

THE VALUE OF TEACHING PRACTICUM

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ABSTRACT

The significant role of teachers to the success of any educational reform is undeniable (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1998, cited in Tuli & File, 2009) in the sense that they can help bringing about changes in the society. This was well-addressed a long time ago by Ho Chi Minh (1958) as "For one year's benefit, plant trees. For 100 years' benefit, grow humans". An effective teacher training program, therefore, contributes a great deal to the high quality of any education system. As for pre-service teacher training, there are several suggested models of professional education, such as "the craft model", "the applied science model" and "the reflective model" (Wallace, 1991, p.6), to name but a few. Although there are certain differences among these models, they all share a common stage – Teaching Practice. Among different ways of organizing teaching practice, apprenticeship, also known as teaching practicum, is a significant aspect since it provides pre-service teachers with practical experience of how the real teaching job actually goes on (Slick, 1998, cited in Gan, 2013).

Teaching practicum is an essential component in the teacher education program of University of Languages and International Studies – Vietnam National University (ULIS - VNU). This multiple-case study aims to seek evidences of the value of teaching practicum as perceived by pre-service teachers of English in two aspects: (1) developing teaching competence and (2) promoting professional working skills. By investigating their six-week teaching practicum experience in a high school in Hanoi, the study reveals that trainees learn a lot of skills to survive their future teaching career. It also shows how they struggle to translate theories of teaching learnt at university into practical teaching techniques in the high school context.

The researchers hope to contribute insights of how an essential component of a teacher education program is being conducted from the perspective of those who are directly involved. Findings from this research suggest certain adaptations to be made to current teaching practicum instructions by the University so that pre-service teachers' experience of the apprenticeship period can be enhanced.

Key words: teaching practicum, professional development, disciplines, teacher trainees (also student teachers, or trainees, pre-service teachers), mentors.