



Universidad Veracruzana



Dirección General de la Unidad de Estudios de Posgrado
Área Académica de Humanidades
Centro de Idiomas Veracruz

**Reporte del Proyecto Terminal de Aplicación Innovadora del
Conocimiento**

*CHALLENGES FACED BY NON-NATIVE EFL STUDENT TEACHERS FROM THE
UV ENGLISH BA PROGRAMME DURING THEIR PRACTICUM*

Que para obtener el grado de

MAESTRA EN ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

Presenta

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Realizado de manera colegiada por integrantes del Cuerpo Académico: Lenguas
Extranjeras: Enseñanza, Aprendizaje y Comunicación.

Línea de Generación y Aplicación del Conocimiento: Políticas
educativas-lingüísticas y diseño curricular en lenguas extranjeras en México.

Veracruz, Veracruz a 15 de octubre de 2018

Abstract

This study investigates the challenges that eleven non-native EFL Mexican student teachers experienced during a twelve-week teaching practicum carried out as part of their academic preparation in an English BA. The aim of this research was to answer the following questions: 1. What challenges do non-native EFL student teachers from the UV English BA programme face during their practicum? 2. What might contribute to these challenges faced by the participants, from both, their own perspective and the researcher's view? For the purpose of answering these questions, data was collected through observation, document review and interview methods. Results from the data analysed revealed that the three major challenges that preservice teachers face during their practicum are *classroom management and organisation, implementation of the teaching practice in real scenarios, and limited English proficiency*. The findings of this study could provide teacher educators and student teachers of English language degrees with better and more effective tools that could help them in the transition between the BA theoretical context and the real teaching situations found in the practicum and working field.

Key words: Challenges, EFL student teachers, non-native EFL student teachers, practicum.

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Introduction

The present report of a case study sought to contribute to the literature regarding the challenges that English teacher trainees in teacher education programmes face during their practicum, as well as the possible reasons behind these challenges.

This exploratory study also intends to address an existing gap in EFL teacher education research. Despite the noticeable amount of research on teacher learning and development in the general education field, there is scarce information regarding the practicum experiences undertaken by non-native EFL student teachers not only in Mexico but also around the world. This study is a replication-extension of Gan's research (2013), in which the author used a phenomenological case study to identify the difficulties that preservice ESL teachers faced during their teaching practicum as part of their Bachelor of Education in English Language in a university in Hong Kong.

Previous studies show that it is usual for student teachers to encounter different challenges when they face real teaching settings for the first time (Gan, 2013; Viafara, 2011; Phairee et al, 2008; Numrich 1996). Even if the challenges faced vary depending on different aspects such as school context, academic background, and the native or non-native status of the student teachers, a good number of student teachers find it difficult to implement the knowledge they have acquired in their teaching training.

It is for this reason that the present case study focuses on understanding both the challenges and the causes of those challenges faced by student teachers during their preservice teaching. Therefore, this study is an exploration and collection of eleven student teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding the challenges they face and the possible causes that trigger these difficulties in their practicum. More specifically, this case study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What challenges do non-native EFL student teachers from the UV English BA programme face during their practicum?

2. What might contribute to the challenges faced by the participants from both, their own perspective and the researcher's view?

In this document, chapter 1 sets this study in the context where it was applied. It describes the features of the English BA programme as well as the practicum.

Chapter 2 provides a thorough review of the literature related to ESL and EFL teacher education, the purpose and function of the practicum and all the previous studies that focus on the challenges that student teachers face during their practicum.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used, as well as the reasoning for the application of a qualitative approach in this phenomenological case study. The type of study, context and participants, along with the data collection instruments are also described in depth.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussions of the challenges identified, and their respective causes. Finally, chapter 5 draws conclusions, suggests future directions to pursue this research topic, and recapitulates on the study.

Chapter 1: Context and Focus

The context of this study was a twelve-week practicum that student teachers of an English Language BA programme from a Mexican public university performed as a requirement for their Teaching Practice course. In this section the features of the educational programme as well as the research topic and its objectives are described.

1.1 The English Language BA at the University of Veracruz

The School of Languages of the University of Veracruz (UV, hereafter) is in the city of Xalapa, Mexico. It offers three undergraduate language teaching degrees: English Language BA, French Language BA and an online English Teaching BA; and three graduate programmes: MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), MA in French Teaching and a PhD in Language Studies and Applied Linguistics.

The programme this case study focused on was the English Language BA, which includes two main goals in its mission statement. The first one is to prepare students to achieve a high English language proficiency level corresponding to the C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The second one is to provide students with the necessary training to develop professionally in areas related to education, translation or any other area in which English is the main tool such as administrative or touristic services.

The current curriculum of the English BA was implemented in 2008 under the name of Integral and Flexible Educational Model (MEIF for its Spanish acronym). The students pursuing this degree take five mandatory English courses, which are based on the level descriptors from the CEFR, in order to go from basic to proficient language levels. Apart from the general English courses and all the courses related to culture and Spanish language analysis, there are three core courses related to English language teaching: English Teaching and Learning, Current Methods and Approaches for English Teaching and Teaching Practice Planning.

1.2 The Practicum

In the Teaching Practice Planning subject, students have to carry out a preservice teaching experience during one school term in an educational institution of their choice. The place selected for practicum can be any school that is willing to receive preservice teachers, or a school that already has an agreement with the School of Languages for this activity.

The purpose of the teaching practicum, also known as preservice or practicum, is to enhance teaching preparation by allowing student teachers to put their knowledge in practice within a real educational scenario. Therefore, the school they attend must ensure that the student teacher gets assigned some hours within an existing class schedule, and that they receive all the support required from both, teachers and administrative staff, to properly perform their teaching duties.

The practicum lasted for twelve weeks and during this time the preservice teachers oversaw teaching English in a variety of contexts. They taught one or more groups in both public and private schools, including language centres. The language learners they worked with ranged from kindergarten children to college students. The teacher students worked under the supervision of the professor of the Teaching Practice course, and they were evaluated through three main components: teaching practice logs, lesson planning and a final reflective journal. The practice logs consisted of a weekly log in which they needed to write the activities implemented, the problems or constraints faced, and the recommendations given by their tutor during feedback sessions. The lesson planning criteria had to do with the weekly submission of all the lesson plans elaborated when teaching. The last evaluation type of evaluation was a reflective journal in the form of a 1000-word essay in which they made a detailed description of how the practicum helped them in their teaching development in relation to the things learnt, the problems faced, and the solutions implemented.

1.3 Objective of the study

This case study attempted to investigate the challenges that eleven non-native EFL Mexican student teachers experienced during a twelve-week teaching practicum carried out as

part of their academic preparation in an English Language Bachelor of Arts. The intention of investigating this topic was to obtain information that would allow a classification of the challenges faced as well as their possible source or reason.

There were two questions that this research intended to answer: *what challenges do non-native EFL student teachers from the UV English BA programme face during their practicum? And what might contribute to the challenges faced by the participants from both, their own perspective and the researcher's view?*

Based on the abovementioned questions, this case study served two purposes: the first one was to identify the challenges faced by non-native EFL student teachers from the University of Veracruz English BA programme during their Practicum; whereas the second one was to investigate the reasons that contributed to the appearance of those challenges.

The target readers of this study are professors and students of any English Teaching BA who could benefit from its findings in order to improve their teaching practice both as teacher educators and student teachers. The ultimate goal was to obtain and generate knowledge that could be integrated into the BA subjects related to teacher training and teaching practice, so that student teachers would raise awareness about the reality of the teaching scenario they might face during their practicum, in the first instance, and eventually, during their teaching practice when they start working.

1.4 Rationale

The present case study was based on the research made by Gan (2013), in which the author identified the challenges that preservice teachers of English as a Second Language faced during their practicum when pursuing a Bachelor of Education in English Language in the University of Hong Kong.

As shown in Gan's (2013) and Viafara's (2011) case studies, it is common that preservice teachers face different challenges when they are first exposed to real teaching scenarios. Although the challenges may vary depending on several aspects related to the school context and

the academic background of each student, this case study aims to fill a research gap by focusing on this particular issue in the Mexican context.

The intention of replicating and extending this study in a local context was to attain knowledge that could provide teacher educators and student teachers of English language degrees with better and more effective tools that could help them in the transition between the BA theoretical context and the real teaching situations found in the practicum and field of work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Past case studies have consistently shown that student teachers face challenges when they are first teaching real students (Gan, 2013; Viafara, 2011; Velez-Rendon, 2002). However, as Freeman and Johnson (1998) claim, the amount of literature on second language teacher education research is notoriously limited compared to the immense amount of texts related to language teaching and learning.

According to these authors, despite the constant increase of theoretical development of English language teaching and learning, little attention has been paid to the practical preparation of future language teachers.

2.1 The role of the practicum

As Farrell (2007) explains, the practicum has emerged as a common feature of ESL or EFL teacher preparation programs. During the practicum, student teachers are expected to apply, in real school contexts, all the theory and training previously acquired in their university education. Nevertheless, as Velez-Rendon (2002) claims, the practicum frequently becomes a complex process in which student teachers might exhibit anxiety regarding their teaching skills and strategies.

Carrying out the teaching practicum not only serves the purpose of allowing student teachers to put into practice their university-acquired knowledge, but it also functions as a way for them to confirm whether or not they have chosen the right career (Phairee et al., 2008). As Gonzalez and Fuentes (2011) point out, the practicum is an important feature in the process of teacher education and it represents an excellent opportunity for student teachers to learn about the teaching profession.

The practicum has been recognized as one of the most important features of the language teacher education programmes, and according to Richards and Crooks (as cited in Farrell, 2007) “many preservice teachers assume that they will be able to neatly translate what they have learned in their theory into practice” (p. 193), which seems not to be the case in real teaching

contexts. The practicum has also been described as a privileged space to analyse both the knowledge about teaching and the knowledge required for teaching, in order to reflect on what and how teachers know, how and who prepares them and how knowledge is spread from theory to practice (Gonzalez & Fuentes, 2011).

Student teachers, who carry out their practicum, have spent more time in the classroom as students than as teachers. In this regard, Farrell (2007) claims that these experiences could be more influential on how information on teaching is integrated into classroom practices during their preservice teaching than what they have been exposed to in the language teacher education up to that point. The formal preparation that student teachers receive in their training courses may not match with the actual challenges that the real teaching context or setting demands. This situation leads preservice teachers to disregard the teaching theory studied in their BA, and to look for shelter in the teaching practice routines observed as language learners. According to Gonzalez and Fuentes (2011), this helps them mitigate the worries and difficulties faced in the classroom. Numrich (1996), who was a pioneer researcher regarding the difficulties ESL student teachers face during their practicum, also identified, from the student teachers' perspective, this disconnection between theoretical knowledge and real teaching practice by claiming that "what we may think novice teachers need to learn as they first set out to teach and what they see as most relevant to their needs may be two different things" (p. 137).

This idea of the interaction between the practicum and the knowledge obtained by student teachers during their teacher preparation courses is also mentioned by Stoyhoff (1999), who proposed the first integrated TESOL practicum model in the United States. He considers that with the purpose of preparing self-aware and skilful teachers who can perform an effective teaching practice, the academic and field experiences must be interrelated and complementary parts of a whole, in which ESL or EFL students simultaneously engage.

According to Stoyhoff (1999) there are five main features of a TESOL practicum. First, the practicum needs to be integrated into an academic programme. Second, the practicum highlights a team approach which includes the collaboration of mentor teachers, university supervisors, language programme coordinators and student teachers. As a third characteristic, the practicum

is expected to provide intensive modelling and coaching, which is closely related to the fourth feature that entails the integration of systematic observation in an extensive way. Finally, the practicum experience has to be evaluated through student teachers' portfolios which show their cumulative development during the practicum.

As Velez-Rendon (2002) claims, the abovementioned characteristics of a TESOL practicum described by Stoyhoff match the two core approaches to second/foreign language teacher education. The first approach has to do with promoting the familiarization of prospective teachers with classroom techniques and skills; the second approach relates to fostering an environment where the student teachers can develop their own ideology of foreign language teaching in order to reflect on their own learning-to-teach processes.

Although the relevance of the teaching practicum stage is recognized in ESL/EFL teacher education programmes, reviews of literature on second/foreign language teaching and learning by Freeman (2002) and Chiang (2008) indicate that there is a lack of research specifically concerning the beliefs and experiences of student teachers regarding the challenges they face during their practicum, as well as their opinion about the causes that may trigger those challenges.

2.2 Prior studies

Some of the papers on this topic are case studies, which focus on the importance of the practicum on the teaching education process of ESL or EFL student teachers. As well, there is some specific research concerning the challenges that student teachers face when performing their preservice teaching or practicum. Most of the qualitative studies on ESL/EFL student teachers' practicum experience have been carried out by using the narrative inquiry as a data collection method. They have been conceived as part of a phenomenological case study approach, which enables the emphasis on the subjects' perceptions and beliefs, along with the meanings they construct from the phenomena under scrutiny.

In the same vein, Gonzalez and Fuentes (2011) carried out a case study in the field of general education in Spain, titled *Practicum in the Learning of Teaching Professionals*. In their conclusions they observe two main points: firstly, the professional knowledge that student

teachers gain through the practicum is an ideal framework to evaluate the integration of both, academic and practical knowledge. Secondly, future teachers face the complexity of learning to teach during the practicum because that is the moment when they experience the challenge to merge their preconceptions about teaching with the knowledge acquired in their teaching training programme and with the practical knowledge observed from their teachers. These three convergent elements need to be harmonized while paying attention to the requirements of the teaching environment they are immersed in. The former makes it a challenging task for preservice teachers with little or no experience as educators.

Another interesting case study related to the practicum in an EFL environment was carried out by Phairee et al. (2008), who examined an EFL practicum in Thailand. Three settings were observed: the first one was a four-year BA programme that offers an additional period for teaching practice; the second one was a regular BA programme at a public university, and the last one was a short TESOL certification course targeted at foreign people who wanted to become EFL teachers.

In their research, Phairee et al. (2008) point out that the most commonly mentioned difficulties during the practicum have to do with the student teacher's anxiety about their limited English skills and the large class sizes they encounter; although, as a positive feature, they are usually satisfied with the help provided by their classroom supervisors and with the amount of time dedicated to lesson planning and preparation. Other important findings from their study were that students seemed to enjoy teaching in both contexts, with and without the close supervision of expert teachers, but they believed that too much of either is counterproductive for their teaching development. Also, teacher students would normally prefer practical feedback on their teaching performance from the classroom teacher-supervisors than theoretical knowledge from the university supervisors. This finding relates to the previously mentioned lack of connection that student teachers perceive between the theory studied in their programme and the teaching practice carried out in real school contexts.

Viáfara (2011) also carried out a case study aiming to understand how student teachers in Colombia face the specific challenge of using English as the language for instruction in public

school classrooms. In relation to the struggle of using English in class and developing learners' motivation, Viáfara (2011) states that student teachers face the challenge of using English to communicate with their students in class as some of them believed that the learners would only understand if Spanish were used for giving instructions or explanations. According to the participants in the study, when using only English, they felt lost and consequently their interest and motivation in class might fade away.

An additional relevant case study was conducted by Numrich (1996), who carried out an analysis with novice ESL teachers undertaking a practicum course in a TESOL master's degree programme in a public university of the United States. He found out that other common challenges faced by these student teachers in their preservice were: time management, giving clear directions, responding to students' needs, grammar teaching, and assessing students' learning. In this study, the participants did not mention the use of English language as a challenge because the study was conducted in a native English-speaking context. However, it is important to notice that most of the challenges that novice teachers deal with are similar regardless of their academic level and background.

2.3 The original study

The original case study, from which the present research is a replication and extension, was carried out at a public university in Hong Kong by Zhendong Gan in 2013, under the title *Learning to Teach English Language in the Practicum: What Challenges do Non-Native ESL Student Teachers Face?* In his study, Gan investigated the challenges that sixteen non-native preservice teachers from a Bachelor of Education in English Language programme experienced during an eight-week teaching practicum.

His case study collected qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and reflective journals of the sixteen student teachers, with the purpose of obtaining a detailed description of the participants' perceptions of their field-based practicum experiences. As in this study, Gan's research attempted to answer two research questions: the first one had to do with the challenges that a group of non-native preservice ESL student teachers experienced during the teaching

practicum; and the second one related to the possible issues that contributed to the challenges experienced by the participants. In his findings, Gan (2013) states that the practicum was characterized by the difficulties student teachers experienced in implementing practices they had learnt in their coursework as well as by their lack of classroom management strategies. As the researcher mentions, “this reality shock could destabilize the already anxious student teachers and have adverse effects well beyond the eight-week teaching practicum” (p. 92).

The challenges these ESL student teachers faced were largely related to the use of innovative teaching practices, learning motivation, classroom management, discipline problems, and using English as the language for instruction and communication. According to Gan (2013), when the practicum started most of the student teachers, after having spent more than three years with theoretical preparation, felt properly equipped to teach. However, after the first few days, they realized that it was difficult for them to put into practice the teaching methods and theory they had learnt, and simultaneously deal with the amount of workload that lesson planning meant, especially if they had a class with discipline issues. Certainly, Gan’s findings coincide with the results from the different case studies mentioned above. Thus, we can infer that student teachers seem to face similar challenges during their practicum regardless of their academic background, location and school context.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this section, the research method used, as well as the context of the research and the participants of the study are described.

3.1 Research Design

In order to select the appropriate methodology for this research project, three aspects were taken into consideration: the topic of investigation, the aim of the research project, and the type of data to be collected. For this reason, the phenomenological case study design was chosen because it is a suitable approach to obtain knowledge regarding not only the subjects' beliefs, opinions and perspectives, but also the reasoning behind the problems encountered.

According to Merriam (as cited in Gan, 2013), a case is “a phenomenon that is inherently bounded, with a finite amount of time for data collection or a limited number of people who could be interviewed or observed” (p. 97). The focus given to this research topic perfectly fits with a case study because its length was determined by the duration of the preservice practicum.

As Creswell (2014) explains, a case study approach allows the researcher to gather information from different data collection instruments and sources. Therefore, by using this approach, I was able to obtain specific and detailed information about the group, consisting of eleven students, which allowed me to study these participants as a whole. Hayes (2000) mentions that educational case studies mainly use typical representatives of groups, but they may also provide information on the unique features of particular individuals. Although the participants in this research are classified as a group case study, they could also be analysed as a person case study if further information was required

As Richards (2003) mentions, a qualitative approach has the advantage of being a person-centred task and it is therefore particularly appropriate in the field of language teaching. The intention of performing this case study was to generate knowledge based on the experiences and views that student teachers have about the challenges they faced during their practicum.

According to Nunan (2010), case studies involve selecting an instance from all the possible objects and phenomena to investigate, and they are a frequently-used approach in second language acquisition research. Along the same lines, Shulman (1992) describes them as a third-person narration which portrays the observations made on the given topic. He also states that case studies can be either registered or displayed events or a set of occasions with the boundaries delimited.

Besides the great advantage that case studies provide when researching about perspectives or documenting events, they also have a pedagogical value. As stated by Shulman (1992) “cases and case methods are employed to teach (1) principles or concepts of a theoretical nature, (2) precedents for practice, (3) morals or ethics, (4) strategies, dispositions and habits of mind, and (5) visions or images of the possible” (p.2). Taking Shulman’s statement into account, the value of the present case study is related to “precedents for practice” and “visions or images of the possible”, because the knowledge obtained from the experience of eleven student teachers could function as a precedent to other people immersed in the field of English language teaching. Furthermore, teacher educators could take advantage of this knowledge to set the basis for a possible improvement plan in English Language Teaching degrees not only for their own benefit, but also to improve the student teachers’ academic performance.

3.2 Context

This study was carried out in a group of the four-year Bachelor of Arts in English Language Programme from the School of Languages of the University of Veracruz. The curriculum of this programme was introduced in 2008 and comprises General Education, Discipline Studies (e.g., English language courses, Spanish and English comparative linguistics, English literature, English culture, grammar, phonology, among others) and Professional Studies targeted to teaching and translation (e.g., language learning theories, EFL teaching methodology, teaching practice, translation and advanced literature courses).

In this programme, the students take a mandatory course named Teaching Practice Planning, which requires them to carry out a twelve-week preservice practicum as part of their

coursework assessment. The practicum can be done at the school of their choice and it is intended as a platform for students to accomplish two goals: to put into practise the knowledge acquired during the previous courses and to develop awareness of the English language teaching and learning in either public or private schools at any educational level from kindergarten to university in Mexico. That is, the purpose of the practicum is to provide student teachers with a link to a real teaching context where they can practise their language teaching skills in front of a group under the supervision of classroom teachers and the professor in charge of the Teaching Practice Planning course. The twelve-week teaching practicum is performed during the third year of their degree and it is directly linked to previous subjects such as language learning theories, EFL teaching methodology and assessment.

3.3 Participants

The participants of this study were eleven student teachers, who spoke Spanish as their native tongue, and were enrolled in an English Language BA programme at a Mexican university. Nine out of the eleven participants were female. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants, except for those student teachers who stated, in the consent form, that their given names could appear on the paper.

At the moment when the present case study took place, all participants were in the fifth semester of their degree and they had been trained in English language with an emphasis on EFL teaching. Their English BA programme mainly focused on English language and culture during the first two years of the curriculum, and afterwards, they took subjects specialized in English language teaching as well as courses related to literature and translation.

Once the purpose and procedure of this study had been explained, all the students signed a consent form to participate in the three stages of data collection: interview, class observation and submission of their reflective journal, which functioned as document review. All participants completed the interview and reflective journals, but only six of them were randomly selected to be observed during two sessions of their practicum.

3.4 Data collection instruments

As mentioned before, the present research is a phenomenological case study with a focus on qualitative data. As Burns (2010) claims, qualitative data collection requires direct interaction with the participants either on a personal basis or within a group. For this reason, the data collection methods chosen were observation, interview and document review. For each method, one instrument was created in order to obtain as much data as possible, and with the intention to triangulate the information gathered.

In the original case study by Gan (2013), only two data collection instruments were used: a semi-structured interview and a reflective journal. However, this case study integrated class observation as an additional tool to further explore the challenges that student teachers faced from an observer's perspective.

Data was collected during the twelve-week practicum, in a schedule arranged with the student teachers and based on their teaching hours and availability. In the following sections, each method and instrument are described separately.

3.4.1 The class observation log

The first type of data collection was the non-participant observation, through a class observation log. Durepos, Mills and Wiebe (2010) state that non-participant observation refers to observing subjects without actively participating in the setting and it is used to understand a phenomenon by accessing the community studied, while remaining apart from the activities under observation. As Liu and Maitlis (2010) mention, non-participant observation is frequently applied along with other data collection methods, and it can offer "a more nuanced and dynamic appreciation of situations that cannot be as easily captured through other methods" (p. 610).

Only six out of the eleven participants were randomly selected to be observed in two different teaching sessions, with a timespan of three weeks between the first and the second observation. The first observation was carried out in the fourth week of their practicum, whereas the second one was done on the seventh week, closer to the end of their preservice teaching.

With the purpose of scheduling the class observations, student teachers were required to confirm the session with the observer one week in advance. This means that in both class observations, the participants knew beforehand when the observation would take place, so that they could ask for permission from the administrative staff of the school they were teaching at and make all necessary arrangements. Furthermore, the researcher was also in charge of asking for the necessary authorizations in advance.

The class observation log was created as a simple and flexible format in which the observer could register all the information collected using both descriptive and focused observation. As Liu and Maitlis (2010) claim, “in a descriptive observation, researchers carry out broad scope observation to get an overview of the setting while in focused observation they start to pay attention to a narrower portion of the activities that most interest them” (p. 612).

Based on these two types of observation, in the paper-based class observation log ([Appendix A](#)) the aspects: class profile, school environment, lesson planning, and class development, along with the student teacher’s language performance are part of the descriptive observation. This gave space to the focused observation of the challenges that the student teachers seemed to be facing during their class session as well as the possible reasons for their occurrence. That is to say, the observation mainly paid attention to both the student teachers’ and the learners’ behaviour and performance.

For the purpose of collecting information from the observation in the most accurate and complete possible way, the class observation log was filled in throughout the class, and as soon as the class ended I recorded any further comments based on the notes taken.

3.4.2 The semi-structured interview

For this case study, the data collection started with the class observation of 6 randomly selected participants, and it was followed by a semi-structured interview done to all the eleven student teachers. As Schmidt (2004) mentions, semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation in order to allow the researchers to develop a better understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful questions.

According to Richards (2003), in a qualitative interview the researcher needs to go deeper and to pursue comprehension in all its forms regardless how complex or elusive the communication can be; and to obtain this, it is necessary to establish a relationship with the participants with the purpose of understanding their perception of the context studied.

Particularly related to semi-structured interview, Given (2008) defines it as a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. She also claims that the advantages of using this type of interviews are: on the one hand that the researcher has more control over the topics of the interview than in unstructured interviews; and on the other hand, the research themes can be expanded as much as needed, in contrast to what occurs in structured interviews. Therefore, a semi-structured qualitative interview was selected as a research instrument with the purpose of obtaining a first-hand description of the perceptions and beliefs that each student teacher had regarding the challenges faced and their possible origin. The justification and validity of carrying out this semi-structured interview to eleven participants are based on the fact that these student teachers are a representative sample of the context of this case study: EFL student teachers from the English Language BA carrying out their practicum. As Patton (2015) explains, a sample is any part of the fully defined population and to make accurate inferences, the sample has to be representative. Thus, a representative sample is one in which each and every member of the population has an equal and mutually exclusive chance of being selected.

The semi-structured interview guide ([Appendix B](#)) contained nineteen questions divided into the following four topics: school context; expectations and school environment; difficulties encountered throughout the practicum, and lastly, academic preparation and ways to overcome challenges. The first topic mainly contained open questions and its purpose was to obtain as much background information as possible about the school where the practicum was carried out. On the other hand, the next three topics were open questions, which mainly required the description of events, by using a lead question along with multiple probe questions used or dismissed according to the answers given. The interviews were conducted in a one to one basis to the eleven participants, and all of them were recorded and had an estimated duration of 50 to 60 minutes

each. They were scheduled three weeks in advance based on the availability of the participants; and with the purpose of creating a friendly atmosphere for the participants so that this encouraged them to have a more direct interaction with the interviewer, they took place in a small café near the School of Languages.

The interview guide was written in English and it was originally planned to be carried out in English due to the expected proficiency level of all the participants. However, at the beginning of the interview they were given the option to be interviewed in the language of their preference, English or Spanish. The majority of them answered in English but some of them expressed to feel more comfortable using their native language. During the interview, notes of the participants' most relevant answers were taken along with the audio recording. The participants were informed that follow-up emails or phone calls might be made later on, in case any part of their interview needed to be retaken or expanded.

3.4.3 The reflective journal

The last method of data collection applied was document review. According to Anderson and Carden (as cited in Bretschneider & Cirilli, 2017), it is defined as a way of collecting data by reviewing existing documents which may be internal or external to a program or organization; besides, reviewing documents is useful for answering basic evaluation questions related to the perceptions of participants. Documents may be hard copy or electronic and may include reports, program logs, performance ratings, essays, letters, funding proposals, meeting minutes or any other form of writing.

Document review was successfully included in this case study by using, as an instrument for data collection, the electronic copy of the reflective journal (in English) that student teachers are required to submit as part of the assessment criteria for the Teaching Practice Planning subject ([Appendix C](#)). This reflective journal is a 1000-word essay in which they make a detailed description of how the practicum helped them in their teaching development with regard to what they have learnt, the problems faced, and the solutions implemented.

Bailey, Curtis and Nunan (2001) define reflective journals as “a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries later on analysed for recurring patterns or salient events” (p. 124). The purpose of using a self-reflective journal is to identify issues or challenges that occur in class in order to carry out a self-analysis which might lead to actions to overcome such difficulties. The advantages of keeping a journal were summarized by Richards and Lockhart (1996) who claim that journals can increase the teacher’s knowledge of the way he or she teaches, and they serve as a source of questions and hypotheses about teaching while offering direct record of classroom events and experiences which is undisturbed by an outside observer.

As mentioned before, this instrument of data collection already existed because it is part of the evaluation system for the course. However, before the beginning of the course, the professor in charge of this subject allowed a few changes in the reflective journal guideline that would be given to the student teachers. Four questions, fully related to the research objectives of this case study, were added, and the amount of words to write in that specific section of the paper was expanded from 500 to 700.

These modifications to the reflective journal guidelines enabled the researcher to obtain more meaningful information from the document review, because the participants focused a good part of their essay on the challenges encountered and the reasons of such challenges, according to them. The reflective journals were written by the student teachers in the last week of the course, immediately after the end of their practicum, and they were submitted electronically to their professor and to me.

To recapitulate, three methods of data collection were used, and one instrument was created for each of these methods: the first method was observation with a class observation log; the second one was interview through a semi-structured interview guide; and lastly, document review in the form of reflective journals written by the participants.

3.5 Data analysis

Once the data collection procedures had been completed, the analysis of the data obtained from all three instruments was analysed through two types of methods by using an open-coding system. The analysis process is described below.

3.5.1 Triangulation in qualitative research

As mentioned before, the instruments for data collection in the present case study are: a class observation log, a semi-structured interview and a reflective journal collected from each of the eleven participants.

Based on the number of instruments used, and the sources of the information obtained, it was decided that triangulation was a suitable method for completing the data analysis. Triangulation is defined by Cresswell (2014) as a strategy to ensure internal validity used in qualitative research that involves cross-checking multiple data sources and collection procedures to evaluate the extent to which all evidence converges.

According to Patton (1999), triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods and data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. With regard to the teaching area, Elliot & Adelman (as cited in Hopkins, 1993) describe triangulation as a technique that involves gathering accounts of a teaching situation from three different perspectives; which in a school context could normally be the teacher, the pupils and an observer.

As Patton (2015) claims, triangulation enables to assure the validity of research through the application of a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic, which involves different types of samples as well as methods of data collection. However, the purpose of triangulation is not necessarily to cross-validate data, but rather to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon. In the same vein, Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation: (a) methods triangulation, (b) analyst triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) triangulation of sources. From these four types, the methods triangulation and the triangulation of sources were the most suitable for understanding the findings achieved from analysing the data of this case study.

Patton (2015) describes methods triangulation as the use of multiple instruments of data collection about the same topic which is frequently used in qualitative studies as it may include interviews, observation and field notes. On the other hand, triangulation of sources involves the collection of data from different types of people, including individuals, groups, families and communities, to gain multiple perspectives and validation of data. Accordingly, as it has been mentioned, this case study includes three instruments of data collection (observation, interview and document review) from two different types of people (preservice teachers and observer).

3.5.2 Open-coding for data analysis

As Coffey & Atkinson (2013) claim, the analysis of qualitative data start with the identification of key themes or patterns and this depends on data coding processes. They define Coding as the process of generating concepts from and with our data in which big amounts of information is condensed into analysable units by creating categories.

Richards (2003) states that there are three different types of coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. For the purpose of analysing the data collected in this case study, open coding was used because it enables breaking down the data in order to categorise, conceptualise and compare it. Open coding is a process that involves: (1) breaking down data into discrete parts, (2) examining these parts closely and comparing them for similarities and differences and (3) asking questions about the phenomena by comparing and contrasting. (Richards, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

Due to the fact that the purpose of analysing data collected throughout three instruments is to look for convergent ideas and discrepancies between the observer's field notes and the participants' spoken and written comments, the best way to identify categories was through the use of open codes generated during the first reviews that focused on labelling and classifying the data collected.

By using triangulation and open-coding, the data analysis process was carried out by following these steps: first, the data obtained from each of the three instruments was separately categorised and set into broad clusters based on their topic similarities; second, this

categorisation through open-coding allowed to make a narrower division into themes and subthemes of the data that appeared across all the instruments used; third, a triangulation was made between all the data collection instruments to make a comparison that enabled to refine the categories by supporting them with a theoretical framework.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In this chapter the findings and their corresponding discussion, including the triangulation of the three instruments of data collection used, are described. The findings, along with their evidences and further comments on them, are presented hierarchically based on the frequency with which each of the categorised challenges appeared.

As explained in the former chapter, after considerable revision and refinement, the open codes that emerged during the data analysis were subsequently clustered into broader subcategories (subthemes) and categories (themes) which are supported by a theoretical framework, as well as by evidence from the data. The preliminary analysis of the data revealed three major themes, which arose from grouping their corresponding subthemes and are included in parenthesis here. That is to say, the answer to the first research question “*what challenges do non-native EFL student teachers from the UV English BA programme face during their practicum?*” is that preservice teachers face three major types of challenges (themes): 1) Classroom management and organisation (classroom management techniques and school-related issues); 2) Implementation of the previous teaching practice into real scenarios (teaching techniques and teaching training at the BA and the practicum); 3) Limited English proficiency from both the student teachers and the learners (language in use).

As abovementioned, each of the themes comprises subthemes that emerged from the open codes after processing the data. The findings from each major challenge and the answer to the second research question “*what might contribute to the challenges faced by the participants from both, their own perspective and the researcher’s view?*” will be analysed together below.

4.1 Classroom management and organisation

The challenge that was more frequently mentioned and clearly identified throughout the study was *classroom management and organisation*. Classroom management is described by Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering (2003), as the actions and strategies teachers use to solve the problem of order in classrooms; effective teachers also use rules, procedures, and routines to ensure that students are actively involved in learning.

Based on the observer’s field notes, most of the participants who were observed during two sessions of their practicum struggled with classroom management and organisation. This issue was also mentioned by some of the student teachers in both the interview and the reflective journal.

This theme arose from the merge of the subthemes *classroom management techniques* and *school related issues*. Retaking the second research question mentioned above, based on the data from both, the observer’s and the participants’ view, it is noticed that the two factors that might have contributed to the appearance of this first challenge are *lack of classroom management strategies and procedures (4.1.1)*, and *students’ behaviour (4.1.2)*. Further evidence of these probable causes will be presented individually through a triangulation of extracts taken from the class observation log, the semi-structured interview and the reflective journal, respectively. Within the extracts, the following codes will be used: SS-students, Tr-Teacher and ST- student teacher.

4.1.1 Lack of classroom management strategies and procedures.

During the data analysis stage, the following open codes, closely linked to the lack of classroom management strategies and procedures, appeared: ineffective seating arrangement, rapport between the student teachers and their students, and student teacher’s confidence to oversee the group. For instance, participant #3 has a noticeable struggle with classroom management possibly originated by her lack of strategies or procedures to be in control of the group.

Class observation log	Semi-structured interview	Reflective journal
<p>“Some SS are not facing the board due to the seating arrangement and at least 4 of them can’t look at the front. The ST has to move from the back to the front of the class multiple times to show her laptop screen to all SS”.</p> <p>1st class observation March 27th, 2017</p>	<p>“The home Tr suggested me to make changes in my presentation style and to always tell students to pay attention but sometimes the home Tr goes out and leaves me alone.”</p>	<p>“I had some problems in some occasions because the students did not pay attention to my classes. It was that way because my classes did not give them any grade like other subjects do, so they were only worried about those exams”.</p>

As it can be read from the extracts above, based on the class observation and the information obtained in the interview, there was an issue with getting students' attention when teaching. On the observer's notes this issue is apparently caused by a poor seating arrangement, whereas in the interview it was mentioned that the home teacher advised the student teacher (participant) to improve her presentation techniques by making sure that all students are attentive to her class. However, from the participant's perception, the students' lack of attention comes from the fact that English is an extracurricular subject and for this reason some students do not show interest in her class.

The development of classroom management strategies and procedures by teachers usually comes after sufficient exposure and training, and it plays a key role in the teaching practice. In essence, teachers use management not to control student behaviour, but to influence and direct it, in a constructive manner, to set the stage for instruction (McLeod, Fisher, & Hoover, 2003).

Facing the challenge of classroom management and organisation is not exclusive of preservice teachers. According to Sokal, Smith, & Mowat (2003), both novice and experienced teachers consider classroom management to be a high priority and an area of concern. Taking into account previous case studies on the same topic (Gan, 2013; Viafara, 2011; Velez-Rendon, 2002), it can be confirmed that classroom management is indeed a challenge faced by most student teachers regardless their teaching context.

4.1.2 Students' behaviour

Another finding repeatedly detected in a good number of teaching sessions is misbehaviour from the pupils, which usually gets worse because the student teachers do not seem to know how to deal with it. These open codes found during data analysis relate to students' behaviour: disruptive behaviour, lack of participation and class interruptions. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Farrell (2007) claims that the formal preparation that student teachers receive in their training courses does not match with the actual challenges that the real teaching context or setting demands and student behaviour is one of the topics that are not usually covered in TEFL training courses.

This is the case documented on participant #4 who carried out her practicum in a highly disruptive public High School class:

Class observation log	Semi-structured interview	Reflective journal
<p>“SS being disruptive, not paying attention. ST is clearly not confident to be in front of the group, most SS don’t seem to respect or care, they even check if the home Tr is looking at them before doing something bad such as leaving their seat, talking, playing or ignoring the student teacher” 1st class observation March 29th, 2017</p>	<p>“I feel frustrated because the SS were disruptive and disrespectful... I just wanted my (practicum) hours to end because it was too stressful, all the groups had the same behaviour and I was frustrated due to the bullying and I feel angry.”</p>	<p>“...it was difficult to get the SS’ attention, they do not pay attention as they are playing and talking with their classmates. I could feel how teachers feel when they give classes, it is not easy, it’s really hard. I had never thought that being a teacher were a hard job”.</p>

As we can notice on the evidence provided above, the student teacher mentions feelings of frustration and anger which were reflected in the class observation through her lack of confidence, and on the reflective journal where she claims to currently feel empathy for the teachers’ struggle regarding student behaviour. According to Tang (2002), teaching and interacting with students who have low motivation to learn and behaviour issues require a high level of expertise to handle classroom management problems. The author also mentions that when student teachers fail to find appropriate ways to manage this kind of classes, they may have feelings of frustration.

It is important to notice that five out of the six teachers observed had difficulties dealing with students’ misbehaviour. On the contrary, as some of the participants commented, when they have a well-behaved and motivated class, they are able to concentrate on teaching instead of investing time and effort in disciplinary issues.

For instance, participant #5, who did her practicum at a private language centre and had only 3 students in her class, did not face any noticeable classroom management issues as stated below:

Class observation log	Semi-structured interview	Reflective journal
<p>“SS are very participative, they are attentive to the class and seem engaged in the activities” 1st class observation from March 27th, 2017</p> <p>“SS are paying attention and are very participative and knowledgeable” 2nd class observation April 26th, 2017</p>	<p>“Students are friendly; they see me as a teacher and as a friend.”</p>	<p>“The students of the English courses are very enthusiastic to learn... most of them enjoy the classes. I enjoyed my experience teaching in this school”.</p>

Undeniably, based on these two different scenarios of students’ behaviour, it can be understood that learners’ positive or negative behaviour can have an impact on the teaching practice of student teachers who have not developed the proper techniques to address misbehaviour in class.

4.2 Implementation of the previous teaching practice

The second more frequently addressed challenge was the struggle from the student teachers to implement the techniques they had learnt into real teaching scenarios. This theme appears from the fusion of two subthemes: *teaching techniques* and *teaching training at the BA and the practicum*.

Therefore, the answer to the second research question of what might contribute to the appearance of this challenge is founded on two issues: insufficient teaching training and experience, and a gap between theoretical knowledge and praxis. These two causes will be presented separately through a triangulation of extracts along with theoretical references.

4.2.1 Insufficient teaching training and experience

As stated in the literature review, student teachers who carry out their practicum have spent more time in the classroom as students than as student teachers (Farrell, 2007). This issue is reflected on the open codes related to insufficient teaching training and experience, because

student teachers had difficulty with the following teaching features: instruction giving, lesson planning, presentation techniques and error correction strategies.

This lack of experience and teaching training is shown in the case of participant #4, who seemed to struggle with instruction giving and presentation techniques. Her practicum was carried out in a High School under the supervision of the classroom teacher.

Class observation log	Semi-structured interview	Reflective journal
<p>“ST doesn’t seem to know how to present a topic. Her class is based only on book exercises explained and answered in Spanish. She only focused on those SS paying attention and did not try to integrate all the class during instruction giving” 2nd class observation April 25th, 2017</p>	<p>“When I started to teach in front of the group with the class teacher there, I didn’t know what to do. I got so nervous that I couldn’t explain the topics, and I somehow expected SS not to understand and to get confused.”.</p>	<p>“During the making lesson plans process I felt insecure about the activities, I did not believe if that activities will be good for the topic, but by request of the teacher I had to work with the workbook in all my classes.”</p>

As Johnson & Freeman (2001) explain, it is important to consider, within the theoretical framework of language teacher education, how individuals learn to teach, and the complex factors, influences, and processes that contribute to their teaching. The impact of considering the individual needs of student teachers is seen in the case of participant #6 who had a more successful practicum experience because the private language centre where she taught would provide her with feedback, training and a punctual follow-up to her teaching practice.

Class observation log	Semi-structured interview	Reflective journal
<p>“ST is part of a team-teaching technique with a more experienced teacher and they take turns to be in front of the group. Overall there is a good instruction giving and topics explanation”. 1st class observation March 27th, 2017</p>	<p>“The school is well-organised, and I receive feedback when I teach. I am learning to make better lesson plans because at school I learnt to make them with 1 skill only, but in reality I have to use all skills plus activities and pictures”.</p>	<p>“One of their policies is that the teacher must be dynamic and help SS to learn while having fun. The teachers have access to games and materials for the classroom and they also design activities for their classes and print them there at school. Through this term teaching, I have learned a lot of things. I learnt that it is very important to give instructions as clear as possible, now I know that I must speak loudly and moreover I learnt that the teacher always must plan the class.”</p>

The case presented above relates to one of the statements in chapter 2, in which Gonzalez and Fuentes (2011) point out that the practicum is a very important feature in the process of teacher education and that it represents an excellent opportunity for student teachers to learn about the teaching profession. Also, as Velez-Rendon (2002) claims, the practicum frequently becomes a complex process in which student teachers might show concerns regarding their teaching skills and strategies. These ideas were expressed by the participant on both, her interview and her reflective journal, by sharing that her current teaching knowledge was not sufficient and that she had learnt new techniques and strategies to improve her teaching practice such as lesson planning and instruction giving.

4.2.2 Gap between theoretical knowledge and praxis

As previously mentioned in the literature review chapter, facing challenges during the practicum regarding how to make a smooth transition between theory and praxis is a common ground among student teachers (Gonzalez & Fuentes, 2011; Numrich, 1996; Stoyloff, 1999). The open codes that emerged on this topic were: excessive use of Spanish for instruction, little use of a student-centred approach, the realisation that the principle of English-only policy is not feasible, and lack of motivation from the student teacher.

As Johnson (1999) states, during the practicum most student teachers frequently show lack of enthusiasm as this positive feature turns into complaints regarding the realities that seem to be beyond their control. Evidence from participant #4 shows disappointment about the fact that she was not allowed to implement her own teaching activities, as she was required by the home teacher to exclusively follow the book provided.

Class observation log	Semi-structured interview	Reflective journal
<p>“English and its Spanish translation are used for instruction giving, monitoring and explanation most of the time. It appears that the ST is not following any language learning methodology or approach.”</p> <p>1st class observation March 29th, 2017</p>	<p>“I couldn’t teach because SS would take advantage of me maybe due to the short age difference.”</p> <p>“I started to avoid SS who were disrespectful, I talked to the home Tr about it and she talked to the group,</p>	<p>“During my teaching practice I felt it was too difficult to get SS’ attention. For lesson plans I had to do what the teacher asked, and I could only teach 6 topics but not evaluate them because the teacher was</p>

<p>“The presentation and explanation focused only on those SS paying attention, ST tried to integrate other SS twice, but she stopped trying. The ST is apparently using a very teacher-centred approach with extensive teacher talking time” 2nd class observation April 25th, 2017</p>	<p>things cooled down but then got worse.” “I tried to use suggestopedia and I think it worked for some of them but the Tr didn’t allow me to use it as she wanted me to follow the book only.”</p>	<p>in charge of the scoring criteria. I think that SS didn’t see me as a real teacher even when I was in front of the group alone.”</p>
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Based on the previous evidence, we can understand that student teachers often struggle to implement what they learnt at school mainly because their real teaching scenario (praxis) differs from what they studied in their BA (theory and practice). Johnson (2006) claims that this situation is clearly identified and ever since the mid-1980s there have been relevant efforts to improve teacher education on the field of theory/practice to praxis. This has led cognitive learning theories and information-processing models to shift the focus of research to questions about what teachers actually know, how they use that knowledge, and what impact their decisions have on their instructional practices. However, despite these new perspectives on how teachers can learn to teach better, teacher education continues to focus on content knowledge and teaching practices, while teachers are thought of as decision makers and are expected to benefit from making their knowledge and decisions explicit.

4.3 Limited English proficiency

The third challenge has to do with the barrier that the proficiency level of English language sets for teaching and communication within the classroom. The probable cause of this challenge appears to be only one: the limited English proficiency from both the student teachers and the learners. On the student teachers’ side, their language skills prevented them from carrying out a meaningful class in the target language, whereas on the students’ side it was either their limited/inexistent English knowledge connected to an apparent lack of interest in the target language. Language in use as the cause of the third challenge is observed on the open codes that emerged on this topic: language errors from the student teacher, students’ language level is lower than expected and students’ reluctance to learn English.

With regard to the limited English proficiency from the student teachers, Shin (2008) explains that it has been assumed that the self-image of non-native ESL student teachers is affected by their English language level, which also has an influence on their teaching practice. During the class observation sessions, it was common to spot some grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation errors made by the student teachers. However, it is important to notice that none of the eleven participants acknowledged that their language skills needed improvement, and most of them blamed the students' language level as the cause of their frequent use of Spanish throughout the class. This is the reason why the data collected from their statements on both the interview and reflective journal varies significantly from the data obtained during the class observation sessions.

The data also indicated that some student teachers experienced difficulty in speaking English as the main language to be used for instruction giving, class presentation or any further explanation. For instance, during the interviews, 6 out of the 11 student teachers preferred to use Spanish so that they could feel comfortable when expressing their ideas and those who tried to use English only, had to code switch to Spanish when further explanation was required.

This issue with language proficiency was also noticeable during their teaching sessions as most of them would actually switch to Spanish in order to provide clear instructions or coherent explanations of language points (see table below). Grammar and lexical issues were also detected in their journals with aspects such as spelling, subject verb agreement, and punctuation being the most frequent errors. This language barrier causes therefore a challenge for student teachers because as Richards (2010) claims, language proficiency is the top skill among the ten basic components of language teaching expertise.

Evidence from participants #8 and #11, whose practicum was in the public sector of an English BA programme and an Elementary school respectively, exemplifies this disagreement between the observer and the participants.

	Class observation log	Semi-structured interview	Reflective journal
#8	<p>“ST performs English-Spanish code switching for all explanation. English skills are barely shown as she used Spanish most of the class. ST struggles to rephrase instructions or to make them suitable for her SS’ English level.”</p> <p>This ST showed great language skills both during the interview and on her writing, but she spoke mainly in Spanish for teaching.</p> <p>1st class observation March 27th, 2017</p>	<p>“I feel frustrated because SS only speak Spanish, I used Spanish the first 3 weeks of the course and I feel confused because they are in an English Language BA”.</p>	<p>“Even though they are in an English BA, it was a really challenging experience because of the students’ struggle with the language and their particular resistance to speak and communicate.”</p>
#11	<p>“ST seems to have great language skills with minor mistakes as she always talked to me in English for any interaction before and after class, but she used Spanish even for basic instruction giving and clarification of simple language chunks.”</p> <p>1st class observation March 29th, 2017</p> <p>“Teacher tries to level English and Spanish language use, but some basic phrases are still given in Spanish”</p> <p>2nd class observation April 24th, 2017</p>	<p>“It is difficult because I have different groups and different levels. Students don’t know English and at the beginning I was nervous because I had only taught in Spanish other subjects that were not English”.</p>	<p>“It was my first experience giving English classes to children. It was a little bit difficult because they don’t know English. I tried to make my classroom dynamic, so SS could participate without embarrassment in all classes.”</p>

Other case studies on this same issue have had similar findings as language proficiency is one of the most commonly mentioned difficulties during the practicum, and it has to do with either the student teachers’ or the students’ concerns about their limited English skills (Gan, 2013; Viafara, 2011; Velez-Rendon, 2002; Phairee et al., 2008).

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this case study was to make a theoretical contribution to the literature regarding the challenges English BA student teachers face during their practicum. This was achieved by looking into the challenges that English BA student teachers from the University of Veracruz deal with and the possible reasons behind such problems. Therefore, this research aimed at identifying the main challenges along with their probable causes to obtain and generate knowledge that could be integrated into the BA subjects. By integrating this knowledge, future student teachers could be better prepared to understand and face the reality of the teaching scenario during their practicum.

To translate these findings into practical knowledge, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn here. Firstly, the information provided by the triangulation of sources suggests that the three challenges found (*classroom management issues, implementation of the teaching practice, and limited English proficiency*) are applicable to all participants regardless their practicum's context. Secondly, it was observed that the abovementioned challenges faced by Mexican preservice teachers match those faced by non-native EFL student teachers from other similar case studies from Hong Kong, Colombia, Spain and Thailand. Lastly, it was interesting to find a mismatch between the observer's and the participants' view regarding the issue of English proficiency as a barrier for teaching and communication. As shown in chapter 4, while the observer made comments on the fact that some participants faced serious difficulties due to their low English level, none of them addressed this issue as something to be personally improved, and they actually blamed the students' lack of communication in English as the main cause to make them hesitant to use English for teaching and communicating.

Therefore, the findings reported in this study imply an urgent need for both the programme's curriculum and the teacher educators, to discuss the challenges that student teachers face during their practicum and begin the implementation of innovative teaching practices, classroom management strategies and more effective English language learning programmes to ensure a comprehensive preparation for student teachers to succeed in their practicum and in their future teaching career.

To conclude, one of the main implications could be that, for future studies attempting to fill in any gaps, more information from the participants could be collected, especially because in this case study not all the participants were observed during their practicum. Although some relevant information about the student teachers' challenges and their possible cause emerged in the present study, in further research, it might be necessary to develop each challenge (classroom management and organisation, implementation of the teaching practice in real scenarios, and limited English proficiency) both separately and as a component of the practicum based on Stoyhoff (1999) reports. He considers that the academic and field experiences are interrelated and complementary parts of a whole that ESL or EFL students engage in simultaneously, with the purpose of preparing self-aware and skilful teachers who can perform an effective teaching practice. As well, additional data collection methods such as questionnaires, focus groups and direct observations may need to be employed to obtain information about the relationship between the challenges faced by student teachers during their practicum and the issues that might contribute to their appearance.

Lastly, it is also relevant to notice that the purpose of the present case study was achieved, as the data analysed allowed to find the main challenges that student teachers face during their practicum as well as the reasons that might contribute to such difficulties. As stated in the ultimate goal of this research, the information obtained will hopefully be used to improve the teaching training courses offered in any English BA programme. This with the purpose of providing student teachers with the required tools to perform successfully during their practicum.

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Appendix A: Class Observation Log

Teacher:	Topic:		
Date:	General class description:		
<i>Class:</i>	Linguistic Competence of the teacher:		
Level:			
Number of students:			
Age:			
School:			
Class time:			
Observation length:			
Class features	Description	Challenges observed	Description
Seating arrangement			
Students' behaviour			
Teaching Practice			
Language in use / instruction giving			
Lesson Planning			
Materials used in class			
Notes on the teacher	Notes on students	Notes on school	
Further comments:			

Appendix B: Questionnaire for semi-structured interview



This semi-structured interview has the purpose of obtaining information that answers the two research questions by analyzing the research issue through four topics.

Topic 1: School context

1. Name: _____
2. School you are teaching at: _____
3. What type of school is it?
A) Preschool () Elementary School () Secondary School ()
High School () University () Language Centre ()
B) Public () Private ()
4. How many groups do you have?
1 () 2 () 3 ()
5. How many students do you have in each group?
Group 1: _____ Group 2: _____ Group 3: _____
6. What age are your students?
Group 1: ___ to ___ Group 2: ___ to ___ Group 3: ___ to ___
7. Days and hours when you teach:
Days: M () Tu () W () Th () F ()
Sa () Su ()
Time: from _____ to _____
8. How did you obtain a place to do your preservice in this school?

Topic 2: Expectations and School Environment

9. Mention the expectations you had before you started the practicum.
(Probe: What made you have these expectations?
Are your expectations being fulfilled so far?
Is your practicum similar to your teaching training in the BA?)
10. Describe how you feel during your practicum
(Probe: Do your students behave properly?
Does the school function properly?
Are you receiving enough support from your supervisors?)
11. Tell me about the relationship you have with the people you work with: students, teachers, school principal, administrative staff, and any other people you meet.
(Probe: Are you struggling to interact with any person in your practicum?
Are you receiving all support needed to have successful lessons?
Who can you talk to in case of doubt, problem, or inconvenience in your class?)

Topic 3: Difficulties encountered throughout the teaching practice

12. Describe the teaching method you are currently using.

(Probe: Did you decide it yourself or are you using the one the school asks you to use?
Is the teaching method working with your students?
What are the advantages and disadvantages of this method?)

13. Describe the topic of your last class and how you taught it.

(Probe: What skills did you integrate in this class?
Was it the first time you taught this topic?
Do you think your teaching was successful?
Did you have any difficulties when teaching this topic?)

14. Have you experienced any difficulties with your lesson planning and all the preparation ahead of lessons?

(Probe: Mention an example of a lesson plan that did not work well.
Mention an example of a lesson plan that worked well.
What do you think made those lesson plans be effective or ineffective?
How much time do you spend in your lesson planning?
Do you prepare your own materials or do you use the ones given by the book?
How often do you bring authentic materials to the class?
If you could do something to improve your lesson planning, what would it be?)

15. Think of the challenges that you have encountered when teaching.

(Probe: describe these challenges in more detail.
Which is the challenge you face more often?
What is your reaction when this happens?
What do you mean by _____?)

16. From the challenges you mentioned, which is the most difficult to face?

(Probe: Think of the last time that this challenge occurred, describe the moment.
How do you feel when this occurs?
What are your thoughts when you feel that way?
What could be done to minimize this challenge?)

Topic 4: Academic preparation and overcoming challenges

17. Mention the subjects from the BA that have been more useful to your practicum.

(Probe: Do you think that the topics covered in these courses are enough to be successful in your practicum?
Think of the subject or teacher that contributed the most to your teaching training.
If you could modify the "Práctica Docente" class, what would you do?)

18. Do you think that the teaching training you have received until now in your BA is sufficient to succeed in your practicum?

(Probe: If you could make changes to the BA Curriculum, what would you do?
What could the BA program improve in order to help student teachers like
you become more successful during their practicum?)

19. Mention some strategies that you have used or that you could use to overcome the
challenges faced during your practicum.

(Probe: How did you come up with those strategies?

Have they been effective?

Do you think that your classmates are facing the same challenges?

What would you advise your classmates and future student teachers to do in order
to have a successful practicum?

Have you changed anything in your teaching to overcome this challenge?

Have you talked to anybody about this problem?

If you could ask for help or advice, who would you talk to?)



Appendix C: Reflective Journal Guidelines



Teaching practice final reflection Guidelines Instructors: OMNT & GGES

An essential element for student learning in teaching practice courses is written and oral reflections about on-the-field teaching experience. To have teaching experience is not enough to ensure learning or improving as a teacher; you need to intentionally and thoughtfully reflect upon the experience and what you learned from it to ensure that learning and improvement occurs.

These reflections are intended to help you focus on what you are learning (or not learning), identify issues or concerns on your mind, explore an idea more deeply, or in other ways to enhance your teaching practice learning about the teaching practice course.

The best reflection follows a simple three step model: (1) describe the experience(s) objectively, (2) analyse the experience(s) in terms of the categories of service-learning objectives (personal, academic), and (3) articulate (express) the learning that results.

1. Format requirements

- Heading: Full Name to the left and course name to the right.
- Title 'Teaching Practice Final Reflection' in bold centred Arial 14 font
- Font: Arial 12
- All margins: 2.5
- Line spacing: 1.5
- Paragraph spacing: 2
- Block style
- Between 900 and 1000 words

2. Content (DO NOT separate the following sections with sub-headings)

A. Context (150 words)

- Brief description of the institution (name, type of institution: private or public, general policies: teaching and evaluation)
- Brief description of the language programme
- Brief description of the students (age, level of English, interested in English?)

B. Materials description (150 words)

- Type of material
- Skills/aspects taught
- Marking and/or scoring criteria used

C. Report/Reflection (600-700 words) Personal reflexion about your teaching practice:

WHAT? What have you learned through this term's teaching? What were your most significant achievements? What stands out to you, feels new to you, excites you, or seems difficult to you?

What challenges did you face both inside and outside the classroom? What do you think could

have caused or contributed to those challenges encountered? What problems did you face when designing your lesson plans? What are your strengths? What are your areas of opportunity?

SO WHAT? Why does this learning matter? Why does it stand out to you? Why is it important - to you personally or to your preparation as a teacher?

NOW WHAT? What do you do from here? How will you take this learning with you? Does this learning change your perspective, your career goals, or your interests? **What would you do different in your future teaching experience? What could have helped you be more successful in your practicum?**

Your reflection should be three pages long (from 900 to 1000 words), according to the suggested length of each section and should dig deeply into your teaching experience to reflect on your learning. It should connect to academic concepts and critically examine your own development through this learning experience.

D. Appendix Sample of some of the materials used.

