Exploring EFL Pre-Service Teachers’ Perception of Internship Programs: Lesson Learned From Thailand

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching internship is recognized as one of the most important aspects of the pre-service teachers’ education during their degree study. According to the Bachelor of Education, English major curriculum in Thailand especially the student teachers take the internship course to practice teaching for one academic year in school of their final year after they have gained experience of English language skills and pedagogy. This paper explored pre-service teachers’ perception of internship experience in terms of (1) lesson planning, (2) teaching and learning process, (3) language assessment, (4) action research, and (5) professional relations. Fourteen English major pre-service teachers, in their second semester of the final year internship in school, were selected by purposive sampling according to voluntary basis and interview (in-depth interview) of the aspects of internship experience above. This paper reflected the details of teaching practice experience of the EFL fourteen pre-service teachers with respect to challenges during the internship namely time allocation for English classes and research conduction. It was suggested that the pre-service teachers needed support from their cooperative teachers and their university supervisors who could work well with them according to styles and readiness.

Keywords: EFL Pre-service teachers, Internship, Teaching practice experience

INTRODUCTION

Besides solid knowledge from teacher education and English-major courses in the curriculum, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) pre-service teachers need to experience the real situations of teacher life in school via practicum and internship. At the research site, pre-service teachers or student teachers have to spend one academic year of their final year of Bachelor of Education in school to become full-time teacher after they are trained to observe classes and record students’ learning development in three practicum courses.

As mentioned earlier, before EFL pre-service teachers are sent to school as full-time teacher, they are trained to be associated with school context by observing and experiencing EFL teachers’ teaching as well as observing learners’ development. After that, they are trained to precisely comprehend the core curriculum of basic education in Thailand covering first grade to twelfth grade in lesson planning and actual teaching with their peers. These processes were conducted through practicum courses before their final year internship in school. Therefore, during the internship year, they are mostly supervised by the EFL school teachers who are in charge known as cooperating teachers (CTs). In other words, EFL pre-service teachers have to pass three preparatory practicum courses before the internship in their final year. According to Huling (1997), teaching practice experience offers pre-service teachers a chance to observe and work with students, teachers, and curriculum in natural settings. Therefore, pre-service teachers’ internship experience is very important in teacher production process.

As required by the National Teachers’ Council, EFL student teachers have to practice their teaching in the final year of their degree in the cooperating secondary schools where qualified CTs are ready to supervise them during their time in school. According to requirement of the National Teachers’ Council, CTs have to hold at
least Bachelor of Education, English major, with at least three-year experience of EFL teaching in school and supervise pre-service teachers with pedagogical and moral support. The cooperating schools where the pre-service teachers are sent for their internship are the places of learning environment. During the period of one academic year, two semesters, the pre-service teachers would have opportunity to practice at least 8 EFL classroom teaching hours per week. Besides classroom teaching of their major subject, student teachers are required to experience other teachers’ tasks, such as mentoring their students, substitute teaching when other teachers are absent, leading extra-curricular activities, and creating projects to promote student learning, and other requested tasks in school.

When the pre-service teachers start the transition to school, they usually attend the orientation from the principal or administrative personnel informing them about the school policy and the working culture in school. After that, the head of English Department would introduce the pre-service teachers to their CTs. The matching of CTs and the pre-service teachers normally depends on the grade they are going to teach. The more competent pre-service teachers would be more likely to teach the higher grade and their supervision in school would be from the CTs who are teaching the particular grade. When the CTs and the pre-service teachers are introduced, they usually discuss about the responsibilities that the pre-service teachers are about to achieve. Whenever the pre-service teachers need advice, they should consult their CTs first. It can be said that the direct support should be from their CTs.

The tasks of the pre-service teachers include lesson planning, developing and creating teaching materials, observing learners’ development, solving learners’ academic, behavioral, and social problems, creating projects to develop good learning environment, and cooperate with other school personnel in order to complete the school assignments. It is also compulsory that each pre-service teacher conducts an action research to solve one of the learners’ problems in learning English (Practicum and Internship Manual, 2017). As there are multiple tasks that the pre-service teachers have to achieve, they really need support from others. The CTs are seen as the main source of this support because they are most available for advice during the internship period (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). The university supervisors visit and observe classes at least once a month and give advice both in classroom teaching and action research. They are also an influential support for the pre-service teachers.

This paper explored pre-service teachers’ perception of internship experience in terms of (1) lesson planning, (2) teaching and learning process, (3) language assessment, (4) action research, and (5) professional relations. During one academic year of teaching experience in school with supports from the CTs, university supervisors, and other school personnel, how would the pre-service teachers view their internship experience?

**LITERATURE & THEORY**

Practicum and internship has been viewed critical to the development of pre-service teachers. It is their first hands-on experience with their teaching profession. It creates opportunities for them to develop the pedagogical skills, and it is the best way to acquire professional knowledge and competences as a teacher (Leshem & Bar-Hama, 2008). These pre-service teachers assume that they will be able to apply most of the theories they have learned in the teacher education courses in their teaching practice. Richards and Crookes (1988) pointed out that these learner teachers will gain practical classroom teaching experience and skills in selecting, adapting and developing original course material. Calderhead (1988) supports that the period of placement during practicum (internship) has an important influence on the current and future impressions learner teachers acquiring the nature of learning and teaching. Thus, the EFL pre-service teachers expect that they will gain more knowledge and experience on learning and teaching English language in school through their hands-on experience of internship. It could be said that what these novice teachers expect to gain more knowledge and skills mainly includes
pedagogical content knowledge.
Richards (2010) suggests a pedagogical content knowledge that novice teachers should be prepared as following:

1. Understand learners’ needs.
2. Diagnose learners’ learning problems.
3. Plan suitable instructional goals for lessons.
4. Select and design learning tasks.
5. Evaluate students’ learning.
6. Design and adapt tests.
7. Evaluate and choose published materials.
8. Adapt commercial materials.
10. Make appropriate use of technology.
11. Evaluate their own lessons.

As pre-service teachers are new to the teaching profession, along this process of learning how to teach and deal with students’ problems, they needed a lot of support. They can ask for advice from their CTs and the university supervisors. However, since the internship takes place mostly at school, the CTs are the most available support for the pre-service teachers. Bailey (2006) applies the situational leadership model to advise the suitable way to match the pre-service teachers and the CTs.

Situational leadership model was originally created for management, but had been used in education and could be helpful for language teacher supervisors. It was suggested that effective leaders tailored their behavior to meet the needs of their followers. Orburne (1989) adapted the idea of situational leadership which was used in management to educational context. She discussed two components of leadership behavior which were task behavior and leadership behavior. These two terms were defined by Hershey and Blanchard (1982) as following:

Task behavior is the content to which leaders are likely to organize and define the roles of the members of their group (followers) to explain what each activity is to do, and when, where and how tasks are to be accomplished. Relationship behavior is the extent to which leaders are likely to maintain personal relationship between themselves and members of their group (followers) by opening up channels of communication, and providing socio emotional support (Hershey & Blanchard, 1982).

We can apply these concepts to language teacher supervision, where the CTs (leaders) must attend to both task behaviors and relationship behaviors while interacting with EFL pre-service teachers (followers). Figure 1 shows the continua of relationship and task behaviors in situational leadership. The explanation will be below the figure.

Figure 1
Continua of Relationship and Task Behaviors in Situational Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High task behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low relationship behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low task, high relationship (S4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low task behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High task, high relationship (S2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low task, low relationship (S3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High relationship behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CTs are flexible in emphasizing or deemphasizing relationship and task behaviors. They can use either high or low task behaviors, as well as high or low relationship behavior orientations. These two constructs are plotted as overlapping continua in Figure 1. The S in each quadrant stands for ‘Style’.

In S1 quadrant, it shows high task, low relationship strategies. This means that the CTs would not attend to maintain relationships or providing socio emotional support, while he/she would provide clear guidance about the tasks to be accomplished. The main focus is on the task rather than the relationship.

In S2 quadrant, it shows high task, high relationship strategies. This means not only the CTs would attend to maintain relationships or providing socio emotional support at the high level, but he/she would also provide clear guidance about the tasks to be accomplished. In this style, the clarity about the task is maintained, but the classroom-based cooperating teachers also provide emotional support and build a positive relationship.

In S3 quadrant, it shows low task, high relationship strategies. This means the CTs would not be specific about the task, but would maintain or build a positive relationship.

In S4 quadrant, it shows low task, low relationship strategies. This style represents a nonjudgmental, nondirective style that is neutral as to affect and also minimalist as to specific guidance.

However, one factor that determines what leadership style to use is the person being supervised, in this case, the pre-service teachers. Is the pre-service teacher experienced or confident? One can be confident but inexperienced, or experienced but lacking in confidence. In situational leadership, these combinations are referred to as readiness.

According to Bailey (2006), there are two components of readiness; job readiness, meaning the knowledge, ability and experience to perform certain tasks without directions from others, and psychological readiness, meaning the confidence and commitment or willingness to do something. This model posits that certain leadership styles are most appropriate for working with people at given readiness levels. In other words, CTs will be more successful with their supervision if they select the combinations that work best with particular pre-service teachers. The constructions can be depicted as overlapping continua in Figure 2 and the appropriate match is proposed in Table 1.

Figure 2
Continua of Job and Psychological Readiness in Situational Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readiness</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>S1 HT/LR</td>
<td>Unable and unwilling or insecure Provide specific instructions and closely supervise performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>S2 HT/HR</td>
<td>Unable but willing or confident Explain decision and provide opportunity for clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>Able but unwilling or insecure</td>
<td>S3 LT/HR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>Able and willing or confident</td>
<td>S4 LT/LR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RELATED WORKS OR DISCUSSION**

Research on pre-service teachers in English teaching field is rare in Thailand. It is worth looking at these two researches conducted in Singapore and Malaysia. Farrell (2008) explored the perceptions of 60 learner English language teachers’ experience in Singapore during the period of their school placement for teaching practice for nine weeks. The result of the study suggested that learners of English language teachers needed and wanted more support while they were on teaching practice and that the support and guidance personnel within the schools could help them to build positively on learner teachers’ success in the initial teacher education course. Wong (2010) explored pre-service teachers’ beliefs of learning English and the stability of these beliefs over time. The participants were 25 pre-service teachers (11 males, 14 females) enrolled in Bachelor of Education (TEL) program. Data analysis was completed using frequency statistics showed that generally pre-service teachers recognized the existence of foreign language aptitude and placed strong emphasis on excellent pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, the benefits of practice, and an immersion approach to language learning. Most of them reported of being highly motivated to learn English and were positive about their ability to master the language. The findings also revealed that with the exception of slight change (ranging from 4% to 20%) to two items on language learning difficulty and six items on nature of language learning, most of their beliefs were stable over time.

**METHOODS**

**Sites and Samples**

Fourteen EFL pre-service teachers consisted of 4 males and 10 females from four cooperating schools in Bangkok, Nonthaburi, and Rajburi participated in the study via voluntary basis. All of them practiced their internship during two academic semesters in 2017.

**Research Instruments**

**Interview**

They attended the in-depth interview in the second semester, and were asked how they perceived their internship experience on the following topics: (1) lesson planning, (2) teaching and learning process, (3) language assessment, (4) action research, and (5) professional relations.

Interview questions about lesson planning
(1) What is the definition of a successful English class concerning the lesson planning?
(2) What are the challenges in lesson planning?

Interview questions about teaching and learning process
(3) How successful is your teaching and learning process?
(4) What are the challenges in the teaching and learning process?

Interview questions about language assessment
(5) How do you assess your students learning?
(6) What are the challenges in language assessment?

Interview questions about action research
(7) What do you think about conducting action research during the internship?
(8) What are the challenges in action research conduction?

Interview questions about professional relations (Use options 1-6 for the questions numbers 9-10.)

(9) During your internship in school, who is most helpful to you in academic support?
(10) During your internship in school, who is most helpful to you in moral support?

1. Pre-service teachers who are doing the internship at the same school
2. Your cooperative teacher (CT)
3. The more experienced teacher in school
4. The head of English department
5. The principal
6. Others (please specify) …………………

Observation
The researcher observed the pre-service teachers’ teaching, their lesson plans, their teaching materials, and their teaching environment and take notes.

Documents
The researcher studied documents relevant to the pre-service internship experience namely “Supervising pre-service language teachers” in Language teacher supervision: A case-based approach conducted by Bailey, 2006), “Second language teacher education” in The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages written by (Carter & Nunan, 2001), and “Professional development” in Methodology in language teaching: An anthropology of current practice conducted by (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Procedure of Data Collection
The interview took place at four cooperating schools. The in-depth interview of the pre-service teachers at their internship sites were conducted as guided by the interview questions according to their convenient time. The interviews were audio-taped. The researcher also took notes right after the interview and the classroom observation.

Data Analysis
The data from the transcribed interview data and the researcher’s notes were analyzed by content analysis according to themes guided by the interview questions adapted from Merriam (2009).

RESULTS

Regarding the in-depth interview with fourteen EFL pre-service teachers in four cooperating schools in three provinces, the results were presented below.

Questions1-2: The pre-service teachers were asked to define the successful English class concerning the lesson planning and what challenged them when planning the lessons. All of them had the same opinions that they agreed that the successful teaching was from the well-planned lesson. However, it was very hard for them to follow every step in the lesson plan because of the limited time allocation. Each teaching period has 50 minutes to achieve 1-3 learning objectives. The pre-service teachers had to make use of the time otherwise they would miss some content that they expected to teach. The successful teaching with respect to the lesson planning, therefore, meant the class that the students were taught all content that were planned according to the curriculum.

In addition, all of them mentioned that the challenges in lesson planning were the time allocation and the
communicative activities. The pre-service teachers tried to plan the classroom activities communicatively (according to the communicative language teaching approach). However, the actual teaching would consume too much time if they followed everything in the plan. Thus, nine pre-service teachers made shortcuts by cutting down some activities and five of them arranged the extra classes to cover the remaining content they could not finish in the allocated regular time.

Questions 3-4: The pre-service teachers were asked whether the researcher could observe their teaching and learning process whether it was successful and what the challenges they confronted to achieve the goals. Thirteen pre-service teachers were observed and found that their teaching and learning process successful in terms of fun atmosphere, observing from the energetic movement of the learners along the class participation. Only one among the fourteen felt her class was not very successful because most of the students do not understand the lesson so that they could not do the exercise well. The challenges of the successful teaching and learning process concern the background knowledge about vocabulary and grammar. The pre-service teachers said that they had to explain a lot of linguistic points which should have been taught before the level they were teaching.

Questions 5-6: The pre-service teachers were asked to explain how they assessed their students’ learning. All of them assessed the learning by using teacher-made tests: formative and summative tests. The most popular type of test was multiple-choice test with four options. Other types were gap filling and matching. When asking about the non-test assessment, all of them assign students to do projects such as Christmas, Halloween, etc. However, when asked about the challenges of language assessment, they all said that test designing was challenging or difficult for them. During their internship year, the CTs could not let them to make the entire test papers. Pre-service teachers were assigned to make about twenty-five percent of multiple-choice test items and they needed to be edited by the CTs.

Questions 7-8: The pre-service teachers were asked about conducting action research; what they thought about it and what challenges were. All of them thought that action research conduction was very difficult, especially at the beginning of conducting it. They found a lot of problems, but they had to choose one topic to do research. Four of them chose to do research on listening and speaking because the principal urged that the secondary school learners should be able to communicate in English well. The rest chose research topics with their CTs and also asked for help from the university supervisors.

Questions 9-10: The pre-service teachers were asked to point out from a list of people who were most helpful to them both for academic and moral support during the period of internship. Actually, they would like to give more than one answer. All of them were close to their CTs and other experienced teachers, especially those who sit in the same teacher’s room. Five out of fourteen mentioned they could consult moral support with the principal. They could consult academic problems raised in the classroom with their CTs and the experienced teachers. For the action research conduction, seven of them preferred talking to the university supervisor, while eight teachers received advice and went hand-in-hand in research conduction with their CTs.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper, the pre-service teachers who were the final-year students of the five-year curriculum, Bachelor of Education, English major attended the in-depth interview in their second semester about their perception of internship experience in terms of lesson planning, teaching and learning process, language assessment, action research, and professional relations. In order to plan communicative activities for English teaching, the pre-service teachers recommended to increase more time allocation for English class. They planned the lessons according to the curriculum and wanted to finish all of the content as they planned. In spite of the students’ not-so-good background knowledge of grammar, most of the pre-service teachers could fulfill the English class with
fun atmosphere. Pre-service teachers practice making tests, but did not have opportunity to make the entire test paper. They need editing and supervising from their CTs. The research conduction seemed to be the hardest part of the internship. However, the pre-service teachers would make decision to choose who they would consult according to those people’s expertise.

It was understandable that not all CTs were good at research conduction though they had many years of teaching experience. Neither were the university supervisors. For the future research, the research about teacher education can apply situational leadership model to the supervisory model for EFL pre-service teachers so that the pre-service teachers, the CTs, and the university supervisors could work together according to their styles and readiness. As Farrell (2008) explored the perceptions of pre-service teachers in Singapore, pre-service teachers needed support from the available supporters around them namely cooperating teachers, experienced teachers at the internship site, the university supervisors and their peers. While Wong (2010) reflected that the majority of pre-service teachers believe that the English teaching subject matters should be focused on pronunciation, vocabulary and the English teaching approaches. Thus, the pre-service teachers should be supported with those aforementioned aspects.

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