

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH STUDENT TEACHERS AND THE CAREER ASPIRATIONS IN HBUN

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the difficulties encountered by pre-service English teachers in Hebei Normal University for Nationalities (HBUN), Chengde, Hebei Province, China. In order to improve the qualifications of the pre-service English teachers and the local English education, the further research of difficulties faced by them is conducted through a non-scale questionnaire with open questions. The findings with the aspirations from the pre-service English student teachers can improve their professional development.

Keywords: Difficulties; pre-service English student teachers; career aspirations

INTRODUCTION

The Background of the Study

As one of the important stages of college life for undergraduates majoring in English Education, the sophomores are the predecessors of in-service English teachers in junior high schools in Chengde, China. Before graduating from HBUN, they have started to learn and grasp teaching theories and teaching skills, but it is not safe to conclude that such pre-service English

student teachers have never considered the difficulties in future professional development.

There is another factor for these pre-service English teacher to take into consideration, which is the newly revised curriculum criterion for primary schools, junior high schools and senior high schools.

The National Curriculum Criterion for Compulsory Education (NCCCE) by Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in April 2022 provides a new guideline for teaching all elementary, junior and senior high schools, which arouse a new cause for keeping up with new demands. Therefore, the teachers are necessarily faced with new challenges. In such a context, the NECCCE (2022) was accordingly revised. The NECCCE (2022) still focuses on the integration and unity of instrumentality and humanity English curriculum. The new version is the basic programmatic document for teaching and reform. It marks a new stage of basic education in China. The NECCCE (2022) is revised based on the principles of being target oriented, problem oriented and innovation oriented. The core literacy focusing on Language Competence, Cultural Awareness, Thinking Capacity and Learning Ability is the manifestation of the value of curriculum education.

Based on the different developmental stages of teachers, the author, as a professional English teacher in university, focuses on the research of the difficulties faced by the pre-servive English student teachers from the Department of Foreign Languages (DOFL) in HBUN. The convenient condition for the research is that the students the author teaches are future English teachers in most local schools in the city, which provides a very close connection between college education and teaching situation in these schools.

Following the general model of skill development presented by two Berkeley professors, the philosopher Hubert Dreyfus and his brother, computer scientist Stuart Dreyfus (1986), Berliner (1988) further analysed the five stages in the development of

expertise in pedagogy: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competent, Proficient and Expert.

Based on the diverse characteristics of each stage, Berliner applied this model to pedagogy to research how many years the whole developmental process from novice to expert needs. However, these five stages start when they win the qualifications for being teachers and they are in service. Before these five stages, there is a very important period that exists before the undergraduates leave school, especially the last year on campus for the pre-service English student teachers.

A review of the literature identifies challenges as difficulties encompassing tensions, varied experiences, opinions, beliefs and conceptions of teaching and learning, basic understanding of the secondary school culture and context for teaching and learning, interaction with students, awareness of teaching skills and techniques, reflective thinking during the initial stages of the pre-service academic program, and practical teaching resources (Napanoy, Gayagay & Tuazon, 2021).

Another review of the literature showed that dominant problems of pre-service teachers are the learning environment, cooperating teachers, peers, students, assigned tasks, lack of school engagement, language barrier and resources. Such difficulties in various aspects of field observation may block the enhancement of field experiences like practicum (Napanoy, Gayagay & Tuazon, 2021).

Professional difficulties are challenges in the process of professional development in which the two are mutually connected closely. Professional challenges circularly emerge, and are overcome by the knowledge, skills and expertness required during the process of professional development.

Statement of the Problem

The foremost purpose of the present study is to look into the difficulties that arise in the pre-service stage of English student teachers. The causes and coping strategies are the second

objective of the research.

As far as the present study is concerned, it is a general idea about the difficulties encountered by pre-service English student teachers in a small city. It will address the following questions in the perspective of the sophomores:

What difficulties do the pre-service English student teachers encounter? And causes?

How to cope with the difficulties?

What are the prominent aspirations among the pre-service English student teachers?

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Research Design

The non-scale questionnaire is applied in the present study. 85 respondents are chosen, the sophomores in DOFL in HBUN. They enrolled for the school year in 2020. As the last year of being English education majors, they are experiencing graduation practice in different junior high schools. At the same time, they are also preparing to become in-service teachers.

The participants are given a questionnaire with multiple choices and an open question to investigate the main questions: 1) What difficulties they encountered during the pre-service stage and the causes; 2) How to cope with the difficulties; and 3) What are the most prominent aspirations?

By using a three-stage coding process derived from grounded theory, as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008), the data in the present study were in descriptive analysis. The three-stage coding process is: open coding involves the examination, comparison, conceptualization, and categorization of data. Raw data are examined for similarities and differences, and initial conceptual categories are identified; axial coding, in which data are put together by making connections between categories and subcategories. Selective coding involves selecting the core

categories and organising them around a central explanatory concept.

Instrument and Data Analysis

85 non-scale questionnaires were collected from the pre-service English student teachers and the coding process was conducted in the following stages.

Opening coding

Among 85 respondents, there are 6 boys and 79 girls, which is a tradition in DOFL in HBUN. The age span of 85 respondents is between 20 to 23 years old. Referring to the topic in the present study, the professional difficulties and aspirations, the responses to the questions are intentionally selected to adhere to the current study with seven questions left, because some of the questions are repeated technically.

The codes derived from the key terms in the selected questions and data were from the responses by 85 respondents. In the opening coding stage, the *codes* or *categories* are highlighted and labelled, as shown in Table 14.1.

Table 14. 1: Open Coding

Data with response number and percentage	Code
1.The lack of teaching experience, 52 (67.06%)	Difficulties
2. The lack of teaching skills, 12 (14.12%)	
3.The lack of teaching resources, 7 (8.24%)	
4.The lack of subject knowledge, 9 (10.59%)	
5.The lack of professional training, 40 (47.06%)	Causes
6.The lack of resources in schools, 18 (21.18%)	
7. The overload teaching, 13 (15.29%)	
8. The lack of faculty, 2 (2.35%)	
9. The unreasonable curricula, 4 (4.71%)	
10.The personal attitude, 8 (9.41%)	
11. The sharing of teaching experience, 33 (38.82%)	Coping strategies
12. The training of teaching skills, 31 (36.47%)	
13. The sharing of teaching resources, 13 (15.29%)	
14. The training of subject knowledge, 6 (9.41%)	
15. The mentor system, 17 (20%)	Better adaption to teaching
16. The faculty training, 36 (42.35%)	
17. The sharing of teaching resources, 15 (17.65%)	
18. The training of subject knowledge, 11 (12.94%)	
19. The subject exchange activities, 8 (7.06%)	
20. The support of subject knowledge, 18 (21.18%)	Supports for solving student problems
21. The support of psychological counselling, 20 (23.53%)	
22. The sharing of teaching experience, 34 (40%)	
23. The training of student management, 13 (15.29%)	
24. The teaching methods, 35 (41.18%)	Instructional improvements
25. The teaching content, 14 (16.47%)	
26. The teaching means, 30 (35.29%)	
27. The teaching assessment, 6 (7.06%)	

Axial coding

Based on the first step of open coding, the axial coding is conducted to clarify the categories of the codes.

Table 14. 2: Axial Coding

Category	Code
Professional Challenges	Difficulties
	Causes
Career Aspirations	Coping strategies
	Better adaption to teaching
	Supports for solving student problems
	Instructional improvements

From the axial coding stage, the codes are finally clarified to two categories, professional challenges and professional development. Difficulties encountered by the pre-service English student teachers are barriers in their career aspirations, which can be illustrated in the selective coding stage.

Selective coding

In this selective coding stage, the data and codes clarified in the first and the second stage should be referred, in order to analyse the relationship between them. Among 85 respondents, some of the pre-service English teachers (52, 67.07%) responded to the encountered difficulties more on “1. The lack of teaching experience”, which is big challenge for their future development. In the causes for the difficulties, there is a greater percentage compared to other causes, which is “5. The lack of professional training” collected from some respondents (40, 47.06%). The difficulties presented in the study are just a tip of the iceberg but they are still the professional challenges during the professional development.

Career aspirations are dreams, goals and desires individuals hold during their professional process. In the present study, for the pre-service English student teachers, there is a period before they

actually start their career but career aspirations refer to their career expectations. In the first two coding, including the initial responses, the career expectations are from those pre-service English teachers who responded to “11. The sharing of teaching experience, (33, 38.82%)”; “16. The faculty training, (36, 42.35%)”; and “24. The teaching methods, (35, 41.18%)”. For this information, it can be concluded that in the career expectations in the developmental process, what the pre-service English student teachers need is concerning instrumental aspects that are included in the field of professional development.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

On the basis of the three-stage coding, the present study finds that in the professional development, the pre-service English student teachers have their focus on instrumental improvements like experience, training and methods.

Professional development must begin with training for the role of teacher and continue throughout the course of teachers' professional service. Professional development is an ongoing process of education that includes teaching practice and support activities (Bolam, 2002). It is safe to say that the need for teaching training is accordingly positive for future professional development of the pre-service English student teachers.

Although the difficulties encountered by the pre-service English student teachers in the present study cannot include most aspects related to teaching process in this field, there is still the significance of the study. The pre-service English student teachers are in the crucial stage to link the in-service stage. Professional difficulties are the challenges for the pre-service English teachers to conquer to foster the professional development. The career expectations stem from the difficulties they encountered, and at same time, they enhance their professional development in advance.

CONCLUSION

The current study only focuses on a small quantity of participants who are English Education majors in DOFL in HBUN. The study shows that there are difficulties in the pre-service stage before the in-service stage. The causes and career aspirations or expectations result from the difficulties. However, the present study still needs in-depth research with more dimensions.

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