The Overseas Teaching Practicum in Pre-Service English Teacher Training: A Qualitative Data Analysis Using SCAT

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Abstract

Some Japanese universities introduce an innovative overseas teaching practicum in pre-service training, and suggest quality and ability change for students who enrol in the practicum. The study aims to explore the changes of language teachers’ possible selves (Kubanyiova, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986) through the experience of the overseas teaching practicum. This paper provided examples of overseas teaching practicum focused on integrating the skills and knowledge that university students need, and reported the impact of the practicum on teacher trainees’ conceptual change about teaching and on their perceptions of English education. Data were collected using open-ended interviews with the five teacher trainees who participated in the overseas teaching practicum in 2015, and analysed through steps for coding and theorization (SCAT) developed as a qualitative data analysis method (Otani, 2008). It was concluded that the trainees saw the practicum as a positive experience that caused them to increase reflection on and revitalize their teaching. Some changes were noted from pre- to post-practicum in the trainees’ ideal and ought-to selves about learning and teaching English. This paper also discussed the framework of language teacher conceptual change (LTCC) for professional development (Kubanyiova, 2012).

1. Introduction

When setting the standards for pre-service training for aspiring foreign language teachers, Japanese universities start by examining the current curriculum for foreign languages in relation to the Central Educational Committee’s 2006 final report. However, many syllabi and standards fail to meet the quality assurance requirements for pre-service training for foreign language teachers. The purpose of this study is to introduce an innovative overseas teaching practicum in pre-service
training and to suggest quality and ability change for foreign language teachers. Discussions were held on how to meet the huge demand for making pre-service training compulsory in Japanese universities. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) publicized its latest policy, “English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization,” on December 13th, 2013. The policy aims to substantially enhance foreign language education by strengthening the English education in elementary schools and advancing the English education in lower/upper secondary schools. Given these discussions and the implementation of English education, some universities have restructured their course curricula to meet the Ministry’s expectations; however, the reform is only partially complete. This paper will commence with an overview of the current state of pre-service teacher training in Japan, and will then provide examples of overseas teaching practicum focused on integrating the skills and knowledge that university students need. Finally, it will propose language teacher conceptual change (Kunanyiova, 2012) through the practicum for professional standards.

2. Overview of Pre-service Teacher Training

We commence with an overview of the current state of pre-service teacher training in Japan, and then provide examples of a curriculum that focuses on integrating the skills and knowledge that university students need. However, we think it necessary to propose a framework of professional standards for foreign language teachers. The most important thing is to establish standards for pre-service training for foreign language teachers, and to suggest quality and ability criteria for teachers who conduct foreign language teaching.

![Diagram of Professional Standards](image)

*Figure 1. Professional standards of teachers conducting foreign language teaching*

Thus, we will focus on the potential components of the knowledge, skills, and competencies required of foreign language teachers (see Figure 1 for details). This pyramid consists of six layers. The components of each layer can be categorized into some pillars, and the components are interrelated. First, the knowledge and skills for teaching foreign language teaching will be
examined. Although some practical benchmarks are required, further research is necessary to compile a complete list of the knowledge- and skills-based descriptors of foreign language teachers. Second, the components of pedagogical competencies will be examined. Some attempts to conceptualize the knowledge and abilities that are necessary for effective classroom teaching will be checked. Some potential descriptors for each of the competence stages—novice, veteran, and expert or mentor teachers—will be suggested. In addition, foreign language teachers are required to possess the personal qualities necessary for coping with the professional demands outside the classroom. Moreover, extensive teaching practice as internship will be discussed as an example of a possible program for pre-service teacher training for foreign language education.

Along with the development of pre-service teacher training courses for foreign language teaching, MEXT implemented a huge shift in the content of the pre-service teacher training courses in 2006. Part of this shift was the introduction of the “practical seminar for the teaching profession” as a compulsory class. The Central Council for Education reported on a recommendation concerned with reforming the pre-service teacher training courses and teaching licenses (MEXT, 2006). According to MEXT, the background of the recommendation was that teachers were facing various problems and were thus required to gain various skills and knowledge to solve these problems. The background also included the fact that teachers had become less reliable, because some of them were not well-behaved and they were increasingly resigning. The recommendation stated that improvements in this situation could be made through pre-service teacher training, teacher employment, and in-service teacher training. The recommendation set its aims for reform as follows:

1. To develop pre-service teacher training courses through which university students can acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to be teachers
2. To develop a system of teaching licenses that guarantees the necessary skills and knowledge for teaching

The recommendation presented three main concrete measures for achieving the aims: improvement of the qualitative standards for pre-service teacher training courses, establishment of professional schools for teacher education, and the introduction of a policy mandating the renewal of teaching licenses. As the present study focuses on pre-service teacher training for foreign language teaching, this section details only one of the measures, namely, the improvement of the qualitative standards for pre-service teacher training courses. This measure focuses on the reformation of pre-service teacher training courses to ensure that students acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to become teachers. This measure consists of five elements: (a) introducing a practical seminar for the teaching profession; (b) improving teaching practice; (c) improving university teachers’ instruction for teacher education; (d) improving the pre-service teacher training curriculum; and (e) improving the evaluation of pre-service teacher training courses.
The introduction of a practical seminar for the teaching profession is described in the following part of this section. The practical seminar for the teaching profession was introduced in pre-service teacher training courses in the revision of the national standards for teaching licenses (MEXT, 2010). The purpose of this seminar was defined by MEXT (2006) as the evaluation of whether university students who had experienced pre-service teacher training courses had gained the necessary skills and knowledge for teaching. MEXT (2012) stated that through this class, university students were expected to understand what they would need to do as teachers to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge. The evaluation of this class is based on standards or goals that each university sets. MEXT stated that the standards or goals of the practical seminar for the teaching profession should include four areas of skills and knowledge: (a) vocation, responsibility, and appreciation for teaching; (b) sociality and relationships; (c) understanding students and classroom management; and (d) subject contents. To evaluate the skills and knowledge in these areas, MEXT requested that universities offering pre-service teacher training courses make a "teaching profession profile," which they would use in the practical seminar for the teaching profession. There is a noteworthy situation in the current pre-service teacher training courses. Some Japanese educational institutes are trying to set standards for the skills and knowledge that teachers require and that should be cultivated through pre-service teacher training courses.

Although universities provide the contents of lectures including teaching methods, theories of second language acquisition, micro-teaching, and practical learning in affiliated schools, opportunities to learn foreign language education are limited to the classroom, and there is few programs outside the classroom for foreign language teachers in overall pre-service training. This leads us to the possibility that there is some room for establishing successful pre-service teacher training for foreign language education by introducing such programs as short-term learning at schools in foreign countries and observing lessons at a school in other countries. This study provides examples of overseas teaching practicum focused on integrating the skills and knowledge that university students need, and reports the impact of the practicum on their conceptual change about teaching and on their perceptions of foreign language education. Some changes are noted from pre- to post-program in the university students’ conceptual changes and views of instruction about learning and teaching foreign language. Overall, the pyramid includes all professional development activities conducted individually or collectively. In order to introduce a training system that integrates these components, it is necessary to set appropriate professional standards for teachers who conduct foreign language teaching.

3. Backgrounds

3.1 Overseas Teaching Practicum

The faculty of education at Chiba University offers an overseas teaching practicum to English major students pursuing a career as foreign language teachers. The present paper reviews
the overseas teaching practicum in Europe by the graduate/undergraduate students in 2015. The students who enrolled in the practicum planned and conducted lessons of Japanese culture in English at some local public/private schools in Vienna, Austria and Prague, Czech, and they also visited Japanese schools in these countries. The students had chances to observe lessons other than language classes and discussed the different educational system and language education in Europe (e.g. CEFR) with teachers there. The students are continuously encouraged to cultivate their intercultural understanding through teaching experience, to increase communication skills by requiring the use of English, and to acquire the ability to work in teams and to understand their individual roles in the project. The significant features of this project are three-fold: (1) To develop practical instructional competence in consideration of the pupils with different cultural backgrounds; (2) to enhance the abilities in developing teaching materials through hands-on teaching experiences in English; and (3) to acquire the abilities to design, implement and evaluate programs for promoting global partnership. Among the major achievements by the participants through this project are the increased awareness of how to manage their own lesson plans, and the development of communication skills in the classroom. It is hoped that this experience abroad will further enhance the Japanese students’ competence in teaching and change their possible selves in language teacher development.

3.2 Possible Selves in L2 research

The theoretical underpinnings of the present study are possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and its application to language teacher development research. Possible selves are the concept of people’s self-related images developed in the field of social psychology which denote the complex and multi-faceted representation of people’s sense of themselves, and Oyserman and Markus (1990) states that “Possible selves are conceptualized as the elements of the self-concept that represent the individual’s goals, motives, fears, and anxieties” (p. 113). Also, there are strong relationships between possible selves and human motivations, and motivations depend on people’s possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Similarly, Higgins (1987) proposed the self-discrepancy theory, which consists of three sub-components: The ideal self, which considers people’s image of themselves that they want to become in the future; the ought self, the images of people’s future selves which they afraid of becoming; and the actual self which represents people’s current state of their selves. His claim in the self-discrepancy theory is that people are motivated when they to reduce the discrepancies between their ideal/ought selves and actual selves. Based on possible selves and self-discrepancy theory, the L2 learning-specific facet of possible selves is set up as the L2 motivational self-system and validated in many contexts (Dörnyei, 2009).
3.3 Possible Selves in Language Teacher Development

By adapting L2 motivational self-system and original theories of possible selves, Kubanyiova (2009, 2012) brought the concept of possible language teacher self into a study on language teacher cognition. The components of the possible language teacher self are: Ideal/Ought-to language teacher self—taken from L2 motivational self-system and Higgins’s original work, and feared language teacher self, which is one of the original concept of possible selves introduced in Markus and Nurius (1986). Kubanyiova (2009, 2012) focused on Slovakian English teachers’ conceptual change, by setting the possible language teacher self as the central concept, and created the model of LTCC.

3.4 Empirical Studies in Language Teachers’ Possible Selves

Apart from Kubanyiova’s work in the Slovakian educational context, Kumazawa (2013) followed the changes of language teacher selves of novice English teachers in Japan, starting from their final year in pre-service teacher training at universities. Her study has depicted the emergence of ideal language teacher self through the positive influences they experienced in the teaching practice, such as the satisfactions in seeing students’ development. Subsequently, the reconstruction of their possible language teacher selves in the real teaching context, where they have a lot of duties other than teaching English, has been rendered. With more intensive focus on pre-service teachers, Itoi (2014) conducted a narrative oriented research into the changes in student teachers’ possible selves among three Japanese undergraduate students taking a teaching practice module. Similarly, Hiver (2013) reported on the Korean teachers’ profiles of their language teacher selves, which brings a distinct existence of the possible selves related to their English proficiencies, as well as those related with their teaching. Therefore, it is assumed that the possible L2 selves play a crucial role in the state of possible language teacher selves. In connection with this strand, Itoi (2014) pointed out the insufficiency of the opportunities—especially as a part of teacher training program—for teacher trainees to improve their English proficiencies. Moreover, there is a quote from one of the participants stating that she cannot study unless she is compelled to.

3.5 Aims of the Study

To sum up, these three strands in the construction of the language teachers’ possible selves mentioned above—Selves related to teaching, teachers’ L2 selves, and pre-service teachers’ opportunities to improve their English proficiency—have been identified as the moderators of the possible language teacher selves among teacher trainees. Our oversea teaching practicum covers all these strands by enabling participants to do teaching practice, classroom observation, and discussion with teachers all in English. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the changes in Japanese teacher trainees’ ideal and ought-to selves through the experiences in the oversea teaching practicum.
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4. Method

4.1 Participants

The participants were the teacher trainees who enrolled in the overseas teaching practicum in 2015. They were four undergraduate students and one graduate student majoring in English education. As summarized in Table 1, all the participants majored in English language teaching for elementary and secondary school level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Kaori</th>
<th>Akira</th>
<th>Saki</th>
<th>Nobuyuki</th>
<th>Keiko</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1st year PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>4th year UG</td>
<td>4th year UG</td>
<td>4th year UG</td>
<td>4th year UG</td>
<td>Secondary ELT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. UG: Undergraduate, PG: Postgraduate, ELT: English Language Teaching.

4.2 Data Collection

After the oversea teaching practicum, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with five participants between June and August 2015. The 30 to 60 minute interviews were guided by several retrospective open-ended questions about the participants’ experience in the overseas practicum, and their thoughts about teaching English. With the permission of interviewees, all interviews were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim immediately after the interview.

4.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of the transcriptions was performed using Steps Coding and Theorization: SCAT (Otani, 2008), which was developed as an easily accessible qualitative data analysis method. The study adopted SCAT since it is a methodology which is feasible for small samples, such as the responses to the open-ended questionnaires and small-scale interviews. SCAT was developed drawing upon the analytical procedure of the grounded theory approach (GTA), and it consists of the main features of GTA, generative coding and theorization. The analytical procedure of SCAT consists of four steps in coding, which is processed by filling in the following four separate columns: (1) focused words from the segmented text, (2) words outside of the text that are replaceable with the words from step (1), (3) words which explain the words in step (1) and (2), and (4) themes and constructs. Subsequently, themes and constructs coded in step (4) are woven together to build storylines which will be transformed into theories. All the transcripts developed from the interviews were included in the analysis, and the whole process of analysis was recorded in the matrix of SCAT (Figure 2).
5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Results

A part of each storyline reflecting these possible teacher selves is as follows. In the storylines that follow, square brackets ( [...] ) denote themes coded in step (4).

5.1.1 Storyline of Kaori

She faced with [the difficulty of using English as a foreign language to both students and teachers in class]. She [used to make a script saying what to speak in class] but in this program she [could not make a script] because of [a shortage of time]. However, she thought she developed [capabilities of immediate response to students.] Additionally, she keenly felt [the need to improve the way of giving back].

She recognized the need to [correspond learning contents with children’s daily life], because of [the gaps between Japanese culture and English or different cultures].

5.1.2 Storyline of Akira

He had an [anxiety about teaching in English] before the practicum started. After the practicum, he keenly felt [the need to learn classroom English] and indicated [a willingness to improve his English proficiency].

He wants to put emphasis on [activities that children can enjoy] and teach [contents more than English skills]. Hence, he began thinking of making use of [the experience of introducing his own culture in the program] to his [practice of teaching cross-cultural understandings].

Observing education in Vienna, he noticed [a lack of individual support]. The teachers in Vienna looked like [cram school teachers] to him. Therefore, he hoped he would be a teacher who can [pay attention to the whole class], [deal with various types of children], and [promote students’ autonomy].
5.1.3 Storyline of Saki

As her background, she had [cross-cultural experience through English] and [doubts about the teaching style focusing on tests and grammar]. Therefore, she tried to [put emphasis not only on four skills but a diversity of languages and cultures] and to conduct an [English lesson comparing Japan with foreign countries]. Throughout the program, she could [go beyond herself with the support of her senior peers].

5.1.4 Storyline of Nobuyuki

He had [hesitation in learning English education as subject pedagogy] at his university. In the program, he saw [the independent students in school for Japanese outside of Japan] and [the class teachers in Vienna tried encouraging students’ autonomy]. It led him back to [his original wish to explore education holistically]. Also, he found [the difficulty of teaching cross-cultural understandings] and he deeply [concerned about the possibility to give prejudice] after he introduced own culture in the practicum. Additionally, he felt [the difficulty to teach as a team] because he thought that his team [could not share the same aim of lessons]. However, he gained [self-confidence in class management] since his senior teacher praised him in the end.

5.1.5 Storyline of Keiko

Before the program, her wish was [to become a teacher in Japan] and had [no idea about school for Japanese outside of Japan because of the lack formation]. However, when she went there, she noticed there is an [option to work at educational institutes outside Japan]. Additionally, [the experience in conducting lessons to teach Japanese culture] gave her the idea that it is an effective [lesson plan to teach from specifically to abstractly]. Moreover, [the experience to teach in primary level, which is not her field, made her [more conscious of the importance of activities in language classrooms].

5.2 Changes Observed in Teacher Trainees’ Selves

Analyses of the retrospective interviews identified that the changes in teaching-related possible selves were closely related to two processes. The first domain is the recognition of actual and possible selves through the reflections on their teachings at the actual classrooms. In this viewpoint, teacher trainees seemed to have recognized their current selves, or their capacities for classroom teaching in English. The second aspect is the identification of their role models through the observations of Austrian English teachers’ and other teacher trainees’ lessons during the program. For instance, Nobuyuki’s story reveals the impact of observations on his ideal self-relating with his teaching. Theoretically, having role models, from the viewpoint of possible selves, can lead a person to acquire the vivid ideal self (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). In Nobuyuki’s case, both Austrian teachers and his colleagues in the program served as his role models which define his future self-images as an English teacher. Also, on the ground of self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), self-regulated actions toward reducing the gap between one’s actual and possible selves promote self-advancement in one’s motivation. By conducting
lessons and reflecting on these lessons, together with observing others’ lessons, teacher trainees have found their actual selves related with their teaching. In the context of the present study, therefore, specifying the teacher trainees’ ideal selves, together with the recognition of their actual selves may lead the teacher trainees’ to become more autonomous and self-regulated in the process of their further development.

At the same time, possible selves related to their English proficiencies have been elicited clearly from the participants. The most prominent pattern in the change of L2 related selves and motivation for improving their English proficiencies has been observed in Akira’s story. His anxiety before the practicum had two aspects, teaching-related and language-use-related. By working together with his peers throughout the program, and by observing his peers’ superior English proficiencies, the vivid ideal L2 self has been constructed. Concurrently, the ought-to L2 self has emerged upon his thought that he has to be proficient in listening and speaking English as a student majoring in English language teaching. The coexistence of the ideal and ought self is a desirable condition to promote strong motivation (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). He also referred to his vitality for language learning after the program, which suggests the needs for the opportunities to study English with other teacher trainees in order to maintain these possible selves during the learning process.

Wrapping up the main findings from the stories of five teacher trainees in the program, the components identified in the literature review—possible selves related to teaching and L2 learning—have been observed. That is to say, the identities of the teacher trainees are multi-faceted, and these different identities are interrelated with each other. Moreover, the complex relatedness among these factors have been suggested, assuming that the complex interplays of the factors can attract teacher trainees’ further motivations in the process of teacher development. As a limitation of the study, there are some restrictions in terms of the richness of data, since the program was fairly intensive and the preparations were done in a relatively short period, as Kaori commented. However, there is no doubt that the participants of the program have experienced the changes in their self-images more or less. To expand our viewpoints to a long-term perspective, the glimpses of the changes in teacher trainees’ self-concept may ignite their ceaseless cycle of language teacher development, such as the model proposed as LTCC (Kubanyiova, 2012).

6. Conclusion

With regard to pre-service teacher training courses, we contend that initial teacher education should be revised in accordance with the new pedagogical objectives. The changes should focus on ensuring lifelong professional development and prolonging the teaching practice. As for the in-service teacher education, the current system is inadequate particularly in the area of foreign language education. Thus, a new framework is desirable. Along with the development of
pre-service teacher training courses for foreign language education, MEXT introduced a new system for guaranteeing the quality of the pre-service teacher training courses. The measurement “teaching profession profile” for student teachers’ skills and teaching knowledge was introduced in a teaching practicum for the teaching profession. Furthermore, each university offering pre-service teacher training courses is required to develop its own programs with a teaching practicum.

This study focuses on the relationship between pre-service teacher training courses for foreign language teachers and practical teacher training, and discusses a solution to the problem regarding what kind of preparation system is needed. As the Japan Association of Universities of Education (2008) stated, MEXT requires standards in universities offering pre-service teacher training courses, and the idea of standards was reflected in the introduction of the practical teacher training program. The overseas teaching practicum proposed in this study will contribute to the students’ understanding of what they need to pay attention to in their fieldwork, what they must revise from what they learned through their fieldwork, and how to link what they learned in their fieldwork and at university.

Along with the development of pre-service training courses for foreign language teacher education, we introduced an innovative overseas teaching practicum for the teaching profession to ensure lifelong professional development. This study also focused on the changes of language teachers’ possible selves through the overseas teaching practicum in pre-service training. Some changes were found in the stories of five teacher trainees who enrolled in the practicum. Especially the students with positive practicum perspectives had in common certain conceptual changes and perceived the gap between their actual and possible selves related to teaching and learning English. Their regulated actions of reducing the gap contributed to teacher trainees’ professional identity development and their autonomy and motivation as language teachers. Social and contextual interactions with European pupils and teachers different from the Japanese situations also promoted the trainees’ conceptual change about teaching, and the experiences they had in the practicum could result in the changes of possible language teacher selves. The present paper revealed that the overseas teaching practicum might lead university students to possess their nuanced picture of ideal and ought-to selves about teaching English, and to change their possible selves for the future development as language teachers.

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