

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON
ENGLISH TEACHERS' TRAINING AND USE OF
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES IN
ENGLISH FOR CAMPING PROGRAM

BY

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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

Teachers' career stages are viewed as a progression that can be affected by personal and environmental factors. There are three main types of teachers' career phases mentioned in Huberman (1993); Beginning, Middle and Ending. These stages reflect the teachers' behaviour and views in their work life. For many of them, experience in career phases influences how they carry out school programmes and activities. English for Camping program (ECP) is one of the many types of English enrichment programs developed for primary students as part of their yearly camping program in public schools in Malaysia. Teaching ECP to a group of primary ESL students has made it impossible to be achieved because they are not mature enough to decide the specified needs yet. To make it possible, ESL teachers of different career stages need to be prepared to understand and create ECP activities, as well as be the medium to ensure the success of the ECP program. This qualitative study attempts to examine the three ESL teachers' views of the train-the-trainer ECP program and their preferred instructional strategies used for the program through a one-to-one semi-structured interview. The study contextualizes the ECP under the umbrella of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which situates the teachers as 'initial learners' of ESP since they needed to get orientated into understanding the language of English for Camping. Findings showed that the teachers were aware of the importance of professional development and that their instructional practices employed during the ECP training were closely related to their teaching experiences. Therefore, the ESL teachers' professional development needs to be relevant to teachers' teaching context which enables their active engagement in content and pedagogy.

ملخص

يتأثر النُّمُو المهني للمُعَلِّمين بعوامل كثيرة منها عوامل نفسية وبيئية. هناك ثلاثة أنواع رئيسية من مراحل النُّمُو المهني للمُعَلِّمين حسب رأي هوبرمان Huberman (1993) ؛ البداية والوسط والنهاية. تتبلور هذه المراحل الثلاثة في وجهات نظر هؤلاء المُعَلِّمين وسلوكهم في حياتهم العملية ممَّا يتبلور في كيفية تنفيذهم للبرامج والأنشطة المدرسية. يعد برنامج المُخَيِّم اللغوي الإنجليزِيّ (ECP) إحدى برامج تعزيز اللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب المرحلة الابتدائية بوصفه جزءًا من المُخَيِّمات السنوية في المدارس العامة في ماليزيا. إن تعليم ECP لطلاب المرحلة الابتدائية مهمة يصعب تحقيقها لأنهم ليسوا ناضجين بما يكفي لتحديد احتياجاتهم اللغوية. لتحقيق هذه المهمة، يجب أن يكون معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغةً ثانيةً من المراحل المهنية المختلفة ذوي الكفاية لتصميم أنشطة مناسبة لطبيعة ECP كما يجب أن يكونوا الوسيط لضمان نجاح برنامج ECP. تسعى هذه الدراسة النوعية لفحص آراء معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية (ESL) حول برنامج ECP لتدريب المدربين والاستراتيجيات التعليمية المفضلة لديهم في البرنامج من خلال مقابلة فردية شبه منظمة. تعتبر هذه الدراسة تحت مظلة اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة (ESP) والتي تضع المعلمين على أنهم "متعلمون أوليون" لبرنامج ESP نظرًا لأنهم بحاجة إلى التوجيه لفهم طبيعة اللغة الإنجليزية المقَدَّمة للمخيمات اللغوية ECP. أظهرت النتائج أن المعلمين كانوا على دراية بأهمية التطوير المهني وأن ممارساتهم التعليمية المستخدمة أثناء تدريب ECP كانت مرتبطة ارتباطًا وثيقًا بخبراتهم التعليمية. لذلك ، يجب أن يكون التطوير المهني لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية (ESL) وثيق الصلة بالسياق التعليمي للمُعَلِّمين مما يتيح مشاركتهم النشطة في المحتوى وطرق التدريس

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Master of Arts (Teaching English for Specific Purposes).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. **MOE** : Ministry of Education
2. **ESL** : English as a Second Language
3. **ECP** : English for Camping Program
4. **ESP** : English for Specific Purposes
5. **CPD** : Continuous Professional Development
6. **NOET** : Non-Option English Teachers
7. **HOTS** : Higher Order Thinking Skills
8. **LOTS** : Lower Order Thinking Skills
9. **TELL** : Technology-Enhanced Language Learning

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

There are 11 shifts identified by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia to transform the education system. One of them is transforming teaching into the profession of choice, where according to the Blueprint (2012), teacher quality is the most significant school-based factor in determining student outcomes, MOE teachers receive the best professional upskilling program to help them achieve their full potential and continuously build their skill levels. There are a lot of school programs conducted in schools to develop the students holistically as reflected in the National Education Philosophy. In Malaysia, teachers are expected to carry out from academic programs to non-academic programs ranging from clubs and societies, the uniformed bodies and sports. These programs require preparation and upskilling, because as teachers conduct programs on their own, they need prior training and preparation to execute such programs which are usually made compulsory to all students.

One of the co-curricular activities held in a school that needs to be conducted every year is the camping program for all uniform bodies (Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas, 2007). The program is conducted outside school hours. Usually, the program will be done in the students' first language which means not many are conducted in English in Malaysian public schools. This is one of the many types of English enrichment programs for students. These programs are made compulsory for students, and the amount of work and preparation teachers put in are a lot. This study focuses on

English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers; hence the discussion will revolve around the professional development program attended by English teachers to enhance themselves.

The content of the “English for Camping” program (ECP) caters to the linguistic needs in camping activity. Teachers need to also learn appropriate language because they are second language users and need to concentrate more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures (Fiorito, 2019). Furthermore, English is not taught as a subject separated from the students’ real world; instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. Hence, teachers need to plan teaching strategies appropriately to ensure the program is effective. An alarming concern in meeting the objective of this program is that many studies (Napisah, 2017; Goh, 2011; Copland and Burns, 2013; Tan and Raman, 2007) and reports (Soo, 2018) have indicated the low proficiency levels among the ESL teachers. These teachers are from all walks of life. Some of them are still new while some are with wide-ranging experience in the teaching profession. Besides, they also have different levels of qualifications and different work experience. They are all sent through to the same professional development programs to enhance themselves. There is no doubt that teachers bring in many different experiences to the training which they share among themselves during the workshop. The enrichment the teachers get during the training is not just from trainers or modules of the training program but also among themselves as they learn from each other. No doubt, their experiences stem from their backgrounds as they belong to different career stages in their career, due to years of being in the business. So, the sharing enrichment that teachers get during professional development training, e.g., the experiences, background knowledge, and so forth, help in terms of

their own pedagogic practices. So, it is very interesting to realize and to investigate how the teachers with different backgrounds view training programs given to them and the types of instructional strategies that they share and use when they teach the program to students. Hence, the objective of this study is to investigate how primary school ESL teachers at different career stages' view the ECP program as part of their professional development training and to examine the instructional strategies preferred to teach the program to students.

The following sections outline the background of the study, in which English for Camping Program (ECP) is argued as program development for teachers who need to learn about all the concepts in ECP (Ibrahim, 2019) and that ECP requires them to acquire specific English words or language to perform a specific task, that is camping. This link will be further elaborated on in the next section.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The study argues that the target learners of ECP are initially the teachers who need to understand the concepts as ECP trainers before the implementation of the real ECP for young campers. These young campers are pupils from upper-level primary school; year four until year six. In this regard, teachers are the initial learners who have a number of characteristics that distinguish them from a child as a learner and thus should be considered in the learning process. The criteria feature of an adult learner analyzed by Lytovchenko, Ogienko, Sbruieva and Sotska (2018) shows his/her practical life needs, which urges an adult learner to be an active participant in the learning process. In this study, teachers are self-directed, have large and varied (domestic, social, professional) life experience, the urgent need for study, are practically oriented and guided by internal stimuli for learning (Lytovchenko et al.,

2018). The argument can be supported by a popular study done by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) in one of the characteristics of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which will be further explained in Chapter 2.

This study argues that the teachers are considered as initial target learners as well as the ones who will be camping with the students hence the need to impart ESP knowledge about camping to them.

Since 2016, Malaysia has been facing several English language reforms in response to nationwide tensions over English language performance issues (Hazita, 2017). The MOE Malaysia has planned detailed systematic changes for English language education starting from preschool to university levels, including professional development for teachers which covers transformation and alignment to the international standards of Common European of Framework (CEFR) in terms of the curriculum, teaching and learning materials, assessment and teacher training (Preliminary Report Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 [PRMEB], 2016). In Malaysia, professional development for teachers has been recognized to enhance the teaching profession. According to Mesyuarat Professional KPM Bil. 7, (2007), teachers who attend or participate in professional development and such, will be given an allocation of time. The Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Bil. 6, (2005) stated, in a year a teacher must attend or participate in at least seven days of professional development. This is to keep abreast with any reforms, changes or new developments of education. Hence, these teachers are sent for courses to ensure quality teaching to transform primary and secondary education and deliver improved outcomes for students. The PRMEB (2016) also reported that MOE Malaysia is committed to fulfil the potential of Malaysian students and ensure that they can compete in the modern world. According to the recent Malaysia Educational

Blueprint 2013-2025 Annual Report [MEBAR] (2017), since the education level is speeding up, priority is also given to the continuous development of the educational system to be able to compete globally. Therefore, teachers who engage themselves in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) could improve the performance and results of their schools and students especially, and gain professional knowledge and skills for their career development (Evan, 2014; Faizah, Akmal Ariff, Azizah and Siti Aisyah, 2018). As mentioned by Dato' Dr Mohd Ghazali Bin Abas who is the Secretary-General Ministry of Education Malaysia, that professional development programs, continued to be improved to ensure that all teachers are equipped and upskilled with the current knowledge, skills and technology (MEBAR, 2017). This statement clearly shows that it is vital to conduct such programs so that teachers could improve their skills and help to improve the English proficiency level of students.

This is also related to the significant role of English as a second language in Malaysia. Numerous reports (PRMEB, 2016; MEBAR, 2017; Tan, 2017: FMT Reporters, 2018) and research (Napisah, 2017) have shown the importance of English and how grave the situation is in acquiring the language to date. As mentioned by Tun Dr Mahathir, being proficient in English enables one to acquire knowledge from all forms of media in the language (Zulita, 2018). In Malaysian schools and institutions of higher learning especially, the teaching of English is aimed at empowering the students to use the language in everyday situations, for knowledge acquisition and transfer as well as for future workplace needs. Despite this, the decline in English proficiency among Malaysian students has been nothing but worrying. Dr Habibah Abdul Rahim told The Nation, that it is imperative to counter this problem as many school leavers show an inability to properly and

accurately speak or write in English (The Straits Times Perak, 2013). The stakes are even higher when the MOE Malaysia decided to implement the Common European Framework (CEFR) in 2017 as benchmark standards of abilities when using English (Blueprint, 2017).

1.3 THE ECP

ECP is one of the initiatives to improve students' English. Every year, public schools will be conducting a camping program for the students. This is part of the Ministry's call for public schools in Malaysia to conduct camping programs (Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas Bil. 2, 2007). Usually, the first language is used to communicate during the camping program, because it is one of the co-curricular activities conducted in all public schools in Malaysia. Hence, ECP is one of the ways to improve the primary students' motivation to learn English and improve their proficiency, as besides other English enrichment activities like storytelling, poem recital, action song and public speaking.

Before conducting the ECP training program, teachers are required to attend a professional development program that teaches appropriate vocabulary or language used specifically for camping. The program also discussed the instructional strategies suitable to be used for the program. So, this program can be one of the initiatives to also improve the teachers' English proficiency and to ensure effectiveness in delivery. During the ECP training program, the teachers are exposed to the language in context than to teaching grammar and language structures (Momtazur, 2015). Hence, they also need to understand the concept and the jargons of ECP in detail. So, they are expected to master all technical words used in camping

after the ECP training program ends because they will be camp facilitators who will be conducting ECP for their students.

ECP may be regarded as part of ESP as the teachers or in this study, who are the learners, are adults who already have some acquaintance with English and learn the language to communicate a set of specialized skills and to perform particular profession-related activities (Momtazur, 2015). Although they are ESL teachers who teach in primary school, their duty is not only primarily to teach, but they sometimes need to wear different hats, like conducting programs that are not within their actual qualification, like being football coaches, camp facilitators, advisors of uniform bodies and many more. This may point importantly to a need to learn the language of those “professions”. The teachers have to be multifaceted in their career as a teacher. So, based on the Needs Analysis Jigsaw by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), the study could justify why the ESL teachers in this study are regarded also as ECP learners.

In this context, the ECP target audience is the primary school students. However, one might not realize that the medium to get through to the students is via the teachers. Hence, to prepare an ESP program, one needs to know what are the means to get the program to happen. One of them is, to find out whether the trainers are ready, or fully prepared or knowledgeable enough to run the course. Presently, the teachers do not have the skills or experience conducting camping in English.

To prepare an ESP program, the present situations and the “means” must also be prepared. Moreover, the teachers are the ones who need preparations and they are the means to execute the program. In short, the ECP training program transforms teachers into better and more apt educators by enabling them to create relevant and tailored course instructions to implement to the target group.

Each participant (ESL teachers) is required to learn the specific words and correct instructions required in the camping activity. ECP training program needs to be conducted on ESL teachers because of several reasons; 1) specialized ESP courses are too difficult for lower-level students; 2) such courses require research in fields other than language instructions and acquisition; 3) specialized ESP courses can only be taught by specialists who are knowledgeable in the field other than the English language; 4) features of language and discourse tend to be generic, not language-specific (Hyland, 2003).

Also, the acquisition of new words is very important for learners as communicative competence can be achieved via lexical knowledge enrichment (Schmitt, 2000). Furthermore, English communication used in camping is different and specific as the terms are new and unfamiliar to the participants. There are words that they might encounter every day but it means differently. For example, the word '*gadget*' can be understood as a mechanical device or tool like a cellphone, tablet, laptop and many more. Conversely, the word '*gadget*' in camping means instruments made by the campers using everything available around them in the woods. Language camps can provide learners with specific, hands-on yet correct use of the English language, as they are conducted fully in English. It cannot be done if the teachers are not aware of the technical words to be used in ECP and suitable instructional to be used.

Moreover, there seems to be a need to make the teachers more aware of ESP as they tend to have difficulties when giving instructions. An interesting study by Karen (2017) on ESP for teachers (including the experienced ones) showed that teachers faced difficulties in making the transition from English for Academic

Purposes (EAP) to ESP instruction and that the transition was not smooth. The participants are required to make some changes and adaptations.

Nowadays, teachers learn formally (through attending courses, reading articles, etc.) or informally (through observations or experience, sharing with friends, etc.). As they serve their teaching careers, they would accumulate knowledge and change, pay attention to changes and develop according to the topics and skills they wish to take away in order to advance and make changes to the expansion or definition of the job (Oplatka, 2010). According to Zamir (2018), teachers' teaching career is expressed by learning and life-long professional development. Moreover, Zamir found that usually, the longer teachers are in their profession the more confident they get in terms of professional skills and knowledge. They also settle into a comfortable and predictable pattern of teaching. There is a main concern being highlighted in Zamir's (2018) and Huberman (1993) studies, that is the worrying notion of stagnating in the comfort zone which will lead to conservatism and eventually to disengagement and retirement. So, will experienced teachers be interested in joining professional development? How will they perceive the program that is made compulsory to join? There seem to be limited studies on how ESL teachers of different career stages' view training programs. Having said that, the present study hopes to shed light on the need to conduct such a study as it will yield some benefits to the teachers, students, as well as school administrators in future.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The need for Malaysian students to be fluent in English is paramount (Blueprint, 2012) because Lee (2019) reported that knowledge comes in English and most books are written in English. Moreover, the student's language performance is on the decline as exemplified by the decrease in performance on the English language writing paper in UPSR (Blueprint, 2017). There are many factors debated on the causes of students' English deficiency level and one of the factors is teachers' lack of proficiency in the language (Hazlina, 2018). Goh (2011) mentioned that teachers usually take the blame for the poor standards of English.

Improving students' English proficiency is not an easy task. A lot of enrichment English programs are being conducted to inculcate a positive learning culture and to give the students exposure to using the English language through supportive activities based on the students' needs (Blueprint, 2017). Furthermore, the MOE is currently trying to elevate the standard of English in Malaysia and improve the English proficiency of Malaysian students to meet the global standard by adopting the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Mohd Sallehudin and Nurul Farehah, 2017) since it was officially introduced in 2013 (Blueprint, 2017).

One of the ways to improve students' proficiency is to ensure that teachers are properly and consistently trained in terms of their professional development. Teachers need to develop their teaching ability and they are under growing pressure to perform because they are the determinants of students' achievements (Goh, 2011 and Lee, 2019). It is proven in a report by Lee (2019), that teachers play an important key role and that they must improve if they want to teach properly. Hence, the MOE encourages teachers to be responsible for self-development and growth,

and invest in their professional development to enhance their teaching quality. As a result, to ensure the teachers teaching quality, the MOE has set credit points for professional development to be completed and recorded by Education Service Officers (PPP) or teachers (Blueprint, 2012 and Blueprint, 2017).

Based on the same circular (Blueprint, 2016), all English language teachers should be at the minimum proficiency level of C1 according to the Common CEFR. CEFR is an international standard for describing language ability. Unfortunately, it is being reported in some studies (Cheng, Melor, and Maslawati, 2016; and Blueprint, 2017; and Sallehuddin and Nurul Fareha; 2017) majority of English teachers are not proficient in English, because they fail to meet the minimum level a Malaysian teacher must attain. In addition, it is also believed that English is not used communicatively (Cheng, Melor, and Maslawati, 2016). Therefore, professional development is believed to be the best option to cater for the problems (Avalos, 2011; Buendia and Macias, 2019, and Powell and Bodur, 2019).

Professional development is necessary because of the responsibility to themselves and their students. Most studies recognize the importance of professional development for teachers because it could improve the teachers' teaching quality (Alibakhshi and Dehviri, 2015) and it will lead to students' improvement and success (Alyah, 2018; Faizah, Akmal, Azizah and Siti Aisyah, 2018; Mohan and Chand, 2017, and Giraldo, 2014). Moreover, it is also known that teachers developed professionally through work, formal education and attending and presenting at professional development courses (Alibakhshi and Dehviri, 2015; Mohan and Chand, 2017; and Alyah, 2018). Although most of the studies show teachers positive perceptions towards professional development, little attention has been paid to focus on instructional strategies used in the classroom. The studies by Mohan and Chand,