question, the sources of emotion can be understood as three interacting domains: agency, classroom realities, and instructional success. These domains explain why the same practicum environment generated both vulnerability and growth: participants experienced distress when their agency was threatened by unpreparedness or classroom disruption, but they experienced



affirmation when classroom interaction provided evidence of learning, recognition, or pedagogical success.

Table 4. *Cross-Case Analytical Synthesis of Emotional Patterns*

Cross-Case Pattern	Participants in whom the Pattern was Most Visible	Main Triggers and Emotions	Analytical Interpretation
Entry shock and perceived unpreparedness	Malena, Francesco, Rafaela, Violet	First full classroom responsibility; teaching young learners; limited methodological preparation; class size. Emotions: anxiety, fear, frustration.	Agency was initially weakened when university preparation did not seem sufficient for real-time classroom demands.
Classroom management as an emotional test	Malena, Rafaela, Violet, Francesco	Noise, disruptive behavior, low interaction, difficulty sustaining participation. Emotions: stress, fear, frustration, sadness.	Classroom realities became the space where participants judged whether they were legitimate and competent teachers.
Validation through student response	All participants	Student learning, participation, engagement, favorable feedback, and recognition such as being called “Miss.” Emotions: happiness, pride, gratitude, satisfaction.	Instructional success restored agency and confirmed participants’ developing professional identities.
Emotional turning points and adaptation	Malena, Francesco, Rafaela, Violet	Successful activities, stabilization of routines, adjusted planning, visible student progress. Emotions: renewed confidence, motivation, relief.	Emotions operated as feedback for pedagogical decision-making and supported identity reconstruction over time.
Positive emotional continuity as a contrasting case	Pepe	Lesson completion, student enjoyment, supportive classroom bond. Emotions: joy, enthusiasm, belonging.	Pepe’s case shows that emotional development was not uniformly crisis-driven; alignment between preparedness and classroom response can sustain positive agency.

Source: the authors

Regarding the second research question, participants did not merely report emotions; they used emotional episodes to narrate professional development. Their accounts show that emotions mediated the movement from uncertainty to adaptation by helping them interpret classroom events, reassess pedagogical beliefs, and construct a sense of legitimacy as English teachers. This interpretation extends international research on preservice teacher emotions and EFL practicum experiences by showing, in a Global South context, how emotional labor, well-being, and socio-emotional competence are embedded in the everyday negotiation of classroom authority, student response, and institutional support (Alhebaishi, 2019; Ariza-Quñones et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Zembylas, 2007).

Interestingly, the participants in this study predominantly reported emotionally challenging experiences, which contrasts with Alhebaishi’s (2019) findings, in which most participants described pleasant emotional episodes attributed to structured emotion regulation strategies and tutor support. In the present study, the absence of systematic emotional mediation or tutor-guided



regulation strategies may explain this divergence. Previous research suggests that activities such as tutor mediation and emotional scaffolding can significantly support preservice teachers in managing emotional demands during practicum (Yin et al., 2017). Implementing similar support mechanisms might have mitigated some of the emotional strain experienced by the participants in this study.

For many participants, emotions such as anxiety, fear, and frustration were closely linked to feelings of unpreparedness. Violet, in particular, emphasized that her university training had not adequately equipped her with practical strategies for teaching young learners. This finding aligns with Keller et al. (2014), who reported that anxiety is common among preservice teachers when they perceive themselves as insufficiently prepared to meet classroom demands. Similarly, Malena experienced heightened anxiety when she was assigned full classroom responsibility on her first day without guidance from the mentor teacher. This experience reflects a recurring theme in practicum narratives, where preservice teachers are “thrown into the deep end” with limited support (Jita & Munje, 2022). Such experiences, combined with high expectations during the practicum, contributed to stress and emotional overload. These findings resonate with Zembylas’s (2007) concept of emotional ecology, which posits that teachers’ emotional knowledge is embedded within broader relational and institutional contexts.

Classroom management emerged as one of the primary sources of emotional instability for the participants, corroborating findings by Martínez-Agudo and Azzaro (2018) and Li et al. (2023). Malena and Rafaela reported that managing young learners’ behavior was far more challenging than anticipated, often triggering fear, anxiety, and frustration. Violet similarly described intense emotional distress when classroom control was lost and when she perceived limited student learning, leading her to question her teaching competence. These experiences reflect what Abou-Assali (2015) describes as the emotional strain generated by preservice teachers’ dual roles as university students and novice teachers navigating complex classroom realities.

Across participants, repeated classroom disruptions and unmet expectations contributed to a decline in perceived self-efficacy, a phenomenon often described as “reality shock” (Ma et al., 2021). As preservice teachers encountered the complexities of real teaching environments, they reassessed their teaching abilities and professional readiness. This reassessment, while emotionally challenging, played a crucial role in shaping their professional identities.

Despite these difficulties, classroom realities also elicited positive emotions. Participants reported feelings of happiness, pride, and satisfaction during moments of instructional success. Pepe’s practicum experience was largely characterized by joy and fulfillment, particularly when lessons proceeded as planned and students demonstrated engagement and learning. This aligns with Waber et al. (2021), who found that positive feedback and supportive classroom interactions foster satisfaction among preservice teachers. Similarly, Francesco and Malena experienced pride when students responded positively to their teaching strategies. Francesco’s use of music as an instructional tool marked a pivotal moment that enhanced his confidence and reinforced his belief in his teaching abilities. These findings support earlier research indicating that instructional success strengthens self-efficacy and professional commitment (Alhebaishi, 2019; Stupnisky et al., 2019).

Beyond individual emotional episodes, the findings reveal a shared emotional trajectory across participants. Most preservice teachers experienced an initial phase of anxiety and self-doubt,



followed by gradual adaptation and, in several cases, increased professional confidence. Despite contextual and personal differences, all participants encountered emotional disruptions triggered by unpreparedness, classroom management challenges, and mismatches between expectations and classroom realities. These patterns mirror findings from similar EFL and Global South contexts, where preservice teachers report heightened emotional vulnerability due to limited pedagogical preparation and contextual constraints (Ariza-Quñones et al., 2022; García-Cano & Niño Murcia, 2023; Li et al., 2023).

A significant point of convergence among participants was the presence of emotional turning points, specific moments that reshaped their self-perceptions as teachers. For Francesco, this occurred when students actively engaged through music; for Rafaela, when classroom routines stabilized; for Malena, when she recognized students' learning progress; and for Violet, when she was first addressed as "Miss Violet." These moments functioned as validation experiences that enhanced self-efficacy and professional identity, echoing the work of Méndez-López (2020) and Stupnisky et al. (2019), who emphasize the importance of emotional feedback in teacher development.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that emotions and beliefs evolved dynamically rather than linearly. Participants' beliefs about teaching children, classroom management, and personal competence were continuously reshaped through emotional experiences, reinforcing Zembylas's (2007) notion of emotional ecology. This dynamic interaction was particularly evident in Violet's experience, where persistent frustration initially undermined her self-efficacy, but subsequent emotional validation enabled her to reconstruct her professional identity. Similar emotional trajectories have been documented in Latin American contexts, where emotional resilience often emerges through lived classroom experiences rather than formal training alone (Ariza-Quñones et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2022).

Taken together, these findings suggest that emotional challenges during the practicum are not isolated individual struggles, but structurally embedded experiences shaped by training gaps, classroom realities, and limited emotional scaffolding. While some participants, such as Pepe, demonstrated sustained positive emotional engagement, others required emotional validation and time to develop confidence. This variation underscores the need to conceptualize emotional development as a core component of teacher education rather than a peripheral outcome of practicum participation.

Thus, the broader pattern across cases is not simply a sequence of emotional highs and lows. It is a process of professional sense-making in which emotional disruption exposed gaps in agency, classroom realities tested participants' pedagogical assumptions, and moments of instructional success enabled the reconstruction of confidence and identity. This cross-case pattern strengthens the manuscript's contribution by moving from descriptive accounts of individual experiences toward an analytical explanation of how practicum emotions operate as mechanisms of teacher learning.

Methodological Limitations of the Narrative Inquiry Approach

A methodological limitation should therefore be considered when interpreting the shared emotional trajectory identified in the findings. The recurrent movement from uncertainty, anxiety, or frustration toward confidence, satisfaction, or professional growth may partly reflect the roller-



coaster structure used in the visual narrative task. Thus, the high-low pattern should not be read as evidence that all practicum experiences naturally unfold in a fixed linear sequence. Rather, it should be understood as an interpretive pattern supported by multiple data sources and shaped, in part, by the metaphor through which participants were invited to represent their experiences.

More broadly, the narrative inquiry design places interpretive limits on the scope of the findings. The study does not aim to generalize statistically to all preservice EFL teachers; instead, it offers situated analytical insights into how five participants narrated emotions within one Ecuadorian practicum context. Because the data were based on interviews, journals, and visual self-representations, the accounts may have been shaped by memory reconstruction, social desirability, and the researcher-participant relationship. These limits do not weaken the value of the findings, but they require that the results be read as contextually grounded interpretations of emotional meaning-making rather than as universal emotional trajectories.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

The findings of this study carry several important implications for teacher education programs, particularly in EFL and similar educational contexts. First, participants reported emotional challenges highlight the need to integrate explicit emotional preparation into practicum design. Teacher education programs should not assume that emotional regulation, resilience, and classroom confidence will develop organically; rather, these competencies should be systematically addressed through guided reflection, emotional awareness training, and mentor-mediated support (Yin et al., 2017; García-Cano & Niño Murcia, 2023).

Second, the recurring sense of unpreparedness, especially regarding teaching children and managing diverse classroom behaviors, suggests a misalignment between university coursework and practicum demands. Programs should strengthen pedagogical preparation for specific learner populations, including young learners and students with special educational needs. Incorporating practical methodologies, simulated teaching experiences, and case-based emotional reflection prior to practicum placement may reduce anxiety and enhance self-efficacy.

Third, the importance of emotional validation identified across participants indicates that mentor teachers and university supervisors play a critical role in shaping preservice teachers' emotional trajectories. Structured mentoring practices, regular emotional check-ins, and post-lesson reflective dialogues can serve as protective factors against emotional exhaustion and self-doubt. Such practices may be particularly valuable in contexts where preservice teachers assume full classroom responsibility with limited supervision.

Finally, this study underscores the value of reflective tools, such as journals, interviews, and visual narratives, not only as research instruments but also as pedagogical resources. Embedding these tools into practicum courses may help preservice teachers articulate, process, and learn from their emotional experiences, ultimately supporting more sustainable professional identity development.

4. Conclusion

This narrative inquiry study used journals, semi-structured interviews, and visual narratives to examine preservice teachers' emotions during the practicum and to understand what these emotions reveal about learning to teach. The findings show that emotions were not incidental



reactions to classroom events. Rather, they formed part of an emotional ecology in which teaching demands, mentoring relationships, institutional conditions, and emerging professional identities jointly shaped how participants interpreted their experiences and positioned themselves as future teachers.

The integration of the three instruments was central to the conclusions of the study. Journal entries, written close to the teaching events, provided field-based evidence of immediate emotional triggers, including disruptive behavior, limited participation, methodological uncertainty, students' learning responses, and moments of instructional success. Semi-structured interviews offered retrospective and interpretive accounts, allowing participants to explain why particular classroom events were remembered as significant and how those events affected their emerging teacher identities. Visual narratives added a symbolic and temporal dimension by showing how participants represented moments of descent, instability, recovery, and professional affirmation. Reading these sources together strengthened the analytical interpretation of the findings because the conclusions were based not only on verbal reports but also on the triangulation of written, oral, and visual evidence.

In relation to the first research question, the findings show that preservice teachers' emotions arose from multiple and interlocking sources. Classroom interactional demands, especially student engagement, discipline, and the unpredictability of lesson enactment, frequently triggered strong affective responses because they directly challenged participants' sense of control and instructional competence. Pedagogical preparedness and methodological uncertainty were also recurrent drivers of anxiety, particularly when participants perceived a gap between university coursework and the real-time demands of planning, pacing, and adapting instruction. Relational and evaluative dynamics further intensified emotional experience: mentor observations, feedback, and perceived judgment generated stress and self-doubt when support felt conditional or unclear, whereas guidance experienced as constructive and caring fostered relief and confidence. Institutional and material conditions, such as time constraints, workload, limited resources, and the organization of the practicum, also constrained participants' perceived agency and narrowed the range of feasible pedagogical responses, intensifying emotions linked to responsibility and accountability.

In relation to the second research question, the findings show that emotions played an interpretive role in professional development. Emotional episodes were repeatedly treated by participants as evidence of competence, legitimacy, and belonging in the profession. Anxiety, fear, and frustration were narrated as moments that exposed perceived inadequacies, such as "I am not ready" or "I cannot manage this class," and prompted efforts to restore competence through additional preparation, classroom management strategies, and confirmation from mentors or peers. In contrast, pride, satisfaction, gratitude, happiness, and confidence were narrated as identity-affirming experiences that strengthened commitment, reinforced a sense of capability, and expanded participants' instructional agency. Importantly, development was not portrayed as a simple progression from "negative" to "positive" emotions. Instead, participants described fluctuating emotional trajectories in which challenges and small successes gradually accumulated into more stable professional self-understandings.

Across the accounts, emotions also functioned as mechanisms of learning. Participants used emotional highs and lows to decide what to change in their teaching, how to relate to learners, and which professional norms to adopt or resist. Frustration highlighted mismatches between intended



pedagogy and classroom realities; anxiety signaled evaluative stakes and the need for coping and preparation; and enjoyment-related emotions marked perceived alignment between values, practice, and student response. In this sense, emotional experience was not separate from professional growth. It was a medium through which participants made meaning, exercised agency, regulated their responses, and constructed their teacher identities.

Overall, the findings extend work on practicum emotions by linking the sources of preservice teachers' emotions with the ways they narrate emotional experience as shaping professional learning. The study suggests that teacher education programs can better support preservice teachers by making emotions pedagogically visible through structured reflection, mentoring practices that balance evaluation with guidance, and explicit attention to emotional labor and identity tensions in practicum settings. Supporting preservice teachers, therefore, requires not only strengthening instructional preparation but also cultivating mentoring ecologies in which emotional experiences can be processed as resources for learning rather than treated as private struggles.

At the same time, because the evidence was participant-generated and interpreted through narrative inquiry, the conclusions should be read as situated narratives of emotional meaning-making rather than as objective measurements of emotional change. This limitation does not reduce the value of the findings; instead, it clarifies the nature of the study's contribution: to show how preservice teachers make sense of the emotional demands of practicum and how those meanings become part of learning to teach.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they do not have conflict of interest.

Ethical implications

This study adheres to the principles of ethical research conduct, operating under the permission granted by the University of Jaén (Reference: FEB.23/15.PRY).

Authors' contribution

Research design, JCS and GLA; Data analysis JCS and GLA; methodology JCS and GLA; manuscript review JCS and GLA. All the authors have read and approved the submitted version.

Declaration of generative AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly in order to revise the English language. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the contents needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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