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Investigating Novice English Language Teachers' Competency: A Case Study

Johan @ Eddy Luaran
Nursyuhada Zakaria
Universiti Teknologi MARA
E-mail address: johaneddyluaran@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Teacher competency is an important issue in the field of teacher education. To be a competent teacher, an individual should possess adequate knowledge and skills to teach students in classrooms. Hence, this study aimed to investigate novice English language teachers' competency to teach in schools. There were three research objectives which were: to identify novice English language teachers' level of teaching knowledge, to assess their competency in classroom teaching and to assess their competency in relation to teaching knowledge and classroom teaching. This research employed a descriptive research design. A total of forty-one novice English language teachers in secondary schools were selected as the sample for the study. The instruments used were the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), teaching observation form and semi-structured interviews. All forty-one respondents were required to complete the TKT, while only nine respondents were selected for the observations and interviews based on their scores in the TKT. The findings revealed that the novice English language teachers had adequate teaching knowledge, as reflected in their scores in TKT. However, the knowledge was not completely applied in their teaching as observed by the researcher, which also indicated that they were incompetent in some aspects of teaching, such as choosing appropriate teaching methods and in time management. The findings hoped to provide input to the teacher training programmes offered in Malaysia.

Keywords: novice teachers, competency, teaching, English language, teaching knowledge

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers are the one of the most important assets in providing good education to students. Without talented and skilled teachers in the education system, students' achievement will be affected (Rivers, 1996 cited in Reza, Purya & Hesamoddin, 2011). With this in mind, nations strive for quality education and one of the ways of achieving this is by emphasizing on preparing good teachers. For example, in the United States, every state has its own licensing and certification rules that enable teachers to teach in their states (Roth & Swail, 2000). However, in Malaysia, its education system is centralized. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for planning the curriculum and syllabus, as well as in training and allocation of teachers in schools. In the Tenth Malaysian Plan, it is stated that Malaysia aims to achieve a knowledge-based economy by 2020. To achieve this aim, one of the strategies is through increasing the quantity and quality of teachers (Yaacob Wan Ibrahim, 2007 cited in Hasbee, Yi & Hong, 2012).

Consequently, thousands of teachers are produced every year by institutes of teacher education and universities to cater for the demand of teachers in schools. After four years of teacher education, graduates will be sent to schools to teach and this is the time where what they have learnt during teacher training is supposed to be utilised. Sometimes, however, novice teachers' expectations of what teaching profession should be are the total opposite of what the reality of teaching offers to them (Melnick & Meister, 2008). The first years of teaching are very critical whereby some researchers liken the first years as a 'sink or swim' situation (Nahal, 2010; Cobbold, 2007). Although these teachers are new, they need to learn and adapt to the situations or else they may suffer from stress and burnout which can result in teacher attrition.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In Malaysia, teachers are very much in need as transmitters of knowledge to educate students in schools. This is the utmost reason why teachers are regarded as one of the nation's most important assets that contribute to the development of the country. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, in 2012, there were 412,720 primary and secondary

school teachers compared to 5, 272, 478 students in schools. Based on these statistics, it is clearly shown that the number of teachers cannot accommodate the increasing enrolment of students. As one of the ways to solve this problem, public and private tertiary educational institutions are increasingly producing graduate teachers to cater for the demands of our schools. Unfortunately, another problem has emerged which is the quality of new teachers in teaching. These new teachers are sent to schools and are given responsibilities to teach students. However, when their performance is evaluated, they are reported to be incompetent in terms of subject matter and pedagogical skills (Munir, 2009). Some of the reasons given are they are fresh graduates and they still lack experience in teaching. Nevertheless, educational institutions should take the responsibility to produce qualified and well-equipped teachers to meet the needs of students. Although they are fresh graduates, they should be prepared to face the challenges of being a teacher not only in terms of teaching but in terms of managing students as well.

Farrell (2003) reveals that some of the challenges that novice teachers face are teacher workload, finding suitable teaching methods to meet students' proficiency, and discipline problems. Similar findings are found in a study conducted by Ye and Cooper (2011) on novice teachers' challenges and struggles. The novice teachers are reported to be challenged by classroom management and how to keep students motivated in learning the content taught. These findings imply that the first year of teaching is the most critical period in a teacher's beginning career in which he or she needs to adjust and adapt to the reality of teaching. In Malaysia, the issue of qualified English teachers to teach the English language is still a main concern as there is a strong decline in the level of students' proficiency in English (Mohan et al., 2010). In view of this, one of the attempts taken to improve English among students is the introduction of the programme called Enhancing Bahasa Malaysia and Strengthening the English Language (MBMMBI) (Ministry of Education, 2010). To achieve the objective of strengthening the English language, the quality of English language teachers also needs to be ensured so that it will be in line with the Ministry's goals. Thus, teachers who teach this subject must be from English-option to ensure quality with regard to subject matter and pedagogical aspects.

The term ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ was first introduced by Shulman (1986) to represent teachers’ professional expertise. It is formed from the combination of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, which are essential to every educator’s professional growth. Having content knowledge alone is inadequate if a teacher is unable to deliver the content effectively for students to understand. This is where pedagogical knowledge comes. Mishra and Koehler (2006) define it as “deep knowledge about the processes and practices or methods of teaching and learning and how it encompasses, among other things, overall educational purposes, values, and aims” (p.1026). Meanwhile, Shulman (1986) defines pedagogical content knowledge as “the ways of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible to others” (p. 23). In view of these, effective teachers should be equipped with these skills, together with good classroom management skills to ensure that learning can take place successfully.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Based on the discussion in the background of the study, there are various issues which are related to novice teachers. Some of the pertinent issues discussed are classroom management skills, lack of support from senior teachers, difficulty in handling individual student differences, and how to motivate students to be interested in lessons. In the Malaysian context, the issue of teacher competence in knowledge of teaching also needs to be addressed. Mohd Sofi (2003) observes that some ESL teachers are incompetent in using English due to their low proficiency in English. He further added that the lack of confidence to use and speak English is one of the problems ESL teachers face. In addition to this, Munir (2009) also identifies that English language teachers lack fluency and accuracy in English. These problems imply that English language teachers may have difficulties in the knowledge of subject matter.

Pedagogical knowledge is also a concern to novice teachers. Studies carried out by Melnick & Meister (2008) and Bezzina (2006) support this claim where novice teachers are found to be less prepared to teach mixed-ability classes and varying group sizes. It is shown that novice teachers may be less competent in varying their teaching methods to suit the ability of their students. Another challenging skill that novice teachers are concerned

with is classroom management skills. Previous studies (Melnick & Meister, 2008; Bezzina, 2006; Ye & Cooper, 2011) reveal that novice teachers tend to have problems in classroom management skills which also include discipline problems.

Despite attending and completing teacher preparation programmes which run for about four years, these problems still persist and are faced by novice teachers. Supposedly, with what they have learnt during the teacher preparation programmes, they should be able to carry out their responsibilities and perform to their utmost capabilities in schools. However, novice teachers in Nahal's (2010) research claimed that what they learnt during the preparation program was irrelevant to classroom teaching, while some of the pre-service teachers in Siti Salina's and Lee's (2008) study asserted that the programme did not expose them to the reality of teaching in schools. Consequently, examining the outcomes of previous studies, the researchers were prompted to investigate whether novice English language teachers are competent in their knowledge about teaching, which in turn is one of the indicators of competency in classroom teaching.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study set out to look into the following research questions.

1. What is the level of teaching knowledge among novice English language teachers?
2. How competent are novice English language teachers in classroom teaching?
3. How competent are novice English language teachers in relation to teaching knowledge and classroom teaching?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches with a descriptive research design. The process of conducting the research involved

three phases: (a) the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), (b) the observation and (c) the interview. These were employed in this study to assess novice English language teachers' competence in teaching. After the marks for the test were obtained, nine selected novice English language teachers were observed on their teaching and learning in classrooms. The observations were conducted twice for each of them. At the end of the second observation, each of them was interviewed. The interviews were aimed to elicit more in-depth information of their experience about their lessons and challenges faced in teaching.

SAMPLE

The respondents for this study were 41 novice English language teachers in secondary schools in Kelantan. The distribution of the schools according to the districts and the number of teachers involved are illustrated in Table 1. For this study, the sampling technique that was used was stratified sampling, which is one of the probability sampling techniques. This technique was employed "to ensure that subgroups within the population are represented proportionally in the sample" (Mertler & Charles, 2005, p. 134). The reason for choosing this sample was due to some pre-determined characteristics that this sample possessed. The characteristics included novice teachers who taught English language subject and they had at least one to three years of teaching experience in schools. After the marks were obtained, the marks were categorized into low, average, and high scores. For each category, three novice English language teachers were selected randomly to be the respondents for the teaching observation. The same nine teachers were involved in the interviews conducted at the end of the second observation.

Table 1: Distribution of Schools and Number of Teachers

District	Name of School	Location	Number of Teachers
Kota Bharu	School 1	Rural Area	3
	School 2	Urban Area	2
	School 3	Rural Area	1
Bachok	School 4	Rural Area	1
	School 5	Rural Area	1
Pasir Mas	School 6	Rural Area	2
	School 7	Rural Area	2
Machang	School 8	Urban Area	2
Pasir Puteh	School 9	Rural Area	1
Tanah Merah	School 10	Rural Area	6
	School 11	Rural Area	1
	School 12	Rural Area	4
Kuala Krai	School 13	Rural Area	2
	School 14	Rural Area	3
	School 15	Rural Area	4
Gua Musang	School 16	Urban Area	3
	School 17	Rural Area	3
Total			41

INSTRUMENTS

Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT)

The Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) was adapted from the University of Cambridge ESOL Examination and a pilot study was run to evaluate its reliability. All of the items for TKT were dichotomous. The value for KR-20 (Kuder Richardson–20) was 0.89 which shows that the instrument is reliable.

The TKT consisted of three core modules with 80 questions per module. Table 2 presents the outline of the modules in the test. The allocated time for each module was one hour and twenty minutes. Module 1 of the TKT was divided into three parts which were describing language

and language skills, background to language learning and background to language teaching. Module 2 of the TKT consisted of two parts, which were related to lesson planning and use of resources for language teaching. Part 1 of Module 2 assessed candidates' knowledge of planning their lessons and choosing appropriate activities to suit the aims and the needs of learners. Part 1 also tested candidates' knowledge of using suitable assessment activities among learners. Part 2 of Module 2 was related to how teachers employ appropriate resources, materials and aids in their teaching. The last module, Module 3 of TKT concerned teachers' knowledge of managing the teaching and learning process. The module was also divided into two parts. Part 1 of Module 3 dealt with teachers' and learners' language in the classroom while Part 2 was intended to assess teachers' knowledge of the range and function of strategies available to manage classrooms effectively.

Table 2: Outline of TKT

Module	Description	Content	Allocated Time
1	Language and background to language learning and teaching	Describing language and language skills	1 hour and 20 minutes
		Background to language learning	
		Background to language teaching	
2	Lesson planning and use of resources for language teaching	Planning and preparing a lesson or sequence of lessons	1 hour and 20 minutes
		Selection and use of resources and materials	
3	Managing the teaching and learning process	Teachers' and learners' language in the classroom	1 hour and 20 minutes
		Classroom management	

In terms of grading, the full marks for each module was 80. The marks were then categorized into four bands, as aligned by Cambridge. The range of marks for the bands is illustrated in Table 3 and it is applicable to all three modules in the test.

Table 3: Band Range

Band	Band Range Outlined by University of Cambridge ESOL Examination	Range of Marks
Band 1	Band 1 indicates that candidates achieve less than 20% of the available marks	0 – 15
Band 2	Candidates need to achieve approximately 20% of the available marks	16 – 39
Band 3	Candidates need to achieve approximately 50% of the available marks	40 – 67
Band 4	Candidates need to achieve approximately 85% of the available marks	68 – 80

Teaching Practice Evaluation Form

The teaching practice evaluation form for observation was adopted from the one used by supervisors in the Faculty of Education in a public university in Shah Alam to evaluate their trainee teachers. The rationale for adopting this instrument was due to its reliability as it was used in the public university in Shah Alam to assess their trainee teachers. Using observation as one of the methods to collect data is advantageous since the researcher is able to capture and observe information in a natural setting (Cresswell, 2005). The teaching practice evaluation form consisted of twenty items, each one on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from “none” (0), “poor” (1), “weak” (2), “average” (3), “good” (4) and “excellent” (5). The total score for this evaluation form was 100. The summary of the items and the marks for this form used in observation is presented in Table 4 while Table 5 shows the grading scale used in this study which was adopted from the same public university in Shah Alam.

Table 4: Total Items and Marks for Each Section in the Teaching Practice Evaluation Form

Section	Number of Items	Total Marks
Planning	4	20
Implementation	11	55
Closure	3	15
Teacher Characteristics	2	10
Total	20	100

Table 5: Grading Scale for Teaching Practice Evaluation Form

SCALE		
Percentage	Grade	Result
90 – 100	A+	Pass with distinction
80 – 89	A	
75 – 79	A-	
70 – 74	B+	Pass with credit
65 – 69	B	
60 – 64	B-	
55 – 59	C+	Pass
50 – 54	C	
0 – 49	F	Fail

Semi-Structured Interview

Interview was employed as one of the methods in data collection since it could elicit further information from respondents. In this study, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews to elicit information regarding teacher competence and how they felt about it in view of the research questions in the study. The seven semi-structured interview questions were related to the three areas of teaching knowledge which were knowledge of subject matter, pedagogical knowledge, and managing teaching and learning process.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

Gender and age

The distribution of male and female novice English language teachers is presented in Table 6. It shows the percentage of male and female respondents involved in the study. It shows that the distribution of the female respondents was significantly higher than the male respondents. Twelve respondents (29.3%) were male while the remaining 29 respondents were female (70.7%).

Table 6: Distribution of Gender

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	12	29.3
Female	29	70.7
Total	41	100

In relation to the age of the respondents, it was observed that novice English language teachers involved in the study were in the range of middle twenties. Table 7 presents the distribution of the respondents' age. The table reveals that only two respondents (4.9%) were 23 years old. 17 respondents (41.5%) were 24 years old, while 22 respondents (53.7%) were 25 years old.

Table 7: Distribution of Age

Age	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
23	2	4.9
24	17	41.5
25	22	53.7
Total	41	100

Academic qualification and CGPA

In terms of academic qualification, all forty-one respondents were first degree holders. Table 8 illustrates the CGPA scored by the respondents in the study. Only one respondent (2.4%) achieved a CGPA below 3.00, while most of the respondents (n=30, 73.2%) managed to score below 3.50. The remaining ten respondents (24.4%) managed to graduate with a CGPA of 3.50 and above.

Table 8: Distribution of CGPA

CGPA	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
2.50-2.99	1	2.4
3.00-3.49	30	73.2
3.50-4.00	10	24.4
Total	41	100

Teaching option and teaching experience

In terms of teaching option, it was reported that all respondents were English option teachers. The present study focused on novice English language teachers who had at least three years of teaching experience. According to Table 9, out of 41 respondents, 21 respondents (51.2%) had been teaching for less than a year. Seventeen respondents (41.5%) had one year of teaching experience, while only three respondents (7.3%) were reported to have two years of teaching experience.

Table 9: Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	21	51.2
1 year	17	41.5
2 years	3	7.3
Total	41	100

Level of novice English language teachers' teaching knowledge

The responses for the three modules in the TKT were calculated and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Table 10 illustrates the total score of the TKT based on the three modules. The marks were categorized according to the four bands outlined by the University of Cambridge ESOL Examination.

Table 10: Total Score of TKT according to Bands

TKT Module	Band 1 (0-15)		Band 2 (16-39)		Band 3 (40-67)		Band 4 (68-80)		Total	
	n	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	n	%
Module 1	0	0	0	0	27	65.9	14	34.1	41	100
Module 2	0	0	0	0	37	90.2	4	9.8	41	100
Module 3	0	0	0	0	39	95.1	2	4.9	41	100

Based on Table 10, it was observed that in the three modules, none of the respondents scored Band 1 and Band 2. In Module 1, more than half of the respondents (n=27, 65.9%) managed to score Band 3, while another 34.1% (n=14) scored Band 4. The performance of the respondents in Module 2 and Module 3 was quite similar, since most of the respondents scored Band 3. Thirty-seven respondents (90.2%) achieved Band 3 and the remaining (n=4, 9.8%) scored the highest band, Band 4 in Module 2. For the last module, Module 3, 39 respondents (95.1%) managed to score Band 3 and only two respondents (4.9%) were classified as Band 4 achievers.

In order for the researcher to select some respondents for observations and interviews, the marks from Module 1, 2, and 3 of the TKT were summed up and were further classified into low, average, and high scores. The total marks for the three modules were 240. High scores ranged from 202 to 205, average scores were at 180 and low scores ranged from 147 to 158. For each category, three respondents were chosen to be observed and interviewed. Table 11 presents the marks chosen for every category.

Table 11: Respondents Chosen for Observation and Interview

Category	Respondent	Gender	School	Teaching Experience	TKT Score
High Scores	Respondent A	Female	School 4	2 years	205
	Respondent B	Male	School 10	Less than 1	204
	Respondent C	Male	School 13	2 years	202
Average Scores	Respondent D	Female	School 10	1 year	180
	Respondent E	Female	School 13	1 year	180
	Respondent F	Female	School 17	1 year	180
Low Scores	Respondent G	Female	School 10	Less than 1	158
	Respondent H	Female	School 12	Less than 1	147
	Respondent I	Female	School 16	1 year	147

Novice English Language Teachers' Performance in Observations

Eighteen observations of the nine novice English language teachers from six secondary schools were carried out. Table 12 demonstrates the grades obtained from the observations. It shows that none of the respondents obtained Grade A for the observations. The highest grade achieved by the respondents was B+ which means that they passed with credit. The lowest score from the eighteen observations was 53, which was categorized as a pass.

Table 12: Distribution of Grades Obtained in Observation

Grade	Frequency	Grades
B-	3	Pass with credit
B	5	
B+	5	
C	1	Pass
C+	4	
Total	18	

Findings from the Semi-structured Interviews

All nine novice English language teachers were interviewed after the second round of observations were completed. The semi-structured interview questions were related to the three areas of teaching knowledge which are knowledge of subject matter, pedagogical knowledge, and managing teaching and learning process. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis; where the researcher categorized and analyzed the data according to the emergent themes. The findings from the interviews are reported according to the seven interview questions.

Question 1: In your opinion, do you think that your knowledge about the subject matter is adequate for you to teach?

The first question was related to the subject matter knowledge of the novice English language teachers to teach English. The responses from the nine teachers were analyzed according to the themes which emerged as shown in Table 13. It shows that more than half (66.7%) of the respondents felt that their knowledge about the English subject was still inadequate to enable them to teach their students effectively. They felt that they had a lot to learn since this was their first experience teaching in schools.

Table 13: Content Analysis for Question 1

No	Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Sufficient knowledge of the subject matter	3	33.3
2	Insufficient knowledge about English	6	66.7

Question 2: What challenges do you have in terms of knowledge of subject matter?

This question elicited the respondents' challenges and difficulties in teaching English. Only two themes emerged from the interviews. They were grammatical rules and fluency and accuracy in English. The themes are presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Content Analysis for Question 2

No	Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Grammatical rules	2	22.2
2	Fluency and accuracy	4	44.4

Since many respondents reported that they felt their knowledge of subject matter was inadequate, their challenges faced in classroom were further investigated. 44.4% mentioned that their problem in subject matter knowledge was related to their fluency and accuracy in the English language while another 22.2% reported that they had problems in explaining certain grammatical rules to the students. However, these novice English language teachers realized that all these challenges could be overcome with teaching experience.

Question 3: How do you approach your students to ensure that your lessons are suitable to meet the needs of your learners?

This question pertained to the pedagogical knowledge of the novice English language teachers. It aimed to look into how they selected and employed teaching methods to suit their learners.

Table 15: Content Analysis for Question 3

No	Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Interactive games	9	100
2	Use materials according to students' proficiency	5	55.5
3	Forcing the students	1	11.1
4	Use of translation method	9	100

Based on Table 15, most of the novice English language teachers had the same opinion on how to approach their students. All of them agreed that the use of interactive games was a good method to be employed since students would be interested to learn. Half of the respondents revealed that they had to adapt teaching materials to suit their students' language proficiency. Surprisingly, one novice English language teacher (11.1%) mentioned that she had to force her students to learn.

Question 4: What challenges do you have in choosing appropriate teaching methods/materials for your students?

For this question, the respondents were asked about their difficulties in choosing appropriate methods and materials to be used in the classrooms.

Table 16: Content Analysis for Question 4

No	Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Students' proficiency	9	100
2	Mixed ability students	8	88.9
3	Time constraint	6	66.7
4	No syllabus to follow	2	22.2
5	Lack of resources	3	33.3

Based on Table 16, five emergent themes were reported. As mentioned before, all novice English language teachers expressed their difficulty in choosing suitable teaching methods and materials due to the students' language proficiency.

Question 5: In your opinion, how does a well-managed classroom look like?

There were three themes which emerged from this question, as shown in Table 17. Generally, all novice English language teachers in this study had the same perception on how a well-managed classroom was supposed to be. All of them agreed that teachers should be in control of their classrooms. Most of them defined good classroom management in terms of students' behavior and the smoothness of the activities carried out during lessons.

Table 17: Content Analysis for Question 5

No	Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Teacher control the class	9	100
2	Students behave well	6	66.7
3	Activities are conducted successfully	6	66.7

Question 6: What strengths do you have in classroom management skills or strategies?

This solicited novice English language teachers' strengths in managing their classroom effectively. Based on Table 18, only two themes were reported from their responses. More than half of the respondents (66.7%) believed that their strength was in their ability to control the students' behavior in the classroom. Another 33.3% felt that they could implement classroom rules which were agreed on with the students.

Table 18: Content Analysis for Question 6

No	Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Ability to control the students	6	66.7
2	Establishing classroom rules	3	33.3

Question 7: What concerns/challenges do you have about managing the classroom effectively?

The last question pertaining to classroom management dealt with the novice English language teachers' weaknesses in managing the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Based on Table 19, 66.7% respondents stated that they had difficulty in attracting students' attention and interest to their lessons. Their inability to attract students' interest led some students to fall asleep during the lessons.

Table 19: Content analysis for question 7

No	Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Ability to attract students' interest	6	66.7
2	Time management	3	33.3
3	Students' misbehavior	3	33.3

DISCUSSION

This study set out to investigate novice English language teachers' competence to teach in schools and data was gathered through TKT, teaching observations, and semi-structured interviews. The following discussion interprets and discusses the findings in detail with regard to the three research questions investigated in the study.

Level of Teaching Knowledge among Novice English Language Teachers

The first research question deals with novice English language teachers' knowledge about teaching. The findings showed that the novice teachers had adequate knowledge regarding knowledge about teaching. It was reported that none of the novice teachers obtained Band 1 or Band 2 which signified limited knowledge of the concepts, terminologies and practices tested in the modules.

Among the three modules tested in the study, the novice English language teacher performed better in Module 1 which was related to language and background to language learning and teaching, compared to Module 2 and Module 3. This is shown through the percentage of novice teachers who obtained the highest band-Band 4, with the percentage of 34.1% for Module 1. Novice English language teachers who achieved Band 4 reflected that they possessed a full range of familiarity with the areas examined in Module 1. This finding is supported by Kömür (2010) who also reported that novice teachers in his study scored the highest in Module 1. Furthermore, the finding can also be attributed to the teaching experience of the novice English language teachers. Half of the respondents in this study have less than one year of teaching experience which indicated that they have just graduated from their degree. Therefore, it is not impossible that they still remember all the theories and concepts that they have learnt during the teacher preparation programmes.

With regard to the second module, Module 2, most of the novice English language teachers obtained Band 3, while a small number of them achieved Band 4. While in Module 3, the percentage of novice English language teachers who managed to score Band 3 was slightly higher than

in Module 2. This means that the teaching knowledge for lesson planning and resources and managing teaching and learning process are almost equal. Most of the novice English language teachers demonstrated that they were generally able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations. This finding concurs with Azadeh's and Mohammad Alavi's (2011) findings as the novice teachers in their study also did not yield significant difference in their performance in Module 2 and Module 3.

Overall, the novice English language teachers' teaching knowledge can be considered as adequate since they scored mostly in Band 3 and some in Band 4 in the Teaching Knowledge Test. According to the band descriptor outlined by the University of Cambridge ESOL Examination, these novice teachers should be able to relate their knowledge and apply it to the actual teaching in classrooms because they are familiar with most concepts, theories, terminologies, and practices involved in the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Turnuklu and Yesildere (2007) also reported results in accordance with the finding in this study. Most of the pre-service primary Mathematics teachers in their study were found to have mediocre level of knowledge in teaching Mathematics, while none of them were reported to have excellent knowledge in teaching Mathematics. In addition, Faizah (2008) revealed that pre-service teachers possessed the basic knowledge and skills necessary of an English teacher even before they were assigned to teach during the teaching practicum. Therefore, it is expected that their teaching knowledge is at the adequate level during the first years of teaching in schools.

The finding is also in line with the academic achievement of the novice English language teachers in the study which was measured through their CGPA. It was found that most of them achieved a CGPA between 3.00 to 4.00 which can be considered as average to excellent achievement. This explains the adequate level of teaching knowledge possessed by the novice English language teachers.

The findings can also be attributed to the preparation programmes that they had attended before teaching. During the teacher preparation programmes of about four years, there are many teaching methodology and educational courses that students need to complete. The findings in this

study suggest that the courses offered in the preparation programmes have to an extent prepare the novice English language teachers to teach in terms of teaching knowledge. They are equipped with the knowledge about the English subject, teaching methods, teaching materials and are familiar with most of the theories and concepts in managing classrooms.

Novice English Language Teachers' Competency in Teaching

The second research question investigated in the study is related to the novice English language teachers' competency in teaching English. The findings were gathered through teaching observations conducted among the nine selected novice English language teachers. In general, based on their distribution of grades obtained in the teaching observations, most of them managed to pass above average scores, while some of them achieved only average scores in their teaching observations. The highest grade obtained by the novice English language teachers was B+, while the lowest grade achieved was C-.

The findings imply that the novice English language teachers are not very competent in certain aspects of teaching. Kızılaslan (2011) also revealed similar findings on novice teachers' competency in teaching language skills. In his study, novice teachers were found to be incompetent in teaching listening, speaking, and writing but they were observed to be quite competent in teaching reading. In contrast, Abdul Rahim, Mohd Najib, and Ting (2010) and Naree Aware (2009) reported that teachers in their studies were competent in all aspects of teaching. The difference in the results could be due to the respondents involved in the studies conducted by Abdul Rahim, Mohd Najib, and Ting (2010) and Naree Aware (2009). Although many teachers participated in the studies, there were no further details provided by the researchers with regard to their respondents' teaching experience. Therefore, there is a high possibility that their teaching experience varied from less than three years to more than ten years of teaching compared to the teaching experience of one to three years of the respondents in this study. Another explanation for the difference is due to the instrument employed in their study. Using a questionnaire as the single measurement of competency which requires the teachers to rate their own teaching competency, the reliability of the results is an issue. As for the present study, the findings were triangulated through the TKT, teaching observations and semi-structured interviews.

The novice English language teachers' performance in teaching was further investigated in detail through the sections in the teaching practice observation form. Based on the findings presented, all nine teachers managed to score high marks in the Planning section. In this section, the novice teachers were able to state their teaching objectives and the objectives were suitable to the students' learning ability. They also exhibited their ability to prepare and organize their lesson plans before conducting lesson although the lesson plans were made simpler compared to those in teaching practicum. This was observed in the teaching observations where the novice English language teachers showed their lesson plans to the researcher before they started teaching. Fadzilah, Scaife, and Nurul Aini (2010) assert that doing preparation before teaching is a good strategy because while planning the lessons, novice teachers will be aware of what they want to do and achieve in their lessons. As long as novice teachers have a plan on what and how they are going to teach a lesson, then it is not important whether the lesson plan is a detailed plan or just a simple one as long as the novice teacher understands it (Farrell, 2008).

A study by Choy et al. (2011) provides support for the findings in the present study. They found that novice teachers' perception of skills in lesson planning has increased at graduation and after their first year of teaching. Similar findings are also revealed by a study conducted by Wong et al. (2011). In addition, pre-service teachers in Al-Mahrooqi (2011) believed that they were prepared enough in writing effective lesson plans. The findings in this study could be due to the methodology courses and the teaching practicum that the novice teachers completed during their preparation programmes. In the methodology courses, students are required to do microteaching sessions in the class. Before they could teach, they need to come out with a detailed lesson plan describing what and how they are going to deliver a lesson. Besides that, being in a school for almost 12 weeks for the teaching practicum, they need to prepare weekly lesson plans for the principal to check. Their mentor teacher and supervisor also supervise the trainee teacher's development when they come into the class for observations. Therefore, these teaching and learning experiences have contributed to the novice English language teachers' adequate knowledge in preparing effective lesson plans when they are posted to schools.

Novice English Language Teachers' Competency in Relation to Teaching Knowledge and Classroom Teaching

It can be concluded from the findings from the TKT, observations and interviews that novice English language teachers who scored high marks in the TKT did not necessarily perform better in classroom teaching. Furthermore, some of them who achieved low scores in the TKT which was an indicator of teaching knowledge performed equally well in classroom teaching in comparison with those who had an average level of teaching knowledge. Kömür (2010) reveals similar findings in his study which provide support for the present study. Incompetency in teaching some aspects of language skills is also highlighted in Kızılaslan's (2011) study.

Therefore, these findings lead to the assumption that having a high level of teaching knowledge does not guarantee that novice English language teachers can teach effectively. Although it has an influence to some extent, some of them mentioned in the interviews that what they learnt during the teacher preparation programmes was different from what they faced and practised in schools. The most cited reason for this problem was students' low proficiency in English as stated by Respondent B.

“When you learn in university, you are told that the students are like they are all good and you won't face any kind of situation like the students don't understand even a single word in English. So, when you are posted to schools, you know the difference – the real situation. As for myself, I found it quite hard for me to be in this school”.

The novice English language teachers felt that another reason which restricted them from applying all the theories they learnt was teaching exam-oriented lessons. They mentioned that with so many programmes conducted in schools, they had to keep up with the syllabus and prepare the students to sit for examinations. This influenced how they taught, i.e which was more focused on answering questions rather than emphasizing on student learning. Respondent D expressed her opinion on this matter.

“When I am teaching, I think I am more to exam-oriented because when we learn in university, our aim is to make the students

to understand better, right. But, when we come to school, the approach is different. Our KP (Ketua Panitia) or our school will stress more on how to get the students to pass the examinations; or for the advanced level, how to make the students get an A”.

Based on the findings from the test, observations and interviews, it can be summarized that novice English language teachers in this study are still incompetent in certain areas of teaching and to cope and adapt with situations in school. It is evident that disconnection exists between the theories learnt and the reality in schools. This issue has been highlighted and discussed in previous studies on teacher education i.e., the findings of this study is supported by findings from studies carried out by Siti Salina and Lee (2008) and Nahal (2010). These studies have reported that pre-service teachers feel that the courses they have learnt do not help them much in their teaching. A gap between theories learnt and application in the classroom is often cited as the major problem in preparing qualified teachers (Melnick & Meister, 2008; Al-Mahrooqi, 2011; Ahmad Alkhawaldeh, 2011; Thenjiwe & Lebogang, 2012). Novice English language teachers should be able to integrate and link theory into practice and vice versa so that they will be able to face any difficulties in handling the teaching and learning process.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have implications for teacher training and shed some light on novice English language teachers. Results from this study provide some information for educational policy makers to enhance novice teachers' first year of teaching and reduce teacher retention. The Ministry of Education needs to provide specific and detailed guidelines and resources for novice English language teachers to follow.

In addition, supervision of novice English language teachers from the MOE as well as schools should also be strengthened and continuously done so that the development of novice teachers could be monitored. The current practice is that within the first three years, a Nazir from the MOE will go to schools to observe novice teachers and if they pass, they will become full-fledged teachers after they have attended an induction programme. It is recommended that the supervision is extended even after they have become

full-fledged teachers. Schools should also play a role in supporting novice English language teachers in their professional growth. It is a common practice that when a new teacher is posted to a school, he or she will be overwhelmed with many responsibilities apart from teaching. It is indeed a good opportunity for the new teacher to learn; however, caution must be taken to avoid the novice teacher from being overloaded with other roles in the school which in turn, will likely to affect his or her capability to teach effectively.

Teacher training programmes have benefited novice English language teachers in many aspects, as illustrated by the results of this study. Nevertheless, necessary improvements need to be considered to ensure that qualified teachers are produced. The courses offered in the preparation programmes for teachers should provide opportunities for future teachers to relate to and apply the theories they have learnt. It is suggested that more practical courses and teaching methodologies are included to equip trainee teachers to face the realities in school. A longer period of teaching practicum is also necessary as twelve weeks are inadequate for the trainees to be exposed to the challenging world of teaching. This will provide opportunities for them to practice their time management skill and questioning skill with students. The courses offered should made them more familiar with school context so that they will be able to cope and adapt with the new environment and people around them and mostly, to benefit their students.

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