

Moskalets Olena

ORCID 0000-0002-5779-1590

ResearchID rid106607

PhD, Associate Professor

Associate professor at Linguistics and Translation Department,
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University
(Kyiv, Ukraine) E-mail: o.moskalets@kubg.edu.ua

Tsapro Galyna

ORCID 0000-0002-0748-7531

PhD, Associate Professor,

Head of English Language and Communication Department,
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University
(Kyiv, Ukraine) E-mail: g.tsapro@kubg.edu.ua

PRE-SERVICE TEACHING PRACTICE: NEW CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Practical experience is a cornerstone of effective teacher preparation, as it bridges the gap between theory and real-world application in the classroom. The effectiveness of teacher training programs is crucial to ensuring that future educators are well-prepared to meet the challenges of modern classrooms. However, a gap often exists between the theoretical knowledge acquired in university and the real-world challenges faced by would-be teachers at schools.

The aim of the article: *The aim of this article is to present and analyze common issues faced by graduates from the «English Language and Literature» program during their school practice throughout three academic years, starting in autumn 2022. The study identifies the main challenges faced by these graduates during their school visits and explores the areas in which their professional preparation can be enhanced.*

Methodology: *The research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. An anonymous survey with selected and constructed responses was administered to three cohorts of students in their final year of bachelor's program throughout 2022-2025 to assess their assessment of pedagogical practice. In total, 124 students participated in the research.*

Scientific novelty: *The novelty of this research lies in its examination of main challenges of teaching practice at school in the time of full-scale military actions as viewed by student-teachers. The study identifies key factors that affect the satisfaction with the teaching experience thus enabling the transition from teacher training to actual classroom practice.*

Conclusions: *The study concludes that after three years of studying and doing field practice in the context of permanent stress students have managed to adjust to the current situation and switch their focus from external factors of providing teaching practice to the process of doing the practice itself viewing lesson preparation and presentation as the main challenge and the main source of satisfaction with teaching practice.*

Keywords: *English language teaching, pre-service teacher training, field practice, classroom management, satisfaction level.*

Statement of the problem in general terms and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks. Field practice in pre-service teacher training has always been one of the most important and challenging aspects of professional preparation of would-be teachers [13]. For years, researchers and supervisors have been looking for the most efficient ways to prepare students for the encounter with the world of the mass education system and, when the teacher students have entered the classrooms, to support them in their first steps in teaching in the ever-changing teaching context.

The years of COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine have neither stopped the process of educating school-age children nor terminated the training of young educators. Nevertheless, traditional procedures of preparation for and running the field practice for would-be teachers have been affected by new challenges. The purpose of this article is to discuss the recent issues the English Language and Literature student-teachers from

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University face during their school practice, and to trace the changes in their attitudes to obstacles faced in the process of field practice.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Until student-teachers are placed in real classrooms, university-based English Language Teaching (ELT) methodology sessions are assumed to prepare them at least for the first two stages of the four-stage cycle of competence development according to the Continuing Professional Development Framework [5]: awareness and engagement. These stages are designed to ensure that prospective teachers have understood the basics of the professional practice, such as learners/learning, lesson plans, classroom management, and the evaluation and assessment of learning as set out in The Profile of a Newly Qualified Teacher of English [6].

In addition, the Standard of Secondary School Teachers in Ukraine specifies other fundamental competences, including pedagogical partnership and emotional-ethical competence [1]. However, one important aspect of teacher training that is not always overtly considered in the 'language' of these official documents, and yet the absence of which would make professional engagement ineffective, is the personality of the teacher. These include personal qualities such as self-awareness and interpersonal skills as well as autonomy, criticality, and a sensitivity to the context in which practice is situated [10]. Such skills may be categorized under the designation of soft, transferable skills, and they are essential for adjusting to the complicated nature of the classroom.

The third level: engaging in practice-based approaches, is the third aspect of competence development. In college settings, the joint preparation of lessons, team teaching, and observation of their peers in action are mechanisms that bridge the gap between theory and classroom practice. It is only in school-based field practice that student teachers begin to have their first hand experience of planning and teaching real lessons. This stage is considered to be crucial by all teacher education systems [12].

Context dependence is especially important at this stage. This «the-all-important aspect of teaching» includes taking into account functional tasks, selecting tasks and activities, and being adaptable within the real world, whether including moods, or aspects of the situation such as disturbances caused by external agents, such as frequent air raid alerts or power outages. Reviewing the action plan can help to show whether the context has been properly considered.

Self-reflection is closely associated with autonomy as it relates to students' ability to make decisions and assume responsibility for them. This aspect of professional identity is developed through practice reflection and through participation in different pedagogical courses, especially during the third semester. In addition to building knowledge, student-teachers are to critically examine their decision makers and responsibility in the educational setting [4].

Interpersonal skills, essential for collaborative work, receive special emphasis in teacher training. Regular teamwork and co-teaching opportunities (both with peers and with students in junior academic years) foster these skills [9]. Through such collaboration, future teachers gain awareness of how their actions affect classroom participants. As research consistently shows, positive emotional environments significantly support language acquisition [7]. Therefore, teacher education programs train student-teachers to promote group cohesion, manage activities effectively, and provide constructive feedback.

Another cornerstone of the competency of the teacher is critical thinking. Student-teachers need to develop this characteristic themselves before they can develop it in their students. Nowhere is this idea more obvious than in lesson or session planning: in the careful consideration of one activity following another. As researchers in the field of education posit, higher levels of learning should be developed and promoted more as the learners go through the lesson, capping, and eventually engaging them in analysis, synthesis, evaluation, or creation [2].

Reflection, which is an integral part of critical thinking, is one of the essential elements of pre-service teacher preparation. It allows student-teachers to evaluate the development of their competences and areas to become stronger. As Dewey [8] and those who followed him have argued, reflective practice is necessary for professional development.

The competences and personal characteristics outlined above can all be developed through four stages: awareness, engagement, integration, and refinement [5]. The first and the second are predominantly covered by university-based training, and the third by field practice at school.

To fully support student-teachers in reaching the final stage of competence development-refinement-teacher education programs must ensure continuity between theoretical preparation and school-based experience. This requires deliberate scaffolding that encourages students to revisit, reassess, and fine-tune their pedagogical decisions in light of practical feedback and evolving classroom dynamics. The refinement stage involves deepening subject knowledge, honing classroom management strategies, and developing the ability to respond flexibly to diverse learning needs. It also includes the cultivation of a professional mindset – marked by resilience, openness to feedback, and a commitment to lifelong learning [12]. By embedding structured opportunities for sustained reflection, collaboration with experienced mentors, and engagement with real-world challenges, teacher training programs can foster the emergence of adaptive professionals capable of navigating complex educational environments with both competence and confidence.

Coverage of the procedure of theoretical, methodological and/or experimental research, indicating the research methods. To meet the objectives of this study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was employed. An anonymous student survey aimed at exploring learners' perceptions of the field practice was administered to three cohorts of students undertaking teaching practice over three academic

years, with one cohort per year. The survey investigated students' views on the effectiveness of their hands-on experience, focusing on their reflective analysis of the level of satisfaction with the experience and the main challenges faced in the process.

The aim of this article is to present and analyze common issues faced by graduates from the «English Language and Literature» program during their school practice throughout three academic years, starting in autumn 2022. The study identifies the main challenges faced by these graduates during their school visits and explores the areas in which their professional preparation can be enhanced.

Presentation of the main research material. At Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, pre-service English teacher training is structured according to the guidelines outlined in the Core Curriculum, developed by participants of the New Generation School Teacher (NGST) project [15; 16]. This project, which was implemented by the British Council Ukraine and the Ministry of Education of Ukraine from 2013 to 2019, laid the foundation for a practice-oriented approach to English Language Teaching (ELT) education. The NGST project's main ideas were integrated into the curriculum for students majoring in English Language and Literature, with ELT serving as a mandatory component of their training.

The main principles of the NGST project implemented at BGKU are as follows:

- Practice-Oriented ELT Course:** The ELT course is designed to be hands-on, where theoretical aspects of teaching are presented through practical tasks during workshops.

- Learner-Centered Approach:** Workshops at the university are modeled to resemble learner-centered communicative English lessons, which are subsequently applied in schools.

- Language Immersion:** English is used as the language of instruction in the workshops, allowing students to practice communication in English and preparing them to teach the language in the classroom.

- Continuous Field Practice:** Field practice is an integral part of the ELT course and occurs throughout the entire three-year period of study.

Field practice is designed to build progressively, with Semesters III–VI focusing on observation and peer teaching, while the final year emphasizes independent teaching with reduced supervision. When the curriculum was first implemented at BGKU, Year 2 and Year 3 students had practice days once every two weeks, while Year 4 students participated in school visits once a week. These visits allowed them to observe classes, interact with schoolchildren, engage in school-related activities, and consult with mentors.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that many of these activities could be effectively conducted online. Virtual platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet enabled lesson observations, lesson planning discussions, and even teaching sessions to be held remotely. The use of digital tools for managing lesson plans and documents saved significant time for both students and mentors. Nevertheless, there was resistance from some educators to virtual observation, particularly when students were not directly involved in teaching. As a result, school-based field practice was limited to the final two semesters, while field practice for Year 2 and Year 3 students was conducted using university-based resources.

Despite this, the technical competencies gained during the pandemic proved crucial in maintaining continuity in education, particularly during the outbreak of military action in Ukraine in 2022. These skills enabled university classes to resume online, even when students were scattered across different countries. However, resuming school-based field practice posed challenges as schools adapted to the new circumstances. For the 2021/22 academic year, students were allowed to present individual and group lessons as part of their field practice, with many students also engaging in private tutoring or teaching at language schools, which helped them continue their professional development under the given conditions.

In the following academic year (2022/23), Year 4 students conducted their teaching practice online for safety reasons, with supervision provided by teachers from partner schools in Kyiv. The 2023/24 academic year saw the majority of Kyiv schools adopting a blended teaching model, with classes delivered either online or offline depending on factors such as shelter capacity and students' location.

Here is an overview of how the teaching practice was organized during these challenging years:

Table 1

Format and Location of Teaching Practice in 2022–2025

Academic Year	Format	Teaching Practice Sites
2022/23	Online	Kyiv schools №№9, 240; schools at the students' place of residence or work (15 schools all over Ukraine).
2023/24	Blended	Kyiv schools №№9, 98, 107, 183, 216, 240
2024/25	Offline	Kyiv schools №№107, 183, 216, 225, 240, Lyceum «MriyDiy»

This progression illustrates the increasing return to in-person teaching practice following the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war. The blended and online formats allowed for continuity of training but required significant adaptation by both students and mentors. By 2024/25, the shift back to offline practice indicates improved stability and institutional readiness for full-scale pedagogical engagement. These changes underscore the importance of flexibility and digital competency in contemporary teacher education.

Despite these adjustments, challenges related to field practice in real school conditions arise regularly, causing student-teachers' frustration and diminishing the effectiveness of the hands-on experience.

To assess the changing challenges of field practice, a survey with close- and open-ended questions was administered to Year 4 students in 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. The tasks of the survey included:

1. To evaluate the students' level of satisfaction with the pedagogical practice.
2. To identify the main difficulties students face during their practice (methodological, psychological, organizational, etc.).
3. To outline potential ways to improve the preparation of future English language teachers for field practice and future careers in teaching.

Since the survey was not mandatory and anonymous, the percentage of the research participants varied from 66% to 76% of the total number of students on the course. The total number of students doing the ELT course in a particular academic year, and the percentage of those who participated in the survey, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Number and percentage of survey participants per year

Academic year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Total number of Year 4 students doing ELT	55	74	44
Number of survey participants	42	53	29
Percentage of students doing ELT who participated in survey	76%	72%	66%

The question about the level of satisfaction with the teaching practice, where the participants had to assess their experience by the scale from 1 to 5 (1-totally dissatisfied; 5 perfectly satisfied) yielded the results, presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Level of satisfaction with the teaching practice

Year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Average score (out of 5 points)	4.69	3.74	4.34

According to the obtained results, the 2023/24 academic year presented the student-teachers with the most challenging and the least satisfying school-based experience. To identify the sources of frustration, open-ended questions of the survey were analyzed.

According to the students' constructed responses, the most burning problems of the 2022/23 academic year were caused by the toll of war time challenges (31%), classroom management and lack of learners' motivation (31%), lesson planning (21%), use of English in class (7%) and students' own time management (7%). As the students stated in their responses, «*Because of constant shelling and blackout, it was quite difficult to conduct these classes. Many lessons were interrupted and everything had to be done again*». When discussing their in-class experience, student-teachers admitted to the state of disorientation, common for them and their learners, as «*sometimes there were students who didn't want to participate and it was difficult to deal with them since I didn't know the exact reason for their reluctance to study*». Thus it was proved again that building up resilience and ability to adjust both the mindset and lesson plan to the current context was among the key tasks of pre-service teacher training.

In 2023/24 academic year, when the majority of students were provided with places to do off-line teaching practice in state and private secondary schools in Kyiv, the necessity to re-adjust to in-person work and commuting between home, university and school proved to be the major challenge. More than every fourth student (26%) pointed out this issue as the main obstacle to fully enjoying their teaching experience. As some of them mentioned, «*the distance between the school and home*», «*changing my pjs to official clothes*» were more challenging than stress or inconveniences, caused by air alerts and power or internet outages, which were pointed out as the most burning issues by 4% of the survey participants. Other issues, listed by the survey participants in this academic year were traditional lesson planning (24%) and in-person classroom management (13%). A new issue, which had not been mentioned in the previous year at all and which accumulated quite a significant number of voices, was interaction with school teachers and school administration (19%). Though when answering the question about the level of satisfaction with the interaction with their school mentor, the majority of respondents provided a positive answer (49% perfectly satisfied, 33% rather satisfied), some students complained about the «*lack of support from school mentors*» and «*lots of misunderstanding between school teachers and students*». The results, mentioned above, prompted the conclusion about the necessity to lay more emphasis on training would-be teachers' skills for decision making and taking the responsibility for their decisions (including routine everyday choices), and working more closely with interpersonal skills and ability

to collaborate with colleagues with different level of professional experience, balancing between the respect for the person's achievements and ability to act according to student's own judgement.

The third survey was administered in 2024/25 academic year, when teaching practice was conducted on school premises only. This year, the student-teachers level of satisfaction increased by 0.6 points out of 5 compared to the previous year; the aspects of teaching practice listed as most stressful were focused on classroom management issues (45%) and lesson planning (28%). Personal time management and commuting remained to be challenging for 14% of participants, while the most burning issues of two preceding academic years (problems caused by the military actions and misunderstandings with school staff) were mentioned by 3% of participants only. As participants' comments reveal, their attention switched back to what was going on in their classroom and how they as teachers could affect it irrelevantly of the current situation: «*The most difficult aspect of my school practice was classroom management, especially dealing with students who were easily distracted and unmotivated*». «*Finding balance between being friendly and maintaining authority was challenging*». «*Coming up with an interesting and engaging task for freer practice was difficult*». «*It was difficult to make lesson plans and hope there won't be any air alerts*». Thus, fundamental competences of pedagogical partnership and emotional-ethical competences come to the forefront again, highlighting the shift in student-teachers' professional focus from external disruptions to the key components of teaching: planning and delivering learner-centered lessons.

The summary of student teachers' dominant challenges in school practice throughout three years of full-scale invasion is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Dominant challenges faced by student teachers durin school practice

Challenge	Year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Toll of war time		31%	4%	3%
Classroom management		31%	13%	45%
Lesson planning		21%	24%	28%
Personal time management		-	26%	14%

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The shift toward a practice-oriented learner-centered approach in pre-service English language teacher training at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University has proved to be effective for improving the alignment of theoretical and practical knowledge. Nourishing learners' autonomy and flexibility, and paying close attention to hands-on experience contributed to the stability of the learning process under most challenging circumstances. However, there still remains a noticeable mismatch between the theoretical training and the ever changing real-world demands of pedagogical work in schools. The challenges faced by students, ranging from methodological difficulties to organizational issues, highlight the need for further refinement of the curriculum to better prepare future educators for the complexities of teaching in diverse classroom environments. Moreover, the evolving circumstances of the past few years, including the impact of military conflict and shifting school operations, have underscored the importance of adaptability in teacher training programs. The ability to continue teaching in online and blended formats has proven to be a crucial skill for both students and faculty. However, the challenges faced during these times have also exposed gaps in the preparedness of students, particularly in the areas of psychological readiness, stress resilience, and communication skills. These gaps, if not addressed, could hinder the successful transition of graduates from the academic environment to the realities of teaching in schools. Consequently, future updates to the teacher training program must place a stronger emphasis on fostering these key competencies alongside academic knowledge and pedagogical skills.

One limitation of this study is that it focuses primarily on the experiences of students from one university, and the findings may not be fully representative of the broader cohort of teacher preparation programs across Ukraine. Additionally, the data was gathered through self-reported surveys, which may be subject to biases and may not reflect the full range of challenges faced by students in practice.

Future research could explore the impact of specific curriculum changes and support mechanisms on the preparedness of graduates from different universities, providing a more comprehensive understanding of effective teacher training practices.

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Москалець Олена

ORCID 0000-0002-5779-1590

ResearchID rid106607

Кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент кафедри лінгвістики та перекладу,
Київський столичний університет імені Бориса Грінченка
(Київ, Україна) E-mail: o.moskalets@kubg.edu.ua

Цапро Галина

ORCID 0000-0002-0748-7531

Кандидат філологічних наук, доцент,
завідувач кафедри англійської мови та комунікації
Київський столичний університет імені Бориса Грінченка
(Київ, Україна) E-mail: g.tsapro@kubg.edu.ua

ШКІЛЬНА ПРАКТИКА МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ: НОВІ ВИКЛИКИ ТА РІШЕННЯ

Практичний досвід є основою ефективною підготовки вчителів, оскільки він допомагає заповнити розрив між теорією та реальним застосуванням знань у класі. Ефективність програм підготовки вчителів є вирішальною для того, щоб майбутні педагоги були добре підготовлені до вирішення викликів сучасного навчального процесу. Однак часто виникає розрив між теоретичними знаннями, здобутими в університеті, та реальними викликами, з якими студент-практикант стикається в школі.

Метою цієї статті є презентація і аналіз типових проблем, з якими стикалися студенти четвертого курсу спеціальності «Англійська мова і література» під час шкільної практики впродовж трьох навчальних років розпочинаючи з осені 2022 року. Дослідження визначає основні проблеми, які виникали у студентів під час шкільної практики і окреслює напрями покращення професійної підготовки майбутнього вчителя.

Методологія: Дослідження проводилося за допомогою змішаного підходу, що поєднує якісні та кількісні дані. Впродовж 2022-2025 років трьом когортам студентів пропонувалося відповісти на закриті та відкриті запитання анонімного опитування з метою визначення їх оцінки власного досвіду педагогічної практики. Загалом, у дослідженні взяли участь 124 студенти четвертого курсу різних років навчання.

Наукова новизна: Новизна цього дослідження полягає в аналізі основних викликів шкільної практики з позиції студентів у контексті воєнного стану. У дослідженні визначено ключові чинники, що впливають на задоволеність педагогічною практикою, тим самим сприяючи переходу від підготовки вчителя до реальної роботи в класі.

Висновки: У дослідженні зроблено висновок, що після трьох років навчання та проходження педагогічної практики в умовах постійного стресу студенти змогли адаптуватися до поточної ситуації та змістити фокус з зовнішніх обставин організації практики на сам процес її здійснення, розглядаючи підготовку та проведення уроків як основний виклик і водночас як головне джерело задоволення від педагогічної практики.

Ключові слова: навчання англійської мови, підготовка майбутніх вчителів, педагогічна практика, управління роботою в класі, рівень задоволеності.

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Рецензент – доктор педагогічних наук, професор **Н.В. Мосьян**