

Issues and Challenges of English Language Teacher-Trainees' Teaching Practicum Performance: Looking Back and Going Forward

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Abstract

To become a better teacher, teachers are encouraged to practice 'a reflective mind' to have an insight of what is going on in the classroom and decipher what works and would not work (Farrell, 2018). Teachers, the English language teachers in particular, are likely to face many challenges not only in the global economy and competitive market of English education but also to the demanding nature of a teaching career. So, this study is intended to help identify the issues and challenges encountered by 15 teacher-trainees' who undertook their teaching practicum. The narrative inquiry approach was used to identify the issues and challenges of their teaching performance. Using convenience sampling in choosing the samples, reflection papers and semi-structured interviews were used as the instruments to collect data. The findings indicated that, teacher's voice, classroom management, teaching strategies, learning strategies, English communication barriers, vocabulary knowledge, lesson planning, teaching appraisal and classroom motivation were among the issues and challenges the trainees encountered. The indication is that, by looking back, teacher-trainees would understand the essence of a good language (English) teacher, as well as, to reflect, self-critique, assess and improve part of their teaching. Being aware of the issues and challenges in a real teaching environment can shape teacher-trainees personal and professional growth and can be a good resource for going forward and to be successful in their teaching profession.

Key words: English teacher trainees, issues and challenges, reflective teaching, teaching practicum, narrative approach

Introduction

Teaching Practicum (TP) is one of the most important stages in teacher's education. Accordingly, English language teachers have to undergo the same training to be successful in their English language teaching profession (Trent, 2013). To be a competent teacher in the field of English language teaching, a teacher needs a growing body of knowledge to help students achieve lifelong learning. Consequently, effective teachers require re-examining their basic principles, methodologies and trainings, such as, through a teaching reflection. Teaching reflection is considered a complex process of thinking in which teaching principles, knowledge and learning have a reflective relationship (Mann & Walsh, 2017). Reflecting on personal teaching performance might establish professional credibility and measure a teacher-trainee's value as an English teacher. As teacher-trainees are considered part of the teaching processes, they are not only learning as students but also teachers-in-making who are trying to learn and understand their strengths and weaknesses in a real classroom situation. This practice is not only fundamental to teacher's professional development but also enhances students' learning progress (Wallace, 1998).

This study aimed to identify the issues and challenges of English language teacher-trainees' teaching practicum performance at one of the bilingual schools in Bangkok. With the rationale that, after finishing the course works, teacher-trainees are often full of ideas which they believed would help them to be equipped to teach English successfully. However,

what happened in the ELT classroom when they were students differs from the practical side of teaching where they demonstrate their ability to apply theory to practice. Thus, teacher-trainees need to look back so they can move forward by reflecting on the many aspects of English language teaching and understand their individual teaching capability, professional standard, and to construct new knowledge (Kaldi & Pyrgiotakis, 2009) in order to create effective lessons.

This study is an attempt to answer the question: *What are the issues and challenges of English language teacher-trainees' teaching practicum performance?*

Review of Literature

The aim of teaching practicum is to develop teacher-trainees knowledge and skills to prepare them for the 21st century teaching and learning environment and be exposed to teaching English where students are speakers of other languages. To achieve the goal of training, teaching practicum is considered as one of the most important components of teacher's preparation (Campbell, 2016; Flower, König, Ligtvoet, Klemenz, & Rothland, 2017; Flower, McKenna, & Haring, 2017). Exposure to a real classroom environment, gain knowledge on understanding and contributing to different classroom practices, skills and learning experiences (Fajardo & Miranda, 2015) provide a firm foundation for future teachers to practice the art of teaching in real school context (Ovando & Combs, 2011). This experience can critically shape students-teachers perception of teaching and learning (Brookfield, 2017; Warren, 2018) in which English language teaching is built around.

A trained teacher is believed to be more effective in determining students' learning achievement. However, there is also a question of knowledge and skills on the teacher's side as no matter what type of training a teacher has undergone, without the combination of both knowledge and skills, training might still not be effective. Knowing what to teach, how to teach, and what methods to be used for a particular topic, empower a teacher and allow them to personalize their teaching. This means, personalizing your lessons to students' needs and ability (Richards & Bohlke, 2011). Different types of students combined with a particular learning environment are likely to form the knowledge and skills that define teaching expertise (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Lacatena, 2018). As aspiring teachers, teacher-trainees need to demonstrate professionalism in the real English language classroom as presenting lessons which motivate students in a long run helps them to gain competence in using English (Richards & Bohlke, 2011). Therefore, incorporating and integrating different kinds of knowledge, building up a sophisticated pedagogical repertoire, and adapting to learner's diversity are imperative to teacher preparation that can be challenging to teacher-trainees. Nonetheless, there are concerns in some studies on how limited the transmission of knowledge seems to be (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018). Consequently, there is a need to develop reflective practices in teaching practicum so teacher-trainees can gain adequate knowledge on what is going on in the classroom that could help them gradually develop their teaching and learning language strategies (Mann & Walsh, 2017). Reflection and reflective teaching are widely used in teacher education as these are viewed to be beneficial for both pre-service teachers and experienced teachers (Ditchburn, 2015; Pacheco, 2005; Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018). As teachers observe, examine, evaluate and think critically about what happens in the classroom will likely help teacher-trainees to think responsibly, act with foresight planning and be up-to-date with their instructional planning. Learning is a dynamic process, so, even teachers learn differently. Promoting reflection as a means of teacher's development, therefore, is an important technique to improve teachers' teaching quality (Pacheco, 2005).

Rodgers (2002, p. 845) summarized Dewey's (1933) four criteria of reflective practice (cited in Farrell, 2018, p. 29).

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society.
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.
4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.

In other words, teaching reflection is the way teachers' look back at their real teaching experience as a process of self-evaluation while recollecting, distinguishing and looking back what was going on in the classroom. Teachers' prior knowledge about teaching and teaching experiences is related to their historical and sociocultural contexts. Teachers tend to teach as they were taught, a phenomenon referred to as the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p. 160). This notion implies that teacher-trainees own experiences as students influence the way they teach. Reflective practices, it is hoped, will help to identify the issues and challenges to make the changes and improvements in teacher-trainees performance in the future (Beck & Kosnik, 2000).

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative design employing the narrative inquiry approach method as a "real world measures" (Schwarzenbach & Hackett, 2015, p. 92) to understand issues and challenges faced by teacher-trainees during their one month teaching practicum. Narrative approach is considered a suitable method to be used in this study as this deals with real experiences or stories of people, such as, in this context of teacher-trainees (Webster & Mertova, 2007, 2020) where the researcher explored and observed the issues and challenges the trainees encountered and helped them to reflect upon. Nonetheless, reflections involve emotions, thoughts, and interpretations, thus, this may contain subjective elements as the emphasis is on the interpersonal aspect of their language (Bruner, 1987; Foley, 2011). For this reason, questions should be part of the process so clarification could be made when problems or issues arise. This allows the researcher to work with the teacher-trainees collaboratively so objectivity can be achieved (Wang & Geale, 2015). In other words, narrative can be used as "a resource" which allows teacher-trainees to portray their "activities in the world" (Barkhuizen, 2016, p. 29) as well as, expanding the range of voices in research reports highlighting their experiences (Hayes, 2013). This is supported by the studies of Polkinghorne (1988), Connelly & Clandinin, (1990), and Kramp (2004), in which they argued that narrative is a vital human activity which structures experience and gives meaning to the mode of inquiry that tells each person's story. This means, narrative structures and organizes new experiences and knowledge to create meaningful realization of an event or situation (Creswell, 2003, 2006) such as, what can be portrayed by teacher-trainees in teaching practicum reflections.

Population and Sampling Technique

There were 15 teacher-trainees taking part in the teaching practicum in the study in AY2018. They were Master of Arts in English Language Teaching students in one of the international private universities in Bangkok. This is a two year degree program which required graduate students to do courses, teaching practicum and a thesis. Teaching Practicum requires field work where teacher-trainees are required to teach English in Thailand's government and international primary schools. In this study, the teaching practicum consisted of 75 hours field work conducted in a bilingual school. Teacher-trainees were from three nationalities, Thai, Myanmar and Chinese who were required to teach 18 to 27 students in each class. The teaching practicum involved teaching English, as well as, Math and Science. The majority of students was originally from different disciplines and had no prior teaching experience.

All teacher-trainees were considered as basically EFL speakers as English is being taught as EFL in Myanmar (Myo, 1992, Myo & Poe, 2003), China (Qi, 2016) and Thailand (Sornkam, Person, & Yordchim, 2018).

Because of the nature of the study, convenience sampling was used as a technique to choose the participants. The reason was quite straight forward; teacher-trainees were available as it was part of their course and accessible for interviewing.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study were teaching reflections and semi-structured interviews.

Teaching reflection: Teacher-trainees were required to write one reflection paper after the teaching practicum. There were no specific guidelines for writing the reflections. However, teacher-trainees were advised to reflect on their overall teaching experience and assess the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching performance including the issues and challenges that they had encountered. Each reflection was at least 1,000 words in length. 15 reflections papers were collected.

Semi-structured interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five trainees to clarify confusing or ambiguous statements. 10 of the trainees were not interviewed as their reflection papers were written explicitly and explained clearly. However notes were made from both the reflection papers and the interviews and kept as part of the data.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

After a month of teaching practicum, the reflection papers were collected. Each reflection was labeled as TT1 to TT15. TT refers to *teacher trainee*. All teaching reflections were collected, photocopied and read. Where necessary, meeting was set for face to face interviews to clarify any unclear issues from their teaching reflections. As this study used qualitative analysis, this required thematic coding to record and identify the texts which captured important patterned responses associated to the themes that answered the research question (Creswell, 2015). Coding is a way of "essentially indexing or mapping data ... disparate data that allows the researcher to make sense" of the whole text (Elliott, 2018, p.2851). In this paper, coded themes were represented by chunks of sentences and long paragraph which were grouped under the different themes during the study (Saldaña 2016). This is also the reason why there was neither inter-coder nor inter-rater requested to evaluate the data as these issues and challenges were implicitly and clearly stated in the texts and identified and supported by teacher-trainees.

Coding involved the following steps before the categorization of the themes found.

1. Read the teacher-trainees narratives to familiarize the text in order and identify the different themes found in the narratives.
2. Assigned different code on each theme found.
3. Categorized and grouped the themes found.

Results and Discussion

Issues and Challenges of English Language Teacher-Trainees Teaching Practicum Performance

The result of the analysis revealed issues and challenges that were encountered during the teaching practicum. Some of those were teacher's voice, classroom management, teaching strategies, learning strategies, English communication barriers, vocabulary knowledge, lesson planning, teaching appraisal and classroom motivation. All of which influenced teacher-trainees overall teaching practicum performance.

- *Teacher's Voice*

15 teacher-trainees had indicated that teacher's voice is one among many issues they encountered in teaching practicum. Teachers are viewed as "professional voice users" (Martin & Darnley, 1999, p. 1). A teacher's voice is considered as one of the most important tools that provides control and order in the classroom. However, this is normally treated as less important when it comes to actual teacher training. In fact, English language teacher, in particular need the ability to 'throw their voices' meaning to effectively use 'voice' in different settings, distance, groups and level of students (Martin & Darnley, 1999; Richter, Nusseck, Spahn, & Echternach, 2016). According to Adam (2017) for teachers', 'it's not just what you say, it's how you say it'.

The excerpts taken from the data [reflection papers] indicated, 'teachers' voice' was one of the issues they faced in teaching practicum.

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

1) *Students' complaint that they could not understand what I am talking about as my voice was so soft, so they started talking to their friends. My voice plays a big part why I cannot control the classroom...*

(TT 1, Chinese)

2) *My co-teacher told me to make my voice louder as students have difficulty of hearing my voice.*

(TT 3, Chinese)

3) *My voice is one of the biggest problems; it is soft and they complaint that they could not hear me because of its softness, my co-teachers said that I need to improve my pronunciation so students who only have native speakers' teacher would understand me. Sometimes, students would not want to listen and just talked to their friends and their noise became too much. My co-teacher told me that I needed to speak loudly when I teach. I have tried and towards the end of my TP, it helped my teaching better. I guess.*

(TT 7, Chinese)

Examples Taken from the Interviews

- 4) *When I looked back, I realized that my voice is one of the big problems in my teaching as my students' voice was louder than mine, it was hard for me to control the class. I requested if I could bring a portable microphone because my throat was sore but my co-teacher said, 'we do not encourage teachers to use microphone'. After two weeks of teaching, I was still struggling using my voice the right way as if I wasn't shouting, it sounded like I was whispering...*

(TT13, Myanmar)

- 5) *Before the teaching Practicum, I thought I was prepared to face the real teaching but after a week of teaching, I found there was something wrong. I had to shout most of the time ... for me it was not shouting but just to overpower the noise of my students but then I noticed that the Thai teacher in the room was not pleased about it as she would scold the students to attract their attention. Then Ajarn [X] came to observe my class ... she gave me feedback after the observation and told me I had to project my voice so it would not be sounded like I was shouting.... That was when I realized, what the issue was... I practiced the pitch of my voice after a month but it was still a problem...*

(TT10, Thai)

For teachers, an ability to transform ideas into words is fundamental. In fact, a voice can be viewed as a powerful apparatus as depending on its tone, this can transform the entire classroom atmosphere and students engagement. It needs passion and flexibility and a wide variety of tonal expression. So, as a teacher he or she should know how to throw or project his or her voice. Voice articulation is vital for communicating the lesson to students as the tone of 'voice' can send a clear message (Martin & Darnley, 1999). Likewise, teachers need to realize that they are actors who know how to hold the attention of their students, thus, the body language, tone of voice and words need to complement each other (Dugdale, 2019; Richter, Nusseck, Spahn, & Echternach, 2016).

Pedagogically, English professional standards start from within; as with a teacher's voice. Teacher-trainees should know how to carry or throw their 'voice', as this is regarded as the most important tool in education especially for English language teaching. Since the importance of 'teacher's voice' is often not emphasized in English language teaching courses, hence 'voice training' should be part of the teaching preparation for the future English language teachers. As the inability to project a 'voice' may have the possibility to influence not only in terms of teaching performance but also classroom management.

- **Classroom Management**

All the trainees expressed that classroom management was indeed a big issue in their teaching practicum. A classroom environment can either create or break either teachers' or students' positive attitude. As well, this determines the learning atmosphere and credibility of a teacher to create a successful lesson. Classroom management is always a challenge for teachers because this involves students' who may need different types of learning and different classroom activities (Richards & Bohlke, 2011).

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

- 1) *I still don't know how to control the class. This made me think that maybe teaching is not for me but I love children.*

(TT 1, Chinese)

- 2) *Classroom management is always the most difficult task to me. I always asked myself how I could discipline my class effectively. Most of the time my class is so noisy, though I repeated over and over again to my students to behave or keep quite but the more I asked them to be quiet the noisier they are.*

(TT 3, Chinese)

- 3) *I confess, I am not good in controlling the class but I tried my best. I realized that good classroom management can make the teaching progress smoothly and the atmosphere of the class better.*

(TT 5, Thai)

- 4) *Classroom management is my big problem as I could not control the class without the help of my co-teacher.*

(TT 7, Chinese)

- 5) *For the whole month of teaching I used different ways to manage my classroom such as bell, etc. But at the end what worked for my students was the used of behaviorism approached or rewards that helped me to control naughty students better. Although I knew, this reward system might have a negative impact to students learning but if it helps me to control the classroom easily, it doesn't matter. One thing I would say, students learned and found the activities interesting and a reward is good.*

(TT 9, Thai)

Example Taken from the Interviews

- 6) *Sometimes I am confused as my students who look like angels can just changed without reasons. I am not sure whether they were bored or just sleepy but once they started not paying attention, they have their own world ... what I was doing was started chasing each one of them and told them to go back to their sets so we can continue our class...*

(TT12, Myanmar)

Classroom management is a vital part of teaching strategies; however, classroom management varies as this depends on teachers' activities, students' levels and even the facilities available (Delceva–Dizdarevik, 2014). There is also a question of the needs and abilities of the students that might not be aligned with teachers' objectives. As students may realize teacher-trainees are novices, students might have a tendency to show little interest in terms of what teachers expect of them and thus, tend to be difficult to control. Furthermore, young students tend to have a short attention span, hence, hands- on activities that might help to draw 'challenged students' attention might help in managing the class.

As part of pedagogy, a good classroom management creates a good working atmosphere for teaching and learning. This creates an affective English classroom environment that might engage students in different activities as they view that their

participation is valued. This means, teachers should recognize not only students needs and interests but also contributions in the class.

- **Teaching Strategies**

10 out of 15 teacher-trainees indicated that teaching strategy is one of the issues that can be challenging for them. Teachers are normally encouraged to use different types of teaching strategies which cater to different students' learning styles and needs (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016). Understanding students' learning styles helps teachers to choose which types of teaching strategies are suitable to their individual students. However, using different strategies can be very difficult to attain especially with large classes and it is probably more realistic to find a balance, so all students understand the essence of the lesson being taught.

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

- 1) *We were told that games help to motivate young students to be participative in language learning, but students didn't care about the game and some could not understand the role of the game... the classroom becomes chaotic and no learning happened. At the end, I felt upset as the game did not turn out well. So I changed my teaching strategy to a more teacher centered- approached, no more games, just me talking in front of the class. I think, it worked as students listened and they were quite.*

(TT 6, Chinese)

- 2) *I have learned different teaching methods and strategies but I always based on the students mood and classroom situation. As I have difficulty communicating my lesson to the students sometimes, TPR became a suitable strategy I used as I could use my body language. I also used reward system and praised my students a lot as encouragement.*

(TT 7, Chinese)

- 3) *As I was teaching young children, I was confused what approach should I used. I realized that we cannot just use one single strategy when we teach ... I observed my co-teacher but I could not determine what strategies or theories they used. ... I was experimenting different approaches I've learned from my MA. courses... I used schema theory in which I reflected on the knowledge of the students acquired from my lesson...sometimes I applied constructivist approached to teaching where students learned by doing something...I believe that learning by doing something interesting allows the students to remember what they have learned better...but I had concerned because a lot of the students were naughty... I used Behaviorism theory and used positive reinforcement by giving them rewards such as chocolates, giving crown to students who always answer the questions. Using this strategy helped me to control the class...in my Science I used Gardner multiple intelligences... I used different teaching strategies in the classroom just to create interesting activities...*

(TT 9, Thai)

Example Taken from the Interviews

- 4) *I tried to be creative with my activities just to make sure that my students can learn something every day from my one month of teaching... I used different games and even let students dance... However, it is hard to know what students really enjoy the most when it comes to learning. One thing that I realized... they liked to compete with each other, the problem was those who were bright dominated the class and those who needed helped just cheered with the rest... I wanted to create an activity in which everyone can benefit from it but the more I tried the more I got frustrated... I just realize how tiring it was to be a language teacher...*

(TT13, Myanmar)

Games were one of the strategies used by the teacher-trainees especially in dealing with young learners in Primary 1 & 2. According to a number of researchers, the use of games as part of teaching English as a foreign or second language helps students to learn in a relaxing environment and be focused. This is supported by Silver's (1990) study in which he argued that the use of the games in the English language classroom would likely help to avoid monotony of a lesson. As students become involved in the game, learning becomes enjoyable. However, the use of games in TT6 lessons seems not to work. This is supported by Stojkovic & Jerotivjevic (2011) study when they highlighted the disadvantage of using games in the classroom. According to them, using games might create 'discipline issues' as students might create excessive noise and 'lack of learning' since students' have a tendency to forget the purpose of the game.

In teaching, there is no definite approach that works for all learners (Prabhu, 1990), so using eclectic teaching strategies is advisable. Teachers should know what work and does not work for their student. As teachers, understanding student's individuality is important because learners are different. They have their individual needs and preferences.

- ***Students' Learning Style***

10 teacher-trainees indicated that students learning styles affect the flow of their teaching performance during the teaching practicum. Students' learning styles tend to determine students' learning habits, confidence and achievement. Therefore, knowing students' learning styles not only allows teachers understand the learners but also "help[s] learners in learning how to learn" (Awla, 2014, p. 242; Wong & Nunan, 2011).

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

- 1) *What impressed me most is seeing students' individuality. Some are fast learners but some learned very slow in which even I repeated what I have explained many times, they (slow learners) still could not do the exercise. But the majority of them prefer hands on activities. Though, a few of them tended to not pay attention but when I asked them questions, they answered very well. This means they are listening.*

(TT 6, Chinese)

- 2) *I realized even naughty children were needed to be appreciated as they actually smart. Smart students like to talk a lot so they dominated the classroom while for those who are quiet and just listened to others... I also realized that quiet students answer their class work better.*

(TT 7, Chinese)

- 3) *I found that students love activities especially if the teacher used video...they liked songs so much but some students would not like to speak... on the other hand I found foreign students spoke better than me. So sometimes because of the different level of students' ability my materials were not suitable for low level student and some looked bored.*

(TT 8, Chinese)

Lessons and activities created by teachers can have an influence on the establishment of students' classroom behavior. However, knowing students different learning styles can be difficult to determine especially if a teacher is a novice or in this context, trainees. So depending on students learning styles they tend to adapt or use different learning strategies as well (Richards & Bohlke, 2011).

Learning strategies are techniques that can help students' learning retention which facilitate language acquisition and retrieve information accumulated overtime, thus, vital to learners' learning development to become independent learners (Oxford, 1990). Understanding students' individuality, preferences and needs can help teacher-trainees to be able to prepare activities that facilitate students with different learning styles.

- ***English Communication Barriers***

Nine teacher-trainees indicated that one of the issues they found was the communication barrier in English. A good and effective communication allows a sender to convey his or her idea and express feeling clearly. However, if a language, such as English, is not the first language of a speaker, he or she tends to encounter difficulties to convey their message or in the context of a teacher, the lesson clearly (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Such difficulties can be viewed as barriers to communication. To be an English teacher, a person should have a good command of English. Meaning, the language should be comprehensible, intelligible and understandable to receivers (Gallaway & Rose, 2015; Jenkins, 2014).

With regards to teacher-trainees who in this case were essentially EFL users of English, English communication was a potential barrier to communicate their lessons to the students. Linguistic complexities such as vocabulary usage, pronunciation, grammar and overall coherence and cohesion make considerable demands on the trainees in an English classroom.

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

- 1) *Students have difficulty understanding my accent as I am Chinese and they are familiar with the native speakers' pronunciation.*

(TT 1, Chinese)

- 2) *I always encountered problem when I talked in front of my students. I realized that pronunciation is very important for an English language teacher*

(TT, 2, Chinese)

- 3) *One of the problems when I was doing my Teaching Practicum is my English communication. My students could not understand the way I talked. My co-teacher told me that I need to speak slowly and clearly. Since then I was conscious of my pronunciation. I tried to speak slowly, louder and used my body language.*

(TT 4, Chinese)

- 4) *I have found that language barrier is one of the problems when I was teaching. Students could not understand the way I speak, so I used TPR (Total Physical Response) as part of my method to be understood.*

(TT 7, Chinese)

- 5) *I really felt frustrated as students found it difficult to understand the way I spoke to them. So, I had to speak slowly or wrote the words on the board to help them understood. I practiced a lot just to make sure that I pronounced the words right. Having no knowledge in Thai language added to the problem as there was no other way to explain words that might be difficult for the students to understand... I tried my best to focus on this issue...*

(TT12, Myanmar)

The examples indicated that teacher-trainees English language proficiency is a problem. As successful communication involves comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981), therefore, understanding the message is vital for a successful acquisition.

Communication barriers can be avoided if teachers' learn to adapt and articulate their language when communicating with students. Comprehensible input works better if students understand and absorb the message. As teacher-trainees were aware that English communication barrier was one of the main issues, they knew they had to work on their English communication skills; for example, know how to adjust and articulate their English pronunciation to improve their self-confidence and develop their communication skills.

• ***Vocabulary Knowledge***

Eight teacher-trainees stated that they had problems with vocabulary. This issue was to some extent surprising as teacher-trainees were graduate students. Nevertheless, as these teacher-trainees were EFL speaker, this might be the case. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the foundations of understanding students' literacy, as well as, determining teachers teaching performance (Muhamad & Kiely, 2018). Nonetheless, teachers' ability to use English confidently and fluently in the classroom depends on how much vocabulary they know. Vocabulary size is not only imperative on teachers' ability to engage in natural communication but also to other learning abilities such as listening, reading and writing skills (Ocampo & McNeill, 2019). Teachers' vocabulary knowledge is important as they normally are responsible in giving correct feedback on words that students might not understand.

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

- 1) *Teaching content based learning is difficult if you don't have sufficient knowledge about the vocabulary used in the classroom, for example, Science.*

(TT 1, Chinese)

- 2) *I wrote the wrong vocabularies in the blackboard and at the end students have written wrong words on their working book.*

(TT 2, Chinese)

- 3) *As I was teaching Science, I noticed that there were many technical words used so vocabulary was a challenge for me. I found there were many words I didn't know while students knew it better than me. It was an embarrassment.*

(TT 7, Chinese)

- 4) *I relied so much in using my phone to check my vocabulary abilities...this might be the reason why I forgot some of my vocabularies when I was teaching. It was so embarrassing actually as students knew the vocabulary better than me especially in the Science subject... I tried to familiarize the vocabulary before I started teaching but I still wrote few mistakes.*

(TT10, Thai)

Part of learning a language is to use words in a real world situation, thus vocabulary should be an integral part of teaching and learning. Because of the complexity in teaching vocabulary, teachers need to have proficient level of the language they teach. According to Nation (2001) knowing a word means knowing, 1) form – spoken, written, word parts; 2) meaning – form and meaning, concept and references, association; 3) use – grammatical functions, collocations, constraints on use, in which according to Sonbul & Schmitt, (2010) may need to be learned explicitly (cited in Muhamad & Kiely, 2018, p. 37).

Learning vocabulary is not only for learners, teachers too need to read and develop their vocabulary. Being prepared is one of the characteristics of a competent teacher. And a competent teacher should always prepare his or her lessons; this includes the vocabulary that will be used in the lesson.

- ***Lesson Planning***

Writing a lesson plan is a requirement for every teacher. Eight out of the 15 students indicated that writing a lesson plan was one of the challenges the teacher-trainees encountered during their teaching practicum. Preparing a lesson plan is a reflection of teacher professional standards, principles and addresses learning outcomes (Richards & Bolhke, 2011). Part of English language's teachers training is to enable the trainees to create effective lesson plans to achieve their teaching goals in order to assist students in developing their language skills and to align with students' language proficiency levels and needs..

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

- 1) *One month in teaching practicum let me realized how important class preparation was. Lesson plan was submitted every weekend. So throughout the teaching, I have thought my teaching methods, prepared my lesson plan especially the 'link' I used for my teaching. I did and redone my materials especially when I noticed that the class had poor performance because of my lesson. I prepared the second materials every day as our TP advisor told us to 'always have a back up lesson'. I spent time reading and re-reading the textbooks that we had to use until I was satisfied with my work.*

(TT 4, Chinese)

- 2) *Throughout the TP, I made sure that my lesson plans were submitted on time and did activities of my lesson interesting and hands on. Sometimes I ran out of idea and no idea at all.*

(TT 9, Thai)

- 3) *During my teaching practicum time, I searched different teaching activities and adapted it in my teaching based on the lesson that I had to teach. Because students' ability is quite high I wanted to make sure that they would never feel bored and run-out my activities. I had to be on time in submitting my lesson plan.*

(TT 5, Thai)

Lesson planning involves teacher's critical and creative ability, competence and confidence in providing students good learning experience. A good language teacher does not only rely on providing series of activities but a considerable body of knowledge to understand students' individuality as these reflect on how lesson plans should be designed. A good lesson plan is not only about creating lessons and activities but also clearly describes the objectives or purpose of the lesson. This reflects on classroom environment and how lesson should be implemented to let students engage and develop a positive view on learning.

Knowing students individuality, needs and interests is helpful in the preparation of lessons. Therefore, a teacher should know how to reflect or review the previous lesson and understand students' strengths and weaknesses in order to launch the next set of activities while focusing on areas in which the students may need further assistance.

- ***Teaching Appraisal***

Teacher appraisal refers to the evaluation of individual teachers to make a judgment about their "competencies and performance and/or to provide feedback" to support the improvement of their practice (Phelps, 2014, p. 272). This is central to teacher-trainees skills development which is essential for their future teaching career especially for those who aspire to be English language teachers. Feedbacks given to teacher-trainees are viewed as necessary as this helps to structure their teaching practice effectively.

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

- 1) *Every time I saw my co-teachers or my supervisor sat at the back of my class, I had mixed feelings. On one hand, I would like my co-teachers to provide me feedback so I can improve. On the other hand, I was afraid that they gave me a low appraisal thinking that it will affect my grade. I know I should have not think that way, but knowing that my teaching performance has consequence on my grade... what I can think of was my students to be with me so I would not have mental block.*

(TT 3, Chinese)

- 2) *My co-teachers helped me a lot. They gave helpful suggestions to improve my teaching, different ways to deliver my lesson and tips on managing my class. Their weekly feedback really helped me a lot... I felt like a real teacher as I started gaining my self confidence.*

(TT 4, Chinese)

- 3) *I don't know why but seeing my advisor setting in the classroom made me cold. However, after talking to her after my class, I felt very happy as her feedback helped me a lot to pay attention on stuff that I normally ignored when teaching, for example, the students at the back as my focus was always on my students in front of me.*

(TT 15, Chinese)

- 4) *I thought I was confident and done very well with my teaching until my advisor observed my class and gave me feedback... I did not realize that my view was different from reality... as my attention was only focusing on the students in front of me and ignored those who sat at the back and quiet students. It was like a wakeup call for me...it also made me worried what my co-teacher and the head of the program would say to their evaluation...*

(TT12, Myanmar)

Teacher's appraisal or evaluation is probably the most difficult part of the teaching practicum. Head teachers, co-teachers, and practicum advisors are assigned to conduct teacher-trainees teaching evaluation. Although the overall teaching-practicum evaluation aims to help the teacher-trainees enhance their teaching practice performance, they are also graded, thus, teaching evaluation can be an important issue. Nevertheless, from the samples reported in this study the indication was that teacher-trainees evaluations seemed to have positive effect on teaching performance which indirectly influenced students' learning outcome. As teacher-trainees became aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching, they would likely change their strategies.

Teaching appraisal is about teaching improvement, thus feedback should not be taken negatively but as room for improvement.

- ***Classroom Motivation***

Motivation is a complex issue that can be challenging for teachers to fully understand. Nine teacher-trainees stated that they had problems in motivating students' engagement in the classroom. Motivation per se is focusing on learning situations that has three components; 1. *course specific*, (the teaching materials, the teaching method, and the learning task); 2. *teachers specific* (teacher's personality, teaching style, feedback, and teacher-students' relationship); 3. *group specific* motivational components (students' dynamics). All of which are responsible on shaping students classroom motivation (Dornyei, 1994, p. 277-79; Dörnyei, Henry, & MacIntyre, 2014).

Examples Taken from Reflection Papers

- 1) *I observed my students were not active and they feel bored. When I asked them questions their response was very low. When I asked them to talk and discuss the activity, they didn't talk, they just scribble something on paper. I felt frustrated and disappointed with my teaching, I don't know how to motivate them except by giving them sweets and letting them watched cartoons.*

(TT 12, Myanmar)

- 2) *I am not sure whether my students were unmotivated or just tired but I really felt sad as they seemed not interested on what I taught as they would rather talk to their*

friends than listen to me. I know they were really young but I cannot think of something that can motivate them to do something. Towards the end of my practicum, I decided to include hands on activities liked coloring and watching video to make them occupied.

(TT 8, Chinese)

- 3) *I think one of the challenges I faced was how to motivate my students to be with me the whole time because sometimes they would just walked around the class. I noticed that their attention span is quite short, so I had to make sure that they stayed focus by giving them lots of work during the class for a short period of time.*

(TT 6, Chinese)

Motivation involves different facets. Knowing what exactly motivates students to learn in the English language classroom would significantly improve the learning situation. Understanding students' individuality is quite crucial as this might help to know what types of teaching materials, teaching methods and learning tasks that need to be used to engage students to do what they want to achieve in the classroom. Students with different proficiency levels and needs are likely to require different forms of attention; hence, different teaching style, rapport and feedback to the students are needed. In motivating students, a teacher's personality is also vital. Knowing how to act accordingly when a situation requires is essential, as well as, having a positive relationship with students can promote a positive learning environment that might be able to change the overall learning atmosphere. Nonetheless, classroom motivation is not as clear cut as it might seem. In spite of this, motivated teachers do produce motivated students, so teachers should inspire their students to motivate them.

Conclusion

As regards this study, the purpose was to identify the issues and challenges of English language teacher trainees' teaching practicum performance. The findings indicated that teacher's voice, classroom management, teaching strategies, learning strategies, English communication, vocabulary, lesson planning, teaching appraisal and classroom motivation all played a part in the complexity of teaching.

Looking back, teacher trainees seemed to realize that assuming you know everything is a false assumption. The indication is that, in teaching profession, no matter how long a teacher works in teaching profession, issues and challenges are inevitable. In actuality, even though teachers are trained to teach and deliver their lessons, not everyone has the quality of a good language teacher especially if the teaching medium is not their first language. As Renandya & Widodo (2016) said, "teachers need to be trained and re-trained to meet the changing language learning needs" (p.5). Thus, teacher-trainees should know that the essence of a good language (English) teacher is to know, how to reflect, self-critique, assess and improve parts of teaching which are not working. Personal observation and evaluation, for example, allow teacher-trainees to be critical of their own performance. Being aware of what is going on in the classroom helps them connect to reality. Hence, reflecting on your own teaching performance in a real teaching environment can lead to your own personal and professional growth.

Teachers in general are learning every day to understand their students' learning ability, their needs and adjust to how complex the teaching situation actually is. On the whole, teaching is dynamic in nature and influenced by students learning styles. A teacher,

therefore, needs to be experimental as there is no single method of teaching that works in the classroom as claimed by Prabhu (1990). Consequently, learning to reflect back is a way of exploring one's own teaching performance and practices that allow teacher-trainees, in particular, to look back in order to go forward in their teaching profession.

As we have seen teachers' learning and development begins with their pre-service teacher education program and developing classroom experience. It is also hoped, that this will develop within a Communities of Practice (CoP) (Synder & Wenger, 2010). Such CoPs are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning, of people who share expertise and passion through learning how to do what they do. Learning, then is not merely acquiring skills and information, it is a process of becoming a certain person, a knower. CoP function as part of their professional development as teachers to find a balance between their personal preferences and shared collegial understanding.

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