

**UNIMAS TESL UNDERGRADUATES' PREFERENCE OF CLASSROOM
ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING THE LITERATURE COMPONENT
DURING TEACHING PRACTICE**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
LCE	Literature Component in English
L2	Second Language Learners
MOE	Ministry of Education
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TP	Teaching Practice
UNIMAS	Universiti of Malaysia Sarawak

ABSTRACT

UNIMAS TESL UNDERGRADUATES' PREFERENCE OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING THE LITERATURE COMPONENT DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

Wong Siew Fang

This study aimed to examine UNIMAS TESL undergraduates' preference of classroom activities in teaching the literature component during Teaching Practice. The research objectives are to find out the classroom activities employed by UNIMAS TESL undergraduates to teach the literature component, their reasons for employing such activities, their perception of the usefulness of classroom activities employed, and lastly the most preferred classroom activity to teach the literature component as well as their reasons for preferring such an activity. 70 TESL undergraduates who were in their third and fourth year respectively and have taught literature component during Teaching Practice were chosen as the respondents for the study. Survey research design with questionnaire as the main instrument was used in this study. The findings showed that respondents have employed a wide range of classroom activities to teach the literature component. Group or class discussion, jumbled sentences, summary writing, role play, and prediction exercises were the most frequently employed classroom activities to teach the literature component. Reasons given by the respondents for employing such activities indicated that students' needs were the greatest concern. Group or class discussion has the highest rating and this activity was reported as the most preferred classroom activity and the reasons identified were scaffolding each others' learning, building students' confidence, the nature of the activity itself which was time-saving, enhancing critical and creative thinking skills, and encouraging interaction as well as interest of the students.

ABSTRAK

AKTIVITI-AKTIVITI KELAS YANG DIGUNAKAN OLEH PELAJAR TESL DI UNIMAS DALAM PENGAJARAN KOMPENEN SASTERA SEMASA LATIHAN MENGAJAR

Wong Siew Fang

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidik aktiviti-aktiviti kelas yang digunakan oleh pelajar TESL di UNIMAS dalam pengajaran komponen sastera semasa latihan mengajar. Objektif kajian adalah untuk mengesan aktiviti-aktiviti yang digunakan oleh responden, sebab-sebab mereka menggunakannya, persepsi mereka terhadap keberkesanan aktiviti, serta aktiviti yang paling kerap digunakan bersertakan dengan sebab. Sebanyak 70 orang pelajar TESL Tahun 3 dan Tahun 4 di Unimas yang telah mengajar komponen sastera semasa latihan mengajar dipilih sebagai responden dalam kajian ini. Soal kaji bentuk kaji selidik dan soal selidik telah digunakan untuk memperoleh data-data. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa responden mempelbagaikan aktiviti-aktiviti kelas dalam pengajaran komponen sastera. Aktiviti-aktiviti kelas yang kerap digunakan ialah perbincangan secara berkumpulan atau kelas, susunan ayat, menulis rumusan, main peranan, dan latihan meneka. Sebab mereka menggunakannya menunjukkan keperluan pelajar adalah yang terpenting. Pada pandangan mereka, perbincangan secara berkumpulan atau kelas merupakan aktiviti kelas yang paling berkesan dan aktiviti ini turut merupakan aktiviti yang paling kerap digunakan. Sebabnya adalah aktiviti ini dapat membantu pembelajaran, membina keyakinan diri, sifat aktiviti yang menjimatkan masa, membantu pemikiran pelajar secara kritis dan kreatif, dan menggalakkan interaksi dan minat pelajar.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter focuses on introduction of study, background of study, research problem, aims and objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, operational definition of terms, and scope of the study.

Introduction of study contains general statements about Teaching Practice together with its aims and significances and the approaches used to teach the literature component in the English language syllabus. Background of the study further discusses the professional development of pre-service and in-service English Language teacher trainees in the Malaysian education context. Research problem, on the other hand, acknowledges the inquiry on to what extent the teacher trainees have applied the approaches learnt in designing classroom activities to teach the literature component during Teaching Practice.

Aims and objectives of the study put emphasis on the main purposes of the study. Then, significance of the study states the theoretical contribution and practical use of findings. Operational definition of terms identifies the variables in the purpose and objectives of study. Moreover, conceptual definitions will be quoted from

authoritative sources, followed by an operational definition. Lastly, scope of study describes the boundaries of this study covers and does not cover.

1.1 Introduction

The practicum or Teaching Practice component is fundamental to all teacher educational programmes (Murphy, 2003, p.112). It marks the time that teacher trainees were being supervised in their Teaching Practice components in schools (Clark & Cutler, 1990, p.182). In this context, teacher trainees will face the real classroom situation whereby they need to apply the learning theories, techniques and approaches that they have learnt throughout their courses. The practicum carried out is to have collaboration with the schools which play a part in teacher training because teacher trainees will have the chance to undergo their practicum and experience real teaching in actual schools.

In Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), the Teacher Educational Programme handled by the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development (FSKPM) put much emphasis on the usefulness of the teaching and learning process (FSKPM Teaching Practice Manual, 2006, p.23). The teaching practicum with the course code KMP 3118 is made compulsory for all the educational courses in UNIMAS, particularly TESL, Mathematics, Science Computer, Sciences (Biology or Chemistry), and ESL. These teacher trainees are been assessed twice by UNIMAS lecturers and the subject teachers from the respective schools for eight weeks. The assessment criteria include preparation on lesson plans, lesson delivery, knowledge of the subject matter along with pedagogical competencies, the use of relevant teaching aids, classroom management, and accomplishment of the school project which lead to effective teaching and learning (FSKPM Teaching Practice Manual, 2006, p.23).

In the language teaching context, McRae (1991) stated that referential texts are always used whereby the emphasis is on language that is inclined to everyday real-life situational use. However, in the literature teaching, he pointed out that representational texts are used because it brings about personal interaction between the text and the reader. This personal interaction evokes readers to use their imagination to interpret the meanings in the text. These differences need teacher to take into consideration the approaches used to present their literature lessons. It is known that the success of teaching and learning in the classroom are dependent on the methodology used by teachers to carry out their lessons in the classroom and the methodology employed is guided by an approach.

The approaches that are suggested by the advocates of literature to teach the literature component in ESL classrooms are: the language-based approach, reader-response approach and stylistic approach. These models are also embraced by teachers as reasons and purposes for the teaching of literature (Carter & Long, 1991; Ali, 1995; Berg & Berg, 2001). All these approaches are critical in determining UNIMAS TESL undergraduates' preference of classroom activities to teach the literature component. It is hoped that UNIMAS TESL undergraduates will consequently use an appropriate method to improve or refine their knowledge and skills in becoming innovative, reflective and successful literature teachers.

This study therefore highlights some ways of connecting these areas of priority by bringing forth the preference of classroom activities of UNIMAS TESL undergraduates in teaching the literature component during their Teaching Practice and why they employ such classroom activities. However ideas and thoughts generated in this project will not help to pinpoint the definitive, right or correct classroom activities to teach literature.

1.2 Background of Study

The teaching of English Language in Malaysia has always been the focus of Ministry of Education (MOE) whether it is at school or college level. On that note, the teaching of English has been overtly discussed and debated in many forums and meetings. One of the main issues addressed would be the intake, training, continuous professional development of pre-service and in-service English Language teachers. The MOE has worked tirelessly in planning and designing programmes to ensure that a viable system would form the nucleus of training English Language teachers in the country. These programmes are currently implemented and monitored and the efforts of Ministry of Education are gradually showing positive developments.

One of the major steps taken by the MOE is to meet the demands of the ever growing populations of students in schools and the shortage of trained English teachers. Some hold drastic measures taken by the MOE include the undergraduate teaching program, including B. Ed. TESL and PKPG ESL educational courses; have proven to be a great success in overcoming the issue of staffing English Language teachers (Subramaniam, 2003, p. 49). Presently, these programmes have been extended to the training of primary school teachers and teachers of other disciplines.

TESL programme is aimed at enabling student teachers to use the English language at a level of linguistic and communicative competence required of a secondary school English Language teacher and to acquire sufficient subject knowledge, pedagogical and technological skills to plan and implement appropriate learning experiences for their adolescent students (FSKPM Teaching Practice Manual, 2006, p.15). The teachers are trained to reflect critically on their own learning experiences for self-evaluation and self-improvement as professionals and direct their personal and professional development in line with current developments in education and information technology.

The aim of TESL and ESL programmes is also to generate expertise and develop idea in language study field. In line with the objective, the university has included literature subjects in the programmes in order to generate language teachers who are knowledgeable and capable of teaching literature component at secondary school level (FSKPM Teaching Practice Manual, 2006, p.17). It means that these two English education programmes not only aim to produce quality English language teaches, but also English teachers who are capable to teach the literature component in schools.

In Malaysia, the aim of the literature component highlights the intentions to enhance students' proficiency in English language through the study of prescribed literary texts, contribute to personal development and character building, and broaden students' outlook through reading about other cultures and world views. More specifically, the English language syllabus (LCE) outlines an intention to enable and empower students to do the following:

1. Give personal response to texts
2. Show an awareness of how language is used to achieve a particular purpose
3. Reflect upon and draw valuable moral lessons from issues and concerns of life as portrayed in the literary works and relate them one's life; and
4. Understand and appreciate other cultures

FSKPM Teaching Practice Manual (2006)

Apart from that, there are suggested activities in teaching the literature component specifically stated in the English language syllabus. The activities included cloze procedures, role-play, story telling, poem recitation, the use of sounds, music, and movement in poem recitation, rewriting a poem in prose form, creative writing, discussion, and summary (Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran KBSM, 2003, p. 18).

Based on the suggestions made by the advocates of literature such as Carter and Long (1991), Berg and Berg (2001) and Ali (1995), classroom activities suggested

are cloze procedure, prediction exercises, jumbled sentences, summary writing, creative writing, role-play, group or class discussion, reading logs, response journal, writing prompts, critical writing, drama presentation, rewriting narratives from another character's point of view, and literary analysis focusing on language and culture.

Teacher trainees should be aware of the various classroom activities that they can employ to teach the literature component. It is of utmost important because “the successful implementation of a lesson depends on a number of classroom activities which the teachers must develop” (Nesamalar et. al., 1995, p.280).

1.3 Research Problem

Lortie (1975:7) wrote “education is long on prescription and short on description.” It means that education takes many years in preparation and yet only takes a few months in portraying the skills or knowledge learnt. This also holds true for literary instruction for students of English as a second language (ESL). Theories, conceptual models, and general frameworks learnt in the university for teacher trainees working with the target students in teaching the literature component include language-based approach (Carter & Long, 1991), stylistic approach (Berg & Berg, 2001) and reader-responses approach (Ali, 1995). Teaching Practice provides the course participants with the opportunities to implement the classroom activities based on the approaches or models learnt during literature lectures. However, to what extent do the teacher trainees apply the approaches learnt in designing classroom activities to teach the literature component during Teaching Practice still remains a question.

From the researcher's experience, most teacher trainees faced the challenges of designing effective classroom activities in literature classes to suit the needs and interests of the students during Teaching Practice. A few claimed that some of

approaches learnt in university could not be applied to their students. On the other hand, several asserted that some of the classroom activities in literature class resulted in great success. It is therefore agreeable to say that “most training teachers are enthusiastic in asserting that Teaching Practice is one of the most valuable and one of the worst conducted parts of their training” (Wong & Paul, 1975, p.12).

In 2003, a research was carried out by Ganakumaran, Shahizah and Khoo on pedagogical implications in the incorporation of literature component in the Malaysian ESL syllabus for secondary schools from five states in West Malaysia, namely Johor, Pahang, Pulau Pinang, Perak, and Melaka. They found out that out of 500 participants, who are involved,

“240 out of 500 participants seem convinced that they lack of knowledge about literature teaching methodology. Another 10% of the participants indicate indifference to the idea of acquiring knowledge of teaching literature methodology... as literature both as content and as a teaching skill received little attention in teacher training until recently.”

(Ganakumaran, Shahizah & Khoo, 2003, p.73)

The above findings discernibly indicate that most teachers admitted lacking of knowledge on the methodology or approaches to teach the literature. This affects their choice of classroom activities since each activity is guided with an approach.

Unlike the study done by Gunakumaran et al., Gurnam (2003) did a study on students' perception towards the literature programme. The participants involved were 30 Form Two students studying in an urban girls' secondary school in Petaling Jaya in the state of Selangor. The researcher categorized the students according to their proficiency levels. The students' proficiency levels were based on the proficiency index calculated from the scores obtained by students in the Malaysian Education Ministry's Diagnostic Reading Test.

The sample consisted of ten advanced students, ten intermediate students, and ten elementary students. An advanced group was those who obtained a score between 75% and 100% for their diagnostic reading test. The scores of the intermediate group were in the range of 36% to 74%. Meanwhile, the elementary group obtained a score of 35% and below.

It was reported that a majority of students (80%) perceived that the literature lesson was boring. The advanced group stated that the classroom activities employed were dull and the text did not match their language proficiency level and the elementary students said that the language was too difficult. It was evident in one of the responses gathered from the elementary group, stating that “My teacher tries very hard to make us understand, but we are poor in English, she teaches us well, she is a very good teacher. She is good but we are not good” (in Gurnam, 2003, p.108).

One of the highlights of the findings was that teachers did not employ the appropriate activities to increase students’ level of interest in literature. This resulted in students getting bored in the language classroom. Some activities were pitched at a low level and boring activities further caused the class dull and uninspiring. All these studies were done in West Malaysia and not in Sabah and Sarawak. Therefore, as a first step to look at how teacher trainees have taught the literature component during the practicum, the researcher would like to examine teacher trainees’ preference of classroom activities in teaching the literature component during Teaching Practice.

1.4 Aims of the Study

The current study aims to examine UNIMAS TESL undergraduates’ preference of classroom activities in teaching the literature component during Teaching Practice. The research objectives are to find out the classroom activities employed by UNIMAS TESL undergraduates to teach the literature component, their reasons for

employing such activities, their perception of the usefulness of classroom activities employed, and lastly the most preferred classroom activity to teach the literature component as well as their reasons for preferring such an activity.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the researcher has formulated a few research questions as the following:

- i) What are the activities employed by UNIMAS TESL undergraduates to teach the literature component during Teaching Practice?
- ii) What are the reasons given by UNIMAS TESL undergraduates for employing such activities to teach the literature component during Teaching Practice?
- iii) How do UNIMAS TESL undergraduates perceive of the usefulness of classroom activities employed to teach the literature component during Teaching Practice?
- iv) What are the most preferred classroom activities to teach the literature component and why do UNIMAS TESL undergraduates prefer such activities?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The present study aims to examine UNIMAS TESL undergraduates' preference of classroom activities in teaching the literature component during Teaching Practice. Results from the study could help in contributing a greater insight to prospective

teachers and teachers in types of activities that they could employ to teach the literature component.

Besides, the findings would highlight the most useful activities to teach the literature component. It could be a resource of references for the prospective teachers and teachers who have no background knowledge in teaching the literature component to try out the highly-rated activities in their respective classes.

Results of the study could provide insights to what extent teacher trainees were confident to teach Literature Component in English (LCE) in their respective ESL classroom during Teaching Practice. It could lend knowledge to the school administrators to understand the importance of attending training courses, seminars or workshops relating to the teaching of literature in ensuring that all teachers could upgrade their practical knowledge to teach the literature component so that they are more confident in their teaching.

Another important outcome of the findings was the information about teacher trainees' reasons or rationales for employing any classroom activity during the practicum. The results could provide an insight to researchers in the field of literature teaching, in which they would gain further understanding to the reasons for employing such activities. It could also be seen as additional reasons to the reasons that have already existed in teaching the literature component.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

The definitions of the key terms used in this research are as follows: