

Lecturers' And Tesl Teacher Trainees' Perceptions Towards The Level Of Readiness In Performing Teaching Practice

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Abstract : Teaching practice is a course offered to teacher trainees of the Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. This course will enable the trainees to practice their teaching skills under the guidance of a supervisor. The research was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of the subjects taught to the teacher trainees before their teaching practice and to determine the level of readiness in terms of subject knowledge and subject competence of the teacher trainees. The respondents of this research were 34 and 39 third and fourth year TESL students respectively. The respondents were required to answer the questionnaires. Five lecturers who had taught the TESL programme and went out to supervise the teacher trainees from the Department of Modern Language (FPPSM) participated in the interview sessions. All the data obtained from the questionnaires and interview sessions were analyzed manually. The findings of this research proved that the exposure to the several subjects before teaching practice really helped the teacher trainees in performing their teaching practice. The teacher trainees were able to apply all the skills and techniques gained in the real classroom context. However, this research proved that many of the teacher trainees were not prepared in terms of subject knowledge and subject competence. Most of the trainees do not have deep understanding on subject knowledge and are still encountering problems in terms of their language proficiency. To conclude, the findings of this research offered some recommendations to further improve the performance of TESL teacher trainees during the teaching practice. The suggestions given would help the teacher trainees to enhance the level of readiness in terms of their subject knowledge and subject competence. This would enable the trainees to perform their teaching practice more effectively.

Keywords: lecturers perception, students perception, readiness in performing teaching practice

Introduction

According to Brown (1980), teaching can be defined as “showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instructions, guiding in the study of something, providing with knowledge and causing to know or understand something”. Chitravelu (2005) stated that a teacher requires practice in using the skills involved in teaching before teaching in the real classroom context. A good teacher should be able to demonstrate and practice various teaching skills and behaviours.

Kennedy (1990) stated that a good teacher needs to ‘understand subject matter deeply and flexibly so that they will be able to help students create useful cognitive maps, relate one idea to another and address misconceptions ’. Teachers must see how ideas are connected across fields and with everyday life. The deep understanding of the subject matter will provide a foundation for content knowledge which will enable the teachers to make ideas accessible to others.

In brief, it is important for teacher trainees to be exposed to the real teaching world where they will be able to apply their knowledge. According to Murphy (2003), teaching practice is a central component in the teacher education programmes. Teaching practice will be the time that trainee teachers will get to work with experienced teachers. This is a crucial step in learning to be

an effective teacher. It is also the time for trainees to put into practice the theories that they have learned in their course. In short, teacher trainees will be able to apply their subject knowledge and subject competence by undergoing teaching practice.

Statement of problem

According to Buku Panduan Akademik Ijazah Sarjana Muda (Sesi 2003 / 04) Fakulti Pendidikan, teaching practice is a compulsory course that all the third year students of Faculty of Education (FOE) should take in order to graduate. The students are required to undergo their teaching practice for twelve weeks at a specific school that is chosen by the FOE. The main purpose of teaching practice is to enable all the teacher trainees to perform all the theories and teaching skills that have been exposed to them throughout the TESL programme. Moreover, the teacher trainees will be able to apply all the knowledge and skills gained in the real teaching world.

As stated by Murphy (2003), teaching practice component is central to all teacher education programmes. Teaching practice will be the time when the teacher trainees will be working with real learners in the real teaching world. Teacher trainees will be able to apply and refine their teaching skills in the classroom. However, many of the TESL teacher trainees are not well – prepared to undergo their teaching practice as they are not ready in terms of subject knowledge and subject competence.

First, teacher's subject knowledge is very crucial in order to develop an effective teaching. By not knowing the subject knowledge well, teacher trainees will not be able to transfer the knowledge to their students at their level of understanding. This will result in negative consequences whereby the students will not be able to comprehend what the teachers are trying to teach.

The level of mastery in subject knowledge is also crucial to deliver the lesson. The teacher should be knowledgeable in the subject area. Trainee teachers will encounter difficulties to teach efficiently if they have not mastered their subjects well. On the other hand, teacher trainees will not be able to deliver meaningful explanations due to limited subject knowledge.

According to Bowers (1987), many teacher trainees are having problems to perform their teaching practice due to the lack of subject competence. Subject competence is one of the important elements as it will help teacher trainees to manage the class. As many of the teacher trainees are not competent, they might have difficulties in performing the teaching practice successfully and effectively.

In brief, teacher's knowledge of their subject matter and the importance of this knowledge are important for a successful teaching process. Milne (1999) highlighted that a teacher should master the knowledge of the subject itself and knowledge of the curricular development. In addition, a teacher should be competent in delivering an effective lesson. The mastery of subject knowledge and subject competence will influence the level of readiness among teacher trainees in performing their teaching practice.

Objective of the research

It is hoped that through this research, the researcher will be able to :

1. identify the importance of the courses taught to the teacher trainees at the university before undergoing teaching practice
2. determine the level of readiness in terms of subject knowledge among the teacher trainees in performing teaching practice

3. determine the level of readiness in terms of subject competence among the teacher trainees in performing teaching practice

Significance of the study

The findings of this research are important to help the Faculty of Education to make some changes to the current courses that are being offered to the students before undergoing their teaching practice. It will enable the Faculty of Education to identify the important courses that should be introduced before the students perform their teaching practice. In other words, as there are many courses that a student should take before graduating from this TESL programme, it is very crucial to identify certain courses which will help the students to prepare themselves before undergoing their teaching practice.

Furthermore, the findings of this research could also be used to make some changes to the current curriculum that is being used for this programme. By changing the current curriculum, the lecturers will be able to highlight the different responsibilities that the teachers should have in order to perform their teaching practice effectively. The exposure to different responsibilities will enable the trainees to know their subject well and know how to teach subject matter so that it can be understood by diverse learners. In addition, the trainees will be able to know how to teach specific subject matter in ways that are accessible, anticipating and addressing student conceptions and misconceptions. The exposure of many different responsibilities of teaching will help the teacher trainees to be fully prepared for their teaching practice.

Besides that, the lecturers could also introduce some different types of learning and teaching strategies in certain courses. This will encourage the teacher trainees to be more committed in performing their duties as a teacher. Moreover, the teacher trainees will be very confident to teach in schools as they would have mastered all the skills and knowledge in teaching.

In brief, all the changes in the TESL programme will adequately prepare the teacher trainees to perform their teaching practice successfully as well as to face the real teaching world. Moreover, all the teacher trainees will be able to be prepared in terms of subject knowledge and subject competence. This knowledge is very important as this will help the teacher trainees to be good teacher.

Respondents

The respondents of this research were 73 students who are currently in their third and fourth year in the TESL program offered by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. The age of the respondents is between 21 to 30. There were 6 male students and 67 female students. They have been following the TESL program and have undergone the teaching practice. Apart from that, five lecturers from the Department of Modern Language (FPPSM) were chosen to be the respondents of this research. All the lecturers chosen were those who teach on the TESL program and who have supervised teaching practice before.

Research Instruments

This research utilized both the quantitative and qualitative research instruments. The quantitative instrument was the questionnaires while the qualitative instrument was the interview sessions. All the questions in these instruments were focused to investigate the level of readiness of the teacher trainees in terms of subject knowledge and subject competence in performing

teaching practice. The different perceptions of the TESL teacher trainees and the lecturers were very useful for this research.

Data Analysis

Table 1 : Responses Based on the Frequency and Percentage for the Level of Readiness in terms of Subject Competence

| No. | Items | SA (5) | A (4) | U (3) | D (2) | SD (1) |
|---|---|----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| A) Pedagogical Content Knowledge | | | | | | |
| 1 | Teacher trainees should be able to develop variety of strategies to present content | 53.42% (39) | 42.47% (31) | 4.11% (3) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 2. | Teacher trainees should be able to use multiple ways to meet the needs of different learners | 56.16% (41) | 41.10% (30) | 2.74% (2) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 3. | Teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to judge the needs of pupils | 42.47% (31) | 47.95% (35) | 9.59% (7) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 4. | Teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to reflect on one's own performance to increase pupil learning | 49.32% (36) | 49.32% (36) | 1.37% (1) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 5. | Teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to reflect on one's own learning process to increase pupil learning | 43.84% (32) | 49.32% (36) | 6.85% (5) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 6. | Teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to focus on pupil understanding as well as the delivery of content | 56.16% (41) | 43.84% (32) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 7. | Teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to focus on the delivery of content | 52.05% (38) | 46.58% (34) | 1.37% (1) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |

Table 1 provides the responses based on frequency and percentage for the level of readiness in terms of subject competence. There are seven different items shown in the table. The findings found in items 1 and 2 are interesting because a majority of the respondents prefer that teacher trainees should be able to develop variety of strategies to present content and use multiple ways to meet the needs of different learners. Item 1 reveals that a large number of respondents, 53.42 percent (39) strongly agree that developing variety of strategies in the teaching process is an important element. Another 42.47 percent (31) respondents agree with the statement too. However, only 4.11 percent (3) of the respondents could not decide with the statement.

As for item 2, 56.16 percent (41) respondents strongly agree while another 41.10 percent (30) respondents agree that teacher trainees should be able to use multiple ways to meet the needs of all the learners. In contrast, 2.74 percent (2) respondents could not agree with the statement. Hammond (2005) highlighted that teachers must be prepared to take into account the different experiences and academic needs of a wide range of students as they plan and teach.

Second, items 3,4 and 5 highlight the important factor to be considered by teacher trainees to increase pupils learning. Among all the three items, item 4 shows the most significant results. This is because 98.64 percent (72) of the respondents strongly agree and agree that teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to reflect on one's own performance to increase pupils' learning. Only 1.37 percent (1) respondent could not decide on the statement. The second most significant results are shown in item 5. A total of 43.84 percent (32) respondents strongly agree while another 49.32 percent (36) agree that teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to reflect on one's own learning process to increase pupils' learning. However, nearly 6.85 percent (5) of the respondents could not agree with the statement.

The least significant findings can be found in item 3. The majority of the respondents, 90.42 percent (66), feel that teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to judge the needs of pupils. In contrast, 9.59 percent (7) respondents could not decide on the statement. Next, items 6 and 7 focus on the delivery of content. The most important findings to appear from items 6 and 7 is 100 percent (73) respondents strongly agree and agree that teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to focus on pupils' understanding as well as the delivery of content while 98.63 percent (72) respondents strongly agree and agree that teacher trainees should have the knowledge of how to focus on the delivery of content. Only 1.37 (1) respondent could not decide on item 7.

Hammond (2005) supported that to teach all students well, teachers must know how to tailor their curriculum and instruction so that their students will be engaged in a meaningful lesson.

Table 2 presents the responses based on frequency and percentage for the level of readiness in terms of subject competence in the practices and skills aspect. Among all the four items, items 1 and 3 show the most significant results. There was a positive connection between the two items because 97.26 percent (71) respondents strongly agree and agree that teacher trainees should be able to adapt instruction during a lesson to meet pupils' needs as they arise and must be able to maintain a genuine enthusiasm for teaching that reflects the teachers' commitment to pupils learning. Only 2.74 percent (2) respondents could not decide on the statements. Pica, T. (1990) supported that 'enthusiasm about subject and a teacher who seems to enjoy teaching are some of the qualities of good teaching'.

Based on table 2, it is clear that 60.27 percent (44) strongly agree while 35.62 percent (26) agree that teacher trainees should be able to improvise instruction during a lesson to meet pupils' needs as they arise. However, 4.11 percent (3) respondents could not agree with the statement. The least significant results can be seen in item 4. A big number of respondents, 89.04 percent (65) respondents feel that teacher trainees should be able to recognize the unique characteristics of all pupils or classroom situations and use these factors to guide instructional choices. In fact, 9.59 percent (7) could not decide with the statement while 1.37 percent (1) respondent disagrees with item 4.

Table 2 : Responses Based on the Frequency and Percentage for the Level of Readiness in terms of Subject Competence (Practices and Skills)

| No. | Items | SA (5) | A (4) | U (3) | D (2) | SD (1) |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| B) Practices and Skills | | | | | | |
| 1. | Teacher trainees should be able to adapt instruction during a lesson to meet pupils' needs as they arise | 53.42% (39) | 43.84% (32) | 2.74% (2) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 2. | Teacher trainees should be able to improvise instruction during a lesson to meet pupils' needs as they arise | 60.27% (44) | 35.62% (26) | 4.11% (3) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 3. | Teacher trainees must maintain a genuine enthusiasm for teaching that reflects his/her commitment to pupil learning | 64.38% (47) | 32.88% (24) | 2.74% (2) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 4. | Teacher trainees should be able to recognize the unique characteristics of all pupils or classroom situations and use these factors to guide instructional choices | 50.68% (37) | 38.36% (28) | 9.59% (7) | 1.37% (1) | 0% (0) |

Discussions

As a conclusion, this research was set out to determine the lecturers' and TESL teacher trainees' perceptions towards the level of readiness in performing teaching practice. The objective of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of the courses taught to the teacher trainees before undergoing teaching practice and to determine the level of readiness in terms of subject knowledge and subject competence among the teacher trainees in performing their teaching practice.

Some of the courses that help the trainees to develop their teaching skills and techniques are Methodology in TESL I and Methodology in TESL II. These courses introduced some major principles and practices in English language teaching. In addition, these courses provide opportunities for the teacher trainees to plan and practice an effective language lesson based on the various theories, principles and methods learned. All the knowledge and experience gained from these courses helped the trainees to develop an awareness and sensitivity to the different teaching methods. It also equips the trainees with practical techniques in teaching the four language skills including grammar, vocabulary and literature. The results of the findings showed that the exposures to plan a lesson and practice microteaching independently in the subjects helped the trainees a lot to gain some knowledge on effective ways to teach.

In addition to that, microteaching course also help the trainees to increase their knowledge as well as their self-confidence. During the microteaching class, trainees are required to practice in one or more of the skills of teaching and focuses on a specific aspect of teaching. As this course required the teacher trainees to practice in using the skills and techniques while

teaching English, this would help the teacher trainees to boost their confident level. Chitravelu (2005) highlighted that ‘microteaching course can be effectively used to develop satisfactory level of mastery in the use of various teaching skills and behaviours’. In brief, all these knowledge and experience gained will prepare the trainees for their teaching practice as various teaching skills and behaviours are demonstrated and practiced.

This study also showed that the exposure to the several courses, such as Fundamentals of Grammar and Structures of English will help the teacher trainees to develop the knowledge of grammar. The exposures to the structural pattern of the language at the different levels with a view of more practical ways of teaching the language will equip the trainees with different kinds of grammatical knowledge. This would help the trainees to improve their knowledge on grammar and their language proficiency.

As for subject knowledge aspect, it is evident that only some of the teacher trainees are prepared in this aspect. Based from the results of the findings, it showed that only a few of the trainees are able to conduct the lesson effectively as they are prepared in this aspect. However, a majority of the teacher trainees are having knowledge at the surface level only while some do not master the subject knowledge at all. Based on the teacher trainees’ perception, it is found that some of the trainees have mastered the subject knowledge but they are having problem to apply the knowledge into practice.

In addition, some of the teacher trainees felt that they do not have deep understanding on subject knowledge. Due to this, some of the teacher trainees are not fully prepared to teach English for Science and Technology and to prepare test questions. One of the reasons that the trainees are not prepared to teach English for Science and Technology and to prepare test questions is because the courses were not introduced to the trainees before they go out for their teaching practice. The Teaching English for Science and Technology and Language Testing and Evaluation courses were introduced to the TESL students when they are in their fourth year.

Some of the teacher trainees are not prepared to teach writing skills too. The teacher trainees find it difficult to teach writing skills to the students. Chitravelu (2005) supported that teaching writing skills is difficult. This is because various stages are involved in the writing process. Besides that, teachers need to understand why each of the steps are important and what it implies for the teaching and learning process. The lack of knowledge and experience might be the reasons why many of the teacher trainees are not prepared to teach writing skills.

In terms of subject competence, most of the teacher trainees are not prepared in this aspect. Most of the teacher trainees are still encountering problems with their language proficiency. The teacher trainees do not have the command of the language to deliver the lesson effectively. As a result of this, the teacher trainees will not be able to manage the students as well as the classroom. The trainees will face problems to conduct interesting activities in the classroom too. The teacher trainees should have the language to manage the classroom and language to deliver the input. However, the teacher trainees who are proficient in the language can perform well regardless of the students’ different levels. Less proficient trainees will struggle to teach and they will not be able to convey the message and input.

In brief, knowledge about teaching, learning and subject matter are interdependent. It is crucial for the trainees to make a commitment to learn what they need to know to help all students succeed (Hammond,2005). In addition, desire, enthusiasm and knowledge are important attributes of teachers. Without an ability to identify and interpret what pupils need and which teaching conditions are best for meeting these needs, teachers may have difficulty applying the successful methods for teaching. (Wood,G.H.,1988)

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