

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW ON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: This systematic review focuses on issues and challenges related to pre-service English teachers (PSETs) in Malaysia for the past decade. Even though improving English language teachers' quality is a primary agenda in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, review studies documenting the recent issues and developments of pre-service teachers who are just joining the teaching profession are still lacking. Combining Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) with published review guidelines, the review utilised seven databases to look for current research. Subsequently, the final search yielded twenty articles for the qualitative synthesis using ATLAS.ti. It has been determined that the PSETs in Malaysia experience issues and challenges in terms of (1) teaching competency; (2) professional development; (3) support; (4) the disparity between theories and classroom practices; (5) classroom management and (6) transition stage in becoming a teacher. This study concludes that future teacher education needs to prepare trainee teachers to be more resilient and adaptable to new environments, challenges and unforeseen circumstances. Finally, several recommendations were highlighted for further studies.

Keywords: English language, teacher education, pre-service teachers, systematic review

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In English language education, various reforms and development initiatives have been implemented in many parts of the world, including the Asia-Pacific regions. Some of these reform studies were documented in Singapore (Gill & Berezina, 2020; Ng, 2008), Cambodia (Tan, 2007), the Philippines (Guzman, 2003), Indonesia (Gill & Berezina, 2020; Khan & Haseeb, 2017) and Malaysia among others (Rashid et al., 2017; Zakaria et al., 2015). For instance, Gill and Berezina (2020) compared three neighbouring countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, that took part in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) cycles in 2009, 2012, and 2015. Despite their numerous similarities, Singapore has continuously been a top PISA performer, whereas Malaysia and Indonesia have consistently ranked in the lowest third of international league tables (Gill & Berezina, 2020). As a result, reforms and changes were implemented in the education system and policies at the school level,

higher institutions and teacher preparation programmes in these regions (Goh & Abdul-Wahab, 2020; Rashid et al., 2017).

Malaysia is no exception in their efforts to reform and transform its educational system to generate skilled, knowledgeable, and holistic Malaysian citizens. When the Malaysian Education Blueprint was introduced in 2013, the Ministry of Education (MoE) focused its initiatives on raising and reforming the educational system to worldwide standards. As a result, Malaysian English language education is going through various transformations aiming to enhance English language competency among teachers and students as it will enable Malaysians to compete globally.

Malaysian English Language Teacher Education

English language teacher education (ELTE) in Malaysia has undergone various transformations and reforms for the past decade in line with the aspirations of the National Education Philosophy (NEP) 1988 and Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025. The establishment of the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) in 2002 by the Education Ministry is to increase the effort in boosting, erecting, advancing and bolstering the quality of the English language in Malaysia (Azizi, 2019). Furthermore, in 2013, when MEB was introduced, the Malaysian Ministry of Education set up the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC) to improve Malaysia's falling English standards. Following that, the council established an integrated, comprehensive, and timetabled strategy for English language (EL) education reform, commonly referred to as "The Roadmap 2015-2025." The roadmap is a 10-year reform plan to improve EL education in Malaysia to help our youth become effective and skilled English language users. This plan coincides with ELSQC's decision to adopt the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in 2013. The recent adoption of the CEFR has led to changes in the curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment for the EL in Malaysia, aiming to meet international standards (Mohd Don & Abdullah, 2019).

The changes have created tensions among teachers as they are at the forefront of the education system. One of the pressures is that teachers must continuously upgrade their English language proficiency. Apart from the minimum C1 qualification required by the CEFR to teach the English language, English language teachers must take the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) and achieve at least Band 4 to teach the English language (Azura Abas, 2019). They had to attend courses and proficiency tests and be involved in CEFR cascade training to be familiar with and keep up with the changing syllabus, requirements and assessments. Consequently, the Malaysian MoE implemented the Professional Upskilling of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) initiative to increase teachers' competency from 2012 to 2016. The first cohort, consisting of 5,000 teachers, ran from 2012 to 2013, while the second cohort, consisting of 9,000 teachers, ran from 2014 to 2015. In 2015, the majority (64.4 per cent) of the English teachers had a CEFR level of B2, which means they did not meet the minimal CEFR criterion of C1 (MoE, 2015).

Despite the ongoing initiatives and efforts to improve the standard of ELTE in Malaysia, critics have argued that the development has been relatively slow, with some even suggesting a downward trend (Goh, 2012; Goh et al., 2020; Goh & Abdul-Wahab, 2020; Goh & Blake, 2015;

Goh & Wong, 2014). This lamentable state requires immediate attention as teacher quality is crucial in determining the students' success and the key to effective education (MoE, 2013; Pushpanadham, 2020). In addition, previous studies on ELTE have mostly documented the reform initiatives done by MoE (Omar et al., 2019; Rashid et al., 2017; Selvaraj, 2010). Nevertheless, these studies did not cover more recent issues and challenges among pre-service English teachers (PSETs) in Malaysia. This paper attempts to fill this gap by providing a more comprehensive review of the problems and difficulties faced by the PSETs for the past decade.

Problem Statement and Purpose

A systematic literature review (SLR) aims to establish the trends from prior results, understand the depth and details of existing information, and determine research gaps. According to Higgins et al. (2011), SLR aims to comprehensively gather and synthesise related research that matches predetermined eligibility criteria using organised and replicable procedures while minimising bias. In the same view, Mohamed Shaffril et al. (2020) further justify that SLR enables researchers to search for evidence and studies through extensive and quality searching and retrieving techniques. In addition, SLR could be used to summarise the current state of a body of knowledge by recognising limitations from which future studies can be arranged (Page et al., 2021).

Health studies and quantitative research have predominated most systematic reviews in the social sciences field (Kraus et al., 2020; Okoli, 2015; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Thus, there is a lack of emphasis on the findings of qualitative studies that focus on pre-service teachers in the education field, including the PSETs. It is crucial to look into these issues as it has been reported that the shift from teacher training to life in a classroom is similar to experiencing "reality shock" (Farrell, 2006; Goh & Wong, 2014; Mansor et al., 2019; Pennington & Richards, 2016). For this reason, this study aims to systematically review the issues and challenges faced by PSETs in Malaysia to identify gaps for further exploration. A detailed insight into the present problems and challenges faced by PSETs over the last decade would add to the body of knowledge of ELTE in Malaysia. Understanding these issues is imperative to provide insights to better prepare future English language teachers on what to expect and how to deal with those challenges.

Other than identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the findings from current studies on the issue, this review is also intended to inform interested personnel and bodies about the dilemma faced by the current system. Statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MoHE) for 2008 and 2009 showed that 24.1% and 26.7% of graduates were unemployed six months after graduating (Ismail et al., 2011). Furthermore, the MoE, in its Graduate Tracer Study Executive Report 2010, reported that from the 174,464 graduates who participated in the survey, 24.6% were unemployed after six months of graduating. One of the usual criticisms expressed by employers is that Malaysian graduates are incompetent in using English (Mohamed et al., 2017). In addition, the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) of Malaysia estimated that more than 10,000 teachers have applied for early retirement in recent years (Parkaran, 2022). Thus, this review is critical to provide systematic information and evidence on the challenges and hurdles faced by PSETs that will inform the policymakers, curriculum developers, and stakeholders on essential considerations in delivering qualified English teachers in the future.

METHOD

Established Guidelines

This review paper adapts the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram by Moher et al. (2009), updated PRISMA by Page et al. (2021) and established guidelines by Mohamed Shaffril et al. (2020). PRISMA was created to assist systematic reviewers in explicitly reporting why the review was conducted, what the authors performed, and what they discovered (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement substitutes the 2009 statement. It contains an expanded checklist with reporting guidelines and revised flow diagrams for updated reviews that reflect developments in methods for identifying, selecting, appraising, and synthesising studies. Although PRISMA is widely adopted to guide SLR, researchers claim that PRISMA has a marked tendency to only focus on randomised trials and health interventions often used in the natural sciences field (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020; Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021). A previous study strengthens this claim by asserting that only 1% of systematic review papers come from non-science studies (Berrang-Ford et al., 2015). This lack of methodological guidance for non-sciences and social sciences systematic reviews has raised issues, especially when reviewing qualitative studies (Haddaway et al., 2018; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020).

Reporting qualitative data presentation and synthesis requires a different approach. To overcome this limitation, this present review adapted the established guidelines by Mohamed Shaffril et al. (2020), offering a comprehensive SLR guideline for social sciences researchers. One reason for utilising this guideline is to meet SLR's makeup where it must be guided by at least a review protocol or published guidelines to reduce the possibility of researcher bias in selecting and analysing the data (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The guidelines by Mohamed Shaffril et al. (2020) outlined seven main aspects in a systematic review:

- i. the development and validation of the review protocol or published guidelines
- ii. formulation of research questions
- iii. systematic searching strategies
- iv. quality appraisal
- v. data extraction
- vi. data synthesis
- vii. data demonstration

Formulation of the Research Question

The research question was formulated using the acronym "PICO", whereby 'P' means population or problem, 'I' implies interest, and 'Co' means context (Lockwood et al., 2015; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020). Based on this technique, the authors included three main features in the review, that is, pre-service English teachers (population), issues and challenges (interest) and Malaysia (context). Thus, the main research question of this study is: What are the issues and challenges faced by pre-service English teachers in Malaysia?

The Systematic Review Processes

This section describes the four phases of SLR: identification, screening, eligibility and quality appraisal, and qualitative synthesis.

Identification

The first stage of the systematic searching strategies is identifying keywords accompanied by searching for synonyms and related terms based on dictionary, thesaurus, and research questions. After the words were determined, the next step was to use the search string through the 'advanced search' feature using four searching functions: phrase searching, Boolean operator 'OR' or/and 'AND', field code and truncation (Refer to Table 1). The current study retrieved 127 articles from the databases in the first stage.

The present study used Scopus, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Proquest, Emerald, Sage, and Google Scholar databases. Even though there are some critiques on the quality issues of Google Scholar articles, we argue that no database is perfect or comprehensive, and systematic searching must be performed from several databases to get the relevant articles (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2019; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Mohamed Shaffril et al. (2020) and Haddaway et al. (2018) also argued and verified the importance of Google Scholar as a crucial supporting database in systematic searching. Aside from database searching, the review also includes manual searching such as backward and forward tracking, known as citation and reference tracking. This involves tracking the authors cited in the text and then tracking the full article written by the authors (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020).

Table 1. Systematic Review Search String

| Database | Search string |
|----------------|---|
| Scopus | TITLE-ABS-KEY (("teacher education*" OR "pre-service teachers*" OR "teacher training*") AND ("challenges*" OR "issues*" OR "problems*" OR "concerns" OR "practices*")) AND ("Malaysia") |
| Google Scholar | allintitle: ("teacher education" AND "Malaysia") |

Screening

Three duplicate articles were excluded after obtaining the potential articles, while the remaining 124 articles were screened based on the inclusion criteria, as shown in Table 2. The first criterion is timeline publication, whereby only papers published from 2011 to 2021 were selected for the review. This criterion is essential to ensure that the issues and challenges in teacher education are still relevant in today's ever-changing educational landscape. Timeline publication also resonates with the concept of 'research field maturity', where the pattern of literature review follows research questions and is more evidence-driven (Kraus et al., 2020). This timeframe was chosen as the quantity of published research was adequate for a representative review. Next, only journal articles published in the English language were considered in the study.

Moreover, it is essential to note that the review only focuses on social sciences and language teacher education which means that teacher education in Science, Mathematics, vocational and other subject areas were excluded in the current research. Most importantly, only studies conducted in Malaysia were selected because they align with the research question and the need to identify gaps in the area of ELTE in Malaysia. Reviewing the teacher education of other countries would involve an unmanageable amount of data resources. 67 papers were excluded based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, leaving 57 articles for the next stage.

Table 2. The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Criterion | Eligibility | Exclusion |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Timeline | Between 2011-2021 | <2011 |
| Type | Journal article | Books, chapters in a book |
| Language | English | Non-English |
| Subject area | Social sciences/ English language | Other than social sciences |
| Country | Malaysia | Other than Malaysia |

Eligibility and Quality Appraisal

Based on the remaining 57 papers sought for retrieval, 21 papers were excluded due to inaccessibility and further exclusion of non-social sciences studies. The next stage is the eligibility stage, where 36 articles were thoroughly screened and appraised by three reviewers independently. At this stage, the reviewers carefully examined the articles' titles, abstracts, and content to ensure they fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The reviewers used the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Appraisal Tool (2018) to evaluate the quality of the articles. CASP was chosen as the appraisal tool as it consists of questions assessing the methodology, results and overall value of previous empirical studies. CASP is often used to appraise the quality of both randomised trials and qualitative studies (Green et al., 2006). Using this method also helps to reduce the risk of bias in the included studies.

The reviewers were guided by seven questions adapted from CASP. For each criterion, the reviewers need to indicate "yes", "no", or "can't tell". The reviewers decided that if the articles fulfilled three to seven criteria (moderate to high quality), they would be included in the review. In contrast, papers that meet only one or two criteria were excluded. Consequently, 16 papers were excluded, and 20 articles were included for the final qualitative synthesis (See Figure 1).

Qualitative Synthesis

ATLAS.ti Version 9 was used for the initial coding and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the data by identifying recurrent and emergent themes related to issues and challenges in language teacher education in Malaysia. The extracted data were summarised under different thematic headings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Dixon-Woods et al. (2005), thematic analysis enables the recognition of prominent themes and the organisation and structuring of literature within these themes. The thematic analysis seeks to find the pattern of

previous research by detecting any articles or relations in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Two expert reviewers reviewed and further defined the themes to ensure the validity of the themes. Adjustments were made accordingly.

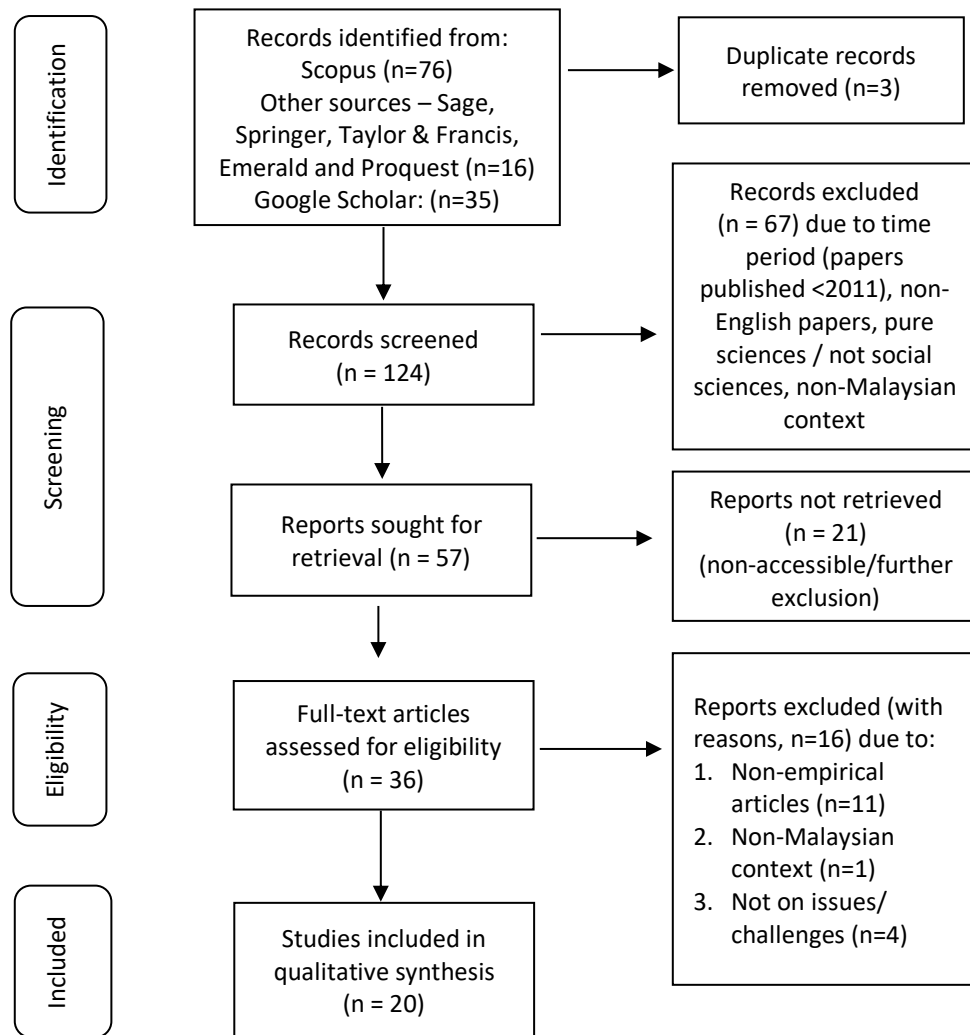


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the Systematic Review (adapted from Moher et al., 2009; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2019; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020; Page et al., 2021)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis produced six main themes and thirty-one sub-themes related to issues and challenges faced by PSETs in Malaysia (See Table 3). The six themes are teaching competency (6 sub-themes), issues on professional development (6 sub-themes), lack of support (4 sub-themes), the disparity between theories and actual classroom practices (6 sub-themes), problems in classroom management (5 sub-themes), and transition from a student-teacher to a teacher (4 sub-themes).

Table 3. Articles Included in the Review and Main Themes

| Theme | | Teaching competency | Professional development practices | Lack of support | Disparity between theory and practice | Classroom management practices | Transition from a student-teacher to being a teacher |
|--------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Author | Amin et al. 2019 | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| | Gill & Berezina 2020 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| | Goh & Canrinus 2019 | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Goh & Matthews 2011 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Goh & Wong 2014 | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Goh et al. 2020 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| | Hassan et al. 2015 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Hassan et al. 2018 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| | Ismail & Awang 2017 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| | Karakas & Yavuz 2018 | ✓ | | | | | |
| | Khan & Haseeb 2017 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| | Lee et al. 2020 | ✓ | | | | | |
| | Madin & Swanto 2019 | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| | Mansor et al. 2019 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| | Omar et al. 2019 | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| | Othman & Kiely 2016 | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |

| Theme | Teaching competency | Professional development practices | Lack of support | Disparity between theory and practice | Classroom management practices | Transition from a student-teacher to being a teacher |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Ratnavadivel et al. 2014 | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sailin & Mahmor 2018 | ✓ | | | | | |
| Sathappan & Gurusamy 2020 | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |

Teaching Competency

Based on the systematic review, eight studies have discussed teaching competency as one of the main challenges faced by PSETs. The studies discussed PSETs' limitations in teaching competency such as soft skills (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Goh & Wong, 2014; Hassan et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2020; Sathappan & Gurusamy, 2019), teaching techniques (Goh & Mathews, 2011; Goh & Wong, 2014; Ratnavadivel et al., 2014), digital skills (Sailin & Mahmor, 2018), inadequate field experience (Karakas & Yavuz, 2018) and classroom management skills (Goh & Mathews, 2011). Hassan et al. (2015) argued that the teacher training programmes in Malaysia did not focus on teaching soft skills and recommended that teacher training institutes create a programme for teacher preparation that incorporates soft skills components into teaching and learning while prioritising principles and holistic integration in their instruction. They claimed that the issue arose due to the lack of guidelines and methods for embedding soft skills in the teacher education curriculum.

Sathappan and Gurusamy (2019) supported this, where they found that PSETs had difficulty communicating and maintaining good rapport with the school communities and their mentors. This problem could be attributed partly to the inadequate time spent on their teaching practicum or field experience. According to Karakas and Yavuz (2018), Malaysian PSETs spent fourteen to twenty weeks teaching practicum in their final semester, which may not be enough time to fully integrate into school professional life. However, recently, the Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education (ITE) has initiated three sessions of school orientation programmes before PSETs go for their compulsory practicum period. This will enable the PSETs to familiarise themselves with the school environment before they proceed with their teaching practicum.

Issues in digital skills are another challenge faced by PSETs. Sailin and Mahmor (2018) discovered that PSETs were apprehensive about using technology due to limited time to use it in classrooms, limited Internet access, or lack of school IT facilities. These factors demotivated them from using technology and increased their lack of confidence in digital pedagogy. Furthermore, the outbreak of COVID-19 is expected to reconfigure further the skills needed by PSETs. It is expected that future English language teachers must master digital pedagogy and manage online teaching and learning and online assessment to cope with the new norm (Abdelhafez, 2021). Accommodating this situation could pose a challenge to school administrators and stakeholders, as they need to make sure the schools in Malaysia are

adequately equipped with the needed IT facilities such as stable Internet connection, computers and computer labs (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Ismail & Awang, 2017).

One unexpected finding by Goh and Matthews (2011) was that some teachers indicated that the training they received in ELTE did not sufficiently prepare them or expose them to techniques for dealing with difficult or unforeseen situations in the classrooms. As a result, many teachers had problems with classroom management strategies which will be further explained in the fifth theme. Figure 2 shows the sub-themes of issues in terms of competency based on the thematic analysis.

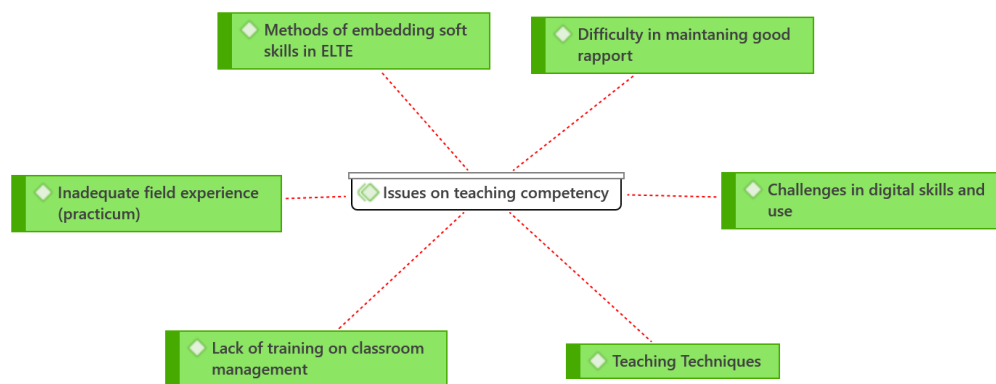


Figure 2. Issues on Teaching Competency

Issues on Professional Development

Based on the analysis, nine studies have discussed PSETs' struggles in their professional development efforts (Amin et al., 2019; Gill & Berezina., 2020; Goh et al., 2020; Goh & Canrinus, 2019; Hassan et al., 2018; Ismail & Awang, 2017; Madin & Swanto, 2019; Omar et al., 2019; Zakaria et al., 2015). The most common issue was time and commitment management among teachers in their professional development initiatives. Some studies found that teachers who were required to complete their degree programme part-time had to juggle between work commitments at school, family commitments and attending their degree programme as a student (Omar et al., 2019; Ismail & Awang, 2017).

Another issue is related to action research and reflective practices. Several studies found that PSETs have an unsatisfactory level of knowledge about action research that serves as a tool for reflective practices (Amin et al., 2019; Madin & Swanto, 2019; Zakaria et al., 2015). Amin et al. (2019) assert that the academic courses in teacher training programmes are disengaged from action research because it was not explicitly and adequately embedded in the curriculum.

Other issues in teacher professional development involved collaborative initiatives by a group of teachers called the professional learning community (PLC). Among the problems noted in the literature is that PLC is challenging to be sustained for an extended period since it cannot maintain a network of teachers and a community that can work together to improve teaching and learning (Hassan et al., 2018). They further explained that the members of the PLC also did not

have sufficient time to collaborate to make the PLC effective. Hassan et al. (2018) have correlated the programme's ineffectiveness to weak planning and execution, as with most professional development programmes in schools.

Another challenge is that decisions on professional development training are determined by the ministry and not the teachers themselves. This result is supported by Gill and Berezina (2020). They found that Singaporean schools have more decision-making freedom than Malaysia, as the teachers are in charge of important staff development choices and skill transfer. In contrast, teacher training in Malaysia is governed by government officials. Thus, Malaysian teachers and schools do not have the autonomy to identify training courses that they think would be useful to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Hassan et al., 2018). Figure 3 sums up the issues faced by teachers in professional development practices.

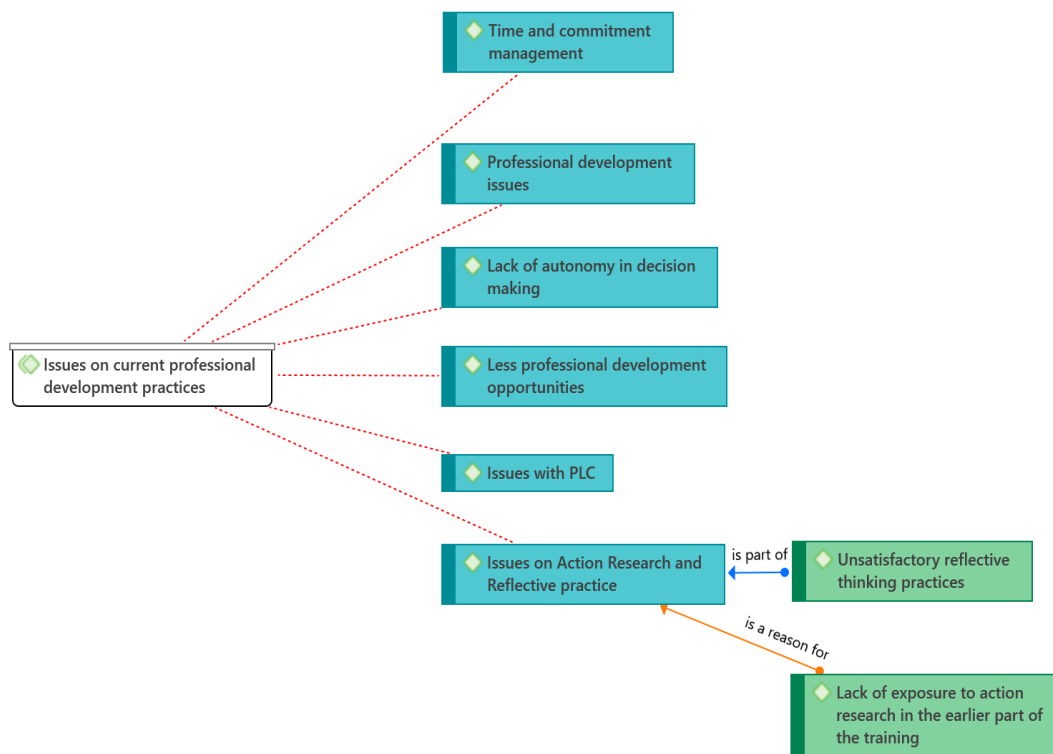


Figure 3. Issues on Professional Development

Lack of Support

Lack of support in terms of guidance and managerial aspects is one of the issues faced by PSETs. In this case, a total of ten studies discussed this issue which includes lack of support from mentors or teacher educators who are assigned to observe and guide the PSETs, problems in resources support, and administrative and technical support. Sathappan and Gurusamy (2019)

found that PSETs did not get sufficient support from their mentors or teacher educators. The findings include the inability of mentors to give timely constructive feedback regarding their lesson plans, lack of observation time and the absence of further explanation regarding their action research projects. Goh et al. (2020) suggested that mentors should play their role and support by providing the correct input and constructive feedback regarding the student teachers' lessons, offering practical advice on teaching and classroom management skills, and helping them improve their action research knowledge.

There were two conflicting findings in terms of support from the school community and school-based mentors. Goh and Matthews (2011) and Goh and Wong (2014) reported that student-teachers had trouble communicating and collaborating with the other teachers at the school. They claimed that there was an element of bias in how the teaching staff perceived them. However, we argue that the study failed to confirm whether the problem exists due to the dissociative behaviour of the school staff or whether it was just sentiments on the PSETs' part because the studies did not involve the perceptions of the school staff. On the other hand, some PSETs seemed satisfied with the help they received from their school-based mentors (Goh & Matthews, 2011).

Regarding resources, PSETs are experiencing issues of inadequate teaching aids and materials, limited facilities, and insufficient financial support to fund their teaching activities (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Ismail & Awang, 2017; Khan & Haseeb, 2017). Participants were concerned about not having enough tools, supplies, and equipment to help them teach (Goh & Matthews, 2011). Their ability to effectively teach was impacted by the fact that the school was unable to provide them with the tools and resources they required. These conditions largely affect the quality of teaching (Gill & Berezina, 2020; Ismail & Awang, 2017; Khan & Haseeb, 2017; Mansor et al. 2019).

The Disparity Between Theories and Classroom Practices

Based on the literature, it was alarming to note that PSETs perceived a lack of coherence between the theories that they learn in teacher training programmes with what they experience in the actual classroom (Amin et al., 2019; Goh et al., 2020; Goh & Canrinus, 2019; Madin & Swanto, 2019; Othman & Kiely, 2016). One possible explanation is that their academic courses emphasise theoretical components compared to practical ones. Consequently, PSETs struggle to theoretically relate what they have learned with their teaching experience, which has become a significant concern among educational stakeholders (Amin et al., 2019; Madin & Swanto, 2019).

Othman and Kiely (2016) pointed out that upon joining the profession, the PSETs felt that the pedagogical theories contradicted their beliefs because they realised that they have to consider their students' classroom context, background and needs when they teach. For instance, despite being aware of the disadvantages of employing the mother tongue in the English classroom, PSETs' lack of experience in dealing with students with low English proficiency has led them to rely on it (Othman & Kiely, 2016). This has raised dilemmas among beginning teachers, as they keep conflicting their methods with pedagogical knowledge. Nevertheless, this also indicates that the PSETs would switch and alternate between ways (i.e., Grammar

Translation Method and communicative language teaching) depending on the situation and context.

Goh et al. (2020) investigated the programme coherence of six specialist areas in the education of a local university: business, vocational, humanities, sciences, languages, and special education. When the six regions were compared, it was found that PSETs from the languages field viewed their courses as having the least coherence with teaching practice. These PSETs agreed the least with the statements on whether or not the teachers in schools were using the same principles and techniques they learned in the teacher education programme. Goh and Blake (2015) supported this claim by stating that PSETs are often presented with sound teaching principles but lack the opportunities to transfer these theories into actual classroom practices.

In a study by Ratnavadivel et al. (2014), it was found that all the theories, concepts, and principles that PSETs have learned in colleges or universities cannot be put into action. They were unable to conduct their instruction based on a synthesis of many educational foundations because they were unaware of how the psychology of learning connects to pedagogical abilities or sociological viewpoints on students.

The findings from the literature concluded that PSETs from the language field perceived the least opportunities to link theory to practice and the least coherence between their teacher training courses. This problem, according to Ahmad Sukri and Md. Yunus (2020) could exacerbate as there is no standardised content and delivery of the various ELTE curricula and a lack of a coordinated communication structure among the teacher training providers. This would be a crucial area of future investigation as previous research did not focus on the reasons for the discrepancies.

The Lack of Classroom Management Skills

Problems in classroom management are another issue that PSETs face. Several results have shown that these teachers have difficulty managing their classrooms, especially when dealing with disruptive behaviour (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Goh & Wong, 2014; Sathappan & Gurusamy, 2019). Sathappan and Gurusamy (2019) further stated that many PSETs viewed their practicum teaching as stressful. They were somewhat unprepared to manage students' behavioural problems, which could disrupt their lessons. This situation is likely attributed to the large class size of Malaysian classrooms (30 to 50 students in a class) and time constraints (Hassan et al., 2015).

Other findings indicated that contextual factors such as tight schedules, packed syllabus and lack of management support also lead to difficulty in managing the classroom successfully (Othman & Kiely, 2016). This will hinder PSETs' abilities to implement lessons according to their teaching and theoretical beliefs. Subsequently, when PSETs fail to manage the classroom effectively, it will lead to discipline problems that can impede effective teaching.

The Transition Stage from a Student-Teacher to Being a Teacher

The final theme is related to the transition process of the student-teachers to become teachers (see Figure 4). The first issue concerns the PSETs' problems or perceptions of their teaching experience. Goh and Matthews (2011) reported that PSETs were anxious about the

perceptions and acceptance of the school community and their students as trainee teachers. This means that even though the PSETs felt they needed to make a good impression on the school staff, they could not collaborate comfortably with the team due to the stereotype of being a trainee. Some of them also questioned their adequacy and competency as teachers. This could be associated with the PSETs' concern about their mastery of the content knowledge and training (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Ratnavadivel et al., 2014).

Furthermore, previous studies also noted that some beginning teachers had problems adjusting to the school's norms (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Mansor et al., 2019). Some PSETs had trouble adjusting to the school's new environment and educational changes. To illustrate, the introduction of School-Based Assessment (SBA) nationwide in 2019 has increased teacher workload (Mansor et al., 2019). This would be overwhelming to PSETs teachers who were not exposed to the new requirements as they need to learn the system and be informed about the new assessment method. They have to constantly monitor, assess, and record the student's ongoing progress. As a result, most PSETs feel unprepared and overworked, affecting their mental and health well-being (Omar et al., 2019).

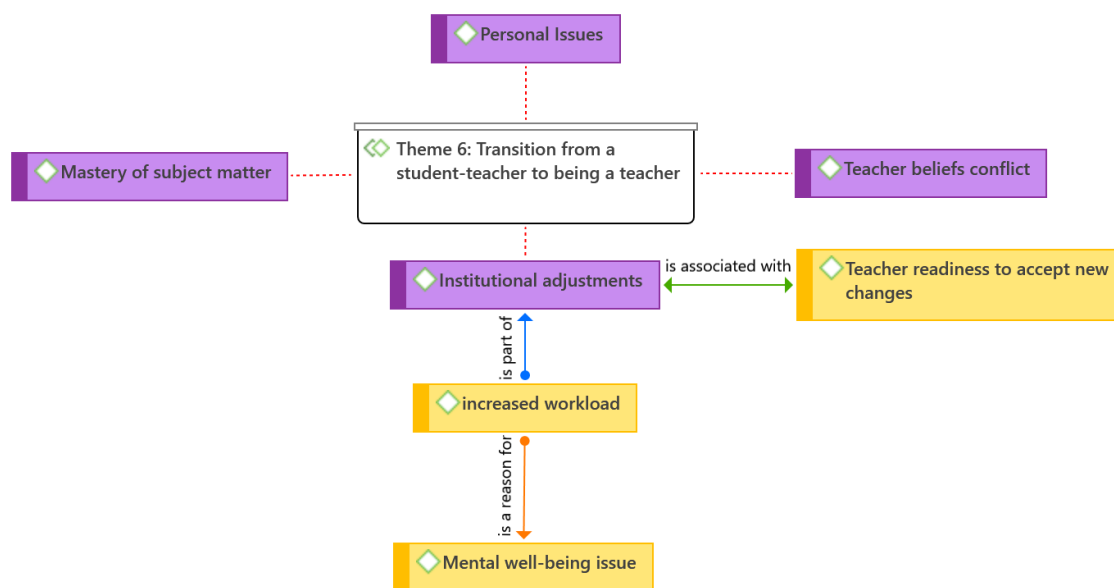


Figure 4. The Transition from a Student-teacher to Being a Teacher

CONCLUSIONS

This study was set to offer a comprehensive review of the issues and challenges of PSETs in Malaysia and has unravelled six main themes representing the issues based on a systematic review of studies conducted from 2011 to 2021. The first theme is related to the lack of teaching competencies among PSETs. These include soft skills, teaching strategies, and digital and classroom management skills. This study indicates that pedagogical content knowledge alone is

insufficient in helping PSETs become effective teachers. As students become more able to gain access to knowledge and even learn technical skills through a few clicks on their gadgets, this phenomenon has refashioned teaching and redefined the educator's role in classrooms. This indicates that the part of educators is transformed towards facilitating young people's development as contributing members of society. For this, Luthra and Mackenzie (2020) suggested that future teachers must master the following skills: resilience, flexibility and adaptability, emotional intelligence, continuous learning, entrepreneurial skills, creativity and critical thinking, as these set of skills are forecasted to be in higher demand in the near future.

Secondly, the literature review indicated PSETs' problems with their professional development efforts. Time constraints, assimilation to the school and classroom norms, lack of support and resources, and lack of decision-making autonomy were the main barriers for teachers to improve their status quo. Early career teachers may find this period troublesome as they have just joined the teaching profession and are still struggling to adapt to the school environment. If the situation is not resolved, it could eventually lead to unfavourable perceptions that hinder their ability to grow into effective English language teachers.

The third theme has shown that PSETs need support from various parties such as mentors (teacher educators) and the school community, administrators, and sufficient financial and material resources. This finding would be helpful for stakeholders in focusing more on allocations for resource development and for schools to work together with institutes of teacher education on successful mentorship. Next, one significant and exciting issue is the discrepancy between teacher training theories and real-life classroom practices. This area is an important issue for future research as the study found that PSETs often could not practise what they learned or believed in due to the students' contexts and needs. This suggests that any pedagogical implementation should consider the various school contexts and students' backgrounds and focus on 'what works' instead of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Moreover, the current review also highlights the PSETs' problems in managing the ever-challenging 21st-century classroom and their transition into the teaching career. These issues focus on their assimilation into the school norms and interactions with other school staff, which could disrupt the teaching and learning process and their professional growth if they are not handled efficiently.

All these concerns and challenges serve as a foundation for ongoing teacher education improvement and the planning of educational reform policies. Future teacher education needs to prepare trainee teachers to be more resilient and adaptable to new environments, challenges and diverse circumstances. This calls for the reconfiguring and remodelling of future teacher education to be relevant and adaptive to further educational and technological trends.

A critical contribution of this study is that the results help in identifying areas that need attention for further research. Though there is extensive research on ELTE, there are still gaps in understanding the language teaching journey and the hurdles of an English language teacher. In doing so, we address the importance of looking into multiple support and challenges in PSETs' life. The findings highlighted would add to the practitioner's knowledge of what challenges could be expected by future teachers. Subsequently, teacher educators, school mentors and teacher training institutions could plan post-training courses or engage in active discussions to prepare PSETs for such challenges and develop their problem-solving skills.

One limitation of this study is the representation of papers in the selected studies. As the review restricts the geographical region and parameter to only issues and challenges of PSETs in Malaysia, a more detailed search focusing on other areas would yield more comprehensive results and problems in the field. In addition, future reviews in this area would benefit from a broader range of databases that could provide a more significant number of sources.

The findings have led to several recommendations that may be useful for future studies. Firstly, investigations into how teacher educators and school mentors can help provide sufficient support to PSETs should be conducted. Teacher training centres should develop detailed guidelines for mentors and school-based mentors as reference points to provide appropriate and sufficient support for the practicum teachers. In addition, the problem should also be studied comprehensively to identify the limitations as well as attributes of a positive teacher-mentor relationship.

This study suggests that PSETs should be well-trained and equipped with appropriate and flexible classroom management skills, both in physical and digital contexts, to deal with unforeseen circumstances. They need to familiarise themselves with the methodology in action research to improve the quality of their teaching as part of their effort to stay current with the latest English teaching pedagogy. Action research helps teachers identify teaching and learning issues, reflect on their teaching practices, and offer immediate and customised solutions within the classroom context. The study suggests that the introduction of action research in teacher training programmes should be done earlier and requires some revisions so that PSETs have a better grasp of the methodology.

It is also imperative to obtain further in-depth data about the PSETs' language teaching journey to understand and describe their transformation process, concerns, and struggles. This is critical since the Malaysian National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) has stated that approximately 10,000 teachers have applied for early retirement in the last several years (Parkaran, 2022). In addition, most of the studies reviewed were contextualised during the teaching practicum phase. Thus, it is recommended that future empirical studies include the experiences of experienced teachers while at the same time looking at the needs and expectations of the stakeholders.

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