

ESL Trainee Teachers' Readiness Towards 21st Century Teaching Practices from A Private University

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Abstract

In order to provide quality education, there are a lot of preparations needed for an English as a Second Language (ESL) trainee teacher to teach in a school. Practicums are intended to provide trainee teachers with authentic practical work experiences in teaching to enrich their professional wisdom. Hence, this study attempts to investigate the level of ESL trainee teachers' overall readiness towards practicum teaching. Questionnaire was used in this study to gather data on 15 ESL trainee teachers from a private University in Kinta, Ipoh. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data and the results show that the participants readiness towards 21st century teaching was high (mean = 3.61).

Keywords: Readiness, practicum teaching, ESL trainee teacher

1.0 Introduction

Education system requires transformation at all levels due to the high competition in education in a global environment. "Under the Government Transformation Programme (GTP), a lot of initiatives introduced as National Key Result Areas (NKRA) have been set out to transform the national education system" (Ibrahim, Adzra'ai, Sueb, and Dalim, 2019). The process of transformation includes all critical aspects in education such as the process of teaching and learning of students', the required preparations for teachers training, and how well the Ministry of Education (MOE) itself operates. According to James, Talin, and Bikar (2019), in order to keep up with today's competitive world "the Education Blueprint 2013-2025 aims to raise the Malaysian education standard to an international level and prepare Malaysian children for the needs of the 21st century". The Malaysian Education Blueprint highlights the education system in Malaysia and how it has moved from the traditional focus in incorporating the 21st century teaching practices that includes elements of leadership, ethics, and spirituality.

The blueprint was welcomingly different as it meets the requirements and future demands to ensure Malaysia keeps in pace with today's competitive world. According to Fitriani et al, (2020), the syllabus of all subjects are improvised in order to incorporate elements of scientific skills, creative and critical thinking skills, scientific attitudes and moral values. As mentioned in the blueprint, approaches to teaching and learning have also been improvised focusing on the critical techniques which are questioning, constructivism, contextual and mastery learning.

There are a lot of preparations needed for an English as a Second Language (ESL) trainee teacher to teach in a school. In order to meet the expectations of 21st century education, practicum teaching allows to prepare students to be a beginner teacher. Practicums are intended to provide trainee teachers with authentic practical work experiences in teaching to enrich their professional wisdom. They are given the opportunity to develop “the skills of reflection with the support of mentors and tutors and to (re)construct their identities as teacher practitioners” (Lawson et al, 2015). There are many researchers conducted on ESL trainee teachers to evaluate their readiness and the challenges they had faced while undergoing their practicum program. In order to teach the subject, it is necessary for ESL trainee teachers to equip themselves with appropriate 21st century teaching practices. Through this way, the experiences gained will prepare them for their future in teaching. Hence, this study focuses on the ESL trainee teachers’ readiness towards 21st century teaching practices in one of the private universities in Kinta, Ipoh.

Objectives

1. To investigate the level of ESL trainee teachers’ overall readiness towards practicum teaching.

Research Question

1. What are the ESL trainee teachers’ level of readiness towards 21st century practicum teaching?

2.0 Literature Review

The 21st century has witnessed tremendous changes in all walks of life, particularly in the education field and English is no exception. According to Junaidi and Hashim (2021), the implementation of the 21st century in both learning and teaching emphasizes more immersive and interactive learning than the traditional teacher-centered learning. The way of teaching focuses more on developing students’ understanding according to their learning needs and style. According to Rao (2019), English as a Second Language (ESL) trainee teachers’ have been using a variety of authentic teaching materials, such as brochures, pamphlets, pictures, videos, audios, and PowerPoint presentations to encourage, motivate, and satisfy the students’ needs and interests. Besides, Nold (2017) mentioned that critical thinking skills, such as exploring the why and how encourages students to practice and perfect deeper thinking in order to face the real world.

Yet there are a lot of preparations needed for the trainee teacher before he or she could teach in a school and implement the skills needed in the 21st century teaching and learning process. According to Razak, Alakrash, and Sahboun (2018), in the 21st century classroom, trainee teachers are required to be prepared in adapting to new ways to teach, such as implementing technology, authentic materials, and encouraging critical thinking as it enhances students’ learning process. “Mastering content standards and learning standards, students’ existing knowledge, providing resources and selecting appropriate combinations of strategies and skills should be emphasized by the trainee teachers” (Mansor and Masran, 2021).

However, there are a number of challenges faced by trainee teachers’ “who are building stones of the educational system, as well as problems during their profession” (Baskan and Ayda, 2018). The lack of preparation and training at the institution level could significantly affect trainee teachers’ readiness to teach in schools. Even though they are aware of what is expected from them, findings have also revealed that the preparation towards practical teaching to provide them with the skills needed to perform in schools is insufficient in the university (Nair and Ghanaguru, 2017). Some had also mentioned they were not well

prepared but due to the high expectations from their supervisors, ESL trainee teachers' ended up stressed and performed poorly (Nair and Ghanaguru, 2017). Besides, findings have also revealed that practicing teachers who lack knowledge of using technology to teach do not encourage trainee teachers to implement them in their teaching process (Razak, Alakrash, and Sahboun, 2018). Hence, "lack of support, and lack of training and development opportunities" have significantly affected ESL trainee teachers' readiness (Razak, Alakrash, and Sahboun, 2018).

Besides, ESL trainee teachers constantly struggle in meeting the demands of 21st century education goals. The most vital area to be particularly good in is to be creative in using technology to fulfill learning goals (Ghavifekr and Rosdy, 2015). However, ESL trainee teachers struggle in meeting the 21st century educational goals and one of the reasons is due to the pressure of higher authorities. Based on a study conducted on 25 trainee teachers in identifying their teaching experiences, the results show that "they worried that the supervisors and cooperating teachers expected them to follow his or her ways, being strict and rigid and having different schools of thoughts and opinions" (Nair and Ghanaguru, 2017).

This has affected them to identify the appropriate teaching practices. As educators, teachers are always finding new ways to innovate and try new things in the classroom to support the students' learning process. However, identifying the appropriate teaching practices can be quite challenging due to the diverse students in a classroom. "Student diversity is a multifaceted phenomenon; however, the goal is singular and specific which suggests that through our practices we should overcome the barriers to participation and facilitate increased participation of every member in the class" (Ainscow, 1999, as cited in Awang-Hashim et al, 2019). Findings have suggested that preservice teachers should undergo training in order to understand and be aware in teaching culturally diverse students (Chouari, 2016). Even so, preservice teachers are not provided with enough training "to teach effectively in multicultural classrooms" (Sharma, 2005, as cited in Alismail, 2016).

3.0 Research Methodology

This study aimed to study the ESL trainee teachers' readiness towards 21st century teaching practices. A total of 15 ESL trainee teachers from the Faculty of Social Sciences, from a private University in Ipoh, Perak took part in this study. This is a quantitative study. Questionnaire was used to investigate the level of ESL trainee teachers' overall readiness towards practicum teaching. According to Sal and Raja (2016), the main purpose of using questionnaires is to extract the data needed in a much quicker and efficient way. In relation to that, it provided the researcher with opportunities to gather data from real life references regarding the focus of the study. Muslimah (2018) cited in her research that descriptive statistics are used to analyse the data that has been gathered by describing it without the intention to conclude in general. Hence, descriptive statistics was used in this study to analyse the data collected for the questionnaire.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Table 1 : Questionnaire (Part B)

1. I am aware of teachers' responsibilities.
2. I have the capacity to work with other people.
3. I have the skills related to teaching.
4. I have problem solving ability.
5. I possess an excellent understanding of 21st century teaching practices.

6. I frequently engage students in activities that promote creativity and innovation.
7. I frequently engage students in activities that promote critical thinking.
8. I frequently engage students in activities that promote problem solving.
9. I frequently engage students in activities that promote communication and collaboration.
10. Technology plays a vital role in supporting 21st century learning.
11. I am confident with using technology as a tool to teach 21st century higher-level skills.
12. I possess the ability to assess students’ mastery of 21st century skills.
13. 21st century skills are important in determine students’ success at workplace in the future.
14. I need professional development to increase my knowledge about 21st century skills.
15. I need professional development to build teaching for 21st century students.
16. I understand the responsibilities as an ESL teacher in the 21 st century environment.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Part B

Statistics																
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	A11	A12	A13	A14	A15	A16
N Valid	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	4.00	4.00	3.73	3.333	3.66	3.73	3.80	3.60	4.00	3.86	3.53	3.46	3.80	2.66	2.73	3.80
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.000	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
Mode	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	2.00	3.00	4.00
Std. Deviation	.000	.000	.79881	1.04654	.48795	.45774	.41404	.50709	.00000	.35187	.51640	.63994	.41404	.89974	.88372	.41404

Table 1 above demonstrates the items that were asked in the questionnaire that answered research question 1, ESL trainee teachers; level of readiness towards 21st century practicum teaching. Part B of the questionnaire consisted of 16 items and was actively answered by the respondents. The results of part B of the questionnaire is illustrated in table 2. Based on the results in table 2, thirteen items scored above average with the highest mean for item 1 which is 4.00 (SD=0.00) and item 2 which is 4.00 (SD=0.00). Item 1 and 2 (refer to table 1) highlighted the awareness of teachers’ responsibilities and having the capacity to work with other people which is vital in the 21st century teaching environment. Majority of the respondents had also strongly agreed that they were aware of the responsibilities and were able to work with their colleagues. This explains the lowest mean scores in Part B (refer to table 2) that have gone below average for items 14 which is 2.66 (SD=0.89) and 15 which is 2.73 (SD=0.88). Item 14 and 15 (refer to table 1) highlighted the trainees teachers’ needs in professional development to increase knowledge about 21st century skills, and needs in professional development to build teaching for 21st century students.

The concern-based model demonstrates stages of concerns as proposed by Fuller and Brown in 1975 and the four developmental stages, which beginner trainee teachers go through when they begin their practicum as proposed by Ryan in 1986. In the first stage, which is the self-concerns stage focusing on internal concerns in which ESL trainee teachers' are usually anxious as theory and practice are different. "Internal factors that influence the understanding of the teacher's role are created by the teachers themselves and can be classified into two categories: the teacher's own beliefs about which role is important and the teacher's expectations for his or her role" (Makovec, 2018). However, the results from the questionnaire had shown that the participants were indeed very well prepared as all of them had strongly agreed that they were aware of the teachers' responsibilities, especially in the 21st century environment.

"The 21st-century skillset is generally understood to encompass a range of competencies, including critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, meta-cognition, communication, digital and technological literacy, civic responsibility, and global awareness" (Kim, Raza, and Seidman, 2019). In relation to that, participants had agreed that they frequently engage students in activities that promote creativity and innovations, critical thinking, problem solving, and communication and collaboration. This is to ensure that students will be able to not only successfully learn in the classroom, but to also ensure that they are able to thrive in a world where change is constant, hence learning never stops especially in the working environment. This was strongly agreed by the majority of the participants through the questionnaire which emphasizes on the importance of 21st century skill to determine students' success at the workplace in the future. The emphasis on the focus of 21st century skills is to prepare students for the workplace environment and to develop these skills, "students need instructions and opportunities for collaboration and problem solving" (St. Louis et al, 2021).

Besides, technology plays a vital role in supporting 21st century learning. According to Raja and Nagasubramani (2018), the use of modern technology and tools increases the learning and interactivity of students. This is because the teaching and learning process becomes much more interactive when aided by technology, resulting in the transferring of knowledge to be more convenient and effective. Based on the results from part B of the questionnaire, the majority of the respondents have a high level of readiness in applying technology when teaching as they are confident with using tools to teach higher-level skills. Hence, from the overall results that were obtained, it undoubtedly shows a positive impact on ESL trainee teachers' level of readiness that they were very well prepared for the 21st century practicum teaching.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Currently there are many trends and changes taking place in the education field. Identifying the general readiness of ESL trainee teachers towards 21st century teaching practices is vital as they are the main sources in development of the students. In relation to that, practicum has been a critical aspect in teacher education programmes as it provides real-classroom exposure. "Developing a 21st century teacher further requires the inculcation of creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration through effective instructional strategies" (Ibrahim, Adzra'ai, Sueb, & Dalim, 2019). This includes the integration of technology to support more teaching methods for the benefit of the students of today's generation. Hence, it can be concluded that the ESL trainee teachers from the private university had a high level of readiness in implementing 21st century teaching practices in their classroom.

Recommendation

Future researchers could consider conducting this study but with a larger scale instead of focusing only on one University. They could focus on ESL trainee teachers from multiple Universities all over Malaysia to find out their readiness towards 21st century teaching practices, perceptions towards challenges faced, and their general needs prior to going for practicum. By expanding the research into several Universities, the findings of the study will be more reliable and in detail. Moreover, there are a lot of preparations needed for an ESL trainee teacher. The expectations of meeting 21st century education and implementing appropriate practices can be a huge pressure on ESL trainee teachers. Hence, through this research, and to upcoming research based on this study, both University and school supervisors will be aware of the needs of trainee teachers in today's era.

Limitation

There were several limitations that were identified when conducting this study. To begin with, many senior students who had completed their studies and practicum much earlier were not able to participate as they would not be able to contribute and would defeat the whole purpose of the study. Besides, due to the pandemic, one of the recent seniors from the private university were unable to go for their practicum. This had limited the researchers' scope in gathering more participants for her study. Moreover, the results from this study can't be generalized as the participants were all from the same private university.

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