

Competency and Self-Efficacy among Trainee Teachers in Teaching Arabic Language

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ABSTRACT

School teaching practicum is an important place in teacher training, it is the theoretical part of teacher training. The requirement of enhancing teaching skills among undergraduate educational students has initiated universities to conduct school teaching practicum programme as part of study plan in the final semester. Hence, there is a need to train the students with the important pedagogical knowledge and skills related to the school workplace and their gained knowledge. This mixed method study was conducted to investigate level of competency and self-efficacy among students in teaching Arabic during school practicum in the Kulliyyah of Education, IIUM among students in the Bachelor of Teaching Arabic Language as a Second Language. A sample of 39 final year students. The main elements were investigated in this study: perceived teaching competency in content knowledge, and competency in instructional strategies, perceived teaching self-efficacy in teaching and self-efficacy in classroom. The study indicates that most Teaching of Arabic Language students show high competency and self-efficacy during teaching practicum in general. The students also expressed their suggestions for further improvement for the teaching practices in IIUM through open-ended responses.

Keywords: Competency, Self-Efficacy, Instructional Strategies, Teaching Practicum, Teaching Arabic language.

INTRODUCTION

A crucial role in the teacher education program is played by practice teaching. It serves as the capstone experience for preparing teachers. It gives new teachers a chance to get acclimated to the teaching profession (Furlong, Hirst & Pocklington, 1988). Performance during practice instruction offers a foundation for forecasting the teacher's future performance. A major contributor to the calibre of teacher education programs is the widespread acceptance and importance of practical teaching. Working with pupils in schools during practice teaching offers a high level of emotional involvement that is primarily good. Through experience, student teachers perceive themselves as developing, and they start to connect with a teaching culture. They experience engagement, challenge, and even empowerment when practicing teaching (Trowbridge, Bybee, & Powell, 1995).

This activity is referred to by several names, including practice teaching, student teaching, teaching practice, field studies, infield experience, school-based experience, and internship (Taneja, 2000). All the learning experiences that student teachers have while working in classrooms are included in the term "practice teaching" (Ashraf, 1990). According to Stones and Morris (1972), the term "practice teaching" refers to three

main things: the practice of teaching techniques and the development of the role of a teacher; the variety of experiences that students have in schools; and the practical components of the course as opposed to theoretical studies. The process of preparing student instructors for teaching through hands-on training is known as practice teaching. In addition to practical training and practice of various activities of everyday school life, it involves the practical application of teaching methods, teaching strategies, teaching concepts, and teaching techniques.

The practicum is a crucial component of teacher preparation and is highly regarded, particularly by student teachers who are thinking about becoming teachers. In addition to providing the framework for student teachers to advance their individual teaching competency, it is crucial in linking "theory and practice" (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). Although the practicum's objectives vary, in essence, it is a process of teachers' professional content knowledge and teaching knowledge acquisition and development (Shulman, 1987). Through the practicum, students gain real-world teaching experience that strives to improve their teaching abilities as well as critical attributes including self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and knowledge of others. Soft skills like self-directed problem-solving and professional attitudes are also taught by the experience acquired during this stint.

Problem Statement

Pre-service teachers are introduced to the teaching profession through the teaching practicum, which ultimately directs their professional development. The kind of tasks that teacher candidates must handle throughout the practicum period make them feel involved, challenged, and even powerful. However, they may also start to doubt their teaching abilities or if they have what it takes to become a teacher. Reflective practice is used at both the pre-service and in-service teaching levels in most of the teacher training and preparation programs, according to Richards and Lockhart (1997) and Pickett (1999). In Malaysia, teacher training institutions offer teacher preparation for instructors who will be employed in government schools in addition to the education faculties of public universities. To achieve its goal of making Malaysia a high-income country by 2020, the Malaysian government launched the Economic Transformation Program in 2010, and one of its top priorities is teacher training. Raising the bar for the nation's teaching profession by enhancing teacher welfare and teaching quality was one of the policies that was made explicit (PMO, 2010).

Without a doubt, the practicum in many teacher education programs aims to raise educational standards and encourage teachers to become more professional. Numerous studies have confirmed how crucial it is for teacher candidates to gain formal teaching experience in a school setting and to adjust to a new setting as part of their induction process before receiving their degrees and diplomas. The importance of content knowledge in developing into a skilled teacher is emphasised by Shulman (1987). Indeed, he goes on to say that in addition to topic knowledge, trainers must also have pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content. Professional knowledge for teaching is characterised by the significance of having these components, and "mere content knowledge is likely to be as useless pedagogically as a content-free skill" (p.8). According to the Education Transformation Development Plan 2013–2025, the teaching profession is elevated when programs and activities are implemented to improve the quality of teaching and learning. To carry out the program and achieve the intended goals, a thorough plan is required. The instructional features of the twenty-first century are one area of focus (MOE, 2013). Furthermore, the need to explain the teaching practices in terms of clear and standard guidelines for trainee teachers and mentors in details is still in obvious and demanding in addition to Education Programme Standard by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA, 2014), Pedagogical Standards for English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) by MOE, Malaysian Education Quality Standards (MOE-a, n.d.) and Malaysian Teacher Standards (MTS) (MOE-b, n.d.) that refers to qualities of teachers, and further teacher education program that benchmark standards within teacher education, and teaching profession in a Malaysia against global teacher education standards. The expected output of this research will improve the procedures and guidelines of conducting teaching practices, to maximize the experiential impacts to the trainee teachers particularly in IIUM.

Prior studies have addressed challenges and barriers related to practicums such as studies conducted by Ismail et. al. (2024-a, 2024-b) among Islamic Education students (IES), the importance of demonstration lessons before practice teaching and increase of the duration of the teaching practice (Ahmad Gujjar, Ramzan, & Jamil

Bajwa, 2011), various difficulties pre-service teachers encountered by pre-service teachers at UniSZA (Jusoh, 2013), professional and pedagogical competencies among trainee teachers (Zulfahmi, Zulvia, & Mahmud, 2020), the use of technology to improve pre-service teachers' visual interpretation, lesson planning, and execution (Judith, & Carol, 2013) and the importance of reflective practice at pre-service as well as in-service levels of teaching (Richards & Lockhart, 1997; Picket, 1999). In the context of this study, the Bachelor of Teaching Arabic as a Second Language program is offered by KOED, IIUM, to produce quality graduates to serve at the secondary schools to meet the Ministry of Education Malaysia's (MOE) needs. This program also seeks to develop highly capable graduates who can act as role models for students and the communities in which they live. The curriculum prepares students for postgraduate study or a career as researchers by giving them research knowledge and abilities in addition to teaching skills (IIUM, 2023; IIUM, 2024). Based on the discussion, this study will identify the level of competency and self-efficacy among students in teaching Arabic during school practicum in IIUM.

METHODOLOGY

This mixed-method study was conducted to investigate levels of competency and self-efficacy among was purposively selected all students in teaching Arabic during school practicum in the Kulliyah of Education, IIUM among students in the Bachelor of Teaching Arabic Language as a Second Language. Purposive sampling is an intentional selection of informants in this study based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon based on Robinson (2014). Researchers must survey a sample of a population to describe its attitudes, beliefs, or characteristics (Creswell, 2008). Because data is gathered from a sample at a specific point in time, this study employed a cross-sectional approach (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). In social science research, cross-sectional surveys are frequently employed (Hair, et. al., 2010).

The questionnaire was modified based on measurements (Noordin, et. al., 2010), self-efficacy models (Bandura, 1997) and Yüksel (2014). There are three parts to it. Items in Section A ask for background information from the responders. The responders' age, gender, and ethnicity were associated with their background characteristics. The perceived teaching competency in content knowledge (five items) and instructional techniques (five items) was linked to the items in Section B. Self-Efficacy in Classroom Assessment (5 items) and Perceived Teaching Self-Efficacy in Teaching (12 items) are connected in Section C. On a 5-point rating system, which goes from NCAL (not competent at all) to NC (not competent), SC (somewhat competent), C (competent), and HC (very competent), respondents are required to express their answers to each question.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demographic Background of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the information of the respective gender respondents where the number of male and female adult students is balanced between 17.9% for male and 82.1% for female.

Table 1: Gender of Respondent

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	7	17.9
Female	32	82.1
Total	39	100.0

Table 2 below shows information related to the age of the respondents. The respondents consisted of a category aged between 23-24 category to 25-26 category in this study.

Table 2: Age of Respondent

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
21- 22 years old	0	0
23- 24 years old	31	79.5
25- 26 years old	8	20.5
27- 28 years old	0	0
Total	11	100.0

Table 3 below shows information related to the marital status of the respondents. Most of the respondents are still single with 94.9% while 5.1% are already married.

Table 3: Marital Status

Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Single	37	94.9
Married	7	5.1
Total	39	100.0

The Level of Competencies and Self-Efficacies during Teaching Practices and Practicum among Respondents

Competencies in Content Knowledge

Table 4 shows the overall data related to the student's competency in content knowledge in teaching Arabic language. Most of the respondents are showing perceiving high competence of content knowledge except in item (d) and (e). Few respondents feel that they are still in need of more knowledge in the learning assessment to identify students' strengths and weaknesses in Arabic Language subjects and more skills in collaborating with colleagues to deepen their understanding of content knowledge.

Table 4: Competencies in Content Knowledge

Questionnaire Item	NCAL	NC	SC	C	HC
a) My content knowledge in Arabic Language is always up-to-date and accurate.	0	3 (7.7%)	8 (20.5%)	21 (53.8%)	7 (17.9%)
b) I can explain a challenging concept in Arabic Language to students needing help understanding it.	0	1 (2.6%)	10 (25.6%)	16 (41%)	12 (30.8%)
c) I can incorporate current research and best practices in Arabic Language into my teaching subject area.	0	0	15 (38.5)	15 (38.5)	9 (25.1)
d) I can provide an appropriate assessment to identify students' strengths and weaknesses in Arabic Language subjects.	1 (2.6%)	0	2 (5.1%)	24 (61.5%)	12 (30.8%)
e) I collaborate with colleagues to deepen my understanding of my content knowledge.	1 (2.6%)	2 (5.1%)	2 (5.1%)	8 (20.5%)	26 (66.7%)

Competencies in Instructional Strategies

Table 5 shows the overall data related to the student's competency in instructional strategies in the teaching of Arabic language. Most of the respondents are showing perceiving high competence of instructional strategies but the results are slightly lower than the content knowledge. It seems that quite numbers of respondents are facing challenges and obstacles in implementing instructional strategies related to all items in (a) to (e).

Table 5: Competencies in Competencies in Instructional Strategies

Questionnaire Item	NCAL	NC	SC	C	HC
a) I always ensure that students are engaged and motivated in the learning process.	1 (2.6%)	0	2 (5.1%)	15 (38.5%)	21 (53.8%)
b) I used technology to enhance instruction and engagement variously.	0	3 (7.7%)	4 (10.3%)	10 (25.6%)	22 (56.4%)
c) I do scaffold instructions to support students struggling with learning and materials.	0	2 (5.1%)	4 (10.3%)	18 (46.2%)	5 (38.5%)
d) I always modified my lesson plan to meet the needs of various groups of students.	1 (2.6%)	1 (2.6%)	5 (12.8%)	15 (38.5%)	17 (43.6%)
e) I incorporate student-led learning and discussion into my lessons.	1 (2.6%)	0	4 (10.3)	17 (43.6%)	17 (43.6%)

Competencies in Teaching

Table 6 shows the overall data related to the student's competency in teaching in Arabic language. Most of the respondents are showing quite high competence of teaching compared questionnaire 4(b) but the results are slightly lower than the content knowledge in 4(a). It seems that few respondents are still in need of good guidance from the teaching practicum supervisors in regard to their self-efficacy in teaching.

Table 6: Self-Efficacy in Teaching

Questionnaire Item	NCAL	NC	SC	C	HC
a) I am confident in creating lesson plans in Arabic Language subjects that engage with my students.	1 (2.6%)	0	5 (12.8%)	14 (35.9%)	19 (48.7%)
b) I have the skills and knowledge to teach Arabic Language effectively.	0	1 (2.6%)	7 (17.9%)	19 (48.7%)	12 (30.8%)
c) I feel confident in managing my classroom and maintaining students	0	1 (2.6%)	8 (20.5%)	14 (35.9%)	16 (41%)
d) I am confident that my teaching can positively impact my students' academic performance.	0	1 (2.6%)	8 (20.5%)	15 (38.5%)	15 (38.5%)
e) I am confident in my ability to provide effective feedback to my students.	0	1 (2.6%)	5 (12.8%)	20 (51.3%)	13 (33.3%)
f) I am confident that I can motivate my students to learn.	0	1 (2.6%)	3 (7.7%)	17 (43.6%)	18 (46.2%)

g) I am confident in my ability to handle challenging students.	0	2 (5.1%)	9 (23.1%)	16 (41%)	12 (30.8%)
h) I am confident in collaborating effectively with colleagues and administrators to improve student outcomes.	0	2 (5.1%)	7 (17.9%)	16 (41%)	14 (35.9%)
i) I am confident in my ability to identify and address the diverse learning needs of my students.	0	1 (2.6%)	6 (15.4%)	17 (43.6%)	15 (38.5%)
j) I am confident in using technology effectively to support students learning Arabic Language subjects.	0	2 (5.1%)	3 (7.7%)	13 (33.3%)	21 (53.8%)
k) I am confident in creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment.	0	1 (2.6%)	2 (5.1%)	15 (38.5%)	21 (53.8%)
l) I am confident in helping my students to think critically.	0	2 (5.1%)	5 (12.8%)	14 (35.9%)	18 (46.2%)

Competencies in Classroom Assessment

Table 7 shows the overall data related to the student's competency in classroom assessment during the teaching of Arabic language. Most of the respondents are showing quite high competence of competency in classroom assessment similar to the results in the questionnaire 4(c). It indicates that few respondents are still in need of good guidance from the teaching practicum supervisors regarding classroom assessment.

Table 7: Self-Efficacy in Classroom Assessment

Questionnaire Item	NCAL	NC	SC	C	HC
a) I am confident using various assessment tools in my teaching, such as multiple-choice tests, short-answer tests, essay tests, etc.	0	1 (2.6%)	3 (7.7%)	13 (33.3%)	22 (56.4%)
b) I am confident in using data from classroom assessments to guide my instruction and improve student learning.	0	2 (5.1%)	2 (5.1%)	17 (43.6%)	18 (46.2%)
c) I am confident in providing students with feedback on their performance on classroom assessments.	0	1 (2.6%)	1 (2.6%)	21 (53.8%)	16 (41%)
d) I am confident in reflecting on my classroom assessment practices and identifying areas for improvement.	0	1 (2.6%)	5 (12.8%)	17 (43.6%)	16 (41%)
e) I am confident in seeking professional development opportunities to improve my classroom assessment practices.	0	2 (5.1%)	5 (12.8%)	11 (28.2%)	21 (53.8%)

Responses from the Open-Ended Questionnaires

From the open ended responses, few themes can be concluded such as shown in Table 8 which are related to 3 main themes of welfare and financial support, teaching practicum management system and support and improving the pedagogical knowledge in the programme related course.

Table 8: Open-Ended Responses

Themes	Responses
1- Welfare and Financial Support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help us to get our allowance
2- Teaching practicum management system and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is better for the lesson plan to be in a file rather than book. Files are more organized. • The observation by school's mentor should have a percentage of marks from practicum. • Appointing a suitable lecturer for each practicum. So that, he/she can deliver the suitable and correct content method for the subject according to our country's education system. • Reduce the amount of observation because students (practical teacher) also occupied with several school programme. • Using standardized lesson plans templates because students might be confused without it. • The faculty can provide teaching aids room so that practicum students can exchange our teaching aids with other practicum students or get ideas to create interesting teaching aids. • The faculty can conduct at least one general meeting with practicum students according to their course so that they can discuss and share their practicum journey. And the way to improve their teaching practices. Lecturers can give and share their opinions based on practicum students sharing. • To have a special dialogue on real-life situation of practicum before, during and after practicum. • To improve communication between mentor and supervisor about the mentee progress in teaching and school engagement. It is because there is a mentor who does not even fulfill the responsibility in guiding the mentee. As a mentee or practical teacher, we need feedback and comments from a mentor to know our progress and room for improvement. • Strengthening relationships with other senior teachers at school to improve social behavior, which indirectly demonstrates good example towards students in balancing social and work life. • Try to collaborate with other kulliyahs such as engineering or architecture to produce teaching aids. • All lecturers should standardize the writing of lesson plans (handwritten or typed) because it is unfair and quite burdensome for students. • Make sure lecturers really assess the students face to face as there are some lecturers only asking for teaching video.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that the “school administration feedback filled in by headmaster/administrator of the school” is not necessary because the headmaster/administrator of the school sometimes were not involve directly with the students/ practical teacher and they are also very busy with administration activities and management of the school, most suitable people that should be given evaluation form in school would be the mentor teacher of Chief Committee. • Please guide us to the next step to become a teacher like guiding about registration in SPP. • I hope the supervisor gives some specific comments to improve my teaching skills.
3- Improving the pedagogical knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be exposure to the undergraduate students on how to cater classroom management. It is vital for them to know these skills to be able to be ready to face the students at school and increase student involvement in school • More exposure on the design of assessment format at schools based on KPM format. • To add a subtopic to be learned for students regarding how to teach the students at school to write an essay in Arabic language that complement 4 skills, and how to manage students' various behavior and intellect in the classroom. • Should provide and include more examples of mock teaching methods. • Providing exposure to effective teaching methods such as holding webinars and seminars by inviting excellent teachers to share their experiences, teaching techniques and how to conduct classes to improve students' knowledge.

RESULTS DISCUSSIONS

In general, the study indicates that most of the respondents are competent in collaborating with colleagues during teaching practicum of teaching Arabic language in schools. The study is found to be consistent with Daniels, Pirayoff and Bessant, (2013), who suggest that creating environments supportive of analytic reflection and collaboration positively influenced teachers' attitudes toward their teaching practice.

However, the students need to be ready to deal with difficult students with assurance. In line with earlier research by Rosas & West (2009), which contends that teacher education programs should prioritise providing aspiring educators with useful strategies for handling challenging behaviours and managing classroom dynamics, this study highlights the difficulties pre-service teachers face in maintaining student discipline and managing classrooms.

By comparing the similar studies conducted by Ismail and others (2024-a, 2024-b) on level of competency and self-efficacy among 93 Bachelor of Islamic Education students (IES), Kulliyah of Education (KOED) of IIUM, the result of the descriptive analysis is quite similar which indicates that this undergraduate educational programme is providing quality knowledge and skills to the students before they are going for teaching practicum in the final semester. However, this study's investigation is more in depth than the latter due to the responses given through open ended questionnaires.

The open-ended responses indicate that more improvements are needed in the 3 main themes of welfare and financial support, teaching a practicum management system and support and improving the pedagogical knowledge in the programme-related course as explained in Table 8.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes by showing that most participants are proficient in pedagogical subject knowledge, content knowledge, and instructional methods during their practicum in teaching Arabic. To be current and correct, the program owner should, nevertheless, continue to enhance their content understanding in Arabic language education courses. To improve the effectiveness of supervisors' supervision and guidance of school practicum sessions, it is necessary to develop the content knowledge linked to teaching Arabic language skills, classroom management, and the creation of school format evaluation materials.

However, few suggestions are found to be irrelevant such as having shorter time of teaching practicum because the duration is subject to the policy of the faculty in addition to provide financial support and allowance because the programme is open market system and not like Institute of Teacher Education in Malaysia which fully funded by the Ministry of Education.

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