Guidance Teachers Scaffolding Techniques on Teacher Trainees during Practicum: An Institutional Case Study

Teknik Scaffolding Guru Pembimbing Terhadap Guru Pelatih Semasa Pratikum: Satu Kajian Institusi

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ABSTRACT
Teaching Practicum provides the teacher trainees an opportunity to acquire practical skills through direct classroom experience. It is also a time for teacher trainees to experiment with the knowledge obtained from the university and put it into practice. Each teacher trainee is assigned to a guidance teacher in guiding them through the three months practicum. In this study, researchers adopted focus group interview. Ten guidance teachers in seven primary schools in district of Selangor were interviewed. The study underpins two objectives namely to examine guidance teachers’ perceptions of the three months teaching practicum duration programme and to explicate the scaffolding techniques they had demonstrated in the practicum event. Guidance Teacher stated that these three months, on-site field experience effectively engaged teacher trainees into the teaching profession, both in the classroom and the school. However they augmented that an extension of another few months would be deem sufficient. They described five strategies used to scaffold teacher trainees into teaching. Successful scaffolding techniques are situated within the context of an extended field experience. This study provides new insights on how the scaffolding techniques are fostered to the teacher trainee.

Keywords: Scaffolding Techniques, Guidance Teacher, Practicum

ABSTRAK
Latihan Praktikum menyediakan peluang kepada guru pelatih untuk menimba ilmu dan kemahiran melalui pengalaman bilik darjah secara langsung. Ia juga merupakan masa untuk guru pelatih untuk mafaatkan ilmu pengetahuan yang diperoleh dari universiti dan menjadikan ia satu amalan. Setiap guru pelatih yang diserahkan kepada seorang guru pembimbing dan mereka melalui praktikum itu selama tiga bulan. Dalam kajian ini, penyelidik mengadoptasikan focus group interview. Seramai sepuluh orang guru bimbingan di tujuh buah sekolah rendah di negeri Selangor telah ditemuramah. Kajian ini meletakkan dua objiktif iaitu untuk mengkaji persepsi guru terhadap tempoh praktikum dan menguturakan teknik perancak mereka perlihatkan ketika menjadi guru pembimbing praktikum. Dapatkan kajian ini merekodkan guru pembimbing telah menyatakan bahawa tempoh praktikum tiga bulan tersebut, pengalaman langsung di bilik darjah dan sekolah

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Introduction

Background

Student teaching practice is a kind of apprenticeship stage during which the students are sent out to schools to gain practical and professional experience by translating all the educational theories they have acquired or learned during training into practice. It is a practical teaching activity by which the student-teachers (in this paper we refer them as teacher trainee) are given an opportunity in real school situations to demonstrate and improve training in pedagogical skill over a period of time. Teacher trainees from Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language programme from Faculty of Education of International Islamic University College Selangor (henceforth IIUCS) underwent three months teaching practicum programme (henceforth TPP) in primary schools. TPP is to provide platform for the teacher trainee to socialize into the teaching profession by linking between theory and practice and to gain on site classroom and school environment experience. Each teacher trainee is assigned to guidance teacher (henceforth GT) with intent that guidance teacher will guide and coach teacher trainee in their three months practicum in schools. Fundamentally, the TPP is to provide platform for the TT to socialize into the teaching profession by linking between theory and practice. Thus, this gives the TT the opportunity and experience on their roles and responsibilities before their placement in school after graduation.

Statement of Problem

Teaching practicum is a key component of a teacher training program. It should be the central pivot of the professional training (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa, cited in Margaret Nalova Endeley 2014) and contributes significantly to teacher quality. The best teacher education programs provide many opportunities for students to spend time in real classrooms under the supervision of an experienced mentor. Yet, in many cases support for beginning teachers is often uneven and insufficient.

Purpose of the Study

This research was motivated by Ewart and Straw (2012) statement who had suggested that if guidance teacher want teacher trainees to learn new ways of thinking and acting, they must be placed with guidance teachers who are already practicing the kinds of reform teacher educators. This enables teacher guidance and teacher trainees to explore new strategies together.
Two research questions underpinned the present study, which are:
1. to investigate guidance teacher perceptions on the duration of practicum programme
2. to explicate the scaffolding techniques which guidance teacher fostered to the teacher trainees

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

The teaching practicum exercise is based on the social construction theory’s concept of cognitive apprenticeship. Collins, Brown and Newman (1989) succinctly define cognitive apprenticeship as learning-through-guided-experience on cognitive and metacognitive, rather than physical, skills and processes. Learning in cognitive apprenticeship occurs through legitimate peripheral participation, a process in which newcomers enter on the periphery and gradually move toward full participation. According to Vygotsky (1978), much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. The tutor may show model behaviours and/or provide verbal instructions for the child. Vygotsky referred to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher), then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance. In the context of Teaching Practice the child represents the learner or teacher candidate while the tutor represents the supervisor who through collaborative dialogue, modeling, coaching or mentoring, guides the student teacher into acquiring teaching competencies.

Teaching Practicum

Teacher education is an important foundation of any educational system. It is through teacher education that the basis for good schools can be created because no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teaching practicum is a key component of a teacher training program. It should be the central pivot of the professional training (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa, 2010). If the literature and folklore of teacher education agree on one point, it is that the student teaching experience or practicum is important (Farrel, 2001). There is no teacher education program that can be said to be complete without an effective student teaching practice program

Scaffolding

Vacca and Lewitt (2008) suggested that when scaffolding is done correctly, students are encouraged to develop their own creativity, motivation, and resourcefulness. Take for a instance, when a new building is constructed the builder uses scaffolding on the outside of the building to give the builder access to the emerging structure as it is being created. When the building is able to support itself, the builder removes the scaffolding. Likewise, the builder the classroom must provide essential but temporary support to their students. This temporary support will assist students to develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities. Here comes in the role of guidance teacher whilst observing teacher trainees lesson. As students gather knowledge and increase their skills on their own,
fundamentals of the framework are dismantled. At the completion of the lesson, the scaffolding is removed altogether; students no longer need it (Lawson cited in Vacca and Levitt, 2008)

**Methodology of the Research**

Ten participants from the appointed guidance teachers participated in the study. These participants are working in primary schools in Selangor state, Malaysia. They have been working in those schools for more than seven years. Their appointment as guidance teacher was made by the Headmistress of the particular schools. They have been coaching the IIUCS teacher trainees in semester 1 of academic year 2016.

Focus groups interview was chosen as method collecting data in the present study. The justification for the method chosen, is that, focus group interview remain the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research, and are now being used with increasing frequency in research, particularly to access areas not amendable to quantitative methods and or where depth, insight and understanding of particular phenomena are required. Furthermore, focus groups are used for generating information on collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views. They are also useful in generating a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs. This method is well suited to informing the questions for the study because participants had first-hand experiences as guidance teachers in an on-site teacher education programme. Focus group interviews allow participants to make comparisons among each other’s experiences and opinions, an exchange of opinion that provides valuable insights into complex research questions. In our study, the interactions among the participants who have been guidance teacher in the practicum program provided a rich data source. 10 guidance teachers became the participant in the study. These participants have been appointed as Guidance teacher for at least three consecutive years.

This study adopted focus-group interviews, as a means of qualitative data collection. Focus group interview is a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are based on purposive sampling, although not necessarily representative. The justification for the purposive sampling is pointed by Richardson & Rabiee (2001) who mentioned that participants “…have something to say on the topic, are within the age-range, have similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other”. One of the distinct features of focus-group interviews is its group dynamics; hence the type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the group are often deeper and richer than those obtained from one-to-one interviews. The uniqueness of a focus group is its ability to generate data based on the synergy of the group interaction (Greenet al. 2003). The members of the group should, therefore, feel comfortable with each other and engage in discussion. Krueger & Casey (cited in Fatimeh R, 2014) pointed out that for some individual’s self-disclosure is natural and comfortable, while for others it requires trust and effort.

Qualitative data were collected through an open-ended question. Responses were subjected to content analysis with thematic categorization. The replies were coded and grouped by two researchers to determine common themes. Next, the researchers from the field of English language teaching and Islamic Studies compared and discussed their
content analysis to determine the final versions. The validity of the common themes was achieved by the agreement of multiple classifiers upon the common themes by working independently of each other.

Findings of the Study

Perceptions of a Three-Month Practicum

The participants disclosed that the three-month practicum duration is of some values to the TT as it is a realistic and authentic on-site experience. However the participants were somehow not convinced that the three-months is sufficient for the TT to develop teaching skills, good practices and to integrate school culture. Three out of ten participants agreed that three months is sufficient however the rest of the GT expressed their perceptions as follows:

*I personally feel that three months was rather too short of a time for the trainees to develop attitudes and would suggest that the duration to be extended to six months so that a more meaningful constructs can be developed.*

(Participant 4)

*Time flies so fast...School programmes are non-stop...I sometimes could not sit in class to guide the Teacher trainees...I could not talk and listen to them on issues encircling their practices. The duration must be extended into two phases.*

(Participant 6)

*To obtain the essence of school teaching within three months is not enough. During my training days we were sent to school for six months during the second and third year.*

(Participant 9)

*3 months is too short of a time to pick up the true pictures of a teacher’s life, expectations, responsibilities, and duties and so forth...The programme must be continued and at least six months is OK.*

(Participant 7)

From the excerpts disclosed above, participants came to agreement that the duration of three months practicum is insufficient to grasp the skills and knowledge on on-site classroom experience. Participants suggested that an extension of another next three months would be ample for that matter.

a. The Scaffolding Techniques

The GT revealed the scaffold techniques which they demonstrated to TT during the PPT. GT admitted that they were honest in telling TT what they perceive about TT’s teaching to enable TT to reflect on their experience, make connections, and observe model teaching.
The trainee teacher is not yet confident in their delivery...it become slightly worse when GT is present in the class at the point of their teaching. They stumbled in their words and sometime mispronounce it, gosh!!

(Participant 7)

I must say that they have prepared the lesson quite well however, when the lesson is observed, they lose some of their confidence...and the lesson became less exciting...

(Participant 9)

I don’t interrupt the TT in the midst of their lesson. I will keep towards the end of the lesson before I modelled to them what I perceived as a better pedagogical option to deliver the lesson content

(Participant 5)

I informed TT that it is good to tap on student’s prior knowledge during set induction stage. These students that have knowledge and experience and if these are integrated at the induction stage, then students are more engaged in the new lesson and the lesson will be more meaningful...This is one of the scaffolding technique which I informed to TT and others.

(Participant 11)

Active engagement in lesson by the pupils would be a good teaching. TT was told to design student cantered activities the lesson especially at the practice stage. Let the students practice the sentence structure over and over again but in different form and situation. Create pair work activities and group activities for them to practice the sentence structure.

(Participant 15)

It is common to see TT will be bringing into the classroom some audio visual aids to aid their teaching. However I personally feel that TT must ask themselves whether the audio visual aids is effective in imparting concepts of the lesson, It is not advisable to bring audio visual aids just for the sake of having some. For instance, teaching “fresh fruits”...we don’t need to bring real fruits if the students have seen, tasted and touch the m. This is what I mean by don’t bring in AV just for the sake of having AV.

(Participant 16)

Some of the scaffolding tools that I imparted to TT are to structure their lesson from most easy to very difficult. Introduce pictures, graphic organizers and etc. to aid teaching

These are some of the scaffolding techniques or tools that are shared and taught to TT during their practicum. These scaffolding tools will enhance TT knowledge and skills which they may not obtain in university classroom.

Conclusion

Contextual support in the context of undergraduate teacher training is influenced by their understanding of the conventions of feedback, as well as an awareness of the norms and accepted practices they are operating in. The notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practice which
inevitably permeate all training contexts can act as a support for learning as long as the accepted practices are made explicit, and the trainee is exposed to a variety of ‘effective’ teaching practice. The aim of scaffolding is to reduce the difficulty of the task, in this case, learning to teach. Guidance teacher and teacher trainees need to recognize the role that the context plays in this learning process, and be cognizant of the supportive structures which underpin good scaffolding. This may pave the way for explicit discussion of expectations from both sides in the interaction, and may raise guidance teachers’ awareness of how they need to support the interaction. This study is limited to the experiences of guidance teacher in certain primary school environment. In spite its limitation, the present study suggest a long-term practicum as necessary condition to successfully scaffold teacher trainees as they learn to teach.

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