

A STUDY ON MENTORING PRACTICES FOR NOVICE TESL TEACHERS: A MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Accepted date: 14-09-2018

Published date: 15-12-2018

To cite this document: Singh, J. K. U., & Omar, A. (2018). A Study of Mentoring Practices for Novice TEDL Teachers: A Malaysian Perspective. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 3 (21), 81-93.

Abstract: *The study aims to examine the mentoring practices applied by TESL mentor teachers to support novice TESL teachers in secondary schools in the Malaysian context. The mentoring practices consist of five elements, Personal Attributes, System Requirements, Pedagogical Knowledge, Feedback and Modelling. This study also investigates the perception of TESL mentor teachers on the mentoring programme. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative method in data collection, which involved 40 Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) mentor teachers. The data collection instruments implemented are documented analysis of the course plan (Panduan Pembangunan Guru Baharu-PPGB 2015), semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires. Based on the findings gathered, 95% of TESL mentor teachers opined that the mentoring programme for novice teachers is beneficial and crucial to assist novice TESL teachers. However, 5% of TESL mentor teachers remarked the mentoring programme as ineffective and not helpful to help novice TESL teachers in schools. The implication derived from this study is a mentoring programme for novice TESL teachers in really helpful and vital to support these novice TESL teachers to embark on their journey in schools. Thus, the mentoring programme should be strengthened and be updated all the time.*

Keywords: *Mentoring Practices, Five Elements, Perception, Mentoring Programme*

Introduction

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010) has reported that the quality of future education lies on several crucial elements which are quality teachers, teacher education and effective teacher training. As such, teacher preparation is a crucial component in ensuring teacher effectiveness. Novice Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) teachers need support and guidance throughout their first to three years of teaching. Thus, mentoring programme is undeniably a vital aspect in preparing them to survive in the teaching field. In Malaysia, the Education Ministry has started to implement a mentoring programme to

address the problems faced by novice teachers. As of late year 2010, all novice teachers would undergo a beginning teacher induction programme with the objective of gearing excellent work culture on duties and responsibilities more systematically. This respective programme will be mentored by experienced teachers together with the school in order to implement more effective teaching and a good quality teacher can be produced. It aims to support novice teachers in Malaysia throughout their first to three years of teaching.

Statement of the Problem

There are myriad of problems and challenges which novice teachers will encounter in the early stages of their career and one of them is facing inadequacies in their own knowledge, skills and attributes as a teacher (Romano, 2008; Starkey & Rawlins, 2012; Wong, Rosnidar & Syakirah, 2015). Without the support from other teachers, these painful experiences will erode the confidence of novice as well as pre-service teachers over time (Andrea, 2010; Ambrosetti, 2014). For a novice teacher, the early years of teaching are often characterized by a “sink-or-swim” or “survival” mentality because not enough careful support and thoughtful development of teaching expertise is given to them over time. (Bartell, 2004).

A mentoring system by schools had been recommended to help novice teachers to adapt to the profession and guide them to the practical aspects of learning to teach (Noraini, Wan Hasmah & Chang, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ambrosetti, 2014). Mentoring is intended to help the novice teachers to adapt and balance their career, skills and expertise as well as their work balance, self-confidence, self-perception and personal influences.

In Malaysia, although Malay language is the official language, English is widely spoken especially in the field of business and it is a fact that English is a compulsory subject in schools in Malaysia. Saying so, novice TESL teachers often face various challenges in the teaching and learning of this language. They have to undergo multiple stages in adapting themselves into the school environment and adjusting to the needs of the school. Thus, a mentoring programme was introduced in late 2010 to assist novice teacher as a mean of support and guidance through their early years of teaching line. Acknowledging the fact that mentor teachers play a very important role in helping novice TESL teachers to grow in the profession, the Ministry of Education has adopted mentoring as an approach to help these novice teachers.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are presented below:

- 1) To investigate the mentoring practices among mentor teachers to support novice TESL teachers in secondary schools in the Malaysian context
- 2) To investigate the perspectives of the TESL mentor teachers on the mentoring practices and mentoring programme

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are presented below:

- 1) How are the mentoring practices conducted to support novice TESL teachers in secondary schools in the Malaysian context?
- 2) What are the perspectives of the TESL mentor teachers on the mentoring practices and mentoring programme?

Literature Review

Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring involves not only mentor teachers and novice teachers, but also the head of the school and district officers. Mentoring can be beneficial to each of them in many ways. For a novice TESL teacher, mentoring is extremely beneficial as this programme helps them to develop professionally in their teaching field and also holistically. The novice TESL teachers will have increased self-confidence and they would perform better due to their decreased stress and

Needs and Challenges of Novice Teachers

Education is a field full of challenges. It is packed with so many systems and loaded tasks. As a novice TESL teacher, it is quite impossible for him or her to get adjusted to the environment. A novice TESL teacher needs time to adapt to the environment and the workload. Often, senior teachers tend to assign more tasks to new teachers as they think they are capable of doing it. However, novice TESL teachers face multiple obstacles and challenges in completing the tasks as they are neither mentored nor guided on ways of doing the tasks. It is vital to assign a mentor for novice TESL teachers as new teachers need support in terms of their work and personal matters as it attributes to their self-confidence, self-perception and personal influences (Vikaraman, Azlin & Mohd Izham, 2017).

Novice teachers need support to increase their quality because teacher's quality is crucial as the development of the education system is highly dependent on teachers (Omebe, 2014). Novice teachers often lack in the management of their workload and time which results in their confidence level eroding. They face problems in many aspects and they need help in cases such as managing a classroom, motivating students, differentiating student learning, assessing students' progress, interaction with colleagues and parents, receiving appropriate advice on school culture, goals and instructional resources, using effective instructional strategies or methods or emotional support (Veenman, 1984; Gordon & Maxey, 2000; Senom and Shahratol, 2013 in Vikaraman, Azlin & Mohd Izham, 2017).

As full-fledged teachers, novice teachers are expected to be perfect in every task they carry out despite of their experiences in the school and teaching life. They have to take up multiple roles resulting them to struggle with the workload and unsureness of carrying out the tasks. For novice teachers, their first year of teaching can be categorized into five stages (Moir, 1999). Those stages are anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation and reflection. Novice teachers tend to perceive teaching field as an easy task but they get the shock when they have to take up numerous tasks other than teaching. When this situation occurs, mentor teachers have to take up their responsibilities in mentoring novice teachers to ensure they are able to commit themselves to the workload and tasks assigned. Mentoring programme is very important at this stage for novice TESL teachers because they would learn and gain experiences in various aspects related to teaching and learning, school, personal development and some important aspects pertaining self-development.

Mentoring Practices for Novice TESL Teachers

As stated by Sharmini Siva Vikaraman, Azlin Norhaini Mansor & Mohd Izham Mohd Hamzah (2017), teacher professional development plays a pivotal role in improving novice teacher quality, student performance and school improvement (p. 159). Mentoring can be defined as an organised, on-going relationship for assisting qualified learners (Ambrosetti, 2014). It functions on a professional level where the mentor plays the role of a critical friend focusing on a reflective practice (Ambrosetti, 2014). Novice teacher mentoring is a type of structured mentorship model that pairs experienced teachers with new teachers for a short period of time

within a teacher education program. These pairings are known as field experiences. (Campbell & Brummett, 2007).

In schools in Malaysia, each novice TESL teacher is assigned a mentor teacher to help them to dwell into the teaching career. Schools need to carry out a mentoring programme for all novice teachers despite of the subjects. Novice TESL teachers are usually paired with an experienced English language teachers who in turn would mentor them on various skills and matters related to personal attributes, pedagogical knowledge, system of the school and Malaysian Education System, personal development through feedback and modelling and overall growth as a quality teacher.

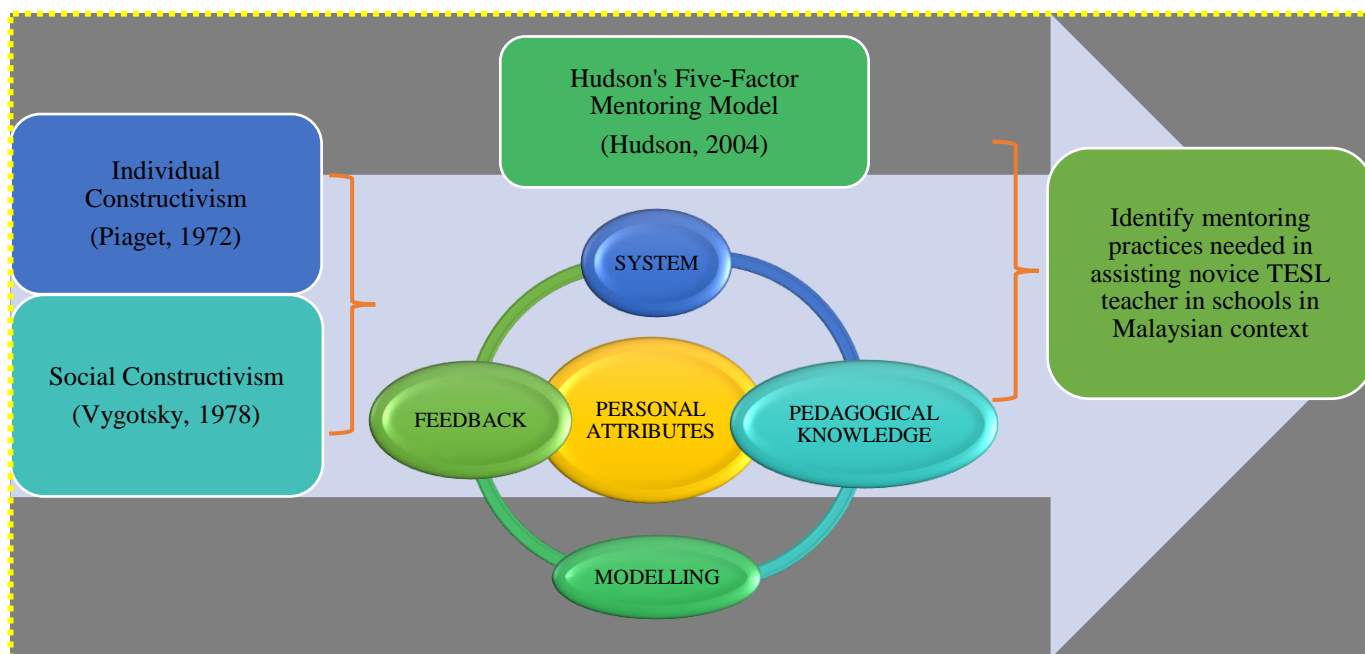
Mentor teachers play two major roles in supporting novice teachers in terms of their career and psychological (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) as well as guide and nurture pre-service teachers through the field experience, customizing each teaching and learning component, while the post-secondary faculty supervisor assists in matching pre-service and mentor teachers, and acts as a liaison between them (Ambrosetti, 2014). Parker (2010) highlighted that novice teachers should be matched with mentors of same content area as this will reduce the anxiety of the novice teachers. This statement is crucial for novice TESL teachers as English language is considered as one of the most challenging subjects in schools.

In order to help other teachers effectively, mentors must be thoughtful practitioners, continuously reflecting on self- practice and professional knowledge (Blank & Sindelar, 1992). Hence, it is important that the mentor teachers possess the right qualities that will enable them to become effective mentor teachers to novice TESL teachers. Mentor needs to have “real-time” interactions (Hudson, 2010) with their novice TESL teachers because teaching is a field that requires the novice TESL teachers to be connected interpersonally, emotionally and socially. The success of mentorships depends largely on the quality of the relationship between participants. Therefore, it is important that mentors and novice TESL teachers be matched up professionally (Blank & Sindelar, 1992). Mentors must have an understanding of the adult learning process and be aware of the needs and development stage of the novice TESL teachers so that they can fully support their growth and professional development (Crasborn et al., 2009).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by Individual Constructivism by Piaget (1972) and Social Constructivism by Vygotsky (1978). These theories go hand in hand with Hudson’s Five Mentoring Model (2004) to guide this research.

Figure 1.0 Theoretical and conceptual Framework: Adapted from Piaget (1972), Vygotsky (1978) and Hudson (2004)



Individual Constructivism and Social Constructivism

This study is guided by the theoretical framework of social constructivism, as presented by Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978). According to constructivist theory, learning is most effective when new knowledge and skills will be used and individuals construct meaning for themselves (Bickhard, 1998 in Hudson, 2004). Constructivism believes that learner’s conception of knowledge are derived from a meaning-making search in which learners construct individual interpretations of their experiences (Roya Jafari Amineh & Hanieh Davatgari Asl, 2015, p. 12). Social constructivism is a theory of sociology and communication in which the individual examines the knowledge of the world and try to comprehend it. These theories agree that learners construct their knowledge. From the point of view of constructivism, the utmost purpose of knowledge is to enable the individuals to function well in the world (Dewey, 1960).

Hudson’s Five-Factor Mentoring Model

Constructivist mentoring may be characterised by Hudson’s Five-Factor Mentoring Model, which has five factors namely personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling, and feedback. The mentoring roles within these factors can be used to frame the novice TESL teacher’s experiences in a constructivist way.

Personal attributes

Effective mentor teachers often utilise their personal and interpersonal skills to engage with the novice TESL teachers. This helps them to build a supportive and trustworthy relationship among each other. Glenn (2006) describes the relationship of mentor and mentee as “give and take”, in which the mentor and mentee care about each other.

System requirements

Education system is a complicated system with curriculum requirements and different aspects of workload. System requirements, is about the knowledge of the organization and the politics in a school. As mentor teachers, they need to be well versed in the content of the curriculum as well as the organization of the school.

Pedagogical knowledge

Pedagogical knowledge, involved content knowledge as well as planning, timetabling lessons, teaching strategies, problem solving, classroom management, questioning skills, implementing effective practices and assessment (Hudson, Skamp & Brooks, 2005).

Modelling

Modelling has a desirable effect on novice TESL teacher's development if it is included in authentic classroom experiences. Modelling is extremely important to the development of the mentee in being a full-fledged teacher.

Feedback

Finally, feedback, as the fifth factor, is an important ingredient in mentoring process, described as a type of communication between mentor and mentee when evaluating the outcome of student learning and setting clear expectations for the mentee (Hudson, 2004).

Methodology

Research Design

This study used mixed-method approach in order to capture the mentoring practices applied by TESL mentor teachers to support novice TESL teachers in Malaysia as well as the perspectives of TESL mentor teachers on mentoring since mixed-method would provide in-depth data. Mixed method research is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analysing and integrating quantitative and qualitative research (FoodRisC, 2016). Mixed-method research can also be defined as “*the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study*” (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2016, p. 555).

Research Participants

Participants in this study were 40 TESL mentor teachers. The researcher has opted for two types of sampling; convenience and purposive samplings. As stated by Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2016), there are usually multiple samples in mixed-method studies. For semi-structured interviews, convenience and purposive samplings were used. A convenience sample is a group of individuals who conveniently are available for the study (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2016, p. 100). The researcher has applied convenience sampling so that the researcher can easily gain data from the participants from *Hilir Perak* and *Batang Padang* as these locations are nearby to the researcher.

Table 1: Selection of Participants for Semi-Structured Interviews

Participants	Criteria	Sample
Mentor teachers	- Appointed mentor to novice TESL teachers - Major in English Language	4 (2 from respective districts)

A survey questionnaire was also conducted with a set of participants. The participants were 40 TESL mentor teachers from *Perak*. The participants were selected purposefully throughout *Perak* to suit the research. Merriam (2001) agreed that purposive sampling is an excellent way to choose participants because the participants have the ability to provide information to the extent that there will be no any redundant information.

Instruments

Semi-structured Interviews

Interview is a method of data collection involving the researcher asking questions to get the answers or response from the participants. For this research, the researcher has decided to use semi-structured interview.

“Semi-structured interviews focus on specific themes but cover them in a conversational style. They are often the best way for learning about the motivations behind people’s choices and behaviour, their attitudes and beliefs, and the impacts on their lives of specific policies or events. And they can provide valuable information that wasn’t anticipated by the researcher.”

(Oxfam Global Research Team, 2012)

The purpose of this instrument is to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four TESL mentor teachers (two from each districts of *Hilir Perak* and *Batang Padang*) to gain in-depth information of the mentoring practices and their experience with it. The interview also explored their opinions regarding mentoring which includes their beliefs, assumptions and knowledge as well as their expectations.

Survey Questionnaire

Survey questionnaire can be defined as a mean of gathering information from a sample to gain information on respective research (Ferber, Sheatsley, Turner & Waksberg, 1980). The purpose of this instrument is to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. A survey was conducted with 40 TESL mentor teachers throughout *Perak*.

The aim of the survey was to gain insight from the TESL novice teachers on their conceptualisation of mentoring and how mentoring was conducted in their perspective. It also provided data on their experiences in mentoring and what they believe they have gained from the programme. According to Trochim (2006), survey is one of the most important element applied in a research.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews was extracted and analysed through thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within a set of data. The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews from TESL mentor teachers was transcribed and further coded according to themes such as personal attributes of a TESL mentor teacher and novice TESL teachers, roles of mentor teachers in schools, types of support from TESL mentor teachers to novice TESL teachers and other themes which is discussed further in Result and Discussion section.

As for the survey questionnaire, it was tabled and analysed thoroughly through themes. These themes were analysed in line with the themes from the transcription of semi-structured interviews by using the six steps of thematic analysis. Finally, the themes were reviewed and

refined to identify the process of mentoring practices applied by mentor teachers to support novice TESL teachers.

Results and Discussion

The researcher's purpose in conducting this mixed method was to investigate the mentoring practices among mentor teachers to support novice TESL teachers in secondary schools in the Malaysian context as well as to gain insights on the mentoring practices on novice TESL teachers by the TESL mentor teachers.

Demographics of Participants

Based on the data collected from TESL mentor teachers, the number of female participants was 33 (82.5%), while male comprised 7 (17.5%). The participants of this research were of different ethnicities, namely Malay, Chinese, Indian and Others with percentage of 37.5%, 20%, 27.5% & 15%. The participants of this mentoring programme aged between 21 to 30 years (2), 31 to 40 years (12), 41 to 50 (18) and 51 to 60 years old (8). 30% of the participants taught lower secondary, 55% in upper secondary and 15% in sixth form. 37.5% of the participants had taught for more than 23 years, 15.0% of participants with 19 to 23 years of experience, 27.5% participants with experience of 14 to 18 years and 5.0% with experience of 4 to 8 years. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants each chosen from the survey questionnaire.

Research Question 1

How are the mentoring practices conducted by TESL mentor teachers to support novice TESL teachers in secondary schools in the Malaysian context?

Table 2: Items Mean and Standard Deviation

Item	Mean (N=40)	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Personal Attributes	4.04	0.83	0.86
System Requirements	3.88	0.88	0.62
Pedagogical Knowledge	4.05	0.87	0.94
Modelling	4.06	0.85	0.95
Feedback	4.02	0.90	0.86

As can be seen from the table, the five factors are equally important in supporting novice TESL teachers. These five factors go hand in hand to assist novice TESL teachers in surviving their first to three years of teaching in schools. Majority of the TESL mentor teachers agreed that these factors contributed to the adjustment of novice TESL teachers in schools.

Table 3: Mentor Teachers' Reports on Their Personal Attributes for Mentoring

Attributes	Mean (N=40)	Standard Deviation
Clear communication	4.30	0.76
Encouraged the novice TESL teacher(s)	4.25	0.76
Supportive	3.98	1.10
Good rapport	4.03	0.97
Well-being	3.93	0.94
Instilled positive attitude	4.03	0.28
Attentive	3.80	0.97
Comfortable in talking	4.08	0.80
Confidence	4.00	0.77

Based on the table, it is clearly indicated that having clear communication (95%) and giving encouragement (93%) are two main mentoring practices that were given more importance as a mean of support to novice TESL teachers. Other personal attributes include being supportive with the mean of 3.98, having a good rapport with novice TESL teacher (4.03), taking into consideration of the well-being of novice TESL teacher (3.93), instilling positive attitude (4.03), being attentive (3.80), comfortable in talking to novice TESL teachers *4.08) and instilling confidence (4.00). This results reflect the mentoring practices in each factor play a significant role in ensuring the adaptation of novice TESL teachers in schools. Moreover, it also indicate the level of mentor-mentee interactions.

Table 4: Mentor Teachers' Reports on Mentoring System Requirements

Mentoring Practices	Mean (N=40)	Standard Deviation
School policies	3.95	0.88
Outlined curriculum / syllabus documents	3.80	0.88

TESL mentor teachers recorded their responses on items associated with addressing the educational system requirements. More than 30 TESL mentor teachers reported that they provided insights of school policies and outlined curriculum as well as syllabus documents to

novice TESL teachers. This infers that this factor has a vital role in novice TESL teachers' lives as a teacher, in which it was made more explicit for the novice TESL teachers.

Table 5: Mentor Teachers' Reports on Mentoring Pedagogical Knowledge

Mentoring Practices	Mean (N=40)	Standard Deviation
Lesson preparation	3.95	0.93
Classroom management strategies	4.10	0.81
Teaching strategies	3.95	0.85
Timetable	3.85	0.80
Problem solving strategies	4.03	0.73
Review lesson plans	4.20	0.99
Viewpoints on teaching	4.55	0.85
Teaching matters and personal issues	3.80	0.97
Discussed questioning skills	4.25	1.03
Discussed content knowledge	4.90	0.38

Most mentoring practices take place around the TESL mentor teacher's pedagogical knowledge. It is undeniable that pedagogic knowledge need to be mastered in order to carry out a proper teaching and learning process. More than 75% of TESL mentor teachers agreed that they provided support in terms of lesson preparation, classroom management strategies, teaching strategies, timetabling, problem solving strategies, reviewing lesson plans, giving viewpoints on teaching, discussing questioning skills and discussing content knowledge. However, 29 TESL mentor teachers stated that they provided support when it came to teaching matters and personal issues.

Table 6: Mentor Teachers' Reports on Providing Feedback to Novice TESL Teachers

Practices	Mean (N=40)	Standard Deviation
Feedback on a regular basis	4.15	0.80
Feedback only when asked	3.58	1.15
Oral feedback	4.05	0.85
Articulated expectations	4.08	0.80

Observed teaching for feedback	4.23	0.89
Written feedback	4.05	0.90

Feedback is essential for novice TESL teachers in the subject area. 85% of TESL mentor teachers provided feedback on a regular basis as well as written feedback. This is important because novice TESL teachers need constructive feedback to improve themselves in the subject area. 63% reported that they provided feedback when the novice TESL teachers asked. 86% of TESL mentor teachers indicated that they provided oral feedback and articulated their expectations to novice TESL teachers. 88% stated that they observed novice TESL teachers teaching to provide feedback to them.

Table 7: Mentor Teachers' Reports on Their Modelling of Teaching

Item	Mean (N=40)	Standard Deviation
Modelled a lesson	3.75	1.03
Displayed enthusiasm	3.95	1.03
Modelled effective teaching	3.85	1.05
Modelled effective classroom management	3.85	0.92
Assisted in reflection	4.10	0.84
Guidance in planning	4.08	0.76
Demonstrated well-designed activities	3.85	0.62

More than half of TESL mentor teachers modelled a lesson for novice TESL teachers, displayed enthusiasm for English language, modelled effective teaching, modelled effective classroom management, assisted in reflection, guided the novice TESL teachers in planning and demonstrated well-designed activities.

Research Question 2

What are perspectives of the TESL mentor teachers on the mentoring practices and mentoring programme?

From the survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the TESL mentor teachers, they felt the mentoring programme has a huge impact on the development of the novice TESL teachers and on them too. They stated that the mentoring practices applied have also helped them to develop their career through the discussion sessions with novice TESL teachers.

Limitations of Study

This study focuses on Malaysian context and survey is administered throughout *Perak* to gain data. However, only 40 mentor teachers were selected for this research to answer the survey questions. A larger scale of sampling might produce different results. For interview, this study only focused on two districts which are *Hilir Perak* and *Batang Padang*, in the state of *Perak*.

From the two districts selected, four English mentor teachers were chosen as the participants of this study. The sampling has been done specifically according to the expertise of the participants. Due to the fact that the study only extends to two districts for interview, the results may vary if a larger sampling is taken. However, through this study, the researchers will be able to identify the practices involved in mentoring.

Recommendations of Study

A study can be conducted further on novice TESL teachers on the core elements of mentoring practices. Through this study, we would be able to identify the perspectives from the novice TESL teachers' views.

Conclusion

Through this study, the researcher was able to draw a conclusion that mentoring practices are important for novice TESL teachers. These mentoring practices help these teachers not only to adapt to new environment but also get familiarised with the subject area. These novice TESL teachers face numerous challenges, thus, mentoring programmes need to be enhanced to assist and support the novice TESL teachers.

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