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Examining Motivation In Tesl Student Teachers Post-Practicum: Insights From The Self-Determination Theory Framework

Nguyen Luu Nhu Quynh
Faculty Of Foreign Languages, Dong Nai University, Dong Nai, Vietnam

Abstract
This study investigates the motivation levels of third-year student teachers and examines the correlations between academic performance, desire to pursue a teaching career, practicum satisfaction, and academic motivation within the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework. The 28-question Academic Motivation Scale (college version) survey was used to collect the data from 167 student teachers in a TESL program at a university. The findings reveal a moderate level of motivation, with external rewards having a stronger influence than internal satisfaction. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between academic performance and increased academic motivation following the practicum. High satisfaction with practicum support, particularly from homeroom and English teachers, is linked to an increased desire to become a teacher. However, the assumption that satisfactory practicum experiences universally enhance motivation might not apply to students with lower academic performance.

Keywords : *Academic performance, Academic motivation scale, Practicum, Self-determination theory, SDI*

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I. Introduction

Insights from prior research

A substantial body of research on student motivation has focused on its correlation with various factors, including retention rate (Willcoxson, Cotter, and Joy, 2011; Rizkallah and Seitz, 2017; Maunder, 2018; Meehan and Howells, 2019; Pedler and Nieuwoudt, 2021), burnout, engagement, and academic performance (Cazan, 2015; Mahdavi et al., 2021).

Among these studies, one that particularly caught my attention is by Willcoxson et al. (2021), even though my research direction does not primarily concern retention. Their examination of students' motivation across all four academic years highlighted an aspect of research that remains underexplored: the motivation of third-year and final-year students. While first-year students have received significant attention from the research community, the motivation of junior and senior students has been relatively neglected.

The prevailing assumption, particularly in the context of retention, emphasizes the practical importance of studying first-year students. This is because many of them are still in the process of exploring various career paths, and understanding their motivation to attend college is crucial for retaining them. In contrast, junior and senior students are more likely to have already committed to continuing their education, having surpassed the critical first-year retention threshold.

Willcoxson et al. recognized the importance of including third-year and final-year students in their study. They concluded that students across all academic years tend to drop out due to a lack of clear purpose for attending university and the inability to study their preferred degree. Additionally, they noted that final-year students are particularly influenced by their academic confidence and the level of support they receive from teachers. These students also place greater emphasis on the status, choice, and reputation of the university.

Their research discussion on how commitment to the school and educational goals more significantly influences junior and senior students, compared to involvement in learning materials, is highly pertinent to my current study, which examines the same kind of motivation, as described by Willcoxson, that impacts the retention of third-year students in a teacher's education program.

Rationale for Targeting Third-Year Student Teachers

My rationale for targeting third-year student teachers is rooted in the observation that their continued commitment to the program indicates a deeper, more sustained motivation, regardless of academic performance. Understanding the nature of this motivation, and how academic performance influences it or is influenced by it,

is crucial. Third-year students have typically engaged in a wide range of academic and extracurricular activities, including internships and other college-related opportunities. These experiences provide rich data for understanding how various factors (academic, social, economic, etc.) influence and reshape their motivations.

Study Design

This study is specifically designed to examine third-year student teachers post-practicum to address the nature of their motivation and the relationship between academic performance and motivation in the context of post-practicum experiences. The research questions are as follows:

a. How strong is student teachers' motivation in their third year of the program? Are they more intrinsically or extrinsically motivated?

b. Is there any correlation between practicum experience and student teachers' academic motivation?

c. Is there any correlation between their academic performance and motivation post-practicum?

This study aims to investigate the intricate interplay between student motivation, practicum experience, and academic performance. There has been limited research exploring the relationship among practicum experience, academic performance, and motivation post-practicum. Therefore, my research aims to delve into the complexity of these relationships.

II. Literature Review

Theoretical framework

The realm of motivation theories is rich and diverse, encompassing influential frameworks such as Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (Artino, 2012), and Achievement Goal Theory (Senko et al., 2011). Among these, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (Ryan & Deci, 2017) emerges as particularly relevant to this study.

SDT employs the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to gauge an individual's level of motivation, making it adaptable to various contexts, including educational environments. In the context of this research, the focus is on third-year university students in teacher education who have completed an intensive 1-month practicum at public schools. At this advanced stage in their academic journey (the fifth semester of their eight-semester program), students who have opted to continue rather than drop out are presumed to have developed a heightened sense of autonomy, reflected in their task proficiency, increased competence as aspiring teachers, and ability to foster positive relationships with peers and mentors. Thus, SDT is selected as the theoretical foundation of this research due to its alignment with these key attributes of junior and senior students.

Furthermore, SDT stands out among motivational theories for its comprehensive exploration of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The three fundamental psychological needs - autonomy, competence, and relatedness - form the bedrock of intrinsic motivation within SDT. Additionally, SDT examines various types of extrinsic motivation, including external regulation (driven by rewards or punishment), introjected regulation (driven by internal pressures like guilt), identified regulation (when a behavior is personally valued), and integrated regulation (when a behavior aligns with one's values and identity). Therefore, SDT is well-suited for investigating whether students exhibit predominantly intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, a central focus of this research endeavor.

The Academic Motivation Scale

The choice of the Academic Motivation Scale (college version) survey, developed by Vallerand et al. in 1992, stemmed from its alignment with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and its widespread use in measuring motivation strength. The scale employs a Likert-type format for responses to the 28 questions, yielding an overall raw score ranging from -18 to +18 for individuals. This scale effectively distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, making it a valuable tool for identifying and categorizing motivation levels. Its straightforward approach to discerning motivational factors adds to its appeal as a research instrument.

III. Methodology

The instrument

In the spring semester of 2024, all 188 third-year students enrolled in TESL programs participated in a survey utilizing the 28-question Academic Motivation Scale. This survey took place immediately after their practicum in the sixth semester of their college year, specifically during the third week of the semester. Out of these surveyed students, 167 responded, providing complete answers to all the survey questions.

Alongside answering questions about their academic motivation, students were also asked to provide demographic details such as age, gender, work experience, family expectations regarding their highest degree, financial pressure, and academic performance in various subjects. Additionally, a section addressing their satisfaction with the practicum experience at public high schools was included. This comprehensive approach

aimed to uncover any correlations between demographic variables, satisfaction with the practicum, and motivation levels. These insights would inform future research regarding the predictability of student motivation.

I applied the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) to Vietnamese university students, operating under the assumption of its validity and reliability. While the AMS has seen widespread use globally, its absence within Vietnam has hindered research efforts in assessing academic motivation. To address this gap, Nguyen & Nguyen (2019) undertook a study to establish the construct validity and reliability of the AMS specifically for Vietnamese university students.

Their study involved 341 university students, predominantly female (88.30%), with an average age of 20.28 years (standard deviation = 1.12). Participants completed an online questionnaire featuring the AMS. Through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), correlation analysis, and assessment of Cronbach's α, they scrutinized the scale's validity and reliability. CFA results supported a seven-factor model, with all unstandardized factor loadings proving statistically significant. Moreover, reliability assessment indicated satisfactory Cronbach α values for AMS subscales. Correlation analysis provided substantial support for the hypothesis regarding the simplex structure of the AMS.

Based on these findings, they concluded that the AMS meets the criteria for both validity and reliability, thus justifying its use in research endeavors concerning academic motivation among Vietnamese university students, as well as its exploration in conjunction with other psychological constructs. Despite limitations such as the non-representative nature of the sample, I still favor the AMS for my research. This preference stems from the belief that third-year students in both my research and their sampled group may share similar motivational characteristics. Furthermore, the AMS has been adapted and validated across diverse cultural contexts globally, including various countries in Europe and Asia, demonstrating its versatility and applicability. This current research utilized the Vietnamese translation of the AMS as outlined in Nguyen & Nguyen (2019)'s study to ensure the survey's validity and reliability among the students.

However, I encountered a concern regarding the translation of the Likert Scale. The original English version employs a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, indicating "Does not correspond at all," to 7, indicating "Corresponds exactly." The issue arose with the translation of the rating "corresponds a little," which was rendered as "không đúng một chút" in Vietnamese. This translation could be interpreted as "just somewhat incorrect, but mostly correct," leading to potential confusion. In Vietnamese, it could also be understood as "Đúng phần lớn," meaning "mostly correct" in English, which is the opposite of "corresponds a little". To address this ambiguity, detailed explanations of the rating scales were provided in both English and Vietnamese within the survey, as well as a different translation of the scale. Notably, the survey was administered in both languages to cater to the English-major third-year students comprising the study sample, ensuring that language did not compromise the reliability and validity of the survey.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to evaluate the characteristics of the sample and the academic motivation of these 167 students. This motivation was measured in terms of the Self Determination Index, the intrincsic scores, and extrinsic scores, all obtained through survey responses. The effect size for the difference between the two mean scores (intrincsic vs. extrinsic) was also calculated. Correlation tests were used to determine the relationship between academic performance and academic motivation post practicum, and between practicum experience and motivation.

The sample

Who the sample represents

The number of students who participated in the survey was 167, and this is not random sampling. The survey was administered to all 188 third-year teacher students in the TESL programs at DNU, but participation was voluntary, resulting in 167 respondents. This introduces self-selection bias, as those who chose to participate might have different characteristics from those who did not.

The sample represents the third-year TESL students at DNU for the Spring 2024 semester. Given that 167 out of 188 students participated, it is a substantial proportion of the target population, making it fairly representative for this specific cohort.

To a smaller extent, this sample might represent third-year TESL teacher students from the last 3 years at DNU because these cohorts have been subjected to the same evaluation standards, curriculum, and lecturers. However, as the researcher of this study, I believe while the shared academic environment supports some generalizability, caution is needed as each cohort might still have unique characteristics. Changes over time in student demographics, experiences, or external factors could affect the applicability of findings to other years.

How good these students are academically
Academic Performance

The following tables summarize the academic performance of the participants across various courses and their overall GPA.

Table 1: GPA Distribution

GPA Range	Percentage
3.6 to 4.0	1.2%
3.2 to 3.59	9.0%
2.5 to 3.19	45.5%
2.0 to 2.49	39.5%
Below 2.0	4.8%

Table 2: Course Performance Distribution

Grade Range	Speaking (%)	Listening (%)	Reading (%)	Writing (%)	Teaching Methodology (%)
8.5 to 10 (A)	3.6	4.8	13.2	1.8	1.2
7.0 to 8.4 (B)	46.7	15.6	38.3	18.6	27.5
5.5 to 6.9 (C)	43.1	35.9	36.5	50.3	46.7
4.0 to 5.4 (D)	6.0	35.9	10.8	25.7	19.8
Below 4.0 (F)	0.6	7.8	1.2	3.6	4.8

According to **Table 1 and Table 2**, the majority of the students have a GPA between 2.0 and 3.19, indicating a moderate academic performance overall. Specifically:

- A significant portion of students falls into the middle range of GPA categories, with nearly half of the students (45.5%) in the 2.5 to 3.19 range and a large percentage (39.5%) in the 2.0 to 2.49 range.
- In the individual courses, the majority of students scored in the B (7.0 to 8.4) and C (5.5 to 6.9) ranges. The Speaking course has the highest percentage of students achieving a B (46.7%), while the Listening course shows a split between C (35.9%) and D (35.9%).
- There are relatively few students scoring in the A range across all courses, with the Reading course showing the highest percentage of A grades (13.2%).
- The Writing course has a notable concentration of students scoring a C (50.3%). Comparing to other courses, the Writing and Listening courses have more students scoring in the C and D ranges.

The main conclusion from this data is while there are high performers in the TESL program, a considerable number of students are achieving moderate grades, with some struggling in specific courses, particularly in the Listening and Writing courses where there are higher percentages of C and D grades.

How satisfied they were with their practicum

The satisfaction levels of the surveyed students with their practicum were evaluated across several dimensions, each rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (**Table 3** and **Table 4**)

Table 3: Practicum Satisfaction

	1 (Minimal)	2 (Inadequate)	3 (Neutral)	4 (Satisfactor/ Good)	5 (Extensive)	Mean	Median	Mode
Support and guidance provided by your homeroom teachers	1.8	9	18.6	29.9	40.7	3.99	4.00	5
Support and guidance provided by your English teachers	3.6	6.0	15.6	31.1	43.7	4.05	4.00	5
Support received from your students	0	6.0	13.8	44.3	35.9	4.10	4.00	4
Academic performance of your students	0	5.4	22.2	60.5	12.0	3.79	4.00	4
Quality of the factilities of the schools during the practicum	1.2	4.8	28.1	46.1	19.8	3.78	4.00	4
Understanding of strengths and weaknesses after the practicum	0.6	0.6	29.9	58.7	10.2	3.77	4.00	4

Table 4: Practicum performance

Practicum score	Percentage of students
From 9 to 10	30.5
From 8 to 8.9	67.7
From 7 to 7.9	1.2
From 6 to 6.9	0
From 5 to 5.9	0.6
From 4 to 4.9	0
Below 4	0

The data suggests that overall, the practicum was satisfactory, with most students feeling the support of the practicum teachers and students and understanding their strengths and weaknesses, which are also the purpose of the practicum.

In terms of support and guidance from teachers, the majority of students rated the support and guidance provided by homeroom teachers as satisfactory (29.9%) or extensive (40.7%), with a mean satisfaction score of 3.99. Only a small percentage (1.8%) found it minimal. Similarly, support from English teachers received a mean score of 4.05, with 43.7% rating it as extensive and 31.1% as satisfactory. The high mode of 5 for both categories indicates that extensive support was commonly experienced by many students.

Regarding support from practicum students, with a mean score of 4.10, the support received from their practicum students was highly rated, with 44.3% of respondents finding it satisfactory and 35.9% extensive. No students rated this aspect as minimal. This indicates that teacher students felt well-supported by the students they were teaching during their practicum, which contributed to a more positive and enriching practicum experience.

The mean satisfaction score for the academic performance of students taught during the practicum was 3.79. A majority, 60.5%, found their students' performance satisfactory, while 12.0% rated it as excellent. Notably, no students rated the performance as poor. This distribution suggests that the practicum students generally performed well academically, creating a conducive learning environment for the teacher students.

With respect to the quality of facilities, it received a mean score of 3.78, with 46.1% rating it as satisfactory and 19.8% as excellent. However, 1.2% of students found the facilities to be minimal, and 4.8% rated them as inadequate. This suggests that while most students found the facilities acceptable, improvements in physical resources could enhance the overall practicum experience.

As to the ability to identify one's strong suit, the mean score for understanding personal strengths and weaknesses post-practicum was 3.77. A significant 58.7% rated their understanding as good, while 10.2% rated it as comprehensive. Only 0.6% found it minimal. This indicates that the practicum was overall effective in helping students identify areas for personal and professional growth.

Finally, for the question regarding how the desire to become a teacher had changed, the distribution of responses indicates that nearly half of the students (43.7%) experienced an increase in their desire to become a teacher after the practicum, while a significant portion (44.3%) remained neutral. Only a small percentage of students (2.4%) decided against becoming a teacher, and 9.6% experienced a decrease in their desire (**Table 5**).

Table 5: Desire to Become a Teacher Post-Practicum

Desire to Become a Teacher	Percentage (%)
I don't want to be a teacher	2.4
Decreased	9.6
Stayed neutral	44.3
Increased	43.7

IV. Results And Discussion

Results

The nature of student teachers' motivation be in their third year into the program

Statistical analysis was conducted to derive a unique Self Determination Index (SDI) value for each of the 167 students, within the instrument's designed range of -18 to +18. Initial descriptive statistics provided a clear overview of the motivational levels of undergraduate students. These values are presented in Table 6:

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of the Self Determination Index Values (N = 167)

Mean	4.80
Mode	9.88
Median	5.46
Standard Deviation	4.70
Range	20.92
Min	- 8.54
Max	12.38

The mean SDI value of 4.8, coupled with a median of 5.46, indicates a left-skewed distribution. This skewness suggests the presence of some low SDI values that pull down the mean, implying that a subset of students exhibits lower motivation levels. However, it does not necessarily mean that a majority of students are low-motivated; rather, the lower scores of a few significantly impact the overall average.

Further analysis divided the 28 questions into categories addressing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with mean values calculated for each. The intrinsic motivation mean was 4.61, while the extrinsic motivation mean was 5.32. These values indicate a higher level of extrinsic motivation among the students. Specifically, 128 students were found to be more extrinsically motivated than intrinsically motivated.

Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation means were not normally distributed. Consequently, Cohen's d was calculated to assess the effect size of the difference between these two means. With Cohen's d = 0.66, the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among undergraduate students is considered practically significant.

In short, the mean SDI of 4.8 on a scale from -18 to +18 suggests moderate motivation levels. The practical significance of the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Cohen's d = 0.66) highlights a noticeable tendency towards extrinsic motivation. While this skew towards extrinsic motivation might imply a reliance on external factors, it does not inherently denote a lack of strong motivation. It simply reflects the nature of what drives these students at this stage in their education.

Correlation between practicum experience and motivation

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to evaluate the relationships between the criteria regarding practicum satisfaction and students' desire to become a teacher, and all of them demonstrated small to moderate, positive relationships with each other, and the relationships are statistically significant. This is to say the student's desire to become a teacher after the practicum tends to increase when their level of satisfaction with the practicum experience increases. The strongest positive correlation was observed between support and guidance provided by your English teachers and desire, r(165) = 0.301, p = .000

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient indicated a significant positive relationship between students' desire to become a teacher after the practicum and their Self Determination Index (SDI), $r_p(165) = .289$, p = .000. This correlation suggests a moderate relationship between these two variables. Similarly, the Spearman's rank-order correlation revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between the desire to become a teacher and the SDI, $r_s(165) = .321$, p = .000. Both tests indicate that as students' motivation levels, measured by the SDI, increase, so does their desire to become a teacher after the practicum.

Additionally, the Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine the relationship between the desire to become a teacher and both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The analysis showed a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between the desire to become a teacher and intrinsic motivation, $r_s(165) = .331$, p = .000, as well as between the desire to become a teacher and extrinsic motivation, $r_s(165) = .331$, p = .000.

In short, these findings suggest that higher levels of self-determined motivation are associated with an increased desire to become a teacher after the practicum. This relationship holds true for both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors.

Correlation between academic achievement and motivation

Both Pearson's and Spearman's tests confirmed a moderate, positive correlation between academic achievement, as measured by GPA, and motivation to study in college, as measured by the self-determination index. The Spearman's rank-order correlation was $r_s(165) = .344$, p = .000, and the Pearson's correlation was $r_p(165) = .330$, p = .000

Discussion

The nature of third-year students' motivation

In terms of how strong student teachers' motivation would be in their third year into the program, the result of the mean SDI of 4.8 on a scale from -18 to +18 suggests a moderate level of motivation, with external rewards and recognition being more significant motivators for these students than internal satisfaction and personal growth.

Desire to become a teacher and practicum satisfaction

The high satisfaction levels in areas such as support from teachers and peers are likely correlated with the increased desire to become teachers. Specifically, the extensive support from homeroom and English teachers likely reinforced their career aspirations. Students who felt well-supported and guided during their practicum were more likely to have a positive outlook on their future teaching careers, as indicated by the high percentages of those whose desire to become teachers stayed neutral or increased. The study also reveals that students with

higher motivation overall, indicated by higher SDI values, tend to be more aspired by the practicum to become a teacher.

Motivation and Academic Achievement

The study confirms a positive correlation between academic achievement and motivation to attend college. In the context of the practicum, students with higher academic performance might draw greater inspiration from the practicum experience compared to those with lower performance. This suggests that even if the practicum experience is positive and the support from practicum teachers and students is high, students with lower academic performance might not experience the same level of increased motivation.

Despite the overall high satisfaction with the practicum—evidenced by more than 70% of teacher students rating their practicum experience as satisfactory or better, and around 70% feeling they understood their strengths and weaknesses after the practicum—only 43.7% reported an increased desire to become a teacher. This indicates that while practicum satisfaction is high, it does not necessarily translate into a heightened motivation to pursue teaching for all students, particularly those with lower academic performance.

V. Conclusion

Implications

The findings suggest that third-year student teachers exhibit a moderate level of motivation, with a stronger inclination towards external rewards and recognition rather than internal satisfaction and personal growth. This indicates that while students are motivated to complete their degrees, their career aspirations need to be continuously reinforced through meaningful extracurricular activities, including practicum experiences.

However, the assumption that a satisfactory practicum experience directly translates into heightened motivation to pursue a teaching career might not hold true for students with lower academic performance. The practicum, while valuable for enhancing motivation, may require additional support mechanisms for low-achieving students to ensure their academic abilities do not negatively impact their motivation. It is essential to provide these students with tailored support to help them realize their potential and maintain motivation despite their academic challenges.

Some may argue that low-achieving students who do not experience a significant motivation boost will naturally filter out of the teaching profession, which is part of a natural selection process. However, given the significant investment that attending college represents, it is crucial to ensure that all students, regardless of academic performance, can reap the rewards of their educational investment. Academic achievements in college may not fully capture a student's potential, especially in an era where technological advancements offer more personalized and adaptive learning opportunities that can help students explore and surpass their limits.

Limitations and Future Research

The mean Self-Determination Index (SDI) of 4.8 on a scale from -18 to +18 indicates a moderate motivation level among third-year student teachers. However, to better understand the strength of this motivation, it is necessary to establish benchmarks and compare these values with other student groups. Future research should focus on creating these benchmarks to provide a more objective evaluation of students' motivation based on SDI values.

Additionally, the study found that students with higher SDI scores, reflecting greater overall motivation, tend to experience a more significant increase in their desire to pursue a teaching career after the practicum. This suggests that the practicum reinforces and amplifies pre-existing motivations in these students. In contrast, students with lower SDI scores did not experience as pronounced a motivational uplift from the practicum. Because SDI and academic achievement correlate, future research should explore how academic achievement and SDI influences the impact of specific interventions, such as the practicum, on career aspirations. This could help in designing targeted support strategies to enhance motivation and career commitment among all students, particularly those with lower academic performance.

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