

## Challenges in Practicum: Views and Perceptions of EFL Pre-service Teachers towards Field Experience Skills in Real Classrooms

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### Abstract

The purpose of this classroom action research was to investigate the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers towards the challenges they face in teaching experience during the practicum period. The participants were 35 Saudi EFL female pre-service teachers in the Educational Diploma Program (EDP) attending Teaching Practicum (1) Course in Taibah University, Saudi Arabia. A mixed method, which contains both quantitative and qualitative research design, was used to collect data. Research instruments comprised a perception opinionnaire designed to measure the perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers towards the challenges they face in teaching experience during the practicum. The results showed that EFL pre-service teachers considered the observation period during the Teaching Practicum (1) Course between moderately and extremely beneficial. The results of the perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers regarding classroom-teaching skills were between highly and moderately to low challenging. Additionally, their skills related to school environment indicated less challenging than skills related to classroom teaching experiences. The results of the open-ended question were divided into three meaningful and thoughtful categories to add much depth and understanding of the research problem. Some recommendations based on the results were derived. For example, EFL pre-service teachers needed further development in teaching experiences and skills related to classrooms and school setting. Furthermore, meetings, workshops, and/or small discussion sessions need to be conducted between all the stakeholders in the practicum to explore problems and anticipate possible solutions.

**Keywords:** challenges, perceptions, practicum, pre-service teachers, field experience

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## Introduction

Many colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia, as well as, in other developed countries such as United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, have developed teacher educational programs to enable pre-service teachers to receive teaching experiences and gain relevant knowledge before they go on to their actual teaching profession. Throughout this research, the term pre-service teachers will refer to those “students enrolled in university-based teacher education programs” (Singh & Han, 2010, p. 1300).

As stated by Depreli (2014) “since the 1990s, teacher educational programs have been a focus of criticisms, particularly with regard to how they balance theory and practice.” (p. 60)

The results of several studies (Liaw, 2012; Goff-Kfourri, 2013; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Wang & Clarke, 2014) have shown that many teacher educational programs are relatively ineffective in preparing pre-service teachers for classroom teaching. Such findings suggest that these programs might require improvement and that pre-service teachers should be more thoroughly assessed during the practicum period.

Moreover, Kabilan (2013) reports that critical reflections, in the context of teacher educational programs, including analyzing, reconsidering, and questioning challenges of the pre-service teachers in real classrooms setting are integral components of teachers’ learning and professional development.

Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in the theme of teaching practicum. The practicum issue has received substantial critical attention and become an increasingly important area in teacher education to key stakeholders of teacher education such as student teachers, classroom teachers, university supervisors, and school administrators. Although these stakeholders have different roles to play, provide different inputs, and yet, are expected to have one output, i., e. effective teaching practicum training (Aquino, 2014).

Çelik (2008) concludes that because of the sensitive nature of practicum, it has received considerable research interests in recent decades. For example, the results of a study conducted by Burant and Kirby (2002) showed that early field experiences in teacher education remain problematic and might be challenged and reconfigured to better prepare pre-service teachers for teaching students in schools.

Recent evidence suggested by Mutlu (2014) indicates that there were serious concerns about practicum practices conducted in Turkey including classroom management, the place and duration of the practicum, regulations, inefficient feedback, and cooperation with faculty. Thus, a revision of those practices was needed and recommended.

Although some attempts have been carried out on practicum, few studies have investigated or explored the challenges that pre-service teachers are often found to face during the practicum period, which may be attributed to the ineffective aspects of practicum practices conducted in schools. For this reason, one possible way to eliminate the problems of pre-service teachers would be to improve the quality of practicum components of teacher education programs. In the hope that detection of the challenges may shed light on which aspects of practicum needs improvement,

the current action research aims to explore the EFL pre-service teachers' views and perceptions towards the most challenges they face in real classrooms and school environment during the practicum period.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teacher educational programs have been always dealt with the recognition of qualified teachers in all subject areas. Although EFL teacher education shares these areas, two main characteristics distinguish this field from other areas. First, teaching English in Saudi schools has been a challenge in itself that makes it difficult for the pre-service teachers to accommodate with other issues in the practicum. Second, English language is seen as a barrier to effective communication with students and school personnel, which adds some burden to the EFL pre-service teachers during their practicum period.

As an instructor and a field experience supervisor, it was possible to notice the weaknesses of the EFL pre-service teachers during the Teaching Practicum (2) Course. They lack the essential skills and competences as teachers. They have problems in different teaching experiences and skills. During the 2-hours weekly meeting in Teaching Practicum (2), EFL pre-service teachers regularly expressed the challenges, difficulties, and the critical issues they faced in real classrooms regarding the subject areas and the teaching practicum skills.

Although they attend an eight-week period of observation in schools during the Teaching Practicum (1) Course, they still face difficulties when they enroll to Teaching Practicum (2) Course. Throughout their observation period, they are asked to attend classes, fill in a checklist assessing the real teacher's performance, as well as, submit a final report based on their experiences to the course instructor. Actually, their observation helps them to acquire certain competencies, but are not enough to prepare them to take over their own classrooms. The construction and implementation of the observation period was not enough to upskill them with essential skills needed for real classrooms and school environment.

In response to this problem, the current action research was conducted in the purpose of exploring the EFL pre-service teachers' views and perceptions towards the most challenges they face in real classrooms and school environment.

### **Research Purposes**

The main purpose of this classroom action research is to explore the views of EFL pre-service teachers towards the instructional benefits they got during the eight-week observation period. Moreover, it aims to explore the EFL pre-service teachers' views and perceptions towards the most challenges they face in real classrooms and school environment. Similarly, based on the results of the research, practical implications on Teaching Practicum (1 & 2) will be suggested and/or applied to fulfil the needs of the EFL pre-service teachers during the practicum period.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the views of the EFL female pre-service teachers towards the instructional benefits they get from the observation period during the Teaching Practicum (1) Course?

2. What are the perceptions of the EFL female pre-service teachers towards the challenges they face in teaching experience during the Teaching Practicum (2) Course?
3. What are the views of the EFL female pre-service teachers towards the appropriate opportunities for future professional improvement?

## Literature Review

### 1. *Early Field Experience (Teaching Practicum) Framework and Context*

Beyond doubt the field experience is a vital part of pre-service teachers' education, because for pre-service teachers, it is the first transition to real field of teaching. Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013) add that pre-service teachers value the practicum period because it works as an interface between their studentship and a prospective profession and strongly influences their ideas about teachers' roles. According to Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013), the purpose of teaching practicum courses is to make the prospective teachers a reflective professional in addition to provide them with a practical field to apply the theoretical and experiential knowledge through the courses.

From the early 2014, pre-service teachers in Taibah University have been trained through an Educational Diploma Program (EDP) offered by the College of Education. This program prepares Saudi teachers to teach several subject areas at the intermediate, and secondary levels in public schools. Graduates are awarded a Diploma degree in Education.

Over the course of one-year, prospective teachers are exposed to (a) 26-credit hours of basic education courses to fulfill college requirements including: research skills, psychology, school leadership, educational technology, teaching methods, curriculum, educational evaluation, professional development, and classroom environment; (b) 10-credit hours for teaching practicum courses including Teaching Practicum (1 & 2). The EDP consists of 12 courses that distributed over two semesters. It is noteworthy that the total number of the credit hours and courses in each semester may vary from one Saudi University to another.

The EDP involves only one theoretical course in methodology entitles Methods of Teaching (by field of specialization) that comes under the College requirements. The practical methodology courses are Teaching Practicum (1) that is tagged on in the first semester and the Teaching Practicum (2) which is placed in the second semester of the EDP. The three courses in methodology accumulate twelve credit hours with a 33.3% of the total courses.

Regularly, pre-service teachers attend an eight-week period of observation in schools during the Teaching Practicum (1) Course with a total attendance of 28 to 32 classes, while in Teaching Practicum (2), they attend four schooling days per week for the whole semester.

### 2. *Challenges during the Practicum*

Not only must the pre-service teachers prove they master their subject matter, but they must also show competence in other teaching field experience skills such as classroom management, methodology, and assessment. Thus, when a pre-service teacher decides to take "teaching" as a profession, further problems, difficulties, and challenges appear. For some pre-service teachers, attending the practicum can be dreadful especially when they face challenges in coping themselves with the new environment. Additionally, Yunus, Hashim, Ishak, and Mahamod

(2010) report that all the challenges that the pre-service teachers had to deal with were due to their desires to become professional teachers.

Several studies have documented the challenges that faced the EFL pre-service teachers and might affect their professional performance during the early field experience. A study conducted by Çelik (2008) offers probably the most comprehensive analysis of 133 Turkish pre-service teachers' concerns and stressful experiences. The results of a 40-item questionnaire indicated that the potential stress areas were analyzed under six categories: personal, communication-centered, evaluation-based, external, lesson preparation, and teaching related. These stress areas were considered challenges to practicum.

A seminal study in this area is the work of Sariçoban (2010) which aimed to display the possible problematic cases that occur in public primary and secondary schools with special reference to the use of materials, equipment, course-books, students' profile, curriculum, and the classroom environment. The results showed that there were still some problems that should be taken into consideration in designing teacher educational programs. These are; (a) lack of support in terms of materials and equipment, (b) problems resulting from the course book, (c) problems resulting from the curriculum, and (e) problems resulting from the classroom environment.

Likewise, Yunus et al. (2010) examined Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) pre-service teachers' teaching experiences and challenges with school administrators, mentor, supervisor, as well as teaching and learning process. A total of 38 Malaysian pre-service teachers who had completed their two months teaching practicum in various schools responded to a set of open-ended questions. The results showed that the challenges were confined to the students' attitudes towards the pre-service teachers, students' motivation, students' discipline, and support system.

A recent comparative study was carried out by Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013) where the researchers analyze the practicum program offered in Chinese teacher education institutions as compared with ten universities from different countries in the world. The results report three basic issues and challenges; the duration, timing, and mode of practicum. The researchers identify that the time allocated to practicum experiences in China is too short; the timing for sending pre-service teachers to the field (schools) is inappropriate, and the mode of practicum adopted is outdated. Accordingly, two main recommendations are derived; (a) the time for practicum experiences should be expanded, and (b) the practicum should be integrated throughout the program.

Moreover, the analysis of a recent study reported by Wang and Clarke (2014) highlight two related issues: the difficulties faced by reform efforts in China and the disjuncture between school and university expectations for practicum students in light of these initiatives.

Generally, it is obvious that pre-service teachers face several challenges as they attempt to achieve excellence in their career. For this reason, this action research was held to address a number of challenges with reference to Saudi EFL female pre-service teachers in the EDP. Specifically, the aims were to closely explore the challenges related to classroom teaching

experiences and school environment and propose areas of improvement to the current EDP in Taibah University.

### **Methods**

In the field of in-service education and professional self-evaluation, as stated by Carr and Kemmis (2003), the teacher as researchers “are asked to conduct action research in their classrooms in the purpose of enhancing learning-teaching process in the classroom environment” (p. 1).

In line with this fundamental purpose, action research was used in the current study that benefited from a mixed method which contains both quantitative and qualitative research design.

### **Participants**

The research sample was 35 Saudi EFL female pre-service teachers enrolled in the EDP at Taibah University. They enrolled in the Teaching Practicum (1) Course during the 2016 academic year.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

The researcher developed a perception opinionnaire, as a research instrument, to collect data from the EFL pre-service teachers regarding the challenges they faced in the teaching field experience. The perception opinionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part consists of one main question to collect data related to EFL pre-service teachers’ general views of the instructional benefits they got during the eight-week observation period. The question was rated on a 3-point Likert scale as follows: extremely beneficial; moderately beneficial; and no benefits at all.

The second part included 15 items related to EFL pre-service teachers’ perceptions towards the challenges they face in the teaching field experience in real classrooms. Eleven items were categorized under the dimension “skills related to classroom teaching experiences” and four items were classified under the dimension “skills related to school environment”. The participants were allowed to select as many items as they represent their challenges in the teaching field experience.

The last part of the perception opinionnaire offered an open-ended question aims to provide a greater depth of insight about future opportunities for professional improvement by asking the EFL pre-service teachers about the topics that they prefer to focus (strongly) on during the Teaching Practicum (2) Course.

Three experts from the field of curriculum and instruction checked the perception opinionnaire as a research instrument and subsequently it was adjusted according to their suggestions. For data collection, the perception opinionnaire was distributed to 35 EFL female pre-service teachers who enrolled in Teaching Practicum (1) Course in the 2016 academic year.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative findings from the perception opinionnaire were analyzed descriptively. Frequencies and percentages of the participants’ responses were computed for the first and second questions. Then, all the scores were ranked from the higher values to the lower ones. For the open-ended question, three major categories were formed to place participants’ responses. Details about future opportunities for professional development will be derived.

## Results

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistical tests (frequencies and percentages) of data collected from the first part of the perception opinionnaire with regard to EFL pre-service teachers' views on the instructional benefits they obtained from the observation period (Table 1).

Table 1. *Frequencies & Percentages of EFL Pre-service Teachers' Views towards the Benefits of the Observation Period*

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Moderately beneficial	18	51.4
Extremely beneficial	16	45.7
No benefits at all	1	2.9
Total	35	100.0

After calculating the frequencies and percentages of the responses of the participants, it appears that EFL pre-service teachers considered the observation period during the Teaching Practicum (1) Course is moderately beneficial (51.4%). The results also indicated that (45.9%) of the EFL pre-service teachers found the observation period is extremely beneficial, while only (2.9%) expressed their negative views about its benefits.

In order to answer the second research question, descriptive statistical tests (frequencies and percentages) of data collected from the second part of the perception opinionnaire with regard to their perceptions of the challenges they face in the teaching field experiences during the observation period (Table 2).

Table 2. *Frequencies, Percentages & Ranks of the Perceptions of the EFL Pre-service Teachers towards the most Challenges in the Teaching Field Experience*

Dimensions	Teaching experiences	N	%	Rank
Skills related to classroom teaching experiences	Selecting appropriate teaching method to the content.	23	65.7	1
	Applying fitting assessment technique to the content.	22	62.9	2
	Managing classroom efficiently.	22	62.9	
	Managing allocated lesson time.	21	60	4
	Preparing activities and exercises associated with the lesson.	20	57.1	5
	Preparing quizzes.	19	54.3	6
	Preparing daily lesson planning.	14	40	7
	Designing suitable teaching aids.	14	40	
	Teaching in real classroom.	12	34.3	9

	Deriving intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the lesson.	10	28.6	10
	Presenting the lessons.	3	8.6	11
<b>Skills related to school environment</b>	Dealing with the teaching load.	8	22.9	1
	Dealing with the school administration staff.	8	22.9	
	Compatibility with real classroom's teacher.	7	20	3
	Commitment to school system.	3	8.6	4

As shown in Table 2, the EFL pre-service teachers indicated that their perception towards the most challenging skills in the teaching field experiences during their observation period that require course teacher's considerations. Based on the skills related to classroom teaching skills, the participants rated some teaching skills as highly challenging (50 % & more) such as: selecting appropriate teaching method to the content (65.7%), applying fitting assessment technique to the content and managing classroom efficiently (62.9%), managing allocated lesson time (60%), preparing activities and exercises associated with the lesson (57.1%), and preparing quizzes (54.3%). These teaching experiences were ranked from 1 to 6 respectively.

Moreover, the EFL pre-service teachers rated the following items as moderately to low challenging (49 % & less) such as preparing daily lesson planning and designing suitable teaching aids (40%), teaching in real classroom (34.3%), deriving ILOs of the lesson (28.6%), and presenting the lessons (8.6%). These teaching experiences were ranked from 7 to 11 respectively.

Regarding the skills related to school environment skills, the participants rated them much less challenging such as: dealing with the teaching load and dealing with the school administration staff (22.9%), compatibility with real classroom's teacher (20%), and commitment to school system (8.6%). These school environment skills were ranked from 1 to 4 respectively.

The results of the open-ended question regarding asking the EFL pre-service teachers about the teaching experiences that they want to focus (strongly) on during Teaching Practicum (2) Course were presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Frequencies of the Responses to the Open-ended Question*

<b>Strongly required teaching experiences</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Preparing daily lesson planning. .1	6
Presenting the lessons. .2	5
Preparing quizzes. .3	5
Selecting appropriate teaching method to the content. .4	4
Applying fitting assessment technique to the content. .5	4
Preparing activities and exercises associated with the lesson. .6	4
Designing suitable teaching aids. .7	4
Dealing with the teaching load. .8	4
Managing allocated lesson time. .9	3

Managing classroom efficiently. .10	3
Commitment to school system. .11	2
Dealing with the school administration staff. .12	1
<b>New recommended teaching experiences</b>	
Dealing with the special needs students. .1	<b>3</b>
Dealing with the school principal as an educational leader. .2	2
<b>Other challenges &amp; suggestions to be considered</b>	
Distributing the week to 3 continuous days for practicum & 2 days for the university courses. .1	17
The difficulty to manage between practicum period responsibilities and requirements of other courses. .2	9
The necessity to change the summative assessment techniques in their diploma courses from final tests to other authentic tasks. .3	5
Selecting either writing the report or filling the observational sheets during the observation period. .4	5
Decreasing the observation period from 8 weeks to 2 continuous weeks for 4 days per week with a total of 32 periods. .5	1

After analyzing participants' written responses, the researcher divided them into three categories that give much details about future opportunities for improvement. The categories are strongly required teaching experiences, new recommended teaching experiences, and other challenges and suggestions to be considered during the Teaching Practicum Courses.

With respect to the strongly required teaching experiences, preparing daily lesson planning (N=6), as well as, presenting the lessons and preparing quizzes (N=5) were strongly recommended by the EFL pre-service teachers. While the teaching experiences: selecting appropriate teaching method to the content, applying fitting assessment technique to the content, preparing activities associated with the lesson, designing suitable teaching aids, and dealing with the teaching load indicated the same responses (N=4). Regarding managing allocated lesson time and managing classroom efficiently, only three EFL pre-service teachers stated to be considered (N=3). Finally, commitment to school system (N=2) and dealing with the school administration staff (N=1) were rated as the least required teaching experiences to be focused on. On the other hand, all of the participants indicated their sufficient practice in the following teaching experiences: teaching in real classroom, deriving ILOs of the lesson, and compatibility with real classroom's teacher.

Furthermore, the EFL pre-service teachers suggested adding two new recommended teaching experiences which are included in the course item: dealing with the special needs students (N=3) and dealing with the school principal as an educational leader (N=2).

The participants also allocated some other challenges and suggestions that should be considered by the instructor of the Teaching Practicum (1 & 2) Courses. They suggested distributing the five-day workweek to three continuous days for practicum and two days for the

other EDP courses (N=17). In addition, they identified their challenge to manage between practicum period responsibilities and requirements of other courses (N=9). Additionally, the EFL pre-service teachers stated the necessity to change the summative assessment techniques from final tests to other authentic tasks (N=5). As a matter of fact, they asked for using either writing the final report or filling the observational sheets during the Teaching Practicum (1) Course. Finally, they suggested decreasing the observation period from eight weeks to one or two continuous weeks for obtaining more benefits.

### Discussions

The researcher found that EFL pre-service teachers obtained some benefits from the observation period. They gained certain skills such as being in real classroom, monitoring EFL teachers in real setting, getting acquainted to students, and acquiring some knowledge about teaching styles that they may expand their opportunity to practice higher level of teaching skills. Moreover, this result seems to be consistent with the idea of Price (1998) that normally the pre-service teachers may feel more secure to be in a real classroom with an experienced teacher for a few meetings before practicing teaching alone.

Based on the results of the calculated frequencies and percentages, the EFL pre-service teachers indicated that their perception towards the most highly challenging skills in the teaching field experiences that require urgent attention is selecting appropriate teaching method to the content. An interpretation of this finding may rely on the EFL pre-service teachers' confidence on the necessity to be well-knowledgeable teachers and have the ability to be selective and elective teachers. They may find selecting appropriate teaching methods a difficult skill to acquire through observation. Such a skill requires training and practicing.

According to the above results, the challenging teaching skills come in the second place with equal percentage are: applying fitting assessment technique to the content and managing classroom efficiently. It could be the reason beyond this result is the nature of assessment in general as a critical issue for all teachers. Furthermore, the majority of teachers prefer to use the traditional assessment techniques such as tests, exams, and traditional home assignments. Likewise, the lack of knowledge in designing and implementing authentic assessment techniques might be a challenge for EFL pre-service teachers. Similarly, what may increase the difficulty of constructing and implementing assessment techniques is the necessity to be aligned with the ILOs of the lesson (Biggs & Tang, 2011). For difficulty managing the classroom, the results of some studies (Ababneh, 2012; Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, & Leutner, 2015) indicated that novice teachers perceive student discipline as their most serious teaching challenge. Additionally, classroom management is a multi-skill as it includes procedures for: (a) grouping students for different types of classroom activities, (b) using well-organized lesson plans, and (c) managing students' behavior that require more experience than the EFL pre-service teachers have. As well, the participants realized that they were not skillful enough to help learners be highly motivated, flexible, creative, and be able to adjust their behavior.

With respect to the results of the current research, the EFL pre-service teachers described managing allocated lesson time as a highly challenging skill. What supervisors always keep alerting pre-service teachers is considering effective time management skills. They seem facing

difficulties to accurately estimating how much time each element of the lesson, in-class activities, or any instructional components will take. Pre-service teachers need thorough training and practicing to acquire time management skill. This finding is in agreement with Collins's (1990) when he stated that time management requires well-prepared and organized lesson plan by a skillful teacher and is still considered a challenge to schoolteachers.

Additionally, the participants expressed their perception towards preparing activities and exercises associated with the lesson as highly challenging teaching skills. This result may be explained by the fact that observation period focuses only on allowing pre-service teachers to live in a real-world setting without propping them in further details of procedures in the design phases of activities, exercises, and/or quizzes. Actually, the real in-service teachers are not authorized to set up discussion sessions, reflect on, or share experiences with pre-service teachers outside the classroom setting. Besides, it seems that the learning and monitoring processes during the observation period are basically theoretical in nature.

One unanticipated finding was that the EFL pre-service teachers indicated less difficulty and challenge regarding preparing daily lesson planning as well designing suitable teaching aids that were equal in parentage. A possible explanation for this might be that most of EFL pre-service teachers usually rely heavily on using the ready-prepared lesson planning with explanation of the needed teaching aids that found on the internet. For this reason, it seems acceptable that they did not consider it highly challenging teaching skills.

For the last three less challenging teaching skills, it appears that EFL pre-service teachers feel much secure to teach in real classroom and presenting the lessons to the students after a long observation period. As one of the requirements of Teaching Practicum (1) Course, pre-service teachers should spend one schooling day per week for eight-week period with a total attendance of 28 to 32 classes. It gives reasonable impression that the EFL pre-service teachers get use to the classroom and school environment and how teachers manage being dealing with content and students. The field experience in itself does not appear new or shocking. On the other hand, the EFL pre-service teachers indicated that the skill of deriving ILOs of the lesson is less challenging for them. Actually, the reason beyond that is due to the ready-prepared lesson planning that found on the internet, which in turn, makes it easy for them to copy them without having any rationale framework and methods for writing ILOs. While based on the researcher's experience during Teaching Practicum (2) Course, pre-service teachers showed weak levels and unacceptable performance in writing ILOs. Moreover, they usually spend more time than expected to gain understanding of how to derive ILOs for each lesson or topic.

Although the challenges during their teaching practicum which were reported in the previous studies varies in nature and existence, the results of the current action research seem in line with those of Çelik (2008), Sarıçoban (2010), Yunus et al. (2010), Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013), and Wang and Clarke (2014) in shedding some light on critical challenges associated with teacher education.

### **Opportunities for Performance Improvement**

This section presents the results of the open-ended question exploring the EFL pre-service teachers' views towards the appropriate opportunities for future professional improvement in both courses Teaching Practicum (1 & 2). The results of the open-ended question gave deep insights and understanding of the challenging teaching skills that the EFL pre-service teachers still need some reflections on, as well as, further attention in teaching them. The results of the thematic analysis together with the frequencies related to the formed categories showed that the EFL pre-service teachers strongly need the following teaching skills and experiences to be the focus of the Teaching Practicum (2) Course:

1. Preparing daily lesson planning.
2. Presenting the lessons.
3. Preparing quizzes.
4. Selecting appropriate teaching method to the content.
5. Applying fitting assessment technique to the content.
6. Preparing activities and exercises associated with the lesson.
7. Designing suitable teaching aids.
8. Dealing with the teaching load.
9. Managing allocated lesson time.
10. Managing classroom efficiently.
11. Commitment to school system.
12. Dealing with the school administration staff.

Although many EFL pre-service teachers asserted that the observation period taught them a lot in preparation for their future career as in Table 2, a number of them also admitted their needs for teaching skills and experiences related to the classroom and school environment. The order of the most required skills seems logical and refers to the insufficient knowledge even though the amount of time spent on the observation period. Not only this, but also the EFL pre-service teachers suggested adding the following skills to the Teaching Practicum Courses:

1. Dealing with the special needs students.
2. Dealing with the school principal regarding the new role as an educational leader.

These skills were recommended based on their observation. The EFL pre-service teachers realized that the topics in the Teaching Practicum (2) Course do not cover item one while partially deals with item two. In the list of topics, nothing was included dealing with integrating students with special needs into regular classes. This recommendation reflects their high sense of responsibility and attention. Additionally, the second recommendation has been included as a topic in Teaching Practicum (1) Course but might be there are some new responsibilities of the school principal after changing the current position title to educational leader that are not explicated to the EDP managers.

Moreover, the results of the open-ended question explored further challenges and suggestions tended to improve both Teaching Practicum Courses. These challenges and suggestions are:

1. Distributing the week to three continuous days for practicum in the field and two days for the University courses due to the difficulty to manage between practicum period responsibilities and requirements of other courses.
2. The necessity to change the summative assessment techniques in their EDP courses from final tests to other authentic tasks.
3. Selecting either writing the final report or filling the observational sheets during the Teaching Practicum (1) Course.
4. Decreasing the observation period from eight weeks to two continuous weeks for four days per week with a total of thirty-two classes.

Based on the results of the open-ended question, it seems that the EFL pre-service teachers are facing other challenges were not included in the opinionnaire. As one can notice, the first and second challenges are related to Teaching Practicum (2) Course where students are asked to spend four days per week in the schools for teaching from 7:00 AM to 1:00 PM, then, they continue their afternoon classes from 4:00 PM to 9:45 PM. Hence, their suggestion for this challenge is to split the week into two periods: three days for field experience in schools and two days for the on-site classrooms in the University. As they indicated, such possible changes enable them to manage effectively all the responsibilities and requirements of the EDP courses.

On the other hand, the rest of challenges are related to Teaching Practicum (1) Course regarding assessment techniques, requirements of observation period, and time allocated for the observation. The EFL pre-service teachers appear uncomfortable with the final test as a summative assessment technique. The reason beyond that might be due to time deficiency to study for final tests, as well as, the practicality nature of both courses makes it possible to integrate various authentic assessment techniques. Moreover, it seems reasonable suggestion to present either a final report or an observation sheet as assessment methods due to the multi tasks required for other EDP courses. Their final suggestion regarding decreasing the observation period from eight weeks to two continuous weeks seems reasonable as it enables them to observe and at the same time manage other courses.

## Conclusions

This action research aimed at exploring the views of EFL pre-service teachers towards the instructional benefits they got during the eight-week observation period. Moreover, it aimed to explore their perceptions towards the most challenges they face in teaching experience during the practicum period in real classrooms. Likewise, this research attempted to handle these challenges by suggesting some modifications for the Teaching Practicum (1) Course and implementing others to Teaching Practicum (2) Course.

The results indicated that EFL pre-service teachers considered the observation period during the Teaching Practicum (1) Course between moderately and extremely beneficial. The results of the perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers regarding classroom teaching skills were between highly and moderately to low challenging. As well, their school environment skills indicated much less challenging than teaching skills. The results of the open-ended question were divided in three meaningful and thoughtful categories to add much depth and understanding of the research problem.

As an academic in the EDP, the researcher will teach the Teaching Practicum (2) Course based on the suggestions of the EFL pre-service teachers, besides, both suggested new topics will be integrated in the course. In addition, the researcher plans to set up department-wide discussions to share ideas about the need to understand the effective implantation of observation period in Teaching Practicum (1) Course and reconstruct its policies, requirements, and procedures to pass the course.

This combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual premise that practicum supervisors have important roles in meeting the basic needs of the pre-service teachers. They have to attend classes with the pre-service teachers and monitor together the performance and practices of the real teachers during the observation period, then, construct focused groups to discuss comments, and finally, provide them with constructive feedback. Moreover, the supervisors should encourage the pre-service teachers to be reflective on the observed practices, explore their beliefs, and find solutions to their own problems. Therefore, they need to establish appropriate settings for communication with the pre-service teachers in order to make them feel secure enough to consult them about any problematic issues or situations.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

As the researcher will teach Teaching Practicum (2) Course, the following implications will be considered:

1. Introducing the course topics regarding the most required skills to support knowledge building and field practices.
2. Preparing the suggested topics with relevant references and materials.
3. Conducting workshops and focus groups to discuss, revise, and practice challenging teaching skills or any critical issues.
4. Setting microteaching classes to facilitate practicing successful teaching skills.
5. Implementing peer and self-assessment techniques while using workshops, focus groups, and/or microteaching as part of the course requirements.

Regarding the suggestions, the researcher plans to propose for department-wide discussions to share ideas about the effective implantation of observation period in Teaching Practicum 1 Course and reconstruct its policies, requirements, and procedures to pass the course. For example, the supervisor is required to:

1. Attend classes with the pre-service teachers during the observation period.
2. Construct focus groups to discuss all their comments, beliefs, and questions, then, provide them with constructive feedback.
3. Establish appropriate settings for communication with the pre-service teachers in order to feel secure enough to ask about any issues.

Further improvements at the program level could be proposed to the University Permanent Committee of Curricula and Academic Accreditation (PCCAA) such as:

1. Splitting the students' week in the Teaching Practicum (2) Course into: three days for the field experience and two days for the University classrooms.
2. Revising the course specification of Teaching Practicum (1) Course and implement any

further modifications in the suggested assessment techniques.

3. Modifying the requirements in the course plan to be either submitting a final report or filling every period-checklist as tasks during the observation.

### Limitations

However, this action research still had several weaknesses. For instance, the number of the research population is limited. This limitation is due to the small number of EFL pre-service teachers who enrolled in the EDP during the 2015-2016 academic year. Moreover, one of juries' comment is using an opinionnaire, as a research instrument, is still not strong enough to provide indicators of potential problems and point to possible ways in which performance might be improved. Therefore, the results are not highly accurate and do not provide critical organizational decisions based on them. The researcher tried to resolve this problem by adding one open-ended question to elicit as much data as possible.

### Recommendations

Results of the action research indicate that EFL pre-service teachers need further development in teaching experiences and skills related to classrooms and school setting. The results also signify the importance of reviewing the EDP and the specifications of its courses in Taibah University. Furthermore, meetings, workshops, and/or small discussion sessions need to be conducted between school personnel, supervisors, University instructors, EDP manager, and pre-service teachers to explore critical issues and anticipate possible solutions.

### Some Suggestions for Future Research on Practicum

In this action research and based on the limitations and results, the researcher suggests the following research areas:

1. Further studies may investigate other problems facing EFL male pre-service teachers in the EDP related to practicum.
2. Researchers may be interested in investigating the role of schools and university supervisors from students' perspectives.
3. Researchers may apply a wide-scale vision through an evaluation of the practicum in college of education at Taibah University.
4. A study about Saudi EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs about practicum may be insightful and shed light in some other factors related to teacher education.

### About the Autor:

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Appendix A: Student's Opinionnaire

**Dear Student** \_\_\_\_\_

Based on your recent experience in observing teaching experience in real EFL classroom, please respond to the following questions clearly.

<p>1. Did you find the observation period beneficial?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Extremely Beneficial  <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately Beneficial  <input type="checkbox"/> No Benefits at All</p>
<p>2. Identify the most prominent Challenges that may affect your involvement in the field training process soon through the following choices:</p> <p>You may tick <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> more than one choice that match your point of view.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Deriving instructional objectives of the lesson.  <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing daily lesson planning.  <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing activities and exercises associated with the lesson.  <input type="checkbox"/> Selecting appropriate teaching method to the content.  <input type="checkbox"/> Designing suitable teaching aids.  <input type="checkbox"/> Applying fitting assessment technique to the content.  <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing quizzes.  <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching in real classroom.  <input type="checkbox"/> Presenting the lessons.  <input type="checkbox"/> Managing allocated lesson time.  <input type="checkbox"/> Managing classroom efficiently.  <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with the teaching load.  <input type="checkbox"/> Compatibility with real classroom's teacher.  <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment to various school systems.  <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with the school administration staff.</p>

3. **What are the topics you want to focus on (strongly) during Practicum 2 Course?**

- .....
- .....
- .....

Thank you