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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding the challenges encountered while teaching English to young learners. It also assesses the effectiveness of a TEYL course in mitigating these challenges. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed, collecting data from 15 undergraduate students participating in the TEYL course at Pasundan University, Indonesia. Data collection involved a questionnaire comprising Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, enabling analysis of both quantitative and qualitative insight. Research findings indicate that the primary challenges faced by students were classroom management, sustaining children's focus, and developing suitable and stimulating materials. However, the TEYL course was perceived as highly beneficial, offering valuable support through the introduction of child-centered methodologies, including storytelling, songs, and visual aids. A significant majority (over 80%) of participants reported that the course enhanced their understanding of young learners and strengthened their confidence in teaching. Significant demand was voiced by the students for enhancing practical teaching opportunities, who also underscored the relevance of incorporating technology and real-world exposure into their learning experiences. This study suggests that future TEYL programs should prioritize practicum-centered instruction and technological integration to connect theoretical knowledge to real-world classroom scenarios effectively.

Keywords: *pre-service teachers' perceptions, TEYL, teaching challenges, young learners, teacher education*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners differs from teaching adult students, so teachers require specialized training. The TEYL course is designed to equip future teachers with the tools they need to address these issues in the most effective way possible. Many instructors recognize the distinct traits of young learners, understanding that pedagogical approaches must differ from those utilized with adult learners (Amumpuni et al., 2020). Now, teachers are required to use technology in a way that helps students learn (Syamdianita & Cahyono, 2021). Modern ELT approaches stress communicative competence, and adaptive technologies make it easier for students to study in their own way (Vaishnav, 2024). The worldwide demand for English competence has increased the importance of early language instruction, highlighting the necessity for specialist training programs like TEYL (Saraswati et al., 2020).

This study looks at how students feel about the difficulties of teaching young learners, how the TEYL course helps them deal with those difficulties, and how it affects their confidence and preparedness to teach. Because the field of English language teaching is constantly evolving, it's essential to understand how pre-service teachers think to enhance teacher education programs and ensure that teachers are well-prepared to meet the needs of teaching English to young learners. Teacher educators should have mental as well as emotional competences to support students in becoming skilled people (Bachler et al., 2023). Teachers are a crucial component of schools, and they influence to a great extent how well students perform and how they communicate, particularly in learning English as a second language (Zheng, 2021). Accordingly, the present study is expected to fill the gaps between theories lectured in a TEYL course and practical teaching situations of pre-service teachers in actual classroom environment.

This study contributes to the development of theory on TEYL teacher education as well as providing practice-based insights on improving the structure and delivery of TEYL courses. As pointed out by Kusumarasdyati & Retnaningdyah (2020), pre-service teachers need to learn effective classroom management skills to deal with to the diverse traits of children. This study intends to offer actionable insights to teacher educators on developing systematic teaching plans through the targeted challenges faced by pre-service teachers and evaluation of TEYL course outcomes. It is crucial to recognise that the use of technology in language teacher education is vital for the preservice teachers (Hsu & Lin, 2020). Ultimately, the knowledge of the challenges pre-service teachers encounters and the effectiveness of TEYL programmes will lead to better outcomes for young learners of English. This will give these students the language they need to succeed later in life.

Prior research and studies have emphasized the importance of concentrated early years language (EYL) pedagogy training, albeit a limited number studying students' perceptions towards the advantages and disadvantages of TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) courses. The study offers important insights into the challenges confronting pre-service teachers and the assistance required to manage the intricacies of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), underlining the need for teachers to foster genuine language use in language learning (Anwar et al., 2021). Focusing on this presented gap in literature, this research investigated the effects of a TEYL course on pre-service teachers and their ability to mitigate the difficulties of teaching young learners, which enhanced their levels of preparedness and self-efficacy regarding teaching.

The aim of this examination is to focus on the specific issues related to teaching young learners by analyzing how a TEYL course equips pre-service teachers. Such courses benefit trainees by providing greater preparedness and belief in their teaching abilities. For instance, Ma (2022) found that teacher self-efficacy significantly improves when pre-service teachers engage in well-structured TEYL programs. These programs typically offer theoretical foundations alongside practical strategies tailored to the needs of young learners, fostering confidence and readiness to teach. Professional development is also essential in supporting pre-service teachers beyond course content. In the context of language education, it plays a pivotal role in shaping student learning outcomes (Gao & Yang, 2022; Zeng, 2023). High-quality teachers are those who continuously develop their skills, understand the developmental needs of their students, provide timely and appropriate feedback, and offer pedagogical scaffolding. Ongoing critical reflection and continuous professional learning are, therefore, central to

cultivating effective Early Years Learning (EYL) practitioners who can adapt to evolving educational demands.

The principles concerning young learners' language acquisition, teaching methodologies, and teacher education are the basis from which findings emerged. Effective programs for teacher education focus on fostering deeply engaged and motivated learners who are capable of addressing contemporary 21st century teaching and learning challenges (Dubash et al., 2020). This study broadens understanding regarding the design and implementation of TEYL courses by illuminating the elements that enhance pre-service teachers' perceived teaching efficacy and responsiveness regarding instruction in English to young learners. The understanding that informed this study stems from the research conducted. The impact of this study will be in its contribution of relevant findings and recommendations aimed at course design and development for TEYLs, thus enhancing the planned courses' effectiveness and reinforcing the need for firsthand knowledge and ongoing professional growth.

To address this purpose, the present study aims to examine the ways in which a TEYL course influences pre-service teachers' perceptions, teaching confidence, and preparedness in responding to the specific challenges of teaching English to young learners. The investigation focuses on identifying the nature of the difficulties commonly encountered by pre-service teachers in EYL classrooms, exploring how the TEYL course supports them in overcoming these obstacles, and understanding how the course contributes to their sense of readiness and self-efficacy as future educators.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To collect the views of diverse students, this study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding the TEYL course. The sample population included students enrolled in a TEYL course at Pasundan University in Indonesia. All participants were undergraduate students in an English Education Program who had completed several classroom observation and micro-teaching activities, making them aware of their teaching competencies and readiness to teach young learners.

Quantitative data were gathered through ten Likert-scale items designed to measure students' positions on teaching challenges, perceived course effectiveness, and levels of teaching confidence. To complement these data, six open-ended questions were included to capture students' reflective thoughts on course benefits, obstacles, and suggestions for improvement. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms. Convenience sampling was used to select a total of fifteen pre-service teachers who were actively participating in the TEYL course.

The framework of earlier work concerning the teacher's standpoint and TEYL practices informed the development of the specific questionnaire, which was adjusted to fit the particular context and goals of the study. Data collection was conducted via an online questionnaire which was shared through Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised both closed and open questions. A questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) measured the students' perceptions on how the course addressed their challenges TEYL. Students' perceptions about the challenges of teaching English to young

learners and the effectiveness of the TEYL course were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative responses were organized thematically for identifying recurring patterns while the quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Participants were encouraged to give honest feedback because they were assured that their replies would be confidential and that their identities would remain anonymous. In order to summarize the viewpoints of the students descriptively, the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics which consisted of means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions answered by students. This was done following a series of steps involving coding and categorization. Then, using the quantitative findings, the themes were interpreted to provide a layered and richer explanation of the students' experiences and perspectives. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches into the research, the issues were studied comprehensively and important findings about the pre-service teachers' perceptions of the challenges and the supports provided within TEYL were uncovered.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of the study contribute significantly when considering the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding the challenges posed by teaching English to young learners and the TEYL course's role in mitigating these challenges. To measure the respondents' evaluation of the courses, a specially crafted survey questionnaire containing closed-ended questions was administered and evaluated through a Likert scale. The evaluation centered on the overall relevance of the course, effectiveness of delivery, usefulness of its practical parts, students' confidence and preparedness to teach, and several other pertinent effects. Some answers were pooled together to capture the composite experience and satisfaction of all the students.

Analysis of the Likert-scale data indicated that the impressions concerning the TEYL course were mostly positive. The mean scores for the value of course content, clarity of teaching, and practicality of hands-on tasks were above 4.0 on a five-point scale which indicates agreement; thus, there was uniform agreement among the students (Ebohon et al., 2021). Similar findings were obtained from the 15 students who participated in the study on their perceptions of the challenges associated with teaching English to young learners (EYL) and the TEYL course. A large number of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements that discussed the challenge of sustaining the attention of young learners, the need for active and novel media, and the merits of teaching through experience. The principal outcomes obtained include:

- Over 80% of respondents agreed with the statement that teaching children is more challenging than teaching adults.
- Most participants agreed that the TEYL course equipped them with appropriate teaching materials, including games, songs, and stories.
- Over 75% reported heightened confidence following course completion.
- A significant desire was observed for enhanced practical teaching experiences, encompassing actual classroom exposure and engagement with youngsters.

- Students indicated that the activities enhanced their self-efficacy and readiness for teaching assignments (Klassen et al., 2021).
- The results reveal satisfaction with the TEYL course while highlighting opportunities for enhancement, including the augmentation of practical experiences and the incorporation of a broader range of teaching methodologies.

No	Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1	Teaching children is more challenging than teaching adults	83%	9%	8%
2	The TEYL course provided effective strategies	91%	0%	9%
3	I feel more confident to teach young learners after taking the TEYL course	75%	17%	8%
4	The course should include more practical teaching experiences	92%	0%	8%
5	I understand child development better after taking the TEYL course	89%	8%	3%
6	More classroom management training is needed in the course	88%	9%	3%

Table 1. Summary of student responses to the TEYL course based on Likert-scale items

The table presents the percentage of students who agreed, were neutral, or disagreed with six key statements regarding challenges in teaching young learners and the perceived effectiveness of the TEYL course.

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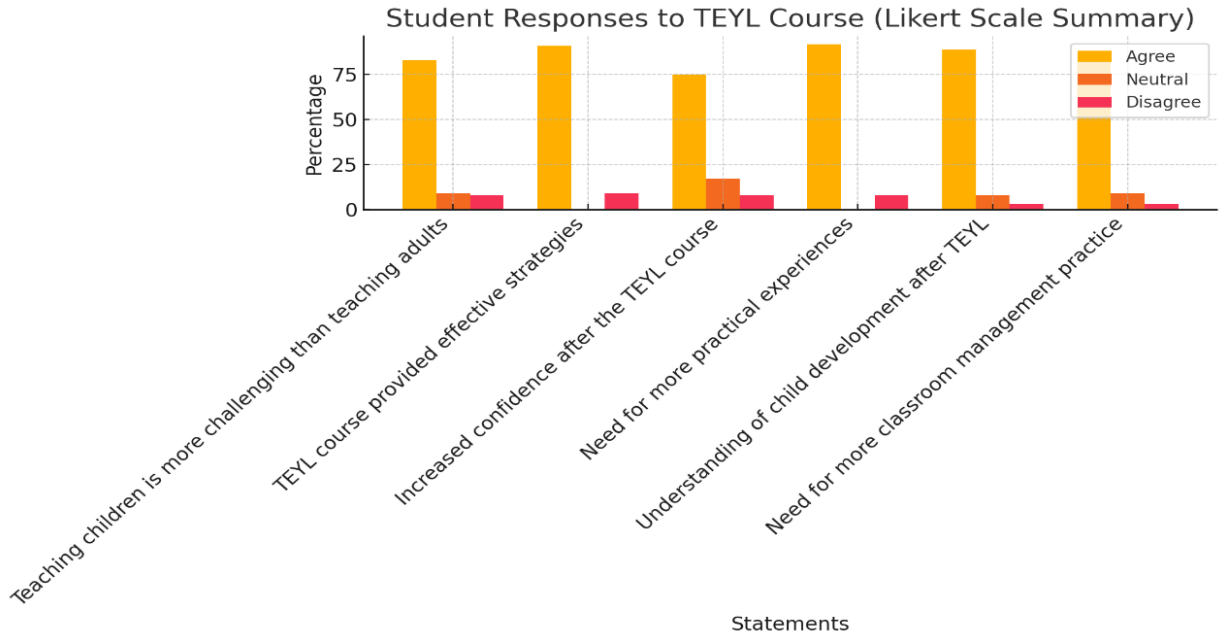

Image 1. Student Responses to the TEYL Course

The bar chart above visualizes the quantitative results of the study, derived from likert scale summary.

Perceived Challenges in Teaching EYL

Students highlighted several challenges, such as maintaining children's attention, managing unexpected behaviors, and creating engaging and age-appropriate learning materials.

> *"Children are easily distracted, so I constantly need to find creative ways to keep the material interesting."*
> *"Managing emotions and classroom behavior—especially when children are tantruming—is quite difficult."*
> *"I'm afraid I'll bore them with my teaching style."*

The difficulties of adapting instructional strategies to the varying rates of learning and personalities of young children were brought up by other pupils. Responses to the open-ended questionnaire provided a wealth of qualitative information that supplemented and expanded upon the conclusions obtained from the quantitative research.

As outlined by the students, the challenges in teaching primary English learners emphasize a dire need for more effective practical training. The complexity of securing young learners' focus, the importance of stimulating and developmentally apt teaching materials, and the necessity for differentiated pedagogy emerged as key issues in balancing instruction with learners' diverse modalities.

TEYL Course Support

The participants asserted that the TEYL course helped them develop specific strategies to tackle such challenges. They learned to use child-centered teaching methods, design appropriate activities, and manage the class.

> *"I learned ways to use songs, stories, and pictures that are really good for kids through TEYL."*
> *"It taught me about how kids think and how to make learning fun."*
>
> *"I learned to use ice-breakers and fun techniques to make classes more engaging."*

As students noted, the TEYL course provided them with effective strategies for teaching young learners. Further qualitative analysis revealed distinct components of the TEYL course that contributed to students' self-efficacy and preparedness (L. Cao, 2024).

Impact on Teaching Confidence

Although some participants expressed self-confidence concerns due to the absence of real-life teaching practice, most noted a considerable improvement. A number of the students observed that the course heightened their sense of self-efficacy by equipping them with suitable skills and competencies that they can readily implement in their future classrooms.

> *"Yes, I feel more confident now because I've practiced and understood child-appropriate techniques."*
> *"I feel somewhat prepared, but still anxious about teaching actual children."*

Future Course Development

The suggestions included adopting technology-based tools, using more video-based examples, and introducing case-based discussions of real teaching scenarios. The study suggests a number of things that should be done in the future for research and curriculum improvement in TEYL. Such research emphasizes the critical need for providing teachers opportunities to enhance their readiness for effective implementation of strategies in their practice (Estaiteyeh & DeCoito, 2023).

> *"I think you should add video examples and interactive apps to stay up to date with modern teaching."*
> *"Add more real-life teaching cases so we can learn how to deal with problems directly."*

The result of the study indicate that effectively structure TEYL courses can positively influence pre-service teachers' views and readiness. Subsequent research should investigate the effects of prolonged practical teaching experiences and the incorporation of technology in TEYL programs. Future research may examine the enduring impacts of TEYL courses on educators' instructional methodologies and students' academic performance. These programs

must amalgamate pedagogical knowledge with practical experience, as comprehensive training in these domains substantially enhances a teacher's qualifications (Mukelabai et al., 2020). Longitudinal designs could also be used in other research to follow the abilities and confidence of pre-service teachers over time. This would give a fuller picture of how TEYL courses affect their professional growth.

Discussion

Consistent with previous research, which emphasizes the complexity of educating young learners and the need for individualized pedagogical training, the highlighted challenges include regulating attention spans, developing novel materials, and handling unexpected behavior. Class management was a common theme in the replies, so it's clear that teachers need to find ways to keep students engaged and handle the unexpected. Findings from this study highlight the difficulty of bridging the gap between classroom practice and the theoretical understanding one receives in a TEYL course. Calls for greater field-based training in teacher education programs are in line with students' acknowledged demand for more practical teaching experience.

1. Perceived Challenges in Teaching EYL

Students in this study identified various challenges such as sustaining children's attention, handling emotional outbursts, and preparing age-appropriate and stimulating materials. These challenges are consistent with previous findings (Kusumarasdyati & Retnaningdyah, 2020) that emphasize the need for specific classroom management and motivational strategies when teaching young learners. As one student commented, “Children are easily distracted, so I constantly need to find creative ways to keep the material interesting,” which aligns with Anwar et al. (2021) who also highlighted the importance of fostering engagement and meaningful communication in TEYL settings.

2. Effectiveness of the TEYL Course

Most students perceived the TEYL course as beneficial, particularly in introducing strategies such as the use of songs, stories, and games. This supports Ma (2022), who emphasized that appropriate training can enhance pre-service teachers’ belief in their ability to teach effectively. It is evident that when teachers are provided with pedagogical tools aligned with child development, they are more likely to approach teaching with confidence and creativity. These results also echo the findings of Gao & Yang (2022), who argued that targeted professional development contributes significantly to student outcomes and teaching quality.

3. Increased Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Over 75% of participants reported increased confidence after completing the course. This development reflects the importance of psychological readiness and self-efficacy in teaching, as discussed by Klassen et al. (2021). According to the students’ responses, engaging with real-

life scenarios, micro-teaching sessions, and reflective practice contributed to this growth. These findings align with the experiential learning theory that suggests learning is most effective when participants are actively involved in applying knowledge and reflecting on it.

4. Demand for More Practical Teaching Experiences

Students strongly recommended that more practicum-based components be included in the course. This suggestion indicates a perceived gap between theory and practice, which is also a common theme in global teacher education (Mukelabai et al., 2020). As noted by Dubash et al. (2020), effective teacher preparation must include robust field experiences that connect abstract knowledge to classroom realities. The need for more practical training also reflects what Estaiteyeh & DeCoito (2023) emphasized—empowering teacher candidates through real classroom exposure and differentiated instruction.

Alghamdi et al. (2022) stated that incorporating technology into early childhood education and remaining flexible in the face of changes caused by technological growth are both emphasized by the study's recommendations. Additionally, technology offers opportunities to develop innovative methods for enhancing teacher education (Kaminskienė et al., 2022). Mixed-reality learning environments are not simply used "in the classroom" but rather "as the classroom" (Ersozlu et al., 2021). This transition is natural because today's educators must be prepared to utilize digital systems and possess the necessary digital skills to teach (Duan et al., 2022; Rakisheva & Witt, 2022).

According to Papa et al. (2023), the incorporation of technology in technology education is heavily dependent on instructors' perceptions of their own topic understanding, specialized training, and professional development programs. The findings stress the importance of institutional policies that promote digital pedagogical practices and the need for specialized training programs (Yulin & Danso, 2025). The incorporation of digital technology in education has revolutionized teaching and learning approaches, requiring a reassessment of educators' pedagogical proficiency. Educators need enough training in digital technology to proficiently incorporate it into their instruction (Gayyur, 2021). In line with socio-constructivist and experiential learning theories, the TEYL course introduced child-friendly teaching strategies, used engaging media, and exposed students to the psychological development of young learners. Students reflected that this course gave meaningful support. The research places particular emphasis on the importance of continuous professional development for educator, particularly relating to the use of technology in teaching and learning (Pappa et al., 2023).

The results underscored that although the acquisition of technological and pedagogical knowledge for teachers is important, it is not sufficient for maintaining technology integration in teaching over prolonged periods of time (Howorth et al., 2024). According to Nordagen et al. (2024), An attempt has been made globally to make teacher education programs more aligned to the profession itself. Therefore, the advancement of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge tailored for educators was crucial yet inadequate for sustaining technology integration in instructional practices over time (Almalki, 2020; Gayyur, 2021; Sánchez et al., 2022). Furthermore, the integration of digital technology is crucial for addressing the fundamental objective of education, which is to enhance the quality of instruction for all

students (Caner & Aydın, 2021). Moreover, educators need to be able to efficiently use advanced technologies, understand their importance, connect them with personal development, and be knowledgeable about the instructional models and the technology's functions which underpin the tool (J. Cao et al., 2023; Tammets & Ley, 2023). The integration of technology and real-world case studies in the TEYL course is essential for equipping pre-service teachers with practical skills and adaptability.

The recurring student suggestions for more real teaching experiences, classroom observations, and feedback mechanisms suggest a gap between theoretical learning and applied classroom readiness, indicating the need to restructure TEYL courses toward a more practicum-oriented model. It was recommended that digital technology infrastructure should be improved across all teacher education institution (Gayyur, 2021). The complexity of teacher digital competence warrants further attention and support as digital higher education evolves in the future (Cîrneanu & Moldoveanu, 2024; Cook et al., 2023; Indalecio, 2022).

This study makes a unique contribution by voicing the lived experiences of pre-service teachers, providing authentic, student-driven insights that can inform the redesign of TEYL courses to bridge the theory-practice divide more effectively. It also provides insights into how teacher education can better prepare pre-service teachers for the realities of teaching English to young learners. Foreign language teachers need to utilize digital tools that enhance students' learning experiences and expand their technology infrastructure (Melkonyan & Matevosyan, 2020). To effectively integrate digital technologies into education, teachers must have the necessary technical skills and experience, and ethical considerations must be addressed when utilizing these tools (J. Cao et al., 2023). Additionally, educators must be dedicated to lifelong learning and adaptability to keep pace with the ever-evolving educational technology landscape. They should seek out new digital tools and innovative pedagogical approaches to improve their teaching methods and cater to the changing needs of young students (Wallace et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Findings show that pre-service teachers face challenges in teaching English to young people. However, the TEYL course helped them understand and prepare for their jobs by using hands-on methods, simulations, and chances to reflect on their work. This study for pre-service teachers focuses on how to use what they learn in real-life situations and how to use technology in language learning. These are both important skills for teachers who have to deal with the challenges of teaching English to young learners. The results showed that it was important but not enough to keep technology integration in teaching methods throughout time to develop technology, pedagogy, and topic knowledge, specifically for teachers.

Digital technology has changed the way teachers educate and students learn; therefore, it's time to rethink how well teachers know how to teach. Because of this, it's very important for teacher education programs to focus on giving pre-service teachers real-world experiences and the chance to think about how they teach. This will help them deal with the challenges of teaching English to young learners and adapt to the constantly changing educational environment. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that learning activities supported by technologies are designed based on appropriate theoretical foundation. By creating more training and support, educational institutions can help pre-service teachers

become more confident, adept, and prepared to teach English to young learners, so improving the standard of language education.

The results underscore the significance of experiential learning within TEYL programs, advocating for the enhancement of modules focused on classroom administration, the utilization of media, and pedagogical approaches centered on the child. The conclusions emphasize the importance of teacher education in equipping pre-service teachers with the skills, knowledge, and tools necessary to teach English effectively to young children. As part of this preparation, they should be given opportunities to gain hands-on experience, reflect on their teaching methods, and incorporate technology into their classes. Longitudinal designs should be employed in future research to examine the long-term effects of TEYL courses on teachers' effectiveness and classroom practices. This would help us learn more about teacher education and professional development. Further study is warranted to examine the advantages and disadvantages of integrating technology into Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), especially concerning digital tools and platforms' effects on engagement, learning, and teacher preparedness.

The research's reliance on self-reported evaluations from a single group lacking direct teaching practice may diminish the applicability of the findings. Further studies need to gather observational data from actual classrooms in order to validate self-reported perceptions and capture more holistic frameworks of the pre-service instructors' challenges. Moreover, the scope of the sample size may be increased to include participants from different types of educational institutions in order to enhance the reliability and generalizability of the results.

Shifting the focus to expanding the use of digital and visual tools, integrating teaching practices into real-world school contexts, and increasing opportunities for feedback, observation, as well as collaborative reflection should be the starting point for developing future TEYL courses. The expected outcome of this revision is to improve the readiness of future educators, especially in relation to the "surprise" factor reported by many prospective teachers. In addition, in order for aspiring teachers to effectively meet the challenges of teaching English to young learners, it is important that their training programs respond to the dynamics of change in education. Teacher preparation programs can better respond to the challenges faced by heterogeneous school populations and help future educators face the realities of teaching today's agile students by providing them with reflective field experiences and integrating new technologies.

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