

TEACHER TRAINEES' PERCEPTION OF THEIR LESSONS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

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Abstract: This research is about the teacher trainees' perception of their lessons during teaching practice. The purpose of this research is to investigate the perceptions of TESL teacher trainees on the effectiveness of the lesson they conducted during their teaching practice, the most frequent teaching method that was most employed during teaching practice and the technique that teacher trainees find most effective. For this purpose, a set of questionnaires were distributed to 26 third year TESL students who have done their teaching practice during their first semester. Data for this research was obtained through sets of questionnaires that were distributed by the end of their teaching practice period. The data was then analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The research findings indicate that the respondents was most likely to apply communicative base teaching whereby majority of the respondents agreed on using communicative language teaching as their main teaching principle in order to make their lesson more effective. At the end of this research, researcher found that the respondents choose communicative language teaching as their preferred teaching approach.

Abstrak: Kajian ini adalah berkenaan persepsi guru pelatih terhadap pengajaran mereka semasa latihan mengajar. Tujuan kajian adalah untuk mengkaji persepsi guru pelatih TESL berkenaan keberkesanan pengajaran mereka semasa latihan mengajar, kekerapan penggunaan metode pengajaran semasa latihan mengajar dan kaedah mengajar yang dirasakan oleh guru pelatih amat berkesan. Untuk tujuan itu, satu set soalan kajian telah diedarkan kepada 26 pelajar TESL tahun 3 yang telah menghabiskan latihan mengajar mereka semasa di semester 1 tahun ke-3 pengajian. Data daripada kajian ini telah diperolehi melalui set-set boring soal selidik ini yang telah diedarkan diakhir tempoh latihan mengajar. Data telah dianalisa secara kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Perolehan kajian mendapati responden amat mengemari aplikasi pengajaran berdasarkan komunikatif di mana majoriti daripada responden bersetuju dengan penggunaan pengajaran bahasa secara komunikatif sebagai prinsip pengajaran mereka agar pengajaran mereka lebih efektif. Di akhir kajian ini, pengkaji mendapati reponden memilih pengajaran bahasa secara komunikatif sebagai pendekatan pengajaran yang sesuai.

Keyword: teaching practice

Introduction

Statement of problem

As mentioned earlier, many factors affect the efforts of a teacher trainee in developing effective lessons during their teaching practice. A typical problem that is faced by some teacher trainees is the difficulty in constructing effective lessons to use in the language classroom. This is constantly the cause of worry for many trainees, as they feel unprepared for the act of teaching, especially in delivering effective lessons.

Firstly, the lack of understanding of a certain component of a lesson plan might drive some teacher trainees to prepare an effective lesson plan. As such, they are psychologically and mentally prepared for teaching, some trainees question themselves on how to produce an effective yet practical lesson.

In actual fact, there are many factors to consider before the trainees can come up with a proper and effective lesson. Practically, the lesson should adopt an appropriate methodology. From here, trainees then have absolute control on the flow of the lesson, which will help them deliver the content of the lesson effectively to the target learners.

Secondly, they also have to consider the problem that underlies within the practical teaching where the problem is visible for teacher trainees in making their perception of their lessons that to be employed during language classroom.

Objectives of the study

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

1. Identify the perceptions of the TESL teacher trainees of the lessons they conducted during their Teaching Practice.
2. Identify the teaching method that was most frequently employed to deliver effective lessons.
3. Identify the techniques that the TESL teacher trainees found most effective.

Significance of the study

The findings of this study will be a useful guide to the teacher trainees in the near future, when they step into the real classroom as full- fledged teachers. Thus, through this research it is believed that the key elements in developing an effective lesson will be identified through their perceptions of effective lessons.

Scope of the study

The scope of the study is on the effectiveness of lessons used by teacher trainees during their teaching practice. Third year students who are currently undergoing their Bachelor of Science in Education (TESL) in UTM were chosen as the respondents of this research. These respondents are selected as they had already gone out for their teaching practice program last semester.

Methodology

Research Instruments

This research used one research instrument in order to collect data. This instrument was questionnaire.

The questionnaire is suitable to use to obtain quantitative data for specific responses. They can be a method to collect data from small to large numbers of respondents with simultaneous distributions. Moore (1987) confirms that questionnaires are extremely flexible and that they can be used to gather information on almost any topic from large or small numbers of people.

Using questionnaires saves time, as it does not need a face-to-face interaction between the researcher and respondents. Thus, “when constructing a questionnaire, one needs to pay careful attention to the wording of the questions.... Questions should not be complex and confusing, nor should they ask more than one thing at a time.” (Nunan, 1992: 143) This is to avoid ambiguity or uncertainty among the respondents when answering the questions. Moreover, the use of questionnaires gives respondents space and time on their own to respond. They can think rationally to choose the appropriate options. Finally yet importantly,

questionnaires need less expense and time compared to other instruments. Hence, questionnaires are cost-effective.

A set of questionnaires were distributed to TESL teacher trainees of UTM. This questionnaire was adapted from Yan Xiao-Yun, Zhou Zhi-Yang and Dai Peixing (questionnaire of *College English Classroom Teaching for College English Teachers*). This questionnaire consists of four different sections, which question respondents on their A) Teaching beliefs, B) Teaching principles, C) Teaching methods and D) Teaching techniques.

The items in the questionnaires were a combination of several different types. The items were mainly four-point Likert-scale items, with options ranging from 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree' to 'Strongly Disagree' in the section on Teaching Beliefs. The section on Teaching Principles comprises Likert-scale items with the following options as responses: 'Never or almost never true of me', 'Usually not true of me', 'Somewhat true of me' and 'Always true of me' while the section on Teaching Techniques consist of these options: 'Never', 'Seldom', 'Often' and 'Always'. There were also ranking items and Yes/ No items.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study were third year TESL students who went for their teaching practice. The majority of them underwent their teaching practice in urban areas of Johor Bahru while there are also a few who were sent to schools in rural areas like Pontian. There were 26 students involved in this study and their ages range from 21 to 23.

Data Analysis

Firstly, the data collected via Likert-scale type questions in the questionnaires were analyzed by using frequency counts. After that, the analysis outcomes are presented in the form of bar charts, showing the percentage of the respondents' responses for each item. Secondly, the data collected via open-ended questions available in the questionnaires were used to support the findings from the questionnaires.

Discussion

Teaching methods

The data reveal that there are three teaching methods that were most frequently employed by TESL teacher trainees during their teaching practice. Besides these three methods, there were also other methods that they employed during their teaching practice. However, the three most popular methods used were the Communicative Language Teaching which was used by 77 percent of the trainees, the Total Physical Response which was used by 35 percent of them and the Grammar Translation Method which was also used by 23 percent of them.

It is obvious that many respondents selected Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the teaching method to use during their English language classes during their teaching practice. The CLT was used by a majority of the teacher trainees, i.e. 77 percent of the 26 respondents. This is due to the belief that communication is a crucial part of language competence. This means that teaching a language does not only foster mastery of linguistic structures among learners but it should also help learners to use the language (Widdowson, 1978).

However, although CLT was used by a majority of the trainees, it was not the sole method they utilized. The CLT method applies the learner-centered approach of teaching and learning whereby fluency is the priority. On one hand this approach is good as it promotes fluency and confidence in using the language,

but accuracy in using the language is usually not prioritized. One of the drawbacks of the CLT is that it lacks feedback for students who need their language errors to be corrected (Ryan, 2001). Because of this, other teaching and learning methods are still used by teachers although the method recommended in Malaysian classrooms now, since the early 1980's, is the CLT.

The method which was the next most frequently employed by teacher trainees during their teaching practice was Total Physical Response (TPR). The percentage of respondents who used this method was 35 percent of 26 respondents. The logic behind the utilization of this method is to make English language learning as fun as possible. This is also to help reduce the stress students feel when learning the English language and thereby encourage students to persist in their study beyond a beginning level of proficiency (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The TPR is also similar to the Natural approach introduced by Krashen and Terrell whereby students are exposed to the development of communication skills and vocabulary through meaningful target language learning, which is why I believe that this method was quite popular among the teacher trainees during their teaching practice.

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was found to be the third most frequent method employed by teacher trainees during their teaching practice. The percentage of respondents who used this method was 23 percent of 26 respondents. The Grammar Translation Method was introduced long ago and is considered one of the oldest methods used in teaching English language. Thus, due to its long history, there are still teacher trainees who chose to use this method in their English classroom. This is most likely because most of the learners in the schools they went to for their teaching practice were mainly Malays whose native language was not English and thus had difficulty in the English subject. The teacher trainees who used the GTM might find this method useful as translating words from English to one's second language is one of the features of the GTM. The GTM could also have possibly been used by the trainees when they taught Literature lessons as the GTM may be used in teaching the students to appreciate at least, the English literature book. Furthermore, it is specifically important not only for students to familiarize with the grammar of the target language but it also helps to provide students with mental exercise in order to develop their minds (Larsen- Freeman, 2000).

A majority of the respondents consider themselves to be more of a communicative teacher than a traditional teacher. The percentage of respondents who regard themselves as a communicative teacher is 96 percent of 26 respondents. The reason behind this is that most of the respondents employed CLT most of the time in their English classroom during their teaching practice. This is also influenced by the characteristic of the CLT itself whereby it focuses more on meaning than language forms. Thus, students have the freedom to express themselves and are given many opportunities to participate in learner-centered tasks. When CLT is used, students use the language actively in many communicative activities such as games, role plays and problem solving tasks where according to Morrow (in Johnson and Morrow, 1981), a true communicative activity possesses three features in common; informational gap, choice and feedback.

Another four percent of respondents claim that he is both a communicative and traditional teacher while another four percent admits to being a traditional teacher. The trainee who considers himself both a communicative and traditional teacher most likely used both communicative and traditional lessons in his classes. This means that he uses a mix of learner-centered activities and teacher-centered activities.

The four percent of trainees who regards himself a traditional teacher most likely employed teacher-centered tasks more than learner-centered tasks in his classes. He also probably focused more on learners' grammatical errors and the accuracy in their use of the language. To conclude, the type of teacher trainees considered themselves as is largely determined by their use of teaching methods.

There are fifteen respondents who agree that their teaching preferences during the teaching practice were based on their intuitions. These fifteen respondents believed that they were not bound to their lesson plan all the time. They agree to an extent that their lessons were flexible enough to cater to their students' special needs while the lessons were being conducted. These trainees felt that they could still achieve the objective of their lesson even though they had not exactly followed the contents and sequence of their lesson plan.

On the other hand, eleven respondents did not agree that the development of their lessons were based on their intuitions. This is due to the fact that they were afraid to experiment with different approaches and techniques when carrying out their lessons and had instead followed exactly according to their lesson plan. Thus, this inhibits their creativity in fostering students' interest towards their lessons as well as the flexibility of the lesson.

Sources of ideas for lessons

There were several resources that inspired teacher trainees in their English classroom during their teaching practice. A majority of the respondents selected TESL classes as their main source of teaching ideas for lessons during their teaching practice. 58 percent of the respondents felt that their TESL classes were an important source of references for them to plan and design effective lessons during their teaching practice. There are quite a number of courses that are offered to TESL students to help prepare them for their teaching practice. The TESL courses which these respondents took in their first and second year of study before they went for their teaching practice include Microteaching, Methodology in TESL 1, and Methodology in TESL 11, Language Learning Theories and ELT in Literature. These TESL classes would have provided the trainees with insights and ideas which they implemented in their teaching practice.

The second most important source of ideas for these trainees would be the discussions with their fellow mentor teachers which constitute 11 percent and discussions with their supervising lecturer which constitute 8 percent. Teacher trainees felt that these two supervisors were an important source for them to gain ideas on what their lessons would be. As both supervisors have had more years of experience than the pre-service teachers in the education field and were more adept with not just the learning theories but with practices that work in the classroom, their ideas were found helpful and beneficial in the respondents' teaching.

The findings revealed that discussions with mentor teachers were found to be more worthwhile than discussions with supervising lecturers. This is probably due to the fact that they had years of experience teaching in the real classroom in a real school environment and have had experience in handling students. A more important reason for mentor teachers being a more important source of reference than supervising lecturers is that the trainees meet the former in school every day as compared to supervising lecturers whom they would meet only a maximum of three times throughout their teaching practice. Thus it is only natural that these teacher trainees consult their mentor teachers more often than they would their supervising lecturer.

Another source of teaching ideas for these trainees was the use of the internet. The use of this source was cited by four percent of the trainees. This is because the internet is a tool that can be used to provide information in just a matter of seconds. There are also many websites that offer teaching ideas and tips on the internet such as *Teacher Ice Breakers* and *Teachers' Top Sites*.

Teaching techniques

There are several teaching techniques that the respondents found effective in their English classroom during their teaching practice. Most of the respondents found games the most effective teaching technique to be employed in their English classroom. 58 percent of 26 respondents selected games as the most effective teaching technique. This was because majority of TESL teacher trainees employed the communicative approach of teaching when delivering their lesson in the English classroom. As communicative language teaching suggests, games is one of the top-rated language activities to use in English language classroom as it is learner-centered. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), students will be motivated to learn the language as games are enjoyable and if the activities are properly designed to meet their interest, this can be beneficial for their communicative practice.

Next, 50 percent of 26 respondents stated that the effectiveness of their English lessons can be boosted by promoting discussions in the class. Discussions as seen by Larsen-Freeman, enhance the ability of the students to get involved with each other while having their message delivered from one to another. This can be seen as an example of meaningful learning experience as learners are not controlled by the teacher. Not only that, discussion has also become a medium to form an interactive communication between students and teacher. This technique can be an excellent teaching technique when used in conjunction with other teaching methods. An active question and answer session can be boosted as the students will feel more comfortable to ask and to answer any question when they are with their group members.

Another technique which teacher trainees found effective is problem solving. This technique was used by 31 percent of 26 respondents. As problem-solving based learning offers a communicative learning approach, the students would be given an opportunity to acquire more language competence by having a more task-based learning experience. As stated by Larsen-Freeman (2000), a task-based approach is one in which learners are given a task to be completed, and they are also given ample time to communicate with each other in the target language. Thus, the goal is to make the students use the language in order for them to solve any given task; hence the given task works as a mechanism in order to induce their use of the target language in the classroom.

There are six teaching techniques that were frequently employed by them. However, only four major techniques will be discussed here: they are discussion, games, problem solving and brainstorming.

Among those six techniques, games and discussion are the two techniques used most frequently; 62 percent of the trainees revealed that games and discussions are the techniques they most often used. Both techniques are mainly derived from the communicative language teaching whereby the lesson is more learner-centered and the teacher is seen as merely a guide to the students. In actual fact, games make the lesson more fun to learn as the students have the opportunity to express themselves and be open among them. This activity in general requires students to participate actively by contributing their thoughts and ideas in order to fulfill the requirement of the lesson. This activity as Krashen (1980) suggests, helps students to reduce their anxiety to speak up the language as a result of the decreasing affective filter.

Two other techniques that are frequently used and having the same percentage are brainstorming and problem solving. 35 percent of 26 respondents identified these two techniques as those which they used most often. Both techniques are somehow inter-related with each other whereby both are derived from task-based teaching. In task-based teaching, the main concern as stated by Candlin and Murphy (1987, cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000) is to get the students to learn the language in an environment provided with problem-solving negotiation where knowledge is acquired.

Perceptions of the effectiveness of the lessons

A majority of TESL teacher trainees found that their lessons were sometimes effective. 58 percent of the respondents felt that their lessons were sometimes effective and this is due to several reasons.

One of the reasons could be the trainees' poor class management. Sometimes, trainees may not get full class attendance when the teacher trainee has already started the class. This poor attendance and interruptions caused by students coming in late to class dampen the trainee's spirit to conduct good lessons. Teacher trainees would have to restart the lesson briefing them the content of the lesson all over again. By doing that, the lesson might not be completed on schedule. This then could be one of the reasons for trainees feeling that their lessons were only sometimes effective. .

Another reason for the fact that 58 percent of the trainees felt that their lessons were only sometimes effective is that they needed to command the students' attention when teaching, and this is sometimes a difficult thing to do, especially when the students know that the trainee is only a trainee, and not their school teacher. In order to come up with an effective lesson, trainees know that they must first gain the attention of the students towards the content or the lesson itself. They believe that students' participation was a good way to indicate students' attention and focus on what the trainee was teaching. Thus, when trainees fail to command the attention and participation required from their learners, this again dampens their motivation and affects their delivery of the lesson. Consequently, this factor leads to them feeling that their lessons had not been effective.

Lastly, a majority of the respondents stated that an effective lesson is a lesson where preparation is made in such a way that it fosters students' interest to participate actively during the lesson as well as to cater to their moods towards the lesson. By doing so, the lesson will not only fulfill the needs of the students but it will also successfully achieve the objectives of the lesson.

The findings reveal that only 35 percent of the respondents felt that the lessons they conducted were effective. The number of trainees who were confident that their lessons were effective is less than those who felt that their lessons were sometimes effective.

This shows that only 35 percent of the trainees were confident in their teaching, and this was due to several reasons. Firstly, these trainees must have felt that their students really understood the content of their lessons during their teaching practice. They stated that their students were able to respond to every question that they asked during the class thus giving them the impression that their students really understood the lesson. This was also supported by some trainees who were of the view that their use of teaching method was the factor that affected the students' response. They stated that their use of Communicative Language Teaching was really helpful and fun because students like to play language games or perhaps they preferred language games as it was really challenging and pretty new to them. The utilization of such a method reduces their anxiety to use the language (Krashen and Tarrell, 1973) and motivates them to use the language during the lesson. This is true because students' participation is enhanced when their anxiety is reduced, hence allowing them to freely enjoy as well as understand the content of the lesson.

Conclusion

Based on the first research question, where the TESL teacher trainees were asked about their perceptions of the effectiveness of their lessons during teaching practice, most of them felt that their lessons were effective.

The next research question was to identify the method that was most frequently employed to deliver their lessons. The findings show that the most frequent teaching method used was the Communicative Language Teaching which was then followed by Total Physical Response and lastly Grammar Translation Method.

To answer the third research question on the techniques the TESL teacher trainees find most effective, it was found that the trainees found games the most effective teaching technique employed, followed by discussion and lastly problem solving.

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