

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) in Ethiopian Secondary School Teacher Education Practicum Supervision

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Abstract

The current teacher education program in Ethiopia has taken a relatively new modality known as PGDT (Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching) program, in which candidates are admitted after obtaining a first degree in one of school subjects and expected to acquire professional knowledge (i.e., Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and knowledge of learners and context). The current study, therefore, aims to examine the practicum supervision practices of the PGDT program at Bahir Dar University (BDU) and Mekelle University (MU), Ethiopia. To achieve this, data were collected from student teachers (n=21), university supervisors (n=16), teacher educators (n=11), and cooperating teachers (n=19) and program coordinators (n=3) through interview along with document analysis. The results show that the practice fails to adequately address PCK as subject-specific pedagogy becomes a peripheral issue in the practicum supervision. Hence, it is called for restructuring the PGDT practicum supervision program in a way that could well address PCK.

Key Words: Pedagogical content knowledge, postgraduate diploma in teaching, practicum, supervision

Background of the Study

In a teacher education program that aims at enabling student teachers make a transition from their academic setting to the realities of teaching in schools, school-based experience is vitally important. This school-based involvement, namely practicum, is conceived of as an opportunity that enables student teachers to observe and participate in diverse educational settings, and apply the theories and concepts learned in their coursework as traditional applied science model (Wallace, 1991) made clear. The recent reflective practitioner model also considered practicum as an important means in which student teachers get practical classroom teaching experiences that help them examine and reflect upon their beliefs, values, and practices and refine their personal theories (Richards & Crookes, 1988). Be it within the traditional applied science model or in the reflective practitioner model, the significance of practicum in teacher education would not be repudiated, and this has been accentuated by many scholars (e.g., Bailey, 2006; Borg, 2006; Crookes, 2003; Gebhard, 2009; Richards, 1998).

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Among the several strategies of teacher development to be employed in a practicum program, the most important one is teaching a class and supervision (Bailey, 2006; Tang, 2003; Youngs & Bird, 2010). During -practicum, student teachers are usually supposed to encounter new school-based experience, which offers them exposure to teaching in real context. This school-based experience usually constitutes one or two components of teachers' knowledge base: PK and PCK, as proposed by Shulman's (1987) typology. Pedagogical knowledge, or teachers' constructs of the task of teaching (VanPatten, 1997), is defined as the teacher's accumulated knowledge about the act of teaching, including the goals, procedures, and strategies that form the basis for what teachers do in classroom (Feinman-Nemser & Flodden, 1986; Shulman 1986, Shulman, 1987). PCK has also been delineated as the knowledge used to transform subject matter content into forms more comprehensible to students (Grossman 1990; Shulman 1987).

In the field of language education, PCK of prospective teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) comes primarily from studies in second language acquisition (Ellis, 1994), and classroom instruction (Lightbown & Spada, 1993). Specifically, PCK of EFL teachers includes skills such as how teachers organize group work (e.g. Long & Porter, 1985), how to teach each language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing), what questions they use to manage input and student output (e.g. Long, 1996; Swain, 1998), and how they deal with issues regarding form-focused teaching (e.g. Doughty & Williams, 1998) and corrective feedback (e.g. Lightbown & Spada, 1993; Lyster & Ranta, 1996) to mention but a few.

Secondary school teachers in Ethiopia had traditionally been trained at universities in a four-year degree program, which combined practicum experience with academic courses in various disciplines before the educational structure of the country changed. In 2003, a teacher education program reform, known as Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), came into effect. The TESO program was developed as part of the implementation strategies of the new Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia which was introduced in 1994. It is intended to bring about a paradigm shift in the Ethiopian teacher education system (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2003). TESO has suggested a change in teacher education emphasizing mainly on professional courses with extended practicum experiences in a reflective approach (Mulugeta, 2009).

Later, a newer model of selection and training strategy of secondary school teachers has been introduced. It was changed from an integrated three-year educational bachelor's degree to a three-year degree course in a major field, plus an additional year of professional teacher education to gain a Post-Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT). The one-year professional education program consists of training in educational foundations, pedagogy, and school-based practicum experience (MOE, 2009). The PGDT program has the same conceptual underpinnings and program undertakings as the TESO program. Like TESO, the practicum is the major focus area of the

PGDT program. While it was commenced, as the Practicum Implementation Guideline (MOE, 2011a) indicates, practicum was attached to courses and is going to be done at secondary schools and has three parts; Practicum I, II and III. The total credit given was 4 for practicum III while practicum I and II had no credit. Later on, when the program was launched in a summer term, implementation of the guideline became impossible. To tackle the problem, a consultative meeting was held in 2011, and PDGT Practicum Implementation Provisional Guideline (MOE, 2011b) was prepared. Thenceforth, Practicum I and II were supposed to be handled as a course by themselves along with the job of teaching.

Statement of the Problem

Practicum is a learning site where student teachers are engaged in real teaching under the supervision of their university instructors. During the practicum, at least three supervisory conferences between student teachers and university supervisors are required. The conferences can be organized immediately after the beginning of independent teaching, following supervision by the university supervisor and at the end of the practicum. Each conference session shall be used for reflection and improvement of teaching and learning practices (MOE, 2011a). The student teachers are also expected to be supported by cooperating teachers (regular teachers of English in the placement schools).

Though the goal of practicum supervision is twofold—support and assessment—assessment of whether the student teachers meet the key requirements of the teacher education program seems to be the dominant one in the current PGDT programs at Bahir Dar University (BDU) and Mekelle University (MU), where the assignment of teachers as practicum supervisors has kept EFL teacher educators away from the process. The PGDT Curriculum Framework for Secondary School Teacher Education Program in Ethiopia (MOE, 2009) proposed nothing about how university supervisors should be assigned and on which specialists should the accountability be vested. As a result, there would be complaints among the subject area teachers on how certain individuals are assigned to supervise EFL practicum at BDU and MU. This disengagement of EFL teacher educators may cause problems in addressing PCK, an important component of EFL teacher knowledge base that deals with what specifically EFL teachers do in the classroom (e.g., using different questioning techniques to manage input and student output, providing corrective feedback, striking a balance between fluency-focused and accuracy-focused activities, teaching different language skills, organizing group work etc.). The researchers' informal observation uncovers that grievances are commonplace among EFL teachers, and student teachers also raise sort of dissatisfaction with the PGDT practicum supervision.

The success of a given supervisory process depends on the reasonably good balance among the different components of teachers' knowledge base. However, empiri-

cal studies addressing this particular issue within a practicum program are scarce. In Ethiopian context, for instance, one can find only a handful of studies (e.g., Hiko, Afework, Usman & Duressa 2014; Kassa, 2014) that evaluates the overall PGDT program. In spite of the importance of the treatment of PCK in a practicum program, it has not gained much attention, and, hence, it warrants an investigation. This study is, therefore, an attempt to produce a good picture of the treatment of PCK in the current practices of the PGDT programs of two Ethiopian universities: BDU and MU. Put it in another way, the study aims to explore how subject-specific pedagogy is accommodated in the PGDT practicum supervision programs at BDU and MU. To achieve this, the study answers the following questions:

1. Who are the participants in the current practicum supervision process of the PGDT programs? What are their roles?
2. What kind of supervisory feedback is offered to student teachers during the PGDT practicum program?
3. What is the PGDT program participants' appraisal of the practicum supervision process?

Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on PCK, one of the components of teacher's knowledge base. The knowledge base for language teaching refers to what language teachers require to know (Borg, 2010, p. 218) puts clearly that "traditionally, the knowledge base of language teaching has been divided into two separate domains—knowledge of language and knowledge of teaching. Current thinking in the field, however, conceptualizes the knowledge base for LTE in much more complex terms." Grounded in a seminal work in general education by Shulman (1987), different types of teachers' knowledge base classifications have been recognized in language teacher education literature. Day and Conklin (1992) taxonomy of the knowledge base of second language teacher education that consists of four types of knowledge: Content knowledge, Pedagogic knowledge, Pedagogic content knowledge and Support knowledge would serve as a lens for the current investigation.

Content knowledge includes knowledge of the subject matter (what EFL teachers teach), for instance, English language (as represented by courses in syntax, semantics, phonology, and pragmatics) and literary and cultural aspects of the English language. Pedagogic knowledge is knowledge of generic teaching strategies, beliefs, and practices, regardless of the focus of the subject matter. It refers to how teachers teach. It includes, for example, classroom management, motivation, decision making etc. (Day & Conklin, 1992). PCK is the specialized knowledge of how to represent CK in diverse ways that students can understand, the knowledge of how students come to understand the subject matter, what difficulties they are likely to encounter when learning it, what misconceptions interfere with learning, and how to overcome these problems.

It is about how teachers teach EFL in general, or how teachers teach EFL listening or speaking in particular. Examples for PCK include teaching EFL skills (reading, writing), teaching English grammar, materials evaluation, and development, EFL testing, EFL curriculum evaluation and development, teaching methods (Day & Conklin, 1992). The fourth knowledge type, support knowledge, is the knowledge of the various disciplines that inform teachers' approach to the teaching and learning of English; e.g., psycholinguistics, linguistics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, research methods (Day & Conklin, 1992).

Although the language teacher education literature could not conclusively recommend a proportion of the treatment of these components of teachers' knowledge bases, a reasonable balance should be maintained in teacher education courses and activities. The practicum, "a period of practice teaching a real classroom" (Borg, 2011 p. 220) is no exception for that.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methodology to provide an exploration of the process of PGDT practicum supervision taking two Ethiopian University cases. This method was assumed that it would enable the description of the nature of the supervision process in detail.

Scope of the Study

The modality currently applied in the practicum program is almost similar across various universities in the country. Nevertheless, for better and closer look, this study attempts to assess the practice of PGDT programs in two universities: BDU and MU. These universities were selected because the researchers had easy access to them.

The treatment of PCK in a practicum can also be similar in many disciplines (English, Math, Biology, Chemistry, etc.) However, for the sake of manageability of the investigation, this study is delimited to English Language Teaching (ELT). The study focuses on the roles of participants of the ELT practicum supervision, the kind of supervisory feedback and the stakeholders' appraisal as a means to explore the treatment of PCK in the PGDT practicum.

Participants

Primary data were collected from PGDT student teachers, university supervisors, EFL teacher educators, cooperating teachers and program coordinators. Secondary data were also collected through analyzing practicum guideline documents. Target population, samples and sampling techniques used are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1.
Target population, Samples and Sampling Techniques

	Population		Sample				Total	Sampling technique
	BDU	MU	BDU	%	MU	%		
1 PGDT Student Teachers (ST)	21	19	11	52.38	10	52.6	21	Random
2 PGDT Coordinators (PC)	1	2	1	100	2	100	3	Comprehensive
3 University Supervisors (US)	8	12	6	75	10	83.3	16	Purposive
4 Cooperating Teachers (CT)	19	18	10	52.63	9	55.6	19	Availability
5 EFL Teacher Educators (TE)	28	30	5	17.85	6	20	11	Random

Instruments

Interview

The main data collection instrument used was a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview was chosen because it enables to generate a general set of themes derived from the literature on the practicum supervision to be addressed (these themes provided a degree of consistency in the topics covered by different participants) while also giving the interviewers the flexibility to personalize the interviews as needed. Flexibility, thus, meant that the interviewers were not obliged to follow rigidly to pre-set questions (Richards, 2003; Creswell, 2007) and could take advantage of interesting issues that emerged in the course of the interview itself. Thus, all the participants of the study—PGDT student teachers, university supervisors, EFL teacher educators, and school mentors—were interviewed. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Document Analysis

Although the two guidelines of the PGDT practicum program (MOE, 2011a; MOE, 2011b) were referred, special emphasis was given to the teaching practice evaluation form found in “Practicum Guideline for Secondary School Teachers Training in Ethiopia” (MOE, 2011a) as it has been used as the main tool used by the supervisors. The document was examined to see the focus of the checklist used by university supervisors during supervision.

Data Collection Procedure

First, the PGDT student teachers were interviewed to investigate the current practices of supervision. Next, the PGDT coordinators and supervisors were interviewed

to investigate the justifications of the current practice and to identify their views on its limitations forwarded by the student teachers. Then, the cooperating teachers were interviewed. Throughout the data collection process, relevant ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and avoidance of harm were duly considered.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were transcribed and analyzed thematically; that is, the data were coded according to emerging issues (with particular attention to justifications and limitations of the current practice and suggestion of alternative modes), then the codes were grouped into categories and organized under major themes. The findings of the study were then presented under these themes. Trustworthiness was maintained through triangulating the data generated from different participants. The analysis also created a thick description of the process.

Findings

Below are the findings gained from the interview and document analysis. The data analysis followed a thematic approach in which a general picture of student teachers' practicum experience in the ongoing PGDT program can be produced and three specific issues are addressed: participants and their roles, the major focus of the supervisors' feedback, and type of feedback offered to student teachers.

Participants and their Roles in the Practicum Supervision

The supervisory processes at BDU and MU involve supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers. Who the practicum supervisors are (in terms of academic qualification) and what kind of roles they play in addressing PCK were especially important questions to start with. The supervisors at both universities were all from Education and Behavioral Sciences fields as the PGDT program has been hosted by Faculty of Education and Behavioral Sciences (FEBS) at BDU and Institute of Pedagogical Science (IPS) at MU. These people have specialization in educational psychology, curriculum studies, educational planning and management, special needs education and adult education, etc.; however, they were assigned to supervise student teachers in whatsoever subjects. For instance, adult education specialists or educational planning and management specialists, by virtue of their membership in the faculty, could supervise student teachers of English or mathematics.

In an attempt to disclose why general education specialists, rather than EFL teacher educators, were assigned in the supervision process, the researchers interviewed the practicum coordinators. One of the coordinators explained:

The current supervisor assignment is parallel to the Ministry of Education's rationale for launching the PGDT program. The PGDT program is aimed at filling the professional gap that the graduates have. The students were enrolled in universities and earned Bachelor's degree and they are believed to have been armed with content knowledge. What they lack is pedagogical knowledge (PC2).

This view has been shared by some of the supervisors as well. They stated that the graduates' pedagogical knowledge requirement was a highly pronounced justification for the PGDT practicum activities. Asserting this, below is an excerpt from the responses of one of the practicum supervisors:

The practicum evaluation rubric is evident of the focal areas. Most of the criteria are more of pedagogical. The criteria which are directly related to the specific subject area are very few. This indicates that there is a consensus among stakeholders that they require professional knowledge, which could help them develop as professional teachers. This implied the supervisors assigned could utilize them in a better way than anyone else (US10, MU).

Therefore, the practicum coordinators and the university supervisors consider that the PGDT program is introduced to develop student teachers' pedagogical knowledge, and therefore general pedagogical experts could handle the task of the supervision effectively. However, this claim contradicts with the aim of the PGDT program which focuses on PCK that integrates CK and PK domains. This misunderstanding, if not ignorance, appears to be justifications for the supervisory assignment process which rather leads to insufficient treatment of the PCK.

Type of Feedback offered to Student Teachers and Roles of Supervisors

To look into the kind of feedback student teachers gain, first, the practicum evaluation checklist included in the PGDT practicum guideline was analyzed as it might be a very good indicator for the process of the supervision. The form has twenty-eight items to be responded on a five-point scale. The first four items refer to objectives of the lesson. The second five items refer to the nature of the activities. The next eight items deal with teacher behaviors. The last six items refer to students' behavior. Having rated the practicing student teacher on this five-point scale checklist, the supervisor is expected to write specific comments by identifying two successful things in the lesson and one or two suggestions for improvement and general comments.

The evaluation checklist is used by all departments regardless of the differences in PCK domains. Perhaps the last open-ended part of the checklist is the only section where the PCK may come into play in the supervision process. This checklist requires

the supervisor to conduct a post-observation discussion with the supervised student teachers. For this purpose, in the evaluation form, there is a separate space in which action to be taken by the student teacher for next lesson, the student teacher's general comments on the evaluation and amount of time spent on post-observation discussion have to be recorded.

Through the interview made with the PGDT student teachers, it was found that the feedback the university supervisors gave them was mainly on general pedagogical practice, not specifically relevant to ELT. Here are two student teachers talking about the kinds of feedback they received after a visit:

During the discussion made after the classroom observation, the supervisor has told me that my lesson plan was good as it provides a lesson beginning, middle activities and summary, and conclusion. He also told me that my time management was good. He then advised me to improve my classroom management skills. For instance, He recommended that I should have more eye contact, louder voice, and good gesture (ST9, BDU).

Likewise, another informant asserted:

After giving me chance to reflect on what I have done, the supervisor gave me some comments. They were, of course, more general. He started with my strengths. He said, "Your attempt to communicate the objectives of the lesson to the students was nice." He also told me that I encouraged students to participate actively. Then he suggested areas of improvement. He advised me to employ more active learning techniques and to use the blackboard properly (ST2, MU).

As student teachers stated the feedback they received was related to lesson planning, time management, and classroom management. They were also on communicating objectives of the lesson, improving students' participation using active learning methods, using blackboard etc., and they were not subject specific.

Most of the supervisors interviewed also admitted that they concentrated on the general aspects of pedagogy and overlooked ELT contents for various reasons. The following were the supervisors' responses:

I have to admit that I usually focus on general pedagogical issues during supervisory conferences. This is because, I think, my responsibility is to introduce the candidates to the teaching profession. I still believe that my comments were invaluable (US6, BDU).

I do not always dare to give subject-specific comments to supervisees for I do not feel that I am capable enough to treat specific issues of that particular subject. There is another end of the continuum that I could contribute

better, so I resort to focusing on the pedagogical part (US1, MU).

Why I refrain from providing subject-specific assistance is not to confuse them [student teachers] in case my comments would be different from what they have learned in subject area courses (US5, MU).

Students' and Cooperating Teachers' Assessment of the Practicum Supervisory Process

The student teachers expressed that their expectations were not fulfilled and they were not satisfied by the kind of support they are offered. One of the interviewees responded the following.

When the lesson was over, I was expecting feedback which is directly related to my teaching of English language. However, the only thing he [the supervisor] said to me was "You need to improve your classroom management skill" (ST1, BDU).

Another student teacher added:

To be honest, I was not satisfied with the supervision since the supervisor's comments were not specific to my field of teaching. They are centered on issues that I have been noticing in my schooling for not less than fifteen years. I found those issues monotonous (ST7, MU).

The students expected subject-specific feedback (both appreciation and criticism), but what the supervisors offered were not specific rather general and repetitive ones which made some of them feel dissatisfied and bored. Contrary to the lack of interest in the kind of feedback, some student teachers feel relieved. They feel that they skipped some of their burdens.

Sometimes I feel like we are fortunate that our supervisors were not EFL teachers. Had the supervisors been EFL teachers, we would have been expected to be concerned with many linguistic issues. They would have expected us to apply the techniques and procedures of teaching the four skills. ...While I was being observed... I was teaching vocabulary but I feel that I did not use effective vocabulary teaching techniques. Nevertheless, he did not give attention to that. If he had been English language specialist, he would have asked me why I used such less effective technique. I thank God (ST4, BDU).

The other participants in the practicum process were the cooperating teachers, who were supposed to host the student teachers in their respective classes and make triad supervisory conference with the university supervisor and the student teacher. These cooperating teachers expressed that there was a mismatch between the univer-

sity supervisors' and their feedback and a loose integration in the current supervisory process. Moreover, the cooperating teachers themselves feel deprived of specialist supports from university supervisors, which will augment their own professional development and their role in their later supervisory support. Here are two cooperating teachers explaining the case:

As coordinating teacher, I support teacher candidates in various ways. I believe I have the responsibility of discussing the student teachers progress with university supervisors. This is very good opportunity for me to learn newer things from the supervisor. What I want to learn is developments in English language teaching. However, our discussion addresses such issues to a lesser degree. Therefore, I am now thinking that I lost such wonderful opportunity (CT3).

Most of the discussions made with supervisors are on pedagogical issues since their primary concern is to equip students with such skills. However, I sometimes try to see things in light of ELT. Here, I realize a mismatch between our focus areas. I sometimes think that even our evaluation would be incongruent (CT8).

Although EFL teacher educators were not involved in the current practicum supervision program, they were included in the study to get their reactions. Results show EFL teacher educators strengthened the claim that student teachers are deprived of subject area specific feedback that they as subject specialists could give them during supervision. In addition, the teacher educators feel that they lost important professional experience being excluded in the program. The following responses indicate their complaints:

I think involving in practicum supervision is significant for my own professional development. Through observing student teachers field experience and through conducting a supervisory conference with student teachers there were quite many things I would have learned (TE1, MU).

Supervision, I believe, is part of my job. I want to be skilled and experienced language teacher supervisor. Thus, I need to practice it while contributing my share in helping student teachers (TE3, BDU).

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that University supervisors, student teachers and cooperating teachers were the participants, and supervisors were general education experts with various specializations (not subject area teachers, not EFL teachers in the present case). These supervisors use similar teaching practice evaluation checklist

with all the students of different subjects, and their feedback focuses on general pedagogical issues rather than subject-specific matters. As a result, student teachers were not satisfied with the feedback received, and cooperative teachers also raise concerns that the supervisory process is not up to the level. Moreover, the EFL teachers who were not involved in the program also complain about losing an important experience where they could contribute their share while developing their competence as a supervisor.

The role of supervisors in a practicum as supporters and assessors is crucial (Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011), and this makes the involvement of appropriate specialists for the task of supervision is essential. Though the supervision of EFL student teachers in earlier teacher education programs in Ethiopia has been problematic (Hailom, 1997; Wondwosen, 1995), the supervisors were EFL teachers. But now, the PGDT program is hosted by FEBS and IPS and subject area teachers has not been involved in practicum. English language teacher educators were the ones to handle the English language teaching methodology courses in the PGDT program at both universities, but paradoxically they were not involved in the practicum supervision. Several studies (e.g., Golombek, 1998; Johnson, 1996; Numrich, 1996) shown that both EFL education coursework and field experiences influence teacher PCK development. Notwithstanding, the current PGDT program has failed to demonstrate a link between coursework and field experiences.

The justifications for assigning pedagogical and behavioral sciences specialists in ELT practicum are not satisfactory since the intention and focus area of PGDT program is not solely the development of students' PK (MOE, 2011a) as the student teachers' knowledge gap is not merely PK. In fact, the general education specialists may appear competent for the task of supervision given that the major focus of the practicum supervision is on generic teaching skills only and that ELT specific pedagogy is an issue of no importance.

The presence and application of the available teaching practice evaluation form in the practicum guideline (MOE, 2011a) encouraged the general education experts from FBES and IPS not only to undertake the whole task of supervision but also to defend their claims of ownership of the process, which reflects the unprofessional decision emanating from the view that a trade-off between offering labour and gaining access to a work environment by itself holds a guarantee for the learning of the apprentice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Moreover, the supervisors employ this same checklist for evaluating all student teachers' classroom teaching practice regardless of differences in their subject area. This is a one-size-fits-all approach that could not be supported by the constructivist paradigm which the countries' teacher education program advocated. The use of this evaluation tool suggests that not only generic teaching skills are emphasized, but also that PCK is almost totally ignored as far as the same tools are used by all departments

regardless of the differences in PCK domains. The review of the evaluation checklist items also revealed the heavy emphasis on PK. Thus, the findings reflect a situation in which the practicum practices in BDU and MU are based on the competency-based approach to teacher education, which relies on a view that teaching is a matter of mastering a pre-specified set of techniques, skills, and procedures (Fish, 1995).

The data from the document analysis and the interviews indicate that the dialogues between the university supervisors and the student teachers during practicum were not up to the expectations of the student teachers concerning dialogic reflection relevant to ELT. This kind of practice is inconsistent with the reflective practitioners' philosophy of teacher education, which holds the view that teaching essentially involves professional artistry (Fish, 1995). Rather, this is reflected in the applied science or technical rationality approach where it is common to observe rather limited attempts of supervisors to engage student teachers in a reflective dialogue (Randall & Thornton, 2001). It is difficult to acknowledge the practicum at both universities as well-administered professional development practice in which subject-specific feedback need to be reflected on by the students in terms of the teaching situation and the individual learning process, and subject-specific theories and experiences. It is not clear how these beginning EFL teachers would support their continued professional development if PCK remained deficient at this important stage of their learning experience.

Although involving EFL teachers would not in itself warrant circumstances for growth in pedagogical reasoning, with the exclusion of subject-specialists the focus of any feedback could only be on general pedagogical knowledge (Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011). If EFL supervisors were involved they would discuss English language teaching and learning issues, and the discussions would generally be broad enough to delve into the nature of English language and ELT-specific pedagogy. It would focus on strategies for presenting particular topics to students, for example, a procedure in teaching the four skills, the importance of teacher talk at different stages of the lesson, or the use of the first language in English classes, to mention but some.

The findings also revealed the weak collaboration among cooperating teachers and university supervisors. This situation is against the aim of collaboration that is not only to provide practice opportunities but also to enable deeper thinking about practice in an atmosphere of supportive and constructive but honest feedback. In this vein, the existing school-university partnership has failed to foster construction of meaning in a flexible way by negotiation and collaboration with others to show multiple perspectives for which many scholars (e.g., Duit, 1999; Smyth, 1989) argue from a constructivist point of view.

Therefore, it is possible to say that the current PGDT environment has given limited attention to the conditions that ensure a fruitful interaction of practice and theory, action, and reflection. As a result, it will hardly enable student teachers to facilitate their own continuous professional growth. This is because of the failure to address the

value of a subject-specific reflective component in the field experiences as a means of developing complex thinking and of understanding classroom events and teaching practices.

Conclusions

From the findings gained and discussions made, it is conceivable to draw the following conclusions. Practicum supervisory involvement in PGDT programs of MU and BDU is not well justified. The student- teachers get very limited subject-specific feedback as subject specialists (EFL teacher educators) are marginalized and general pedagogy specialists are made the only participants for no sound philosophical reason. Generic teaching skills are highly emphasized at the expense of PCK. Consequently, student teachers could hardly develop the English language teaching skills they need when they begin teaching.

The underemphasis of PCK implies that the link between coursework and field experience is loosened; the interaction between theory and practice is less fertile; the school-university collaboration is negatively affected; student-teachers are deprived of relevant reflective practice and student teachers would not be efficiently engaged on continuous professional development.

In sum, the PGDT practicum merely resembled an induction program designed to introduce the candidates to some general educational principles. This reflects an act of de-professionalization while professionals miss an important component of teacher's knowledge base (PCK). In addition, there is a conflict of rhetoric and practice which can give the practicum component a picture of a return to the earliest atheoretical form of teacher education, a practice-without-theory model or the later technical rationality or applied science model of teacher education. The theoretically heavy emphasis on improved school-based practice for developing reflective practitioners has been articulated on teacher education program policy documents in Ethiopia. Practically the whole emphasis seems to make the practicum as a testing ground, where little meaningful feedback on the practical teaching of the subject matter can be gained. Thus, it is recommended that the PGDT practicum program should be restructured in a way that could address PCK.

Limitation of the study

This study has some limitations. First, the study relies on self-report and on respondents' understanding the interview questions and relating them to their own experience. Direct observation of the phenomenon was not applicable. Second, an important segment of informants from the ministry of education was not included. Instead, the documents they have prepared were consulted.

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