

Strengths and Challenges Faced by History Optionist Novice Teachers in Vernacular Schools in Northern Regions

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Abstract: *Institute of Teacher Education plays a very important role in producing potential teachers in implementing quality teaching and learning. Every year, the Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education becomes the main supplier of trained novice History optionist teachers to primary schools nationwide. There is no doubt that these novice teachers also faced various pressures and challenges in order to implement quality and excellent teaching and learning in order to produce educated younger generation line with the new millennium demands. Thus, a case study was carried out using purposive sampling. Qualitative data for this study were triangulated through various interview sessions, observations and document analysis. The sample of this study consist of 5 novice History teachers, 5 school administrators and 5 colleagues of the novice teachers from the Northern Zone. All these novice teachers selected for this study is from the January 2014 cohort who completed their studies in Bachelor of Education Program and majoring in History. These respondents were all posted to the vernacular schools in 2018. This study aims to identify the strengths and challenges faced by these novice teachers in implementing their daily Teaching and Learning practices in selected vernacular schools. The results of the study found that these novice teachers are able to implement 21st Century Classroom Teaching and Learning well. They are also highly skilled in the use of Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias as well as producing digital teaching aids for teaching and learning purposes. However, it was identified that these teachers also faced some challenges in implementing effective teaching and learning in their classroom. Among the challenges that have been identified are the difficulties of class control, being burdened with very high teaching periods and having to teach more periods of non-option or non-elective subjects. Several suggestions for improvement have also been discussed in this study.*

Keywords: Novice Teachers, 21st Century Classroom Teaching and Learning, Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Media, Teaching Aids, Class Control, Optionist, Non-Optionist, Non-Elective

1. Introduction

Without an introduction it is sometimes very difficult for your audience to figure out what you are trying to say (Harrington, 2005). Education is the heart of a country's development. Quality and excellent education is important to mould the younger generation towards the needs and demands of the new millennium. Thus, a comprehensive education system must be enforced in line with the demands of the current rapid global development. Therefore, transformation in

education is implemented in Malaysia in order to strengthen the education system through the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) which was launched on 6th September 2013 (Mary Yap, 2015). Hence, it is undeniable that teachers play a significant role in transforming and realising PPPM from 2013 to 2025 (Mary Yap, 2015).

In context of realising the aspirations of PPPM, teachers need to have a superior vision to transform various aspects of teaching and learning practices in the classroom such as by implementing 21st Century Classroom Teaching and Learning, integrating Information Technology and Multimodal Medias and being able to integrate innovation in the classroom to improve students' progress and holistic development especially in History subject. A study conducted by De Jagler, Reeqiqr and Creemers, (2002) in the United States found that quality performance by novice teachers in education, which is at a real school context is highly dependent on the knowledge, attitude and training gained by these teachers when they were trainees in their respective training institutions. Thus, the role of novice teachers becomes increasingly complex and challenging in efforts to improve the quality of education.

The Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education plays a very significant role in producing potential teachers in the effort of implementing quality teaching and learning in History subject. Every year, the Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education becomes the main supplier of trained novice teachers to primary schools throughout Malaysia. According to Lorena David and Abdul Said Ambotang (2014), some novice teachers who are still not ready to face various challenges in the real classroom context and real demand of world education today which are considered more challenging strings than the rapid technological advances.

Novice Teacher

Novice teachers refer to new teachers who graduated from the Institute of Teacher Education who are first placed in schools as trained teachers within the first year of their service. This means that they yet to have any in-depth experience in the field of teaching in a real classroom context and still in the process of observing, consulting, learning and adapting to the real school context and needs.

In Malaysia, all novice teachers posted to schools had already undergone teacher training courses from the Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education, according to the standards set by the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). However, the transition process from teacher trainees to in-service teachers is not an easy task. These novice teachers had to face the realities of playing various roles and responsibilities that they have never experienced before while they were enduring their training in the Institute of Teacher Education at their respective campuses (Tengku Sarina Aini Tengku Kasim & Fatimah Sahid Abdurajak, 2018).

Problem Statement

Several past studies have discussed extensively on the issues and challenges faced by novice teachers, both locally and abroad. Among the issues that are often debated are with regard to the implementation of teaching and learning process of the novice teachers in the classroom and the issue of class control (Tengku Sarina Aini Tengku Kasim & Fatimah Sahid Abdurajak, 2018).

A study conducted by several researchers abroad found that the majority of novice teachers experienced various problems in their teaching and learning activities such as managing students, establishing good relationships in the classroom, mastering lesson content, planning student-centred activities, helping students to learn, monitoring their understanding and in

becoming part of the social structure of the school (Veenman, 1984; Knowles & Cole, 1994; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997). Meanwhile, a study conducted by Orgoványi-Gajdos (2015), Oshrat-Fink (2014), and Lokman Mohd Tahir, Mohd Nihra Mohd Said, Roslee Ahmad, Khadijah Daud, Bambang Sumitono and Suhana Yusoff (2014) found that novice teachers faced difficulties in adapting what they have actually learned while at the Institute of Teacher Education into a real classroom context.

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study to investigate the strengths and challenges faced by these History optionist novice teachers graduated from the Institute of Teacher Education for each cohort from time to time.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to identify the strengths and challenges faced by the History optionist novice teachers from the January 2014 intake of an Institute of Teacher Education in the Northern Zone in implementing teaching and learning practices.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the strengths of the History optionist novice teachers graduated from an Institute of Teacher Education from a Northern Zone in implementing their teaching and learning practices?
- 2) What are the challenges faced by the History optionist novice teachers graduated from an Institute of Teacher Education in the Northern Zone in implementing the actual teaching and learning practices in their classroom?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be able to aid the Institute of Teacher Education to plan and make improvements to the existing curriculum and programs in order to produce excellent competency among the teacher trainees. This finding too will be able to facilitate the training institutes in to produce competent History optionist novice teachers in handling various challenges more confidently and independently when they were placed in schools throughout the country later on. Besides that, the findings also can aid the lecturers in Institute of Teacher Education to mould the trainees to match the current needs and demands of the 21st century classroom teaching and learning practices.

2. Research Methodology

Research Design

A case study was conducted using qualitative approach with purposive sampling. Qualitative data for this study were triangulated through interviews, observations and document analysis.

Sampling

The sample of this study includes 4 selected primary schools in the northern zone of Perak and one from Terengganu. A total of 4 novice teachers, 4 of their colleagues and 4 school administrators from Perak as well as a novice teacher, her colleague and the school administrator from Terengganu were selected for this study. All these samples selected are from the January 2014 intake and graduated in Bachelor of Education Program in 2018. They were all homogeneously History optionist who reported duty in vernacular schools simultaneously on 16 April 2018. Refer Table 1.0 to see the distribution and sample code of these samples for this study.

Table 1.0: Distribution and sample code

No	Novice Teachers (GN)	School Administrator (GBE)	Colleagues (RS)	States
1	GN/AMCI	PK1/AMCI	RS/AMCI	Perak
2	GN/SDJPBTT	GBE/SDJPBTT	RS/SDJPBTT	Perak
3	GN/NKG	GBE/NKG	RS/NKG	Perak
4	GN/BSBI	GBE/BSBI	RS/BSBI	Perak
5	GN/CMJBP	PK1/CMJBP	RS/CMJBP	Terengganu

3. Findings and Discussion

Qualitative data were triangulated through interviews, document analysis and observations from 5 novice History optionist teachers, 5 of their colleagues and 5 school administrators. These interview data were recorded using a telephone before transcribing. All these data were then, coded and analysed thematically to determine repeated and dissimilar ideas using the Miles and Huberman Interaction Model (Miles & Huberman 1994). Data from the analysed documents and observations were photographed with the permission of the samples.

The results of this study found that there are several strengths in the implementation of teaching and learning practices among these novice teachers. Nevertheless, these novice teachers too had to face various challenges in performing their duties as young educators in a real classroom and school context.

Strengths of the Teaching and Learning Practices

Among the strengths identified in this study are the ability of these novice teachers to implement 21st Century Classroom Teaching and Learning, the use of Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias and the production of good teaching aids.

Implementation of 21st Century Classroom Teaching and Learning

21st century classroom teaching and learning is crucial in producing a generation that is capable to compete globally in this rapid developing world. It is the responsibility of every teacher to shape the younger generation who are still in school with a range of skills in line with the needs and demands of 21st century classroom teaching and learning.

The findings in this study found that, all 5 school administrators interviewed were very satisfied with the implementation of 21st century classroom teaching and learning practices by these novice teachers in their schools. According to GBE/SDJPBTT, GN/SDJPBTT is, "a teacher who can implement the teaching and learning very well in the classroom" (4.10.2019). Novice teachers (GN/AMCI) are able to implement 21st century teaching and learning such as parking lots, group works, worksheets completed in groups and Flipped classroom. According to GBE/SDJPBTT (4.10.2019) novice teachers implement 21st century classroom teaching according to the suitability of the syllabus. "She also implements 21st century classroom teaching techniques such as the use of traffic lights and parking lots. Teach according to the syllabus ... take into account the level of the students as well" (GBE/SDJPBTT; 4.10.2019).

A study conducted by YM Raja Abdullah Raja Ismail and Daud Ismail (2018) also found that Islamic Studies optionist were able to implement 21st century classroom teaching and learning during their teaching practicum in schools. These teacher trainees manage to integrate creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication in their teaching practices. The findings of this study are also in line with the views of Mohamed Amin (2016) who said that

the teachers need to prepare themselves to make a transformation in teaching and learning practices to meet the educational needs of students in the current digital technology age.

Integration of Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias

The rapid development of technology requires novice teachers to integrate Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias in the implementation of their daily classroom practices (Osman & Basar, 2016; Langworthy, 2013). The use of Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias in teaching and learning can increase the interest and make learning more meaningful which subsequently improve students' performance.

In this study, novice teachers were also found to be highly skilled in the use of Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias. According to PK1/AMCI (4.10.2019) and RS/AMCI (4.10.2019), novice teacher (GN/AMCI) used Flipped Classroom and Smart Board in her daily teaching and learning practices. GN/AMCI is also competent in using VLE Frog. According to GBE/NKG (3.10.2019), "Information Technology and Multimodal Medias is integrated in teaching and learning" by GN/NKG. GN/CMJBP and GN/SDJPBTT also applied Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias in their daily classroom teaching and learning practices. GBE/BSBI (3.10.2019) explains that, "GN/BSBI uses Google Classroom, Facebook, Kahoot and YouTube in her daily teaching and learning activities".

The results of this study are very different from the study conducted by YM Raja Abdullah Raja Ismail and Daud Ismail (2018) with the January 2013 intake of teacher trainees. Their study found that time constraints with various assignments during the practicum period and inadequate facilities of Information Communication Technology equipment in schools were found to interfere with the teaching and learning practices of the trainee teachers.

This clearly proves that these January 2014 intake novice teachers are very competent in integrating Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias in their daily teaching and learning activities. Time constraints and imperfect Information Communication Technology equipment facilities in schools are not an obstacle to their teaching and learning activities for these novice teachers in this study. They are also highly skilled in using various online applications for teaching and learning purposes.

Teaching Aids

An effective teaching and learning process needs to be supported with the interesting and effective integration of teaching aids in line with the development of students' comprehensibility. Novice teachers need to produce appropriate and creative teaching aids so that the delivery of the curriculum content can be inculcated effectively within the stipulated timeframe.

Novice teachers in this study were also found to be able to produce various types of teaching aids such as puzzles, video clips and slides. GN/NKG (3.10.2019) is highly skilled in producing digital teaching aids. These digital teaching aids produced moreover save cost, space for storage and greatly portability.

The results of this study are very different from the study conducted by Fadzilah Amzah, Abd. Rahman Abd Aziz and Mahzan Arshad (2011), who identified some weaknesses of novice teachers in teaching preparation involving the selection of teaching aids. Among the

weaknesses are the selection of the existing teaching aids that are unsuitability with students' development in terms of shape and size of the material.

Challenges in Implementing Teaching and Learning Practices

In addition, there are also some challenges that these novice teachers had to face. These challenges included difficulties in class control, high load of teaching periods and higher teaching periods for non-optional subjects as well as not being given the opportunity to teach optional subjects at all.

Class Control

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports, one-half of teachers in Brazil, Malaysia and Singapore spend more than 15% of their time in class control (OECD 2014). Here, it is clearly evident that these teachers lose excess time in managing their students' problem behaviors in the classroom then using optimal time for their actual classroom teaching and learning practices (OECD 2014).

This study highlights that these novice teachers also faced difficulties in class control. According to PK1/AMCI, "this teacher (GN/AMCI, 4.10.2019) is too gentle with the students ... make her look like she is their friend". The same feedback was also received from GBE/SDJPBTT. According to GBE/SDJPBTT (4.10.2019), GN/SDJPBTT, "during the teaching I saw that this teacher was a bit less skilled in class control. Even though the students are noisy, she still continues to teach ..."

The interviews conducted with these novice teachers found that most of them also agreed that class control is a very challenging aspect in the implementation of 21st century classroom teaching and learning excellently. According to GN/AMCI (4.10.2019), the students in her class were only a bit noisy when discussing while doing group activities in carrying out task related to the 21st century classroom teaching and learning. Pupils move and discuss in groups, which lead to rather noisy environment because "sometimes they enjoy working with their friends" (GN/AMCI, 3.10.2019).

Meanwhile, GN/SDJPBTT (4.10.2019) stated that, "the attitude of some mischievous students because many students here in this school are taken care of by their grandparents. Their parents work outside like in Singapore. Many students here are also from mixed marriages with foreigners such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam. So some of these students lack of the value of respect for their teachers ... they consider the teachers as a friend". Hence, it is identified that such students' attitude further complicated class control for this novice teacher.

This situation is also found in a study conducted by Tengku Sarina Aini Tengku Kasim and Fatimah Sahid Abdurajak (2018) on novice teachers of Islamic Studies from 4 selected states in Malaysia. The qualitative results revealed that the Islamic Studies novice optionist too faced several complications in managing students' attitudes or behavior during the teaching and learning activities, which actual took much of their time.

A study conducted by Goh, Qismullah and Wong (2017) also identified that novice teachers in Malaysia faced difficulties in class control. This is because they are incapable of controlling the complexity behavior of students in a real classroom context.

High load of teaching periods

One of the biggest challenges for novice teachers is in preparing themselves to accept the high load of teaching periods assigned by the school administrators. This is because high teaching periods require a very high sacrifice of time to check on students' exercise books, preparation for daily lessons and implementation of Classroom Assessment for each student.

All the 5 novice teachers interviewed in this study were identified to struggle with a very high load of teaching periods. For example, GN/NKG and GN/CMJBP teach 30 periods a week. One period in the primary school is equal to 30 minutes. This means, GN/NKG and GN/CMJBP teach 900 minutes or 15 hours in a week. Meanwhile, GN/SDJPBTT teaches 31 periods a week. GN/AMCI also teaches 35 periods in a week. Refer to Figure 1.0 to see the timetable of GN/AMCI. This high load of teaching time affects greatly the performance and quality of work of these novice teachers. According to GN/NKG and RS/NKG (3.10.2019), "very high load of teaching time causes creative teaching aids cannot be produced as the real needs of the students and the school." Hence, it is evident in this study that, although these novice teachers are highly skilled in the production of teaching aids but the time factor is a major obstacle here for them to perform.

High load of teaching periods are also a major barrier for these novice teachers to explore other areas of new knowledge. They also agreed that time constraint is the main obstacle in doing Action Research, producing teaching and learning modules, attending seminars, presenting research papers in conferences and participating in innovation competitions. According to GN/NKG (3.10.2019), "there is no time to do modules for students during school holidays ... Action Research and paper presentations are the same ... can't be done because don't have that much of time... we are very busy with school work most of the time..... innovation also no".

The finding in this study is similar with the claimed made by Norhiza Fadila and Mahamod Zamri Wan Mohamad Wan Ruzanna Muna (2016) in a study that they conducted with 137 teachers teaching the Malay Language in primary schools in a selected district in Negeri Sembilan. According to Norhiza Fadila, Zamri Mahamod and Wan Muna Ruzanna Wan Mohamad, the workload that the Malay Language teachers have to bear is also very stressful and caused them to face problems in producing quality teaching aids for each lesson.

	1 1:10-1:45 PM	2 1:45-2:15 PM	3 2:15-2:40 PM	4 2:40-3:15 PM	REHAT 3:15-3:30 PM	5 3:30-4:00 PM	6 4:00-4:30 PM	7 4:30-5:00 PM	8 5:00-5:30 PM	9 5:30-6:00 PM	10 6:00-6:30 PM
ISNIN 星期一	PS 美术 2F	PS 美术 2F			REHAT 休息	SAINS 科学 2E	SAINS 科学 2E		PJ 体育 1G	BC 华文 2E	BC 华文 2E
SELASA 星期二	P 周会 2E	MT 数学 2E	BC 华文 2E	BC 华文 2E					PK 体健 1G	MT 数学 2E	PJ 体育 2E
RABU 星期三		PS 美术 2E	PS 美术 2E	BC 华文 2E				MT 数学 2E	MT 数学 2E	PJ 体育 1G	PK 体健 2E
KHAMIS 星期四		BC 华文 2E	BC 华文 2E	SAINS 科学 2E			MUZIK 音乐 1G	MT 数学 2E	MT 数学 2E	PJ 体育 2E	BC 华文 2E
JUMAAT 星期五	MT 数学 2E	MT 数学 2E						BC 华文 2E	BC 华文 2E	BC 华文 2E	BC 华文 2E

Subject	Class	Total
PENDIDIKAN JASMANI 体育	1G	2
PENDIDIKAN KESEHATAN 保健	1G	1
PENDIDIKAN MUZIK 音乐	1G	1
MATEMATIK 数学	2E	2
MATEMATIK 数学	2E	4
PENDIDIKAN JASMANI 体育	2E	2
PENDIDIKAN KESEHATAN 保健	2E	1
PENDIDIKAN SENI 艺术	2E	2
PERHEMPUNAN 周会	2E	1
SAINS 科学	2E	3
PENDIDIKAN SENI 艺术	2F	2
BAHASA CINA 中文	2E	2
BAHASA CINA 中文	2E	10

Figure 1.0: shows the personal teaching timetable of GB/AMCI

Teaching Optional Subjects

There are also a number of novice teachers who are not given the opportunity to teach their optional subjects at all. This is evidenced by referring to the teaching timetable of GN/AMCI in Figure 1.0. This causes the expertise built for 5 years while at the Institute of Teacher Education cannot be applied optimally by these novice teachers.

The breakdown of teaching periods for non-optional subjects was also found to be greatly higher than the actual teaching periods for optional subjects for the History optionist novice teachers in this study. This can clearly be seen in the teaching periods according to subjects of GN/CMJBP shown in Table 2.0. This teacher (GN/CMJBP) was only given the opportunity to teach 4 periods of History which is the optional subject for this teacher, out of a total of 30 teaching periods. Meanwhile, this novice teacher too had to teach 12 periods of Chinese Language which is not even the elective subject when she was at the Institute of Teacher Education. This means that this novice teacher bears the burden of teaching higher non-optional subjects in order to meet the current needs of the school.

Table 2.0: Breakdown of teaching periods according to subjects taught by GN/CMJBP

No.	Subjects	Periods	Remark
1	History	4	optional subject
2	Chinese Language	12	elective subject
3	Science	7	-
4	Information Technology	2	-
5	Moral	5	-
Grand Total		30 Periods	

The same situation was also detected for GN/SDJPBTT and GN/NKG. GN / SDJPBTT who is the History optionist, had to teach various subjects for 31 periods in a week including 2 periods of History for Year 6, English for Year 5, Science for Year 1, Chinese Language for Year 5,

Music and Visual Arts Education for Year 6. GN/NKG who is also a History optionist had to teach a total of 30 periods a week covering 2 periods of History for Year 5, Chinese Language for Year 3, English Language for Year 1, Year 4 and Year 5, Science for Year 5 and Moral for Year 5.

The higher distribution of teaching periods to teach non-optional subjects causes these novice teachers to less participate and voice their opinions in panel meetings. They also agreed that they are “lack of confidence in voicing opinions in other subjects or panel meetings” (GN/AMCI;4.10.2019). This is because they do not have much experience or less exposure in those subjects. This is supported in several studies done by Ethell and McMeniman (2000), Putnam and Borko (2000), Shulman (2000), Freeman (2002) and Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002) in Western countries that showed that teachers’ knowledge related to teaching approaches, content and teaching practices are very important to help in strengthening the process of successful classroom teaching and learning practices.

4. Suggestions

There are several suggestions discussed in this study such as the number of teaching practicum for trainees that need to be reviewed, briefing to the Headmasters and placement of teachers according to the needs of the actual options in the school.

Teaching Practicum

Knowledge and skills imparted in the Institute of Teacher Education during the teacher training programs are very imperative in producing outstanding teachers. According to Mohd Zarawi (2012), the success of producing competent and excellent teachers highly depends on the teacher training curriculum provided at the Institute of Teacher Education. The teacher training curriculum needs to be structured and improved towards enhancing teaching excellency when these teachers are still pursuing their studies at the Institute of Teacher Education (YM Raja Abdullah Raja Ismail & Daud Ismail, 2018).

Therefore, the duration and number of teaching practicum at the Institute of Teacher Education can be extended so that the trainee teachers would be able to obtain more in-depth experience in the aspect of classroom control. Increasing teaching practicum durations, the number of teaching practicums in the curriculum and sending trainees to several types of schools to pursue their teaching practicums can provide adequate exposure to them. These teachers would be able to deal better in the real situation of class control when they are posted as novice teachers in their respective primary schools.

Teaching practicum in various different schools is also able to produce novice teachers who are more established with various techniques and ways of class control by using various interesting approaches. Hence, novice teachers will be more prepared and stable in class control when faced with the real classroom context after posting to schools.

Briefing to the School Administrators

Briefings should be given to the headmasters, headmistress or school administrators to provide an opportunity for the novice teachers to teach optional subjects at least in the first year of their service in the school. This is to prevent novice teachers from being stressed and discouraged from teaching all the non-optional new subjects in the first year of their service in the school. In addition, teaching optional subjects in the first year also provides an opportunity for these

novice teachers to apply the knowledge that they had acquired from the Institute of Teacher Education for 5 years of their studies.

Briefings should also be given to the school administrators on the distribution of teaching periods for novice teachers. Excessive teaching periods to teach non-optional subjects is less appropriate. The distribution of teaching periods must be in accordance with the main optional subjects or elective subjects of the novice teachers as to how they were trained in their respective Institute of Teacher Education.

Placement of teachers in schools

The Ministry of Education in Malaysia must conduct an in-depth study on the actual needs of teachers in a particular school before placing the novice teachers. The placement of novice teachers in schools must be in line with the actual needs of the school according to the subject options. This will avoid a situation where there is a pile of teachers with the same options beyond the actual needs in a school that forces these novice teachers to teach neither their optional nor their elective subjects as they were trained at the Institute of Teacher Education.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, these novice teachers are able to implement 21st century classroom teaching and learning, highly skilled in the use of Information Communication Technology and Multimodal Medias as well as producing interesting digital teaching aids for teaching and learning purposes, even though they are in fact burdened with very high teaching periods. Furthermore, these novice teachers had to teach more periods of non-optional or non-elective subjects. In fact, there are novice teachers who do not have the opportunity to teach their optional or elective subjects at all. However, these novice teachers still need help to deal with some of the challenges that they faced such as relatively weak class control.

As these novice teachers are still new to the teaching profession. Hence, the potential to improve their self-skills through various types of ongoing professional development programs in the future is wide open for them to address all the future challenges.

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