TESOL Collaborative Action Research: A Case Study on Issues in Practices

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Abstract

This qualitative exploratory case study of an MA TESOL practicum course employing Action Research (AR) and Reflective Practices (RP) investigated by the researcher as an outsider, details the issues practicum teachers face in the process of doing a collaborative Action Research. Through the exploration, the researcher identified issues that significantly affected the outcomes of teachers' intervention plans yet was not identified and addressed for their AR projects. These issues included issues with *collaboration* such as expectations of collaboration, and teaching styles, skills, and experience, *reflection and peer feedback*, as well as *length of AR*. The exploration revealed that due to the shallow nature of teachers' reflections, they were unable to recognize and address issues that fell beyond the immediate level. Therefore, based on existing literature and the research findings, the researcher made suggestions to aid facilitators, practicum teachers, and in-service teachers alike in addressing issues that fall beyond the immediate, easily identified level of issues teacher experience in the teaching practice. These suggestions include recommendations regarding collaboration, reflection and peer feedback, and the length of AR.

Keywords

Introduction

This study takes the form of an exploratory qualitative case study, exploring an MA TESOL practicum course in Seoul, South Korea, offering insights into an otherwise black box of teacher training programs. In South Korea where English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL), teachers are required to have TESOL or TEFL certificates or degrees to teach according to government regulations, making these courses quite popular amongst aspiring teachers.

First, this study has the purpose of adding to the research as it provides a description of the ongoings of a practicum course aimed at preparing EFL teachers for Action Research (AR), that help equip teachers to deal with issues in teaching practices, as well as to create habits of reflection that will help teachers continuously improve professionally. Instead of only looking at the affordances of AR, the study highlights the realities of a teacher training program, as well as the hurdles or more specifically, blinders teachers have in the workforce by specifically looking at the issues the teachers identify themselves and address through AR compared to the issues that affected the teachers' practices beyond the scope of their own investigations. This is especially important as researchers in the field found that it is common for teachers to be unaware of their own teaching practices, their actions, beliefs, and thoughts and how these affect their practices (Schon, 1983 as cited in Lyon, 2010; Craig, 2010; Farrell, 2015). When teachers only reflect on shallow or individual issues, they do not view teaching as something changeable and controlable (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Schon, 1983 as cited in Lyon, 2010; Craig, 2010; Farrell, 2015), which is the foundation of AR and RP practices. Additionally, this study serves as evidence that practicum teachers and practicum instructors should not under- or overestimate the outcomes of AR, as the AR process and teacher practicum could easily be glamorized, leaving teachers frustrated, and worst, underprepared for the real practice of teaching (Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Loughran, 2010; Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

Then, this study is significant from both Action Research (AR) and Reflective Practice (RP) perspectives. First, at the time of writing, only one practicum MA TESOL program exists in the capital Seoul. The professors of the MA TESOL program at the specific university developed this course and curriculum to provide the students, who are in-service teachers, with opportunities for a more focused and strategic in-practice training while doing AR (Rozells 2019). Furthermore, the study is significant as it explores an AR were the teacher trainees collaboratively devise lesson plans and instruct an undergraduate credited course at the specific university. In other words, the teachers work with other teachers, as they would in the real world instead of going through the AR process alone. More importantly, the student-teachers are teaching actual credit courses with real consequences, creating a different and more realistic set-up than micro teaching with controlled environments, smaller class sizes, and low risks outcomes. Thus, it is expected that the teachers treat it differently than mock-teaching, unrealistic settings, which could cause students to invest little time and energy. Finally, by the time of writing, there were not many studies conducted on AR in a practicum setting where the researcher is an outsider looking in. Most AR studies are reports of the participants themselves, which could limit the scope and depth of reflection in reporting or even patterns or connections that emerged during AR (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Second, from a RP perspective this study is meaningful as the studies conducted in education are limited compared to other practice settings. According to Rogers (2002, as cited in Lyons, 2010), it is hard to investigate the results of reflective teaching and professional develop in teachers' practice. Moreover, according to the American Education Research Association Panel on research and teacher education of 2005 (as cited in Lyons, 2010), the "subject of reflective inquiry, like so many in education research, lacked rigorous, systematic investigation, and thus, there existed few studies to validate its claims or to include in a report" (p. 8). Subsequently, through this exploration, the study provides a glimpse into a teacher training program that builds reflection into the AR, describing the process and outcomes. Lastly, this case study is of personal relevance to the researcher due to her own endeavor in teacher training and developing as an in-practice EFL practitioner and teacher-trainer.

Literature Review
For the purpose of this paper, action research (AR) is tentatively defined as the planned interventions, grounded in theories practicum teachers implement upon reflective inquiry aimed at transforming their teaching practices (Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Watt & Watt, 1993). The reflective nature of AR specifically initiates and supports reflective practices (Farrell, 2015). According to Hagevik, Adeniz and Rowell (2012), AR "is a way to promote a cyclical process of improvement that includes describing a problem, seeking knowledge from previous investigators, collect data, devising and implementing a strategy for change, evaluating the results and planning another cycle of improvements" (p. 675).

Then, the term reflective practices (RP) is used to refer to collaborative efforts of practitioners to become more mindful of their actions, and the effects of their behaviors, thoughts, as well as theories in action, while engaging in reflection aimed at professional development (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). In other words, RP afford deliberate actions by making practitioners more cognizant of their actions and their effects.

Reflection
Reflection becomes transformative when a state of confusion becomes understood and intelligible (Dewey, 1922). According to Dewey (1922), to become reflective in thought, one must take certain steps to gain control and move from ordinary thinking, that is "no pains" taken to gain control, towards critical thinking, that is "great pains" taken to gain control (Dewey, 1922, p. 32), making reflection is essential in teacher education, especially for professional development and continuous growth (Shulman & Shulman, 2004; as cited in Gerlach, 2021).

Then, reflective competence refers to a teachers' aptitude to incorporate theoretical knowledge gained during their studies in their own teaching practices (Shadlich, 2015 as cited in Gerlach, 2021). Teachers' potential reflective competence is determined by their personality, beliefs, practice, information, feelings, skills, as well as the society and established norms (Abendroth-Timmer, 2007; Terhart, 2011; as cited in Gerlach, 2021). Additionally, critical events are necessary to trigger teachers to reflect and investigate their practices (Gerlach, 2021).

Similarly, Action Competence refers to the aptitude for constructing and implementing lessons according to the curriculum and specific guidelines (Wegner, Weber & Ohlberger, 2014). Therefore, teachers should be able to critically reflect on their own practices to guide them in reconsidering their actions and skills that will allow them to develop their scope of techniques as well as to increase their motivation and capabilities to realize their goals in education (Wegner, Weber & Ohlberger, 2014). This means that reflective competence translates into action competence (Wegner, Weber & Ohlberger, 2014).
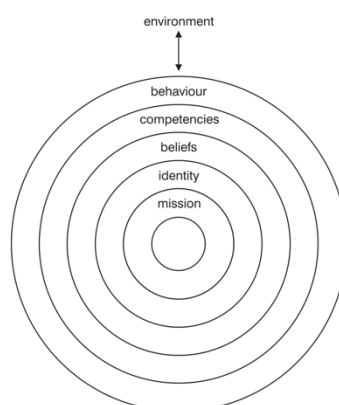
Levels of Reflection
Importantly, Harland and Wondra (2011) found that preservice teachers' reflections move across four levels, from shallow to deep reflections. Level 1 refers to the nonreflective or descriptive level where teachers simply describe the experience (Harland & Wondra, 2011) where Level 2 refers to understanding, making connections between the experiences and themselves, yet without translating the experience to other contexts (Harland & Wondra, 2011). Then, Level 3 refers to reflection where teachers reflect on transferring their experience, knowledge, and beliefs to their practice (Harland & Wondra, 2011). Finally, level 4 refers to critical thinking where their practice reflects the changes in teachers' conventions based on their experiences (Harland & Wondra, 2011).

Likewise, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) found that the depth of reflection depends on the content of reflection. They discovered that teachers limit their reflections to the immediate teaching environment, their behavior, competencies, and beliefs (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Their investigation suggests that the underlying issue that prevent students from developing is limited by their own self-concepts, their personal identities, as they often don't or can't reflect beyond these issues in the teaching profession (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Therefore, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) argue that teacher trainees should be more open to developing personal qualities instead of being fixated on what they think are fixed. Thus, for students to develop growth competence, they should engage on a deeper level with their reflections (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Core Reflection. The core of a teacher refers to the inner two layers of the onion model presented by Korthagen and Vasalos (2005). See figure 1. According to the authors, different levels, like the layers found in an onion, influence teachers' practices. The inner layers, teachers' missions and identities, affect the outer layers which include their beliefs, competencies and behavior, and the other way around (Korthangen & Vasalos, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to reflect to the level of mission, to remind teachers of their missions in life, the things that inspire them, and make their lives meaningful and significant (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Consequently, reflecting down to the core, the mission, allows teachers to put things into perspective, without losing sight of what drives them and make them who they are, the identity level (Korthangen & Vasalos, 2005). By doing this, teachers tap into their core qualities such as love, empathy, kindness, flexibility, bravery, and creativity (Tickle, 1999; as cited in Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). In other words, through core reflections, teachers' callings can be converted into actions in the classroom, bridging the different layers in the so-called onion (Korthangen & Vasalos, 2005). Additionally, they feel that supervisors can aid in systematic reflection and ultimate growth by guiding reflections and approaching reflections with a desire to change thoughts, actions, and feelings in practice (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Figure 1
The Onion Model illustrating different Levels of Reflection. (Taken from Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 54).

However, to achieve this level of reflection, core reflections should be focused on building teachers' qualities and change their mindsets from only negatives, such as issues, to positives, such as the possibilities they can achieve through their cores, missions, and identities (Korthangen & Vasalos, 2005). When teachers focus on their positive attributes, meaning their strengths, and on ideal situations, reflecting to the core can be a positive adventure as they are concentrating on the positive sources of their inner potential and the outer sources that inspire actions (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990; as cited in Korthangen & Vasalos, 2005).

Reflective Practice in Teacher Practicums
Benefits of RP in a Practicum Setting
Hageveik, Aydeniz and Rowell (2012) noticed that the teachers participating in their research reflections varied between a focus on self, routines, and technical features, to dialogues that encouraged change. All participants recounted the valuable information and abilities they gained through reflection which will guide them to continuously inspect their practices, recognize issues, as well as target these issues through research. One participant testified that RP was "incredibly fulfilling and strengthened [their] confidence" (p .682). Additionally, the participants stated that through RP they had opportunities to undertake authentic teaching challenges which will help to prepare them for their separate practices. Moreover, the participants reported that they become increasingly "thoughtful" about instruction and their own practices as they learned to navigate teaching all the while conducting and probing research grounded in firsthand experience, modifying strategies, and connecting theories to their practice aimed at transformation and development (p. 682). Finally, they added that RP provided an essential platform to encourage discourse and discover their individual abilities, philosophies, and knowledge.

Behavioral Change
Teachers that participated in Ryder's (2012) study displayed behavioral change through noticing aspects they are unhappy with, questioning their professional philosophies, and making decisions based on reflections. Ryder (2012) concluded that an awareness of issues allowed teachers to modify their actions. In addition to that, he found that teachers' self-identity and professional identity aids behavior and professional transformation. For example, one teacher did not change her ways easily, where another teacher noticed that expectations drove the actual practice (Ryder's, 2012).

Developing Practical Theories
Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, and Turunen (2016) found indications of steps towards the development of practical theory while investigating teachers in a teacher practicum. They noticed that reflection reinforced practical theory as well as professional growth. Additionally, the researchers observed the teachers reflecting more broadly and deeply, and that they developed practical theories through their experiences in the practicum course. More specifically, reflection was found to have a transformative impact on the practicum teachers' professional development as they construct practical theories by theorizing their experiences grounded in practicum settings and the different perceptions they came across while reflecting and making connections between what they know and what they are experiencing. In short, the practical experiences allowed teachers to test their knowledge and beliefs through observation and analysis, which enabled them to become more objective in the process that helped mold their own teaching philosophies and identities. Based on their findings, the researchers hold that it is important to support practicum teachers' reflection as they found proof of just how positively it can influence teachers' individual professional transformation. Furthermore, they concluded that teacher practicum courses are indispensable platforms for teachers to develop practical theories. According to the researchers, practical theories make up the core of teachers' identity and that these identities are shaped through practical experience as well as their relationships with other teachers.

Similarly, the participants in Hageveik, Aydeniz and Rowell (2012) study's related that reflection on their practice, that includes their experiences, beliefs, knowledge, and abilities allowed them to develop and redevelop personal theories.

Reflecting Beyond the Individual

Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, and Turunen (2016) found that their student teachers' reflections in their portfolios progressed through four levels of reflections, going beyond the individual level to include the students, classroom, school and finally the society at large during their practical experience and continuous reflection.

Initially, during the first level, reflections remained descriptive and personal in nature. In other words, the students were unable to separate themselves from their practice and reflected on the easily detectable and familiar. Next, during the second level reflections, however still descriptive in nature, they began to discover their strengths and weaknesses through feedback sessions with others and consider their roles as practitioners and different opinions by analyzing different features in the practice. They also started to notice teachers' collective growth as peers. Then, during the third level of reflections, teachers began to realize the various roles as teachers that goes beyond pure instruction as they gained deeper understandings of their own teaching identity and the contexts outside of the classrooms that influence practice. Finally, during level four of reflections that included critical feedback, the teachers recognized that teaching is not simply a natural ability, and that it rather "develop(s) through learning and experience…(a) lifelong learning process" (Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016). Additionally, they acknowledged their overarching roles of teachers within a society and that their actions have consequences. During this fourth level, the teachers developed a more objective and critical stance on their own practice as they questioned and investigated their actions and norms and considered different circumstances. Yet, despite the deepened and critical level of reflection, the teachers did not come up with alternative approaches and plans to improve their practice.

Likewise, Harland and Wondra (2011) found that teachers reflected until the level of reflection that is Level 3, analyzing different methods and content that connect to their future practices. However, none of the participants reached level 4, critical reflection where change could be witnessed in their practices (Harland & Wondra, 2011).

Collaboration

Parker et al. (2007, as cited in Loughran, 2010) state that:

> communication among teachers is a major vehicle to foster teacher development. Teachers reflect on their practices and open eyes to different perspectives through discussion with colleagues of their concerns or teacher difficulties. Therefore, strategies that facilitate professional communication among teachers need to be integrated into teacher professional development. (p. 404)

Hageveik, Aydeniz and Rowell (2012), Burhan-Horasanli and Oractepe's (2016) and Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, and Turunen's (2016) came to the same conclusions. The participants in Hageveik, Aydeniz and Rowell's (2012) study reported that they learned from others in collaboration as they discussed their practices, reflected, as well as observed each other, and were able to "appreciate the process of critical reflection on their practice" (p. 682). In particular, they discovered the different perceptions, philosophies, approaches, and skills different teachers have when addressing issues in practice. Similarly, the teachers in Burhan-Horasanli and Oractepe's (2016) study reported that collaboratively sharing their ideas, discussions, and observations afford awareness of own beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as gaps in their lesson plans. They added that this awareness allowed them to consciously improve and develop their skills and lessons, in addition to recognizing their objectives as teachers. Correspondingly, Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, and Turunen's (2016) participants recognized their strengths and weaknesses through collaboration. Most importantly, during the

third level of reflections, the researchers observed that collaboration allowed the teachers to gain awareness of the range and variety of teaching styles and beliefs in education which is essential to transform teaching and learning.

Shortcomings and Issues in Reflective Practice

Despite the benefits, there are shortcomings and concerns in RP. The first major issue is in relation to collaboration. Teachers did not always understand why and how to collaborate and deal with observations (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016). Finefter-Rosenbluh (2016) investigated teachers' feelings towards RP and found that they were underprepared for collaboration and considered observations as intrusive. The teachers confessed that they were "massaging the truth" to avoid "hurting a colleague" (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016, p.7). Furthermore, they felt that their discussions of issues caused additional stress as they were "forced to conjure a problem" as they did not get to experience real issues (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016, p.7). The teachers thought the practice coerced them in "mistreat(ing) or l(ying)" to their peers, leaving them feeling "humilia(ted) and "guinea pigs" (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016, p. 7). Based on her findings, Finefter-Rosenbluh (2016) warn facilitators of RP of the complicated, underlying issues that exist in RP and that facilitators should prepare and explain the process to teachers in terms of the outcomes of the practice, that is professional development.

Similarly, one of Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, and Turunen's (2016) participants stated that peer feedback was inconsistent, often excessively negative, or overly positive and therefore unconstructive. They too argue that teachers need assistance and productive feedback in reflective practices to guide teachers in reflecting from personal and descriptive stages of reflection to the stages required to start developing practical theories (Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016)

Additionally, collaboration should not be the main source for professional development as the outcomes are often overestimated (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). Based on 30 years of being a practicum instructor, Zeichner found that collaboration with others, experts and novices alike, is not sufficient to encourage professional growth (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). They hold that in order to develop professionally, teachers should be reflecting on their own, first-hand experiences and understandings of the practice, and become inspired to develop as they gain insights into their own practices as well as the different choices they can make in the practice (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). Therefore, they concluded that facilitators should encourage sincere and deep reflection to foster transformation (Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

The second major issue is in relation to the depth and level of reflection. The reality of RP does not hold up to the potential it promises in teacher practicums (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). Zeichner (1974, as cited in Zeichner & Liu, 2010) noticed that teachers are often weighed down by the things they cannot control and change, and causing them not to reflect beyond those issues to focus on the things that they can indeed control and change. Reflection for these teachers became a technical procedure and they are "committed to some version of it" (Zeichner and Liu, 2010, p. 70). The researchers observed teachers using the term as if it was simply a teaching jargon and focused their so-called reflections on what they thought were expected from them, leaving their reflections uncreative, and superficial, lacking depth, authenticity, and thought. Due to their misinterpretation of the true meaning of reflection and mindlessly going about the process, the teachers were unable to develop theories in action and effectively lost opportunities to create any. Based on similar evidence found in their analysis of written reports, Gore and Zeichner (1991) concluded that reflection should be supported to guide and challenge

teachers to reflect deeper, beyond themselves, by address greater issues and essentially constructing research communities through teacher practicums.

Unfortunately, Zeichner and Liu (2010) found that teachers can burnout when they are not supported in noticing an understanding bigger issues outside the immediate environment that affect their practice (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). When teachers stay ignorant of outside factors, they remain unable to address certain issues and consequently miss the potential results of deep reflection (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). Therefore, teacher practicums should not give the illusion that blueprints exist in the practice (Zeicher & Liu, 2010). Teachers should be afforded opportunities and guidance to collaborate and reflect in ways that afford ownership of their practices and develop healthy perceptions of their practices by becoming objectively, aware of the things they can change and can't change while adapting a flexible approach to their practice (Zeicher & Liu, 2010).

Then, the research question guiding this exploratory case study is, "What issues do practicum teachers face in the process of doing a collaborative Action Research?" To answer this, the researcher, in line with other models of reflection, differentiates between shallow and deep reflections (Harland & Wondra, 2011). Shallow reflections are those reflections descriptive and individualistic or personal in nature, and on the easily detectable and familiar aspects of teaching (Harland & Wondra, 2011; Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016) and deep reflections those that illustrates critical reflection (Harland & Wondra, 2011; Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016) that results in changes in behavior, actions, competencies, and beliefs (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005) which are necessary for reflective (Abendroth-Timmer, 2007), action (Wegner, Weber & Ohlberger, 2014) as well as growth competence (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Figure 2
Level of Issues and Depth of Reflection

Shallow Reflection

Easily Identified and Addressed Issues

Deep Reflection
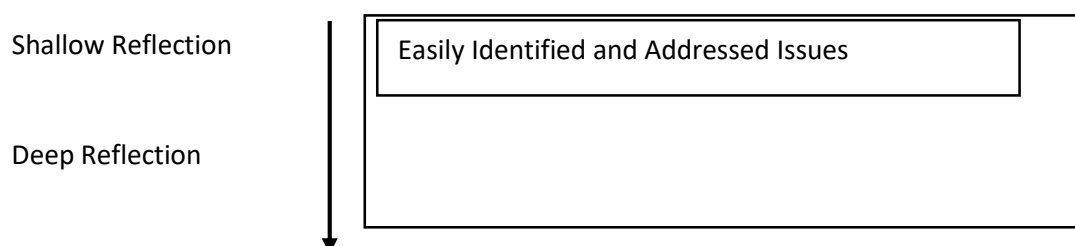
Methodology
The Case
The context of this study is a 15-week MA TESOL practicum course where in-service teachers complete their training by means of an AR project while teaching an undergraduate English in Action course at a women's university in Seoul, South Korea.

Six female in-practice teachers participated in the practicum course as part of their 5-semester MA TESOL graduate program requirements. All teachers besides one who was in her early twenties, were between mid-to late thirties. They all had various teaching experiences ranging from two to thirteen years. Four participants were South Koreans and two American nationals. Both American teachers had teaching experience in America before coming to South Korea where they have been teaching for over seven years respectively. The practicum teachers were in charge of designing coursework, activities and coming up with themes to engage the students in real-world activities to produce language withing the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.
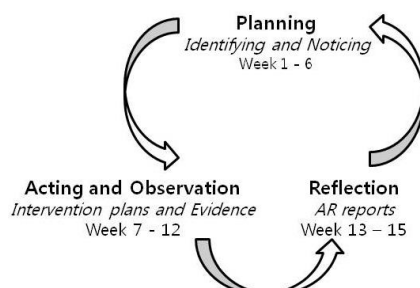
Twenty-one Korean and three Chinese female students between the ages of twenty to twenty-five made up the undergraduate course participants. The student-centred undergraduate course met twice a week for 2-hour classes.

Additionally, the practicum teachers attended two MA practicum classes to discuss reflections, view recordings and get feedback. The AR project built into the practicum program is meant to afford opportunities for in-practice teachers to observe their shared practice, investigate solutions through research, employing intervention plans, all the while reflecting on the process. Through these opportunities teachers can probe, identify issues, research, test hypothesis and theories in an authentic teaching environment, with real consequences while receiving guidance and support from experts in a collaborative setting. One expert was a male professor from America, and the other a female professor from Singapore.

The AR cycle was implemented over 4 movements, planning, acting and observing, and reflecting aimed at improving the participants' practices through interventions grounded in observation, reflection and research (see figure 3). During the planning movement, teachers gather proof of issues or problems in their practice through their practical experiences, reflection as well as observations, which sets in motion their intervention plans or actions to actively improve their teaching practices. During the acting and observation movement, the teachers implement and test their intervention plans. Finally, during the reflection moment, the teachers look back on the experience and write-up their AR reports.

Figure 3
The AR Cycle completed over 15 weeks.

Planning Movement	Acting and Observation Movement	Reflection Movement
Weeks 1 - 6	Weeks 7 - 12	Weeks 13 - 15
Preparation for the official AR project through reflective inquiry, noticing, observing, identifying issues.	Implementation of planned interventions, observation of effectiveness and collecting evidence by means of video recordings, surveys and reflections.	Reflection on effectiveness of intervention plans by means of AR reports compiled from data collected through video recordings, surveys and weekly reflections, theories.

The participants were paired with teaching partners for the practicum course. Pre-semester meetings and planning sessions started three weeks before the start of the calendar semester. Teachers collaborated to compile weekly lesson plans for the undergraduate course and submit their plans for approval and feedback two weeks prior to conducting the lessons. Each week, a

different pair was leading the classroom activities, while the remaining pairs led groupwork activities in their respective groups

As for reflection tools, Video recordings, written reflections, debriefing sessions, and AR reports were employed as AR tools throughout the course. The video recordings were uploaded on a private YouTube channel after each practical session. Written reflections shared on an online forum were completed following a specific format, but teachers were still encouraged to reflect beyond the points provided. The format included five points, namely 1) what happened in the classroom, 2) what went well, 3) what didn't go well and why, 4) what went better than the previous teaching week and 5) what could be done better next time. Then, during the once-a-week debriefing sessions, teachers discussed the experience, share their perspectives and ideas, as well as request support where needed. The feedback sessions were specifically geared towards deepening reflections (Farrell, 2015). Lastly, the teachers in groups of three, compiled AR reports which included their intervention strategies, theories behind these plans, data collection, their results as well as future implications and limitations.

Data Collection

Data was collected and triangulated through observations, surveys, interviews, and action research reports. Observation data was collected from three different sources, namely written reflections, video recordings of classes, and lesson plans. Again, the researcher operated as an outsider and observer, and not a participant of AR. The validity and the quality of interpreting the observations rely on the researcher being an objective outsider to the case (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

First, to record issues the teachers identified, the researcher explored reflections, specifically the "What didn't go well?" sections in reflections that related teachers' experiences and compiled a list of issues using an observation protocol. The "What happened?", "What went well?" and "What can be done better in the "future" sections were used to record teachers' intervention strategies planned and used, along with their outcomes. Second, eight weeks, a total of 32 hours of video recordings were collected and used to make observation notes about the classroom environment as well as certain salient issues emerging, and strategies employed. Video recordings were not meant to capture everything and individual aspects of the classroom but serves as an overall connection between the plans and what students reflected on. Third, teachers' lesson plans gave insights into their plans, objectives, goals, explanations as well as materials necessary to conduct the lesson.

Following the observation period, data was collected by means of an anonymous paper survey with a mix of 30 open and closed questions, including Likert scales, yes/ no, as well frequency questions, to limit potential thoughtless answers during week 14 of a 15-week semester including. To ensure reliability, teachers were asked to answer as honestly as possible. There were no risks involved in answering the survey questions. The questions were aimed at eliciting the teachers' first-hand experience, attitudes, sentiments, positions, and ideas regarding the AR project they had during their MA Practicum course (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

The surveys were followed by semi-structured face-to-face interviews upon completing the practicum course. The interviews were audio recorded to ensure the quality and validity of the data collected and pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. 13 pre-determined, structured interviews led the start of the interview process to keep interviewees on topic, and unstructured interview questions elicited more qualitative, descriptive narrations of the teachers' experiences (Nunan & Bailey, 2008). Unstructured questions were most often used to probe

for more details. Both the survey and the interview data afforded a more attuned exploration of the specific issues observed.

Finally, the data collected was compared with the practicum teachers' AR reports that were posted on their individual e-portfolios and were specifically used to add qualitative data to teachers' experiences as they reveal the issues identified, their explicit intervention plans developed, as well as their reports on the effectiveness of their intervention strategies across a 5-week intervention plan.

Data Analysis
To commence data analysis, the data collected from the written reflections using an observation protocol went through three stages of analysis to compile a focused report to uncover the frequency of themes, or issues. Accordingly, the data collected from the video observations and lesson plans and underwent three additional rounds of data analysis to validate and supplement data collected from the written reflections. After compiling the observation data using the observation protocol, the researcher reorganized the data to create a direct comparison between the identified issues, the reported interventions plans, as well as their reported and real outcomes. The data from the second analysis was turned into a checklist that was used when the researcher went back to the data to check the outcomes of teachers' intervention plans and potential reoccurring themes and subsequent intervention plans. During each step of the data analysis period, a second rater went over and confirmed the issues and themes.

Next, the data collected from the surveys were compiled to create a mean score that reflects participants responses, as well as triangulate observation data, fill in gaps and extract sensitive and less covert data. Data collected from the interviews were audio recorded and played back to document the teachers' responses. Combined with the survey data, the interviews triangulate observation data, confirm themes, fill in the gaps, extract sensitive and less covert data, as well as provide qualitative data for the case study.

Finally, data collected from AR reports were used to compare the researchers' observation data and the decline and/ or increase of identified themes with the reported intervention strategies and observations, to add qualitative data as well as triangulate data.

The researcher identified the issues *clear and effective instructions, time management*, *target language use* and *teachers' roles and responsibilities* from the written reflections, videos, AR reports, as well as the surveys and interview data. For their AR reports, the teachers identified and selected *clear and effective instructions* and *academic learning time* to be addressed through intervention strategies from week 7, the start of the intervention stage. See table 1 for a visual comparison.

These issues were fairly easy to observe and recognize in the immediate environment of a teacher practicum, by both the researcher as outsider and the hands-on practicum teachers. Due to their salience, these issues can be directly identified and addressed through first-hand experience, research, and intervention to direct professional growth and transformation in their teaching practice. However, in the survey and interview data, additional issues were voiced that affected the teachers' intervention strategies and results. As per figure 4, the frequency of the issues generally decreased, except for the issue of target language use over the course of the semester. Taking a closer look at the Action and Observation Movements, the intervention weeks from weeks 7 – 12 illustrated in figure 5, the identified issues continued to fluctuate across the intervention weeks, which warranted additionally rounds of data analysis. Further

analysis revealed the issues that coincided with the issues the teachers experienced, which affected their experiences of AR and RP, as well as the outcomes of their intervention strategies. These issues are discussed in the findings section.

Table 1

Triangulated Data Collected from Observation, AR Reports, Surveys, and Interviews.

	Observation	**AR Reports**	**Surveys**	**Interviews**
Identified Issues	1. Clear and effective instructions 2. Time management 3. Target language use 4. Teachers' roles and responsibilities	1. Clear and effective instructions 2. Academic learning time	1."clear instructions" 2."academic learning time", "time management" 3."simple PPT"	"clear instructions and timing"

Figure 4

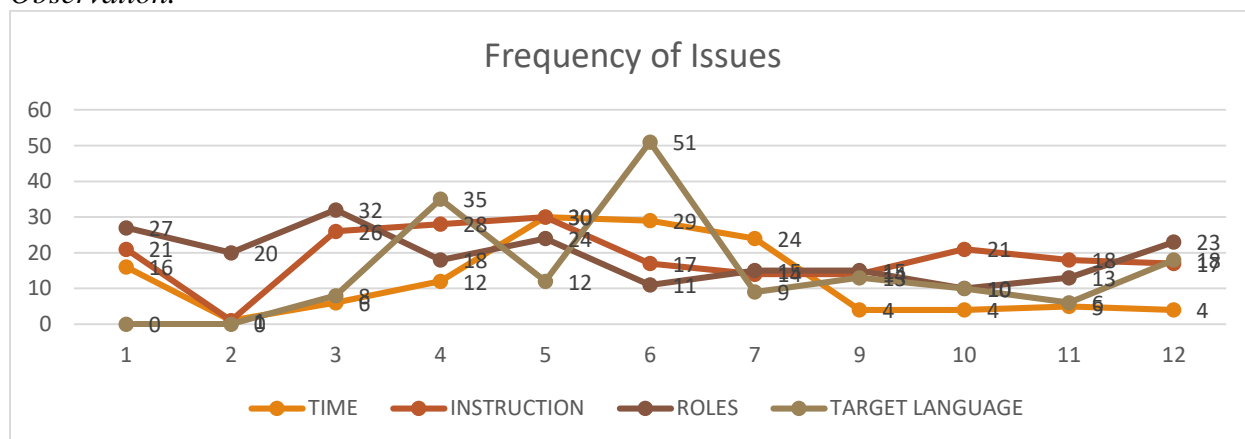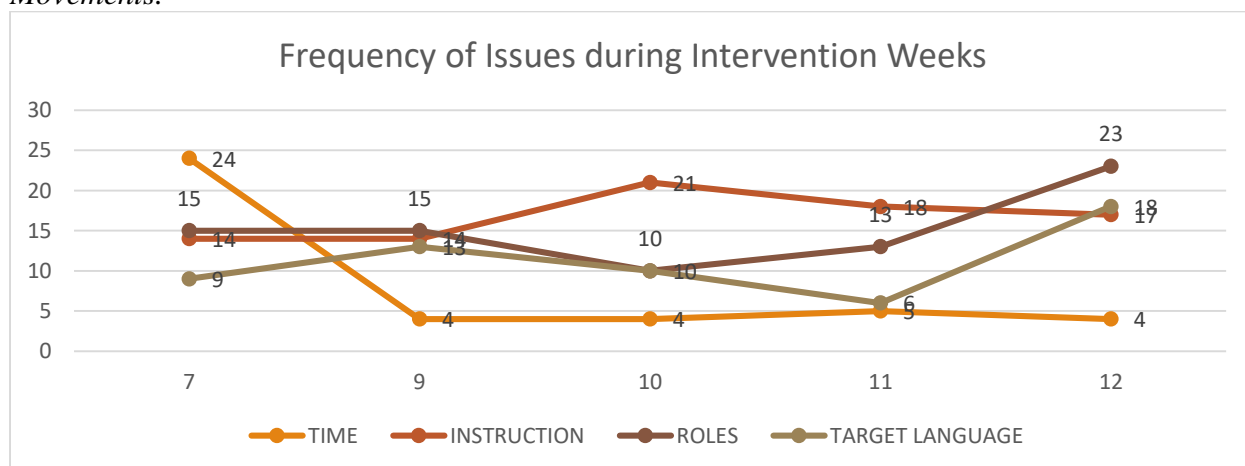*Frequency of Issues Reported in Written Reflections during Movements Planning, Acting and Observation.*

Figure 5

Frequency of Issues Reported in Written Reflections during the Action and Observation Movements.

Findings
Issues beyond the identified AR Project Issues
Despite the easily observable issues teachers identified and addressed for their interventions and as reported in their AR reports, other issues emerged that affected the outcomes of the AR project and their overall experiences. These issues existed alongside yet beyond the issues detected by the in-service teachers. Despite the teachers' best efforts to implement their planned intervention strategies, the outcomes were inconsistent across the intervention weeks of the AR cycle and certain issues persisted. From the anonymous survey and interview data, the researcher identified *collaboration*, *reflection and peer feedback*, as well as *length of the AR cycle* as background and more covert issues that existed but were not directly identified and address as part of the AR project. This could imply that teachers might not have chosen these issues to be addressed in the written reflections and AR project due to the sensitivity of collaboration and the shared nature of the reflections.

Collaboration
Collaboration seems to have been the most persistent and overriding issue that existed alongside the identified issues of the AR report. Effective collaboration was influenced by teachers' views and styles, which also affected their written reflections and peer feedback, and consequently the outcomes of their intervention plans. Data triangulation uncovered that teachers' *roles* in terms of collaboration affected the identified issues *clear and effective instructions* and *academic learning time* which could explain the inconsistencies in the outcome of intervention strategies as well as the continuous mention of these issues during the intervention weeks of the AR cycle.

Expectations of Collaboration. Teachers' expectations and experiences of collaboration affected the AR project. The survey revealed that collaboration did not boost teachers' confidence. Instead, it caused stress. 5/6 of the teachers answered that working with others made them feel stressed, 2/6 anxious, 2/6 uncomfortable, 3/6 reassured, 2/6 comfortable and only 1/6 confident.

Moreover, teachers experienced a sense of frustration during collaboration of "communication" as per T3, which could clarify the increase in the frequency of the issue *roles* around Week 12 when the teachers reflected about teachers' obligations to provide clear and effective instructions to explain "complicated task" and "language functions", and to "intervene" and "scaffold" more intentionally increase *academic learning time* as per the AR reports. In terms of collaboration, T2 said:

> I'm used to working on my own. I've been teaching the last 7 years, it's my classroom, I'm in control of my classroom, but it was like, you have a boyfriend now, you can't just do things on your own. You gotta talk with someone, but see, that's a good thing, but not a bad thing, but a hard part because you have to agree on something. Let's say your partner didn't give you an idea you thought were not that great, it's like you had, I had to find ways to say it in a nice way. Oh, this is not a bad practice, but you know when I'm not used to doing that it kind of force you to watch my language, because you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, because you still got a whole semester to get through, so that was hard.

When asked about collaboration, T3 answer:
> Like I never experienced when you're teaching pair-work, like. So really knowing how to listen to your partner. And time management was a big thing as well… But like I

said, it's group work, so it's not easy to juggle. It can never go your own way... You really need to be flexible with teamwork, coz if you're not…whoo oo.

T3 added, "I just felt some teachers weren't very confident when teaching…I really didn't like that."

From the survey data it appears that teachers preferred to collaborate and discuss their teaching practices with the professors in charge of the practicum course instead of their colleagues. This could explain the issue of communication mentioned in the surveys and interviews. As per observation and survey data, teachers "asked for help" and "clarification" and felt that their trusted colleagues' feedback was fairly useful, with a survey score of 3.5/6, and that they could rely on their collaborators with a score of 3.6/ 6. However, the survey data revealed that working with the 2 professors to develop their professional skills was beneficial with a survey score of 5.2/6, and that consulting the professors about their teaching practices was helpful with a score of 5.2/6. Moreover, they felt that they were able to rely on their professors to help them while doing AR with a score of 5.2/6. T2 felt that, "talking with professors were useful". Thus, it appears that the teachers were ready and willing to work with the professors that facilitated the AR, but not so much with the other teachers.

Teaching Styles, Skills, and Experience. Additionally, a difference in teaching styles and work ethics affected the way teachers collaborated and feel about collaboration. The survey, interview, and AR data revealed that there were noteworthy differences between the different groups, in particular skills and strategies.

In survey, the teachers reported that clear and honest communication, "procrastination", insecurities, inexperience and working with "difficult teachers" affected collaboration. In the interview T3 answered, "so trying to and juggle those different skills together were really hard." In her interview, T2 replied:

> Different ethics of working, um, … The other thing is, I was thinking something, oh, different styles of working. I'm not a procrastinator, most people are. I had to learn to, okay, can I just give up that control? You know, of having that, you know, that need to make sure everything is done on time, before the time? So, that was really hard. It was really hard for me because working full time, doing the practicum, I didn't have time to procrastinate. Um, it's like I work little by little, but it gets done. Most people are like okay, let's wait until last minute and get everything done. And I don't function like that. When you put me under pressure like that I'm like okay, I give up. You do it!

The AR report revealed that "each teaching group had their own different teaching styles which may be one of the main reasons for unsteady results between weeks". In her interview T1 answered:

> Most useful? It's hard to say, because there's a lot of diversity in people's teaching skills and like common sense and personality plays a big part and we just had a very diverse group, probably not as diverse as others. But useful? I'd say seeing where I was able to improve and how it's something that was learned as a teacher, umm helped me help realize, that doing action research is important actually for people who do not have any experience like reflection, evaluating your work. So yeah, I'd say the useful part is being surprised at how different people interpret the same situation very differently all the time. And how important it is to have the right information and tools to actually see it, in a somewhat more objective way instead of delusional.

T1 felt that the same things that made collaboration useful, caused issues, "Issues? Probably the same as the usefulness, the fact that people do see things so differently." T3 felt that some teachers were not flexible and that it affected their lesson plans and the outcomes:

> Oh boy, oh, I had a lot of trouble trying to juggle it with this one. I mean, it's just like for me, I don't know if the age thing is really mattering, but I was the most youngest out of the groups, so I somewhat understand what college students are, because I wasn't a college student long ago, I was, just, just 2 years ago I was a college student. And I was like, um no this is not going to work, in my own, but nope, nope this isn't going to work… So a lot of the activities, my partner was um, I don't have that much knowledge in that area, or what so ever. And I was like, um you seem to socialize with a lot of people, why don't you just ask those people about certain things about certain things about in this area, so that would not be a problem to brainstorm some ideas. So that was the main thing, communication, but, we figured something out, so eventually… Compared to the other semester, having like two classes a week, you gotta be with this person like almost literally umm a lot more times….

T3 in her interview mentioned that group members should "take more responsibility" and properly prepare, go over lesson plans, manage their student groups, facilitate learning, scaffold, and intervene as necessary without "wasting time while waiting for the leaders to clarify instructions one by one."

In the AR reports, the teachers also stated that different teachers had "different perceptions about scaffolding" as a facilitator of learning, which created a lack of scaffolding and intervention and as often caused interferences.

In short, work ethics, teaching styles, skills and experiences, as well as different perspectives led to inconsistent results and outcomes of intervention strategies during the intervention weeks. The researcher grouped these issues under the umbrella term *collaboration*, which created additional issues for the issue *roles* the teachers identified for their AR reports.

Reflection and Peer Feedback

Reflections and peer feedback on written reflections were both affected by collaboration. To illustrate, T1 felt that some teachers were too subjective which hindered the depth of their reflections as well as how they responded to feedback:

> ...if I try to give feedback, and to help other people, they are not used to thinking of their work objectively, and kind of take things personally instead of thinking this is something you can change, it's not who you are, or that your value as a person. So, I think that was a challenge, and then also when people tried to give feedback to me, I was like, umm well. Like I didn't, um, I don't like flattering in teaching. I want like concrete examples of what is effective and what not. I think the lack of experience made it difficult to work together.

Additionally, all the interviewees felt that feedback from the written reflections were not beneficial as they were too superficial. For example, T2 felt that reflections are only beneficial when feedback on reflections are constructive, mindful, and truthful instead of just giving friendly responses. She added:

> Well, they are beneficial when you get good feedback from your other classmates, not just oh great, you did a great job. Okay, like what do you mean you did a great job….Honest enough? No. If you just tell me I did a great job when I know that I did things wrong, I mean. Okay, maybe you can see things that I don't, but give me good kind of criticisms. Like, um, yeah, you know it's. I think for me to be able to write down is one useful side

of the reflections that was supposed to be beneficial, but then that only works if your classmates are giving you good feedback that that's actually detailed and specific. Um, the one that's constructive.

However, she did say that she was not always honest in her feedback either, since, as previously mentioned, she felt that, "you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, because you still got a whole semester to get through."

Besides the difference in how teachers approached and perceived reflections and feedback, T3 mentioned that age and cultural background affected the ways she reflected. She experienced difficulties communicating with other teachers due to differences in age and culture:

> There were some times when I felt I wanted to tell things to her, like to my partner, like could you at least tried to do that, or this. But first things first, I have, we have, um the age gap is very different. So I was being very careful how I say things. There were also cultural differences, so I was really just trying to put that into mind. So a lot of the activities, my partner was um, I don't have that much knowledge in that area, or what so ever. And I was like, um you seem to socialize with a lot of people, why don't you just ask those people about certain things about certain things about in this area, so that would not be a problem to brainstorm some ideas. So that was the main thing, communication, but, we figured something out, so eventually… um the way she's good at, what she's good at and what I'm good at is very different. Like I'm more technological and dealing with computer stuff and, um, and like I can be in front of people, but she's better like, like being in front of people yeah, but the planning parts she needs, she needs, yea we are very different, so trying to and juggle those different skills together were really hard.

Despite issues with collaboration, all three interviewees still felt that they improved by means of reflection during an AR project and it didn't hinder the project all too much, besides making it "hard". However, T3 felt that these difficulties helped shape her and increased her "confidence".

To sum up, the inconsistencies in the teachers' intervention plans could then bring forth the issue of the teachers' inability to reflect deep, critical and "honest enough" to affect change and development in their practice. After all, reflection is a crucial part of AR and RP as it is meant to create and enhance teachers' awareness of their practice that in turn foster change and development.

Length of AR
Then, the length of the actual intervention cycle affected the outcomes of teachers' intervention plans. In the AR report and interviews teachers mentioned that "intervention cycles were too short", and "the main limitation of this action research is the short cycles of intervention". The teachers felt that a more truthful account of the effectiveness of their intervention strategies "could be triangulated with a longer research period and reflection".

Moreover, T1 reported that the specific AR project was too short to try out additional theories in practice:

> It would have been nice to yeah, to dive deeper into more detailed aspects of the teaching practice, but I think for time and instruction it was a challenge enough for everyone in general, so, that was sufficient I suppose.

In line with this, T3 answered:

> So, action research wise, like I'm not sure, like I said, we had a very short period of time. Like if we had a couple of weeks more, I would definitely have a more definite answer, but since we only, since I only had 2 weeks it was hard….with our schedule it's crazy….there's too much to juggle, like we gotta get that portfolio thing together, portfolio, action research…, and that basically takes all your energy out. I, 5 weeks, it sucks… Having that gap in between …, um, maybe affected our AR, I don't know. I think it's our, um, teaching patterns and like our state of mind when we were teaching… It's a tiring process. You're just trying to do so many things in just 3 months. I mean, even hearing it, you're doing AR, and you're teaching a course, you're making lesson plans,….

Furthermore, in the interview T1 mentioned that when they were focusing on one problem, other aspects got ignored or neglected:

> I'd say we were still able to improve what we could. But, um, you know, as far as with the action research, it is, it's like, whenever you try to focus on one aspect of teaching, sometimes another aspect lowers, so it's just hard to juggle everything. Maybe things that weren't in the action research I personally wanted to uphold as a standard in my teaching, like I made sure, it was a challenge to try and do that. But I think we, my teaching partner and I still improved and were able to, yeah.

Similarly, T3 answered, "because it's hard to juggle multiple things in a lesson. There's certain things that you forget." This phenomenon could clarify why the issues *target language* and teachers' *roles* increased towards the end of the intervention cycle.

In the AR reports, teachers felt that certain issues such as teaching skills and styles that interfered with the intervention plans could have decreased over a longer intervention period as different teachers with "different skills" planned and led the class each week during the intervention weeks. In line with the interview data, the survey data revealed that teachers felt that AR is a continuous process and not something that teachers only do once, with a survey score of 5.5/6.

In summary, *collaboration*, *reflection and peer feedback*, and the *length of AR cycle* affected teachers' intervention plans and their outcomes. The inconsistencies in the outcomes of the intervention strategies observed by the researcher corresponded with the inconsistencies the teachers reported in their AR reports along with the additional issues disclosed in the survey and interview data. These issues, although not identified as part of the AR project, existed alongside the identified issues, and influenced the outcomes of the intervention plans. In particular, the issue *collaboration* explicates the inconsistencies in the graphs illustrated in figures 4 and 5 as well as the continuous increase in certain issues during the intervention weeks.

Discussion

Through a focused data analysis of observation data as an outsider of AR, as well as survey and interview data, the researcher explored an MA TESOL practicum course where in-service teachers collaborated in AR and RP. RP in teaching practicums, when done correctly in a supportive environment, is essential as it creates habits of continuous reflection until it becomes "common sense" and second nature (Farrell, 2015, p. 6). RP is "a process of professional development" that provides teachers with a platform to question and validate their behaviors, actions, and thoughts, as well as their existing knowledge, teaching styles, character, and their strengths and weaknesses to become thoughtful and responsive practitioners (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 1). Regardless, the research data revealed inconsistencies in the outcomes

of the intervention plans and issues that existed and emerged that affected the outcomes of the AR project and their overall experiences. Even so, these issues remained unaddressed in teachers' written reflection during AR. In other words, these issues existed alongside yet beyond the issues detected by the in-service teachers. These unidentified and unaddressed issues caused inconsistencies across the intervention weeks of the AR cycle, with some issues persisting despite the teachers' best efforts to implement their intervention strategies. Data analysis revealed that issues persevered due to the shallow nature of teachers' reflections, as teachers only reflected on the salient, easily identified, immediate and personal. These issues were labelled *Level 1: Shallow Issues.*

Through data triangulation, specifically the anonymous surveys, in-person semi-structured interviews, and the AR reports, the researcher explored additional issues or reasons behind the inconsistencies and ineffective intervention plans. The researcher labeled these issues *Level 2: Issues Beyond* as they were first, not directly identified and addressed by the teachers, and second, as they required deeper reflection to be recognized in the practice when they emerge and affect teaching practices.

Then, to answer the research question "What issues did practicum teachers face in the process of doing a collaborative Action Research?", the teachers identified *Level 1: Shallow Issues* namely *clear and effective instructions* as well as *academic learning time* as issues affecting their practice, while the researcher uncovered deeper level issues, *Level 2: Issues Beyond,* specifically *collaboration*, *reflection and peer feedback*, *and length of AR* that emerged during a collaborative AR and affected teachers' intervention strategies, the outcomes, as well as their experiences of AR. The researcher concluded that for teachers to overcome Level 1 type of shallow reflections, subsequent AR reports, and expected professional growth, they need to reflect deeper, more critical, and to the core to reach Level 2 and to reap the various benefits of AR and RP.

Based on these findings, the researcher tends to agree with other researchers such as Finefther-Rosenbluh (2016), Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä and Turunen (2016), and Zeichner and Liu (2010) when they caution facilitators not to take the process of reflection lightly, as it could do more harm than good in some cases, whereas it simply wastes time in others. Therefore, in the following section, the researcher makes suggestions for a successful AR based on existing literature and research, as well as the findings of this study.

Implications

To encourage continuous and future research, the research suggestions first highlight the useful aspects of AR in a teacher practicum through the voices of the practicum teachers to help facilitators and future practicum teachers understand the benefits beyond the issues emphasized in this study. Next, by taking a closer look at the *Level 2: Issues Beyond*, the researcher intends to stress the important aspects of AR and RP that can direct and influence practice along with recommendations for instructors and teachers.

Useful aspects of Action Research

In the surveys and interviews, teachers mentioned that AR in a practicum setting help them to become "mindful", "aware", thoughtful, and attentive. Additionally, they developed "different perspectives" through their collaboration and realized the importance of objectivity in practice. Also, they gained valuable information through "collaboration" such as sharing, and complementing "skills", "ideas", and "experience".

Perhaps more importantly, even though all the practicum teachers were in-service, experienced teachers to varying degrees, AR was beneficial despite their experience, as it helped them to be "flexible" and "improve" their practice. To start, the teachers felt that the continuous, on-going nature of AR is particularly valuable as it affords continuous improvement. Additionally, AR helped them to become more comfortable, "confident", "selfless" and "meet higher expectations".

In conclusion, despite the different levels of issues and inconsistent outcomes of intervention plans, the usefulness of AR is undeniable, even for experienced teachers, which only further drives the importance of a facilitating and thoughtfully organized AR as per Zeichner and Liu (2010).

Level 2: Issues Beyond

The chief implication of this study is to raise awareness of deeper level issues, or *Issues Beyond* that influence teachers' practice despite AR projects, written reflections and facilitated practice, and to give suggestions accordingly.

Some of these issues were hinted at in the reflections and AR report, but they did not fully come to the front until the surveys and interviews were conducted. These issues remained unaddressed while their effects stained the teaching practice. Consequently, it is important to consider issues beyond the identified and targeted shallow issues of an AR as they influence the outcomes of the intervention plans to various, nevertheless continuous degrees until they are sufficiently addressed. More crucially, these unidentified issues can and does affect teachers' practices and beliefs as the seemingly ineffectiveness of carefully researched and planned strategies and interventions leave teachers stressed, anxious, weary, feeling unsure and uncertain about their strategy choices, and can even lead to burnouts and demotivation as their new skills continue to fail, which consequently cause them to resort to fossilized skills and strategies instead of truly trying to transform and develop their practice. In short, the researcher found similar shortcomings and issues in terms of collaboration, reflection, and peer feedback as well as length and organization that researchers such as Finefther-Rosenbluh (2016), Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä and Turunen (2016), and Zeichner and Liu (2010) found in their respective studies.

Collaboration. To fully reap the benefits of collaboration, issues in terms of collaboration should not be left as a covert issue, an afterthought, or as an issue that might or might not affect teachers' AR projects, practicum experience and intervention plans. Thus, it should not be left to chance. Therefore, it is the researcher's opinion that both facilitators and teachers doing AR should be fully aware of both benefits and pitfall of collaborations before going into AR. This opinion is supported by Finefter-Rosenbluh's (2016) findings that collaborations can be damaging and a waste of time if not addressed appropriately.

Additionally, literature on RP as well as the data collected in this study support the benefits of collaboration in AR reported in research done by research such as Hageveik, Aydeniz and Rowell (2012), Burhan-Horasanli and Oractepe (2016) and Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, and Turunen (2016) despite the issues surrounding it. Beyond AR and RP in a practicum setting, collaboration in these settings help prepare teachers for real world contexts where teachers work with other teachers in schools and communities, stressing the need for teachers to be prepared and objective towards different teaching styles, perspectives, approaches, teaching philosophies and working ethics amongst others. Therefore, it remains important for practicum

instructors and teachers to fully and continuously take *collaboration* into consideration during AR and RP.

At first, facilitators should prepare teachers for collaboration, spelling out the hurdles they might experience and stressing the importance of communication. Teachers could also prepare themselves by reading research on practicums and collaboration. Additionally, facilitators could employ the debriefing and feedback sessions to address certain issues around collaboration as they emerge before they evolve into bigger issues. Continuous discussions and a safe and supportive environment to encourage discussions (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Zeichner & Liu, 2010) about teaching characters, beliefs, and habits (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005) can help guide teachers think objectively about their own teaching practices, change their behavior (Ryder, 2012), reflect deeper (Harland & Wondra, 2011; Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016) and to the core (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005), and ultimately gain reflective competence (Abendroth-Timmer, 2007; Gerlach, 2021). In the case where teachers are of different ages and cultures, it might also be useful to discuss feedback and interactions to help bridge any cultural and age gaps that exist for the benefit of the AR and RP process. By knowing and understanding each other better, with the goal of improving collectively, teachers may reflect and cooperate beyond simply and/ or superficially collaborating (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016) during the AR and RP process.

Next, teachers should be prepared to communicate their goals and beliefs, to understand who they are, what they can and can't change, and find positive outcomes to the issues they experience in their practice (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Furthermore, teachers should be willing to focus on productive and constructive feedback instead of stroking egos and giving neutral responses (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016).

Another idea is to pair teachers according to their skills and teaching characters for teachers to complement each other as well as learn from each other through the collaborative experiences.

Reflection and Peer Feedback. Subsequently, practicum instructors should prepare students to reflect deeper and highlight the importance of deep reflections in AR for change and transformation, along with the purpose of constructive feedback. This means that practicum instructors should reap all the benefits of reflection and help their teachers focus on deep reflections that are beyond the superficial like simply touching on the truth or reflecting for the sake of simply completing yet another task (Zeichner & Liu, 2010; Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016, Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016). As per a participant in Finefter-Rosebluh's (2016) study, the participants in this study too mentioned that reflections were too nice, unconstructive, and often not appreciated.

Even more important, core reflection is essential to help teachers stay positive and focused on the things they can change and cannot change in their practice (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). This is critical as teachers' personalities, beliefs, practices, knowledge, feelings, skills, society and established norms can affect their initial or natural abilities to reflect (Abendroth-Timmer, 2007; Terhart, 2011; as cited in Gerlach, 2021). A negative frame, constantly critiquing one's own work and those of others, could affect teachers' mindsets and keep them focused on the unchangeable, which is fruitless and more crucially, does not amount to change (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Reflecting to the core during each reflection session could help teachers perceive their practice more objectively and discuss the factors that exist in the classroom environment, as well as the surrounding environment and community, to help focus their role as teachers in the practice and within a teaching community (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). To

encourage core reflections from the get-go, at the start of the course, the teachers could write down and discuss their core values as teachers, and what made them decide to become teachers. Teachers could make visual posters to look at to guide and focus their reflections. Then, during debriefing sessions, facilitators might help guide students to focus on positive change instead of getting stuck on things out of their control (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Zeichner & Lui, 2010).

Additionally, to promote deeper reflections, practicum instructors could go through reflection sessions and perhaps draw flow diagrams to help teachers visualize the process of reflecting deeper, from easily identified and visible issues in the environment, that is *Level 1: Shallow Issues*, to more hidden or covert issues, that is *Level 2: Issues Beyond*, while reflecting on their cores as teachers and discussing what they should focus on and what not, to make their reflections transformative, productive, and constructive. This exercise could help teachers perceive their own practices more objectively by taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture as suggested by researchers such as Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) and Zeicher and Lui (2010). To continue this idea, debriefing sessions could be used to help students think beyond the immediate, and more holistically as a group, before students write down their written reflections individually with more detailed comments. On top of this, practicum instructors could suggest that teachers follow more specific guidelines to help them reach deeper levels of reflections, create habits of reflection, and set the stage for continuous professional development (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993) especially since there is the risk of teachers rushing through reflections just to get it done (Zeichner & Liu, 2010) if there is no specific format that they need to follow or questions they need to answer to encourage deep reflection. A habit of reflection can set in motion the transformation of characters (Ryder, 2012), break fossilized routines and unhealthy or unproductive habits (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Zeichner & Liu, 2010) and facilitate teachers in becoming lifelong investigators and researchers aimed at continuous positive change to meet their own and their students' goals and needs (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016) and should therefore not be neglected or left to chance in any way.

To address the issue of constructive feedback, the instructor can pull up samples of reflections and practice how to give constructive feedback to avoid neutral, overly positive and negative comments. Also, debriefing and feedback sessions should be used to help focus teachers on giving and receiving constructive feedback. If teachers do not understand or appreciate the usefulness or purpose of constructive feedback, which was the case for some teachers in this study, then teachers could become offensive and take feedback as personal attacks or insults on their personalities, as they are unable to separate themselves from their practice (Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016). Again, an objective view of one's practice is essential, and teachers should reflect beyond the individual and develop practical theories through reflection (Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, & Turunen (2016) and reflecting to the core (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). It should be clear that the purpose of feedback is meant to raise them up and point them in the right direction, towards transformation and positive, constructive outcomes.

Alternatively, the instructors could introduce anonymous comment boxes to give shy and cautious or reluctant teachers opportunities for giving constructive and truthful feedback. However, as Boud and Walker (1998) found, this often introduces the risk of unnecessary and/or rude comments, which should be discouraged and prevented at all costs as the course should be a safe space (Zeichner & Liu, 2010) for teachers to reflect and grow. Instead, the practicum teachers could introduce a feedback format at the beginning of the course to help teachers focus on what they should give feedback on. This format can be removed when the

facilitator feels that students understand why, where, and how to give feedback to each other to help encourage growth, which would also depend on the length of the course.

Length of AR. Finally, the length of AR affects the outcomes and teachers' overall experience. Given the numerous positive outcomes of AR, a facilitating and supportive environment can help prepare teachers to the best of their abilities (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). This includes guidance for reflections. A facilitating environment includes the syllabus, tools, opportunities to use them, as well as the general atmosphere.

First and foremost, it is important to give students firsthand experiences and guidance to foster and encourage deep reflection and not let students come up with hypotheticals without concrete experiences (Zeichner & Liu, 2010), just as this practicum course under study affords. Teachers should take active roles when learning through experience, and try out different perspectives, roles, methods, and skills while researching and collaborating to facilitate professional growth as well as realize their intentions. As per Gerlach (2021) critical events are necessary to initiate teachers to reflect and investigate their practice (Gerlach, 2021).

Next, the practicum instructors should prepare teachers for some issues and pitfalls despite the AR cycles having this overall purpose. Teachers do not have to experience every issue to know that they exist in practice. These include collaboration, different teaching styles, beliefs, and experiences, skills, as well as work ethics they will come across during the practicum, especially since they exist in the real teaching world as well.

More importantly, at the beginning of the course, practicum facilitators can prepare teaches to reflect deeper and address more serious issues right from the start. Through the data analysis it became apparent that the teachers addressed issues that were easily identified for their AR project, instead of addressing the deeper layers that really affected their practice and could affect their practice in the long run. Therefore, the teacher practicum, AR, and PR should focus on issues that are harder to identify and transform on one's own. AR and RP should help focus teachers' reflections in ways that enable them to recognize hidden aspects and deeper levels that really affect their practice, which exist in both their own and the overall teaching community. This type of reflection will help teachers focus on what is truly important and help avoid burnouts (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Additionally, deep reflections will help instill good, positive, and healthy habits of reflection and research (Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016) to help teachers really experience the impact of intervention strategies and plans, as well as help them develop personal theories for their practices. Facilitators should encourage, guide and support teachers when reflections do not come naturally, or when reflections are too shallow.

Then, the design, framework and organization of the course and the AR cycles are important to take into consideration. To begin, teachers should be notified that not all changes and improvements happen immediately and should be encouraged to continue to investigate their practices to develop professionally throughout teaching careers. Also, teachers should be reminded of the time constraints they will face to help prepare them and limit procrastination.

Next, it is expected that consecutive AR cycles would give teachers additional opportunities to reflect deeper and address more issues, allowing them to become aware of the advantages of continuously reflecting through the progressive cycles of AR and RP. Short practicum courses could consider extending AR projects into teachers' own practices, where they teach in their own practices following the practicum course but continue the written reflections as well as the

support from a facilitator and peers for an additional AR cycle or two. In other words, teachers are slowly becoming more independent in their reflections, interventions, and research practices beyond the course.

Finally, deeper and core reflections should be encouraged even more during short AR reports such as this one. Deeper and core reflections can only help teachers notice issues more objectively and attentively to research, plan and implement changes that potentially have more immediate effects. When teachers understand how beneficial reflections are even in a short amount of time, they would be more likely to try it long term to continuously reap the benefits and improve their overall practices.

Conclusion

To conclude, the researcher as an outsider, observed an MA TESOL practicum course where 6 in-service teachers taught an undergraduate course at the same university while doing an Action Research (AR) project and engaging in Reflective Practices (RP) in the process of developing professionally and transforming their teaching practices. This qualitative exploratory case study was guided by the question, "What issues did practicum teachers face in the process of doing a collaborative Action Research?"

Data analysis revealed issues that fell beyond the *Level 1: Shallow Issues* the practicum teachers identified and addressed for the AR namely, *clear and effective instructions* as well as *academic learning,* that significantly affected their intervention plans. These *Level 2: Issues Beyond* were *collaboration* which includes expectations of collaboration, and teaching styles, skills, and experience, *reflection and peer feedback*, and *length of AR.*

Based on the existing literature and the research findings, the researcher made suggestions to help facilitators and practicum teachers alike reflect on and address issues that fall beyond the immediate, easily identified issues that teachers experience in the teaching practice to help focus them on objective (Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016), deep (Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Harland & Wondra, 2011; Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016), core (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005) and critical (Harland & Wondra, 2011; Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä & Turunen, 2016) reflections that will transfer their teaching practices and afford professional development (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Zeichner & Liu, 2010). These suggestions include recommendations regarding collaboration, reflection and peer feedback, as well as the length of AR.

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