

PRACTICUM EXCELLENCE ASPECTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINEE TEACHERS AT THE INSTITUTES OF TEACHER EDUCATION

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The school-based practicum is a compulsory teaching course in the curriculum of Bachelor in Education Programme (PISMP) at the Institutes of Teacher Education Malaysia. This school placement provides a developmental experience for trainee teachers to develop, master and reinforce their professional knowledge in teaching. Based on the Motivation Theory of Achievement, evidence of excellence in teaching among trainee teachers on practicum can be identified through an assessment of behaviour and effort made toward achieving the best. A trainee teacher who is deemed excellent is usually awarded more than 90% of the total score by the supervisors and school mentors which is further verified by authorised Heads of Department. Practical assessment includes aspects of teaching and learning, student assessment, co-curriculum, other roles given during practicum and their portfolios. This study was conducted to identify the characteristics and best practices of practicum trainee teachers that could be established as a model for the other special education trainee teachers. Seventeen special education trainee teachers majoring in visual impairment and hearing impairment in the June - November 2018 academic session at Institute of Teacher Education Ilmu Khas Campus participated in this study. The data collection methods were observation, interview and document analysis during the cross-session at the school. The data were analysed qualitatively to identify themes. Findings show that all excellent trainee teachers have a positive disposition as a role model. They delivered effective teaching and learning processes, and integrated communication, information and technology elements as well as creative and innovative elements in line with the needs and suitability of students with special needs. Best teaching and learning and co-curriculum practices are demonstrated consistently and supported through documentation. The Model of Excellence in Special Education Practicum was designed accordingly based on six themes. This model provided significant implication to the practicum for Special Education trainee teachers.

Keywords: Practicum excellence, trainee teachers, special education

INTRODUCTION

Education and teacher training are essential elements in education development of a country. These components are considered important in the education structure because teachers are the individuals that will implement and realise education's policy and goals. In many situations, the strength of an education system solely depends on the quality and the excellence of the teachers. The quality and excellent work culture of teachers can boost the excellence of the nation's education system.

Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014) outlines the criteria of an excellent teacher that need to have functional competency elements through efficient teaching and learning which includes (a) to master the content and deliverance technique of the related subject and to incorporate it into teaching and learning process designed by adjusting it according to the characteristics and student learning styles in planning effective deliverance; (b) able to select, prepare and use interesting, safe and effective teaching sources; (c) are able to come out with questions that can drive interest, devise effective questioning techniques to enhance understanding and encourage critical and creative thinking among learners; (d) able to get involved and actively interact in various ways during teaching and learning activities to achieve the learning objectives as well as increasing student's learning ability and (e) teachers are able to conduct evaluation in many appropriate methods to determine student's achievement level and to take follow up actions to overcome any weaknesses. A competent teacher often gives high commitment and care to learn about the problems faced by the students, gives fair evaluation of students, provides clinical guidance, helps students to gain a deep understanding of the subject being taught hence, fostering student's interest and diligence to strive for excellence (Norhana, Mohamad Saad, Juliana Baharuddin, & Siti Noor Ismail, 2016).

Practicum is a teaching exercise which is a compulsory component in the curriculum of teacher education programme either at the diploma or degree level. It is a practical training that gives trainee teachers the opportunity to build, master and reinforce school-based teaching professionalism and developmental skills. Trainee teachers who want admirable practicum results are motivated by intrinsic motivation. The Motivation Theory of Achievement by McClelland (1970) emphasises that the drive to achieve needs (nAch) is one's desire to achieve outstanding success at work. Individuals with high motivation have the ability to do their job well and always move actively. Grieve (2010) identified some of the internal factors such as teachers' characteristics connected with excellence. The teacher consistently described excellence in terms of personal qualities and interpersonal skills. Teachers gave high ratings to qualities which demonstrated their expectations of positive relationships with students. Practitioners consistently rated characteristics related to classroom 'relationships in action' as essential characteristics for excellent teachers. These findings suggest a new emphasis on interpersonal skills in continuing

professional development for teachers who are increasingly expected to develop students' openness to new thinking; self-respect and a commitment to responsible participation in life. Another factor related to teacher excellence is involvement in training courses that enrich them with excellent teaching techniques. Taylor (1990) focused on the initial practicum component of teacher education, so that educators view the practicum as indispensable to the development of effective instruction and excellence teaching, where a practicum course has the potential to provide a sound beginning to the development of teaching excellence. Obeidat and Al-Hassan (2009) demonstrated some of the external factors show that teachers connect with parents and the community in five ways: communicating with parents, involving parents in the learning process, involving the community in the school, pursuing volunteer projects, and involving students in the community. Therefore, the relevance of this theory with the excellent trainee teachers can be seen through the behaviour and effort toward the best and excellent practice.

The school-based practicum is a compulsory teaching course in the curriculum of Bachelor in Education Programme (PISMP) at the Institutes of Teacher Education Malaysia (IPGM). Institute of Teacher Education Ilmu Khas Campus (IPGKIK) is a premier institution that provides special education teacher training since the 1960s. IPGKIK niche in the field of special education and IPG's only campus offering Bachelor of Education (PISMP) in (a) Learning disability (b) Visual impairment, and (c) Hearing impairment. Throughout four years of PISMP study, trainee teachers beginning from June 2015 intake had undergone practicum twice, Phase 1 during the 5th semester and Phase 2 during the 7th semester. Duration of practice for each phase is for 12 weeks. The location for practical implementation was at Special Education Primary Schools (SKPK) or Special Education Integration Program schools (PPKI) throughout Malaysia.

Trainee teachers were guided by an IPGKIK faculty advisor who was also a lecturer and a mentor teacher who guided the trainees in each school. The role of lecturers and mentors are for amending the weaknesses of teaching or learning of the trainee teachers and developing their potential and skills. Lecturers and mentor teachers use the Practicum Guidance Form (PR1) to record planning, implementation, assessment, reflection, attitude, personality, co-curriculum and other role of trainee teachers each time a clinical observation session in the classroom is done. Assessment and outcome of the practical performance of the teachers, in turn, is determined through observation and discussion sessions with mentor teacher using the Practicum Evaluation Form (PR2). Trainee teachers who acquire practical marks of 90% and above may be nominated as having an outstanding practice. Next, the excellent candidate confirmation is determined by the Head of Specialisation Department and Head of Academic Department who will be appointed for the final observation.

Previous literature highlighting the studies on IPG practicum trainees focused mainly on the effectiveness of practicum training (Mahaya Salleh, 2016), the level of trainee teacher preparedness (Khairul Anwar Abu Bakar, 2014), the

relationship between professionalism and the readiness of teaching with supervision of lecturers (Mohamad Nizam Nazarudin, Nur Fatihah Luciana Benjamin Abdullah, & Zakiah Noordin, 2017), the guidance practice of lecturer and mentor teacher (Syed Ismail Syed Mustafa, 2012), thinking skills (Fazlulaini Mohd Yunus, Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, Md Zuki Hashim, & Ruhayati Ramly, 2017), stress levels during practicum (Syed Ismail Syed Mustapa, & Lye Guet Poh, 2016) and more. The study on Special Education practicum is very rare; this lack needs to be addressed and given more attention. Thus, this study was carried out.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Special education trainee teachers' role and commitment are becoming more challenging with the 21st century learning needs. They need to be more proactive and skilled, not only in the curriculum content, but also in the latest pedagogy, understanding the learning psychology, and integrating the latest technology in teaching and learning according to the needs and requirements of students with special needs (MBK). The type and severity of the children's disabilities also affect teachers' willingness to accommodate certain students and their confidence that they will effectively manage their classroom (Cassady, 2011). The lack of knowledge and experience in handling students with behaviour problems in the classroom also reduce the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. This may be due to the lack of exposure and training facilities before entering the school (Manisah Mohd Ali, Rozila Abdullah, & Rosadah Abdul Majid, 2014). They might be equipped with theoretical training pertaining to standard conduct and culture, but not being exposed to the real environment to feel the real challenges of teaching students with special needs (Golder, Norwich, & Bayliss, 2005). Another problem occurs when trainee teachers do not receive proper supervision from either colleagues or school authority, assuming that they have already done their best to teach the students even if the results are not favourable (Golder, Norwich, & Bayliss, 2005).

On the other hand, teachers with specialised competencies tend to engage students with disabilities employing a variety of learning strategies to enhance their learning (Malak, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2017; Shaukat & Iqbal, 2012). Professionally committed teachers show more willingness to exert extra effort to ensure that students succeed (Lewis, 1998). Self-efficacy is one of the significant indicators of the degree of teacher's determination, commitment and job satisfaction (DiPaola & Hoy, 2005). In relation to that, this study is conducted to determine the characteristics of special education trainee teachers with an excellent practicum result. The best practices of these outstanding trainee teachers can serve as a guide for other teachers in the same field.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to review the implementation of practice by excellent practicum special education trainee teachers from PISMP Programme. The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the attitude and personality of the trainee teachers with an excellent practicum result.
2. To identify the best practices implemented by the trainee teacher with an excellent practicum result in teaching and learning and other responsibilities at school.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes and personality of the trainee teachers with an excellent practicum result?
2. What are the best practices implemented by the trainee teachers with an excellent practicum result in teaching and learning and other responsibilities at school?

METHODOLOGY

This study is a case study focused on the implementation of practice among outstanding candidate of trainee teachers in PISMP Special Education IPGKIK. They underwent practicum for 12 weeks from July 2017 to October 2017 at one of the Special Education National Schools (SKPKP) or the Special Education Specialist (PPKI) Visual Problems / Hearing Disability throughout Malaysia. A total number of 17 trainee teachers from Semester 5 and Semester 7 who were the outstanding practicum candidate participated in this study. The candidate selection was done by lecturers and coaching teachers through their observation and both parties must agree to give marks of 90% and above to the trainee teacher. The excellence verification of the practicum is further carried out by the Head of the Special Education Department and Head of Department or Unit Head or Senior Lecturer appointed by the Director during final observation. The details of the outstanding trainee teacher candidates participating in the study are in Table 1.

The data collection method involved observation, document analysis and interview with the trainee teacher, lecturer and mentor teacher during excellence final observation. Data collection using triangulation increased the reliability and validity of the study data (Cresswell, 2014). The data were analysed

qualitatively by coding, categorising and building themes (Cresswell, 2014), and presented in narrative form.

Table 1
Practicum Excellent Trainee Teachers' Information

| PISMP according to intake and specialization | 2016 intake (semester 5) | | | | 2015 intake (semester 7) | | | |
|---|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
| | Visual impairment | | Hearing impairment | | Visual impairment | | Hearing impairment | |
| Practicum phase | Phase 1 | | | | Phase 2 | | | |
| Number of outstanding trainee teachers | 4 | | 5 | | 1 | | 7 | |
| Number of outstanding trainee teacher by gender | Male 2 | Female 2 | Male 2 | Female 3 | Male 0 | Female 1 | Male 0 | Female 7 |

RESULTS

All 17 outstanding candidate of trainee teachers in PISMP Special Education IPGKIK were confirmed as being excellent in their practicum practice.

Superior Educators Identity

Based on observations and interviews with lecturers and coaching teachers, all 17 excellent trainee teachers have a commendable attitude and personality, positive thinking, proactive, innovative and motivated which can be exemplary to other friends. From the results of observation, all the 17 trainee teachers have the characteristics of excellent educators in terms of appearance, concern, behaviour and professionalism.

1. Personal appearance. All trainee teachers have an appearance that portrays their self-confidence in every action such as being friendly, have a pleasant attitude that can create easiness for others, polite, courteous and authoritative as a teacher. They are also very successful in adapting to situations.
2. Concerns. Very attentive and demonstrate humanity such as being sensitive, friendly, considerate, patient, empathy and familiarity and care about the problems, interests, welfare and safety of the students. They can also make appropriate actions towards problems faced by showing their parenting characteristics.

3. Character. Always show noble, praiseworthy, courteous character and can adjust their behaviour as teachers. They do not miss to always practice moral values.
4. Professional nature. All trainee teachers were willing to sacrifice their time and energy in carrying out their duties. They demonstrated high responsibility, commitment, hard work, besides preparing a very neat, organised and updated teaching materials.

Example of behaviours that they always demonstrate are being enthusiastic in performing responsibility, high-spirited and are always excited to meet with the students. They equipped themselves with the necessary preparations before entering the classroom such as making lesson plans before class starts. They planned activities in the classroom and used the time available optimally. They used the learning method in accordance to the level of achievement of their pupils. They were also committed to their job, and during their absence the students become curious and feel a great impact, especially when the trainees were involved with official tasks outside the classroom. In addition, they always obey and celebrate MBK which indirectly influence students to also show interest in their studies. However, sometimes they have to act strict on the students to control the classroom.

Guided Teaching Setup

From the results of interviews and document analysis it can be concluded that all the teachers do proper preparation before executing the lesson in class. They always ensure writing Daily Lesson Plan which is appropriate and matching the level of students with special needs (MBK). This practice can be viewed through the Daily Lesson Planning sent to lecturers for review. All the mentoring lecturers reported that the trainee teachers under their guidance have never neglected their responsibility to submit lesson plans for every teaching and learning class.

For the purpose of helping trainee teachers to make a neat and better preparation before teaching and learning, IPGKIK came out with an effort to provide a platform to ease the coaching lecturers to review the Daily Lesson Planning online. Collaborative Instruction Design System (CIDS) is an application designed specifically to write Daily Lesson Plannings that have been formatted online. This application is very good because the lecturer can examine and identify the weaknesses of trainee teacher in writing Daily Lesson Planning before teaching and learning class. Daily Lesson Plannings written through this CIDS need to be sent a day before the implementation of the teaching and learning plan. This application was introduced in June to November 2018, therefore, its usage is not mandatory. However, all the excellent trainee teachers practiced Daily Lesson Planning writing using the application. According to them, CIDS is very helpful in making better teaching preparations by getting

their lecturers' guidance. The lecturer can assess the writing of learning outcomes, lesson contents, teaching and learning strategies, teaching aids, cross-curriculum elements, the application of pure values and higher order thinking elements suitable for students with special needs. The lecturer's guidance and teacher as mentor have impacted the motivation and confidence of the trainee teachers on the teaching and learning plan to be implemented in accordance with the special needs level and requirements. The findings are similar with the results of Mahaya Salleh (2016) who investigated the effectiveness of practicum training based on the development of teacher's professional identity which are influenced by mentor teachers, coaching lecturers and the school environment (Mahaya Salleh, 2016).

Another mandatory application designed by IPGM and adopted by trainee teachers throughout IPG campuses in Malaysia is Myporoms. The Myporoms application is an online platform that contains PR1 and PR2 forms. Besides, trainee teachers can review the lecturer's observation and evaluation reports. This application also becomes the Daily Lesson Planning storage medium and medium for teaching and learning reflective writing.

Efficient Teaching Context

Based on the observation, this study found all the 17 trainee teachers have good knowledge on all the subjects being taught, carry out teaching and learning efficiently such as following the steps in a very orderly manner, coupled with teaching delivery speed which is perfectly suited to students with special needs' level and ability. They also have the ability to diversify student-centred activities, integrating elements of information and communication technology, as well as elements of creativity and innovative that suit to the needs and appropriateness of students with special needs.

The following are the practices of excellent trainee teachers during practicum which were observed, and portfolio document analysis, as well as their daily lesson planning when implementing teaching and learning:

1. Integrate language elements. This study finds that Hearing Problem Special Education PISMP trainee teachers are very attentive to the students' weaknesses especially in language aspect. They are constantly integrating language elements in each subject being taught.
2. Visual and kinaesthetic method. In order to provide optimum knowledge or information, all trainees use visual and kinaesthetic approaches to help the students to improve their understanding of a concept.
3. Usage of senses stimulator. The full range of sensory uses such as touch and other stimuli can help MBK be more prepared and sensitive to what they are learning. Name calls, touches on the desk and visual stimuli (for students with hearing impairment) greatly help students to be more active in learning activities.

4. Effective communication. All trainees were found to combine various methods of communication as a medium for teaching students with hearing impairments.
5. Hands-on. Care about the needs of students with hearing impairments or visual impairments by implementing teaching and learning using hands-on technique and demonstrate in detail and one by one.
6. Differential learning. All the trainees in this study apply the differential learning method to teach their students and that the learning outcomes are made according to the level of understanding and ability of the students. Each student is assessed individually.
7. Recovery and enrichment. Observation and enrichment activities observed are practiced entirely in each teaching and learning undertaken.
8. Checklist record. Documents analysis found that all of the trainees participated in this study practiced to record student achievement on a topic in the checklist provided.
9. Reflective practice. All trainee teachers practice reflective writing every time the teaching and learning ends. The practice of recalling teaching and learning is very good for assessing weaknesses and acting to improve upon them.

The best teaching practices identified above are highly relevant in the teaching and learning of students with hearing loss and visual impairment. Even though the trainee teachers are still on training period and lacking experience, their seriousness and concern to support and celebrate MBK in education is something to be proud of. Other than showing excellence and effective teaching method, all the trainee teachers in this study also showed outstanding performance in other roles and school co-curriculum.

Caring Social Roles

Interviews with coaching teachers in school found that all of the trainees in this study showed active involvement with all types of school activities. The easy going and hardworking attitude with other teachers led to their presence being very much liked.

Below are the quoted text from the interview with the coaching teachers in schools:

“...i see him/her to be differentvery hardworking, friendly, and the students also like him/her. He/She loves to help us if there is any event at school. There will be a National Day celebration event soon, he/she represents the others trainee teachers to ask if the teachers need any help and also gives thoughtful ideas...”
(GP 1/SKPK1).

“I figured out that teacher A is like an experienced teacher, he/she also mingles around with other teachers as well not only with the trainees. I see him/her to outshine in any programme organised by the school meanwhile, the other trainees only participate when they are asked to..” (GP2/PPKI 2).

“I hope all these trainee teachers to be hired in this school, especially teacher B. He/She is very hardworking. Any school administration is lucky to have him/her as their staff, very helpful and also knows how to treat the students. If there is any co-curriculum activity in school he/she will handle the programme, thus, the leadership value can be seen..” (GP2/SKPK3).

The findings of this study clearly showed that being proactive and caring about the school environment gives great impact on trainee teachers’ social relationship with school staff. The findings of this study have a positive impact as a result of the role teachers play in the school community and are able to generate a positive school environment (Kutsyruba, 2013).

Co-curricular Commitment

Interviews with teachers found that the trainees are not only actively involved in extra-curricular activities in school but also outside school. Three trainee teachers that participated in this also represent IPGKIK for inter IPGs sports conducted during school holidays. While at the school, all the teachers in this study use consensus approach to the activities given by rotation of duties. They also share ideas with other peers on a school project that they want to contribute.

Teamwork in education is an important element for school development. In the context of this study, teamwork seems to be the preferred platform to solve problems, determine decisions, also to integrate the action principles, culture planning, development, arrangements and research in school (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Hourcade and Bauwans (2003) through their study determined that when teachers cooperate and play respective roles in the best way it gives opportunity to combine uniqueness, expertise and skills with their colleagues.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

Based on the results, the excellence of the trainee teachers during practicum is determined based on the following criteria: (a) impressive self-esteem, (b) commitment to extra ordinary task, (c) consistent performance, (d) very appealing teaching aids application (e) active in co-curriculum activities, and (f) excellent relationship with all related parties. All the excellent practicum teachers not only

excel in the subject content, but are also skilful in teaching, classroom control and the usage of teaching aids. They also have personality and interpersonal skills that can be exemplary to other practicum peers at school. The characteristics of special education trainee teachers in this study are in line with the excellent teacher criteria as outlined by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. The best practices identified by special education trainee teachers are the result of internal and external factors that further strengthened the Grieve (2010) and Obeidat and Al-Hassan (2009) studies.

This study summarises the findings in the form of a Model. This Practicum Model of Excellence can be used as a reference not only for trainees in the Special Education field but also in other areas. The Practicum Excellence Model in Figure 1 consists of six themes covering various aspects of personality, teaching and learning, co-curriculum and other roles. Motivational themes are also emphasised as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is a contributing factor to the excellent achievement of practicum. This model demonstrates the practicum excellence of the trainee teacher from their personality itself. It is a centre of positive behaviour at a time according to the situation. The identity of a superior educator possessed by an excellent trainee teacher is taken anywhere in the school, known to be the second circle and outside of the school which is referred as third circle.

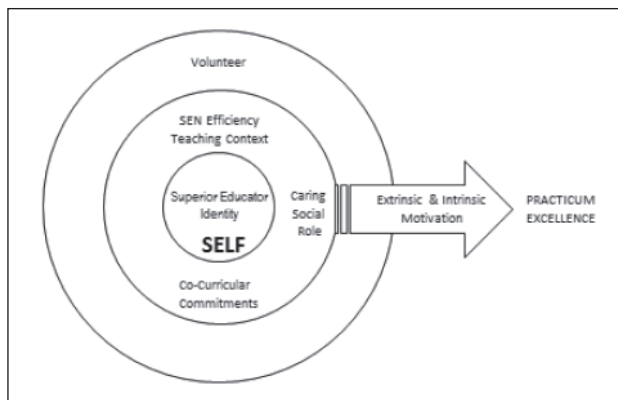


Figure 1. The Practicum Excellence Model.

This model is an important element that can be a good practice during practicum process of trainee teachers. Excellence in practicum allows their presence to be felt by the school. The passion, consistency and patience of trainee teacher in educating and delivering knowledge is highly appreciated by school (Irmaz Dini, 2014). Based on the input of this study, the excellent practicum trainee teachers play a significant role in elevating the quality of national education to the global level.

CONCLUSION

The excellence of trainee teachers in practicum is the beginning of greater success when they become certified teachers. Therefore, their potential and role should be highlighted in order to help improve the quality of national education through the ranks of outstanding and dedicated teachers. In the context of realising the wishes expressed in the Malaysia Education Blueprint, the trainee teachers need to have a superior vision to transform various aspects of education, high-level thinking and innovative ability to improve the success of the school and students.

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