

# EFL Trainee Teachers' Perceptions of School-Based Teaching Practice: Some Selected Teacher Education Colleges in Southern Ethiopia in Focus

Manguday Mercho Bagaje



**Abstract:** *The perception one holds towards language teaching practice governs the failure or success of teaching practice. To this end, this study aimed to assess EFL trainee-teachers' perceptions of teaching practices in four selected teacher education colleges of southern Ethiopia. To address the objectives, the study employed mixed method design. 120 EFL trainee-teachers were selected through comprehensive sampling. Questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion were data collection tools. Questionnaire was employed to examine the perceptions of EFL trainee-teachers towards school-based teaching practice. Interviews was carried out to triangulate data from questionnaire. Focus group discussion was employed to corroborate the data from questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was administered to all 120 EFL trainee teachers. Accordingly, the quantitative data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. Qualitative data were analysed descriptively. The finding from survey data revealed that EFL trainee teachers had positive perceptions towards school-based teaching practice. The findings from interview also supported the quantitative data result. The findings from the focus group discussion also supported the quantitative and qualitative results. Furthermore, the findings from Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there were no perceptions differences between male and female students due to gender.*

**Key words:** *Perceptions, School-based teaching practice, pre-service EFL trainee teachers*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Training prospective teachers through school-based teaching practice is a vital part of the EFL teacher education program because it is the first opportunity that student-teachers have to experience the real teaching practices (Blunden, 2000). According to Mutlu (2014) school-based teaching practice allows EFL student-teachers to discover their abilities and creativities that help them to reflect on their school-based teaching practice. Teaching practice is also regarded as the first opportunity for preparing EFL trainee teachers for real teaching context. It also gives opportunity for EFL trainee teachers to employ knowledge, information, and theories acquired through their study (Kennedy, 2006). This suggests that it is the real practice of the teaching process through which EFL trainee-teachers investigate the current working environment conditions and

explore internal and external factors affecting organizational structure characteristics and school planning activities. Teaching practice is further aimed at providing opportunities for student-teachers to integrate theory and practice (Al-Momani, 2016).

Moreover, Petrarca (2013) suggested that what makes an effective teacher is based on teaching practices and what teachers actually do in the classroom and reflect on it. This infers it is during this stage that student-teachers form their personal teaching styles and philosophies that will guide them through the multiple, varied and complex pathways of teaching through reflecting on their teaching practice. Supporting this Richards (2011), stated that the process of learning to teach English involves becoming socialized into a professional learning community where the goals, shared values and norms of conduct have been established.

To enter the teaching profession, novice teachers need to develop an "identity kit", the ways they manage their actions, talk, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values that comply with the norms of the teaching community and take on a social role recognized by other teachers. They also focus on exploring and resolving issues related to the workplace practices that members of the community take part in. This implies school-based teaching practice is a good example of trainee teachers' socialization into a professional learning community because it requires the trainee teacher to develop collaborative and cooperative activities including team teaching, peer observation, peer coaching, support groups and development discourses to fulfil their practicum responsibilities with the school mentor, the college supervisor and other school teaching staff.

Though the school-based teaching practice has many benefits for pre-service EFL trainee teachers, the teaching practice of EFL trainee teachers is governed by what they perceive and these perceptions often serve as a filter through which instructional judgments and decision are made (Shavelson & Stern 1981 as cited in Zeichner, 2015). EFL trainee teachers' perceptions have become widely recognized that they play central roles in their reflection in their teaching practices. These perceptions are manifested in the teaching methods, in choosing the subjects and activities, decision-making, and evaluation (Borg, 2001). This implies how EFL trainee teachers' perceptions govern the way they think, practice and reflect on their practice. One basic reason that makes EFL trainee teachers' classroom practice and their reflection on their practice different from one to another is due to their perceptions.

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Likewise, many pre-service EFL trainee teachers enter into this independent teaching practice phase with hopes, perceptions, inflated images, and expectations that are often shattered by exposure to certain realities of schools, classroom, and teaching (Gabrys-Barker, 2010, p.66).

According to Guardiola (2001), perceptions are mental images that result from selecting and interpreting feelings and which provide data on our habitat, our actions and internal states. They are processed by which "our brains give meaning to the stimuli registered by our senses" (Guardiola, 2001 p. 45). Highlighting the importance of perceptions, Guski (1992, as cited in Borg, 2006) points out that it is by collecting and analyzing information from the outside world that human beings can familiarize themselves with it and develop possible action plans. Gabrys-Barker (2010) further stated that in English language teaching, the perceptions about how language should be learned and taught are the significant factor that makes them involve different strategies, materials, media, and evaluation. This deduces EFL trainee teachers are influenced by certain perceptions in their mind when they think, react, and respond during their professional routine tasks and performances.

Most of the time, EFL trainee teachers are not aware of the existence of the perceptions inside their mind and that perception shape the way they do their profession for example how they view the students and the materials, how they use teacher talk and code switching, how they develop their supplementary materials, which approach they employ most of the time, and how they interact with their colleagues and students and how they reflect on their teaching practice.

As referred by Borg (2006), an awareness of teachers' perceptions as professionals in an academic setting will contribute to the need of teacher training in enhancing the educational system.

Borg (2003) describes teacher's perceptions as constituents of a wider notion of teacher cognition. The relevance of teachers' perceptions shades a light in teacher education program and it includes experiences in schooling, professional lives and classroom practices (Borg, 2003). As claimed by Borg (2003), it is now accepted that teachers are active decision-makers who make instructional decisions by considering complex, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and belief with the help of the perceptions they hold. That is, the EFL trainee teachers' perceptions hold a significant role in the arena of English language teacher education program. As a result, in different studies across the globe have attempted to investigate EFL student-teachers' perceptions on classroom teaching.

For example, Gerges (2001) conducted a qualitative inquiry on ten Vietnam EFL student teachers using interview on their perceptions of instructional practice during the practicum. The finding revealed that prior classroom experiences have an influence on developing pre-service EFL teachers' images of themselves as teachers and their perceptions of their own instructional practices. Nae-Dong (2000) in Taiwan also conducted a survey on pre-service English language teachers' perceptions about teaching and learning. Using Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs About Foreign Language Learning Inventory (BFLLI) and literature reviews on child development.

Another study in Nicaraguan (Central America) EFL context, Chavez (2006) investigated 13 EFL pre-service teachers' knowledge, beliefs and perceptions of the teaching

practice and the influence these elements exert on the trainees' performance and behaviour in the classroom. This ethnographic-based study mainly addresses major pedagogical themes: teachers' instructional context, sources of trainees' perceptions, trainees' approaches to lesson planning, and nature of teaching and learning process. The results indicate that most of the participant EFL trainee teachers were easily challenged with the contextual factors such as unsuitability of the instructional materials, lack of formal and consistent national program for EFL teaching process due to the perceptions they held before entering into the school-based teaching practice.

Velez-Rendon's (2006) also conducted interpretive case study examines four German pre-service EFL student-teacher's perceptions about teaching practice using questionnaire, interview, and classroom observation. The result of his study indicated that pre-service EFL student teachers' perceptions had an influence on learning to teach in EFL classroom.

The finding of his study also revealed that lack of experience and their expectations to teach were other problems associated with their perceptions.

Despite the prevailing dominance of research on language teachers' perceptions, studies in developing nations like Ethiopia, tend to give little attention to EFL trainee teachers' perceptions of school-based teaching practice. Even, in the process of curriculum revisions, the teachers' role in providing their experience-based pedagogical assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge tends to be minimal. Most research works in the country seem to focus on finding some forms of correlations between what teachers do in the classroom and what students learn from it. In other words, the existing local investigations of language pedagogy seem to reflect a process-product research approach. They attempt to investigate and characterize observable teachers' behaviours and the corresponding learning outcomes. Generally, significant attention has not been given to EFL trainee teachers' perceptions of school-based teaching practice. Moreover this, the above international studies addressed only in-service English teachers' perceptions of classroom teaching practices. Likewise, most the above studies conducted in high schools. However, they did not address pre-service EFL student-teachers' perceptions of school-based teaching practice. Above this, there was a dearth of research regarding EFL trainee teachers' perceptions of school-based teaching practice in Ethiopia in general and in the context of this study.

Therefore, taking all these facets into consideration, it is vital and important to assess the EFL student teachers' perceptions of school-based teaching practices in four colleges of southern regional state in Ethiopia. Hence, this study sought to answer the following specific research questions.

## **II. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. What are the perceptions EFL trainee teachers hold about their school-based teaching practices?

- Is there any gender-based differences among EFL trainee teachers' perceptions towards school-based teaching practice?

Based on the research questions provided above, the following null hypotheses was formulated.

**HO:** There is no difference between female and male EFL trainee teachers in their perceptions towards school-based teaching practice due to gender

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Theoretically, school-based teaching practice is rooted from constructivist paradigm. In light of constructivist view, knowledge is believed to be constructed by people's inter-subjective constant interpretations, comparisons and contrasting of phenomena with reference to those of other people. The constructivist paradigm regards knowledge as a "human construction," that recognizes "multiple realities," and sees the research as a process through which the "researcher and the participant co-construct understandings" (Hatch, 2002 p.32). The constructivist approach; therefore, demands the participants to be interactive. The participants attempt to understand what the researcher wants from the exchange, and the researcher needs to understand the world from the respondents' perspective. Meanings are co-constructed between the researcher and the participants, the researcher and the context. Thus, this study was built up on the constructive theory in which EFL trainee-teachers construct meanings on their practical works during the research process.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore EFL trainee teachers' perceptions of school-based teaching practice and to examine if there is a difference between male and female students' perceptions due to gender in three selected teacher education colleges in southern, Ethiopia. To this end, mixed method research design was employed as it enables the researcher to study a single unit intensively for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units (Creswell, 2013). Participants of this study were EFL trainee teachers in three selected teacher Education colleges in southern, Ethiopia. Accordingly, 120 third year EFL trainee teachers who were engaged in teaching practice were included for the survey data using comprehensive sampling technique.

In order to collect data from EFL trainee teachers regarding their perceptions of school-based teaching practice, questionnaire was adapted from (Yehia, 2012). This questionnaire was divided into four major parts. The first part was about EFL trainee teachers' perception of the school-based teaching practice, the second part was their perceptions towards cooperating teachers, the third part was about EFL trainees' perceptions towards their supervisors and the last part was their perceptions towards the host school.

Each part had different items to be responded on a five-point scale (1-5) with the extreme alternatives of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The internal consistency reliabilities of each item were checked using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded **0.869** which refers to a high level of reliability. Hence, the survey data were collected with valid

and acceptable tools as it filled the international standard. Moreover, ample time was given to EFL trainee teachers to fill the questionnaire freely.

### V. DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analysed and conducted by using SPSS 20.0. As a result, the basic descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were computed for some part of the survey data. Mean and grand mean were computed to determine the extent to which the participants agreed or disagreed with the items referring to their perception regarding school-based teaching practice. Standard deviation was used to measure the homogeneity or heterogeneity of responses for each item. On other hand, non-parametric test such as Mann Whitney U test was employed to analyse the perception differences between male and female students towards school-based teaching practice. Finally, the data generated from interview were described qualitatively through verbal descriptions.

### VI. RESULTS

The first purpose of the study was to identify the perceptions hold by EFL trainee teachers about their school-based teaching practices. The results obtained from the statistical analysis are presented in the table below:

**Table 1. Mean scores of EFL trainee teachers' perceptions of school-based teaching practice**

Perception Components	N	Mean	SD
Classroom teaching practice	120	4.43	0.70
Cooperating teachers	120	4.27	0.89
Supervisors	120	4.22	0.70
Host school	120	4.19	0.92
Grand mean		4.27	

As it can be shown in the above table, EFL trainee teachers perceived the school-based teaching practice positively. The mean result of each dimension is above 4 points. For example, the mean score of classroom practice is 4.43. On the other hand, the mean scores of cooperating teachers, supervisors, and the host school are 4.41, 4.34 and 4.48 respectively.

Furthermore, the grand mean is 4.27. This indicates majority of EFL trainee teachers perceive the school-based teaching practice positively. This result further checked through interview result.

Accordingly, the first interviewed (S1) EFL trainee teacher reacted that he has positive perception towards school-based teaching practice. He presented his view as follow.

*"I perceive school-based teaching practice positively as it helps me to put my theoretical knowledge into practice. In addition, he stated that via teaching practice I develop my professional identity. Hence, I have positive perception towards school-based teaching practice".*



The second (S2) interviewed EFL trainee teacher also perceived school-based teaching practice positively. As she stated:

*“School-based teaching practice showed me a direction on how to plan and deliver the lesson properly during my teaching practice. In addition, school-based teaching practice helped me a lot to see myself as a future teacher. Moreover, school-based teaching practice helped me to reflect on my own work. Therefore, I perceive school-based teaching practice positively”.*

The third interviewed (S3) EFL trainee teacher reacted his perception as follow.

*“Being a teacher is all the result from teaching practice. To be a teacher one must pass through teaching practice. I started learning how to teach during teaching practice. All in all, I have positive outlook towards school-based teaching practice”.*

The fourth interviewed (S4) EFL trainee teacher expressed his feeling as follows.

I really enjoyed teaching practice, but the problem was the way I was treated in the host school and from my cooperating teachers. Once the course teacher gave me his timetable of a month, I was not checked & followed up by anyone including the supervisor. But, with this all pitfalls the school-based teaching practice had a positive influence upon my life, and it made me a real teacher than the bulky theoretical courses I came across in the last two years.

The fifth interviewed (S5) EFL trainee teacher had also positive perceptions towards the school-based teaching practice. She explained her feeling as follow.

I have a positive perception towards school-based teaching practice. Because, without school-based teaching practice it is impossible to *achieve* my dream. To be a teacher teaching practice is mandatory. School-based teaching practice helps me to put the content knowledge I had earlier to practical (professional) knowledge. Hence, I have positively perceived the school-based teaching practice. Similarly, (S6, S7 and S8) expressed their feeling positively towards school-based teaching practice. They feel that due to the school-based teaching practice, they identify themselves as a real teacher.

As indicated in the interview data above, EFL trainee teachers had positive perceptions towards school-based teaching practice though there were some pitfalls as mentioned by fourth interviewee. In general, the finding from quantitative data were highly supported and triangulated with the finding from interview.

#### Mann Whitney U-test result on EFL trainee teachers' perceptions towards teaching practice due to gender

#### Summary on Mann-Whitney U-test result

Gender	N	Mean	Std	Df	T	P
Male	72	4.436	0.66	116	0.03	0.97
Female	48	4.328	0.63			

A Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted to identify if there is a difference between male and female students' perceptions towards teaching practice at 0.05 level. Perception scores for males (M = 4.436, SD = 0.66) and females (M = 4.328, SD = 0.63). The test result (t = 0.03, df=116, p=0.97) since p > 0.05) proved that there was no significant difference in scores for males and females. This result disproved the null hypothesis. In general, both male and female students had nearly the same perceptions towards school-based teaching practice.

## VII. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore EFL trainee teachers' perceptions of school-based teaching practice and to examine if there were differences in perceptions between male and female students due to gender. To this end, the findings from each objective were discussed briefly in the following sections.

One of the aims of this study was to gain comprehensive insight on EFL trainee teachers' perceptions towards school-based teaching practice. Under perceptions, perceptions towards their classroom teaching practice, perceptions regarding their cooperating (school-teachers), perceptions regarding their supervisors and perceptions regarding their host schools were thoroughly examined. The results obtained from both questionnaire, interview and focus group discussions pointed out that all EFL trainee teachers had positive perceptions towards their school-based teaching practice: (perceptions towards classroom teaching practice, perceptions towards cooperating teachers, perceptions towards academic supervisors and perceptions towards the host school). This result is consistent with other findings.

With regards to perceptions, Gerges (2001) conducted a qualitative inquiry on ten Vietnamese pre-service EFL student teachers using interview on their perceptions of instructional practice during the practicum. The finding revealed that EFL student teachers had positive perceptions towards instructional practices. The finding further indicated that for their perceptions prior classroom experiences had an influence on developing pre-service EFL student teachers' perceptions towards school-based teaching practices. Moreover, the result of this study indicated that the majority of the participants strongly agreed that the teaching practice experience, cooperating teachers (school teachers), the academic supervisor, and the host school were effective in supporting EFL trainee teachers during their teaching practice.

Likewise, Yehia (2012) conducted a mixed research on prospective EFL trainee teachers' perceptions of the teaching practice experience at AUST, Ibb University of Yemen. 70 prospective teachers were data sources. The data were taken from a questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists of 24 close items and three open ended questions were distributed to all seventy students and analyzed properly. The finding corroborates the finding of this study. The findings of the study showed that the participants' perceptions regarding the teaching classroom teaching practice, their cooperating (school) teachers, their supervisors and their host schools were generally positive.

The participants expressed their positive appreciation to the cooperating teachers, the academic supervisors, and the host schools who supported them during their school-based teaching practice. Likewise, the interview results regarding EFL trainee teachers' perceptions towards their cooperating teachers (school teachers) highly interrelated with the survey result. In other words, the results from the interview corroborated with the results from questionnaire.

The finding also recapitulates the central role of the cooperating teachers, particularly the school teaching mentors, to assist novice teachers to learn new pedagogies and socialize them into new professional norms (Rajuan et al., 2007; Hobson et al., 2009). Moreover, there was general agreement among trainee teachers that the school cooperating teachers imparted influential pedagogical advice and provided more emotional support because of the close interaction between them during the teaching practicum, as mirrored in the research literature (Huling-Austin, 1990; Smithey & Everton, 2003; Sommer & Dickstein, 2008).

All the trainee teachers, irrespective of their colleges, age, gender, self-rated English proficiency and sense of teaching readiness, wanted the school mentors (cooperating teachers) to get a more structured support. As indicated in the findings from both questionnaire and interview EFL trainee teachers have got sufficient support which later helped them to develop positive perceptions towards their cooperating teachers. This finding resonates with a number of studies in the field (Gratch, 2001; Merseth, Sommer, & Dickstein, 2008). In general, based on the findings from both the survey data and the interview data, it is possible to say that EFL trainee teachers had positive perceptions towards their school-Based teaching practice.

Similarly, the study was also intended to identify the perceptions differences between male and female students towards school-based teaching practice. The findings revealed that there was no difference in perceptions towards school-based teaching practice due to gender. This finding is harmonious with some previous studies which indicated that there were no perceptions differences between males and females EFL trainee teachers towards school-based English language teaching practice (Akram & Ghani, 2013; Zareian, Zangoei & Taghvaei, 2014). On the other hand, a few studies revealed that male EFL trainee teachers had more favorable perceptions towards school-based teaching practice than female EFL trainee teachers (Gajalakshmi, 2013; Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013). This implies, perceptions regarding gender varies under different contexts and circumstances.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to identify EFL trainee teachers' perceptions towards school-based teaching practice and to identify if there was a perception differences between male and female students. As indicated in the finding of this study, EFL trainee teachers' perceptions towards school-

based teaching practice laid aground for proper teaching practice.

Hence, there appears to be a need to enable pre-service EFL trainee teachers to expand the scope of their perceptions to broader grounds towards ethical, social, and contextual considerations. This will enable them to look at their experiences from critical perspectives rather than using knowledge solely to direct their practice for instrumental instructional delivery during their teaching practice. It is important for beginning teachers to realize that instructional decisions and educational practice are context bound. This can be achieved through deliberate inclusion of goals, purposes, values, and constraints of education. Therefore, EFL trainee teachers should keep and engage in teaching practice teachers to develop professional identity and to have all rounded development for their future carrier.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author professed no conflict of interest.

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