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Korean EFL teachers' perceptions of the impact of EFL teacher education upon their classroom teaching practices

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ABSTRACT

This study employed qualitative data collection and analysis methods to investigate the influence of English as a foreign language teacher education programme on Korean teachers' classroom teaching practices. Six in-service secondary-school teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was applied to the data collected from these interviews. Findings from the analysis included that: a) most of the teachers were dissatisfied with the largely theory-oriented pre-service teacher education programmes that they attended; b) a major source of influence on their teaching was their experience of in-service teacher training programmes with practical curricula; c) observation of other fellow teachers' teaching had the strongest impact upon the teachers' teaching practices; and d) the teachers' low English proficiency and the washback effect of the Korea Scholastic Aptitude Test hindered the maintenance of the changes brought about by in-service teacher education programmes. This study ends with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

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Introduction

English language skills are now considered to be vital for participation in the global economy. As the importance of English as an international lingua franca has increased, demands for English language teaching (ELT) has increased as well, particularly in countries where English is taught and serves as a foreign language (Crystal, 2003; Held & McGrew, 2003). Many of these English as a foreign language (EFL) countries have been attempting to reform ELT. Since Shulman (1987) suggested a model for the knowledge base of teaching, the general consensus in the literature has been that the success of any educational reform is contingent upon teachers' willingness to implement the reform in their classroom teaching. Researchers in the EFL field have adopted this perspective and focused on EFL teachers in different contexts (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Hiramatsu, 2005; Li, 1998).

The critical role of teachers in ELT reforms points to the important role of EFL teacher education, particularly in those countries where ELT reforms are a matter of serious concern. This was one of the reasons why Freeman and Johnson (1998) called for a

reconceptualisation of the knowledge base of English as a second language (ESL) teacher education. ESL/EFL teacher education is expected to provide pre- and in-service teachers with professional training and qualifications, which are supposed to have a substantial influence upon their classroom teaching and professional development (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Maggioli, 2012). To put it differently, EFL teacher education is regarded as the site where pre- and in-service teachers learn to teach through exposure to theories, methods, and practices that are considered to be important for EFL teaching and learning. Consequently, there has been increasing demand for EFL teacher education to prepare teachers for ELT reforms.

In Korea, a serious effort to reform ELT started with the issuance of the 6th National Curriculum by the Ministry of Education (ME) in 1992. The 6th National Curriculum announced that the goal of ELT was to develop students' abilities to communicate in English (The Sixth Curriculum Development Committee, 1992). The issuance of the 6th National Curriculum was followed by the reform-related proposals of the Presidential Commission on Education Reform (PCER), which was established in 1994. One of the items on the PCER's reform agenda was to strengthen English language training for in-service teachers (Park, 2001). More recently, in 2006, an "English Language Education Reform Plan" was pronounced. Among the policies and measures proposed by the reform plan was a measure to further strengthen and diversify intensive training programmes for in-service teachers. The 2006 reform plan announced that, starting in 2007, the ME would begin to provide 6-month intensive training to 1,000 teachers each year, so that the cumulative number of reeducated Korean EFL teachers would reach 10,000 by the year 2015. The ultimate goal of the reinforcement of English language training for in-service teachers was "to enhance their English abilities enough for them to teach English in English" (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 9).

Another measure taken by the ME in its reform efforts was to encourage EFL teacher education programmes to revise their curricula so that they could better prepare prospective teachers for communication-oriented teaching. The ME asked EFL teacher education programmes to provide prospective teachers with more classes related to oral and practical English. An underlying assumption of these two measures (i.e., the provision of various in-service teacher education programmes and the encouragement of revision of pre-service teacher education programmes) is that pre- and in-service EFL teacher education programmes can make a significant impact upon EFL teachers' classroom teaching. In this sense, it is important to investigate the extent to which Korean EFL teacher education programmes influence Korean EFL teachers' classroom practices.

Freeman (2009) suggested three dimensions of second language (L2) teacher education: "substance, engagement, and influence" (p. 15). Among the three, the influence dimension, which refers to the influence of a particular L2 teacher education programme on pre- and in-service teachers, has been drawing considerable research attention. In Korea, too, researchers have begun to recognise that teachers are central to understanding and improving ELT (e.g., Ahn, 2009; Lee, 2006). However, only a few studies have examined the influence dimension of Korean EFL teacher education from the Korean EFL teacher's perspective. The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of EFL teacher education programmes on EFL teachers' ongoing professional work in Korea.

Duffy (1987) described qualitative research as “a vehicle for studying the empirical world from the perspective of the subject, not the researcher” (p. 130). Therefore, this study employs qualitative data collection and analysis methods and examines, from teachers’ own perspectives, the extent to which EFL teacher education programmes influence EFL teachers’ classroom teaching practices. To be more specific, the study attempts to answer the following research question:

- How do Korean EFL teachers perceive the impact of the EFL teacher education programs they have attended on their current teaching practices and other aspects of their professional development?

It must be noted here that, in this study, teacher education refers to both pre- and in-service teacher education. In addition, a pre-service education here means a 4-year bachelor’s degree programme in English education.

Literature review

Researchers have been paying much attention to the influence dimension of ESL/EFL teacher education in different contexts (Freeman & Graves, 2004). These researchers have come to recognise that ESL/EFL teachers are central to understanding and improving ESL/EFL education. They have also realised that teachers’ own beliefs act as starting points for learning to teach. In other words, they have realised that prospective teachers enter ESL/EFL teacher education programmes with previously established beliefs about teaching and learning and that these beliefs form a filter through which they perceive, process, and put into practice information presented to them in the programmes. It can therefore be considered that in order to set up more effective ESL/EFL teacher education programmes, we need to understand ESL/EFL teacher’s beliefs more fully.

Consequently, a number of studies have examined the role of teacher education in changing teachers’ beliefs. They have produced mixed results. Some studies presented evidence for the positive role of ESL/EFL teacher education in changing teachers’ beliefs (e.g., Barahona, 2014; Borg, 2011; Burgess, Turvey, & Quarshie, 2000; Busch, 2010). For example, Busch (2010) investigated the effects of an introductory second language acquisition (SLA) course on the beliefs of 381 pre-service teachers enrolled at a state university in the US. Employing a pre-course survey and an analysis of post-course explanations made by the participants, Busch found that the SLA course content, together with their actual experience of tutoring an ESL student, had brought substantial changes to their beliefs about L2 teaching and learning. Her conclusion was that pre-service teachers’ beliefs evolve within the context of teacher education courses. To give another example, Borg (2011) employed a semi-structured interview method to examine the impact of an intensive 8-week in-service teacher education programme in England on the beliefs of six English language teachers. In this qualitative, longitudinal study, Borg found that the programme had a significant impact on the teachers’ beliefs.

Other studies have argued that ESL/EFL teacher education programmes have little or no impact on teachers (e.g., Peacock, 2001; Poynor, 2005). These studies have found that some beliefs prospective teachers bring to their teacher education programme are so strongly developed that they rarely change, forming obstacles in their

learning to teach and other forms of professional development. Peacock (2001), for example, tracked changes in 146 prospective EFL teachers' beliefs towards EFL learning from their first to third years of an EFL teacher education programme and found no significant changes. His conclusion was that teachers' beliefs were resistant to any external influence.

Research on Korean EFL teacher education has typically focused on what Freeman (2009) termed "substance" of (EFL) teacher education (e.g., Jo, 2008; Kim, 2003). For example, Kim (2003) analysed the curricula of five primary school EFL teacher education programmes and suggested that EFL teacher education programmes in Korea should provide prospective teachers with more courses related to English language and culture. Recently, research has begun to focus on the influence dimension of Korean EFL teacher education. Several studies have examined Korean EFL teachers' perceptions of the impact of pre-service EFL teacher education programmes on their teaching practices. For example, Chang, Jung, and Choi (2008) used a questionnaire in order to survey 48 professors and 426 students from English education department of 17 universities in Korea. To take another example, Yoon et al. (2007) investigated the state of primary English education as a second major at 11 national universities of education and then used a questionnaire to survey 48 professors and 363 students of the 11 national universities of education, and 382 elementary school teachers. These two studies found that the majority of the participants perceived that English teacher education programmes that they had attended were not appropriately designed to train prospective teachers into well-prepared, well-qualified in-service teachers. The two studies also found that the student participants thought that teacher education programmes needed to offer more practical courses that they could easily employ in classroom teaching, such as English-skills-related, teaching-methods-related, material-development-related courses and longer practicum.

Some other studies have focused on training programmes for in-service EFL teachers (e.g., Kim, 2008; Lee, 2006). For example, Lee (2006) investigated the influence of in-service EFL teacher training programmes upon teachers' instructional behaviours and attitudes via a survey of 122 in-service teachers, interviews with four additional in-service teachers who had attended various types of intensive training programmes, and the analysis of the four interviewees' reflective journals. What Lee found included that although in-service teacher training programmes had brought change to the teachers' behaviour and attitudes, such change was short-lived, and one of the factors impeding the change was the washback effect of the Korea Scholastic Aptitude Test (KSAT). This finding provides evidence that Freeman's (2004) observation is relevant: discussions of the long-term influences of EFL teacher education programmes are often compounded by the variety in contexts of application, including test, class size, availability of materials, etc.

This review of the studies on Korean EFL teacher education indicates that researchers have rarely focused on how Korean EFL teachers perceive the influence of EFL teacher education programmes on their classroom teaching. An underlying assumption of the current study is that much more research on the influence dimension of EFL teacher education in Korea must be done. Such research is important because it will point to a direction that Korean EFL teacher education may have to take in the concerted efforts to improve ELT in Korea.

Method

Participants

Six in-service Korean EFL teachers participated in interviews. The recruitment of the participants was extremely difficult. Most of the teachers the researchers met at schools or re-training programmes declined request for participation. They were uncomfortable with the idea that their thoughts and comments would be made public. They also thought that spending a substantial amount of time on interviews would be too much for their busy lives. As a result, the researchers were forced to turn to personal networks. The researchers asked around and contacted promising candidates. In the process of recruitment, the researchers made it clear that participation should be on a voluntary basis (ethical issues will be discussed more later in the ethical issues section). The researchers initially succeeded in recruiting seven participants, six females and one male. They then decided to take three factors into consideration: teaching level, age, and gender. Two female candidates were in their late 50s and teaching at elementary schools. The researchers decided to drop these two female candidates and, instead, to try to recruit one more male participant teaching at a secondary school in order to increase the male participation ratio and focus on secondary school teachers. The attempt was successful.

Of the six participants, four were female, and two were male. Their age ranged from 27 to 40, with an average age of 33.3. Three of the participants were teaching at middle schools, and three, at high schools. Their years of teaching English varied from 2 to 8 years, with the mean number of years spent teaching being 5.3. Four of the six participants received MA degrees in English Education, and the remaining two received BA degrees in English Education.

All of the six participants had attended various programmes for in-service EFL teachers. The ME has been offering seminars, English programmes, and other forms of meetings for in-service teachers. English programmes include two types of programmes: general English programmes and intensive English programmes. General English programmes include English language instructional methods and conversational English classes, whereas intensive English programmes focus more on spoken communication skills. Intensive English programmes are offered either domestically or abroad. Short-term overseas intensive English programmes are selectively offered to EFL teachers based on their teaching experiences and English proficiency. The overseas intensive English programmes vary from 4 weeks to 6 months in duration and take place in the US, Canada, Australia, or England. Some of these programmes were mandatory.

This study's participants had attended various general and intensive programmes designed to inform attendants of the ME-initiated reforms, to increase English proficiency, or to improve teaching skills. Only one participant, Namsoo, had attended an overseas intensive English programme for 4 months. [Table 1](#) summarises the background information of the six participants.

Data collection method and procedure

A semi-structured interview method was employed in this study. This type of interview is flexible, allowing the interviewer the freedom to bring up new questions as a result of what

Table 1. Background information of six interviewees.

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender/age	Highest degree	Teaching level/years of experience
Gyunghee	Female/39	MA in English Ed.	High school/8
Namsoo	Male/30	MA in English Ed.	High school/4
Dahee	Female/33	MA in English Ed.	High school/6
Sohee	Female/40	MA in English Ed.	Middle school/7
Youngsoo	Male/27	BA in English Ed.	Middle school/2
Jinhee	Female/31	BA in English Ed.	Middle school/5

the interviewee says, or to ask the interviewee to elaborate on a response (Kvale, 1996). The participants were interviewed three times, with each interview lasting 60 to 90 minutes. The first interview aimed to establish an appropriate level of rapport with the participants, to complete the “informed consent” procedure, and to establish a profile of each participant’s educational background and teaching experience. The second interview was conducted a week after the first interview. This interview centred around three pre-planned questions: a) the participants’ experiences of the pre-service EFL teacher education programmes that they had attended, b) their experiences of in-service teacher training programmes that they had attended, and c) the relationship between these two kinds of experiences and their teaching practices. In addition, follow-up questions were asked depending on individual responses. The final interview was made a month after the second interview. During the interval, the participants were sent transcriptions of the first two interviews for verification and follow-up clarification. The final interview was largely intended to ask whether there was any part of the interviews that they would prefer not to be made public, to check whether the participants had any topic or issue they wanted to discuss further, and to express our gratitude. None of them made any particular request with regard to the transcriptions.

To help ensure that all participants could express their ideas and feelings as fully as possible, interviews were conducted in Korean, the first language shared by the researcher of this study and the participants. All interviews took place in quiet coffee shops. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Korean.

Ethical issues

In the course of research, the researchers followed the ethical guidelines suggested by Georgia State University’s Institutional Review Board to protect the rights of the participants. In particular, the researchers kept in mind two issues: informed consent and confidentiality. First of all, the researchers explained the participants the purposes of the research, the risk involved in their participation, and the use and security of their data. The researchers also informed them that they participate on the voluntary basis and could withdraw from the research for any reason, at any time, and at no disadvantage. The researchers then asked them to sign the informed consent form. As for confidentiality, the researchers deidentified the data by using pseudonyms for the participants’ names. The researchers also assured the participants that any information would not be used if they did not want.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the data collected from the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data” (p. 79). Braun and Clarke provided a guideline for thematic analysis, which consists of six phases: a) familiarising with data, b) generating initial codes, c) searching for themes, d) reviewing themes, e) defining and naming themes, and g) producing the report (p. 88). This six-phase framework was followed in the analysis of the interview data.

The promotion of descriptive validity through the decrease of researcher bias is one of the major concerns in a thematic analysis (Johnson, 1997). In order to address the researcher bias problem, a Korean EFL researcher was invited to assist the first researcher of the article in coding the interview data. This collaborator had previously earned a master’s degree in TESOL in the US and a doctoral degree in English Language Education in Korea. She was familiar with procedures of thematic analysis. She was asked to code the transcriptions of the first six interviews. As for the inter-coder reliability, the collaborator and the first researcher agreed with each other for over 80% of the shared coding data. Whenever there were disagreements, they reviewed the parts in question and resolved our disagreements.

In the actual analysis, the first researcher read transcripts repeatedly and highlighted in colour the parts that appeared to be relevant. The researcher coded each part manually and identified recurrent codes. The researcher then went through the codes and identified recurrent patterns. Finally, identified patterns were presented and discussed. During this process, quotations were made from the highlighted parts, and the two researchers of the article translated the quoted parts into English. They tried to retain as much of the flavour and intention of what the interviewees said as possible, rather than attempting a literal translation.

Results

Four recurrent patterns or themes were identified from the data collected through interviews: a) the limited impact of pre-service EFL teacher education programmes, b) the significant influence of in-service EFL teacher education programmes, c) the strongest impact of observing other teachers’ teaching, and d) the factors that nullified the impact of EFL teacher education programmes.

The limited impact of pre-service EFL teacher education programmes

The teacher participants’ recollections of their experiences in their pre-service teacher education programmes indicated a certain influence of the programmes upon their teaching. When they were asked to recall the courses that they had taken in their pre-service teacher education programmes, they remembered various courses. Dahee recollected an elective course titled “Story Telling,” in which she learned how to apply story telling methods to classroom teaching (2nd interview). Most of the participants remembered a course called “Classroom English,” in which they learned practical methods and skills for EFL classroom teaching. The general consensus was that these two courses

were particularly helpful for their current classroom teaching. Other courses recalled by the participants included phonology, phonetics, syntax, grammar, English conversation, practical English, writing, reading, theories, and practices in English teaching, and material development.

Namsoo stated: "Although what I learned at the teacher education programme was largely theory-oriented, its influence upon my teaching has been considerable" (1st interview). This statement seems to indicate that, to a certain extent, pre-service EFL teacher education programmes had influenced the participants' teaching practices. Nevertheless, all participants (including Namsoo) expressed disappointment that theories and methods they had learned in pre-service teacher education programmes were usually divorced from classroom teaching realities and thus of little practical use. Youngsoo described his disappointment:

I was really disappointed. I expected the teacher education program to be the kind of environment where I could learn practical methods I needed to know to become a good English teacher. However, the curriculum consisted largely of theory-oriented courses. (1st interview)

Sohee went a step further in her description of her disappointment:

What we learned in the "teaching methods" course wasn't practical. We just learned theories. The professor emphasized learner-centeredness, communication-oriented approaches, and whatnot. But even the professor's teaching style was against what he lectured. It was a teacher-centered, long rambling about grand teaching theories and supposedly effective methods based on the theories. He should have shown us how we could apply what he was talking about to our actual classroom teaching. (2nd interview)

The significant influence of in-service EFL teacher education programmes

The participants revealed generally positive perceptions of in-service teacher education programmes. As discussed earlier, the participants had attended various seminars and other forms of meetings held to inform attendants of the ME-initiated reforms, including the Teaching English in English (TEE) policy, the English immersion education policy, the differential instruction policy, to name only a few. The participants had also attended various programmes designed to improve their English proficiency or teaching skills.

Most of the participants showed positive responses to their experience with the in-service EFL teacher education programmes that they had attended. Gyunghee's recollection of a 1-month-long in-service teacher training programme she had attended a few years ago was representative: "The program I attended changed me a lot. It taught me what I hadn't known yet, with regard to teaching methods" (3rd interview). Some of the positive respondents stated that they tried to use some of the ideas, methods, and activities they had learned in the in-service teacher education programmes or tried to change their teaching goals towards the directions of which they were informed of in the programmes. Dahee reported that she got "updated information about new teaching methods, skills, and activities" that she could easily apply to her classes by attending in-service teacher education programmes (2nd interview). Sohee remembered that the activities she had learned at the in-service teacher education programmes always stimulated her to try them in her classes (2nd interview). Namsoo admitted that,

whenever he attended an in-service teacher education programme, he became “uncomfortable with the way” he taught and, thus, often tried some of the methods and activities he had learned at the programme (2nd interview). Jinhee, who attended at least six programmes of various length and nature, was specific about the influence of in-service teacher training programmes on his teaching practices: “I changed a lot after I had attended several of the programs for in-service teachers. They made me think deeply about the purposes and effects of certain activities I did” (2nd interview). In short, participants agreed that in-service teacher education programmes that offered easily applicable teaching methods or that were designed to enhance their spoken English proficiency were very helpful and useful.

The strongest impact of observing other teachers’ teaching

Participants reported that they had opportunities to observe other teachers’ teaching and such experiences had a strong influence on their own teaching practices. Namsoo reported: “I learned a lot by observing the teaching demonstrated by other teachers in the in-service teacher training programs that I attended” (1st interview), while Jinhee argued: “Observation of other teachers’ teaching give an opportunity to gain practical information and to reflect upon my own teaching practices” (1st interview). Youngsoo described how helpful an in-service teacher education programme he attended was to her preparation for TEE:

Last year I attended an in-service teacher education program designed to prepare us for TEE. That was very helpful. A native English-speaking instructor presented a model class. We also observed a class conducted in English by one of us. We learned a lot from this training. (2nd interview)

Dahee repeatedly emphasised the usefulness of observing other teachers’ classroom teaching: “We can learn a lot by observing other teacher’s regular classes. I always want to observe other teachers’ teaching on a regular basis. We need to set up a system for that purpose” (2nd interview). Thus, the participants perceived the experience of observing other teachers’ teaching to have been the strongest impact upon their own teaching practices.

Factors that nullified the impact of EFL teacher education programmes

It can be said that various in-service teacher education programmes that the participants had attended had a significant impact on their teaching. However, most of the participants qualified their positive statements by referring to the educational realities that often neutralised their attempts to try the ideas, methods, or activities they learned from training programmes. A typical statement came from Namsoo. He explained: “I tried to use the methods I had learned at the in-service teacher program, but the realities of the educational environment force me to teach as usual” (3rd interview).

Two factors were frequently cited by the participants as neutralising the impact of in-service teacher education programmes: (real or perceived) low English proficiency of the participants themselves and the washback effect of tests and the KSAT in particular. Most of the participants perceived that their English proficiency, particularly speaking proficiency,

was not high enough to conduct classes as they had learned in EFL teacher education programmes. For example, they attended programmes designed to prepare in-service teachers for TEE. However, they reported that their own low English speaking proficiency or lack of confidence in their own English speaking proficiency made them reluctant to conduct English classes exclusively in English, although they were well aware of the benefits of TEE for increasing students' English proficiency in the input-limited context of Korea. Gyunghee admitted that she was not comfortable with the TEE policy because she was afraid that she might not be able to "explain some complex grammatical features fully and effectively in English" (3rd interview). Sohee argued that the TEE policy did not consider the situation that her English (speaking) proficiency was not high enough to conduct English classes exclusively in English: "If TEE is necessary, it must come with intensive English training for us. Forcing us to teach English in English is just unfair" (3rd interview).

As Sohee's statement implied, most of the participants wanted to attend programmes specifically designed to show them how to improve their English speaking proficiency as well as what methods could be employed in communication-oriented classroom teaching. Jinhee wanted to have more programmes "designed to improve teachers' ability to speak English" (3rd interview). Similarly, Youngsoo emphasised the necessity to have more training programmes designed to increase teachers' English proficiency: "I want to see more practical programs that provide us with methods that we can apply in class or increase our ability to speak English" (3rd interview). Accordingly, participants were disappointed that some in-service teacher education programmes they had attended were theory-oriented and, thus, impractical. Gyunghee stated: "Intensive training programs should offer more practical training on teaching methods and spoken English, not on theories" (2nd interview).

Another impeding factor that was frequently cited was the washback effect of grammar-and-reading-based tests in general, and the KSAT in specific. Youngsoo reported his failed attempts:

I wanted to have communication-oriented English classes. However, after several attempts, I realized that I had to teach more grammar and reading than speaking. Students wanted to get high scores on grammar-and-reading-based tests. Therefore, to them, what I tried to do in the classroom was irrelevant. (3rd interview)

The KSAT exerts a particularly strong influence on the way English is taught in high schools, where English language education virtually centres on preparing students for the national exam. Teachers, under pressure to ensure that students do well on the national exam, spend considerable time teaching test-taking skills and drilling students on test items of a similar nature and format to those of the KSAT. Gyunghee's experience underlines the influence of the KSAT on ELT in Korea:

In a class, I tried some of the activities I learned from a training program. Few students paid attention to the activities. They were reluctant to participate in the activities. It was as if they were asking me what the hell I was doing.... The KSAT exerts a great influence on classroom teaching and learning. I have no choice but to teach to the test. (2nd interview)

Because of the washback effect of the KSAT, some of the participants' classroom teaching had little room for the methods, skills, and activities that they had learned in various in-service EFL teacher education programmes.

Discussion

The patterns and other related issues identified in the interview data can be summarised into the following four major findings. First, the participants' perceptions of pre-service EFL teacher education programmes were generally negative. Most of the participants stated that the pre-service EFL teacher education programmes they attended had had limited influence on their teaching practices. The main reason for such negative perceptions was the perceived gap between what was taught in the EFL teacher education programmes they attended and what was demanded in their teaching. This finding is in itself nothing new. For example, the finding is consistent with Chang et al. (2008) finding in regard to secondary EFL teacher education programmes and Kim's (2010) conclusion in her review of studies on EFL teacher education in Korea.

Second, most of the participants stated that a major source of influence on their teaching was their experience of in-service teacher training programmes with practical curricula. They stated that the experience helped improve their English proficiency and/or increase their confidence in their English proficiency. More importantly, the experience made them try new teaching methods. This finding is not consistent with the findings of Lee (2006) or Kim (2008), who found no influence of in-service EFL teacher education programmes on teachers' teaching practices.

Third, the participants noted that observation of other fellow teachers' teaching had the strongest impact upon their classroom teaching. This finding relates to the form of observational learning that is termed as "peer observation" by Hendry, Bell, and Thomson (2014). Hendry et al. defined it as "the process of [a teacher] watching another colleague's teaching *without* necessarily judging their practices or being required to give feedback" (p. 318; emphasis is theirs). Peer observation is thus distinct from the form of observational learning which is commonly provided as observation practicum in teacher education. This traditional form of observational learning is carefully planned, monitored, and assessed, and aims at providing feedback. Peer observation is relatively free from these traits. Benefits of peer-observation have recently drawn attention (e.g., Hendry et al., 2014; Hendry & Oliver, 2012). However, this type of observational learning has not been referred to in any of the available studies on Korean EFL teacher education.

Fourth, the changes brought about by EFL teacher education programmes were generally short-lived. Two factors that caused this short-lived influence were the participants' (real or perceived) low English proficiency and the washback effect of the KSAT. Participants frequently cited these two factors as constraints on the maintenance of changes brought to them through their experiences of EFL teacher education programmes. This finding is also consistent with some of the constraints identified by previous studies (e.g., Li, 1998).

Conclusion

Any research enterprise is inevitably limited by constraints such as time, participant recruitment, and resources. This study is no exception. A possible limitation of the study is related to the difficulty of recruiting the six participants, which has been described in the participants section. The six participants as a group can be described as better

trained and better qualified than average Korean EFL teachers. Four of the six participants had MA degrees. Although the exact percentage of Korean EFL teachers who have MA degrees remains unknown, the ratio of four out of six certainly seems high. This and other characteristics of the participants (e.g., gender) could have skewed the results.

Having said that, the findings have several implications for EFL teacher education in Korea. Of the findings, two are particularly significant: in-service teacher education programmes with practical curricula and observation of fellow teachers' teaching. These two turned out to exert considerable influence on the participants' classroom teaching.

First of all, the ME must pay heed to the findings. As discussed in the introduction part, the ME has been providing a variety of in-service teacher education programmes, including short- and long-term intensive English programmes abroad. It now needs to further strengthen those programmes and, at the same time, to provide more programmes which are more finely tuned to Korean EFL teachers' needs and expectations. More importantly, the ME must find ways to monitor Korean EFL teachers' needs and expectations and reflect them into the policy-making process. One way to do this is to establish standing committees on "EFL teachers' voices" at local offices of education. The committee would consist of EFL specialists, ME officials, and a focus group of teachers. Its major function would be to meet teachers and collect their voices widely and systematically on a regular basis.

In addition, the ME needs to find an effective way of incorporating in-service EFL teachers' continuing professional development as an integral part of its efforts to prepare more qualified EFL teachers. In particular, the ME must find systematic ways to provide in-service teachers with more opportunities to observe on a regular basis other teachers in action. These observation opportunities must not carry any pressure to provide evaluation or feedback. As Hendry et al. (2014) recommend, teachers must be allowed to just immerse themselves in their fellow teachers' teaching situation. Incidentally, the strong impact of the observation of fellow teachers' teaching indicates a possible area of future research: how and to what extent would Korean EFL teachers' classroom teaching be influenced by the observation of fellow teachers' teaching? It would also be interesting to compare the impact of observing native speakers of English in Korea and that of observing Korean teacher peers.

Second, EFL teacher education must attend to the fact that in-service teacher education programmes with practical curricular were perceived to have stronger influence on the participants' teaching than theory-oriented pre-service teacher education programmes. What this means is that pre-service teacher education programmes should offer more courses that reflect the needs of EFL teachers and the demands of the ME-initiated reform. To be more specific, they need to provide more practical courses that aim to increase EFL teachers' individual English proficiency and to expose them to methods that can be easily applied to the teaching of the four English skill sets. Teacher education programmes also need to be concerned with effective ways of improving prospective teachers' English proficiency in the input limited EFL context of Korea. At the same time, teacher education programmes should offer pre-service teachers more opportunities to integrate what they learn with how they teach in the classroom. This is what Shulman (1987) and Freeman and Johnson (1998) emphasised with the concept of pedagogical content knowledge. For this purpose, for example, pre-

service programmes must attempt to interconnect courses designed to increase teachers' English proficiency with courses dealing with teaching theories and methods.

Third, the pressure of testing has been documented and commonly cited as a major detriment to reform efforts (e.g., Hiramatsu, 2005; Li, 1998). According to Shohamy (2005), teachers are often forced to "teach to the test" (107). This "teaching to the test" explains partially why the influence of Korean EFL teacher education programmes was short-lived. Therefore, in order to have a long-term influence on teachers, EFL teacher education, together with the ME, must work for a fundamental change of current testing systems.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, Korean EFL teacher education programmes must engage in the development of theories and methods that are more suitable for ELT in the Korean EFL context. There have been ongoing discussions of the necessity to develop EFL theories and methods that more reasonably reflect local needs and realities (e.g., Hu, 2005; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). Barkhuizen (2008) highlighted the significance of a context-sensitive approach to language teaching. A simplistic adoption of theories developed in non-EFL contexts and methods based on such theories may not be appropriate for EFL teaching and learning in an EFL context. It would be better to develop theories and methods which take into consideration the ELT realities in Korea. What is important is that such discussions must be based upon a more in-depth understanding of Korean EFL teachers' struggles with realities of ELT in Korea.

Disclosure statement

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