Teacher educators’ understanding of integrating lesson study into pre-service teacher education

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Received: July 9, 2021  ●  Accepted: October 17, 2021  Published online: December 21, 2021

ABSTRACT

In Myanmar, according to the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016–2021, the four-year Education College curriculum has been developed and implemented, in line with the pre-service teacher education reform. In the new curriculum, the Lesson Study (LS) model is integrated into the practicum. LS is an effective teacher professional development practice that originated in Japan and is becoming popular all over the world today, suited to both pre-service and in-service teacher education. The LS concept has been introduced to the Myanmar context since 2011 through international training projects and there are two LS research projects which focus on the impacts of the training. However, there is no follow-up research which explores teacher educators’ understanding of LS and their LS practices after the training projects and there is no research related to the integration of LS into pre-service teacher education. This study explores the LS experiences and perspectives of teacher educators who have to take the responsibility of integrating LS into pre-service teacher education with the aim of assessing their readiness for that. Eight teacher educators from six Education Colleges in Myanmar participated in this qualitative research project. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection. The results reveal that teacher educators are already familiar with the term “LS” through the former LS projects. Moreover, the findings show two dimensions of teacher educators’ lesson study experiences; namely, lesson study experiences as a tool of professional development and as a tool of teacher training. They have positive perceptions about the integration of LS into the practicum but it is still challenging for them.

KEYWORDS

teacher educator, lesson study, pre-service teacher education

INTRODUCTION

In Myanmar, educational reforms have been conducted as a national priority since 2011. As a first step of the reforms, the Myanmar government conducted a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) in partnership with some international organizations, aiming at finding solutions to the challenges and gaps in the former education system in 2012 (Soe et al., 2017). Based on the recommendations of the CESR, the Myanmar government created the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016–2021. According to the goals of the NESP plan, one of the focus areas is the Teacher Education and Management sector (Ministry of Education, Myanmar, 2016). According to the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016–2021, the four-year Education College curriculum has been developed and implemented, in line with the pre-service teacher education reform. In the new curriculum, the LS model is integrated into the practicum. LS, as a professional development or professional learning tool for teachers, has positive impacts: improvement in teachers’ attitudes to and enjoyment of professional learning, teacher confidence, subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Seleznyov, 2018). Moreover, it makes some shifts in the school’s professional development model or professional learning culture and results in improvement in teachers’ use of new knowledge and skills. This study aims to explore the extent to which teacher educators have LS knowledge and experiences and its findings offer some recommendations in order to effectively integrate LS into new pre-service teacher education.
curriculum. The study was conducted with eight teacher educators of six Education Colleges and a semi-structured interview guide was used as a research instrument to explore their views. The results can contribute to the successful implementation of the four-year Education College curriculum, as a result of which, eventually, they can lead to improve the quality of teacher education.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Lesson study

LS is a particularly detailed form of classroom action research, emphasizing the teacher’s professional development. “Professional development is about teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students’ growth” (Avalos, 2011, p. 10). Japan, one of the East Asian countries, has developed LS culture since the 18th century (Dudley, 2014). Nowadays, LS has globally spread beyond Japan, in the recognition of the positive impact of LS according to Stigler and Hiebert, 1999 (cited in Chen & Zhang, 2019). It identified that the deep pedagogical content knowledge of Japanese teachers results in high academic achievement of Japanese students through LS practice (Dudley, 2014). LS is a cyclical process of lesson planning, teaching, observing and reflection. In each cycle, groups of teachers collaboratively plan lessons, teach, observe and reflect on how teaching and learning occur. Through this process, teachers improve their teaching skills (Dudley, 2014; Hourigan & Leavy, 2019; Makinae, 2010).

LS forms different model versions in adaption with different country contexts beyond Japan. The typical LS models all over the world are the original LS model of Japan, the Mainland China Model, the learning study of Hong Kong, the microteaching LS (MLS) of the USA and the LS Process Model of the UK (Chen & Zhang, 2019; Zhang & Liu, 2018). The focus of LS varies according to each model. While the Japanese LS model focuses on the improvement of teachers’ teaching skills and supporting teachers to become life-long learners, the MLS of the USA emphasizes improving instructional practice and enhancing teachers’ knowledge of effective instructional strategies. The LS Process Model of the UK focuses on teacher collaboration and understanding of how students’ learning can be improved. The focus of the Mainland China Model is similar to that of MLS of the USA to some extent, although the former focuses on students’ academic achievements in an exam-driven system. The Learning study in Hong Kong contrasts to the other models as it uses variation theory as a guiding principle of pedagogical design, focusing on scientific investigation and the assessment of student learning.

The integration of LS into the practicum of pre-service teacher education in education colleges

With the aim of responding to the recommendations of the CESR, the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016–2021 has been developed. The NESP reports that the quality of pre-service teacher education needs to be improved in order to address the strategic challenges facing teacher education and management in the basic education sub-sector in Myanmar. One of the significant reforms in pre-service teacher education is to upgrade two-year diploma program in education colleges into four-year degree program. In harmony with these reforms, a new teacher education curriculum for Education Colleges is being developed (Ministry of Education, Myanmar, 2016). There are 25 Education Colleges nationwide in Myanmar. The Education Colleges are mainly responsible for training primary school teachers and middle school teachers.

The four-year Education College Curriculum is based on the Myanmar Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF) developed by a group of national professional education experts and UNESCO education specialists over a period of eight months in 2015–2016 (Myint & Win, 2016).

The curriculum structure provides an integrated approach. This approach addresses the gap between theory and practice. In the curriculum, teacher guides and student guides for practicum are prescribed with the focus not just on subject content, but also on the skills and attitudes needed to effectively apply their knowledge, skills and attitudes in teaching and learning situations, with specific age groups. In the new curriculum, LS is used as the training tool during practicum. The upgrading four-year teacher education program in ECs started in December 2019 and is still in the process of implementation, while the old and new programs still exist side by side (Ministry of Education, Myanmar, 2019).

Teacher education in Myanmar

In Myanmar, there are two types of teacher education institutions: Education Colleges (EC) and Universities of Education (UoE). The ECs offer a two-year Diploma in Teacher Education (DTED) course and postgraduate course (Pre-Service Primary Teacher Training (PPTT) for pre-service teachers. Moreover, the ECs also provide a one-year correspondence course for in-service teachers. Recently, in ECs, a new four-year course in Education was upgraded in December 2019, offering BSc and BA degrees, while the new and old programs will still exist side by side. The UoEs offer the Bachelor of Education (BED) course and other courses such as Post Graduate Diploma in Multimedia Arts, and Post-Graduate Diploma in Teaching for pre-service teachers and a two-year correspondence course for in-service teachers. The main responsibility of ECs is to train primary and middle school teachers while that of UoEs is to produce upper secondary school teachers. There are 25 ECs and two UoEs nationwide (DFAT, 2017).

The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) has collaborated with Myanmar’s Ministry of Education to launch a program, Strengthening Pre-Service Teacher Education in Myanmar (STEM) with the aim of developing teacher policy frameworks, redesigning pre-service teacher education curriculum and programs, and strengthening Education College
management (Borg, Clifford, & Htut, 2018). Through STEM, the current curriculum of the ECs has been reviewed and a four-year degree curriculum was proposed and implemented in December 2019. A teacher competency framework (Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF) has been drafted. Aligned with the TCSF, some reforms will be conducted in the teacher education sector (DFAT, 2017).

There are some international projects which introduced LS to the Myanmar Teacher Education system. In the next section, the Strengthening the Child-Centered Approach (SCCA) project of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the English for Education College Trainers (EffECT) project are described.

**Strengthening the Child-Centered Approach (SCCA) project of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).** LS was first introduced to teacher education in Myanmar through the Strengthening the Child-Centered Approach (SCCA) project with the technical support of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) (Kishi, Kubota, & Ito, 2012). The main aim of this project was to help Myanmar teachers to acquire knowledge and skills of the Child Centered Approach (CCA) and to establish CCA in practice in primary schools. The target groups of the project were in-service primary school teachers and Education College (EC) instructors. Phase I of the project lasted from 2004 to 2007 and Phase II from 2008 to 2011 (Wai, Kenichi, & Kishi, 2010).

The project used LS as a professional development training tool to convey the objectives of the project. The LS process of this project followed the principle of “Plan-Do-See”. In the one-hour “Plan” stage, EC instructors planned lessons through pre-discussion, and then an EC instructor demonstrated the planned 45-min lesson and other instructors observed during the “Do” stage. The “See” stage is the reflection or discussion time. During this stage, the EC instructors discussed how the lesson went and gave their comments and suggestions for modifying the lesson. Within this project, a case study was conducted. The findings of the study suggested three elements for designing LS; (1) setting up rules of mutual interaction for productive discussion, (2) assessing various Learner-centered Approach (LCA) methods and (3) having shared responsibilities for demonstration lesson for future research (Kishi et al., 2012).

**The English for Education College Trainers (EffECT) project.** In 2013, the Myanmar Government initiated the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) to examine the needs of all levels of the education sector for educational reforms. The CESR justified the need for improving the quality of Myanmar teacher educators and the EffECT project, a two-year initiative, was run to meet this need partially with the support of the British Council and the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) in 2016–2017. The project trainers trained teacher educators of twenty teacher education colleges (ECs), the two universities of education and another teacher training institution under the Ministry of Border Affairs through LS (Borg et al., 2018). The training consisted of two LS cycles. The first cycle took place in February 2016 and the second in June 2016. The steps of each cycle were as follows:

1. identify a research theme (based on departmental challenge or goal);
2. research the lesson to be given;
3. plan the lesson;
4. teach/observe the lesson (observers collect data on student behavior/reactions);
5. debrief and reflect on the lesson; and
6. re-plan the lesson based on information gathered.

Based on this project, a case study was conducted on implementing LS into a two-year teacher training project. The findings suggested that LS was a useful tool to encourage structured collaboration between university-level teacher educators, although it was also confirmed that continued supported practice was needed to expand the benefits and ensure sustainability (Shepherd, 2018).

**Empirical studies on the integration of LS into pre-service teacher education**

According to the nature of LS, which entails a need for a stable community of practice that can build knowledge and experience together over time, LS is typically conducted with in-service teachers or predominantly in-service teachers with a few pre-service teachers mixed in. In addition, pre-service teachers’ relative lack of experience with children and their limited knowledge of curriculum are factors that hinder the LS process. However, it is suggested that there are some virtues of LS which are especially relevant for pre-service teachers.

The research lesson, the collaborative planning beforehand and the analysis afterwards based on an actual lesson with real children in real time are the main features of LS. These features of lesson study offer pre-service teachers real classroom-based experiences more than other practices conducted away from classroom life (Lewis, Friedkin, Emerson, Henn, & Goldsmith, 2019).

There is extant literature on pre-service teachers’ learning through the lesson study process in pre-service teacher education. Most of the studies have been conducted in different contexts worldwide. An overview of the empirical literature shows that the occurrence of the integration of lesson study into pre-service teacher education has increased in recent years. In the next section, two thematic categories related to the integration of LS into pre-service teacher education are described; namely, the impact of LS on student teachers’ learning and forms of integrating LS.

As for the impact of LS on pre-service teachers’ learning, the literature review reveals that LS could affect their learning in various aspects ranging from reflective practices and lesson planning skills through inquiry tasks and classroom communication, to collaboration and observation skills. Gutierrez (2015) analyzed teachers’ reflective practices during the various stages of lesson study process and yielded three types of reflective practices, namely: descriptive,
analytical, and critical and also suggested that the collaborative, sustainable and provisional environment enabled the teachers to become reflective practitioners to gain understanding of their instructional practices. Conceição, Baptista, and Ponte (2018) explored the impact of LS on student teachers’ learning from the perspectives of inquiry skills and classroom communication. They revealed that Lesson Study could support pre-service teachers to learn the characteristics of inquiry tasks, how to develop an inquiry task when planning the research lesson and acknowledge its potential for student learning.

Moreover, through participation in the LS process, the pre-service teachers realized the impact of the classroom communication promoted by the teacher such as fostering student participation, negotiation of meanings about scientific concepts and construction of new learning that can be shared within the class. Diem and Thathong (2019) conducted an empirical study on the impact of LS on student teachers’ lesson planning skills and found that by engaging in the LS training workshops (LSTW), student teachers got a better knowledge of LS and the skill of how to use the LS process to construct better biology lesson plans (LPs) and acknowledged that LPs were collaboratively prepared so that all members shared their experiences in the planning. Similarly, Chen and Zhang (2019) found that after experiencing the LS process, the participants demonstrated significant improvement in lesson planning skills, specifically thinking about learning objectives, analysis of content and students, anticipating students’ solutions, and sequencing mathematics tasks.

Leavy and Hourigan (2018) studied the ways in which LS promoted mathematics specialized content knowledge (SCK) development and found two primary ways; (1) raising awareness of the complex relationships between early number concepts that contribute to developing robust early number understandings and (2) developing expertise in identifying the nature and source of children’s mathematical errors. Danday and Monterola (2017) conducted experimental research to examine the impacts of the Multiple-Representation Lesson Study (MRLS) on the technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) of pre-service Physics teachers and proved positive impacts of the MRLS in instructional practices, particularly in developing pre-service teachers’ TPCK. Additionally, Lewis et al. (2019) found that pre-service teachers developed mathematical care (dispositions), pedagogical moves (actions) and teacher identity (self-knowledge) from their participation in a cycle of LS. It can be concluded that LS could impact not only student teachers’ professional knowledge and classroom practices but also teachers’ motivation and self-efficacy.

The findings of some empirical studies showed that LS is incorporated into pre-service teacher education in different ways, such as school-university partnership, or a three-tier teaching experiment explained below. In an empirical study of Baldry and Foster (2019), it was explored that lesson study has the potential to support pre-service mathematics teachers’ pedagogical development and suggested the importance of a productive school-university partnership for integrating LS in pre-service teacher education. Hourigan and Leavy (2019) explored the benefits of LS using a three-tier teaching experiment approach which facilitates insights into the effects of participation in LS practice from the perspectives of the three partners: teacher educators, pre-service teachers and the pupils.

Shuilleabhain and Bjuland (2019) described that LS, a collaborative model of teacher professional development, is increasingly integrated into pre-service teacher education, with the aim of supporting student teachers’ learning and identified three main structural factors for the integration of LS in pre-service teacher education; first, defined roles of mentor and university teachers as knowledgeable others; second, the engagement of pre-service teachers at each phase of LS, with the inclusion of case pupils; and third, the conduction of the LS cycle on both university campus and in the classroom.

In a systematic literature review of LS in pre-service teacher education from the aspects of pre-service teacher learning and observation, Larssen et al. (2018) suggested that LS researchers consider a) how to prepare student teachers to observe, b) the wide variation in the focus of classroom observation in ITE lesson studies c) discussion of what is understood by learning needs to stand at the heart of preparation for lesson studies in pre-service teacher education. In addition, in some studies (Gunnarsdóttir & Pálssdóttir, 2019; Lewis et al., 2019), LS has been formally integrated into teacher education programs while some studies (Næsheim-Bjørkvik, Helgevold, & Østrem, 2019) showed that LS has been informally intervened during teaching practice/practicum because LS is a classroom-based practice.

METHOD

This study explored the lesson study experiences and perspectives of teacher educators for integrating lesson study into pre-service teacher education with the aim of assessing their readiness for that. Based on the research aim and literature, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What do teacher educators know about LS?
2. What kind of experiences do teacher educators have of LS?
3. What are the teacher educator’s perceptions of integrating LS into pre-service teacher education as a teacher training tool?

Research paradigm

This study aimed to find out teacher educators’ perspectives of the integration of LS into pre-service teacher education. Due to the exploratory nature of the inquiry, the qualitative research method was used in order to interact extensively and intimately with participants during the study (Mills & Gay, 2016). As a data collection method, semi-structured interviews were conducted which permit flexibility used to further explore some matters arising from the participants’ responses (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).
Participants

The study selected participants by using maximal variation sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods in which the characteristic of participants is required to be identified and the participants are selected according to the different dimensions of that characteristic (Creswell, 2012). In this study, two types of teacher educators were selected with the aim of covering diverse participants. The first type comprised the ones who received both JACA training and EffECT training, the second consisted of those who received only EffECT training. By using convenience sampling, the study sites where the researcher could have easy access were selected (Cohen et al., 2007). They were Magway Education College, Lashio Education College (LEC), Yankin Education College (YEC) and Sagaing Education College (MEC). The total number of participants was eight teacher educators (Table 1).

Instrument

The interview guide was developed by the author based on the literature review and the objectives of the research in English. Subsequently, it was translated into Myanmar language. The design of the interview questions was guided by the research questions. The purpose of the interview guide was to find out what the participants knew about LS, what kind of experiences they had about LS, what perspectives they had of integrating LS into pre-service teacher education, and what expectations they had for pre-service teachers’ learning through LS training.

Procedures

The online semi-structured interviews were conducted in Myanmar language, the participants’ native language, so that language could not hinder getting rich information. The interviews were conducted via Facebook Messenger and Skype, they lasted 25–30 min. The interviews were recorded after the participants had signed the consent forms. The semi-structured interviews were then transcribed in Myanmar language, the quotations were translated into English language for the purpose of this paper.

Data analysis

For data analysis, inductive content analysis (Kyngás, 2020) was manually conducted. The researcher read the transcripts sentence by sentence and determined if each sentence is related to the research questions of the study. The related sentences were classified as open codes and these open codes were grouped into different categories. The emerging themes fell under the following categories: overall awareness of LS, LS as a professional development tool, LS as a training tool, perspectives of integrating LS into the practicum of the pre-service teacher education curriculum, and expectations of pre-service teachers’ learning.

FINDINGS

The finding has two facets: one teacher educators’ professional development and other aspect, a new methodology (LS) in their teaching (working) activities (teacher training).

Teacher educators’ overall awareness of LS

All teacher educators from ECs are already familiar with the term “Lesson Study” through previous LS training courses. However, the training projects trained teacher educators to improve teaching skills and to be able to use the “Learner-centered Approach, LCA” in their classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Education College</th>
<th>Faculty Position</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>JACA Training</th>
<th>EffECT Training</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total Teaching Service (years)</th>
<th>Teaching Subject</th>
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<td>Yan Kin</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>M.Ed</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>M.Ed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Participants
using LS as a media training tool. Therefore, the training focused more on teacher educators' teaching skills. Due to the effect of training, some teacher educators are still confused about LS and LCA. One of the teacher educators noted that as she understands, LS is the teaching activity in which teachers gives students more learning activities in the classroom.

Some TEs had had a deep understanding of LS before the EiECT project although they missed the JACA CCA project because senior TEs who attended the JACA CCA project mentored them and gave them the chance to practice LS as a professional development tool. One of the TEs answered that LS is the study of how lessons are taught effectively through actual practice and the stages of the LS process are planning, implementing and reflecting. Other teacher educators have an incomplete understanding of LS because they did not get any empirical practice of LS. Some ECs cannot systematically and effectively implement LS as a regular professional development tool although they were trained for LS because of limited time and limited human resources. Their understanding of LS could not reach beyond the first stage of LS, lesson planning.

Since I started working at EC, I have heard the term "LS", but I have not practiced it exactly. ......................... I asked my seniors what LS is. They told me that in LS, one presents his/her lesson plan, others give suggestions to improve the lesson more. In LS, I plan a lesson and discuss it with my colleagues and then modify it according to their advice and comments. Finally, I teach it to students. It's my understanding about LS. (Mar)

One of the teacher educators has a research perspective of LS Implementation and conducted research on the effectiveness of LS in ECs. She has a deep understanding and rich experience in LS, not only from a practitioner perspective but also from a researcher perspective. It can be seen in her interview answer below:

I conducted research on LS for my M.Ed study with the title "Investigation into the effectiveness of LS Practice in Teaching at Education Colleges in Myanmar" because I'm very interested in LS and I have hands-on experience and learned its benefits from previous training experience (JACA CCA project). (Aye)

**LS as a professional development tool**

Concerning the LS experience, most teacher educators received hands-on experiences of LS from the JACA CCA project and the EiECT project. LS was first introduced to Myanmar teacher education by the JACA CCA project from 2004 to 2011. The training was based on the Japanese LS model. The EiECT project trained teacher educators, using the UK LS model for two years (2016–2017). All teacher educators were informed that the JACA CCA project trained them by using LS while the EiECT project did not inform them that they were being trained through LS. As a result, in the JACA CCA project, teacher educators are more aware of LS than those in the EiECT project. One of the teacher educators described this as follows:

I think that I did not get formal LS training directly. I was not aware that the EiECT project trained us to practice LS because in the training period, the trainer did not mention that we were being trained through LS. (Nwe)

Among teacher educators, only one TE noticed that the EiECT project had trained them by using LS. In her interview answer, she mentioned the EiECT training as her first hands-on experience. She explained that the EiECT Project had trained them how to use LS as a professional development tool. Most teacher educators have had LS experience as a professional development tool through LS training but could not do LS professional development practice in real classrooms in a sustainable way because of some barriers:

Since I started working at EC, I have got to know the term “LS”. I heard it from my senior teacher educators who participated in JACA training. They said that before, the EC educators had practiced LS regularly but later they couldn’t practice it because of limited time and overwork. (Kay)

In my college, other subject teacher educators said that they practiced it. For me, it’s not my subject and I have other class periods, so I could not join them. (Mar)

The LS experiences of TEs are different depending on the interest and enthusiasm of responsible persons of EC, for instance, the Headmaster. One of the teacher educators who has been working at two ECs compared the LS practice of the former EC with that of the latter in detail:

The headmaster of the former EC is very enthusiastic and had a good understanding and experience of LS from the JACA CCA project. In the current EC, they practiced LS at the college level, but not in the LS process, they only gave presentations. They describe this practice as "LS" but in my opinion, it is not LS. The application of LS is different according to each college. In the previous EC, we practiced LS as a professional development tool. Groups were formed into Science subject group and Art subject group. I was in the Science subject group. We implemented multidisciplinary LS. So, the other subject groups gave suggestions and feedback about classroom management, teaching aids, teaching learning activities, etc. while the same subject teachers gave feedback and suggestions about subject content. First, we did pre-discussion, and taught lessons and were observed by using observation checklists, we practiced LS once every second month because of our limited time. (Wai)

One of the teacher educators who participated in the EiECT project noted that:

During training period, we just practiced LS among colleagues, but no chance to practice LS in a real classroom. In the planning stage of LS, we shared lesson portions among the group of 4 or 5 members and discussed together how to teach cohesively. And then, each member taught his or her respective portion to peer groups and the last members and trainer observed teaching. As soon as teaching was done, we discussed it and gave feedback about teaching and how students learn during discussion/reflection stage. After some days, we had a...
Most of the ECs are practicing LS as a professional tool in the way that teacher educators plan a lesson individually and present this lesson to the colleagues and the colleagues give suggestions before teaching. It means that they can practice only the first step of the LS process, but not all the steps of the whole process. The evidence can be seen in interview answers, such as the one below:

When I started working at EC, my seniors mentored me although we could not practice LS informally. I developed a lesson plan by using the template they used in the JACA LS training and they gave feedback about my lesson plan. (Wai)

Concerning with teachers’ professional learning, teacher educators have learned a lot through each component of LS. As the results of LS, they have improved their lesson planning skills, preparation of instructional materials, ability to do collaborative work, to give constructive/positive feedback, reflection skill, observation skill and understanding of students’ learning. However, after training period, they have not improved their professional learning in their workplace because they have some challenges such as time constraint in implementing LS in their workplace. It can be seen in the participants’ interview answers below:

Before training, we never worked collaboratively, we just did individual teaching and never visited to my colleagues’ classroom for observation. After training, we work collaboratively as much as time allows us. (Mar)

As the result of LS training, I could get awareness of the benefits of collaborative work. Moreover, I could improve my lesson planning skills, use of constructive feedbacks, self-reflection, observation skill and understand students’ learning. (Kay)

In my opinion, I could improve my professional learning during training, more than in the workplace because we have many challenges such as time constraint, large class size and over workload to implement LS in the actual classrooms even though we have commitment to our own professional learning. (Wai)

Some ECs can systematically integrate LS into practicum, according to the new curriculum while some implement incomplete LS integration in a way in which teacher educators practice LS as a professional development tool:

We divide the lessons into small topics so that all student teachers can get a chance to teach. In teaching stage, one group is the observer group and they are informed about which factors have to be observed, the others are peer students, and one student teacher teaches. In reflection stage, the student teachers reflect on the lesson and teaching together, using the observer group’s observations and others’ feedback and comments. The teacher educators facilitate student teachers’ reflection/discussion and give feedback and suggestions if needed. (Wai)

In the new curriculum, LS is integrated into the practicum. In the first semester, we asked student teachers to plan a lesson individually and checked their lesson plans by teacher educators. (Mar)

Perspectives on integration of LS into practicum in the new curriculum

Although teacher educators view LS as a new and effective training tool, they believe that there are big challenges in order to use the LS training tool effectively for some reasons while they see its benefits. The participants explained this as below;

In the new curriculum, LS is integrated into the practicum. It’s still new as a training tool and unsystematic as a professional development tool of teacher educators. (Wai)

I think that even for teacher educators, it is not easy to practice LS, so if students will be trained through LS, it can be possible but it is a big challenge. Because of time constraints and crowded classrooms, I think that all student teachers cannot teach evenly. I believe that LS can be an effective training tool because since the training period, student teachers have been able to get classroom experiences as LS is real classroom practice. (Nwe)

Some teacher educators realize that they have to take a facilitative role in implementing LS as a training tool. They have confidence in implementing LS as a training tool successfully because of the previous training although they could not regularly practice LS as a professional development tool.

As regards the role of a teacher educator, I think it is enough to facilitate student teachers when implementing LS as a training tool. I believe that if I have to use LS as a training tool, I can manage it successfully because I already received enough training from the EJECT project. (Win)

All teacher educators do not recognize in-service school teachers as mentors when pre-service teachers do practical teaching at the practicing schools. The teacher educators expressed their opinion in this way that they think that pre-service teachers can face some challenges when they do practical teaching at the practicing schools because they do not get direct support from teacher educators as they do on the college campus.

LS as a teacher training tool

None of the teacher educators practiced LS as a teacher training tool in the old curriculum. In the new curriculum of the four-year program, LS is being integrated as a teacher training tool into practicum. They elaborated on their new experiences about the integration of LS into the new curriculum as below:

I haven’t used LS as training tool in the former curriculum. I am from the Department of Educational Studies (Educational theory and Educational Psychology). We share duties to organize and manage the practicum among the departments. (Kay)

In the first year of the new four-year program, student teachers first select a lesson, plan a lesson in a group and teach a lesson in microteaching style. (Wai)
Expectations of student teachers’ learning

Teacher educators believe that student teachers will improve their lesson planning skills significantly as some teacher educators understand LS as lesson planning. Even though they have a deep knowledge of the LS process, they could practice only the lesson planning part of the LS process due to some constraints, such as limited time and work overload. One of the teacher educators (Mar) expressed this in the following way, “I’m sure that they will improve the lesson planning skills significantly during LS practice. We (teacher educators) focus on lesson planning more than other parts of LS”. One teacher educator noted the benefits of integrating LS into the practicum, comparing it with the old one. She believes that LS can improve not only student teachers’ teaching skills but also other skills, such as observation skills.

Concerning that, the interview answer was as follows:

LS as a training tool has some benefits, for example, in traditional peer group teaching (PGT), the teacher educator evaluates only the student teacher’s teaching, peer student teachers don’t seem to have any responsibility. In contrast, in LS PGT, all the student teachers have their specific role and responsibilities, such as the observer role. (Wai)

Overall, based on the answers elicited during the interviews, teacher educators are already familiar with the term “LS” through the former LS projects. They practice LS as a professional development tool although it is not fully exploited. They have no informal LS experience of LS as a teacher training tool. They have positive perceptions of the integration of LS into the practicum but it is still challenging for them.

DISCUSSIONS

According to (Dudley, 2014; Hourigan & Leavy, 2019; Makinae, 2010), LS is a cyclical process of lesson planning, teaching, observing and reflection. This study found that some teacher educators completely understand that the stages of the LS process are planning, implementing (teaching/observing) and reflecting, while in the perception of some of the participants, LS is limited to lesson planning only. Consistent with the present findings, Shepherd (2018) also reported that it is challenging to develop sustainable LS practice as a professional development tool or pre-service teacher training tool in teacher training institutions of Myanmar due to many constraints.

Some studies (Chen & Zhang, 2019; Diem & Thathong, 2019) revealed that one of the positive impacts of LS in pre-service teacher education is lesson planning. This coincides with the findings of this study, where, a common response from the participants has been that they believe that LS can improve pre-service teachers’ lesson planning skills. This study points out that teacher educators expect pre-service teachers to improve observation skills through LS practice. This is confirmed by the finding of Larssen et al. (2018) that suggests LS researchers to consider how to prepare pre-service teachers’ observation skill. In this study, it was found that the mentor role of in-service school teachers are not recognized while teacher educators are considered as knowledgeable ones. This aligns with the finding of Shulleabhain and Bjuland (2019) which identified the roles of mentor and university teachers as knowledgeable others for the integration of LS in pre-service teacher education. Gutierrez’s (2015) study analyzed teachers’ reflective practices during the various stages of the lesson study process and suggested that LS supports teachers to become reflective practitioners to gain understanding of their instructional practices. However, the results of this study do not seem to confirm that LS can improve the reflective skills of pre-service teachers.

Lewis et al. (2019) stated that LS is more beneficial to pre-service teacher education than other practices which cannot provide real classroom experiences because LS itself is a real classroom practice. This is in agreement with the present findings that teacher educators see LS practice as an opportunity of experiencing real classroom for pre-service teachers.

According to Lewis et al. (2019), teachers improve professional learning through LS and make changes in teachers’ knowledge, teachers’ beliefs, routines and norms of professional learning and Instructional tools and routines. This study showed that teacher educators have improved their lesson planning skills and preparation of instructional materials, collaborative skill, self-reflection skills and observation skill and understanding of students’ learning. Concerning to teacher educators’ professional learning and development, this study showed that teacher educators’ learning process occurs more during LS training (EfECT training project) than during teaching practice because some challenges such as time constraint, hinder teacher educators’ professional learning through LS. The result agrees with the studies of Coe et al., 2010; Meyer & Wilkerson, 2011, cited in Kihwele and Sang (2020) which proved that time is an important resource in facilitating and accomplishing the implementation of LS.

The findings of this study have some important implications for a successful integration of LS into pre-service teacher education. It highlights 1) the need of particular training related to the integration of LS into the practicum for teacher educators 2), the consideration of the mentor role of in-service school teachers (school-university partnership), 3) the expectation of pre-service teachers’ learning through LS practices to the fullest extent.

CONCLUSIONS

Myanmar has been on the journey of education reform. This study explored teacher educators’ understanding of integrating LS into pre-service teacher education in order to contribute to the teacher education reform, one sector of the education reform taking place in Myanmar. The objective of this study was to reveal teacher educators’ current cognizance of LS. The results showed that teacher educators’ awareness of LS ranges from the lowest level, represented by
an incomplete understanding of LS, to the deep understanding of the concept not only from the practitioner perspective but also from the research perspective, in light of their received LS training and practical LS implications.

In response of RQ 2 “what kind of experiences do teacher educators have of LS?”, the results of this study identified teacher educators’ LS experience into two ways; on the one hand, as a professional development tool and on the other, as a teacher training tool. Although teacher educators were introduced LS as a tool of professional development through previous training, the professional development practice of LS was not sustainable in most ECs due to some challenges, mainly time constraints, a limited number of student teachers and work overload. None of the interviewed teacher educators seem to know how to use LS informally as a teacher training tool in the old curriculum. Only when LS is formally integrated into the practicum in the new curriculum, do teacher educators have their first experience of it. While some ECs can implement LS systematically, some are still practicing it incompletely.

As regards with RQ 3 “what are the teacher educator’s perceptions of integrating LS into pre-service teacher education as a teacher training tool?”, the results showed that teacher educators were positive towards the integration of LS into the practicum but found it difficult to practically implement it. The integration of LS into pre-service teacher education is very new to both teacher educators and student teachers, although they have some LS experience as a professional development tool. All teacher educators have positive perceptions of the integration of LS into the practicum. However, they are still less confident in practicing it and their perception is that they still need school-based training that can facilitate its implementation. Some teachers do not have a clear understanding of the process of integrating LS into the practicum while some understand the process in detail.

This study has some limitations. First, the results of this study are not generalizable to the entire population because of the relatively low number of participants. Second, this study used only a semi-structured interview guide as an instrument. If observation had been added as an instrument tool, the results related to exploring teacher educators’ LS experiences could have been more trustworthy.

This study can be regarded as baseline research for integrating LS into pre-service teacher education in Myanmar. As regards future studies, there is an obvious necessity to continuously study the progress of the implementation of LS integration into pre-service teacher education. Moreover, it is necessary to investigate in more detail if LS can meet the needs that the pre-service teacher education system of Myanmar requires.

REFERENCES


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