

Validating the Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles for Teacher Educators from the Perspective of Policy Makers and Teacher Trainers

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Abstract

This paper reports on the validation of the Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles for Teacher Educators by means of interviews with the two policy makers and three teacher trainers. Through document analyses of the prospectuses from certain reputable teacher education institutions as well as the policy documents from countries such as Finland, Australia, Singapore and USA the Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles comprising 6 themes were conceptualized, namely (1) intellectual excitement; (2) quality learning spaces; (3) constructive alignment; (4) international and cultural diversity; (5) climate of inquiry and critical reflection; and (6) nurture good values, attitude and behaviour. Nonetheless, the validity of the conceptualised Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles (TLGP) solely through document analyses is less rigour. Therefore, to increase the rigour, these TLGP were subjected to validation by experts consisting of two policy makers who once held the post of the deputy Director General of Education in the Malaysian Ministry of Education, and three senior teacher trainers at the Teachers' Training Institutes. In the interview, these policy makers and teacher trainers were asked to provide their views of the conceptualised TLGP in terms of scope and breath. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed so as to enable a recursive qualitative analysis. The results indicate that, while the policy makers and teacher educators were generally in agreement with the six themes in the conceptualised TLGP, they, however, extended these themes with two additional themes, namely (1) nature entrepreneurship and (2) value the mother nature. The validated Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles with 8 themes constitute the cornerstone of the development of Teaching and Learning Framework for teacher educators in preparing future teachers.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Guiding Principles, Teacher Educators

Introduction

It is very disheartening to discover that critiques of teaching quality and teacher ability is consistently blame on the preparation that the pre service teachers have received in the Teacher Education Institutions. The accusation maybe because of the findings that show the correlation between teacher training and their performance has been in work since decades. Turney and Wright (1990) for example claimed that there is a direct relation of the quality of teaching in schools to the quality of the training that the teachers have received in their training institutions. Musset (2010) and Sadler (2011) concur with this finding, which focuses on the teacher education institutions when the quality of teaching is concern. The irony is teacher education institutions “have been criticized as ineffective in preparing teacher”(Darling Hammond, 2006, p. 19). It is even popular now when researchers around the globe are interested in studying the ways teachers are recruited, prepared and certified (i.e., Cochran-Smith, Villegas, Abrams, Chavez-Moreno, Mills, & Stern, 2015). Some of the studies have led to the discovery that quality of the teacher education institutions are related to teacher educators who are claimed not capable enough to teach future teacher (Goodwin, Smith, Souto-Manning, Cheruvu, Tan, Reed, & Taveras, 2014).

Hence, teacher Education Institutions around the globe are harassed in ensuring they will produce teachers who are competent and able to meet the demand in teaching career (Gore, Griffith, & Ladwig, 2004). To meet the need of the demand, many countries in the world are now paying more attention in their teacher education programmes. Finland, for example, is recognizing the teacher education as an important part of their higher education transformation (Sahlberg, 2012). Singapore also sees teacher education as platform to boost the human capital for the betterment of their country (Goodwin, 2012). In order to be at the same level of other countries, Malaysia initiated the transformation of teacher education that aspired through her blueprint recently. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013) recognises the quality of the teacher education in the eleven transformation shifts as documented in MEB 2013-2025.

Why does the teacher education becoming a central of discussion in transforming teacher carrier path in the MEB 2013-2025? This is because the carrier path as a teacher started since the selection of student teacher candidates to the first day of their teaching in the classroom (Goh & Wong, 2014). Therefore there is a need to also transform the way teacher educators prepare pre-service teachers to teach (Goh & Blake, 2015). This transformation is needed due to the irrelevance of teacher education preparation for the reality of everyday practice in schools (i.e., Barone, Berliner, Blanchard, Casanova, & McGowan, 1996; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Goh & Blake, 2015; Goh & Matthews, 2011; Goh, Saad & Wong, 2012; Goh & Wong, 2014 Sandlin, Young, & Karge, 1992).

To meet the demand globally and to overcome the critiques on teacher education in Malaysia, Sultan Idris Education University, is currently developing the Malaysian Teacher Education Model in her quest to prepare quality teachers for the future. Teaching and Learning aspect is one of the highlights that is expected to contribute to the development of the model. This is an effort to react to the finding of the study by Higher Education Leadership (AKPET, 2012), School Inspectorate and Quality Assurance (JNJK, 2012) and Cambridge English, 2013 that have found that teachers are lacking in teaching skill as well as to be align with the aspiration of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

The first step before moving on with the model is to develop a Teaching and Learning Framework which is hope to assist teacher educators in preparing their students in the teaching and learning aspect. As a first step to the framework, Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning were identified through document analyses of the prospectuses from certain reputable teacher education institutions (e.g., Nine Principles Guiding Teaching and Learning, Melbourne University, Australia; Singapore Teacher Education Model for 21st Century, National University, Singapore; Strategic Plan 2010-2015, Nottingham University, UK) as well as the policy documents from countries such as Finland, Singapore, Australia, the USA and the UK. There are six themes that have been conceptualised from the analyses namely (1) intellectual excitement; (2) quality learning spaces; (3) constructive alignment; (4) international and cultural diversity; (5) climate of inquiry and critical reflection; and (6) nurture good values, attitude and behaviour. Nonetheless, the validity of the conceptualised Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles (TLGP) solely through document analyses is less rigour. Therefore, to increase the rigour, these TLGP were subjected to validation by experts; consisting of two policy makers who once held the post of the deputy Director General of Education in the Malaysian Ministry of Education, and three senior teacher trainers at the Teachers' Training Institutes.

Literature Review

Validity and reliability are the most important factors in ensuring the credibility of the data collected in the research (Barribal & White, 1994; Creswell, 2012). There are wide ranges of sources that can be utilised to validate the process of the data collection. Interview is one the sources that can be employed to validate the data collected. Interview is important data collection approach because it allows the researcher to interact purposefully with the interviewee in order to get their view and feedback based on their experience and expertise (Creswell, 2012; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011).

According to Gillham (2000) and Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam (2003), the interview is a managed verbal exchange and as such its accomplishment heavily depends on the interviewer's communicating skill and the ability to encourage the interviewee to talk freely (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). It is also include the ability of the interviewer to clearly structure questions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011); listen attentively (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012); pause, probe or prompt appropriately (Ritchie, Lewis & Adam, 2003). Interpersonal skills (Opie, 2004) such as the ability to establish rapport, perhaps with humour and humility, are also important. This last point draws attention to the relational aspect and trust, which is needed between participants.

There are a variety of interviews to be employed to collect a qualitative data and can be distinguished by their degree of formality and structure (Gay et al., 2011). Gay et al. (2011) also claim that some interviews are structured, with a specified set of questions to be asked, whereas others are unstructured, with questions prompted by the flow of the interview. Krathwohl (1998) opined that semi-structured interviews combine both structured and unstructured approaches and this view concurs with Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2001) who claimed that semi structured interview lies between tightly structured and open-ended interviews. Semi-structured interview allows for flexibility within each interview so that optimal information is obtained from participants. It is also the optimal method where the researcher wishes to discover what is known about the concepts in question from the

interviewee's perspective (Chenail, 2011). Furthermore, the open-ended question also allows for follow up questions and prompts based on the answers given by the participant.

Methodology

Research Design

Given the intent of this paper to report on the validation of the Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles (TLGP) for Teacher Educators, the use of an expert panel comprising two policy makers and three teacher trainers is deemed suitable for such validation. The exercise involving the panel of five experts experienced in the subject matter (i.e., teaching and learning at teacher education) included a face-to-face semi-structured interview with regard to each of the panel members' view on the TLGP. More specifically, the focus research questions navigating this study are as follows:

1. "Literature has outlined few elements (guiding principles) that need to be imparted in preparing student teachers to teach. To what extent these principles are in line with the Ministry of Education's policy that has been embraced in the Malaysia Education Blueprint?"

- 1.1 Teaching foster students' intellectual excitement.
- 1.2 Teaching provide quality-learning spaces, resources and technologies.
- 1.3 Teaching ensure a constructive alignment between an evolving knowledge base, student learning outcomes, learning experiences, actual practice, and assessment.
- 1.4 Teaching nurture a climate of inquiry and critical reflection.
- 1.5 Teaching nurture good values, attitudes and behaviours.
- 1.6 Teaching that offer an international and culturally diverse learning environment.

2. Any other principles that you think are important to be infused in preparing student teachers to teach in the future?

- 2.1 Why do you think the principles are important?
- 2.2 Which part/s of the MEB that emphasise/s these principles?

The six themes of the TLGP were conceptualized from the document analyses of the prospectuses from renowned teacher education institutions as well as the policy documents from the reputable countries in teacher education such as the USA, Australia, Singapore and the UK. The cornerstone of the concept of the TLGP are the six themes which have been categorized, namely (1) intellectual excitement (2) quality learning spaces (3) constructive alignment (4) international and cultural diversity and (6) nurture good values, attitude and behaviour. Nonetheless, the validity of the conceptualised TLGP solely through document analyses is less rigour. Therefore, to increase these TLGP were subjected to the validation by the experts.

For the purposes of this research, the focused, semi structured interview was employed using broad open ended questions (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Jacob & Ferguson, 2012) because the researcher already has some knowledge in the area of the subject matter of the interviews.

Sampling

In order to validate the Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles (TLGP) that were conceptualized, two policy makers and three teacher trainers were interviewed to “understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). These purposeful sampling were selected because they are “information rich” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Chart 1 shows the breakdown of the position, roles and contributions in the Ministry of Education Malaysia as well as the universities and achievement of the two policy makers and three teacher trainers that has been interviewed.

Chart 1: Position, Roles and achievement of the interviewees



Instrument

Semi-structured interview protocol was utilised in this interview. The semi-structured interview protocol validated by the two experts in research design. The protocol was divided into two sections as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Section 1	Section 2
Details on the service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roles in the Ministry of Education Malaysia / University / Department 	Focus of the interview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Views on the existing teacher education programmes in the universities in Malaysia Views on the six themes of the Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles (TLGP) Other elements that can be imparted as part of the TLGP other than the six themes asked

Data analysis

Since this study employed semi-structured interview as an approach to validate the TLGP, the interview sessions with the respondents were recorded. Audio recording was chosen because “audio- or videotape recording, which provides a verbatim account of the session”... “taking notes during the interview can be distracting and can alter the flow of the session” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011., p. 387). The recording then was transcribed and analysed thematically by “identify central themes” (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 432) as well as recursively by looking at the sentences thoroughly to get the views and agreement or disagreement given by the interviewees.

Findings

The analysis of the transcription from the semi-structured interview indicates that generally, the policy makers and teacher educators agreed to the conceptualised themes that were put forward to them during the interview. In addition, two other themes seemed to emerge from the recursive analysis. The discussion in support of the themes is given below, with “I” indicating the “Interviewee” while the number which follows the “I” represents a particular expert.

- (1) Intellectual Excitement
- (2) Quality Learning Spaces
- (3) Constructive Alignment
- (4) International and Cultural Diversity
- (5) Climate of Inquiry and Critical Reflection; and
- (6) Nurture Good Values, Attitude and Behaviour.

Nurturing good values, attitudes and behavior gets endorsement from all the members of the panel of experts. Reminiscing the past experiences at the helm of the Ministry of Education, one expert noted that:

“...principle number 5, nurtures good values ...we stressed on this. When I was in the ministry I was involved in the development of Malaysia Teacher Standard and the first standard that we stressed on is values, values on the teachers practices...” (I1)

Corroborating this positive endorsement by Interviewee 1 (I1), Interviewee 5 remarked that:

“...teaching nurture a good values, attitudes and behaviours, off course...” (I5)

Table 2 summarizes the positive responses given by the interviewees when asked the first question; Literature has outlined few elements (guiding principles) that need to be imparted in preparing student teacher to teach, namely:

- 1.1 Teaching foster students’ intellectual excitement.
- 1.2 Teaching provide quality-learning spaces, resources and technologies.
- 1.3 Teaching ensure a constructive alignment between an evolving knowledge base, student learning outcomes, learning experiences, actual practice, and assessment.
- 1.4 Teaching nurture a climate of inquiry and critical reflection.
- 1.5 Teaching nurture good values, attitudes and behaviours.
- 1.6 Teaching that offer an international and culturally diverse learning environment

To what extend these principles are in line with the Ministry of Education’s policy that has been embraced in the Malaysia Education Blueprint?

Interviewee Responses

Table 2: Answer given by the interviewee

Interviewee	Responses
I1	<p><i>"... basically saya bersetuju, semasa saya menjadi tenaga pengajar di maktab perguruan dulu pun kita dah tekankan perkara ini..."</i></p> <p>"...I'm basically agreed, these matter has been stressed upon since I was an educator in teacher training college..."</p> <p><i>"...principle number 5 is it nature good values...memang kita tekankan, semasa saya di kementerian pun saya terlibat dalam penggubalan dalam Standard Guru Malaysia dan memang ini standard pertama yang kita tekankan ialah values, amalan nilai keguruan..."</i></p> <p>"...principle number 5 is it nature a good values...we stressed on this, when I was in the ministry I was involved in the development of Malaysia Teacher Standard and the first standard that we stressed on is values, values on the teachers practices..."</p>
I2	<p>"...it all there on paper, even in the Education Blueprint ... our Blueprint in on of the best in world..."</p> <p>"... the priciples are perfectly fine ... in fact it takes all these things to make it happen ..."</p> <p>"...the principles are perfectly fine, we advocate all these things and its on the aspirational of the ministry..."</p> <p>"...I like the word intellectual excitement..."</p>
I3	<p>"...these six principles are in line with the blueprint and I do agree..."</p> <p>"...teaching should foster student intellectual excitement, it should make student excited about learning itself, persuing knowledge ... other wise that is not effective teaching..."</p>
I4	<p>"...I think this is important that teaching is not merely transmitting knowledge, teaching is to liberate the mind..."</p> <p>"...I think fostering cognitive excitement intellectual excitement is important, I'm sure we can relate this to HOT (Higher Order Thinking Skills)..."</p> <p>"...of course I think technology has affected how we do things nowadays including teaching..."</p>

	<p>“...constructive alignment is the same ... to be clear about the learning out come and then to provide the appropriate learning experiences and to assess whether the learning goal achieved...”</p> <p>“...teaching that offer an international and culturally diverse learning environment...world getting smaller now ... so you need to be able to appreciate other people’s culture ... appreciate different way of thinking...I think that is necessary...”</p> <p>“... I think these are important principles...”</p>
15	<p>“...these are the principles that encompasses the whole thing...”</p> <p>“...definitely...intellectual excitement...”</p> <p>“...teaching provide quality learning spaces, resources and teachnologies, yes off course...”</p> <p>“...teacher ensure a constructive alignment between evolving knowledge base, student learning outcomes, learning experience, actual practices and assessment...I think you can see this in the course that we are doing...”</p> <p>“...teaching nuture a good values, attitudes and behaviours, off course...”</p> <p>“...these principles are very much inline with the blueprint...”</p>

Table 3 summarizes the responses given by the interviewees when asked question; Any other principles that you think are important to be infused in preparing student teacher to teach in the future?

Table 3: Suggested Principles

Interviewe e	Answers
I1	“...love mother nature...if can be one of the priciples or maybe it has been there under other pricnicples like values...”
I2	“...the six are perfectly inline with the ministry aspirationa...”
I3	“...the six sort of cover up everything already...”
I4	“...I think this is fine...but maybe entrepreneurship need to be highlighted...or maybe it is under this six values...”
I5	“...these principles are all okay...”

Interviewee Answers

Based on the summary and the answers given by the interviewees for the interview, it is seen that all of them are agreed with the conceptualized principles that showed and elaborate to them. These Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles, according to the panel of five experts,

are indeed in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint, of which one of the aspirations is to elevate teaching profession to the higher level through teaching practices. As such this TLGP are validated and can be a construct to develop a questionnaire on the TLGP that will be a cornerstone of the Teaching and Learning Framework.

Conclusion

These interviews were conducted to validate the conceptualized teaching and learning themes to generate a guiding principle to develop a framework for teaching and learning. Therefore it provides the view of the policy makers and teacher trainers on the principles that were showed to them. Teaching and Learning Guiding Principles that were conceptualised covered the aspect of teaching and learning that need to be imparted in teacher education and it is inline with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. In addition the policy makers suggested the other two principles that should be imparted in teacher education namely (1) nature entrepreneurship and (2) value the mother nature which can be discuss further if the two principles can be assemble under the other conceptualized themes that forwarded to them.

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