Service-Learning as an Innovative Approach in ESL Teachers' Training

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Twenty-first century's wave is demanding teachers to be more competent and committed towards their teachings than ever. However, current trainee teachers, or pre-service teachers, seem to be unprepared for the challenges that they might face as educators. Hence, this paper discusses the service-learning approach in teachers' training among English as a Second Language (ESL) pre-service teachers. The service-learning approach offers an authentic experience and is an innovation for learning in teaching which they may not be able to achieve in a classroom environment. Service-learning encourages engagement that offers authentic experience as well as their understanding on the course content. Other than that, this paper also discussed the service-learning collaboration with audio-visual method. This study implies that pre-service teachers should be exposed to real-life experiences through service-learning as it can be beneficial. Future researches can look into the perceptions of trainee teachers on service-learning and its effectiveness in training programs.

Key words: *service-learning approach, pre-service teachers, training programs, authentic experience, engagement, content understanding.*

Introduction

Becoming a teacher requires patience and commitment. Understanding all of the problems or challenges that one will face is crucial (Yazan, 2019). According to Palardy & Rumberger (2008), the United States Department of Education started to hire high quality teachers to make sure that no student would be left behind in learning. High quality teachers display not only excellence in teaching but also have great characteristics (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008).

Language teacher training programmes offer courses related to the pedagogical and content knowledge (Mukhtar, Hasim & Yunus 2018) among it would be service-learning. Service-learning was long conducted as part of teachers' training. For teachers to be able to function effectively, they should undergo preparation to be able to handle crucial tasks. According to Anderson, Swick & Yff (2001), teachers must be thoroughly educated to take on leadership roles in schools. They continue by stating that the interest in service-learning has grown among colleges in United States of America. Service-learning has been implemented and conducted in many tertiary levels as part of their coursework. In Malaysia particularly, students are being exposed with the challenges in school during practicum teaching. According to Yunus, Hashim, Ishak & Mahamod (2010), practicum teaching which is also a part of the teachers' training program was conducted to ensure that pre-service teachers can have hands-on experience of teaching in schools. However, it is important that the pre-service teachers are given prior exposure before going for practicum teaching. Service-learning provides opportunities to work with students in a non-school environment which can be conducted as part of the coursework.

University or tertiary level study has had a massive change in their coursework (Yunus et al., 2010). The implementation and the combination of both traditional lessons in a classroom as well as outside activities are among the changes made. Being in the educational field, teachers are required to experience and conduct multiple learning sessions before being able to teach effectively (Barnes 2016; Manaf & Ibrahim 2017). It is vital for pre-service teachers to engage in training and practice to gain more experience in teaching (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015). According to Hullender, Hinck, Wood-Nartker, Burton & Bowlby (2015), students' participation in outside activities or even providing service-learning will be able to provide meaningful experiences for pre-service teachers.

According to Yunus et al. (2010), despite classroom experience and practice for pre-service teachers, they are seemingly still not ready to face challenges in the classroom. Service-learning is said to provide numerous benefits for beginner teachers as it helps to prepare pre-service teachers to use service-learning as a pedagogy to achieve the standards and the necessary level of quality of teacher education (Anderson, Swick & Yff, 2001; Mansor, Darus & Dali, 2013). This study mainly discusses the Cone of Experience framework. The Cone of Experience characterises learners realistically through observing their experience (Davis & Summers, 2015). Edger Dale's Cone of Experience (Figure 1) explains the process of gaining experience from learning, to performing and then applying what they have learnt.

Cone of Experience

The Cone of Experience theory by Edgar Dale (as shown in Figure 1) focuses on the progression of the experiences from concrete which is at the bottom of the cone, to the most abstract which is at the top of the cone (Davis & Summers, 2015). According to Davis & Summers (2015), these levels describe what the learners will to be 'doing'. The middle cone is where the learner is 'observing' the experience. The top two levels are different from the one at the bottom where students do not interact directly with the phenomena such as demonstrations, field-trips, and even learning in lecture halls (Davis & Summers, 2015). The further down in the progression, the more information is received. According to Masters (2013), the bottom level is where you "do the real thing" (p. 4). Dale (1969) describes this as "direct, firsthand, experiences in which becomes the foundation of our learning" (Dale, 1969 as cited by Masters, 2013). The service-learning approach is known for its direct opportunity to offer hands-on and practical experiences (Coffey & Lavery, 2015) which align with the framework. Figure 1 shows the Cone of Experience Framework.

Service-Learning Approach as a Platform for Teachers' Training

Service-learning can be defined as offering learning opportunities related to the content knowledge in the discipline being practiced (Ryan & Callahan, 2002 as cited by Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015). Service-learning is an approach that allows pre-service teachers to be exposed with experiences beyond formal teaching and learning sessions (Barnes, 2016). Service-learning is an approach that is innovative, rich and much more effective than other learning models in pre-service teachers education (Furco, 1996). It is also said to be a method that allows school and community-based professionals to use effective teaching strategies and employ student centered activities (Furco, 1996). Hence, this paper will focus on the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards the service-learning approach.

The training of pre-service or beginner teachers is significant because it is important to make sure that they are ready to teach in the real-world. According to Wilkins & Nietfeld (2004), one of the most predominant factors in influencing teachers' acceptance of inclusion-based practices is their training. There are numerous teacher training programs conducted by universities and colleges to ensure students' have full understanding of pedagogical practices before teaching in real-life. Among the teachers' training programs are field-trips, exhibition, learning in lecture halls as well as service-learning (Barnes, 2016).

Authentic Experiences in Service-Learning

Authentic learning is referred to as life learning. According to Hasnine, Akcapir, Ogata & Mouri (2019), authentic learning allows students to create concrete and useful materials for

them to use and share. Service-learning is said to provide authentic learning experiences for pre-service teachers. The service-learning experience provides adventure and outdoor activities through a field-trip experience for students (Tice & Nelson, 2015). For example, Tour's (2017) findings show that teachers enjoy practising a meaningful and independent learning (Tour, 2017 as cited by Kearney & Maher, 2018). There is also value from learning through giving service and it can also create awareness among pre-service teachers (Kearney & Maher, 2018). According to Santagata, Zannomi & Stigler (2007), many researchers believe that pre-service teachers should be exposed to more field experiences to make sure that they have an authentic experience in preparing them for the difficulty they might face in a classroom environment.

Service-learning also allows students to solve real-life problems through experiences. Many students love to get out of the traditional classroom. The chance to work with their hands and minds to solve real problems or build something meaningful are much preferred (Pearce & Manion, 2016). The majority of teachers' education programs include field experiences where pre-service teachers are exposed to the challenges and the complexities of a classroom (Santagata, et al., 2007; Mansor & Ilias, 2013). Service-learning is an experiential form of education that occurs over a period of time and requires interaction between the pre-service teacher and a certain community. Experiential learning is effective because, knowledge has to be applied, and then, the situational knowledge is easier to recall. This requires reflective thinking and inquiry (Lake et al., 2015; Md. Wahid Murad et al., 2019). Service-learning is achieved by assigning students to work on community-based issues and applying what they have learned. Students can also work together in solving real problems through applying classroom knowledge; this is interactive learning (Rutti, LaBonte, Helms, Hervani, & Sarkarat, 2016). Through the service-learning pedagogy, instructors can integrate classroom learning and address the complexities and differences of transitioning from education and training to employment, while providing a more substantial impact for students (Rutti et al., 2016). Real-life, authentic experiences offer challenging tasks which can promote a much more active learning for the pre-service teachers (Hero & Lindfors, 2019).

Other than that, implementing service-learning can improve pre-service teachers' soft skills and develop their attitudes. Students become better in preparing to participate in society by engaging in opportunities that allow them to work with community partners (Rutti et al., 2016; Mikail & Zainol, 2018). Providing opportunities to explore pedagogical practices in an authentic environment enables pre-service teachers to be able to communicate effectively with their students (Hughes, Bown & Green, 2019). In other words, authentic participation in the community can build relationships and knowledge which can lead to learning (Cleland & Durning, 2019). Embedding service-learning in pre-service teacher education coursework improves their soft skills such as problem-solving, leadership and communication.

Understanding on the Course Content and Engagement

Engagement, according to The Committee on Institutional Cooperation's Committee on Engagement (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonca, Furco & Swanson, 2016), is "the partnership of university" as "it enrich[es] scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance[s] curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare[s] educated, engaged citizens; strengthen[s] democratic values and civic responsibility; address[es] critical societal issues; and contribute[s] to the public good" (p. 6). According to Hildenbrand & Schultz (2015), service-learning has become more relevant in teacher education as it provides opportunity for pre-service teachers to participate and engage in real-life experiences. In its current application, service-learning can introduce active participation as well as exposure to real-world challenges (Lancaster & Bain, 2019). Prior exposure is significant as it can evolve pre-service teachers' soft skills. It is vital for pre-service teachers to understand the course content in their study. Pre-service teachers should be able to systematically collect information to make informed decisions that can improve their workmanship, enhance their understanding about why certain outcomes were achieved and increase the confidence with which can represent their work to others, including colleagues and the community (Reiter, 2017).

Understanding the content can ensure students have a positive attitude and outcome (Daniels, Radil, & Goegan, 2017). Pre-service teacher programs are the main driver to provide practice to pre-service teachers (Lancaster & Bain, 2019). Each program is built to provide deeper and a more coherent understanding of the content and teaching practices (Lancaster & Bain, 2019). Through conducting service-learning it has been proven to show that students understand the course content. According to Schoenherr (2015), service-learning helps students to have deeper understanding of the content and acquire novel knowledge that they do not achieve anywhere else.

Service-Learning Collaboration with Audio Visual Method

Innovative teaching would often bring out interest and motivation to learners, which eventually leads to learning (Hashim, Saharani, Zulkifli, Mokhtar & Yunus, 2019). Universities and higher education institutions worldwide are occupied in change processes to improve their quality teaching practices. The use of ICT in modern education increases the possibilities for universities to innovate their teaching practices (Sarango-Lapo, Mena & Ramirez-Montoya, 2016). The use of technology is also being maximised as an innovative practice in the education system (Yunus, Hashim, Embi & Lubis, 2010). According to Anzaku (2011, as cited by Ashaver & Igyuve, 2013), audio-visual methods are an instructional material to convey meaning without having to complete verbal symbols or language. Audio-visual is defined as the combination of various digital media types such as text, images, sound and video, to convey a message or information to an audience. Ashaver &

Igyuve (2013) continue by stating that audio-visual methods involve and are recorded through ear, eyes and touch. Visual aids are those instructional aids which are used in the classroom to encourage teaching and learning processes (Shabiralyani, Hasan, Ahmad & Iqbal, 2015). The use of technology helps students develop their interest in learning and helps teachers familiarise themselves with a more interactive teaching and learning session. Through conducting service-learning, pre-service teachers should develop their own teaching materials. To produce quality teachers, pre-service teachers should be well equipped with hands-on tasks as well as familiarising themselves with 21st century technology education.

Exposing pre-service teachers to the millennials way of learning can reduce the burden of venturing independently into real-world as well as the challenges they will face. According to Hashim, Yunus, Embi and Ozir (2017), the existence of ICT has proven to contribute to a more interesting learning environment. To be innovative in one's teaching, future teachers need to implement the usage of ICT like smartphones, social media, LMS, etc. Smart mobile devices as well as modern applications are not limited to just making calls, but students can send text messages to anyone around the world (Shin et al., 2011 as cited by Huda, Anshari, Almunawar, Shahrill, Tan, Jaidin, Daud & Masri, 2016).

Conclusion

To conclude, as the world is advancing every day with technology, every field of work including education field are familiarizing themselves with technology. Technology have eased our ways in doing work or even for communication purposes. However, using technology to learn, whether in a lecture hall or as an independent study, may differ from having to experience for ourselves. Students may find it easy to learn and understand as they would still have guidance from their lecturers and supervisors. Yet, having to experience for themselves might be difficult and challenging for some. In this case, they will struggle when they are dealing with real-life challenges. This applies the same to trainee teachers or pre-service teachers. Teachers are among the professions that require practice and training before going to venture into real-world. New teachers will have to deal with tasks that they never thought of facing.

There are countless benefits of service-learning in pre-service teachers' education programs. Service-learning is among the most effective teachers' training approach. The benefits of service-learning are: students are able to provide service to the community, they gain a deeper understanding of the course content and acquire novel knowledge that they may not be able to get anywhere else. Service-learning provides real-life experiences and challenges that students will face as future teachers. To study and investigate benefits of service-learning will create more of an understanding about its practical implementation. It is also crucial to investigate the challenges and limitations of service-learning in teachers' training program.

Such as, students come from various backgrounds, and have different attitudes and behaviours, therefore, having to conduct service-learning may create apprehension in pre-service teachers. However, despite such challenges, service-learning is considered one of the most effective innovations in teachers' training.

Acknowledgement

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Figure 1. Dale's Cone of Experience by Dale & Summers (2014)