

An Exploratory Study on Knowledge Acquisition in Work-based Learning

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Abstract:- This study is an inquiry into the nature of the knowledge and skills acquired by trainees during teaching practicum, which provides the trainees with exposure to the prospective working situations to gain professional knowledge. This knowledge is reproached at times when the scenario of learning through work is held questionable. Therefore, the study aims to explore the nature of the knowledge acquired by the teacher trainees relating to the identification of types of knowledge, means of knowledge acquisition, and ways the knowledge is used by the trainees. As the study is explorative, a qualitative case study methodology was adopted. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews from a purposive sample of 25 teacher trainees who are undergoing the teaching practicum of the Higher National Diploma in English program. In the analysis of the findings using the thematic analysis technique, two major global themes were devised i.e. potential for knowledge acquisition and potential for effective knowledge use, that are illustrated using thematic networks. The first global theme comprised two sub-global themes, ‘acquisition of a variety of knowledge’ and ‘variety of means for knowledge acquisition, each containing three sets of organizing themes identified from the basic themes emerging from data. They are service requirement, exposure, feedback, work culture, professional knowledge, trainee attitude that are respectively based on the means, and types of knowledge acquisition. The second global theme was deduced from eight organizing themes representing the ways the knowledge is used. They are the teaching-learning process, students’ evaluation, extra-curricular works, dealing with pupils and co-teachers, handling special need pupils, classroom management, office works, and survival in the field. A comparison of the two global themes on the potential for knowledge acquisition and potential for effective knowledge use concludes the study with an implication to the complementary nature of the relationship between the acquisition and the use of knowledge and skills during the practicum.

Keywords:- Acquisition, Knowledge, Practicum, Teacher-Trainees, Work-based Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study undertakes to explore the nature of the knowledge and skills acquired by teacher trainees. It investigates the learning experiences of teacher trainees who are undergoing the teaching practicum of Higher National Diploma in English (HNDEn) conducted by the Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE). The study examines what and how they acquire related to the profession during the teaching practicum, which is a fundamental mode of achieving work-based learning. The effectiveness of teaching practicum has been a topic of discussion in the field of pre-service teacher training. In Sri Lanka, it is used as a major means of providing professional training to those who are beginning their career as teachers. A lot of prospective teachers experience the nature of the teaching profession by way of undergoing teaching practicum and many join the teaching profession each year after the completion of the requirements of the practicum. The potential to acquire knowledge and skills by a trainee from practicum is worth considering in this context as it plays a pivotal role in laying the foundation within a trainee to be a professionally competent teacher. Therefore, the present study aims at exploring the nature of the knowledge acquired by the teacher trainees concerning the identification of the types of knowledge, means of knowledge acquisition, and ways the knowledge is employed by the trainees during the practicum.

I.I Background to the study

The current topic of investigation is important in the context of vocational education in Sri Lanka. Many institutes offer vocational training at the tertiary education level to those who wish to enter the teaching profession. Many higher education programs are designed to provide the youth with basic theoretical and practical principles of teaching. The government and semi-government institutions like the College of Education, National Institute of Education (NIE) and SLIATE, etc. conduct programs including a training component on teaching to meet the demands of the field as well as those who pursue to be teachers. These training components provide pre-service teacher training where the followers are offered the opportunity to expose to the real working environments of schools for a prior-stipulated period. What is identified as Work-based Learning (WBL) is this concept of acquiring knowledge being exposed to real work experience. The purpose of educationists in utilizing the work-based learning method in the field of education is to provide the learner with opportunities to acquire knowledge

in a work environment by way of experiencing different situational changes in the setting. In the academic literature and policy documents, the term work-based learning is used to refer to learning that arises directly out of workplace concerns in the course of normal work activities of learners, undertaking their work tasks and performing their work roles (Lester & Costley, 2010). How a learner can improve his or her work-related knowledge without being guided formally in an academic setting in the task of achieving career development is the focus of work-based learning programs. Teaching internship provides the learner with a means of achieving work-related knowledge. Concerning the field of education, a teaching internship is designed to fill in the vacuum of producing an experienced teacher by exposing her or him to the target work environment i.e. the school to acquire knowledge in the field. For Brown and Brown (1990), the most important component of teacher training programs is the teaching practice period which provides student teachers with an opportunity to put their theoretical studies into practice (Azeem, 2011). An internship is the means to provide such learning experiences to student teachers. This is separated from the academic course work and the permanent teacher position as the trainees are appointed for a certain duration to work as teachers after the completion of course work in a respective higher education program.

I.II Summary of the existing literature

The present work is positioned in the field of teacher education that has been researched amply. However, still, considerably less attention has been paid to teacher development via pre-service training. The impact of pre-service training on the knowledge enhancement and professional development of teacher interns claims further scrutiny concerning the professional career of the beginning teachers. The current study aims to address this gap by exploring the nature of the knowledge acquired by teacher trainees during their pre-service training period.

The underpinning concept of the study is WBL which is significant in the context of vocational education and training. It specifies the particular learning that occurs when undertaking real work or in the production of real goods and services (Sweet, 2014). WBL has received scholarly attention in the discussion of the learning scenario of a person. Alfeld, Charner, Johnson, & Watts, (2013) (as cited in Hamilton, 2014) identify WBL as a kind of learning on technical, academic, and employability skills by a person working in a real work environment. WBL was derived from the School to Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) (1994) which provided a temporary financial platform for high schools to develop programs to create or expand sustainable career preparation activities (Halperin, 1994; Hughes, Bailey, & Karp, 2002).

WBL is a learning process that focuses on university-level thinking upon work to facilitate recognition, acquisition, and application of individual and collective knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve specific qualified outcomes that are important to the learner, employer, and the university (Lester et al., 2010). The workplace is highlighted as a significant phenomenon that is directly related to WBL. It offers learners the opportunity to develop competence and acquire

vocational and technical skills via kinesthetic learning in the context of work. This is greatly related to the nature of the tasks the learner is required to carry out such as professional activities, dealing with problems, coping with new situations, handling social interaction with colleagues (Anne Mari-Hall, 2013). As cited by Brennan & Little (1996), Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) bring in a proposition related to the learning aspect of a student with the expectation of bringing together significant points underlying learning from experience. Here, active engagement with experience is considered as the foundation of and the stimulus for learning. The fact that learners actively construct their experience by bringing their attitude, emotions, knowledge, and expectations to the activity is established as a pivotal factor in learning by experience. Also, learning is concerned to be a holistic process including different domains such as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Learning is portrayed as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon too which is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs (Brennan & Little, 1996).

In his study on WBL, Raelin (1997) introduces a model that integrates two views on learning and work. There, the explicit and tacit forms of knowing and theory and practice modes of learning are combined at individual and collective levels. According to the model, one's learning at the workplace starts with conceptualization which is observed to be providing him or her with a means to challenge the existing assumptions, perceiving things anew making them handle different problems in different situations. As Raelin (1997) introduces, conceptualization is necessary for WBL to make the students able to deal with change. In the experimentation stage, the students are allowed to try out the conceptual knowledge in practice. As Raelin (1997) uses in Shon's (1974) terms, it is an alignment between one's 'espoused theory and 'theory-in-use'. The experience component is introduced to be reinforcing the tacit knowledge acquired in experimentation. It is referred to as implicit learning and reflection is identified as an important element in uncovering the inherent tacit knowledge contributing to the reconstruction of meaning.

A sound theoretical explanation has been provided in explaining the learning aspect of teachers by Korthagen (2010) who presents two opposite perspectives of teacher education namely the traditional cognitive perspective and the situated learning perspective. For Korthagen (2010), the situated learning perspective refers to the practical experience in school contexts as the basis for teacher learning whereas the traditional cognitive perspective offers guidelines for building cognitive representations of theory and practice. Korthagen (2010) argues that the integration of the two models would be helpful to make teacher education more successful. A three-level model is suggested consequently comprising with gestalt level, schema level, and theory level of teacher learning. The first level deals with the processes in teacher behaviour when the teacher is not aware of what is happening in the classroom. It refers to the practical experiences which are often unconscious. The next level called the Schema level develops through the reflection of this level. Schematization i.e. networking of elements and

relations takes place here within the learner. It represents the behaviour of the teacher which takes place consciously in a planned schedule. At the theory level, teachers are more experienced to build up concepts and theories where a logical ordering is constructed within the schema formed beforehand (Korthagen, 2010).

Knowledge production in the WBL context is discussed in the literature regarding two basic types of knowledge i.e. Mode 1 knowledge and mode 2 knowledge. These two types of knowledge have been identified with WBL by Gibbons (1994) and Scott (1995), the pioneers in the area of knowledge production. The disciplinary knowledge which is culturally concentrated and institutionalized within universities is typified as Mode 1 knowledge. In contrast, Mode 2 knowledge is produced in the context of the application. (Gibbons et al., n.d.) Mode 2 knowledge reveals some particular characteristic features. Primarily, it has been observed to generate in the context of application where the total environment is considered in which scientific problems arise, methodologies are developed, outcomes are disseminated and their uses are defined. Also, Mode 2 knowledge is considered to be trans-disciplinary which indicates the mobilization within a range of theoretical perspectives to solve a problem. And, there is a diversity of the sites where Mode 2 knowledge is produced which is highly reflective (Scott, Gibbons, & Nowotny, 2003). Compared to Mode 1, Mode 2 is more socially accountable and reflexive which includes a wider heterogeneous set of practitioners working in a localized context (Gibbons et al., n.d.). Mode 2 knowledge is in common seen as involving fields of understanding rather than discipline and specifically it has been considered to be exemplified by WBL (Boud & Symes, 2000). As Brennan and Little (1996) also state, the distinction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge is parallel to the distinction between college learning and WBL and it is the Mode 2 knowledge that represents WBL. This comparison is made subject to some conditions like the consideration of transmission which is lacking in Mode 2 knowledge and which has to be implemented in WBL through enforcement of authority (Brennan & Little, 1996).

I.III Aims of the study

The focus of the present work is on the learning development of HNDEn teacher trainees. HNDEn is a program that is designed to give language-related knowledge and skills to a person enabling him/her to deal with the prospective working conditions confidently and conveniently. The teaching practicum is a compulsory component of the HNDEn program, where the course followers are required to complete 540 hours of training at a school as a teacher. This serves the purpose of producing a competent and professionally proficient person with an understanding of the teaching-learning situation in the current field of education in Sri Lanka. To what extent this purpose is achieved needs to be examined to assess the effectiveness of the practicum. Hence, this study is designed to investigate how far the HNDEn teacher trainees acquire the knowledge and skills required for the teaching profession during their practicum.

II. METHODOLOGY

II.I Objective & Research questions

The main objective of the present study is to explore the nature of the knowledge acquired by the HNDEn teacher trainees during their practicum. To achieve the objective, it was expected to investigate the knowledge acquisition related to the identification of types of knowledge, means of acquiring knowledge, and the ways knowledge is employed by the trainees. The following research questions have been formulated to examine these aspects.

1. What kind of knowledge does a trainee acquire during the practicum?
2. What are the means available for knowledge acquisition in the training settings?
3. How is the acquired knowledge used by a trainee during the practicum?

II.II Research Design

A close examination of the experiences of teacher trainees is required to investigate how knowledge is acquired and disseminated during the teaching practicum of the HNDEn program. Hence, the study is designed to adopt a qualitative case study research methodology. Utilizing this, it was expected to evaluate the descriptive data collected from the participants of the study in their respective research settings.

II.III Setting of the study

The case under investigation is the teaching practicum of HNDEn conducted by the Advanced Technological Institute of Kurunegala. The practicum commences immediately after the 2-year coursework of the program and the course followers are required to assume duty as teacher trainees at the schools assigned for them for the training. The setting of the study is some of these schools and the Advanced Technological Institute, Kurunegala.

II.IV Participants

The population of the study consisted of the teacher trainees following the practicum of HNDEn conducted by the Advanced Technological Institute, Kurunegala. This approximately amounted to 90. Upon the registration for the course, applicants had satisfied the course enrolment requirement of achieving a basic competency level of the English language. Therefore, the trainees in the research population were at a similar competency level.

The sampling criteria were designed according to the qualitative method. Accordingly, the purposive sampling strategy was used to select the participant sample from the population. The goal was to select an information-rich sample as it provides the opportunity to gain important issues and dimensions related to the research questions of the study. The sample consisted of 25 teacher trainees who shared similar features in terms of educational background, language competency level, duration of training input, and there were certain slight demographic variations related to sex, race, and age among them.

II.V Methods

According to the nature of the study, it is vital to get an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants. This was achieved by conducting standardized, open-ended interviews that were designed in a semi-structured format and conducted in-person. The interview was semi-structured because the information had to be taken from the informants according to the requirements of the research questions. Therefore, an interview protocol was prepared to ensure that all the necessary issues would be addressed. All the interview questions in the protocol were in line with the research questions of the study allowing the researcher to obtain a comprehensive view of the topic of investigation.

II.VI Procedure

A pilot study was carried out before the commencement of the data collection of the main study to test and validate the interview protocol. During the pilot study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 trainees during the first half of the training period. Consequent to the protocol piloting, certain interview questions were revised to suit the objective of the study. The data collection of the main study was conducted soon after the termination of the training period so that the informants could provide a better view of the overall practicum. Subsequently in the process, data analysis was conducted using the qualitative technique of thematic analysis.

III. RESULTS

The qualitative data analysis approach was the fundamental data analysis approach in the study. Data gathered from the semi-structured interviews were first transcribed and then thematic analysis was conducted which initially involved coding the data. Identification of key themes and patterns took place consequently based on grouping and analyzing the data guided by the research questions of the study. The expectation was to examine each theme to obtain an understanding of the nature of the experiences of participants and their perspective towards knowledge acquisition during training.

Thematic analysis was conducted using the thematic networks technique introduced by Stirling (2001). Thematic networks are used to illustrate the main themes and sub-themes available in a piece of text or a corpus of data. They systematically summarize and present qualitative data. In thematic networks, themes derived from data are organized in

three levels 1. lowest level themes containing undeveloped pieces of evidence, 2. middle-level themes that organize the lowest level themes into categories, and 3. themes in the super-ordinate level that encompass sets of middle-level themes at a macro level. These three categories of themes are introduced respectively as Basic themes, Organizing themes, and Global themes (Stirling, 2001).

Themes in all these three levels are represented in a web-like map in thematic networks. The reason for using this particular technique in the current study is to facilitate the process of qualitative data analysis and to create a comprehensive picture by visualizing the findings on trainee experiences.

In the overall sense, two main global themes were identified from the analysis of the interview transcripts. These two global themes pertained to two aspects representing knowledge acquisition and knowledge dissemination. Accordingly, they are 1. Potential for knowledge acquisition and 2. Potential for effective knowledge use. The first global theme on the potential for knowledge acquisition comprised of two sub-global themes that were identified depending on the nature of the knowledge acquired in the training setting. They are 1. Acquisition of a Variety of Knowledge, and 2. Variety of means for knowledge acquisition. These are illustrated in the sub-thematic networks presented in the following section.

The first sub-global theme comprised three sets of organizing themes namely, work culture, professional knowledge, and trainee attitude, which were based on different types of knowledge acquired (Figure 01).

The second sub-global theme was related to different means of knowledge acquisition and it was derived from another three sets of organizing themes i.e. service requirement (needs/necessity-driven), exposure, and feedback (Figure 02).

The ways the knowledge is disseminated by the trainees during their practicum were represented in the second main global theme that was derived from eight sets of organizing themes viz.: teaching-learning process, Pupil's evaluation, extra-curricular works, dealing with pupils and co-teachers, handling special need pupils, classroom management, office works, and survival (in the field and setting). Thus, altogether fourteen (14) sets of organizing themes helped derive the two major global themes of the study (Figure 03).

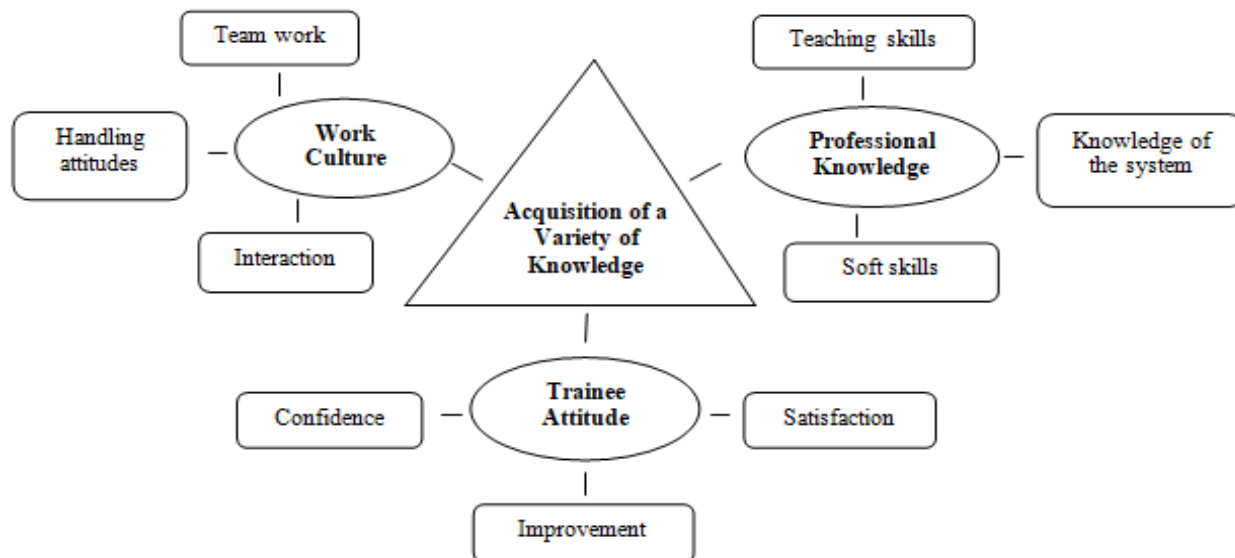


Figure 01: Sub-thematic network 1 – Types of knowledge acquired from practicum

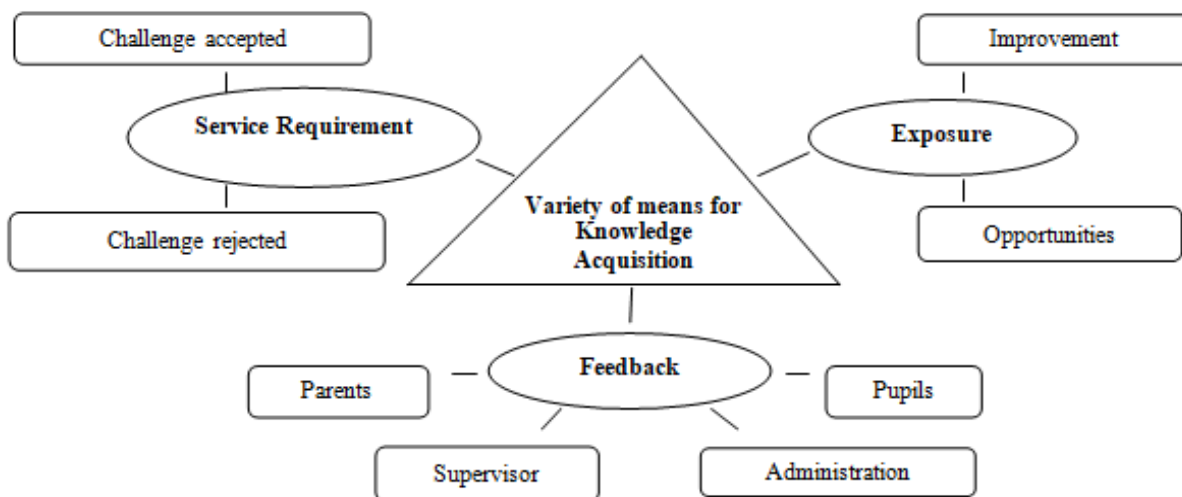


Figure 02: Sub-thematic network II – Means of knowledge acquisition during practicum

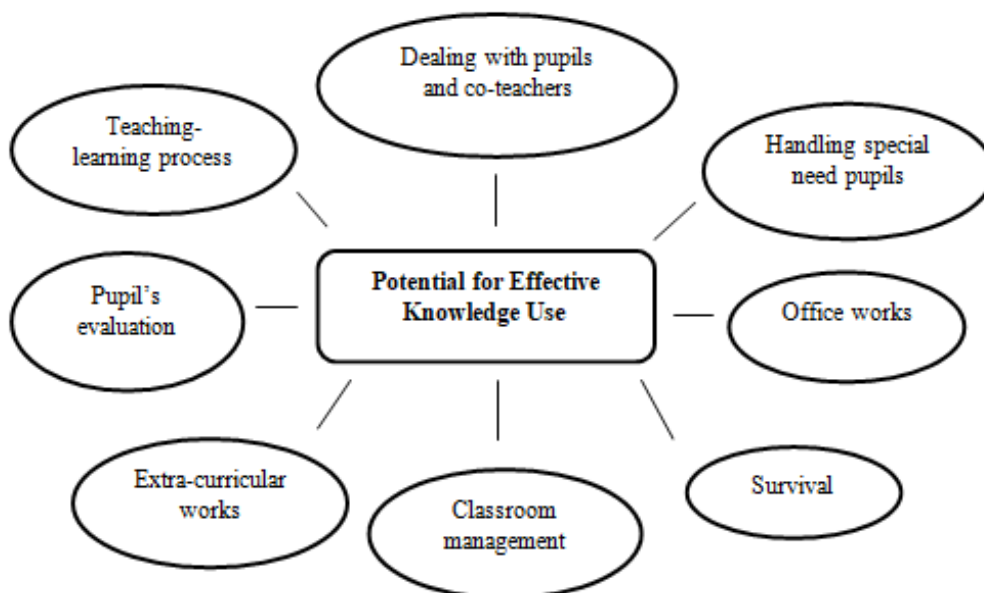


Figure 03: Thematic network 2 – The ways the knowledge is employed by the trainees

All the sets of organizing themes were formed by combining clusters which were the Basic themes of the study. They were extracted from the interview transcripts at the initial analysis level. Basic themes united the evidence for multiple aspects of learning at an abstract level. At the lowest level of the analysis, several basic themes could be identified allowing the formation of the above-stated 14 organizing themes. For example, the organizing theme on service requirements was formed from the basic themes of challenge acceptance and challenge rejection. Further to the lower level analysis of data, exposure was formed by improvement and opportunities; feedback was formed by parents, supervisor, pupils, administration; work culture was formed by dealing with attitudes, teamwork, and interaction; professional knowledge was formed by knowledge of the system, record maintenance, register, testing, and evaluation, handling classes, teaching skills, and soft skills; and trainee attitude was formed by satisfaction, improvement, confidence. The concluding theme of the above sets at the super-ordinate level was the major global theme on the potential for knowledge acquisition.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study aims at exploring the nature of the knowledge that takes place in HNDEn training settings. Based on the above findings, this section discusses the nature of knowledge on types, means, and use in line with the emerging themes related to the research questions of the study.

IV.I Potential for knowledge acquisition

The first research question is formed to find out what kind of knowledge is acquired by a trainee during the practicum. From the interviews conducted with the teacher trainees, it was revealed that a variety of knowledge is possible to be acquired during their experience as trainees. The sub-thematic network I (Figure 03) illustrates the range of knowledge in two levels of themes. The sub-global theme, 'Acquisition of a variety of knowledge' is derived from the three organizing themes on work culture, professional knowledge, and trainee attitude. Several basic themes help derive these three organizing themes.

Understanding work culture through teamwork, interaction, and handling attitudes is a key organizing theme that represents a significant aspect of knowledge. The theme indicates what a trainee has to undergo in her learning process apart from the major learning aspects meant to be gained from training. Involving in teamwork explores a fundamental aspect of work culture. Achieving a common goal with mutual understanding, cooperation, patience, respecting others' views, taking lead, and being punctual are the skills a trainee gains from teamwork with co-trainees and co-teachers in the staff. Social interactional skills provide another dimension to the nature of knowledge through the basic theme, interaction. It reveals trainees' perspectives on the knowledge they could obtain from training.

"We could know how to be with the other school staff members and principal, how to talk with the senior people, how to behave...". Importantly, they have learned, *"... dealing with the different personalities of the same profession..."*.

Gaining the ability to handle a variety of attitudes of the co-workers signifies an important perspective to the knowledge of work culture in training settings. The difficulties they encounter being trainees are disclosed in the following perception, *"If we smile and talk, we can survive, otherwise we'll be dismissed from their company. As we are trainees who are not permanent, we are welcome. If we go there as permanent teachers, they won't definitely let us survive"*.

Acquisition of professional knowledge is a pivotal aspect of the discussion of the diversity of knowledge possible during the training. Basic themes associated with this are the acquisition of the knowledge of the system, teaching skills, and soft skills related to the teaching profession. Knowledge of the system is acquired from the preparation of term notes, daily notes, lesson plans, assignment schedules; and maintaining record books and students' registers, etc. The knowledge gained through these means is complemented by the acquisition of teaching skills that was the major learning objective supposed to be obtained from the teaching practicum. Trainees expose themselves to teaching environments where different methods of teaching are tried according to the necessities and levels of their students. Diversity of the students in the same grade and class provides a platform for the trainees to realize the nature of the requirements expected from them as teachers. According to Raelin (1997), learning of a person at the workplace initiates with the thinking that enables him to challenge the existing assumptions, perceive things anew that make him handle different problems in different situations.

"Handling one class is not the same as handling another. There should be different techniques to address the level of the students".

Many acknowledge the improvement of their level of audibility as a skill required for teaching. Also, the ability of critical thinking and problem-solving has developed when they are faced with situations that are not anticipated in the school environment. Along with these, the acquisition of soft skills such as communication, leadership, individual and social intelligence indicate different dimensions of the achievement of knowledge and skills related to the profession.

Trainee attitude is the other organizing theme that leads to the global theme of acquisition of a variety of knowledge. Trainee attitude has an impact on the acquisition of knowledge during training as it can either bar or facilitate acquiring knowledge. In the present context of the discussion, it indicates the development of confidence, trainee improvement, and trainee satisfaction. Attitude improves due to the improvement of these factors. Towards the end of the training period, HNDEn trainees have achieved confidence in

working as a teacher, *“We can teach to any grade in any school at this level”*. Their attitude towards training becomes positive also due to the improvement they achieve as trainees within a short period. Lack of satisfaction caused by the lack of opportunities available to use their knowledge has a considerable effect on forming the attitude towards the HNDEn practicum.

“It is better if we were allowed to work more”.

The second research question on the means available for knowledge acquisition is answered with the aid of the second sub-thematic network (Figure 04). It illustrates a set of three organizing themes that pertain to the sub-global theme, ‘Variety of means for knowledge acquisition’. The theme depicts the multiple ways available for trainees to acquire new knowledge during the period of training.

Service requirements, exposure, and feedback are the organizing themes that indicate the major means of knowledge acquisition. Service requirement conveys the obligations assigned to the trainee to fulfill tasks required by the school authority. Teaching a less-familiar subject, teaching to higher grades, assigning the duty of a class teacher, and handling parents’ meetings, etc. are such obligations. The service requirement is a needs-driven phenomenon that provides the trainee with challenging environments to obtain new knowledge. In the majority of instances, the challenge has been accepted and successfully faced by the trainees while, in some other situations, the trainee has not been able to cope up with the requirements. Rejecting the request of the principal to teach science to grade six and seven and accepting the request to teach O/L commerce are two such situations that exemplify the opposing responses of trainees towards service requirements.

The organizing theme on exposure shows two interrelated aspects viz. availability of opportunities for exposure to knowledge and the improvement resulting from that. This indicates a two-way impact on trainees’ knowledge acquisition. Learning opportunities are limited due to the factors such as poor English knowledge of the co-teachers in the permanent carder, limited interaction with the students using English as the medium of communication, and the approach of certain permanent teachers in teaching and dealing with the students that don’t create healthy teaching-learning environments. These lead to a lack of trainee improvement too.

“Majority can’t understand when we use English”.

“English speaking skill declined a lot. After going to the school, we couldn’t speak of even what we know. It was Sinhala that we mostly got used to”.

Still, instances are indicating learning from the exposure to the teaching styles of their supervisors. *“I got new things while I was observing the teaching of my supervisor sir. Some grammar structures and some styles of teaching... We haven’t thought of them earlier”*.

Feedback is a major means of knowledge acquisition indicated by the third organizing theme. Feedback is provided by several parties of the school culture including the administration, supervisor, students, and parents. The trainee receives constructive feedback directly as well as indirectly from these parties. Following is an extract that shows the impact of students’ feedback on a trainee regarding her approach to the students. It helps her understand a particular dimension of the student-teacher relationship.

“Students are the ones who know whether we can teach or not. They come to decisions by looking at our faces... Though they liked me first, later they didn’t as I teach instead of playing with them. Students are strange”.

A vast range of opportunities is open for the trainees to improve from supervisor feedback. They help acquire new teaching methods as well as generate a new understanding of what they already know. *“I was instructed not to say ‘Good Morning and take out your books’ as it is traditional. Instead, the lesson can be started with a game”*. Similar input is given to the trainee from the school administration and the parents in terms of the learning development of the trainee.

The first major global theme, ‘Potential for knowledge acquisition’ is thus explored in line with the first two research questions giving an insight into the nature of knowledge acquired from the training.

IV.II Potential for Effective Knowledge Use

The second major theme ‘Potential for effective knowledge use’ is discussed in this section answering the third research question on how the knowledge is used by a trainee during the practicum. Following thematic network illustrates the multiple ways the knowledge is used by a trainee (Figure 05).

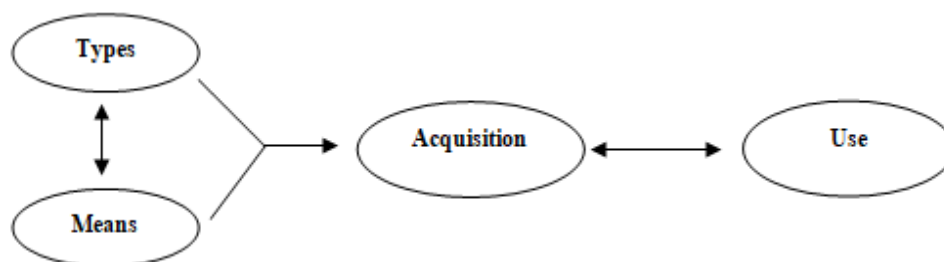


Figure 04: Interconnections among the global themes

The theme derives from several organizing themes that reveal the numerous ways the acquired knowledge is employed in the training setting. The teaching process is one such situation where the trainee is made to try innovative techniques when the prevailing methods and procedures are not sufficient to address the level and expectations of the students. Innovation is a key basic theme that shows trainee's readiness to handle challenges with the knowledge of teaching methods and the teaching-learning environment. Similarly, situations like students' evaluation, extra-curricular works, classroom management, and involvement in office works provide opportunities for the trainee to use the knowledge effectively. Further to this, in some particular circumstances, the trainee is required to teach students with special needs. This is evidence of the trainee's capability to handle situations that claim skills and improved attention. Throughout the practicum, HNDEn trainees are faced with the challenge of dealing with co-teachers and students with different attitudes. They learn by constructing their experiences from the attitude, emotions, and knowledge acquired from the setting (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1993). The setting itself is a means of providing the trainees with an opportunity to test their capacity to survive in their respective workplaces.

All the organizing themes are indicative of the experiences gained by the trainees during training, which in turn are the sources of knowledge. In his discussion of situated learning, Korthagen (2010) refers to the practical experience in the school context as the basis for teacher learning. This is the aspect of knowledge emphasized by Gibbons (1994) and Scott (1995) in their introduction of Mode 2 knowledge. It is produced in the context of application requiring an understanding of the situation. Work-based learning experiences acquired by trainees are examples of Mode 2 knowledge production (Boud & Symes, 2000).

In line with the above observations, the two global themes 'Potential for knowledge acquisition' and 'Potential for effective knowledge use' can be perceived to comprise dimensions that are empirically interconnected (Figure 04).

As figure 04 shows the two pivotal aspects of knowledge acquisition that are related to each other are the 'variety of types of knowledge' and the 'variety of means the knowledge is acquired'. The combination of these two leads to the acquisition and the acquisition provides means for knowledge use. The latter is interrelated with the former with its links to the two nodes of types and means of knowledge acquisition.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study is an attempt to understand the nature of knowledge acquisition that takes place in the HNDEn teaching practicum. The two global themes emerging from the investigation reveal the nature of knowledge acquisition and the means of utilizing knowledge effectively during the training. These two perspectives are detailed with the use of thematic networks that correspond with the research questions. A comparison of the two global themes indicates the fact that the potential for knowledge acquisition and knowledge use are interrelated aspects of trainee learning. The factors related to these two major themes function as complementing each other. This establishes that the teaching practicum provides the trainees with abundant opportunities to acquire new knowledge as well as use that knowledge in the training setting itself, leading to the learning development of the trainee. The study gives an insight into the pre-service teacher training in Sri Lanka with an implication to its contribution to trainee development.

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