

# How EFL Preservice Teachers Perceived the Requirements of Their Future Teaching Career and Context

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## Abstract

The study entitled “EFL Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of the Requirements of Their Future Teaching Career and Context” is conducted with the aim of examining perceptions of the requirements of future teaching career and the English language teaching context from students who are studying English language education program. Data were collected from questionnaires administered to 114 students of English Education (including 19 freshmen, 29 sophomores, 40 juniors and 26) who are studying at a university in the Mekong Delta. The quantitative method is utilized in this study and questionnaire is the main instrument. The results indicated that participants highly perceived the importance of these requirements within five domains in Competency Framework for preservice English language teacher by Ministry of Education and Training namely: Knowledge of Subject, Knowledge of Language Teaching, Knowledge of Language Learners, Professional Values and Processes in Language Teaching and Connections to Practice and Context of Language Teaching. Furthermore, the similarities and differences in perceptions of freshmen and seniors were also found out. However, the study also reveals that freshmen participants perceived the requirements of their future teaching career and context stronger than seniors’. Therefore, the study findings suggest some pedagogical implications for preservice teachers of English Education as well as for English Language Education program, specifically in the Mekong delta and generally in Vietnam context.

**Key words:** Requirements, EFL preservice teachers, future teaching career and context

## 1. Introduction

Teaching profession is a special job, and is a labor tool as well, and the final product is human knowledge and

personality. Therefore, teachers are required to have certain competencies for their teaching. This means the requirements for teachers are put forward. According to Hakim (2015), competence is basically a picture of what a person should do the job. The quality of teachers in the learning process is one of the factors that determine the quality of learning and the quality of students. In terms of the most general and essential competencies, a teacher must have certain personality and competencies to meet the requirements of his/her teaching career.

In Vietnam, government requires that teachers must be licensed by completing educational programs. A bachelor's degree is the minimum requirement. However, it is not adequate to evaluate a teacher. In the field of English teaching, Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam has recently published a version of English Teacher Competency Framework (ETCF). It is the first set of subject-specific teacher standards in Vietnam, but whether all Vietnam's English teachers know and are able to perceive what they need to do so as to equip themselves with the skills and competencies in the 21st century. Therefore, the researcher finds it necessary to conduct this study to discover EFL preservice teachers' perceptions of the requirements of their future teaching career and the English language teaching context based on criterion composed by MOET.

For above reasons, the present study aimed to examine perceptions of the requirements of future teaching career and the English language teaching context from students who are studying English education program at a university in Can Tho. This study is also to seek out the differences in perceiving the above requirements between groups of participants so as to check whether preservice English teachers define correctly teaching competences for an English teacher. The study is carried out to answer these following questions:

1. How do EFL preservice teachers perceive the requirements of their future teaching career and context?
2. What are the similarities and differences between freshmen and seniors about perceiving the requirements of their future teaching career and context?

## 2. Literature review

A teacher's competency is defined as their skills, knowledge and beliefs to perform the profession efficiently (Brauer, 2010). There are some views about teacher competency. In one view, teacher competency area is defined as knowledge of subject, professional knowledge and presentation of it (Kauchak & Eggen, 2005; Balyer, 2017). In another, it is classified as cultural competency and feeling of social justice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Gay, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995). It is also considered as arousing interest in research and teaching (Boyer, 1997; Schön, 1983).

Meanwhile, the standardized framework which is suitable for Vietnamese teaching context, as an instruction to assess the competency of Vietnamese language teachers in current Vietnamese setting consists of 5 domains, applied in National Foreign Language 2020 project (p.17).

### 2.1 Knowledge of Language, Language Learning and Curricular Content

"Domain 1 represents subject matter knowledge for teaching. This domain includes teachers' language proficiency, knowledge of the language system, understanding of how languages are learnt, content and curriculum. Curricular content knowledge includes cultures of English-speaking countries; basic academic content in English; and knowledge of locally-used English curriculum".

### 2.2 Knowledge of Language Teaching

"Domain 2 deals primarily with pedagogical content knowledge. This knowledge includes teaching the four skills, planning effective language lessons, assessing students' progress and proficiency, and using resources and technology efficiently to support student learning".

### 2.3 Knowledge of Language Learners

"Domain 3 relates to the knowledge of language teachers. Teacher's understanding of students' development, stages of learner language, and prior learning experiences contribute to successful student learning. Understanding their students is also necessary as teachers help to develop students' creativity and critical thinking-essential 21st century skills".

### 2.4 Professional Attitudes and Values in Language Teaching

"Professional attitudes and values are embedded throughout the other knowledge domains, as indicated by Domain 4. These attitudes and values include promoting and modeling language learning; practicing cooperation, collaboration and teamwork; demonstrating lifelong learning and participating in professional development activities".

### 2.5 Practice and Context Language Teaching

"Domain 5 represents teachers' understanding of the context in which English is being taught, and connecting language learning to real uses of English in Vietnam. This understanding involves connections to other subjects, relevant contextual issues, and other English users. It also involves reflection on practice, language learning, and teaching questions.

A number of studies related to preservice teachers' perception about the requirements of their future career have been conducted in different contexts.

Witcher (1999) investigated factors that may have influenced preservice teachers' perceptions of effective teacher characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, year of study, area of specialization, and parental status). 219 students from a large mid-Southern university took part in the study. Students completed a questionnaire in which they were asked to identify, rank, and define three to six characteristics that they believed excellent teachers possessed or demonstrated. A phenomenological analysis (method of constant comparison) of the responses revealed several characteristics that many of the preservice teachers thought reflected effective teaching. The following six themes emerged from these characteristics, in order of endorsement level: student-centeredness, enthusiasm for teaching, ethicalness, classroom and behavior management, teaching methodology, and subject knowledge. A canonical correlation analysis revealed that college-level juniors, and minority students tended to endorse teaching methodology and teacher characteristics classified as ethical to a greater extent than their counterparts, while rating attributes associated with subject knowledge and classroom behavior management to a lesser extent.

Aiming at finding preservice teachers' perceptions of effective teaching characteristics, as well as to see if these perceptions are related to educational beliefs, Minor (2002) carried on a study. Data for this study were gathered from 134 preservice teachers enrolled in various sections of an introductory-level education course for education majors at a large university in southern Georgia. During the first week of classes, the

authors gave students a questionnaire in which they were asked to identify, rank, and define characteristics that they believed excellent teachers possessed or demonstrated, and a published survey in which participants' educational beliefs were classified as either progressive or transmissive. A phenomenological analysis of the responses revealed several characteristics that many preservice teachers thought reflected effective teaching. The following 7 themes emerged from these characteristics, in order of endorsement level: student centered (55.2%), effective classroom and behavior manager (33.6%), competent instructor (33.6%), ethical (29.9%), enthusiastic about teaching (23.9%), knowledgeable about subject (19.4%), and professional (15.7%). It also revealed no relationship between the 7 perception categories of effective teachers and preservice teachers' year of study, preferred grade level for teaching, and educational belief.

Fajet (2005) carried a study that used a survey and semi-structured interview to ascertain what students in a beginning education course felt were the qualities and determining characteristics of both good and poor teachers. To this end, this study seeks to examine the perceptions of 62 pre-service teachers whether they understand the characteristics and qualities of good and poor teachers. Findings suggest that pre-service teachers conceive of teaching primarily as a task involving affective, interpersonal relationships rather than a profession requiring a skilled and knowledgeable practitioner. The findings of this study can be useful in the process of developing teacher education programs.

Although many research studies on preservice teachers' perceptions have been conducted, there is a shortage related to the preservice English teachers' perceptions of the requirements of teaching career and teaching context as well and how they conceive themselves as teachers of future. Therefore, perceiving these requirements, in other words, perceiving English teacher competencies from preservice teachers is indispensable. Neither much research in this field is conducted in Vietnam nor in the region of the Mekong delta. For this reason, my research would be necessary to provide more understanding into the research topic and the findings will provide some valuable information for further research that relates to the preservice English teachers' perceptions of the requirements of teaching career and teaching context in the region.

### 3. Methodology

This research was designed as a descriptive research which employed both quantitative method with the purpose of discovering EFL preservice teachers' perceptions of the requirements of their future teaching career and context from participants of freshmen,

sophomores, juniors and seniors. Particularly, all of the participants were asked to respond to the 37-item-questionnaire in which the close-ended questions were designed in form of 5-point Likert scale and the results were reported with the Statistic Test of SPSS (Statistics Package for Social Science) such as mean, standard deviation, ect and were compared to One Sample T-Test or run with Descriptive Statistic Test. The portions of the questionnaire were designed around five domains in Preservice ECTF and the 37 questions represent five domains. The results would help reveal how EFL preservice teachers perceive the requirements of future teaching career and the English language teaching context for an English teacher. To make it easier for participants to answer questionnaire, it was translated into Vietnamese by the researcher. Before the questionnaire was piloted, it was revised and modified five times with the screening of nine people – the researcher's supervisor, 5 English teachers and 3 students in English Education.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Participants' perceptions on the requirements of their future teaching career and context

First and foremost, the reliability was checked. The Cronbach's alpha was relatively high ( $\alpha=.93$ ), which means that the questionnaire was reliable. Therefore, the data could be analyzed with a Descriptive Statistic Test of SPSS to collect the average mean score of perceptions of the 114 preservice teachers. The result indicated that the requirements of future teaching career and context were highly perceived by the EFL preservice teachers with the average mean score was  $M=3.99$ . Specifically, it could be respectively arranged: Professional Values and Processes in Language Teaching ( $M = 4.13$ ); Knowledge of Language Teaching ( $M = 4.12$ ); Know of Subject ( $M = 4.01$ ); Connections to Practice and Context of Language Teaching ( $M = 3.92$ ); Knowledge of Language Learners ( $M = 3.77$ ). Moreover, a part of participants did not perceive the importance of knowledge of language learners because the mean score of this domain was the lowest in the 5 domains ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) and the minimum value was only 1.50. This conclusion is in line with the hypotheses that the teachers' perceptions towards the requirements of future teaching career and context is relatively high. Moreover, there were also differences between freshmen and seniors towards the five domains. For illustration, the result indicates that participants most favored proficiency in the target language in all skills and understanding the CEFR proficiency. It is essential for teacher educators and policy makers to get insights about how preservice teachers assess their knowledge and skills as well as competencies (Yüksel, 2014).

Supportive learning environment is preferred by all participants. It is in line with Thompson (2010) indicating that environment assists preservice in theories of literacy, composition, grammar/mechanics, child development, student motivation, and classroom management. It is better for them to understand the dynamics of an English classroom. Assessment is noticed that preservice teachers should understand a variety of purposes and forms of formative, and summative assessment tools and techniques. It is consistent with the results of Russell & Airasian (2012) indicating that teachers make significant contributions in classrooms.

#### 4.2 A comparison of freshmen and seniors on the requirements of their future teaching career and context

The results of the study are expected to discover how preservice English teachers perceive the requirements of future teaching, whether they determine English teacher competencies which are required for English teachers. From these perceptions, they can improve, change, and prepare themselves in order to become a more effective English language teacher after finishing school. A comparison of freshmen and seniors on the requirements of their future teaching career and context was also carried to reflect.

Table 4.2: A comparison of freshmen and seniors on the requirements of their future teaching career and context

Domains	Mean by freshmen	Mean by seniors
1. Knowledge Language Learning and Curricular Content	4.67	4.22
2. Knowledge of Language Teaching	4.20	4.13
3. Knowledge of Language Learners	4.04	3.79
4. Professional Attitudes and Values in Language Teaching	4.20	4.15
5. Practice and Context Language Teaching General	4.06	3.90
	4.23	4.04

There were evidences that although they came in agreement to perceive that the requirements were significantly important for an EFL preservice teacher, the results showed that freshmen strongly perceived these requirements more than seniors.

#### 5. Conclusion

The present study provided perspectives of what EFL preservice teachers need to have in order to equip themselves the requirements for future teaching career and context. The results indicated that both participants strongly perceived the importance of these requirements within five domains in ETCF by MOET: Knowledge of Subject, Knowledge of Language Teaching, Knowledge of Language Learners, Professional Values and Processes in Language Teaching and Connections to Practice and Context of Language Teaching. Furthermore, the similarities and

differences in perceptions of freshmen and seniors were also found out. Although they came in agreement to perceive that the requirements were significantly important for an EFL preservice teacher, the results showed that freshmen strongly perceived these requirements more than seniors. The results also showed the rank of five domains in ETCF that were perceived by EFL preservice teachers respectively: (1) Professional Values and Processes in Language Teaching and Connections to Practice, (2) Knowledge of Language Teaching, (3) Knowledge of Subject, (4) Context of Language Teaching, (5) Knowledge of Language Learners. The results contribute a better understanding of how EFL preservice teachers perceived the requirements of their future teaching career and context in Mekong Delta region.

#### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to send a basketful of thanks to the teachers spending their priceless time participating in the study.

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