THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM: IDENTIFYING THE DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent pre-service teachers apply the methods, theory, and training received during training in the teacher training program into their classroom teaching. The sample involved in the study were pre-service teachers from the Bachelor in Education TESL program who had just completed their 3-month teaching practicum and are currently in the final semester. This study employed a qualitative research design and the data sources included (open-ended) pre-service teacher questionnaires and document analysis. The questionnaire distribution phase was conducted with 68 pre-service teachers who came for a one-day post mortem of their teaching practicum. From the analysis of the qualitative data, the findings derived four themes that best described the codes from the participants' responses: dealing with students in class, the pre-service teachers' self-belief, the supervisors, and the schools, which reflect the difficulties and challenges faced by the pre-service teachers.*

KEYWORDS: Pre-Service Teachers, Challenges in Teaching, Teacher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Current research in the field of education suggests that what teachers know and are able to do in the classroom teaching are important factors that determine the success in student learning (Broad, Evans, & Gaskell, 2008). Similarly, research also suggests that the act of teaching has become more complex and that a highly skilled teacher must be able to apply various practices for many different purposes, integrate and incorporate various kinds of knowledge, construct a sophisticated pedagogical repertoire, and adapt to learners' diversity in the classroom (Broad & Evans, 2006). The views indicate the importance of having quality teachers in classrooms, thus this gives rise to the increasing attention and debate about the critical elements of a high-quality Teacher Education Program within the broader context of lifelong professional learning across the teaching profession.

The quality of student's learning outcomes is determined by several inputs that contribute in improving the quality of education. Researchers have identified the inputs as curriculum resources, participation of the students, leadership and management of the school, and effective accountability and evaluation system (Ishumi, 1986; Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991; Grodsky & Gamoran, 2003; Tikly, 2010). Even though the contribution of previously mentioned inputs are vital, Delors (1996) clarified that classroom teachers play a significantly important role to determine the success and failure of achieving quality education. Therefore, it is necessary to

identify the centrality of the role played by teachers in their classrooms in order to achieve quality education.

According to Gamage and Walsh (2003), the most important contributing factor to improve the quality of education is identified as the professional competence of educators. The reason being, the educators act as the key person responsible for transforming resources, curriculum, and educational policies to students in effective practice. Gendall (2001) and Lingam (2010) further explained that the teachers' preparation and the courses that they undergo in the pre-service teacher education determine the teachers' professional competence. This is because the pre-service teacher education program and the trainings received must be parallel and relevant with the work and responsibilities that they will face in real teaching. This enables the concerned parties to close the gap between students who have access to quality education and those who do not.

Gore and Thomas (2006) stated that the quality of performance in the classroom, feelings of professional efficacy, and the teachers' potential length of career are impacted by one's experience of transition into the teaching profession. Across a range of applied professions such as health care, legal, financial, and particularly the interest of this study that is the teaching profession, the transitional period between undergraduate preparation programs and working world is very significant. According to Goetz, Tombs and Hampton, (2005), although with limited supervision and mentoring, new graduates in the applied fields still need to be competent in applying and synthesizing their theoretical knowledge on a daily basis therefore it requires a critically effective transition into practice. Additionally, there exist an enormous difference between the role of a pre-service teacher and what is expected from them in the teaching profession. The position of pre-service teachers in the classroom is encapsulated by Feimen-Nemser (2001) in the following statement: the pre-service teachers really have two tasks to do in which they need to teach and at the same time learning to teach.

Problem statement

According to Syed Azizi Wafa, Ramayah, and Tan (2003), a nation depends heavily on its specific human capital such as teachers, to mould and nurture its young minds (Idris et al., 2007). This is the reason why it is often argued that the role of teachers is at the heart of the educational process and teachers' responsibility in education becomes higher depending on the level of importance attached to education as a whole (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1989). In laymen's term, the quality of student learning experience is of the same importance with the quality of teacher training.

In the teaching profession, it is important for teachers to promote renewed enthusiasm by rejuvenating new ideas and challenges in the field of teaching (Idris, Loh, Nor, Razak & Saad, 2007). Therefore, the needs of individual teacher should be addressed for professional development. As such, educational institutions across every continent that provide training for future teachers including in Malaysia, are under increasing pressure to prepare their student teachers for the real teaching experience (Goh & Matthews, 2011). In a recent study by Nasir and Safran (2014), the researchers indicate that teacher education programs in Malaysia have received the blame from the society for failing to prepare and equip in-service teachers with the right competency to educate school leavers with sufficient skills and knowledge, which are useful for their future undertakings. In highlighting the issues in teacher education programs, critics of teacher preparation program claim that what is taught in education courses in universities, colleges, and teacher training institutes is disconnected from a teacher's work in

actual classroom (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2010; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Various recent studies analyzed the preparedness of English pre-service teachers in Malaysia by focusing on the themes such as Information technology (Wong, Bakar, Hamzah, Tarmizi & Tang, 2012), perceptions of teachers' efficacy (Faez & Valeo, 2012; Nasir and Safran, 2014; Berg and Smith 2014), teaching practicum (Goh & Matthews, 2011), challenges and survivability (Senom, Zakaria & Shah, 2013), and teacher education implication (Ghanaguru & Rao, 2013).

However, there are very few studies conducted on the perceptions of English pre-service teachers towards the teacher training program in Malaysian universities albeit some studies have been conducted in other countries. For example, Rahman, Abdullah, and Rashid (2011) mentioned that Way and Holden (2009) conducted a study with 1200 K12 teachers, and discovered that the teachers demanded more training to develop capacity to teach financial education because their students were facing difficulty in financial management. While in Nepal, Gnawali (2010) argued that the teacher training program in the country is not effective in providing teaching methodology knowledge to the teachers. In the United States, Thompson (2010) conducted a qualitative study with master level beginner teachers on their perceptions of preparedness, and suggested for a need to do revolutionary change in America's university-based teacher preparation program. A search in the body of literature pertaining to the same topic of interest has shown very little studies conducted in Malaysia and among the few is the study by Jaafar and Sreetharam (2010) who studied English pre-service teachers' perception towards teacher training program in Malaysia. Thus, according to Croom (2009), teacher education program is an integral part of a quality education. Therefore, it is worth investigating its effectiveness to the whole education system.

While numerous studies have been conducted internationally to investigate the effectiveness of teacher education program, there have been very few empirical studies conducted in the tertiary level education in Malaysia pertaining to the same area of interest. In addition, the studies conducted in different continents, although applying the same variables may suggest different outcomes here in Malaysia due to cultural and educational system differences.

Therefore, the specific aspects of an English teacher preparation program are examined in this study because the pre-service teachers rely heavily on them in their classrooms as every day teaching practice. The efficiency of the program is examined through determining the difficulties and challenges faced by the pre-service teachers. The study is also very significant in determining and identifying any deficiencies of the current teacher preparation program through investigating the difficulties and challenges faced by the trainees. The authentic data and information gathered from multiple sources in the study are vital to shed light for some changes that will benefit all parties in the education field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' Perceptions towards their Teacher Education Programs

A meta-analysis study was conducted by Zeichner and Conklin (2005) analyzing 38 empirical studies concerning about teacher education. In their study, there were nine studies reviewed specifically addressing the pre-service teachers' perceptions of their teacher education

programs. The findings of their review were informative and instructive because they provided the evidence of a connection between teachers' perception of preparedness with the teacher education program. Consequently, there have been many additional studies on this subject since that time. For instance, Darling-Hammond (2006) examined how graduates of the Stanford Teacher Education program rate the effectiveness of their teacher education program. Multiple methods of gathering data such as interviews, surveys, pre-test and post-test were used to elicit responses from the graduates. The researcher discovered that eighty percent of the participants rated the program as effective and thus they felt prepared to teach. In a similar study to assess pre-service teachers' readiness to teach English language learners, Durgunoglu and Hughes (2010) conducted a study to investigate how prepared are pre-service teachers in the U.S to teach English language learners. The researchers concluded from 'study 1' of classroom observation that the student teachers were not well prepared to teach English language learners although some of the pre-service teachers rated themselves as moderately prepared from the second study of knowledge test.

Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions towards Specific Aspects in the Teacher Education Program

More recently, literature review has shown a consistent increase in the study of teachers' perceptions towards teacher preparation program by analyzing from various aspects such as content knowledge. Banegas (2009) conducted a study to examine trainee teachers' content knowledge in a teacher education program. One question in the questionnaire asked the participants on what was the positive or negative aspect in the program as a whole. Fourteen out of fifteen of the participants acknowledged the programs effort in offering a solid base for content knowledge.

Another aspect that managed to obtain the researchers' attention is the authentic or field experience exposed in a teacher program. According to Moore (2003), field experiences hold countless prospective for providing pre-service teachers with chances to exercise decision-making. Blackwell and Pepper (2009) conducted a research on the value of experiencing the first days of school for pre-service teachers. The participants involved in the study were 244 pre-service teachers in the University of Mississippi. The findings of the study proved that field experience provides the only authentic learning experience in the university's teacher education program before the trainees undergo teaching practicum. Ramsden (2003) mentioned that personal conceptions of and approaches to teaching of all teachers are resulted from their experiences as students in a teacher education institution and later as teachers at schools. Similarly, Berry, Montgomery, and Snyder (2008) stressed on the importance of continuous exposure of pre-service teachers with authentic teaching experience combined with a year-long student engagement in teaching experience had produced quality teachers that met the demand of urban area schools in Boston. Likewise, Mishra and Koehler (2006) claimed that the process of preparing pre-service teachers who develop deep thinking and reflection about their learning and teaching is centralized in authentic classroom experiences through active participation of the pre-service teachers. Thus, it is vital to expose trainee teachers to as much experience as possible to prepare them for real teaching tasks. Furthermore, according to Frey (2008), pre-service teachers must engage themselves actively in field experience such as conducting activities at schools and getting used to the real classroom setting to gain valuable classroom experience and learn how to implement new instructional strategies in authentic classroom environments

In highlighting the significance of field experience, a survey of teacher trainees' expectations, experiences and assessment of a teacher education program in Uganda was conducted by Kagoda and Itaaga (2013). The study provided suggestions for improving the teacher education program by conducting more study trips and practical exercises. The participants in the study also suggested that the program should focus on the content relevant to what is being taught in schools but not generalized subjects. Specifically, the participants wanted to be well-versed with local school cultures instead of foreign school cultures.

The Significance of Microteaching in Teacher Preparation Program

The role of microteaching in providing authentic school experience is lesser if a comparison were to be made with the role of field experience in a teacher education program. However, microteaching plays a vital part for providing the trainee teachers with a platform for them to practice their teaching skills. Microteaching is a teacher training method that provides the student teachers the opportunity to implement their teaching skills by refining various simple tasks known as teaching skills and it is the current practice worldwide (Remesh, 2013). Other researchers also stated the value of microteaching as the best platform of practice for developing satisfactory level of mastery in the use of various teaching skills and behavior (Jaafar & Sreetharam, 2010). In highlighting the importance of microteaching to teacher trainees, a study was conducted by Ismail (2011) with sixty-one pre-service English teachers in a teacher education program. The purpose of the study was to investigate student teachers' microteaching experiences in a teacher preparation program in Saudi Arabia. The participants in the study stated that microteaching was very helpful for their professional experience and academic study. Therefore, the researcher concluded that promoting effective teaching strategies and reflective practices among student teachers was possible with microteaching in a teacher education program. Saban and Coklar (2013) also conducted a similar study analyzing the specific aspect of microteaching in a teacher preparation program. The result of the interviews in the study showed that the trainees perceived microteaching as very effective for giving them a chance to assess their strengths and weaknesses in teaching practice.

Teaching exposure in microteaching session enables the trainees to experience and execute appropriate instructional strategies before the real task of teaching coming in the later stage of the teacher education program. The significance of exposing the trainees with most appropriate and relevant instructional strategies is to create and mold effective teachers in the profession. This is in line with the statement by Bandura (1977) and Liljedahl (2005) as cited in Woodcock and Vialle (2010) who stated that the teachers form their beliefs about teaching during their pre-service training and that one belief is held for a long time thus it becomes very difficult to change. Woodcock and Vialle (2010) conducted a study on instructional strategies to determine the common instructional strategies employed by a sample of pre-service primary school teachers from four University campuses across New South Wales, Australia. The findings indicate that pre-service teachers in the study favor more learner-centered instructional strategies for students who do not have learning disability.

The Role of Teaching Practicum in Teacher Preparation Program

All established teacher education programs require their teacher trainees to undergo a certain period of practicum. Following the philosophy by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), which stated that teachers learn to teach from teaching, Scott, Gentry and Philips (2014) further define that a teacher education program should embed practicum, field experiences, and student teaching in its program. This is due to the theory and practice that are bridged by the

experiences therefore allowing teacher trainees to improve and apply knowledge learnt in the program as well as experimenting with the best strategies or approaches in teaching.

Qazi, Rawat and Thomas (2012) conducted a study with 46 Notre Dame Institute of Education pre-service teachers to examine the role of practicum in enhancing student teachers' teaching skills. From the data analysis of the study, the researchers concluded that the practicum aspect of the teacher education program played a significant role in enhancing the trainees teaching skills. Furthermore, the participants in the study suggested having a longer teaching practicum in the program to provide more opportunities for the trainees to exercise their teaching skills as well as improving their content knowledge (Qazi et al., 2012). In another aspect of a teacher education program, the significant role of university supervisors has also gained attention from educational researchers. Gurbuz (2006) conducted a study to examine the differences of perceptions between university supervisors and school mentors against the pre-service teachers' strengths and weaknesses during their practicum practice. The findings from the study indicate that both parties agreed upon the failure of the pre-service teachers to give clear instructions to their students. The researcher noted further that the trainees do not have a good command of the language and therefore tend to make long explanations in the class.

One of the most prominent problems faced by beginner, novice, and pre-service teachers is classroom management during the actual practice of teaching. A teacher plays various roles in his classroom, but the most prominent role is that of a classroom manager because effective teaching and learning cannot take place in a poorly managed classroom. Chaos becomes the norm if students are disrespectful and disorderly due to lack of apparent rules in guiding their behavior. Thus, both teachers and students suffer in this chaotic situation because students most likely learn much less than they should, and teachers struggle to teach too (Oliver & Reschly, 2007). Contrary, teaching and learning flourish in a well-managed classrooms environment but it takes a good deal of effort to create a meaningful environment. Similarly, according to Berliner (1981), pre-service teachers often deal with unexpected classroom experience because they fail to understand and develop the schemata in interpreting students' behavior due to lack of experience (Demiraslan-Cevik & Andre, 2013). In a study conducted by Giallo and Little (2003) on 54 elementary teachers with less than three years of teaching experience and 25 pre-service teachers in their final year teaching program, both groups reported feeling only moderately prepared and indicated that they required additional education in classroom management, a finding also confirmed by Maskan (2007).

Teacher Education Research in Malaysian Education Context

Searching the literature for other studies related to the current study in Malaysia has shown only few results. The Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education (2006) conducted a large-scale nationwide study to explore English beginner teachers' experience in teaching. The data on problems faced by the beginner teachers were categorized into four major themes; (1) problems concerning school students; (2) school community; (3) teaching profession; and (4) parents. The participants in the study informed that problems related to school students included lack of interest in learning, misbehaviors and lack of discipline, illiterate, and negative attitude towards learning the language.

Furthermore, Jaafar and Sreetharam (2010) analyzed lecturers' and TESL teacher trainees' perception towards the level of readiness. The researcher conducted a study on UTM's pre-service English teachers on their perceptions towards their level of readiness. As part of the purpose of the study, the researchers discovered that the methodology courses to were

significant in helping the trainees preparing for teaching task. The researchers further stated that the major principles and practices in English language teaching were introduced to the learners in methodology courses. Nevertheless, the study also revealed that majority of the pre-service teachers were not prepared in terms of subject competence and subject knowledge. The researchers further stated that many of the teacher trainees were still encountering problems in their English language proficiency.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design, Population, and Sampling

Qualitative research design was adapted to gather qualitative responses for the study. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is considered as a complex process because it involves a prolonged engagement of time, gathering words and sometimes pictures, focusing on participant views while analyzing information inductively, and using expressive and persuasive language to write about the process. A complex, holistic picture, analyzed words, specific views of informants, and a study conducted in its natural setting are able to be built by a researcher in a qualitative design. The population for this study was determined as the undergraduates enrolled in Bachelor of education (TESL) program from the Faculty of Education UiTM. A purposive sampling method was selected for determining the sample of this study.

The sample involved in this study were trainee teachers who had just completed their three months practicum in various secondary schools in the state of Selangor. The trainee teachers that participated were available for this study as they attended a one-day post mortem meeting with the Language Coordinator. According to the name list provided by the faculty, there were 84 TESL pre-service teachers identified for the open-ended questionnaire distribution. However, during the distribution phase, only 68 questionnaires were distributed and returned.

Instrumentation

The open-ended questionnaire was adapted from a PhD thesis of Thompson (2010). The thesis was obtained via on-line from the Georgia State University library website. A written consent was deemed not necessary because the administrator had mentioned that the work could be used as a reference for educational purposes. The open-ended questionnaire was used in the current study with a few modifications in terms of the level of the respondents, whereby, the undergraduate level was selected. The settings of the study were also modified. The research objectives and research questions remained as stated by Thompson. The questionnaire consisted of 9 questions that asked the pre-service teachers' perceptions in the following aspects; (1) specific classes that help prepared the trainees, (2) specific projects, theories, experiences incorporated in their classroom lessons during the teaching practicum, (3) how well the program has prepared the trainees for their practicum , (4) effectiveness of the program in preparing the pre-service teachers, (5) positive aspects of the program, (6) obstacles and dilemmas as a trainee, (7) suggestions to handle obstacles and dilemma, (8) recommendation, and (9) perceived preparedness of teaching. All returned questionnaires were labeled and numbered; Respondent student (Number 1-68).

Document analysis

There are three forms of documents namely personal document, physical evidence, and public records. This study focused on a public record document. It is the official and ongoing records of an organization. In the context of the study, the document used was the official document that contained the program structure, vision and mission, strategic plans, brief description of the English teacher education program, and objectives of the faculty. The document also contained the structure of the current teacher education program. All documents were acquired from the program coordinators in the Faculty of Education, UiTM. Document analysis is significant for the study to map the benchmark of the trainees' achievement.

Data analysis

The current study incorporated inductive approach when analyzing gathered data, which is, cyclical analysis followed by going back and forth to the data rather than sequential analysis. Additionally, the method is intended to generate new theories rather than testing the existing theories. Therefore, none of the categories and codes emerged and developed from the data were predicted from the inception of the study.

Trustworthiness and validity

To measure the trustworthiness of the qualitative questionnaire used as the primary data source, face validity was applied. The researchers employed a team of experts from the university, specifically Faculty of Education, UiTM Shah Alam, who have various educational background expertise. The team of experts was tasked to validate and review all the questions in the open-ended questionnaire as well as provide necessary feedback for amendment. This is significant to reduce ambiguity, leading questions, emotive questions, and stressful questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the qualitative data, the researchers identified four themes that best described the codes from the participants' responses: dealing with students in class, the pre-service teachers' self-belief, the supervisors, and the schools.

Dealing with students in class

Majority of the participants (39%) mentioned that dilemmas and obstacles encountered during practicum were related to school students. The participants' responses included descriptors such as "low proficiency", "proficiency level", "speaking only English rule", "student's native language", "negative perception of English", "student's attitude" and "student's attention".

Student's language proficiency

Students' language proficiency was one of the major concerns among the pre-service teachers during their practicum. Lack of proficiency among students would lead to declining of interest in the language, negative perception of English, improper use of the language, and against the rule of English-only in English classroom by using native language. A statement by respondent number 2 representing those who shared the same view stated that:

"The students nowadays tend to speak/use English language as how they were exposed by the media. This set of English language is not proper English but the students used it often in the classroom"

Respondent student 2

Respondent student 1 also stated that h/her difficulty was to deal with weak student who are unable to understand the English language. Thus making h/her lesson very challenging such as regularly provide explanations for words, repeating instructions, and explaining in native language. Another participant also expressed the same concern of students' language proficiency:

"The obstacles that I faced was in terms of the proficiency level of the students where the students can't understand English at all which required me to speak in my native language most of the time"

Respondent student 54

Students' low proficiency was also a main reason to bereluctant to speak in the language during English lesson. This was against the conditions of using only English in the English language classroom in order to practice the speaking element of the language. Respondent number 10 stated:

"Some students in my class refused to follow my instructions of speaking only English in my class. Out of my sight, they still spoke in other languages during English class. I think this is related to their language proficiency because most of the times when I asked questions in English, they answered me in Bahasa Malaysia"

Respondent student 10

Student's motivation in learning the language

Students' motivation is important in language learning. It creates the goals and objectives of learning the language and without it, the students are reluctant to learn the language in their classroom (Ushida, 2005). One factor that defines the students' motivation in language learning is the perception of the students towards the language itself. Negative perception can affect one's view of the language learned. The following participants mentioned about the negative perceptions of their students towards the English language:

"Students who have really low proficiency and no interest in learning have negative impression towards English language" *Respondent student 26*

"Lack of interest and motivation of students in learning English. In fact, the way they perceive the language as bahasa penjajah (foreign language)" *Respondent student 35*

Student's attitude in the classroom

Another concern regarding students as mentioned by the respondents was pertaining the students' attitude in the classroom. Respondent number 17 described the attitude of the students as unique and described it further as noisy, disrespectful, stubborn, and always seeking the teacher's attention. It is difficult to deal with the students; therefore, the pre-service teachers need to learn more on controlling the students by referring to knowledge learned in educational

psychology and classroom management course. Silvestri (2001) stated that teachers in the first year of teaching always faced difficulties in classroom management and it was ranked among many other obstacles they faced in the beginning stage of teaching.

English-language-only policy

According to Spahiu (2013), debate on the use of learners' native language in ESL classroom has always been the topic of discussion within the academia community for many reasons. Some argue that learners are more dependent on their native language to learn English and may affect the progress of mastering English. Others suggest that using native language in English language classroom may provide clearer explanation of difficult terms and save more time for other activities (Spahiu, 2013). The use of native language in the English language classroom had been the dilemma of some pre-service teachers as mentioned in the answer scripts. They were unsure whether to use it or not because they had been told that using other languages to teach English would cause them harm.   Some pre-service teachers who mentioned their concerns of using the native language were stated as respondent 29, 47 and 56 collectively:

"I faced dilemma of using full English in my class because students could not understand the English language well especially those in the beginner class"

Respondent number 23 stated other difficulty relating to school students. The respondent described it as difficult to acquire the students' attention to learn in the class because some of them were demotivated to learn due to very low language proficiency. Similarly, respondent 40 also mentioned that the trainee was out of idea on trying to attain the students' attention in the class. The trainees had tried many ways, but to no avail.

The findings of this study showed that the trainees also encountered school students' lack of interest in learning English. The findings were parallel with a large-scale nationwide study (Ministry of Higher Education & Ministry of Education, 2006) to explore English beginner teachers' experience in teaching. The data on problems faced by the beginner teachers were categorized into four major themes: (1) problems concerning school students, (2) school community, (3) teaching profession, and (4) parents. The participants in the study informed that problems related to school students include lack of interest in learning, misbehaviors and lack of discipline, illiterate, and negative attitude towards learning the language. Similarly, some participants in the current study also mentioned about students' attitude towards learning English, lack of interest in learning the language, and students' misbehavior in class.

The pre-service teachers' self-belief

The subsequent theme associated with research question number two is "The pre-service teachers' self-belief" in which, 15% of the participants communicated about their self-ability as English language teachers. Interestingly, after 3 years of studying in the program, some participants doubted their capability as teachers after the practicum and experienced for themselves their role as teachers. The descriptors from the participants responses that described their self-belief included "self-discovery", "own ability to teach", "lack of confidence", "lack of interest in teaching", and "personal ability to teach". In expressing their doubt in teaching profession, few questioned their own ability to teach and doubted on the lessons taught to the students as mentioned by the following respondents:

"I was always in dilemma whether the students understand my lessons or not. I was unsure what to teach them and how to teach them effectively"

Respondent student 33

"I face the dilemma of no interest to become a teacher. It has blocked my mind and jeopardizes my teaching skills"

Respondent student 38

Respondent number 55 also supported the view of others who questioned their self-belief as a teacher by stating that the trainee had difficulty in the language. The trainee tends to speak in other language at times in the classroom and stuttered due to lack of confidence in speaking the language as well as having pronunciation problem, thus the students may be affected by the teacher's difficulty in the language. However, according to Veenman (1984), beginning teachers usually feel that they have inadequate knowledge on the subject matter taught. Additionally, the author explains the shift for novice teachers from teacher training program to real teaching job as dramatic and traumatic.

The Supervisor's Roles

The next theme finalized from the participants' responses was the supervisor's roles during the teaching practicum. Twelve percent of the participants' responses included descriptors such as "supervisor's guidance", "structured to supervisors' instructions" and "conflict". Respondent number 12 mentioned that it was difficult to seek the supervisor's guidance. Supervisor's guidance and advice is needed to learn more, but the trainee was afraid to arrange for regular meeting because h/she understood the availability of the supervisor was very limited due to hectic tasks. Conflict with supervisors was inevitable among some participants. They described their supervisors as know-everything persons, therefore the supervisees had to follow structured guidelines and instructions that made them less creative in teaching as stated by respondent number 42 and 53.

The Obstacles Related to the Schools

The final theme identified to answer research question number 2 was associated with the school where the pre-service teachers conducted their practicum. A quick count by the researcher on the answer scripts revealed 11 participants or 17% mentioned about matters related to the schools. Some participants stated that the real world of teaching was very different as opposed to the micro teaching course. One participant stated:

"Somehow, microteaching did not come as close as real-life teaching at school"

Respondent student 15

Respondent 32 and 60 described the difference of microteaching classroom setting with the real classroom. For example, during the micro teaching course, a few of the participants acted as problematic students and conversely, they were taught methods and ways to control the problematic students during real teaching. However, in reality, the respondents mention that the students were worse than anticipated in the course. Furthermore, social culture was also identified as the obstacle faced by the participants their practicum. Respondent number 62 mentioned:

"The school culture and seniority of the teachers. My students cooperated with me well and I do not think the teaching process is challenging. The colleagues and teachers however are

always particular about their position and how we should do things their way in order not to appear rude"

Respondent student 62

Table 1 provides the overall view of the difficulties and challenges faced by the trainees in the program.

Students	Teachers	Mentors / supervisors	School
- Proficiency - Refuse to use English - Using native language - Difficulty understanding English - Attitude in class - Negative perception - Lack of interest - Students' attention - To use L1 or not	- Proficiency - Preparation to become a teacher - Personal ability in teaching - Lack of interest - lack of confidence	- Difficult to seek for guidance - structured to mentor's instruction - Conflict with supervisor	- Different situation from micro teaching - Real classroom experience - Rapport with other staff - School culture

Table 1: the overall view of the difficulties and challenges faced by the trainees in the program.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigates on the obstacles and challenges faced by the teacher-trainees during their first-hand experience in teaching. The findings from this study disclose four main categories of challenges which the pre-service teachers were subjected to, among them students, teachers' self-beliefs, supervisors and school environment. In a similar study, the Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Education (2006) discovered that most pre-service teachers encountered challenges in coping up with the students, the school community, the parents and the teaching profession itself.

The first main challenge revolves around the issues regarding the students. The pre-service teachers found difficulties in adapting to the students' low language proficiency, students' motivation in learning the language, students' obstinate attitude in the classroom and their reluctance to follow the 'English-Language-Only' policy in the classroom. Demiraslan-Cevik and Andre (2013) stated that pre-service teachers perceive unexpected classroom experience as difficulties because they have minimal experience to construct schemata in interpreting the students' behavior, which parallel with the study by Berliner (1981). Therefore, the pre-service teachers were underprepared when facing the students' conflicting situations in classroom. One of the ways to prepare these pre-service teachers to be more aware of the issues is by providing them with thorough education classroom management training classes. Giallo and Little (2003) mentioned that the pre-service teachers demanded for additional education in classroom management to cater to their perceived moderately prepared readiness based on their teaching experience.

The second challenge highlighted by the pre-service teachers was on their self-belief as a teacher in the teaching profession. The teachers are found to struggle with their own proficiency in English language, their mental preparation to become a teacher, their perceived personal

ability in teaching, lack of interest and lack of confidence in teaching. Mishra and Koehler (2006) proposed that authentic classroom experiences aid the pre-service teachers to develop deep thinking and reflection about their learning and teaching. In the present study, the pre-service teachers perceived themselves as inadequate and lack of confidence to become a teacher, which is an evidence of thereflection on their teaching. Concerning the negative self-beliefs on teaching, Feimen-Nemser (2001) stated that the pre-service teachers need to teach and at the same time learn to teach. Learning to teach is a process; hence, in the beginning phase of the pre-service teaching career, it is natural for the teachers to perceive themselves in inadequacy. One of the suggestions to enhance the pre-service teachers' confidence and self-esteem in teaching is to prepare them with extensive authentic practices through microteaching. Jaafar and Sreethram (2010) claimed microteaching as the best platform for building satisfactory level of mastery in teaching skills and behavior.

Obstacles related to school are third in rank of the main challenges the pre-service teachers dealt during their practicum. The obstacles recorded based on the respondents' answers include the differences of situation faced from microteaching and real practicum experiences, rapport with the other staff and adapting to the school culture. The teaching education programs prepared for the pre-service teachers are conducted to prepare them for the authentic teaching experience as close as possible in many aspects. However, field experiences are lacking for the pre-service teachers as prior practicum, they have not encountered the reality of the teaching ground on day to day basis similar to a permanent teacher at school. Blackwell and Pepper (2009) proved that field experience provides the only authentic learning experience in the university's teacher education program before the trainees proceed to undergo teaching practicum. Through abundant field experiences assignments during their training program, the pre-service teachers will be familiar with the school environment, reducing their worries and stress related to acclimatization of the teachers in school.

Lastly, the supervisors are also one of the issues perceived by the pre-service teachers as a trial during their practicum. The pre-service teachers experienced difficulties in seeking guidance from the supervisors, conflicts in supervisor-supervisee relationship and difficulties in following highly structured instruction from the supervisors. A research constructed by Gurbuz (2006) emphasized the significance of the supervisors' roles to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the pre-service teachers during their practicum. Hence, supervisors should provide more attention to the pre-service teachers as this group of educators is still as the stage, which requires guidance.

Conclusively, pre-service teachers experience trials and challenges in facing their practicum session such as the students, the teaching profession and the school and supervisors and extensive studies could be conducted to investigate further on factors for improvements to overcome the challenges faced by the pre-service teachers.

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