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**INTERNATIONAL TEACHING PRACTICUM IN
BANGLADESH: AN INVESTIGATION OF TESOL PRE-
SERVICE TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – International teaching practicum (ITP) is seen as an avenue for future teachers to broaden their world views and enhance their personal and professional development. Based on two teachers’ experiences of ITP in Bangladesh, in comparison to their teaching practicum experiences in Malaysia, this paper aims to examine the impact of the ITP on their professional development as future English language teachers.

Methods – Two female teachers were involved in this qualitative research, whereby data were obtained from the teachers’

observations, reflective journals and face-to-face interview. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the data.

Findings – Findings indicate that the two teachers had gained positive professional development experiences as a result of participating in the ITP, especially in terms of these four aspects: (i) confidence; (ii) teaching skills; (ii) perspective on education and culture; and (iv) interpersonal skills.

Significance – The study indicates that ITP could be an alternative platform for future teachers to gain positive professional development experiences, which then would prepare them for the challenging teaching environment.

Keywords: Teaching practicum, international teaching practicum, professional development, globalization, culture and cultural issues, personal and interpersonal skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum or practical is a crucial phase for pre-service teachers (PSTs) where they get to apply and practice all the theories, techniques and pedagogies that they have learnt in their teacher education programs in the real school environment (Barton, Hartwig & Cain, 2015). It is also a transition process from a student to a teacher, in which PSTs develop and grow professionally and personally, culminating in the development of their own self-image as a teacher with their own professional identity (Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010).

In most cases, PSTs undertake their teaching practicum in their local settings, which is basically in their home country. However, many educational institutions are beginning to initiate networking, agreements and meaningful collaborations with institutions from other countries with the aim of providing a platform and opportunities for their PSTs to experience learning and engaging in teaching in foreign educational settings and schools. Such an initiative, in the form of an international teaching practicum (ITP), is motivated by the significance of ‘borderless education’ (Middlehurst, 2006) and the drive for globalization (Larsen, 2016; Kabilan, 2013; Mwebi & Bringham, 2009) so that PSTs are better prepared as teachers to face the challenges of the 21st century. For such a demanding epoch, professional development experienced during ITP could be one of the ways to prepare teachers, as Cushner & Mahon (2002) highlight:

It is essential especially in these interdependent, global times, that preservice teachers experience cross-cultural learning to gain a deeper understanding of the world in

which they live and to enable them to teach with, work with, and continue to learn from people different from themselves (p. 55).

The above gains of ITP in terms of learning experiences and professional development for PSTs have encouraged many international practicum projects around the world, such as in Australia (Cinelli & Jones, 2016); Canada (Larsen, 2016); Germany (Vogt, 2016); Malaysia (Kabilan, 2013); and many other countries as indicated in Velliaris and Coleman-George (2016). The outcomes for these projects are similar in some respects that include expanded worldviews, deeper and more critical understanding of global interdependence and awareness of different educational systems. However, there are also outcomes that are unique to the specific contexts, and these are usually findings that are related to curriculum and syllabus, culture and personal identities that are shaped (Kabilan, 2013; Lee, 2009).

In the Malaysian context, the idea of embarking on teaching practicum for PSTs is to serve the purpose of preparing them to become professionals and eventually join the teaching profession. While most Malaysian institutions have made it compulsory for all PSTs to go through teaching practicum in Malaysia, ITP is based on volunteerism, whereby they are given the freedom to choose the country that they would like to pursue their ITP. In the case of PSTs from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), they have to fulfill certain general criteria before they are allowed to do their ITP, such as obtaining a minimum CGPA of 3.0 and performing well in micro-teaching sessions. Based on these criteria, two female PSTs from the School of Educational Studies, USM undertook their ITP in a school in Dhaka, Bangladesh after completing a period of two months of local teaching practicum in a secondary school in Penang, Malaysia. The main aim of this ITP is to enhance and enrich the PSTs' professional development experiences. Hence, a study was planned and designed to investigate and examine the PSTs' experiences of professional development that they gained during their ITP in Dhaka.

This study is significant as it indicates the value of ITP for PSTs, especially in terms of their professional growth and development, hence contributing to the rethinking of how teaching practicum

should be planned, organized and implemented so that PSTs could gain the most out of their ITP experiences. In addition, ITP providers and other interested stakeholders could benefit from the findings of this study in their efforts to equip PSTs with meaningful and impactful professional development experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching practicum is an essential and vital component of teacher education programs due to its relevance to PSTs' professional experiences (Mena, Hennissen, & Loughran, 2017), as they get the opportunity to be in schools, engage with the learners and interact with teachers. These are opportunities for the PSTs to learn and gain experiences from real contexts and real school environment (Herbert & Hobbs, 2017). For example, the engagement and interaction between teachers and PSTs can develop into a community of practices that can facilitate PSTs in 'their future professional lives' (Admiraal, Akkerman, & Graaff, 2012, p. 275). These will open doors to various professional development endeavors, including long-term teacher development (Crookes, 2003). Similarly, an ITP would also be able to achieve and facilitate professional development of PSTs but the experiences gained would be different from the normal teaching practicum, especially in terms of world views of education, working culture, culture and professional life. In addition, ITP in different countries would offer different kinds of professional development experiences and challenges, where teachers and learners will get to learn from and about each other, and at the same time, be able to 'understand the different ideas and philosophies of diverse groups of individuals' (Kabilan, 2013, p. 208).

Professional development experiences gained from the different countries and different educational settings/contexts (in the structure of ITP) are valuable, particularly when the PSTs can translate those experiences into everyday teaching and learning practices in the classroom settings for the benefit of learning and development of their future students. This is possible due to three main elements of learning that the PSTs' practice, decide and act upon during the ITP: (1) reflecting critically; (2) integrating knowledge and experiences; and (3) making decisions and taking actions based on critical reflections (Kabilan, 2013). These three learning tenets influence

and change PSTs' experiences during the ITP (Maynes, Allison, and Julien-Schultz, 2012) and thus, lead the PSTs to embrace new world views and reconstruct new knowledge and practices (Kabilan, 2013).

Apart from the above professional development gains, experiencing cultural sensitization, enhanced confidence in teaching, improved content knowledge, language skills and teaching skills and sharing of different ideas and philosophies, are the other kinds of professional development experienced during the ITP (see Teekens, 2000; Cruickshank, 2004; Rodriguez, 2011; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Kabilan, 2013). These professional development gains by PSTs are practical, relevant and meaningful in preparing the PSTs for the future since many educational systems have begun 'integrating the globalized world into the school curriculum' with an emphasis on 'educational change and innovation' (Chung et al., 2017, p. 389), as well as 'the pedagogies needed to foster 21st century learning and readiness for college and careers (Madden, 2017, p. 87). Hence, the ITP seems to be a potentially integral initiative in the overall teacher education program to further enhance the quality of PSTs in view of the imminent demands for teachers who are enterprising, dynamic, creative and innovative.

In the process of experiencing meaningful professional development during the ITP, PSTs are expected to, and naturally, encounter numerous challenges and problems. These include financial challenges (Kabilan, 2013; Walters, Garii & Walters, 2009); location of schools and geographical issues (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008); and adapting to foreign culture (Spooner-Lane, Tangen, & Campbell, 2009; Walters, Garii & Walters, 2009), among others. Some of these challenges are surmountable with appropriate support and theories and concepts (such as reflective practices) learned prior to the ITP. These are applied during the ITP to 'make sense of and reflect on the challenges and opportunities of teaching abroad' in an authentic situation and provide the PSTs the 'opportunities to evaluate their own understanding of the world, their practices and their students in less formal, less didactic settings' (Walters, Garii & Walters, 2009, p. 156). It is this process of reflection and evaluation by the PSTs of their own understanding that reify their self-realization and self-awareness and 'contribute more to teachers' critically refined pedagogical awareness and knowledge' (Kabilan,

2007, p. 701), and transpires their learning, thus, leading them to experience a satisfying and meaningful professional development.

Despite the above challenges, this study (and other similar studies) would yield valuable information on the types of professional development experiences that the PSTs would gain and that would enrich their knowledge, skills and practices. Previous research has concluded that ITP 'creates culturally confident, competent and sensitive world-minded teachers' (Walters, Garii & Walters, (2009, p. 156); facilitates PSTs to learn new things and gain new experiences (Kabilan, 2013); and constantly reshapes PST's 'understanding of legitimate pedagogical and interpersonal authority' (Lai, Gu, & Hu, 2015, p. 429). These would pave the way for the PSTs' increased professional competencies (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006), which are basically 'essential elements of professional development' (Kabilan, 2013, p. 199).

With such professional development experiences, a teacher would be able to engage learners in a more meaningful manner, i.e., being more contextualized, bringing about positive learning outcomes and addressing the demanding needs of current educational ecology of the 21st century that are intertwined with issues and concepts of globalization, diversity and multiculturalism (Sherman, 2016). Therefore, certain sets of skills are needed to manage and navigate such situations especially when PSTs are not well equipped with multicultural education, knowledge and apathy (Walters, Garii & Walters, 2009). The provision of ITP would greatly benefit PSTs in terms of gaining the appropriate knowledge and skills related to multicultural contexts and settings, and surmounting the pertinent challenges.

ITP projects and research are on the rise due to the increase of networking among universities globally (Azizah, 2016; Parr & Thomas, 2013). The collaborations and networking initiated by the educational institutions enable PSTs to experience the diversity of culture in a foreign setting and facilitates them to gain invaluable insights of the host country, its educational system as well as the people and surrounding communities (Kabilan et al., 2017; Dunn et al., 2014; Grierson & Denton, 2013; Kabilan, 2013). Such an exposure and experience directly and indirectly can construct and enhance the PSTs' professional development. It is the intention of this study to

identify the kind of professional development experienced by the PSTs, and therefore, enrich the literature and assist educational institutions in planning a successful and meaningful ITP for their PSTs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Background and Setting

This research was a qualitative study that investigated the experiences of two PSTs (majoring in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, [TESOL]) in terms of their professional development during their ITP. The teaching practicum was conducted at both the local and international levels. Prior to their ITP, they were involved in local teaching practicum in Penang (one of the states in the Northern region of Peninsular Malaysia) for two months, from the second week of February to the second week of April 2017 in two different secondary schools.

As for the ITP, it started in the third week of April and ended in the fourth week of May 2017, i.e., six weeks of teaching. The two participants involved were placed in a government school (later referred to as School U) in Dhaka. Since this ITP was a collaborative effort between the School of Educational Studies, USM with Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka, School U agreed to host the two participants involved, as the school is under the supervision and management of IER.

During the practicum, the participants were given the opportunities to teach primary, secondary and college level classes (Note: School U has all the levels under one institution and monitored by one principal). Each participant was given eight English language classes to teach (50 minutes per class) each week. Apart from teaching, the participants were also given the chance to be involved in any extra- curricular activities (such as club activities and sports) as other teachers are required to do in School U. During the ITP, each participant was assigned a mentor teacher, who guided, advised and facilitated their learning and adjusting to teaching in School U. The two mentor teachers also supervised and monitored the participants' lessons through observation on a daily basis. Besides the mentor

teachers, a supervising lecturer from IER was assigned by IER to supervise and observe the participants' lesson at least once during this period of six weeks. Apart from the observations done by the mentor teachers and lecturer from IER, two lecturers from USM also visited the participants in the fifth week of the practicum to observe their lesson. At the end of the visitation, the USM lecturers held a discussion and meeting with the participants, the mentor teachers and the principal of School U with the aim of acquiring information on the participants' overall performance throughout the practicum.

Participants

The participants of this study were two TESOL PSTs who had completed two months of local teaching practicum in Penang, Malaysia and were in their final year of the 4-year program that included 136 units of courses. These two female participants volunteered for the ITP in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, their selection was made based on merit – they had achieved the requisite CGPA of at least 3.0 at the time of the ITP project. In addition, their passion and interest for learning, doing research and having a positive outlook and attitude towards the teaching profession were also taken into consideration. Their progress and development as a future teacher were also observed and monitored before accepting them to be part of the ITP project in Bangladesh. From the above measures, we can discern that these two participants had demonstrated some level of understanding of the importance of professional development. For the purposes of identification and data analysis in this study, the first female teacher is known as Teacher A while the second female teacher is known as Teacher B.

Data Collection Method and Analysis

Two main sources of data were used in this study: (1) reflective journals (RJs) that were written by the participants on a daily basis about their experiences of teaching English in School U; and (2) an interview session with the participants that focused on their experiences during their ITP. Teacher A's RJs were labeled as RJA while Teacher B's were labeled as RJB. As for the interview, Teacher A's answers were labeled as IA and Teacher B's answers as IB.

RJs were the main method used for collecting the data for this research. Teacher A and Teacher B were asked to write a RJ on a daily basis about their teaching life in Bangladesh. Kabilan's (2013) procedure of writing a RJ was adopted and practiced by the participants with the aim of facilitating the participants' reflective processes and documenting 'their experiences of professional journey during the international practicum' (Gil-Garcia & Cintron, 2002 in Kabilan, 2013, p. 202). Before the ITP, the participants were given a one-day training on how to reflect on their practices and experiences by the researchers. In this training, the participants were asked to focus on their own teaching and learning, and then move on to a 'thoughtful consideration of their students' learning' (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Shulman 2002, p. 241). Such reflective practices may be adequate and satisfactory for demonstrating their "ability to evaluate their practice, to understand their students as learners and to become strong, purposeful, teachers who think about teaching in ways that reflect the complexity and intellectual and emotional challenges of the work" (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Shulman, 2002, p. 242).

They were required to make as many entries as possible during their ITP on any issue that they felt were pertinent to their professional development experiences, their perceived gains of professional development and their endeavors as a future English language teacher. The contexts and parameters for the reflections encompassed but not limited to: (i) teaching and learning elements and processes; (ii) engagement and interaction with pupils and teachers; (iii) construction and reconstruction of pedagogical knowledge and skills; and (iv) psychological and emotional factors, including self-efficacy.

An individual interview session was carried out with each of the participants. Each interview session took approximately one hour and was carried out in the School of Educational Studies, USM. Teacher A and Teacher B were asked to respond to the questions posed during the interview with accurate explanations and examples of their professional development experiences, especially the ones in tandem with their reflections that were recorded in their journals. Both interviews were recorded using voice recorder device for analysis process. The interview provided an opportunity for the researchers to have a first-hand observation of the participants' reactions and

expressions, especially with regards to their confidence, which helped in providing sufficient amount of information in supporting the data from their RJs.

Both types of data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) that included the processes of multiple reading, making notes, transferring the notes into themes, determining the relationship and clustering the themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The IPA procedures ensured the accuracy, reliability and trustworthiness of the information obtained from the RJs and interviews. These were attained as a result of multiple reading of the data and the process of comparing the data from both Teacher A and Teacher B in search for similarities (using both the RJs and interviews). Notes were made based on the readings, whereby the recurring ideas found during the process were sorted into several major themes according to their conceptual similarities (see Appendix 1 for sample analysis).

FINDINGS

Four major themes emerged from the analysis process and these themes were identified as the PSTs' experiences of professional development as a result of the ITP in Bangladesh. The four themes are confidence, teaching skills, perspective on education and culture and interpersonal skills.

Confidence

Both Teacher A and Teacher B reported that the experiences of teaching in two different countries have helped in boosting their confidence level. For Teacher A, the experience has made her more confident, specifically when it comes to teaching. Her confidence level in teaching increased due to the environment in the classroom. She wrote in one of her journals:

Being able to conduct a successful lesson in an environment that is totally out of my comfort zone has definitely affected my confidence level positively especially in teaching. (RJA)

The same scenario applied to Teacher B's situation as she stated that both local practicum and international practicum have made her more confident about her teaching skills. She explained that the local practicum served as the first 'stepping stone' in boosting her confidence level as the lessons conducted in Malaysia can be compared to the ones conducted in Bangladesh. The differences between the lessons conducted in Malaysia and Bangladesh gave her the magnifying glass to highlight her improvement with regards to her teaching skills and relatively, increasing her confidence level. However, she also highlighted in her journal that the confidence boost only surfaced after she managed to overcome the challenges of teaching in Bangladesh.

The sudden boost of confidence only came to me after a month teaching here (Bangladesh) and that is due to the fact that I managed to overcome the difficulties I faced teaching Bangladeshi students in the new environment (RJB)

Both PSTs also specified in their journal and interview that the experiences also affected their confidence level in terms of speaking and using English for the purpose of communication. Both of them stated that during the local practicum, they only used English during the lesson and they usually conversed with the local students and their colleagues in Bahasa Melayu as they find it more convenient. However, it was not possible to do this in Bangladesh as are not the speaker of the country's mother tongue. Due to that reason, English is the only language they could use to communicate with the teachers and the students. Teacher B and Teacher A clarified:

It is a force of circumstances, in a good way. We somehow are being "forced" to use English as we cannot speak Bangla language at all and at the end, it becomes beneficial to us as our proficiency can be adjusted which made us more confident to speak with the locals in English without being understood differently (RJB)

I think it is the concept of "the more we use it, the better we are at it". The environment "forced" us to

use English all the time. So, when we used it (English) frequently, we became more comfortable which made us a little more confident (IA)

Teaching Skills

Teacher A and Teacher B also reported that the experiences of teaching in two different countries have improved their teaching skills. Teacher B explained that due to the fact that she was given the opportunity to teach in two different sets of environment, she was able to compare and contrast her experiences. The comparison helped in highlighting the differences between the teaching skills she practiced in both countries. One of the skills highlighted in their journals and interview is classroom management.

Teaching 60+ students in one class is a whole new experience for me. Through discussion and observing my mentor teacher's classes, I managed to learn the way the teachers here control their students. Besides, you learn things by doing it, so this ITP has helped me to acquire this important skill (RJB)

As for Teacher A, teaching in Bangladesh has helped her to improve her voice projection which is related to classroom management. In her interview session:

In Malaysia, I do not have any problem with my voice projection as all my classes consist of 27++ students which is the exact opposite of the situation I have in Bangladesh. Although at first, I do shout because it is hard to control 60+ students at the same time but after some time, I learned to project it (voice) in the right way. The teachers here are very helpful and I learned one or two techniques and the right way to breathe from them which become very handy during teaching (IA)

Apart from classroom management, both teachers also indicated that the different experiences have taught them to become more resourceful and more creative in planning their lesson. Both teachers agreed that they have become more resourceful due to the different teaching approaches used and also due to the learning styles of the students.

I have also become more resourceful as the experiences somehow encourage me to relearn some teaching methods and classroom management which are not very common in the classrooms in Malaysia. I also find myself researching through new interactive teaching methods to “adapt-and-adopt” into my lesson which I think will definitely benefit me in the future (RJA)

Teacher B also stated in her interview that she has become more creative in selecting the media and planning her lesson due to the limitations she faced in the classroom in Bangladesh. She clarified:

Planning an interactive lesson for 50+ students is very tough but at the same time, I wanted to show the students that we can learn English through language games and not just through memorization and writing exercises. This challenge has encouraged me to search for other methods that can be both fun and also manageable to be conducted in a lesson for 50+ students. At the end of it, without me realizing, I actually made a “collection” of interactive teaching methods which will be very useful for my teaching career in the future (IB)

Perspective on Education and Culture

Teacher A and Teacher B stated that being able to teach in two different environments that use different approaches and ideology has helped in changing their perspective of education. Both of them claimed that the experiences have taught them to be more “open-minded” towards differences in terms of school climate, syllabus and content and teaching pedagogy.

Teacher A and Teacher B clarified in their journal:

I am more open-minded now compared to the earlier weeks where I always see the differences between the school system in Malaysia and Bangladesh as something negative instead of positive. I learned that there are no such things as the “correct” methods and the “wrong” methods as it actually depends on the environment and the culture of the place (RJA)

The experience helped me to broaden my perspective of education. I learned how different syllabus, content and classroom climate can be. I was exposed to new climate and syllabus and I have come to terms with myself that there is no right or wrong in teaching as long as the methods chosen or the syllabus provided will help in achieving the education goals. I believe that this “open-mindedness” has made me more flexible in teaching (RJB)

Teacher A and Teacher B also reported that their perspective of the culture also changed after the ITP. They claimed that the experience has helped in increasing their level of intercultural sensitivity. For Teacher B, the pressure of teaching new multiethnic students has encouraged her to be more sensitive towards the culture.

The pressure of teaching in a totally new environment and teaching a totally new race or ethnic group has pushed me to be more receptive towards the culture (IB)

Both of them also clarified that the experience has taught them that culture can be influential in education.

I also learned about the importance of being sensitive towards the culture of the country. The group activity today was a success and the reason is that we took into account the culture of the country. Bangladeshi people are very proud of their country; thus choosing the activity that will boost their patriotism towards their nation will definitely attract the students to participate actively which definitely made the lesson a successful one for us (RJA)

Interpersonal Skills

Teacher A and Teacher B reported that their interpersonal skills have improved during both the local and international teaching practicum. Both of them stated that both practicums provided them with the setting and the opportunities to interact with people. Teacher A explained that due to the nature of the practicums where daily interaction with the teachers is required as part of the mentoring

purpose, she interacts with people better now compared to before the practicums, especially with people at different levels.

I used to have problems to communicate with people who are not the same level as me, for example, the principal because I was not very good when it comes to communicating formally. However, both practicums have helped in providing the medium to practice these skills as the practicums require the pre-service teacher to be involved in all school activities, like sports day and department meetings (RJA)

For Teacher B, being in both situations where daily conversations involve local settings and international settings, she found that her interpersonal skills improved a lot whereby when she was in the home country, she thought that when she is doing her ITP, she would not communicate much with the people around her as she has the perception that she might not be too comfortable conversing in her second language (English) all the time. However, she grows as she is there, daily conversation with the colleagues throughout the ITP went on just as how she had with her colleagues in the home country.

Communicating, be it in formal or informal settings is of no problem here as the colleagues are all very welcoming and help me to improve my interpersonal skill as not to limit it with a common and local settings only (IB)

Whether they liked it or not, during the ITP, according to Teacher A and Teacher B, ‘we must engage ourselves in communicating with new colleagues and the new school community’ (IA) due to the fact that they need to ‘discuss work related matters’ with fellow teachers and mentor (IB) and also to ‘understand the structure of the curriculum’ (IA). ITP ‘helped in providing the setting and the chances to interact with people of different cultures and backgrounds’ (IB), and thus Teacher B’s interpersonal skills ‘improved greatly’ (IB), while according to Teacher A, it ‘has impacted positively’ (IA). Another communication skill that TA gained is ‘listening skills’ (RJA):

Staying there for certain period of time definitely helps in brushing up the trainee teachers' communication skills as we have to understand discourses that if not all the time, many times carry a different kind of sense from what we have been using all this while.... understanding new slang requires an active listening ability. Besides listening in order to respond, trainee teachers also need to listen carefully to make sense of the content and understand the things that were being said by other people especially the colleagues. Good listening skills will undoubtedly contribute to effective communication (IA)

In relation to ensuring good communication with their new colleagues, Teacher B echoed what Teacher A stressed about the importance of good communication skills, but in the form of non-verbal communication (RJB):

Because of the different background and culture, I learned to communicate using body language as well as making more eye contact with my colleagues and my students to avoid any miscommunication that may have been caused by verbal communication alone. I learned that using body gestures and making eye contact help in intensifying my verbal communication, thus making the interaction more understandable and less confusing (IB)

DISCUSSION

Findings indicate that Teacher A and Teacher B have undergone a meaningful ITP in Bangladesh, whereby they have: (i) gained confidence in teaching and using the English language; (ii) enhanced specific and related teaching skills; (iii) experienced and internalized new perspectives on education and culture; and (iv) developed useful interpersonal skills. These are profound competencies gained from ITP that should enrich the teachers' knowledge and skills, and mold them into becoming a professionally resourceful English language teacher in the future. This is perhaps what ITP does in guiding the PSTs' professional development, i.e., via a 'continuous negotiation

of meaning accentuated by language and inter-cultural factors', and how well the pre-service teachers are able to 'establish rapport and understanding among the school community' (Myles et al., 2006, p. 243) by integrating acute collaborative practices.

Though in this study, the PSTs were asked to only reflect on their teaching experiences and professional development gained during their ITP in Bangladesh, Teacher A and Teacher B invariably and consistently made comparisons to what they had experienced in Malaysia and in Bangladesh in their RJs. For all the four themes established in the findings of this study, some comparisons were made, thus highlighting the positives and negatives of their experiences in both countries. Nevertheless, the outcomes of their reflections (of those comparisons) were usually positive in nature, i.e., they examined and delineated carefully the benefits of having gone through two teaching practicums, and yet focusing on the benefits of teaching in an international context and settings. Most probably, this is because the second practicum (i.e., in Bangladesh) gave 'the teachers the opportunity to enrich their teaching and learning experiences as well as provided them the opportunity and platform to rectify the mistakes they made during their first practicum (i.e., in Malaysia) (Kabilan, 2013, p. 207). Moreover, the different experiences in both Malaysia and Bangladesh marked by different cultural and educational perspectives and practices observed by the PSTs, mean that their confidence levels in teaching and using the English language have increased (Kabilan, 2013) and they were able to refine their teaching skills (such as assessing students' needs, identifying instructional classroom practices and planning lessons) (Johnson, 2015).

The two different experiences of practicum highlighted by the PSTs seem to have contributed to their professional development, especially in terms of teaching skills and to some extent, their confidence level in their teaching abilities. However, findings clearly and profoundly indicate that the other professional development gains mentioned by the PSTs were mainly due to their ITP experience in Bangladesh. The daily use of the English language that was 'forced' onto them, new perspectives of education and culture and some aspects of their interpersonal skills flourished and grew due to the unique and very specific intricacies of how the Bangladeshi school environment presents itself and how its educational systems function. The obvious

cultural and language differences also contributed hugely to the development of the PST's English language usage (Kabilan, 2013; Sahin, 2008); their interpersonal skills and awareness (Kabilan, 2013); and their cultural consciousness and understanding (Cushner & Mahon, 2002).

The four themes are the main foundations and sources of professional development that were experienced by the PSTs during their ITP in Bangladesh in this study. For instance, the interpersonal skills gained allowed the PSTs to establish 'close relationships and mutual understanding' with the Bangladeshi teachers, thus, quickly enabling them to adjust to the 'working environment' and adapt to 'working culture' (Kabilan, 2013, p. 206). Another example – the PSTs were able to formulate and accept new perspectives of education and culture due to their being exposed to different educational systems, philosophies, ideologies and culture, which allowed them to become more aware of the advantages and disadvantages of these contexts. This is an integral source of professional development for the PSTs, as they were able to realize that 'teaching is unique, and is embedded within the ideologies and philosophies of the respective educational contexts'. They could also establish a 'connection between their concerns as teachers, their students' learning experiences and the overarching educational process' (Kabilan, 2013, p. 206). For this particular nexus, it is discernible how this tenet of understanding educational perspectives and cultural elements may contribute to superior teaching skills, which is another main theme of PSTs' professional development during the ITP.

CONCLUSION

It is suffice to conclude that the ITP in Bangladesh has contributed to the PSTs' professional development in terms of the four main themes – confidence, teaching skills, new perspective of education and culture and interpersonal skills. It has become a relevant platform to shape PSTs' professional growth and development in the times of globalization, borderless education and 21st century learning. In this era, the minds of PSTs need to be creative and critical, their attitudes and actions engagingly collaborative and their personalities and working ethics exuding healthy and active communication. To some extent, the ITP has managed to reify and highlight some of these

abilities, which has become prerequisites for effective teachers in current times, as well as in the near future. It is our view that the ITP has deepened and stretched PSTs' experiences gained during their first practicum in Malaysia and engaged them in meaningful and enriching extensions of teaching and learning activities while in Bangladesh. As a result, their overall professional development experiences during ITP were consequential and has had a great impact on their progress and growth as a future teacher.

One of the main implications of the study is that providers of teacher education programs should now consider at least two teaching practicum sessions structured into their programs since many institutions still plan only one session of teaching practicum (Kabilan, 2013). In relation to this, another implication is the providers should also consider the inclusion of ITP as part of their curriculum since its benefits are quite evident. However, financial implication is one aspect that should be considered and straightened out before ITP initiatives are planned and implemented. An alternative, if financial constraint is a serious burden to the institutions and the PSTs, is to ensure that PSTs do not return to their hometown for their second practicum, or in other words, they must undergo their practicum in a cultural surrounding that is copiously different from their own.

Under the current situational needs in schools, where cultural sensitivity and multiculturalism issues are of paramount importance, professional development for both PSTs and in-service teachers (ISTs) should address these. ITP could be a program that can easily facilitate PSTs' awareness, consciousness, knowledge and understanding of issues related to culture, multiculturalism and diversity, and thus assists them in planning teaching and learning activities that emphasize learners' needs. As for ISTs, providing them in-house or in-service professional development opportunities and programs that encourage multi-cultural gains should give them new learning experiences, as well insights into new and relevant teaching practices.

While the above suggestions are desired and could pave the way to further improve the development of future teachers, more studies are needed since the findings from this study are based on only two PSTs. Future studies should examine the experiences of more PSTs in different countries with diverse cultural settings

and environments. Currently, this is the biggest limitation in understanding and painting a complete picture of TESOL PSTs' professional development during the ITP, as most studies conducted have been within a context where the native speakers undergo their ITP in a non-native speakers' environment. More studies on the non-native PSTs' experience in ITP would give us a more comprehensive understanding of their professional development and growth and thus, help teacher education providers to plan and implement a more meaningful program for their PSTs.

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