

Assessing ESL Teacher Trainees' Content, Pedagogical, and Professional Knowledge Base

Gurnam Kaur Sidhu
Chan Yuen Fook

*Faculty of Education,
Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Shah Alam, Malaysia*

Sarjit Kaur

*School of Humanities,
Universiti Sains Malaysia,
Malaysia*

This paper investigated the content, pedagogical and professional knowledge of 69 teacher trainees enrolled in B. Ed. (TESL) programmes at Faculties of Education located in two public universities in Malaysia. The study employed a three-pronged system of collecting data which involved the use of questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. The findings revealed that teacher trainees' content knowledge in terms of grammar, syntax and generic structures left much to be desired. Close to 70 per cent of them possessed a low to fair level of linguistic proficiency. Analysing the professional knowledge base of teacher trainees continues to contribute to the discourse on improving quality of teacher education worldwide. Their pedagogical knowledge in terms of teaching and learning was however good but they displayed limited knowledge in terms of the teaching profession, legal liabilities and assessment of the learning process.

Keywords: Professional knowledge base, Empowerment, Teacher Trainees

The twin waves of globalization and internationalization of education have placed critical demands on teacher education. Today, international quality assurance standards in teacher education are seen as a public policy priority and the catalyst to higher productivity and competitiveness. Increasingly, there are calls to re-vision and address the challenges facing teacher education programmes. The provision of opportunities for the development of employability skills and careers awareness has become central in debates about the future of higher education (Baker & Henson, 2010). Higher education has increasingly been seen as vital to maintaining international economic standing (Knight & Yorke, 2003). Arguably, teacher education programmes must strive to ensure that international standards are well entrenched in all teacher trainees so that they can function effectively at the

workplace and contribute to nation building. Considering the multiplicity of activities surrounding the teaching profession, it points to reason that teacher training programmes should endeavour not only to have a vision of good teacher training components for 21st century needs but they should also have a definite plan to train teachers who will have the aptitude, knowledge, skills and competencies to be good teachers.

For the past two decades, teacher education research has made significant strides in studying the complex relationships between teacher knowledge, beliefs and practices. This new line of research has generated important findings that outline international standard practices that have practical implications for teacher education. A cursory investigation into international practices in teaching and learning in Teacher Education reveals that both western and eastern Teacher Education Programmes put emphasis on the following aspects in their programmes: knowledge and understanding, planning teaching and classroom management, monitoring, assessment, recording, reporting and accountability and other professional requirements

Most international standard practices require teacher trainees to possess a sound knowledge and understanding of concepts and skills in their specialist subjects at a standard equivalent to a degree level to enable them to teach it confidently and accurately. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'knowledge' is defined as the expertise and skills acquired by a person through experience or education. This includes the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject and what is known in a particular field or in total; facts and information or awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation (Ashton, 1990).

Concern about teacher trainees' knowledge base continues to generate interest among policy makers and educational professionals yet not much has been done to address this shortfall. Nevertheless, both literature and research (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Van Driel, Veal & Janssen 2005; Goodnough, 2006) make the claim that teacher trainees need to be equipped with relevant and up-to-date knowledge, skills and attitudes. The extant literature reveals that an effective teacher needs to master two types of knowledge -- content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Content knowledge, often referred to as "deep" knowledge, refers to the knowledge a teacher should possess in the subject itself while pedagogical knowledge refers to the teaching and learning of the subject and the curricular development. McCaughy (2005) notes that since the past decade, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) has emerged as a prominent and insightful feature in teacher education programmes. This paper analyses the content, pedagogical and professional knowledge of ESL teacher trainees at two public universities in Malaysia as the gap in this area of research has received scant attention in Malaysia.

Background of the Study

According to Wright and Bolitho (1997), Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) teachers need to be both *proficient users* and *skilled analysts*

of the English language. This means that effective TESL teachers should possess the ability to speak and write English as competent users and have sound knowledge of English from an analytical perspective - i.e. the phonology, grammar, syntax, lexical properties, generic structures and literacy conventions.

Shulman (1988), the initiator of the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK hereafter) concept, states that PCK is an important category of the knowledge base for teaching. It consists of seven categories, three of which are content related while the other four categories refer to general pedagogy, learners and their characteristics, educational contexts, and educational purposes. In subsequent years, many scholars have used Shulman's knowledge base for teaching and have elaborated and conceptualized PCK in myriad ways.

Although content and pedagogical knowledge have been integrated in teacher education, the actual implementation has eluded many programmes (Houston, Haberman, & Sikula, 2002). Today, both PCK and Teacher Language awareness (TLA) are concepts receiving increased attention among researchers, teacher educators, and those responsible for quality assurance in language education. Breen (2006) highlighted that in the field of TESL, we need to look at English language teachers in the Asian context. He stressed that all second language teachers need to be properly educated in a 'professional and reflective manner' so that we can maintain international standard practices and increase the respect accorded to the teaching profession. Kennedy (1990) added that for non native TESL teachers teaching English as a second language (ESL), what is more critical is teacher trainees' personal acquisition of the second language and the pedagogical content knowledge. He highlighted that these two aspects should be the prerequisites for all TESL teachers.

Besides pedagogical content knowledge, the professional standards for qualified teachers all around the globe including Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status by Training and Development Agency for Schools (2007) in UK cite planning, teaching and classroom management as other important and complementary aspects for the award of a qualified teacher. These professional standards usually clarify further the professional characteristics that a teacher should possess and maintain. In the Malaysian context, the planning, teaching and classroom management component refers to teacher trainees' knowledge and ability to apply the knowledge and understanding of the teaching and assessment methods outlined in the national curriculum. With regards to monitoring, assessment, recording, reporting and accountability, teacher trainees must be able to assess how learning objectives have been achieved and use this assessment to improve specified aspects of teaching and learning, monitor their strengths and weaknesses and assess and record students' results accurately and systematically through focused observation, questioning, testing and marking.

Notwithstanding these elements, other teaching professional requirements include aspects such as knowledge and understanding of their professional duties, legal liabilities, responsibilities in relation to school/ministry policies and practices, and their awareness of the role and

purpose of school and other governing bodies (Ball & McDiarmid, 1990). Several researchers (Shulman, 2002; Mullock, 2006; Ellison, 2007) have pointed out that though much has been explored in terms of teachers and student learning, there is scant empirical research conducted on teachers' pedagogical and content base knowledge and how they use content knowledge to make sense of their classrooms in a natural setting. Other researchers (Enfield, 1999; Shulman, 2002) also add that PCK is something that has not been addressed sufficiently. They claim that active learning involves a more integrated model which involves confronting prospective teachers with conflicts in bifurcation and coordination between content specialists and pedagogy specialists. Therefore, this study investigates the content, pedagogical and professional knowledge base of ESL teacher trainees in two public institutions of higher learning in Malaysia in an effort to examine how prepared they are to make informed decisions about the content and pedagogy of their future language teaching endeavour.

The Present Study

In Malaysia, the discourse on language and pedagogical competency of TESL teachers is often discussed in national forums and English language dailies. This exploratory study investigated the knowledge base of TESL teacher trainees in two Malaysian public universities and analysed Malaysian TESL teacher trainees' competency in the following aspects:

- (1) knowledge of the teaching profession in Malaysia
- (2) knowledge of teachers' legal liabilities
- (3) knowledge of the Malaysian schools' English Language curriculum
- (4) knowledge of teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in Malaysian public schools
- (5) knowledge of the assessment of student learning
- (6) proficiency/ mastery in the subject content (English language)

Method

Procedures

The study employed a descriptive research design to identify the knowledge base of ESL teacher trainees. It involved the use of a questionnaire, structured interviews and document analysis to triangulate the data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Quantitative data in the questionnaire were analysed by using SPSS to identify the mean and standard deviation of each item. The qualitative data were analysed to identify the issues, concerns and emergent themes raised by teacher trainees in relation to the research questions.

Participants

The sample comprised 69 undergraduate final-year students undergoing the TESL Teacher Education Programme at the Faculties of Educations located in two public universities in Malaysia referred to as 'University A' and 'University B' (for reasons of anonymity). Of the 69 respondents, 32 respondents were from University A whilst the remaining 37 were from University B. All the respondents were teacher trainees who were in their final semester of their four-year B.Ed. (TESL) degree programme. All trainees had undergone a three-month Teaching Practicum exercise in Malaysian secondary schools. Upon completion of their course after eight semesters, these teacher trainees will be awarded a B.Ed (TESL) degree that would enable them to teach ESL in Malaysian schools or institutions of higher education. Of the 69 respondents, 10 respondents (five from each university) were randomly selected for the semi-structured interviews.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were semi structured interviews, document analysis and a questionnaire. The document analyzed for the study was the report written by teacher trainees while on their 3-month Teaching Practicum (the School Orientation Report) and these reports were later analysed.

Results

A total of 69 respondents were involved in this study. Of the 69 respondents, 79.7% of them were females and 20.3 % were males. This is reflective of the fact that a majority of teachers in Malaysian schools are females. The average age of the respondents was approximately 22.6 years old and all of them were undergoing a TESL teacher training programme. Findings also indicated that 11 respondents (15.9 %) had between one to four years teaching experience as temporary teachers before embarking on the B.Ed (TESL) degree programme.

Table 1 below shows respondents' CGPA scores for the various semesters. The findings indicated that the CGPA scores of the respondents improved with each semester of study. The highest CGPA mean score was obtained in Semester 7 (3.16) whilst the lowest CGPA mean score was obtained by respondents in Semester 1 (2.92).

Table 1
CPGA Scores Obtained by Respondents

Semester	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Semester 1	1.00	3.76	2.92	.49
Semester 2	2.20	3.70	3.05	.32
Semester 3	2.30	3.89	3.08	.34
Semester 4	2.33	3.79	3.09	.33
Semester 5	2.30	4.00	3.14	.35
Semester 6	2.49	3.95	3.15	.32
Semester 7	2.00	3.87	3.16	.43

Knowledge of the Teaching Profession in Malaysia

One international standard practice required of teachers is to possess a working knowledge and understanding of the teaching profession. In Malaysia, teachers are expected to have good knowledge and understanding of the Ministry of Education's vision, mission, philosophy and objectives of education in Malaysia. This is of critical importance as teachers are 'sense makers' of nationhood and as implementers of the national curriculum, they should have a shared vision and mission with the MOE. Besides that, they must also be aware of their professional duties and responsibilities. The teacher trainees' knowledge and understanding of this component was investigated in a test.

The results indicated that a majority ($M = 95.7\%$) of the teacher trainees were aware of the importance of the National Philosophy of Education (NPE) but were rather ignorant of the aspirations it set out to achieve. For example, slightly over half (55.5%) of the teacher trainees knew that the function of schools to prepare students for the relevant public examinations is not stated in the NPE. This is stated in the National Education Act of 1996. Results also indicated that respondents were also not aware of the vision and mission of the Malaysian MOE. Slightly less than one third ($M=28.9\%$) of the respondents knew that producing loyal and united Malaysians was not the mission of the MOE. The mission of the MOE in Malaysia is to "develop a world-class quality education system which will realise the full potential of the individual and fulfil the aspiration of the Malaysian nation" (Ministry of Education, 2009). Besides that, only 24.6 % of the respondents knew that one of the four objectives of the MOE was to provide educational opportunities for all. Interview sessions revealed that all respondents agreed that they had learnt this in their courses but could not remember the details.

Results also revealed that a majority ($M= 97.1\%$) of the respondents were aware that school syllabi and curriculum were prepared by the Curriculum Development Centre in the MOE. Conversely, 76.8% knew that syllabi and curriculum had to be endorsed by the Parliament before it could be implemented. These teacher trainees were also aware of the importance of the Teacher Record Book and a majority ($M = 88.4\%$) of them knew that they had to maintain the Record Book. Nevertheless, only 28 (40.6%) of them knew that the Record Book is not checked by the school head on a monthly basis. In Malaysia, school administrators are required to monitor teachers' Record Book on a

weekly basis. Findings also indicated that only slightly more than one third ($M = 33.3\%$) of the respondents were aware of the need for school administrators to endorse time table for validation processes.

The respondents also indicated that they were not aware of the latest developments in schools. They were ignorant of the fact that the latest amendments to the Education Act were made in 2002 ($M = 24.6\%$). Interview sessions further indicated that respondents from both University A and University B were not exposed to the latest Education Act 1996 and all the ten respondents interviewed revealed that they had not seen the document and neither had their lecturers indicated that they needed to read it. The respondents' limited knowledge base of the profession was further revealed when only two out of the 10 respondents indicated that they knew they had to sit for an Induction Course and not a Competency Test before confirmation. The rest of the 8 trainees opined that once they had obtained their degree, they would be confirmed after teaching a year at a school. Due to this ignorance, only 33.4 % of the respondents were cognisant of the fact that public school teachers must pass two written papers during the Induction Course before they can be considered for confirmation.

These results indicate that even though the respondents are nearing completion of their B.Ed (TESL) programme, their knowledge of the teaching profession leaves much to be desired ($M = 57.7\%$). Interview sessions further established they had limited knowledge of the teaching profession in Malaysia. None of the 10 interviewed respondents could articulate the vision and mission of the Malaysian MOE. A majority of the respondents were also unaware of the Education Act of 1996 - an important document for all teachers in Malaysia. Three respondents however claimed that they had heard about it in their course (*Education in Malaysia*) but could not remember the details. When asked if it was important for them to be aware of the teaching profession in Malaysia, all ten respondents agreed and stated they would appreciate more knowledge of this in their teacher education course.

Knowledge of Teachers' Legal Liabilities

Another aspect investigated was the respondents' knowledge of Malaysian teachers' legal liabilities. The results showed that the respondents possessed very limited knowledge of teachers' legal liabilities. Only slightly more than a quarter of the respondents ($M = 26.9\%$) were aware that teachers who did not enter classes based on given schedules / timetables by school administrators could face a 3-month jail sentence if found guilty. Furthermore, only 35.4% of the respondents knew that teachers who did not teach according to the stipulated syllabus could be fined up to a maximum of RM5000.00 and only 21.7% of the respondents were aware of the fact that teachers can be fined to a maximum of RM500.00 if they failed to produce subject syllabi for inspection. Only 27 (39.1%) of the respondents were aware that a maximum fine of one thousand Ringgit Malaysia can be imposed on pre-schools that did not use the National Curriculum endorsed by the MOE. These facts indicate that

a many teacher trainees under the Teacher Education Programme are not aware of the legal aspects of the Teaching Profession.

Interview sessions further indicated that respondents did not have any exposure to legal aspects of the teaching profession in any course under their current syllabi. Three respondents indicated that they learnt some aspects in their course (*Education in Malaysia*) but were not made aware of the legal implications if they did not teach according to the stipulated timetable of the given subject syllabi. All respondents acknowledged that these aspects needed to be included in the course to safeguard them against any future indictments when they became teachers.

Knowledge of Subject Content - Teaching English in Malaysian Schools

Another aspect investigated in the questionnaire was the respondents' content knowledge and understanding of teaching English in Malaysian schools. The findings indicated that a majority (56.6%) of the respondents were not aware of the theoretical framework of the English language syllabus that was used in both primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. A large majority (72.5%) was also not knowledgeable of the language contexts and 66.7% of the respondents did not know that there are 3 and not 4 domains of language use under the Malaysian Secondary School KBSM English Language Syllabus. This clouded understanding was further confirmed as only half (50.7 %) of them were positive that the study of Literature in the language classroom is an example of language for aesthetic use outlined in the language syllabus.

The respondents' lack of content knowledge of the language syllabus was also evident in their understanding of educational emphases as only 27.5 % of them knew that there are more than five main aspects. Nevertheless, 76.6% were confident that the concept of Learning-How-To-Learn (LHTL) is a component in the educational emphases but only 26.1% could explicate the term 'multiple intelligences'. However, the respondents displayed positive results in their knowledge of the language content aspect of the syllabus. A large majority (85.5%) were aware that grammar is part of language content and 66.7% were positive that the sound system and vocabulary components were also aspects of language content under the current language syllabus. A large majority (94.2%) also knew that the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing form the core of the language curriculum.

The limited knowledge and understanding of the teaching of English in Malaysian schools was also highlighted during the interview sessions. Of the 10 respondents interviewed, only two had a good understanding of this aspect, largely because they had taught in schools before embarking on this Teacher Education Programme. The remaining respondents admitted that they had learnt this but did not feel it was important.

Knowledge of Teaching and Learning English

Section C of the questionnaire examined the respondents' knowledge of teaching and learning English. In this self-report section, respondents were required to rate their knowledge and understanding on a number of aspects related to teaching and learning English. Respondents replied based on a 4-point Likert scale, where a mean score of 2.5 and above indicated sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Teaching and Learning items. The findings relating to these items are presented in Table 2.

Generally, the findings revealed that respondents felt they had sufficient understanding of all the items posed in the teaching and learning component. However, respondents showed they had limited knowledge and understanding of the secondary school syllabus ($M=2.55$, $SD= .56$) and earlier results in Part 2 of the questionnaire also indicated that only less than half (43.4%) of them had good understanding of the secondary school syllabus. Also, respondents were confident ($M = 3.13$) in writing a lesson plan and did not have problems in writing both the specific ($M = 2.97$) and general ($M = 3.01$) objectives for their lesson plans. The results also revealed that the respondents had sufficient knowledge in preparing teaching aids ($M = 3.04$), questioning techniques ($M = 2.55$), providing appropriate feedback to students ($M = 2.65$) and fostering a conducive learning climate ($M = 2.61$). Besides that, they gave positive responses to motivating students to learn ($M = 2.58$) and maintaining classroom discipline ($M = 2.94$).

Additionally, the respondents did not have problems integrating educational emphases components in the educational process. They exhibited sufficient knowledge in integrating multiple intelligence ($M = 2.61$), critical and creative thinking skills ($M = 2.67$), preparation for the real world ($M = 2.67$), knowledge acquisition ($M = 2.65$), values and good citizenship ($M = 2.72$), the ICT component ($M = 2.62$) and the Learning-How-To-Learn (LHTL) concept ($M = 2.48$). Interview sessions corroborated these findings. The 10 students interviewed stated they found it easier to integrate moral values and multiple intelligences but felt they were not very confident in implementing the LHTL concept. Further investigation revealed that 7 out of the ten respondents had never even heard of this concept in their methodology classes.

Table 2***Respondents' Knowledge in Teaching and Learning (n=69)***

How do you rate your knowledge and understanding on the following items?	M	SD
Understanding of the secondary school KBSM Syllabus	2.55	.582
Writing a Lesson Plan	3.13	.482
Writing a general objective for your lesson plan	3.01	.653
Writing specific objectives for your lesson plan	2.97	.664
Preparing teaching material for your lesson	3.04	.629
Maintaining classroom discipline	2.94	.749
Motivating students to learn	2.58	.775
Fostering a conducive learning environment	2.61	.669
Questioning techniques	2.55	.676
Providing appropriate feedback to students	2.65	.734
Integrating the 'Learning-How-To-Learn' component in the teaching and learning process	2.48	.699
Integrating Multiple Intelligences in the teaching and learning process	2.61	.712
Integrating Critical and Creative Thinking Skills (CCTS) in the teaching and learning process	2.67	.700
Integrating the 'Preparation for the Real World' component in the teaching and learning process	2.67	.700
Integrating 'Knowledge Acquisition' component in the teaching and learning process	2.65	.660
Integrating 'Values and Citizenship' component in the teaching and learning process	2.72	.662
Integrating the use of ICT component in the teaching and learning process	2.62	.847
Teaching the Listening component	2.95	.547
Teaching the Speaking component	2.88	.631
Teaching the Reading component	3.00	.542
Teaching the Writing component	2.83	.641
Teaching the Grammar component	3.14	.707
Teaching the Pronunciation, word stress, rhyme & rhythm	2.78	.661
Teaching the Literature in the language Classroom	2.88	.744
Overall Mean	2.79	.670

Note. Scale: 1= very limited, 2=limited, 3=sufficient, 4= very sufficient /excellent

Respondents were also asked how successful they were in teaching the four language skills in their classroom. Results showed they had excellent knowledge in teaching reading skills ($M = 3.00$) and possessed sufficient knowledge in teaching listening ($M = 2.95$), speaking ($M = 2.88$) and writing ($M = 2.83$) skills. Respondents also possessed excellent knowledge in teaching grammar ($M = 3.1$) and sufficient knowledge in teaching literature ($M = 2.88$), and pronunciation, word stress, rhyme and rhythm ($M = 2.78$).

Table 3
Self Reported Knowledge in Assessment of Learning (n=69)

How do you rate your knowledge and understanding on the following items?	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Constructing MCQ Test Items	2.84	.593
Constructing test items for Cloze text/Text completion	2.86	.625
Constructing test items for guided / directed composition writing	2.77	.667
Constructing test items for free writing	3.26	.567
Developing a Table of Specifications for a language test	2.41	.717
Reviewing (editing and proof reading) and assembling the classroom test according to the exam format	2.64	.568
Administering a classroom test (security aspects, rules & regulations, exam time table, etc.)	2.81	.648
Conducting self reflection / self evaluation	2.88	.561
Overall Mean	2.81	.620

Note. Scale: 1= very limited, 2=limited, 3=sufficient, 4= very sufficient /excellent

Finally, respondents were asked to rate their knowledge in evaluating the teaching and learning process. The findings are shown in Table 3. In constructing test items, respondents felt they had sufficient knowledge in constructing Multiple Choice Questions ($M = 2.84$), open-ended questions ($M = 2.86$), and questions for free writing ($M = 3.26$). Respondents also indicated confidence in reviewing and assembling test items ($M = 2.64$), and administering a classroom test ($M = 2.81$). Nevertheless, they admitted having limited knowledge in developing a Table of Specifications for a test. Interview sessions indicated that they had little practice in this and felt they needed more exposure and practice in planning and formulating a table of specification for their tests. Overall, the findings revealed that respondents had sufficient knowledge in assessing student learning.

Knowledge of Subject Content - English Language Proficiency

Wright and Bolitho (1997) affirm that TESL teachers need to be both *proficient users* and *skilled analysts* of the English language, indicating that TESL teachers must have the ability to speak and write English as competent users and at the same time possess knowledge of English from an analytical perspective - i.e. the phonology, grammar, syntax, lexical properties, generic structures and literacy conventions.

In this study, document analysis involved examining the School Orientation Report of the 10 respondents who were selected for the interview. During the Teaching Practicum, teacher trainees had to write a report on the School Orientation Program. These reports were analyzed (for content and language used) to investigate if the teacher trainees were competent users of the English language. The reports were graded by two raters (termed Evaluator A and Evaluator B) who are qualified English Language lecturers at local Malaysian universities.

The findings revealed that the respondents performed better in content ($M = 6.6$) than their language ability ($M=5.2$), demonstrating that 30% of the respondents were rated as being 'good' in content by both evaluators while the remaining 70% were awarded a 'fair' rating. However, the mean score of 5.2 showed that the trainees were only 'fair' in terms of their linguistic competency. Further investigation showed that 70% were graded as fair whilst 30% of the trainees possessed limited language competency. This means that the overall linguistic ability of the TESL teacher trainees can be said to be rather limited considering they were going to be future English language instructors.

Further investigation of the 10 reports was carried out in terms of knowledge of English from an analytical perspective. It examined the language use in aspects such as grammar, syntax, lexical properties and generic structures. The two evaluators were required to identify the main grammatical errors. The results showed TESL teacher trainees had difficulty grasping basic subject-verb agreement and tenses, punctuation (using apostrophe, colon and semi-colon) and the use of quotation marks.

Interview sessions with the 10 respondents supported the above findings. Eight of the 10 respondents admitted that they were aware of their linguistic limitations and another five respondents felt they possessed limited vocabulary. They realized they had to read widely to improve their language proficiency but cited time constraints as a major obstacle. However, they indicated that punctuation was not a problem for them and stated that language proficiency courses should be held for them during all semesters so that they could be competent and confident in using English.

Implication for the Field: Professional Knowledge Base of Teacher Trainees

In this exploratory study, the findings revealed that the pedagogical, professional and content knowledge base of TESL teacher trainees in the two selected universities in Malaysia leave much to be desired. Firstly, Malaysian TESL teacher trainees are unclear about the vision and mission of education in Malaysia. Secondly, they possess limited knowledge of their future profession. Thirdly, their knowledge of the national curriculum with regards to teaching English in the Malaysian context needs to be upgraded. Furthermore, they were also rather ignorant of their legal liabilities as teachers. More importantly, the pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge of TESL teacher trainees need to be improved. The respondents highlighted that they could cope with writing

lesson plans and stating both general and specific learning outcomes. They were also confident in teaching the four main language skills and could integrate both grammar and educational emphases in their language lessons under the Integrated National Curriculum (KBSM) that is practiced in Malaysian secondary schools. Finally, the results revealed that respondents' content knowledge in terms of their language competency in terms of grammar, syntax, and generic structures is rather limited. Close to 70.0 % of them reported a low to average level of grammatical knowledge.

Tran and Lawson (2007) stress that pedagogical knowledge is crucial for teacher-education students as it can help them not only in their current learning but also in their future students' learning. Therefore, TESL teacher trainees must have a good grasp and understanding of their subject discipline - i.e. the English language. They should be competent and proficient users of the language. The findings of this study showed that respondents had limited proficiency and therefore language awareness is perhaps one aspect that needs to be addressed in the Malaysian TESL Teacher Education Programme. The importance of language awareness in relation to teachers' language proficiency is also a view shared by Farias (2005) and Strevens (1974). They highlight that EFL training courses are often criticized for not helping teachers towards mastery of a body of distinct, specialized knowledge. Breen (2006) adds that in today's ESL teaching, it is essential that Teacher Education focus on both reflective practice and language awareness. Furthermore, Thiessen (2000), adds that successful teaching rests upon teachers' capacity to concurrently use both knowledge and skills in purposeful contexts and understand that knowledge and skills come with changes in what 'the knowledge is for and how and with whom it develops' (pp. 133).

Biggs's (2003, p. 5) model of teaching in higher education highlights that university teachers shift their role from transmitters of knowledge to organisers and facilitators of the learning processes as "good teaching is getting most students to use the higher cognitive level processes that the more academic students use spontaneously". Instructors in higher education should remember that in adult teacher education programmes, trainee teachers learn best through reflection and by collaborating with other teachers and sharing what they see and learn through their interaction with students (Major & Palmer, 2006).

Conclusion

This exploratory study, though not conclusive due to the small sample size, makes pertinent observations regarding pedagogical and national implications in TESL teacher-trainees' professional, content and pedagogical knowledge base that need to be addressed. These preliminary findings intimate that relevant authorities need to take stock of the quality of TESL teacher trainees leaving institutions of higher learning in a rapidly developing country like Malaysia.

Importantly, if teachers are well trained and have a solid knowledge base, only then can we hope to see quality teachers that shall beget 'quality students'. Implications arising from this study make the point that well trained teacher trainees can contribute more to their profession and will have the motivation to instil leadership qualities in themselves and others to create a collegial work environment that celebrates professionals who have good content and pedagogical knowledge to mould the future leaders of tomorrow in today's increasingly globalised classrooms.

References

- Ashton, P. T. (1990). Pedagogical content knowledge (Editorial). *Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(3), 12-29.
- Baker, G. & Henson, D. (2010). Promoting employability skills development in a research-intensive university. *Education + Training*, 52(1), 62-75.
- Ball, D. L. & McDiarmid, G. W. (1990). The subject matter preparation of teachers. In J. E. Brophy (Ed.), *Advances in Research on Teaching* (Vol. 2, pp. 1-48). Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Houston, M. Haberman, & J. Sikula (Eds.). *Handbook of research on teacher teacher education*. Macmillan, New York.
- Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university: what the student does*. Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Breen, P. (2006). The education of language teachers in East Asia. *Asian EFL Journal*, 13, 1-27.
- Calderhead, J., & Shorrock, S. B. (1997). *Understanding teacher education: Case studies in the professional development of beginning teachers*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Ellison, V. R. (2007). A preliminary investigation of pedagogical content knowledge and techniques in the teaching of Spanish to native-speakers. Kent State University Radical Pedagogy.
- Enfield, M. (1999). Content and Pedagogy: Intersection in the NSTA Standards for Science Teacher Education. *Electronic Journal of Science Education*, 3(4), 14-34.
- Farias, M. (2005). Critical language awareness in foreign language learning. *Literaturay Lingüística*, 16, 211-222.
- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2006). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. Boston: McGrawhill.
- Goodnough, K. (2006). Enhancing pedagogical content knowledge through self-study: An exploration of problem based learning. *Teacher in Education*, 11(3), 1-318.
- Houston, W.R., Haberman, M., & Sikula, J. (2002). *Handbook of research on teacher education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Kennedy, M. (1990). *Trends and issues in teachers' subject matter knowledge. Trends and issues Paper No. 1*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, ED#322 100, Washington, DC.

- Knight, P.T., & Yorke, M. (2003). Employability and good learning in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(1), 3-16.
- Major, C.H., & Palmer, B. (2006). Reshaping teaching and learning: the transformation of faculty pedagogical content knowledge. *Higher Education*, 51, 619-647.
- McBee, M. T. (2004). The classroom as laboratory: An exploration of teacher research. *Roeper Review*, 27(1), 52-58.
- McCaughy, N. (2005). Elaborating pedagogical content knowledge: what it means to know students and think about teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 11(4), 379-395.
- Ministry of Education. (2009). Mission: Ministry of Education, Malaysia. Retrieved on 21 December 2009 from <http://www.moe.gov.my/?id=40&lang=en>.
- Mullock, B. (2006). The pedagogical knowledge base of four TESOL teachers. *The Modern Language Journal*, 90(1), 48-66.
- Shulman, L. S. (1988). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 1-22.
- Shulman, L. (2002). Truth and consequences: Inquiry and policy in research on teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(3), 248-253.
- Stevens, P. (1974). Some basic principles of teacher training. *ELT Journal*, 29(1), 19-27.
- Thiessen, D. (2000). Developing knowledge for preparing teachers: Redefining the role of schools of education. *Educational Policy*, 14(1), 129-144.
- Training and Development Agencies for Schools (2007), Professional standards for teachers- qualified teacher status. Retrieved December 24, 2009 from www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/s/standards_qts.pdf.
- Tran, T. A. T., & Lawson, M. J. (2007). Students' pedagogical knowledge about teachers' use of questions. *International Education Journal*, 8(2), 418-432.
- Van Driel, J.H., Veal, W.R., & Janssen, F.J. J. M. (2005). Pedagogical content knowledge: an integrative component within the knowledge base for teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(8), 979-986.
- Wright, T. & Bolitho, R. (1993). Language awareness: A missing link in language teacher Education. *ELT Journal*, 47(4), 292-304.

Gurnam Kaur Sidhu (PhD) is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education, University Technology MARA, 40200 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA. With more than 25 years of experience in the field of education as a lecturer, practitioner and researcher, she is a member of numerous education committees and author of English Language Textbooks currently used in Malaysian schools. Her interests include TESL, Learner Autonomy, Educational Management and Life-Long Learning. Email: gurnamsidhu213@yahoo.com.

Chan Yuen Fook (PhD) is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40200 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA. Dr. Chan has presented numerous papers at both national and international conferences. His written

contributions have appeared in a number of journals, books and proceedings. Currently, he is a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Indiana University from September 1, 2010 until March 31, 2011. His interests are in the field of Testing and Evaluation, Educational Management, ICT and Curriculum & Instruction. Email: yuenfookchan@yahoo.com.

Sarjit Kaur (PhD) is Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics and Programme Chairperson of the English Language Studies Section at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, MALAYSIA. She is also an Associate Research Fellow of Malaysia's National Higher Education Research Institute (NaHERI). Widely published, her areas of specialisation include Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), workplace literacies, postgraduate education, learner autonomy and policy research in higher education. Email: sarjit@usm.my.