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Challenges Faced During Teaching Practice by Undergraduate Pre-Service Music Trainees at a Teachers' Training Institution

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to capture the challenges faced by music teacher trainees during their teaching practice in music education in a Bachelor of Teaching with honours for primary education (PISMP) at a teacher training institution in Kuala Lumpur. The objective of this study was to determine the challenges faced in terms of pedagogical and technological delivery during their teaching practice in primary schools. A total of 10 trainee teachers from Year 4 Semester 2 participated in this study. The researchers chose to conduct an exploratory study employing interviews for data collection. This study comprises of two phases. The first phase consisted of a focus group discussion with three male and three female participants. A semi-structured interview was conducted to enable the music teacher trainees to reflect and give their opinions. As a result of the first phase, four trainee teachers from the same cohort were targeted for a follow-up interview. The narratives of the teacher trainees' from the interviews were transcribed and analysed according to themes. Preliminary findings revealed the challenges in facing a music class for a continuous period of three months were, difficulty in developing approaches to musical creativity in the classroom setting, unsure in designing creative musical activities that employ higher order thinking skills for teaching, problems in integrating various technological tools that are suitable for music activities and the role of creativity and technology in supporting pedagogic change. This study concludes by proposing the development of emerging technological and pedagogical content knowledge approaches to support the development of twenty-first century skills among music trainee-teachers.

Keywords: Teaching practice, music education, teacher training institution, creativity, technology

Introduction

The paper addresses the challenges faced by music teacher trainees during their teaching practice in music education in a Bachelor of Teaching with honours for primary education (PISMP) at a teacher training institution in Kuala Lumpur. As the need for quality in the teaching profession arises, the need for 21st century skills must be included in teacher education. According to Voogt et al. (2013), teachers must know various pedagogical approaches to take advantage of ICT and support the development of students' twenty-first century skills. As education in Malaysia faces rapid changes in current educational development of 21st century skills, international research shows that teacher quality is the most significant school-based factor in determining student outcomes. The quality of a system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. A 2011 research by AKEPT found that only 50% of lessons are being delivered in an effective manner. This means that the lessons did not sufficiently engage students, and followed a more passive, lecture format of content

delivery. These lessons focused on achieving surface-level content understanding, instead of higher-order thinking skills. This statistic is particularly challenging as an estimated 60% of today's teachers will still be teaching in 20 years' time (MOE, 2013).

Evidence from literature validates the notion that the teacher is the most critical participant in an educational reform, particularly in one that touches on what goes on in the classrooms ([Mundy, 2008](#) cited in Anyiendah (2017)). Music teacher trainees need to be adequately trained. Teacher educators have always believed that the practicum attachment is an essential and integral part of teacher education and have therefore given it key focus in teacher preparation programmes (Haigh & Tuck, 1999, cited in Doris Choy, 2014). The content and pedagogy of teacher education programmes interact with teachers' previous knowledge and influence what and how they learn (Borko et al, 1992; Calderhead, 1991; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1993).

Pre-service music trainees bring with them in a degree programme all their previous knowledge about learning music either privately or during their primary school days. Only a small number of the music trainees begin their four year degree course with basic knowledge in music having obtained theory and piano examination certificates accredited from the Associated Board of the Royal Schools Of Music, London. The main goal for teacher education institutions is to produce good teachers for the future. A good music teacher must combine musical artistry with the artistry of teaching (Brinkman, 2010). The question then arises regarding the potential of transforming the basic knowledge music trainees have so as to become future music teachers of the 21st century. In order to meet the needs of the current trend, a good music teacher should acknowledge that creativity and technology are two important areas in music education that would play a major role in the development of music classes in schools.

Pre-service music trainees face various challenges during their teaching practise in real classroom situations in primary schools. The application of new technologies to support and develop music learning and teaching in school and how students use technology at home preoccupies teacher thinking about *what* should be included in the curriculum, *how* it should be delivered, and the confluent questions of *why*, *when* and *where* in the curriculum it should be positioned (Espeland 2006). Besides the application of technology, pre-service teachers generally found it difficult to suggest ways of assessing creativity in mathematics in the classroom (Bolden, Harris and Newton, 2010).

Feedback from music teacher trainees during practical teaching are essential in helping trainees to bridge the theory-practice divide and obtain practicum feedback in primary schools. Indeed, teaching practise is seen as crucial in helping to bridge the theory–practice gap (Price, 1987, p. 109 cited in Doris Choy, 2014). The music trainee teachers who participated in this study have undergone three practicum attachments and are currently in year four semester two which is also known as Semester 8. This study looks at the insights of music teacher trainees after completing their three month practicum stint in Year 4 Semester 1 or also known as Semester 7.

Objectives

The objective of this study was to gain insights on the perspectives of music teacher trainees regarding the challenges faced in terms of pedagogical and technological delivery during their teaching practice in primary schools by undergraduate pre-service music trainees in Year 4 Semester 2 of the Bachelor of Teaching programme with honours in music education.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study include the following:

1. How do music teacher trainees in their final year perceive their overall experience in a three month practicum attachment?
2. What are the challenges faced in terms of pedagogical and technological delivery during their three month practicum attachment?

Literature Review

The teaching profession today requires each trainee teacher to develop competences in various aspects of learning, subject knowledge and the curriculum in music education. The commitment to creativity continues to be a major part of music teachers' thinking. The 'deeper' object of musical learning arises inseparably from creativity and technology as interrelated tools. Both teachers and learners use these tools to manage their own learning, creating opportunities for the making, creating, receiving and producing of music (Burnard, 2007). One of the important focus on keeping abreast with 21st century learning is by ensuring that all teachers and Ministry officials are literate in their technological and pedagogical content knowledge. The Education Ministry has been trying their level best to enhance its existing set of training programmes to ensure that all teachers meet a minimum level of ICT literacy by the end of 2015 (MOE, 2013).

All teacher trainees will be required to meet these competency standards as part of their pre-service training. In practice, as noted by Hennessy, Ruthven and Brindley (2005), research literature offers little support about technology revolutionizing teaching and learning and also how teachers fundamentally rework their lesson plans and pedagogy (p.156, cited in Burnard, 2007). Research has also shown that technology is deeply embedded in the contemporary lexicon of young people's musical lives (Folkestad, 2006). On the other hand, there have been a small number of studies that have explicitly examined the processes of creative music making in a computer-mediated environment (Hickey, 1997; Seddon and O'Neill, 2003; Collins, 2005; Kirkman, 2007) or the impact of technology on learners' creativity (Dillon, 2003, 2004, 2006).

Although technology has become available in the classrooms, the use of it has continued to be criticized because of some factors, such as teachers' use of technology infrequently and for knowledge transmission rather than the construction of knowledge (Clark, 1985; Gao, Choy, Wong, & Wu, 2009; Harris, Mishra, & Koehler, 2009; Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Glazewski, Newby, & Ertmer, 2010; Sang, Valcke, van Braak, & Tondeur, 2010). In contrast, Teo (2010) says it is reasonable to create and maintain a positive attitude toward learning technologies in the process of pre-service teacher education rather than after they begin the profession. Therefore, those observations get the correct integration of technology more emphasized in education (Chai, Koh, Tsai, & Tan, 2011) cited in Karatas, Tunc, Yilmaz, & Karaci, (2017).

Theoretical Framework

This study is preliminary and views to build further by applying the TPACK model by Koehler & Mishra, 2009. The TPACK model highlights technological knowledge (TK), in conjunction with pedagogical knowledge (PK) and content knowledge (CK), as another basic form of teachers' professional knowledge (Angeli & Valanides, 2005). Despite the recognised difficulty in defining TK (Koehler & Mishra, 2009), TK generally refers to knowledge of integrating various technologies (Koh, Chai, & Tsai, 2010). PK, on the other hand, can be understood as "teachers' deep knowledge about the processes and practices or methods of teaching and learning" (Koehler & Mishra, 2009, p. 397), and CK refers to knowledge about specific subject matter. A study done in with preservice chemistry teachers'

said that TPACK was significantly correlated with their epistemological beliefs about chemistry and lesson planning. This could be interpreted through the nature of TPACK that it can be seen as a form of *dynamic* knowledge creation (Chai et al., 2016).

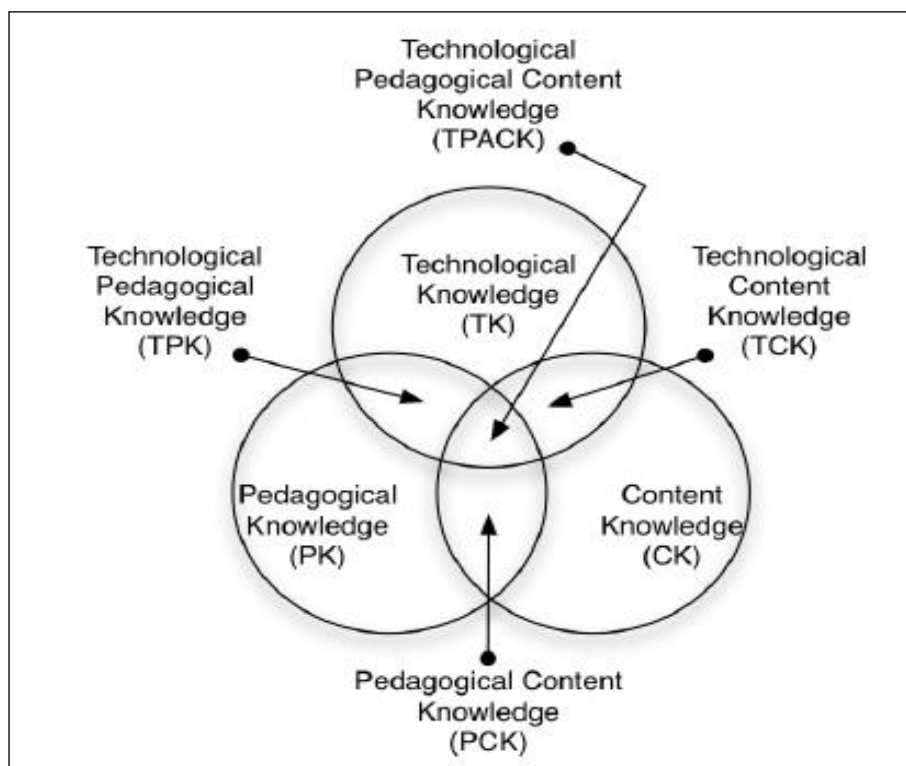


Figure 1. TPACK model

However, studies conducted with larger target groups following the gradual development of TPACK over longer time periods, especially in the teacher training context, are scarce (Voogt et al., 2013). Therefore, in order to improve the standard and quality of music teacher trainees, the TPACK model would be ideal to be applied by integrating pedagogical, content and technological knowledge in music education.

Methodology

Research Design

As this phenomenon is relatively new and not been researched thoroughly in a music education course, a qualitative method of research aimed at understanding the meaning people attribute to it was used in an exploratory study. The purpose of focus groups is to promote self disclosure among participants in a group(s) by ascertaining their perceptions, feelings, opinions and thoughts. Focus group interviews are not intended to help groups or researchers reach decisions, gain consensus or establish how many people hold a particular view like statistics (Ludwig, 2000). A focus group interview was done in the first phase to elicit responses from each individual in the group and collect shared understanding from the participants. The first phase consisted of three male and three female participants. A semi-structured interview was conducted to enable the music teacher trainees to reflect and give their opinions. The discussion in a group helped the researcher gain insights of the challenges faced during teaching practice. As a result of the first phase, four trainee teachers from the same cohort were identified for a follow-up one-on-one interview. The second phase was conducted to validate the findings from the focus group interview. Five questions were given as a guide to enable the music trainees to reflect and state their perspectives of the

challenges faced during teaching practise in this particular paper. The students related their views in a narrative form. Narratives provide the researcher with a way ‘to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness’ (Bell 2002, p.209). With this in mind, teacher training institutions with preservice music trainees recognise that from talking to trainees after experiencing a three month teaching practise various issues are indentified for further action to improve the quality of teaching.

Sample

The participants of this study differed according to the phases. Phase One was conducted in a focus group discussion with six undergraduate pre-service music teacher trainees. As a follow up, four pre-service music teacher trainees from the same cohort in Year 4 Semester 2 or also known as semester eight of the Bachelor of Teaching degree programme (PISMP) were interviewed in Phase Two on a one-on-one interview. This cohort was selected because of their teaching practice experience for three months in school.

Research Instrument

This study captures reflections by the music trainees based on their perspectives experienced during teaching practice for three months. As a guide, the following questions were posed to them to reflect and share their personal perspectives.

1. How did you experience teaching practice for three months?
2. Which of the music courses that has helped you plan and apply creative musical activities in the classroom?
3. What were the challenges faced in terms of pedagogical delivery during their three month practicum attachment?
4. What were the challenges faced in terms of technological delivery during their three month practicum attachment?
5. Do you feel your undergraduate training has prepared you for promoting musical creativity in the classroom?

Research Procedure

Before conducting this study, permission was obtained from the Head of the Music Department and the study explained to the ten pre-service music trainees. In order to maintain anonymity, the pre-service music trainees were told by the researcher that their names will not be revealed.

Findings

The purpose of the study was to find out the perspectives of ten music trainees in Year 4 Semester 2. The preliminary findings from the narrative reflections of the music trainees are presented thematically. Four prominent themes emerged from this study and are discussed below.

Pedagogical and Technological Delivery

Difficulty in developing approaches to musical creativity in the classroom setting.

The music teacher trainees from this cohort were concerned regarding the difficulty in developing approaches to musical creativity in the classroom setting. The findings from the focus group semi-structured interview revealed that 80% of the trainees faced difficulty developing new creative musical ideas each time they had to prepare a lesson. S9 added, “*I become stressful when planning musical activities that would encourage creativity amongst my students. I feel that I don’t have ideas*”. S6 stated that, “*I normally look up the internet or*

google and look out for creative ideas that I feel is suitable to be used in my class. Then I would just copy the idea and use it with my students even though it seems not suitable". S10 added, " Even though I have learn the course known as Method and Approaches In Music Teaching in Semester 3 of my programme, I still feel that I lack confidence in developing music activities that would enhance creativity. My ideas are always the same for each class even though my students are from different standards". Perhaps this is because the course was taught to us in Semester 3 which is at the beginning of the degree programme. Overall, 90% of the teacher trainees stressed the importance of mastering musical skills and understanding to engage with musical creativity. By being not so confident themselves, the ability to create creative musical activities have limited their pedagogical delivery in the classroom.

Unsure in designing creative musical activities that employ higher order thinking skills for teaching. Employing higher order thinking skills in musical activities in music activities plays a major role in a 21st century classroom. From the focus group interview and individual interviews conducted, 80% of the music trainees were concerned regarding challenges they faced adapting higher order thinking skills with the students in school from a pedagogical content knowledge perspective. S12 added, *" I feel that I am unable to integrate higher order thinking skills in the musical activities due to limitations of classroom resources. There aren't enough materials to stimulate my students thinking and therefore I normally make my lessons simple."* S1 said that during teaching practice most of his students had not been taught many topics in the syllabus and therefore this scenario hindered him from pursuing activities that were more challenging. On the other hand, 3 trainees from the individual interview stated that they tried employing higher order thinking skills through improvisation activities but were disappointed when their students did not respond well. This made them sceptical as to ways of designing creative musical activities that were suitable to integrate higher order thinking skills with the mixed ability of students in a school setting.

Integrating various technological tools suitable for music activities. From the responses during the interview, 90% of the music trainees said that the only form of technology applied during teaching practise was from downloading music videos which they accessed from the Youtube. S5 added, *"I normally download videos from the Youtube and show it to my students at the start of the lesson. I do this to get their attention even though it does not really relate to my lesson for the day."* S 10 said, *"I really feel that teaching with technology would help contribute to a positive atmosphere."*

80% of the music teacher trainees stated that they lacked exposure in creating musical activities using technology because the music technology paper is only offered in their final semester which is after their three months teaching practice. S7 stated, *"It would have been better if using technology was emphasized more in courses that are related to the school syllabus."* S1 added, *"I still lack the knowledge of ways to integrate technology with the pedagogical aspects of creating musical activities that would be fun to the music trainees."*

On the other hand, one music teacher trainee felt that there was insufficient time to be teaching with technology due to time factor. S4 indicated, *"I still feel that I can teach without using technology during my class."*

The role of creativity and technology in supporting pedagogic change. Integrating creativity and technology in musical learning would enhance classroom practice in the 21st century. From the discussion with all 10 music trainees, each of them agreed that using some form of technology in the music class has helped them with students attention span and also increased interaction amongst student and teacher. Some responses from the music trainees include, S8 added that, *" My students paid attention in class when I made them watch a recording of a singing competition. My students were able to discuss and give me their views regarding the singing competition."* From this response it can be said that the use of

technology has helped stimulate the thinking skills of students and given encouragement to the music trainee during teaching practice. On the other hand, S13 stated that she lacked confidence incorporating technology during her music class and therefore realized that her students were not as active when participating in playing percussion instruments with created rhythms from recycled materials. *“My students were not sure how to create rhythms on their own as they were not given a chance to view a video recording from the famous group called Stomp. I felt discouraged after the lesson as it did not go the way I wanted it.”* Whereas S14 said that when she showed her students a recording of a percussion ensemble downloaded from the Youtube, her students responded well and could give suggestions on different rhythms that would be suitable to accompany with recycled materials. S14 added, *“My students could imitate the rhythms they listened from the video recording and improvise new rhythms. This was fun to me and my students.”* From these feedback, it can be stated that in order for change to happen in music education, creativity and technology would play a vital role in supporting pedagogic change. Therefore, applying technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) with music trainees from the responses above can be used for different pedagogical approaches as well as different content areas and technologies in music education.

Discussion

From this study, it can be noted that music trainees currently lack pedagogical and technological content knowledge during their teaching practice in school. The ability to incorporate pedagogical content knowledge will help music trainees to motivate and encourage independent learning in schools (PCK) while incorporating technology into their music lessons will also encourage fun learning (TCK). This will enhance the importance of technological and pedagogical knowledge (TPK). Therefore, incorporating technological and pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) will be ideal to enhance students learning in the classroom. Thus, having more interest in music and a natural progression to learning is important in meeting the aesthetic needs of education. It is important for music trainees to be more innovative, take risks and close the traditional gap of learning (Burnard, 2007).

The questions then arises as to How do we create, learn and talk about music in ways that are compatible with existing pedagogy and stimulate innovation and changes in teaching practices? In order to rectify the gap, there should be new models of creative teaching with technologies designed which could be used for training preservice music teacher trainees. Understanding how effective learning should happen in music education requires a realignment of both learner creativity and the creativity of the teacher with the ICT reform agenda ((Burnard,2007).

Limitations

This study was carried out with ten music teacher trainees from Year 4 Semester 2 from a teachers' training institution. The respondents are in their final year and pursuing a degree in music education. The findings may not be representative of the other trainees in other institutions but may provide some insights into the situation.

Recommendation

As creativity and technology play an important role in 21st century education, it is therefore recommended that the role of professional educators is seen as an essential ingredient with the demands of 21st century learning and meeting the needs of music teacher trainees to have both technological and pedagogical skills. It is very essential that professional educators such as music lecturers from teacher training institutions be reflective in their practise by improving their pedagogical delivery and improving their mode of

instruction. Thus, helping music teacher trainees to improve their pedagogical and technological skills during teaching practice highlighting TPACK is important. This means that teacher training should take into account building both TCK, TPK as well as TPACK.

Conclusion

From the above study, it can be summarized that creativity and technology are essential in fostering music learning even though the interrelationship between these two components is still imperfect. It is important that music education meets the requirements of 21st century skills which include classroom practices that enhance student exploration, collaboration, communication and creative thinking.

The question then arises on the role of music teacher trainees complementing their teaching with best practices in music education by planning activities that incorporate technological and pedagogical content knowledge. Therefore, teacher training institutions that offer music education need to help music trainees bridge the gap between technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (TPACK) to meet the goals of education in the 21st century.

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