

TEACHERS TRAINEES' PERCEPTION OF THE USE OF READERS' THEATRE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract. This study aimed to explore teacher trainees' views of Readers Theatre in the English language classroom. The participants for the study were fifth semester Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) diploma students from Universiti Selangor who had enrolled in the ELD 2243 course in November 2023. A sample of 44 fifth semester diploma students was purposively chosen to represent the participants of this study. Readers' theatre was introduced to the students in the 10th week of the semester via lectures and Youtube videos. They were then required to write the scripts and perform the plays in groups of 5 people. At the end of the 14th week, a questionnaire consisting of 12 statements using the 5-point Likert scale was administered to the students. The findings from the study showed that the teacher trainees had mainly positive views about their experience in using Readers Theatre in the ELD 2243 course, and a majority of them would apply the teaching method in their future career as teachers.

Keywords: *teacher trainees, readers' theatre, TESL, English language*

Introduction

The English language subject is considered an important subject for most school-leavers in Malaysia as they need to pass it in order to be able to further their studies to tertiary level. It is also an important subject for those seeking employment in many sectors as they need to be able to converse in the language for employment purposes. However, the 2022 Sijil Pendidikan Malaysia (SPM) examination results showed that a total of 52,000 students failed the English language subject (Norhisham, 2023). This is disappointing indeed as the students have learned the subject since they were 7 years old. It appears that 10 years of learning English at school has not been very effective for the students. Some experts have suggested a few ways for teachers to make the English language more interesting for students. As reported by D'Silva (2019), one suggestion is that the teacher has a similar role to stage actors as they have to make the audience enjoy each performance in a conducive atmosphere. As such, the English teacher has a special role in ensuring that the classroom is interactive and student-centred. As stated by Dr Farhana Deris, play is an important feature in language learning and it can be used to teach English language effectively (Sani, 2019). Using games, students can practise their language skills as well as other skills like teamwork and leadership.

One particular way to improve students' English language skills is the application of active learning strategies in the classroom. A study by Waluyo (2020) found that the integration of smart classroom and active learning into a general English course at Walailak Universiti, Thailand, resulted in significant differences in students' pre-and post-test scores for vocabulary, listening, grammar, reading and writing. Another study

by Özer (2020) found that the application of active learning strategies such as writing poetry, role-play, script writing and drama, on students in a Turkish state university, assisted in the students' acquisition of Vocational English Course objectives with a large effect size. Yet another study by Elmetaher (2021) found that the implementation of active learning group discussion activities on 25 Japanese students in a southern Japanese university showed significant increase in their post-test English language listening scores. As stated by Mastrothanas et al. (2023), readers' theatre is a technique which is based on drama. It is a combination of reading practice and drama. The technique is considered a performing art as it involves actors reciting a script. Unlike theatre, however, it does not involve elaborate costumes or stage settings. According to Junttila et al. (2024), the main aim of RT is to provide a fun and inspiring way of practising reading, as students are involved in reading a text repeatedly while at the same rehearsing the reading as a performance for others. There have been some studies conducted on the usage of Readers' Theatre in Malaysia to improve students' English language skills. A study by Shanthi et al. (2019) found that Reader's Theatre was a useful tool to increase high school students' motivation to speak clearly and confidently in English in their collaboration and interaction with their peers.

Shanthi and Jaafar (2020) found that the technique improved students' test scores in English language skills such as reading, listening and speaking. Hassan et al. (2018) found that Reader's Theatre helped to improve students' reading comprehension, as well as improved their reading interest and motivation. Devarajoo and Yamat (2021) discovered that the use of the Audacity software and Readers Theatre increased low-level primary students' motivation level as well as helped them to read more fluently. Bakar and Sulaiman (2023) explored the usage of Online Readers Theatre on a group of first-year university students and found that the technique helped them to sustain their interest in learning literature and increase their engagement with their peers and instructors. Chin et al. (2016) found that by using Readers Theatre as a method of active learning for diploma students, their incidental learning was more apparent and their ability to learn words from the higher vocabulary levels was noticeable through higher accuracy scores. The RT group scores were compared to the scores from the group which used the conventional classroom reading (CR) method. Khing (2020) study on the use of RT on eight students in Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis found that the approach was able to enhance the students' English comprehension level and they also showed positive perception of the learning activities implemented. Wui and Aziz (2019) conducted a systematic review on the effects of Readers' Theatre on students' reading performance. They found that most of the papers reviewed pointed out that RT was effective in improving students' oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. The positive results from these studies indicate that Readers' Theatre is a useful technique to be introduced to teacher trainees in Malaysia so that they could implement the approach in their classroom later in the future. As such, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the perception of teacher trainees towards the use of Readers Theatre in the English language classroom.

Materials and Methods

Research design

The study involved gathering responses from 44 teacher trainees. The data collection process involved the purposive sampling method. The data was acquired through a

questionnaire distributed to the trainees using Google Form. The study participants were Semester 5 students of the TESL Diploma course in Universiti Selangor. They had taken the compulsory course ELD 2243 Teaching of Literature Skills in the November 2023 semester. The study utilised a questionnaire containing 12 statements which had to be answered using the 5-point Likert scale. The statements were adapted and adopted from previous studies conducted by Yusnilita et al. (2020), Uribe (2019), as well as Ng (2010). The data analysis was performed by calculating the percentage of responses towards each statement in the questionnaire. The quantitative approach enables the researchers to determine the perception of the teacher trainees towards the usage of Readers Theatre in the English language classroom. The data collected would be presented in the format of percentage tables. This would be followed by a discussion of the results.

Research procedure

The students were enrolled in the ELD2243 course for the November 2023 semester. The semester consisted of 14 weeks. In the first week, the lecturer provided them with important information regarding the assignments and tasks that the students had to complete for the semester. Among the tasks were the microteaching and the readers' theatre sessions. The lecturer informed them that they would be involved in performing Readers' Theatre in the 13th week. They were instructed to form groups of 5 people for the Readers' Theatre. In the 10th week of lecture, the lecturer gave the students were a lecture about Readers' Theatre. She used videos from Youtube to provide the students more exposure about Readers' Theatre. Then the lecturer gave a different story (based on famous fairy tales) to each group. They were required to read the story and understand the content and identifying the main scenes. In the 11th week, the lecturer guided them on how to write a short play based on the short story. Each play should contain 4 to 5 characters and the play length would be about 10 minutes. The students were given a week to finish writing the play. In the 12th week, the students had to show the plays that they had written to the lecturer. The lecturer would provide comments on how to improve the plays. The students made the necessary changes to the scripts. They were also informed to practise performing on their own at their hostels. In the 13th week, the students presented the plays in front of the lecturer and other students. Although they did not have to prepare anything special for the performance, most of them brought along costumes and props. After the session, they were given the questionnaire via Google Form which they had to answer before the class ended.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of survey

The 44 teacher trainees managed to answer the survey which was conducted via the Google Form questionnaire. From the data analysis, we can ascertain that a majority of them had positive views about their experience with Readers' Theatre in their Teaching of Literature course. This statement is based on the trainees' responses to each statement listed in the questionnaire. The findings shown in *Table 1* provide interesting insights into the views of teacher trainees towards the usage of Readers Theatre in the English Language Classroom. As seen in *Table 1*, most of the questionnaire items measuring the teacher trainees' views of Readers' Theatre came with average point of 3 and above.

This indicates that the trainees mainly agreed with the statements presented in the questionnaire.

Table 1. Perception of teacher trainees towards the usage of readers theatre in the English language classroom.

| No. | Statement | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|-----|---|------|-------|-------|------|------|
| 1 | From my experience, RT enhances students' engagement during lessons. | 34 | 56.8 | 6.8 | 0 | 2.27 |
| 2 | I believe that RT effectively promotes active participation among students. | 36.3 | 50 | 11.36 | 0 | 2.27 |
| 3 | I feel that RT facilitates better understanding and retention of a text. | 25 | 61.36 | 11.36 | 0 | 2.27 |
| 4 | In my opinion, RT encourages creativity and expression in students. | 54.5 | 34.1 | 6.8 | 2.27 | 2.27 |
| 5 | I think RT improves students' confidence in expressing themselves. | 43.2 | 45.4 | 6.8 | 2.27 | 2.27 |
| 6 | I believe RT fosters a collaborative learning environment among students. | 38.6 | 54.4 | 4.54 | 0 | 2.27 |
| 7 | I feel that RT contributes towards the development of communication skills among students. | 41 | 52.2 | 4.54 | 0 | 2.27 |
| 8 | In my opinion, RT increases students' overall enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning. | 38.6 | 52.3 | 4.54 | 0 | 2.27 |
| 9 | From my experience, RT can be a useful teaching approach in the English language classroom. | 41 | 52.3 | 9.1 | 0 | 2.27 |
| 10 | I believe that RT can be implemented in the English language classroom | 29.6 | 52.3 | 13.6 | 0 | 2.27 |
| 11 | I know how to implement RT as a trained school teacher | 15.9 | 45.6 | 34.1 | 2.27 | 2.27 |
| 12 | I am looking forward to implement RT when I teach students in the future | 26.4 | 40.1 | 20.45 | 0 | 2.27 |

Note: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree.

According to the survey results, there were 8 male students and 36 female students involved in the survey. 28 of them were in the 17-20 years old age group, while 16 of them belonged to the 21-25 year old age group. The survey results shown in *Table 1* indicate that the majority of teacher trainees had positive views of the usage of Readers' Theatre in the English language classroom. The number of trainees who had a negative perception of Readers' Theatre and its implementation in the classroom was generally small, ranging from 2.27 percent to 4.54 percent of the sample or 1 to 2 trainees. From this we can ascertain that the trainees enjoyed learning about RT and were open to the usage of this approach in their career later. Regarding statement number 1, 90.8% of the respondents stated that from their experience, RT enhanced students' engagement during lessons. Next, 86.3 percent of them also believed that RT effectively promotes active participation among the students. The outcomes are indeed in line with the findings of Mastrothanas et al. (2023) which reported that the utilisation of Readers' Theatre in education have indeed presented positive results. Regarding statement number 3, 86.36 percent of the trainees felt that RT facilitates better understanding and retention of a text. This finding is aligned with findings from Young and Rasinski (2018) which stated that RT enables students to comprehend the text. As for statement number 4, 88.6 percent of the trainees believed that RT encouraged creativity and expression in students. This is aligned with Craft et al. (2014) who stated that environments that encourage students to be active, independent, and express their ideas and opinions also support creativity.

As for statement number 5, 88.6 percent of the respondents believed that Readers' Theatre improved students' confidence in expressing themselves. This finding is in line with studies by Karabag (2015) and Lin (2015) which stated that the method builds student confidence to speak in front of others, and encourages active student

engagement. Regarding statement number 6, 93.2 percent of the trainees felt that the technique contributed towards the development of communication skills among students. Regarding the next statement (number 7), we can see that 93 percent of the trainees (93%) believed that RT fosters a collaborative learning environment among students. This is aligned with a study conducted by Kalamees-Ruubel and Läänemets (2010) which stated that the drama and performance elements in Reader's Theatre can help to develop emotional and intellectual capabilities and nurture collaborative learning through teamwork. As for statement number 8, 91 percent of the trainees stated that RT increased students' overall enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning. This is in line with findings from Drew and Pedersen (2010), who reported that the majority of the pupils in their study thought of Readers Theatre as both enjoyable and educational. In terms of the potential of RT, for statement number 9, 93.3 % of the respondents related from their experience that RT could be a useful teaching approach in the classroom. Regarding statement number 10, 81.9 % of the respondents believed that teaching approach could be implemented in the English language classroom. As for statement number 11, 61.5 % of the respondents were confident that from the knowledge that they gained about RT, they could implement the approach in their future career as a trained school teacher. As for the final statement which was statement number 12, 66.2 % of them were also looking forward to implement RT in the classroom in the future. The findings suggest that teachers should consider using Readers' Theatre in classroom activities for more positive outcomes in English language lessons.

Conclusion

The teaching of English in primary and secondary schools should be made more interesting in order to encourage students to practise using the language not just in the classroom, but also in their everyday lives. From the survey conducted, we can see that readers' theatre is one teaching approach which will be useful to attract students to use the language in the classroom. Unlike traditional teaching, which is mostly teacher-based, readers' theatre is more student-focused and it provides opportunities for the students to express themselves. The benefits as outlined by Kabilan and Kamarudin (2010) such as improvement in learners' creative and critical thinking and comprehension of a text, as well as improved students' attitude and motivation level and academic scores (Corcoran and Davis, 2005) indicate that this approach should not be left out by English language teachers.

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Conflict of interest

The authors conducted this study entirely on their personal effort and resources. They did not receive any commercial or financial contributions from external parties. As such, there are no conflicts of interest or involvement of any external parties.

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