

**EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH  
PROFICIENCY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE  
INTENDED AND ENACTED CURRICULUM OF  
THE PISMP TESL PROGRAMME AT THE  
INSTITUTE OF TEACHER EDUCATION**

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by

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for the degree of  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BM	<i>Bahasa Melayu</i>
ESL	English as a Second Language
ITE	Institute of Teacher Education
ITEs	Institutes of Teacher Education
PCK	Pedagogic Content Knowledge
PISMP	Program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan (Bachelor of Teaching Programme)
RMK	<i>Ringkasan Maklumat Kursus</i> (Summary of Course Information)
SLTE	Second Language Teacher Education
SMK	Subject Matter Knowledge
SPM	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i>
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language



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**MENEROKA KEPENTINGAN PENGUASAAN BAHASA INGGERIS:  
ANALISIS KURIKULUM TERANCANG DAN KURIKULUM  
TERLAKSANA PROGRAM PISMP TESL DI INSTITUT  
PENDIDIKAN GURU**

**ABSTRAK**

Keperluan terhadap guru TESL berkemahiran tinggi telah menjadi persoalan yang membimbangkan di negara ini sejak beberapa tahun lalu lantaran penguasaan bahasa Inggeris yang lemah dalam kalangan guru bahasa Inggeris. Guru dalam perkhidmatan yang gagal memperoleh tahap penguasaan yang diperlukan telah dihantar untuk mengikuti program Peningkatan Kemahiran Profesional Guru Bahasa Inggeris (Pro-ELT) bagi meningkatkan tahap penguasaan bahasa Inggeris mereka. Situasi ini menimbulkan persoalan tentang keberkesanan latihan pra perkhidmatan dalam mengatasi isu penguasaan bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan guru bahasa Inggeris, sekaligus membawa kepada fokus kajian mengenai kepentingan penguasaan bahasa Inggeris melalui program PISMP TESL yang ditawarkan di Institut Pendidikan Guru di Malaysia. Kajian kes kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tahap keutamaan penguasaan bahasa Inggeris dalam kurikulum terancang dan kurikulum terlaksana program PISMP TESL. Analisis kandungan telah dijalankan ke atas dokumen kurikulum yang relevan dalam menentukan sejauh mana penguasaan bahasa Inggeris diberikan perhatian secara eksplisit dalam kurikulum terancang. Selain itu, kajian ini turut menggunakan kaedah temu bual separa berstruktur yang melibatkan enam orang pensyarah dan lapan orang siswa guru untuk mengumpul data tentang penekanan yang diberikan terhadap penguasaan bahasa Inggeris dalam kurikulum terlaksana program tersebut. Para peserta ini dipilih daripada dua buah Institusi

Pendidikan Guru di Malaysia. Kajian ini mendedahkan bahawa penguasaan bahasa Inggeris tidak memperlihatkan kepentingannya yang signifikan sama ada dalam kurikulum terancang atau kurikulum terlaksana program PISMP TESL. Malah, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa wujudnya keperluan terhadap penggubal dasar, pentadbir dan guru pendidik untuk membuat penilaian semula kurikulum di samping meningkatkannya ke tahap yang lebih baik. Bagi melahirkan siswa guru sebagai pendidik bahasa Inggeris yang berkemahiran, kajian ini turut mencadangkan bahawa penekanan terhadap penguasaan bahasa Inggeris dalam kurikulum perlu bersifat eksplisit dan pengintegrasiannya harus lebih komprehensif.

**EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE INTENDED AND ENACTED CURRICULUM  
OF THE PISMP TESL PROGRAMME AT THE INSTITUTE OF  
TEACHER EDUCATION**

**ABSTRACT**

The demand for highly proficient TESL teachers has become a national concern, driven by the widespread issue of poor English proficiency among current English language teachers in Malaysia. In response, in-service teachers who did not meet the required proficiency levels were enrolled in the Professional Up-skilling of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) programme. This situation raises questions about the effectiveness of pre-service training in addressing proficiency needs, leading to this study's focus on the importance of English proficiency within the PISMP TESL programme offered at Institutes of Teacher Education in Malaysia. This qualitative case study aimed to analyse the extent to which English proficiency is prioritised in both the intended and enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme. Content analysis of relevant curriculum documents was conducted to determine how proficiency is explicitly addressed in the intended curriculum. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with six teacher educators and eight student teachers were used to gather insights into the emphasis placed on proficiency in the enacted curriculum. Participants were selected from two Institutes of Teacher Education in Malaysia. The findings reveal that English proficiency is not given significant importance in either the intended or enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme. This research concludes that there is a critical need for policymakers, administrators and teacher educators to re-evaluate and enhance the curriculum. The study emphasises that

English proficiency should be more explicitly and comprehensively integrated into the curriculum to better prepare student teachers to become proficient English language educators.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The target language used in the language classroom is both the means and the objective of instructions (Freeman, 2016; Faez & Karas, 2017). The target language is the language the student teachers are trained to teach once they complete their teacher education. Teachers' proficiency in the target language is pinpointed as a vital aspect of teacher expertise, influencing language teaching and learning (Richards, 2015). The significance of being fluent in the target language would mean that worldwide, any attempt to improve the standards of English instruction would have to be targeted at the teachers' language proficiency (Richards, 2015; Hong, 2017; Van Canh & Renandya, 2017).

In recent years, poor English proficiency among English teachers has been a national concern in Malaysia (Sahib & Stapa, 2021). Teachers who failed to obtain the required level of proficiency were sent for Professional Up-skilling of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) in various batches to improve their proficiency level (Gill, 2013). Sending out teachers with a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) qualification for Pro-ELT endorses the importance of providing a language proficiency course to help teachers improve their proficiency. Nevertheless, sending these teachers for language proficiency courses raises questions about why their proficiency was not enhanced while still in their pre-service years. It is, therefore, necessary to bridge the gap by addressing the pre-service English language teachers' proficiency before they join the service.

It is unknown if teacher education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) addresses the common yet persisting issue of low English language proficiency among teachers. This gap provided the basis for this study; to get insights into the nature and extent of the proficiency work done in the Bachelor of Education (HONS) in TESL for Primary Education or *Program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan* (PISMP) TESL programme. The PISMP TESL programme is a formal pre-service TESL teacher education offered in Malaysia's Institutes of Teacher Education. A brief introduction of the PISMP TESL programme is provided in the ensuing section.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

Proficiency in the English language encompasses a range of skills, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, comprehension and written expression. Richards (2018) defines language proficiency as the competence and ability to use these skills effectively to communicate in diverse contexts. Beyond knowledge of language rules and structures, proficiency involves the practical application of language skills in real-life situations, such as communication, academic pursuits, professional settings and social interactions.

For English language teachers, proficiency is not just an asset but a fundamental component of their professional competence. According to Richards (2018), proficient teachers can comprehend and use the language with ease, express their ideas clearly in both spoken and written forms, and engage in meaningful communication with others. Although proficiency is not the sole factor influencing second language learning, it is a crucial prerequisite that enhances a teacher's ability to deliver lessons effectively. Teachers with higher proficiency levels are better

equipped to provide rich language input, thereby supporting their pupils' language acquisition (Richards et al., 2013).

While the proficiency of English language teachers is shaped by both personal experiences and the quality of their teacher education programmes, current research in Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) raises concerns about the inadequate focus on language proficiency during pre-service training (Macalister, 2017). Despite longstanding calls for greater emphasis on proficiency development, these recommendations appear to have been only partially implemented, leaving gaps in the effectiveness of teacher preparation. This issue is particularly pressing in the Malaysian context, where the misalignment between teacher education programmes and the linguistic demands of the classroom continues to hinder the proficiency levels of new teachers (Richards, 2017).

Studies, such as those by Macalister (2017), highlight the ongoing challenges faced by TESL programmes in Malaysia, particularly concerning the proficiency levels of student teachers. Macalister's research on the TESL trans-national programme involving Malaysian student teachers underscores the need for teacher education programmes to prioritise language proficiency development. He argues that without a strong emphasis on improving student teachers' proficiency, TESL programmes may fail to equip future teachers with the necessary skills to teach English effectively.

In the context of Malaysia's Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE), the need to address proficiency within the TESL curriculum is critical. The extent to which English language proficiency is prioritised in a TESL teacher education programme is fundamentally linked to the design and implementation of the curriculum, specifically,



the intended and enacted curricula. The intended curriculum encompasses policy documents, frameworks and guidelines outlining what teachers are expected to deliver, while the enacted curriculum refers to the actual content and experiences that students encounter (van den Akker, 2003).

Given the pressing need to enhance English proficiency among future TESL teachers, as highlighted by Macalister (2017), this study critically examines the extent to which English language proficiency is addressed in the PISMP TESL programme at the Institute of Teacher Education in Malaysia. This analysis is vital for understanding the current state of the TESL curriculum and identifying areas where improvements are needed to better prepare student teachers for the demands of the profession.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Low English language proficiency is an increasing concern, particularly among student teachers enrolled in TESL programmes (Hong, 2017; Macalister, 2017; Van Canh & Renandya, 2017). Their inadequate language skills often prevent them from communicating effectively in the target language, a shortcoming that has also been highlighted by cooperating teachers in schools where these student teachers were placed for practical teaching.

There is growing evidence to show that both in-service and pre-service teachers in Malaysia lack English language proficiency (Jalleh, 2012; Kwan & Yunus, 2014; Hall, 2015; Macalister, 2017). Alarming, 70% of in-service English language teachers who sat for the English Language Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) performed poorly, being classified as “incapable” and “unfit” to teach the English language subject in schools (Jalleh, 2012; Kwan & Yunus, 2014; Hall, 2015).

The validity and reliability of these results were met with scepticism from various parties, especially teachers nationwide. However, these results corroborate Nunan's (2003) earlier observations that Malaysia's English language skills are in decline, with many teachers, particularly those in rural areas, lacking sufficient proficiency to conduct classes confidently.

Addressing such issues concerning teacher competencies, Darling-Hammond (2020), a prominent researcher in teacher education, asserts that teacher education programmes play a crucial role in either contributing to or alleviating these deficiencies. Drawing from Darling-Hammond's perspective, which is widely regarded in the field of teacher education, the poor language proficiency of in-service English language teachers raises critical questions about how their teacher education programmes addressed this issue. Consequently, it becomes essential to study the intended and enacted curricula of the PISMP TESL programme to gain insights into the importance rendered to proficiency.

Despite nearly completing their teacher training, many PISMP TESL student teachers fail to achieve the expected MUET Band 5 level of proficiency. These student teachers often lack the desired level of proficiency even before enrolling in the program. The 5-year TESL teacher education programme is expected to equip them with adequate knowledge and proficiency in English before they join the teaching service. However, their continued poor proficiency suggests that the programme may not be adequately addressing their language proficiency needs. While multiple factors could contribute to such poor proficiency, one significant factor might be the inadequate emphasis on proficiency during their teacher education.

Issues related to TESL student teachers' low proficiency are not unique to Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE). Student teachers enrolled in TESL degree programmes at public universities also struggle with proficiency in the target language (Kabilan, 2007; Kwan & Yunus, 2014). Improving TESL student teachers' English language proficiency is, therefore, a critical aspect of any teacher education programme, particularly if there is a genuine concern about producing proficient English language teachers.

A growing body of research in Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) has emerged over the past few years, contributing significantly to the empirical understanding of various issues and practices in SLTE, including current approaches, classroom activities, interactions, teacher self-evaluation, and teaching styles (Johnson, ; Wright, 2010; Abednia, 2012; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Kiely & Askham, 2012; Kanakri, 2017; Macalister, 2017; Richards, 2017). However, one aspect that remains underrepresented in the literature is the importance of English language proficiency within TESL programmes.

Although the importance of proficiency in the SLTE context is not a new issue, it has recently garnered greater attention both locally (Hall, 2015; Macalister, 2017) and globally (Richards, 2017). The literature suggests a general consensus that proficiency is essential for successful language teaching. English language proficiency is recognized as a vital component of non-native English language teachers' competence (Kanakri, 2017; Macalister, 2017; Tsang, 2017).

Despite its importance, proficiency is frequently underestimated and not extensively integrated into TESL training programmes (Gobiowska, 1985). Macalister, whose study focused on a Malaysian-New Zealand TESL twinning

programme, emphasises the need for SLTE programmes to explicitly focus on enhancing student teachers' language proficiency.

In an attempt to address the identified research gap, this study aims to analyse the importance rendered to target language proficiency in the intended and enacted curricula of the PISMP TESL programme. By gaining insights into how proficiency is addressed within the PISMP TESL programme, this research seeks to uncover underlying issues and practices related to the emphasis on proficiency during TESL teacher training, with the ultimate goal of improving student teachers' language proficiency.

#### **1.4 Intended and Enacted Curriculum**

The success of any education system depends heavily on a well-structured framework and strategic planning (Darling-Hammond, 2020). At the core of this framework is the curriculum, which defines the educational goals, resources and methodologies required to produce quality teachers, especially in the context of pre-service teacher education. Without a robust curriculum, the foundational goals of teacher education, particularly in enhancing proficiency, remain unmet.

Scholars have provided varied definitions of curriculum, emphasising its pivotal role in guiding teaching practice. English (1992) defines the curriculum as “any document or plan that exists in a school or school programme that defines the work of teachers, at least to the extent of identifying the contents to be taught to children and the methods to be used in the process” (p. 2). Similarly, Glatthorn (2016) views the curriculum as “the plans made for guiding learning.” These definitions underscore the curriculum’s role as a blueprint that directs the methods, content and intended learning outcomes within educational institutions.

However, simply having a well-constructed curriculum does not guarantee its successful enactment in classrooms. Prideaux (2003) emphasises that the curriculum is “the expression of educational ideas in practice” (p. 268), suggesting that the value of curriculum lies in its execution. Tyler (1949) expands on this idea, defining curriculum as the total learning experience designed to achieve educational goals, stressing that teachers must not only have the content but also know how to implement it effectively in classrooms.

In teacher education, including the PISMP TESL programme, the curriculum serves as both the foundation and the guiding framework for student teachers. The intended curriculum, the document designed by policymakers and curriculum developers, contains standards, objectives and structures that student teachers are expected to follow. Yet, the gap between the intended curriculum and its enactment is crucial. Marsh and Willis (1999) argue that the curriculum starts as a plan but only becomes meaningful when interpreted and enacted by teachers in classrooms. Fullan and Miles (1992) further assert that no matter how meticulously a curriculum is planned, its success depends on its execution in real-world settings.

In the context of the PISMP TESL programme, the intended curriculum refers to the formal programme guide and Summary of Course Information (RMK), outlining the standards, objectives and key components that are expected to be delivered. However, the enacted curriculum, what actually takes place in classrooms, depends on how teachers interpret and adapt these guidelines to meet the needs of their students.

A major concern that arises, based on the background of this study, is whether the intended and enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme sufficiently prioritise English language proficiency. The problem, as outlined in the problem

statement, is that student teachers are graduating from the PISMP TESL programme without achieving the necessary English proficiency levels required to be effective language teachers.

Therefore, it is imperative to analyse both the intended and enacted curriculum in the PISMP TESL programme to determine whether the curriculum aligns with the overarching goal of producing proficient English language teachers. As Richards (2017) stresses, teacher quality is closely tied to both the content they are taught and their ability to effectively deliver that content. If the curriculum is skewed too heavily towards content knowledge without ensuring proficiency development, the result will be TESL graduates who are well-versed in pedagogy will lack the language skills essential for teaching. This imbalance is at the core of the problem faced by TESL teacher education in Malaysia.

By analysing the curriculum through the lens of language proficiency, this study sheds light on how proficiency is (or is not) integrated into the PISMP TESL programme. This analysis is crucial, as it directly addresses the gap identified in the problem statement: the absence of structured language proficiency support within the TESL teacher education. Understanding this will provide valuable insights into curriculum development and teacher training, particularly with regard to how proficiency is viewed within the broader context of TESL teacher education. The goal, ultimately, is for the intended and enacted curriculum to balance both pedagogical skills and English language proficiency, which are critical to the success of English language teachers.

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

As a result of the issues mentioned earlier in this chapter, and in light of the importance that should be given to proficiency in the pre-service TESL teacher education, this study was set out to get insights into the importance rendered to English proficiency in the intended and enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme.

In line with this overarching aim, the objectives of the study were:

- i) To analyse the extent to which importance is rendered to English language proficiency in the intended curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme.
- ii) To examine the extent to which importance is placed on English language proficiency in the enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme.
- iii) To investigate how teacher educators perceive the importance given to English language proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme.
- iv) To investigate how student teachers perceive the importance given to English language proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

In this study, four research questions were developed to get insights into the importance rendered to English language proficiency in the intended and enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme.

- i) To what extent is importance rendered to English language proficiency in the intended curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme?

- ii) To what extent is importance placed on English language proficiency in the enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme?
- iii) How do teacher educators perceive the importance given to English language proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme?
- iv) How do student teachers perceive the importance given to English language proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme?

The research foci, objectives and questions are summed up in Table 1.2 below.

**Table 1.1**

*Research Foci, Research Objectives and Research Questions*

Research Foci	Research Objectives	Research Questions
To get insights into the importance rendered to English language proficiency in the intended curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme.	RO 1 To analyse the extent to which importance is rendered to English language proficiency in the intended curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme.	RQ 1 To what extent is importance rendered to English language proficiency in the intended curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme?
	RO 2 To examine the extent to which importance is placed on English language proficiency in the enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme.	RQ 2 To what extent is importance placed on English language proficiency in the enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme?
To get insights into the importance given to English language proficiency in the enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme.	RO 3 To investigate how teacher educators perceive the importance given to English language proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme	RQ 3 How do teacher educators perceive the importance given to English language proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme?
	RO 4 To investigate how student teachers perceive the importance given to English language proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme	RQ 4 How do student teachers perceive the importance given to English language proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme?



## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

Given the reports on the poor proficiency of TESL teachers in Malaysia (Hall, 2015), naturally, there is now an expectation for the newly trained teachers to possess the target language proficiency. Comprehensive insights into how the TESL student teachers' proficiency is dealt with in the PISMP programme will thus suggest amendments and improvements within the PISMP TESL programme, which can make a major contribution towards impacting student teachers' language proficiency.

Presently, it is not clear how the PISMP TESL programme improves the student teachers' English proficiency. As this programme is still in its early years of implementation, it provides curriculum planners with reliable research-based data to make relevant changes that support language proficiency. The study, conducted within the settings of the ITEs, will inform the programme's decision-makers of how and why particular practices help enhance the student teachers' proficiency, while some do not. Understanding the practices that support or constrain the acquisition of proficiency will guide the stakeholders in deciding future action plans regarding proficiency.

The findings of this study will raise useful academic debates and discussions among the teacher educators in ITEs, where the PISMP TESL programme is offered. These will, in turn, provide the teacher educators in the programme with information on best practices related to English proficiency which could help them make wise decisions in training their students. The findings will then help enhance the TESL student teachers' English proficiency.

Moreover, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there has been no research done based on the student teachers and teacher educators regarding the proficiency work in the PISMP TESL programme, i.e., curriculum, relevance of the syllabus,

effectiveness or value of the courses, since the programme began in 2011. Findings of the teacher educators' and student teachers' perspectives of the proficiency work done within the curriculum will shed light on how its key stakeholders experience the PISMP TESL curriculum. This study will thus be a platform to give a voice to the unheard.

Another notable feature of this study is that it will contribute to the scant body of literature on the PISMP TESL programme. Even though there are studies conducted locally on teacher education, research is scarce on this programme. The study's findings will help other universities or institutions make better decisions regarding their curriculum to improve the TESL student teachers' language proficiency. It is also hoped that it could enthuse other scholars to use this study as a reference to further research on TESL programmes offered by other institutions in Malaysia.

Getting a comprehensive overview of the programme structure, course content and student teachers' and teacher educators' feedback on English proficiency will help ITEs to effectively discharge their mandate by producing competent English language teachers. The change will fulfil Shift 10 of the Malaysia Education Blueprint; to make the teacher education worth the value by maximising student outcomes for every ringgit.

## **1.8 Definitions of Key Terms**

The definitions of terms used in this study are provided to facilitate in understanding their meanings within the context of this study. The terms are as follows.

### **1.8.1 English Language Proficiency**

Richards et al. (1992), as cited in Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012), describe language proficiency as a skill that allows an individual to use language for specific purposes. Harsch (2017) expands on this by stating that being proficient in a second or foreign language means not only understanding the language but also knowing how to use it effectively in various contexts.

In the context of TESL programmes, particularly in Malaysia, English language proficiency refers to the level of competence and ability required by student teachers to effectively understand, speak, read and write in English. This proficiency is crucial, as it directly influences their ability to teach English to primary ESL pupils. It encompasses various language skills, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, comprehension and written expression.

Proficiency in English for TESL student teachers involves more than just theoretical knowledge of language rules and structures; it also requires the practical application of these language skills in real-life teaching scenarios. This includes communicating effectively with pupils, engaging in academic discourse, managing classroom interactions and participating in professional development. Inadequate proficiency can hinder these student teachers from effectively delivering lessons and supporting their pupils' language development, which is a significant concern within the PISMP TESL programme.

### **1.8.2 Intended Curriculum**

The planned curriculum refers to the formal document that includes the standards, objectives and structure of an educational programme (Phaeton and Stears, 2016). Within the context of this study, the planned curriculum is the curriculum designed for the PISMP TESL programme carried out in ITEs. It is represented by the PISMP programme guide and the Summary of Course Information (RMK) of each course offered in the programme.

### **1.8.3 Enacted Curriculum**

The enacted curriculum in this study is based on Nawaz and Akbar's (2019) definition which describes enacted curriculum as using the intended curriculum to actually teach in classrooms. In implementing the intended curriculum, the teacher educators link the curriculum with the actual situations in the classroom.

## **1.9 Delimitations of the Study**

In analysing the importance of English proficiency in the intended and enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme at the ITEs, teacher educators and student teachers were selected to be part of this study. Just as with any study, this study too has its delimitation which is related to the number of interview participants from whom data were collected for this study.

Data were collected from eight student teachers who were in their final semester of the PISMP TESL programme. The entire TESL student teacher population of the two ITEs would have nevertheless provided a wider range of experience with the PISMP TESL programme. For feasibility of the study, the researcher had however

narrowed the target population to eight student teachers; four from each of the two ITEs.

Having experienced the whole programme, student teachers at their final stage of the programme were deemed to be suitable participants who could provide the researcher with feedback regarding the importance of proficiency in the programme. It was, therefore, important in this study to select student teachers with special considerations.

In getting the insight into the importance given to English language proficiency in the enacted curriculum of the PISMP TESL programme, teacher educators (TEs) were also interviewed. Although the initial study involved eight TEs, towards the end of the study only six TEs consented to the interviews. As the study aimed to have an in-depth understanding of the programme, this allowed the researcher to thoroughly extract insightful information from each participant on the importance given to proficiency in the PISMP TESL programme. The focus was confined to the six available TEs as the interview participants. It did not affect the depth of the participant's perspectives in any way.

As data were obtained from only six TESL teacher educators (TEs) and eight final year student teachers (STs), the number of participants in this evaluation effort limits the generalisability of the findings. This study was conducted in 2 ITEs. Hence, the findings of this study related to the English language proficiency in the PISMP programme were applicable to only these institutes. The findings could not be used to generalise the whole ITE TESL population as the data did not include participants from Years 1 to 3 of the TESL programme from other ITEs.

However, the findings are likely to have some bearing on the importance given to proficiency in the PISMP programmes in general since the ITEs implement a centralised curriculum which is monitored by the Teacher Education Division of the MOE.

### **1.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides key background information of this study and highlights the need to improve English language teachers' language proficiency. The study pinpoints proficiency as a fundamental issue in the Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) and that proficiency requires attention during the pre-service teacher training. It also provides some information about the PISMP TESL programme in ITEs.

This chapter also addresses the absence of empirical evidence on the importance given to English language proficiency within the TESL programmes. Most importantly, it provides the basis of this study; the pressing need to know how this common yet persisting issue of low English language proficiency is dealt with in the PISMP TESL programme. Additionally, it presents some guiding research questions, followed by the significance of this study and the definition of certain terms central to this study. Next, in the subsequent chapter, reviews of literature related to this study is provided.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a review of literature related to pre-service teacher education, Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) and the importance of English proficiency among Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) teachers. While the literature review on pre-service teacher education covers how it impacts teacher effectiveness, SLTE is reviewed for its origins, teachers' crucial role in teaching the second language, the need for second language teachers to acquire the target language and the content. The review on the importance of English language proficiency provides the definition of proficiency. It also furnishes research in SLTE that supports proficiency to be an essential element for English language teachers to teach the target language effectively. These are ensued by the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study. This chapter ends with the summary of the literature review.

#### **2.2 Institutes of Teacher Education in Malaysia**

At the 1996 International Conference on Education held in Geneva, representatives from the Ministries of Education worldwide discussed the critical role of teachers. They underscored the importance of this vital force that revitalises education with their approaches, practices and ideals (MOE, 2004). The recognition has led teacher training to be upgraded and institutes of teacher education (ITEs) have been tasked to produce future-ready knowledgeable teachers who perceive education positively and are adequately prepared with skills to teach the younger generation.

The responsibility to train teachers to be of quality have led ITEs to develop curriculum that allows them to arm their student teachers with suitable professional competencies (Eriş & Kılıçoğlu, 2019). In the context of Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE), Al-Issa (2017) suggests that ITEs consider providing their students with opportunities to learn from experienced English language teachers to help them attain the necessary skills and understand how these in-service teachers adapt to different teaching strategies in their language classrooms. The suggestion is consistent with Medley (1979) who opines that exposing student teachers to effective teaching would help them understand that efficacy in the classroom requires them to possess strong language proficiency, knowledge and teaching skills.

According to Mahmud et al. (2018), before ITEs became an organisation of their own, the curriculum taught in the institutes was created, assessed and monitored by the Teacher Education Division (TED). TED is one of the government divisions responsible for improving teachers' quality in Malaysia. Rashid et al. (2017) state that presently there are three divisions, namely TED, ITEs and Institute Aminuddin Baki (IAB), have their specific roles in teacher education. Their functions are illustrated in the following table (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1**

*Summary of Divisions' Roles*

Division	Roles
Teacher Education Division (TED)	Determining types of policies to enhance in-service and pre-service teachers' quality and professional development
Institute of Teacher Education (ITE)	Training teachers to meet primary schools' academic needs and demands
Institute Aminuddin Baki (IAB)	Training teachers for school leadership roles

*Note:* Adapted from “Reforms in the policy of English language teaching in Malaysia,” by R.A.B. Rashid et al, 2017, *Policy Futures in Education*, 15(1), pp. 100-112.



When ITEs were upgraded in 2005, they are responsible for equipping student teachers with knowledge and skills using a tailored syllabus covering specialised and elective subjects. Nevertheless, preparing these student trainees goes beyond teaching skills. They must be taught to live up to teachers' expectations to impart knowledge effectively to their students and produce students who perform well academically (Goh, 2011).

The challenge to produce capable teachers to meet the nation's academic demands falls on teacher educators' shoulders. Goh (2011) also highlights that teacher educators must ensure that the current curriculum can equip their student teachers with the competency they need. When determining the efficacy of an existing curriculum, it is imperative to analyse whether the content provides student teachers with what they must be ready for and prepare them for unexpected incidences in the classroom. Therefore, this study delves deeper to explore whether the contents of the PISMP TESL programme helps improve student teachers' English language proficiency that would help them cope with their future teaching demands when joining the service after graduation.

### **2.2.1 Pre-service English Language Teacher Education**

As the entry point into the teaching profession, pre-service teacher education is responsible for shaping the quality of teachers and has gained importance in recent years (Ramirez, 2020). Teaching, widely recognised as a complex intellectual profession, necessitates comprehensive preparation to ensure that teachers are not only knowledgeable in their fields but also equipped with the pedagogical skills necessary for effective instruction.

However, while Boudersa (2016) and Buss (2017) emphasise the critical role of teacher training as a dominant factor in educational quality, their focus predominantly centres on the input provided during teacher education, rather than the practical outcomes observed in classroom settings. Abonyi et al. (2021) further contribute to this discourse by highlighting the link between rigorous teacher training and improved student outcomes, yet they do not fully address the variability in training quality across different educational institutions.

This gap suggests a need for more comprehensive studies that not only examine the content of pre-service training but also assess its practical application and long-term impact on teaching efficacy. Alsubaie (2016) argues that the effectiveness of any curriculum or teaching methodology hinges significantly on the quality of teacher training, suggesting that inadequate preparation can undermine educational outcomes.

This perspective aligns with Ramparsad's (2000) assertion that poorly trained teachers struggle with curriculum implementation. However, both authors primarily address the issue from a theoretical standpoint, with limited empirical evidence to substantiate their claims. While their arguments are compelling, a critical examination of the existing literature reveals that the relationship between teacher training and curriculum execution is not always straightforward. Factors such as institutional support, access to resources and ongoing professional development also play crucial roles, suggesting that effective teaching is influenced by a complex interplay of variables beyond initial teacher preparation.

While Osamwonyi (2016) and Jelani et al. (2020) correctly highlight that pre-service and in-service teacher education are complementary processes, this perspective may oversimplify the challenges inherent in transitioning from pre-service to in-

service teaching. The literature often assumes an integration of these components, yet empirical studies suggest that many new teachers experience a significant gap between their pre-service training and the realities of classroom practice. This disconnect raises questions about the efficacy of current pre-service programmes and suggests a need for a more nuanced understanding of how pre-service and in-service training can be better aligned to support teachers throughout their careers.

Given the dynamic nature of educational demands, it is imperative that teacher education programmes undergo rigorous and ongoing evaluation to ensure their content remains relevant and effective. While annual reviews are a common recommendation, the mere act of evaluation is insufficient if it does not lead to meaningful and evidence-based revisions. Curriculum developers must not only restructure and reorganise content based on current educational needs but also critically assess whether these changes genuinely enhance teacher preparedness or merely respond to superficial trends.

The adage 'teachers are made and not born' (Candal, 2015) accentuates the complexity of teacher training. However, it also risks oversimplifying the multifaceted challenges faced in teacher education. While the acquisition of knowledge and professional skills is a fundamental expectation, there is often a disconnect between what is taught in pre-service programmes and the realities of classroom practice. Darling-Hammond (2014) advocates for the critical role of pre-service teacher education in equipping future teachers with the necessary skills to navigate classroom challenges.

Yet, this perspective may overlook the variability in programme quality and the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of such training. It is not enough to assume that the provision of knowledge and skills will automatically translate into effective teaching. Instead, a more comprehensive approach that considers the complexities of educational environments is needed to truly prepare student teachers for the demands of the profession.

These perspectives align with Danielson's (2011) assertion that exposing student teachers to a variety of teaching methods enhances their effectiveness and positively impacts their students' academic performance. While this view is widely accepted, it is crucial to question whether simply exposing student teachers to different methods is sufficient for producing high-quality teachers. The assumption that varied exposure alone leads to better teaching outcomes overlooks the importance of depth in understanding and the ability to adapt these methods to diverse classroom contexts.

Al-Issa et al. (2017) support Danielson's stance, emphasising that student teachers are expected to demonstrate the knowledge and competencies gained during their training in real classroom settings. However, this expectation raises questions about the adequacy of current teacher education programmes in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. It is not enough to assume that competency is achieved through exposure; the quality of instructional methods, the context in which they are applied, and the ongoing support provided to student teachers play equally critical roles.

Furthermore, while researchers like Darling-Hammond (2014) argue that extensive training during pre-service years leads to better performance as teachers, this assertion warrants deeper examination. The notion of 'extensive training' must be

critically analysed. What constitutes 'extensive' and how is this training evaluated? Moreover, the variability in teacher preparation programmes, along with the diverse challenges faced in different educational environments, suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to teacher training may be inadequate. A more comprehensive evaluation of pre-service teacher education is necessary to ensure that it truly equips future teachers with the skills required for effective teaching across various contexts.

Consistent with the widely accepted view that pre-service teacher education is essential for equipping future teachers with vital teaching skills, Coenders and Verhoef (2019) argue that such programmes specifically aid student teachers in mastering the introduction and conclusion of lessons. While this is undoubtedly important, focusing primarily on these aspects risks oversimplifying the complexity of effective teaching, which requires more than just structured lesson planning. Similarly, Mufidah (2019) contends that pre-service education enhances teachers' ability to communicate and understand their students, which is crucial, yet the extent to which these skills are effectively transferred to real classroom settings remains a critical point of inquiry.

Moreover, Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) suggest that pre-service instruction plays a pivotal role in helping teachers navigate the challenges of their first year in service. However, this perspective could benefit from a more detailed examination of the specific elements of pre-service training that contribute to such resilience. Simply stating that pre-service education is important for early-career coping does not sufficiently address the variability in teacher preparedness or the differing levels of support new teachers may receive.