# A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS TAMIL UNIT STUDENT-TEACHER TEACHING PRACTICE EXPERIENCES: A NEW CASE STUDY APPROACH

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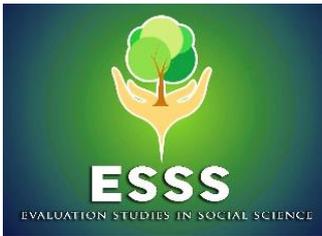

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## ABSTRACT

The experiences of undergraduates' student-teachers from the Tamil unit program at Sultan Idris Education university who underwent teacher training are examined in this paper. A crucial part of teacher preparation is practical teaching experience. What the student-teacher has experienced in the teaching and learning environment is unknown, though. What experiences student instructors have while they are in the teaching practice phase is the topic that this study aims to discuss. Since this study is focused on the real-world experiences of student teachers, qualitative research was chosen as the method of inquiry. Additionally, experiential learning and reflective learning theory serve as the theoretical foundation for this investigation. In addition, it was noticed that they were not doing well in their teaching practices throughout the student evaluation. Five student-teachers participated in semi-structured interviews, and they also kept a reflective journal. Contextual information was obtained by document analysis using the student-teachers' reports. The data was analyzed and themes found using thematic analysis. Results showed that in certain schools, student-teachers were ill-prepared for the real teaching and learning environment. Additionally, at many schools, mentor teachers and other important individuals who play a crucial role in providing student support during teaching practice did not provide any assistance.

**Keywords**: *teaching practices, student-teacher, Tamil teaching and learning*

## INTRODUCTION

In general teaching practice can be best described in these 3 aspects which are the development of teaching techniques and the role and function of a teacher; the experiences that trainee students have in schools; and the course's practical components as opposed to its academic components (Kolb, 2014). Tamil majoring student teacher's performance during teaching
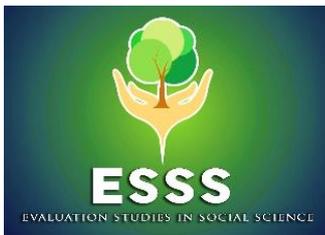
practice gives some indication on how successful they will be in the future (Stronge, 2002). Dealing with students in schools during their teaching practice offers a high level of emotional connection which is also good for the Tamil trainee teachers (Kumar, 2020). Additionally, when trainee teachers get experience in practical teaching, they start to connect with the real teaching culture. Teaching practice aims to give future Tamil student teachers the chance to build a professional relationship with the other subject teachers in the school as well as an acceptable teacher-pupil interaction (Younus & Akbar, 2017).

It is also a chance to put theories into practice and gain a deeper comprehension of educational concepts and how Tamil language learning is affected by them. Furthermore, as noted by Dodd (1990), student teachers have hands-on experience in schools to help them develop control strategies and address discipline issues among Tamil students. The chance to assess a student's aptitude as a teacher and appropriateness for the teaching profession is the other goal of teaching practice, according to Ramsden (2003). Additionally, via teaching practice, student teachers may efficiently organize and prepare lessons and hone their proficiency in the application of basic processes, techniques, and teaching methods (Ramsden, 2003). Additionally, teaching practice fosters the development of desired professional interests, attitudes, and concepts relevant to the teaching profession (Shuib & Yusof, 2020). It also helps student instructors acquire desirable teacher attributes and exhibit proper behavior (Younus & Akbar, 2017).

Additionally, student teachers may have their teaching reviewed, benefit from constructive criticism and self-evaluation, and identify their own strengths and limitations during teaching practices (Muin & Perveen, 2020; Perry, 2013). Teaching practice helps aspiring educators increase their fluency, understanding, proper use of teaching aids, ability to engage students, listening skills, and ability to answer their questions (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023). The word "teaching practice" refers to the process of preparing student teachers to teach through hands-on instruction. Furthermore, a crucial part of teacher preparation is practical teaching experience. Additionally, it provides student instructors with hands-on experience in a real teaching and learning setting (Sá & Serpa, 2023).

After completing 4 years of undergraduate studies at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), the trainee teachers will be focusing on becoming teachers—with a focus on Tamil language teaching in secondary schools nationwide. During the 4 years of studies, students will be performing the teaching practices twice for 8 weeks each time.

Following approval from the UPSI to house them, these students are assigned to nearby secondary schools for their teaching practice. Throughout the eight weeks the guiding teacher from the school will be guiding the trainee teacher when they instruct their own classes. In addition, the trainee teachers are required to adhere to the school's schedule while organizing, planning, and delivering classes in accordance with their areas of expertise. The most memorable part of their degree for several trainee teachers is the required teaching experience they have at a school prior to certification. They go through both the highs and lows of dealing with teens. Additionally, it can be a stressful and depressing period if trainee teachers perceive other instructors as less than ideal role models or do not receive enough mentoring and support.

According to Nasution et al. (2021), during teaching practice, trainee teachers experience a sense of engagement, challenge, and empowerment.
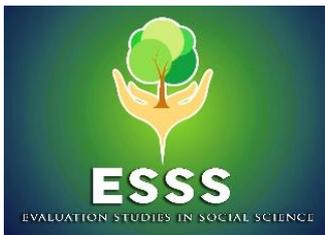
Every week, during the teaching practice period, trainee teachers are urged to attend a debriefing session held with the guiding supervisor from UPSI. Furthermore, WhatsApp groups and online discussion forums are employed as tools to help trainee teachers perform better during practice teaching. A lecturer from Tamil unit in which the trainee teacher is specializing facilitates this. Trainee teachers discuss the many experiences and difficulties they have had while practicing teaching during this session. This procedure aids in locating and resolving important problems. Similarly, trainee teachers are equipped with the knowledge and abilities to handle difficult circumstances. The contribution of various role actors in assisting trainee teachers during teaching practice is also examined in this paper. Guiding teachers, and supervisors are some examples of these key figures in trainee teacher assistance. Additionally, teaching practice phases and tactics are examined.

This study is grounded on the theoretical framework of experiential learning and reflective learning theory. This kind of learning is the process by which information is produced by transforming experience, according to (Kolb, 2014). Understanding and changing the experience together produce knowledge. Kolb's experiential theory emphasizes how experiences including cognition, emotions, and contextual factors—influence learning in a comprehensive way.

Trainee teachers were allowed to contribute their insights and knowledge gained from their experiences in a variety of classroom settings in this study (Mellon, 2023). A WhatsApp group and an online discussion forum were used to accomplish this. In addition, reflection was emphasized as a discipline that helped student-teachers explore, analyze, and comprehend what they were experiencing, thinking, and learning. It carefully examines scholarly content, individual experiences, and interpersonal connections.

Trainee teachers were able to conduct an internal investigation through reflection that expanded the applicability of theory and enhanced their comprehension of day-to-day practise while teaching Tamil language (Silver et al., 2023). According to (Cranton, 2002), reflection helps us confront our presumptions, pose fresh queries, and attempt to make sense of the experiences we've had. We become active makers (and co-creators) of our own knowledge, rather than passive consumers of knowledge from other sources (experts). Reflection is the process of actively, persistently, and carefully weighing the premises of any belief or purported body of knowledge against the conclusions that follow Miller (2023) presented the idea of the reflective practitioner, who uses reflection as a technique to go back over experience to draw lessons from it and to make sense of unclear, difficult issues pertaining to professional practice. Trainee teachers investigate how they perceive the effects of their Tamil language teaching experiences and behaviors on both others and themselves (Hayes, 2010).

Therefore, it is hoped that the reflection provides a clear method for integrating them. Consequently, developing integrated knowledge bases necessitates a proactive Tamil learning strategy that results in grasping and relating new information to what is already known (Simelane & Mji, 2014). Furthermore, these talents could be the foundation for the growth of a self-aware student-teacher who can practice self-monitoring and self-regulation.

Furthermore, rather than requiring that students master the theory before they can participate in practice, the rise of reflective practice is a part of a shift that recognizes the need for trainee teachers to act and think professionally as an intrinsic aspect of Tamil learning throughout courses of study. Reflective practice may be used in both in-person and virtual learning environments (Harford & MacRuairc, 2008).
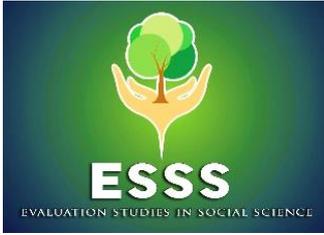
Divergent rather than convergent learning outcomes are promoted as reflection on experience improves learning via experience. The time spent reflecting has a significant impact on what may be seen and acted upon, which in turn affects this crucial interaction between experience and reflection. Different skills and framing abilities are required for anticipatory, retrospective, and contemporaneous reflection (Loughran, 2002), which has a range of effects on learning from experience. It is sufficient to mention that the many requirements connected to the reflective period might affect the experiential learning of trainee teachers. The purpose of this study was to look into how Tamil unit student teachers at the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Iris experienced the real teaching context of teaching practice and how it affected their perception of the teaching profession.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were gathered using a qualitative methodology. Focusing on language, experiences, and perceptions, qualitative researchers aim to comprehend and explain human behavior (Moule et al., 2016). Furthermore, as the participants are thought to be the subject matter experts for the phenomena, emphasis is focused on their perspective (Lach, 2014). The plan for doing research in relation to its environment is indicated by the research design, which also provides a detailed description of the study (Bredeweg & Kragten, 2022). For this study, phenomenology was determined to be a suitable mode of inquiry in order to comprehend the real-world experiences of student teachers. This study mainly aims to answer what experiences do student teachers have when they are in the teaching practice phase?

Semi-structured interviews were used in the study. These twenty-minute interviews, which were conducted with the six participants following campus debriefing meetings, were accompanied with document analysis of reflective diaries and observations reports given during the assessment of teaching practices. Interviews were conducted with a focus on listening, reflecting, clarifying, and describing in order to guarantee that rich data were gathered. To guarantee reliable data collection, the researcher first obtained the participants' consent to record each interview session.

After every interview, each recording was listened to a few times, contrasting them with the field notes that had been noted down throughout the interview sessions. Thematic analysis was also employed to find themes in the data that related to the study topic and

participant similarities. Through recurring themes, this type of analysis offers a comprehensive and lucid explanation of the participants' everyday experiences (Flick, 2013).

## RESULTS

***Tamil Unit Student Teachers Experiences during Teaching Practice And Its Impact On Their Perception Of The Teaching Profession.***
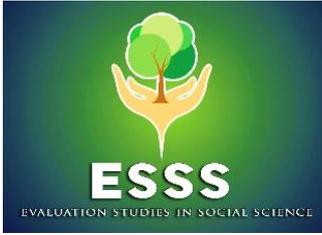
**Table 1**
The Themes That Emerged Were As Follow.

| Themes from interviews | Themes from documents |
|---|---|
| Support from guiding teacher | Professionalism |
| Welcoming environment | Lesson plan |
| Classroom management & Behavioural problem | Presentation style |

*Guiding Teacher Support*

One of the most important aspects of teaching is the guiding teacher's support. Essentially, teaching practice is the act of guidance of an experienced teacher. To add to this, the guiding teacher's job is to assist each student teacher in making sense of their experiences and in seeing patterns in both their successes and failures. Nevertheless, a few student-teachers were not getting any assistance from their guiding teachers.

> *"I am having a big problem with my guiding teacher. She had only allowed me to teach lower forms of Tamil language, and I haven't taught upper forms. Then she accused me of not requesting to teach the upper form Tamil language as they students will be sitting for SPM exams, even though I have requested several times". (P1)*

When compared to what guiding teachers are supposed to do, this act reflects poor support. The guiding teacher's duties include helping the student teacher to have a balanced time table so that the student teacher is able to teach Tamil language for both lower and upper forms.

Among the instances mentioned were the student teachers being left on their own to teach every topic in the classroom and the guiding teacher not being there when required.

> *"My guiding teacher only visits my classrooms during the observations. I was required to teach every Tamil class on my own". (P3)*

Another responded had the same feelings:

> *"I think my guiding teacher is misusing the circumstances. She doesn't even provide me with any suggestions. It's all on me to create my Tamil lesson plans creatively". (P4)*

Guiding teachers are required to give positive holistic behavior examples for the students' teachers and to give suggestions or comments in carrying out the Tamil teaching interestingly. In contrast, several student-teachers said that their guiding teachers were encouraging and available most of the time to help them when they had doubts about the lesson plans.
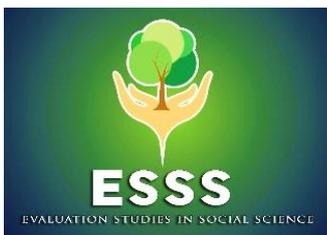
One of the trainee teacher affirmed this statement:

> *"I have had a great and purposeful time at the school. I have a good relationship with my Tamil class students and my guiding teacher. I can strongly say that I have learned a lot of things about interactive teaching approaches from my guiding teacher who always treats me well and cares for me so much. (P2)*

In a similar context, another respondent said,

> *"I've had a valuable experience practicing Tamil language teaching. This would not have happened without my guiding teacher support and I learned a lot of things on how to plan student centric lesson plans. My guiding teacher has always allocated time to assist me whenever I had difficulties or doubts. She also provides critiques as well as constructive comments for improvements. She was there for me at every stage of the preparation process, encouraging and supporting me when my supervising lecturer arrived". (P6)*

These responses showed that guiding a teacher's duty includes helping, making friends, directing, counseling, and advising. When the student teachers get appropriate guidance they tend to perform much better.

*Welcoming Scene*

The school principal is expected to explain student teachers with the school administration processes, the students in their classrooms, the staff members, and the resources available in the schools which can be used during their teaching practices. Furthermore, the improvement of student teaching experiences depends on a supportive school environment. In sharing their stories, student teachers claimed that when they first arrived at school, the principal had not greeted them. Among the remarks made by the respondent are the following ones:

> *"It was not at all good on my first day." Initially, I wasn't unsure about where to sit in the staff room. I felt so scared". (P4)*

Several student teachers felt disregarded and uncared for. This sensation may result in low self-esteem and a feeling of alienation. As a result, the success of the teaching experience in the classroom may be impacted, and some student teachers may even feel that they couldn't be a perfect Tamil teacher in the future.  Therefore, as part of a quality teaching practice, it is critical that student-teachers feel valued and regarded as educators by both their guiding teachers and their school higher administrators.
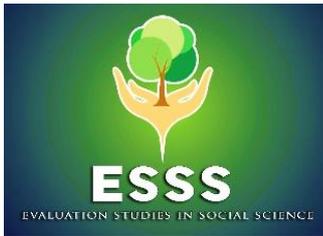
One of the respondent agreed to the same feelings, saying,

> *"Unfortunately, on my first day, there was no staff meeting since my principal was not at school. I waited for an instruction from someone in the reception area for about an hour. Teachers were going by without enquiring as to whether they had assisted me. "Every morning, briefing meetings take place in the staff room; however, as student-teachers we are excluded from such sessions," said another student-teacher, who expressed feeling ignored. I was instructed to wait in the receptionist's office. I feel as if I am not a member of the school because of this incident.  (P3)*

Contrast to this, there are some schools that are very welcoming to the student teachers. The student-teachers were happy about this and this made them feel like they are a family. Here are a few of the affirmative remarks:

> *"I was greeted with warm hands on my first day and was introduced to top management, which was such a pleasant experience. My guiding teacher has been instructed by the principal to assist me on all my needs". (P1)*

> *"On my first day, a special meeting was arranged to greet me and other student-teachers". (P2)*

### *Classroom Management and Behavioral Problems*

Classroom management can be said as root to a proper learning, good behavior, and positive interpersonal relationships among the student-teacher and the students (Affrin et al., 2021). A different view of classroom management sees it primarily as discipline and management of student misconduct. However, successful teaching requires more than controlling student behavior. Teaching can be a daunting endeavors for both experts and novice teachers. It is a profession that requires the ability to be responsive to new demands and changing needs of the students.

It is noted that classroom management was reported by the participants as their most worrying issue. Furthermore, the classroom management issue contributes to the tensions and anxieties the student-teacher experience during teaching practice. Classroom management is particularly important as that determines the whole Tamil lesson and a class that is not managed correctly will lead to failure from the learners and the teacher.

One respondent indicated that:

> *"Some students don't respect me since they believe that I am not a permanent teacher for Tamil subjects. Managing the class is not an easy task. I don't feel comfortable conducting my class when the students aren't listening to what I am saying. Some students are just chatting with their friends no matter how many times I remind them to stay silent while I am teaching".* (P4)
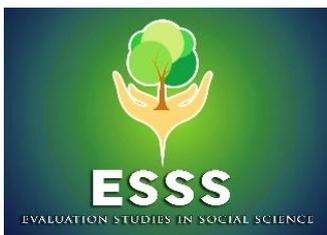
Another respondent remarked:

> *"I have some problems with the students' behavior. They are always not submitting their Tamil class homework that I give them on time". (P5)*

Managing the classroom and maintaining discipline, seems to be emotionally draining to student-teachers.

> *"My problem was that all the Tamil classes that I have taught are from the last class. And the majority of the students always tend to disturb the other students who are willing to learn. I have to waste my time in controlling this disruptive students".(P1)*

In relation to classroom management and behavioral problems, one respondent had remarked:

> *"My only problem is the students always take a very long time to come to the Tamil classroom which is located in the new block. This would be worse if the Tamil class is after the recess break." (P4)*

But there is one respondent has given a positive feedback which is as follow :

> *"I personally feel that being at a school with a lot of discipline problems has given me real experiences to be a better Tamil teacher in the future. I always look for ways to make my class innovative and attractive so that I can make all my students take part in my teaching. I am very grateful that I have learnt a lot from problematic students which has made my experience to grow" (P2)*

The respondent can make sure that their Tamil lesson plan is well prepared so that it will be a helping hand to deal with the class better especially when dealing with the problematic students. This was confirmed by the respondent:

> *"So, since the students are always talking among themselves during my teaching, I have made my teaching more student centric and with some interesting Tamil language games and also attractive teaching aids. In this way, the students have to pay attention to what I am teaching, otherwise they cannot participate in the activities. I personally feel that as a teacher I should well prepare my lesson so that I can handle any situation during my Tamil class" (P5)*

These findings support the research findings which suggest that during Tamil language teaching practice, student-teachers are mostly affected by classroom management related problems especially the student's behaviors.
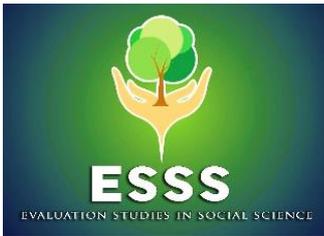
*Findings from Document Analysis*

### Professionalism

The conclusion drawn from the data is that the guidance teacher's support has a significant impact on student teachers teaching professionalism. Student teachers have a strong grasp of and interest in teaching professionalism when they receive good and constructive guidance from their individual leading teachers. When they don't, they struggle mightily to finish their tasks and to exhibit a good teacher characters.

### Lesson Planning

The document analysis showed that Tamil language lesson planning is a very challenging task for student teachers without welcoming environment in the school. Deficient in information, including the lesson's goals, the activities for the students, the teaching aids and notes are the major issues in lesson plans when the student teachers did not have a welcoming environment at their schools during the first day or first week  the student teachers expected their principal

and guiding teacher to: introduce them to the school staff; explain the roles and responsibilities of the mentoring teachers and other individuals in the school. Also the student teachers feels that having a welcoming environment includes having a guiding teacher who can give ideas regarding the lesson plans; provide written and oral feedback on these plans; observe their teaching activities; and offer constructive feedback on these practices. This is because a well prepared lesson plan give confidence to the student-teacher to handle the classroom better.

### Presentation Style

If a teacher couldn't create a creative lesson plan and also using the same recurring teaching methods means it would be a problem for the teacher too. In this study, it was found that student-teachers presentations greatly influences classroom management and students behaviours. This is because when the student teachers are more dynamic and creative they are able to engage all learners by responding positively to learners in class. Lesson presentation should be interesting and effective, and timely use of teaching methods and teaching aids especially the use of ICT should be exercised more (Banggu & Kiflee, 2022).
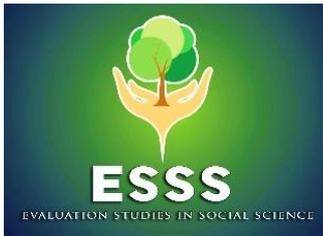
## DISCUSSION

All Sultan Idris Education University undergraduate students, regardless of course, are required to do teaching practice, much as in any other University's teaching programmes. It is a course called "teaching practice," aspiring future teachers to apply all of their theoretical knowledge to use in a real classroom setting. It was found that:

1. Student teachers can show a great teaching professionalism when they have support from their guiding teachers.
2. When the student teachers has a welcoming environment they can create lesson plans much better.
3. Student teachers presentation style greatly influence classroom management and students behavioral problems.
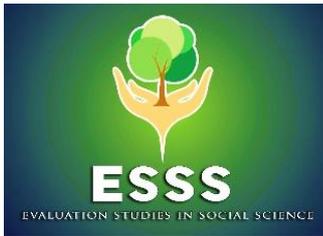
## CONCLUSION

It is highly hoped that teaching practice can help student-teachers to get well prepared for the real problems in the classroom. It is also essential to future teacher's professional development. It's a lifelong path that calls for a blend of disposition, expertise, education, and experience. Making the experience of student teachers worthwhile is the duty of guiding teachers and supervising lecturers at active schools, particularly as they are preparing the next generation of

students for the workforce of tomorrow. From the Tamil unit student teachers teaching practices the main three important aspects as professionalism, lesson plans and presentation style as achievable via a supportive guiding teacher, welcoming environment at the school and well-handled classroom management and behavioural problems. This clearly shows that students teachers teaching success during their teaching practices equally involves other aspects apart from the theoretical knowledge from the University subjects such as guiding teachers support and also a welcoming environment and classroom management and student behaviours.

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