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Policy, Research and Practice

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5 Professional development through practicum

A case study on Malaysian pre-service ESL teachers' professional identity construction

Juliana Othman and Fatiha Senom

Introduction

As a member of ASEAN community, Malaysia has strong commitment to improve both professional and English language skills of its citizens for the new challenge of the ASEAN Integration. This is in line with the needs of ASEAN Integration 2015, which emphasized the importance of English as an international medium of communication. The provision of high-quality English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher education is vital for Malaysia to produce highly competent teachers for the Malaysian school system as well as to strengthen human resources in meeting the demands of globalization. Among the many initiatives taken is the enhancement of ESL teacher education, which focuses on developing pre-service teachers' teaching practices during practicum.

Studies have shown that teaching practicum plays a fundamental role in any teacher preparation programme (Gebhard, 2009; Farrell, 2012, 2013; Ogilvie and Dunn, 2010). The practicum has long been recognized as an important part of ESL language teachers' preparation, as it offers school-based experiences that can help pre-service teachers to make transitions from their academic programmes to the realities of teaching in a school. Research on teacher education has looked at different aspects of pre-service teachers' learning to teach; however, little has been documented concerning how their practicum experiences had an influence on their professional identity formation with respect to knowledge, procedural awareness, and skills, dispositions and teacher identity. There is a relatively small body of literature (Afrizta, 2015; Atkinson et al., 2008; Canh, 2014; Farrell, 2012; Gan and Lee, 2016; Trent, 2013) that is concerned with the impact of practicum on pre-service teachers' professional identity formation in non-Western settings, including the ASEAN context such as Malaysia. According to Kamhi-Stein (2009) most of the research that discusses the identity development of non-native ESL teachers during teacher preparation and development programmes are conducted in the Inner Circle countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), where English is the dominant language.