



A CASE STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES IN A CHINESE ELT STUDENT TEACHER'S CLASSROOM TEACHING

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Abstract:

This paper presents the results of an in-depth investigation into the challenges a Chinese English language teaching (ELT) student teacher faced in his classroom teaching during the teaching practicum. The subject for the study was the researcher himself. The data collection instrument consisted of a series of materials collected when he was doing the teaching practicum in Year 4 at the university, which included classroom observation forms by his supervisor, the evaluations from the supervisor and students after classes, his after-class reflections and the weekly journals written by himself. By analyzing these qualitative data with “coding”, the study revealed different challenges in a Chinese ELT student teacher’s classroom teaching, including (a) neglect of teaching aims and objectives; (b) inappropriate teaching philosophies and methods; (c) insufficient student analyses; (d) weakness in textbook integration; (e) lack of teaching experience, and so on. Corresponding strategies in coping with these challenges (implications) are put forward and discussed.

Keywords: ELT student teacher; teaching practicum; challenges; strategies

1. Introduction and overview

Classroom teaching plays an important role in student teachers’ English teaching practicum. However, previous research studies did not look deep into this section. This research is a self-reported intrinsic case study focusing on one Chinese ELT student teacher’s classroom teaching. Based on a wide range of materials (i.e. classroom observation forms, evaluations from the supervisor and students, after-class reflections and weekly journals) collected during the researcher’s teaching practicum, the question “what were the challenges a Chinese ELT student teacher faced during the teaching practicum” was investigated. And it is found that the challenges existing in the ELT

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student teacher's classroom teaching can be classified into the following different types: (a) neglect of teaching aims and objectives; (b) inappropriate teaching philosophies and methods; (c) insufficient student analyses; (d) weakness in textbook integration; (e) lack of teaching experience, and so on. Finally, corresponding strategies (implications) are put forward to deal with these challenges.

2. Literature review

This section provides a literature review in four subsections, namely, English teaching practicum and student teachers' problems, intrinsic case study, reflective teaching, and statement of the research question, which intends to explain the key variable as well as the important issues.

2.1 English teaching practicum and student teachers' problems

English teaching practicum plays an essential role in higher English Education programmes. As a core course of these programmes, it can be seen as a simulate training for pre-service teachers before they become in-service teachers. Daresh (1990) states that teaching practicum is the best opportunity for pre-service teachers to enhance their professional skills. As an important part of English teaching practicum, classroom teaching attracts most attention and is the most challenging component.

A variety of problems, inevitably, appears in English student teachers' classrooms teaching, and some find it challenging to teach in a real classroom environment (Stuart and Thurlow, 2000). Some scholars have been trying to identify the problems in student teachers' classroom teaching during the practicum and have specified various problematic areas, such as classroom management, individual learner differences, dealing with unmotivated learners, time management, inappropriate lesson planning, and so on (Veenman, 1984; Kwo, 1996; Aydın & Bahçe, 2001).

Veenman (1984) reviewed 83 different studies around the world and investigated the perceived problems of pre-service teachers. According to his study, managing classroom, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, evaluating students' work, developing relationships with parents, organizing class work, lacking sufficient materials and supplies, solving problems of individual students, and heavy teaching load leading to the insufficiency of preparation time were the most frequent problems. Despite the fact that certain categories of problems run into by student teachers could be categorized through a number of research studies, Veenman (1984) asserts that these problems may vary based on different contexts and cultures in which certain studies are conducted, and that the differences in educational systems and social contexts of the schools could not be ignored.

Numrich (1996) reported the problems confronting pre-service ESL teachers in America. The student teachers' most frequently mentioned problems were time management, giving of clear directions, responses to students' various needs, teaching of grammar, and assessment of students' learning.

Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006) investigated the problems of pre-service ESL teachers' in a six-week teaching practicum programme in Auckland, New Zealand. They found that the teachers found it challenging to transfer to practice the communicative teaching methodologies they learned in their teacher training courses.

Sarlıcöban (2010) scrutinized the potential problems that Turkish student teachers encountered during their practicum and he tried to categorize these problems into 5 types, namely, a) shortage of support in terms of materials and equipment (i.e. audio-visual aids and other supplementary materials such as internet, cartoons, teacher-made materials, etc.); b) problems resulting from the course book (i.e. the lack of pronunciation, translation exercises); c) problems resulting from the students (i.e. needs and interests, motivation, curiosity, discipline, participation, memorization, language proficiency, reading, speaking and writing skills); d) problems resulting from the curriculum (i.e. the lack of speaking skills, pronunciation, translation activities, revision, pair & group work activities, grading, comprehensive skills, etc); e) problems resulting from the classroom environment (i.e. crowded classes, different levels, sitting arrangement, etc). In another study, Korukcu (1996) found that pre-service teachers considered the following aspects as problematic: teaching methods, classroom management, lesson planning, and motivation of students.

Unlike the above studies which were conducted in western contexts, in an earlier study, Kwo (1996) identified that student teachers in Hong Kong had problems concerning learners' own culture, challenging students to higher levels of learning, and responding to unexpected students' questions throughout the practicum.

Similarly, Gan (2013) studied the challenges ESL student teachers faced in an eight-week English teaching practicum. According to his investigation, their practicum was characterized by difficulties in experimenting with pedagogical practices and a lack of sense of control in class. Also, inadequacy in English language competence, which appeared to affect not only these student teachers' teaching performance but also their establishment and achievement of their teacher role and relationship with their students, was also revealed.

Based on a qualitative research study, Farrell (2007) studied how one pre-service English language teacher in Singapore failed her practicum. The researcher suggested that fundamentally, it was the student teacher's unconscious assumptions about teaching and learning that might result in the teacher's failure in the practicum.

In another study, student teachers in Singapore were reported to be suffering from personal-survival concerns, such as maintaining appropriate classroom management, feeling under too much pressure of the time; pupil concerns, such as guiding students towards intellectual and emotional growth, satisfying different requirements of students, challenging unmotivated students, and diagnosing students' learning problems (Mau, 1997).

However, research concerning the challenges that Chinese student teachers face during the English teaching practicum is scant, and only a few scholars (e.g. Wang, 2010) have studied this area. According to her investigation, problems that student teachers encounter could be categorized into three: problematic language teaching

methods, unsatisfactory language competence and weak classroom organization ability. Moreover, mainly, these foregoing research studies were conducted by educators or supervisors of student teachers by means of observation, group study and induction, and so on, which were mainly analyzed relying on their experience. Therefore, they are in fact relatively broad and not very insightful, as it seems difficult to look into different problems of different individuals in one single research study and explore corresponding reasons behind. Quite a few studies (e.g. Chang, 2016) are self-reported case studies conducted by student teachers themselves which intend to deeply analyze one individual's teaching in different aspects and seek for enhancement.

2.2 Intrinsic case study

A case study usually involves complete and rich resources as well as deep analysis of (a) research subject(s). It uses vivid examples to support theories. Also, research findings of a case study can be adequately generalized depending on the actual situation, which is beneficial for concluding and finding out commonness (Dörnyei, 2007). In terms of the types of case study, it can either be "multiple" or "intrinsic". The former focuses on a number of cases, while the latter studies one case due to its own value or specialty (Stake, 1995, 2005). The researcher himself, actually, satisfies the requirements of being the subject of an "intrinsic" case study, which will be further discussed in the next section.

2.3 Reflective teaching

Reflective teaching is a process in which teachers look back on their teaching practices, analyzing how a lesson was taught and how it could be improved or changed for better learning outcomes (British Council, 2012). Researchers (e.g. Munby, 2004) have studied how reflective teaching can contribute to the excellence in teaching, and the improvement of educational outcomes for students as well as the teacher him/herself. There are different approaches of gathering information, such as, teacher diaries, peer observations, lessons recordings, student feedback, and so on (British Council, 2012), which had already been collected during the researcher's teaching practicum. Meanwhile, a reflection can also take place daily, at the end of each unit, termly or yearly (British Council, 2012). As a result, for an English student teacher, having a macro reflection on the whole teaching practicum after it ends is a wise choice, by which he/she can be aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses and become more prepared for future teaching practices.

2.4 Statement of the research question

Based on the foregoing three perspectives, it is worthwhile for the researcher to do a self-reported intrinsic case study in order to look closely into and gain a comprehensive understanding of his own classroom teaching. The research question, hence, is stated as: What were the challenges a Chinese ELT student teacher faced during the teaching practicum?

The next section will continually shed light on the researcher's special features showing that he satisfies the requirements of being the subject of an "intrinsic" case study, and will present the research methods.

3. Research methodology

3.1 The subject

The researcher (subject) did the English teaching practicum during the period of September 2015 and December 2015 when he was in Year 4 at the university. Prior to that, he had had 2 years' experiences of part-time teaching in some tutorial institutions, but the teaching mode was traditional (mainly examination-oriented or grammar translation) and different from the communicative teaching mode during the teaching practicum (mainly task-based or communicative teaching). Meanwhile, he took courses such as "English Reading and Writing Instructions" and "English Teaching Methodology and Curriculum" as a junior, and did micro-teaching for final examinations. Therefore, he also had knowledge of the communicative teaching mode.

Prabhu (1990) argues that the best teaching method in English language teaching (ELT) depends on the teaching context. It is necessary for educators to look for a teaching approach that is best corresponded to the local teaching situations, which is defined as the context-based teaching approach. It focuses on the consideration of the teaching environment, including students' needs, local cultures, testings, teaching materials, and so on (Bax, 2003). In the context of China, ELT is based on both of the traditional and communicative teaching modes. The former one is utilized to cram for exams due to the exam-oriented system, while the latter one is adopted for daily teaching and especially, for teaching competitions which are intended to test teachers' teaching philosophy and teaching methodology. Consequently, an effective teacher needs to know how to make a shift and attain a balance between these two modes (Zeng, 2013).

So, in addition to the foregoing research question, by studying the research subject, we can also explore (but not very deep) the relationship between these two different teaching modes, i.e., if one is good at the former one, is it sure that s/he can do well in the latter one without difficulty, or vice versa? In this sense, the subject has his own value and specialty, and thus makes the case study "intrinsic".

3.2 The data collection instrument

The data collection instrument involved the following: the classroom observation forms, lesson evaluation forms from the supervisor and students, the subject's after-class reflections and his weekly journals.

3.2.1 Classroom observation forms

During the teaching practicum, the subject gave 4 lessons to the students altogether. And each lesson given by him was recorded in a classroom observation form by his

supervisor, which included his teaching steps/activities, time allocation and the supervisor's simultaneous comments.

3.2.2 Lesson evaluation forms from the supervisor

In addition to the in-time comments in classroom observation forms, the supervisor also provided an evaluation form after each lesson to make some general comments and give feedback on major concerns.

3.2.3 Lesson evaluation forms from students

After each lesson, students were also invited to express what they thought about what was going on in the classroom. Their opinions and perceptions mainly concentrated on the subject's teaching bearings, manners and other details, adding different and valuable perspectives to the evaluations.

3.2.4 The subject's after-class reflections

The subject also made a self-reflection subsequent to each of his lessons. It mainly shed light on his reactions to some teaching affairs and feelings of the class, and some issues such as whether the lesson had achieved his expectations, what were the strengths and weaknesses, how to make an improvement, and so on.

3.2.5 The subject's weekly journals

At the end of each week, the subject kept journals to review his teaching practice throughout the whole week, such as how he evaluated his performance in classes or what he had learnt from evaluations, which can be seen as an overview of his weekly teaching.

3.3 Data analysis

"Coding" is an effective way for qualitative data analysis, which is intended to highlight extracts of the data and label these in a way that they can be easily identified, retrieved or grouped, so that the useful information can be manageable and malleable (Dörnyei, 2007). By studying and analyzing the data with "coding", the researcher attempted to find out and categorize challenges in the subject's classroom teaching into different codes, which are short phrases being able to refine and classify the important information reflected in the above documents mentioned in section 3.2. To give an example:

<i>Code</i>	<i>Information</i>
<i>Problematic teaching philosophy and methods</i>	<p><i>"A teacher should be the instructor of students and lead them." (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 07/10/2015)</i></p> <p><i>"It seems that the student teacher has not-completely-right teaching philosophy." (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 07/10/2015)</i></p> <p><i>"I did not adopt the heuristic teaching mode and inspire the students step by step". (Weekly journal, 09/10/2015)</i></p>

Based on the above research methodology, the researcher tried to investigate the research question “what were the challenges an ELT student teacher faced during the teaching practicum”. The findings and discussions as well as the implications will be provided in the next two sections.

4. Research findings and discussions

It is found that the challenges the student teacher faced in his classroom teaching fall into 5 categories: (a) neglect of teaching aims and objectives; (b) inappropriate teaching philosophies and methods; (c) insufficient student analyses; (d) weakness in textbook integration; (e) lack of teaching experience.

4.1 Neglect of teaching aims and objectives

Lesson excerpt 1: English 8A, Unit 3, Integrated skills A1 and A2, p. 37 (see appendix). The observation form (19/10/2015) shows the subject designed his teaching in the following way:

A1

T: Today, one basketball team gets to the final of the basketball competition. But I'm not sure of the time and place. Can you help me find the information?

T plays the record and instructs Ss to complete A1.

T checks the answers to A1.

T asks Ss to read the poster in A1, find out the useful information and answer:

(1) Which school is in the final of the basketball competition?

(Sunshine Middle School)

(2) Where will the match take place?

(In Moonlight Town)

A2

T: OK, if you are invited to watch the basketball final, what information do you need to know?

S1: How can we arrive/**reach** there?

T: I guess you can take a bus.

S2: When will it start/ finish?

S3: During the match, can players have any time to **rest**?

T: I guess the players can have the Half-time to rest. During this time, the school will give us some snacks and drinks. They may be free. That is to say, we don't need to pay money for them.

S4: Do we need to spend money to watch the match?

T: Maybe we need. But don't worry. I don't think the **cost** is high.

T writes the bold words on the blackboard.

T: OK. Now, the chairperson of Sunshine Middle School is giving more information about the day of the final. Please listen carefully and help Kitty complete the notes.

T plays the record and instructs Ss to complete A2.

The subject reflected on this lesson after class:

“After finishing the exercises of A2, it would have been better to design a gap-filling activity and let students fill in the gaps using the new words taught in the lesson:

Sunshine Middle School is in the__of the basketball competition. It__on Sunday, 17 October at the Sports Centre in Moonlight Town. Come and__for our team. We need your__.

At 9:30 a.m., you can meet at the__. It will take you __ minutes to__the Sports Centre by bus. The match____ at 10:30 a.m. and ____ at 11:30 a.m.. Players and s____can have a half-time to _____. After lunch, don't forget to _____ the bus in front of the restaurant. The__of the trip is only 20 yuan per student.

(Answer: final, takes place, cheer, support, school gate, 30, reach, starts, finishes, supporters, rest, get on, cost.)

For one thing, it can train students' reading and writing abilities, which is correspondent to the idea of “Integrated skills”, as A1 and A2 are listening activities and throughout the whole “Integrated skills” in this unit, reading and writing are not involved much. For another, it can strengthen the teaching objective “to extract useful information from a poster”. Meanwhile, it can be seen as a review of new words.” (After-class reflection, 19/10/2015)

Lesson excerpt 2: English 8A, Unit 5, Reading B4, p. 60 (see appendix).

Part B4 presents a dialogue between Kitty and Millie, which was adapted from the reading text. It was aimed to let students complete the missing information according to the reading text. The observation form (09/11/2015) shows the subject designed his teaching as follows:

B4

T: Now please listen to the record of the reading context for 2 times. You are required to finish B4 without looking at the reading text.

T chooses some Ss to stand up and read the conversation in groups.

The supervisor made some comments on the subject's design:

“It was a reading class, so attention should be paid to the improvement of students' reading abilities. The teacher treated it as if it had been a listening class or Integrated skills class. I don't think he had fully understand what he should have done in a reading class.” (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 09/11/2015)

4.1.1 Findings and discussion

From the analyses of the above two lesson excerpts, it is found that before planning lessons, the subject tended to ignore the importance of teaching objectives. He did not place emphasis on reading in an integrated skills class, and wrongly gave extra attention to listening in a reading class. In fact, teaching objectives are the core of teaching. They not only decide what should be done during a class, but also determine what outcomes should be expected (Centre for Learning & Professional Development, University of Aberdeen, 1997, 2007). The subject did not fully understand the teaching objectives of the two lessons, which made some teaching activities casual and not scientific.

Actually, this problem was also identified in some previous research studies (e.g. Farrell, 2007). Farrell investigated one student teacher's unsuccessful English teaching practicum in Singapore. And it is revealed that the teaching objectives that the student teacher intended to use for each class were very general and unclear, and she did not tend to specify them, which was one of the elements contributing to her failure in the teaching practicum. From this perspective, the two student teachers share the similar problem, not giving much attention to teaching objectives when planning a lesson. In SarlıoĖan's (2010) study, this problem (neglect of teaching aims and objectives) was categorized into the aspect of problematic lesson planning.

4.2 Problematic teaching philosophies and methods

Lesson excerpt 3: English 8A, Unit 3, Comic strip, p. 30 (see appendix).

The comic strip presents the dialogues between Eddie and Hobo. The observation form (07/10/2015) shows the subject arranged a role-play session in his teaching:

Role-play

T: Please work in pairs and practice the conversation. You need to use some body languages when performing.

Ss perform the dialogue.

T: Which pair would like to give us a performance?

Some pairs raise hands.

T chooses some pairs to come to the front and praises them.

In the after-class reflection, the subject mentioned:

"Actually, after I told them to practice performing the dialogues, they just read the dialogues out instead of using some body languages as expected. It was the same situation when I asked some pairs to perform in front of the whole class." (After-class reflection, 07/10/2015)

The supervisor held the opinion that:

"I think the teacher should have given some concrete and clear instructions to students after assigning the role-play task. He should not have let students play freely and made them too independent. A teacher should be the instructor of students and lead them." (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 07/10/2015)

Lesson excerpt 4: English 8A, Unit 3, Welcome to the unit A, p. 31 (see appendix).

Three postcards are shown in this part. In addition to other previous teaching activities (which will be presented later in lesson excerpt 7), the subject also planned to teach students how to write a post card (Observation form, 07/10/2015):

T: Now, let me introduce to you how to write a postcard.

T directly shows the format and elements of a postcard on the ppt slide:



T: You can take down some notes.

The supervisor pointed out the problems with this kind of design:

"It seems that the student teacher has not-completely-right teaching philosophy. He just tended to directly pass information to the students and ask them to remember it. It does not conform to the education philosophy nowadays." (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 07/10/2015)

Similarly, the subject himself also realized what the supervisor pointed out and recorded it in his weekly journal:

"Looking back, I made a mistake in designing my teaching activities. I just presented the structure of a postcard and asked them to take notes, hoping that they would master it well and know how to write a postcard correctly. Actually, it is a wrong teaching approach. I did not adopt the heuristic teaching mode and inspire the students step by step. I need to take it seriously." (Weekly journal, 09/10/2015)

4.2.1 Findings and discussion

According to the above analyses, the subject had problematic teaching philosophy and methodology. In lesson excerpt 3, he did not adequately instruct students and depended too much on students themselves. In contrast, in lesson excerpt 4, he tended to pass information to students in a direct way, avoiding the design of teaching tasks to appropriately inspire them and involve them in the exploration of knowledge. The students, therefore, would become captive audience. These are two extreme teaching approaches: one is too free while the other is too mechanical. Problems with the subject's teaching philosophy and methodology were revealed.

Similar problems were also identified by other researchers. For example, Korukcu (1996) analyzed the problems of pre-service teachers in order to develop an induction programme for the Basic English Departments of the universities in Turkey. In his investigation, teaching methods were found problematic in student teachers' classroom teaching, among which the mechanical teaching approach (didactics) could never be ignored. In Hong Kong, student teachers were also found to have difficulties in experimenting with modern pedagogical practices due to their own traditional learning experiences (Gan, 2013), because a teacher's teaching philosophy is, to some extent, related to his/her own learning experiences as a student (Chang, 2004).

4.3 Insufficient student analyses

Student analysis refers to the process in which the teacher diagnose, evaluate and analyze the elements affecting students' learning outcomes, which can give him/her references for teaching and make it suitable for certain students. It includes both intelligence and non-intelligence elements. The former includes students' cognition and knowledge levels and the latter involve students' interests, psychology, and so on (Chen, 2014).

Lesson excerpt 5: English 8A, Unit 3, Integrated skills Lead-in (see appendix).

Prior to the teaching of Part A1 and A2 as discussed in lesson excerpt 1 (see section 4.1), the subject arranged a lead-in session to introduce new words (Observation form, 19/10/2015):

Lead-in & New Words

T: Last week, we had a day out, right? We took a journey to Qixia Mountain for an autumn outgoing. Did you enjoy yourselves?

Ss answer.

T: Besides this activity, what else activities did we have last week?

Ss: The sports meeting.

T: Our school held the sports meeting, another important activity.

T: When and where was the sports meeting?

Ss answer.

T: The sports meeting **took place** on last Wednesday, at the Tianjiabing High School.

T: How many of you took part in the sports meeting this time?

Ss answer.

T: Some of you were players in the sports meeting. What about others? What did you do?

Ss answer.

T: You **cheered for** them, because they needed your **support**.

T: In the afternoon, the sports meeting became more and more exciting. Some **finals** of matches took place and you could know the results.

T writes the bold words on the blackboard.

The following comments from the supervisor show her perspective:

"It looks good that the student teacher used the sports meeting taking place last week as a lead-in. It is eye-catching, attractive and interesting, and can easily draw students' attention. But I suggest him also adding some photos taken by students during the sports meeting, which can better attract and interest students and therefore liven up the class atmosphere. Also, when writing the new words on the blackboard, he did not mark the stress and part of speech of each word, and did not ask students to read them together. These are the weaknesses of the lesson." (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 19/10/2015)

Lesson excerpt 6: English 8A, Unit 5, Reading, p. 58-60 (see appendix).

The reading text is a magazine report introducing the growth of giant pandas and the dangers they are facing, appealing people to take actions to protect them.

Prior to the teaching of the reading text, the subject made up some riddles as a lead-in and warm-up activity (Observation form, 09/11/2015):

Lead-in & New Words

T: Today, we'll continue to learn something about wild animals. Before we start, I'd like to play a game with you--Riddles(谜语). That is to say, I give you some descriptions and you tell me what animal it is. I can give you an example.

T provides an example:

Example:

Description:

It has black and white lines.

It looks like a horse.

Question: What animal is it? Answer: Zebra

T gives Ss the rule:

Rule: Answer race. After I say "1,2,3 Go!", if you know the answer, please stand up and say it out. I'll see who is the fastest one. Please remember, don't say the answer out before I give you the instruction.

T: Now, let's start.

Riddles:

1. It is small and lovely. It has a long, lovely tail.

It lives in the trees. It **lives mainly on** pine nuts (松子).
(squirrel)

2. It lives in the forests. It feeds on animals.

The stripe (条纹) on its forehead (额头) **means** it is the king of the forest.

However, it **faces** a **serious** problem: some people catch it for its bones and fur.
(tiger)

3. When it **is born**, it's as small as a white mouse **in the beginning**.

It likes to eat bamboo. It lives in Wolong Nature **Reserve**.

It is **in danger**-it's difficult for it to have babies.
(giant panda)

T: From what has been discussed just now, we can know that giant pandas are in danger now. **As a result**, we must **take action right away**. For example, we can make **laws** to protect them.

T writes the bold words on the blackboard, with their stresses and part of speech marked and collocations given.

The supervisor recognized the using of riddles as a lead-in.

"For one thing, it interested the students and got them actively participate. For another, it could also help students review the words concerning the names of animals taught in the last lesson". (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 09/11/2015)

The subject also mentioned these advantages in his self-reflection (09/11/2015). But he also found that *"the riddles seemed too easy for students and they seemingly have mastered the words concerning the names of animals taught in the last lesson very well. As a result, the design of "answer race" seemed useless, as everyone could respond quickly. Meanwhile, it even made the class in a mess to some extent"*. These are also mentioned in the

evaluation form from the supervisor (09/11/2015). She held the idea that *“the use of riddles is just an approach not an aim. The aim is the teaching of new words. Also, the riddles are easy. So, special attention should not have been given to the game itself. The answer race is not that necessary”*.

Subsequent to the teaching of Part B4 (see lesson excerpt 2), the subject then designed a retell session for students to let them retell paragraphs 4 and 5 of the reading text (Observation form, 09/11/2015):

Retell the reading text

T: Now, I want you to try to retell paragraphs 4 and 5 of the reading text. You can use the following sentence pattern if you like:

Giant pandas face serious problems. For example:

1. *As a result, we must ...*

2. *As a result, we must ...*

...

T gives 1 minute to students for preparation.

T selects 2 students to come to the blackboard to retell the paragraphs.

The subject recorded students' performance in class in his self-reflection:

“I invited 2 highly-proficient students in the class to come to the front and retell the paragraphs. But to my disappointment, they did not do well as expected. They did not retell the paragraphs very fluently but needed my help.” (After-class reflection, 09/11/2015)

As far as the supervisor was concerned,

“It is a good idea to have students retell the text. But the time allocation was not reasonable: only 1 minute was given to students, which is limited for them. The teacher seemed to have overestimated the students' English proficiency”. (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 09/11/2015)

4.3.1 Findings and discussion

In lesson excerpt 5, the adding of photos taken by students during the sports meeting considered students' interest and psychology, which belongs to non-intelligence elements. In addition, the subject's insufficient teaching of new words in lesson excerpt 5 and his problematic design of the answer race (underestimate of students) and time allocation of retelling (overestimate of students) in lesson excerpt 6 revealed his unfamiliarity with students' cognition and knowledge levels, which are related to intelligence elements. From what has been discussed in this subsection, it can be seen that the subject lacked sufficient student analyses, at either non-intelligent or intelligent levels.

In other research studies, the problem (insufficient student analyses) was interpreted as motivating students (Veenman, 1984; Korukcu, 1996), responding to students' various needs (Numrich, 1996), understanding students' needs and interests, motivation, curiosity and language proficiency (Sarlıçoban, 2010) or meeting the needs of different kinds of students (Mau, 1997).

4.4 Weakness in textbook integration

Textbook integration refers to the adaptation or adjustment of a textbook, including adapting its contents, changing its structure, adjusting the sequence of some contents, and so on, according to the actual teaching needs. It is not easy to add or delete of the contents and some principles should be conformed to in order to guarantee effective teaching (He, 2014).

Lesson excerpt 7: English 8A, Unit 3, Welcome to the unit, p. 31 (see appendix 6).

The observation form (07/10/2015) shows the subject designed his teaching in the following way:

Welcome to the unit A

1. T: Good job. OK, you know the winter holiday is coming. It is longer than any other of your winter holidays before, right? You have 30 days off. So, let's see if you are free, which foreign country are you going to visit? Please make some sentences with the sentence pattern "I'm going to visit ___ in ___."

T gives Ss an example with "I'm going to visit the White House in the Washington DC."

2. T show Ss the flashcard of "the White House" and asks them to repeat.

T: Do you know who lives in the White House?

Ss list some names of American presidents, such as Obama, Bush.

T: Who are these people? They are presidents.

T writes down the word "president" on the blackboard and divides it into syllables.

3. Ss go on making some sentences with the pattern "I'm going to visit ___ in ___." Once they mention "the Harbour Bridge", "the Sydney Opera House", "the River Seine" and "the Eiffel Tower", T stops, shows the flashcards of each place and instructs Ss to read these places correctly. T also says something about these places.

4. T shows Ss a table containing the information of these places and their cities and countries respectively.

Places of interest	Cities	Countries
the White House	Washington DC	the USA
the Opera House	Sydney	Australia
the Harbour Bridge		
the River Seine	Paris	France
the Eiffel Tower		

5. T: OK. Look at me. What are these?

Ss: They are postcards.

T: Yes. They are postcards from Taiwan. When I was there this year, I liked to write postcards to my friends when I went travelling. Do you like to write postcards to friends when travelling?

Ss answers.

T: Nick, Leo and Jane also wrote postcards to their friends Amy and Simon when they travelled. Now, take a look at the three postcards in page 31 and try to finish the table.

Who	What	Where
Nick		under the Harbour Bridge
	went	
Leo	sat	
	went	
Jane	saw	

T explains the usage of “top”

T asks Ss to match the postcards with the pictures.

6. T introduces how to write a postcard (see lesson excerpt 4).

Welcome to the unit B

1. T: After reading the postcards from his friends, Simon searched on the Internet for some information about the places around the world. Which places of interest are Simon and Amy talking about?

2. T plays the record of part B.

Ss: They are talking about the Golden Gate Bridge.

3. T plays the record for a second time and asks Ss to listen for more details:

(1) How long is the Golden Gate Bridge?

(2) How wide is the Golden Gate Bridge?

(3) What is the Golden Gate Bridge made of?

T uses the blackboard as an example to explain the meaning of “long” and “wide”

Ss answers.

4. T asks Ss to read after the record. (Girls as Amy, Boys as Simon, then exchange)

5. T provides some information about other places of interest and asks Ss to make new dialogues.

Wrap up

A game: Which place is missing?

T asks Ss to close their eyes and hide one flashcard each time. Then, T asks Ss to open their eyes and quickly judge which flashcard has been hidden.

The evaluation form from the supervisor (07/10/2015) shows that she recognized the advantages of the subject's teaching, stating that

“Overall, it is a very good classroom teaching of a student teacher. He was not only good at teaching, but also good at interacting with students. He did not show his nervousness during the class, but looked very relaxed and easygoing”.

At the same time, she also pointed out some problems. For example, the subject did not adjust the teaching sequence according to the actual needs. Actually, some sections/parts in the textbook could have been adjusted properly. For example,

Welcome to the unit B (the conversation) had better be taught immediately after the completion of step 4 in Welcome to the unit A, because some useful vocabulary (e.g. mile, feet, wide, be made of steel, weigh) and sentence patterns (e.g. how long/how wide is.../what is ...made of) are involved in this conversation. If it had been taught earlier, the teacher would have been able to apply the useful vocabulary and sentence patterns to the introduction of places of interests (e.g. the Eiffel Tower, the Harbour Bridge) in part A, which could be more cohesive and naturally-ordered.

Similarly, the adding of a gap-filling activity discussed in lesson excerpt 1 in section 4.1 is also a case of textbook integration, which could not only strengthen teaching objective, but also test students' mastery of the new words and therefore provide in-class feedback.

4.4.1 Findings and discussion

From what has been discussed in this subsection, it is clear that the subject did not have a strong awareness of textbook integration and was weak at it. He just strictly followed what had been presented in the textbook without critical evaluations and adjustments to best suit his own teaching needs.

According to Sarlıcöban's (2010) research, Turkish student teachers also encountered problems concerning the textbook, such as the lack of pronunciation translation exercises, speaking skills, pronunciation, translation activities, revision, pair & group work activities, grading or comprehensive skills, and so on. Like the subject in this research study, the student teachers in Turkey also had problems in textbook integration and strictly adhere to what had been presented in the textbook.

4.5 Lack of teaching experience

As an inexperienced student teacher, the subject lacked teaching experience and could not adapt himself to the environment quickly, and encountered other kinds of problems in the real teaching context. For example, he ran into some technical problems with the classroom audio-lingual devices when teaching (Weekly journal, 09/10/2015). Also, when standing in front of the teacher's desk, he could not react fast enough and was a little bit awkward. He tended to rely too much on his teaching plan. Otherwise, he was afraid that he would forget the teaching procedures and felt at a loss (Weekly journal, 23/10/2015). Also, he was weak at adjusting the teaching plan according to the actual teaching context in class. For example, if students had already known well what he was teaching, he should not have explained too much as what he had planned (Weekly journal, 13/11/2015).

The supervisor noticed that after asking students some questions, the subject tended to answer them by himself, which was a wrong tendency, because the questions were set for students, not for the teacher. Also, sometimes he talked too much. He should have given more chances to students to express their own opinions and practice their speaking (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 19/10/2015). In addition, he was not good at classroom management and was confronted with challenges in the control of classroom disciplines (Evaluation form from the supervisor, 09/11/2015).

From the students' perspectives, the subject's voice was not loud when teaching. Sometimes, he liked to lower his head to look at his teaching plan. Or he needed to stoop down to speak with the microphone. Moreover, sometimes, he stood in front of the blackboard and hid his writing on the blackboard (Evaluation form from the students, 09/11/2015).

Among the above problems, classroom management (the control of classroom disciplines) has been mentioned most frequently in previous studies, such as Veenman (1984), Numrich (1996), Mau (1997), and so on. In addition, the problem of slow reaction to the classroom emergencies (not being able to react fast enough and being a little bit awkward; being weak at adjusting the teaching plan according to the actual teaching context in class) was revealed in Kwo's (1996) study.

4.6 The relationship between the traditional and communicative teaching modes

As is mentioned above in section 3.1, the subject had 2 years' teaching experiences in some tutorial institutions, and was good at the traditional teaching mode (mainly examination-oriented or grammar translation). But it did not directly benefit his teaching during the teaching practicum. To some extent, it even restricted his teaching philosophy and methodology, as teachers in tutorial institutions usually need to help students cram for exams and didactic methods are often adopted.

Also, the teaching contexts are different. In tutorial institutions, the class size is usually small (around 3-5 students in a class) and the teacher does not need to stand in front of the classroom and teach in front of many students, which is not that highly demanding in a teacher's psychology, classroom management skills or teaching bearings, manners or other details. Consequently, there is not a direct relationship between the above two different teaching modes.

5. Implications

In this section, implications (corresponding strategies in coping with the subject's challenges) are put forward and discussed.

5.1 Attaching importance to teaching objectives

Teaching/learning objectives articulate the knowledge or skills students are required to acquire by the end of the course (Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation, Carnegie Mellon University, 2008, 2015). Research (e.g. Ericsson, Krampe, & Tescher-Romer, 2003) has shown that learning and performance are best fostered when students are engaged in teaching activities that focus on a specific goal or criterion for performance. From Tyler's (1949) perspective, the nature and process of curriculum development can be summarized as: teaching aims and objectives → content → organization → evaluation. Teaching objectives are usually presented at the beginning of a unit (i.e. unit teaching objectives) and each section (i.e. what should be done step by step for the realization of the whole unit teaching objectives) in the teacher's book (Wu, 2003).

As a result, special attention should be given to teaching/learning objectives when a teacher begins to design a lesson. S/he should start from the teaching/learning objectives, then move on to the instructional/teaching activities and assessment tasks, and revisit the cycle as needed, which can be illustrated with the following triangle (Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation, Carnegie Mellon University, 2008, 2015).

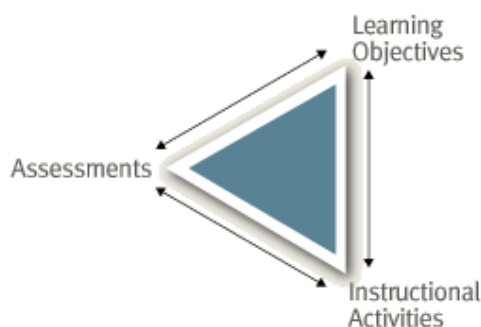


Figure 1: The teaching/learning objective triangle

5.2 Establishing correct teaching philosophy

In section 4.2, it is mentioned that the subject held two extreme teaching philosophies. Sometimes, his teaching method was too free, giving students too much freedom. On contrast, it could also be too mechanical and fell into the didactic teaching mode. Didactics (didactic method) is a traditional teaching approach, in which a teacher presents and passes information to students directly. As a traditional method, it is rooted in some Confucian-influenced countries, such as China, Korea and Japan, where teachers are considered as holders of knowledge (Yu, 2001).

In fact, neither of these two teaching tendencies should be adopted in classes, and nowadays, the heuristic teaching mode has been greatly supported and advocated. It is intended to encourage students to solve problems first and make conclusions by themselves. In other words, students need to explore knowledge and experience the learning process themselves instead of being told the conclusion in a straightforward way (Sale, 2005). Therefore, in teaching, the teacher should try to set questions for students and lead them to solve them step by step and make a conclusion afterwards. The supervisor provided a good example in the evaluation form (07/10/2015) for lesson excerpt 4:

"I think when teaching the format and elements of writing a postcard, the subject should have designed his teaching activities in this way:

T asks three S to read the three postcards.

T lists one question for each postcard to help Ss to discover the elements of postcards:

Postcard one: What did he/she do there?

Postcard two: Which city did he/she go to?

Postcard three: What did she see there?

Other questions:

What else can you find in the postcards? (addresses)

What can you see near the end of each postcard? (closing)

T: So, can you try to conclude and summarize the elements in a postcard?

Ss try to conclude and express ideas.

T shows Ss the format of a postcard later."

It is a good example of applying the heuristic teaching mode to teaching. The subject needed to change his incorrect teaching concepts, establish correct teaching philosophy and therefore adopt effective teaching methods in his teaching.

5.3 Doing student analyses

Student analysis means the procedure where the teacher diagnose, evaluate and analyze the elements that could influence students' learning outcomes, which can provide him/her with references for teaching and make it suit certain students. It includes both intelligence (students' cognition and knowledge, etc) and non-intelligence elements (students' interests, psychology, etc). Due to the limitation of objective conditions, a student teacher cannot do deep analyses of the students, but can also take some actions.

In terms of the non-intelligence elements, a student teacher needs to interact more with students and observe their behaviours in class in order to know their psychological features and what they are interested in. As for intelligence elements, when observing the supervisor's classes, s/he can pay attention to the difficulty of the activities that the supervisor designs and students' reactions. Also, a portfolio is an effective tool for evaluating a student's mastery of knowledge. As a collection of a student's homework or test papers, it can be used to record his/her improvement and progress within a period of time. During the process of establishing a portfolio for the student, a student teacher can observe the changes of his/her English level and design appropriate levels of teaching activities relative to the student current performance (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

5.4 Critically evaluating a textbook

Nowadays, a large number of different textbooks are launched each year, but they may not always be perfect and scientific enough and may inevitably equip their own shortcomings (McGrath, 2002). Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to critically evaluate a textbook and make corresponding alterations according to the actual teaching needs, such as adapting some materials, changing its structure, adjusting the sequence of some contents, and so on. A textbook should be regarded as the assistance of teaching, instead of restricting the plan of teaching.

5.5 Attaching equal importance to other details in the teaching context

As is mentioned above, it seemed difficult for the student teacher to adapt himself to the teaching context quickly, and he run into different problems. For example, he had problems using the audio-lingual devices and felt at a loss when standing in front of the teacher's desk and could not flexibly adjust some teaching procedures. These were due to his nervousness. Also, he talked too much and could not manage the classroom very

well. Meanwhile, he also had problems with his teaching bearings, manners or other details.

Consequently, a student teacher should not only focus on how well s/he can plan her/his teaching, but also pay attention to the extent to which s/he can implement her/his plans in the real teaching context (Maudoodi, 2011). It is actually a matter of time and experience, but the student teacher should also strengthen her/his awareness and take measures to solve some of these problems. For example, once some problems are discovered and pointed out by the supervisor or students as what has been discussed in section 4.5 in this research, the student teacher needs to attach importance to them and try to get rid of the bad habits consciously. Also, s/he can consider setting up cameras at the back of the classroom and watch the classroom videos for several times after class to observe his own behaviours, which supports pre-service teachers' video-based reflective practice (Maudoodi, 2011).

6. Conclusion

Based on the conduction of an intrinsic case study, this paper attempts to explore the challenges that a Chinese student teacher faced during his English teaching practicum. After data analysis, it is found that the challenges that the student teacher faced fell into 5 categories, namely, (a) neglect of teaching aims and objectives; (b) incorrect teaching philosophy and methods; (c) insufficient student analyses; (d) weakness at textbook integration; (e) lack of teaching experience. In addition, it is found that the subject's teaching experience in the tutorial school did not guarantee or directly benefit his performance during the English teaching practicum. Meanwhile, corresponding strategies are put forward to cope with these challenges, including (a) attaching importance to teaching objectives; (b) establishing correct teaching philosophy; (c) doing student analyses; (d) critically evaluating a textbook and (e) attaching equal importance to other details in the teaching context.

As a case study, the research provides vivid examples, rich resources and in-depth analysis, which fills the research gap (i.e. the lack of self-reported intrinsic case studies of Chinese ELT student teachers) to some extent. In addition, it gives references to supervisors and student teachers, and therefore can enhance their supervisions and teachings. For example, supervisors could know where student teachers need help, and student teachers could try to avoid some inappropriate tendencies ahead of their classroom teachings. It also provides opportunities for the researcher to reflect on his own teaching. However, it still has some limitations. For example, video-taking was not used for classroom observation in this study, which might result in the loss of some more detailed incidents in class. Also, the data were collected more than one year ago and some details cannot be further verified due to the span of time. It is suggested that for such studies in the future, video-taking should be utilized and the data should be analyzed as soon as possible. Anyhow, the study has achieved the aims it set and answered the research question in an ideal way, and thus will contribute to research in ELT student teachers' teaching practicum.

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Appendix

Unit 3
A day out

1 What are you going to do, Eddie? I'm going to exercise.

2 Are you going to climb a hill? Yes.

3 That's good. You need to exercise and keep fit. Well, this hill isn't as high as a real one!

4 Come on, Hobo. Let's enjoy ourselves!

Let's go!
Kitty's cousin Linda is visiting Sunshine Town. Find out where Linda, Kitty and her classmates went and what happened there.

Task Make a plan for a day trip and write an invitation letter to your classmates.

30



Welcome to the unit

Unit 3

Where are they?

A Amy and Simon are reading some postcards from their friends. Read the back of the postcards and match them with the correct pictures. Write the correct letters in the boxes.

1

2

3

Hi Amy,
Yesterday I took a boat trip under the famous Harbour Bridge and went past the Sydney Opera House. I'm having a great time in Australia!
Take care!
Nick


Hi Amy,
We're sitting in a little coffee shop by the River Seine. We're going to the top of the Eiffel Tower this afternoon!
All the best,
Leo

Hi Simon,
I saw the White House today. It is a beautiful building with a big garden and many trees. The President of the USA lives there.
See you soon,
Jane


Simon
Flat 01, 6/F, Block 3
City Garden
Ninth Street
Sunshine Town
Beijing 100000
China



a



b



c



B Simon searched on the Internet for some information about places of interest around the world. He is answering Amy's questions. Work in pairs and talk about the places you are interested in. Use the conversation below as a model.

TIP We use **How tall/high** to ask about height.

- Amy:** How long is the Golden Gate Bridge?
- Simon:** It's very long, about 1.7 miles.
- Amy:** How wide is the bridge?
- Simon:** It's 90 feet wide.
- Amy:** The bridge is made of steel, isn't it?
- Simon:** Yes, and it weighs over 100,000 tons.





Integrated skills

A The basketball final



A1 The Sunshine Middle School basketball team is in the final of this year's basketball competition. Listen to the chairperson of the Students' Union and help Kitty complete the poster.

**Sunshine Middle School
gets to the final!**

Our school basketball team needs your support! It is in the final of the basketball competition! The match takes place on

(1) _____, 17 October, at the

(2) _____ in Moonlight Town.

Come and cheer for our team!
Don't forget to bring your friends!
With your support, we will win!




A2 Listen to the chairperson giving more information about the day of the final. Help Kitty complete the notes below.

The day of the final

9:30 a.m. Meet at (1) _____

(2) _____ Bus leaves.

(3) _____ Reach the Sports Centre.

10:30 a.m. (4) _____

(5) _____ Half-time.

11:30 a.m. (6) _____

(7) _____ Bus leaves from the centre.
Have lunch at Moonlight Restaurant.

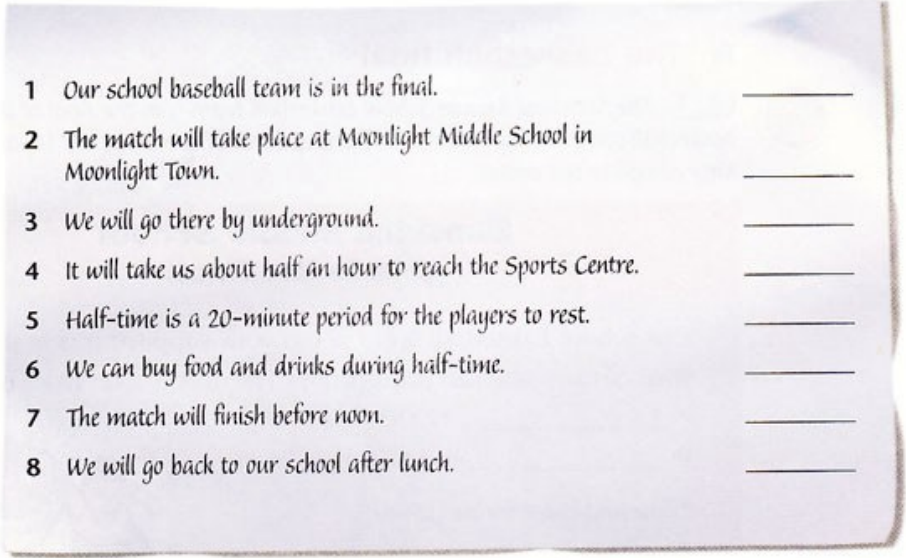
1:00 p.m. Get on the bus (8) _____ the restaurant.

1:30 p.m. Back to our school.

Cost of the trip ¥ (9) _____ per student.

Unit 3

A3 Read Kitty's notes and check if there are any mistakes. Write a **T** if a sentence is true or an **F** if it is false.



1 Our school baseball team is in the final. _____

2 The match will take place at Moonlight Middle School in Moonlight Town. _____

3 We will go there by underground. _____

4 It will take us about half an hour to reach the Sports Centre. _____

5 Half-time is a 20-minute period for the players to rest. _____

6 We can buy food and drinks during half-time. _____

7 The match will finish before noon. _____

8 We will go back to our school after lunch. _____

B Speak up: Where are we going tomorrow?



Daniel and Kitty are planning a trip for Linda. Work in pairs and plan a day out for a visiting friend. Use the conversation below as a model.

- Daniel:** Where are we going tomorrow? Shall we take Linda to the Summer Palace?
- Kitty:** I don't think that's a good idea. She went there yesterday.
- Daniel:** Well, what about the Great Wall?
- Kitty:** That sounds good, but it's too far away.
- Daniel:** Why don't we go to the China Science and Technology Museum? It's free for groups of 30 or more students.
- Kitty:** Great! Let's go to the museum. See you tomorrow.



Unit 5



A Giant pandas



▶ Millie found a report on giant pandas in a magazine. Here is the report.

Animals in the Wild

The story of Xi Wang

I first saw the baby panda when she was only ten days old. We called her Xi Wang. This means "hope".

When Xi Wang was born, she weighed just 100 grams and looked like a white mouse.

5 At four months old, she weighed about eight kilograms and started to go outside for the first time. Eight months later, she was not a small baby any more and weighed over 35 kilograms.



10 In the beginning, Xi Wang drank her mother's milk. When she was six months old, she began to eat bamboo. When she was 20 months old, she learnt to look after herself.

Sadly, giant pandas face serious problems in the wild. For example, it is very difficult for pandas to have babies, and many baby pandas die when they are very young. Also, giant pandas live mainly on a special
15 kind of bamboo. However, the bamboo forests are becoming smaller and smaller. As a result, pandas may not have a place to live or food to eat.

Giant pandas are now in danger. We should take action right away. Here
20 are some ideas.

- help pandas have more babies
- build more panda reserves
- make laws to protect pandas



25 There are now only about 1,600 pandas in the wild. If we do nothing, soon there may be none left! However, we do believe that where there is Xi Wang, there is hope.

B Knowing about giant pandas

B1 Millie does not know the meanings of some words in the report. Help her match the words on the left with the meanings on the right. Write the correct letters in the blanks.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|
| 1 be born (line 3) | _____ | a do something |
| 2 in the beginning (line 9) | _____ | b not any |
| 3 serious (line 12) | _____ | c bad or dangerous |
| 4 mainly (line 14) | _____ | d at first |
| 5 take action (line 19) | _____ | e more than anything else |
| 6 none (line 25) | _____ | f come into the world as a baby |

B2 Millie is making a growth chart for Xi Wang. Help her match the sentences with the pictures. Use the information in the report on page 58 to help you. Write the correct letters in the boxes.

1  1 day e

2  10 days

3  4 months

4  6 months

- a She learnt to look after herself.
- b She was about eight kilograms and started to go outside.
- c She looked like a white mouse.
- d She began to eat bamboo.
- e She weighed 100 grams.
- f She weighed over 35 kilograms.

5  12 months

6  20 months

Unit 5

B3 Millie is telling Amy about the serious problems that giant pandas are facing. Complete what she says with the words in the box.

as a result in danger in the wild live on take action very young

We need to do something for giant pandas. They're now ⁽¹⁾ _____. For example, giant pandas do not have many babies during their lives, and it's easy for baby pandas to get sick and die when they're ⁽²⁾ _____. Also, giant pandas mainly ⁽³⁾ _____ a special kind of bamboo, so the bamboo forests are very important to them. However, the bamboo forests are becoming smaller and smaller. ⁽⁴⁾ _____, giant pandas may not have a place to live or food to eat. There are now only about 1,600 pandas ⁽⁵⁾ _____. We should ⁽⁶⁾ _____ to protect them right away.



B4 Millie's classmates are asking her some questions about Xi Wang. Help Millie answer their questions.

Kitty: What did Xi Wang eat when she was born?

Millie: She ⁽¹⁾ _____ in the beginning, but half a year later, she began to ⁽²⁾ _____.

Simon: Did Xi Wang grow very quickly after she was born?

Millie: Yes. She weighed only ⁽³⁾ _____ at birth, but she weighed over ⁽⁴⁾ _____ when she was one year old.

Sandy: Is it easy for giant pandas to live in the wild?

Millie: No, it isn't. They face ⁽⁵⁾ _____.

Daniel: So what should we do?

Millie: We should help pandas ⁽⁶⁾ _____, build more ⁽⁷⁾ _____ and ⁽⁸⁾ _____ to protect them.

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