

How Prepared are the Preservice ESL Teachers to Teach: Insights from University Supervisor Feedback

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A central component in pre-service teacher training is teaching practice and feedback (Copland, 2010). The study reported in this paper examined the experience of ESL trainee teachers in Hong Kong during the practicum. In total, 74 field experience feedback forms and 74 classroom language use evaluation sheets were collected and analyzed. Data analysis showed that the dominant challenge this group of ESL trainee teachers encountered was an apparent lack of adequate pedagogical knowledge needed to translate their subject-matter knowledge into effective instruction. The study also revealed that a closer relationship between the university language education program and schools is needed to create the conditions that permit ESL student teachers to better contextualise their theoretical knowledge learnt in the university teacher preparation course in practice. Results of this study contribute to the current debate on how university second language teacher education programs can best equip trainee teachers with the knowledge and skills that will best enable them to participate in the actual experience of teaching.

Keywords: ESL trainee teachers, university supervisor feedback, teacher knowledge, ESL teacher education programs

Introduction

Although it is widely believed that teaching practice can establish a process of helping student teachers build a bridge between their theoretical knowledge base and their practical experience in schools, recent research suggests that there has been a lack of empirical description of what pedagogical knowledge and skills pre-service ESL student teachers need to acquire to function effectively in the classroom and how such practical knowledge and skills develop. While there is near unanimous agreement on the importance of supervisor feedback in student teachers' professional learning (Copland, 2010; Tang & Chow, 2007), previous research in this field has tended to focus strongly on the perspectives of student teachers, with less attention being paid to the views of university-based teacher educators. The insights that can be learned from these previous studies, about the detail and complexity of the difficulties actually encountered during the practicum, are thus of limited scope, and far less is known about second and foreign language teachers' initiation into the teaching profession. This paper examines student teachers' professional learning experiences during the practicum from the perspective of university supervisor feedback. The paper attempts to contribute to a better understanding of how ESL trainee teachers are faring in the practicum experience and to shed light on the implications for second language teacher professional development.

Teacher Knowledge and Competence Development in the Practicum Context

The idea that that experience-based learning is an effective way of learning about a new discipline or subject is well-documented in the teacher education literature (Borko, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991). As such, the practicum provides opportunities for student teachers to acquire a repertoire of teacher knowledge and teaching skills through observing experienced teachers and guided practice-teaching (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Shulman (1987) defines teacher knowledge as encompassing content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman views content knowledge as the knowledge, understanding, skill, and disposition that are to be learned by school children, and this constitutes the basis of a teacher's professional experience. According to Shulman, pedagogical content knowledge refers to ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to students. In other words, pedagogical content knowledge focuses on the teacher competence to make subject matter accessible to students. In the field of language teacher education, teachers' subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of learners are recognized as three essential components of effective ESL teaching (Johnson & Goetsch, 2000). These three categories of knowledge are intertwined in complex ways as they are played out in the classroom and in teacher thinking (Bayurt-Tuzel & Akcan, 2009). It is noteworthy that in the second or foreign language context, teachers' subject knowledge includes teachers' proficiency in the target language and an awareness of the structure and features of the target language (Andrews, 2007; Richards et al., 2013). However, there have been concerns that the language training which pre-service trainee teachers have received in the context of their undergraduate studies does not equip them with competence necessary to cope with classroom communication (Richards et al., 2013). According to Elder (2001), teacher target language proficiency and awareness is multidimensional, encompassing everything that 'normal' language users might be expected to be able to do in the context of both formal and informal communication as well as a range of specialist skills such as command of subject-specific terminology, the discourse competence required for effective classroom delivery of subject content, and effective target language modelling. Consequently, an essential characteristic of an effective language teacher is target language knowledge for accurate modelling of target language structure, lexis, and pronunciation (Nasserdeen, 2001, p. 22).

Teacher competence is teacher knowledge put in practice (Day, 1993). More recently, Tang (2004) outlines how the practicum context (i.e., the action context, the socio-professional context, and the supervisory context) impacts on student teachers' professional knowledge and development. In the action context, student teachers engage in actual classroom teaching, with pupils being the 'critical reality definer' who validates student teachers' professional knowledge and competence or makes them feel inadequate (Nias, 1989). The socio-professional context enables student teachers to interact with practitioners and peers, and it gives them access to the practical knowledge possessed by these practitioners in the teaching community. In the supervisory context, teaching supervision helps bridging student teachers' theoretical and practical forms of knowledge.

Specifically, in the context of practice teaching, supervision typically takes the form of lesson observation and post-observation conferences and a provision of constructive feedback (Tang & Chow, 2007). Feedback is usually defined in this context as information supplied to trainees by a teacher education supervisor, concerning some aspect of their performance on a task, with a view to enhancing practice (Brandt, 2008). According to Shute (2008), formative feedback is information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behaviour for the purpose of improving learning. In the appraisal of student teacher practicum performance, feedback is provided to help student teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses, formulate target areas for remedial actions, and develop skills to improve their practice (Topping, 2009). Such feedback processes that clearly build on formative interactions between student teachers and teacher educators may consequently offer new windows into what practical knowledge student teachers develop and how such knowledge develops. More recently, it is argued that even summative assessments of the students' language skills can also be used formatively to give constructive learner feedback and improve learning. Hence, an important requirement for the

learning purposes of any appraisal or assessment of field experience is the feedback that is provided to student teachers during the learning-to-teach processes.

Non-Native Teachers in Second or Foreign Language Teaching Profession

In the context of ESL teacher professional development, Richards (2010) rates language proficiency as the most important skill among the ten core dimensions of expertise in language teaching. This echoes Cullen's (1994) argument that inadequate command of spoken English undermines pre-service teachers' confidence in the future classroom, affects his or her self-esteem and sense of professional status, and makes it difficult for him or her to follow even fairly straightforward teaching procedures such as asking questions on a text. For example, Littlewood (2007) observed that in Asian English classrooms, non-native teachers themselves lack confidence to conduct communication activities in English because they feel that their own proficiency is not sufficient to engage in communication or deal with students' unforeseen needs. Lee (2005) reported that in Hong Kong English classrooms there was excessive dependence on the mother tongue to solve communication problems, which deprives learners of the opportunity to listen and speak in the target language. Lee further attributed Hong Kong students' poor English performance to local non-native teachers' low proficiencies in English. In the context of New Zealand high schools, Richards et al. (2013) investigated the differences in the classroom practice of foreign language teachers with limited subject knowledge compared to teachers with more extensive subject knowledge. Their study demonstrated a variance in the number of key aspects that the teachers could manage and in the differences in their level of effectiveness in managing these key aspects. Richards et al.'s study thus emphasized the importance for teachers with limited levels of target language proficiency of continuing to develop their subject knowledge in order to maximise the language learning opportunities for their students.

Method

Against the backdrop of the literature reviewed above, we undertook a study on the experience of ESL trainee teachers in their practicum experience. Specifically, this study focuses on the following two questions:

1. What aspects of ESL trainee teachers' classroom teaching did supervisor feedback suggest that needed improvement?
2. What were supervisors' evaluations of the ESL trainee teachers' competence with classroom language use?

Setting

The teacher education program in which this study was conducted is a Bachelor of Education (BEd) for prospective primary or secondary teachers of English as a second language provided in a Hong Kong university. The program therefore covers the equivalent curriculum of a BA in English as well as provides pedagogical training. Specifically, pedagogy-oriented courses include language teaching theory and methodology, curriculum and assessment, and classroom management. Language proficiency-oriented courses include vocabulary, phonology, literature, semantics, and grammar. Such proficiency-oriented courses are provided to ensure that students in this program will experience significant English language development as most of them usually have a fairly modest level of English proficiency on entry. In this BEd program, a component of 6-week practice teaching is also offered in the first semester of their fourth year as part of the practical application.

During the 6-week practice teaching experience, the participants were placed at different local primary

and secondary schools to take up the role and responsibilities of an ESL teacher and to be engaged in the life and work of the school. The participants worked under the guidance of a supporting school teacher and were supervised by a staff member of the BEd program. These ESL student teachers' major duties in the schools included planning and preparing lessons, according to the school curriculum and the students' needs, and carrying out independent teaching in the assigned classes. The responsibilities of the supporting school teachers included helping the student teachers settle into the life of the school and helping them with their teaching preparation, whereas the university supervisor was responsible for on-site observation of student teachers' classroom performance and for providing evaluation and feedback after each lesson observation. In this study, each ESL student teacher was formally observed twice. During the lesson, the supervisor, who has received teaching practice assessment training organized by the University Student Field Experience Centre before undertaking observation and assessment, is usually perched on a chair placed towards the rear of the classroom, assessing the student teacher's performance using a standardized field experience feedback form. This field experience feedback form has two major columns. The left-hand column has 16 items, arranged in five categories (i.e., Teacher, Planning & Content, Teaching & Managing Learning, Assessment strategies, Communication & Interaction), to be rated by the supervisor on a four-point scale (i.e., Distinction; Credit, Pass, and Failure). The right-hand column permits the provision of qualitative feedback on the student's actual teaching performance. This article focuses on the qualitative feedback provided by the supervisors as such feedback was based on observation of the student teachers' actual teaching performance rather than any predetermined guidelines.

In addition, a classroom language use competence form is designed for the supervisor to assess four aspects of the supervisee's classroom language use on a five-point scale. The inclusion of a classroom language use ability evaluation in the assessment of the student teachers' practicum performance is based on the premise that second or foreign language teachers' use of the target language in the classroom is crucial to successful instructed language learning. It needs to be pointed out that in assessing ESL trainee teachers' classroom language competence, the Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) component of the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT) in Hong Kong was adopted by the university to evaluate ESL student teachers' competence to deliver an English lesson to students in a secondary English class. The CLA assessment criteria cover five levels of ability (i.e., Level One represents the lowest ability and Level Five represents the highest ability) in four major domains of teacher classroom language use: 1) grammatical and lexical accuracy and range; 2) pronunciation, stress, and intonation; 3) the language of interaction; and 4) the language of instruction. The passing criteria for the CLA is that a minimum of Level 3 must be obtained on all 4 domains to pass. The rating of the classroom language use ability constitutes an important component of each student's overall teaching practice performance assessment.

Data and Data Analysis

In line with the research questions, this study focuses on the pedagogic content of the qualitative feedback provided by the university supervising teacher on different aspects of the student teachers' classroom teaching. The study also analyzes the supervisor evaluations of the student teachers' classroom language use ability as it is usually suggested in the literature that teachers' use of the target language in classrooms is crucial to effective instructed language learning. The data used in the study are thus written lesson observation feedback reports and the classroom language use competence evaluations completed by university supervisors. A total of 74 completed field experience feedback forms as well as a total of 74 classroom language use evaluation sheets were collected from 37 ESL student teachers who volunteered to take part in the study. Most student teachers had their teaching observed twice by the same supervisor. Eighteen supervisors were involved in the supervision of the 37 student teachers. Most supervisors involved in this study supervised two student teachers. All supervisors undertook the compulsory teaching practice standardization training. In line with content analysis, a descriptive, mainly qualitative

approach was used to analyse each supervisor's written feedback report to identify their observed problems and inadequacies concerning the student teachers' teaching as well as their suggestions and recommendations for improvement. The analysis was based on case study research (Merriam, 2009). Initially, after a line-by-line review of each report, open coding occurred where each phrase or notion indicating pedagogical difficulties or inadequacies and the supervisor's suggestions or recommendations was identified and labeled. Secondly, through cross-case comparison, the codes were grouped into various thematic categories indicative of a need for improvement in student teacher classroom teaching practices. This process of identifying and generating particular conceptual categories of supervisor feedback was first done manually by one of the authors. To ensure the validity and reliability of the generation of those feedback thematic categories, the whole process of identifying and categorizing the data was thoroughly checked by the other author. When issues of ambiguity arose, the two authors discussed it until consensus was reached.

In addition to the analysis of supervisor qualitative feedback on student teacher teaching, supervisor evaluations of student teacher classroom language use were analyzed descriptively to provide insight into student teachers' proficiency of the target language, which, as the literature suggests, can influence language teachers' classroom practices.

Results

Aspects of the Trainees' Teaching Needing Improvement

Table 1 below shows that seven main feedback themes with a total of 153 mentions emerged from supervisor comments, suggesting a need for improvement in student teacher classroom teaching. These themes are: 1) *Subject-specific instructional strategies*; 2) *Management of learning environment*; 3) *L2 task design, implementation, and assessment*; 4) *Classroom interaction*; 5) *Use of instructional resources*; 6) *Catering for learner differences*; and 7) *Lesson planning and implementation*. The 153 comments that represent specific challenges observed and the suggestions for improvement are presented in Appendix A.

TABLE 1

Seven Main Themes of Supervisor Feedback Suggesting a Need for Improvement in Student Teacher Classroom Teaching

Theme	Frequency of mention	Percentage
1. Subject-Specific Instructional Strategies	50	32.7%
2. Management of Learning Environment	31	20.3%
3. L2 Task Design, Implementation, and Evaluation	21	13.7%
4. Classroom Interaction	16	10.5%
5. Use of Instructional Resources	12	7.8%
6. Catering for Learner Differences	12	7.8%
7. Lesson Planning and Implementation	11	7.2%
Total mentions	153	100

Subject-specific instructional strategies

Subject-specific instructional strategies in this article refer to the processes and actions that are consciously deployed by the ESL student teachers to assist students in learning or using the target language in class. Such strategies focus on the activity of teaching itself (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). In this study, data analysis revealed that supervisor feedback for improvement in student teachers' use of instructional methods to teach subject-matter knowledge involves: 1) strategies in teaching grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, and stress (e.g., "In teaching grammar, give examples for each item and also ask pupils for examples"); 2) strategies in optimizing or maximizing target language use (e.g., "Presentation of target language is too form-focused and should have attended more to the

meaning/context”); and 3) other pragmatic pedagogical strategies (e.g., “Complete answers from students should have been insisted instead of just accepting simple answers like ‘Yes’ or ‘No’”). The fact that *subject-specific instructional strategies* emerged as the most frequently mentioned improvement-oriented feedback category suggests that very likely the central challenge to this group of ESL student teachers in the classroom was their lack of experience in employing effective strategies to link subject-specific knowledge with appropriate teaching methods. Note that previous research suggests that such challenges may increase pre-service language teachers’ anxiety and decrease their self-confidence (Bayurt-Tüzela & Akcanb, 2009).

Management of learning environment

Learning environment management is often described as the actions teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates academic, social, and emotional learning (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Research in the general education field shows that classroom management is a perennial challenge encountered by student teachers in their field experience. In this study, there were 31 mentions of learning management-related issues, suggesting that classroom management also constituted a serious concern of ESL student teachers. Specifically, supervisor feedback on classroom management relates to: 1) discipline maintenance techniques (e.g., “Don't give students any chance to make noise to an unacceptable level or even shout”), 2) techniques for orienting and engaging students in learning (e.g., “Be more firm and urge students to follow instructions more quickly/to get students' attention”), and 3) classroom teaching and learning management techniques (e.g., “The group work would have been more effective if students had been asked to move their desks”). These results suggest that some of the ESL student teachers in this study might lack nuanced understandings of how an ESL teacher can effectively establish and manage classroom environments that support both engaged learning and meaningful interactions.

Task design, implementation, and evaluation

In the language teacher education course, trainee teachers learned theoretical principles underlying innovative language teaching approaches such as Task-Based Language Teaching. Learning such theoretical principles, however, is apparently not a guarantee of student teachers integrating and effectively implementing these principles in real ESL classrooms. This appears to be best illustrated by the supervisors’ comments on some of the ESL student teachers’ experiences associated with trying out Task-Based Language Teaching in this study. There were 21 mentions of potential challenges of this type which apparently relate to L2 task design, implementation, and evaluation. Examples of supervisor feedback on L2 task design include “The task/activity could have been extended to include some more challenging/open-ended activities through which meaningful language output could be produced” and “Task instructions are too wordy and complex for primary students.” Examples of supervisor feedback on L2 task implementation include “One activity/part took up a lot of lesson time,” and “Scaffolding in the form of cue questions can be decreased gradually.” Examples of comments on L2 task evaluation include “Make time at the end of the lesson to evaluate students' learning,” and “The task sharing activity and the peer evaluation could have been more effective if instructions had been given task by task.”

Classroom interaction

Most of the English teachers in Hong Kong schools are speakers of Cantonese whose traditional and textbook-bound teaching styles often result in little authentic and meaningful interaction in the classroom (Ma, 2012). The lack of a strong interactive atmosphere also appeared to be reflected in the student teachers’ teaching in this study. There were 16 mentions of interaction-related issues by the supervisors, which mostly related to: 1) the need to diversify interactional patterns in the classroom (e.g., “Little elicitation and interaction with students” and “Ask questions to individuals but not just the whole class”),

2) practical techniques for increasing interactiveness in the classroom (e.g., “Don't just rely on verbal explanations” and “interact with a wider range of pupils”), 3) the need to build teacher-student rapport (e.g., “Very detached with students” and “Can try to use more positive comments to encourage students and to build teacher-student relationship”). Apparently, these interaction-related issues could probably be the result of rare opportunities for student teachers to practice the interactive work of teaching in their university education.

The use of instructional resources

Supervisor comments in this category suggest that the use of instructional resources plays an important role in ESL classroom teaching, as evidenced in the comment “More teaching resources should be used to arouse students’ interests and consolidate their learning.” Also explicit in this category of comments were a rich pool of suggestions on how ESL student teachers could use different kinds of resources in the classroom to increase teaching effectiveness and to foster greater levels of student participation and engagement in the second language learning process (e.g., “Use better text colours so that they can be clearly seen by students” and “Papers taped to the blackboard could be presented more effectively than PowerPoint or simply writing on the board”). In addition to some common instructional resources such as PowerPoint slides and worksheets, supervisors drew student teachers’ attention to the use of some other kinds of classroom equipment to facilitate students’ learning in the classroom (e.g., “The lighting in the classroom is a concern. Teacher should turn on the lights when writing on the blackboard” and “Use a microphone to project voice to sustain class attention”).

Catering for learner differences

A pervasive weakness in some student teachers’ teaching observed by the supervisors was the student teachers’ failure to cater to individual learner differences, interests, and needs, as can be seen in supervisor comments such as “More prompts or guidance are needed to cater for learner differences” and “Make sure that each student is really offered individual help.” Specific strategies recommended by the supervisors include “Cater for differences by preparing different tasks” and “Categorize different language items on the board to help those slower learners learn better”. A major factor that might contribute to these student teachers’ inability to cater to individual learner differences could be that they were probably too focused on maintaining the flow of instruction and classroom order, which tended to result in insufficient attention to meeting the needs of individual students in their classes (Pennington & Richards, 1997). It was also likely that due to minimal pre-service classroom experience, some of the student teachers had not developed skills for organizing students according to their abilities, needs, and interests, or in providing students with different tasks or activities graded according to the levels of difficulty.

Lesson planning and implementation

The final category of feedback for improvement in student teachers’ classroom teaching concerns lesson planning and implementation. Supervisors mostly drew student teachers’ attention to: 1) the clarity and appropriacy of learning objectives and 2) lesson planning. Examples of the first include “The teacher needs to make sure that the learning objectives are reflected in the lesson” and “The objectives are too narrow and presented primarily in a sentence but not text or social level.” Examples of the second include “Be flexible to what has been planned” and “Transition from teaching one language item to another should be clearer.” This category of supervisor feedback thus suggests that some student teachers apparently had difficulty in both lesson planning and implementing lesson plans. There was also the possibility that sometimes some student teachers might be aware of faults in their lesson planning or implementation but that they did not necessarily know how to improve them (Bigelow, 2000).

Evaluations of the ESL Trainee Teachers' Classroom Language Use

The assessment of practice teaching of the ESL student teachers in this study consisted of classroom teaching performance assessment and classroom oral language use evaluation. As mentioned earlier, the university involved in this study adopted the Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) component of the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT) in evaluating ESL student teachers' competence to deliver an English lesson to students in a secondary English class during the practicum. Undoubtedly, such an established oral language proficiency assessment procedure would provide ESL student teachers with very valuable feedback on how well they were able to function in the classroom with the target language.

As each student teacher was observed twice, this resulted in each student teacher's classroom language use being assessed twice. Among the 37 student teachers, one student teacher scored 5, the highest score, in some domains in one assessment; one student teacher scored 2.5, the lowest score, in some domains in one assessment; and one student teacher scored 2.5, the lowest score, in some domains in both assessments. The majority of the student teachers obtained a score of 3 (i.e., the minimum passing level) in most CLA domains in both assessments (See Appendix B). As can be seen in Figure 1, the supervisors' two sets of evaluations of the ESL student teachers' CLA in the two assessments appeared to be identical, and among the specific four CLA domains, the trainee teachers appeared to have the greatest difficulty in *the language of instruction*. These results indicate that most of the ESL student teachers in this study had apparently failed to achieve a good level of oral target language ability after three years of training in the university ESL teacher education course. Consequently, they would still face the considerably arduous task of continuing to improve their oral English proficiency even after their graduation.

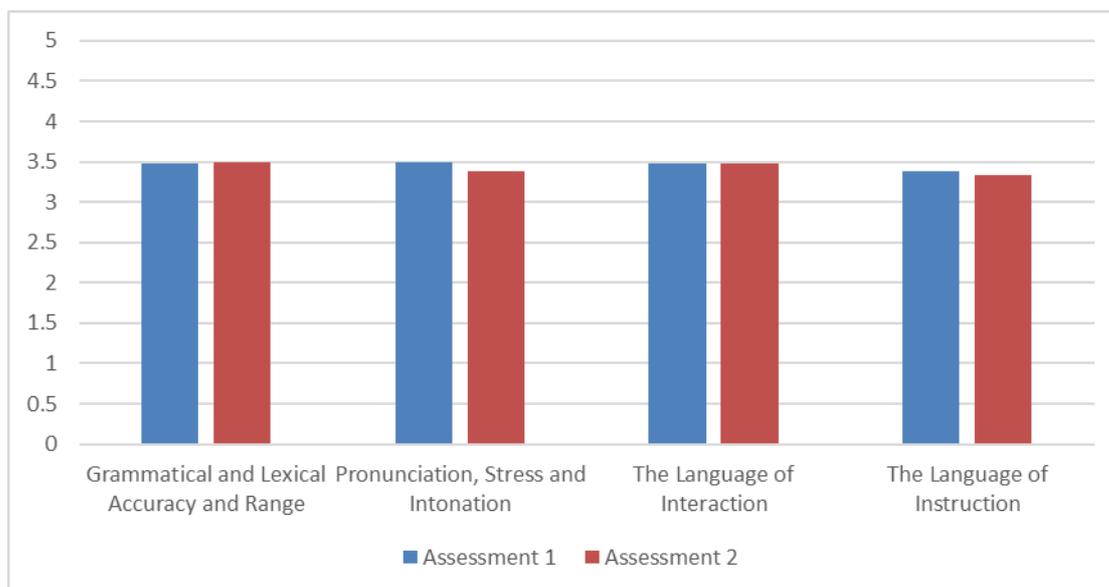


Figure 1. Supervisors' evaluations of the ESL student teachers' CLA in the practicum assessments.

Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research suggests that at the heart of teacher professional competency is his or her teaching skills (Shulman, 1987), which include the most crucial aspects of pedagogy such as lesson delivery, presenting subject matter from a learner's perspective, providing clear and effective explanations, and questioning skills. Essential to carrying out these aspects of a lesson effectively is a teacher's knowledge of teaching strategies for teaching the subject matter (Day, 1993). In this study, *subject-specific*

instructional strategies emerged to be the most frequently mentioned category of feedback for improvement in ESL student teachers' teaching. This suggests that the dominant challenge this group of ESL student teachers encountered was an apparent lack of adequate pedagogical knowledge needed to translate their subject matter knowledge into effective instruction, echoing the previous observation documented in the teacher preparation literature that trainee teachers, due to minimal pre-service classroom experience, do not possess a repertoire of instructional strategies upon which they can rely in helping students to learn subject matter knowledge (Johnson, 1992). This apparent lack of adequate pedagogical knowledge for teaching the subject matter effectively points to the limitation of the university language teacher training course and highlights the complexities and the contextual nature of ESL teaching in schools. In the case of the ESL student teachers in this study, learning of pedagogical skills for effective teaching of the subject-specific knowledge in the practicum setting inevitably involved learning how to engage a specific group of students in worthwhile learning and to adapt curricula to their needs and capabilities as well as understanding what students were like as learners and what problems they might encounter in learning specific content (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). This means that classroom experience and learning that comes with it would be vital to these ESL student teachers' acquisition of subject-matter teaching skills. The results thus imply that whatever preparation these pre-service student teachers had received in their university education, some aspects of ESL teaching could only be learned in situ.

The 21 mentions of the feedback theme *L2 task design, implementation, and evaluation* further show that some student teachers appeared to have difficulty in putting in practice the new language teaching philosophies or innovative approaches that they were taught in the university course. Such difficulty in experimenting with innovative principles and approaches in real teaching situations might be the result of a combination of the potential ineffectiveness of the current teacher training program, contextual constraints of the traditional school teaching culture, and individual teachers' English language competence. It could also be that some of the ESL student teachers tended to adopt practices they remembered from their own experiences as students. Under such circumstances, theoretical knowledge learnt in the teacher preparation course would not likely result in substantial changes in the student teachers' schema directing their behaviour in the classroom (Pennington & Richards, 1997). This echoes the findings of our earlier study of the same group of ESL student teachers in which they cited discrepancy between theories learnt in the university language teacher education course and the reality of teaching as the major factor that stood in the way of their application of these theories in practice. First, the university preparation courses usually focused on theories without illustrating their connections to different kinds of teaching situations. Second, they found it difficult to reconcile their theoretical knowledge gained during training with the set routines and practices in schools (e.g., the grammar-focused and teacher-centred instruction that focused on covering the required materials and syllabus). The results of this study thus suggest that a closer relationship between university language education program and schools is needed to create the conditions that permit ESL student teachers to better contextualise their theoretical knowledge learnt in the university teacher preparation course in practice.

The emergence of other feedback themes such as *management of learning environment, classroom interaction, use of instructional resources, catering for learner differences, and lesson planning and implementation*, suggests that the ESL student teachers in this investigation also lacked knowledge of general pedagogical skills for developing lesson plans, classroom management, and organizing instruction. The challenges they encountered in these pedagogical areas further provided evidence that the art of language teaching does not rely on automatic application of the knowledge ESL trainee teachers learned during their teacher preparation programs in their particular field experience setting (Farrell, 2012). The results thus corroborate Richards' (2011) observation that learning to teach involves understanding the dynamics and relationships within the classroom and the rules and behaviours specific to a particular setting. The challenges experienced by these ESL student teachers appeared also to be consistent with findings from research in the general literature on teaching (e.g., Bigelow, 2000) in that

novice teachers might not have developed a solid understanding of what teachers do to make a lesson effective and that they lacked the conceptual framework for formulating goals for instruction as well as lacked the knowledge of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments. Encouragingly, the practicum assessment performance feedback provided by the supervisors in this study had the potential to alert these student teachers to the various issues in different aspects of pedagogy as well as to effective strategies to cope with these issues, which would eventually enable the student teachers to be metacognitive and reflective, accepting and acting on feedback (Schön, 1987), and further experimenting with new pedagogical strategies in response to the challenges. Seen in this way, the ESL trainee teachers' formative professional learning could be described as an evolutionary process facilitated by their significant others inside the teaching context, where they interacted with the social and professional conditions of the environments in which they learned and taught (Johnson, 2009).

It is recognized in research that target language proficiency, which functions as subject knowledge, is the most important skill among the core dimensions of expertise in language teaching (Richards, 2010; Richards et al., 2013). Richards (2010) argues that teachers with an adequate command of the target language should consequentially be able to make better and more appropriate decisions about teaching and learning and to arrive at more appropriate solutions to problems than teachers without such knowledge. Teachers with limited English proficiency may be so preoccupied with their own language difficulties that they themselves lack confidence to conduct communication activities in English or deal with students' unforeseen needs (Littlewood, 2007). In this study, the supervisors' two sets of evaluations of the ESL student teachers' language use show that most of the ESL student teachers in this study just reached the minimum passing level in the four specific CLA domains, and among these four CLA domains, they appeared to encounter greatest challenges in *the language of instruction*. These results suggest that some aspects of the student teachers' classroom language use might not be adequate enough, which could negatively impact on both the student teachers' classroom behaviour and the quality of the student target language learning. Consequently, the potential lack of sufficient target language proficiency might help to explain some of the challenges in some student teachers' managing of some key aspects of classroom practice observed by the supervisors, such as relying too much on textbooks and the lack of meaningful and natural language use in the classroom. It needs to be pointed out that limited target language proficiency might threaten student teachers' security and efficacy in the classroom. These challenges might also significantly affect these student teachers' abilities to accrue maximum benefits from the teaching practice, and might even negatively influence their perception of and attitudes towards the teaching profession. Freeman et al. (2015) refer to the classroom language that ESL teachers need to be able to use as 'English-for-Teaching', focusing on the specific English skills that teachers need for the work they do in their classrooms rather than on general language proficiency. Apparently, this reconceptualization of teacher language proficiency aligns particularly well to the practice teaching context in the current study as it highlights the importance of the teacher connecting her English language knowledge to its situated use with students in her classroom. As such, pedagogical knowledge is infused throughout the concept as language to enact teaching (Freeman et al., 2015). This approach towards teacher language proficiency thus raises important implications for reshaping the design of teacher education and professional development programs to meet pre-service student teachers' learning needs and context. Consequently, university L2 teacher education programs need to develop or refine student teachers' language skills in relation to the specific tasks and routines they are doing with their students in their classrooms in English.

In summary, this study investigated the experience of a group of ESL student teachers in their initial entry into teaching in the practicum from the perspective of supervisor feedback. Despite the subjective nature of the data and the potential differences within this group of student teachers concerning their classroom practices and subject-matter knowledge, the challenges documented above suggest that ESL trainee teachers preparing to teach ESL in a context like Hong Kong have to develop a good range of professional knowledge and skills in addition to mastering the target language itself and maintaining that mastery. The study has demonstrated the seemingly complex nature of ESL teaching and the diverse areas

of knowledge and skills needed by ESL student teachers in order to function effectively in the classroom. The findings of this study led us to concur with the argument that teacher learning entails a process of increasing participation in the practice of teaching, and through this participation, a process of becoming knowledgeable in and about teaching (Adler, 2000; Boroko, 2004), which is in line with Widdowson's (1994, 2015) suggestion that teaching English is a craft, a skill that has to be learned and mastered. The study also points to the need for further research on how these pre-service teachers will confront classroom teaching during their first year of teaching after their graduation from the teacher education program. Such research should provide insight into the impact of these student teachers' practice teaching experience on how they will cope with teaching complexities in the classroom as regular in-service ESL teachers after their graduation. Future research needs also to explore whether, during their first year of teaching, these student teachers will abandon principles and practices they were exposed to in their university training program, as observed by Pennington and Richards (1997) in their study, how they may evolve their own conceptions of good ESL teaching practices, to what extent such conceptions are consistent with the theories and approaches learned in the university teacher education course, and whether target language use ability will continue to be a concern to these ESL teachers. Such research should help us better understand the relationship between the content of a teacher education program and the practices of its graduates in the classroom.

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Appendix A.

Categorized Supervisor Feedback on Aspects of Classroom Teaching That Need Improvement

1. Subject-specific instructional strategies

Strategies for teaching of grammar, vocabulary, reading, pronunciation, intonation and stress

Always present target language/vocabulary in context.

Help pupils with intonation patterns for better meaning.

In teaching grammar, give examples for each item and also ask pupils for examples.

Try not to be too technical.

Set vocabulary in meaningful context.

Thorough presentation of new vocabulary items by giving examples and their use in different contexts is necessary.

Extend students' vocabulary knowledge by asking them for synonyms and antonyms.

Less teacher control for developing students' reading skills / Students should be given time to read the passage.

Try to get students to use correct stress and intonation, especially when reading sentences.

Recap the pronunciation of key vocabulary and structures before having a group activity.

Don't forget pronunciation practice of key vocabulary.

Other than recapping pronunciation, teacher could have also revisited other aspects of vocabulary such as spelling and meaning.

When students respond in Cantonese, the teacher should translate their answers in English so that they can pick up a few new English words.

When watching a film, teacher should show the English subtitles so that students can pick up some vocabulary.

You could provide options when students are having difficulty in guessing meanings of the vocabulary words.

Need to illustrate difficult grammatical concepts with examples.

Ask students to read words aloud together.

Could have explained more clearly/given more explanation of the target language/vocabulary.

Target language practice and use in the classroom

Use mime to explain target language.

Encourage/Remind students' use of English when having activities.

There is not enough focus and attention on the target language and use.

Try to elicit more pupils' extended responses for greater language use.

Maximize language use opportunities / Give more opportunities for students to speak.

Always keep language use meaningful and natural / Give language use a meaningful context.

Presentation of target language is too form-focused and should have attended more to the meaning/context.

More modelling of target language is necessary / When students give answers, teacher can repeat in full sentences to model the target language.

Telling students something is not enough; students must do something with the language.

Other pragmatic instructional strategies

Complete answers from students should have been insisted instead of just accepting simple answers like 'Yes' or 'No'.

Wrap up the lesson to consolidate the lesson content.
 Demonstration of the activity could be done to help students understand what to do before starting an activity.
 Give students some independence and let them do the activities.
 Can do more in the pre-listening stage to activate students' schema / Pre-viewing questions (for a video) are needed.
 Need to draw students' attention to the target sentences/structures.
 The details of the story learned could have been elicited from the students instead of just telling them.
 Avoid repeating students' answers right away.
 More oral practice could be given to enable students to use the language confidently.
 More examples or students' work can be given/shown.
 More guidance needs to be given before asking students to do the worksheet.
 Make sure that the students have completed the worksheet before going through the answers.
 Students' higher-order thinking needs to be addressed.
 Before having a free practice, there should be a controlled practice.
 Better begin the lesson by telling students briefly what they are going to do and why they are doing them so that they can be more motivated to learn.
 Checking of the answers could have been speeded up by making use of the PowerPoint prepared beforehand.
 Could do more preparation by asking students some questions before showing them a video.
 More questions could have been asked to check students' understanding or their prior knowledge.
 Should not have given the microphone to the students but should have asked them to speak up.
 The group work could have been completed in a more structured manner.
 Elicit responses from students after each activity.
 Get students to guess the endings of stories.
 Elicit a few students' responses to warm up and get class attention.

2. Management of learning environment

Feedback on discipline maintenance strategies

When the teacher asked a student to stand up as punishment, he/she should allow the student to sit down when the student behaves well or can answer a question correctly.
 Needs to think of more effective strategies to engage the misbehaved students.
 Use an activity or show a video when students lose concentration.
 Make sure that those poorly behaved students are settled down.
 Need to stop students' bad behaviours.
 Don't give students any chance to make noise to an unacceptable level or even shout.
 Walk towards the misbehaved students to check how students are going.
 Authority of the teacher is minimal.

Strategies for orienting and engaging students in learning

Be more firm and urge students to follow instructions more quickly/to get students' attention.
 Remember to bring the whole class to attention after group work.
 Don't let students get too excited by the activity.
 Need to keep calm and think thoroughly about the lesson planning.
 Try to call upon those students who did not put up their hands.
 Ensure inclusion of pupils at the back of class / Involve those quiet students in the class.
 Guide the whole class to read aloud to wake the class up.

Teaching and learning management strategies

The teacher needs to monitor students' progress and give sufficient input of language.
 The group work would have been more effective if students had been asked to move their desks.
 Be firm to ask students to put up their hands before answering questions.
 Avoid only asking students to copy the answer shown on the PowerPoint.
 Call individual students by names to respond/answer questions.
 Encourage students to speak louder when presenting to keep the class attention.
 You can pick students with different criteria every time.
 The turn-taking/role assignment of a group activity could have been done more effectively if each student in the group had been assigned a number, as some students were too passive in the groups.
 You can distribute the whole set of material in one sitting.
 Time management is a concern.
 Students use Chinese to discuss, chat and shout loudly.
 Too much unnecessary use of Cantonese.
 There is too much teacher talk.
 Students can be invited to do the role play in front of the classroom.
 Maximize pupils' responses/participation/involvement / Students need more engagement in activities.
 Organise more pair work and group work.

3. Task design, implementation and evaluation

Task design

The task/activity could have been extended to include some more challenging/open-ended activities through which meaningful language output could be produced.
 The activities are too form-focused which may minimise their effectiveness.
 Task instructions are too wordy and complex for primary students.
 The worksheet needs to be structured more coherently.
 Some challenging tasks can be assigned for enhancing students' learning.
 Task is not properly devised for consolidation of the use of language

Task implementation

Vary practice format.
 Scaffolding in the form of cue questions can be decreased gradually.
 Leave time for consolidation.
 One activity/part took up a lot of lesson time.
 One activity was run too quickly / Time for individual/group work was not enough.
 The teaching content is obviously inadequate and activities are too easy to do.
 Task instruction and explanation need further clarification.
 Before asking students to write, more language input is required to ensure that they are able to complete the task properly.
 Over-do activity.
 Clearer sequence of learning activities is needed.
 More time should be given for students to complete the activity.

Task evaluation

Make time at the end of the lesson to evaluate students' learning.
 Both self and peer assessment methods can be adopted.
 More explanation of task instruction is required to make it better understood.
 The task sharing activity and the peer evaluation could have been more effective if instructions had been given task by task.

4. Classroom interaction

Need to diversify interactional patterns in the classroom

Little elicitation and interaction with students.

Elicit more. Don't tell pupils directly.

Vary types of interaction: teacher-student and student-student interaction, but not so much teacher talk.

Should cut the presentation short, and elicit students' responses more frequently.

Increase opportunities for peer interaction.

Ask questions to individuals but not just the whole class / Try to speak to individuals as well as the whole class / Increase interaction with individual students.

Practical Techniques for increasing interactivity in the classroom

Project voice more/The teacher's voice is a little 'small'.

A variety of expressions and feedback is needed.

Should vary the tone to attract students' attention.

Change the speed/stress/tone to get students' attention.

Speaking pace is a little fast.

More gestures can be used / Don't just rely on verbal explanations.

Write more students' answers on the blackboard to enhance their sense of achievement.

Interact with a wider range of pupils.

Need to build teacher-student rapport

Very detached with students.

Can try to use more positive comments to encourage students and to build teacher-student relationship.

5. Use of instructional resources

Emphasizing the role of resources in classroom teaching and learning

More teaching resources should be used to arouse students' interests and consolidate their learning.

Practical strategies of making use of different kinds of resources and equipment

Use a microphone to project students' voice to sustain class attention.

Use better text colours so that they can be clearly seen by students.

Materials to be distributed need to be checked carefully.

No need to have a PowerPoint slide for everything the teacher says.

Put the instructions on PowerPoint.

Papers taped to the blackboard could be presented more effectively than PowerPoint or simply writing on the board.

A more visual format can be used.

New vocabulary items should be written on the blackboard for consolidation.

Better clean the blackboard before the lesson begins.

You could show the phrases in a worksheet.

The lighting in the classroom is a concern. Teacher should turn on the lights when writing on the blackboard.

6. Catering for learner differences

Emphasizing the need to cater to learner differences

Make sure that each student is really offered individual help.

More prompts or guidance are needed to cater for learner differences.

Students' initiations are not always attended to / Some students put up their hands for a long time waiting for the teacher to respond.

Could have been more sensitive to students' needs and the learning environment.

Strategies for catering learner differences

Walk around the classroom to give students timely feedback / give them help and make sure all students are involved in learning tasks.

Categorize different language items (e.g. a little/few/a lot) on the board to help those slower learners learn better.

Cater for differences by preparing different tasks.

For a few weak students, teacher could give explanations to them in Chinese.

There should be an equal opportunity for each student to contribute.

Responses from lower ability students need to be acknowledged.

Some students finished their work quickly. More attention should be paid to tackle individual differences.

Be aware of the class as a whole while offering help to individual group.

7. Lesson planning and implementation

Lesson planning

Learning objectives are not clear enough.

The objectives are too narrow and presented primarily in a sentence level.

The objective is simple which is appropriate only if the lesson topic is new.

The language focus/skill of the lesson is not clear.

The teacher needs to make sure that the learning objectives are reflected in the lesson.

Lesson planning needs to be more thorough.

Lesson implementation

Adjust plan to avoid rushing activities / Be flexible to what has been planned.

Lesson is incoherent (lesson focus is changed from time to time).

Transition from teaching one language item to another should be clearer / Lesson transition needs to be smoother.

Target language should be introduced more systematically, from known knowledge to new structure.

The pace of a certain part of a lesson could have been faster.

Appendix B.

Supervisor evaluations of the ESL student teachers' CLA

(Notes: Grammar= grammatical and lexical accuracy and range; Pronunciation= pronunciation, stress and intonation; Interaction= the language of interaction; Instruction= the language of instruction)

	Assessment 1				Assessment 2			
	Grammar	Pronunciation	Interaction	Instruction	Grammar	Pronunciation	Interaction	Instruction
1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
2	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3
3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
5	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	2.5
6	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	3
7	4	4	3	3	5	5	5	5
8	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
9	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3
10	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	3	3	3	3
11	4	4	4	4	4	4	3.5	4
12	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4
13	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
14	5	5	4.5	4	5	5	5	4
15	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
16	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4
17	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
18	2.5	2.5	3	3	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
19	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4
20	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3
21	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4
22	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	4
23	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3
24	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
25	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	4
26	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	3
27	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	3
28	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3
29	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	4
30	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
31	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	3
32	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
33	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3
34	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
35	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
36	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
37	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3
Avg.	3.47	3.49	3.47	3.38	3.49	3.38	3.47	3.33