

# WHAT DO TRAINEE TEACHERS LEARN THROUGH FIELD WORK?

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**Abstract:** To what extent does real classroom experience provide essential experience for trainee teachers, especially in the domain of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)? This paper describes the experience trainee teachers gain through classroom observation and in-depth interviews with the observed teachers. This study involved fifteen second-year TESL trainee teachers from the education faculty who registered in the curriculum and pedagogy course. The trainee teachers were not expected to teach but to observe and reflect teachers' teaching in real classroom environment. After they observed the teachers, they conducted an in-depth interview with the observed teachers. Subsequently, they wrote a report and submitted it to the class instructor who is also the researcher. They were then asked to present their reports to their classmates. After the presentations, the trainees underwent focus group interviews. The findings indicate that classroom observation is an essential component in teacher training. It enhances teacher trainees' knowledge of the job specifications for English teachers at the secondary levels in Malaysia. Furthermore, they could also see the importance of relating the lessons learned in the university and the real teaching practices. The findings are useful for teacher training institutions to prepare trainee teachers with relevant knowledge and skills to be dynamic and effective teachers.

**Keywords:** Classroom Management Strategies, Trainee Teachers, Teachers' Roles, Teaching Styles, Assessment toward Teaching Strategies.

## INTRODUCTION

It is very important for trainee teachers to experience teaching in real classroom environments to prepare them with the relevant knowledge and skills to be dynamic and effective teachers (Rosaline, 2011). The trainee teachers engaged in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) in the Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia (UKM) must learn and apply the methods of teaching in the form of mini or micro teaching. Therefore, there is a need for these second-year TESL students to visit schools and observe how English teachers in the schools conduct their classes. This study was conducted to explore what these trainee teachers learnt in terms of the various types of teachers' roles in secondary schools.

This exercise is performed because trainee teachers should be prepared with relevant educational courses, as Jonas (2015) proposed that they need to be given a clearer picture of what the current needs and practices in schools and colleges are. By doing so, the trainee teachers could become effective teachers. Allowing only selected qualified teachers who had undergone different stages of training could help them to become effective teachers, thus

benefiting the students (Darling Hammond, 2012). Trainee teachers should be made aware of teachers' roles in the classroom so that they can know what to expect when they start teaching, as the real situation might not develop as expected. They should also know when and how to apply the knowledge and methods learnt in the university within their classrooms, as Siti Salina and Lee Lai Fong (2008) proposed. According to these researchers, trainee teachers need to reflect on other teachers' teaching to see whether the methods used in the real classroom could help develop students' learning intellectually, morally and socially. They also suggested that trainee teachers could also learn more about classroom management and gain more knowledge and experience by discussing and working with other teachers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theory of Social Studies**

This activity was conducted based on the theory of social studies. According to Bandura (1973), who developed this theory, people learn from others through observation, learning, copying and modelling. When people learn from others, they are influenced by what is happening around them. Whether they realise it or not, they actually copy what others are doing. This results in the inauguration and later retention of the actions copied.

In this study, the trainee teachers had to observe the English teachers' role with regard to teaching methods and classroom management techniques in secondary schools. When they returned to the university, they presented their observations and participated in a discussion session with their classmates and lecturer. Then they started the screening process, during which they identified the teaching pedagogy that works best in multiple contexts. If they perceive any of the teaching pedagogy as ineffective, they discuss the reasons during their discussion. In doing so, the level of effectiveness of a teaching method could be measured by the trainee teachers.

### **Teachers' roles in teaching English as a second language**

Harmer (2015) mentioned that a teacher not only is seen as a transmitter to transfer knowledge, but a teacher should also be able to create a lively learning environment. The lively environment promotes active learning, which makes learning more meaningful. He also stated that teachers could be perceived as facilitators, because they need to assist with students' activities in class. Teachers were also seen as controllers, in which capacity they take charge of the class during learning or other activities. Sometimes teachers also act as prompters in which they encourage students to think creatively and become more independent in their learning. Teachers also act as participants, especially in discussions, to encourage their students to be more confident in presenting ideas without being afraid of making mistakes. Teachers are also perceived as resources to which students could always refer if they come across any problems in the learning process. They also serve as tutors to teach and guide their students during the task completion. Teachers are often perceived as performers, because they have to perform in front of the audience to make the learning process entertaining and interesting. Teachers should know how to shift among their various roles depending on the situations and settings.

In order to create a learning environment that can attract students' interest, teachers must be able to tackle the challenge of creating a pleasant environment in the classroom (Deewaele, 2014). Delaney et al. (2010) stated that effective teachers should learn and understand various personality traits such as diligence, friendliness, and tolerance in order to attract students' attention. Dornyei and Murphy (2003) also suggested that teachers should

encourage students to get involved in the decision-making process, as this could help them adopt autonomous learning and help them enjoy the learning process even more.

### **Reflective Practice**

Effective teachers need to improve their teaching skills and enhance their knowledge about teaching constantly. Reflective practice was one of the ways to help teachers to improve their teaching. Hanafi et al. (2014) stated that reflective practice was one of the most important elements in teaching, as it could serve as the bridge between practices and theories, thus contributing to better understanding about effective teaching. Reflective practice could also be used to help teachers to improve themselves and develop their knowledge. Rahimi (2008) stated that teachers' personal experiences and background knowledge were the key elements to teachers' development. He also claimed that self-assessment and reflective thinking were the ways to evaluate the teaching process.

Boyd and Harris (2010), on the other hand, suggested that reflective practice is "*a well-defined and crafted practice that carries very specific meaning and associated action.*" This perspective involves motivating teachers to write down their daily encounters in the classroom. They added that reflection is only considered effective when teachers are able to make meaning from the situation so that they could comprehend the overall lessons to be learned.

Bullough and Gitlin (2013) agreed that an effective teacher should be able to think of his classroom practices and find ways to make adjustments and improvements to his teaching. Arthur-Kelly et al. (2013) asserted that reflective practitioners always take their time studying their innermost views about behaviours and manners and thus review their actions. This is not just reporting on what happened in class on a particular day; teachers should also note the causes of the activities they did in class. This is because effective reflection helps teachers to examine the reasons behind every action taken to develop understanding of the issues being investigated.

Effective teachers promote reflective practice, as it helps them evolve and better understand classroom management (Kiely, 2013). Goh and Matthews (2011) agreed that teachers could help enlighten issues pertaining to students' motivation, challenges encountered, and ways to overcome those challenges. Munirah and CheNoraini (2014) suggested that it triggers awareness and leads teachers to make changes in the way they teach. This will result in teachers to be more efficient in teaching. This effort is also parallel to the curriculum of teacher training in Malaysia, which focuses on autonomous learning. Ismail (2012) also believes that, if trainee teachers are able to understand the changes and improvements brought by reflective practice and apply them in their teaching, then the goal of education programmes to produce graduates with better understanding of teaching can be achieved.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach in order to focus more on the details of the phenomena from different perspectives and the meaning given from the perspective of respondents (Noraini, 2010). Researchers used focus group interviews (FGI), document analysis using the respondents' reflective notes (RN), and students' oral presentations (SOP).

### **Oral Presentations (OP)**

Respondents were asked to provide an oral presentation on what have they learnt through their observations and engage in an interview session with the English teachers in school. The duration of their individual presentation was 10 minutes. The slides and script of their presentation were analysed to identify appropriate themes. Later, they were interviewed in focus groups.

### **Focus Group Interviews (FGI)**

One of the instruments for a qualitative approach is through focus group interviews. Interview sessions were chosen so that researchers could further investigate and gain specific and clearer explanation and elaboration from the respondents. According to Morgan (1988), meaningful interviews could involve two or more people at a time. For the purpose of this study, the researchers used the focus group interview as a technique for collecting data. The face-to-face interview session involved the trainee teachers.

Interviews can be divided into three which are the structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview (Merriam, 1998). In this particular study, the researchers used semi-structured interviews so that the respondents could give a detailed explanation and elaborate on their answers and opinions.

There are three groups of respondents that have been interviewed. Each of the groups consists of 4 to 5 respondents. Each interview session lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. Focus group interviews were chosen so that respondents could get some ideas through their group members' responses during the interview session (Patton 1987). The researchers used this research tool so that the respondents would feel more comfortable answering the questions and to create a more relaxed atmosphere.

The interview session were recorded and were transcribed verbatim. Later, the respondents were asked to read the transcription and agreed to make some corrections (if there were any) to the transcription. The transcription was later coded. The data were analysed manually to develop appropriate themes. Respondents were marked with numbers 1 to 14.

### **Reflective Notes (RN)**

Creswell (2005) suggested that reflective notes could be made valuable in qualitative studies. Other than interviewing the English teachers observed, respondents also wrote reflective notes which were analysed for this study. Even though the respondents interviewed and observed the teachers in groups, the reflective notes must be written and prepared individually. The three-page reflective notes were also given as one of the assignments that needed to be submitted to the lecturer, who is also the researcher. In the reflective notes, respondents must attach the pictures taken throughout the interview sessions with the English teacher in school, with the use of teaching aids such as PowerPoint slides and whiteboards. The reflective notes were later evaluated. The total marks for reflective notes represented 10 percent. Marks were given to ensure that the respondents prepared comprehensive reflective notes.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings indicate that the respondents have learnt about English teachers' roles in teaching and their classroom management strategies. They were also able to evaluate the teaching methods used by teachers to teach English in secondary schools. However, in this paper, the teachers' teaching methods are not discussed.

## **Teachers' Roles**

Teachers' roles were mentioned in all reflective notes, interviews, and oral presentations. Respondents could see the different roles of a teacher and why the teacher employed different approaches in teaching. There are three main roles of a teacher that have been reported: (1) Facilitator, (2) Expert in the field, and (3) Motivator.

### **a) Facilitator**

As a facilitator, teachers do not make the class a teacher-centered lecture. Teachers explain concepts in detail and clarify matters that were not understood by the students using a few methods. The first method is through using dual language. This method is used especially when dealing with weak students to help them understand the concepts better. Here are the statements by 3 respondents (Respondent 1, 9 and 10) in the focus group interviews:

*"Using dual language/ code switching for weak students."* (Respondent 1; FGI)

*"Teacher used dual language because the students were from weaker class."*

(Respondent 10; FGI)

Respondent 9, on the other hand, explained that, if English is used thoroughly, students will lose interest in learning because they will not understand what is being said by the teacher. The use of a dual-language technique (English and Malay) also helped the students to slowly understand and develop an interest in learning English.

During the focus group interview, Respondent 8 stated that teachers were also seen as facilitators when they answered students' questions in English despite being asked in Malay. The teacher demonstrated the meaning of the words using body language and giving an analogy. In addition, the teacher also drew pictures to give meaning to the words to facilitate visual learning.

### **b) Expert in the field**

Respondents 8 and 9 stated in their reflective notes that the teacher used the drilling technique to train students in pronouncing words and sentences correctly. Respondent 3 mentioned in her oral presentation that the teacher used the *Grammar Translation Method* to translate an English poem in English into Malay. Meanwhile, Respondent 4 stated that the teacher corrects the mistakes made by the students directly and explains the mistakes made so that the students would not repeat the same mistakes in the future. Some of the mistakes that were commonly corrected were related to pronunciation and grammatical errors. The teacher asked the students to read poems to help improve their reading and poem recitation. Respondent 5 mentioned this in his presentation:

*"Teacher asked the students to read poem to help improve reading skills. Teacher corrects the students' pronunciation"*

The technique was also witnessed by Respondent 6 (*"Teacher corrects students' pronunciation directly and prudently. She uses drilling technique for her students"*). Respondent 6 also mentioned in his oral presentation that the meaning of words was explained using explanations that are relevant to the students' surroundings. On the other hand, the demonstration technique was also used to help students understand the topic of the lessons. The *Total Physical Response* technique was also used during which the teacher acts as a model to the students, and instructions were given in English and students attempted to mimic the teacher. As the expert of this field, the teacher could identify the most appropriate method to be used for students of different ages and language proficiency levels.

### **c) Motivator**

The teacher also plays the role as motivator by encouraging students to get involved in activities and continuously praising them if they managed to complete the activity correctly. The teacher encourages the students to bring their own dictionary and write their own vocabulary notebooks (Respondent 10). As a motivator, teachers always encourage the students to continuously use English even though they have made mistakes in the sentences and pronunciations. As Respondent 1 stated in the interview,

*“There are students who actively responding to the teacher despite using ‘broken English’. This sure help the students build their confident level and slowly would help improving their English.”*

During the presentation, some of the respondents mentioned in all three research tools namely reflective notes, focus group interviews and oral presentations, teachers who encouraged their students to use English, but the students were not confident enough to use the language. The teacher then praised the students, even though they used the simplest English and made some grammatical mistakes.

### **Classroom Management Strategies**

Other than teachers' role, respondents also witnessed the way teachers conducted their classrooms, especially in implementing discipline to the students. Some of it occurred through the use of individual names to attract the students and help build good rapport as well as using positive and negative stimulation. The teacher should not stand statically but should move around the classroom to ensure that students are more disciplined, pay full attention, and give the teacher their full concentration and follow the teacher's instructions during the teaching and learning process. The teacher could also approach the weaker students and asked them to check their understanding.

*“Teacher punished problematic students. Teacher also praised good students who at least tried to answer her questions.”* (Respondent 5; RN and OP)

*“Teacher praised students who behaved in her class”* (Respondent 9, FGI; RN, OP)

*“Teacher called the students' name to get the attention and build good rapport”* (Respondent 3; FGI, RN)

*“Teacher managed to conduct the class well. Teacher moved in different directions to ensure that students were more disciplined. Teacher also approached students especially the weaker ones and asked whether or not they have any problems understanding”* (Respondent 2; OP)

Respondents also noticed that warnings should be made gradually. In the beginning, teachers will warn the students gently. However, if the warnings are ignored by the students, they should be punished to overcome discipline problems and to ensure that they do not disturb the others. It could also ensure that the learning process is more effective. Normally students who are bored will have the tendency to make noise. Therefore, the teacher should be well planned and conduct activities that would involve discussions to prevent students from chatting with their friends in class.

*“For those who always went out to the washroom and disturbing their friends, teacher will warn them gently at the beginning. If they still ignored the teacher, students will be punished in front of the whole class”* (Respondent 9; FGI)

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*“There are also teachers who brought cane with them. This was meant to students even though that the teachers did not use it against them. effective technique to make students pay more attention in class is through class more interactive and involving all of the students”* (Respondent 10;

*“Teacher did not raise her voice even though that she had her cane with her. She made the class more interactive. Students pay more attention because they were afraid of making grammatical mistakes. They were afraid that their friend might laugh at them.”* (Respondent 2; FGI)

To ensure that all students pay attention to the lesson and are not left behind, the teacher used the questioning technique for the weaker students. This technique was used to measure the level of understanding among the students. The teacher reported having to take some precautions to avoid misunderstanding among students.

*“Teacher will ensure all students to ask questions especially to the weaker ones.”*  
(Respondent 3; OP)

*“The questions were asked to students especially to the weaker ones. If they failed to answer then teacher will repeat the lesson”* (Respondent 14; OP)

*“If students could not answer the questions, teacher will asked the students to try to understand and explain it to the whole class on what have they learnt on that day”*  
(Respondent 4; FGI)

In order to overcome vocabulary problems, the teacher asked the students to bring their own dictionary to class. If the students are having a hard time understanding and using the English-English dictionary, the teacher will encourage the students to use a dual-language dictionary.

As Respondent 2 mentioned in his report, the teacher used the mentor-mentee technique. This approach represents a programme in which the student with a high language proficiency level helps students with low language proficiency. He also mentioned the same thing in his presentation and interview session.

Respondent 9 reacted in the report and during the interview session and mentioned a problematic student who caused trouble in class; the teacher later went to the student, patted his shoulder, and asked him to answer a question. Through this approach, problematic students could get the teacher’s attention and probably help them out.

### **Assessment toward Teaching Strategies**

The findings indicated that students also had made some assessments of the teaching strategies and activities conducted in class. For example, as Respondent 1 wrote in his report, the teacher was witnessed ignoring a student who does not follow her instruction to pick up her chair. This caused the student to lose focus and lack concentration in class. The respondent reported that the teacher should have personally confronted the student and warned him, since the teacher acts as the guardian to the students. This was also discussed during the focus group interview. Some of the other respondents also expressed the same view. Respondents 5 and 14 stated that,

*“Teacher should take some action towards the student who did not pay attention in class as this would also affect the other students. It could be a bad influence to the other students as they will easily lose focus and missed the lesson. The best is for the teacher to advise the students individually”* (Respondent 5; FGI)

*“Teacher should have called the students who was not paying attention and playing outside of the class. Teacher should not abandon the student because gradually they will lose interest to learn”* (Respondent 14; FGI)

Many respondents made assessment of the use of English between the teacher and students in class. Most of the respondents mentioned in the interview and report that the teacher should have used English more during the teaching and learning process to expose the students to the language. This is because the students could learn new vocabularies and also learn how to use them. Students could also learn how to pronounce words correctly from the teacher throughout the lesson. Respondents also commented on how students should be encouraged to use English as much as possible to help them boost their confidence to use the language. This can be facilitated through group discussions and so on. Confidence is very important, as many would feel embarrassed if they mispronounce words or make grammatical mistakes. Teachers on the other hand should not focus too much on the students' mistakes, as it would not help boost their confidence. Some of the responses gained from Respondents 3, 8 and 11 in their reflective notes and focus group interviews are,

*“Teacher encourages students to use English. However, students still use Malay language. Students felt that teachers should stressed out the importance of using English in class. It is because it is the only time and chance for the students to use English.*

*Teachers should use English at the same time encouraging the students to use it. Some might feel ashamed of using English because they are not confident of using it but teacher should show good examples to them.”* (Respondent 3, RN)

*“Teachers should asked the students to discuss in groups on what do they understand about the poem. No answer should be given to the students”* (Respondent 8; FGI)

*“It would be much better if both students and teachers uses as much English possible in class as the students could learn a lot of new vocabularies, improve pronunciations and increase the level of confidence in speaking English”* (Respondent 11; RN, FGI)

A few respondents also suggested in the reflective notes that more teaching techniques should be integrated in the teaching so that teachers could be more versatile and increase the fun level by learning the language and helping students to understand better. This suggestion were also repeated by Respondents 10 and 13 during the interview session,

*“If only one teaching technique were implemented, there are possibilities that only good students could enjoy it the most. Advanced students would feel bored and weak students will be left out and missed the lesson”* (Respondent 10; FGI)

*“Creative teachers are those who use variety of teaching techniques. Students could enjoy the lesson more”* (Respondent 13; FGI)

The findings highlighted that the respondents assessed the various techniques the teachers needed to apply when teaching English so that the learning process could be made more fun and interesting as well as increase students' proficiency level. Moreover, the respondents stated that students need to learn actively and get involved directly in the learning process. A learner-centred approach is better than a teacher-centred approach and is crucial to enhance students' level of understanding despite the different learning techniques that they have. Some of

the respondents' suggestions were to use a sense of humour in the classroom, advise the students to bring their own dictionary to school, ask them to find the meaning of words they do not understand in the dictionary, encourage repetition, and use a vocabulary note book. Repetition is a process during which the teacher repeats the points taught so that the students can remember better. The vocabulary note book on the other hand will enable the students to write down the new words they encountered that day. Students could write the meaning of the words and explain how to use the words in sentences in the note book. This could help them better to remember the word.

*"Teacher makes jokes in class. I find it very interesting. I am very confident that the students really enjoyed the lesson with the approach used"* (Respondent 2; SGI, RF)

*"Teacher asked the students to find the meaning of words in the dictionary. This technique involved the students more in the lesson and they were no longer bored in class"* (Respondent 9; SGI, OP)

*"Students found that the vocabulary note book as something very interesting because they could learn a lot of new words and get to learn how to use the words. They could also remember the words better"* (Respondent 5; OP, RF, SGI)

*"Teacher-centred classroom and Grammar Translation Method does not give the students a lot of chances to speak English. In order to help enhancing the level of proficiency of the students, they need to be exposed as much as possible to the language"* (Respondent 11; OP)

*"Other than interpreting the poem, teacher should have asked the students to have a discussion session in groups to discuss on what do they understand about the poem. Answers should not be given to the students"* (Respondent 12; RN, SGI )

There are two more techniques that the respondents thought were effective, which are reflection and drilling. When doing elections, students will try to understand and recall what they learnt in the previous class. Drilling, on the other hand, would require the students to repeat over and over what had been learnt in the previous class. The respondents thought that both are very good techniques that could help the students to learn, understand, and remember better as highlighted using all research tools.

*"Teacher asked the students to recall what have been learnt in the previous meeting. It is a very good technique as the teacher could check on the students understanding towards the subject matter."*(Respondent 2; SGI, OP)

*"Drilling is effective as it could help the students to improve on their pronunciation. The teacher herself has used the same technique and felt the improvement"* (Respondent 6; RN, OP)

## CONCLUSION

Preparing trainee teachers with the relevant knowledge and skills to be dynamic and effective teachers were not easy. As far as the trainee teachers are concerned, there are a lot of matters to be considered if they want to be effective teachers. Effective teachers should know their roles as teachers and fulfill them effectively to ensure that students have a better learning environment and help boost students' confidence and motivation to learn. Effective teachers should also know how

to manage the classroom and use appropriate methods in teaching so that they are able to understand the students better. They should also reflect more on their teaching styles so that they can improve their teaching skills and identify the issues encountered by students that could affect their teaching quality. This study indicates that by conducting field work at schools, trainee teachers have learnt a lot especially on the diverse teachers' roles, classroom management strategies, and teaching strategies. It is hoped that the findings of this study could provide both trainee teachers and lecturers on related area to teach more effectively and benefit their students.

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