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The Influence of Short-term International Intensive Programme on Student Teachers' Perception of Their Future Profession

Abstract: Foreign language teacher training programmes often require student teachers to spend some time in a country where the target language is spoken. While research on the role of study abroad experiences in general teacher education is well documented, investigations dealing with the impact of mobility initiatives on FL teacher education are rather scarce. The present study, based on oral interviews, examines long-term effects of a two-week international workshop, an Erasmus Intensive Programme (IP), on student teachers' perception of their role as FL teachers. The IP aimed at finding ways to incorporate elements of the arts into English classes in four European countries: Germany, Poland, Turkey and Lithuania. The IP participants were invited to take part in lectures, practical workshops and visits to local schools. The results of the study reveal that within approximately a year after the completion of the IP the participants from Poland express a general positive attitude towards the infusion of the arts into the EFL curriculum. The IP experience evoked the future teachers' reflection upon a number of key issues in the profession of FL teaching: the degree of individualization and learner autonomy in class, rejecting the idea of teacher as solely an authority figure, the use of various forms of social interaction in class, and self-improvement or life-long learning being inherent aspects of the teaching profession.

Keywords: study abroad, teacher education, mobility, the arts, teacher's role, long-life learning

1. Introduction

Since language is inseparably linked to culture, foreign language (FL) teachers need to be aware of both the cognitive and affective changes learners undergo in the process of FL and culture learning (Byram 1994). In the twenty-first century, instead of focusing on the target culture only, FL education needs to be moving in the direction of a more global perspective, a perspective that enables effective

and appropriate communication in a variety of cross-cultural situations. Bruce, Podemski, and Anderson (1991) underline that this objective of language teaching can be accomplished only when such a global perspective is implemented in teacher education. At many universities prospective FL teachers are required to spend some time of their teacher education abroad, mainly in the target language country. During this period, whose duration varies from university to university, student teachers may undertake teaching internships, study at a university, work as language assistants or do work placement in an area that is not directly related to their major field of study. In some places certain top-down initiatives are implemented to enable students to participate in a teaching education course abroad in order to enhance FL competence, raise intercultural awareness and develop professional skills (Hepple 2012; Lee 2009). In places where such regulations are not introduced or difficult to execute, for instance due to organizational or financial reasons, a variety of short-term mobility initiatives can be organized as a part of international exchanges, bilateral agreements between universities or such European programmes as Erasmus+.

Whereas research concerning the role of immersion teaching training (Brine & Shapson 1989; Bartlett, Erben, & Singh 1996; Lapkin, Swain, Shapson 1990) and other study abroad experiences (Malewski & Phillion 2009; Palmer & Menard-Warwick 2012; Pence & Macgillivray 2008) in general teacher education have a relatively well documented history, studies focused on the impact of international experiences on FL teacher education are rather scarce. The available literature suggests that mobility initiatives addressed to future teachers of English produce a number of positive effects. Lee (2009) asserts that intensive interaction with native speakers both in academic and social situations contributed to self-perceived improvement of participants' FL proficiency, especially in terms of sociolinguistic competence. After a period of time spent abroad, student teachers reported an increase in the level of intercultural awareness, wider knowledge about the host country and its citizens, and a greater sensitivity to cultural differences (Lee 2009; Tang & Choi 2004). As Pray and Marx (2010) indicate, on return to the home institution such students expressed more emphatic attitudes to the cultural and linguistic problems FL learners may experience. Other professional gains included student teachers' familiarisation with a new educational system, exposure to different teaching approaches and development of reflective skills (Hepple 2012).

No matter how beneficial such international experiences may appear, some recurring problems were also observed. Future teachers tended to overuse their mother tongue when they communicated with their peers in social and academic contexts (Barkhuizen & Feryok 2006; Lee 2009). Since some participants also expressed their dissatisfaction with having had little opportunity to communicate with native speakers, organisational measures need to be undertaken to improve this situation (Sutherland 2011). Even though mobility initiatives are reported to have a positive impact on future teachers' professional skills, a number of researchers

emphasize the need to offer student teachers ongoing guidance and mentoring during their teaching internship. Pray and Marx's (2010) study conducted on American students undergoing a teaching course in Mexico revealed that they formed certain misconceptions about FL teaching, for instance about teaching grammar or error correction. Additionally, Trent (2011) noted that confrontation with different teaching approaches in the host country resulted in developing conflicting teacher identities in Chinese student teachers.

So far studies of the role of international FL teacher education programmes on student teachers' professional skills to a large extent focused on Asian students visiting English speaking countries and little is known about effects of mobility programmes on prospective teachers in the European context. For this reason, this article is dedicated to Polish student teachers who participated in a two-week training session in Germany.

In 2014 Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Germany, organized an IP entitled "LETTA – Learning English through the Arts" for student teachers and their academic trainers from four European countries (Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Turkey). The aim of the IP, funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme, was to develop future teachers' professional skills by offering theoretical and practical introduction into a cross-curricular approach to L2 teaching, which assumed applying different forms of art in the language classroom. The study presented in this article aims to investigate to what extent participation in this short-term international teacher education programme has contributed to the professional development of student teachers from the Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław. The data was collected by means of individual interviews during which future teachers of English were invited to share their reflections concerning the usefulness of the LETTA approach and express their stance towards the teaching profession.

2. Learning Through the Arts and the LETTA IP

The *Learning Through the Arts* (LTTA) education model originated in the mid-1990s in Canada as an "artist-teacher-institutional collaboration" (Elster 2001: 19), which aimed at the infusion of arts directly into the general curriculum in a way that could support the acquisition of knowledge required in various disciplines. The effectiveness of the program has since then been subjected to an extensive empirical investigation, which points to a beneficial emotional, physical, cognitive and social impact of involvement in the arts on learning (Upitis & Smithrim 2001). This result is corroborated by other studies, which show that involvement in the arts is correlated with (Eisner 2001). Should we create new aims for art education? *Art Education*, 54(5), 6–10.): (a) higher academic achievement (e.g. Catterall 1998; Deasy 2002); (b) development of analytical thinking and

problem-solving skills (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Greene 1995); (c) development of natural curiosity (Pitman 1998); (d) an increase in the relevance of learning for students with diverse cultural backgrounds (Pitman 1998); (e) an emphasis placed on the connections between academic areas and events outside the classrooms (Miller 1994); (f) enhancing teamwork (Pitman 1998); (g) strengthening the ability to use and acquire information and to master different types of symbol systems (Abbott 1999; Gardner 1993); and (h) enhancing the process of making meaning of learning (Greene 1995). Furthermore, in a synthesis of 685 studies, Hattie (2009) shows that creativity programs, which try to foster fluency and flexibility in thinking and in responses to questions or problems (Cohn 1986), exert a strong influence on student achievement outcome that can be compared to those taking place during one typical year of schooling.

It was reasoned that based on its success, the LTTA model could prove to be an equally valuable tool for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Europe. In the international field of EFL, the dominant paradigm over the last 30 years has been the *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) approach. It assumes that foreign languages are learned best through the exposure to comprehensible input, in collaboration and in settings that support the development of thinking skills and learner autonomy. In addition, modern EFL/CLT-based classrooms should involve teachers, who are co-learners, and place an emphasis on the expression of meaning, possibly through curricular integration (Jacobs & Farrell 2003). These trends are somewhat visible in national and international curricula and educational standards. In Poland for instance, Lewandowska et al. (2009) draw the attention to the need to incorporate authentic materials into the EFL classroom. Furthermore, Siek-Piskozub (2006) highlights the necessity to include opportunities for meaningful interaction, which supports social and cooperative skills. In Germany the federal educational standards (*Bildungsstandards*, KMK 2004) recognize these principles and prescribe that FL classrooms engage learners in linguistically and cognitively challenging and stimulating tasks that foster the understanding of and active participation in the sociocultural, literary and aesthetic processes. The incorporation of the arts into the EFL curriculum was seen as a viable means to achieve these ends.

With this premise in mind, the aim of the IP was to explore potential ways of applying the LTTA model in EFL classes as an innovative factor that contributes to the creating of meaning-oriented and communicative language environments, which promote interaction and negotiation of meaning. To that end, EFL student teachers, academic staff, in-service teachers, local artists and student teachers from four countries (Poland, Germany, Lithuania and Turkey) engaged in a cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. After a careful analysis and comparison of respective curricular goals as well as what was considered best teaching practice in the respective countries, followed by observation of teaching practice and interaction with artists and teachers who use the arts in their work, the participants

of the LETTA workshop tried to develop a collection of classroom materials and activities based on the LTTA model. These prototypical EFL LTTA resources were then used as the basis for a set of guidelines (“criterion catalogue”) for the development of LTTA based EFL resources and have been published as a collection of activities and classroom ideas (Gehring 2016).

A significant portion of the IP was spent on multinational group activities, interaction, and discussions of opinions, attitudes and experiences. In that sense, the IP was heavily based on practical activities that required the synthesis of expertise, skills, perspectives and experiences. Yet, every attempt was made to maintain a proper balance between theoretical foundations as well as research findings and their classroom applications of the new approach. The above-mentioned workshops and collaborative activities were furthermore balanced by two visits to German primary and lower secondary schools, where the IP participants had a chance to observe English and art-related classes.

The LETTA IP strived to broaden the typical dialogue held between student teachers, their university trainers as well as practitioners in the course of teacher training to a multilateral arena where various points of view, ideas, thinking and learning styles, languages and cultures meet, giving the participants a unique chance to share their experiences, to evaluate the potential of LTTA for European EFL classrooms in an objective, thorough and reflective way, and to create practical solutions for European classrooms as a joint venture. The LETTA IP also offered a chance for these different agents active in European classrooms to compare and contrast their perspectives on more global issues involved in EFL teaching, encouraging transparency, reflective thinking and learning from one another.

3. Research methodology

As mentioned above, the teacher training course consisted in both theoretical classes and practical workshops on the application of art in an FL classroom, as well as school visits to German schools; therefore, it seems interesting to investigate whether and to what extent this experience has affected student teachers’ perception of their role as FL teachers. In particular, the research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What FLT aspects drew the student teachers’ attention during their visits in German schools? What were their attitudes to the recalled observations?
2. How do the student teachers assess the usefulness of the LETTA approach to FL teaching?
3. How do they perceive themselves as L2 teachers? How was their perception of FL teacher’s profession affected by their participation in a short-term mobility programme?

3.1. The participants

The data was collected by means of oral interviews with 6 female student teachers of Polish origin who participated in the IP in Oldenburg in 2014 and agreed to take part in the research. The sample consisted of one undergraduate and five graduate full-time students of the Institute of English Studies at the University of Wrocław. All of them had selected a teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) course as their major specialisation and before the onset of the IP had at least rudimentary expertise in FL teaching. Recruitment to the participation in the IP was conducted on a voluntary basis.

3.2. The procedure

The oral interviews took place approximately one year after the completion of the IP, which enabled the participants to reflect on the practical value and usefulness of the course from a wider time perspective. The following two questions served as a springboard for the semi-structured interview:

1. Has the participation in the LETTA IP changed your perception of your role as an FL teacher? If yes, how?

2. To what extent were the visits in German schools relevant to you?

The individual interviews were recorded, transcribed and content analysed. To ensure interrater reliability, the coding process was first conducted separately by both authors, then one common set of categories was established and used by both researchers in the final analysis. Since the interviews were conducted in Polish, the students' responses were translated into English by the authors of this article and the respondents' names were replaced with initials.

3.3. Results

As for the first research question, there were a number of aspects of FL teaching in German schools that seemed to have caught the attention of the interviewed student teachers. Some respondents focused on differences between Polish and German schools and approaches to language teaching, whereas others analysed teaching techniques and resources used by German teachers. The reported attitudes towards German schools, observed teachers and applied teaching techniques were generally positive.

The most frequently recalled aspect of the observed lessons, underlined by three respondents, was high degree of individualisation of the teaching process and teachers' ongoing interest in students' needs.

The teachers' approach was more individualized. ... The teachers didn't start with what syllabus must be covered, but with "I have such and such students here", so the teaching was more individualized. (M.)

[She] wasn't like a traditional Polish teacher. She was more like a person who approaches each pupil individually and knows his needs. During the lesson she told us something about each pupil and I liked her approach a lot. (M.)

It was very interesting. It was completely different there. School is more learner-centred, I think. (N.)

Such more individualised approach to teaching seemed to entail other didactic choices. The observed German teachers were, with one exception, generally perceived to exercise the role of a gentle facilitator and supporter rather than the one of an authority figure.

The children were working without the teachers' supervision and were helping each other... They could ask the teacher how to do a given example. We (the visiting student teachers) were helping them, but normally they helped each other. And it didn't mean less work for the teacher, but the kids were less stressed. They felt secure in that school. It was definitely something different. (P.)

When [the pupils] got engaged in a conversation, the teacher did not silence them too much. When a problem arose, she set things right, but in general the learners were free to work unsupervised in groups. And if somebody didn't want to cooperate with others, they were allowed to work on their own, as long as they were working towards the same goal. (N.)

As can be seen, even though the learners were given considerable freedom and were allowed to make independent choices, they remained disciplined and focused on the task. The teacher did not unnecessarily silence the learners or interfere with the group's work and, at the same time, was able to keep the class under control. The situation recalled by N. gives further insight into how the individualized approach was applied — the learners were given choice whether or not they want to cooperate with others, which enabled them to do an activity in a way that matched their learning preferences and learning styles. All the fragments presented above demonstrate how the teachers develop the learners' collaborative skills, independence and responsibility for their own work. In short, without being prompted by the interviewer, in their accounts student teachers seemed to pay quite a lot of attention to different techniques of fostering autonomy in learners.

The respondents also referred to a number of teaching techniques and the choice of classroom setting that they found particularly appealing. First of all, it was reported that unlike in Polish schools, where “only grammar, grammar and vocabulary” (N.) remain the major focus of teaching, the observed teachers used many activities that aimed at enhancing the learners' speaking skills. The learners seemed to be used to speaking English in the classroom and did so willingly. M.'s remark “A child in the fifth grade is not able to speak English fluently, even if they have English four times a week” shows her surprise and disbelief that primary pupils' competence in English might be high enough to enable them to engage in speaking tasks. Many activities recalled by the student teachers involved the use

of collaborative work forms that were supported with suitable classroom setting — the learners were sitting in fours at their desks or the classroom was arranged in a U-shape. Additionally, one person reported the willingness of the teacher to change the physical set up of the classroom and a more relaxed time management that engaged different learning styles.

Only one respondent reported negative observations about one of the teachers whose approach to the learners and provision of corrective feedback seemed to have been underpinned by certain misconceptions. As D. commented on the situation: “For me, it was a broad generalization, as if she wanted to avoid the problem.” The teachers’ behaviour might have had a debilitating effect on the class as only in this group discipline problems were recalled.

To summarise, except for the above-mentioned situation, German teachers were seen as capable of motivating the learners, keeping them interested and stimulating their FL learning. The interviewed student teachers underlined their charisma and good rapport with learners, who, in turn, were perceived as active, engaged, disciplined and willing to speak L2. It is evident that in respondents’ opinion the learners were independent and used to cooperating with their peers.

In the case of such research it is difficult to avoid making comparisons between the observed and the respondents’ own system of education and most commonly adopted teaching approaches. As indicated above, the respondents criticized too dominant position of grammar and vocabulary in FL teaching in their home country, and dubbed the prevailing teaching approach as traditional and “stiff.” The facilitative and supportive role of German teachers was opposed to a rather authoritarian model to teaching adopted in Poland, according to which maintaining control and discipline were more important than making the lesson attractive. When N. recalled a situation in which a German teacher asked the pupils to move chairs to the corridor as a part of an exercise, she also remarked:

I don’t think it would fly here. That teacher was willing and courageous enough to devote her lesson time to [this activity]. She knew it was beneficial for the kids in some way. And here, it’s like... There’s always too little time, it isn’t worth it, they will forget soon, if we do something new, they will get out of hand immediately. (N.)

It appears that time constraints associated with the teaching profession were mentioned by several student teachers, who noted that in Poland the completion of the syllabus seems to be more important than effective teaching and learners’ individual needs:

Here it still seems that a teacher keeps distancing himself from the learners. He treats them as a group of people that need to learn the new material. And nothing else matters to him as he has some documents to fill and needs to follow the syllabus. (M.)

A strong focus on the curricular and administrative requirements and the perceived time pressure, in the respondents’ opinion, result in the dominance of less learner-centred teaching approaches in Polish schools.

On the other hand, K. reported that the differences between the two systems of education are not as striking as it would seem:

...they used coursebooks, just like we do here. ... actually, it depends on the teacher. Here there are teachers who use additional materials, and teachers who do this rather rarely. There are not that many differences — teaching in Poland is becoming more and more modern, let's say, we use interactive whiteboards, multimedia presentations. I think we are not that far behind. (K.)

Moreover, a few respondents, while expressing their praise concerning different aspects of teaching in Germany, added that they were fully aware that not all German schools and not all lessons look like this, although it needs to be noted that the choice of schools participating in the IP was random.

The interview respondents expressed positive attitudes towards the new, alternative methods that were presented during the IP. While B. stated how much she liked the new methods and expressed her own surprise at the fact that the arts can prove useful in the FL classroom, N. simply called the methods “neat” or “cool.”

I really liked the presented methods. And I used some of the ideas during my internship and I was surprised that it is possible to use the arts to teach the English language. (B.)

Similarly to B. and N., K. described the methods as really interesting on the grounds that the alternative methods provide a setting for incidental language learning as the learners concentrate on the topic of the arts.

I think that if I have the chance to work as a teacher in the future, I will definitely want to use tools that we were shown, because that was really interesting. And then children do not know that they are learning about the arts, and learn a language at the same time, so I think it is a cool idea. (K.)

K. also remarked that she would readily use the new methods if she were to work as a teacher in the future and emphasized that the application of these methods and the effect they have on pupils prove to be important in primary school settings as they provide a useful outlet for the energy that young learners bring with them into the classroom. On that level, the combination of the arts and a foreign language seemed to be a good idea to K. The same sentiment was shared by D., who appreciated the idea of combining language learning with content matter:

And it taught me a more alternative approach; it showed me that you can do it in a different way and that you can make such a combination... Not only the knowledge of the English language, when we learn super grammar, but also the inclusion of elements from other subjects, teaching that subject in English. Also developing children in multiple directions at the same time. (D.)

D. brought up another interesting aspect into the discussion of new methods and their evaluation by student teachers, namely the role of experience and existing knowledge. She suggested that being confronted with new methods at a relatively early stage of her teacher training made her more receptive to non-standard ways of teaching. It needs to be pointed out, however, that this respondent was still a B.A. student with only one completed course in TEFL at the time of the workshop.

I did not have such knowledge as the older students but exactly that changed my attitude and taught me more of an alternative approach. (D.)

The interview data revealed a tendency for the participants to reflect upon their experience during the IP in association with their own teaching competences. While B. gave a few non-specific examples of how she used alternative methods in class, K. mentioned a newly formed and persistent tendency to perceive the arts as a potential tool for teaching. Similarly, M. emphasized the fact that the IP equipped her with knowledge of how to offer more attractive and less traditional classes for her pupils.

M. admitted that she had envisioned herself as a teacher who is able to modify her lessons in a way that is more attractive to learners but felt that she had no means to achieve this goal before the workshop. The IP and the presented alternative methods provided her with such a tool.

Before the trip I knew that I don't want to be a traditional teacher, who only follows course-book materials, but I also wanted to make the lessons more attractive. So that pupils learn more willingly and this trip showed me how to do it. So, before I knew I wanted to do it differently, but I didn't know how to do it, and this trip showed me ways which allow me to do it, to implement it. (M.)

The observations the respondents made during the IP as well as their deliberations after the workshop seemed to have given ground to some more overarching reflection on the teaching profession. Although she admits that change is difficult, B. is convinced that given sufficient will power more traditional "stiff" teaching methods can be altered. She also thinks that in order to reach the style of teaching she experienced in German schools, she will need to work hard. Yet, she remained optimistic and admitted that even though she had felt ambiguous about the choice of her profession before the IP, the workshop has made her change her mind and convinced her that teaching is indeed the right path for her. That path, according to B., will indeed require constant self-improvement or lifelong learning.

[The impact of LETTA on my perception of the role of a teacher is] that you need to search for new teaching methods, the transmission of that knowledge, and that one cannot stick closely to stiff norms and that one needs to self-improve at all times. (B.)

P. shows a similar attitude when she says that:

Well and it's possible to be a teacher, but you need to really want to and you need to spend a lot of time on being a teacher. That is really demanding. (P.)

P. also develops an understanding that teachers can take upon various roles and depart from being solely a figure of authority and that teachers are there for students, a view shared by D. who praises the teacher's motivational and group-oriented approach to her pupils before an upcoming exam.

A teacher does not only have to be a figure of authority who stands in the middle of the classroom and gives orders. ... There is an element of pupils' evaluation in all of it. You need to offer them something. (P.)

Interestingly enough, despite these meaningful insights into the role of teachers, P. expresses the wish to take a different, more art-oriented professional path.

P. also makes an encouraging remark on what constitutes one of the most important yet difficult topics for many language teachers, namely target language use in class and suggests that consistency in speaking the language is the key. This observation leads to the conclusion that the opposite attitude may have been experienced frequently during their school internship.

Apart from that, you can speak to these children in English the whole time and they understand it. In Poland this is not a given, but what you need is discipline so that you do not show that you give up and speak Polish. Tough luck. Speak English consistently. (P.)

4. Discussion

In the interviews conducted approximately one year after the IP, student teachers expressed mainly positive attitudes towards this short-term international experience. They appreciated both the subject matter of the meeting, that is application of different form of arts in language teaching, and the two days they had spent in German schools. Especially the latter element appeared of a high value to future teachers as it gave them a chance to observe real lessons, interact with learners and observe teaching approaches adopted in a different school system. It appears that the respondents treated this course not merely as a trip, but paid a close attention to the practical value of the acquired competences and their usefulness in their future professional work. This finding complies with the results obtained by Lee (2009), who indicates that future language teachers pointed to workshops, study visits and field experience as most beneficial aspect of their international experience.

The student teachers' responses reveal a certain discrepancy between their theoretical knowledge and practical skills. On the one hand, the participants knew and understood the importance of such concepts as individualisation, learner autonomy (even though this term was not mentioned verbatim) and collaboration in FL teaching; they were aware of the role of speaking activities and efficient classroom management. On the other, the implementation of these elements in school practice by German teachers appeared to be most striking and most enlightening for the respondents. It may therefore be hypothesised that, being educated in a rather traditional, teacher-centred system of education in which language teaching is focused on grammar structures and accuracy (cf. Ellis 2014, 2015), Polish future teachers did not have many opportunities to experience such individualised approaches in the FL classroom. The expressed disbelief that passing on a dose of responsibility to the learners does not undermine the teacher's position or that primary pupils may be able to participate in speaking activities indicated some deeply rooted stereotypes concerning FL teaching. This finding complies with a questionnaire study conducted on student teachers in the same institute, which indicated that

although the respondents were able to formulate a relatively accurate definition of intercultural communicative competence, their understanding of how it should be developed in the language classroom was flawed and incomplete (Czura 2016). Both studies seem to be indicative of the advantages as well as drawbacks of initial teacher education the respondents received: during the academic TEFL courses student teachers appeared to be familiarised with the principles of high quality L2 education; however, they may not have a chance to observe and apply the newly acquired knowledge and skills in the course of their teaching internships.

The general evaluation of the new approach to teaching was highly positive. It was observed that combining language learning with the arts may serve as an interesting alternative to the typically structure-oriented teaching. Some student teachers had successfully implemented some elements of LETTA in their teaching internship, while the rest was planning to do so in the future. The IP additionally helped them to observe the advantages that can be drawn from interdisciplinary teaching, for instance that the language classroom may involve incidental acquisition of art-related knowledge and competences. Moreover, this short-term mobility programme appeared to have a positive influence on both more and less experienced student teachers. For undergraduate students, it served as a motivating and eye-opening experience which let them look at the teaching profession from a more positive perspective. The postgraduate students, who at the time of the IP had had full qualifications to teach in primary and lower secondary school, reported that it equipped them with additional teaching competences they felt they lacked.

We understand that some of the conclusions drawn by the students may be overly optimistic and based on rather superficial classroom observations that lasted only two mornings: students were not aware of, for instance, the administrative and curricular requirements, the teachers' time- and workload or a school profile. Some of the students expressed some doubts that their evaluations of the school visits should not be extended to all schools in Germany. What was important, however, was the fact that student teachers were able to pay attention to teaching principles they had been taught during their TEFL courses and notice examples of good practice. Additionally, future teachers of English turned out to be enthusiastic, open-minded, eager to learn and willing to undertake the teaching profession despite its drawbacks. It was evident that they did not want to become conventional teachers, who take on an authoritarian role and blindly follow the coursebook.

5. Conclusions

The results of the study point to the conclusion that international educational initiatives, such as the IP, although not necessarily exceedingly long or placed in an English speaking country, can exert a long-lasting impact on student teachers' perception of their profession. While not all observations made during such sojourns

or the reflections that accompany them prove to be objective, systematic, and free of stereotypical thinking, it is the very fact that experiences like the IP evoke such mental processes that matters the most. Naturally, there is no doubt that working towards reducing stereotypical thinking among future teachers and encouraging a more objective assessment of existing teaching methods and practices form a crucial aspect of teacher training. Yet, this is a step that needs to be preceded by the identification of teaching approaches or tools that are able to leave a lasting mark on student teachers' beliefs, to touch their core and to make them challenge their subjective theories in the first place. After all, as Pajares (1992) points out, the choice of techniques, materials and the approach to language teaching depends to a large extent on the teachers' beliefs, or as Michońska-Stadnik (2013) suggests, their subjective theories. A statement by B. demonstrates just how strong and life changing the effect of a mobility incentive such as the IP can be on the attitude towards the teacher profession:

[This trip] has changed my outlook on everything. Sometimes I used to wonder whether it [the teaching course] was a good choice. I had mixed feelings about it, but when I went there, I changed my mind and I thought it was a good decision. ... then I felt that I would like to be just like those teachers, that it was worth it.

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