

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the significant themes drawn from the findings are discussed in depth. The implications, limitation of the study, recommendation for future studies and the conclusion are also presented. Section 5.1 to 5.3 discussed the research questions and compared them with the previous studies. In Section 5.1, Bert's teaching experience in Taiwan and its influence on his development as an English teacher and his current teaching practice is discussed. In Section 5.2, prominent characteristics of Bert's classroom practices, teaching effectiveness and its problems are discussed. In Section 5.3, other difficulties Bert encountered in Taiwan are discussed. Next, Section 5.4 to 5.5 covers the implications and the limitation of the study. Section 5.6 provides the recommendation for future studies. Finally, the whole study was concluded in Section 5.7.

5.1 Bert's English Teaching Experience in Taiwan and Its Influence

Reviewing Bert's past teaching experience in Taiwan, such experience could be described as a comprehensive one—teaching English to students of different levels, ages and different learning contexts. The findings show that what Bert has gained from his rich teaching experience which benefits him greatly in terms of his development as an English teacher in Taiwan and makes him successfully teach English in Taiwan for more than fourteen years.

The first influence of Bert's past teaching experience is his alteration of teaching attitude. Generally speaking, NESTs are criticized for their irresponsible attitude toward their teaching and students' learning (Pan, 2004). It was because for most NESTs, their intention of teaching English in Taiwan was “to make money” or “to experience the culture” (Pan, 2004; Lin, 2003; Ting, 2000). Teaching English is

merely a way for them to survive in Taiwan. However, the finding of the present study showed that even though Bert's initial intention of coming to Taiwan was similar to that of most NESTs, his teaching attitude has gradually changed as he gained more teaching experience in Taiwan. Bert's serious attitude originated from his experience at K-School, a private international school where formal education is delivered there. During his four years in K-School, Bert recognized a teacher's responsibilities and the impact a teacher could bring to his/her students. With such realization, Bert learned to be serious about not only his students' education but also his own profession as an English teacher. In the study, Bert's serious attitude toward his profession as a teacher was manifested in his insistence on starting the class punctually, maintaining his reputation carefully, providing additional instructions for slow learners, and grading students' homework in person, whereas the same serious attitude toward his students' learning was displayed in demanding students to pay full attention in class, to take notes thoroughly, and to fulfill their in-class task correctly and completely before going home.

Second, Bert's rich teaching experience allowed him to improve his teaching skills, especially those about classroom management and grammar teaching. As indicated by past literature, the lack of skills in classroom management and grammar teaching is listed the top two weakness for NESTs in ESL/EFL teaching environment (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Lin, 2002; Chou, 2004; Chuang, 2006). However, with rich teaching experience in Taiwan, Bert had more opportunities to obtain and then develop classroom management skills and grammar teaching approaches, which has therefore compensated one of his deficiencies as a NEST. Furthermore, as Chen (2007) suggested in her study, students' respect toward NESTs determines the success of NESTs' teaching. Bert's possession of good classroom management skills and competence in teaching basic grammar have also

attracted students to take Bert's class seriously and to respect him as a teacher rather than "a young chap messing about in sneakers" (Arva & Medgyes, 2000).

Third, Bert's rich teaching experience helped him to familiarize himself with the local education system in Taiwan and Taiwanese students' learning traits. Compared with the average NESTs who have little understanding about local education model (Barratt & Kontra, 2000), Bert's familiarity with local current education situations allowed him to clearly differentiate the roles he should play between public schools and cram schools. In the study, Bert obviously played a supporting role in Li-Li Junior High School, where he assisted local English teachers with the aspects that they tended to be neglected in their teaching—training students' speaking and listening skills in class. Whereas at I-School, Bert viewed himself as a foundation-builder whose mission was to build a strong foundation of four skills for his students at this cram school. In addition, Bert's knowledge toward current English teaching problems in Taiwan enables him to figure out possible solutions which allowed him to teach English more efficiently and successfully than the average NESTs. Take teaching large multilevel classes at Li-Li Junior High for example. To deal with this problem in many Taiwanese public schools, Bert chose to aim at his teaching quality instead of quantity and strived to arouse the learning interests of students in all kinds of levels first. Concerning "knowing the learning trait of Taiwanese students", Chou (2004) and several researchers (Lin, 2002; Pan, 2004; Chiang, 2006) all specified that many NESTs in Taiwan are incompetent in recognizing Taiwanese students' proficiency levels and in anticipating their learning difficulties. However, Bert was not one of them. Bert's rich teaching experience has helped him to pinpoint his students' English proficiency level and learning difficulties. In addition, owing to his acquaintance with Taiwanese students' passive learning traits, Bert even deliberately performed some teaching strategies to transform

his students into active learners in class, such as having group or individual punishment for students who do not voluntarily answer the questions in class.

5.2 Bert's classroom practices, teaching effectiveness, and teaching problems

5.2.1 Bert's classroom practices

There are several findings concerning Bert's classroom practices that were in accord with the results of the previous studies. First, most of Bert's teaching activities belonged to oral training skill, the same characteristic of NESTs' teaching mentioned in Chen(2007)'s, Liu(2004)'s and Lin(2002)'s studies. Due to the influence of Bert's Chinese learning experience, Bert believed that the ultimate goal of EFL learning is "communication." In order to help students reach the goal, a large amount of time in Bert's class was invested to cultivate students' communicative ability, such as answering questions, describing a news event in English or explaining a Chinese expression, phrase or word to Bert in English.

Second, Bert's classroom practices focused on the process of thinking and the application of the knowledge. Such finding was similar with that in P. Wang (2007)'s study, indicating that native English-speaking teachers, on the whole, advocate free thinking and discovery learning. In the study, Bert endeavored to promote students' independent thinking ability by constantly raising the question "Why?" for students to answer in class and continuously reminding students to "use their brains." As for the application of the knowledge, Bert created plenty of opportunities for students to display the knowledge they learned from the class. In the study, the most significant activity for students to apply their knowledge was news-telling activity which Bert performed at I-School. In order to fulfill the task, students need not only the knowledge of sentence structure but also that of vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation to function together. In short, it was an activity for students to integrate their four skills and display it in front of the whole class.

Third, Bert successfully created an active and lively learning atmosphere in the classroom, which is in line with Chen (2007)'s and Lin(2002)'s studies. NESTs' classes are generally regarded as amusing and interesting. Bert's are no exception. He believed that making class full of fun was an effective approach to grab students' attention and to arouse students' learning interest regardless of students' language proficiency. Once their interest was aroused, so would their learning performance be. Therefore, Bert often posed funny gestures or talked with an exaggerated intonation to attract students' attention in class. In addition, Bert's sense of humor was also a contributor which increased the enjoyment in class.

However, there is one finding regarding Bert's classroom practices which was not found in the previous literature—Bert's emphasis on vocabulary teaching. In the study, Bert's vocabulary teaching has occupied a large proportion of his teaching; he taught plenty of new words to students almost in every class. In addition, even the only formal written exam Bert conducted in class, the mock exam, was also designed to assess students' ability of applying the new words in context. Although the definite reason for Bert's inclination to emphasize vocabulary learning is not clear, a plausible reason can be attribute to his belief influenced by his Chinese learning experience—the larger vocabulary one possesses, the less difficulty one has in communicating with native speakers of the second language. Therefore, Bert tried very hard to help his students enlarge their vocabulary in story-telling time, news-telling activity, Chinese-English translation activity, or in reading class.

5.2.2 Bert's teaching effectiveness

Many results relating to Bert's teaching effectiveness in the study were consistent with those of previous literature. First, Bert served as a “perfect language model,” a notion proposed by Phillipson (1992), indicating that NESTs can help students pronounce correct English as well as intonation. In the study, Bert not only

taught students' correct pronunciation whenever possible but also conducted the activity called "Give me the Fu" to train his students to utter English with appropriate intonations.

Next, Bert has successfully enhanced students' listening and speaking ability, one of the NESTs' advantages mentioned in many studies (Chen, 2007; Wen, 2006; Chou, 2004; Liu, 2004; Lin, 2002; Ting, 2000). Regarding enhancing students' listening ability, telling stories was one of Bert's tools in class. When hearing Bert's stories, students received the so-called "comprehensible input" of English. Once the input from Bert was accumulated enough by students, their listening ability would consequently uplift to a higher level. As for enhancing students' speaking ability, Barratt and Kontra (2000) mentioned that one of NESTs' advantages is to naturally provide an authentic communicative environment for students to directly talk to native speakers. Bert, a native speaker, indeed created this kind of surroundings for his students to practice talking English with him both in and out of class. With the abundant opportunities to practice their English with Bert, students' speaking ability was definitely enhanced.

Last, Bert constantly shared with his students his childhood memories in the United States and his life experience here in Taiwan. The former contributed to students' cultural knowledge of target language (Arva and Medgyes, 2000; Barratt and Kontra, 2000) whereas the latter facilitated his students' understanding of multi-cultures (Chou, 2004; Pan, 2004). Bert's students could also foster their multi-cultural understanding by witnessing Bert's ways of dealing with things in his life, hearing Bert's opinions on the big events in Taiwan and most importantly, by experiencing Bert's enforcement of western teaching style in his class, such as actively participating in class activities, highly emphasizing voluntarily answering questions from teachers, and raising questions about the teaching content.

However, there is one discrepancy in the previous studies relating to Bert's teaching effectiveness. Although NESTs were perceived to be a strong motivator for getting students to talk (Phillipson, 1992; Wen, 2006), this advantage was only half-proved in Bert's case. Regardless of Bert's success in training students at I-School to actively speak English in class, Bert somewhat failed to arouse most of the Li-Li Junior High School students' willingness to speak and only a few students dared to voluntarily answer Bert's questions in class or talk to him. Such situation echoed Scully (2000) and Cortazzi & Jin (1996)'s findings, indicating that both NESTs in Japan and China have encountered great difficulty with inciting students' willingness to talk. One plausible reason for Bert's failure in Li-Li Junior High School would be that most students in this school had "face issue" to deal with. They were afraid of losing face if they made mistakes in speaking English in front of the whole class. Consequently, the students chose to be silent rather than to talk to Bert. Another possible reason which could account for this phenomenon was students' mentality in Li-Li Junior High School. For those Li-Li Junior High School students, they did not perceive the urgent need for sharpening up their oral ability because oral ability test is not included in Basic Competence Test, the national joint entrance exam for senior high schools. Therefore, it was normal for them to neglect the opportunities to train their oral ability in Bert's class. The same mentality was also reported in Scully's (2000) study which tried to answer Japanese students' reluctance to speak English to NESTs in class.

5.2.3 Bert's teaching problems

Many problems mentioned in the previous studies did not appear in Bert's teaching. As opposed to "NESTs' clumsy classroom management skills" (Lin, 2002; Chou, 2004; Chuang, 2006), Bert had good classroom management skills, and set up rules in the classroom which he strictly executed and was able to handle students'

behavior problems during class. Contrary to “being unable to understand students’ learning difficulties” (Lin, 2002; Pan, 2004; Chiang, 2006), Bert was more likely to predict or anticipate students’ learning difficulties because the same difficulties happened to Bert when he learned Chinese. Unlike “failing to grade students’ homework after class” (Lin, 2002), Bert was often seen to collect students’ homework before starting the class in Li-Li Junior High School and at I-School.

However, one problem still occurred in Bert’s teaching—Bert adopted limited types of teaching activities in class. Both Lin (2002) and Liu (2004) point out that NESTs generally use various teaching aids and perform more dynamic teaching activities in class, such as playing games, watching movies, competitions in answering questions, reciting practices, group practices and activities for festivals. However, Bert was seen to perform no games or to use fewer kinds of teaching aids in class. Besides, the few teaching activities Bert frequently performed in class were story-telling by himself and news-telling or reciting the sentences dramatically by his students. Even though the exact reason for Bert to perform no games or few competitive activities in class is not clear, one possible reason could be inferred that Bert’s disfavor of games might due to his past teaching experience in Jolly School where Bert learned that playing games did not benefit much on students’ English learning outcome. In addition, “playing games” might be a negative label for Bert. Since having the unpleasant experience at Jolly School, Bert has been making effort to get rid of the image which foreign teachers can only play games in English classes. Thus, Bert adopted no games but conducted more teaching in order to prove his ability of being a real English teacher instead of a “game machine.” However, Bert did not deprive his students of having fun in class. Bert skillfully merged the “fun” element into his teaching activities, such as “News-telling” and “Give me the Fu,” which created the same entertaining effect with games.

5.3 The Difficulties Bert Encountered in Taiwan

There are four findings regarding the difficulties Bert encountered here which are consistent with previous literature—Chinese people’s indirect way of expression, the incompatibility between Bert’s beliefs and Taiwanese education system, unstable working environment and no channels for professional growth (Lin, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Pan, 2004; Chen, 2005).

The first difficulty Bert encountered in Taiwan was Chinese people’s indirect way of expression. Although “language barrier” was reported as the biggest difficulty for NESTs in a foreign country (Lin, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Pan, 2004; Chen, 2007), Bert’s Chinese competence has prevented him from most of the inconvenience which most foreigners have experienced in Taiwan, such as being unable to obtain feedback from their students, having fewer chances to interact with students and colleagues, or feeling like an outsider in the host country (Scully, 2000; Pan, 2004). However, Bert still found it difficult to have Taiwanese people talk to him directly. This inadaptation to Chinese indirect communication is also listed as the biggest difficulty for foreigners in Taiwan in Zhan (2008)’s study, where the life adjustment of NESTs in Taiwan was investigated. Westerners are used to expressing their opinions or intentions in a direct and honest way while Taiwanese are not used to this kind of expression. Bert’s constant frustrations of gaining indirect information from Taiwanese people seem to result from the cultural differences between the West and the East. No matter how well a foreigner like Bert accustomed into Taiwanese culture linguistically or behaviorally, such problem caused by cultural differences still could not be overcome easily. The feasible strategy for NESTs to deal with this difficulty is to accept the difference and try to accommodate to it.

The second difficulty for Bert was the distrust from local teachers. Echoing

the observation in Cortazzi & Jin (1996)'s study, Bert found that Chinese education highly praises students' hardworking learning attitude in class. Unfortunately, Bert's entertaining style of teaching, which allowed students to have fun in class, was seriously challenged by local teachers, especially those in Li-Li Junior High School. Without having direct communication with local English teachers, Bert would have no chance to explain the reasons and his teaching belief for doing so. Again, the possible solution to this difficulty was hindered by the inability of direct communication. Without effective communication, NESTs' different teaching behaviors could hardly be understood by local teachers. Only with the two cohorts holding an open-minded attitude toward communicating with each other could this problem be solved.

The unstable teaching environment, as discussed in Chen's (2005) study, was the third difficulty. As an NEST working in cram schools, Bert's salary was hourly-based. With such unstable income, Bert had to learn how to manage his money well. Besides, Bert had encountered that the content of his working contract could be easily altered by cram school owners without consulting him first. The same situation was also reported in Lin (2002)'s, Chou (2004)'s and Chen (2007)'s studies, indicating that the regulations of hiring NESTs in Taiwan was not strictly followed in many private institutes.

The last difficulty was related to Bert's professional training—there are few channels provided for NESTs to pursue their professional growth, the same difficulty reported in Lin's (2002) and Chen's (2007) studies. Bert complained, "In Taiwan, nobody really ever gives you any kind of instruction or teaching workshop" (08/28/2007). In fact, most NESTs who worked in cram schools in Taiwan have long been viewed as an instrument to attract more students. For customers and cram school owners, they only care about the sole advantage NESTs can bring—their

natural linguistic competence. As a result, “white skin” and “English-speaking” became the only requirements for hiring the NESTs. Apparently, NESTs’ professionalism has been ignored. Teachers like Bert who seriously care about their own performance and their students’ education have therefore found few channels to obtain or upgrade their teaching skills. However, under such an environment, Bert still managed to proceed his own professional growth on his own. The most important factor which enabled Bert to overcome this difficulty was his positive personality. Holding a positive attitude toward this disadvantage, Bert aggressively sought solutions by reading books, observing other good teachers’ class, discussing problems with his colleagues and surfing on the Internet to find useful ideas with other teachers and experimenting the useful suggestions in his class. Besides, the successful findings gained from the experiments Bert conducted in class have also continuously sustained Bert’s passion for teaching English in Taiwan. From Bert’s case, we can conclude that positive personality is a drive for Bert’s professionalism and also a key element to determine the success of a NEST’s teaching in Taiwan in a long term, the same finding which is also reached in Tsai (2004)’s study.

5.4 Implications of This Study

Several suggestions drawn from this study were made for NESTs in Taiwan to improve their teaching careers and for policy makers to improve the NESTs-recruiting program in Taiwan.

Concerning NESTs in Taiwan, the first suggestion was that NESTs are suggested to hold a serious attitude toward their English teaching career in Taiwan. Instead of viewing their job as a tool for making money, NESTs should put their students’ education as their priority and have a passion for teaching English. With both passion and serious attitude, even a novice teacher would eventually become an excellent teacher.

Second, NESTs are advised to actively seek opportunities to improve their own teaching skills. Since NESTs' professional growth is often neglected in Taiwan society and few channels or platforms are set up for NESTs to improve their teaching skills, NESTs' self-learning ability has become one of the most important tools for them to improve their teaching skills or to solve problems in their class. Therefore, NESTs are suggested to learn teaching skills from their surroundings by themselves, such as reading books and related websites, observing good teachers' classes or consulting problems with their experienced colleagues.

Third, NESTs are recommended to value the importance of gaining classroom management skills. Having good classroom management can help NESTs to obtain respect from students. Some Taiwanese students tend not to respect NESTs as a teacher, always viewing NESTs' class as time for playing games instead of learning English. Normally, NESTs would require NNESTs' assistance to behave the rowdy students in class so that they can perform their teaching more smoothly. However, in students' mind, teachers who are able to discipline them and control the dynamics of the classroom are usually the teachers they respect. NESTs without good classroom management skills would possibly result in having few students respect them and focus on their teaching. Therefore, it is strongly recommended for NESTs to learn how to manage a class well and discipline their students in class. NESTs with good classroom management skills would not only make their teaching procedure more smoothly in class but also to earn respect and cooperation from students.

Last, positive attitude is highly required, especially when NESTs encounter difficulties in Taiwan. As discussed in the present study, positive attitude has played an important role for NESTs to successfully deal with difficulties merged from their jobs, culture differences or language barriers. A NEST with a positive attitude would also treat cultural shocks properly, which might fasten their adaptation in the

local society. Besides, NESTs' successful experience of adapting themselves into a different culture could also be a vivid example for students to hold a liberal attitude toward different cultures, preparing themselves to be the citizen of the world. This is just one of the goals which the government and the public expect the NESTs can help students to reach (Lin, 2002).

As for the policy makers, increasing the professional knowledge for NESTs would be the most urgent task since most NESTs in Taiwan are not TESOL majors (Lin, 2003; Ting, 2000). In the study, even though Bert was a NEST with so many years of teaching experience, he still had difficulty in teaching sentences with complex grammar. Bert's lack of formal training of teaching English grammar is the main reason. Therefore, in order to help NESTs in Taiwan to become more competent teachers, the first thing the government should do is to sponsor workshops or courses for NESTs to enhance their professional knowledge, ranging from foreign language teaching (e.g., pedagogical grammar, contrastive analysis) to classroom management skills. The more professional knowledge NESTs possess, the more successful will their teaching be.

Next, concerning reducing NESTs' cultural shocks in Taiwan, our government should make effort to inform NESTs different aspects of Taiwanese culture and current education situations. Courses or workshops like "Understanding Taiwanese Culture," or "Current Taiwan Education Model, Policy and Problems" should also be offered so as to help NESTs to be familiar with their teaching environment, the learning traits of Taiwanese students and their typical learning difficulties. In addition, NESTs or foreigners who have successfully lived and taught English in Taiwan for many years should also be invited to share their experience with inexperienced NESTs. Overall, the more cultural knowledge NESTs are informed of, the less frustrations or failure would occur in NESTs' English teaching and their

everyday life in Taiwan.

Third, it is also our government's social responsibility to provide a better working environment for NESTs in Taiwan. In addition to providing NESTs with sufficient professional knowledge and opportunities for in-service training, our government should further establish laws/regulations of hiring NESTs, where their rights and obligations were clearly stated (e.g., the hours of in-service training a NEST should receive) and their working contracts were strictly followed by owners of cram schools, private language institutes, and formal schools. Any organization that hires foreign teachers violating the regulations would be penalized.

Last, professional advisory groups which consist of experienced NESTs, local English teachers and universities professors are suggested to be set up. The advice or information from the professional advisory groups may provide insights for NESTs in understanding their own profession and further enhancing their teaching skills. In addition, the functions of such government-driven groups could be broadened to design and operate teacher-training programs for both novice and in-service NESTs, to help and to monitor the development of the NESTs, to provide support for the innovative teaching methods and related teaching resources (Jeon and Lee, 2006) just like Advisory Teaching Team (ATT) in Hong Kong.

5.4 Limitation of This Study

The limitations of this study are presented in the following. First, as only one participant was investigated in the study; the results of the present study are difficult to apply to a wider population. Second, since this study employed the qualitative research approach, the researcher's subjectivity may have influenced how the findings of this study were reported. In addition, her experience as an English teacher in junior high school may also have played an important role in how the data were collected, analyzed and interpreted. Even though a complete objectivity was

impossible to obtain because of the nature of case study, the researcher still tried to strike a balance by offering her field notes and the preliminary analysis to the participant, hoping to decrease any possible personal bias. Next, the insufficient time invested in the field work was another weakness in this study. Because of the heavy workload for an English teacher to accomplish every day, it was difficult for the researcher to leave her school and observe each of Bert's classes in Li-Li Junior High School or at I-School. Besides, without ample time for the research, it was also inconvenient for the researcher to observe Bert's classroom practices in classes of different levels, such as classes in the beginning level or advanced level. If a longer and wider span of field work was available, a better understanding of Bert's teaching repertoire can be gained and the explanations of several specific significant features in Bert's teaching (i.e. his emphasis on vocabulary) may also be explored. Last, this study was limited in terms of triangulation. As a matter of fact, the researcher relied solely on self-reported data from Bert to explore his past teaching experience. As for the effectiveness of Bert's teaching, only opinions of six students in Li-Li Junior high school were collected. If more data and opinions can be collected from Bert's students, students' parents, colleagues and administrators from the various schools he has worked, the results would be more impartial and strengthened.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Studies

In reply to the results and the limitations of the present study, several directions for future studies are recommended as follows.

1. Involving more NESTs to conduct a larger scale investigation on NESTs' teaching either quantitatively or qualitatively so that richer data could be collected to confirm (or to refute) the results of the present study and to infer them to a wider population.
2. Conducting a study similar to the present one but with longer investigation time.

Many unexplained (i.e. Bert's disfavor of using games in his class) issues can be answered and unexplored teaching behaviors (i.e. Bert's teaching on the beginning level or higher level) can be obtained.

3. Researching the attitudes of NESTs in different teaching contexts toward EFL teaching to see whether NESTs in formal schools hold a different attitude from those in cram schools.
4. Researching NESTs with/without Chinese competence to explore the influence NESTs' Chinese learning experience on their teacher's beliefs, teaching behaviors, their teaching efficiency, and their students' response.
5. Researching opinions on NESTs' teaching from students', local English teachers', cram school owners', and public school administrators' perspectives.

5.7 Conclusion

In the present study, the researcher has explored the teaching experience of Bert, an American English teacher who has taught English in Taiwan for more than fourteen years. In addition, his teaching behaviors, teaching effectiveness, teaching problems and the difficulties he encountered in Taiwan were also investigated.

Bert's past teaching experience in a variety of schools indeed benefits him a lot in terms of his development as a successful English teacher. For example, Bert has changed his teaching attitude into a serious one. Besides, the skills which Bert gained from his past teaching experience have enabled him to compensate his weakness as a NEST, such as good classroom management skills, and grammar teaching skills. Bert's teaching mainly focuses on training students' oral skills, independent thinking, and enlarging their vocabulary. The effectiveness of his teaching was manifested on three aspects—serving as a perfect language model, enhancing students' listening and oral ability, and introducing multi-culture awareness to students. However, the major problem of his teaching lied in the limited types of

teaching activities in class. Bert's difficulties in Taiwan were Chinese indirect way of communication, unstable working environment, and insufficient channels or chances for professional growth. Noteworthy, Bert's positive attitude toward these difficulties has successfully facilitated him to solve the problems.

From Bert's case, it is clear to see that although Bert began his practice with insufficient professional knowledge and training, his rich experience, serious teaching attitude and positive personality make him become a successful NEST in Taiwan.

