

**IDENTIFICATION OF TRAINING  
NEEDS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL ESL  
TEACHERS IN PERAK TENGAH**

by

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## DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree of qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher learning

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## ABSTRACT

Currently there is no written policy for the training of English as a Second Language (ESL) secondary school teachers in Perak Tengah. Training was traditionally done on an *ad hoc* basis and was practically based on the perception of the trainers. This study was undertaken to identify the perceived training needs of 52 practising ESL teachers, as perceived by themselves, in the following categories: knowledge, teaching methods and strategies, classroom-based skills and organisational and management skills. The findings of the study revealed the following: Firstly, most teachers preferred training on classroom-based skills more than the other categories. Secondly, younger, less experienced teachers needed more assistance in most of the training categories than did their older, more experienced counterparts. Thirdly, lower secondary teachers with minimum qualifications perceived more training needs on knowledge of learning theories and the more advanced field of Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics, perhaps to enable them to understand their students better. Finally, upper secondary teachers perceived more training need on how to help their students to upgrade their studies. The identification of these training needs will form the basis of work for trainers to plan an efficient and effective ESL training program in the district.

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

The roles and responsibilities of the ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers in schools are increasingly becoming important, especially for a developing country like Malaysia which needs a dynamic workforce to keep in pace with its fast rate of national development. Thus, teaching the subject is essential for two major reasons, both of which are explicitly stated in the *Cabinet Committee Report on the Implementation of the National Education Policy* (1979). The report requires English to be taught as a Second Language to enable learners to use the English Language in the jobs they pursue as well as in situations which call for proficiency in the language. Secondly, to have a grasp of English as a Second Language so that they are better prepared for tertiary education where almost all the reference books are in English.

Teachers teaching English need training to teach students to realise the aspirations of the government as mentioned in the Cabinet Committee Report. However, teaching English in rural areas, such as Perak Tengah, is easier said than done because of several constraints. Ghani (1991) points out that one of the constraints is that students may tend to view the language as unimportant, partly because a pass in the English Language is not compulsory at any of the national examinations. In addition, students may also tend to ignore the subject because Bahasa Melayu is the medium of instruction from primary school to

the university level. Thus, they feel that there is really no great need to study it, let alone use it in everyday communication in their homes.

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

The secondary school ESL teachers in Perak Tengah are diverse in nature. Some of these graduate teachers are TESL-trained, either locally or abroad. Yet others are not TESL-trained but are teaching the subject. They are either interested to teach the subject or being asked to teach the subject by their principals because of the lack of teachers. There are also graduate teachers who are TESL-trained at the teachers' training colleges teaching English. Non-graduate teachers who are also not trained in TESL are found to teach English due to their interest to teach the subject or are being forced to teach the subject. The rest are temporary teachers, both graduates and non-graduates, normally employed on a contractual basis.

The ESL teachers' teaching experiences varied from one teacher to the other in terms of duration of service, number and types of classes taught, teaching areas and syllabus components. Training these teachers would be difficult because they would perceive different training needs. Both the TESL-trained and non-TESL-trained Perak Tengah ESL teachers may need up-to-date knowledge of the English Language, latest teaching methods and strategies, classroom-based skills, organisational and management skills to cope with

their students whose mother-tongue are alien to the use of English Language. This study is concerned with identifying the ESL teachers' perceived training needs. It was undertaken to facilitate professional upgrading of ESL teachers in the district of Perak Tengah, which has a predominantly rural Malay student population.

Currently, there is no attempt to identify training needs of ESL teachers in the district. This study will help the TESL trainers in the district prepare an effective and efficient training program for the ESL teachers based on the identified training needs.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

In order to attend to the constraints stated earlier, this study has the following objectives:

### **1.2.1 General objective**

The main purpose of this study is to identify the perceived training needs of the ESL teachers in Perak Tengah, as perceived by the teachers themselves.

### 1.2.2 Specific objectives

Specifically, the study seeks:

1. to identify perceived training needs of ESL teachers in Perak Tengah in the following categories:
  - (a) knowledge,
  - (b) teaching methods and strategies,
  - (c) classroom-based skills,
  - (d) organisational and management skills
2. to identify the relationship between background variables (sex, marital status, age, experience and qualifications) and perceived training needs of ESL teachers in terms of the four categories of needs;
3. to find out if there are significant differences among ESL teachers teaching different classes in terms of their perceived training needs; and
4. to identify the five most important perceived training needs of ESL teachers in Perak Tengah.

### 1.3 Research questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceived training needs of the ESL teachers in Perak Tengah as a whole?
2. What professional and personal characteristics are associated with the various configurations of training needs perceived by the ESL teachers?
3. What are the different perceived training needs of ESL teachers who teach:
  - (i) Lower Secondary?
  - (ii) Upper Secondary?
  - (iii) both Lower and Upper Secondary?
4. What are the five most important perceived training needs of ESL teachers in Perak Tengah?

## **1.4 Significance of the study**

- 1.4.1 Identification and prioritisation of needs of the Perak Tengah ESL teachers will serve as new knowledge that could contribute to the re-thinking of certain aspects of ESL in-service training in the district.
- 1.4.2 The findings of the study will determine the contents and topics for ESL in-service training in the district.

## **1.5 Limitations of the study**

- 1.5.1 The researcher was not able to cover training needs of the whole ESL teacher population in the state of Perak because he was given about three months to complete the research. The researcher instead studied the perceived training needs of secondary school ESL teachers in Perak Tengah which consisted of a total population of 53 teachers.
- 1.5.2 The study focused on perceived training needs of all 53 secondary school ESL teachers based on these four categories:
- (i) knowledge;
  - (ii) teaching methods and strategies;
  - (iii) classroom-based skills; and
  - (iv) organisational/ management skills

1.5.3 This study measured the perception of teachers' training needs. Since perception is a very subjective and relative human behaviour, it is quite difficult to measure. It is measured on a scale of 1 to 4, where

1 which means *No Need*

2 which means *Little Need*

3 which means *Moderate Need*

4 which means *Great Need*

## 1.6 Definition of terms

Perceived needs - the perceived discrepancy between what a person wants and what he has in terms of academic knowledge, professional knowledge, practical experiences and different teaching skills.

Perception - a teacher's impressions, views and insights in relation to professional needs based on his experience.

Secondary school - a school catering for students from the age of thirteen to eighteen (Forms 1, 2 and 3 are categorised as Lower Secondary; Forms 4, 5 and 6 are categorised as Upper Secondary).

ESL teachers - English as a Second Language teachers, that is, teachers who teach English Language; may be graduates or non-graduates and are either trained to teach the subject or otherwise.

T.E.S.L - Teaching of English as a Second Language.

Skills - ability to teach, knowledgeable on organisational or managerial know-how.

Staff development - a deliberate and continuous process involving the identification and discussion of present and anticipated needs of individual staff for furthering job satisfaction and career prospects and the institution for supporting its academic work and plans, and the implementation of programmes of staff activities designed for the harmonious satisfaction for those needs (Billing, 1982).

Teaching - a deliberate set of actions and activities by a person for the purpose of inducing learning in terms of cognition, affect (attitudes, values, beliefs, etc.) and skills (intellectual or conceptual skills, technical and human relations).

Teaching-learning situation - the place, physical arrangement, climate, facilities, interaction, communication. In short, the conditions surrounding the teaching and learning experience.

In-service training (INSET) - a training program to equip the serving teacher to do the same job better.

## **1.7 Background of the study**

To date there is no fixed statement or policy for professional training of ESL teachers in the district of Perak Tengah and for Malaysia in general. Teachers who are interested may apply individually for professional training through the Ministry of Education Staff Development Program. However, the awards are limited because of unavailability of fund. Successful teachers will be given a half-pay leave to pursue their first degrees. Those who are doing their second degree will be given a scholarship and a full pay leave. The Public Service Department and the National Institute of Public Administration give scholarships to deserving government public servants.

Prior to 1993, in-service training in the Perak Tengah district was provided by the state education departments on an *ad hoc* basis. Training was highly dependent on financial support from the federal government under the in-service training fund. The education department officers normally never took into consideration the ESL teachers' training needs in particular but perceived a general need for teachers based on the overall results of the students in the district two public secondary school examinations.

However, since 1993, the Schools Division of the Ministry of Education has embarked on an ambitious in-service training programme called the *Teacher Support Team (TST)* especially tailored to the training needs for the ESL teachers. To date there are nearly 1000 TST- trained secondary and primary school ESL teachers in every district of the country. Teachers are enthusiastic about the programme because they could see that it works. It helps tremendously in teachers' own professional development, a responsibility shared and shouldered by many in the profession. It helps to boost the morale of ESL teachers who were normally disappointed with the English Language results of their students in the two public examinations (the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* and the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*).

The TST programme proved to be a successful venture in the district as the 1996 English Language results showed that the students performed very well.

However, this programme is voluntary in nature and much depend on the leadership of the ESL Resource Personnel, who is also a practising teacher often bogged down with paperwork and never has the time to do research on the actual teachers' training needs.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Successful language teaching is dependent upon many factors. These relate to such elements as the teacher's sound knowledge of the language, teaching methods and strategies, classroom-based skills and good organisational or management skills. The teacher should be able to incorporate these elements while teaching. At the same time, he must also be aware of any change occurring in the classroom. Training is necessary when there is something new or the teacher is unable to keep up with changes in his classroom (Wallace, 1991; 1994).

In-service training might be conducted by ESL Resource Personnel using modules about new methods, new materials and new findings in research. However, training via such transmission does not seem to be enough. Teachers often complain about the gap between theory and practice. What they learn at such training session may not be applicable to their classes. The perceptions of both Resource Personnel and teachers are not the same. Why does this phenomenon occur?

It is appropriate to examine and thus understand the nature of perception in greater detail in the first part of the chapter. This will be followed by needs