

An Investigation into Third-Year Students' Perceptions of the First English Teaching Practice

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Received: 06/09/2024

Revision: 18/10/2024

Accepted: 31/10/2024

Online: 01/11/2024

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

perceptions, teaching practice, satisfaction

Research into language teaching methodology involves a dynamic interplay between teacher-led activities and learner engagement to acquire knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities. Even so, more research has been done to explore students' unique challenges during their initial teaching practice sessions. This study addresses this gap by looking into the perceptions of junior English majors while taking their first teaching practice in language teaching methodology classes. The study aims to pinpoint these issues and provide workable fixes to improve instruction. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies, such as close-ended and open-ended questionnaires, were used to collect data from 150 junior English students. The results show that students face difficulties resulting from internal and external sources during class. The study provides valuable insight to support the teacher trainee and practical improvement for the development of the course Language Teaching Methodology.

Introduction

Teaching English is an important concern for educators, teachers, and parents worldwide (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). "Teaching practice" is one of the many demanding training processes that teacher candidates must go through to become highly trained and self-assured educators. Regardless of how long it lasts, Kabilan and Izzaham (2008) claim that teaching practice is an excellent approach for aspiring teachers to experiment and assess their expertise. Similar to this, Riesky (2013) believes that during the teaching practice phase, student-teachers will be able to apply the knowledge they have gained from the academic curriculum to real-world teaching circumstances. Teaching practice is crucial for trainees since it gives them the chance to hone their skills. Putting information into practice during a teaching practicum is not always simple. (Riesky, 2013). At the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, Language Teaching Methodology 1 is a specialized subject for 3rd-year students in the foreign language department. Students have to do some teaching practice in this subject, and this phase can be considered their first teaching experience. During this learning process, the students have encountered difficulties that will greatly affect themselves and their performance in class. Thus,

identifying the challenges these teacher trainees face in their teaching practice and providing solutions is crucial since it can help reduce the problem and their anxiety. Following this, the current study aims to discover the reason for difficulties in planning and organizing experimental teaching in front of classes of the foreign language teaching methods of 3rd-year students at the University of Ho Chi Minh City and propose suitable solutions for the problems.

Literature review

Definition of teaching practice

Gebhard (2009) defines 'teaching practice' as a variety of forms such as "practice teaching, field experience, apprenticeship, practical experience, and internship". This activity aims to provide opportunities for student teachers to practice and improve their teaching by applying their knowledge to gain more practical experience in academic settings. Riesky (2013) also adds that one of the crucial steps for student teachers is the teaching practicum, which gives them the opportunity to put what they have learned in the classroom into practice. The author's statement clearly defines teaching practice as providing teachers with real teaching situations in which they can apply what they have learned to practice. Regardless of its length or duration, pre-service teachers have a wonderful chance to test their knowledge and skills in a real teaching and learning environment. They can also use this experience to better understand their personal and educational theories and philosophies. This showed that "Teaching practice" is not only a part of the education curriculum but is also an important opportunity for teachers involved in teaching in a real academic setting.

Review previous studies

Ong et al. (2004) studied trainee teachers' perceptions of the school teaching practice, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between teacher training institutions and schools. Mixed methods were used in this study, utilizing the close-ended and open-ended questionnaire with 44 Malaysian trainee teachers. A key contribution of this study was its identification of the factors that influence trainee teachers' awareness and the nature of these factors. The study's results also highlighted the necessity for trainee teachers to continually develop themselves to adapt to the educational environment to meet the demands of 21st-century teaching. The study also suggested the complex relationship of various factors that can support or hinder the effectiveness of new teachers' teaching practices.

Kabilan and Izzaham (2008) did a case study to investigate the challenges faced by student teachers during their teaching practice. The study focused on the strategies employed to overcome the difficulties faced by a single participant, Ms. Aida, a 24-year-old Malay teacher, during her three-month internship at a secondary school. Data was collected by means of reflective reports and interviews with the participants. Research findings revealed that the participants faced three primary challenges: managing a mixed-ability class, dealing with the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, and navigating expectations of teacher-centered instruction. This study has provided insights into the challenges encountered. However, the limited number of participants made it hard to draw general conclusions.

Following the theme, Goh and Matthews (2011) conducted a study to identify the causes of Malaysian student teachers' concerns before and after their teaching practice. The study involved 14 female students from Sultan Idris Education University, and data were collected through interviews and reports. The researchers found that classroom management was the main concern for the participants, who often struggled to distinguish between poor classroom

management and a lack of student discipline. The participants also demonstrated emotional concerns regarding the images they perceived by the students and other teachers. The research finding also indicated that the student teachers were worried about the methods and the content of the lesson, as well as the classroom environment.

Another study by Riesky in 2013 was conducted to discover trainee teachers' difficulties when teaching in secondary schools in Bandung, Indonesia, and their solutions to overcome these challenges. These 14 participants were paired and observed for 4 months for data collection. Research findings showed that these participants faced challenges related to their students, themselves, and other teachers. In order to overcome these problems, the trainee teachers tried to implement many teaching approaches, establish connections with the students, and enhance their teaching methodology. The study highlighted the importance of getting support and flexibility in teaching to get through the difficulties encountered.

Ledy Mardiah (2020) explored the challenges that student teachers encounter while they are practicing teaching English to speakers of other languages. The qualitative study involved 5 participants from IAIN Batusankar. Purposive sampling was employed. Interviews with the participants revealed that class management, lesson planning, feeling inexperienced in the classroom, implementation of language teaching methods, using Media and technology, creating teaching aids, and dealing with students' different characteristics were the main challenges that the participants had faced.

Many studies have been done to investigate the challenges associated with teaching practicums across various international contexts; however, most of them have been conducted in foreign countries with participants from a range of locations. Thus, they do not specifically address the context of Vietnam, especially concerning the "Language Teaching Methodology 1 (LTM 1)" course, the first language teaching methodology the students attend. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by focusing on students' experiences in Vietnam during their LTM 1 teaching practice.

Research Questions

This research is going to answer the following questions:

1. How do students in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at a university in Ho Chi Minh City feel when planning and organizing experimental teaching sessions for a language teaching methods course?
2. What are the difficulties of planning and organizing a lesson for these students?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study focuses on English major students at the FFL in a Ho Chi Minh City university. One hundred fifty third-year students specializing in English from four Foreign Language Teaching Method 1 classes were invited to participate in the survey. At the Faculty of Foreign Languages, students who majored in English have to study 3 obligatory courses in language teaching. They are Theory of Language Teaching, Foreign Language Teaching Method 1, and Foreign Language Teaching Method 1. These selected students all studied this subject and had previous teaching practice, thus deeply understanding the planning process, classroom organization, and the difficulties encountered in practical teaching. Participants are required to share their thoughts and challenges during the practical teaching process. This is crucial in collecting the

necessary data for this research.

Design of the Study

The quantitative and qualitative methodology are the focus of this study. The mixed methods research approach combines various methods by collecting, analyzing, and mixing quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies (Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K., 2017). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest that a mixed methods approach can help explore and explain the processes at work in a phenomenon and the different perspectives on the phenomenon, thereby increasing the usefulness and credibility of the results found, and after that the opportunity for unexpected results will be found. In order to find out the thoughts of the participants, a combination of close-ended and open-ended questionnaires is used to gather data.

The questionnaire consists of two parts:

- Part I: General information
- Part II: A list of 20 questions which are divided into 3 groups of open-ended questions to collect quantitative data from 150 students:
 - Group 1 (questions 3-8) is aiming at gathering insights into students' perspectives and opinions.
 - Group 2 (questions 9-21) is designed for intending to find out the challenges faced by students teachers during teaching practice.
 - Group 3 (question 22) is a summarizing question related to the most challenging factor that the student faced.

Data collection & analysis

The data collection process spanned 14 days and included three main stages. First, the researchers identified study participants as third-year English major students enrolled in 'Language Teaching Methodology 1'.

In the second stage, private meetings were held from April 3rd to 5th, 2024, to design a questionnaire based on the research questions. The finalized questionnaire, consisting of 22 questions across two sections (General Information and Teaching Practice Challenges), was reviewed, revised, and printed for distribution.

In the third stage, the survey was conducted on April 6th, 2023, with the support of language department lecturers. Around 150 students from four classes participated, filling out the questionnaire during lecture breaks. Afterward, the researchers collected the data for analysis, expressing gratitude to the faculty and students for their cooperation.

After collecting 150 questionnaires, the researchers reviewed and summarized the students' thoughts and difficulties during the teaching practicum. Due to the open-ended nature of the responses, the data was initially challenging to analyze. To streamline this process, the researchers replicated the paper survey in Google Forms and manually entered all responses.

Once entered, the data was reviewed and exported to Microsoft Excel, where it was organized into charts for easier interpretation. Similar questions were grouped together, and appropriate charts were used to highlight key comparisons. The original paper questionnaires were kept to ensure the reliability of the results.

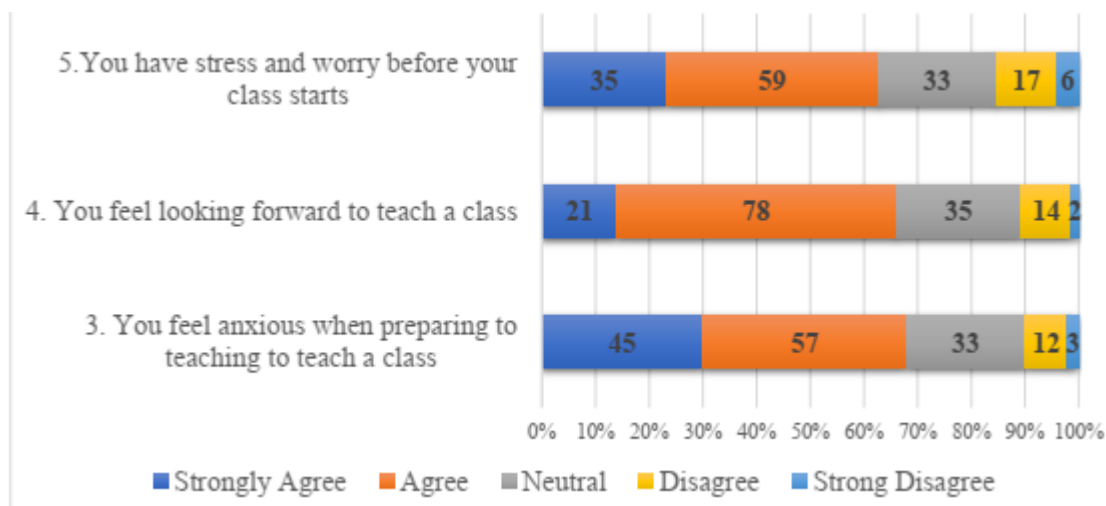
Results/Findings and discussion

This section will present the research results in two parts, namely the perspectives and the challenges during practice teaching in the course Foreign Language Teaching Method 1 (including internal factors and surrounding factors)

The feeling of the students when doing the teaching practice

Figure 1

The feeling of the students when doing the teaching practice



Most third-year students participating in the teaching practice for the first time have feelings of their own, as shown by the chart in Figure 1. Apart from the students, most people (66%) think there is a sense of excitement and anticipation for practicing teaching, but they also feel uncertain and uneasy when they first plan a lesson (68%). When this member teaches in class directly, they also cause tension and worry (62.6%). Third-year students may be learning Foreign Language Teaching Methods 1 for the first time, so they will likely be excited and looking forward to it. Additionally, students will experience anxiety and nervousness because this is a new subject. However, a few students still do not feel that way, so about 15% of 150 people disagree with this idea, and 23% of students choose neutral.

Figure 2

The percentage of 3rd-year students satisfied with teaching practice

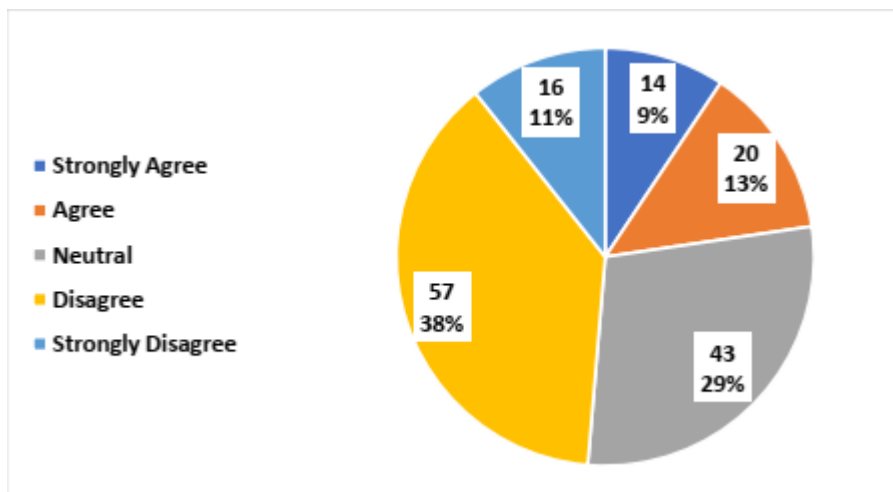


Figure 2 illustrates the level of student satisfaction with their teaching after the completion of the teaching practice session. The results are rather unexpected because over half of the students who responded to the poll (49%) said they were dissatisfied with the instruction they received, suggesting that their lectures were not well-received and that they might have done a better job. About 29% of students gave indifferent answers. On the other hand, 22% of students said they were happy with the results, demonstrating that they worked hard and thought their efforts were worthwhile. Overall, there are twice as many students who are unsatisfied as there are who are satisfied. This implies that some students are unhappy with the outcomes they obtained from their classes.

The difficulties of planning and organizing a lesson for these students

Figure 3

Difficulties in preparing the teaching materials

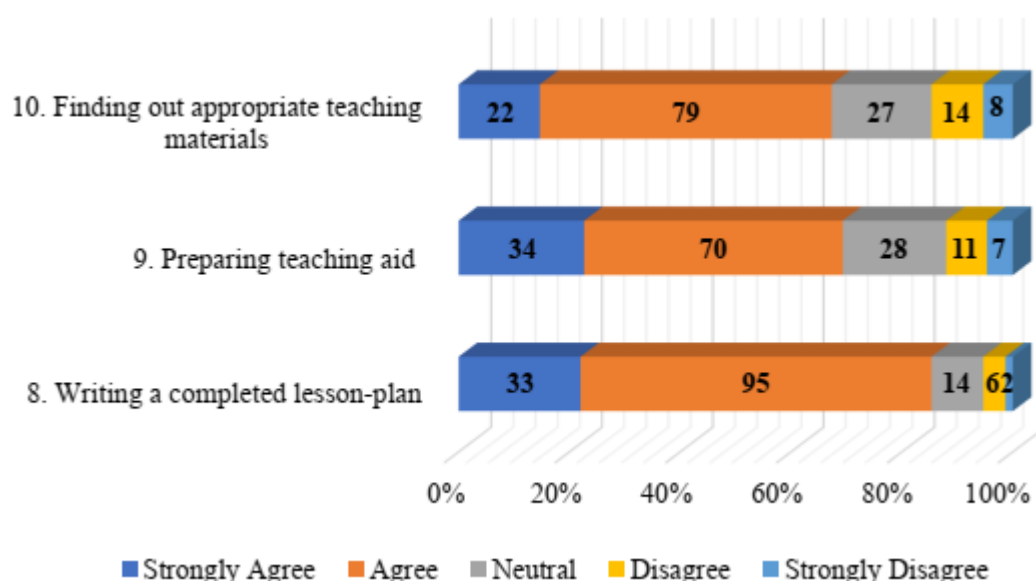


Figure 3's survey findings illustrate students' three main difficulties when looking for instructional materials for the "LTM 1" course.

1. Writing a completed lesson plan

A significant 85% of students, totaling 128 individuals, indicated difficulties in developing a thorough lesson plan, highlighting a widespread challenge in formulating effective processes and materials. Only 14 students, representing 9%, remained neutral on the matter, while 9 students, or 6%, voiced their disagreement.

2. Preparing Teaching Aids

Preparing appropriate teaching aids was difficult for 70% of students (104), with 18% (27 students) feeling neutral and 12% (18 students) disagreeing. These results point to a noteworthy but less widespread problem.

3. Finding Appropriate Teaching Resources

There was some variation in the experiences of the students, as 67% (101 students) found it difficult to get reliable and pertinent instructional resources, while 18% (27 students) were neutral and 15% (22 students) disagreed. Ultimately, the hardest part of the job was coming up with a thorough lesson plan, followed by making teaching aids and locating relevant materials.

The results are in accordance with previous studies by Ledy Mardiah (2020) and Aisyah (2017) since the participants also admitted difficulty in writing lesson plans and preparing teaching aids. Moreover, because there are too many sources to refer to, students and teachers can lose their orientation in selecting materials, causing unnecessary obstacles.

Figure 4

Challenges relating to the skills that students face during teaching practice

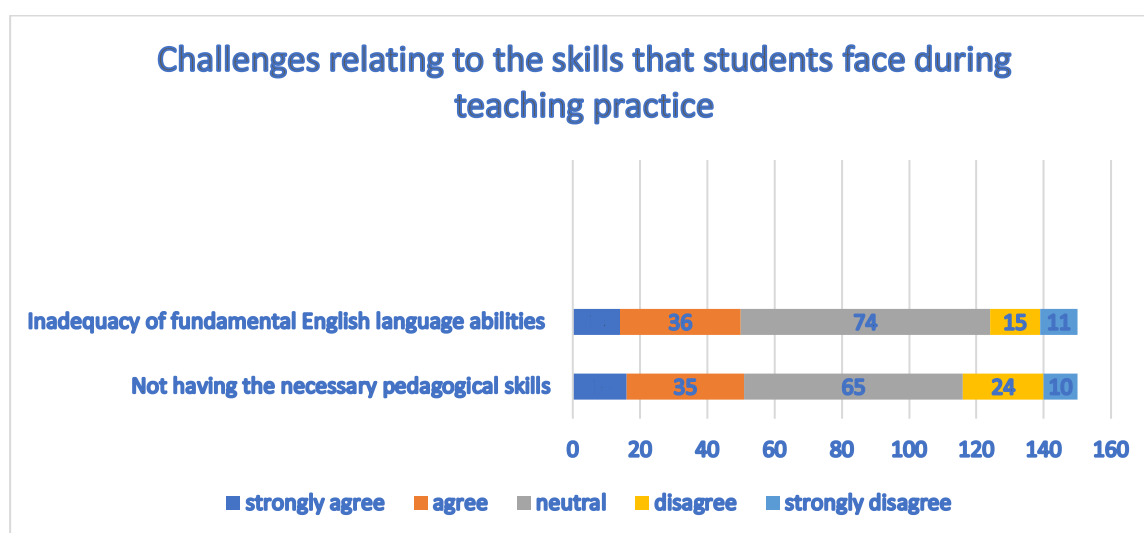


Figure 4 discusses the challenges relating to students' skills during teaching practice. The figures showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the two bars, with the biggest percentage of students responding neutrally to both problems. For Bar 1, about 49% of students (74 students) offered a neutral response, while for Bar 2, about 43% of students (65 students) gave a neutral response. The next commonality between the two bars was that they had roughly the same percentage of agreement (33% for Bar 1 and 34% for Bar 2). In contrast, 17% of students (26 students) for Bar 1 dispute that they faced skill-related difficulties throughout their teaching practice. Meanwhile, 17% (26 students) of Bar 1 and 22% (34 students) of Bar 2 students disagree that they faced skill-related difficulties during their teaching practice. All things considered, these statistics indicate that most students do not encounter severe difficulties with regard to skill-related problems when they are teaching.

Other difficulties mentioned by the participants include a lack of confidence and physical problems. The majority of students (64%) agreed that they lack confidence when teaching in front of many people. Meanwhile, approximately 22% (32 students) provided neutral responses, and a few students (14%) disagreed that they lacked more confidence during the teaching process. Furthermore, a small percentage of students (18%) concurred that they experienced some unintended health problems. That being said, this is a negligible amount. In general, most students concurred that they do not encounter many substantial physical obstacles when they are instructing.

Suggested Solutions

A number of suggestions are possible to deal with the challenges noted in the research. To overcome the feeling that novice teachers have to face in their initial teaching, guidance on controlling their emotions should be provided before the training. Diverse strategies can be employed to manage the feelings, including redirecting attention, modifying pedagogical

approaches, and reassessing feelings (Ngo, 2024). Ali Bin-Hady and Abdulsafi (2018) recommended some ideas to help trainees improve their writing lessons. They suggested that EFL teachers notice 1) Reading the lesson notes and materials and listening to the Cassette section and 2) Thinking about whether the suggested course of action will accomplish this goal. If required, adjust the process to meet your student's unique requirements. 3) Consider challenges that your students may meet and choose the most effective presentation method for the materials to address them. You can write the question or provide some examples in the lesson plan. 4) Calculate the duration of each lesson part and prepare the homework as soon as possible 5) Make sure there is enough time in your schedule for student-to-student interaction 6) Ensure that the class includes a wide range of activities; it should include a short teacher-led introduction, pupil activities, short teacher-led conclusion. On the other hand, Nurfirtri, Regina, and Yulian R. (2020) suggested dividing the process of writing lesson plans into 3 main stages, including pre-design, whilst-design, and post-design. In each stage, the author mentions factors that teachers should pay attention to in the writing process; for example, in the design phase before lesson plans, teachers should pay attention to "unique, different, and full of planting attitudes, knowledge, values, and character of students". Finally, he suggested that teachers "manage the time" and "make their own lesson plans" because it is necessary in the teaching process.

Conclusion

The study aimed to identify the challenges faced by third-year English majors and provide solutions to help them get past those challenges. Findings for the first research question indicate that most students experience anxiety before class begins and have a sense of unease as they prepare for the session. The students' difficulties have been caused by internal variables (lack of confidence, deficiency in fundamental English abilities, creation of instructional materials, creation of insufficient lesson plans, etc.). It is advised to put in place thorough training programs that emphasize improving students' capacity for lesson planning and offering sufficient teaching assistance in order to mitigate these difficulties.

To help the research have more diverse information and more perceptive perspectives, it is advised to conduct more interviews with experienced teachers and to employ group interviews with students. Future research should look at developing an understanding of data problems. From there, we may find more practical ways to support and overcome challenging issues in our practice as teachers.

Acknowledgment

Describe the acknowledgment to the affiliation or persons that helped the papers accomplished.

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Biodata

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