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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN DEVELOPING READING MATERIALS FOR THE TEACHING OF READING IN AN ESL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

There is a need for teachers to have the ability to develop their own materials to cater to their own pupils' proficiency level, background knowledge, needs and interests (Janelle, 2019) in order to supplement existing textbooks. Therefore, the process of acquiring the ability to develop their own materials should start when they are still student teachers at their teacher training institutions (Abdul, Narayanasamy, Mohamad, & Abd, 2019; Janelle, 2019). This research aims to investigate 30 TESL student teachers' experiences in developing and implementing their designed reading materials in an ESL classroom. The objective of this activity is to help them understand the principles of material development for teaching reading in an ESL context. The researchers carried out qualitative research adopting a case study method. The research instruments used were researchers' field notes (RFN), student teachers' personal reflective journal (PRJ) and individual interview (II). The findings indicate that TESL student teachers learnt to develop reading materials more effectively by analysing their targeted pupils' proficiency level, age, needs and interests. This experience enables them to gain valuable experiences on how to be producers of reading materials rather than mere consumers of existing reading materials. The findings could provide better insights to TESL educators in designing their own reading materials for their own students.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on the development of teacher professionalism through practical and entrepreneurial spirit, an extension to past teacher development programme that limits the role of student teachers to being recipients of knowledge from 'expert' scholars.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the policy changes that have taken place in the Malaysian education system is the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The roadmap for English Language Education: an agenda for reform 2015-2025 states that English language programme in Malaysia must be aligned to international standards. This has brought about the implementation of CEFR aligned curriculum in our education system which is the

global standards for defining English language ability. Currently, not only the curriculum and assessment are aligned to the CEFR but also the learning materials that are becoming more global in terms of content such as the textbook 'Pulse 2' used in the lower secondary Malaysian classroom.

It is commonly accepted that most English language teachers use course books. However, a very limited number of course books could meet the needs and interests of every pupil in a class (Tomlinson, 2008). Pulse 2 for example is a foreign produced textbook. Based on this notion, there is a strong need for teachers to have the ability to develop their own materials and activities to cater to their own pupils' proficiency level, background knowledge, needs and interests (Janelle, 2019) to supplement existing textbooks. Therefore, the process of acquiring the ability to develop their own materials should start when they are still student teachers at their teacher training institutions (Abdul et al., 2019; Janelle, 2019).

English teachers need to know how to select or produce reading materials to cater to their own pupils' needs (Janelle, 2019). This is very essential to ensure that their pupils have better understanding of their reading materials. Undoubtedly, reading comprehension is one of the most important components in the English syllabus. English as Second Language (ESL) learners must possess adequate reading skills, as it is part of the process of learning and acquiring language. In order to understand or derive information from a reading material, English language learners must first be able to read the material and comprehend before successfully extracting information from the text. When ESL learners read, they would have to bring in information, knowledge, emotion, experience and culture to the word (Goodman, 1967). Based on this statement, it is believed that by creating the right type of reading materials, pupils would be able to enhance their comprehension on these reading materials. In addition, suitable reading comprehension questions and reading activities that stem from these reading materials would allow the pupils to share and explain information according to how they understand the reading materials read (Rulon & McCreary, 1986). Rulon and Mcgreary further claimed that this technique could produce more clarification checks with regard to the reading lesson. Furthermore, it could ensure that the pupils would be playing a more active role during the reading lessons rather than be passive learners in a teacher centred lesson. This is where student teachers need to be equipped with such skills and abilities. In order to be able to conduct a rewarding reading lesson, they need to learn a variety of effective approaches to teach reading. They need to be aware that good reading materials and reading activities should be able to promote more engaging reading and enable the pupils to acquire or learn the target language simultaneously (Rosenblatt, 1978) in Tomlinson (2008).

Based on the abovementioned statements, this study was embarked in order to find the answer to the research question – What are the TESL student teachers' experiences in developing reading materials for the teaching of reading in an ESL classroom? It is hoped that findings of the study could provide insights to the course developers as well as the course lecturers on the needs for TESL student teachers to be exposed to developing reading materials for effective reading lessons. This is in line with Hansen-Thomas and Daftuar (2016) suggestion that many education institutions should stress the importance of equipping TESL student teachers with the skills to develop their own teaching materials so that they could be become better English teachers (Hansen-Thomas & Daftuar, 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the TESL student teachers produced their own reading materials in the form of their personal narratives and reading activities based on their personal narratives. The development of localised reading materials is intended to bring about optimal participation of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in a reading class. The personal narratives of the TESL student teachers are based on their own life experiences. The preparation of their personal narratives is based on two underpinning theories: Transactional Theory and Material Development Theory. Before further discussion, it is important that the researchers provide the definition of the term 'reading materials' used in this study. Tomlinson (2008) has defined materials as any items which could be used to facilitate

language learning. He further elaborated that these materials include course books, videos, graded readers, flash cards, games, websites and mobile phone interactions. The materials used or developed in a language classroom should be informative (informing the learner about the target language), instructional (guiding the learner in practicing the language), experiential (providing the learner with experience of the language in use), eliciting (encouraging the learner to use the language) and exploratory (helping the learner to make discoveries about the language).

Rosenblatt's transactional theory is relevant to ELT material development as it attends to cognitive and affective dimensions of the writer and target readers. The proponent of this theory emphasises that a reader performs two categories of reading - efferent and aesthetic (Rosenblatt, 1976). When a reader does efferent reading, he is selecting and comprehending information in a reading material. On the other hand, a reader has an aesthetic reading when he has an emotional experience based on the reading. In order for a reader to be an effective reader, he should be able to practice both efferent and aesthetic reading. Thus, an English teacher should be able to select appropriate reading materials for his reading lessons to enable the pupils to practice both aesthetic and efferent reading skills. Being able to produce his own reading materials is even better as he could tailor made them according to his pupils' prior knowledge, interests and needs. It is essential that the ELT reading materials are able to cater to the needs of the readers especially ESL readers due to their cultural background, proficiency level and interests (Tomlinson, 2008). He believes that any reading materials should be able to capture the readers' interest in order to make them more engaged in their reading. He further asserts that most course materials are preventing learners from achieving affective engagement by presenting them with bland, and safe texts. In this study, the TESL student teachers have written authentic personal narrative texts based on their experience. Their lecturers gave them a theme to write upon - family. The personal narrative texts attend to both cognitive and affective aspects of the pupils. The pupils who read the personal narrative texts should be engaged in both efferent and aesthetic reading as they could relate themselves to the stories on family issues discussed in the reading texts.

Different scholars have suggested various procedures and criteria for evaluating ELT materials. Tomlinson (2008) provides an extensive list of principles to be considered in material development and evaluation. He proposes that good English language learning and teaching materials should be able to achieve impact (by having novelty, being attractive and appealing). Besides, the materials should enable the pupils to feel at ease and are comprehensible (Krashen, 1988). Krashen further explained that in any attempt to introduce new reading materials, it is utmost important that the materials need to be relevant to the learners' needs and promote independent learning. The newly introduced materials should also draw learners' attention to linguistic features of the input (which does not necessarily mean an explicit presentation of grammar).

The reading process is a complex process but can be made easy if readers are allowed to use their past experience (schemata) to shape their own meaning. A text that revolves around what is familiar to the readers would allow them to engage with the text more meaningfully. Therefore, an English teacher should be able to choose a text that benefit their pupils. The reading materials should allow the English teacher to focus on her pupils' senses and emotions thus allowing them to make or draw conclusions from the text read. Another teacher's role is to facilitate their pupils in conducting both intensive and extensive reading through mentoring, guiding, and adapting lessons (Rosenblatt, 2004). On the other hand, the main role of a pupil is to be an active participant during classroom activities.

Hence, this study is aimed at creating a new breed of TESL student teachers who would play the roles of writers, editors, material developers and facilitators. When they are exposed to the principles and reading strategies in their academic course, the student teachers were asked to write personal narrative texts based on a theme assigned to them. Personal narrative texts are a form of writing in which the writer relates one event, incident, or experience from his/her life. Personal narrative texts allow the writer to share their lives with others, vicariously experiencing the story described by the writers. The writer's job is to put the readers in the midst of the action,

letting them live through an event, incident, or experience. Personal narratives also incorporate vivid descriptive details as well as the thoughts, feelings, and reactions of the writer. The texts which allow the student teachers to share their life with others will evoke in the pupils the emotions and senses that would help them engage with the text. As a result, the reading activities based on these personal narrative texts could be more meaningful thus allowing optimum acquisition of the target language.

In order to conduct a rewarding reading lesson, student teachers would need to be knowledgeable on many pedagogical approaches to teach reading. Besides possessing relevant pedagogical approaches, many teaching institutions have stressed the importance of equipping their student teachers with effective reading strategies in order for them to impart such knowledge to their future pupils (Hansen-Thomas & Daftuar, 2016).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The researchers were interested in obtaining an in–depth understanding of the student teachers' perceptions when they developed reading materials. Thus, a qualitative study is the most suitable approach as the researchers' focus was on the learning process rather than the learning outcome (Merriam, 2009). The researchers employed a case study method as this study was on a group of 30 TESL student teachers in a public university in Malaysia (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2009).

The researchers used three research instruments namely student teachers' personal reflective journal (PRJ), researchers' field notes (RFN) and individual interviews (II) in this study. Multiple research instruments were used in this study to triangulate and corroborate data. Interview was used as the main research tool because it concerns behavioral events (Yin, 2009). Besides being interviewed by the researchers, each TESL student teacher kept a personal reflective journal detailing what they have learnt and the challenges they faced during the process of preparing the personal narrative texts and reading activities. The TESL student teachers were divided into small groups of four members. Each small group handled a one hour reading lesson to a Form Two class (14-year-old secondary school pupils). The secondary school pupils' proficiency level ranges from basic to intermediate. The reading lesson was based on the lesson plan prepared. The lessons consist of reading activities which stem from the personal narrative texts. The TESL student teachers conducted reading lessons at 2 schools. The researchers carried out classroom observations on both reading lessons. Their observation notes were documented as field notes. Each observation lasted for one hour or two period lessons.

After the observations, the researchers carried out a 30-45 minute semi-structured interviews to interrogate the TESL student teachers' perceptions in developing and implementing the materials for the teaching of reading in an ESL classroom. The interviews were recorded and the interview responses were transcribed in verbatim.

3.2. Validity and Reliability of this Study

In order to ascertain the validity and reliability of this study, the researchers took several measures as proposed by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2012) namely triangulation, validation of interview questions, and member checks. According to Creswell (2012) triangulation is a process of corroborating evidences or data from more than two research tools. In this study, the researchers used three research tools namely TESL student teachers' personal reflective journal (PRJ), researchers' field notes (RFN), and individual interviews (II).

One of the validation measures employed by the researchers was the interview questions were reviewed and validated by experts (Merriam, 2009). These two experts are doctorate holders in TESL and have more than 15 years teaching experience in the related field. They reviewed the semi-structured interview questions on a few aspects namely clarity, redundancy, readability and completeness. After getting the feedback via discussions with the experts, the researchers reworded, added and deleted the questions. By doing so, the interview questions were

able to elicit rich responses from the respondents. Furthermore, the interview questions would be more suitable and more comprehensible to the participants.

Another measure to ascertain validity and reliability is through member checks. The interview responses were transcribed in verbatim. Member checks is where the transcriptions of the interview responses were returned and reviewed by the participants for verification. The participants made comments if the interview transcriptions or interpretations were not similar with their responses.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

As suggested by Creswell (2012) all the participants were given pseudonyms when reporting the findings. Creswell further stated that the measure of using pseudonyms reassured the participants that their identity would remain anonymous. Their responses remained confidential. Hence, this encouraged the participants to respond honestly and accurately.

The researchers also sought the participants' consent prior to the interview session. Only volunteers were selected to be interviewed this study. They also mentioned that they preferred to be interviewed individually. Thus, the researchers conducted individual interviews. The researchers also sought the permission of the principal of each participated school before conducting the research.

3.4. Setting

In this study, the researchers employed purposive sampling which is generally used in case studies in selecting the participants (Cohen & Manion, 1989). The researchers employed purposive sampling because we hoped "to discover, understand and gain insight from a sample from which the most could be learned" (Merriam, 2009). The selection criteria are the participants must be TESL students and have enrolled in the course 'Teaching of Reading in ESL Context'. They had written personal narratives and developed lesson plans based on the personal narrative texts. Based on these criteria, a total number of thirty, TESL Year 3 student teachers at the Faculty of Education of a public university in Malaysia were selected. Their age ranges between 23 years old to 25 years old. Their English proficiency level is high intermediate. Fifteen out of the thirty participants volunteered to be interviewed individually. The participants' willingness is very essential as their full collaboration is highly needed to ensure the success of the research.

The 'Teaching of Reading in an ESL Context' course's main objective is to equip the TESL student teachers with reading theories and models, reading strategies, instructional and pedagogical approaches, and reading assessment and evaluations. They also learned to be writers, editors, material developers and facilitators within a semester. A semester consists of 14 weeks. From 1 to Week 3, they were taught on reading theories, models, and reading strategies. From Week 4 until Week 6, each TESL student teacher was instructed to develop a personal narrative text on the theme 'Family'. By equipping the TESL student teachers the ability to create, adapt or modify the content or text, they would be able to meet their future pupils' interest and needs in an ESL reading classroom. They needed to be aware that the texts used in reading lessons should arouse pupils' interests in order to boost their engagement in the task prepared by the teacher. Rosenblatt (2004) has stated that pupils tend to respond to reading text by relating new information with their prior knowledge to construct their own meaning. Their interaction with the text based on their own schemata and background knowledge brings about the learners' construction of personal meaning. Responding to the reading text helps the pupils to develop their meta cognitive reading strategies, which are important for effective reading comprehension (Palincsar & Brown, 1986). Providing pupils with personal narratives encourage responses that could ensure a proactive reading lesson and optimal target language acquisition.

In order to promote team work ability and collaborative learning, they were divided into small groups of four. Each personal narrative text was further commented on and edited by their small group members and lecturers to

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ensure that the content is coherent, clear, interesting and suitable for Form Two secondary school pupils. It was also edited to ensure that it was free from any spelling and grammatical errors. From Week 7 until Week 11, they were taught on the theories of reading assessments and evaluations. Besides the theories, they were instructed to apply those theories in producing reading assessments and evaluations to cater to the needs of pupils of various proficiency levels. They were also taught to prepare lesson plans which consist of reading activities, and reading comprehension questions based on their personal narrative text. The lesson plans were also checked and commented on by the lecturers and two English school teachers, and their classmates. The TESL student teachers made amendments based on these comments. In Week 12 and 13, they went to school and implemented the lesson plans to Form 2 secondary school pupils. In Week 14, the TESL student teachers presented their reflection which they wrote in their individual journal. In the reflective journal, they noted down what they have learnt and the challenges they faced during the process of preparing the personal narratives and reading activities.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings and discussions are explained by answering the research question of the study: What are the TESL student teachers' experiences in developing reading materials for the teaching of reading in an ESL classroom? The research tools used in this study were researchers' field notes (RFN), student teachers' personal reflective journal (PRJ) and individual interview (II).

Generally, the findings indicate that the whole process of writing out the personal narrative texts, developing lesson plans and implementing the lesson plans has allowed the TESL student teachers (ST) to gain experiences on how to be producers of reading materials rather than just consumers. They also learnt to do text selection more effectively by analysing their targeted pupils' proficiency level, age, needs and interests. They were also aware that the reading texts used for reading lessons should contain information that the pupils could apply in their daily lives. These statements are derived from the responses given in the ST interview responses (II), ST reflective notes (PRJ) and researchers' field notes (RFN). One of the TESL student teachers (ST1) claimed that:

"Yeah, this is actually the first time we did it, you know constructing personal narrative text and I think it is really new to us because we have never constructed a personal narrative text and to make comprehension questions out of it. I think it is really important because during the process of constructing texts, we actually have to think and relate a lot of things towards not just society issues but pupils' understanding enable it has to be localised or else we cannot relate. The pupils, you know cannot get themselves into the text" (II).

The statement above is further supported by the reflective notes written by ST 3 where she wrote;

"As a teacher, we need to be aware of the selection of the text and the context of the question and it must be parallel with the text. It is because we have to understand the pupils' ability in interpreting the text because the level of the text is important towards student participation in the classroom." (PRJ)

Another participant, ST4, also expressed similar opinion as she wrote in her reflective note, "Teacher also needs to provide suitable materials as pupils are not only using the text as a reference but they will apply the lesson learnt into their daily life". These responses demonstrate that the process of developing reading texts and activities is a new experience for them. They applied their knowledge learned in the course. Based on the learned knowledge, they had to construct a personal narrative text that is based on their real-life experiences and a set of reading activities based on the text. In doing so, they had to use their higher order thinking skills. They were able to identify and synthesise many elements that are relevant to issues pertaining to local society. They need to be aware of sensitive issues as Malaysia is a multi-racial society.

The researchers observed and noted down in their field notes that the ST faced difficulties during the development of the personal narrative text. The lecturers and the English school teachers had to provide much guidance to the ST on the syllabus that is covered in the curriculum. A parameter of what should be covered in the

syllabus and the sensitivity of issues portrayed in local context were discussed to help the student teachers develop their personal narrative text. This is in line with Rosenblatt (2005) as she stated that pupils tend to respond to a piece of reading text by using their prior knowledge to construct their own understanding. The pupils' interaction with the reading text using their own schemata and background knowledge brings about the learners' construction of personal meaning (Shuying, 2013).

Another theme that is derived from the findings is the ST believed that there is a strong need for reading materials to cater to the needs and interests of the pupils. From the individual interviews, three of the ST shared that they realised they must make sure the text and content chosen must strike a chord with the interests of the learners or it might not reach the objectives of their reading lesson. Three of the participants mentioned in the interview:

"Yes of course because if the learner does not have the interest in reading the text then, they would not you know. Not just relating themselves into the text but they cannot answer the question and most probably they would feel bored to actually improve themselves in comprehension." (II, ST6)

"Well at some point I do agree that there is a sufficient need to think all of these to make it very compatible for the pupils because it is the matter of their interest. Because when the text is something out of context, out of the experiences, we could not grab their attention. So, I believe it needs to be compatible with the pupils." (II, ST2)

"Yes, there is a need for reading material to be compatible to the needs and interest. We do not want the reading material to be too foreign to the pupils. If we are able to provide what is relatable to them, that is much easier to understand and that might enhance their reading interest". (II, ST5)

The three interview excerpts above indicate the importance of materials to be relatable to the schemata or cultural knowledge of the pupils. This notion is supported from the reflection notes written by two ST. In reflective journals, the researchers identified that two ST mentioned how the theories that they have learned and the development of activities helped them to engage with the pupils better during lessons. Choosing the right content that resonates with the pupils' background and level of understanding also helped them to prepare and conduct better reading lessons which are more engaging and interactive;

"This is where all the theories learnt during lecture at the faculty came into practice when we have to tackle the pupils' attention in order to encourage them to actively be involved in all activities carried out in the classroom." (RFN, ST 13)

"The article, 'Secret Untold', is more relatable with the pupils as the English school teacher informed us that we will be teaching pupils with different background and some of them might be experiencing the same thing. My group and I wanted to make the activities more interactive and game-based as we wanted to nurture their love in reading, thus getting rid the idea that reading is boring and dull." (RFN, ST 1)

The researchers observed that the two classroom meetings carried out by the ST helped them to design more student-centered activities. Student-centered activities are important in order to avoid the pupils from being dull and bored. The ST have developed better understanding on how to do the selection of content to cater to the targeted pupils. The findings from the researchers' field notes are parallel with the ST's opinions documented in one of the ST's reflective notes and interview responses.

"This is to ensure that the reading materials exposed to the pupils are not too foreign in nature" (RFN, ST 12)

"A text that is out of context, out of experience could not grab the attention of the pupils." (II, ST 2)

Being able to relate to the text, the pupils could understand the reading text better and subconsciously enhance their reading interests. It will also help to make the lesson more interesting and allow the pupils to understand and successfully extract information from the text. This is evident from the response given by one of the ST in her reflective journal;

"This is proven when we went to the school because every student was able to answer all questions including the HOTS question since they can relate to the topic." (RFN, ST11)

Most of the TESL student teachers believe the pupils will be able to have the skill to interpret text better if they are given exposure to familiarise themselves with the reading content. It will help the pupils to adapt to the reading texts and improve the ability to extract information and complete reading task. Two of the respondents, ST6 and ST7, stated that;

"Based on the personal narrative, we need to localise the text; if we refer online we can see there are variety content, types of text. As a Malaysian teacher, we need to localise the text because we need to fit the text with the pupils' issue in Malaysia. We cannot have the content of text like social problem that happened in the club or pub. That one is not really relatable to the culture of our country. To be a good teacher that particular person needs to localise the text in which will bring the pupils to the text." (II, ST6)

"I think the text created helped the pupils to relate better since the personal narrative text were created from our experience so we can explain better and the pupils can share from their experience as well." (II, ST7)

The responses from ST6 and ST7 indicate that there is a need for pupils to be exposed to reading materials that are more culturally bound. Teachers should be able to filter information that are not suitable such as social problems in pubs or clubs as it might not be appropriate for Form two pupils. This is further resonated in a reflection note written by one of the ST where she had written,

"It is important because not all English texts contain suitable context with our (Malaysian) multi-cultures and religions". (RFN, ST 12)

ST 14 also concur with ST12 viewpoint,

"I can relate the reading materials to our multi-cultures and religions make it more reliable and relevant to our society. Most importantly, I can make it close to the pupils' emotions and feelings." (RFN, ST 14)

It is safe to conclude that by providing student teachers with the skills to create their own personal narratives gave them the ability to also censor materials that are deemed unsuitable for the local pupils. As stated by Goodman (1967) an ESL learner should bring in information, knowledge, emotion, experience and culture to a printed word to help comprehend the reading material better. Providing a localised text based on their personal experiences is also a plus point as they are able to explain the content better and provides a platform for pupils to discuss and share their experiences.

In their learning process, the ST experienced two main challenges namely:

a.   Identifying suitable vocabulary, number of words, topic, content and length.

b.   Lack of knowledge about the targeted pupils.

a. Identifying Suitable Vocabulary, Number of Words, Topic, Content and Length

The first challenge that is evident is the issue pertaining to content. Some of the respondents were struggling with the task as they did not know the suitability of the content and vocabulary to the targeted pupils. In ST4 interview responses, she shared,

"I have to make a reading text simple for Form 1 and Form 2 pupils, this is very hard because during my course I have to write pieces that are not for Form 1 and Form 2 pupils. So, to find words that are easy I have to put myself back to their age like I was in Form 1 and Form 2, like what kind of vocabularies that I understand during that time. Also, I have to find or create something that is not boring for them that is easy for them to understand, readers to relate themselves and instill the knowledge to them." (II, ST 4)

The worry and concern of ST4 were shared by two other participants,

"I study the appropriate length of essay in PT3 English paper as a guideline for my personal narrative text. This is very crucial since a too lengthy text might be unsuitable for the lower secondary pupils and

too time consuming for the activities in class to take place. The text should be between 500-700 words, five to seven paragraphs which will only take one page. Later, Pn Hameedah and Miss Jeya also advised the same thing to us." (RFN, ST 6)

"Actually yes, many of our texts are too long and I think that they are actually having quite a difficulty to stay focused because we have many long pages." (II, ST 2)

The researchers observed that this difficulty was resolved when the ST sat together via face to face and discussed with the lecturers and English teachers together. They listened to the ST problems and provided some suggestions to solve or minimise the problems.

Some of the ST felt that the topic or issue shared was too personal and general. As a result, they felt uncomfortable in sharing their personal information when writing the personal narrative texts. This point was highlighted by ST 3, ST 8 and ST6 in their reflective journal. They confessed:

"It is quite hard for me because it was so personal for me and I kind of like felt depressed at first." (RFN, ST3)

"Should I write about my family? Or should I not? But this is an assignment. But also my family issues are so private. None of my classmates or my other friends in college knows about my family." (RFN, ST 8)

"The content itself whether or not it is too deep for the pupils to actually digest and understand and relate to and as well as the language because you know in one classroom there are pupils of different levels of ability when it comes to the language usage so I was struggling when I need to use lesser range of the tenses or easier vocabs instead of complex ones and in terms of relating it to classroom activities" (RFN, ST6)

In conclusion, the ST were aware that the topic of the content should not be too personal, the text should not be too lengthy, and the vocabulary and tenses used should be suitable to the pupils' age, ability, and proficiency level. Hence, there is a need for them to put considerable thought into writing their personal narrative texts and designing reading activities.

b. Lack of Knowledge about the Targeted Pupils

Another challenge faced by the ST was they did not have sufficient information about the target pupils' level of proficiency when developing the personal narrative texts and lesson plans.

"The problem we had is that we actually we do not know the pupils' learning ability and the level of proficiency." (II, ST 2)

"We went through several activities assisted online so I think that is the biggest challenge is not knowing our audience." (II, ST 5)

The two participants did not know who their targeted pupils were when writing the personal narrative texts. Not knowing the pupils' proficiency caused the ST to have difficulty in designing the personal narrative text and designing the lesson plan. However, based on the researchers' field notes, reflective journals, and interview responses shared by the ST, the ST were able to adjust the reading activities to suit the targeted pupils' ability and proficiency level when they were informed about the targeted pupils two weeks before the implementation. In the future, it is important for the lecturers to inform the ST before they start to write their personal narrative texts and design lesson plans. It was also observed in the researchers' field notes that the lecturers had informed the ST to adjust the reading activities when they observed that the pupils are struggling to understand and show signs of boredom. As a result, the ST became more mentally prepared and made prompt adjustments to the designed reading activities during the implementation. Three of the participants also expressed their opinions through their reflective notes,

"I did remind myself that the content of the lesson plan can be changed depending on the situation where I had to meet the pupils learning needs". (RFN, ST10)

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"So, what I had learned before carrying out a lesson was to always prepare myself with lots of teaching reading techniques and strategies. If I had noticed my pupils were lost during the lesson, I am able to carry out other back up strategies and techniques whenever it is needed." (RFN, ST 10)

"I think it is very important for us to have back up plans or know what to do or know how to improvise our activities… . Probably we have to improvise the lesson so the pupils can participate more because I think during our session because I myself met them one to one are you sleepy because it is not fair for us make us discuss it if they are not into it". (RFN, ST 1)

Another two participants also pointed out the weaknesses of their activities after teaching the pupils using the lesson plans. After carrying out the macro teaching, they shared that the reading activities that were a bit dull for the pupils and could not get the pupils to participate actively during the lesson. They did not push the pupils to make the connections with the personal narrative text but only pushed the pupils to become efferent readers.

"I developed a quite a boring task activity which involved reading, telling the meaning of vocab, discussing the answer and that's the end". (II, ST9)

"You actually have to push them a lot and make them more interactive instead of just sitting there and read. You have to make them answer or do something which is not dry." (II, ST1)

This is further strengthened by the reflection shared by the ST 7,

"While I am implementing the lesson that we have planned, the activities were not really interactive because we did ask the pupils to understand the text but me and my group members did not explain to them paragraph by paragraph and they looked lost when I asked them what the whole text is about."

The findings also verify the need for language teachers especially in Malaysia to use or create materials that are relevant to their pupils. Having the knowledge about each pupil in the class allows an English teacher to work within his or her zone of proximal development—gap between what pupils can do on their own and what they can do with the help of more knowledgeable individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, it could be concluded that by being responsible for content and language, teachers could optimise the impact of their lessons.

The findings are also parallel with Tomlinson (2008) - rather than depending solely on professionally and commercially imported textbooks, English teachers of second language learners should also select local and non-commercial materials driven by the needs and wants of their own pupils.

5. CONCLUSION

The researchers of this study were able to explore in depth the experience and challenges the TESL student teachers went through during the process of creating the reading materials, and implementing those activities.

Generally, the findings indicate that the TESL student teachers gained beneficial experiences when developing their own personal narrative texts and reading activities based on the personal narrative texts. This experience enables them to gain valuable experiences on how to be producers of reading materials rather than just being consumers. They also learnt to do text selection more effectively by analysing their targeted pupils' proficiency level, age, needs and interests. They were also aware that the reading texts used for reading lessons should contain information that the pupils could apply in their daily life.

There were two major challenges faced by the participants. First, they had difficulties in identifying suitable vocabulary, number of words, topic, content and length in creating the personal narrative texts. Second, they expressed that they had lack of knowledge about the targeted pupils.

It is hoped that findings of the study could provide insights to the course developers as well as the course lecturers on the needs of TESL student teachers to be exposed to developing reading materials. It is because it is vital for the TESL student teachers to be equipped with the knowledge on how to do reading materials selection and development. In other words, more trainings or courses could be conducted to equip TESL student teachers

with the skills and knowledge to create reading materials and activities rather than just relying on commercially produced textbooks.

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