

CHALLENGES OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY

Vishalapriya Karunagaran and Rahimah Saimin

Faculty of Business, Information and Human Sciences, Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur

ABSTRACT

This present study was conducted to explore pre-service teachers' experience in teaching practice from a private university in Selangor. Information was gathered from five 8th semester pre-service teachers undergoing their Bachelor of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language on their experience of teaching practice. This qualitative study employed a semi structured interview for the data collection. The interview was audiotaped and transcribed. The transcribed audiotaped interview was analysed to identify the challenges faced by the pre-service teachers during the teaching practice. Also, this study investigated some possible ways that can be used by pre-service teachers to overcome the challenges during teaching practice. The findings revealed that teaching methods, communication and the students' behaviour were amongst the challenges that they faced. As a result, to overcome these challenges, having effective teaching methods and communication were suggested by the pre-service teachers.

Keywords:

pre-service teachers, ESOL, teaching practice

INTRODUCTION

Teaching programmes especially teaching practicum are intended to create experts who are set up to overcome the obstacles of the 21st century in the classroom. Mtika (2011) cited some empirical studies that "teaching practicum has attracted and continues to attract a lot of research interests across the world" (Korthagen, et al., 2006; Bates, 2008; Pitfield and Morrison, 2009; Du Plessis, Marais, Van Schalkwyk, and Weeks, 2010; Ssentamu-Namubiru, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). Also, "teaching practicum is also considered as one of the most critical components of teacher preparation with the greatest impact on teacher quality" (Zeichner, 2010; Graham, 2006; Tang, 2003). In addition, a "well-designed teaching practicum is needed to ensure that teacher training institutions produce high quality teachers" (Zeichner 2010; Sabar, 2004). Rainal Wempi Pasaka, Emi Emilia and Lulu Laela Amalia (2014) cited in their studies that "in literature concerning teacher education, it has been noted that field practicums help preservice teachers to integrate theories, learned in teacher training institutes, into practice" (Hudson & Hudson, 2012, p. 12; see also Tuli & File, 2009, p. 111-12; Hacıomeroglu, 2013, p. 132). Mtika (2011) also cited that "teachers enter the education profession and are attracted to teaching as a career because of what they view as the role of the teacher (Anhorn, 2008)". Nevertheless, "the education profession is a far more complex career than new teachers realize" (Cookson, 2005). "In order to be successful in such educational contexts, pre-service teachers must have field experiences with diverse populations. In the absence of a formal field component focused on ELLs, creative ways like volunteer teaching and tutoring opportunities can be developed to provide a venue for pre-service teachers to connect theory with practice in the field of English as a second language (ESL) education" (Baburhan Uzum, Mary Petrón, Helen Berg, 2014).

The researcher had experienced the similar scenario during her teaching practicum that she completed for four months in an international school. The researcher encountered a few disparities between expectations and reality in her teaching practicum experience. Before going for teaching practicum, the researcher thought that she could manage the classroom and the students in the class but in reality, she could not do so at the beginning. The researcher also thought that being a teacher is an easy job but in reality, it was totally not. At the beginning, the researcher lacked confidence and

interpersonal skills but then her confidence level and interpersonal skills improved over time. This realisation of the differences between her expectations and reality led the researcher to conduct a study on this topic with the intention of it being beneficial to practitioners in the education field.

Scholars and practitioners would benefit from the results of this study as the information provided described challenges that would assist pre-service teachers' perspectives and preparedness. Results in this study provide educational policymakers with information to support any professional development activities that correspond to the specific skills novice teachers wish to learn. From the results of this research study, educational leaders can discover strategies and tools to help new teachers in the classroom, those who want to become teachers, and those who train and hire new teachers.

Research Questions

- i. What are the challenges that the pre-service teachers face during teaching practice?
- ii. What are the possible ways to overcome the challenges during teaching practice from the pre-service teachers' perspective?

Research Objectives

- i. To investigate the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice.
- ii. To examine some possible ways that can be used by pre-service teachers to overcome the challenges during teaching practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Practice

"Teaching practice (or more popularly known as the practicum) is recognised as one of the most important aspects of a teacher education" (Farrell, 2008). Faysal Özdaş (2018) cited that "one of the broad objectives of teacher preparation programs is to ensure pre-service teachers to have a solid foundation to start their teaching professions" (Eryaman, 2008; Goodnough, Falkenberg & MacDonald, 2016). Teacher education institutions worldwide, including Malaysia, are under increasing pressure to prepare their student teachers better for the actual world of teaching, and the practicum provides an avenue by which this expectation may be addressed. "During practicum, the student teachers are given the opportunity to experience and 'experiment' their knowledge and skills in an authentic teaching and learning environment" (Kennedy, 1996). Dr. Sello Mokoena (2017) claim that "during teaching practice, student teachers observe subject teachers at work so as to learn about teachers' skills, strategies and classroom achievements" (cited in Komba and Kira, 2013). Importantly, Heri Retnawati, Eny Sulistyarningsih, Lau Yoke Yin (2018) claims that "the quality of the teaching practice is determined by several variables such as teacher and prospective teacher, mentor, and school where teaching practice is implemented". Yan & He (2010) assert that "it also provides them with and develops their knowledge about the teaching profession including: knowledge about people, self-knowledge, and self-control" (cited in Ali Ebrahim, Waleed Eyadat and Fahad Alshammari, 2017). As cited by Benedicto William Msangya Stelyus L, Mkoma Wang Yihuan (2016) state that "student-teachers also know the value of teaching practice and they perceive it as the important aspect of their preparation for the teaching profession since it provides for the real interface between student hood and membership of the profession" (Rakesh Ranjan, 2013).

In a case study, Urip Sulistiyo, Amirul Mukminin, Kemas Abdurrahman, and Eddy Haryanto (2017) gathered information on the implementation of teaching practicum to improve the quality of an English teacher education programme at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. The participants for this qualitative study were 20 teachers which is quite a big size, with five from recent graduates, beginner teachers, school principals and teacher educators respectively. All of them vary in age and teaching experience as well. For data collection, the three instruments used were background survey, document analyses and interviews. The findings indicated that teaching practicum projects undertaken during the programme provided suitable but limited experience for student teachers to translate their knowledge learnt at university into the real practice of teaching at school levels. For future improvement of the programme, the role of the supervising teachers and teacher educators in assisting student teachers during the teaching practicum project should be the priority. The organisation and management of school–university partnerships for schools taking part in the teaching practicum require attention to maximise benefits to student teachers.

In a similar qualitative study by Vo Thi Kim Anh, Vincent Pang and Lee Kean Wah (2018) studied efficiency of teaching practicum. This study was participated by seven fourth year students who were 22 years old. Three of them were males and the rest were females. Semi- structured interviews were employed in this study. The interviews were conducted in two stages which was before and after the students went for their teaching practice. Each of them was interviewed for approximately six hours which is considered as longer period. The findings indicated that the implementation of teaching practicum did not provide student teachers with sufficient opportunities to develop their teaching skill efficiently. Inappropriate methods of implementing teaching practicum, loose cooperation between the university and high schools, and insufficient support were major issues that caused the teaching practicum to be ineffective. Peer mentoring and a more suitable method of implementing the internship were recommended solutions to improve the effectiveness of teaching practicum.

Some Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers

Intan Safinas Mohd Ariff Albakri, Mohd Hassan Abdullah and Ahmad Jazimin Jusoh (2017) explored the focus of seven sixth semester student teachers' reflection and the challenges faced by them when they interacted in the real context during practicum. The students were enrolled in a Bachelor in Education with honours Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) programme. Data was obtained using reflective journal entries and semi structured interviews with all the participants by analysing according to the emerging themes. As a result, it was found that the main six themes that were focused by the student teachers in their reflections were managing learning, pedagogy and teacher attributes while difficulty in socializing with members of the institution, lack of professional support and lack of ability to manage a classroom.

A qualitative study (Nair & Ghanaguru, 2017) was conducted on TESL student teachers' concerning aspects of the preparation, role of supervisors, cooperating with teachers in providing support for the student teachers and teaching and evaluation stages of their 12 weeks practicum stint. This study made use of two types of instruments for data collection which are open-ended questionnaires and document analysis focussing on student teachers' reflections. The size of the sample for this study is huge which was 25 student teachers. The result revealed the effectiveness of pedagogical skills learnt in managing the practicum.

In an another similar qualitative research, Rainal Wempi Pasaka, Emi Emilia and Lulu Laela Amalia (2014) investigated the challenges of six pre-service EFL teachers of a Bachelor of Education (Sarjana Pendidikan) programme during their practicum. A qualitative research design with a phenomenology approach was employed. For the data collection, in-depth interviews were used and a thematic content analysis was used to identify, analyse, and report themes. The findings indicated that the challenges of the pre-service teachers were lesson preparation, classroom management, and

communication breakdown within their field practicum. As recommendation and justification for teacher preparation programmes, the pre-service teachers should be provided with strong theoretical frameworks in order to be able to design instructions based on practical experiences in classroom management, knowledge of English language and activities that instil and cultivate strong confidence in teaching. In addition, teacher preparation programmes should formally inform mentor teachers regarding their roles and responsibilities in the practicum.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative research design was employed to collect data by using a set of semi-structured interview to explore the challenges faced by the TESOL pre-service teachers who had completed their teaching practice and to investigate some possible ways to overcome the challenges faced by them. This study took place at a private university located on the west of Peninsular Malaysia.

The target population were the TESOL final year students who had completed their teaching practice in their final semester which was ninth semester. All participants were female. The pre-service teachers were in the range of 20 to 23 years old. They were varied in the places of teaching practicum placement from public to private schools.

An availability sampling procedure (i.e. a purposive sampling) was employed to select the participants in this study. Purposive sampling is when 'the researcher handpicks cases to be included in the study on the basis of their typicality' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000).

Each interview session was for approximately 15 minutes. The face-to-face interview for each participant was recorded and then was manually transcribed into word document. The researcher analysed the transcribed data and identified (i) challenges that the pre-service teachers faced and (ii) some possible ways that can be used by pre-service teachers to overcome the challenges faced during teaching practice. The transcriptions were carried out straight after the interviews to consider any clarification and were then put into file folders in a personal computer with a password. The transcripts were imported into the NVivo. The transcripts were coded and more nodes and sub-nodes were developed later on. Coded nodes on NVivo were reread to identify significant broader potential themes. A thematic content analysis was used to identify, analyse, and report themes.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the challenges that the pre-service teachers faced during teaching practice?

The challenges of the pre-service teachers were obtained from the interviews with the participants which were manually transcribed by the researcher to identify emerging themes.

a) Teaching Method

Participant 1 faced challenges in engaging with students during lessons and when she consulted her supervisor, she did not get any help from her supervisor.

“Once I thought her class and she knows her students better than me. There are a few students in the class who don't really engage in the lesson. So, when it comes to that, I asked for her help but she didn't help me. I even tried to get to know the students to see the students whether they have any problem through her, asked for her opinion but she brush it off.”

(Participant 1)

Participant 3 encountered challenges in ensuring that students speak in English Language. The students preferred using their mother tongue and therefore they were reluctant to converse in English.

“The second challenge was about their English language. They always speak in Mandarin and whenever I teach them, they always request me too speak in Mandarin.”

(Participant 3)

Participant 5 had to face a real challenge in understanding the student-centred learning style/process.

“First will be the language barrier. Then, the knowledge of English language. Next, is the students centred lesson to understand the flow even until the last day but I have learnt a lot about that.”

(Participant 5)

b) Communication

Participant 2 faced challenges in communication skills. A miscommunication occurred between her and a school teacher which affected her lesson and led to confusion with another teacher regarding a class period.

“Communication was a challenge because towards the end of my teaching practice there was some complications where the school had to terminate a teacher and replace her with a new teacher and the new teacher didn’t know that I was an intern there and I taught one of the grades and there was no communication that told me or him about the schedule. It was like, I went to the class and he was like why are you here and I was like why are you here. It was miscommunication and nobody notify me about that even my principal even though we have a close kind of relationship and you know they have this telegram group without me in it and that made feel a bit outcast I would say. I won’t get the details like what is happening in the school and stuff like that. Towards the end, my principal did not tell me that the schedule has changed and the lesson that I have prepared for that day has passed. So, I think the principal should have notified me about that.”

(Participant 2)

c) Students’ Behaviour

Participant 3 encountered inappropriate action by the students in the school compound.

“Yeah, they were a lot of challenges actually. The first one was the student’s behaviour. They were having issues in discipline. I encountered two students a girl and a boy were holding hands and when I saw them, they let go their hands.”

(Participant 3)

Research Question 2: What are the possible ways that can be used by preservice teachers to overcome the challenges faced during teaching practice?

There were a couple of possible ways (namely teaching method and communication) that could be used by pre-service teachers to overcome the challenges during teaching practice were extracted from the interview transcription.

a) Teaching Method

Participant 2 said a teacher should always be well-prepared as in having a few backup plans.

“You as a teacher have to be prepared. You have to have plan B and sometimes plan C or D. I face the technological sides in that school because they have projectors but sometimes it doesn’t work and sometimes you don’t have internet connection. So, you have to have a backup plan and sometimes you have to have spot on time like this doesn’t work what else work, you know? Sometimes, you might be blur because you don’t prepare yourself right, so you have to prepare yourself as a teacher.”

(Participant 2)

Participant 3 recommended to explore and use different teaching methods that works with the students. For example, Participant 3 pretended being not able to understand Mandarin to ensure the students spoke only in English language in the class.

“So, I pretend like not to be able to understand Mandarin and I just want them to translate Mandarin in English. As a teacher, you have to try few teaching methods in order for you to find the method that works with the students.”

(Participant 3)

Participant 5 said that in gaining knowledge one definitely needs to do homework beforehand and to observe and learn from the experienced teachers.

“For the knowledge of English language, just do homework before the class by studying the topic and going through your lesson plans. If you don’t understand something, just go and ask the teachers because sometimes Google can’t answer you. For the students centred, you just observe how the teachers conduct the classes and then do research on how the flow of the student-centred classes are by talking to the teachers by asking questions to the teachers to understand the flow of the student-centred class and by practicing.”

(Participant 5)

b) Communication

Participant 2 said that a pre-service teacher should communicate and comprehend information effectively. For instance, discussing or sharing ideas on some possible classroom activities or lesson plans to make sure that things are done correctly.

“I would say first and foremost communication because communication in everything is essential right. Without communication you can the message through because you can’t read people’s mind. Even though you are shy about it, just talk. Generally, you can have plans but through experiences, you can actually learn that if this plan doesn’t work what should I do next, later and what works especially with your students, colleagues. For lesson planning, I would say that if you have time during your 16 weeks of teaching practice, try and draft

out the lesson plan for the next day like maybe having these types of activity like adjectives or verbs. Just draft it so that when you go home when you read your it will easier for you to do the lesson plan. You can share your ideas and your friend can share their ideas and you can brainstorm the ideas like asking yourself does this work?"

(Participant 2)

Participant 3 personally dealt with the students to positively address students' unwelcome behaviour and an inappropriate remark.

"I went and talked to them personally because they are too young to be in relationship and told them it is inappropriate to behave like that in a school. Talk personally to the students if they make any mistakes before going to the principal. You have to know how to adapt to an environment and it takes time."

(Participant 3)

Participant 4 suggested that pre-service teachers should communicate to and reach out to other colleagues to expand and expose what and how a real teaching-learning process looks like.

"Just talk to the teachers and ask about their experiences so that you can get a good exposure of teaching life. If you are not confident enough, just fake it because only you know what you are feeling but students don't and they shouldn't know it."

(Participant 4)

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What are the challenges that the pre-service teachers faced during teaching practice?

There were three core challenges faced by the pre-service teachers: (i) teaching method, (ii) communication skills, and (iii) students' behaviour.

These findings concur with findings of Peter Mika that "Trainee teachers' experiences of teaching practicum: Issues, challenges, and new possibilities" which found few challenges including teaching method, communication skills but not for students' behaviour.

The current study also has similar results with a study on "Lesson from Experience: ESL Student Teachers' Reflection during Practicum through Reflective Journal" by Intan Safinas Mohd Ariff Albakri, Mohd Hassan Abdullah and Ahmad Jazimin Jusoh in 2017 which explored the focus of student teachers' reflection during practicum and identified the challenges faced by the student teachers.

Research Question 2: What are the possible ways that can be used by preservice teachers to overcome the challenges faced during teaching practice?

Two possible ways were suggested by the pre-service teachers to overcome the challenges during teaching practice which include: (i) teaching methods and (ii) communication skills.

According to the findings, these two possible ways can be used by pre-service teachers to overcome the challenges discussed above (namely teaching method, communication, and students' behaviour).

In a similar qualitative study by Vo Thi Kim Anh, Vincent Pang and Lee Kean Wah (2018), the authors found that peer mentoring and teaching methods are suitable solutions for challenges faced by pre-service teachers. Communication skill is incorporated in peer mentoring as well. So, the findings of this study do support findings in past studies.

CONCLUSION

This case study investigated challenges faced by TESOL pre-service teachers from a private university who had completed their teaching practice. Being well-prepared in all aspects before going for the teaching practice is important. Therefore, this study is hoped to give an exposure to the future pre-service teachers to face the reality of their teaching practice. Generally, each of the pre-service teachers will have their own ways to solve problems but through this study they might get some insights on how the reality of teaching practicum could be and be prepared for it.

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