



Case Study

Pre-Service English Teachers' Acculturation into School Teaching Practice during Internship: A Narrative Case Study

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Abstract: Given the lack of research inquiring into pre-service teachers' acculturation, this study explored pre-service English teachers' acculturation into teaching practice during their internship in the Chinese context. A qualitative case study was conducted among two intern English teachers, with data obtained from semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that pre-service intern English teachers perceived uncertainties and confusion, they encountered difficulties when acculturating into school teaching practice, including acculturation into the new living situations, psychological well-being adaptation, identity transformation, and the handling of interpersonal relations. Possible reasons for these difficulties include divergence in value orientations, unprepared mindset and professional identity, and insufficient cooperation among teacher-training universities, the administrative departments of government, and local schools. The results of the study provide pre-service teachers with suggestions to effectively acculturate into teaching practice during the internship, but also provide suggestions for universities and local schools to make informed decisions.

Keywords: pre-service English teachers, acculturation, internship

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of society and the continuous advancement of educational reform, people have paid increasing attention to teachers' professional development. Teachers' professional development runs through pre-service training, in-service training, and continuing professional development, which provide opportunities for teachers to obtain sufficient knowledge and skills, including content, pedagogical, and technological knowledge and skills (Huang et al., 2022; Lai et al., 2022). In this process, teachers formed teaching beliefs and improved professional qualities and abilities. Professional development matters to every teacher, although it is usually a tough process in which teachers might face challenges and problems (Smith & Sela, 2005). Therefore, teachers need to conquer difficulties and acculturate well into different stages to succeed in their professional development.

Redfield et al. (1936) noted that acculturation is a phenomenon that the cultural patterns of individuals or groups change due to continuous and direct cultural contact among different cultural groups composed of individuals. The premise of cultural adaptation is that individuals or groups have contact with new cultures, and the process of adaptation

will inevitably lead to psychological changes and cultural pattern changes. Powell (1880) suggested acculturation is an individual's psychological changes when he or she lives in a new culture. Berry (1980) also pointed out that when people move from one culture to another, they often face changes and demonstrate diverse levels of adaptation, namely, integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization.

Teaching practice during the internship is a critical period for pre-service teachers. The degree to which they would acculturate into new living situations and school cultures influence their beliefs about teaching, identity formation, as well as professional development (Jensen, 2003). However, existing studies on teachers' acculturation were mostly focused on novice teachers, with an insufficient number of studies examining pre-service or trainee teachers' acculturation. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies that combined quantitative and qualitative research methods to achieve triangulation. Therefore, the current study aims to understand pre-service English teachers' acculturation into school during their internships. The research questions are:

(1) What is the situation of pre-service English teachers' acculturation during educational practice?

(2) Did pre-service English teachers encounter problems in the acculturation process? What are the possible reasons?

This study interviewed two pre-service English teachers who had interned in secondary schools for 18 weeks in 2017 and 2018, respectively. By unpacking their perceived problems and difficulties in the acculturation process and synthesizing reasons, this study hopes to deepen people's understanding of teachers' professional development from an acculturation perspective and provide suggestions for university teacher training programs, schools, and policymakers to make informed decisions.

2. Literature review

Veenman (1984) suggested that novice teachers were prone to encounter a variety of challenges in teaching since it involves classroom discipline and management, lesson preparation, and getting along with students and their parents. According to a survey conducted by the University of Georgia in the US, many novice teachers failed to build up a satisfying teacher-student relationship, which was an important prerequisite for teachers to perform good teaching. In China, scholars noted that teachers' difficulties when entering into a new teaching environment also included the formation of interpersonal networks, adaptation to the new living environment, identification of teachers' roles, and their professional development (Liu, 2017; Wang, 1999).

To prepare pre-service teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills to succeed in teaching, universities or colleges provided related courses but focuses were primarily placed on enhancing students' specific content knowledge (i.e., English, mathematics) and pedagogical understandings (i.e., feedback, learning styles, learning strategies), leaving training on teaching skills insufficient. Although micro-teaching courses were provided by expert in-service teachers (Cheng, 2017), the limited time for teaching practice cannot provide pre-service teachers with a sufficient understanding of teaching.

To succeed in teaching, intern teachers and novice teachers are supposed to adjust their individually espoused values and perceptions of teaching to the host school cultures. In the 1980s, the United States put forward the *Introductory Guidance Program for New Teachers* to provide support and help teachers to deal with problems in their work. It recognized the importance of pre-service education, and specified the responsibilities of various departments within the education system, which are helpful to novice teachers to adapt to the teaching environment and improve their professional development.

In intercultural studies, scholars examined individual acculturation from social and psychological perspectives (e.g., Berry, 1992; Ward & Kennedy, 1992). In the teacher education context, Liu (2017) investigated the cultural adaptation of middle school teachers born in the 1990s from three aspects: psychological adaptation, teaching adaptation and interpersonal adaptation. Pre-service teachers are at the initial stage of teacher professional development and the degree to which they could acculturate to the new teaching environment determines their welfare and professional development. Subconsciously, pre-service teachers often regard themselves as students when they teach in the practice schools, they perceive difficulties in emotional development and identity change in the practicum experiences (Teng, 2017), which leads to problems in the acculturation process (Volkman & Anderson, 1998).

Pre-service teachers refer to student teachers who have learned in teacher-training programs at universities or colleges. When they entered teacher training programs to obtain technological, pedagogical and content knowledge, they were at their initial stage of teacher professional development. It is a norm that pre-service teachers will practice teaching for a certain amount of time, and one of the most challenging tasks is the acculturation into the new environment, from living, psychological, and teaching perspectives. As previous studies suggested, pre-service teachers regard themselves as students, and the difficulty of role change leads to their difficulty in acculturation (Volkman & Anderson, 1998).

As for the perspectives of acculturation, life adaption indicates teachers' adaptation to the new environment, including diet and living conditions, traffic, ways of communication, and physiological well-being. Life adaption touches upon a person's basic needs. Psychological adaptation is described by teachers' emotions, values and identities when they take up the profession. These are important because they may affect pre-service teachers' teaching beliefs, teaching commitment, and identity formation. Teaching adaptation mainly refers to teachers' adaptation to schools' system norms and rules and classroom teaching. It is one of the core elements for intern teachers to succeed in the teaching because it includes details in the teaching process, such as teaching objectives, teaching design and teaching methods to achieve aims, assessment and evaluation. Interpersonal adaptation indicates intern teachers' relationships with tutors, colleagues, students and their parents. It affects intern teachers' happiness in life and professional development.

3. Method

Due to the researchers' interest in understanding and interpreting the complexity of pre-service teachers' acculturation during the internship, a qualitative case study was conducted in the present study. Rossman and Rallis (2003) pointed out that case studies enable people to understand a larger phenomenon through in-depth inquiry into a specific case. Gall et al. (2003) suggested the case study is an in-depth study of an example of a phenomenon in the natural environment and research from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon.

In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted among participants (Adamson, 2004) as interviews provide direct routes to the research data through interactions, which are suitable for this study (Drever, 1995). Besides, the following narrative research methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), interviewees were inquired into some key events that happened during their internships (Creswell, 2012).

3.1 Participants

This study invited two English pre-service teachers who undertook internships in secondary schools in Shandong province, China. Pre-service teachers receive knowledge and skill training in the first three years and are supposed to practice teaching at practice schools in the seventh term. They will perform teaching and take any teaching-related tasks based on the school's requirements. Participants were informed of the research purpose and agreed to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from them to record interviews. Table 1 illustrated detailed information about the interviewees (pseudonyms were used to ensure their confidentiality).

Table 1. Participants' information

Name	Age	Gender	Teaching grade	Place of internship
Anna	22	female	8	Qingdao City
Lily	21	female	7	Dongying City

3.2 Instrument

They were purposefully chosen for the following reasons. First, the researchers are well acquainted with the two

interviewees, and this would guarantee the interviewees' willingness to express their feelings. Being a close friend, Anna worked in the same practicum school with one of the authors. As for Lily, she often communicated with one of the authors about their internships, and shared joy and confusion with each other. Secondly, Anna and Lily went to different schools in the Shandong province, and thus, they may have similar or different perceptions about acculturation during internships. In addition, both Anna and Lily were not familiar with the education situation in the practice schools, and we believe they might encounter challenges or problems during acculturation. Although they had obtained pedagogical knowledge before they started their internship, they might face with difficulties resulting from an identity shift, namely, from a student to a "student versus teacher" duo identity.

A semi-structured interview protocol was designed based on Ward's sociological theory and Liu's (2017) study on Chinese teachers' acculturation. The first section contains basic information about the interviewees, such as their teaching grades during internships. The second part inquires into participants' perceptions of the four dimensions: life adaptation, psychological adaptation, teaching adaptation and interpersonal adaptation.

3.3 Procedure

The semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online assisted with *WeChat*, a tool widely used in China. To ensure good understanding and communication, Chinese is used in the interviews since the researchers and participants are all Chinese. Interviewees provided information about the general situation of their internship, especially some key events and their emotions, attitudes, and perceived difficulties or confusions. Based on the interviewees' consent, their answers were recorded for further data analysis. Generally, it took about one hour for each interview.

The interviews were guided by an interview protocol, and recordings were transcribed word by word by the first author of the study. As suggested by Walker and Myrick (2006), text reading, code marking, and theme generation were conducted. To avoid bias and ensure inter-rater reliability in the data analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the two authors discussed the different understandings of the codes and categories to achieve consent in the generated themes.

Besides, participants provided their teaching records, lesson preparation notebooks, intern manuals and related materials during their educational practice. Rooted in the practice school for a whole semester (18 weeks), participants in the study observed 20 classroom teaching sessions and kept writing notes based on classroom observations. These were valuable first-hand information that was analyzed in the study.

4. Findings and discussions

4.1 Acculturation into backward living conditions

Life adaptation includes intern teachers' adaptation to the new living environment, diet, language used and their own physiology. Participants in the study were arranged in rural schools for their internships. The living environment in the rural areas is different from that in the city, especially in terms of accommodation and food. The intern teachers have studied for many years and got used to life in the city, so they encountered challenges when they tried to adapt to the new but comparatively poorer living environment.

The living environment provides basic conditions for people's development. When intern teachers came to local schools, they found the living conditions were not satisfying, which brought about negative emotions to them.

Accommodation conditions were very simple, and there were no dormitories in schools, so the school arranged for us (for intern teachers) to live in other places. In winter, the window cannot be closed, and the room was extremely cold. There was no hot water in the dormitory. If you need hot water, you need to go downstairs to pick it up. Sometimes I used cold water to wash my clothes in winter... (From Anna)

The overall environment of the school was rather primitive. There was no washing machine or water dispenser, there was no bathroom. Our school is located in rural area, and it takes at least one hour for us to

get to the central area. (From Lily)

As for dieting, one participant suggested the schools she was assigned do not have a canteen, so she had to pay for food by herself. The other participant suggested despite that her school has a canteen, the food is not good and they rarely change recipes. An unsatisfying diet made them feel homesick and sometimes pitiful. They missed their parents and university canteens.

The school doesn't provide any lunch or dinner. You have to order food and pick up food at the school gate every noon. The price is not cheap for intern teachers and eating costs a lot of money. (From Anna)

Brunch is provided but the meals in the canteen are usually very oily. The food is almost the same every day... I don't think it's nutritious and I'm tired of eating it. The school does not provide places for teachers to cook, so I often order takeout. (From Lily)

Although difficult, the participants suggested they have gradually adjusted their eating habits and accepted dieting. They ate more vegetables, drank porridge, or bought some food by themselves. In the end, they found the simple diet was no longer the main problem for them.

Physical discomfort happens when an intern teacher comes to a new school, or an unfamiliar environment, and it easily leads to negative emotions such as lack of belonging, loneliness and irritability. In a long run, these negative feelings may lead to physical discomfort or symptom.

I don't have any sense of belonging here. It's too far from my home. When we have a weekend or a holiday, I feel particularly lonely and sad. If my family is here, I can go home and talk with them... Once I went to the hospital at three o'clock in the middle of the night because of food poisoning, I felt very frustrated... (From Anna)

Intern teachers adapted themselves to the physical environment, struggled to accomplish teaching tasks, and survive the heavy workload. They have accumulated strong willpower, and build up self-efficacy during the acculturation, but they admitted that physical discomfort made them vulnerable and depressed in emotions and thus, is not easy to overcome. If the physical discomfort was not solved, it would affect teaching efficiency.

The work is very intense, and I am tired every day. It was very wet and humid here, and I felt an obvious discomfort in my body. The humidity caused a lot of eczema in my body after the rain. And with the intense work, I'm unbearable... the end of the internship seems to be a hope and a countdown for me. At the end of the internship, I was really overwhelmed. (From Lily)

During internships, participants experienced acculturation and identity transformation, namely, from students to novice teachers. They realized the difference between being a real teacher and being a student. The hands-on experience left them a deep impression and helped them to build up teaching beliefs as a future teacher, and accumulate pedagogical knowledge and skills. They have realized as an educator, they take on more responsibilities and obligations.

It is quite difficult for intern teachers to adapt to school life and the adaptation needs time. The living conditions and diets of the intern schools were backward and unsatisfying, therefore, some students felt physical discomfort. According to Maslow, once the basic needs of life are not met, the need for self-development is even more distant. The adversity of survival leads to a deep feeling of helplessness and a decrease in their initiative, which in turn de-motives them as a teacher. Allowing backward life conditions to be unsolved, teachers might easily lose passion for teaching.

4.2 Difficulty in psychological adaptation

The psychological adaptation is mainly evaluated from the aspects of professional emotion, professional value and professional identity. Teachers' good psychological adaptation is the internal motivation and catalyst for teachers to perform teaching tasks, achieve educational goals with high quality and further realize the value of life. But during internships, they encountered difficulties when trying to adapt psychologically.

I take things seriously. Although it is a practice, I really regard it as a formal job. I wanted to improve my students through my own efforts, but most of the time it was not satisfying. If students failed the examination, I would feel guilty, remorse and a lot of pressure. (From Anna)

As novice teachers, participants of the study considered students' performances as important criteria for measuring their teaching abilities. She has yet to understand comprehensively the role of teachers. Her stubbornness led to her suffering from great psychological pressure.

In addition, being funded by the government, participants suggested they are kind of destined as secondary school English teachers, this sense became stronger during the internship but made them felt lacking passion and desire for competition and the pursuit of professional development.

Although I have a stable job and income, and my colleagues are nice, I do not feel satisfied. My future should have infinite possibilities, but now I seem to foresee myself as a teacher in the coming 60 years, no desire, lie flat... (From Anna)

This extract also suggested Anna's low sense of professional identity of being a rural teacher, especially when she realized the actual distance between rural and urban life. Rural schools cannot provide teachers with satisfying working environments and professional development opportunities, which made teachers lose rural teacher identities.

4.3 Gordian knot in teaching adaptation

Teaching is the center of the internship; it is also the thorny difficulty faced by most intern teachers when they adapted themselves at secondary schools. Through the interview, it is found that teachers were very busy and had heavy workloads every day. Their time was occupied with classes from morning to night, in addition, they were tired from diverse non-teaching related tasks (Huang et al., 2022).

There is a shortage of teachers at my school, so the work intensity is very high. I have four classes and night care (1-1.5 hours) a day. Because I have to teach students in different grades, the daily teaching and lesson preparation is quite hard and time-consuming. The role of a teacher is not only to give lessons, as novice teachers, we also undertake a lot of tasks that are unrelated to teaching, such as sports meetings, New Year's party preparation, and students' behavior training. (From Lily)

Besides the diverse tasks mentioned above, classroom teaching is the central part of the internship and an important way for them to improve their professional skills. Intern teachers need to deal with the complexities, such as teaching content selection, teaching approaches based on student's learning needs and levels, assessment, and others. With helps from intern tutors and peer support, participants suggested they had successfully solved problems, which indicated success in teaching adaptation.

In teaching design and classroom arrangement, there is a contradiction between idealization and reality. Every time I worked hard to prepare the courseware before class, few people listened carefully in class. Their focus in class was different from what I expected. Sometimes there are students' laughing, whispering, I don't know what they are saying, they do not tell me when I ask them... (From Lily)

In the beginning, I felt that my language ability was not good, and the language I used was not concise. Through exercises in the half semester, my language level has improved a lot. Later, my tutor recommended me to learn from good teaching demos (high-quality classes) on the Internet. I even recorded it and listened to it again and again in my office. Through learning, I gradually found a feeling in class. (From Anna)

4.4 Tension relationship: Interpersonal adaptation

For pre-service teachers, the internship provides them with an important opportunity to socialize with others. Communicating with others is the need for social communication and the starting point of socialization. The main parties for their interpersonal relationship are tutors, school leaders, colleagues, students, and their parents. The two teachers interviewed in this study did not contact students' parents during their internship, due to their identity as intern teachers. They mentioned difficulties in communicating with these parties.

The principal of the school cares about how we fit in, but he only pays lip service to it and gives us more and more work... In fact, there is no time for us to adjust, and no place to argue or negotiate, we have to substitute for other teachers. (From Lily)

During the internship, it is important to keep a good relationship with tutors, because she or he will provide evaluation for intern teachers. Besides, the effective guidance of tutors is very helpful for novice teachers' professional growth. Realizing the importance of getting along with tutors, participants of the study tried to do what they were asked to, although reluctance sometimes, to leave a good impression on them.

My tutor often asks me to copy papers in the copy room. Printing work is particularly boring, repetitive manual labor. Sometimes basic fast printing tasks like changing the toner cartridge and solving paper jams can take an entire morning. But I don't particularly reject it, I know my tutors are busy, so it's nice to be able to help them out. And I'm learning new skills, which is a bonus although boring... (From Anna)

In a word, pre-service teachers come to intern schools and live and work in an unfamiliar culture, where previous standards, thinking patterns and ways of behavior are no longer appropriate. They need to acculturate into school life and it is one of the important prerequisites for their growth. In addition, unsatisfying living and working environments make them pay more effort and sweat than urban teachers in daily life. In the professional context, they clearly understood their roles, duties and responsibilities as teachers, and gradually formed professional identities. Although sometimes frustrating, and felt lacking self-efficacy and passion, they finally succeed in the internship. At the end of the internship, they were not willing to leave their schools, colleagues, and especially their beloved students.

I did not like the facilities in my schools, very backward, but when I realize, my internship is coming to an end, I do not feel happy as I expected, ... I think I will miss my students, my tutors and my colleagues here. (From Anna)

5. Suggestions and implications for teacher training

Intern teachers' acculturation into school teaching suggested their emotions, perceived identities, difficulties and coping strategies. Based on the research findings, suggestions were provided for university teacher training programs, governments, and local schools to improve teacher training effectiveness.

5.1 Improve pre-service teachers' acculturation knowledge and ability

Landman (1974) suggested that individual's participation in the cultural life of the group will promote the growth of individuals themselves. Culture is a way of life, a kind of cognition, and a specific kind of knowledge. It is diverse because of cultural differences, and it is rich because of integration. The survival of each individual is inseparable from the influence of group culture, and the individual culture gradually adapts to group culture through positive acculturation. When pre-service intern teachers come to schools, they must constantly adjust themselves so as to carry out the teaching practice. Their knowledge and ability to adapt to the new culture become particularly important. There are some suggestions to improve pre-service teachers' acculturation knowledge and ability.

University teachers are suggested to infiltrate students with cross-cultural awareness through course teaching.

For example, through teaching teachers professional ethics and literacy, students can understand the characteristics of teacher identity and their missions. Besides, it is necessary for teachers to provide training to improve students' acculturation knowledge and skills before the internship, such as case analyses and in this way, pre-service teachers who will be intern would be psychologically prepared.

Practicum schools should pay attention to intern teachers' physical and mental situations and help them adapt to the rural cultural environment as soon as possible. Schools are suggested to provide comfortable living conditions for intern teachers to show respect to them. This would greatly improve intern teachers' satisfaction index, which is important for them to make a good start in the teaching practice.

Pre-service intern teachers should also learn about culture-related theories and establish beliefs in hard work. Acculturation is an inevitable stage when people enter a new environment (Sam, 2006). Pre-service intern teachers should make full psychological preparations before practice. They should strengthen teachers' beliefs and behave properly to meet the requirements of schools.

5.2 Establish teachers' professional identity

Volkman and Anderson (1998) believes that new teachers see themselves as students subconsciously, and the difficulty in switching roles results in acculturation ineffectiveness. Establishing professional identity is a constructive process of objectively knowing about oneself and being understood by others. It helps achieve balance by adjusting the differences between one's own culture and the school culture. Only when pre-service intern teachers identify with their profession and identity, can they find their own values in their work.

Practice school is the most important place for intern teachers, and school culture plays an important role in shaping teachers' professional beliefs, feelings and identities. Therefore, the practice schools should create a strong atmosphere for intern teachers to feel respected and valued and provide learning opportunities for intern teachers to form a professional identity, such as assigning expert tutors to intern teachers, making the mentoring system effective. Tutors can help pre-service teachers to clarify their teaching responsibilities and job characteristics, reduce their anxieties and uncertainties caused by role change, and increase their sense of identity and self-efficacy in teaching.

Pre-service teachers should make a clear career development plan and understand their own value. A pre-service teacher who wants to get the intern credits but does not want to be a good teacher will not form a strong teacher identity and realize the values of being a teacher. When encountering difficulties, they should try to seek solutions actively, and communicate with peers, tutors, and even their students.

Pre-service teachers should also respect teachers' posts, love this job, and care for students. The educational environment of rural schools is backward compared with that of cities, but there is no difference between students' curiosity and thirst for knowledge. Therefore, pre-service teachers should help and care for every student, and keep the responsibility and mission of teachers in mind.

5.3 Build cooperative teacher training community

To promote intern teachers' acculturation, universities, schools and local governments are suggested to build up a cooperative teacher training communities. Universities should take measures to improve training quality as they are the cradle of teacher training. Pre-service teachers should be trained for being qualified teachers in secondary schools who can teach based on the national curriculum standards. It is also necessary to reform the evaluation system and highlight the formative assessment. Further, teacher training in universities should tailor to the needs of specific subjects, such as English. Last but not least, universities are suggested to strengthen the connection between universities, local government and schools. The government and school leaders as well as university teachers are supposed to regularly express their care for pre-service intern teachers, so as to help them conquer difficulties, feel the warmth of being cared for, and devote themselves to the practice with more enthusiasm.

Practice schools should build up teachers' learning community and form an educational joint force. Schools should advocate teachers' cooperation, share information with each other, and create a cultural atmosphere of mutual help and assistance. Teachers' professional development can be realized through communication, cooperation and inquiry with others in the community. Despite the fierce competition among teachers, the relationship among colleagues should be harmonious and teachers should share opinions and learn from each other. School policies and culture are the basis

to ensure teachers' benign cooperation. The establishment of a teacher's learning community emphasizes teachers' personal understanding of knowledge, and also pays attention to teachers' roles and contributions in the team, to improve teachers' professional ability in collaboration.

Local governments should actively participate in teacher training plans. Building cooperation with universities and local schools is beneficial for training excellent teachers, which further benefits local educational development. The local government plays roles in teacher enrollment and policy-making based on the actual needs of local educational development. Thus, local governments must cooperate with teacher training programs at universities and local schools to make informed decisions. Local governments should also increase investment in teacher training, because the subsidy for intern teachers can help improve their motivation, sense of belonging, and teacher identity, to a certain extent.

6. Conclusion

Culture suggests people's ways of thinking, and behavior. When people move to a new place, they need to acculturate both psychologically and physically. For pre-service teachers, the internship is a critical period and whether they could adapt well influence their attitudes toward teaching, identity formation and professional growth.

This study provided a deeper understanding of pre-service intern English teachers' acculturation into school teaching practice by using a qualitative research method. Results suggested their acculturation includes four dimensions, namely, acculturation into a new living situation, psychological well-being adaptation, identity transformation and the handling of interpersonal relations. Suggestions from the practice teachers, practice schools and universities and other subjects were put forward to improve intern students' acculturation,

Compared with previous studies that mainly focused on acculturation into a foreign county, this study inquiries into intern secondary English teachers' acculturation into teaching practice, which extended the scope of acculturation research. This study is limited due to the small sample size. Further studies are suggested to include school leaders, tutors, and students as interviewees to better understand intern English teachers' acculturation.

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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