

In-Service Trainings (INSETs) for English Lecturers: An Exploratory Study in Malaysian Polytechnics

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Abstract

In the context of local polytechnics, developing skillful English lecturers is a critical effort. Driven by the demand to produce highly desired graduates for industries, they require supports to stay developed and realise the demand of those industries. Yet, the offered in-service trainings (INSET) of the current system very lightly focus on their real needs. Hence, this study aims to identify the types of INSET that are exactly required by polytechnic English lecturers. A survey was delegated to a random sampling throughout Malaysia to get the related information. An SPSS procedure was run to generate the results. The findings of this exploratory survey are expected to benefit related stakeholders to prepare and offer more relevant courses to English lecturers in the future.

Keywords English lecturers, INSET, professional development, Malaysian polytechnic

INTRODUCTION

Changes are a constant in the educational field. As the bedrock to most nation building plans, changes require a solid support from all stakeholders in the field, particularly educators who are responsible for integrating and synchronising new ideas into the systems. Teachers in schools, tutors in colleges or lecturers in higher learning institutions are typical terms used to label the most prominent agents in education. In this regard, their roles produce a significant impact on the society.

Due to this, educators indirectly have to ensure that their professional credibility is consistent and updated with the changes. Although most of them are formally trained in teaching preparatory programmes, which entitled them as professionals in this profession, their in-service trainings (henceforth INSETs) act as vigorous supports to keep them abreast with constant changes in education. It is a part of the educators' professional learning process (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Hence, it is vital for institutions to offer continuous supports for educators who are serving in their systems. The rationale is, educators' professional development (PD) does not solely depend on their own account but should be supported by top management efforts (Aziah et al., 2014). As concluded by Hayes (1995), a PD process is meant for all participants:

“...at the grass roots must have a sense of ownership of the programmes in which they are involved. In this way, development can continue, and the ‘sense of plausibility’ that is crucial to the effective implementation of any change can be achieved.” (p. 261)

**This article is based on a paper presented at the International Seminar on Language Teaching (ISELT) 2015 organized by Pusat CITRA Universiti, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.*

RELATED ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF POLYTECHNIC ENGLISH LANGUAGE LECTURERS: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

In the current scenario, Malaysia is actively striving to achieve a developed country status by 2020. Many nation building plans are dynamically being executed especially in the education sectors. For instance, there is a list of re-aligned and transformative education institutions and systems being included in the Government Transformation Plan (GTP). It is an effort to synchronise the human capital production and industrial demands in gearing up the economic progress to aim for the status. This is where the polytechnics play an important role. Due to that, a transformative plan was introduced known as the Polytechnic Transformative Plan (PTP), (Jabatan Pengajian Politeknik [JPP], 2009). The ultimate aims are empowering polytechnics as a preferred choice for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) higher learning institutions in Malaysia, and becoming a hub to produce human capital for the industries (JPP, 2009; 2011).

In achieving these aims, common issues on polytechnic graduates such as low English proficiency and poor communication skills capture more attention among local researchers. This is because being competent in the English language is crucial and the most critical skill sought by employers (Ramakrishnan & Norizan, 2012; Zaliza & Mohd Safarin, 2014; Yuen 2015). In polytechnic context, Ahmad Yasruddin et al. (2010) discovered that the civil engineering students participated in the study had low ability in using the English language, despite the types of workplace and level of study. A more recent study by Subramaniam and Raja Nor Safinas (2013) found similar findings among marketing students who were undergoing their industrial trainings. In a similar study, the employers found that the trainees needed more practices in oral English communication, including negotiation skills, public speaking and handling of customers. Next, polytechnic graduate tracer studies that examined the students' insight about skills and knowledge attained in polytechnic also corresponded with the aforementioned studies. The 2010 and 2012 reports reveal that students were not entirely contented with the English language skills and knowledge attained in polytechnics. In the 2010 report, slightly more than half of the students (51.9% from 27012) stated that their satisfaction level in regards to English language skills gained at polytechnic was only at 'intermediate-very unsatisfactory'. A similar trend was observed in 2012 but with a slight increase in the percentage i.e. 53.9% from 27424 students. However, another study conducted in 2014 witnessed a positive change whereby a large majority of the students (85.8% from 23960) indicated their satisfaction level at 'intermediate-satisfactory'. Even though the finding demonstrates a significant change, English language skills and knowledge are yet the lowest attained among all subjects offered in polytechnics. The previous reports in 2010 and 2012 also displayed a similar trend.

The findings of the studies seem to indicate the inadequacy of English language knowledge and skills that have been imparted to students. Conventionally, when it relates to teaching and learning process, the concern often falls back to English language lecturers who play a prominent role in determining successful learning among learners. They are the key individuals who execute any educational planning and reforms at the classroom level, whose instructional decisions greatly impact students' learning process (Aziah et al., 2014; Richards 2011). Hence, it is necessary to look into the knowledge they receive through PD, in helping them to become professionally competent. Effective PD programs are crucial since it addresses their learning needs as well as tackles students' major learning challenges. The data gathered from JPP (access on 15 May 2014) however, shows that only one course reflects content knowledge of ELT i.e. a course on language testing and evaluation. This is indeed insufficient to help approximately 368 English lecturers who serve in 35 polytechnics nationwide. In other words, this scenario connotes that the responsible party should be proactive in providing more required ELT skill-upgrading courses to this group of lecturers.

In addition, local studies in PD area have been focusing on teachers in schools with different foci such as the needs of training among primary school English teachers (Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013), and means of PD such as blogging (Nambiar & Thang, 2015), online collaboration (Kabilan et. al., 2011), professional learning community (Aziah et. al., 2014) and mentoring programmes (Lyne, 2013). Meanwhile, in polytechnic setting, a study that directly addresses PD issue is limited to Wan Noraini and Mohammed Sani (2010) who investigated the relevant competencies of PD programmes to polytechnic technical lecturers. One of the results yielded stressed on the requirement to improve professional knowledge in their technical subjects. Meanwhile, a specific study that highlights English lecturers' PD

concerns was conducted by Khairun Nisah and Sandrasagran (2010). They suggested that peer observation as a means to promote PD. Other studies related to ELT process situated in polytechnic have been on analysis of semester five technical syllabus (Harlini, 2011), assessing technology integration into teaching (Mohd Khalid, 2012), identifying teaching challenges (Marwan, 2009; Suhaily & Faizah, 2013a), sources of teacher beliefs (Suhaily & Faizah, 2013b), and teacher decision making (Suhaily & Faizah, 2016). The scarce number of studies related to English language lecturers' PD supports the need for more research in this area. In regards to this, an exploration on language teachers' knowledge base would be an appropriate frame to underpin this investigation in order to identify relevant INSET programmes to support English language lecturers' PD. This is because INSET is a form of PD programmes that promote professional learning of in-service educators in upskilling their competency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

INSETs as a Professional Development Means

In teacher development scope, teachers continuously adapt to changes through teacher professional learning (Avalos, 2011). Teacher professional learning takes place individually as well as collectively. According to Opfer and Pedder (2011), teacher professional learning refers to the state where teachers actively get involved in any activities that directly change their beliefs and knowledge which take place within their immediate professional community. Its path is different for one teacher to another, yet their mission is still the same; to improve students' learning (Craft, 2000; Richards & Farrell, 2005). In addition, it is also a part of teacher PD domain (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Avalos, 2011)

In second language teacher education, reflective teaching is a common alternative to providing a proper channel to assist teachers' PD (Richards & Lockhart 1996; Borg, 2006; Avalos, 2011). A widely established procedure like writing teaching journal is employed to uncover language teachers' private voice (Borg, 2003). The findings often yield onto bottom-up solutions to immediate classroom issues (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). These include teachers' decision making, moments of certainty, worry, or confusion, and private triumphs – all grist for the PD (Bailey et al., 2001:57). As a result, it inclines more towards an individual teacher's efforts to continuously monitor his or her own development.

Then, there is a collective effort conducted by language teachers to stay updated in their teaching practice. For example, peer observation encourages cooperation among teachers in the faculty to promote PD (Bailey et al., 2001; Khairun Nisah & Sandrasagran, 2010). Also, professional learning community among teachers encourages teachers to work collaboratively and learn from each other (Aziah, Najdah & Abdul Ghani Kanesan, 2014). Not forgetting, the mentoring helps teachers deal with change and accept new ideas and teaching methods (Lyne, 2013). The results gathered are likely to be less private since it is not a one-person opinion. It could be carried out if members in teachers' immediate surrounding are supportive (Richards & Farrell, 2005). This is because some teachers are hesitant to participate since observation is linked to evaluation (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). However, this procedure is also derived from an individual's drive before it could be expanded as a collective effort of reflective teaching.

Other than that, there is an institutional effort to professionally assist teachers to stay developed. The common one is in-service training (INSET), which refers to all types of formal courses undertaken by teachers after their initial teaching training (Craft, 2000). It is a top-down approach provided by schools or administrators as an opportunity to provide the continuity in teacher professional learning (Higgins & Leat, 2001; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Its concept rests on a course-led model (Craft, 2000). Though it has been criticised as less workable for teachers' instant change in belief or knowledge (Hayes, 1995; Avalos, 2011), it is a traditional means of helping teachers to gain knowledge and keep on learning (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Furthermore, the necessity to conduct courses from the top-down approach still exists in the current education field.

Opfer and Pedder (2011) conceptualise teacher learning as a complex system and identify “three overlapping and recursive systems involved in teacher professional learning: the individual teacher, the school, and the activity” (p. 384). Thus, it is coherent with Hayes's (1995) opinion that all stakeholders at the grass root ought to own or involve in any ways to support each other to develop and cope with the

changes. The rationale is that individual's need to improve is often influenced by implemented policies into the system (Craft, 2000).

However, in certain organisations, the desired teacher professional learning programmes are lightly based on their immediate needs (Higgins & Leat, 2001). The metaphor '*horses for courses or courses for horses*' clearly implies the dilemma to understand a guide in planning INSETs (ibid). The designs for the courses should prioritise teachers' needs in their current practice rather than being a delivery medium of government policy changes (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). In addition, Richards and Farrell (2005) say that there is a need for on-going renewal of professional skills and knowledge. This necessity does not mirror an insufficient pre-service training but simply a response to the fact that the knowledge base of teaching constantly changes. So, by identifying which knowledge base of teaching needs to be tended or refreshed, both teachers and administrators could effectively contribute to desired INSETs that should be conducted.

Language Teacher Knowledge Base

Regardless of often being remarked as a lower status profession (Borg, 2006), language teachers have devotedly undergone a teaching preparatory stage before they enter the teaching services (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Avalos, 2011). No one should be doubting or questioning their credibility as language educators. This is because they have been trained as content-based educators who are equipped with required knowledge (Richards, 2008). Researchers believe that teacher development programmes, after their initial training, generate teacher knowledge to promote teacher effectiveness (e.g. Shulman, 1987; Richards, 2008).

In mainstream teacher education, Shulman (1987) conceptualises teacher knowledge base into three categories namely (1) *general pedagogical knowledge* (PK) (2) *content knowledge* (CK) and (3) *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK). Shulman (1987:8) suggested that the 'special interest' should be given to PCK because it signifies the distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching. It is actually an eclectic knowledge that has been derived from the combination of (1) and (2). It involves gradual transform and constant supports within the community of practice.

Sharing the similar view, Opfer and Pedder (2011) summarise PCK as a unique form of knowledge that represents teacher learning. The identified criteria include synthesis of different knowledge bases, emerging learning process, and on-going interaction of teachers' existing knowledge, learning activity, and change in practice. All these are actually considered as 'reciprocal causative' that constantly influence the teacher development (ibid: 389).

In the similar tone, Richards (2008) postulates knowledge base in second language teacher education (SLTE) in two conceptions. The first conception is *knowledge about*, which refers to explicit knowledge that teachers have about language and language teaching principles, in which very similar to Shulman's content knowledge. Richards (2008) lists some topics like language analysis, discourse analysis, phonology, curriculum development, and methodology as examples of explicit knowledge. The knowledge consists of academic content and methodology course that guide language teachers to teach. In Wallace's (1991) term, it is known as teachers' *received knowledge*. The theoretical subject-matter and pedagogy contents receive during the preparatory teaching training stage (Wallace, 1991; Richards, 2008).

Next, the second conception is *knowledge how*. It denotes the implicit knowledge of language teachers. It is reciprocally shaped from their beliefs, theories, and knowledge (Richards, 2008). The 'contents' of this knowledge is acquired from the experience gained in the classroom and what work best for them at the moment (Shulman, 1987; Wallace, 1991). That is why it is viewed as the results of teacher continuous learning process (Craft, 2000; Avalos, 2011; Richards & Farrell, 2005). The rationale is their *received knowledge* grows from theoretical roots into practical branches which represent Wallace's (1991) *experiential knowledge* or Shulman's (1987) *pedagogical content knowledge*.

At this stage, teachers' existing knowledge is revisited and their real-time experience is blended to form an individual teaching theory, to the extent it forms teacher belief system (Borg, 2003). For instance, language teachers would integrate the advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching grammar to make the lesson more interactive as compared to a structural model in the traditional approach. However, this requires external facilitation. This is because teachers' capacity to transform content into accessible and learnable forms (Richards, 2008) depends on the present nature of their subject content requirement (Borg, 2006) as well as current institutional policy and system (Avalos, 2011).

Moreover, according to Borg (2006), English language teaching methodology is progressive than other subjects. Thus, the on-going learning process is demanded from teachers to avoid them from being stagnant with the knowledge acquired in the past 20 years (Richards, 2008). The research advancement in ELT also implies that teachers need to 'add on' their knowledge particularly about the content subject, which this accentuates the significant of PD. This impression is particularly important for responsible stakeholders to take note and consider in delivering the desired supports. This is because there are in-service language teachers who mainly depend on institutional support to provide those courses and trainings to expand their knowledge, specifically on pedagogical and content knowledge, and directly keeping them abreast with the current changes in ELT. Subsequently, the exploration, or need analysis, to identify the required knowledge base courses should be offered to language teachers. This could be a point of departure in planning in-service trainings for them.

THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to explore the INSET required by polytechnic English lecturers. Hence, the research questions are:

- i. Does Malaysian polytechnic provide relevant INSET for the respondents' knowledge base requirement?
- ii. Does Malaysian polytechnic provide relevant INSET for the respondents' PD?
- iii. Are the respondents satisfied with the INSETs provided by Malaysian polytechnic?
- iv. What are the courses needed by the respondents?

METHODOLOGY

The respondents of the study were 134 English lecturers, who were selected randomly from 28 polytechnics in Peninsular Malaysia. A survey questionnaire which consists of four parts was developed and used as the instrument to gauge the lecturers' responses. The instrument consists of four parts: Part 1 details the respondents' demographic background; Part 2 describes their qualifications; Part 3 lists the items on the respondents' views on the trainings/ courses received, and Part 4 asks the respondents to give suggestions on courses and trainings needed. A pilot study was conducted to test its reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha result yields to .8, suggesting that the items in Part 4 of the questionnaire have relatively high internal consistency. The questionnaire was then distributed to the respective respondents either by hand, mail or e-mail. The data were generated via a simple SPSS procedure; the application of means. Respective results were illustrated in tables in the following subsection.

FINDINGS

Demographic Findings

The demographic data collected (respondents' age, gender, number of years teaching; both in the polytechnic system and other institutions; and education background) serves as the baseline data for this study. However, its correlation with the main findings on the respondents' responses on INSETs provided by the polytechnics seems unnecessary. It is not the focus of this study to tap into that.

Based on the analysis, 134 respondents (i.e. $n = 134$) participated in the survey (Table 1). One hundred and nine who responded are female respondents (81.3%), and another 25 of them are male respondents (18.7%). For education background, in terms of academic qualification in TESL, most of the respondents (90.3%) have been formally trained to teach the English language. The remaining 9.7% did not have any formal TESL/TESOL or English language teaching qualification. However, they did undergo short preparatory teaching trainings such as *Diploma Pendidikan Lepas Ijazah* (DPLI).

Table 1 Gender and Qualification

Mean	Gender		Qualification	
	Male	Female	TESL/TESOL	Without TESL/TESOL
f	25	109	121	13
%	18.7	81.3	90.3	9.7

The respondents were sorted into 4 age groups; (a) 22 – 30 years old, (b) 31 – 40 years old, (c) 41 – 50 years old, and (d) 51 years and above (see Table 2). Half of the respondents (50%) came from the age of 31 to 40, while the least (8.2%) was from 51 years and above.

Table 2 Respondents Based on Age Group

Mean	Age group (years)			
	22-33	31-40	41-50	51 & above
f	42	67	14	11
%	31.3	50.0	10.4	8.2

Regarding the respondents' duration of teaching experience in their overall teaching services (see Table 3), 35.8% of them has been teaching for 6 to 10 years. This was later followed by those with only 1 to 5 years of teaching experience that represents 29.9% and 11 to 16 years of teaching experience with 18.7%. The remaining 15.7% was those with teaching experience of 16 years and above. Among these respondents, 36.6 % have been servicing the Malaysian polytechnic system for 5 years or less (refer Table 4). A high percentage of the respondents (58.2%) have been teaching in the system for 6 to 11 years while the remaining 5.1%, which equals to 7 respondents, have been with the polytechnics for 16 years or more.

Table 3 Respondents' Teaching Experience (Overall)

Mean	Teaching experience (years)						
	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	>30
f	40	48	25	5	8	2	6
%	29.9	35.8	18.7	3.7	6.0	1.5	4.5

Table 4 Respondents' Teaching Experience (Attach to Polytechnics)

Mean	Teaching experience (years)						
	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	>30
f	49	43	35	5	1	0	1
%	36.6	32.1	26.1	3.7	0.7	0.0	0.7

OTHER FINDINGS

Generally, the analysis shows that the respondents provided positive responses to the statements enquired pertaining to their trainings and courses received at polytechnics (Table 5). Item 1 of the questionnaire suggests that a large majority of them (81.3%) felt that they have sufficient knowledge to teach English courses at polytechnic, and only 4.5% disagreed with the statement. Item 2 also shows a similar pattern whereby 73.2% of them agreed that the PK and CK acquired during their teaching preparatory courses are adequate and relevant for their teaching process. Similarly, less than half of the overall respondents (43%), concurred that their teaching institutions, polytechnics, did provide them with courses and trainings relevant to their content knowledge, meanwhile, the other 25% did not agree with the statement. This statement is

further supported with Item 4 and 5, which more than half of the respondents agreed that the courses and trainings provided by polytechnic were needed for their PD and enrich their knowledge about English language, recorded 56% and 61.2% respectively. For Item 6, and 7, majority of them (70.1% and 69.4% respectively) agreed that the INSETs attended had increased their self-esteem and improved their efficacy as English lecturers. However, in terms of their satisfaction of the INSETs (Item 8), only 39.6 exhibited their satisfaction, meanwhile 35.8 was neutral and 24.6% was not satisfied.

Table 5 Received Trainings and Courses

Mean (%)	Item							
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Agree	81.3	73.2	45.5	56.0	61.2	70.1	69.4	39.6
Neutral	14.2	16.4	29.1	24.6	23.9	19.4	18.7	35.8
Disagree	4.5	10.4	25.4	19.4	14.9	10.4	11.9	24.6

Based on the above-mentioned results, the following discussions are organised into each intended research question for the exploratory purpose to identify the types of INSET required by English language lecturers in Malaysian polytechnics, particularly to those in Peninsular Malaysia.

i. Does Malaysian polytechnic provide relevant INSET for the respondents’ knowledge base requirement?

The analysis shows that most of the respondents agreed that their respective institutions provide relevant INSETs for their knowledge base requirement. This indicates that they have received relevant courses or trainings during their services in polytechnics. It is a good positive indication to show that polytechnics are accommodating in giving the platforms for the staff to keep on learning. As stated by Richards (2008:165), learning is seen to emerge through social interaction within a community of practice. However, a quarter of the overall respondents felt that polytechnics are quite unsupportive in providing them the continuous assistance that is relevant for their knowledge base requirement. Thus, it may be an indication to the responsible party to check on the distribution of the INSETs provided. The rationale is due to the fact that certain offered courses were conducted based on the *courses for horses* rather than *horses for courses* in which had been commented in Higgins and Leat’s (2001) study about the effectiveness of INSETs for teacher development.

ii. Does Malaysian polytechnic provide relevant INSET for the respondents’ PD?

As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, the majority of the respondents had the same opinion that polytechnics do provide them relevant INSETs for their PD. This is in line with Craft’s (2000:13) view that “recent development in PD should include greater analysis on basing PD on careful needs analysis linked to evidence of existing practice and thus targeted training”. The findings in this research question further confirm research question (i) that the training provided by polytechnics are not only relevant but also benefit their PD. PD is significant to sustain teachers’ professional learning in order to avoid from being underdeveloped and complacent (Wallace, 1991; Avalos, 2011). In addition, institutional support can increase job satisfaction which will result in better teacher performance and better teacher retention (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

iii. Are the respondents satisfied with the INSETs provided by Malaysian polytechnic?

In terms of the respondents’ satisfaction with the attended courses, the number of those who chose to agree, neutral, disagree did not show vast differences. This is, perhaps, due to the respondents’ teaching experience ranges from 1 to more than 31 years of service. The diverse teaching years indicates different needs among the lecturers. For instance, the novices who have just left teacher training institutions may have issues with how to assimilate theories learned with the true colors of teaching practice. On the other hand, the more experienced teachers might differ from the novice, as they typically concern over issues on refresher courses

and the emergence of new teaching theories and strategies. Both situations are harmonised with Borg's (2003) concerns about the development of teacher cognition that shapes language teaching practice. He stated that "the notions of *variable outcomes* and *individual developmental pathways* seem central to an understanding of the impact of teacher education on language teacher cognition because individual trainees make sense of and are affected by training programmes in different and unique ways" (ibid:91). This is further confirmed by Richards and Farrell (2005:2) who believe that "teachers have different needs at different times during their careers, and the needs of the schools and institutions in which they work also change overtime".

iv. What are the courses needed by the respondents?

The data from the last section of the questionnaire (Part 5) shows some patterns in terms of the suggested trainings and courses. Generally, the courses and trainings proposed by the respondents fall into three main areas which are PK, CK and PCK. In terms of PK, the majority of the respondents felt in need for courses related to material development in ELT, such as designing modules and teaching materials, teaching approaches and principles, classroom management, and added values in teaching. Meanwhile, for CK, four types of courses are identified, which are specific genre-based writing, four skills in language teaching, language and linguistics, and other branches of English. Courses related to genre-based writing and its application such as writing academic report business writing (writing cover letter and resume) are amongst the most common suggestions found. The second most preferred courses are the ones related to the four skills of language learning. In PCK area, suggestions on courses related to ESP teaching principles/approaches dominated this area, which inclusive of courses on ESP teaching methods, approaches to genre-based writing, integration of other skills such speaking in ESP context and few others.

It is surprising that the proposed courses and trainings in CK area are on genre-based writing such as academic writing, cover letter and resume writing. Similarly, courses and trainings proposed in PCK are mostly on ESP teaching principles and approaches. These kinds of refresher courses are needed perhaps due to the fact that they are teaching technical and commercial students which require them to use specific terms and terminology related to students' fields of studies. These actually correspond with Opfer and Pedder (2011) that teacher learning is related to the immediate needs of teacher PD as:

- a. it is an interaction and intersection of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, practices, and experiences,
- b. it is a cognitive conflict that teachers experience (that caused conflict in teachers' approaches and thinking) in which drives them to seek for change,
- c. it represents that dissonance in teacher thinking is often required for teachers to unlearn much of what they believe, know, and know how to do in order to learn and adopt new practices.

Finally, polytechnics as a TVET higher learning institution in Malaysia can be classified as a supportive institution, given that it provides the opportunities for the lecturers to keep on improving their skills and knowledge. The allocation of *PPK* courses in the earlier section does not represent the holistic INSETs provided, hence the claim on '*lightly emphasises on*' can be ignored as polytechnics are seen to be rather committed in their aim to assist the staff in upgrading skill and knowledge as a lifelong learning process during PTP phases (Sahul Hamed, Mohd Amin, & Mohd Ali, 2010). This is because giving the chances to update teacher professional knowledge through partaking in INSETs suggests a positive remark about the institutions' commitment to quality and to PD of its staff (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Overall, the exploratory survey conducted revealed that Malaysian polytechnic has provided sufficient in-service support to its English language lecturers to improve their competence. The courses and trainings offered cover all three types of knowledge base as conceptualized by Shulman (1987), i.e. PK, CK, and PCK, in the mainstream education. It is in line with Richards's (2008) knowledge base concepts (i.e. *knowledge about* and *knowledge how*) that specifically reflect the second language teacher education requirement. In other words, polytechnic English language lecturers in Peninsular Malaysia have received

ample knowledge enhancement opportunities for their professional learning and development. Effective PD programs should ideally boost lecturers' knowledge, skills and motivation that consequently improve classroom instruction and elevate students' achievement. This should also address the problems faced by polytechnic graduates in regards to their English low proficiency.

It is recommended that future studies could run need analysis to further investigate the actual needs of these lecturers on a bigger scale whilst focusing on specific related items. The suggested need analysis can be aimed at determining and justifying the synchronised efforts to investigate the immediate needs concerning English language lecturers' required knowledge based on the implemented policy. The rationale rests on the fact that a strategic approach to PD starts with needs analysis, which refers to both the institution's needs and the perceived needs of teachers (Richards & Farrell, 2005). This can be seen as a catalyst to the institutional excellence which commonly determined by staff performance. In conclusion, the initial findings of this exploratory study are hoped to spark and precipitate further efforts by responsible parties to identify more relevant INSETs that could be provided to polytechnic English language lecturers in the near future.

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