This study aims at investigating students’ perceptions and peer feedback to practicum for teaching English in the English Department at a Korean university. The participants were forty–two students at an elective course, ‘Method for teaching English’, and the data comprised questionnaire, 12 teams of practicum, and 15 sets of PF. A ‘Word Count System (WCS)’ was adopted to analyze the data. The findings show that students regarded ‘practicum’ (52.4%) as more important than ‘teacher’s lectures’ (42.8%), and most students (80%) applied more than 70% of lesson plans to their practicums. The practicum gave them experience of a teacher, development of confidence, recognition on their weaknesses and values of teaching. While the strengths shown in PF were mainly ‘teaching methods and technique’, ‘use of multimedia’, and ‘teaching materials’, the weaknesses were ‘classroom interactions’, ‘teaching methods and techniques’ and ‘use of blackboard’. Overall praises were 1.8 times more than the matters which needed to be developed. The conclusion suggest that the students had their own insights toward teaching practices and how learners can be motivated.
I. INTRODUCTION

Researchers in education have given considerable attention to the social and affective factors in learning. The social and affective factors can be related to effective pedagogical performance characterized by the interactionist theory which suggests that learning is never constructed by individual learners and is always a mutual accomplishment in a given context. Students’ teaching practice represents their activities, underlying plans and purposes in terms of their insights on education. Teaching practice, thus, is seen as outcome of the various interactions surrounding learning environment[1].

To understand teaching as a 'site of interaction' is a useful way of exploring students’ performance in the recontextualized position. Recontextualization takes place when students’ activities are changed to other arenas and used for different purposes. Shifting the teacher’s lectures from its location in the pedagogic practices into other activities, i.e., students’ practicum, is an example of the recontextualization of a role[2].

In the increasingly diverse context of higher education, the formative and heuristic purposes of practice have become more prominent. In particular, students’ teaching practice can be at the fore in designing the course of teaching English, because students are able to consider the value, worth, quality, or success of the course by learning with peers of similar status[1]. In this sense, students’ practicum is meaningful, as it plays a pivotal role in presenting either a positive or negative academic output.

Regarding teaching practices, some researchers engaged in studies on psychological perspectives on teaching methods and teachers’ motivations, and classroom methods and commitment to teaching of non-native English-speaking teachers. Some examined self evaluation of training students as future teachers, conception of teaching practices, and expectations of student teachers[3]. However, there has been few research on the perceptions and peer feedback (PF) of students who have a variety of plans for their careers. Many existing studies tend to focus on pre or in-service teacher development rather than working with students in an optional course for teaching English at university level.

Since students’ teaching practices are different from those of teacher development, research is needed to examine how students think about teaching practices and in what ways they respond to their peers’ performance in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. This study aims at investigating students’ perceptions and the nature of PF toward practicum at a Korean university. Based on the above speculations, the present study is guided by the following research questions: (a) What are the purposes and desires of the students in the course for teaching English in the Korean context? (b) How do the students take practicum as a teaching practice in learning how to teach English? (c) What are the characteristics of the strengths and weaknesses shown in the students’ PF toward others’ practicums?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Teaching Practices

The notion of practices offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between practicum and PF in this study, because the two activities help each other shape a better way of pedagogical approaches. The term of practices connotes doing but not just doing in and of itself. It includes language, tools, documents,
images, well-defined roles, specified criteria, and regulations that make explicit for a variety of purposes. In the educational literature, the relative advantage of practice has been a recurrent theme since Plato and Aristotle[1][2].

There is a general consensus that two distinct components of teaching practice are central to a discussion of students’ adjustment. The first factor is the social and emotional elements of classroom practice and the extent to which teachers are generally positive and supportive. For example, teachers might carefully observe students’ interests and initiative to find meaningful links between academic learning and students’ learning experience, emphasizing positive social relationships. The second factor is the instructional and cognitive elements of classroom practice. That is, teachers might engage in frequent interactions with students for scaffolding and guiding, providing individual help when needed. In this type of practice, students may be found working on varied and different learning activities that are suited to their developmental level. In sum, when students’ personal and social, as well as their instructional and cognitive, needs are carefully considered, it may be possible to provide an ideally supportive social context for learning[2][4].

In contrast, a different type of approach might emphasize teacher presentation of materials, rote learning, and instruction that is whole-group and less individualized. With such instructional practices, the goals and expectations of teaching are more likely to drive instruction and learning activities. From this, individual academic achievement can be advanced through members of classroom. In addition, learners’ reflection, self-esteem, confidence, and motivations are also developed, which can improve classroom activities considerably[2][3].

From the theories on teaching practices so far, I rather believe that teaching practices need to be related to the real implementation beyond simply certain types of framework, as education is embedded in a specific context. Students may acquire knowledge and skills through actual practices in their classrooms. This study will focus on how students think about practicum as a teaching practice and in what ways they evaluate the practicum through PF, which provide a deeper understanding of students’ learning and teaching practices.

2. Practicum

The issue of practicum is significant as the way of students’ learning on how to teach will depend on the kinds of performance in the classroom. The research on the initial teacher education tend to adopt Schön’s notion of the “practicum” (p.37) as follows:

A practicum is a setting designed for the task of learning a practice. In a context of a practice world, students learn by doing, although their doing usually falls short of real world work[5].

This simplification of the real world of practice enables students to think about the inherent complexity in the classrooms. Schön’s model on the practicum challenges the established principle of the school experience. This is related to the view that ‘practicum’ is the common practice of having students in educational method courses ‘teach’ a lesson to their peer to gain experience with lesson planning and delivery. Practicum has generally been found to be a way of helping student teachers or pre-service teachers learn about and reflect upon effective teaching practice[5].

Studies on education have attempted to deal with a variety of issues such as ideology of practicum, effectiveness of practicum for students, and evaluation about the practicum. For instance, Bell
(2007) attempted to discover what practicum means to students, focusing on the interactional structure of the task. She found that the question of how to frame the practicum was a constant challenge to the students, who had to negotiate the roles of teacher, student, classmate, and peer or friend. Practicum was also described as a ‘performance’ or ‘classroom task’ rather than ‘teaching’ [6]. Bell and Mladenovic (2008) adopted a peer observation model for a tutor development program, dealing with 32 peer observations. In their study, 94% of participants found the exercise valuable and 88% said that they would change their teaching as a result of the exercise [7].

On the other hand, Majzub (2013) investigated four undergraduate teacher trainees’ self reflection and self evaluation during their practicum. The findings revealed that the participants demonstrated an increasing awareness of their own teaching skills as well as increased ability to manage issues and problems related to their teaching experience [8].

However, because of the generally positive findings regarding the common practicum, the previous studies have not yet examined students’ desires, nature of the performance, and ways of evaluation for the practicum. To fill up this gap, this study attempts to examine purposes for attending practicum, benefits of the practicum, and strengths and weaknesses of the practicum through peer feedback.

3. Peer Feedback

Feedback is defined as post-response information which informs the learners on their actual states of learning or performance to help them detect if their state corresponds to the learning aims. Meanwhile, PF refers to a process whereby students evaluate, or are evaluated by, their peers, and it aims at self-directed and collaborative learning. Self-directed learning implies that learners are actively involved in shaping their own learning processes, and collaborative learning implies joint effort in carrying out tasks [1][9].

To date, research on education has examined various issues related to PF. One strand of research has focused on the impact of PF on students’ performance or products. Results, however, are largely mixed. Another line of research has examined the effects of training students for peer response tasks. In these studies, students are trained and helped to develop strategies for peer response, and results are overwhelmingly positive [9].

Some studies have been interested in language functions of peer utterances and group dynamics. For instance, Gielen and Wever (2012) analyzed transcript of L2 feedback dyads and identified four types of reader stances during PF. Students may not feel their peers are qualified enough to critique their work and may distrust their recommendations. For this reason, students may prefer teacher feedback to PF, but this does not mean students find peer review a waste of time. However, some students found peer review helpful in regard to audience perspective and idea development [10].

PF might be an instructional strategy with the potential to correspond to the imperatives of twenty-first century pedagogy: customization, interaction, and learner-control. Therefore, to increase the potential impact of PF on learning, it is crucial “to understand which mechanisms affect learning, and how these mechanisms can be supported. More specifically, feedback gives learners an indication of their strengths and weaknesses but also of the next steps to be taken in the learning process [1][9].

Previous research has shown that PF has a positive influence on the learning process both as a learning tool and as an assessment tool. As a learning tool, PF involves learners directly in the learning process and
provides them with skills to assess criteria that define high-quality work. As an assessment tool, PF increases the responsibility towards students as they are actively involved into their own assessment and consequently more engaged in their own learning[1].

Even though the previous review provides a preliminary understanding of PF in general, there are still difficulties in assuming that these aspects would be similar in the PF in an EFL context, where language and culture may add unanticipated challenges. For this reason, this study will examine students’ PF, focusing on strengths and weaknesses of others’ practicums, which can show how PF can be associated with ‘evaluation and learning’.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. The Context and Participants

The investigation of this study took place in an elective course entitled ‘Methods for teaching English’ in the English Department at a university in Korea. The purpose of the course was to provide students with theories and practices of teaching English. The main contents of the course consisted of lectures, practicum, and textbook-focused presentation.

The participants were forty-two students, including forty students (95.2%) from English major, one from Chinese major, and one from counselling. Most of them were juniors (50%) and seniors (42.9%), except three sophomores. The number of female students (66.7%) were twice of male students (33.3%), and their ages ranged from 21 to 26.

2. Questionnaire and Peer Feedback

This study was based on two sets of data: questionnaire and 15 sets of PF. The questionnaire from the forty-two students was focused on students’ perspectives on purposes for attending the course, future careers, values of practicum, and PF. All the students were required to deliver their practicums alone or in pairs for 15-20 minutes and complete comments as PE to their peers’ practicums. The teaching materials and target learners were entirely up to the presenters. A total of 35 practicums (i.e., 28 singles and 7 pair ones,) were delivered. Out of the 42 sets of PE toward the 35 practicums, 15 sets of PE and 12 practicums were focused in this study.

3. Procedure of Data Collection

The questionnaire was completed at the end of the course so that the students could reflect upon the whole activities in the course. Regarding the 15 sets of PF and 12 practicums, firstly, 5 sets of PF were collected from each of the three different groups —high, mid, and low— in terms of credit levels to represent the whole class. Next, for the 12 practicums, 4 ones were also selected from each of the high, intermediate, and low groups based on the scores of lesson plan (5 points) and practicum (25 points). These were the attempt to examine the overall characteristics of PF, dealing with all levels of practicums. Because the practicum was the last task of the course, it seemed to be a reliable means to assess students’ performance ability. These approaches were useful to identify the students’ teaching practices that combined practicum and PF.

4. The Framework for Data Analysis

In the first phase, the questionnaire was analyzed, dealing with the students’ perceptions about purposes, contents of the course, practicum, and PF. In the second phase, for the content analysis of the 15 sets of PF, what I call ‘Word Count System (WCS)’ was developed from the program, ‘Structured Word Identification and Frequency Totals (SWIFT)’.
SWIFT is a software for single-word-count system for content analysis which includes technical features of concordance with accuracy[11]. However, it is not enough to capture the meanings and complexity in written comments because of the technology-based counting system. To compensate this, the WCS was built up as a manual system to count basic keywords and phrases that represent meanings and context sensitivity in the PF, as shown in [Figure 1]. The WCS is more flexible and reasonable than SWIFT, because it is simple, adjustable in meaning, and self-contained. It does more than just count words.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Students’ Purposes and Desires

The students’ purposes for attending the course widely ranged from ‘being a teacher’ to ‘preparing graduation exam’. More than two-thirds of the students were interested in teaching (59%) or obtaining the TESOL certificate (10%) accredited by the department. The other reasons were ‘others’ recommendation’ (8%) and ‘having confidence through practicum’ (6%). However, contradictorily, only 29% of the students wished to be teachers in the future. The rest of them hoped to work in a variety of areas, including trading companies (19%), airlines (15%), interpretation/translation field (6%), and services (6%). It is noticeable that 9% of the students had no idea what they wanted to do after university [Figure 2].

These results indicate that the students try to find something useful for their future careers from the course, outreaching their concerns to many other areas beyond teaching. Here, the teacher’s pedagogic practices should take into account students’ needs and interests to help them think and prepare for their future. Regarding the elements of the course, 32.4% of
the students regarded the ‘practicum’ as the most important activity. The next priority went to the ‘teacher’s lectures’ (42.8%) and ‘textbook-focused presentation’ (4.8%), as shown in [Figure 3]. In fact, all the students, except one, felt that the practicum should be essential for the successful completion of the course. This reflects that ‘practicum’ is not only the most significant concern also the main practice for the students who participated in the course.

Note) 1–3 in the horizontal axis: priority order 0–25 in the vertical axis: number of students

Fig. 3. The priority of the course elements

2. Values of the Practicum

Based on the students’ emphasis on the practicum, it is worthwhile to examine the values of the practicum. All the students, except two, considered that the practicum enabled them to deliver ‘their own lessons’ (61.9%) and experience teaching ‘based on their lesson plans’ (33.4%). These findings suggest that practicum provides learners with realistic and student-centered teacher education with a degree of motivation and interests. This also indicates that the approaches of subject-centered emphasis, theory-laden orientation, and teacher-centralized classroom management, in general, can hardly suffice the kind of transformation that a student can have the learning experience as a student teacher.

On the other hand, 80% of the students self evaluated that they followed their own lesson plans with more than 70% of the consistency for their practicums. This can be the evidence to show to what extent the students were enthusiastic and keen toward the practicum and comprehended the value of it. From the findings about the benefits and the students’ concerns toward practicum, the practicum as a teaching practice can be described as the ‘core activity’ of the course, which provides students with a new experience and insight on teaching English.

Meanwhile, regarding future development of the course, 40% of the students responded that the opportunity of practicum should be increased, and 24% needed more earnest PF. Other issues to be developed were also raised such as ‘teacher’s implicit criteria for scores’ (15%) and ‘lack of confidence for the practicum’ (13%). Here, the teacher needs to design a more elaborated program for the practicum and evaluation criteria to help students develop their teaching practices.

3. Nature of Students’ Peer Feedback

For a successful teaching practice, 92.9% of the students agreed to complete PF toward others’ practicums. In this sense, it is significant to examine how actually the 15 observers evaluate the 12 practicums. The PF focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the each practicum. Overall, the 15 sets of PF were very positive on a variety of issues, including seventeen categories in terms of the classroom activities, as shown in [Table 1].

The 15 peer observers placed high values on the three issues in order such as ‘methods and techniques (22.0%)’, ‘use of multimedia (10.3%)’, and ‘materials (9.5%)’. In the category of ‘methods and techniques’, they particularly praised the presenters’ ‘explanation’ (31 out of 85) and use of ‘examples’ (19 out of 85) with more frequency than other activities. These results can be interpreted that the students might have their own perceptions on which activities are useful for learners from their learning experience.
That is, they might be aware what ways of ‘explanation’ and ‘examples’ can help learners understand lessons easily.

Table 1. Strengths in the 15 sets of PF

| No | Category                                      | Classroom activities (frequency) | F (%) |
|----|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| 1  | Methods and techniques                        | Explanation (31), examples (19), writing on board (10), repetition (9), reading (8), review (3), comparison (2), exercise (2), further study (1) | 85    |
| 2  | Use of multimedia                             | Moving images, ppt, internet     | 40 (10.3) |
| 3  | Materials                                     | Pronunciation (18), poems (8), songs (4), games (3), grammar (2), handouts (2) | 37 (9.5) |
| 4  | Objectives                                   | Clear/consistent                 | 33 (8.5) |
| 5  | Interactions                                  | Student participation (25), teacher-students interactions (4), eye contact (1) | 30 (7.7) |
| 6  | Medium of teaching                            | English only (18), Korean and English (9) | 27 (7.0) |
| 7  | Voice                                         | Loud voice                       | 25 (6.4) |
| 8  | Fun and interests                             | Interesting (19), Japanese lesson (5) | 24 (6.2) |
| 9  | Teacher traits                                | Calm (7), accurate (4), skillful (3), kind (3), complimentary (3), active (2), charismatic (1) | 23 (5.9) |
| 10 | Degree of difficulty                          | Difficulty level                 | 11 (2.6) |
| 11 | Reward                                        | Gift of snack                    | 11 (2.6) |
| 12 | Confidence                                    | Strong                            | 10 (2.6) |
| 13 | Feedback                                      | Confirmation (5), walking around the classroom (5) | 10 (2.6) |
| 14 | Classroom environment                         | Vigorous (1), familiar (2), soft (1), environment student-centered (3) | 7 (1.8) |
| 15 | Assessment                                    | quiz (6), Q&A (1)                | 7 (1.8) |
| 16 | Warm up                                       | Greetings (4), weather (1)       | 5 (1.3) |
| 17 | Time management                               | Enough time for activities (3)    | 3 (0.8) |
|    | Total                                         |                                  | 388 (100) |

Note: F (%): Frequency and % in parentheses

The evaluators in this study seem to regard classroom interaction as a social ‘game’, consisting of an implicitly agreed set of ‘moves’ by all participants rather than a set of teaching ‘acts’[1]. Next, the evaluators tended to fond of using multimedia such as ‘ppt’, ‘moving images’, and ‘internet.’ This is related to the finding that use of audio-visual aids is one of the most effective approaches in language classrooms[12]. In the category of ‘materials’, lessons for ‘pronunciation’ were favored by the evaluators. This suggests that students’ first concern in learning English in Korea might be speaking, in general.

On the other hand, the keywords related to the weaknesses of practicum were categorized into fourteen issues[Table 2]. It is notable that the first issue requiring further development was ‘interactions’ (19.2%), including ‘student participation’ ‘teacher-student interactions’, and ‘eye contact’. These findings are
consistent with Lee (2008)'s study where 'interaction' is considered as the most important element in classroom learning environments[2]. The need of the development of classroom interactions has also been found by Gielen and Wever (2012) in which particularly student participation was the most frequently mentioned weaknesses of student lecturers[10].

In the second category to be developed, 'methods and techniques' (18.9%), evaluators pointed out the presenters' insufficient explanation, showing the frequency of 19 out of 40. This means that 'explanation' is one of the most common activities in teaching, as it was also mentioned as the first issue in the strengths. Interestingly, the 'use of blackboard' (11.7%) was also a key part for the further development. This reflects that proper use of board can influence students’ learning in the classroom.

Overall, the total frequency of the keywords in the weaknesses was 213, and this figure was far less than that of strengths. These findings can be interpreted that the evaluators tend to be more focused on the positive aspects of the practicums than negative ones. This is consistent with the findings of Lee (2011) in which more than 73% of the students gave perfect scores to their peers’ products with high emphasis of ‘praises’ in their written comments[1].

V. CONCLUSION

This study has examined students’ perceptions on practicum and PF for teaching English. The students regarded the ‘practicum’ (52.4%) as more important element than ‘teacher lectures’ (42.8%). Most students (80%) were enthusiastic in the practicum, applying more than 70% of lesson plans to their practicums. The practicum gave them experience of a teacher, development of confidence, recognition on weaknesses, and values of teaching. In the PF about practicums, ‘teaching methods and techniques’, ‘use of multimedia’, and ‘teaching materials’ were main compliments, whereas ‘classroom interactions’, ‘teaching methods and techniques’ and ‘use of blackboard’ were pointed out as the weaknesses.

The text analysis on the PF revealed that the frequency of keywords for strengths were 1.8 times more than the matters which needed to be developed. This implies that the students had their own insights on teaching and how learners can be motivated. More than 40% of the students suggested to increase the opportunity of practicum, and this is the evidence to show the students’ creativity and positive attitudes toward learning. These findings are significantly different from Lee and Kim (2014) in which students showed passive learning in the Korean context[13]. Thus, teachers should provide students with a variety of opportunities, tasks, and activities so that students can explore new ways of learning and radiate their imagination and creativity at university in Korea.

Of course, an analysis of 15 sets of PF and 12 practicums do not yield sweeping implications generalized to all university students’ teaching practices. With a large number of sampling which includes different types of practicum and PF in different contexts such as OECD non-English speaking countries[14], the research would have shown the results that can be generalized to EFL students’ teaching practices. Nevertheless, this study shows the originality which enables us to gain new insights into students’ perceptions on teaching and the teacher’s roles for contributing to the English education in Korea. The present study, thus, suggests the need for a further study on how the students can develop their practicums after PF, combining photographing the practicum and observations.
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