

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The late twentieth century has seen a rapid advancement in the field of communication, which has narrowed the gap between the nations in the world bringing them closer to the realisation of the world as a "*global village*". Consequently the major languages of the world, especially English has gained ever more importance. In Malaysia, as the nation moves towards its vision of an industrialised country and as it opens its boundaries to a borderless world, the need for its people to be proficient in English is becoming ever more evident. These phenomena have increased the demand for professionally qualified English language teachers in the country, especially at the primary school level, which the Education Ministry of Malaysia is trying its best to produce. This is not an easy task as in the past few decades the country has seen a tremendous decline in the command of English among Malaysians due to Education reforms made in the early 1970s, which have gradually depleted the resource for potential English teachers.

This chapter gives an overview of the Diploma in English Studies Program and the Teaching Practice Program offered at many of the Teacher Training Colleges in Malaysia, highlighting the roles of college supervisors, school mentors, school administrators and student teachers in relation to clinical supervision and reflective practice.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The English Studies Program

The Teacher Training Division (Bahagian Pendidikan Guru - BPG) of the Education Ministry of Malaysia has been commissioned to shoulder the mammoth task of producing competent English teachers through the English Studies Program at its various Teacher Training Colleges. English Studies is a six-semester teacher preparation program offered at the Diploma level to cater to the needs of the primary school curriculum.

The syllabus comprises two major components, namely proficiency and methodology. The Proficiency component, which focuses on developing language skills, is aimed at providing adequate language input to upgrade the student teachers' proficiency and competence in the language. The methodology component includes theoretical aspects and teaching skills, which aim to provide the student teachers with the basic pedagogical skills needed to teach English confidently in the KBSR classrooms.

The objectives of the program are to enable the novice teachers to:

- i. use the language for both their academic and professional development;*
- ii. use the language at a level of linguistic and communicative competence required of a teacher of English as a second language;*
- iii. acquire the subject knowledge, pedagogical and technological skills to plan and implement appropriate learning experiences for their pupils based on the KBSR (New Primary School Curriculum) syllabus using a variety of approaches;*
- iv. reflect critically on their learning experience as a means of self-evaluation to improve their teaching practice; and*

- v. *direct and manage their own professional and personal development in line with current developments in education and information technology.*

(Sukatan Pelajaran Pengajian Bahasa Inggeris, 2001)

To achieve these objectives, teacher-educators are expected by the Bahagian Pendidikan Guru (BPG) to adopt a variety of learner-centred strategies in the implementation of the syllabus.

The course components - Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills; Language Study, Principles and Practice of English Language Teaching; and TESL Methodology totalling 41 credits and 615 contact hours is spread out schematically over the six semesters.

(Sukatan Pelajaran Pengajian Bahasa Inggeris, 2001)

1.1.2 The Teaching Practice Program

One core element of the teacher preparation program is PRACTICUM or teaching practice. Teacher educators and researchers describe it as a crucial component for the professional development of pre-service teachers (Campbell, 1981 and Mc Aleer, 1976 in Marimuthu, 1991). It is during this period of teacher preparation that the student teachers make connection between theory and practice. With the guidance of 'co-operative teachers' (school mentors) and 'university supervisors' (in the context of this research - college supervisors) they "*...explore, experiment, and put it all together*" in their efforts to become a competent teacher (Kramer and Jacko, 1977: 51 in Marimuthu, 1991). The supervision of student teachers during their classroom practice by college supervisors and school mentors is considered to be the most powerful intervention (Turney, et al. 1982:47 in Randall and Thornton, 2001) and reflective practice (Schon 1983, 1987) is essential for the independent professional development of teachers.

The teaching practice program, which is to be seen as a continuous process beginning from the time the student teachers start their courses at the teacher training colleges, is sub-divided into pre-Practicum and Practicum. The pre-Practicum entails micro and macro teaching, which prepare the student teachers for the actual teaching practice. Generally, micro and macro teaching are exposed to them in college by their language lecturers and education lecturers respectively during the early semesters. Specifically, English Language Teaching (ELT) lesson planning and microteaching is practised at the beginning of the fourth semester just before the first Practicum (in Sukatan Pelajaran Pengajian Bahasa Inggeris, 2001). Practicum is the actual teaching practice within and outside the classroom that the student teachers undergo in two phases during the course of teacher preparation. The diagram in Figure 1 shows the divisions of the program.

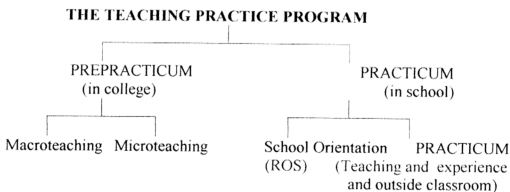
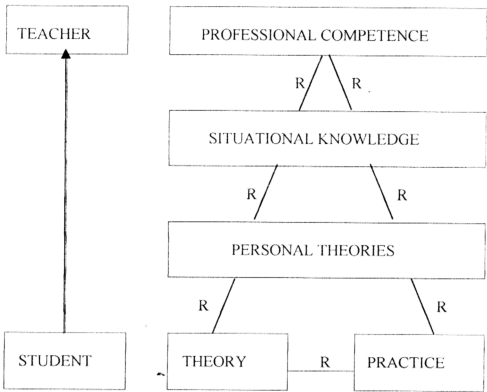


FIGURE 1 The Teaching Practice Program Concept
(Translated from "Garis Panduan Praktikum Latihan
Perguruan Praperkhidmatan", 2002: 1)

Primary schools in the vicinity of the colleges play an important role in the process of guiding and supervising the student teachers during Practicum. An experienced teacher is designated as a mentor to guide and coach the student teachers during their exposure to actual teaching in these schools. This collaboration between the teacher training colleges and schools during Practicum instils a sense of joint

responsibility and ownership as well as strengthens the concept of partnership in the professional well being of the teaching profession.

The rationale for the Teaching Practice Program is to provide opportunities for student teachers to bring theory to practice as well as to develop their own theories about teaching and learning. The practical experience and reflective practice lead the student teachers to acquire situational knowledge, which is the foundation for their growth towards professional competence. The diagram in Figure 2 shows the process of professional development of student teachers through Practicum and reflective practice.



R = Reflection

FIGURE 2 The Process of Professional Development through Practicum
 (Translated from “Garis Panduan Praktikum Latihan
 Perguruan Praperkhidmatan”, 2002: 2)

This school-based training program emphasises training and guidance more than assessment and the collaboration of the expertise and experience between the college and school is the core element in its implementation. This program, which is practical,

systematic and developmental in nature, is designed to develop the professional competence of the student teachers. The main components of Practicum are:

- i. School Orientation (ROS);
- ii. teaching and classroom experience;
- iii. teaching and experience outside the classroom; and
- iv. the development of personality traits which are appropriate for the teaching profession.

(Garis Panduan Praktikum Latihan Perguruan Praperkhidmatan, 2002)

The goal of the Teaching Practice Program is to enable student teachers to grasp and apply all the principles, skills and values that make a professional teacher. The teaching practice experience is also expected to help them develop their potential and self-confidence in facing the challenges of the school.

The objectives are that

- (a) the student teachers will be able to:
 - i. instil in themselves a positive attitude, boost their self-esteem and practice the virtues of the teaching profession;
 - ii. develop their adaptability, self-esteem, competitiveness and creativity;
 - iii. improve their observation skills, consideration and sensitivity towards pupils;
 - iv. improve their observation skills, sensitivity and the ability to adapt to the school culture;
 - v. integrate theory and the practice of teaching and learning;
 - vi. identify and solve problems of teaching and learning and develop their potential as teachers; and
 - vii. reflect upon and self evaluate every aspect of a teacher's duty.
- (b) the college and school can:
 - i. provide an overall guidance which encompasses all the aspects of teaching and learning in and outside the classroom;
 - ii. foster a professional relationship between the college and school through discussions and the sharing of information as well as expertise in the context of teaching and learning; and
 - iii. assess the student teachers' professional competence during Practicum

(Garis Panduan Praktikum Latihan Perguruan Praperkhidmatan, 2002)

1.1.3 The School Orientation Program (Rancangan Orientasi Sekolah - ROS)

ROS is an early two-week exposure of the school environment in semester two for student teachers to observe, reflect upon and interact with teachers and the school community. Through their observations they are expected to understand the behaviours of pupils, school management and the classroom manager, which would give them insights of the integration between theory and practice in teaching and learning contexts. The people involved in this exercise are the student teachers, the school mentors and the college supervisor. The researcher has chosen not to elaborate on ROS as it is not the focus of his research.

1.1.4 PRACTICUM

For the Diploma in English Studies and other similar programs, the Practicum is carried out in two phases. The first phase, which is for eight weeks, is in the fourth semester whilst the second phase, which is for twelve weeks, is in the sixth semester. To fulfil the requirements of the Practicum the student teachers need to teach eight to twelve periods a week, of which six to eight periods are allocated for their Major.

The Practicum is a follow up to the ROS which gives the student teachers opportunities to put their theoretical knowledge, English Language Teaching (ELT) skills, virtues of the teaching profession and reflectivity to practice in a real classroom and school.

The collaboration of the college supervisors, the students teachers and the school mentors are essential in the successful implementation of the Practicum. The student teachers have to prepare their semester and daily teaching plans completely and sufficiently, and teach both individually and in pairs using a variety of teaching strategies. They need to complete a Practicum portfolio, keep a weekly journal and

write reflections of their daily lessons. They are also expected to abide by the ethics of the teaching profession, the school regulations and their college rules.

The College Supervisors and school mentors need to provide advice and support according to the principles of clinical supervision both in the students' lesson planning and after their lessons. They also need to collaboratively supervise, counsel, monitor and assess the student teachers' performance.

1.1.5 Journal Writing

The student teachers keep a journal about events, problems, achievements and other important matters as well as views and suggestions throughout the Practicum. The journal is a medium for reflecting their experience of the duties of a teacher as well as the teaching and learning process in the classroom; a means for self-evaluation and a source for follow up actions.

The college supervisors and the school mentors guide the student teachers to enter only relevant and critical matters in their journal. The contents of the journal are discussed by the student teachers, college supervisor and the school mentor, and are given written comments by the school mentors and college supervisors for follow up actions by the student teachers.

1.1.6 Clinical Supervision

Clinical supervision includes observation of the teaching, data collection from the observation, and analysing the teaching behaviours and activities to improve the quality of teaching. The college supervisors and school mentors collaboratively advice and support the student teachers to solve their teaching and learning problems and to expand their potential and skills. The diagram in Figure 3 summarises the Clinical Supervision Cycle

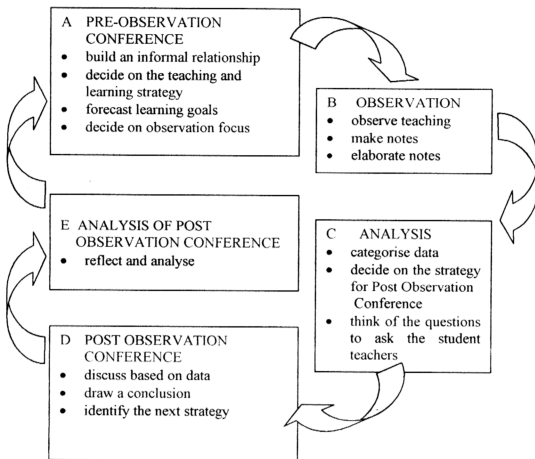


FIGURE 3 The Clinical Supervision Cycle
(Garis Panduan Praktikum Latihan Perguruan Praperkhidmatan, 2002)

(a). Pre-Observation Conference

The purpose of this stage is to create an overall understanding of the steps/procedure involved at every stage of the supervision. The College Supervisor has to attempt to create an informal relationship with the student teachers and convince them that the aim of the supervision is to help them improve their professional skills. At this stage too the College Supervisor/school mentor and the student teachers decide on a specific focus for the observation.

(b) Analysis

This step is for the college supervisor/school mentors to:

- i. explain what has been noted during the observation with specific focus to the specific area that had been agreed upon; and
- ii. plan an assessment strategy.

The College Supervisor categorises the data, and prepares an action plan, questions and a conclusion for the post observation conference.

(c) Observation

At this stage the college supervisors observe and make notes of the student teachers' teaching (the whole lesson). They also expand the data to assist them during the counselling session.

(d) Post Observation Conference

During this stage the College Supervisor/school mentor and student teachers discuss the teaching

- referring to specific episodes during the lesson;
- seeking information or explanation; and
- working out alternatives

(e) Post Observation Conference Analysis

This step is taken by the College Supervisor/school mentor to analyse the post observation conference to evaluate the assessment strategy and to conduct a self-evaluation.

1.2 Statement of Problem

1.2.1 The Present Demands on ESL Teachers

It is the belief of many ELT practitioners and researchers that tremendous changes have taken place in the views on language, language learning, and the role of the learner in language teaching in the last decade of the twentieth century. Simultaneously, the role of the language teacher in language instruction has altered considerably (Richards and Nunan, 1990).

Teachers are no longer viewed as the person who knows all and has the sole responsibility of imparting knowledge to the learners who '*do not know*' or '*do not know yet*'. Teachers seen as authoritarians and learners as passive recipients (Yalden, 1987: 54) is no more the education scenario now. The models of language learning and teaching processes, which are currently being practised, have changed the attitude of what has to be taught and how it is to be taught. Teachers are not only expected to be experts in providing comprehensible input, but providers of activities in a conducive environment that would promote language learning through natural communicative interaction. The teacher is now seen as a facilitator, an adviser and a consultant who is more concerned with providing an environment that will provide opportunities for language learning (Edelhoff, 1985:128).

Besides providing materials and activities, the teacher's sensitivity with which he directs learners' activities is of paramount importance as he is the one who shapes what happens in the classroom. This requires the teacher to make informed choices as well as reasoned judgements and decisions. To keep up with the continuous changes of the pedagogical context and skills teachers today have to be even more than that. They have to be responsible for their own individual growth.

In teacher training, thus, the mere enhancement of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills is not sufficient to fulfil these new demands. Opportunities should

be made available for teachers to acquire new knowledge and competencies on their own and to develop in them the qualities of intuition, flexibility and adaptability. In other words, the attitude, which would enable them to seek their own solutions to problems they face, instead of looking for ready-made solutions. The need is now felt for making teachers aware of their own strengths and weaknesses as classroom practitioners and to inculcate in them the habits of 'introspection' and 'reflection' - the qualities that enable a teacher to analyse and interpret on his own his teaching in the classroom. This implies a concern in teacher preparation with the emphasis on developing the 'self' of the teacher. In other words, producing autonomous individuals who can direct their own professional learning and development.

1.2.2 The TESL Student Teachers' Competency in English

The TESL student teachers sat for a placement test at the beginning of the first semester and the results show that most of them have average to slightly above average level of competency in especially speaking and writing skills. Their knowledge of grammar is low and their command of vocabulary is limited. This is understandable as the present intake of student teachers for the ESL programs are '*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*' (SPM - the equivalent of the Malaysian Certificate of Education) or '*Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia*' (STPM - the equivalent of the Malaysian Certificate of Higher Education) holders who have gone through a Malay medium of instruction for all the subjects except the English subject and have average grades in English. As a result, the teacher educators have an uphill struggle as they are not only to mould the student teachers into independent thinkers and decision makers for their own professional growth but, also to improve the student teachers English competency so that they are themselves proficient enough to teach.

The question now is whether the advice, support, coaching and counselling given during clinical supervision and insights gained through reflective practice can promote their professional development given the circumstances that they are moderately weak in content knowledge (the English language).

1.3 Rationale of the study

This research looks at the communication between college supervisors and TESL student teachers from the Tun Abdul Razak Teacher Training College in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak during teaching practice in their fourth semester of teacher preparation. During this eight-week teaching practice, the college supervisors, the school mentors and sometimes the school heads communicate with the student teachers to guide, advice, support, and give suggestions on improving their practice.

A number of research has been carried out elsewhere and at least one in Malaysia (Marimuthu, 1991) on the role of the school mentor (co-operative teacher) in helping student teachers develop their teaching competency, but one can scarcely find investigations on the effectiveness of the counselling of college supervisors. Counselling and professional support during teaching practice is claimed to be essential for the independent professional growth of student teachers (Randall and Thornton, 2001). The current trend to prepare student teachers to become independent, and adaptive to different teaching situations and the continuous changes in the teaching and learning arena, has increased the need for college supervisors to themselves be competent in giving constructive counselling. They have to administer advice and support in such a way so as to allow the student teachers to explore their personal experience and discover solutions for the teaching problems they encounter during this school practice. This has prompted the researcher to investigate the communication between college supervisors and student teachers.

Teachers are considered to be fully professional only if they are able to reflect critically on their practice (Randall, and Thornton, 2001). Although teacher preparation at the Teacher Training Colleges in Malaysia today is of the Reflective Practitioner model (Schon, 1983, 1987), no research has been conducted to gauge the effectiveness of this practice during the Practicum. Do student teachers reflect on their teaching practice and if they do, how effective is it on helping them develop professionally? These are some of the questions the researcher seeks to find answers to.

Communication between the college supervisor and the student teachers during teaching practice is said to be of varied forms, for example, verbal and written comments, gestures during the lessons, telephone calls, e-mails, informal chatting during supportive activities and others. The researcher is keen on discovering the different means of communication that are employed between the college supervisors and the student teachers and how these help in promoting their professional growth.

1.4 Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to get the views of the college supervisors, school mentors and trainee teachers on their experience of the supervision and reflective practice process during PRACTICUM. The researcher intends to study the emerging patterns in relation to the advice and support given by the supervisors during clinical supervision and reflective practice in changing the teaching behaviours of the student teachers as well as their attitude towards becoming independent agents of their own professional growth. If the findings are negative in nature then the researcher wants to find out the reasons for the failure - the hindering factors.

It is hoped that this study will provide the researcher and the teacher educators involved insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their practice, which could serve as a means to improve themselves for the next teaching practice.

Although the findings are specific to the students investigated, it could prove to be useful for teacher educators of other colleges who could use them as a benchmark to compare their own practice.

The findings too could be useful to the Teacher Training Division for looking into the need for developing training programs for beginning college lecturers and school mentors.

Lastly, these insights into the practice of college supervisors in providing advice and support to beginning teachers can add to the body of limited literature on supervisor – student teacher communication, especially in Malaysia.

It could also add to the limited literature on the practice of college supervisors during clinical supervision, especially in Malaysia.

1.5 Research Questions

The researcher prefers the questions to be general so as to be able to gather as much data as possible from those involved.

- i. How do the College supervisors, school mentors and student teachers perceive clinical supervision and reflective practice?
- ii. How do the supervisors advice and support the student teachers during clinical supervision?
- iii. How do they promote reflective practice?
- iv. What are the student teachers perceptions and reactions towards the supervisors' advice and support?
- v. How do the college supervisors collaborate with the school mentors in advising and supporting the student teachers during clinical supervision?
- vi. What are the factors that affect the counselling process adversely, if any?

1.6 Definition of Terms

i. Action Plan

This refers to the plans of actions to be taken by the student teachers with the help of the college supervisors or school mentors in experimenting suggestions and ideas that emerge during the counselling dialogues based on their classroom experience.

ii. Clinical Supervision/Three Stage Cyclical Process

It refers to the face-to-face interaction between College supervisors and student teachers on their classroom practice (Wallace, 1991), which is intended to improve the student teachers' pedagogical skills and professional growth (Sergiovanni and Starrat, 1983). This involves three stages, namely the pre-observation conference, the observation and the post observation conference.

iii. College Supervisors

Refers to college lectures who have been appointed by the college principal to supervise student teachers during teaching practice.

iv. Communication

Refers to the exchanging of information verbally, in written form or other means by college supervisors/school mentors and student teachers during teaching practice.

v. Interaction

Refers to the reciprocal actions (verbal or non-verbal) of college supervisors/school mentors and student teachers during the pre and post observation conferences as well as during other supportive activities.

vi. Intervention

During clinical supervision the supervisors/mentors offer help to the student teachers based on their perception of the students' classroom practice, and the way they express these is termed intervention (Freeman, 1982). The student teachers learn from the content and process of the interventions.

vii. Novice teachers/student teachers/beginning teachers/trainees

Refer to student teachers studying at the various Teacher Training Colleges in Malaysia in general and specifically the semester four TESL students enrolled at the Tun Abdul Razak Teacher Training College in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak for the 2001/2002 session.

viii. Observation

Refers to the stage of clinical supervision where the college supervisors/school mentors observe the student teachers teaching. During the observation they make notes of the weaknesses and strengths in the lesson for discussion and counselling during the post observation conference.

ix. Peer Teaching

Refers to student teachers teaching in pairs during teaching practice. They share every aspect of planning the lesson and take turns to teach the lesson. While one student is teaching the other observes and makes notes of the partner's weaknesses and strengths, which they share and discuss after the lesson.

x. Post-observation conference

Refers to the stage of clinical supervision where the supervisor/mentor and the student teachers discuss the findings of the observation. The

supervisor/mentor advises, guides, counsels and coaches where appropriate. The aim is for the student teachers to identify their weaknesses and come out with their own solutions and plans of follow up actions.

xi. Practicum

Refers to the practical teaching experience inside and outside the classroom that student teachers in Teacher Training Colleges in Malaysia undergo in the fourth and sixth semesters.

xii. Pre-observation conference

Refers to the stage prior to the actual observation of teaching during clinical supervision. It is at this stage that the student teachers' lesson plan is scrutinised by the college supervisors and school mentors to make suggestions for improvement. It is at this stage too that the college supervisors/school mentors and student teachers decide on an area of focus for the observation.

xiii. Reflective practice

Refers to the practice of deep thinking by student teachers (and experienced practitioners) of episodes that occur during a lesson for the purpose of identifying weaknesses (and strengths) and seeking solutions/alternative ways to better themselves professionally.

xiv. School mentors

These are qualified and experienced primary school English teachers who have been designated to supervise, support, counsel and coach student teachers who are placed at their schools for teaching practice.

xv. Supervision

Supervision in the context of teacher preparation is the overseeing of student teachers by their college supervisors and school mentors during teaching practice. This supervision is more in the form of guidance and support rather than assessment.

xvi. Teacher Educators

Refers to college lecturers in the various teacher Training Colleges in Malaysia. For this research they are ESL college lecturers from the Tun Abdul Razak Teacher Training College in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study involves two qualified and experienced college supervisors and four semester four ESL student teachers during the first phase teaching practice. The researcher aims to study specifically the communication between the college supervisors and the student teachers during the clinical supervision and reflective practice. He intentionally leaves out the role of the school mentors and their communication with the student teachers as several studies have been conducted on this aspect (Marimuthu, 1991). Besides, it was not possible for the researcher to collect data on the communication between the school mentors and the student teachers as he was not present and they (the school mentors) were not known to him.

The rationale for choosing this particular college is that the researcher is a lecturer from this college and has taught the students in their first semester. Since he knows the students and lecturers personally, he hopes to get better co-operation and more reliable data.

The four students are from a class of twenty-eight students all of whom are ladies. The researcher left the selection of the student teachers to the discretion of the

head of the language department of the college, as he was at the university at the start of the Practicum. The head of the language department selected two slightly above average student teachers and two average students based on their spoken and written performance observed in the last three semesters. Three of the students speak English fairly well, but the fourth one is not confident of her spoken English. The main setback is their poor grasp of grammar, limited vocabulary and poor pronunciation of even some common words. This lack of content knowledge, though a limitation, could provide interesting insights on how the college supervisors focus their advice and support in their efforts to develop the student teachers' professional development.

Besides that, this is their first practical teaching experience and they have not had much practice in lesson planning, journal writing and reflective practice of this scale. However, they have been exposed to the primary school environment during ROS, and have prepared lesson plans for microteaching and journal writing of their learning experience in college and reflections of lessons given by their lecturers in college. This places them at the cognitive stage (Anderson, 1983 in Randall, and Thornton, 2001) of teacher development. As such, their main focus during their classroom practice would most likely be classroom survival. They would be using discrete instructional and managerial techniques based on imitation and advice from others, and follow teaching steps that they have planned and memorised without attempting to make changes according to the immediate teaching and learning needs. They may not be concerned or be aware of language learning problems that may arise in the classroom.

Because of these limitations the findings of the study would apply specifically to these student teachers and may not be representative of the other ESL student teachers in that college and elsewhere.

1.8 Summary

This chapter examined the Diploma in English Studies Program and the Teaching Practice Program offered at the various Teacher Training Colleges in Malaysia outlining their objectives. It also lists the roles of the college supervisors, school mentors and student teachers in the implementation of these programs. In addition, the chapter touched on the present demands on teacher development, that is, the requirement for teachers to make informed choices as well as reasoned judgements and decisions as well as be responsible for their own professional growth. The concern is whether the present practice of clinical supervision and reflective practice during teaching practice can provide opportunities for student teachers to develop professionally to meet the current ELT demands considering the fact that many of them do not have a good command of the English language.

The next chapter will review related literature on teacher preparation, counselling and supporting teachers, clinical supervision, and reflective practice.