Investigating the Difficulties Faced by Iraqi EFL Students Teachers in the Practicum Teaching Phase

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Abstract--- *The necessity for more and well qualified teachers of English in Iraq is greater than ever before, due to the fact that without English proficiency, professionals in mostly all sectors of community are blocked from career advancement and self-development. Accordingly all difficulties and obstacles that are likely to hinder the promotion of skilled language teacher preparation should be carefully investigated and then treated and terminated. In agreement with the idea that language teaching profession like all of education, is faced with accountability issues that call for improved teacher preparation as a means of improving students language learning, the present paper investigates and classifies the different problems faced by EFL student teachers during practicum which aiming at calling attention to these difficulties and their negative impact on EFL teacher preparation, which in turn affects EFL learning all over Iraq. The population of the study consists of student teachers at the Iraqi Colleges of Education / Departments of English during their field of experience at schools, while the sample includes student teachers at the College of Education University of Babylon/ Department of English during the academic year 2016 – 2017. They were (128) student teachers practicing their practicum teaching at different intermediate and secondary schools in Babylon. The results of the study proved that student teachers at the departments of English of the colleges of education in general do face real problems that are related to different categories. And that these problems affect the teaching performance of student teachers during practicum. In light of the study findings, a set of remedial recommendations are presented.*

Keywords--- *Self-development, Career Advancement, EFL Student Teachers.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Problem and its Significance

In most of the teacher preparation programmes, student teachers spend a period of time practicing teaching in real situation (schools) under the supervision of university instructors and cooperating teachers from the schools they practise teaching in.

There is an agreement among educators regarding the important role of this period of practicum teaching in the teacher preparation programmes to help student teachers develop a set of teaching skills that are likely to enable them to be successful teachers.

However, very little is known about the problems and difficulties faced by student teachers during this significant phase of their career training (Embeier, 2003: 122) Alfonso (1990: 186) points out that the lack of research on such problems contributed to weak preparation programmes.

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Regarding Iraq, practicum teaching is an essential component of EFL teacher preparation programmes. Still, little information is available on practicum problems. Moreover, there is a real need in the field for a body of knowledge on what difficulties student teachers encounter, how they should be classified and overcome, and how these difficulties affect EFL student teachers' performance in real teaching. Such knowledge is likely to help Iraqi EFL teacher trainers and educators eliminate, or at least, reduce the negative effects of these difficulties such as administrational, linguistic and pedagogical difficulties.

Aims of the Study

The present paper aims at:

1. Identifying the difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL student teachers during their application period at school.
2. Analysing these difficulties according to the results and recommendations the researcher got.

Limits of the Study

The present study is limited to investigating the difficulties faced by fourth year student teachers at the department of English/ college of education/ University of Babylon in practicum teaching during the academic year 2015-2016.

Definition of Basic Terms

Difficulties is a term that refers to the obstacles that prevent achieving certain objectives of practicum teaching.

Student teachers are the fourth year students at the departments of English/ colleges of education in Iraq.

Practicum is the period of practising real teaching at the intermediate and secondary schools by student teachers.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Preparation; is it education, development, or training?

The concept of teacher preparation in general and EFL teacher preparation in particular has been a subject for a great deal of change in the twentieth century. This change is quite obvious in both the theoretical principles and the practical application of these principles in foreign language teacher preparation.

Mohanraj (2006: 7) discusses the change suggesting that it can be noticed in the following three thoughts though may seem synonymous, distinct phases.

- Teacher training, an expression basically related to the behaviorist and philosophy in which the focus is primarily on promoting the teaching skills.
- Teacher education, a term appeared in the cognitive school literature as a reaction to the behaviorist model in which knowledge is greatly stressed as the basic part of training in this model competence is preferred to performance.
- Teacher development is an applied science model in which focus is basically on developing proper attitudes towards language teaching. This model takes into account both skills and knowledge.

Wisddowson (1983: 19) tries to explain the distinction between training and education in teacher preparation context , sees that the difference can be obviously understood from the everyday meaning of the two terms. So that to train is to install habits or skills, accordingly "training seeks to impose conformity to certain established patterns of knowledge and behaviour, usually to carry out a set of clearly defined tasks". Education, on the other hand, is the situation in which somebody guided towards moral and intellectual excellence. It, then," seeks to provide for creativity whereby what is learned is a set of schema and procedures for adapting them to cope with problems which do not have a ready-made formulaic solution".

Kennedy (1993: 162) suggests a distinction between training and development in which he refers to the first as a view of teaching as a set of skills that have pre- specified finite elements that are learnable. Teacher development in this distinction focuses much more on the individual language teacher as s/he develops his / her own theory through personal, reflection, examination and intelligent analysis.

Another distinction is made between teacher training and teacher development by Barbara Wright (cited in Matheson 1997:16) in which both of them are put under the umbrella of teacher education. She suggests that "for the new, pre-service teacher education may take the form of teacher training, and for the experienced (post - service) one, it will be teacher development". However, this classification goes with that of Richards et al. (1992: 374) in which education is defined as the field of study that deals with the preparation and professional development of teachers within which a distinction is made between teacher training and teacher development.

It can be concluded, then, that the term teacher training is more related to the pre- service context of teacher preparation, while teacher development is more accurately used in the in- service context. And that both are two phases of education through which student teachers should achieve acceptable levels in a set of professional abilities. Still, the three terms are usually interchangeably used.

What to Stress; Training or Developing

Gabrielators (2001:37) states that the shift from focusing on method to teacher is correspondingly accompanied by the significant shift from emphasizing training to developing. One positive result of this shift is the new view of language teachers as life-long learners, researchers, and methodologists. Unfortunately, another result of the same shift is the view that emphasizes development(in-service training over initial (pre-service) training. This over-emphasis on teacher development is unreasonably justified. According to this view, the current system of foreign language teacher preparation is, to certain extent, deficient, so the least that can be done is to minimize, as much as possible, the shortcomings by focusing on the vital role of ongoing teacher development and helping those teachers lucking the requisite knowledge and skills to acquire them after they have been appointed as English language teachers (Gabrielatos, 2002:56).

However, this view seems to disregard, and ultimately draws attention from, the need to acquire a minimum acceptable level of knowledge and skills before one is accepted in the ELT community. The effects of graduating and employing incompetent foreign language teachers are deviating, not only on the educational character which immediately affects society as a whole, but also on the budget of education. Attempts to develop the professional competence of unskilled teachers are usually expensive as well as ineffective (Cross, 1995: 38). This is obviously

under stood when considering that, in order to be trained and ultimately developed, in-service teachers have to be free from work on full payment. And since they are at schools, training has to be done on costly one –to-one basis or at least in small groups, rather than the more effective, intensive situation available in the educational faculties in which large homogeneous groups are usually trained. Accordingly, emphasizing pre-service mode of language teacher preparation is likely to save a great deal of effort, time, and money that would be spent in the in – service mode (development)

Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that language teachers, like all other teacher, are fully responsible for both the subject matter and the pedagogical procedures used for teaching it, and they are also responsible, at least partly, for the outcomes of this process. So language learners are not concerned with what professional competence their teachers will have within few years; they are primarily concerned with what they have now (Gabrielatos, 2002:56).

Practicum in Teacher Preparation Programmes

Mostly all of EFL teacher preparation programs try to meet two main aims, firstly to enable student teachers achieve a competent level of mastery over language skills and provide intellectual stimulation outside the professional area of ELF methodology, pedagogical skills, classroom management and career development materials and resources (Okita, 1996: 20). Practicum is usually one of the courses that are designed and included in the preparation programs to help achieving to second aim.

At the Iraqi Colleges of Education, which are mostly the only important educational faculties that supply teachers to intermediate and secondary schools, the situation is not different. The main aim of the preparation program of the English department of these college is to prepare competent teachers of English. Generally speaking, in this program student teachers are expected to study two main types of course. The first type is intended mainly to develop students language skills to ensure that the graduated teacher's command of English is at least adequate for classroom purposes. Language, linguistics and literature courses are usually the main components of this type. Courses of the second type are related to the general professional training of student that would be teachers of English. These may include course of education, psychology, measurement and evaluation testing curriculum and methods of teaching and practicum.

Practicum, as a course of study, is divided in two main phases:

The Theoretical Phase

This is usually carried out at the college during the first semester of the fourth year. In this phase student teachers are provided with TEFL theoretical and pedagogical knowledge. It may also include lesson observation of experienced language or peers.

The Practical Phase

Student teachers are supposed to join a school to practice teaching for about six weeks during the final semester of their B.A programme .This is to be done under the supervision of one or more of their university instructors along with an experienced teacher from the schools they join.

As far as EFL student teachers are concerned, they have to teach 10-12 hours of English per week at any secondary educational level (1st intermediate – 6th preparatory). The university supervisor is expected to visit each practicing student teacher at least twice. The first visit is usually devoted to instructional purpose, while the second is an evaluative one.

When this period of practice is over, student teachers are supposed to rejoin their colleges to finish having the required academic courses.

Why Practicum?

It is said that more than any other variable-instructional materials, supplies, administration, class size, etc ….-the quality of teaching has the greatest effect upon the quality of education as a whole (Cross, 1995: 35).Therefore, in pre- service teacher preparation programmes, especially those of foreign language teachers practicum or as it sometimes called field experience, forms a core component and occupies a pivotal role in the entire process of language teacher preparation.

Scholars and prominent figures in the area of language teaching preparation usually acknowledge the centrality of field experience (Simpson 2003:207). They see it as a significant testing ground through with the three apparent dichotomies of theory/ practice area, pedagogy and student / teacher can be addressed.

It is a fact that preparing foreign language teachers involves the promotion of both foreign language skills as well as the pedagogical and professional skills. In such a case, It is vital to ensure a balance of theoretical training and clinical experience. Practicum is included in preparation programs as an attempt to ensure this balance.

However, this field should not be viewed as limited to testing or solving immediate problems and helping only development of teaching skills. Practicum may be important in enabling student teachers to enquire and reflect (McIntyre et al., 1996: 172)

Developing and reinforcing reflection and criticism skills may help student teachers experience, appreciate, and cultivate the relationship and interconnectedness of the different elements in the foreign language teacher process. Such skills may help them also comprehend the influences that shape classrooms and operate schools (Graves, 1990: 62).

Swanwick (1990: 101) clarifies the importance of developing reflective skills saying that "the profession as a whole will suffer if critical reflection, self-evaluation and the extension of perspectives beyond a single classroom are not developed".

In foreign language teacher preparation literature, there is increasing evidence that what determines the actual teaching classroom procedures is not the methodological framework itself, but teacher's interpretations of this framework, i.e., teacher's personal methodology (Woods, 1996 : 33).

However, teachers' own interpretations of teaching are created in the real context (classrooms) and the conceptual knowledge (theory) can only be truly meaningful when it is contextualized in classroom practices (Johnson 1996: 49). This process is usually called "sense making" and the practicum is the central and perhaps the sole course that provides real opportunities for sense-making in actual teaching situations.

Another outcome sought from practicum is enabling student teachers to develop a sense of being part of a certain community or profession (EFL teachers). In addition to satisfying student teacher's human need of belonging, it is significant for pre-service teachers in particular to feel supported as they start their career as teachers. This support is likely to come as a result of working with school teachers, discussions and contacts with peers and supervision the university instructors or any other teaching expert (Eltis, 1991: 13).

Practicum may also have appositive effect in shaping the general character of student teachers as it improves their sense of self-awareness. A developing sense of one's strengths and weaknesses, the ability to work cooperatively with other people, and a sense of making change is likely to aid pre- service teachers to understand how to help others to learn. This is also likely to build one's self- confidence which is quite important for student teachers, for "without confidence a lot of competence be a failure" (Mohanrag, 2006: 8). **Stages of Practicum**

Since the principal aim of practicum is to provide hands on experience to student teachers in the art of teaching. It is expected then that this course of study help student teachers;

- Gain an understanding of foreign language learning theories and research and, then, develop a coherent set of beliefs about foreign language teaching,
- Become acquainted with pre lesson tasks,
- Become familiar with the various stages of lesson,
- Use appropriate classroom teaching procedures,
- Manage classroom properly in terms of discipline and time,
- Evaluate learner's achievement objectively,
- Self-evaluate their lesson and make necessary adjustment,
- Analyze items in the textbook and determine why and how they should be presented and
- Reflection, so as to improve, their teaching practice. (Woods, 1996: 33)

To achieve the previous objectives, practicum can be organized in five graded steps:

1. Gaining pedagogical and content knowledge; student teachers from their pedagogical knowledge based on language learning theories and foreign language research standard, and principles.
2. Developing beliefs and attitudes; as they gain theoretical and pedagogical knowledge student teachers develop and revise their own beliefs and philosophies towards foreign language teaching.
3. Determining classroom techniques, according to the beliefs and attitudes they adapt and in light of their teaching philosophies, student teachers determine what classroom teaching and management procedures to use.
4. Practicing reading and teaching; student teachers are given the chance to practice their classroom teaching procedures in real situations (schools).
5. Criticism and self-evaluation; they are given the chance to reflect on, analyze and criticize their teaching practice. And through additional knowledge they are likely to expand and improve their philosophy of teaching and, ultimately classroom procedures (Woods, 1996: 40).
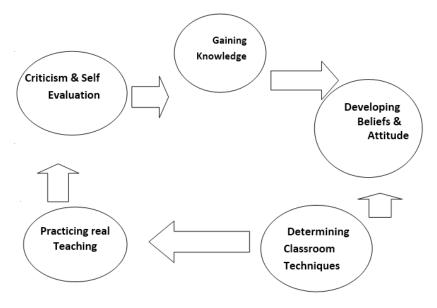
Figure 1: Stage of Practicum

Though all previous stages are significant and integrated, only one (step 4) is obviously observable. It can be regarded as the application and testing ground of the whole process of practicum. Other than the student teacher him/herself, two main variables play a pivotal role in shaping this stage. These are; cooperating school teacher and, supervising college instructor(s).

The Cooperating School Teacher

The key figure in the school supporting system of teacher preparation is the cooperating teacher. In related literature, s/he is sometimes called school supervisor, pedagogic counselor, associate teacher, partner teacher, coach or mentor. S/he operates as a link between the pre-service teacher and his/her future community, and between the educational academic faculty and the school (Thiel, 1999:23).

Language teacher trainers and educators usually view cooperating teachers as having a critical role to play with pre-service teachers in accelerating their professional and attitudinal development (Gliekman & Bey, l990:554). Cooperating teachers are expected to help practicing pre-service teachers take on increasing responsibility for the ordinary teacher's complete load of teaching, though in some cases, inquiry-based ones, the ideal recently emerged picture of cooperating teacher as teacher educator is fragmented.

The potential for addressing the tasks of cooperating teachers in a more coherent and comprehensive manner is provided by many studies. They usually provide much needed discussions on clarifying who the cooperating teachers are, what factors influence their work, and what sense they make of their work with pre-service teachers. In such studies constructing professional development opportunities for cooperating teachers are also discussed.

On the other hand, many studies also prove that "student teachers regard co-operating teachers as the most important element of their teacher preparation" (Clarke, 2001: 255). Accordingly, it is very important to assign certain schools (not any sch00l) for the purpose of practicing teaching, in which skilled, experienced, and willing to cooperate teachers are available.

Theoretically speaking, the role of cooperating teachers as feedback providers is critical and important. Through this feedback, student teachers are supposed to improve their classroom teaching and management skills such as employing appropriate presentation and interaction procedures, establishing and monitoring pair and group work, giving proper classroom commands, keeping records and student profiles, employing peer evaluation, planning and timing a- lesson, maintaining discipline, provoking classroom discussion etc. In practice, the feedback provided by cooperating teachers is often limited in quality and quantity (Pelletier, 2000:68). Unfortunately, this fact seems to be local as well as global.

Finally, one of the basic tasks of a cooperating teacher is to observe. The student teacher in action several times so as to form an evaluative, diagnostic picture of his/her performance. This evaluation is pivotal in the cooperative supposed meeting with the college supervisor(s) in which they have to discuss and agree upon things concerning how to help the student teacher develop his/her teaching skills and get rid of the shortcomings in his/her performance.

The Supervising College Instructor

In related literature practicum supervision, sometimes called 'clinical supervision' is mostly seen as an interaction between supervisor and trainee teacher to discuss and analyze the trainee's teaching with a view to professional development (Wallace, 1991: 18).

Though the importance of instructor supervision is stated in many studies, very little is empirically proved about its effects on student teachers (Embeir, 2003:121). This gap in research, along with continuing disagreement on the definition and purposes of clinical supervision result in weak preparation programmes for instructional supervision.

However, Santoro (1996) suggests that success of this field experience can, frequently, be attributed to the nature of the instructor supervision. Accordingly, any differences in student teachers, experiences and attitudes on practicum may be related to the ways by which their supervising instructor allows them access to professional teaching knowledge and the ways they are encouraged or, sometimes, discouraged in improving their identities as teachers.

The traditional view of the supervising instructor is still predominant, for s/he is authority, expert, and judge. S/he is expected to visit the practicing student teacher at least twice (thought this is often determined by the number of student teachers and available supervisors). The first visit is instructional in nature, in which s/he gives oral and written recommendations to be kept by student teacher to benefit from them in his/her subsequent lessons. The second visit is usually evaluative one in which the supervisor fills an evaluation form of different items classified into certain categories that are related to the overall teaching performance of student teacher such as general appearance, lesson planning, actual, teaching, promoting interaction, using blackboard, using teaching aids, using accurate language .. etc. Each of these components is given certain weight according to its significance. In addition to that, Supervisors "should be good observant in order to offer valid comments and to award fair marks to student teachers' performance.

However, Alfunso (1990: 183) suggests that during the field experience both cooperative teacher and college - instructor supervise the student teacher and are important - to the success of practicum. Their roles, though played differently, are supportive, instructional, and evaluative in supervising instructor and cooperating teacher to integrate their efforts and partner with each other to support and student teacher and help him/her make extensive use of practicum. Yet, "in reality, this is seldom the case" (Dove, 1986:252).

Critique

Although the field of L teacher preparation does not operate within a theoretical vacuum, yet it is a fact that its research framework is less 'developed than that of related fields such as L2 acquisition, applied linguistics.. etc. Most of the principles underpinning the range of procedures used in language teacher preparation have been explored and adapted through different empirical investigation (M1u'phy, 1994: 9).

To compensate the absence of clear well-agreed upon theoretical background, foreign language teacher education may sometimes be informed by more general theories of learning, e.g., Behaviorist, Cognitive, Functionalist ...etc. This is clearly expressed by the unsettling recent suggestions of foreign language teacher educators in which they do"(Candlin, l992:XI). This situation makes Freeman (1989:26) warns that foreign language teacher education has increasingly become "fragmented and unfocused" simply because it lacks "a coherent, commonly accepted foundation". And the fact that EFL teacher education is healthy, vibrant, and scientific does not mean to ignore the evidence that its theoretical underpinnings have to be synthesized within a unifying flame of reference which is the most significant feature of any established discipline. Till then, EFL teacher educators, by keeping a comprehensive range of relevant principles in mind, are in a better situation to comprehend and exploit connections between events taking place within the related setting.

On the practical side, EFL teacher preparation programmes have process. This emphasis on methodology has made EFL instruction more teacher-centered as it concentrates on how the teacher best organizes and produces classroom activities and evaluates his/her students, achievement (Tedick & Walker, 1994: 306). Such a narrow focus enable student teachers to imitate rather than question the practices of their cooperative teachers and peers which in turn leads them to develop either a limited range of teaching strategies or an unreconstructed set of bad habits and worst practices(Lugton,200,0). This model obviously lacks the development of student teachers' ability to critically analyses teaching practices they observe and experience, critically reflect on their practical experiences or mindfully connect these experiences with the theories they have learned earlier.

Moreover, in their field experience, student teachers usually face the difficulty of the disconnection, or how to balance, between theory and practice (Hawkey, l998:337). This is often widened by the lack of unified theoretical framework and/or the disparity between student teachers', perceptions and researcher critiques of practicum. Such a situation is likely to lead practicum to depend on "an outmoded apprenticeship model" (Cooper, l995:593).

However, one of the factors that support this disconnect between theory and practice is related to the timing and scheduling of practicum in the teacher preparation programmes in which field experience is taken place at the end of the programme (usually in the last semester). This scheduling is based on the idea that by the end of their programme, student teachers are likely to be sufficient enough to transform the theoretical knowledge they achieve

into appropriate classroom teaching practices (Ghani, l990:46). Yet this idea overlooks the fact that without ongoing consideration of theory in practical or applied setting, student teachers cannot incorporate their theoretical learning into their teaching practices. Moreover, in programmes of longer duration (like that of the. Iraqi colleges of education), student teachers may forget a lot of the stockpiled theory by the time they arrive at the practicum. This is why, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, practicing student teachers mostly fail. to meet the expectations of their supervisors during practicum. Accordingly, "if teaching practice occurs at the same time that theory is being learned, its relevance may more easily be seen, learned and applied" (Ibid: 46) suggests that. This call is in correspondence with the notion of holistic learning and offers real opportunities for reinforcing student teachers' learning.

Another point of criticism is that in EFL teacher preparation programmes, focus is often on the components of English language, i.e. phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. Such a narrow view ignores the social nature of the target language. In this case, the study of language and language teaching is decontextualized and unrelated to student teachers 'lives, schools, or community (Gonzalez, 2000).

Another criticism, somehow related to the previous one, is student teachers'failure to develop an accepted mastery on language skills. In this case student teachers cannot speak English well enough to be able to teach it appropriately. They are, as suggested by Cross (1995237), "expected to do something that they simply cannot do!" The result of this situation is producing teachers who either try to avoid the use of English much of the time, or use and teach it very badly. However, sending student teachers into the field of teaching without adequate educational knowledge and minimum mastery on language and language teaching skills is contrary to all education principles.

III. PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The population in this study includes all Iraqi fourth year student teachers at the Departments of English / College of Education.

The sample is restricted to the student teachers of the Department of English at the College of Education /University of Babylon. After excluding(5) primary school teachers repeaters and those who do not respond to the questionnaire appropriately .The total number of the sample subjects consists of (128) student teachers.

Description of the Instrument

In order to achieve the aim of the study, a questionnaire has been developed. A questionnaire is one of inquiring from that "includes data gathering instruments through which respondents answer question or respond to statements in writing" (Best, 1981:16).

The questionnaire has been constructed by the researcher drawing on the following source:
1. Related literature, such as books, theses and dissertations.
2. Consulting specialists in the field.
3. Conducting an open questionnaire which has been directed to 128 student teachers at the department of English / College of Education / University of Babylon. They have been asked to state the difficulties they

have been facing during their teaching practice. Then student teachers, responses have been shaped and unified in final form.

Finally, all difficulties have been classified into four areas, namely; linguistic, pedagogical, administrative and attitudinal difficulties (see appendix 1 and table 1).

Table 1: Questionnaire Items Distributed on its Categories

Items	Categories	No. of items
1 – 11	Linguistic difficulties	11
12-26	Pedagogical difficulties	15
27-43	Administrational difficulties	17
44-50	Attitudinal difficulties	7
Total No. of items		50

Face Validity

Validity is the first aspect to be checked when constructing any type of measuring instrument. It refers to the degree to which a tool measures the particular intended aspect. So, face validity is secured if a tool items appear to be measuring what is intended to be measured (Ingram, 1977: 18).

In order to ensure the face validity the questionnaire with its scoring scheme has been exposed to a jury of specialists. The jury consists of number of prominent figures in the fields of language teaching methodology, education and linguistics at the universities of Babylon. Mostly all of them agreed on the relevance of the questionnaire items to the topic and aim of the study.

Pilot Administration of the Questionnaire

A group of 40 student teachers has been randomly selected from the Department of English / College of Education /University of Babylon for the sake of conducting a pilot administration of the questionnaire. This pilot study has been conducted in order to:

- Check the clarity of the instructions.

- Estimate the time allotted for answering the items and

- Compute the reliability of the questionnaire

Consequently, the application of the pilot study, which has been done 28 / 4 / 2017, shows no ambiguity concerning the instructions of the questionnaire the time required for students to work out the questionnaire has been found to range from 50 to 60 minutes so the average length of time needed for responding is 55 minutes.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability is one of the necessary characteristics of the questionnaire, It refers to the consistency of measurement which makes validity possible and indicates the amount of confidence that can be placed in the result achieved by the questionnaire (Oiler, 1979: 4).

In practice, reliability is enhanced by making the questionnaire instruction absolutely clear and making sure that the questionnaire remains consistent (Harmer, 2001: 322).

The method adopted in this study to obtain reliability is the test retest method using person correlation

coefficient formula. So the questionnaire has been administered again to the same pilot sample after two weeks. The statistical manipulation of the date obtained from the two administrations using person correlation coefficient. The questionnaire reliability is acceptable if it is not less than 0.5 (Hedges, 1966: 78).

Final Administration

The main questionnaire has been given after finishing the practicum teaching period, the researcher has administered the questionnaire to the sample of the study on 20 / 5 / 2017 excluding those of the pilot study.

Scoring Scheme

An objective scoring scheme has been adopted the questionnaire items are intended to be answered to five point scale (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never). The marks are assigned as follows:

Always = 4 Often = 3 Sometimes = 2 Rarely = 1, and Never = 0

Statistical Methods

1. Person correction formula is used to calculate the reliability correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores of the pilot study which are scored by me and my colleague Dr. Kareem Nify on two occasions the following formula is used.

2. Percentage is used to find out the percentage of each difficulty.

3. Fisher formula of weighted mean (WM) is used to find out the degree of power of the items.

$$WM = \frac{f1 \times 5 + f2 \times 4 + f3 \times 3 + f4 \times 2 + f5 \times 1}{Total\ F}$$

Where:

f1 = frequency of the first level (always)

f2 = frequency of the second level (often)

f3 = frequency of the third level (sometimes)

f4 = frequency of the fourth level (rarely)

f5 = frequency of the fifth level (never)

F = Total frequency

4 = weighted percentile (WP)

$$WP = \frac{WM}{Total\ score} \times 100$$

Where:

WM = weighted mean

Total score = the highest score in the scale (5)

According to the formula adapted the item that gets a minimum weighted mean (3:00) and minimum weighted percentage (60%) is regarded as a real difficult. Items with less than the above mentioned standards are not regarded difficulties.

Data Analysis, Conclusion, and Recommendations

After the application of the statistical formula on the four parts of the questionnaire sixty four items have been found to be real difficulties and only four items namely 10, 39, 49, 50 have been found to represent no difficulties for student teachers in the sample (see table 2, 3, 4, and 5).

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Linguistic Difficulties

As shown in table 2 eleven items are related to this area ten of which (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11) form real difficulties faced by the study sample. These points have got weighted means of (3.36 – 4.15) and weighted percentiles of (65% - 83%) one item (10) hasn't form a difficulty for it has got weighted mean of 6.91 and a weighted percentile (39.6%) (See table 2 below).

Table 2: Weighted Mean, Weighted Percentile, and Sequences of Items Related to Linguistics Difficulties

Item	Weighted Mean	Weighted Percentile	Rank
1	3.99	79.8%	2
2	3.38	68%	6
3	4.15	83%	1
4	3.45	69%	5
5	3.27	65.4%	9
6	3.26	65.2%	10
7	3.30	66%	8
8	3.36	67.2%	7
9	3.64	72.8%	9
10	3.98	39.6%	Not a dif.
11	3.85	77%	3

Pedagogical Difficulties

Table (3) shows the results of the fifteen items (12 – 26) related to this area all of which have been found to form difficulties for the subject of the study. These items weighted means and weighted percentiles have been found to be ranging from (3.28 – 4.70) and (65.60% - 94%) respectively.

Table 3: Weighted Mean, Weighted Percentile, and Sequences of Items Related to Pedagogical Difficulties

Item	Weighted Mean	Weighted Percentile	Rank
12	4	80%	5
13	3.90	78%	6
14	4.07	81.4%	4
15	4.15	83%	3
16	3.28	65.6%	3
17	4.70	94%	1
18	4.70	94%	1
19	3.32	66.4%	12
20	3.50	70%	10
21	3.55	71%	9
22	3.62	72.4%	8
23	3.28	65.6%	13
24	4.33	86.6%	2
25	3.64	72.8%	7
26	3.49	69.8%	11

Administrational Difficulties

Seventeen items in the questionnaire are related to this area (27-43) according to student teacher's in the sample, sixteen items have been regarded as difficulties with weighted means of (3.65 – 4.89) and weighted percentiles of (61% - 97.8%) on the other hand. One item only (39) in this category has been founded to form no difficulty. It has got a weighted mean and weighted percentile of (2.83) and (56.6%) respectively. (See table 4 below).

Table 4: Weighted Mean, Weighted Percentile, and Sequence of Items Related to Administration Difficulties

Item	*Weighted Mean*	*Weighted Percentile*	*Rank*
27	4.27	85.4%	8
28	4.51	90.2%	5
29	4.14	82.8%	10
30	3.17	63.4%	14
31	4.27	85.4%	8
32	4.82	96.4%	3
33	4.70	94%	4
34	4.30	86%	7
35	4.20	84%	9
36	4.89	97.8%	1
37	3.69	73.8%	12
38	3.91	78.8%	11
39	2.83	56.6%	Not a dif.
40	3.05	61%	15
41	3.65	71.2%	13
42	4.88	97.6%	2
43	4.38	87.6%	6

Attitudinal Difficulties

As shown in table (5), only seven items of the questionnaire are related to this area (44 – 50) out of which five items have been viewed as difficulties by the study sample. These items have got weighted means of (3.008 – 4.20) and weighted percentile of (60.2%-84%). Two items (49 - 52) on the on the other hand, haven't been regarded difficulties. Their weighted means have been founded to be (2.30) and (2.55), while their weighted percentiles have founded to be (46%) and (51%) respectively. (See table 5).

Table 5: Weighted Mean, Weighted Percentile, and Sequence of Items Related to Attitudinal Difficulties

Item	*Weighted Mean*	*Weighted Percentile*	*Rank*
44	3.8	76%	2
45	3.008	60.2%	5
46	3.68	73.6%	3
47	3.20	84%	1
48	3.18	63.6%	4
49	2.30	46%	Not a dif.
50	2.55	54%	Not a dif.

V. CONCLUSION

Student teachers at all the colleges of education / departments of English do encounter real difficulties during practicum. These difficulties can be categorized into four sets; linguistic, pedagogical, administrational and attitudinal. Although the sharpness of difficulties stated in the questionnaire items (see appendix 1) differ from one

student teacher to another, there is a general agreement on some items to be real difficulties (see table 2, 3, 4, 5).

These difficulties are likely to negatively affect pre – service language teacher preparation and result in producing unqualified teachers which in turn affects the quality of the whole educational system in Iraqi.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of investigating the difficulties encountered by EFL pre–service teachers, the researcher presents the following recommendations:

1. A set of clear directions and regulations should be developed that may underlie practicum and clarify the roles of practicing student teachers and college supervisors.

2. A reliable evaluation from should be especially designed to aid college supervisors EFL student teachers teaching performance during practicum.

3. Certain schools with skilled, experienced, and willing teachers should be assigned to practice teaching in due to the important role played by these teachers.

4. A reliable test should be developed as entry requirement to departments of English, colleges of education. This is due to the fact that some of the students are very weak in English so it is impossible to train them to be capable teachers of English.

5. A set of regulations should be developed that may determine the tasks of student teachers and their college instructors after practicum when student teachers rejoin their colleges.

6. Theory and practice of language teaching should be integrated from the beginning of the preparation programme, rather than starting with academic course work and educational theory and moving latter to classroom practice (the predominant situation in Iraq).

7. Pre- service and in- service training should be done correspondently so that in- service training covers and focuses on items missed, or slightly touched, by pre- service training.

8. Due to the rapid and continuous change in ELT methodology including teaching strategies textbook and supplementary materials, teaching aids, classroom management, lesson planning …etc, real cooperation should be insured between personal of the Ministry of Education who are responsible for ELT and teacher trainers and educators at the colleges of education so that efforts for EFL teacher preparation are correspondently collaborated.

9. As an essential and core element in initial EFL teacher preparation programmes, practicum should be given due emphasis in the time table. Supervisors' role, grading scheme, teaching practice timing and duration should all be reconsidered.

10. School teachers who are willing and able to cooperative teachers should be carefully trained so as to be solid part of the preparation programme.

11. Since student teachers at the Iraqi colleges of education face real linguistics difficulties in practicum. Language and linguistics courses, with special reference to pronunciation courses, should be reconsidered and remedial actions should then be taken.

12. Real changes should be done to activate and support the practical side of the preparation programme, for it is not reasonable that in a four- year preparation programme of EFL forms only one semester course!

13. Cooperation of school administrations with college of education in Iraq should be ensured, for one of the well – agreed upon difficulty faced by student teachers is to be accepted by any school to practice teaching in.

14. Due to the unfortunate, very influential fact that the majority of students at the Colleges of Education / Departments of English have no desire to be teachers, the acceptance system at these colleges should be reconsidered and modified so as only those who are willing and able to be teachers are accepted. In addition to that an efficient programme that supports and highlights teaching profession should be developed and applied as part of the preparation programme of these colleges.

15. Student teachers should be aided to have access to website and ELT journals to help them update their knowledge about the process of language teaching and its requirements and to be in touch with their wider society of EFL language teachers.

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Appendix 1

Item	Difficulties	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	Linguistic Difficulties					
1	I need to use expressions inside the classroom that I don't know because I never used them before.	8	8	16	8	10
2	Too difficult to be understood when using English in explaining grammatical rules and constructions.	22	8	13	5	2
3	Too difficult to make students produce some of the English sounds and clusters correctly.	26	8	8	7	1
4	Students inability to use language makes them unmotivated to participate in class activities.	18	10	9	9	4
5	Speaking English all the time costs me time and effort.	15	12	17	2	4
6	It is difficult to use language spontaneously.	16	12	12	6	4
7	Using inappropriate terms due to vocabulary inadequacies.	23	11	12	3	1
8	It is difficult to secure positive interaction inside the class.	18	15	10	2	5
9	I commit errors in grammar and word order.	23	13	9	3	2
10	It is difficult to answer some of the student's questions because I don't know the answer.	2	4	8	20	16
11	I have some pronunciation problems and inappropriate intonation patterns.	25	10	7	3	5
Pedagogical Difficulties						
12	I feel that I am not educationally and professionally qualified enough to be a teacher.	15	12	18	2	3
13	When I finished teaching the target time, I don't know how to check my student's understanding.	23	14	8	3	2
14	Naughty students exhaust most of my time and efforts in class.	25	12	6	4	3
15	Time is never enough to cover all planned activities.	24	17	4	4	1
16	Constructing and administrating a test is very difficult.	11	17	18	3	2
17	Students are extremely weak.	38	5	5	2	0
18	Classes are very large in number.	35	10	5	0	0

19	I don't know when it is better to use the native language.	17	14	9	2	8
20	It is difficult to specify the objective of teaching all the items in the plan.	18	14	8	4	6
21	I am not familiar with the specific content of the textbook.	15	13	7	9	6
22	I cannot utilize motivational techniques.	13	11	12	8	6
23	I cannot establish an environment that provokes productively in the classroom.	13	15	11	7	4
24	I think that there is no harmony between what is given in the college and what is taught in school.	27	7	9	5	2
25	I don't know how to deal with some problems in the class.	15	10	10	0	0
26	I cannot decide the time allotted to each activity.	17	14	11	6	4
Administrational Difficulties						
27	No correspondence is there between my teaching and the way the school teacher teaches. We have different plans and procedures.	34	7	6	2	1
28	The school teacher is not cooperative with me to produce successful lessons.	30	8	7	4	10
29	The school teacher insists on me following his own different way of teaching.	18	17	8	6	1
30	Student awareness of me as a student teacher staying with them only for few weeks makes the unmotivated and sometimes disrespectful.	14	12	18	4	2
31	It is quite difficult to be accepted to practice teaching by any school.	30	10	5	4	1
32	It is very difficult, if not possible, to secure teaching aids.	40	7	3	0	0
33	The school is not qualified enough to practice teaching in.	38	7	3	2	0
34	The school administration is not organized.	21	13	7	6	3
35	School administration tries to make extensive use of me with no attempt to help me develop my teaching skills.	18	11	8		
36	I am not invited to attend staff meetings and other related activities during the practicum period.	39	5	0	4	2
37	I am often asked to substitute the absent teachers.	11	25	9	4	1
38	The school teacher and principal's insist on using physical punishment with students.	24	11	6	7	2
39	The school teacher and principal show no respect to me which harm and embarrassment	13	14	17	4	2
40	No attention is given to evaluating and rewarding embarrassment.	13	9	11	8	9
41	The school teacher insists on covering more and more material regardless of the plan.	16	11	10	3	10
42	I am not given the chance o know something about the administrational phases of school i.e. keeping records, time tabling, handling student's problems ….etc.	40	6	0	2	2
43	One visit is not enough for the supervisor to evaluate me and comment on my teaching performance.	35	10	4	0	1
Attitudinal Difficulties						
44	The fact that ELT is regarded by many as a fairly low-status occupation affects my teaching performance.	24	13	10	1	2
45	I don't like teaching, and I have no desire to be a teacher. This is obviously reflected in my unsatisfactory teaching performance.	7	18	8	2	15
46	I like teaching but I don't like the current educational system and situation in the Iraqi schools.	15	18	10	5	2
47	It is very difficult to grade students only according to their performance in the test (regardless of the nature of their behavior in class).	20	22	6	0	2
48	I feel confused when I teach in front of my supervisor. I am fully occupied with not to make any mistake.	15	12	17	3	3
49	I don't believe in extracurricular activities (outside the syllabus).	2	5	20	7	11
50	I have no commitments toward the preparation of lessons material.	9	7	13	14	7