

ISSUES FACED BY NOVICE TEACHERS IN MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS

Khaliza_Saidin*, Nurul Atikah Azamin* and Arsaythamby Veloo*

Upon the completion of teacher training program at universities or Teacher Training Institutions, novice teachers are posted to schools to start their teaching career. Previous studies showed that many novice teachers faced problems in teaching when they were posted to schools despite undergoing formal teacher training at universities or Teacher Training Institutions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the problems of teaching and learning faced by novice teachers in classrooms. This qualitative study employed in-depth face-to-face interview to identify the problems faced by novice teachers in classrooms. The study found that there are four main problems encountered by novice teachers which are issues related to syllabus, challenges in getting teaching resources, lack of skills and knowledge, and poor class management. Novice teachers also reported that they did not receive enough guidance in starting their career as teachers. Based on the findings, this study suggests that novice teachers should be given appropriate training and exposure in their subject matter, and exposed to various teaching techniques. Novice teachers must also be proactive to prepare themselves with enough knowledge and skills during probation, without relying too much on guidance and support from others. In addition, staff development programmes and motivational workshops can also help improve the knowledge and skills of novice teachers

Keywords: novice teachers, novice teachers problem, staff development programme.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is rapidly changing together with the unprecedented rapid development in the technology and information era. With all these rapid developments in the lives of human beings, teachers who are responsible for educating the young minds must keep abreast with the new wave of challenges in the education world.

The 21st century challenges require skillful teachers who are also knowledgeable in ensuring the development of education (Altbach, 2007). Therefore, professional and personal development of teachers must be taken seriously as they are the front runners in the education of the country's young minds. Their personal and career development should not come to an end when they finish their training and start teaching at schools. In addition, unplanned and unsystematic teacher development programmes would be an obstacle in teachers' success and effectiveness and would be a hindrance to achieve the objective of developing their potentials in teaching.

As teachers play pivotal roles in a nation's education system, they must possess high quality subject knowledge and skills to be able to teach effectively. Based on Malaysia Development Plan in the Tenth Malaysia Plan gazetted in 2014, every

* Collage of Arts & Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia, E-mail: khaliza@uum.edu.my; nurulatikahazamin@yahoo.com; arsaythamby@uum.edu.my

year the Ministry of Education (MOE) receives more than 175,000 applications from candidates who are keen to join the teaching profession but is only able to hire 20,000 new teachers in schools all over the country. These new batch of teachers are referred to as novice teachers. Ministry of Education Malaysia (2010) defines a novice teacher as a Permanent or Temporary Education Service Officer or a Trained Substitute Teacher who has a Diploma or Degree with teaching qualifications and has to undergo a probation period by Ministry of Education before being confirmed in the Education Service Officer Scheme.

There are many issues which are reported to be faced by novice teachers including school adaptation, teaching skills, and many others despite all the approaches and improvement programmes taken by various parties to solve these issues among novice teachers (Bailey & Taylor, 2015, Calderhead & Shorrock 1997; Lundeen, 2004 and Zakaria Atan, 2015). These issues and conflicts among novice teachers should be identified and addressed to ensure that novice teachers will be able to function well in the system. Thus, research which highlight issues and challenges in the education world is important in providing the necessary information to the authority so that effective actions can be taken to solve the problems.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many studies on novice teachers done locally and abroad (Confait , 2015; Habibah Elias & Foo Say Fook, 2006; Judy Bailey & Taylor, 2015; Le Cornu, 2013; Rahmah Murshidi, Mohd Majid Konting, Sumru Akcan, 2016; Warren & Miller, 2013; Zakaria Atan, 2015). The studies include issues and challenges faced by novice teachers and professional development programmes implemented for them. Sulman (1987) suggested that research must focus on classroom teaching among novice teachers. This is because teaching is the main focus in the teaching profession. His opinion was shared by other scholars in education field who believe that the most pressing problem faced by novice teachers is classroom activities (Socket 1996; Staton & Hunt 1992). This problem causes novice teachers' failure in applying the knowledge they receive during their training into their classrooms. Due to this, many scholars try to examine the strategies employed by novice teachers in classroom. This is because the core business of teachers takes place in classrooms and their failure in executing their lessons in class would hinder students' progress.

In addition, a few researchers such as Bailey and Taylor, (2015) and Cameron, Mulholland & Branson, (2013), highlighted the issues of novice teachers' support in their research. Their findings indicated that it is important that novice teachers are given enough assistance and guidance about the right teaching techniques from more experienced teachers who can act as their mentors. This is because techniques taught and learnt in the teacher training programmes are different from the real school environment. Novice teachers who receive guidance from their mentors

should be able to display some improved behavioural changes as compared to those who do not receive any guidance from other teachers.

Trotter (1986) believed that a teacher needs many years of teaching experiences before he or she can be a skillful teacher. They also believed that only a small percentage of teachers will become experts in their field. Hence, novice teachers must move towards improving their knowledge, skills, and increasing the effectiveness of their teaching techniques to achieve the status of expert teachers. In order to achieve this, these novice teachers should be provided with the necessary assistance to help them manage the early phase of their teaching career.

3. PAGE LIMIT

The transition phase from a trainee teacher to novice teacher involves different challenges, experiences and roles. This is inevitable as the scope and responsibilities of trainee teachers and novice teachers are different. Therefore, it is important that a comprehensive study on novice teachers is carried out to help them become effective and skillful particularly in classroom teaching.

A number of studies have been done to explore the issues and problems faced by novice teachers (Calderhead & Shorrock 1997; Lundeen, 2004; Nasir Mohd Idris, 1998). A study done by Tan Meng Guat (2007) on 200 Bahasa Melayu novice teachers at Chinese Vernacular Primary Schools indicated lack of teaching and learning skills among novice teachers in classroom teaching. This shows that there is a need for these novice teachers to be helped so they can improve their teaching skills. If teachers do not have adequate classroom knowledge and skills, students' academic achievement might be adversely affected. In addition, novice teachers who are not fully prepared to enter the teaching profession can also bring about negative effects to the students' performance. This will subsequently cause a decline in the schools' grades and affect the country's education system as a whole. If the problem is not addressed, this would eventually affect students' academic achievement. Furthermore, it was also found that these novice teachers lack references and information on the latest changes in the grammar of the language they are teaching.

Bartell (2005) found that the main problem faced by novice teachers when they were first posted to schools was trying to adapt themselves to the real classroom environment. These novice teachers should be given proper guidance to carry out their responsibilities of fulfilling the needs of students from different ethnic groups and backgrounds (Knowles & Cole, 1994; Veenman, 1984).

Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) opined that majority of teachers who are in the first few years of their service face various problems in teaching and learning which include managing students in classrooms, managing relationship with students in classroom, planning students' activities and learning, observing students' understanding of lessons and adapting to their roles in school's social structure.

Based on the Integrated Education concept (Mohammed Sani, 2002), a teacher must undergo continuous teaching training throughout his career as a teacher. A study done by Lundeen (2004) examined problems faced by novice teachers in their first year of teaching service and found that four major problems faced by novice teachers include issues related to classroom management, student discipline, peer relationship and interaction among teachers. Novice teachers are also having problems adapting themselves to the real school environment because teacher training programmes are theoretical in nature (Veenmann, 1984). The complexity and the uniqueness of teaching and learning process may impede a teacher's progress in adapting to a new working environment. Based on a research done by Mohd Aliff and Yusraini (2014) about novice teachers, it was found that novice teachers are very tentative in varying their teaching methods because they are still new in the teaching profession.

In addition, a study done by Mohd Nasir Mohd Idris (1998) on 128 novice teachers in four districts in Malaysia found that among the problems faced by novice teachers are students' personality, co-curricular activities, teaching methods, classroom management and problems in getting teaching aids. A research done by Zuraidah A. Majid (2001) on 250 novice teachers serving in schools in the Federal Territories, Malaysia indicated that novice teachers encounter problems in student discipline management and classroom control.

Meanwhile, the Federal Schools Inspectorate (1998) reported that teachers graduating from teacher training institutes who are teaching at primary schools in the country are only rated average in their teaching performance. Among the weaknesses observed among them in classrooms are lack of preparation and the absence of teaching aids. Similarly, Baharin Abu (2006), in his study, found that teaching knowledge and skills among novice teachers are only at the average level.

Based on these two studies, it is clear that novice teachers will face bigger problems if their level of preparedness in teaching and learning process is low. The failure of novice teachers to address this problem would hinder quality learning and affect students' academic performance. Therefore, this study is carried out to explore the problems faced by novice teachers in schools

II. RESEARCH QUESTION

This study is aimed at exploring problems faced by novice teachers in classroom. The research question is:

4.1 What are the problems faced by Malaysian novice teachers in classroom?

III. METHODOLOGY

10 novice teachers from different schools were involved in this study. 5 of the respondents took part in face-to-face interview sessions as shown in Table 1 below.

IV. TABLES

TABLE I: SAMPLES OF STUDY

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Teaching Experience</i>
GN 1	25	Female	1 year
GN 2	24	Female	4 months
GN 3	31	Female	2 years
GN 4	26	Male	2 years
GN 5	25	Male	1 year

V. FINDINGS

Findings show that problems faced by novice teachers in classrooms include syllabus-related issue, teaching resources, skills and knowledge, classroom control and management.

(A) Syllabus-related Issue

Three out of five participants who were interviewed in this study reported that they faced problems with the syllabus that they were using to teach. They stated that they were facing problems utilising the syllabus as they were still new in teaching. They reported of not having mastered the knowledge they need to deliver as required by the syllabus. To address this problem, some of them resorted to using resources found on the internet to improve their subject matter knowledge. Respondents mentioned this during the interview:

“...I had to mostly refer to the internet as I didn’t get much guidance and exposure from the school...yes I was assigned to a mentor but she is occupied with her teaching activities most of the times.” - GN 4

“...When I first started teaching, I was confounded by the whole thing and began to try to master the syllabus by making references to the internet and text books. Sometimes I asked help from my colleagues but I didn’t really received much help from them. Then, I decided it’s best that I learn on my own.” – GN 5

Based on these responses, it can be said novice teachers are facing problems in mastering the syllabus they are supposed to teach. Despite trying to reach out to other teachers for help, they did not get enough guidance as it was reported by them that other experienced teachers are too occupied in their work to help them.

(B) Teaching Resource Issue

The second problem reported by the respondents is issue related to teaching resources. According to the respondents,

“...I was not provided with enough teaching resources or teaching aids...most of the times I had to use the old ones.” - GN 2

“...and I had to spent substantial amount of money to buy teaching aids to be used in my classroom.” - GN 1

Responses from the respondents indicate that they were having problems in getting resources for their classroom teaching. Based on the interview, novice teachers reported that their schools did not have suitable teaching aids for the topics they need to teach and sometimes the teaching aids are technologically already outdated and thus not suitable to be used for their students. Consequently, these novice teachers had to either fork their own expenses to buy new teaching aids or use the old ones in their classrooms.

(C) Teaching Skill-related Issue

The third issue faced by novice teachers in this study is related to teaching preparation. From the interview, these responses were mentioned:

"I try to give my level best and make it a point to mix around with experienced teachers" - GN 3

"Sometimes I forget to prepare the daily lesson plan but I would continue teaching as usual even without one" - GN 4

Based on the above responses, it can be said that novice teachers face problems in teaching preparing their lessons and it was found that there are teachers who do not prepare daily lesson plans before entering the classroom.

(D) Knowledge-related Issue

Classroom teaching proves to be a problem faced by novice teacher due to various levels of abilities among students in one classroom. For one of the respondents, GN 2, she experiences stress in classroom management. During the interview, she revealed that she was taken aback by things she experiences in the real classroom situation. The responses regarding this issue are as follows:

"The first two weeks of teaching was difficult...I didn't know what I was supposed to do" - GN 1

"I didn't know how to set classroom discipline and matters related to classroom management ... frankly, I was jolted by the reality of what's really happening in school" - GN 3

Based from the findings, it can be said that novice teachers face problems in managing classroom and found difficult in the beginning of their careers.

Classroom Control and Management Issue

Data from this study indicate that novice teachers are having problems controlling aggressive students who disturb teaching and learning process. Here are respondents' responses regarding the issue:

"Novice teachers are given problematic class which are rejected by other teachers. With these kind of classes and students...how do you expect us to apply all the theories we learn in our training? In fact, we lose some motivation because of this" - GN 2

“At first, classroom control proved to be a problem to me, but as time passes I get used to the situations and learned how to control my students and ensure that they learn when they are in my classroom.” – GN 5

“I was quite apprehensive with the whole thing, so I decided to be very strict and firm with my students. I would say they are intimidated by me.” - GN 4.

Based on these responses, it can be said that novice teachers do not have enough experience with classroom management aspect of teaching. However, data also show that they are taking some measures to address this problem. Overall, findings show novice teachers face several problems in classroom. However, there are indications that these novice teachers are taking their own initiatives to address the problems and improve their teaching.

VI. DISCUSSION

This study is aimed at exploring problems faced by novice teachers in classroom. Based on the findings, among the problems reported by respondents are issue related to syllabus, resources for teaching and learning, teaching preparation, classroom teaching, as well as classroom control and management.

The findings of this study on the problems related to knowledge and skills faced by novice teachers in classrooms concurred with the study done by Khalid Johari *et al.* (2009) which involved 928 teachers at 22 schools from four districts. The study found that teachers with more than seven-year experience differ with those teaching below seven years in terms of their efficacies. This is also in line with a research on 54 novice teachers (with less than three years of experience) and 25 final-year trainee teachers carried out by Giallo and Little (2003) which showed that teachers' efficacy differs based on the length of teaching experience. In the contexts of the novice teachers in this study, they are still new and do not have enough experience in teaching, thus they need to be guided by teachers who have more experience in teaching.

In addition, findings show that novice teachers are aware of the importance of knowledge and skills in teaching. This is similar to the findings of a research by Mohd Ridhuan *et al.* (2014) which indicated that there is a need for various strategies in classroom teaching for different groups of learners to attract their attention to learn. Furthermore, Abdul Razaq Ahmad *et al.* (2013) argued that professional teachers should possess specific knowledge and skills in teaching. In the current context which requires teachers to apply various teaching approaches, it is important that novice teachers improve their skills and creativity to ensure interesting and effective teaching. They not only need to be aware of this but they need to be given enough guidance to improve their skills.

Other than the abovementioned roles, teachers also have responsibilities to disseminate knowledge in their subject matter and ensure the implementation of curriculum and syllabus. In addition, teachers are required to carry out cocurricular

activities, attend courses, and undertake research. All these tasks which require teachers to allocate a lot of time and energy could adversely affect their teaching and professionalism. All the strategies mentioned above could help novice teachers in implementing teaching and learning activities. However, inadequate experience can affect their teaching and learning process.

Moreover, findings indicated that novice teachers reported to have problems in classroom control. Fogarty, Wang, and Creek (1982) stated that beginning teachers were less able to attend to spontaneous student responses and to cues from the class as a whole than were experienced teachers, but instead were very sensitive to student behaviours that could disrupt their planned presentation. The finding showed that these novice teachers took firm actions to address the issue. This finding is similar with the finding of a study done by Zuraidah A. Majid (2001) who found that one of the problems faced by novice teachers is classroom control. This finding indicated that teachers' failure in classrooms, especially in managing the classrooms, must be taken seriously by schools. Furthermore, Oliver and Reschly (2007) stressed that teachers' ability to organize and manage students' behaviors will have a positive effect on students' performance. In the context of teachers' effectiveness, teachers' failure in managing classrooms would adversely affect teaching performance especially when there is a severe disciplinary problem among students. Schools must help these teachers by monitoring students' discipline and take necessary actions to help these teachers address the problem of class management.

Findings from this research also showed that the respondents reported that they were having problems in getting resources for their classroom teaching. In education, teachers' quality is affected by resources and the use of teaching aids (Warren & Miller, 2013). Therefore, to increase the teaching quality and to ensure effective teaching, it is important that teachers have easy access to various teaching resources. Besides providing good internet access to teachers, schools must also provide enough reference books which can be used by teachers.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the training received by trainee teachers at teacher training institutions or universities must be followed by programmes which can increase exposure and experience so they can be better prepared to face the real school experience when they start their teaching career. There might be a need to increase the duration of teaching practicum to give enough time for these trainees to get first hand experience of real classroom teaching. Furthermore, the duration for teaching practicum is differs according to universities and teacher training institutions.

The present practice of mentoring system for trainee teachers in schools is too short for these trainees to maximise their learning and for mentors to identify the

weaknesses of the trainees and to guide them accordingly. Once these trainees become novice teachers, they are still deprived from the mentoring process as many teachers are too occupied with their teaching related tasks that they do not have enough time to guide these novice teachers. Effective mentoring is key in ensuring the improvement of the teaching quality among novice teachers despite being new in the profession.

The findings of this study found that it is important that novice teachers exchange ideas and discuss with their colleagues to improve and enhance their competencies and motivation. Furthermore, school administration officers should carry out classroom observation to ensure the effectiveness of novice teachers in classroom.

Novice teachers must be involved in all activities related to staff development including in-service training, in-house training, and motivational workshops. The State Education Department and District Education Department must organize courses or workshops for novice teachers in the first three years of their career. These courses and workshops would hopefully give exposure to these novice teachers on how to adapt themselves to their school environment.

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