

A Case Study of the Impacts of Teaching Practicum on the Self-Efficacy among Pre-service English Teachers

Jing Yang *

School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu 610100, China

* Corresponding author Email: 1012801720@qq.com

Abstract: Teachers' self-efficacy refers to the subjective evaluation and cognition of teachers on whether they can successfully achieve their teaching aims in specific teaching situations, including effectively complete teaching tasks, and promote the improvement of students' learning compacity as well as their adherence to teaching beliefs. Teachers with elevated sense of self-efficacy are more likely to be conscientious about their students' education. Teaching practicum is a crucial part of pre-service English teacher education, which is also deemed to be helpful in improving pre-service teachers' eligibility to be qualified teachers. For pre-service English teachers, their teaching practicum experience is very vital to form and impact their self-efficacy. The past studies mainly focused on the effects of in-service teachers' self-efficacy on language levels and teaching ability, this study takes pre-service English teachers as the research participants, through the ways of questionnaire and interview to collect the data and tries to figure out how to improve pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy during the teaching practicum.

Keywords: Self-efficacy; Pre-Service English Teachers; Teaching Practicum.

1. Introduction

Self-efficacy is a psychologic concept identified by Albert Bandura, who referred self-efficacy as the belief in one's capacities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura,1977, p3), or that a person possesses the ability to attain specific goals. As for pre-service English teachers, their levels of self-efficacy will greatly impact their teaching effects. And for teachers with high level of self-efficacy, who are not only more dedicated to students' learning, but also more confident and more likely to rise above a variety of obstacles (Good & Brophy, 2003). Therefore, it is imperative for pre-service English education to not only ensure the pre-service teachers' teaching eligibility to enter the field of teaching, but also with a strong sense of self-efficacy (Pamela, 2014). Teaching practicum is a crucial part of pre-service English teacher education, which is also deemed to a key process to form and impact pre-service teachers' self-efficacy of being qualified teachers.

2. Significance and Purpose of the Study

Teaching practicum has been regarded as an essential component in the pre-service teacher education curriculum system. Besides, as teaching practicum plays a very crucial role in impacting pre-service English teachers' eligibility in all-round. The past studies mainly focused on the effects of in-service teachers' self-efficacy on language levels and teaching ability, and studies on the impacts of teaching practicum on the self-efficacy among pre-service English teachers are relatively rare. Therefore, it is necessary to figure out the changes of pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy level before and after teaching practicum, identify the most influential factors impacting their self-efficacy so that try to expound the reasons behind them and help pre-service English know how to enhance their self-efficacy. And this study focuses on whether participation in a 2-week teaching

practicum of pre-service teachers would have any impact on their self-efficacy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The research questions need to be answered in this study are as follows:

- 1.What are the differences of pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy before and after teaching practicum?
- 2.What are the factors that impact pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy during teaching practicum?
- 3.How to improve pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy during the teaching practicum?

3.2. Participants

Four post-graduate students major in English teaching in Sichuan Normal University who have practicum experiences are selected to participate in this study. And this study is conducted after the four participants completed their teaching practicum. The reasons why these four participants were selected are follows.

First, as the covid-19 pandemic resurges nationwide from the beginning of November, only few of post-graduate major in English teaching are available to start their teaching practicum, therefore, only 4 participants were selected.

Second, these four participants went to different schools to start their teaching practicum, which include from primary school, middle school to high school. And the study results based on them will be representative.

Third, the four participants have teaching or practicum experiences before, they also have something different such as different learning experiences, teaching experiences and so on. Thus, the study data collected from them will be more meaningful. Among them, two participants are English teaching majors in their undergraduate stage, while another two participants are just English majors.

3.3. Research Methods

This study adopted case study as its main research method, and questionnaire as well as interview were also be used in this study to collect deeper information from the participants.

3.3.1. Case Study

A case study refers to an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evidence. And the case study method is especially suitable for explaining and describing some conditions when previous theoretical propositions guide data collection and analysis. The four participants have different practicum experiences, they teach different students in different schools, guided by different mentors. Thus, the four participants self-efficacy may impact by different factors. And the purpose of this study is to discover the influential factors that affect pre-service teacher's efficacy and try to find out the viable ways to improve their self-efficacy during the process of teaching practicum.

3.3.2. Interview

The process of shaping self-efficacy is very complicated, consequently, the semi-structured interview is mainly designed in this study. Except making a face-to-face interview, the research also interview the participants through making a phone call and sending voice messages. Interview is used to collect the participants' background information and their understanding of being a pre-service teacher as well as their feeling about the teaching practicum. The outline of the interview was divided into two parts. The first one is the source of the participants' self-efficacy, and the second one is their feeling about the teaching practicum. The details and specific questions about this interview can be seen on the appendix part.

3.3.3. Questionnaire

This study is conducting in Sichuan Normal University, and four post-graduate students major in English teaching are its main research objects. The participant's self-efficacy level was disclosed through a questionnaire designed by Li Ping who used it to gather the basic information of the pre-service teacher's understanding to the self-efficacy.

3.4. Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted after launching the questionnaire. And the language used in interviews was mainly Chinese so that the participants can feel more relaxed. And through interview, some information was collected from the participants.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section will present the findings and discussion of the research. It starts with the levels of the pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy before and after teaching practicum. Then, it will further explain the most influential factors that impact the participants' self-efficacy and the reasons behind the factors. And then, some viable suggestions will be proposed based on the discovery and results of this study.

4.1. The Pre-service English Teachers' Self-efficacy before and after Teaching Practicum

This part is mainly based on the results gathered through questionnaire and interview. Before the four participants start

their teaching practicum, they claimed that they have high or moderate self-efficacy to be a qualified English teacher. While after they finished their short teaching practicum, it is revealed that their self-efficacy as pre-service English teachers dropped in different degrees.

Participant S said she was confident to complete all kinds of tasks during teaching practicum and learn some professional teaching skills. But she found the teaching practicum is far from her expectation. And the four participants all stated that there is a wide gap between the authentic teaching process and the teaching theories they learned in school. Due to different studying background and practice experiences, their self-efficacy varies a lot, but all of them imply that in the early stage of English teaching practicum, their self-efficacy dropped in different level, but at the end of teaching practicum, they learned from teaching practicum, and their self-efficacy raise again. And they have shared some factors that affect their self-efficacy.

4.2. The Most Influential Factors that Impact Pre-service English Teachers' Self-efficacy during Teaching Practicum

A lot of researchers have investigated the factors that impacting the pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. Nevertheless, whether pre-service teachers change their self-efficacy or not rely on their ability, personality, existing knowledge, the task difficulty, effort expenditure and background factors (Bandura, 1997; Poulou,2007). And this part will address the second question on the factors that affect pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. According to the interview and questionnaire results, the factors that influenced the four pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy mainly origin from two aspects, they are the internal factors like teaching mastery experiences, the proficiency of teaching skills, personality, and the external factors such as the relations with students and the mentor, students' responses. All in all, internal factors have something to do with individual English pre-service teachers and external factors have something to do with teaching environment.

4.2.1. Teaching Mastery Experiences

Past experiences are one of the most salient influencing factors to affect pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, and the teaching mastery experiences in particular. Through interview, the participants stated that existing successful teaching experiences enhance their self-efficacy as English pre-service teachers, while unsuccessful teaching experiences lower their self-efficacy. In this study, most participants highly agree that their teacher self-efficacy is greatly influenced by their past teaching experiences. As participant L and said:

I taught several some students English during last summer vacation. They were my relatives' kids who can get high grades in math, but they are not good at learning English. For this reason, o tried all kinds of teaching methods and designed a lot of games in class. several weeks later, they had improved their English marks in test. And their parents were so happy and told me I would be a good English teacher one day. After hearing their positive comments on my English teaching, a great sense of achievement came to me, and I thought I was confident to be a qualified English teacher. (Participant L)

According to Bandura's theory, it is not hard to expound that past teaching experiences of the participants show great influence on their self-efficacy as pre-service English teachers. And the participants in this study, their teaching

experiences, which are influential sources for self-efficacy.

Practice opportunities play very vital roles in determining pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy. As pre-service English teachers' experiences are different, their practice opportunities vary. And they are expected to put theories into practice and train teaching skills, having immediate influence on their teacher self-efficacy both positively and negatively.

When pre-service teachers receive encouragements and approval from their mentor peers, or other teachers during their teaching practicum, their self-efficacy as an English teacher will be greatly improved. However, if they fail to perform their teaching tasks or receive some unpleasant comments from mentors or other students, they will feel incapable to be qualified English teachers.

4.2.2. The Proficiency of Teaching Skills

According to the interview data, teaching proficiency is one of the most influential factors that impact pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. The higher level of teaching proficiency teacher has, the more confident they are. In this study, the four participants claimed that they feel more confident to give explanations or be a professional teacher after the teaching practicum, because they feel more competent in English teaching compared with those who are at the beginning of the teaching practicum.

I used to make mistakes on the stress of some words, but during the teaching practicum, I had opportunity to have lessons to teach the pronunciation of stress. After having several lessons, I can swiftly identify my students' mistakes. And I also feel I can do a better job in paraphrasing that I used to confuse in the past. Maybe I can teach a little bit better than before. (Participant P)

In this study, the four participants' education background is different. Although all of them are English major in the undergraduate stage, yet only half of the participants are majoring in English teaching. As a result, their teaching proficiency is different accordingly. Participant S and participant P as English teaching majors, as they have been systematically trained in school and learned some pedagogical expertise, they declared that they are expecting to start their teaching practicum and confident to be qualified English teachers. And they said their confidence largely comes from systematic training and studying in school as English teaching majors.

It is not surprising to be proven that higher level of teaching proficiency has positive effects on pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy.

4.2.3. Personal Characteristics

Multiple external and internal factors that contribute to the formation of pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy and influence the outcomes of teachers' self-efficacy have been revealed by researchers (Klassen et al., 2011). Researchers have found that Pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy is also influenced by personal characteristics.

In this study, interviews indicate that the participants who are outgoing and optimistic are more prone to believe their competence in English teaching. As Friedman (2003) pointed out in this research, he stressed that pre-service teachers' overall level of self-efficacy in school mainly origins from teachers' belief in their competence to adjust their relationships with students and communicate and cooperate with their colleagues. For those pre-service teachers who are more outgoing, they are easier to get along well with the students and other teachers, accordingly, their self-efficacy is comparatively higher than those more introverted. For

instance, those outgoing pre-service teachers, who are full of confidence in establishing good relationship with students and creating virtuous learning atmosphere during the teaching process, vice versa. As participant S and W said:

I am a moderate person and not very confident in my ability. Sometimes I feel very certain on something that I can handle it well. But sometimes I feel confused because I think I might make things worse. Strictly speaking, I am not an outgoing person, so I might feel awkward in English teaching process, and I am not good at creating pleasant and relaxing atmosphere. And I often heard some people suggest that I should be more confident and do not be shy. Yes, they are right. I am just a shy girl who needs much encouragement and support. That is why every time when I was criticized, I would doubt myself and think I am a loser and cannot achieve anything, so does teaching. (Participant S)

Definitely, it can be ensured that I am an outgoing person and I usually confident and optimistic about anything happened to me. Therefore, I think I can be a good English teacher from the beginning of my postgraduate stage. According to the comments from my teachers and friends, I am very easygoing. Thanks to the personal trait, it can help me build a good relationship with my students during my teaching practicum. And I am willing to create some relaxing and pleasant atmosphere and design some interesting activities in the teaching process so that my lesson won't be make students feel bored. (Participant W)

In a word, according to the data of interview, extrovert personality is more prone to benefit vibrant teaching atmosphere and build close teacher-student relationship. While the introverted teachers might not very helpful for teaching. To sum up, those pre-service English teachers who have more extrovert personality tend to have high sense of self-efficacy on English teaching, who those teachers who have more introverted personality tend to have comparatively lower sense of self-efficacy.

5. Conclusion

This study is to identify the difference of pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy before and after the teaching practicum. And it is to find out the factors that influencing the change in pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy. The major findings can be seen as follows:

Firstly, due to different studying background and practice experiences, their self-efficacy varies a lot, but all of them imply that in the early stage of English teaching practicum, their self-efficacy dropped in different level, but at the end of teaching practicum, they learned from teaching practicum, and their self-efficacy raise again.

In general, the factors that influenced the four pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy mainly origin from two aspects, they are the internal factors like teaching mastery experiences, the proficiency of teaching skills, personality, and the external factors such as the relations with students and the mentor, students' responses.

Besides, Past experiences are one of the most salient influencing factors to affect pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, and the teaching mastery experiences in particular. Through interview, the participants stated that existing successful teaching experiences enhance their self-efficacy as English pre-service teachers, while unsuccessful teaching experiences lower their self-efficacy.

Moreover, the higher level of teaching proficiency teacher has, the more confident they are. In this study, the four

participants claimed that they feel more confident to give explanations or be a professional teacher after the teaching practicum, because they feel more competent in English teaching compared with those who are at the beginning of the teaching practicum.

Finally, those pre-service English teachers who have more extrovert personality tend to have high sense of self-efficacy on English teaching, who those teachers who have more introverted personality tend to have comparatively lower sense of self-efficacy.

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