



Anxiety Among Teacher Professional Education Students During Teaching Practice: The Effectiveness of a Self-Efficacy-Based Systematic Desensitization Technique

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study aims to determine: (1) the effect of applying the systematic desensitization technique on student anxiety during teaching practice, (2) the effect of self-efficacy on student anxiety during teaching practice, and (3) the interaction effect between the application of the systematic desensitization technique and self-efficacy on student anxiety during teaching practice.

Methodology - This study employs a quasi-experimental design. The independent variable is the systematic desensitization technique. The moderating variable is self-efficacy, while the dependent variable is student anxiety regarding teaching practice. The population consisted of 208 Teacher Professional Education students at Universitas PGRI Madiun who were undergoing teaching practice. A sample of 120 students was obtained using the disproportional random sampling technique. The instruments used were the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) and an anxiety scale. Data analysis included descriptive analysis, prerequisite testing, and inferential data analysis using one-way ANOVA.

Findings - The research results indicate that there is a significant difference in teaching practice anxiety levels between students who received the systematic desensitization technique treatment and those who did not; there is a significant difference in anxiety levels between students with high self-efficacy and those with low self-efficacy; and there is an interaction effect between the systematic desensitization technique and self-efficacy on the anxiety levels of Teacher Professional Education students during teaching practice.

Contribution - This study contributes to the development of an intervention that integrates gradual anxiety reduction with the strengthening of students' belief in their teaching abilities, thereby offering an alternative psychological support strategy to enhance the readiness and self-confidence of teacher professional education students as they face teaching practicums.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2026, Universitas PGRI Madiun was allocated a quota of 208 students for the Teacher Professional Education program across four fields of study: Indonesian Language, Primary School Teacher Education, Pancasila and Civic Education, and Guidance and Counseling. Within the Teacher Professional Education curriculum, in addition to completing theoretical coursework, every student is required to undertake Field Experience Practice at a school, comprising Guided Field Experience Practice (Semester I) and Independent Field Experience Practice (Semester II).

Field Experience Practice—or student teaching—is a crucial phase in the education of prospective teachers, providing a platform to integrate theoretical knowledge, pedagogical and communication skills, and professional competencies into real-world instructional settings. Through this practice, students are required to plan lessons, master subject matter, deliver content systematically, utilize instructional methods and media, manage the classroom, respond to student inquiries, and assess both the learning process and its outcomes. Thus, student teaching is not merely an academic activity but a transitional process that moves students from learners to aspiring professional educators.

However, this transition process is not always smooth. It highlights a gap between the theoretical knowledge acquired during university coursework and actual field practice. Student teachers often encounter various psychological challenges when entering the teaching practicum, one of which is anxiety. Such anxiety can arise from the need to perform in front of students, undergo evaluation by university supervisors or mentor teachers, master subject matter within a limited timeframe, handle unexpected questions, and manage student behavior in the classroom. Gorospe (2022) explains that student teachers undergoing practicums experience various concerns and anxieties linked to low teaching self-efficacy, which can ultimately impact their performance. The study also found a significant relationship between teaching anxiety and teaching self-efficacy, identifying classroom management skills as a key factor predicting student teachers' teaching self-efficacy.

According to Badran (cited in Putri et al., 2020), anxiety is a strong emotion stemming from worry and fear regarding something. When speaking in public, students experience anxiety and fear of potential negative outcomes. Abdolrezaipoor (2023) describes anxiety as an emotion characterized by feelings of distress, worried thoughts, and physical changes. Ansari (2016) states that anxiety is a complex concept that depends on an individual's self-confidence as well as the probabilities and risks associated with a specific situation.

Anxiety during teaching practice can manifest in various forms. Cognitively, students may worry about making mistakes, fear an inability to answer students' questions, or doubt their capacity to be effective teachers. Physiologically, anxiety can be characterized by a racing heart, sweaty palms, a trembling voice, muscle tension, and difficulty concentrating. Behaviorally, students may avoid eye contact, speak too rapidly, rely excessively on reading materials, or even attempt to avoid opportunities to teach (Naibaho, 2024). Academic anxiety is an emotional response arising from pressures perceived in learning situations, particularly during academic evaluations. Various studies indicate that the emergence of anxiety is influenced by factors such as self-efficacy, achievement motivation, academic pressure (Sari & Naqiyah, 2020; Kita & Wilani, 2024), and self-disclosure (Tamarasukma et al., 2026). Furthermore, empirical findings demonstrate a negative relationship between anxiety levels and academic performance, where students with high anxiety levels tend to exhibit lower learning outcomes (Hameed et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2023). If not properly addressed, this condition can hinder students' development of teaching competencies.

One important psychological factor in understanding student teachers' anxiety regarding teaching practice is self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions required to achieve specific goals or levels of performance. Self-efficacy is not merely a matter of actual ability; rather, it concerns an individual's belief in their own capabilities. In the context of teaching practice, self-efficacy manifests as a student teacher's belief in their ability to master the subject matter, deliver lessons effectively, manage the classroom, employ appropriate instructional strategies, interact with students, and successfully carry out teaching tasks (Aini, 2018).

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy beliefs influence how individuals perceive situations, make choices regarding actions, exert effort, persist in the face of difficulties, and manage emotional responses. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to view difficult tasks as challenges to be met, whereas those with low self-efficacy are more likely to perceive such tasks as threats. Research by Sahin et al. (2024) indicates that in teaching practicums, student teachers with high self-efficacy tend to feel more confident handling classroom situations. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy are more prone to anxiety when required to teach. The relationship between self-efficacy and teaching anxiety has received empirical support; Gorospe (2022) and Nisa & Dwijayanti (2024) found a significant association between teaching anxiety and teaching self-efficacy among student teachers. These studies demonstrate that various issues arising during the teaching practicum—such as classroom management challenges and high expectations from supervising teachers or students—can be linked to the students' levels of anxiety and self-efficacy. More recent findings have been reported by Islami & Suryati (2026) within the Indonesian context. Their research specifically examined teaching anxiety and self-efficacy among EFL student teachers during their practicums, thereby providing empirical evidence that these two variables are relevant for simultaneous study within the context of teacher education in Indonesia.

To reduce student anxiety about teaching practice, systematic desensitization can be applied by constructing an anxiety hierarchy of teaching activities. Systematic desensitization combines several techniques, such as cognitive processing, calming oneself (relaxation), and visualization. The underlying assumption of this technique is that a fear response is a learned or conditioned behavior that can be inhibited by engaging in an activity incompatible with the stimulus that triggers that fear.

In practice, the counselor seeks to reduce or eliminate the counselee's fear or anxiety (Depiani et al., 2014; Putriani, 2023; Almizri & Karneli, 2021). The application of relaxation focuses primarily on relaxing the muscles until complete relaxation is achieved (Irmawati, 2022). Incorporating relaxation techniques places the counselee in a relaxed state and associates that state with the anxiety-inducing experiences being imagined or visualized. Systematic desensitization is employed to eliminate behaviors that are negatively reinforced in learning situations and to foster behaviors that counteract the individual's anxiety. Relaxation exercises are intended to help students feel comfortable and relaxed (Heiriyah & Aminah, 2022).

According to Astuti (2018) and Komalasari et al. (2017), the systematic desensitization technique is implemented through the following steps: (1) analyzing the behaviors that trigger anxiety; (2) constructing a hierarchy of anxiety-inducing situations, ranging from the least to the most anxiety-provoking; (3) providing training in muscle relaxation for various body parts, such as the arms, head, shoulders, neck, chest, abdomen, and lower limbs; (4) asking the counselee to visualize or imagine a situation they find pleasant; (5) having the counselee close their eyes and visualize a situation that causes mild anxiety—if the counselee can handle it without feeling anxious, it indicates they have successfully managed that situation; (6) if the counselee feels anxious or agitated during a situation, the counselor instructs them to visualize the previously imagined pleasant situation to alleviate the anxiety; (7) continuing the process gradually, moving to situations that provoke higher levels of anxiety than the previous ones; and (8) concluding the therapy when the counselee is able to remain relaxed while visualizing the anxiety-inducing situations.

Theoretically, the systematic desensitization technique is carried out in three stages: (1) relaxation training, (2) the construction of an anxiety hierarchy or scale, and (3) actual systematic desensitization (presenting anxiety-inducing stimuli according to the established hierarchy). In practice, systematic desensitization operates through mechanisms of counterconditioning and habituation, wherein the individual is gradually exposed to anxiety-provoking stimuli under controlled conditions. This process enables the replacement of the anxiety response with a more adaptive response, such as relaxation (Apriliani & Astuti, 2025). These results align with previous findings indicating that systematic desensitization is effective in reducing student anxiety during examinations (Novitasari, 2020; Hernawati, 2023).

Based on this description, this research aims to prove: (1) the effect of applying systematic desensitization techniques on student anxiety in teaching practice, (2) the influence of self-efficacy on student anxiety in teaching practice, and (3) the interaction effect of applying systematic desensitization techniques and self-efficacy on student anxiety in teaching practice. The novelty of this research lies in the

effort to position self-efficacy as a psychological characteristic to be considered when testing the effectiveness of systematic desensitization techniques for student anxiety in teaching practice. This is important because teaching practice anxiety has more complex characteristics compared to general public speaking anxiety. Students are required not only to speak but also to master the material, manage the class, interact with students, use learning methods, manage time, and be accountable for the learning process.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research uses an experimental research design. The type of experimental research used is quasi-experimental research because, in this research, it is not possible to control all variables thought to influence the treatment and its impact (Borg & Gall, 2003). The variables in this research consist of independent, moderator, and dependent variables. teaching at school.

The influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable, and its interaction with the moderator variable, was examined using a 2 x 2 factorial design incorporating a pretest-posttest control group design. The study design aimed to assess: (1) the main effect of the treatment variable—the application of the systematic desensitization technique—on student anxiety during teaching practice; (2) the effect of self-efficacy on student anxiety during teaching practice; and (3) the interaction effect between the systematic desensitization technique and self-efficacy on student anxiety during school-based teaching practice.

Participant

The population for this study consisted of all 208 students enrolled in the Pre-service Teacher Professional Education program, distributed across four fields of study. A disproportional random sampling technique was employed, resulting in a sample of 60 students for the experimental group and 60 students for the control group. The experimental group was drawn from students specializing in Primary School Teacher Education. In contrast, the control group was drawn from students specializing in Indonesian Language, Pancasila and Civic Education, and Guidance and Counseling.

Instrument

The instrument used to measure self-efficacy is the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). The TSES comprises three main dimensions: efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The items are categorized as either favorable or unfavorable, with four response options: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). The scale consists of 24 items; consequently, the minimum score is 24, and the maximum score is 96.

The academic anxiety scale employed is based on Ottens' (1991) theory, which encompasses four aspects: mental activity patterns that trigger anxiety, unfocused attention, physical distress, and maladaptive behavior. The scale consists of 21 items, categorized as favorable or unfavorable, with four response options: Never, Sometimes, Often, and Always. A higher academic anxiety score indicates a higher level of academic anxiety in students; the scores range from a minimum of 21 to a maximum of 84.

Prior to data collection, the validity and reliability of both instruments were assessed. The validity testing encompassed both construct validity and empirical validity. The construct validity results indicated that, overall, the self-efficacy and anxiety scales met the requirements for measurement tools, as they aligned with the underlying theoretical constructs and dimensions. Empirical validity testing demonstrated that all 24 items of the self-efficacy scale and all 21 items of the anxiety scale yielded valid results. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded coefficients of 0.938 for the self-efficacy scale and 0.920 for the anxiety scale; consequently, both research instruments were deemed reliable.

Data Analysis

Data analysis includes descriptive, prerequisite, and inferential analyses. Descriptive data analysis is intended to make it easier to observe statistical data that has been obtained based on statistical calculations. Prerequisite tests include normality tests using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, homogeneity tests using

Levene's Test, and balance tests using the t-test. Inferential data analysis to test the hypothesis was carried out using one-way ANOVA.

FINDINGS

This experimental research was conducted over 4 months. The experimental group received systematic desensitization techniques, while the control group received no treatment (only guidance on practical teaching activities at school). The experimental procedure was carried out with the following steps: (1) measuring self-efficacy, (2) giving a pretest of the anxiety level of Teacher Professional Education students in teaching practice to the experimental group and control group, (3) providing treatment, namely systematic desensitization techniques to the experimental group, and (4) giving a posttest of the anxiety level of Teacher Professional Education students in teaching practice to the experimental group and control group.

The Effect of Applying Systematic Desensitization Techniques on Student Anxiety in Teaching Practice

Data analysis encompasses descriptive data analysis, prerequisite testing, and hypothesis testing. Descriptive data analysis involves describing the data on self-efficacy and anxiety levels among Teacher Professional Education students regarding their teaching practice, categorized by the techniques employed, self-efficacy levels, and cell groups (representing the interaction between the systematic desensitization technique and self-efficacy). The results of the self-efficacy measurements for both the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number of Groups Based on Self-Efficacy Level

Group	Self-Efficacy	
	High	Low
Experiment (Applying the Systematic Desensitization Technique)	38	22
Control group (Received only a briefing on the teaching practice activities)	35	25
Total	73	47

An analysis of the pre-test and post-test data on the anxiety levels of Teacher Professional Education students during teaching practice revealed a difference in mean scores between the experimental and control groups, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Number of Groups Based on Self-Efficacy Level

Group	N	Mean Pretes	Mean Postes	Difference	Lowering (%)
Experiment	60	66,45	42,72	23,73	35,71%
Control	60	66,52	64,73	1,79	2,69%

The data in Table 2 above indicate that the mean pre-test scores for teaching practice anxiety among Teacher Professional Education students were nearly identical in both the experimental and control groups: 66.45 and 66.52, respectively. This demonstrates that, prior to the intervention involving the systematic desensitization technique, the levels of teaching practice anxiety in both research groups were comparable. The data in Table 2 also show that the application of the systematic desensitization technique can reduce students' anxiety in teaching practice. This conclusion is based on the analysis of post-test data regarding teaching practice anxiety in both groups. A 35.71% reduction in anxiety levels was observed in the experimental group, compared to 2.69% in the control group. The reduction in teaching practice anxiety was greater in the experimental group than in the control group.

The Influence of Self-Efficacy on Student Anxiety in Teaching Practice

Based on the analysis of pre-test and post-test data regarding the teaching-practice anxiety of Teacher Professional Education students—categorized by self-efficacy—the difference in mean anxiety scores between the high self-efficacy group and the low self-efficacy group was determined, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Description of Data on the Mean Score Difference Between Pre-test and Post-test Results Regarding Student Anxiety in Teaching Practice, Based on Self-Efficacy

Group	N	Pretes	Postes	Difference	Lowering (%)
High Self-Efficacy	73	61,23	46,86	14,37	23,47%
Low Self-Efficacy	47	74,64	64,38	10,26	17,34%

The data in Table 3 above indicate that the mean pre-test scores for student anxiety regarding teaching practice differed between the high- and low-self-efficacy groups (61.23 and 74.64, respectively). Furthermore, the post-test results also reveal a difference in anxiety levels between the two research groups: 46.86 for the high self-efficacy group and 64.38 for the low self-efficacy group. The reduction in mean scores was 23.47% for the high self-efficacy group and 17.34% for the low self-efficacy group. Thus, it can be concluded that the reduction in student anxiety levels regarding teaching practice was greater in the high-self-efficacy group than in the low-self-efficacy group.

Based on the analysis of pre-test and post-test data regarding student anxiety levels during teaching practice across four research groups, the difference in mean scores between the pre-test and post-test results was determined, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Data Description of the Difference in Average Scores of Pretest and Posttest Results of Students' Anxiety Levels in Teaching Practice Based on Cell Groups

Cell Groups	N	Pretes	Postes	Differences	Lowering (%)
Experiment-High SE	38	64,16	35,37	28,79	44,87%
Experiment-Low SE	22	74,50	55,41	19,09	25,62%
Control-High SE	35	60,63	56,25	4,38	7,22%
Control-Low SE	25	59,34	53,28	6,06	10,21%

The proportions of mean pre-test and post-test anxiety scores among student teachers during teaching practice—based on the research cell groups listed in Table 4 above—are more clearly visualized in Figure 1 below.

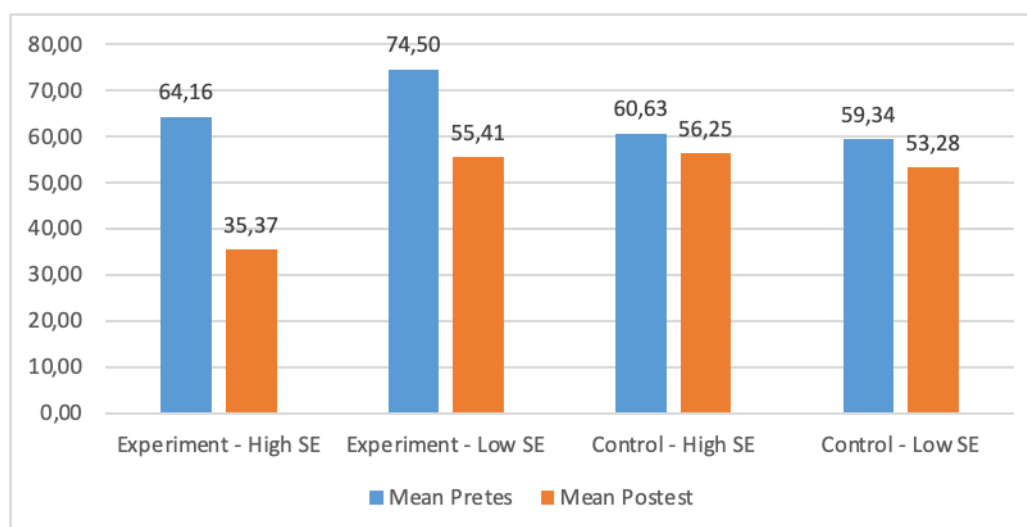


Figure 1 Histogram of the Difference in Average Scores of Pretest and Posttest Results of Student Anxiety in Teaching Practice Based on Cell Groups

Based on Table 4 and Figure 1 above, it can be explained that the experimental group with high self-efficacy experienced the greatest reduction in mean teaching anxiety scores from pre-test to post-test—specifically 28.79 (44.87%)—followed by the experimental group with low self-efficacy at 19.09 (25.62%), the control group with high self-efficacy at 4.38 (7.22%), and the control group with low self-efficacy at 6.06 (10.21%). This indicates that, overall, the reduction in student-teaching anxiety during the teaching practicum was greater in the experimental groups than in the control groups.

The Interaction Effect of Applying Systematic Desensitization Techniques and Self-Efficacy on Student Anxiety in Teaching Practice

Following the descriptive data analysis, the next step was to conduct prerequisite tests—specifically, normality, homogeneity, and balance tests—as a requirement for hypothesis testing. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality tests on the pre-test and post-test data regarding students' teaching anxiety during teaching practice indicated that all data were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$).

The homogeneity of variance test using Levene's Test yielded the following conclusions: (1) the homogeneity test for pre-test scores between the experimental and control groups resulted in a statistic of 0.831 with a significance of 0.364 (> 0.05); (2) the homogeneity test for pre-test scores between the high self-efficacy and low self-efficacy groups resulted in a statistic of 2.874 with a significance of 0.094 (> 0.05); (3) the homogeneity test for post-test scores between the experimental and control groups resulted in a statistic of 2.155 with a significance of 0.145 (> 0.05); and (4) the homogeneity test for post-test scores between the high self-efficacy and low self-efficacy groups resulted in a statistic of 2.874 with a significance of 0.094 (> 0.05). Since the significance values for all four homogeneity tests were greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the variances of the anxiety data regarding teaching practice are homogeneous.

Furthermore, the results of the balance tests using the t-test are as follows: (1) the balance test between the experimental and control groups yielded a calculated t-value of 1.614 with a significance level of 0.109 (> 0.05); (2) the balance test between the high self-efficacy and low self-efficacy groups yielded a calculated t-value of 1.920 with a significance level of 0.057 (> 0.05). Since the significance values for both tests exceeded 0.05, it is concluded that there is no significant difference in teaching practice anxiety scores between the research groups or the self-efficacy groups. After meeting the requirements, hypothesis testing was conducted using a two-way ANOVA. The criterion for hypothesis testing is that the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected if the significance value (p) is less than 0.05. The table presenting the analysis of variance results is provided below.

Table 5 Results of Analysis of Variance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	7192,402 ^a	3	2397,467	60,254	0,000
Intercept	289309,190	1	289309,190	7270,982	0,000
Group	3383,710	1	3383,710	85,040	0,000
Self-Efficacy	2794,041	1	2794,041	70,220	0,000
Group* SE	167,848	1	167,848	4,218	0,042
Error	4615,589	116	39,790		
Total	302777,000	120			
Corrected Total	11807,992	119			

a. R Squared = ,609 (Adjusted R Squared = 0,599)

The results of the first hypothesis test comparing the experimental and control groups yielded an F-value of 85.040 with a significance level of 0.000. Since the significance value (0.000) was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected; it was concluded that there was a significant difference in teaching practice anxiety levels between students who received the systematic desensitization technique and those who received no treatment. The hypothesis test comparing the high- and low-self-efficacy groups yielded an F-value of 70.220 with a significance level of 0.000. Since the significance value (0.000) was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected; it was concluded that there was a significant difference in teaching practice anxiety levels between students with high self-efficacy and those with low self-efficacy. Furthermore, the hypothesis test regarding the interaction between the research groups (experimental and control) and the self-efficacy groups (high and low) yielded an F-value of 4.218 with a significance level of 0.042. Since the significance value (0.042) was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected; it was concluded that there was an interaction effect between the systematic desensitization technique and self-efficacy on the teaching practice anxiety levels of Teacher Professional Education students.

DISCUSSION

The application of the systematic desensitization technique can reduce students' teaching practice anxiety levels. This conclusion is based on the analysis of post-test data regarding teaching practice anxiety in both groups. A 35.71% reduction in anxiety levels was observed in the experimental group, compared to 2.69% in the control group. The reduction in teaching practice anxiety was greater in the experimental group than in the control group.

Recent research in Indonesia indicates that teaching anxiety is indeed an issue that arises during the teaching practicum. A study by Islami and Suryati (2026) – conducted with 59 pre-service EFL teachers who had completed a four-month practicum – identified teaching anxiety and self-efficacy as two critical factors in the practicum experience. The study underscores that while the practicum is a vital phase for developing students' teaching readiness and confidence, it is also a time when teaching anxiety can emerge, linked to the students' sense of self-belief. These findings reinforce the argument that student anxiety during the practicum warrants special attention, particularly because such anxiety does not exist in isolation but is intertwined with the students' psychological characteristics.

Empirical evidence from various studies has demonstrated the effectiveness of systematic desensitization in reducing speaking anxiety (Solikin et al., 2023; Irmawati, 2022). These findings indicate that the technique can serve as an alternative strategy within school guidance and counseling services (Apriliani et al., 2025). Based on their research results, Getsmani and Farid (2025) recommend that guidance and counseling teachers enhance services for students experiencing high levels of anxiety – for instance, by providing group counseling sessions focused on managing learning-related anxiety.

Another study conducted by Wahed & Palmer-Wackerly (2026) involved university students with speech anxiety compared to groups undergoing systematic desensitization, flooding, and a control condition. The results showed that the desensitization group experienced significant changes from pre- to post-treatment across various self-reported anxiety measures. These findings demonstrate that the gradual desensitization approach has an empirical basis for reducing speech anxiety among university students.

The results of the first hypothesis test comparing the experimental and control groups yielded an F-value of 85.040 with a significance level of 0.000. Since the significance value (0.000) was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected; it was concluded that there was a significant difference in teaching practice anxiety levels between students who received the systematic desensitization technique and those who received no treatment.

Other research findings also provide supporting evidence. Izzah and Sa'idah (2023) investigated the effectiveness of the systematic desensitization technique in reducing public speaking anxiety among students at MAN 1 Pamekasan, employing a one-group pretest-posttest experimental design. The results revealed a difference in speaking anxiety levels before and after the application of the systematic desensitization technique. This study is significant for the present research because it was conducted in the Indonesian educational context and demonstrates that systematic desensitization can be used to address anxiety associated with speaking in front of a group.

Research by Yuniartari et al. (2023) also demonstrates that behavioral counseling utilizing the systematic desensitization technique is effective in reducing public speaking anxiety among students. The study employed a quasi-experimental approach with a non-equivalent control group design. These findings further reinforce the use of systematic desensitization as an alternative behavioral intervention for addressing anxiety associated with communication and performance in front of others.

More specific support regarding pre-service teachers comes from a study by Madoni et al. (2026). This study examined group counseling based on systematic desensitization, incorporating guided imagery, to reduce public speaking anxiety among pre-service teachers. The research used a pretest-posttest control-group experimental design. The results revealed a highly significant difference in anxiety reduction between the experimental and control groups. These findings are particularly relevant given that the subjects were pre-service teachers and the issue addressed – speaking anxiety – is directly related to challenges that may arise during teaching practicums.

More recent research on systematic desensitization also provides empirical support. Tappi et al. (2026) conducted a single-subject study using an A-B-A design with university students experiencing public speaking anxiety. The intervention used a stimulus hierarchy that increased in difficulty in stages: starting with speaking in front of a mirror, then in front of three people, and finally in front of six people. The results demonstrated a reduction in anxiety across biological, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional domains

following the intervention. The researchers reported a relatively large and stable decrease in anxiety scores after the treatment. These findings support the principle that the gradual exposure involved in systematic desensitization can help individuals reduce their anxiety responses to performance-based situations.

Various studies indicate that the emergence of anxiety is influenced by several factors, including self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and academic pressure experienced by students (Sari & Naqiyah, 2020; Kita & Wilani, 2024). Furthermore, empirical findings reveal a negative relationship between anxiety levels and academic performance, wherein students with high levels of anxiety tend to demonstrate lower learning outcomes (Hameed et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2023). If not properly addressed, this condition can hinder students' development of teaching competencies. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions required to achieve specific goals or levels of performance. Self-efficacy is not merely a person's actual ability; it relates more to their belief in their own capabilities. In the context of teaching practice, self-efficacy manifests as a student's belief in their ability to master learning materials, deliver content effectively, manage the classroom, employ appropriate instructional strategies, interact with learners, and complete teaching tasks (Aini, 2018).

Self-efficacy is significant because the process of systematic desensitization involves not only reducing anxiety responses but also providing students with opportunities to achieve success incrementally. According to Bandura (1997), experiences of success—or mastery experiences—are the most potent source of information regarding self-efficacy. When a student completes a stage previously perceived as difficult, that success can reinforce the belief in their ability to tackle the subsequent stage. Therefore, in theory, systematic desensitization has the potential not only to reduce anxiety but also to foster belief in one's own capabilities when facing the task of teaching.

This relationship can be described as a psychological process. Students with low self-efficacy tend to perceive teaching practice as a threatening situation, thereby triggering higher levels of anxiety. When students gain experience in facing such situations gradually—through systematic desensitization—their anxiety levels can decrease. Successfully navigating each stage can then serve as a mastery experience that reinforces self-efficacy. Conversely, students with high initial self-efficacy may be more inclined to view teaching practice as a manageable challenge, resulting in a lower anxiety response.

Thus, self-efficacy is a significant variable in assessing the effectiveness of systematic desensitization. Students can be categorized by self-efficacy level—high versus low—and subsequently compared with respect to the extent of anxiety reduction following the intervention. With this design, the research addresses not only whether systematic desensitization is effective in reducing anxiety but also whether this effectiveness varies among students with differing levels of self-efficacy. A review of prior studies indicates that research on anxiety among student teachers has frequently examined the relationship between teaching anxiety and teaching self-efficacy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) there is a significant difference in student anxiety levels during teaching practice between students who received the systematic desensitization technique treatment and those who did not; (2) there is a significant difference in student anxiety levels during teaching practice between students with high self-efficacy and those with low self-efficacy; and (3) there is an interaction effect between the systematic desensitization technique and self-efficacy on the anxiety levels of Teacher Professional Education students during teaching practice. These findings reinforce the argument that student anxiety during teaching practice requires special attention, particularly because such anxiety does not exist in isolation but is linked to the students' psychological characteristics.

Despite the significant findings, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the participants were limited to 120 Teacher Professional Education students from a single university, namely Universitas PGRI Madiun. Although the sample included students from several fields of study, the experimental group consisted of Primary School Teacher Education students. In contrast, the control group was drawn from Indonesian Language, Pancasila and Civic Education, and Guidance and Counseling programs. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution regarding their generalizability to pre-service teachers at other institutions, in other regions, or within other teacher education contexts.

Second, this study employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. Although this design enabled the researchers to examine differences associated with the systematic desensitization intervention, it did not allow complete control over all factors that might influence students' anxiety during teaching practice. Students' previous teaching experiences, characteristics of the practicum schools, mentoring experiences, classroom conditions, and other psychological factors may also contribute to variations in teaching anxiety.

Third, the study relied primarily on self-report instruments to measure self-efficacy and anxiety. Although both instruments demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.938 for the self-efficacy scale and 0.920 for the anxiety scale, self-report measures may still be influenced by participants' subjective perceptions and response tendencies. Future studies could therefore combine self-report measures with behavioral observations, supervisor assessments, physiological indicators, or qualitative interviews to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of teaching practice anxiety.

Fourth, the present study focused on the immediate changes in anxiety following the intervention and did not examine whether the anxiety reduction was maintained over an extended period. Future research should employ longitudinal or follow-up designs to determine the sustainability of the effects of systematic desensitization. Such studies could include follow-up measurements several weeks or months after the intervention to examine whether students can maintain lower anxiety levels when encountering increasingly complex teaching situations.

Based on these limitations, future research could expand the study across multiple teacher education institutions and involve larger and more diverse samples to enhance the transferability of the findings. Researchers could also investigate the effectiveness of systematic desensitization across different teacher education fields and practicum contexts. In addition, future studies could compare systematic desensitization with other psychological interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness-based interventions, relaxation training, or guided imagery. Further research could also examine additional moderating or mediating variables, including teaching experience, perceived social support, resilience, achievement motivation, and classroom management self-efficacy. Finally, mixed-methods and longitudinal approaches would be valuable for exploring not only whether systematic desensitization reduces teaching anxiety, but also how and why the intervention works, and how its effects develop throughout the teacher's professional education.

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