

## **Teaching Literature among Pre-Service Teachers: Challenges and Solutions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Teacher trainees should be prepared to teach and exposed to the approaches, models, and techniques of literature teaching. Being ready can also boost their confidence to teach literature so that the lessons can be delivered smoothly. These teachers are so new to teaching that they might face difficulties when teaching English, specifically literature. There are teaching techniques, strategies and approaches that those pre-service teachers can investigate to understand better how to apply in their teaching. Additionally, their lack of exposure towards literature teaching can also affect the performance of teaching. This paper seeks to investigate pre-service teachers' readiness to teach literature in schools and the challenges faced by them while teaching literature. It also attempts to offer suggestions to improve better literature teaching. This mixed method research study used questionnaires distributed to 22 TESL pre-service teachers from a public university in Johor. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two lecturers who have vast experiences in supervising pre-service teachers at schools. Results show that a majority of fourth year TESL students are ready to teach literature with the training and courses provided by the university. Also, among the challenges that they faced are time management and their students' feelings on the subject. This study hopes to provide insights to training teachers on literature teaching.

*Keywords:* Pre-service teachers, literature, challenges, ESL classroom

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Literature can be defined as an art in the form of literary texts or poems taught in the English language classroom and the teaching of literature is important as it is in the requirement of English subject. Widdowson (1985) in Fook, Kaur and Sidhu (2010) concur that literature cannot be removed from language teaching and learning as it is unquestionably useful in invoking aesthetic feelings of the learners in the rendition of the story line produced by the writer. Additionally, as highlighted in the objectives of English syllabus, Druis (2008) states that literature should be included in the language classroom in order to enhance language proficiency of the learners. The syllabus also clarifies the

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importance of exposing literary texts to Malaysian schools in order to allow students to appreciate and enjoy the storyline which portrays the real life situations. For this reason, teachers need to be creative to make sure that the objectives of the literature lesson are achievable. English teachers, inclusive of pre-service teachers, need to know the suitable methods, approaches and techniques to be used in a literature classroom. In Malaysia, pre-service teachers would need to experience teaching practice in its authentic context, that is, the school environment, for a few months. This would include the help from the lecturers and teachers from the school who act as a supervisor to guide the pre-service teachers during the training process. The training is crucial as it provides some exposure to the pre-service teachers on the best practices in conducting literature lessons, as stipulated in the syllabus and curriculum (Ganakumaran, Shahizah & Koo, 2003 as cited in Isikli and Tarakcioglu, 2017). However, teaching literature among pre-service teachers is not easy as they must deal with students who have difficulty understanding the materials taught and more efforts need to be put in order to enhance English proficiency among the students. Thus, the challenges faced by them needs to be identified and addressed.

Some aspects that can be looked at regarding pre-service teachers teaching literature at school are their readiness to teach and the challenges they faced. Solutions for the problems faced are also important to be discovered. Through assessing their readiness, pre-service teachers can identify the elements needed to deliver good literature lessons and be prepared before they graduate as English teachers. Since they are still new in the teaching field and still have a lot to learn, they are bound to face challenges when teaching literature. For that reason, these issues need to be addressed so that solutions can be achieved. Katz (2001) as cited in Isikli and Tarakcioglu (2017), mention that English teachers thought themselves incompetent because of the inadequacy in pre-service training to teach literature. Consequently, pre-service teachers need to identify the challenges faced when teaching literature so that it will not affect them when they become full fletched teachers. Subramanian (1997) classified seven categories of challenges faced by pre-service teachers, which include teacher, students, teaching, school, supervision, learning and preparation. This paper however will classify the challenges into three categories which are teachers, students and material

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term pre-service teachers are also interchangeably known as student-teachers, training-teachers or practicing-teachers, although they refer to similar notion (Johnson, 1994; Karekatti and Shinde, 2012). Johnson (1994) and Numrich (1996) as cited in Karekatti & Shinde (2012), reveal that student-teachers have the principles that are based on their experience and the way in which the experience can relate to their classroom practice. Karekatti and Shinde (2012) add that training-teachers are supposed to undergo pre-service training on how to make their speech useful and related in classrooms. Sandholtz (2011) elaborates more about analysing and reflecting on the practice that has been done is helpful to improve teaching and promote student learning. This can also mean that in any context, pre-service teachers must always strive for a good teaching practice in their teacher education programme before becoming teachers. Hence, they must understand their roles to enhance a good

student learning. Because they are new to teaching, they may have challenges when teaching English, particularly literature.

Teachers are encouraged to identify the challenges and figure out ways to overcome the challenges. As cited in Isikli and Tarakcioglu (2017) among the problems in literature teaching are students' proficiency level and insufficient in-service training received by the pre-service teachers. Teaching literature may be a challenge when the learners have low proficiency level. Isikli and Tarakcioglu (2017) concur that one of the problems of pre-service teachers in teaching English literature is having a satisfactory command of English to ensure that they can teach literature well besides keeping up with the workload of the literature lesson. Similarly found in Al-Emami and Hussein (2016), literature teaching is deemed beneficial to enable students to develop positive attitudes towards learning English whilst improving their language and linguistic skills for various purposes. This shows that literature component is crucial to heighten students' capability in conversing in English.

Furthermore, the issue of insufficient training received by the pre-service teachers in teaching literature cannot be denied. Some teacher training colleges tend to focus more on language skills than literature skills. In other situations, the pre-service teachers themselves failed to give attention to literature due to lack of interest or were not proficient enough in English language. Isikli and Tarakcioglu (2017) agree that teacher training is equally important in terms of their effect in teacher performance. Dlavane (2003) also supports this by mentioning that student-teachers also need to give effort in transforming and presenting knowledge to make it accessible to the learners in their class. From this, it can be understood that to have the ability to use knowledge or theory into practise, the student-teacher needs to attend training. This proves that lack of training may be an issue for teachers when it comes to teaching literature.

The objectives of this study are to investigate the readiness of pre-service teachers to teach literature subject in schools, discover the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers while teaching literature subject in schools and identify the solutions that can be used to help pre-service teachers in teaching literature.

### 3.0 METHOD

This study adopted a mixed method approach, in which questionnaire and interview were used in this study as both would provide an in-depth result on the challenges and solutions. Two types of sampling method: purposive sampling and convenience sampling were used in this study in choosing the respondents.

According to Alkassim, Etikan and Musa (2016), purposive sampling is chosen based on the qualities that the participants possess. Also, it is seen in Parveen and Showkat (2017), that this sample provides the researchers freedom to choose their participants based on their own judgement. Steinmetz *et al.* (2016) support the statement as the participants are selected by following some judgement by referencing a kind of 'representative' sample or seeking for diversity. In this study, two lecturers were chosen via purposive sampling as they have the experience in supervising literature.

From this judgement, they were interviewed to answer three questions related to the readiness of pre-service teachers to teach literature, challenges encountered and solutions to the challenges faced by the pre-service teachers when teaching literature.

Convenience sampling is defined as a sampling where the people of the target population meet specific criteria (Alkassim, Etikan and Musa, 2016). Also, Parveen and Showkat (2017) describe that researchers prefer participants as per their own convenience for example, choosing their own classmates. In this study, convenience sampling was used when the third and fourth year TESL students were chosen to answer the questionnaire. This is convenient as the group of people can be easily reached. Hence, in this study, the respondents were third year and fourth year TESL students who have done their practical teaching in schools.

In this study, a questionnaire was constructed to discover about the pre-service teachers' readiness, the challenges faced and the suggested solutions. The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions and was distributed to 22 pre-service teachers at a university in Johor. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire by filling in 4 questions on demographic information and ticking (/) on the likert scale statements about their level of agreement, which include (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree or (4) strongly agree. The results are important in identifying the pattern of problems and the best suggested solutions for it. Also, an interview was carried out with two lecturers who have experience supervising literature teaching by pre-service teachers. This was a semi-structured interview which was recorded and then transcribed.

#### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table below shows how the data of this study were analyzed.

**Table 1** Data Analysis for the Research Instruments

Research Instruments	Data Analysis
Questionnaire	The questionnaires were collected and analysed. The questionnaires were analysed by calculating the mean value for each item. The highest mean values in the questionnaire are further described.
Interview	The interview sessions were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analysed by looking at the readiness, challenges and solutions.

#### Pre-Service Teachers' Readiness when Teaching Literature

The results indicated that majority of the participants perceived that they were ready as 21 out of 22 respondents responded that they were ready to teach literature. Likewise, the two lecturers also expressed that their pre-service teachers were ready to teach literature in the aspects of contents, approaches and elements of literature. From their perspective, if pre-service teachers could manage their time wisely, they were more than ready to teach literature. Most pre-service teachers were

actually ready when given the right exposure and training. Upon completion of their practical teaching, they already have experiences on how to deal with students. They have faced issues when teaching literature and with the guidance from their school teacher supervisor and supervisor, they learn how to teach literature better. Hence, they are ready to teach literature in school as they have been exposed to the actual environment of teaching.

### **The Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers during Literature Teaching**

The challenges listed in the questionnaire are divided into three categories which are teacher, student and materials. In the teacher category, six statements related to the challenges that teachers faced, five statements related to challenges with the students and four statements associated with the problems of the materials used.

Analysis of the mean values of respondents' responses on challenges faced when teaching literature revealed that pre-service teachers considered '*having difficulty with the time allocation to teach literature*' to be the most serious problem as it has the highest mean value which is 3.2273. Likewise, it is also found that pre-service teachers were '*struggling in giving clear instructions or examples*' in literature teaching and is also considered as an important problem with a mean value of 2.8182, rated lower than the former. Pre-service teachers also revealed that they had to '*struggle to respond to students' various needs when teaching literature*' which has a slightly higher mean value than having '*anxiety over their capability of teaching literature*' which are 2.7727 and 2.7273 respectively.

When dealing with students in literature classroom, pre-service teachers identified that students found '*literature as a dull subject*' as the most prominent problem with the highest mean value of 3.0909. Also, it is also found that students '*have difficulties in understanding vocabulary in literature materials*' to be another problem with a mean value of 3.0455. Pre-service teachers also regarded that students have '*difficulty engaging with the literature lesson*' to be another problem and has higher mean value than students '*having no motivation in learning literature*' with a mean value of 2.9545 and 2.9091 respectively.

In the aspect of literature materials, pre-service teachers regarded '*limited teaching and learning literature modules*' to be the most evident issue with a mean value of 3.0909. Following this is '*limited exposure to literature teaching*' with a mean value of 3.0444. '*Having poorly equipped library at school*' was also considered as another problem and has a higher mean value than '*cultural prejudices about foreign literature*' with a mean value of 2.8182 and 2.7273 respectively.

Based on the interviews carried out with the two lecturers, there are a few challenges that were mentioned based on their experiences supervising pre-service teachers teaching literature. The problems that they observed was time management as indicated by their inability to finish the class activities carried out on time and their tardiness in getting to class late. Besides that, pre-service teachers were thought to be lacking in creativity in literature teaching.

Ab. Rashid, Abdul Rahman & Vethamani (2010) describe literature teaching approaches as a set of assumptions that deals with the nature of language, teaching and learning. This means that literature teaching approaches are very important to be understood among educators. According to Ab. Rashid, Abdul Rahman & Vethamani, (2010), there are five types of approaches to be used to teach literature for average groups which are language-based, information-based, personal response,

moral philosophical and paraphrastic. As pre-service teachers, distinguishing the definition and purposes of the approaches is significant as it can be used in literature classroom according to the suitability of their students or situations. Ann, Yunus and Abdul Aziz (2016) describe that some of the factors that can influence the selection of approaches are students' proficiency levels, exam-oriented culture, classroom enrollment and completion of syllabus. Understanding these approaches can also help in teaching as problems or issues when teaching literature can be reduced. To support this, Al Sabiri and Kaymakamoglu (2018) state that without proper understanding on literature, it can harm the students more than it can provide. To explain this, the researchers describe those students can have trouble with certain aspects of literature such as characters with complex names or losing interest due to not being able to understand. This means that students can get bored when learning literature. For this reason, it is up to pre-service teachers' creativity to make the literature lesson more interesting by adding fun and interactive elements into the teaching.

### Suggested Solutions for Pre-Service Teachers

In the questionnaire, nine suggested solutions are hoped to help pre-service teachers overcome their problems. All the statements are written in the perspective of training teachers. The data below shows the mean value for each statement.

**Table 2** Solutions to Help Improve Pre-Service Teachers Teaching Literature

Item No	Description	Mean Value
16	I want feedback from my university supervisor about my literature teaching.	3.3182
17	I want feedback from my school-teacher supervisor about my literature teaching.	3.3636
18	I prefer a smaller number of students in my literature classroom.	3.0455
19	I need more exposure on the teaching literature modules.	3.6818
20	I need more time to teach literature.	3.6818
21	I prefer to use videos, songs and images to teach literature.	3.7273
22	I want to incorporate language games when teaching literature.	3.6364
23	I need to make full use of the equipment available.	3.4545
24	I need to relate the cultures in the materials with the culture in Malaysia.	3.6818

The table above indicates that pre-service teachers prefer to use multimedia the most such as videos, songs and images to teach literature as it has the highest mean value which is 3.7273. The second highest mean value is 3.6818 whereby pre-service teachers need more exposure on the teaching literature modules, need more time to teach literature and need to relate the cultures in the materials with the culture in Malaysia. The interview data reveals that managing time would be the best solution for pre-service teachers instead of having more time to teach literature. The lecturers added that students' attention span is not long therefore, managing the time would be the key to solve the problem. As suggested by the lecturers, the use of multimedia is necessary to attract the students' attention. In the light of the above, incorporating multimedia such as images, videos or songs can be a

great solution for pre-service teachers to deliver a better literature lesson. This may solve the problem where students find literature learning dull. This is where pre-service teachers are suggested to use their knowledge on technology and apply it in their literature teaching.

In a different research conducted by Siti Nursakina, Khairunnisa and Melor (2019), conventional and animation method of teaching literature were compared. In their findings, they conclude that video can be very useful in helping students to comprehend better in literature materials as more learners performed well in a test when comparing conventional and animation method. They also describe that using video can help students to boost their attention span to the maximum level and understand literature better. Similar to the study, Yesilbursa (2012) found that a majority of students enjoyed learning poem with songs and pictures. She suggested that the use of the audio-visual materials with poem had helped students impressively in enjoying the poem. This shows that incorporating multimedia can help greatly in literature teaching and overcome the problem of having boring literature class. It is also mentioned by Padurean (2015) that teachers should consider choosing their text materials to be interesting and appropriate with the students' age and interest. This shows how important students' interest towards the lesson is.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Overall, there are many issues faced by training teachers when teaching literature at school and there are also solutions to help them overcome the issues faced. It is significant to highlight that the problems faced by these teachers can disrupt the process of teaching and learning literature if the problems are not managed well. This means that the effectiveness of teaching literature to students may deteriorate. However, the problems can be overcome with the right pick at the solutions to boost the efficiency of literature teaching and learning. It would be a great measure for universities or faculties of education to look through of what teacher trainees need for their future preparation when they become teachers in school. This may include exposure on approaches, methods, and techniques on literature teaching. It is also critical for pre-service teachers to always encourage themselves to explore more on the good side of literature teaching. Incorporating approaches that is enjoyable would be a great solution for both literature teachers and learners.

It cannot be denied that literature teaching involves knowledge about the nature of language and skills in teaching and learning as mentioned by Ab. Rashid, Abdul Rahman & Vethamani (2010). This entails the importance of deep understanding of the purpose of teaching literature as well as the passion of teaching and learning it. The five types of approaches which include language-based, information-based, personal response, moral philosophical and paraphrastic mentioned earlier need to be employed in literature teaching to generate a variety of creative techniques that pre-service teachers can bring to class.

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