

Language Teaching Anxiety Before and After Practicum: A Qualitative Inquiry of Korean Pre-service English Teachers

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This qualitative study explored how teaching practicum experiences influence foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA) among Korean pre-service secondary English teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted before and after the practicum with eight pre-service English teachers selected for their high FLTA levels. Results showed a notable reduction in anxiety post-practicum. Initially, FLTA was driven by perceived linguistic deficiencies, fear of negative evaluation, perfectionism, non-nativeness, and inadequate pedagogical preparation. After the practicum, triggers shifted toward practical classroom issues, including time management and responding to student questions. Coping strategies evolved from rigid rehearsal and avoidance to adaptive practices such as rapport-building and reflective teaching. Participants emphasized the practicum's role in reducing anxiety through authentic teaching experiences, advocating longer and more frequent practicums. These findings highlight the critical role of supervised, experiential classroom exposure in teacher education for mitigating FLTA and easing the transition from theory to practice.

Key words: foreign language teaching anxiety, pre-service teachers, teaching practicum, coping strategies, qualitative research, teacher education

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1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA) is increasingly recognized as a critical issue in language education, with significant implications for teacher effectiveness and student learning (Alrashidi, 2022; Gannoun & Deris, 2023). While foreign language anxiety among learners has been extensively studied (e.g., Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), comparatively less attention has been paid to the anxiety experienced by foreign language teachers. High levels of FLTA can undermine classroom practice: teachers may reduce target-language use, avoid interactive tasks, and appear uncomfortable, dampening students' motivation and learning (Alrashidi, 2022; Horwitz, 1996).

This issue is acute for pre-service English teachers, whose proficiency and pedagogical skills are still developing. Many teachers report low confidence in English use and doubt their teaching expertise (Aydın, 2016; Kim, 2010; Li, Xie, & Zeng, 2023), which can trigger anxiety even before they begin full-time teaching. Aydın (2016) reported that perceived linguistic inadequacy, fear of negative evaluation, and teaching inexperience contribute to FLTA experienced before, during, and after teaching activities. Kim (2010) also found that Korean pre-service primary English teachers often reported FLTA levels higher than their own foreign language learning anxiety, indicating that teaching-related anxiety is not merely a reflection of linguistic ability. Li et al. (2023) showed that pre-service English teachers with practicum experience exhibited significantly higher FLTA than their non-practicum peers, with anxiety strongly associated with self-perceived language proficiency and teaching inexperience. Taken together, findings indicate that perceived inadequacy and contextual factors play a larger role in teaching-related anxiety than objective language proficiency.

Globally, pre-service English teachers face heightened anxiety during the teaching practicum, when they encounter real classroom challenges for the first time (Li et al., 2023; Merç, 2010). Contributing factors include inexperience, fear of mistakes, and pressure to appear professionally competent. Approaching graduation, many student teachers report mounting self-doubt, especially about target-language use (Tum, 2012). Such anxiety can curtail classroom English, hamper skill development, and ultimately erode long-term teaching efficacy (Li et al., 2023; Tum, 2012). If left unaddressed, such anxiety may deter them from adopting communicative teaching approaches or even pursuing a career in education.

Despite growing interest in FLTA, little is known about how the practicum experience alters the anxiety levels and coping strategies of pre-service English teachers. Most studies have relied on cross-sectional surveys, limiting insight into the dynamic nature of anxiety. Across different contexts, common FLTA triggers include fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, classroom-management challenges, and lack of experience (Alrashidi, 2022;

Kim & Kim, 2004). Yet studies rarely follow teachers both before and during practicum, and few track anxiety as anticipation turns into classroom reality. In addition, one longitudinal study by Li et al. (2023) showed an unexpected trend: pre-service English teachers who completed a four-month practicum reported higher FLTA than those who had not, likely due to increased awareness of real-world teaching challenges. This highlights the need for in-depth qualitative research exploring how and why FLTA changes throughout the practicum.

To address these academic gaps, this study examines FLTA among Korean pre-service secondary English teachers before and after their practicum, focusing on anxiety triggers, coping strategies, and perceived intensity. Through in-depth interviews, it investigates how participants' perceptions evolve and what factors drive changes. The following research questions guide this inquiry:

- 1) What FLTA triggers and coping strategies characterize Korean pre-service English teachers prior to their practicum?
- 2) How do the triggers, coping strategies, and perceived intensity of FLTA shift after the practicum experience?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

FLTA refers to the distress and apprehension instructors may feel when teaching a foreign language, especially among non-native speaker teachers¹ (Horwitz, 1996; Tum, 2012). This construct is related to—but distinct from—the well-known concept of foreign language anxiety (FLA) in learners. Horwitz et al. (1986) define learner FLA as a “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning” (p. 128), characterized by nervousness or worry when using a second language. Like learners, teachers can fear errors or negative evaluation; however, FLTA also encompasses stressors unique to the teaching role. Non-native teachers may worry that any linguistic imperfections on their part will undermine their credibility as language experts (Kim & Kim, 2004). They often feel pressure to model flawless language and manage classroom instruction entirely in the target language, which can heighten anxiety (Horwitz, 1996). In essence, FLTA encapsulates the tension of having to perform as a competent language user and teacher simultaneously, even as one's own command of that language is still developing.

¹ The term non-native speaker teacher refers to language instructors who teach a language they did not acquire as their first language. In the context of English language teaching, it commonly denotes teachers from Expanding Circle countries (Kachru, 1985), such as South Korea or China, who teach English despite not being native users. However, this terminology has faced increasing criticism for reinforcing native-speakerism and deficit views of teacher identity (Holliday, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

Building on Horwitz's (1996) insights, research across contexts has identified various interrelated factors contributing to FLTA. Since the late 1990s, studies have confirmed that many non-native EFL teachers experience significant classroom anxiety. Sources of FLTA are generally categorized as personal, linguistic, and situational. Personally, low self-confidence and self-efficacy in teaching are strongly linked to higher anxiety (Kim, 2019; Merç, 2015). In Liu and Wu's (2021) survey, Chinese university EFL teachers with lower self-rated proficiency and confidence reported higher FLTA. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2017) found that Korean pre-service teachers' FLTA was negatively correlated with self-assessed English proficiency and overseas experience, suggesting greater exposure reduces anxiety.

Teaching experience and training also play a vital role. Novice and pre-service teachers typically report higher anxiety than experienced ones (Kobul & Saraçoğlu, 2020). Using the foreign language teaching anxiety scale (FLTAS), Kobul and Saraçoğlu (2020) found that in-service teachers had lower FLTA than pre-service teachers, and anxiety decreased with teaching experience. Lack of practical experience is a commonly cited anxiety trigger (Aydin, 2016; Kobul & Saraçoğlu, 2020). Before classroom exposure, pre-service teachers often feel unsure how to apply theory in practice and manage real-time demands. Practicum is designed to bridge this gap. Kim (2019) found that Korean elementary pre-service teachers with more pedagogical training or practicum experience showed lower FLTA, suggesting training boosts teaching confidence.

However, practicum does not always reduce anxiety. Li et al. (2023) reported that Chinese pre-service teachers who completed a 4-month practicum experienced higher anxiety than those without, likely due to increased awareness of classroom challenges. In the study, female participants reported more anxiety than males. The interviews of this study revealed core anxiety triggers: fear of negative evaluation, low perceived proficiency, and limited teaching experience, underscoring the interplay of personal beliefs and skill development.

Affective factors like perfectionism and fear of failure further exacerbate FLTA. Teachers who internalize high expectations face greater pressure (Horwitz, 1996; Tum, 2015). Tum (2015) noted that pre-service teachers feel compelled to prove their competence, amplifying anxiety. Horwitz (1996) found that low-confidence teachers avoid communicative tasks, limiting student interaction and reflecting a maladaptive coping mechanism. Conversely, self-efficacy and anxiety are reciprocally related: greater self-efficacy reduces FLTA, and reduced anxiety can enhance confidence (Tum, 2012). Thus, strengthening realistic self-appraisal is key to mitigating FLTA.

A growing body of research has identified various factors associated with FLTA across different teaching contexts. In general, research consistently reveals similar FLTA patterns among pre-service teachers. Merç (2010) found that Turkish student teachers experienced moderate anxiety at the beginning of their practicum, which declined notably by its end. Key stressors included managing real classrooms, supervisor observation, and addressing diverse

student needs. In China, Li et al. (2023) reported high overall FLTA among pre-service EFL teachers. Paradoxically, those who had completed a practicum reported greater anxiety than those without such experience, possibly due to heightened awareness of classroom demands. Across these contexts, common anxiety triggers included fear of negative evaluation, low self-perceived proficiency, and limited teaching experience.

In the Korean context, research similarly highlights several factors associated with FLTA among pre-service English teachers. Kim (2010) reported pre-service teachers' high FLTA irrespective of actual proficiency. However, certain experiences appeared to mitigate teaching anxiety; for example, greater teaching experience, longer stays in English-speaking countries, and higher self-rated proficiency were correlated with lower FLTA (Kim & Kim, 2017). Additionally, extensive training and stronger self-perceived teaching competence corresponded with decreased anxiety (Kim, 2019). As for the factors contributing to FLTA, Yoon (2012) identified using English in classroom settings as the most anxiety-provoking factor for Korean pre-service teachers, followed by concerns about self-confidence and lesson preparation. This anxiety primarily stemmed from their fear of making linguistic mistakes in front of students, concerns about being judged by peers or students with higher proficiency, and a lack of confidence in spontaneous classroom interaction.

Nonetheless, critical gaps persist. Few studies track FLTA longitudinally or probe the lived experiences of Korean trainees through qualitative lenses. Few studies have explored how coping strategies are articulated or modified during authentic classroom exposure. The present two-phase interview study therefore examines high-anxiety Korean pre-service teachers before and after practicum to illuminate how FLTA is experienced, managed, and potentially transformed. By grounding analysis in participants' lived contexts, the study also aims to inform teacher-education programs about targeted supports that can mitigate anxiety before graduates enter full-time service.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

In South Korea, prospective secondary school English teachers are typically trained through four-year teacher education programs at accredited universities. These programs combine coursework in language teaching methods and theory with a mandatory practicum experience. The practicum generally occurs in the senior year, lasting approximately one month, during which pre-service teachers are placed in local secondary schools. Under supervision, they observe experienced teachers and conduct actual classroom lessons.

From a cohort of 25 seniors in such a program at a private university, eight trainees (five

women, three men) were recruited for this study on the basis of high FLTA. All participants first completed the FLTAS (Kim & Kim, 2004), a 30-item five-point Likert instrument covering concerns about linguistic errors, classroom management, and self-presentation in English. The full 30 items administered in this study are reproduced in Appendix A for transparency and replicability. A composite total score was computed by summing the 30 items (possible range = 30–150). The sample showed the following descriptive profile: $M = 78.17$, $SD = 16.54$, Median = 78.00, and Range = 42–117. The eight top scorers were purposively selected to ensure rich information on anxiety triggers and coping strategies. Participants were 22–24 years old, native Korean speakers, and had no teaching experience beyond campus micro-teaching. Each provided oral consent and was assigned a pseudonym (P1–P8) for confidentiality.

3.2. Data Collection

The practicum ran mid-semester in the first senior term. Each participant was posted to a different public or private middle or high school for five weeks. Teaching loads varied: one participant delivered only two full lessons, whereas another taught 30 lessons. Mentor teachers observed some of the lessons and offered formative feedback. During practicum, participants kept daily journals of lesson goals, challenges, mentor comments, and emotions; these notes helped them to answer the post-practicum interview questions. Two rounds of semi-structured, individual interviews captured shifts in their FLTA and coping strategies: a pre-practicum interview (one week before placement) and a post-practicum interview (within seven days of completion). Interviews were conducted in Korean in a quiet campus office, lasted 30–60 minutes, and were audio-recorded. All sessions were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. A flexible protocol ensured that all participants addressed core topics (e.g., anticipated triggers, perceived proficiency, coping plans) while allowing follow-up probes. For example, when a participant reported nervousness about real-time error correction, the interviewer asked for concrete incidents and emotional reactions. Such probing generated nuanced narratives unavailable through surveys.

3.3. Instruments

Prior to the interviews, all participants completed the FLTAS, a 30-item instrument rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Item responses were averaged to produce an overall FLTA score, with higher values indicating greater teaching anxiety. This questionnaire served as a screening tool to purposively identify participants with high FLTA for the subsequent qualitative interviews.

After the participants whose FLTA level was high were identified, semi-structured

interview protocols were designed for this study. The pre-practicum interview included questions on participants' general feelings about teaching, anticipated FLTA triggers, self-assessed English proficiency, and planned coping strategies. The post-practicum interview asked about changes in anxiety during the practicum, specific anxiety-provoking incidents and how they were handled, any physical symptoms of anxiety, the practicum's impact on the participant's confidence, and the evolution of their coping strategies. All questions were open-ended to encourage detailed responses. The protocols were reviewed by an experienced English education expert for clarity and content validity and piloted with three pre-service teachers to refine the questions. (Appendix B contains the full list of interview questions.)

3.4. Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for candidate themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The researchers first familiarized themselves with the data, generated initial codes, identified potential themes, and then reviewed and defined these themes before producing the final written analysis. To ensure the reliability of coding judgments, a peer researcher—who had a year of teaching experience at the public secondary level high school and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in English education—independently coded 20% of the interview data. This proportion of 20% was determined with reference to methodological guidance that calibrates early-stage double coding to the study design, code complexity, and available resources (e.g., Halpin, 2024). The initial intercoder agreement was 82%. The majority of discrepancies arose from ambiguous boundaries between codes, specifically around concepts related to perceived English proficiency and non-nativeness. These differences were addressed through two in-depth consensus meetings (approximately 90 minutes each), during which unclear codes were explicitly redefined, exemplars were added to the codebook, and criteria were clarified. After this process, the same data were re-coded, resulting in a final intercoder agreement of 94%. The revised coding scheme was then applied to the remainder of the dataset. To ensure credibility, member checking was conducted: each participant reviewed a summary of their pre- and post-practicum interview findings, and minor clarifications provided through their feedback were incorporated into the analysis. These verification procedures helped ensure that the coding and thematic interpretations accurately reflected the participants' experiences. Representative participant quotations are included in the Results section to illustrate each theme.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Theme-based Description Before and After Practicum

This section presents the key themes identified through thematic analysis of pre- and post-practicum interviews, highlighting the primary factors contributing to FLTA and the coping strategies utilized by participants at each stage.

4.1.1. Factors contributing to FLTA before practicum

Before the teaching practicum, participants overwhelmingly reported anxiety stemming from doubts about their own English proficiency (42.3%) as shown in Table 1. Many felt that their productive language skills were underdeveloped, mainly because their own English education had emphasized exam preparation rather than communication skills, providing limited opportunities to practice speaking and writing. Additionally, participants reported feeling inherently disadvantaged as non-native speakers. These inadequate learning experiences and lack of confidence led them to question their ability to teach those skills to students. They perceived their vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation as inadequate and feared they could not conduct English classes confidently. For example, some participants felt overwhelmed by the idea of teaching language skills that they themselves were still struggling to master, and other was anxious that their non-native pronunciation would be obvious to students. Such self-perceived linguistic limitations directly contributed to their FLTA, as they felt unqualified to serve as a model of English for their future students.

Participants also had a strong fear of being negatively evaluated by others (16.7%). They worried that students might judge their English ability or that mentor teachers and peers would critique their teaching performance. A common concern was that if they failed to answer a student's question on the spot, the students would think the teacher "doesn't really know English" and lose confidence in him or her. This anticipated loss of credibility was a major source of anxiety before the practicum, as the trainees imagined their authority being undermined by any shortcoming.

Relatedly, many pre-service teachers felt intense pressure to avoid making mistakes while teaching (16.0%), which became another distinct source of anxiety. They contrasted everyday casual conversation—where small errors are no big deal—with the high-stakes classroom environment where, as the teacher, they felt they had to be error-free. The prospect of even a minor linguistic or pedagogical slip-up was terrifying to them. They believed that any mistake could embarrass them in front of students or provide incorrect information, thereby 'misleading' the class. In their minds, being in the role of the supposed expert meant they had to model perfect English and flawless lessons, so even minor slip-ups were feared.

TABLE 1
FLTA Factors Before Practicum

	Main themes	Number of coded extracts	Examples of the coded extracts
Factors contributing to FLTA	Self-perception of linguistic proficiency	66 (42.3%)	"I'm still learning productive skills myself, so being told to teach them to students feels really overwhelming."
	Fear of negative evaluation	26 (16.7%)	"What I worry about the most is that if I can't answer a student's question, they might think, 'Oh, this teacher doesn't really know English,'"
	Fear of making mistakes	25 (16.0%)	"... the focus is on doing everything accurately without mistakes. That makes me feel a bit anxious."
	Non-nativeness	24 (15.4%)	"Since I'm not a native speaker, I often worry whether the English I'm teaching is really what native speakers would actually use."
	Pedagogical preparedness gap	15 (9.6%)	"... and I don't have much experience with that, I feel ... kind of anxious, actually."

Note. Number of coded extracts = the count of distinct meaning units (coded segments) assigned to each theme; % = the proportion of all coded extracts in this table attributed to that theme

All participants mentioned their non-native English speaker status as a factor contributing to FLTA before practicum (15.4%). They were acutely aware that English is not their mother tongue and worried that this would disadvantage them in teaching. Being non-native made them question the authenticity and quality of the language input they could provide. Some were anxious that their English might sound unnatural or not truly reflect how a native speaker would say things, which they felt could shortchange their students. This non-nativeness fed into their feelings of inadequacy, reinforcing other fears like making mistakes or being judged. A few acknowledged that they overcompensated by focusing excessively on using "correct" or native-like expressions in their lesson plans, setting very high standards for themselves in an attempt to counteract their perceived disadvantage.

Finally, participants highlighted a gap in their practical teaching experience—a pedagogical preparedness gap (9.6%)—as a major source of anxiety before entering the classroom. Despite all their university coursework in teaching methods, they felt unprepared for the unpredictable reality of managing a real class. The prospect of leading an actual class for the first time made them question whether they truly knew how to teach effectively. Many noted that aside from micro-teaching in college, they had never taught real secondary students before. They worried that something unexpected might happen in a real class and they would not know how to handle it. In essence, they felt theoretically prepared but were unsure if they could translate that knowledge into effective teaching practice, which fueled their FLTA.

4.1.2. Coping strategies before practicum

To cope with their pre-practicum anxieties, the preservice teachers relied heavily on rigorous practice and rehearsal of lessons (57.7%) as shown in Table 2. Nearly all of them tried to simulate teaching scenarios on their own to build confidence. This often meant performing a ‘mock’ lesson by themselves or with a stand-in audience (like friends or even a doll) to mimic the classroom environment. By repeatedly rehearsing their lesson scripts and instructional delivery, they aimed to internalize the material and reduce uncertainty. This over-preparation gave them a sense of having ‘already taught’ the lesson once, so that the actual delivery would be less intimidating. In their view, intensive rehearsal was the best way to prevent freezes or mistakes during the real lesson.

TABLE 2
Coping Strategies for FLTA Before Practicum

	Main themes	Number of coded extracts	Examples of the coded extracts
Coping strategies for FLTA	Practice and rehearsal	30 (57.7%)	“... I think the best way is to really imagine I’m in an actual class and immerse myself in that situation ...”
	Contingency planning	16 (30.8%)	“I also try to anticipate possible questions and prepare answers in advance.”
	Avoidance and delay tactics	6 (11.5%)	“When a student asks something I don’t know right away, I say, ‘I’m a bit busy right now ...’ and then I use that time to look it up ...”

Note. Number of coded extracts = the count of distinct meaning units (coded segments) assigned to each theme; % = the proportion of all coded extracts in this table attributed to that theme

Along with general rehearsal, many participants engaged in contingency planning (30.8%) to address specific worries – particularly the fear of being unable to answer students’ questions. They would deliberately think through possible classroom scenarios and questions in advance and prepare “backup” answers or activities. For instance, while preparing a lesson they might anticipate difficult questions students could ask and formulate answers ahead of time. This strategic foresight gave them a feeling of control: knowing they had a prepared response for potential “what if” scenarios alleviated some anxiety about being caught off-guard. It was a way of preempting situations that could make them look or feel incompetent.

A few participants acknowledged using avoidance or delay tactics (11.5%) as another coping mechanism, especially when they feared their knowledge might fall short. If confronted with a question they did not know how to answer, some preferred to postpone their response rather than admit “I don’t know” in front of the whole class. One tactic was

to tell the student to ask again later (e.g., during break or after class), which bought the teacher time to privately find the information before responding. While they knew this was not ideal pedagogically, it allowed them to avoid exposing their uncertainty publicly. This avoidance strategy reflects their acute fear of negative evaluation – by delaying an answer, they could maintain an appearance of confidence and authority in the moment, which was psychologically comforting despite being only a temporary solution.

4.1.3. FLTA factors after practicum

After completing the teaching practicum, participants identified some new anxiety triggers that emerged during real classroom teaching, even as many of their earlier fears diminished (see Table 3 for further details). One of the most salient anxiety factors during the practicum was managing class time effectively (39.0%). Once participants began teaching actual lessons, many discovered that pacing a lesson was more difficult than they had anticipated. Several admitted they struggled to cover all the material or activities they had planned within the allotted time, leading to anxious moments when they had to skip parts of the lesson or felt their timing was off. This difficulty with time management became a genuine anxiety trigger in the early stages of the practicum. They realized that their inexperience with real classroom pacing – unpredictable student interactions, unexpected questions, or technical delays – could throw off their schedule, which was distressing. However, most noted that with continued practice, they gradually adapted, and this particular anxiety about timing began to diminish.

TABLE 3
FLTA Factors After Practicum

	Main themes	Number of coded extracts	Examples of the coded extracts
Factors contributing to FLTA	Difficulties in time management	16 (39.0%)	“I couldn’t manage the time properly, so I had to skip some of the activities I had planned ...”
	Self-perception of linguistic proficiency.	10 (24.4%)	“I don’t have good pronunciation skills, so I can’t pronounce words like ‘literally’ the way native speakers do.”
	Fear of negative evaluation	8 (19.5%)	“There was a time when I couldn’t answer a question right away ... I remember feeling anxious because I thought I might have come across as lacking professionalism.”
	Fear of making mistakes	7 (17.1%)	“One mistake I made was saying ‘watch a TV’ instead of just ‘watch TV.’”

Note. Number of coded extracts = the count of distinct meaning units (coded segments) assigned to each theme; % = the proportion of all coded extracts in this table attributed to that theme

Some anxiety about their English proficiency persisted into the practicum (24.4%), though generally in more specific ways and to a much lesser degree. A few participants became acutely aware of certain linguistic shortcomings as they taught. Pronunciation remained one example: A participant (P7) became self-conscious that he could not pronounce certain words (he gave ‘literally’ as an example) in a native-like manner and worried students would notice. Another (P3) mentioned that if a student’s question ventured into a grammar point she was not fully confident about, her anxiety would spike at that moment. Overall, however, language-use anxiety was much lower post-practicum than before. By the end of the practicum, many participants had gained confidence in their classroom English. Teaching experience helped them realize that their English was generally adequate for instructional purposes; by preparing lessons and fielding questions, they organized their own knowledge more systematically and found they could explain things better than they had feared. In some cases, actually teaching even improved their language awareness and ease. As P4 reflected, the process of planning and answering students “boosted my confidence in my English skills a bit” because it forced her to articulate knowledge clearly and she discovered she was capable of doing so. In short, while a few language-related nerves lingered, the practicum reassured most participants that their English proficiency was sufficient for teaching, which in turn reduced their overall FLTA.

The fear of negative evaluation (19.5%) did not vanish in the classroom, but its nature shifted and gradually diminished. During the practicum, one prominent worry was losing credibility in front of students if something went wrong. For example, P4 momentarily blanked on a very simple English word when a student asked, and she resorted to checking a translator app on her phone in class. In that instant, she felt extremely anxious and unprofessional, worried that students would think her English ability was poor. Incidents like being unable to answer immediately or making a basic error triggered the familiar fear that students (and watching mentor teachers) would judge them harshly. However, as the practicum progressed, many participants started to recalibrate these worries. They realized that students were generally not as critical as expected. In the example above, none of the students seemed to mind the teacher using her phone to find a word. More broadly, participants observed that students were usually cooperative and not looking to ‘catch’ the teacher in a mistake. Nonetheless, especially in the early practicum phase, the immediate fear of “students thinking I’m not good enough” did contribute to anxiety – until the teachers saw for themselves that such fears were often exaggerated.

In the practicum context, participants still feared making mistakes (17.1%), but they learned to cope with this fear much better over time. Early in the practicum, some did experience minor slip-ups—from small language mistakes to pedagogical oversights—and these moments spiked their anxiety when they happened. For instance, one participant was so worried about accidentally slipping into Korean or phrasing something oddly in English

that she found herself over-monitoring her own speech while teaching, which ironically sometimes broke her flow. Another admitted that she once used an incorrect phrase in English (saying “watch a TV” instead of “watch TV”), and the moment she realized it, she felt a wave of panic and became even more anxious about her speech. These examples illustrate how even trivial mistakes loomed large in their minds at first. In practice, most students either did not notice or did not make an issue of such errors, but the novice teachers were highly self-critical. By later in the practicum, however, many participants had become more forgiving of their own mistakes. They learned that a minor error was not a catastrophe: they could correct themselves and move on, or even laugh it off once they had established rapport with the class. Several noted that they became much better at just continuing the lesson despite a mistake, whereas before practicum the mere thought of making a mistake was paralyzing. Thus, while the fear of mistakes never completely disappeared, its intensity waned as participants gained experience and perspective.

4.1.4. Coping strategies after practicum

At the beginning of the practicum, participants continued some of the same coping strategies they had used before, especially extensive lesson rehearsal (see Table 4, 44.2%). For their first few lessons, many still practiced teaching at home and tried to simulate the class to bolster their confidence. P4 said she rehearsed her very first lesson multiple times the night before, going over her teacher talk and timing in detail. This kind of preparation did help calm their nerves for that first real class. However, as they accumulated actual teaching experience, they gradually let go of this rigid rehearsal habit. As shown in Table 4, time constraints during the practicum made it impractical to fully script and practice every lesson; more importantly, as their anxiety levels decreased, they felt less need to meticulously rehearse. By the middle of the practicum, several participants were no longer doing thorough run-throughs at home. P4 realized she had stopped practicing at home altogether—she simply had no time and found that just planning the lesson was enough. When she went into class unrehearsed, it turned out to be fine. In essence, practice and rehearsal remained a helpful coping strategy in the early stage of the practicum, but its use tapered off as the teachers became more comfortable and learned to trust their ability to handle the classroom without exhaustive pre-performance preparation.

TABLE 4
Coping Strategies for FLTA After Practicum

	Main themes	Number of coded extracts	Examples of the coded extracts
Coping strategies for FLTA	Practice and rehearsal	19 (44.2%)	"I practiced teaching at home by imagining students were in front of me ..."
	Rapport- building	16 (37.2%)	"... interacting with them during class felt easier, and that lowered my anxiety."
	Self-reflection	8 (18.6%)	"I realized that ... not all of it was actually used in class. Some parts turned out to be unnecessary ..."

Note. Number of coded extracts = the count of distinct meaning units (coded segments) assigned to each theme; % = the proportion of all coded extracts in this table attributed to that theme

A powerful new strategy that emerged during the practicum was building rapport with students (see Table 4, 37.2%). Participants found that establishing a personal connection with their students significantly lowered their anxiety. As they got to know the students and developed a friendly, trustful relationship, teaching became less intimidating. Initially, many had feared the students' judgments; but after a few lessons, when students started smiling, chatting, and responding positively, the teachers' fears eased. Several participants noted that once they felt "closer to the students," teaching felt more natural and much of their anxiety melted away. By memorizing students' names, making small talk, showing humor and empathy, and generally humanizing the classroom, they created a more relaxed environment for themselves. They realized that students were not there to criticize them—on the contrary, many students were supportive and even sympathetic to a new teacher. P8 shared that when her voice trembled early on, a few familiar students gave her encouraging looks and she focused on those, which helped steady her nerves. In short, rapport-building proved to be one of the effective anxiety-reduction strategies during the practicum—something unavailable before (when they had not met the students yet) but immensely valuable once they were actually teaching.

Another coping strategy that developed post-practicum was self-reflection (18.6%). After each lesson, participants would take time to reflect on what happened—sometimes on their own, sometimes guided by mentor feedback—and consider what went well and what did not. This reflection often led to the realization that some of their meticulous preparations or worries had been unnecessary. One participant had an especially insightful moment: she realized that even though she had prepared an extremely detailed lesson plan, not all of it was used in class, and it did not really matter. That realization helped reduce her anxiety because it meant that she did not need to over-prepare to have a successful lesson. By reflecting on student feedback and lesson outcomes, the novice teachers learned to recalibrate their perceptions of what is important. If a lesson went better than expected or a feared problem never occurred, they noted that and adjusted their future anxiety downward.

By the end of the practicum, several participants mentioned they were actively reminding themselves to “be flexible” and “not worry about little mistakes,” having seen that those details usually did not ruin a lesson. In sum, self-reflection enabled these novice teachers to learn from experience, correct their overestimations of risk, and reinforce their growing confidence—thereby diminishing FLTA in the long run.

4.2. Analysis of Changes Between Pre-and Post-practicum

Overall, all eight pre-service teachers experienced a marked decrease in FLTA from the beginning to the end of the practicum. In their pre-practicum interviews they reported numerous intense anxieties, but in their post-practicum reflections they described feeling far less fearful and far more confident (see Table 5 for further details). In fact, every participant indicated that their anxiety was highest during the very first class they taught, then decreased with each subsequent lesson as they became accustomed to teaching. Many participants described their first teaching experience as the peak of their anxiety, marked by shaking hands, racing hearts, and trembling voices. However, they noted that even one successful lesson helped them begin to relax. The second lesson felt less intimidating than the first, and by the third or fourth session, they reported feeling significantly more at ease in front of the class. This progressive reduction in anxiety suggests that much of their pre-practicum fear stemmed from uncertainty. Once the unpredictability of teaching real students was replaced with familiarity and a sense of instructional efficacy, their anxiety naturally subsided.

TABLE 5
Factors Contributing to the Alleviation of FLTA During Practicum

	Main themes	Number of coded extracts	Examples of the coded extracts
Factors that alleviate FLTA	Recalibrated expectation	40 (50.6%)	“At first, I felt a vague sense of fear and had many worries ... But as time went by, I gradually adjusted,”
	Improvement of confidence	26 (32.9%)	“Since I had to work with students at very different proficiency levels, I realized the need for more tailored explanations ... that experience helped me improve my instructional skills.”
	Rapport-building	13 (16.5%)	“Building rapport means showing my human side ... I think I was able to let go of the pressure to be perfect all the time.”

Note. Number of coded extracts = the count of distinct meaning units (coded segments) assigned to each theme; % = the proportion of all coded extracts in this table attributed to that theme

When asked why their anxiety had decreased, participants pointed to three main factors. The first was a recalibrated expectation: teaching in the real context showed them that many

of their worst fears were exaggerated or unfounded (50.6%). Several participants reflected that they had anticipated a multitude of problems that never materialized once they were in the classroom. P8 admitted that after teaching she realized “perhaps I was worrying for nothing” about many issues, because things turned out far better than she had imagined. Simply put, hands-on experience dispelled a lot of the scary myths they had built up in their minds. They learned that even if a lesson was not perfect, it was far from the disaster they had envisioned. They could manage a class, students were generally cooperative, and mistakes or tough questions did not occur. This realization removed many unfounded worries and significantly reduced their anxiety moving forward.

The second major reason for the decline in anxiety was the improvement of confidence (32.9%). Participants reported a significant change in how they coped with stress, reflecting lessons learned through the practicum. Before the practicum, they tended to cope by over-preparing, essentially trying to avoid any possible error or challenge. After the practicum, their coping strategies became more flexible, focusing on adapting to changing situations and drawing on their increased confidence. Having real teaching experience under their belts, they no longer felt the need to script every move in advance. For example, P3 who initially practiced her lessons exhaustively eventually stopped doing formal rehearsals and noted that she “ended up practicing by actually teaching.” She discovered that standing in front of a real class was the best practice—it taught her to think on her feet and adapt, and after that realization her anxiety continued to diminish. Similarly, many participants started to adopt a healthier internal dialogue about their anxiety. P2 mentioned that overthinking worries only made things worse, and that at some point “you’ve prepared as much as you can, so just stop and trust that it’ll be fine.” This sentiment was shared by others: by the end, they were actively telling themselves to be confident and “you’ve got this,” a stark contrast to the lack of confidence they felt initially. In essence, the practicum taught them to let go of perfectionism and excessive worry—they learned to rely on their training and emerging skills, and to accept that not every lesson will go exactly as planned.

Participants also mentioned a development of positive rapport and relationships with students (16.5%). As the practicum went on and the trainees grew closer to their students, they felt increasingly at ease in the classroom. P7 reported that after a few lessons, even a lower-performing class gave him good reactions and told him “Mr. Lee, your class is fun.” That kind of feedback, which he also received from higher-performing students, boosted his confidence and made his initial worries disappear. Across all participants, student enthusiasm and encouragement turned out to be a critical factor in easing anxiety. They realized that their students trusted and supported them, which dissolved fears of being ineffective or rejected. With a friendly, supportive classroom atmosphere, the pre-service teachers no longer felt they had to prove themselves with perfect performance; instead, they could focus on engaging with the students. P8 said she came to believe that communication

with the students was more important than showing professionalism—a profound shift in mindset from before practicum. By replacing the need to be seen as an infallible “expert” with the goal of building a connection, they naturally became far less anxious.

TABLE 6
Summary of Key Findings Across Tables 1–5

Timing	Domain	Top themes	Key findings
Before practicum	Triggers	Self-perceived linguistic proficiency (42.3%); fear of negative evaluation (16.7%); fear of making mistakes (16.0%); non-nativeness (15.4%); pedagogical preparedness gap (9.6%)	Anxiety was primarily anticipatory and self-referential (language adequacy, credibility, perfectionism).
	Coping strategies	Practice & rehearsal (57.7%); contingency planning (30.8%); avoidance/delay (11.5%)	Coping emphasized over-preparation and control, aiming to preempt mistakes or unknowns.
After practicum	Triggers	Time-management difficulty (39.0%); lingering concerns about linguistic proficiency (24.4%); fear of negative evaluation (19.5%); fear of making mistakes (17.1%)	Triggers shifted to situated classroom demands (e.g., pacing), while language-related anxiety diminished.
	Coping Strategies	Practice/rehearsal (44.2%); rapport-building (37.2%); self-reflection (18.6%)	Coping diversified toward adaptive strategies (building rapport, reflective adjustment) beyond pre-lesson scripting.
	Alleviators	Recalibrated expectations (50.6%); improved confidence (32.9%); rapport-building (16.5%)	Anxiety decreased progressively as experience corrected exaggerated fears

Note. Percentages are reproduced from Tables 1–5. Each percentage reflects the share of coded extracts for the respective table and may not be comparable across tables due to different denominators; see table-specific notes for details.

For these three reasons, the practicum experience substantially reduced participants’ FLTA and reshaped their approaches to managing it. Authentic teaching opportunities and supportive relationships with students helped alleviate initial fears related to language proficiency and the possibility of failure, shifting participants’ anxiety toward more situational and manageable concerns. Their coping strategies evolved from rigid, rehearsed behaviors and avoidance to more adaptive and reflective practices. All participants identified the practicum as the most critical factor in overcoming FLTA, with several recommending longer or repeated teaching experiences to further mitigate anxiety.

Taken together, the findings show a transition from anticipatory, self-focused anxiety (before practicum) to context-embedded challenges (during practicum), alongside a shift in

coping from over-preparation to rapport-building and reflective adaptation. Anxiety declined over time, largely through recalibrated expectations and growing instructional confidence supported by authentic classroom experience. Table 6 presents a summary of the key findings.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. FLTA Triggers and Coping Strategies Before Practicum

Prior to the practicum, participants' anxiety revolved around several well-documented concerns: self-doubt about their English proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, worry about making mistakes, non-nativeness, and lack of teaching experience. Like other novice EFL teachers, our trainees felt vulnerable about their non-native language skills and feared that any shortcoming in class would invite criticism and undermine their credibility. This convergence with the literature reinforces the generality of FLTA's sources—novice teachers across contexts tend to worry about very similar issues related to language use and professional competence.

Our findings also shed light on how pre-service teachers attempted to cope with such anxiety before they had actual teaching experience. The participants predominantly relied on heavy lesson preparation and precautionary tactics to manage their nerves. They meticulously scripted lessons, rehearsed repeatedly, and tried to anticipate every possible question or problem—all in an effort to gain control over uncertainty. This behavior aligns with a perfectionist mindset noted by Tum (2015): Anxious trainees often set extremely high standards for themselves to avoid any chance of failure. The flip side of over-preparation was a degree of avoidance. Some participants would even defer answering student questions they felt unprepared for—essentially avoiding situations that might expose their weaknesses. Such avoidance echoes Horwitz's (1996) observation that anxious teachers may steer away from potentially threatening interactions. These coping strategies, while understandable, are not ideal in the long run. They suggest that without guidance, trainees resort to self-protective measures (like over-planning and avoidance) that may reduce anxiety temporarily but do not build the skills or confidence needed for real classrooms. This points to a need for teacher education programs to address FLTA directly—helping trainees develop more constructive coping strategies early on.

5.2. Changes in FLTA After Practicum

After the practicum, all participants reported substantially lower levels of FLTA and a

marked shift in both their anxiety triggers and coping methods. This outcome clearly shows that hands-on teaching practice can alleviate foreign language teaching anxiety by building confidence. Consistent with prior work, our participants began to see that their worst fears did not materialize. For example, Arslan and Ilin (2018) found that pre-service teachers' concerns changed dramatically between the start and end of practicum, as actual classroom work provided a "base for awareness on teaching-related issues in real contexts" (p. 265). In our study, after only a few weeks of teaching, trainees realized that classroom challenges were manageable. Their confidence grew and anxiety naturally fell. This outcome supports the general principle (also noted by Merç, 2010) that actual teaching experience helps novices overcome much of their initial nervousness.

Not all research has found anxiety decreasing after practicum—for instance, Morton, Vesco, Williams and Awender (1997) observed that student teachers' classroom-management anxiety "did not decrease after practicing teaching" (p. 69). Similarly, Li et al.'s (2023) study indicates that trainee teachers currently in practicum often have higher FLTA than peers without practicum experience. However, in our case, the practicum was short and tightly mentored, with frequent successes and feedback. This supportive environment directly addressed key anxiety triggers (such as fear of negative evaluation) so that classroom exposure led to adaptation rather than overwhelm.

Another key finding was the evolution of coping strategies. Before practicum, trainees coped with their anxiety by avoiding errors at all costs. By the end, they coped by engaging more actively. For example, many began to focus on building rapport with students to create a more comfortable class atmosphere, and to reflect on each lesson afterwards to improve next time. These adaptive strategies echo what prior research has found. Earlier studies reported that effective coping includes self-regulation, positive thinking, and social support. For instance, Sammephet and Wanphet (2013) and Lampadan (2014) found that anxious student teachers employed techniques like self-control, acceptance of challenges, and strong ties with peers or mentors to manage stress. In short, our participants discovered they did not need to plan for every hypothetical scenario; they could rely on growing experience and deal with issues as they arose.

The present study proved that the practicum is the decisive factor in helping our participants manage and overcome FLTA. The experience transformed their perspective: initial fears about language use and failure were largely dispelled, and the classroom became a place of relative comfort. All participants identified the practicum as the turning point in their anxiety, suggesting that hands-on teaching practice—especially in a supportive, feedback-rich environment—is an effective way to help novice teachers conquer their teaching anxiety.

6. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings carry important implications for teacher training. Teacher education programs should proactively address FLTA by integrating anxiety-coping techniques and discussions into the curriculum. For example, helping trainees share their concerns, normalizing the experience of anxiety, and teaching specific strategies (e.g., relaxation techniques, peer support, reflective microteaching) can empower pre-service teachers to handle FLTA (Kim, 2009). Providing more opportunities for controlled teaching practice—through frequent microteaching sessions or a longer/multiple practicum—may gradually build confidence and reduce anxiety before full-time teaching begins (Peker, 2009). Mentor teachers and supervisors should also foster a supportive feedback climate during the practicum, emphasizing constructive guidance over criticism to help ease trainees' fear of evaluation (Han & Tuglar, 2019).

The participants unanimously recommended extending the practicum period or offering additional rounds of practicum, reflecting how beneficial they found real classroom experience for overcoming anxiety. Educational policymakers might take this into account by ensuring practicums are sufficiently extensive and well-supervised. Pre-service teachers themselves can be encouraged that FLTA is a common and temporary hurdle. They should approach the practicum as a learning opportunity, not a test of perfection, focusing on building rapport with students and learning from mistakes. Through open reflection and support from mentors and peers, novice teachers can manage their anxiety and turn it into professional growth.

Despite its valuable insights, this study has limitations. While a sample of eight participants is acceptable for qualitative inquiry, it nonetheless represents a small cohort for interpreting the present patterns. The findings also lack statistical generalizability with this small sample size. In addition, participants differed significantly regarding practicum context (school types, teaching loads, and instructional languages), making it challenging to isolate context-specific influences on anxiety reduction. Future research should address these limitations by employing larger, mixed-method designs to validate and extend findings statistically and qualitatively. Studies focusing on participants from consistent practicum contexts or longitudinally tracking novice teachers into their initial teaching years would further clarify how teaching anxiety evolves over time and under varying conditions.

Applicable levels: Tertiary

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APPENDIX A

Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale

Please indicate your agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree.

1. I am anxious when I have to deal with unfamiliar idioms or expressions in English classes.
2. I am not confident in speaking English.
3. I am afraid that my students regard me as an incompetent English teacher.
4. I am not confident in writing English.
5. I worry when I happen to deal with unknown contents related to culture in English classes.
6. I am afraid that the parents of my students regard me as an incompetent English teacher.
7. I am afraid that I lack knowledge about English testing theories and methodologies.
8. I worry about being compared with native English teachers.
9. I feel anxious when I teach students who are good at English.
10. I am not confident in reading English.
11. It is difficult to control students when I conduct group activities in English classes.
12. I am afraid that my school regards me as an incompetent English teacher because I cannot attain satisfactory results which the school expects in the English-related events (i.e., English proficiency contest, admission rates to a university or high schools specialized in foreign languages, etc.).
13. I feel uneasy that my students are bored with my class.
14. I am not confident in pronouncing English.
15. I am afraid that my colleagues who are very fluent English speakers regard me as an incompetent English teacher.
16. I worry when I happen to deal with unknown vocabulary in English classes.
17. I am afraid that my students ask me about unknown contents in English classes.
18. I am anxious when I teach writing skills.
19. I feel anxious when I correct my students' mistakes in English classes.
20. I am afraid that I lack knowledge about English teaching theories and methodologies.
21. I worry when I correct the writing assignment of my students.
22. I am nervous when I teach English through English.
23. I am anxious when I teach reading skills.
24. I am afraid that I mispronounce English words or sentences.
25. I worry when I happen to deal with unknown grammar items in English classes.
26. I feel uneasy when I teach students with a low level of English proficiency.
27. I am anxious when I teach listening skills.
28. I am not confident in listening to English.
29. I am afraid of making mistakes when I use English.
30. I am anxious when I teach speaking skills.

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview Questions

1) Pre-practicum

- How do you feel about teaching English in general? Are you excited, nervous, confident, uncertain?
- What aspects of teaching English make you most nervous or worried, and why?
- When you feel nervous about upcoming teaching, what do you usually do to prepare or cope with this situation?

2) Post-practicum

- Describe how you felt during your first teaching session compared with later sessions. How did your anxiety level change?
- Overall, did the practicum increase, decrease, or have no effect on your anxiety about teaching? Why do you think so?
- What coping strategies did you actually use during the practicum? Which were most effective, and why?