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The barriers pre-service English teachers encounter in the classroom during practicum

Las barreras que encuentran los futuros profesores de inglés en el aula durante las prácticas

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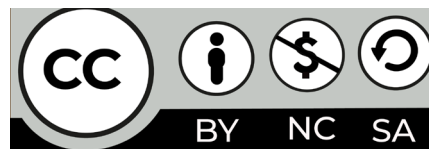
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RESUMEN

La práctica preprofesional es un componente crucial del programa de la carrera de inglés en la UNAN Managua. Este componente es la base para que los estudiantes pongan en contexto no solo la teoría aprendida en el aula de clases, sino sus experiencias relacionadas a la enseñanza del inglés en las escuelas públicas de primaria y secundaria de nuestro país. Aunque los estudiantes son preparados con todas las competencias para la enseñanza en el contexto mencionado, en esta oportunidad, ellos realizan sus prácticas en un entorno diferente. En este estudio analizaremos los desafíos que los estudiantes de inglés enfrentaron en la práctica preprofesional en el contexto universitario. Además, describiremos el impacto que este nuevo contexto de enseñanza tuvo en los estudiantes y las estrategias que ellos utilizaron para afrontar estos retos durante su pre-práctica profesional. De igual manera, es preciso mencionar que en este estudio cualitativo también describiremos cómo los estudiantes manejaron aspectos relacionados con el nuevo tipo de planificación, el diseño de materiales, el manejo de estrategias del aula de clases, el estrés, la ansiedad y las emociones como maestros de inglés. Con relación a los instrumentos utilizados para recolectar la información para el estudio, se utilizaron una entrevista y un grupo focal a los mentores de estas prácticas. Ambas herramientas fueron enfocadas en los aspectos antes mencionados. Los resultados nos indican que los estudiantes tuvieron que adaptar planes de clases según el nuevo contexto, diseñar sus propios materiales, recibir tutorías de mentores, autoayudarse, hacer ejercicios de inhalación, confiar en sí mismos, establecer rutinas de clases, reglas y usar pósters con instrucciones claras. Finalmente, este estudio servirá para que los futuros maestros de inglés consideren los retos que se pueden encontrar en la enseñanza del inglés a nivel universitario y cómo enfrentar estos obstáculos utilizando sus propias estrategias.

Palabras Claves:

Retos, estrategias,
superación, prácticas,
profesores

ABSTRACT

The teaching practicum class is a crucial component of the English degree program at UNAN Managua. This component provides students with the foundation to contextualize not only the theory learned in the classroom but also their experiences related to teaching English in public elementary and secondary schools in our country. Although students are prepared with all the skills necessary for teaching in the context described previously, they carry out their internships in a different environment. In this study, we will analyze the challenges that English students faced in their pre-professional internships in the university context. In addition, we will describe the impact that this new teaching context had on students and the strategies they used to face these challenges during their pre-professional internship. Similarly, it should be mentioned that in this qualitative study, we will also describe how students handled aspects related to the new type of planning, material design, classroom strategy management, stress, anxiety, and emotions as English teachers. Regarding the instruments used to collect information for the study, an interview and a focus group were used with the student teachers. Both tools focused on the aspects mentioned above. The results indicate that students had to adapt lesson plans to the new context, design their own materials, receive mentoring, help themselves, do breathing exercises, trust themselves, establish class routines and rules, and use posters with clear instructions. Finally, this study will help future English teachers consider the challenges they may encounter when teaching English at the university level and how to overcome these obstacles using their own strategies.

Key words: challenges, coping strategies, practicum, pre-service teachers

INTRODUCCIÓN

English language learning has become paramount for students, professionals, and business entrepreneurs as it has become part of the National Education Strategy, Blessings and Victories 2024-2026. There is a need for qualified English teachers that can help solve English learning problems students in elementary and secondary schools face. Nonetheless, pre-service teachers at UNAN-MANAGUA struggle to find a school in which they can do their practicum. In fact, this problem was solved by giving students the opportunity to teach English in different areas of our university. Our pre-service teachers, this first semester of 2025, were placed to do their practicum in the English courses, tutoring program, and as teacher assistants. In this article, we will discuss the challenges and factors that influence these pre-service teachers' teaching experience.

As part of the requirements for their bachelor's degree, senior TEFL students at UNAN- MANAGUA take two practicum courses. These courses comply with the laws governing education (Laws 89 & 582). From these policies, universities have the responsibility to establish guidelines and criteria that stipulate how practicums or internships will be conducted (Asamblea de la República de Nicaragua, 2006). At UNAN-MANAGUA, the English curriculum states that in one of the practicum courses, the pre-service teachers rotate in a public elementary school and then transfer to a public high school in their final semester. In fact, teaching practicum allows students to examine and clarify their skills (Williams- Pinnock, S.K., 2025). It is done to immerse future graduates in real teaching contexts, and at the same time, the setting is used for their

own dissertation.

In addition, research is needed to determine the challenges faced by pre-service English teachers and factors that influence their teaching experience during their practicum. This article puts in perspective the coping strategies used by pre-service teachers to overcome challenges during their practicum in the university. Coping strategies are defined as the mechanisms we use to deal with difficult situations (Team, C.E, 2025). Our research is not finished yet; however, we want to share our findings thus far.

It is essential to identify the challenges these pre-service teachers face and the coping strategies they employ to solve the problems they find in their classrooms. As a matter of fact, teachers lack time, materials and have problems balancing their emotions (The 12 main challenges of becoming a teacher, 2025). As TEFL trainers, the insights we can gather from this study will help us make the necessary adjustments in the curriculum and the competences they need to develop to become better professionals in the field of English language learning and teaching. This study will also contribute to providing evidence on how to optimize the instruction in diverse educational settings.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This research follows a qualitative descriptive design because it aims to understand the perspectives and experiences of a group of pre-service teachers. It is suitable because it explores and describes their feelings and emotions towards the challenges they faced during their practicum course; besides, it seeks to identify the coping strategies these pre-service teachers used to overcome these barriers. According to Vaughan (n.d), the aim of qualitative research methods is to investigate and comprehend the significance and background of social problems. In addition to this, a qualitative approach also focuses on exploring feelings, emotions, and experiences (Qualitative research: what is it and why should you use it, 2022).

This research was conducted at the university. The study population was 30 female students and 6 males. All the participants belonged to the English major. We chose the students according to one of the purposive sampling methods, which is homogeneous sampling, with the purpose of seeking information from participants with similar traits or experiences to study a specific group in detail (Market, 2025). We used interviews and focus groups as data collection techniques. Both were crucial to gathering relevant information for this research. Biden states that interviews and focus groups are used to collect qualitative data because they provide meaningful information from the participants (2024). Regarding the content of both instruments, they contained questions about lesson planning, material design, access to information, coping strategies used in the context, and classroom management. It is important to mention that the interview consisted of nine multiple-choice questions. These questions were answered through an online form. Regarding the focus group, it also had four questions practicum teachers had to discuss and provide their points of view. This last technique was also answered online.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For this research, we used three different types of instruments for data collection: students' reports, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews.

Students' report (journal)

The students' report, in this case, was used to collect personal insights at a deeper level in which students can express, through reflective writing, intimate introspection of the challenges and coping strategies they used during their practicum (Friedman et al, 2011).

For data analysis, we used Braun & Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, which state that it is essential in qualitative research for the processing of raw information into categories, themes, and patterns. This is a systematic way of analyzing information provided from students' final report (journal).

Raw Information from Interview	Initial codes	Themes
"My challenges were: content, activities to match resources, time constraint,	Lack of teaching experience	Challenges in lesson planning
"I had to design and create my own teaching material, find material online to download, or use a textbook as a coursebook to guide me in the course."	Little experience in adapting and adopting material for the students	Challenge in creating teaching material suitable for the students
"I had to find ways to help me cope with my teaching. For example, I had to ask for help from my mentor, other peers, and other teachers."	Asking for collaboration and mentorship	Challenges in classroom management

We found that the challenges students faced during the practicum course were related to lesson planning. Students were not familiarized with the format and the complexity of the content. In addition to it, the creation of teaching materials was not suitable for the type of students they had. Moreover, the trainees had to depend on the collaborative work and the guidance of their teacher-trainers.

Focus group

A focus group is used in qualitative study because it is useful in exploring behaviors, emotions, attitudes, and motivations (Lauri, 2019). For this study, the focus group will help us gather information about the feelings and emotions they experienced while in their practicum. In addition, this method of data collection will help us explore the coping strategies they used to overcome their challenges in teaching.

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Since it was difficult for us to find a place and the time to gather the participants of this study, we did it online. We used Microsoft Forms to share the questions with them. In the end, they used the Forms to write the answers they previously discussed with us. The information gathered was transcribed for better analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Questions	Categories	Themes
What aspects of lesson planning and classroom management were challenges you had to face during your practicum?	Students' language level Activities to match resources Creation of materials Adopting and adapting exercises from textbooks Time allotted Adapting content to students' needs	Challenges Lesson planning Classroom management
Where did you find help to overcome these challenges?	Peers help Tutor's mentorship Teachers' help and advise Group collaboration	Mindset about profession
Can you recall any actions you took to succeed in your practicum?	Breathing and exhaling Meditation and relaxation exercises Refrain from negative thoughts Take breaks Laugh at times Write it down Positive self-talk Spending time in nature	Resilience (coping) strategies

Regarding the focus group, the teacher trainees were asked three questions to discuss. The main topics were the challenges they faced when planning lessons and classroom management used in the classroom. In this case, the students were specific in explaining the challenges such as students' language level, activities to match resources, adapting and adopting exercises from textbooks. Additionally, they explained that to overcome these challenges, they looked for peers' help, tutor mentorship, and teacher's help and advice. Apart from that, the students shared some actions they took to succeed in their practicum. For instance, they used breathing and exhaling exercises, meditation and relaxation exercises, refrained from negative thoughts, took breaks, laughed at times, positive self-talk, and spent time in nature.

Teachers' Interview

To triangulate the information collected from the students' report (journal) and focus group, we used a semi-structured interview. The interview is one of the most common data collection tools for qualitative studies; however, for our study we used it to collect in-depth information from the experts (practicum trainers) and to explore their insights and understanding of the challenges their practicum trainees faced during their practicum (Interviewing for Data Collection | Western Australian Community Impact Hub, 2025). Moreover, we wanted to identify any alignment with the resilience strategies of these practicum trainees.

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Questions	Categories	Themes	Patterns
What are the most common challenges your trainees faced during their practicum?	Classroom management, because of the students' behavior. The common challenges my trainees face are - Lack of preparation and experience to face university students because they are prepared to assist primary and high school students. - Time availability because of their jobs' routine.	Classroom management Lesson planning Experience in context	Challenges
How do you think your trainees manage stress and workload during practicum?	I think they looked for strategies to keep the balance. Some of them deal stress in good manner and tried to do their best and some others feels desperate and anxious.	Strategies to keep the balance	Resilience (coping) strategies
When they face a classroom challenge (e.g., lack of materials, noisy students, time pressure), do they ask you for help or do they ask their peers for help? (Ask for examples.)	--When the trainees face a classroom challenge, they ask for help to the main teacher because she stays there with them (any misbehavior or something regarding specific language activities. They even plan their classes with her because the trainees work in co-teaching to have an easier, manageable, and organized teaching learning environment. On the other hand, they actively communicate with me about the teaching process development, and they ask for help if it is required. -Most of the time they ask for help from their peers.	In-service teacher Practicum mentor	Mindset about profession

To find concordance with the information gathered from the students' report and focus group, the findings from the teacher trainers' interview were aligned. First, lack of expertise and preparation were challenges students faced because they were trained in a different context. Also, they suffered from stress and anxiety because of their teaching experiences. In relation to looking for help, the students planned their classes with the help of their tutors, others looked for their peers' help.

CONCLUSIONS

The information collected in the interview, focus group and the students' report describes not only the challenges but also the coping strategies these pre-service teachers used in their teaching context. In this study, we found that the most common struggles students encountered during their teaching practicum were planning lessons, creating materials, adapting and adopting materials according to students' needs, and classroom management, dealing with students' discipline and time allotted to teaching lessons.

In fact, these coping strategies are related to the way they manage their emotions, feelings, and expectations to cope with their first teaching experience. It is important to mention that these students were not prepared for the university teaching context. However, this experience can help both mentors and trainees prepare for similar teaching scenarios. In addition, mentors and teachers should be prepared for this type of teaching context because according to the new strategy of education, it should prevail throughout the different teaching levels. Besides, it is worth mentioning that this study is relevant to making the necessary changes to the curriculum.

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