



The evaluation of non-native speaking English language trainee teachers' practice: unfolding university supervisors' and host teachers' perspectives on judging performance

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Barbara Skinner and Helen Hou

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Abstract/background

This project explores differences in, and similarities between, university supervisors' and host teachers' perspectives of trainees' practical teaching practice performance. Specifically, the project investigates the ways in which university supervisors and host teachers take into account evaluative judgements of non-native English speaking teacher trainees' (NNESTTs) teaching practice (TP) performance. The context is a vocational Masters in TESOL at a UK university where trainees carry out a teaching practice in Hungarian primary or secondary schools. Specifically, the study examines the perceptions that the supervisors and host teachers have when judging the performance of four overseas TESOL trainees, who are NNESTTs from Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan and Bangladesh. Findings show firstly that host teachers take a 'soft' approach compared with the 'hard' approach of university supervisors, secondly, that host teachers and supervisors seem to prioritise different variables when evaluating TP performance and thirdly, that both groups of participants see the benefit of working together to create reliable judgements of NNESTTs' performance.

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Introduction

Evaluation of teaching practice performance is important as it provides a guarantee of quality for future employers. Thaine states (2004: 337) ‘the realities of the English language teaching (ELT) employment world means that assessment must be carried out, as language teachers now operate in a world where learners, employers, and quality assurance agencies require some kind of guarantee of ability that is in some way measurable’. This study examines the perceptions host teachers and university supervisors have which impact on the evaluation of the ESL teaching practice performance of non-native English speaking teacher trainees (NNESTTs) on an MA TESOL programme. The trainees carry out six weeks’ teaching practice in Hungarian schools and are evaluated by host teachers who work with them on a daily basis and university supervisors who observe and give feedback once a week. The MA TESOL Teaching Practice (TP) module handbook states that the aim of the TP is to ‘give trainees an authentic opportunity to develop their teaching skills in a real situation to prepare them for the future job market’¹. Kennedy (1998) underlines that TP evaluation is a necessary part of an ELT qualification and although formative assessment is important in helping student English language teachers develop, the summative assessment is just as crucial as it acts as the gate to the profession: ‘we can be flexible about entrants to the profession and in English language teaching this may be a good thing, but we must have a strict and hard headed approach as to exits’. Evaluation of the trainees’ teaching performance serves exactly that end, that is, to ascertain, for reporting purposes (e.g. to trainees, supervisors, host teachers, the University, potential employers) trainees’ level of competence in English language teaching.

Firstly, the report explains the context and the problem, describes the participants, methodology and research instruments and then it discusses ethics. Subsequently, it explores and discusses findings in response to research question 1 and research question 2 (see page 8), followed by an explanation of limitations of the study. Finally some conclusions and recommendations are drawn.

¹ This quote is taken from the Teaching Practice module handbook 2011.

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Context

Each year MA TESOL trainees go to Gyor in Hungary to teach 12 hours per week on a teaching practice placement as part of their vocational programme. Colleagues involved in this partnership, which has been running for 20 years, have a strong relationship with one another, with Hungarian host teachers and university staff getting to know one another well on a professional and personal basis. This project develops the already established partnership between the university and the schools in Gyor in Hungary, by establishing its first research collaboration. This study aims, firstly, to examine the different roles of host teacher and supervisors in teaching practice. To do this, semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants. Secondly, to find out whether and how the different roles affect participants' perception of NNESTTs' TP performance, audio-recordings of participants' formative comments are made during the six week placement. The study focuses on six participants – two university supervisors and four Hungarian host teachers who were involved in evaluating TP performance of four NNESTTs. The findings have the potential to impact on ELT teacher education programmes within and outside the UK in terms of recommending refinements to current practice in evaluating NNESTTs and teaching practice placements abroad.

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Setting the problem

This context contains many variables. These relate to the physical context; for example, class size, learners' English language proficiency, primary/secondary school, type of school, Hungary and the ethos in the English department. They also relate to the supervisors and host teachers; for example, professional/learning backgrounds, ideas of good ELT, orientation to the culture of NNESTT, orientation to the Hungarian classroom, and attitude towards the job. Finally, variables relate to the trainees; for example, experienced/non-experienced, familiarity with Hungarian culture and English language proficiency. These contextual variables can interact with student teachers' competence in complex and unpredictable ways which means that fair and reliable evaluation by host teachers and supervisors is not straightforward. For example, those trainees who have previously visited, or who come from Eastern European countries such as Hungary may understand the culture and ethos and 'settle in' to school life more quickly and therefore teach more effectively than those who come from countries which are culturally very different. In addition, different schools and host teachers may give different amounts and quality of support to their trainee teachers – this can be profoundly affected by the personal relationships involved too (Cope et al. 2003). For example, a host teacher may make allowances for a 'difficult' class or a supervisor may make allowances when aware that the relationship between host teacher and trainee is not positive.

The fact that this teaching practice is held in another country further complicates the impact of variables. Kennedy (1998: 11) states that when the context is an overseas one, the problem is complex for the supervisors coming from the home country: 'as assessors what do we know about that context –

how its values inform teaching practices and curriculum interpretation?' Moreover, the problem is complex for the host teachers too – how much do they know about, for example, how a Chinese trainee's Confucian values may influence his/her teaching performance in a Hungarian ELT classroom? Cope et al. (2003: 680) support the idea that it is difficult to judge a teaching practice performance without allowing the variables which make up that context to influence the judgement. They reflect Wenger's idea of 'situated learning' (Wenger, 1998) – that competence of any kind, including teaching competence, is not down to the single person but located within a 'community of practice' and that being competent is about adopting a community's practices and values. The supervisors' and host teachers' teaching and educational experiences, and their cultural backgrounds, along with the previously mentioned variables, are in an important mediating position between the performance in the classroom and the evaluation of the trainee's teaching practice. The participants are positioned at an interface between assessing and taking into account cultural and experiential variation impact.

This project investigates how supervisors and host teachers interact with variables to come up with a judgement of a NNESTT's performance. Interestingly, little research has been carried out on how such evaluations are made of non-native English speaking teacher trainees' performance. This study goes some way to filling that gap. In this report, 'supervisors' are the members of staff from the university who go to Hungary to support the trainee teachers and 'host teachers' are the Hungarian English language teachers who work in the placement schools and also support the trainees.

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Literature review

Researchers agree that the relationship between host teachers and university supervisors is crucial to the success of the TP. Tomas et al. (2008: 660) state 'one noteworthy absence of interaction is that between practicum supervisors and mentor teachers, even though this interaction is considered a critical element of the practice teaching experience'. They go on to suggest that this is important because the university supervisors do not observe the trainees as frequently as the host teachers and are therefore 'limited in the amount of feedback and support they can give' (*ibid.*). The authors suggest that dialogue is needed between these key participants and that a collaborative working relationship may 'present supervisors as well as mentor teachers with additional opportunities to provide enhanced guidance and feedback to pre-service teachers (2008: 663). Stoyhoff (1999: 146) agrees: 'the delivery of a teaching practice emphasises a team approach – the team includes mentor teachers (who serve as ESL teachers, models and coaches and university staff (who serve as supervising teachers and academic advisors). Each team member should be involved in a collegial, consultative decision-making process'. Studies also show that there is a need to explore the different perceptions of trainees held by participants who evaluate NNESTTs' TP performance. Nemtchinova (2005: 236) states that host teachers may have both positive and negative perceptions of NNESTTs' TP performance: 'they resented their accents, questioned the grammatical accuracy of their English and referred to ESL students' reluctance to have a non-native speaker as an instructor. And yet, other TESOL practicum coordinators and program directors worked with host teachers who welcomed NNES teacher trainees in their classrooms because of their expertise in diverse languages and cultures, their sensitivity to students' needs, and their responsibility and competence'.

In recent years the role of the NNEST has been discussed in terms of the dominance approach versus the difference approach (Medgyes, 1994). Proponents of the dominance approach recognise a gap between native and non-native proficiency and view non-native English speakers as 'linguistically handicapped' (Medgyes, 1994: 103) in relation to native English speakers. The difference approach perceives non-native English speakers from another perspective. According to this position, both NNEST and NES groups may be good or bad teachers even though they arrive from different backgrounds. Its proponents argue that NNEST teachers in fact bring certain linguistic and pedagogical resources that are as important for language teaching as the resources that NES teachers bring. Among the positive attributes credited to non-native English speakers are their conscious knowledge of grammar, language learning experience that they can share with learners, a good learner model that they may represent, and the empathy they bring to the task of teaching (Braine, 1999).

This concise review of literature has outlined issues regarding host teacher and supervisor evaluation of NNESTTs' teaching practice performance. It is hoped that this report will go some way to adding to this literature.

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Participants

Hungarian host teachers

In the 1990s, the Russian language ceased to be compulsory as part of the school curriculum in Hungary and Hungarian teachers were either retrained as English language teachers or undertook a three-year 'fast-track teacher training programme' in English (Halápi and Saunders, 2002: 169). Female teachers are the primary make-up of the workforce in teaching English as a foreign language in primary and secondary schools across the country. Teaching is generally known a low-paid job. Although they have been trained to integrate communicative language teaching approach into their teaching (Balassa et al., 2003), many teachers are observed to apply techniques of audio-lingual and grammar translation method in English classes (Nikolov, 2003. cited in Mihaljević Djigunović et al., 2008). Currently, the host teachers observe the 12 hours the trainees teach each week and give informal, oral feedback after class on the trainee's performance. The host teachers are not involved in the formal evaluation of trainees but play an important role in supporting trainees and giving encouragement and feedback on a day-to-day basis.

University supervisors

Normally there are about 20 trainees on the course and there is one university supervisor in attendance during five of the six weeks. In the year in which this study took place, two supervisors went to Hungary, one for two weeks, followed by another for three weeks. Whilst each supervisor is there, they observe each trainee (normally up to 20) and give formal feedback at least once a week. This feedback is in the form of a face-to-face session and a written report; supervisors also make a summative assessment of performance in week 6 (when the final lesson is also examined by a visiting external examiner).

This study focuses on six participants: two university supervisors and four Hungarian host teachers.

Host teacher/University supervisor	Years of experience ELT	Years of experience teacher training
Host teacher A Nationality of NNEST: Taiwanese	unknown	unknown
Host teacher B Nationality of NNEST: Saudi Arabian	9 years	3 years
Host teacher C Nationality of NNEST: Bangladeshi	30 years	5 years
Host teacher D Nationality of NNEST: Brazilian	6 years	3 years
University supervisor 1 Nationality of NNEST: all four nationalities	5 years	34 years
University supervisor 2 Nationality of NNEST: all four nationalities	4 years	12 years

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Methodology

This project takes a broad sociocultural approach as it recognises the need to understand the evaluation of teaching performance within the social and cultural context in which it takes place. A case study of six participants is used to focus on the issue. Yin (2003: 1) states case study is ‘the preferred strategy when ‘how’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context’. Two different data collection methods were used; semi structured interview and think-aloud audio recordings. They attempt to fit in with the ‘ecology’ of the TP so that the research process avoids requiring the participants to carry out too much extra work whilst participating in the normal activities of TP. Research questions, research instruments, and data analysis are summarized below.

Research question	Research instrument and data set	Data analysis
RQ1: What are host teachers’ and supervisors’ different roles in teaching practice?	Six semi-structured interviews of approx. 30 minutes duration carried out before TP. Audio-recordings of ‘think aloud’ comments during TP. Host teacher data set: five recordings (one for each week) from each host teacher so 20 altogether. University supervisor data set: four recordings each week (one on each of the four NNESTTs each week for five weeks) so 20 altogether. Each recording was two to three minutes long.	Topic coding to generate themes
RQ2: How do their different roles affect their perception of trainees’ performance?	Audio-recordings of ‘think aloud’ comments during TP. Host teacher data set: five recordings (one for each week) from each host teacher so 20 altogether. University supervisor data set: four recordings each week (one on each of the four NNESTTs each week for five weeks) so 20 altogether. Each recording was two to three minutes long. Semi-structured interviews post-TP.	Topic coding to generate themes

Pre- and post TP interview

Firstly, the participants were interviewed pre-teaching practice (face-to-face interviews with the university supervisors and telephone interviews with the Hungarian host teachers) to find out how they perceived their roles in TP. Participants were also interviewed post-teaching practice to explore the audio recorded think-aloud evaluative comments made during TP. This post interview schedule included a common framework of questions which could be tailored to each interview depending on what the participant had said in the previous audio recordings.

Audio recordings

In addition to semi-structured interviews, data was also collected by giving each participant a digital recorder to make audio recordings of their evaluative comments of the NNESTTs' performance, to find out how their role affects their evaluation of NNESTTs. The four host teachers made one recording about their one non-native trainee every week for five weeks (five recordings for each host teacher, so 20 for all four host teachers), whilst the two university supervisors (the first supervised during weeks two and three of the practice, the second during weeks four, five and six) also made one recording regarding each of the four NNESTTs every week for five weeks, (so, four recordings, one on each of the four NNESTTs, each week for five weeks, that is 20 supervisors' recordings altogether). So, in total 40 recordings (each around three–four minutes long) were made; 20 by the host teachers and 20 by the university supervisors. For each NNESTT, 10 audio recordings of comments about his/her teaching practice performance were made (five from the host teacher and five from the two supervisors).

The participants were advised to make the recordings as soon as possible after each observation of the trainees' performance. The idea behind the audio recording is that participants make a verbal report on their NNESTT's performance, they 'think-aloud' their thoughts. This think-aloud procedure is relatively common in research studies which aim to gain insights into the reasoning behind language learners' written or spoken behaviours (Gass and Mackey 2000), however, in this instance it is used to uncover key features about participants' reasoning when making a judgement on NNESTTs' teaching performance .

Analysis

Analytical categories were allowed to emerge from, rather than being imposed on, the data. Richards' (2005: 87) strategy for topic coding was used to interpret the interview and think-aloud transcripts. The data was read and re-read and then coded into categories related to key features which influenced supervisors and host teachers when judging TP performance. The purpose of the coding was to interrogate the data in order to keep generating themes related to the topic. Regarding reliability, coder consistency was achieved by having a colleague code the same transcripts and measure the extent to which coding into similar themes occurred. Four themes emerged from the data. These are 'soft' versus 'hard' approach (RQ1) and level and curriculum, pupils' learning versus trainees' teaching and working together (RQ2).

Given the mixed methods nature of this study, data analysis also involved a comparison of the interview and think aloud data; this allowed us to illustrate interview findings with think-aloud audio recording examples, and therefore to obtain a more meaningful understanding of why the participants responded in the ways they did.

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Ethics

The study was approved by the researchers' institutional ethics committee. Participants were provided with enough information to make an informed decision about whether to take part in the study, and it was made clear that they could withdraw at any time. Participation was voluntary, and the data collected were treated confidentially and in such a way as to protect respondents' identities. They were also told that the results of the study would be fed back to them on completion. That participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any point is important as participation threw up issues which could be challenging and emotionally difficult. For example, one host teacher was angry towards their non-native trainee because of their attitude towards the Hungarian pupils; they interpreted the trainee's attitude towards the pupils as critical and condescending. In fact, this participant did not leave the project but instead used the think aloud recordings and the post TP interview to explore feelings.

The two researchers involved in carrying out this study have over eight years of supervisory experience on the TP in Hungary, and although they did not go to Hungary during the particular period of this current project, they do feel that the 'insider status' they hold as both Teaching Practice supervisors and researchers may have limited the study's validity. Regarding validity, we are mindful that as we have two roles as supervisors and researchers, participants might feel obliged to give pleasing responses or not to 'open up' fully in the

interviews or audio recordings because they were anxious about our impressions on listening to their thoughts (the Hawthorne effect) (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). To minimise this bias when explaining the study at the start of the project we emphasised that anonymity was a high priority (see below), that the data collected should reflect real feelings as far as possible (i.e. that both positive and negative opinions were sought) and that the data collected would have no influence on their future participation in the partnership. Validity and reliability of the study were achieved through comparing and contrasting data collected from interviews and participants' audio recordings. Investigator triangulation (Robson, 2002) was also adopted to reduce the threat to reliability. The two researchers were both involved in collecting data at different stages, peer-debriefing regularly and thematising findings through co-coding data together in a compare and contrast analysis. Meanwhile, the dual role we have as researchers and supervisors has its advantages for the study, for example, we are familiar with the history and context of the TP, and so are less likely to make mistakes due to ignorance.

Anonymity is an important ethical concern in this study. The postgraduate TESOL programme is unique in the UK being the only one to have an overseas TP in Hungary, so, in order to safeguard participants' anonymity, participants were advised that any future reports would not include their names or the names of their non-native speaking trainees, the name of the university, or the year the study was carried out.

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Findings and discussion

A number of themes emerged from the data regarding how the participants orient themselves to the evaluation of the NNESTTs' teaching practice performance. Related to research question 1, about host teachers' and supervisors' different roles in TP, the theme of the 'soft' versus 'hard' approach emerged. In relation to research question 2, concerning how the different roles affect perception of performance, three themes emerged: level and curriculum, pupils' learning versus trainees' teaching, and working together. The origin of the data is given in brackets after each quotation, for example, HTD, SSI post TP means Host teacher D speaking in semi-structured interview post TP, whilst US2, TA means university supervisor 2 speaking in think aloud audio recording.

Findings related to research question 1: what are host teachers' and supervisors' different roles in teaching practice?

In relation to the first part of the question it may be that the Hungarian host teachers see their role as much more pastoral than the university supervisors. Data showed that this led to the host teachers having a more realistic, process view of the trainees' task whilst the supervisors had a more idealistic, end product view of what their trainees may achieve. The host teachers see the trainees on a day-to-day basis and have an overview of the whole six weeks practicum so are more aware of other factors which come into play and affect their performance; the university supervisors however see each trainee once a week and have as their biggest concern that the trainees 'pass' the module.

Host teachers 'soft' approach versus university supervisors 'hard' approach

Comments such as the one below show that although host teachers do not find it straightforward to support some of the NNESTTs, they do care for, nurture and are benevolent towards the trainee even when the relationship is difficult. It seems that host teachers have a more 'soft' minded approach and as such often refer to more intangible qualities of the trainee teachers and their moral attributes.

'I realise towards the end of the practice that the course must have been more difficult for him even in the University not just the teaching practice but his whole course...the UK try to work very independently and perhaps we had expected the same and we shouldn't have done so ...we should have understood the culture ..he told us a lot about the education in his own country...and towards the end of the practice we were beginning to understand why he behaved so differently in class'. (HTC post TPSSI)

This can be compared with the supervisors who have more of a 'hard' minded approach; they are aware that they are the gatekeepers of who goes forward into the profession and who does not.

'He was confident going into class and while a lesson plan was in place and detailed he did not seem to have really grasped the link between the contextual content of the lesson and the concept of quantifiers.' 'When I suggested that he needs to reflect on our conversation he thought this would be more work and that he has some psychological problems and financial worries. I really did not want to get into a conversation about these and said I hoped he would be able to sort them out – not exactly the most caring solution and maybe we need to just be aware of this in case an issue develops.' (US2 TA)

These comments from university supervisors suggest that although they support the trainee, their focus is on getting the trainees through the practice and passing. This difference may be because supervisors may fear becoming over involved in their students' lives to the detriment of fulfilling their academic role.

Findings related to research question 2: how do their different roles affect their perception of trainees' performance?

In relation to research question 2, it can be seen that host teachers' and university supervisors' different roles did not necessarily affect their perceptions. Both groups agreed that NNESTTs were successful in planning and preparation and in their ability to empathise with ESL learners by sharing their language learning experience. Additionally both groups perceived that NNESTTs' ability to share their different cultural backgrounds was of benefit to their pupils. This finding is consistent with previous research that describes the positive impact non-native English speakers have on ESL students (Kamhi-Stein, Lee, and Lee, 1998; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1994; Tang, 1997).

Preparation and empathy

Supervisors were of the opinion that NNESTTs tend to prepare well for their teaching and that this has its advantages. For example, a supervisor reports *'one of them had been very weak then actually it was one of the best lessons I saw but I think they had actually practised it and rehearsed it and done it about four times'* (US2, TA). However, they also believe NNESTTs' tendency to over prepare is disadvantageous: *'sometimes the NNESTTs want to write down every word that they are going to say and they keep on doing that for a long time because they are afraid of drying up ... and many of them spend time writing out their intentions and instead of writing 'I am going to ask the children' they should refocus and be more practical and formulate and list the four questions that they plan to ask'* (US1).

Comments also show that an important aspect of NNESTTs' competence in the classroom is their ability to empathise with their pupils:

'I think they understand our pupils well, they are better in that way, more emotional if you know what I mean' (HTA, TA).

'They have gone through the process themselves of learning English and they draw on their experiences of how it was taught to them and have great understanding of the difficulties that we (the native speakers) would have no concept of, they are also good role models for their learners' (US2, TA).

'it's positive to have them in the classroom because they have been through all the processes of learning the language so they know how hard it is and so really show their kindness to pupils who struggle' (HTB, SSI post TP).

They have to have a good command of the language...on the other hand Hungarian pupils are simply delighted if the teacher doesn't know a word because they see that the teachers are not perfect either and that encourages them to use the language even if they make mistakes' (HTC, TA).

Difference in cultural backgrounds

Comments from host teachers and supervisors frequently show that NNESTTs' cultural differences add to their teaching performance; an HTC expresses excitement at the opportunity to host a trainee from a country as different as Bangladesh:

'it will be very interesting because they [my pupils] have never met a Bangladeshi person ever in their life ... even in my life...I think besides teaching English he can bring the atmosphere of his own country and what he does, what he says, what he looks like, everything tells us about his culture' (HTC, SSI preTP).

HTB also underlines the strength of the cultural factor in the classroom: *'I think communication of culture is a great strength of the NNESTTs – some of the Hungarian pupils have really enjoyed things like Chinese New Year, or Chinese myths and legends'* and *'I think that from a cultural point of view they [the pupils] can learn a lot ... to broaden their minds...to open...become more open to the world'* (HTB, SSI preTP).

HTB goes on to state that when a trainee makes explicit their cultural difference, this can have a positive impact on the trainee's relationship with the pupils and therefore on the trainee's TP performance. HTB's comments below highlight the importance of revealing personality by giving personal cultural information;

'he opened up and made some personal comments about himself and his life in the class, this makes his teaching more personal and much more enjoyable – the pupils were really engaged' (HTB SSI post TP)

'because of his cultural background there was a kind of wall around him and then there was a time during the practice when his personality broke through and you could see more of a teacher in him' (HTB SSI post TP).

'I think it creates a personal bridge between them and the pupils...there was one girl called Becky and he said that it means something nice like little sister or little girl in Arabic and do you know it made a connection' (HTB SSI post TP).

However, both university supervisors and host teachers comment that the cultural gap can also cause problems which impact on TP performance especially the potential risks of the cultural gap between the NNESTTs' previous and current learning and teaching experiences. A university supervisor states *'their previous learning experience can*

influence how they teach and sometimes be detrimental...’ (US2, SSI post TP), whilst another comments: ‘It’s about how they interpret their experiences of being taught in a more traditional context, into a teaching role in a more liberal context, that’s one of the big differences and one of the biggest challenges for them’ (US2, TA).

The culturally situated role of the teacher is an important factor in defining the nature of the interaction between pupils and the trainee teacher as well as the communication between the trainee and the host teacher or supervisor, all of which influences their classroom performance. HTB considers whether her NNESTT’s awkward performance in the classroom in the first half of the practice is due to the cultural difference between the Hungarian ELT classroom and previous learning experiences or whether it is due to a low level of English proficiency.

‘Sometimes I can’t decide whether he uses the language the way he does due to lack of knowledge or due to his cultural background’ (HTB, TA).

The following comment from Shin, referring to non-native English as a Second Language (ESL) trainees in American schools, concurs with HTB’s thoughts: ‘Non-native teachers may lack cultural understandings and the social language to navigate professional relationships with colleagues and students in a foreign setting’ (2008, 62). It may be that the ‘culture bumps’ (Archer 1986) experienced by the non-native trainees in the classroom are real for all involved, as not only are they interacting with pupils and colleagues who have a different culture to them, but this is in Hungary, yet another culture from the one where their university is based; this ‘double layer’ of cultural complexity may possibly hinder their confidence and therefore their ability in the classroom.

In addition to factors which both groups generally agreed upon, host teachers and university supervisors also seemed to prioritise different factors when gaining an impression of a trainee’s performance.

Level and curriculum

Regarding the host teachers, comments illustrate that their perception can be skewed by how well a trainee adapts their teaching to the level of pupils and to the curriculum. HTA is a primary school teacher and her experience in the primary sector has a huge impact on her perception of the performance of their trainee from Taiwan.

‘In my opinion a good trainee has to use a lot of pictures and cards for the lesson and use a lot of games and keep them moving and teach them words not just words whole sentences but do not teach grammar’ (HTA).

HTA believes that visuals, games and movement are the only ways to teach young children and so may not support, even if unconsciously so, a trainee who wishes to introduce children to activities which are not short and sharp but more lengthy, involved and long term. Another host teacher’s comments show that they are concerned with how the trainee is dealing with the curriculum, that they want the trainee to push the learners to get the syllabus covered – an aspect of the TP that university supervisors may not feel is so important, because they are not so aware of it:

‘she doesn’t want to push the students ahead...The syllabus here, in Hungary, is quite tight and we have to keep pace for it...em...I explained it to her and showed her the file tests...so she can see what the students will have to know by the end ... it is much more than she expected...and it all made me realise that I should have done that before so the trainee could see what must be covered...and by what time’ (HTD TA).

Pupils’ learning versus trainees’ teaching

Interestingly, the comments also show that host teachers place importance when evaluating the trainee’s performance on how the pupils are learning under the guidance of the trainee; this however, does not seem to be such an important focus of the supervisors’ comments, which generally tend to focus on how the trainee is teaching rather than on how the learners are learning.

‘Much time was taken up earlier in the lesson with presentation of structures in the context of the first stage, and this detracted from the last stage which could have been good. He spent too much time correcting, and not enough on creative activities’ ‘Recap was a Minitest...15 minutes allowed for Pronunciation, though this phase was supposed to include an exercise in Headway which he did not do. He made use of the Smart Board, displaying pictures of travel events. He could have used these to provide enriched vocabulary.’ ‘The students had been explicitly warned in the seminar not to concentrate exclusively upon grammar, and to focus on communication.’ (US1, TA).

So far it can be seen that participants' perspectives on a trainee's teaching competency is very much entwined with their own biographies, teaching experience and beliefs. They inevitably bring their own perspectives to every stage of the assessment process, so that what they see in the trainees' teaching is shaped by their own experiences as a teacher. Host teachers predominantly cited issues to do with the curriculum, homework and class management, reflecting the practical issues underlying their comments that they want to make sure their English language pupils attain certain targets under the direction of their trainee. These are different from the issues predominantly cited by supervisors, which are students' creativity in lesson designing, good preparation, good use of visuals, students' ability to explore and present language points and their reflective thinking.

Dealing with different 'subjective' perspectives: working together

Punch suggests that in contexts where decisions may be subjective, like evaluation of TP performance, participants 'come clean' (1998: 222) with their beliefs, biases and assumptions. This suggests that those evaluating teaching practice should develop reflexivity in their interpretations of their perspectives on teaching practice performance and attempt to state why they interpret in such a way. By doing this they may become more open minded – their ideas may be modified through trying to understand where those perspectives come from.

Another way in which host teachers and university supervisors can deal with the subjectivity inherent in assessing teaching practice performance and therefore evaluate the trainees more reliably is to work more closely together. This way multiple sources of evidence, and reflection on that evidence, can be brought together leading to a more reliable final judgement. According to Richards and Crookes (1988: 21) 'the success of the practice teaching experience depends ... on the kinds of liaisons and communication established between the supervisor and the [mentor] teacher'. Data from the current study shows that host teachers and supervisors realise the benefit of engaging with another evaluator's perspective. A university supervisor comments:

'I find it interesting to have another's opinion. Sometimes the HTs are more sympathetic to the trainee than I would be because I know the standard the University would expect ... the host teacher will have observed the trainee from an initial stage where they showed quite a lot of vulnerability so may be a little more sympathetic' (US1: post TP SSI).

Whilst a host teacher states:

'Yes, it's always helpful to have another observer apart from me ...because of the different interpretations they might make just to see if I misunderstood something...they see it in a different way' (HTB post TP SSI).

Usher (1996: 19) explains this way of coming to a conclusion as a type of 'circle of interpretation': like reading a book, the story of the lesson depends on its parts and different readers will have different interpretations of each part. The host teacher's comment below is evidence of different interpretations of the same trainee's lesson.

'US1's criticism was that she should have included more free practice in the lesson so that the pupils can experience the benefit of learning, by which she meant grammar and vocabulary to reach the real aim that is oral communication. I would add that... em...US1 might have only oral communication in her mind but the way I see it the written communication is just as important an aim' (HTD TA).

In this comment 'interpretations of interpretations' (Usher 1996: 20) are at work, as the host teacher reflects upon the supervisor's evaluation and interprets the phase of a trainee's lesson in a different way. Gadamer (cited in Usher: 18) suggests that by examining other interpretations of the same situation an intersubjective agreement can be achieved leading to a type of standard of objectivity. However, for this to be achieved participants have to use their own voices to create a 'fusion' of ideas which allow for a degree of objective agreement to be reached.

'I would welcome a discussion with other teachers because...we just get a snapshot of that lesson... the teacher may well have seen an improvement or have said to the student ...why don't you try this' (US2 post TP SSI).

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Limitations

Before we move on to conclude, it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of the research reported above. We must acknowledge the case study nature of this study, and that there were only six participants involved in the study, so that the application of presented findings should rely on readers' discretion to identify and decide on the commonality of the findings that resonates with their own experience and practice. Notwithstanding, the study is methodologically sound, the research instruments used appeared to be the most appropriate as the primary purpose of the study was to allow the real voices of participants to be heard in the research (Boyle, 1994).

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Summary

Our aim in this study was to move beyond the routine exploration of the evaluation of teaching practice and to take a critical look at the factors that were at play when host teachers and university supervisors made judgements of non-native ESL teacher trainees' TP performance. It is hoped that the insights reported here contribute to the literature on evaluation of teaching performance. Below is a summary of the salient findings to emerge.

1. There was a significant difference in host teachers' approach towards the evaluation of the trainees' performance and the supervisors'. For example, host teachers take a 'soft' approach and focus more on the trainees' pastoral needs compared with the 'hard' approach of university supervisors who focus more on the end result of the TP.
2. Although there were similarities in the two groups' perceptions of NNESTTs (planning, empathy, cultural resource), host teachers and supervisors seemed to prioritise different variables when evaluating NNESTTs' TP performance. Host teachers focused on the trainee's ability to adapt to the demands of the curriculum and the pupils' differing levels of ability. Indeed host teachers placed emphasis on pupils' learning when evaluating TP performance, whilst supervisors were more concerned with trainees' teaching.
3. Both groups of participants were positively disposed to working more closely together and value each other's opinions.
4. The findings show that the university supervisors and host teachers involved in the teaching practice in Hungary work within the boundaries of their jobs, experience and lives when assessing trainees' performance and that potentially their interpretations may be constrained because they have not been encouraged to see beyond the prism of their own experience.

Perhaps one of the most surprising findings of our study was the enormous thought that goes into the evaluation of the trainees' TP performance. A large proportion of the comments offered in the interviews and think aloud reports referred to how participants took contextual variables into consideration when evaluating non-native trainees. Our own experience then reinforces the conclusion of Delandshere and Petrosky who state (1994: 14) that pieces of performances 'can only be analysed, interpreted and evaluated in the context of the whole performance because their significance is determined by that context'.

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Recommendations

Results from this study demonstrate that there are differences in the perceptions of host teachers and university supervisors of NNESTs' performance and that host teachers and supervisors see the benefits of working more closely together. This more rigorous host teacher involvement would benefit the students, as it would lead to better evaluation processes. To this end the course team plan to involve the host teachers in carrying out formal, rather than informal, supervisory observations and feedback sessions with the trainees. This finding has led to a commitment to implement training, in the form of CPD workshops, to ensure consistency and standardisation of evaluation procedures for the Hungarian host teachers in subsequent years. There is also a need for awareness raising of the importance of reflexivity among both groups of participants. Those evaluating NNESTTs need to become aware of reasons for their perspectives on NNESTTs' teaching practice performance, for example, their own teaching background and their own language learning experiences, and allow their evaluative judgements to be altered through trying to understand where those perspectives come from.

A particular challenge which will remain constant is how to take into account the variables in terms of the teaching practice context, the pupils, the NNEST trainee teacher and the different roles and responsibilities and experiences that each of the evaluating participants bring with them. The answer to this lies in the communication and reflection which occurs between those evaluating the performance.

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