

***Teacher Education in Malaysia:  
Preparing and Training of English Language  
Teacher Educators***

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This paper presents the findings of a study into the profiles of English Language teacher educators in the Malaysian teacher educator system. The objective of this study is to identify the level of preparation that teacher educators have when entering Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE). In addition, the study also aims to identify the kind of training given to teacher educators while in the system. The data for this study was obtained through e-mail and telephone interviews. The sample for this study was 20 English Language teacher educators in ITE. The findings from this study revealed that no formal teacher educator training was given prior to recruitment into an ITE and some teacher educators received various forms of training upon entry into a teacher training institution while others were left to learn on the job. The findings of this study also present various implications on the need for formal training of teacher educators before they are appointed as teacher educators in ITE.

**Key words: teacher education in Malaysia, English language, teacher educators**

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher educators are one of the main stakeholders in teacher education. Research on teacher educators has developed over the few decades, but little systematic research on teacher educators had been developed (see Korthagen, Loughran & Lunenberg, 2005; Martinez, 2008; Murray & Male, 2005). Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg (2005) propose that there are several concerns which need to be addressed in order to understand teacher educators as professionals. The proposed four questions are as follows:

1. What do teachers educators do and how is their work constructed?
  2. What competences are germane to teaching about teaching?
  3. What support is necessary in the professional development of teacher educators?
  4. What is the role of teacher educators as both consumers and producers of knowledge?
- (p. 109)

Martinez (2008) considers that these four questions as fundamental in understanding characteristics and professionalism of teacher educators. She states that Question 1 explores qualifications, recruitment process and career pathway of teacher educators. Question 2 examines the knowledge and skills needed for teacher educators. Question 3 looks at the induction, training and professional development of teacher educators. Lastly, Question 4 researches into learning and teaching processes among teacher educators.

The impetus for the present study is due to the scarcity of studies published on teacher educators in Malaysia. This study aims to examine Question 1 and 3 proposed by Korthagen, Loughran and Lueneberg (2005). The focus of this study is on the level of preparation that teacher educators have when entering Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE). In addition, the study also aims to identify the kind support given to teacher educators while in the system.

### **Entry Qualification**

Entry qualifications for teacher educators vary. Most of the teacher educators are recruited based on teaching experience besides the required first university degree in the relevant specialization. However, the trend of looking for candidates who hold postgraduate degrees has increased. Twombly, Wolf-Wendel, Williams and Green (2006) reported that tertiary institutions in the US faced shortages of teacher educators who hold doctorate qualification at the time of their study. One reason was that good teachers sometimes did not see pursuing a postgraduate degree a necessary. They also pointed out that some teacher educators were caught between the tension of research and training trainee teachers. The teacher educators felt pressurized by research requirement and time consuming training of trainee teachers.

The myth that good teachers make good teacher educators is interrogated by Karthagen, Loughran and Lueneberg (2005). Many studies (see Dinkelman, Margolis & Sikkenga, 2006; Kitchen, 2005) indicate that there is a misconception that teacher educators need not be provided induction or training when they join teacher training institutions. This has resulted in Murray and Male (2005, p.125) labeling new teacher educators as “poorly understood occupational groups”, and that there is more work to be done in the training of teacher educators.

### **Training and Support for Teacher Educators**

The role of teacher educators is not limited to training trainee teachers. Their role is complex for they not only need to support learning but also role models (Korthagen, Loughran & Lunenberg, 2005), and provide emotional support to trainee teachers (Walker, Gleaves & Grey, 2006). However, as indicated by Buchberger, Campos, Kallos and Stephenson (2000), Dinkelman, Margolis and Sikkenga (2006), Guifoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar and Placier (1995) and Murray (2005), training and support provided for teacher

educators at the initial stage of their career are minimal.

Sometimes a mentor system was provided, but the quality of support varied. Martinez (2008) reported that although mentor system was in place, new teacher educators felt they were thrown into deep end as their mentors were too busy to answer their questions. She also observed that mentor support which new teacher educators needed was a system in which experienced mentors made time to mentor and provide guidance in the working framework and practices in an institution. Martinez quoted Sinkinson (1997) to highlight the informal professional assistance and systematic implementation of the mentor system.

### **Teacher Training Institutions in Malaysia**

Malaysia has a long tradition in teacher training. The first teacher training college was the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC), established in 1922. In 1957, its name was changed to Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris based on the recommendations of the Razak Report. The college broke tradition and opened its gates to women students for the first time in 1975. It was then upgraded to an institute and renamed Institute Perguruan Sultan Idris in 1987. Ten years later, the institution was further upgraded and given university status and came to be called Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and its sole focus continues to be in teacher education.

With the increasing demands for education for the growing young Malaysian population and to meet the need for trained teachers in both primary and secondary schools, the Ministry of Education Malaysia set up teacher training colleges throughout the country. Every state had at least one teacher training college, except Perlis where there has been none. As in the case of Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris, these teacher training colleges also underwent various similar transformations and in 2009, the 27 existing teacher training colleges were upgraded into degree-awarding institutions and were renamed *Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia* (Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia). Teacher training colleges which had initially conferred

certificates and then diplomas were finally allowed confer their own degrees.

Besides, the teacher training colleges, faculties of education in public universities, provide teacher training for teachers to be absorbed in government schools. Initially, teacher training colleges undertook the training of teachers for primary schools while the universities were responsible for secondary schools. This too has changed over the years and now both Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE) and universities train teachers for primary and secondary schools.

The Malaysian government initiated the Economic Transformation Program in 2010 with the aim of transforming Malaysia into a high-income by 2020. In this program, teacher training remains a priority area for the Malaysian government; however, the government has gone as far as to open teacher training to the private sector as the public sector is unable to meet the growing demands for qualified teachers in Malaysian primary and secondary schools. The Economic Transformation Program states teacher training is now one of the segments in Malaysian private education sector.

Within the Economic Transformation Program, in the National Key Economic Area (NKEA), expanding private teacher training appears as an Entry Point Project (EPP) and is described as a Rapid Scale-Up Initiative. The Economic Transformation Program goes as far as to state, “We will allow private providers to provide pre-service and in-service training for primary and secondary school teachers. Private providers will be responsible for determining the subject areas ..., as well as what business model they use (e.g. face to face, e-learning, or blended models). (Performance Management and Delivery Unit, Prime Minister’s Department (PEMANDU), 2010, p. 487). This recent development is a major shift in the government stance towards teacher education and has opened the doors for teacher educators of various qualifications and teaching experience to enter the teacher educator profession.

There has also been a further development in the mode of delivery of the teacher training programs. Traditionally, teacher training had been very much a face to face activity and teacher trainees were required to be on campus for

their training. From the early 1990s, with the setting up of Open University Malaysia and its offering of in-service teacher training, open distance learning which incorporated a blended mode of face to face and on-line learning became yet another mode of teacher training. Today, both Open Universities and some public universities conduct teacher training in the blended mode of face to face and on-line learning.

All these developments suggest that more and more people are going into the teacher training profession. The qualifications, training and preparation of the people who assume the role of teacher educators needs to be researched on. This preliminary study will help raise awareness of the current situation in a small way which could lead to a large-scale study on this area.

### **Teacher Educator as a Profession in Malaysia**

Teacher education in the Malaysian government's Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE) has been under the purview of a division in the Ministry of Education called *Bahagian Pendidikan Guru* (BPG) or the Teacher Education Division. Those who desired to become teacher educators or teacher educators often saw it as a career pathway for experienced teachers with suitable qualifications; a Bachelor of Education or even a Diploma in Education, was sufficient in the early years (Vethamani, 2010).

Entry into ITE as a teacher educator was either through government posting or through application. Today, many teacher educators in ITE hold Master and doctoral degrees. In 2004, 79 PhD holders, 1674 master degree holders, 1349 basic degree holders and 124 non-degree holders were employed in teacher training colleges and in the Teacher Education Division of the MOE (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2004). Though teaching experience was considered an important criterion, it was not necessarily the determining factor for eligibility for recruitment as a teacher educator.

For recruitment of lecturers or teacher educators, into Faculties of Education in universities, the main criterion was the possession of a minimum relevant Master degree in Education; teaching experience was not a

major criterion. Often, lecturers with Master and Doctoral degrees with little or no teaching experience could be appointed as university lecturers who then took on the role of teacher educators. With the urgent need to provide tertiary teacher training programs to meet the demand for teachers with a degree qualification, many faculties of education and teacher training colleges have also been set up by private education providers. This again raises questions on how qualified are these teacher educators to provide effective teacher training.

## **OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The main objective of this study is to identify the level of preparation that teachers educators have when entering ITE. In addition, the study also aims to identify the kind of training given to teacher educators while in the system. The following are three research questions to fulfill the objectives of the study:

1. What qualifications did English Language teacher educators possess upon entry into a teacher training institution?
2. What kind of training or preparation was provided for the English Language teacher educators?
3. How do English teacher educators develop in their profession?

Research Question 1 solicits qualifications of English Language teacher educators in terms of academic qualifications, levels and years of teaching experience. Research Question 2 looks at the types of training or preparation which they have gone through before and while they work in ITE. The last research question explores how the teacher educators and ITE develop their profession.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach in understanding English Language teacher educators in ITE in Malaysia. The data for this study were collected through e-mail and telephone interviews. E-mail interviews were used as the main instrument of data collection while telephone interview were used to get clarifications from the sample of this study.

### Samples

Teacher educators from six teacher training colleges throughout Malaysia participated in this study. The Snowballing sampling technique was used in this study. It is a sampling technique that allows process of accumulation of referrals, in which each located and interviewed informant suggests other informants (Arce, 2001; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). This process is carried out until saturation of data is reached. This sampling process was useful as the researcher could connect to the sample through acquaintances and their contacts in the teacher education fraternity. It also allowed the researcher to have a better representative in terms of geographical distribution and among the ITE which offer TESOL as a major.

A total of 20 teacher educators responded to a questionnaire which was administered through email correspondence. These 20 teacher educators were from six different ITE which offer TESOL as a major in Malaysia. The geographical distribution of ITE also covers West and East Malaysia. The distribution of the participants in terms of ITE is as follows:

**TABLE 1**  
**Samples for the Study**

Institute of Teacher Education (ITE)	Number of Participants
A	7
B	4
C	3
D	3
E	2
F	1

## **Instruments**

Interviews were the main data collection method. According to James and Busher (2009), qualitative research in virtual sphere, such as e-mails, is a legitimate avenue for researchers to construct and validate knowledge as compared to traditional face to face method. There are two advantages of using e-mails for data collection, and they are at the level of execution (see James & Busher, 2009) and quality of content (see Kanayama, 2003). E-mails are cost effective and flexible in terms of responding time. As a form asynchronous online communication, emails allow the researchers and participants time to organize their thoughts before they send or reply their e-mails (Bampton & Cowton, 2002; Gordon, Petocz & Reid, 2007). As such, the quality of content is more thoughtful and personalized (Kivits, 2005).

All the questions were open-ended and participants provided their own personal and unguided responses. The interview was conducted in October 2010 and all participants replied within a week. There were 9 interview questions. Questions 1 to 4 were related to the participants' personal details. The first question was to identify the duration which participants had become English Language teacher educators. The second question required the participants to state how they were admitted into an ITE while the third question asked how many years' teaching experience the participants had when they joined the ITE. The fourth question dealt with the participants' academic and professional qualifications when they were admitted into the ITE. These questions were to understand how ITE in Malaysia recruitment process because unlike public universities in Malaysia, ITE do not advertise in the newspaper for recruitment of staff.

Questions 5 to 8 dealt with training which is important in how teacher educators viewed their job as a profession (Martinez, 2008). Item 5 asked if the participants were provided any training before entering an ITE while Question 6 dealt with the kind of training they were given upon joining an ITE. Question 7 asked for the participants' view on training which they thought they should have. Question 8 asked about details on how the

participants equipped themselves to be effective teacher educators. Question 9 solicited participants' views on their experience as teacher educators. The nine interview questions are as follows:

1. How many years have you been in an Institute of Teacher Education?
2. How did you enter an Institute of Teacher Education? You applied or were transferred to it?
3. How many years of teaching experience in schools did you have when you joined an Institute of Teacher Education?
4. What were your qualifications when you entered an Institute of Teacher Education?
5. Were you given any training to be a teacher educator upon entry into an Institute of Teacher Education?
6. Have you been given any specific training to be a teacher educator since joining an Institute of Teacher Education?
7. If you have not been given any training to be a teacher educator, do you think, such training would have helped you? Why?
8. How did you equip yourself to become a teacher educator?
9. Any comments you like to make about being a teacher educator.

Telephone interviews were used to get clarification from the sample of this study (see Creswell, 2004; Ibsen & Ballweg, 1974). Telephone interviews were used because of the geographical distance between the researcher and several of the participants in this study. Among the 20 participants, 10 gave their telephone contact details and were subsequently interviewed through telephone. The interview questions were based on the interview questions listed in the e-mail interviews. However, attention was given more on interview questions 7 to 9 as they required more detail elaborations from the participants. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews. The transcriptions were emailed back to the participants for verification.

In qualitative research, researchers are instruments in a study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1998). Within the context of this study, the researcher played the role of enquirer to solicit responses from the participants. The researcher intended to disclose meanings and knowledge

from the participants' perspectives through e-mail and telephone interviews, a dialogical process (Crotty, 1998). The researcher as a teacher educator has had his views on professional development of teacher educators during the course this study. To reduce biasness, the researcher referred to two studies which explored the professional development for teacher educators (see Korthagen, Loughran & Lunenberg, 2005; Martinez, 2008) to keep this study focused. However, according to Merriam (1998), instead of compromising the credibility of a study, a researcher's experience and knowledge on the subject of study could contribute to a more detail study. For the case of this study, the researcher's experience in working as a teacher educator in Malaysia helps provide more depth to the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher used tabulation for the responses provided by the participants for Interview Question 1 to Question 8 because these eight questions solicited factual information. For Interview Question 9, coding strategies as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) were used in this study in which responses based on the topic discussed. The two codes used were Attitude Code and Outcome Code. Attitude Code was derived from teacher educators' disposition in writing towards teacher educators as professionals. Professional Code was based on the skills and practices which teacher educators should possess. The coding system in this study was used for Interview Question 9 *Any comments you like to make about being a teacher educator?* For this question, the researcher coded the participants' answers into two themes and established the themes to answers from the previous questions. The coding system is as follows:

**TABLE 2**  
**Coding System**

Codes	Themes	Examples
Attitude	Teacher educators are conscientious professionals.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher training <u>involves a lot of self-driven initiatives in order to excel</u> as an effective Teacher educator. (A, p. 3).</li> <li>2. One <u>needs commitment, willing to accept changes and try out new invention</u> (in terms of teaching strategies/ approaches/methodology etc). (P, p. 4).</li> </ol>
Professional	Teacher training is a knowledge and skill-based profession.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. have learnt to be <u>more flexible in term of learner needs. ( adult learners vs young learners)</u> (S, p. 4).</li> <li>2. To be a teacher educator you <u>need to have ‘educator presence’...</u> (R, p. 4)</li> </ol>

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are organized according to three sections—*Qualification, Training* and *Views on Roles of Teacher Educators*. Answers for Interview Questions 1 to 4 formed findings for *Qualification*, Questions 5 to 7 for *Training*, and combination of Questions 8 and 9 for *Views on Roles of Teacher Educators*.

### Qualification

The number of years as teacher educators among the 20 participants in the ITE was diverse; it ranged from 4 to 26 years. The table below depicts it:

**TABLE 3**  
**Numbers of Year in ITE**

Number of Years as Teacher Educator in ITE	Number of Participants
1-5	4
6-10	5
11-15	6
16-20	3
21-25	1
26-30	1

Of the 20 participants in this study, 11 participants had applied for transfer to an ITE and they were granted their application. The remaining 9 participants in this study were transferred by the Ministry of Education from schools to ITE. The transfer by the Ministry of Education was considered as a promotion which teacher educators' work had been recognized. The voluntary transfer and transfer by the Ministry in Malaysia to an ITE is not a common practice in other countries, such as the US where recruitment is done through open recruitment (see Twombly, Wolf-Wendel, Williams & Pamela Green, 2006).

When they entered an ITE, 6 of the participants in this study were holders of a Bachelors degree while 14 were holders of a Masters degree. Although all the participants had at the least one qualification in education, none had any formal qualification in teacher training before they joined any ITE. The entry requirements as provided by the participants indicated that skills and performance were main considerations at the time the participants were recruited. These entry requirements could be supported by the fact that all the participants in this study had 5 to 25 years of teaching experience in schools before they joined their respective ITE. Many of these teacher educators had taught in both primary and secondary schools prior to the appointment to an ITE. The table below presents the breakdown of the number of years of teaching for the participants in this study:

**TABLE 4**  
**Teaching Experience in Schools**

Number of Years of Teaching in Schools	Number of Participants
1-5	1
6-10	6
11-15	6
16-20	5

Although all the participants in this study had teaching experience, Participant S in this study mentioned in the telephone interview that there have been appointments of “young lecturers” (meaning teacher educators) who have a only a Bachelor degree and no teaching experience. The participant added that the only teaching experience these “young lecturers” had was through the 12-week teaching practicum stint prior to their completion of their degree program. Participant S’s concern was, “*I wonder how these ‘young lecturers’ are coping with the task of managing in-service and pre-service teachers. How are they able to advise experienced teachers on classroom management, pedagogy matters and such?*” (S, p. 2). When Participant S was asked if there was a guideline on the recruitment practice, Participant S mentioned there was but it was considered private and confidential.

### **Training**

A revealing finding in this study was that none of the participants in the study had been given any kind of training nor did they possess any formal qualification in teacher education prior to their entry into ITE. All the participants were appointed as teacher educators after they had been selected by the Ministry and sent straight to the ITEs without any formal or even informal training. The need for training was voiced by the participants when they were asked if they had been given any training in the area of teacher training prior to their entry into ITE, would they have found it useful. All the respondents said “yes”. The main reasons were as follows:

1. There was a need to change from being a teacher to becoming a teacher educator;
2. There was a need to be better equipped as teacher educators;
3. There will be less need to learn on the job.

Of the 20 participants in this study, 13 of them were given a two-week induction course organized by the Teacher Education Division of the Ministry of Education when they joined ITE. The remaining 7 participants were not given any training upon entering into any ITE. However, of these 7 participants, one was given a mentor to help her in supervising student-teachers during their teaching practicum at schools. Another 2 participants mentioned that they just learned on the job, while carrying out their work.

There was a marked difference in the response to the training teacher educators received while serving in the Institutes of Teacher Education. Of the 20 participants in this study, 16 of them indicated that they received relevant training from staff in the Education Division of the Ministry of Education and their own ITE. Only 4 participants in this study mentioned that they did not receive any training specifically related to teacher training. Those who received training mentioned that they attended short courses on mentoring, especially for teaching practicum and training the educator courses which they found useful for their work.

One of the recurring answers from the participants regarding training was the mentoring program. Participant B, *“And now, there is the buddy support system for newcomers to shadow senior lecturers and learn on the job.”* revealed a support mechanism offered for new teacher educators. The mentoring program was discussed in positive manners as all participants who indicated such program considered it as useful. Participant H’s answer summarized participants attitude towards mentoring system: *“I learned from my “mistakes” and learned from my mentor while carrying out my duties as a teacher educator.”* Participants’ comments on mentoring system were in tandem with Murray’s (2005) report in which mentors’ and teaching team support were crucial in assisting transition of new teacher educators.

However, Murray also cautioned that variables in the quality and availability of support as opposed to mentors' and mentee's expectations might produce different outcomes.

Several participants who did not receive training claimed that they turned to their previous experience to compensate their lack of training. Participant L's compensation strategy exemplifies such practice. Her response is as follows:

*My experiences in the primary, secondary, as an English Language officer helps make me prepare my lectures using real life experiences. I also found that teaching and training are 2 different tasks. Most of my lectures I teach and impart knowledge but I use my tutorials to train using simulation and microteaching*

The participants considered real experience in the classroom was better training ground than courses. They felt that their experience as teachers stood them in good stead on becoming teacher educators. They value their experience and indicated that they would share their best practices to their teacher trainees.

This training condition stated by the participants was similar to Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg's (2005) and Martinez's (2008) claim where very few teacher educators were prepared for the transition from teaching students to training teachers. Some of the effects of the lack of training include what Murray and Male (2005) indicated that tension between teaching and demands from the institutions. In addition, some of the teacher educators found it difficult to cope with the job responsibilities in higher education institutions (see Walker, Gleaves & Grey, 2006). Although the participants did not reveal much on the effects of lack of training, their responses to the interviews indicated that induction course and continuous training were necessary. When there was a tension between what they should achieve as demanded by the institution or personal expectation with what they were not prepared for, they had their compensatory strategy—previous classroom experience.

The responses provided by the participants for Interview Questions 1 to 7 revealed that they did not have any formal training to be teacher educators prior to their entry into ITE. They also indicated that the training they later received were in the form of in-service short courses which were related to some aspects of teacher training. Question 8 elicited information from the participants on how they equipped themselves to be teacher educators. The table below presents the course of actions the participants took to equip themselves to be teacher educators:

**TABLE 5**  
**Actions Taken to be Equipped as Teacher Educators**

Actions Taken	Number of Participants
Reading and researching	19
Attending conferences and courses	8
Learning from senior teacher educators	5
Reflecting on their own practice	5
Learning through working with local and foreign teacher educators	4
Discussion with colleagues	3
Learning while on the job	2
Training others	1
Joining professional bodies	1
Experimenting with new ideas	1

The participants in this study carried out a number of actions to better equip themselves as teacher educators. Almost all the participants mentioned that they read and researched in the area of teacher education. The main sources of information were books and journal articles. Three participants mentioned that they used the Internet to get the latest information on teacher training. Professional development through attending courses and conferences, besides those provided by the Teacher Education Division and ITE, was the second most common means used by these teacher educators. They attended and presented papers in national and international conferences

organized by local professional organizations (e.g. the Malaysian English Language Teaching Association), Faculties of Education and Faculties of Modern Languages in local universities. Only one participant mentioned that she was a member of a professional organization.

In the telephone interviews, five participants mentioned that they present papers regularly in international English language teaching conferences in the South-East Asian region like Thai TESOL Conference in Thailand, CamTESOL conference in Cambodia, Regional English language Centre (RELC) conference in Singapore and in the Asian region largely at the Asia TEFL conferences held all over Asia in such countries like South Korea, China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia. Teacher educators in this study also used their senior and experienced colleagues as resource persons to learn from and five participants mentioned that they reflected on their practice and examined how they could be more effective teacher educators.

Despite the training provided while at the ITE and personal initiatives, some participants expressed concern about how they would fare with their teacher trainees and keep up with developments in ICT. Participant K mentioned *“You have to be on your toes all the time because you will not only be meeting pre-service trainees but also in-service teachers who have been teaching for more years than you.”* This teacher educator did not want to be seen as less knowledgeable or equipped than his students. Another participant, Participant A added that *“You need to be ahead of the trainees and to keep abreast with ICT because the new generation is way ahead of the average lecturer [teacher educator]. You also need to use the latest Internet application like Web 2.0 so that your teaching will not be a turn off and for students to be engaged all the time.”*

The answers by the participants in Question 8 provided a list of survival strategies for the lack of induction or training provided by the ITE or Ministry of Education. These strategies taken were due to two main concerns—teacher trainees and ICT. The concern about teacher trainees was valid because the teacher educators were not informed about the teaching

approaches and learning strategies used by adult learners. Some inexperienced teacher educators voiced their concerns about what they could offer to teacher trainees who had been teaching for many years. This situation alluded to Buchberger, Campos, Kasslos and Stephenson's (2000) observation that most teacher educator had not been oriented towards teaching adult learners. The Digital Age posed various problems to teacher educators as they too needed to be trained not only to be able to use new pedagogies which incorporated ICT, but also train the teacher trainees how to use them in their future lessons.

### **Views on Roles of Teacher Educators**

The participants in this study said they enjoyed teaching and being teacher educators. They recognized the challenges that lay before them and how they needed to prepare themselves to be successful teacher educators. None of the participants were negative or mentioned any regret on becoming a teacher educator. They expressed enthusiasm and seemed very motivated in their profession. Two themes emerged in the participants' view on their roles as teacher educators. The two themes are listed as follows:

1. Teacher educators are conscientious professionals.
2. Teacher training is a knowledge and skill-based profession.

### **Conscientious Professionals**

The participants in this study expressed their initiatives to equip themselves to be better teacher educators. For instance, Participant A considered teacher educators required *"a lot of self-driven initiatives in order to excel as an effective Teacher educator."* Participant P also concurred with Participant A by stating that, *"One needs commitment, willing to accept changes and try out new invention (in terms of teaching strategies/approaches/methodology etc). Otherwise, there will be no difference between*

*a teacher and a teacher educator.*” Positive words and phrases, such as “ever willing to”, “need to”, “commitment”, “self driven” and more were seen in their responses to the interview questions. The participants were reflected in their answers to Question 8 when they were asked how they pursued their professional development. Their initiative to read, research and present in conferences indicated their efforts.

According to five participants, another important characteristic of teacher educators was becoming role models. Besides being role models in knowledge and skills, teacher educators also needed to be role models for positive attitudes toward learning. Participant J’s statement summarizes this point:

*Read and learn from seniors and juniors too. Pick up good practices and be advanced in latest technology and pedagogy. Do want to be using latest strategies all for the benefits of your student teachers. You are their role models.*

The discussion of being role models reveals that teacher educators are conscientious professionals. It underlines the importance of not only being academically prepared, but also possessing positive attitudes towards the process of learning and behaving.

### **Knowledge and Skills-Based Profession**

A recurrent statement which was seen in both e-mail and telephone interviews was the emphasis on the differences between teacher educators and school teachers, and teaching students and training teachers. For instance, Participant A wrote that “Teacher Trainers need to understand the scope involving teacher training before applying to be a Teacher Trainer because it’s totally a new endeavour as compared to school.” Participant P also said that “[o]ne needs commitment, willing to accept changes and try out new invention (in terms of teaching strategies/approaches/methodology etc). Otherwise, there will be no difference between a teacher and a teacher

educator.” The differences highlighted the different sets of knowledge and skills needed while teaching teacher trainees and school students.

Among the knowledge and skills that teacher educators needed to equip themselves with was the “scope involving teacher training” and “present condition in school.” The participants indicated that among the knowledge and skills needed for teacher training included philosophy of teacher training in the country, differences between pedagogy and andragogy and “trainer presence” which meant knowledge on how to train adults. These sets of knowledge are different from those which are used to teach students. In addition, Participant M also indicated that an understanding of the present school system and knowledge about the real situation in the school were crucial too. Participant M cautioned that without such knowledge teacher educators would not be able to prepare teachers for their future teaching careers.

## CONCLUSION

The aims of this study were to identify the level of preparation that teacher educators have when entering Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE) in Malaysia and to identify the kind of training given to teacher educators prior entering and while in the system. In view of the small size of the sample, no broad generalizations are made. However, the findings of this study reveal the profiles of the English Language teacher educators in Malaysia from a qualitative approach through e-mail and telephone interviews.

The 20 English Language teacher educators in ITE could be profiled as possessing a Bachelors or Masters degree when entering ITE. However, these teacher educators in this study had all gone on to become holders of Master and Doctoral degrees since their initial appointment as teacher educators. The participants in this study also possessed teaching experience which ranged from 5 years to 26 years upon entry into a teacher training institution. However, there seemed to be some concerns that there were cases where

those who had freshly qualified with a Bachelors degree in education might be entering ITE as teacher educators.

Fresh English Language teacher educator recruits for ITE did not have any formal training or qualifications in teacher education prior to the appointment as teacher educators. Most of these recruits were given 2-week induction courses either by the Teacher Education Division of the Ministry of Education or by senior staff in the ITE upon entry into ITE. Subsequently, these teacher trainees received various short-term in-service courses while working in ITE.

The English language teacher educators developed in their profession in a number of ways. The initiative to develop was generally self-motivated. The participants in this study read, researched and reflected on their profession. They participated and presented in local and international conferences on teaching English. They also learned from their peers and seniors in the profession. When training was not available, the participants resorted to their prior teaching experience to carry out their duties.

The participants in this study considered teacher educators as conscientious and their profession as a knowledge and skills-based profession. All of the participants in this study remained motivated and was conscious about the knowledge and skills needed to train their teacher trainees to become good English Language teachers.

The findings of this study have several implications that the Malaysian Ministry of Education, especially the Teacher Education Division should look into. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, the government clearly stated it would want teaching to be a profession of choice and it goes on to add that better qualified applicants will be admitted into teacher training programs and that these programs too will also be improved (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2004). However, the 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan is silent about training the teacher educator. As seen through the findings in this study, it is indeed important that teachers who aspire to become teacher educators or those who are appointed as teacher educators be given proper training.

The Ministry of Education should consider establishing an Institute of

Teacher Educator Studies similar to the Institute of Principals Studies which was set up to ensure that principals had the appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies to carry out their tasks. A similar institute for teacher educators will provide formal and sustained training for both new recruits and those who are already in the system (Vethamani, 2010). In addition, programs at the Master level can be developed by universities as is the case in foreign universities which now have programs for teacher educators. Quality teacher educator education is essential for the development of qualified and competent teacher educators.

Now that the Malaysian government has open the doors for private education providers to be involved in teacher education, it is also important to set up regulations and requirements on who can be employed as teacher educators to ensure that only qualified personnel are appointed and teacher training is not compromised as it would have serious repercussions on the whole education system (Vethamani, 2010). This study has provided a profile of English Language teacher educators. What has emerged is that despite the lack of formal training, these teacher educators seem to have “survived” and seem to be very motivated in their profession. The situation could be even better if they had been quite the appropriate training which would have prepared them to become competent teacher educators.

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