education sciences

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Mongolian Pre-Service English Teachers' Voices about Their Teaching Practicum Experiences

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Abstract: Despite the growing uptake of the English language by Mongolian youth and policy initiatives at the governmental level that have emphasized English education, there is very limited internationally available discussion and research on English language teacher education in Mongolia. Thus, the paper aims to examine teaching practicum experiences of pre-service English teachers in Mongolian secondary school settings and explore what challenges they face. Eleven pre-service English teachers, who completed their 12-week teaching practicum in secondary schools in Ulaanbaatar, participated in this study by writing personal narratives on their teaching practicum experiences. The findings indicate that the participants struggled in their teaching contexts due to the lack of mentoring by public school mentor teachers, insufficient university-school partnerships, and classroom-level constraints caused by the mismatch between what they had learned at university and the realities faced in school classrooms. It is recommended to develop a comprehensive teacher development program to improve the quality of both in-service and pre-service English teachers, and to reduce educational inequality associated with access to quality English language education. Furthermore, incorporating social justice education into English teacher preparation programs is important to help future teachers become more critical, reflexive, and transformative.

Keywords: pre-service English teachers; teaching practicum; challenges; Mongolia; educational inequality

Citation: Marav, D. Mongolian Pre-Service English Teachers' Voices about Their Teaching Practicum Experiences. *Educ. Sci.* **2022**, *12*, 339. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12050339

Academic Editor: Federico Corni

Received: 12 March 2022
Accepted: 11 May 2022
Published: 12 May 2022

1. Introduction

It has been nearly 30 years since the Mongolian government made English language education compulsory from grade 5 at the primary level in public schools. Historically, after the country moved from a socialist system to a free market economy, the English language started to be taught in secondary schools from the academic year of 1992–1993, and the official decision to teach English as a primary foreign language at all levels of educational institutions from the academic year of 1997–1998 was made by the Mongolian Government in 1997. Since then, the government of Mongolia has prioritized English language education, as evidenced in a number of policy documents. For example, the Millennium Development Goals-based Comprehensive National Development Strategy of Mongolia: 2007–2021 [1] states that English language knowledge of the population will be regularly enhanced to develop human capital and increase the competitiveness of Mongolians. According to this document, officials in the Mongolian public sector would have been able to conduct their work in English by 2021. In fact, in the early 2000s there were active discussions on making English an official second language at the governmental level [2]. Moreover, the English language is closely linked to educational and economic opportunities, employability, personal development, and social mobility in the country [3–5]. Thus, for Mongolia, it has become pivotal to continuously improve the quality of English language education and address the demands for multilingualism in an age of intensifying globalization.

However, there has been very limited internationally available discussion and research on English language teacher education in Mongolia despite the growing uptake

of the language by Mongolian youth and policy initiatives at the governmental level that have emphasized English language education. Thus, the paper aims to examine teaching practicum experiences of pre-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mongolian secondary school settings and explore the challenges they face. Furthermore, the paper will discuss what the country can learn from other countries about preparing qualified English teachers given the realities of globalization and equity in the field of English language teaching.

2. Context: English Language Education in Mongolian Schools

In Mongolia, schoolteachers are prepared through a four-year university bachelor's degree program with a compulsory component of a 12-week teaching practicum (six weeks in the third year and the rest in the fourth year). During the English teaching practicum, each student teacher at the National University of Mongolia is assigned two university supervisors, one of whom supports and monitors their English teaching and the other giving guidance on organizing or contributing to extracurricular activities at a school, and a mentor teacher who teaches English in their school placement. Most students do their teaching practicum in public schools; however, sometimes a few private schools allow pre-service teachers to do their practicum. The Placement Manual does not specify who is responsible for finding school placement for pre-service teachers, though this states the roles of supervisors, mentors, universities, and schools. However, as the key organizer of the teaching practicum for the students majoring in their programs, university departments have to pay attention to effectively collaborate with certain schools to make their students' practicum more efficient.

The English language has been a compulsory subject in Mongolian schools for nearly three decades. In public schools, English language education begins in grade 5 of primary school and is compulsory throughout lower and upper secondary schools. Students receive three class hours (40 min each) of English per week as a mandatory subject in each grade of their school years. The number of class hours increases to six if students choose English as an elective subject in grades 10–12. It is noteworthy here that the Russian language is another foreign language that is included in the secondary school curriculum in public schools. The Russian language is taught compulsorily for two class hours a week in grades 7–9 and is offered as an elective subject in grades 10–12. Public schools implement the National Core Curriculum for English Language Education, which was designed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MECS) following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) English levels of A1–B1 in 2015. According to the Curriculum [6], the goal of English education in each grade is to develop students' four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and use of English (grammar) through student-centered ways of teaching. Overall, the Curriculum aims to enhance students' communicative English language skills. Locally written textbooks, designed within the framework of the Curriculum, for every grade at the primary and secondary levels are used by Mongolian public schools.

In terms of private schools, they mostly start teaching English from the first or third grade following their own or international curricula for English language classes. According to the statistics on the number of schoolchildren in Mongolian schools, 7.1% of them studied in private schools in the academic year of 2020–2021 [7]. This means that over 90% of the schoolchildren nationwide studied in public schools. However, the statistics on the general entrance exam results required to access universities demonstrate that private school graduates had much higher scores in English language than public school graduates [8,9]. The statistics align with the commentaries, discussions, and social discourses in the media about deepening educational inequality in Mongolian society in recent years.

In fact, educational inequality due to some constraints on accessing quality English language education in Mongolia is attributed to many factors, including structures or contexts at a macro-level and the socio-economic status of families (income and education levels of parents) at a micro-level. Studies [5,10] have shown that the urban–rural divide,

a long-standing social boundary in Mongolian society, is enacted or reinforced through unequal access to English and digital technologies. Because of the unequal distribution of resources in urban and rural areas, urban students are more advantaged in learning English since, for instance, there is a lack of high-quality English teachers in rural schools. It is worth noting here that many graduates who majored in English teaching prefer to teach in cities because of the living and teaching conditions. Furthermore, depending on their financial situation, Mongolian families invest in their children's English language education by sending them to private international schools, adopting English as a medium of instruction, or bilingual private schools in urban areas [10]. It is true that the graduates who attended those private schools continue their post-secondary education abroad. This public–private education divide in accessing good-quality English language education in Mongolia is exacerbated by the realities in public school education. For instance, a recent study [11] on English language education in 17 public schools in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia, indicated that English teachers face a variety of challenges, including large class sizes, limited teaching materials and resources, lack of professional development opportunities, and frequent changes of textbooks. These studies and the previously mentioned statistics on university entrance exam results clearly show that there is a divide in accessing good-quality English language education in Mongolia depending on educational infrastructure and resources, students' socio-economic status, and the shortage of high-quality English teachers.

3. English Teacher Education in an Age of Globalization

English language skills are indeed valued as "a resource with exchange value" [12] that increases people's employability, social participation, and position in society in many Asian countries [13,14] in an era of globalization. Therefore, high-quality English teachers who "work towards transforming schoolchildren into active agents who will effectively participate in a globalized economy and contribute to national economic development" [15] (p. 27) are in demand. For this reason, English teachers need to develop their global outlook; be proficient in English; possess pedagogical knowledge, not only in communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches and principles but also in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) or content-based instruction (CBI); and be competent in educational and information technologies [16]. Moreover, teachers should be able to explore the pedagogies that work best in their teaching contexts after taking contextual factors into serious consideration and reflecting on their teaching experiences informed by their professional knowledge and expertise [17–19].

Globalization also necessitates integrating English as an international language (EIL) or English as a lingua franca (ELF) pedagogies into pre-service teacher education curricula since students need to communicate internationally and interculturally [16,20,21]. In addition, there is a need to incorporate social justice education into English teacher preparation programs because educational inequality associated with access to quality English language education in many Asian countries has become a great concern due to the status of the language in those countries shaped by the forces of globalization and the increasing popularity of digital technologies [10,13,22–25]. However, English teacher education programs have not adequately oriented toward social justice and equity compared to general teacher education [26]. In fact, "keeping English from anyone, whether actively or indirectly, must now be seen as a social injustice" since "English has become the first truly global lingua franca" and "appropriate knowledge of English is as essential a tool as basic literacy and numeracy" [27] (p. 12). There has also been concern about preserving minority or local languages due to the dominance of the English language [28–30]. Some Asian countries such as the Philippines and Taiwan have been implementing mother tongue-based multilingual policies to ensure that their indigenous languages are not neglected in the curriculum [19] and to keep the balance of their mother tongues and English. Thus, pre-service teachers need to be prepared to respond to the educational needs of linguistically diverse students and to both the global and local community needs [28].

As "quality teaching often looks different in different settings" [31] (p. 30) and teacher education "should be an educative process that develops thoughtful, informed and highly able professionals" [32] (p. 416), both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should include reflective practice that assists teachers to become "transformative intellectuals than on being passive technicians, so that they can carry out their social obligations along with their pedagogic obligations" [18] (p. 16). Therefore, teaching practicum is considered an important part of an English teacher preparation program because it helps pre-service teachers gain practical classroom or school experiences, link their theoretical knowledge with the realities of teaching, learn from mentor teachers, reflect on their teaching practices, and make a smooth transition to teaching after completion of the program [33]. Furthermore, ongoing professional development opportunities must be integrated into English teachers' professional lives not only to help them keep up with the educational changes and be professionally competent but also to motivate and empower them [34,35]. On the whole, English teacher education programs are expected to prepare teachers who can meet the needs of their students—global citizens, cater to a variety of educational contexts, and be agents of change in school settings and beyond.

4. The Study

In this study, the pre-service English teachers at the National University of Mongolia, who completed their 12-week teaching practicum in secondary schools in Ulaanbaatar, were asked to reflect on their teaching practicum experiences, as "the professional repertoire of language teachers should include . . . a deep reflection on their own personal experiences and professional trajectories" [17] (p. 309). The researcher was the lecturer who taught the course on English-teaching methodology. The course had already been completed during the recruitment for research participation, which means there was no coercion or undue influence of the researcher in this study. Eleven pre-service teachers voluntarily participated in the study. Ten were female, which was not unusual, as women predominate as English teachers in Mongolia. They were asked to write an overall reflection of their teaching practicum as narratives, particularly about the challenges they encountered during their practicum based on their experiences and observations, and submit their narratives within 1.5 months after completing their practicum. The word length was not specified; thus, the typed narratives were of different lengths, from one page to four pages. The narratives were written in their native language, Mongolian, to enable them to express themselves freely. Thus, the details in the participants' narratives used as quotes in this paper were translated from Mongolian into English by the author. The data in this study were reported with the use of pseudonyms to ensure that the identity of the participants and the schools remained anonymous.

Located within the theory and practice of qualitative inquiry, the study employed personal written narratives as a data collection tool. Personal narratives can reveal information about the person and the issues under investigation through the lens of individual experiences [36]. Narratives actually enable researchers to access people's experiences using their theoretical and methodological lenses. In addition, the narratives or stories are important for researchers, as they help them to understand the interrelation between individual lives and social contexts, and to study people's experiences from their perspectives [37]. In the field of teacher education, "the use of narrative has emerged as the predominant means of getting at what teachers know, what they do with what they know, and the sociocultural contexts within which they teach and learn to teach" [38] (p. 308).

The qualitative textual data gathered through the written narratives were analyzed using inductive and interpretive methods. Inductive analysis means "discovering patterns, themes and categories in one's data" [33] (p. 453). Drawing on the elements of the thematic analysis [39,40], I read and re-read narratives to get familiar with the data and generated codes, that is, "a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst" [40] (p. 88). Next, I identified recurrent patterns or themes that emerged from the data. For instance, codes such as class size, out-of-pocket expenses, shortage of teaching facilities, lack of

technology integration, grammar-focused classes, lack of English language proficiency in teacher, heavy dependency on textbooks, and examination-driven classes were combined to form the subtheme of classroom-level constraints under the theme of challenges during the teaching practicum.

5. Findings

5.1. Challenges

The narratives enabled insight to be gained into the challenges with which the participants struggled in their teaching contexts due to several factors: (a) the lack of mentoring by public school mentor teachers and their attitudes to pre-service English teachers, (b) the bureaucracy of public school management, and (c) classroom-level constraints mainly caused by the mismatch between what they had learned at university and the realities faced in school classrooms.

5.1.1. The Lack of Mentoring

Eight out of 11 research participants were quite critical about their mentor teachers' attitudes toward them. For example:

> *Most of the school teachers treated us like their "servants" sending us on errands and asking us to do what they actually had to do. Sometimes they even did not make time to discuss our lesson plans with us, so we just taught without their approval. (Oyun)*

> *Most of the mentor teachers at schools thought that we were there to assist with their teaching. But we were there to learn from them. They may have been focusing on the ways they could use us, student teachers, to their benefits rather than mentoring us. (Dulguun)*

> *I observed that some mentor teachers were interested in "mentoring" more students since they wanted to reduce their workload by letting the students teach their classes. (Enerel)*

These accounts emphasize the urgency of changing the attitudes of some mentor teachers in public schools toward student teachers to improve the quality of pre-service teachers' teaching practices. Otherwise, such unethical and unprofessional conduct by mentor teachers can negatively affect the student teachers, their motivation, and willingness to continue teaching after graduation.

Moreover, some mentor teachers did not provide adequate professional support and guidance in teaching and organizing extracurricular activities:

> *My mentor teacher in a school did not give me instructions or guidance when I taught her classes. Sometimes she asked me to teach a class without telling me beforehand which means I did not have a chance to prepare for the class. She just asked me to continue teaching using the textbook. Honestly, I wanted to use different teaching materials to motivate students and engage them. (Dulguun)*

> *My mentor teacher was so stressed. She had to teach many hours and lots of paperwork to do. She, actually, did not give any advice during my practicum. (Bulgan)*

> *The biggest challenge that I encountered during the teaching practicum was the fact that a mentor teacher assigned me to organize extracurricular activities for her class without any guidance. Honestly, some of my classmates in other schools also complained about their mentor teachers who did not guide them well enough. Moreover, when I asked some questions about teaching methods my mentor could not answer which means she lacked in professional knowledge. (Tsetseg)*

> *My mentor teacher did not observe my whole class, she had just left during the class before I finished. (Khaliun)*

Evidently, some mentor teachers did not meet pre-service teachers' expectations. It is noteworthy here that the roles of mentors are specified in the Placement Manual. Thus, they should know how important their roles are in pre-service teachers' practicum. For

example, they should assist student teachers to prepare for their classes, review lesson plans, and provide appropriate feedback.

5.1.2. Insufficient University–School Partnerships

Most of the participants complained about the bureaucracy and attitude of public school management and staff. Here are some comments from the pre-service teachers:

> *It took me and other student teachers two weeks to get my teaching practicum plan approved by an academic manager. Sometimes he was not in his office and when he was in his office he used to say that he was busy. Generally, when we wanted to access certain documents related to school rules and curricula, staff members did not assist us. Mostly, they ignored us. Thus, we got the information available only on the internet. (Dulguun)*

> *For the pre-service teachers, one of the biggest challenges was finding school placement. Also it was difficult to access the relevant documents that I needed to get myself familiarized according to the requirements for the practicum. Staff members were reluctant to provide with them saying I should find on my own. Therefore, our university needs to make contracts with several schools to enable pre-service teachers to do their practicum. (Bulgan)*

Similarly, other students recommended the university collaborate with certain schools to send pre-service teachers for their practicum, and they hoped that contracts or agreements would help to reduce bureaucracy affecting pre-service teachers in some public schools. Thus, the university needs to pay close attention to the organization of the teaching practicum, an integral part of teacher education, and establish partnerships with schools as soon as possible to make the practicum experiences more favorable to the student teachers.

5.1.3. Classroom-Level Constraints

For most of the pre-service teachers, managing big classes of 30–40 students in public schools was not easy. They mentioned that engaging all students in a big class during the 40 min lesson was hard. Moreover, one of them stated that due to the shortage of classrooms she once had to teach in the corridor, which made her teaching not effective as it was distracting and uncomfortable. Furthermore, the research participants observed and experienced the gaps between the university course content related to teaching English and the realities or practices in school classrooms. The most frequently mentioned mismatch was associated with the way English is taught in public schools:

> *I observed that students were mostly asked to do only grammar exercises throughout the English class where I was doing my practicum. So the students were not motivated to learn the language at school though they liked listening to songs and watching movies in English. Actually, when I had a discussion with some students about the importance of English language, they all valued the language as this would play the key role in accessing education and employment in Mongolia. I think, therefore, English teachers need to motivate their students to learn English. I also observed that in Grades 11 and 12 teachers mostly prepared students for their entrance exam which made English classes boring and grammar-focused. (Tovuu)*

> *A teacher who mentored me taught English in the same way everyday, using only the textbook. She even mispronounced some English words. (Undraa)*

> *The English teachers, whose classes I observed, taught English in Mongolian language, using only textbooks. In addition, the teachers did not use the CDs that are included in the textbook package. When I asked why, they said that they did not have time for listening exercises. Generally, the public school students were mostly weak in communicative ability. (Alimaa)*

In fact, the research participants had been taught to teach English by integrating the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and language knowledge (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, functions, and topics). They had also studied the

importance of using a variety of teaching methods and materials while considering the teaching and learning contexts, students' backgrounds, and English proficiency levels. However, according to the research participants, grammar-translation, teacher-centered, and exam-oriented instruction was dominant while neglecting some language skills and being heavily dependent on the textbooks in public school settings.

Moreover, some research participants had issues with incorporating digital technologies into their teaching in public schools:

> *I planned to use digital content for my "open class" and I checked the computer and the connections in the classroom the previous day. Unfortunately, the computer did not work during my teaching. And I was embarrassed in front of the students and teachers, and wasted my teaching hours. (Bulgan)*

> *The government had distributed desktop computers to public school teachers a few years ago, but most of them were broken, had viruses and malfunctioned. I think the teachers used them only for typing their term or annual reports. Even the printers did not work properly. So I had to run to the internet café on the opposite side of the school to get some teaching materials printed out. (Dulguun)*

> *Although I wanted to teach using online authentic materials I could not because of the lack of computer technology in every classroom. I think teachers can motivate modern day children through digital content since they use digital technologies, especially the internet, on a daily basis. (Oyun)*

These accounts show how government policies to promote computer and internet use in the education sector have been implemented in public school contexts and the shortage of teaching facilities in those schools.

5.2. Concerns about English Language Education

In addition to the previously mentioned challenges, the participants shared their concerns about English language education in Mongolia based on their reflection about their teaching contexts in private and public schools.

Inequality in English Language Education

The participants expressed their viewpoints on the quality of public school teachers. According to them, some public school teachers' low level of English proficiency makes their teaching dependent on textbooks, grammar focused, and teacher centered; thus, there is an urgent need to improve the quality of public school English teachers, as there are many students who cannot communicate in English when they finish their schools after studying the language for eight years. Four research participants spent six weeks of their 12-week teaching practicum in four different private schools and the rest of it in public schools. Therefore, they narrated about the differences between private and public school settings, teachers, and students, and the provision of English language education in those schools. They were all concerned about the class size and the lack of educational resources and qualified English teachers in public schools. For example, Tsetseg noted that "the classes, on average, consisted of 40 students which was really difficult for me to teach and manage," and she continued that "there were not sufficient educational resources such as textbooks, printers, photocopiers and paper at school, and on a few occasions I paid out of my pocket to get some copies of exercise sheets made by out-of-school photocopying service."

Moreover, Tovuu stated that "there are many students, even in my university class—majoring in teaching English, who cannot communicate well in English though they have been taught the language since the 5th grade in their schools, and all of them are from public schools." Dulguun also remarked that she had noticed the schoolchildren in expensive private schools communicated only in English with each other and their English proficiency was better than hers. These statements revealed pre-service teachers' anxiety about their English language knowledge and skills. They might be worried about facing insecurity when they teach students with higher English proficiency in the future.

According to Enerel, the main differences between public and private schools lay in the three areas: teacher–student ratio (private school classes were not big), teaching skills and English proficiency of the teachers (private school teachers mostly taught communicatively in English and their English language skills were more advanced), and educational environment (private schools were well resourced). She further commented that the main reason for private schools having skilled teachers with "good" English is that they offer much better salaries than public schools and recruit the teachers through a selection process assessing their English language proficiency. These differences between public and private schools made some students more reflective about educational inequality:

> *I firmly believe that we need to create equal opportunity for every school child. Privileged students should not be the only ones to receive high quality English language education. Public school students should also get such kind of education. In practice, this may seem like it is impossible, but, as future English teachers, we should never accept this social phenomenon without challenging ourselves and the society we live in. Together, we need to create more opportunities for public school children to reduce educational inequality in our society. (Tseren)*

In addition, some students made suggestions to improve the quality of English teachers in public schools. For example, Bulgan, Oyun, and Alimaa posited that the minimum entrance exam scores required to be admitted to the universities that prepare English teachers need to be raised because the English language level of students majoring in English has mostly been quite low in recent days. For Naraa, continuous professional development opportunities for public school teachers can be one of the immediate measures to tackle the issue of low-quality English education in public schools. Plus, two students mentioned that there is a need to assess English language proficiency level of teachers when they are recruited into public schools. In general, the narratives deeply reflected the realities of English language education in school settings in the capital city of Mongolia.

5.3. Benefits of the Teaching Practicum

Even though the participants faced some challenges, they gained a lot during their teaching practices in different contexts. The three of them were positive about their mentors, noting that they had received constant guidance and were motivated by their mentors. All participants were happy to have gained firsthand experiences in teaching English and to have enhanced their teaching methodology knowledge and the skills that they had developed in the university classrooms. Despite the fact that their teaching and working experiences varied from school to school, they clearly benefitted from their teaching practices by "discovering themselves more," "determining their future career path," "exploring how exciting it is if teachers are well prepared for their classes," "applying theoretical knowledge in practice," and "exposing themselves to the teaching world" (students' own words).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Though English has become desirable linguistic capital in Mongolia [10] due to its status in the country and internationally and the government placing emphasis on English language education, evidently, there are gaps between the policies and their implementation at schools. The study findings from the narratives by 11 pre-service teachers in an English language teacher preparation program corroborate the realities of English language education in Mongolian public schools, which were raised in the previous study [11]. Teacher-centered, textbook-dependent, examination-oriented, and grammar-based teaching dominates in public schools, which is caused by constraints such as large class sizes, teachers' lack of English proficiency and teaching methodology knowledge, and insufficient resources and facilities. The quality of English teachers, on the one hand, can be attributed to the pre-service teacher education programs that may not be offering future English teachers sufficient training and experience necessary to become competent in their chosen field. On the other hand, this is associated with the lack of continuous engagement of teachers in professional development activities. Indeed, quality teaching depends on teachers who

have (a) a foundation of the effective teaching practices that they can build on during their career; (b) competence to assess students' knowledge, identify their needs in regard to content, and respond appropriately; and (c) a commitment to lifelong learning or ongoing professional development [41]. Therefore, there is an immediate need for the Mongolian government to develop a comprehensive teacher development program to improve the quality of both in-service and pre-service English teachers to ensure the quality of English education in the country. For instance, the continuation of reflective teaching practice and good-quality mentoring in novice teachers' first years can assist pre-service teachers to make a smooth transition into in-service teaching, as Farrell [42] recommends. In addition, teachers should explore professional development activities to advance their language and pedagogical skills and choose the most effective methods for themselves, since "there is no recipe for professional development that works for everyone" [34] (p. 10).

At the university level, the quality of the teaching practicum needs to be taken seriously to ensure a practical and effective pre-service teacher education program, because most of the participants narrated that there was a lack of adequate mentoring. Foremost, the university should develop its partnership with schools, as Nguyen's study [43] illustrated that the effectiveness of the teaching practicum is determined by the university–school collaboration concerning their roles and responsibilities in supporting pre-service teachers. The study recommends maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between experienced mentor teachers and pre-service teachers in which mentors should provide "the wisdom of their knowledge and practice" [43] (p. 180), whereas student teachers can share new ideas and contribute to teaching process. Simply, mentor teachers have to engage pre-service teachers in regular conversations to assist in planning their lessons, give feedback, and encourage them to share their thoughts and reflection about the classes they have taught and observed.

This study indicates that pre-service English teachers need opportunities to reflect on their teaching practicum and to consider critically the implications for teaching the language of globalization in order to better understand not only their teaching practices but also themselves as future English teachers in different contexts. For instance, all participants were eager to improve not only their English proficiency to be a "good" English teacher but also the quality of English language education in their country. Furthermore, some participants were concerned about the unequal educational opportunities for schoolchildren depending on the type of school they go to, either private or public. Indeed, studies [5,10] about Mongolian university students' English and digital literacy practices found that inequalities related to English language competence amongst students were attributed to their prior schooling. Undoubtedly, the quality of English education in public schools has to be enhanced to ensure equity and equality for all children learning English, which has become basic literacy in an era of globalization, and to contribute to the social mobility of students in the future. Therefore, teachers and policymakers should become reflective enactors to minimize unintended consequences of English language education [44], one of which is educational inequality.

Meanwhile, English language teacher preparation programs in Mongolia are required to support pre-service teachers to develop a social justice standpoint and become advocates for their future students—global citizens. To this end, pre-service teachers need to be prepared to use social justice teaching by thinking critically about how to engage their students in problem-solving activities and group projects concerning the issues in their communities to develop their social, economic, and democratic skills [45]. As Warren [46] contends, pre-service teachers' potential to acquire accurate knowledge of students and the local teaching context, and to appropriately respond to students' needs through that knowledge, is very important to become a "good" teacher. This aligns with Kumaravadivelu's appeal for supporting language teachers to "become strategic thinkers, exploratory researchers and transformative intellectuals" [18] (p. 10). Thus, pre-service teachers should learn how to be reflexive and transformative by teaching topics that address inequality and promoting equality and social justice [45]. Incorporating social justice as an important component of

language teacher education would actually help pre-service teachers to understand how social inequalities are sustained and reproduced.

This study represents a starting point for internationally available studies on teaching practicum experiences of pre-service English teachers in Mongolia. As the participants were from only one discipline and were relatively small in number, the findings cannot be generalized to Mongolian pre-service teachers and universities that prepare teachers. Future research recruiting student teachers from different majors or disciplines may offer useful insights into teacher education programs in the context of Mongolia. Overall, the study shows that the teaching practicum enables student teachers to gain firsthand experiences in teaching, contextualize or localize the theoretical knowledge, confront the challenges and tensions in English language education in their teaching contexts, and discover themselves. Importantly, through reflection on their teaching practice experiences, they could develop not only their own self-awareness but also awareness of others, as Kramsch [17] stated. Drawing on the practical skills they gain from teaching in a variety of settings, they will definitely become more critical, reflexive, and transformative, and contribute to ensuring social justice in English language classrooms in Mongolia.

Funding: This research was supported by the Chey Institute for Advanced Studies under the International Scholar Exchange Fellowship program for the academic year 2021–2022.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The narratives written by the participants will be secured by a researcher and no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the study or to any other party.

Acknowledgments: I wish to thank the research participants for their contribution to this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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