School Survival for Novice Teacher in Malaysia

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Teaching strategy is always considered as one of the important element in teaching and learning process, yet schools always be occupied with experienced and seniors teachers who are used to the school system and pupils preferences. This study focuses on novice teacher not only in finding suitable teaching strategies to suit the pupils but also to cope with new school culture; forming a relationship. The objectives are to understand how novice solely finds suitable teaching methods as well as how novice teacher survives in teaching world by developing trust and relationship with the senior teachers. Methods which will be used are semi structured interviews and observation; both collected data were taken down as field notes and journal writing; findings were transcribed and recheck by the participants. Result shows that by asking and interacting help novices to survive and improve them in school's context. This study helps to understand the real challenges faced by novice teacher through their school's lives.

Keywords: Novice Teacher, School Survival, Teaching Strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

In aligning Malaysia with the flow of globalization, the government have been transforming and modifying our education according to the present needs. All the alterations are made to produce well balanced citizens in terms of intellectual, emotional, social, physical and spiritual; relating to our National Education Philosophy (NEP), an ongoing process to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large (Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, 2008). Reconstruction of Malaysian curriculum emphasizes the importance of Malay and English language so that our curriculum will be in the same standard with other countries.

According to Malaysian Education Philosophy, parts of English language curriculum specifications are to equip learners with four basic of communicative skills so as to enable them to interact; both orally and in writing. Recently, the changes made in primary school; ‘Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah’ or known as KSSR uses modular approach and in English, learners are exposed to the basic of literacy which is phonics. This shows that curriculum is always evolving based on what it needs. Hence, teachers need to be alert and updated to all the changes made in education’s field.

Besides that, teaching strategies also need to be taken seriously by all teachers because each strategy used designates how much knowledge can be transferred to learners during teaching and learning process. Teaching is not a static task but it is an evolve process which should be gradually improved from time to time considering what learners’ needs. It is necessary for teachers to plan systematically and meticulously the teaching strategy in order to come up with suitable technique to teach, motivate and expand learners’ interest to study, gain new knowledge, strengthen their skills and the most important thing is to understand and apply what they have been taught throughout the lesson. Supported by Yaxley, teaching strategies are part of intellectual activities and efforts with the aims to bring positive changes towards an individual in terms of belief and values.

There are variety of existed teaching strategies but based on the module Curriculum Development Center (2001), student centered learning is said to be the best technique for learners as they are directly involved throughout the lesson which commonly heard in one of Chinese proverbs ‘I hear I forget, I see I remember but if I do, I understand.’ Nevertheless, it is not easy to begin with a technique and make it as a habitual practice especially for...
 novice teachers as they have to understand and explore first before implement it, similarly stated by Saeigh that first year of teaching, most novices will test theories learnt in order to find their own preference traits. This statement indirectly declares that not all theories and approaches trials grant encouraging results but gradually it will tailor novices to form their own styles of teaching. Besides that, novices have to bear in mind that their strategies might not be the same with the senior teachers; hence mutual understanding and respect between both parties need to be built up in order to survive under one roof.

According to Marshall, school culture is nurture and foster by several dimensions which involved students, teachers and stakeholders like parents, staffs and community and these parties in some way contribute either positive or negative affect to an institution. This indicates that each school has its own culture and obviously it is a must for novices need to cope, adapt and adopt with the culture in order to survive within it. According to an article studied by Littleton and Littleton, novice lives always focus on to survive in school and it is also said that if novices fail to adapt or befriend with school’s community; their careers will be stunted. In other words, novices need to find a helping hand from senior teachers to face all the challenges in school. This is highlighted through a research handled by Sousa to create and build mutual understanding and cooperation between novices and seniors not only benefit the students but also whole school organization. Murshidi, Konting, Elias, Fooi indicates that positive relationship among teachers contribute constructive product for their schools.

In this research, I will act as a researcher and also a colleague to my participant, hence I need to be more understanding and play my roles depending on the situation with my participant. As a researcher, my great interest would be novices’ feeling as they step into school compound and what manners they use to be accepted and familiar with new place. While as a colleague, I am more towards helping my participant especially in work management as well as suitable teaching methods for students because as teachers, teaching is just part of it, there are documentation, registrations, marking record and attendances. It is a challenge for researcher to study regarding novices survival during school, however, both need to be attended by researcher because novices always learn on how to improve their teaching strategies even outside the classroom.

2. METHODOLOGY
2.1. School
The setting is an old school which was built in the 1950’s with the helps by previous citizens and was considered as a rural school. Beginning 1991, the school was composed to a better school; new buildings, facilities and computer labs provided with 20 computers. By that time, the school was already situated in the middle of a hectic city, which is beside the main road to go back and forth to the city. Besides that, this school was conducted in two sessions; morning and evening to cater all pupils due to limited classrooms.

Presently, the school is known as one of the ancient schools in Johor Baharu which surviving with students less than 900 pupils; combination of male and female young learners. In addition, this research also consisting 828 students, 52 teachers including headmaster and 15 school’s support staffs. Most community within the school is Malay with only one Indian teacher.

The school is chose by the amount of novices existed in the school and located near from the researcher’s resident. Considering it is a big school to capture a lot of data from the participants also the school’s community. The bigger the school, the more challenges to be faced by the novices.

2.2. Participants
The participants chosen were novices who just transferred to the school end of 2010. Puni and Sara were products of a twining programme conducted by Bahagian Pendidikan Guru (BPG) under a course named Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Both agreed to participate after a thorough explanation about the research. Both participants graduated from different teaching colleges and have less than 5 years of teaching experiences.
(a) The first participant who is an introvert wanted to be known only as Puni. She studied at a teacher training programme which ported at the north of Malaysia. She never wanted to be a teacher yet she began her life as a teacher around 2003 and ended her studies in the middle of 2009. Six years of schooling under TESL course focusing on primary school content and context; curriculum, child development theories and some teaching strategies. Her first school wasa very rural area in Beluran, Sabah. She lived there for 14 months before transferred to present school in Johor Baharu, Johor. Puni is originated from Kedah, so Johor is new for her too. Puni who is 26 years old is the only Indian within the school community and stake holders. She teaches only English for 3 classes consisting 14 hours in a week. Puni is a year 3 class teacher and she rented a house alone.
(b) Second respondent is Sara, an extrovert who was also posted to Sandakan, Sabah for 14 months before transferred to present school. Sara was born in Johor and she wanted to be a professional photographer but ended up as a teacher. She started to enroll as teacher in 2003 and graduated from teaching college in 2009. She is 25 years old Malay teacher who is easy to talk to. In the school, Sara holds a few posts which are the head of English Society, Discipline teacher and Co-curricular secretary. Sara only teaches English for 4 classes consisting 15 hours in a week. These three posts are crucial as its’ able to maintain the school’s performance. Sara also lives with her parents as she is not married yet.
2.3. Observation and Procedures

This small scale collaborative research engaged teachers’ personal, professional development as well as reflective practices. Although researcher formulated a research problem, this research evolves other issues within the process and because of the nature of evolving, a qualitative approach was adopted. According to Wolcott, qualitative is a systematic process of describing, analyzing and interpreting insights discovered in everyday life.

In this research, semi structured interviews and observation were used. I believed that observation provides me real pictures of participants’ real approach in surviving either in classroom or interaction between colleagues. Supported by Jorgensen, observation supplies researcher the exact settings and allows interpretation for each action, emotion and participant interaction while it occurred. In addition, observation also permits me to act as a researcher and colleague. Besides that, according to Denzin and Lincoln, observation served to enrich the themes found in interviews as well as providing a new data information.

There are times I feel like participants do not act ‘naturally’ when they knew that they were being observed, however, during hectic times, usually participants were forced to portray and act realistically which gave me a transparent picture about my participants. Hence I used observation and this daily observation is done in both way; formal and informal, most of it with a distance and field notes were taken; significant dialogues, actions and also facial expressions. As noted by Denzin and Lincoln, observation can never be erased and pure is detached. These are all very important for the study, however, I myself as a researcher also have a great responsibility in school and it is possible to observe participant consistently in a day, hence semi structured is adapted to assist observation. Referring to Guba and Lincoln, combination of method is also to ensure all information collected and observed are not missed and revealed.

2.4. Semi Structured Interview and Procedures

Semi structured is chosen due to flexibility of changing or recreating questions depending to the situation and also participants. Participants are human being who might be facing a bad or tough day, with that researcher needs to play several roles either as a friend, colleague or researcher to help her out. This method encouraged researcher to interview participants and also other colleagues regarding participants behavior because they are always communicating with each other; I believed that through their interaction, most important data would be provided. Journal writing also encouraged me to think explicitly what kind of questions to ask, thus it supplying us more reflective discussion and interview. According to Kumar, this technique is flexible, easily modify and researcher are free to adjust the questions from time to time. In addition, Kumar also said that this method provides benefits to researcher especially when it depending on participants’ context, therefore by interviewing participants, there is no time limitation, participants are visible and data can be collected perfectly. My journal writing gives me time to reflect on the process thoroughly as well as for me to assist my participant throughout the process.

Nonetheless, I adapted some interview questions as part of my instrument by Ginfang on the issue of EFL novice teachers in China. There are at least 40 questions but I only use some of the questions and adapt it according to the purposes of research and my research participants. I also used the semi structured interview without recording as according to Ginfang, recording makes participant more nervous and anxious; with this high affective filter, participants are not in their natural ways. I only use my journal writing to record what had been highlighted and shared by my participant. Besides that, the interview takes less than 20 minutes; this is to ensure consistency as they are responding towards the questions.

3. RESULTS

Over 12 weeks from March 2012 to May 2012, dates and times for the interviews and discussions were stated from time to time, usually a day before the meeting up took place. Still, there were number of times participants or myself cancelled the meeting due to varied schedules of work and personal. All the interviews and meetings were accomplished in mutual agreement of all including other terms such as; recording or written notes. Each session started with an agreement by the participants whether digital recording was allowed or not. Again, participants consent would furnish calm and reassure environment for the interview.

Using the interview scripts, participants were informed the purpose for each interview to lead participant’s focuses towards it and minimize time allocation for the process. At the end of each session, researchers enlighten participants that all interviews, withdrawal responses and opinions were remained anonymous and confidential.

The interviews followed the same sequential order as written on the research instrument. First, I asked general question about participants’ conditions to qualify participants are in good health. Second, the interview process starts and questions related will be asked. Questions are not repeated but there are times where I probed participants to inquire information in depth. I do not use leading clues or questions which can influence participants; thus recording is taken to recheck participants’ responses for interpretation. Such answers that similarly emerged will be explained in a discussion according to the questions.

Besides that, I will relate the results of my observation will be asked during the interview to affirm the situation that they faced at the moment. This is to link the accuracy of my observation and participants’ experiences towards
the incident. Participants can either deny it or admit their situations for accurate findings.

The results added to the existing body of literature and reflection of findings could lead to improvisation and further recommendations for research. Analysis of the data allowed for meaningful findings and better understandings of the research’s purposes. Through the deconstruction of recorded interviews, reconstruction of the meaningful and similar answers occurred to find key phrases or words that portray participants’ experiences. Besides that, all answers in Bahasa will be translated in English when I write it in the research. To ensure accuracy of the findings, transcribed interview transcripts were sent to participants for member checking.6

3.1. Forming Relationship
As my focuses were on how novices trigger a relationship with teachers, I always observed them conspicuously in attention to understand and capture their actions. In ensuring what I have seen, I asked my participants during the semi-structured interview.

There were times where Puni always kept herself ‘hectic’ with hand phone; texting and calling someone. Through my observation, I could see her ‘trying’ to keep herself occupied so I decided to ask Puni during the interview session to ensure my intuition, however; as I want to make it personal, I decided to ask her alone without Sara at the side. Puni responded was;

‘...sometimes I find myself don’t have anything to say to them, beside they seem so comfortable with their groups and I don’t want to silent them.’

Based on Puni’s response, Puni was trying to mingle with the teachers but at the same time she felt like intruding a comfort zone which already existed within community. This is a common feeling which also happened to myself as I was once a novice. Besides that, I feel that Puni is still uncomfortable or feels isolated because she is the only Indian in the school’s community. Even though, Malaysia is a multiracial and cultural country, still there must be a sense of cut off in some issues especially when it comes about races or religions. This was highlighted by Puni during a session a week before Deepavali;

‘...I feel miserable to apply for extra days off for Deepavali as I am the only one who is celebrating it. I feel like the headmaster does not like it but this is my day and I want to have extra like Hari Raya’

I could see that Puni was hassle with the situation and she claimed that the authority needed to be lenient about it as she has the right for it. I could not deny the awkwardness when she applies for extra but I myself forgot that she is an Indian and it was logic for her to ask for it. Through her responses, I decided to proceed the beginning of her collegiality on the following session. I could see the gap between Puni and Sara; Sara was much easier in mingling with the teachers. These may be due to Sara who is a Malay and acts most of the time as a youngest sister to the rest of teachers. I always heard other teachers called Sara as ‘dik’ or ‘Mia.’ Once I purposely asked one of my colleagues reasons of calling Sara as ‘Mia’ and she said;

‘don’t know, I like the name (Mia) and I feel like Sara is suitable as she is the youngest among us all’

This shows that Sara is treated like a youngest sister and easily shared her problems or life stories with other teachers (elder sisters). I pointed to Sara about the matter, Sara claimed that;

‘Oh, I don’t mind about it and we should be open minded right? Besides Mia is a lovely name. I think it is more intimate name and I love to be acknowledged as the youngest one’

Therefore Sara proved that by allowing her name to be changed, her intimacy with the teachers is tauter and happier. She seems to be blended easily with the colleagues because of the nicknames and her religion as well as race makes it easier to deepen the collegiality relationship. Looking at this point, novices could form collegiality through conversation or name calling because it permits warm and acceptance within the community. Besides that, the same background’s consent sharing stories among teachers3 as it strengthen the relationships by getting to know each individual better; same goes with novices who are friendly and chatty. Combination of conversation with these ‘open minded’ attitudes promotes better reliance and cheerful situations to form trustworthy relationship between novices and teachers. Besides that, Sara did mention that;

‘I always put myself as the youngest and seek for the elders’ helps even though I know how to solve it by myself. Sometimes, putting myself down to ask for ideas or opinions led me indirectly into the group so that we can talk about other things and I always do that’

The finding of interviews shows that in forming a relationship with seniors or in this case; the teachers, sometimes novices need to downgrade themselves in order to fit in. By doing it, it allows Sara to seek for information and ultimately places her to talk about other things and deepen the relationship. After Sara brought it up; I could see it through my observation. Sara frequently solicits views or opinion about her pupils from the teachers and gradually the story departed to something else and Sara blended in like a chameleon. She was there interacting with the teachers until she needed to go for her classes. Therefore, it can be said that seeking for helps or lowering our knowledge able to form a collegiality between novices and teachers.9

As a week passed, I chose to re-solicit Puni regarding her relationship with the teachers and how she developed it. Puni told that inquiring and asking load of questions
to the right persons gradually invite you to the group. By doing it, Puni was able to fit in better but at the same time she has her privacy and silent moment for herself. A part of Puni responses was:

‘...saya akan tanya some setbacks from certain teachers and these gradually assist me to the group. Tapi, I limit my life stories so that I have some moments to myself, but saya rasa cikgu-cikgu already know my style’

Again, these interviews prove that asking and inquiring helps from the teachers, consent relationship between colleagues to be formed slowly but surely. Looking back at Stansbury and Zimmerman,32 their research did reveal some novices are unwillingly to share difficulties to the attention of their colleagues because they don’t want to be a burden. However, through Puni and Sara experiences and responses; it demonstrates some ways for novices to form and build healthy relationship with other teachers. It was stated that most novices quit teaching profession due to burn out and undefined aims4 (Ingersoll 2011). Hence, forming relationship would be the best solution for novices to develop themselves in every aspect and these responses might be able to help other novices on how to form better and healthy collegiality relationship.

In analyzing the findings, novices are able to form a relationship with senior teachers with appropriate ways. Communication and interaction3 are important in building a relationship. Asking and inquiring helps from teachers definitely help to build up a good rapport among the teachers. Besides that, positive attitudes and ‘open minded’ also contribute to strengthen constructive relationship between novices and teachers.5 In addition, these findings are linked with some researchers such as friendly and cheerful attitudes by Hoy and Sweetland (2000), communication; reliance to one another by Tschannen (2000). Thus, these methods are appropriate for novices to form a relationship among the teachers.

3.2. Teaching Strategies

In terms of teaching strategies, I regularly observed both participants as it is quite difficult to be noticed. Again, I interviewed them to ensure my findings through observation are correct. Through the interview; there were some interesting issues on how both participants find appropriate teaching strategies. In the beginning of this research, both participants once said the same phrase;

‘How can someone has a specific teaching strategies? I just go with the flow looking at the day lesson’ (Puni)

‘Emmm ... I don’t think I have specific one, usually I go with the flow and previous lesson’ (Sara)

The phrase; go with the flow portrays that both novices do not have any teaching strategies and they make it sounds needlessly. Thus, I decided to observe them thoroughly; in class and in teacher’s room. So I tell both of my participants that teaching strategies are not easily to be found but it is important for teaching and learning process. We decided to discuss the matter in the following interview session.

As I decided to interview them in other session, I took a time to observe them in their natural settings especially in teacher’s room because most of our free times happened to be at the same time. Commonly in the room, teachers talk about their students, workloads, work confusions or out of school’s matters. Once, I noted Sara whined to her colleagues.

This proves that as novices; teaching strategies as well as teaching management play a crucial role in teaching profession. Through the situation, I assumed that Sara and Puni did not realize the importance of teaching strategies in their working lives. According to Marzano,25 a good classroom can be made effectively through instructional strategies which promote positive surroundings and motivations. There are some important components identified in a research of classroom management, including beginning the school year with a positive emphasis on management; arranging the room in a way conducive to effective management; identifying, implementing rules and operating procedures.7 Hence, I believe it is necessary for novices to look for individual teaching strategies and to verify the situation, I prompted the situation to both participants during the second session and they said;

‘Oh, I didn’t realize that it (management—homework) was part of teaching strategies and it affects classroom management’ (Sara)

‘Actually I am still confused what are teaching strategies exactly meant; does it refer to only teaching style in each lesson or for the whole process? Does it include homework?’ (Puni)

These responses indicate both participants did not understand and realize teaching strategies in their daily teaching classes. They see teaching strategies as a tool to teach only without comprehending that through appropriate teaching strategies; classroom management will be organized and the lesson will be flowed very well. Instead of identifying participants’ process in gaining suitable teaching strategies, I realize that novices are still confused with teaching strategies. This leads to another question which their answers are concluded and agreed on both parties:

‘Even though we learnt 100 theories on teaching, we think we only applied 10% or 20% at most in real teaching context. We are still learning, hence I feel like these experienced teachers are more secure even though their certificate are lower than us’

‘Basically, we always refer to these sisters (senior teachers) on how to manage the class or specific pupil in the class. Sometimes we asked them how...’
they were able to collect each pupil’s home works when they asked for it. We usually do this (asking questions) to help us handling the class.’

‘We believe these teachers already aware of these pupils’ attitudes and situations. Times and experiences taught them to handle better in future’

This emergent data directly establish previous literature that most novices are intellectually prepared and had terrific background on theories but less experiences in practical. Apart from that, both participants again claim that asking questions help them to learn new techniques or skills in managing the class as well as the learning process (Green, 2006). Thus, it is important to observe on how novices perceive teaching strategies. However, processes in gaining information how my participants seeking teaching strategies were not properly achieved due to time constrain and limit.

In referring to the responses above, both participants do need the help from senior teachers and they are accommodating as well as assimilating16 with the working environment; school. Both participants realize that teaching is only a part of their works; there are others like documentation, filing, coursing and even meeting with authorities or parents.29 These side jobs equally need teachers’ attention and both my participants are learning all these with the helps from their sisters (senior teachers).

4. DISCUSSION

It is impossible for novices to enter school and be expert in everything as theories are way too different with practical. Most novices in the 90’s entering school with a good education background and might be higher than the existed teachers in school. The awkwardness between both parties exist because they need to immediate working as a group teachers in school. The awkwardness between both parties education background and might be higher than the existed in everything as theories are way too different with practical. Apart from that, both participants again claim that asking questions help them to learn new techniques or skills in managing the class as well as the learning process (Green, 2006). Thus, it is important to observe on how novices perceive teaching strategies. However, processes in gaining information how my participants seeking teaching strategies were not properly achieved due to time constrain and limit.

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As for teachers, this research gives some perspectives from an outsider. There are a few weaknesses which can be improved especially providing good impression of teachers’ collaboration among each other. Being in ‘groups’ and not working as one will affect schools’ performances.4 Hence, it is better to learn from each other as each teacher has a special skill.

As a whole, this research is less fair to portray definite situations of novices in school. This is due to several limitations which influence the findings especially when it represents large numbers novices. This research’s findings cannot be over generalized because it only involved two novices as participants. Researcher hopes that future researches will fill in the gaps or limitation in this research’s context or methodologies. Below will be some suggestions and guidelines:-

(a) This research only studied in a school. Each school has its own culture; hence future research can be done in several schools; rural or urban. This definitely will trigger different data from this research.

(b) Besides that, it is also situated in a primary school which may be different from secondary school. For this reason, future research can focus on secondary schools; different environment not only within colleagues but also the teaching strategies; because of different age of pupils.

(c) This research is less concern about the time; it only took three months to understand both variables and it is not sufficient. It is propose to research provide an adequate time for the research so that the findings will be deepen thoroughly.

References and Notes


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