PRACTICUM PORTFOLIOS FROM THE STUDENT TEACHERS' LENSES

Geetha Veerappan[1]
Bharathi Mutty[2]
Kristina Francis[3]
Malvin Kaur[4]

[1,2,3,4] Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman - Kampar Campus, Faculty of Arts & Social Science, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia
[1]geethav@utar.edu.my, [2]bharathi@utar.edu.my, [3]kristinaf@utar.edu.my, [4]malvink@utar.edu.my

_____

Abstract: *This study focuses on the teaching portfolio which is anticipated to be an exceptional tool in enhancing learning about teaching. Regardless if one is a trainee in the classroom or an accomplished veteran, such a portfolio can be a constant channel for development for the future. Such portfolios are used as part of assessment methods in teaching practicum to evaluate student teachers' teaching reflection, documentation and artifacts collected. Nevertheless, when it comes to assessment, educators are discovering that the portfolios presented by student teachers are not up to the standard required and their expectations. This paper thus examines the perceptions and challenges faced by 30 English Language Teaching (ELT) student teachers in developing a standard portfolio during their teaching practicum. Findings of the research indicated that time management, overload of work, lack of knowledge and awareness in developing a portfolio were the major concerns faced by the respondents. By contrast, the perception of the students on developing the portfolio deemed to be positive. This study serves as a prelude to further research into portfolios as a tool in teaching and lends credentials to look into other avenues which could spur teaching in the future.*

Keywords: Teaching Practicum, Student teachers, Teaching Portfolio
_____

Introduction

Education is ever evolving due to the rapid rise of globalization and the need of individual countries to move towards innovation and excellence. Sambai (2017) averred that a strong nation is built by the students and the teachers. Hence, students as well as the teachers who teach them have been recognized as the future of a country's establishment in achieving

greatness. Education institutes are continuously developing strategies and innovative methods in assessing student abilities and performances, which is then used to enhance the current system in teaching. The constantly changing education platforms are challenging to both experienced and new teachers. Yaacob, Walters, Ali, Abdullah & Walters (2014) claimed that good reflection is the key for a teacher to learn successfully in any situation. In virtue of the importance of self-reflection in teachers, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia made a requirement for all the student teachers to keep teaching portfolios, as stated in the Practicum Guidebook that the ministry had issued (1994). A teaching portfolio consists of a collection of documents, artifacts and reflections about a person's teaching competences (Lally, 2000). Numerous claims have been made regarding the educative benefits of constructing a teaching portfolio (Zeichner, 2001). Increased reflection upon teaching and subject matter content; expanded awareness of the theories and assumptions that guide instructional practices; increased self-confidence; and heightened collaborative dialogs about teaching are some examples of the benefits of portfolio development (Anderson & DeMeulle, 1998; Bartell, Kay, & Morin, 1998).Although portfolios can be time-consuming to construct and cumbersome to review, they can capture the complexities of professional practice in ways that other approach could not possibly be delved into. Not only are they an effective way to assess teaching quality, but it also provides teachers with opportunities for self-reflection and reciprocal interactions based on documented episodes of their own teaching. The interest of the researcher in teaching portfolios and the perceptions of student teachers about them might raise a question in many since the practice of keeping the portfolios has been around for a while. However, Subramaniam (2001) expressed that research regarding student teachers in Malaysia and their perceptions about the training as well as their portfolios is lacking. Thus, this research attempts to contribute to the existing literature of student teachers.

Literature Review

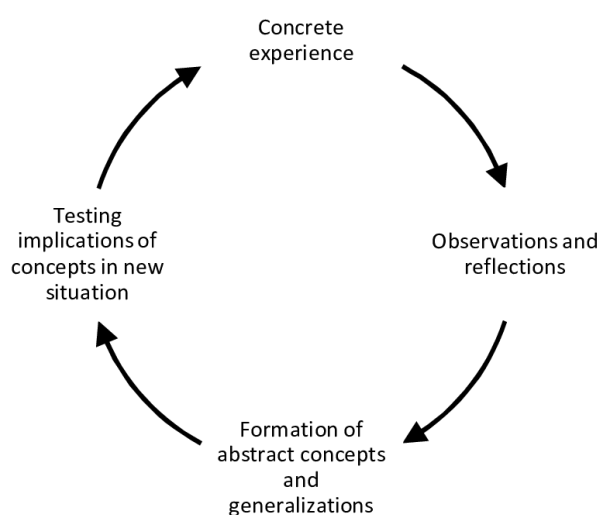### *Kolb's Learning Theory*

Figure 1: The Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (Kolb, 1984)

Learner's participation and involvement in real life activities play a vital role in his/her learning process. The learning process based on an individual's real experience will actually contribute to the preparation of his/her job prospect. Hence, Kolb's Experiential Learning

Model is applied in describing the process of student teacher producing a teaching portfolio and learning from it. According to the article "Connecting classrooms to the real world" (2018), a person can learn the best when he/she is exposed to the real situation of his/her profession during his/her industrial training rather than just attending classes and listening to the lectures. Traditional classroom-based learning would not provide the learners with the deep understanding of their job prospect because of its standardised and unauthentic simulation of the real world. Thus, active participation and real experience will lead to the enhancement of the deep meaning in which the learning process will take place effectively (Natasha Ariffin, 2015).

Using the Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984), a student teacher's learning experience during his/her teaching practicum can be explained in four significant stages. At the concrete experience stage, the student teachers are able to see themselves as educators involved in a new experience or situation in the classroom while teaching. After every teaching session, the student teachers engage in reflective observations where they deliberate on their teaching strategies, teaching behaviours and their learners' behaviours during the class. It should be highlighted that the reflections are done by writing reflective journals, which form an integral part of the student teachers' teaching portfolios. Subsequently, in the abstract conceptualisation stage, new ideas are constructed or modifications are done on any existing concept that needs to be changed. Finally, in the active experimentation stage, new ideas are implemented to solve the problems met during the earlier stages in the classroom.

Past Related Studies

Essentially, a teaching portfolio is a collection of information about a teacher's practice. It can include a variety of information, such as lesson plans, student assignments, teachers' written descriptions and videotapes of their instruction, as well as formal evaluations by supervisors. Adapted from professions ranging from art to architecture, portfolios have traditionally been comprised of "best practice" samples of professional work (Bird, 1990). A teaching portfolio thus builds upon the conception of "best practice" and expands the boundaries of this concept when incorporated as a tool to capture the complexity of learning to teach. Influenced by the adoption of a performance-based mode of assessment by US teacher education institutions, teaching portfolios are increasingly being used to assess prospective teachers' readiness to teach in the real environment (Diez, 2001). Teaching portfolios are often a component of a teacher preparation program's admissions process in decision making, a requirement for admission to student teaching (Zeichner, 2001), and as a means of evaluating students' knowledge and ability as part of a program's exit requirement (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2000).

Natasha Ariffin (2015) in her study acknowledged the fact that portfolio assessments enhanced self – determining among learners towards their responsibilities. In her research, it has been proven that student teachers have demonstrated positive perceptions toward the implementation of such portfolios in education, especially during teacher practicum periods.

Nevertheless, if not carefully thought out, a teaching portfolio can easily take the form previous sub standards set upon as policies. For example, Kaur Sidhu (2010) highlighted that writings and contents of the portfolio have the disadvantages of "containing far more information than is needed for a straightforward analysis". In another word, it can be said that student teachers might include too much of unnecessary information in their portfolio which

are beyond the criteria and requirements fixed. This in return will breed complexity of portfolios that would not enhance the teaching system, rather complicate the outcomes.

In addition, the inability to engage in a two-way communicative process is a drawback of portfolios. Linking a portfolio's purpose to the institutional vision rather than promoting personal meaning making intended to impact the students' development and learning could severely alter a teacher's perception and renegade the entire outcome intended. As such, it is imperative to explore the various forms of guidance, support, and interconnected engagement pre-service students need to successfully navigate a teaching portfolio requirement.

On another note, student teachers themselves might have few challenges in keeping teaching portfolios. To begin with, Donnely and Fitmaurice (2007) averred that portfolios are complicated and time consuming to create. The student teachers often find it difficult to include contents that are imperative to improve their current classroom practice. Their portfolios, especially the reflections frequently lack any weakness in teaching practice in general. As student teachers face heavy teaching duties, tasks like producing reflective journals for portfolios and creating teaching materials and improvised lesson plans to be included in the folios are challenging for them. As a result, they prefer not to indicate any weakness in their current lessons; absence of weakness in current teaching method requires no improvisation, which alleviates the student teachers' workload.

Besides, many student teachers are nonplussed when they realise that they have to continuously improvise their teaching materials and teaching strategies, and indicate these changes in teaching portfolios, as mentioned by Desai (2013). As teaching practice is the first encounter with real-life situation for student teachers, they spend most of their time absorbing the new environment and learning about various things that they have never thought about before. Consequently, when they are required to prepare teaching portfolios to demonstrate their constant changes and modification in many aspects of their teaching, they feel ill-equipped to perform such onerous tasks.

Teaching portfolios have been identified in bringing various benefits to the student teachers. However, what if the portfolio produced by the student teacher is not equivalent to the standard expected? As a result, the objectives of the study are to identify:

1. The challenges faced by the student teachers in developing a standard portfolio during their teaching practicum.
2. The perception of the student teachers in developing their teaching portfolio.

Significance of the Study
This study will be a significant endeavour in identifying the challenges and the struggles faced by student teachers in developing a portfolio during their teaching practicum. This study will be beneficial to three main parties; the student teachers, the lecturers and the higher learning institutions.

First, this study will be a great indicator for upcoming the student teachers as they will be aware of the challenges that they might face in the future during their teaching practicum. Problems and challenges identified through this research will inspire them to prepare themselves on how to overcome the challenges and problems faced in developing their portfolio.

Second, as for the lecturers, this research contributes to an awareness to figure out the effective ways to train the student teachers in developing their portfolios as it will be assessed during the students' teaching practicum

Finally, this study will be also a great indicator for the higher learning institution to facilitate the production of teaching portfolio during their undergraduate studies by having workshops on producing a quality teaching portfolio that might help to enhance the professional development of the student teacher.

Methodology

Participants

30 student teachers from a private higher learning institution majoring in English Education were selected purposively for this study. They were in the final year of the course after completing their teaching practice in the government secondary schools.

Instrument and Data Analysis

A questionnaire comprising two sections was used in this study. Section A consist of an open-ended question to find out the challenges faced by the student teachers in developing a standard portfolio and Section B consist of 10 (Likert scale) questions to find out their perception on developing it. Descriptive Analysis (using SPSS) and content analysis was done to analyse the data respectively.

Findings and Discussion

Section A: Challenges Faced by Student Teachers in Developing A Standard Teaching Portfolio During Their Teaching Practicum

The findings show that the biggest challenge in developing a standard teaching profile is time constraint. A total of 20 student teachers or 66.67% faced this challenge. In a standard teaching portfolio, there will be much information to be created and kept such as lesson plans, activities, daily and weekly reflections. This information not only needs to be prepared in a short period of time but it also needs to be interesting and creative to suit each level of students. This consumes a lot of time but as a student teacher, they are bound to other duties given to them by their mentor, thus affecting their capability in developing a standard teaching portfolio. Sathappan et al (2018) further supported this notion whereby it was concluded in their study that one of the 3 main challenges faced by the student teachers during their teaching practice at a local institute is time constraint.

Besides that, 7 student teachers or 23.33% stated that the challenge faced is overload of work. The student teachers claimed that there were multiple tasks to focus in schools such as preparation for sports day, English camp, and choir and drama practice. These extra tasks crippled the ability of the student teachers to reflect their teaching, enhancing professional development, planning lesson plans and activities accordingly because it is time consuming to complete the multiple tasks. The workload is beyond the student teachers' capacity and as a result, they will be tired at the end of the day to reflect and prepare for the next teaching session. This is in line with Winifred (2014) who revealed that teachers were generally consumed by administrative activities and paperwork while Milman & Kilbane (2005) stated

that time restraints and excessive workload in schools make the process of constructing portfolio challenging.

Lack of knowledge and awareness is also one of the challenges faced by 3 student teachers or 10% out of 30 student teachers. They are not clear of the requirements to produce a standard teaching portfolio especially the reflection part. The reflection is written in a paragraph of 60 to 70 words, repeating the same points for almost all the entries. The reflection is narrated the same way and the student teachers fail to identify the strengths and weaknesses in most lessons. Besides that, they also do not know how to reflect critically because they focus on their teaching instead of focusing on the students' learning and progress. This clearly shows the students are ill equipped in writing a critical teaching reflection. Seldin (1997) narrated that when doing reflections, the teachers tend to concentrate on their teaching practices and overlook their students' learning and progress. It fails the idea of self-reflection and professional development if the student teachers are unable to reflect their strengths and weaknesses in all dimensions. This will further deplete their improvement in their teaching practice resulting in futile production of a quality teaching portfolio to be assessed and used for lifelong learning (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000)

Section B: The Perception of The Student Teachers in Developing Their Teaching Portfolio

Table 1: Distribution of Likert Scale Questions Answering the Perception

Item	Mean Score	Weight %	Rank
Makes me more interested in collecting artifacts	2.8	56.6	6
Makes my mind to be relaxed	2.4	45	8
Gives me the opportunity to improve my teaching skills	4.0	80	1
Demands a little effort from me to complete	2.2	43	9
Opens new perspective to upgrade my progress	3.5	71.2	4
Demands less time to plan my content	2.0	40	10
Is easy for me to reflect my progress	3.7	75.2	2
Improves my method in the teaching process	3.6	72	3
Promotes self – confidence	3.0	60.6	5
Makes my work easier	2.6	49.6	7

With reference to Table 1, it is apparent that by developing a teaching portfolio, the student teachers are given an opportunity to improve their teaching skills. It ranks at number 1 with a mean score of 4.0 and 80% weight. This shows that, the student teachers are able to improve and improvise their skills in teaching to achieve better outcome. Ranking at number 2 with a mean score of 3.7 and weight of 75.2% is how easily the student teachers can reflect their progress. Teaching portfolio is like a mirror to the student teachers where they are able to look back to check their progress. Improving the method of teaching process has a mean score of 3.6 and weight of 72%. It ranks at number 3 while opens new perspective to upgrade teacher students' progress ranks at number 4 with a mean score of 3.5 and weight of 71.2%. This proves that teaching portfolio can be used to improvise the way of teaching which will eventually improve the student teachers' ability in teaching. Besides that, the student teachers can also increase their confidence level in teaching because they are able to reflect upon their

strengths and weaknesses. This ranks at number 5 with a mean score of 3.0 and weight of 60.6%. Student teachers also will be more interested in collecting artifacts which ranks at number 6 with a mean score of 2.8 and 56.6% weight. Ranking at number 7 is student teachers' work is made easier with the teaching portfolio. A mean score of 2.6 and weight of 49.6% thinks that by developing their own teaching portfolio, it makes their teaching a lot more laid back due to the fact the content is all in the teaching portfolio. Having a relaxed mind with a mean score of 2.4 and weight of 45% ranks at number 8 while less effort to complete teaching portfolio by teacher students ranks at number 9 with a mean score of 2.2 and weight of 43%. Student teachers have a perception that by developing their teaching portfolio, they will be stress free and have less work to complete the teaching portfolio. Ranking last, at a mean score of 2.0 and weight of 40%, student teachers feel that developing their teaching portfolio demands less time to plan out their content.

Ranking from 1 until 6 is perceived as positive perception by the student teachers in developing teaching portfolio as the weight is above 50% while the ranking of 7 until 10 is perceived as negative perception as the weight is less than 50%.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The outcomes of this study provided some information that has some pertinent pedagogical implications. The analysis of the challenges faced by the student teachers in developing their teaching portfolio revealed that the student teachers need some proper guidance and briefing that can help them to be more precise and critical in their portfolio development. Since teaching portfolio is a mode of assessment that contributes a considerable amount of marks for the student teachers during their teaching practicum session, it could be more efficient if the student teachers are exposed with the necessary skills which will guide them to produce a quality portfolio.

According to Nunan's scheme of five levels for encouraging the gradual development and autonomy of learners, (1996), the learners must be guided systematically through a proper step of journey until to a point where the learners are able to make their own decisions about their learning process. It is also mentioned that the effective way to guide the learners is to move slowly from awareness to involvement, intervention, creation and at last transcendence. As a result, awareness should be created in these student teachers by sharing with them the knowledge of creating a standard teaching portfolio. Subjects pertaining to professional development should be implicated in the syllabus so that the student teachers will be exposed to it before the teaching practicum. Furthermore, since the findings of the study revealed that time constraint is the biggest challenge that was encountered during the portfolio development, more workshops should be conducted to train and familiarize the student teachers with the steps on how to develop their portfolio in a short period of time. Apart from that, the schools should not take the student teachers for granted by loading them with maximum workload which is not related to their professional development.

Even though the challenges seem to be critical, the study shows that the student teachers' perspective towards developing the portfolio is relatively positive as they are well aware of the benefits as discussed in the past studies relating to developing a portfolio. As such, the challenges can be undeniably prevailed in the future as the student teachers' are aware of the omnipotence of a teaching portfolio if necessary actions are taken.

References

Anderson, R.S., & DeMeulle, L. (1998). Portfolio use in 24 teacher education programs. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 25(1), 23-31. Retrieved December 3, 2017, from http://www.teqjournal.org/backvols/1998/25_1/1998v25n104.PDF

Bartell, C., Kay, C., & Morin, J.A. (1998). Teaching portfolios in teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 25 (1), 5-8.

Bird, T. (1990). The schoolteacher's portfolio: An essay on possibilities. In J. Millman & L. Darling Hammond (Eds.), *The new handbook of teacher evaluation: Assessing elementary and secondary school teachers* (pp. 251-256). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Synder, J. (2000). Authentic assessment of teaching in context. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16, 523–545

Desai, A. J. (2012). Problems of teacher education in India. *International Journal for Research in Education (IJRE)*, 1(1), 54-58. Retrieved from http://raijmr.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/54-58-Dr-Ashok-J.Desai_.pdf

Dietz, M. E. (2001) *Designing the School Leader's Portfolio.* Arlington Heights: Skylight Professional Development

Donnelly, R., & Fitzmaurice, M. (2007) The Use of Teaching Portfolios for Academic Professional Development in *Teaching Portfolio Practice in Ireland: A Handbook* (pp.112-120) Dublin: Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL); Trinity College Dublin.

Kaur Sidhu, G., & Kaur, S. (2010). Pathways to reflective learning and teacher development: Insights from teacher trainees' diaries. *Jurnal Pendidikan Malaysia*, 35(1), 47–57.

Kolb, D (1984). *Experiential Learning as the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Lally, A. (2000). Teaching portfolios and the continuous improvement of teaching. *Art Documentation*, 19(1), 48–49.

Milman, N.B. & Kilbane, C. R. (2005). Digital teaching portfolios: Catalysts for fostering authentic professional development. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, 31(3).

Natasha Ariffin, J. M. (2015). TESL Trainee teachers' Perspective in Using Portfolio as a Performance Assessment. *International Seminar on Tarbiyah 2015* (pp. 480-488). Bandar Acheh: Persatuan Intelektual Muslim Malaysia.

Porter, A., Youngs, P., & Odden, A. (2000). Advances in teacher assessments and their uses. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 259–297). Washington, DC: AERA.

Ramesh Sathappan, and Dr. Malini Sathappan. (2018). Tesl student teachers' perspectives of practicum practices in a Malaysian teacher education institute. *International journal of Research - Granthaalayah*, 6(2), 86-93.

Seldin, P. (1997). Using student feedback to improve teaching. *To Improve the Academy*, 16. 335-346

Subramaniam, M. (2001). Journal writing as a tool for teacher trainees: Reflection on teaching. *Jurnal Penyelidikan*, *3,* 1-17.

The Importance of Connecting Classroom to the Real Word. (2018, November 15). *The Age*. Retrieved from http://schoolsubscriptions.com.au/the-importance-of-connecting-classrooms-to-the-real-world/

Winnefred, A. (2014, June 30). NUTP wants less paperwork, more time with students. The Malay Mail. Retrieved December 3, 2017, from http://www.themalaymailonline.com

Yaacob, A., Walters, L. M., Ali, R. M., Abdullah, S. S. & Walters, T. (2014). Reflecting on Malaysian Teacher Trainees' Journals. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction, 11*, 1-21.

Zeichner, K. and S. Wray (2001). "The teaching portfolio in US teacher education programs: what we know and what we need to know." *Teaching and Teacher Education* (17, 613-621).