



## PERCEPTIONS OF TEFL INTERNSHIP AMONG EFL TRAINEE TEACHERS AT A UNIVERSITY IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

Nguyen Truong Giang<sup>1i</sup>,  
Nguyen Thi Bach Lien<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Foreign Languages,  
Van Hien University,  
Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>Gia Dinh University,  
Vietnam

### Abstract:

The study aims to investigate the perceptions of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) internship among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) trainee teachers at Ho Chi Minh University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology. Specifically, this study investigates the perceptions of 50 TEFL trainee teachers from the Department of Foreign Languages at Ho Chi Minh University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology involved in the TEFL internship program. Quantitative data was gathered from the questionnaire and analyzed to evaluate trainee teachers' opinions to find out their perceptions of the TEFL internship. The findings expressed that most EFL trainee teachers perceive the TEFL internship as beneficial and important in terms of improvement of language skills, teaching methods, in-class management skills, and contribution to the love for the teaching career. Depending on the findings of the study, recommendations for trainee teachers also suggested that a full understanding of the importance of all the tasks during the internship should be required.

**Keywords:** EFL, TEFL, internship, trainee teachers, perception

### 1. Introduction

For more than half a century, the English language has been prevailing in Vietnam and the Ministry of Education and Training has assigned the teaching of English an important role in secondary and high schools around the country (Phung, 2018). On the higher education level, many universities in large cities, for example, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho, Da Nang, and so on, have foreign language faculties, in which English is the prominent language. In addition, to meet the great demands of students' learning the

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [giangnt@vhu.edu.vn](mailto:giangnt@vhu.edu.vn)

English language, centers for teaching English at all levels have been established around large cities.

For students, the TEFL internship plays an important role not only in the learning process but also in the career of students in the future (Levine, 2010). TEFL internship results are usually calculated with a relatively large weight in the semester, affecting the graduating results of students. But actually, the score only plays a small role. This internship gives students access to the career of their choice upon entering university. Practical activities once again help students understand how they will work after graduation and make timely adjustments, along with more appropriate training strategies (Kash, 2009).

This paper examines a research question as follows:

- How do EFL trainee teachers at HUFLIT perceive TEFL internship?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Types of internships

#### 2.1.1. Cooperative internship or cooperative education (Co-op)

A co-op is a three-way partnership between a student, an employer, and a college or university (the six-most-common-internship-types). This type of internship permits interns to combine their studies at the university and their experience at work to gain credits (Glenn, 2006). These students are engaged in jobs that are relevant to their majors; thus, they have a great chance to put what they have learned at the university into practice in the workplace. For instance, a student majoring in English Teaching Methodology might work on a part-time job at a local high school. As Briana (2015) puts it, *"It's not enough to go to college and get good grades. Many employers expect students to graduate with relevant good experience gained from the co-operative internship."*

#### 2.1.2. Independent and college-sponsored internships

Most senior students participate in the internship programs sponsored by the college or university that they are attending. A smaller number of students find workplaces that they think are suitable and do their internship there. According to Taft (2013), it is possible to find an independent internship. However, in internship programs sponsored by universities, interns are better prepared than independent ones. One reason is that, before students are sent to the workplace to work and gain experience, they are equipped with the necessary theoretical knowledge of the related field. They also receive good guidance from their teachers, who advise them on what they should do during the internship period and warn them of the difficulties they may be confronted with. For instance, before going to the high schools to do the internship, senior students have learned the methods and techniques of teaching the language; they have practiced making lesson plans, and are trained about how to manage the class and how to take the tests. All this facilitates their practice in high schools. In addition, being sponsored and protected by their colleges or universities, the students can be assured that they are not

exploited by employers in the companies or schools where they work as interns. Independent interns, on the other hand, have to try harder than the sponsored interns. Nevertheless, with their great effort and with good guidance from the experienced staff at the workplace, those who are engaged in independent internships can obtain as good results as the sponsored ones.

### **2.1.3 Paid and unpaid internships**

Chloe (2015) states: *“Most young people see internships as a logical step between formal education and a career, but roughly half of those internships are unpaid.”* Cost conceives that students who are engaged in paid internships can gain intensive training and have more experience and knowledge of their field of study. This should be viewed as a useful method of acquiring necessary experience and reference for future job seeking (Forbes, 2013). However, paid internships are more often found in the business sector than in the training of teachers.

## **2.2. Typical teaching English internship tasks**

### **2.2.1. Observation**

According to Gerald (2015), observation is an integral aspect of teaching. In the university class alone, much of what novice teachers ought to be informed of can not be learned. Classroom observation thus provides an opportunity to see teachers in real-life teaching conditions. Many of our teacher friends discuss their experiences in their reflections and how they affect the way they prepare and teach. Teachers think and make choices for life because when they see someone else in practice, almost as much as they see someone else, they see themselves almost simultaneously. This means observation at any point in a teacher's career is important.

Santiago (2009) also states that observation in the classroom defines the custom of sitting in on the class of another teacher to observe, learn, and reflect. Various aspects of the class, such as routines, time usage, schedule, participation, teaching strategies, management strategies, learner interest, and much more, can be examined. Naturally, a teacher may look for guidance on a matter that is challenging for him or her, but it is also a perfect way to be introduced to a new and different approach to teaching.

### **2.2.2. Teaching assistant**

Teaching assistants play a vital role in training the students. It is the responsibility of a teacher to ensure that the students are learning their lessons well (Gorsuch, 2016). This duty includes a wide variety of activities, and the instructor will often consider it too difficult to do too many activities. Teacher assistants play a key role in helping the teacher by ensuring that the pupils get the full benefit from the learning experiences that the teacher prepares and carries out for them.

Last but not least, Luckie *et al.* (2020) examine that trainee teachers are allowed to make test corrections so that they can have a chance to get used to the way how to assess students' performance as well as the way to design a test.

### **2.2.3. Demonstrating micro-teaching**

Koross (2016) argues that micro-teaching is a teacher-training method for teaching skills. This requires a specific teaching situation in order to improve teaching skills and helps to acquire deeper knowledge about the art of teaching through the reduction of sense in the teaching complexities in terms of the number of students in a class, subject scope, and timetable. In the practice of microteaching, the length of the lesson is brief (5-20 minutes), and the number of students is limited.

### **2.3. How can internships be beneficial to EFL trainee teachers**

According to Cain (2009), teachers who are actually committed to their students, take care of them strongly, constantly support their students, and prepare their students for facing their future confidently. He also said that they are student-centered teachers who are committed, and they work from their own passion. The teacher who lets standards slide is working not from values but from ego, wanting to be loved.

Santiago (2009) states that one of the ultimate goals of higher education nowadays is to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and practical skills required in the field of study they have chosen. Therefore, internships have been integrated into the curricula of senior students in most universities, including those that prepare students for a Bachelor's Degree in liberal arts. Students majoring in English Teaching Methodology, by taking part in internship programs, they become accustomed to the authentic school environment, with real students and their abilities to acquire language knowledge and skills. In this authentic environment, interns learn to solve real problems and difficulties students are faced with while they are learning the language. Interns will gain sample experience in authentic interactions with those they are teaching (Calloway & Beckstead, 1995). All this will enable interns to make good preparations for their teaching positions later (Levine, 2010).

On the other hand, Carpenter and Blance (2007) believe that teaching practice provides an opportunity for developing a three-way partnership between the university, the school and teacher trainees. This partnership is collaborative, neutrally advantageous, and shares governance and evaluation of the programme. According to Loretto (2022), an internship expert, internships are relatively short-term, with the main aim of providing job training by having the interns apply what they have learned in the university courses to the real workplace.

Ryan (2012) states that many people practice internships with their work in a particular role, which helps their career to grow in a particular field. Interns who are going to be English teachers in high schools train not only their teaching skills but also their language skills, as in real settings with real students, these interns have to try their best to impart the knowledge of the language to high school students and help students to improve their language skills. And this contributes a great deal to the interns' career growth.

## **2.4. Criteria of TEFL internship**

According to Ghufuron (2022), there are main points to consider when assessing trainee teachers' performance:

- Recognize the importance of internship tasks such as: demonstrating microteaching and teachers' class observation.
- Master the content of the lesson, fully and accurately build knowledge, skills, and attitude education for students according to the requirements of the program, and determine the correct focus of the lesson.
- Take advantage of this TEFL internship to improve teaching methods, language skills, class management skills, and teaching career passion.
- Rouse trainee teachers' interest in internship tasks of demonstrating microteaching, teachers' class observation, and other TEFL internship tasks.

## **3. Research methodology**

### **3.1. Research site**

The research was conducted at Ho Chi Minh University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT). English-majored students in this university can choose one of the career-oriented majors such as Translation and Interpretation, Office Business, Education, and Business English. The English language program is very flexible because students have the opportunity to choose one of the majors in the Department of Foreign Languages and enhance their skills or expand their knowledge of skills in another career field trained in the school through elective modules. Additionally, all subjects of language and major are taught in foreign languages, so students have the opportunity to improve general English, English for Academic Purposes, and specialized English for 4 years.

### **3.2. Sample and sampling procedures**

In this study, the participants were fifty senior students from the Department of Foreign Languages at Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT), who were trained in the internship program of the academic year 2023-2024 at the three high schools in Ho Chi Minh City - Nguyen Du, Nguyen Thai Binh, Gia Dinh High Schools. All of these students have completed the "Teaching Practice", "Teaching Methodology" as well as required classes at HUFLIT to be qualified for the internship program. This is important because students should be proficient enough in reading English and English teaching so that they can properly understand the questionnaire items to provide reliable and researchable responses. With their knowledge and experience, their sharing would be considerably rich and varied and would significantly contribute to the value of this study as a result.

### **3.3. Research instruments**

For trainee teachers who took part in the survey, quantitative data was collected by means of one self-designed questionnaire, which had 3 categories consisting of 18 scale items that elicit participants' opinions about their perceptions of the TEFL internship. Additionally, the questionnaire included instructions for the students to complete this task honestly and carefully. This data was collected through close-ended questionnaire items with evaluation scale formats. Closed-ended questions, suggested by Oppenheim (2001), offer several advantages, including time and cost savings, ease of processing, and use in testing hypotheses. To avoid any confounding effect that students' limited linguistic competency might have on their efforts to understand the items written in English, the questionnaire was translated into the students' mother tongue, Vietnamese. The items in the questionnaire in this paper were in the form of scale items ranked on 4 selections containing "very important", "important", "fairly important", and "not important" for the first category. In the second category, the scale items ranked on 4 selections containing "very beneficial", "beneficial", "fairly beneficial", and "not beneficial". The last category contained the scale item ranked on 4 selections as "like the most", "like", "not like very much", and "not like at all".

### **3.4. Data collection procedures**

First of all, the questions were piloted with 3 EFL learners who were not in the main study so that it would be more careful to test if the questions could cause any confusion about the word meaning, and structures to the participants. There were no changes in the main questionnaire. As a result, the questionnaire was applied officially.

After the internship, the survey was conducted at HUFLIT during break time. The trainee students had thirty minutes to return the questionnaire to the researcher, then these answers were analyzed to find out how they perceived the TEFL internship.

In order to be certain that subjects would give reliable answers, the researcher ensured them that their ideas would be kept confidential and that their truthful answers would make the research work valid, and hence would contribute a part to improving the internship programs in the future. The results were presented in tables, and the data collected from the survey was shown in percentages.

### **3.5. Data analysis procedures**

By using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), quantitative data from the survey was analyzed to evaluate trainee teachers' opinions to find out their perceptions of the TEFL internship. The researcher used quantitative data descended from the questionnaire for learners to analyze by employing SPSS, and it was sure to examine the data of the questionnaire by using descriptive statistics. According to Mackey and Gass (2005), descriptive statistics use a straightforward embracement that allows the researcher to gain a broader understanding of the data collection. Cronbach's Alpha was also calculated using SPSS.

### 3.6. Reliability and validity

A calculation of the stability or quality of test scores is considered to be reliable. It is recognized that there would be skewed points of view and personal views in the report, so this paper was extremely important to ensure reliability and validity maintenance (Chisnall, 1997). In particular, the quantitative data studied to demonstrate the validity of the findings could be significantly evaluated by the statistical results from the questionnaires.

In this research paper, the data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed by Cronbach's Alpha. The researcher was also encouraged to test the reliability of the answers and verify the learners' responses. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are from .655 to .762, which is considered to be usable (Hoang & Chu, 2008). The results of Cronbach in the study are shown in Table 3.1 below:

**Table 3.1:** Cronbach's Alpha Indexes of the Questionnaire Items

No.	Content	Number of items	$\alpha$
1	Tasks trainee teachers think important	7	.655
2	Benefits of internship tasks	4	.762
3	Tasks trainee teachers like the most	7	.671

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Results

**Table 4.1:** Tasks Trainee Teachers Think Important (percentage)

What tasks do you think are important to you?	Important and very important (No. of participants)	Percentage
A. Listening to reports about the school	0	0%
B. Demonstrating microteaching	38	76%
C. Teachers' class observation	43	86%
D. Peers observation	10	20%
E. Participating in other internship activities	3	6%
F. Administering and correcting students' tests	5	10%
G. Attending class meetings	0	0%

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the tasks that students think are important and very important to them. The findings showed that about three-quarters of the respondents (76%) rated their demonstrating microteaching as important. In addition, 86% of them considered the observation of high school teachers' teaching to be useful for their future careers.

On the other hand, very few of the participants rated the other tasks (A, E, F, and G) as important to them. In fact, the high schools' Board of Directors and staff attempted to offer the trainee teachers most of the necessary knowledge and skills through the tasks assigned to them.

**Table 4.2:** Trainee Teachers Rate the Benefits of The Internship Tasks (percentage)

Trainee Teachers' Opinions		1. Very beneficial and Beneficial	2. Fairly beneficial	3. Not beneficial
A. Improvement of your language skills	No.	32	17	1
	%	64%	33%	3%
B. Improvement of teaching methods	No.	48	1	1
	%	96%	2%	2%
C. Improvement of in-class management skills	No.	40	8	2
	%	80%	16%	4%
D. Contribution to the love for the teaching career	No.	38	8	4
	%	76%	16%	8%

The above table was designed to show the information of the trainee teachers' opinions about the benefits brought by the internship program.

Concerning the trainee teachers' improvements after the internship stage, high percentages of the respondents affirmed that the internship stage offered them a great opportunity to improve and develop their language skills, teaching skills, and classroom management (at least 96% rated as very beneficial, beneficial, and fairly beneficial in these three areas).

Finally, the great success of the internship program was proved by the fact that 92% of the respondents are in favor of the idea that the internship contributes to their love for the teaching career. The internship stage gave students a chance to expose themselves to a real teaching environment. That was also a chance for the trainee teachers to know more about the challenges in this career.

On the other hand, only 8% of the participants did not find that the internship stage made them feel more attached to the teaching career. These 8% of the respondents may find that they will not be able to face the challenges presented in the teaching position, or they may not have much attachment to the younger generation.

**Table 4.3:** Tasks Liked the Most by Trainee Teachers (percentage)

What tasks are you interested in?	Like and like the most (number of participants)	Percentage
A. Listening to reports about the school	0	0%
B. Demonstrating microteaching	43	86%
C. Teachers' class observation	28	56%
D. Peers observation	7	14%
E. Participating in other internship activities	15	30%
F. Administering and correcting students' tests	7	14%
G. Attending class meeting	0	0%

The above table reveals what tasks the trainee teachers liked or liked most during the time they took part in their internship program. As shown in A, D, F, and G in Table 4.3, when the subjects were asked what tasks, they liked or liked most among the tasks they were assigned, the percentages shown in A, D, F, and G are very low (0%, 14%, 14%, and 0% respectively).



On the other hand, 86% of the participants liked the teaching practice, and 56% were interested in observing high school teachers' classes. From the data shown, we can conclude that most of the trainee teachers were interested in the teaching practice, and only half of them had an interest in observing high school teachers' classes. They showed little interest in the other tasks.

#### **4.2. Discussion**

As shown in the previous section, 86% of the subjects conceived that observing teachers' teaching English lessons was important to them, which is understandable by the studies conducted by Gerald (2015) and Santiago (2009) that there are benefits from teaching observation such as: getting new tactics, methods, concepts, and tools, seeing student reactions from a different viewpoint.

Regarding the improvements of the trainee teachers after the internship stage, high percentages of the respondents stated that the internship stage offered them a great opportunity to improve and develop their language skills, teaching skills, and management of the classroom (at least 96% classified as very beneficial, beneficial and fairly beneficial in these three areas). Obviously, these improvements are beneficial for the future teaching career of trainee teachers, as mentioned in the study by Ryan (2012), suggesting that who are going to be English teachers in high schools' train not only their teaching skills but also their language skills, which contributes a great deal to the trainee teachers' career growth. Furthermore, the great success of the internship program was demonstrated by the fact that 92% of the respondents are in favor of the idea that the internship contributes to their love of the teaching profession. It is related to the study by Cain (2009); teachers who are actually committed to their students love to learn and practice, as they also try to instill this love in their students.

When asked about the tasks that they are interested in, 86% of the subjects responded that they like to practice teaching English most. This can be explained by the fact that as the trainee teachers majored in English Teaching Methodology, they were eager to put the theories they learned at the university into practice. Fox (2001) stated, "*internship is a way of building bridges between school theory and practical reality*". That is the reason why almost all of the subjects prefer this assignment.

#### **5. Recommendations**

In terms of pedagogical skills-teaching knowledge, and encouraging reflection, participating trainee teachers were favorably assessed, while both linguistic (English) and administrative skills were not adequately covered in the curriculum. The key deficiency illustrated was the lack of linguistic knowledge due largely to the lack of communicative experience in classrooms and late specialization. It is definitely important to teach realistic opportunities as a means of experiential learning. Furthermore, specialization will begin earlier in the program, and more relevant subjects will be linked to English study in order to better prepare for trainee teachers.

Future study studies may need to collect questionnaires and perform more in-depth interviews with a greater number of trainee teachers as well as teacher educators. There is no question that additional participants might have provided more insight into the program. Further research such as longitudinal studies that analyze the actual effects of TEFL programs over time, relying on both qualitative and quantitative research methods, is required. In short, further assessment studies are currently required in other training contexts.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the perceptions of TEFL internship among EFL trainee teachers at Ho Chi Minh University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology reflect a positive outlook on the program's significance. The findings reveal that the internship is instrumental in enhancing language skills, teaching methodologies, in-class management techniques, and fostering a passion for the teaching profession. Recommendations underscore the necessity for trainee teachers to comprehensively grasp the importance of all internship tasks. As internships continue to play a pivotal role in shaping future educators, further research and emphasis on the benefits and challenges of such programs are crucial for the continual improvement of teacher training initiatives.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## About the Authors

**Mr. Nguyen Truong Giang** is currently a full-time lecturer at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Hien University, Vietnam and also a PhD candidate in Education at Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education (HCMUTE), Vietnam. He possesses a degree of master of arts in English Language, and his academic areas of interest are teaching methodology as well as British and American literature.

**Ms. Nguyen Thi Bach Lien** is currently teaching at Gia Dinh University as a part-time lecturer. She graduated from Can Tho University with a Bachelor's Degree in English and holds a Master's Degree in TESOL. She has had over 10 years of experience as an English teacher in both private schools and foreign language centers. With a great passion and flexible style of teaching, as well as talented in using different teaching methods, she can cater for all students and abilities through physical demonstrations and visual presentations.

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