A Conceptual Framework For Evaluating Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers Programme

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Background: Pedagogical content knowledge and content knowledge are the key indicators of teachers’ competence that contribute to student achievement gains. Thus, it is important for teachers to always upskilled in both knowledge. This can be done by attending professional development programmes. The professional development programmes should incorporated the pedagogical content knowledge as well as content knowledge. One programme that follows this principle is The Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme. Thus, it is crucial that the programme is to be evaluated to determine whether it can increase teachers’ competence. Programme evaluation is usually conducted after the programme ends. However, evaluation still needs to be conducted while the programme is being implemented especially new programmes for improvement purposes to ensure its effectiveness. Objective: The purpose of the study is to outline a comprehensive conceptual framework for evaluating the Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme by using Provus’ Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM). Methods: The use of convergent parallel mixed-method design through concurrent transformative strategy is more practical in optimizing research findings about the effectiveness of the programme. A sample of 370 out of 9,000 participants will be involved in this study as well as the programme staff and the trainers. Data will be collected by using interview protocol, questionnaires, observation checklists and document checklists. The data will be analysed according to the stages of evaluation: i) the design stage, ii) installation or input stage, iii) process stage, and iv) product or output stage. During the installation, process and product stages, the performance of the programme will be compared to the programme standards built in the design stage to find any differences that exist. These differences, known as discrepancies, will be used to assist the programme management team to make rational decisions whether to amend, review or terminate the programme. Conclusion: The proposed conceptual framework can serve as a guide to make some amendments and improvements to the programme based on the discrepancies, and will be able to enhance our understanding of conducting a programme evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Ball (1991, as cited in Sadler et al., 2013) mentioned that “Teachers cannot help children learn things they themselves do not understand.” This statement implies that if teachers do no master the subject they are teaching, they will experience difficulties in assisting their students to understand the subject. Hence, it is important for the teachers to grasp their knowledge. Shulman (1986) has indicated that teachers knowledge consists of subject matter content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and curricular knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge and content knowledge are the key indicators of teachers competence that contribute to student achievement gains (Kleickmann et al., 2012). Hill et al. (2005) have found out in their study that the “… teachers’ mathematical knowledge was significantly related to student achievement gains…” whereas Sadler et al. (2013) also indicated that teacher subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge accounted for higher student gains and teacher competence. Howey and Grossman (1989) also mentioned about the importance of
pedagogical content knowledge in English in helping the teachers teaching writing and literature. Thus it is important in making sure that the teachers are always upskilled in their subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. One of the ways to accomplish this is through professional development programmes.

In general, professional development programmes for teachers usually include various activities designed to contribute to the learning process for teachers who have completed their teacher training involving all forms of learning, formal or informal, to enhance their knowledge and skills continuously (Craft, 2002; Earley and Bubb, 2004). Three types of activities under continuous professional development programmes for teachers are self-directed learning experience, formal teacher professional development programme, and organizational development strategy (Caffarella and Zinn, 1999). For Bolam (2000), continuous teacher professional development programmes include providing education, training, and support to teachers after obtaining teaching certificates to increase professional knowledge, improve professional skills, and help explaining the professional values to enable them to educate their students more effectively.

Hence, in making sure that teachers are able to enhance their subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, these two components should be incorporated in the professional development programmes. By including these two elements in the programme, the teachers are hoped to be able to give an impact to student achievement. One of the professional development programmes in Malaysia that combines both elements in the programme is The Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme.

**Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme:**

The Pro-ELT Programme was introduced as one of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013 – 2025) initiatives to ensure students’ proficiency in the English language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The Pro-ELT Programme was designed to further enhance the level of English proficiency and pedagogical competence of teachers (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012).

The selection of the programme participants is based on the teachers’ performance in two tests administered prior to the programme. The English teachers were required to sit for Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) and were graded according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standard which consists of three levels. Those who achieve Level A in the CEFR standard are basic users, Level B are independent users, and Level C are proficient users. Those English teachers who achieved Level B had to sit for another test named Aptis Test. The Aptis Test is an English language proficiency assessment tool which also uses the CEFR standard in grading. If the teachers still achieved Level B in their Aptis Test, they would be selected as The Pro-ELT Programme participants. The Aptis Test results will be used as the entry point or pre-training results for the teachers and will be compared to their post-training results after their completion of The Pro-ELT Programme. The comparison of test results is done as the target of this programme is for the 100% participants the programme to improve by at least one proficiency level (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014).

The duration of this programme is approximately one year. A consultant was appointed to implement the Pro-ELT Programme. Total contact hours for this programme is 480 hours of blended learning mode that involves 240 hours of face-to-face training sessions with the staff/coaches and 240 hours of online training sessions with the online staff/coaches known as the e-Moderators. The face-to-face training sessions are conducted before or after the school hours and during school holidays. Teaching and learning materials and modules were prepared by the appointed consultant (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). The first batch of the participants attended the programme in November 2012 until December 2013 whereas the current second batch started to participate in February 2014 and will end in March 2015.

Since this programme has incorporated both subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, it is crucial that the programme is to be evaluated to determine whether it can increase teachers’ competence and that will eventually help them in their students’ achievement. In order to measure the effectiveness of a professional development programme, programme evaluation has to be conducted as it can assist in making decision whether to continue, terminate or improve the programme implemented. Mostly the main focus of programme evaluation is usually given in respect of the programme effectiveness or the programme product. For example, Cook et al. (2009) evaluate the effectiveness of continuing professional education training within 18 months by using the Kirkpatrick model. Helitzer et al. (2010) used a logic model to evaluate whether a community-based programme has achieved its goals. However, the focus of programme evaluation should also be given to the new programmes so that improvements can be implemented to improve the quality of the programme, as well as the evaluation can be performed to see whether there are any discrepancies between the programme performance and the predetermined standard (Alter, 1998). The new programme should be systematically evaluated before they are implemented widely or terminated prematurely. Sometimes stakeholders want to get information on the effectiveness and outcomes of a
A programme that has been carried out. However, an evaluation of the programme advantages based on programme product can only be implemented after the programme is stable and all situational factors affecting the programme product have been identified and taken into account (Provus, 1971). Therefore, the programme that is still not stable is less suitable to be evaluated in terms of process and product as this evaluation may lead to failure or inaccurate information (Provus, 1971). Thus choosing the right model of programme evaluation is crucial.

One of the programme evaluation models that is suitable for evaluating and improving a new programme is Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM) by Malcolm Provus. DEM was chosen because its tools can be used for improving the programme and as a means of programme evaluation (Provus, 1969). DEM also originally developed for new and experimental programme (Yavorsky, 1984). The selection of DEM is very appropriate because one of the main purposes of evaluation of this model is to get enough information about the operation of the new programme so that the programme changes and improvements can be implemented in the early stages of planning and installation (Provus, 1969).

The purpose of this paper is to outline a comprehensive conceptual framework for evaluating The Pro-ELT Programme by using DEM. This study will be conducted to test the effectiveness of DEM in evaluating and improving a professional development programme.

Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM):

There are three main purposes of assessment outlined by Provus (1969), which is to identify the benefits of a programme to pupils, to obtain sufficient information about the operation of the new programme in order to change and improve the programme in the early stages of planning and installation, and to make early predictions about the success or failure of a programme so that evaluation can be used as a basis to terminate the programme with a high risk of failure.

Three key elements of DEM are standard, performance, and discrepancy. Standard can simply be defined as a statement about how things are supposed to happen or what should be, and statements can be measured (Marrs and Helge, 1978; Steinmetz, 1989). Standard can exist in the form of a list, description, or a statement about the quality or characteristics that should be included in the subject matter to be measured as the objectives of the programme or philosophy of the school system (Marrs and Helge, 1978; Steinmetz, 1989). When the standard has been set, the next step is to obtain information on the operation of the programme so that the information about what actually happen can be obtained (Steinmetz, 1989). The information obtained is the performance of the programme. The concept of discrepancy is based on the comparison between performance and standard of a programme (Marrs and Helge, 1978; Steinmetz, 1989). Ideally, the performance should be equal to the standard set (S = P). However, if the performance does not equal to the standard, then the discrepancy will exist as shown here: (S ≠ P) → D (Marrs and Helge, 1978). The process of comparing the performance to the standard happens in all stages of evaluation in DEM except in Stage I and Stage V.

In this model, there are five stages of evaluation which is programme design/definition, programme installation or the input stage, programme process, programme product or also known as the output stage, and cost-benefit analysis (Provus, 1969). Stage I is the only stage to obtain information about the design of the programme that will be used as the programme standard. The purpose of evaluation at this stage is to evaluate the programme design by setting the programme input, process and output in the early stages, and to evaluate the internal consistency of the programme design comprehensively to ensure the programme has a theoretical basis and adequate face validity and in accordance with its surroundings (Provus, 1969; Yavorsky, 1984; Alter, 1998). Stage II of DEM is the first comparison between the standard set in Stage I with performance in terms of the programme operational (Provus, 1969). The objective of evaluation at this stage is to assess the implementation of the programme installation to be compared with the programme standard set out in Stage I and to identify any problems (otherwise known as the discrepancies) that arise (Provus, 1969; Alter, 1998). The purpose of Stage III evaluation is to estimate the impact of process elements or treatment variables to the output element or dependent variable to ensure that the resources and techniques implemented are consistent with programme goals (Provus, 1969; Alter, 1998). In summary, the evaluation conducted in Stage III is to assess whether the process can change the input to the output (Provus, 1969). For Stage IV, the purpose of evaluation at this stage is to assess whether the programme implemented has achieved its objectives (Provus, 1969; Alter, 1998). Stage IV will also investigate whether the combined set of interim products has produced primary products and eventually has achieved the programme goals at the end (Provus, 1971). Stage V compares the financial allocation of the programme implemented with other programmes that have produced the same output in order to decide which programme has spent the allocation most effectively (Provus, 1969; Yavorsky, 1984). Provus (1969) reported that the cost-benefit analysis requires effective input and output that can be quantified in terms of costs and benefits. However, the information needed in order to make a comparison between the programmes is still not available yet. Furthermore, this stage is only an
optional because of the need to find another programme that has the same output (Provus, 1969; Yavorsky, 1984).

**Conceptual Framework:**

A conceptual framework based on the DEM was built to evaluate The Pro-ELT Programme. For the purpose of this study, only the first four stages will be evaluated as the last stage which is Stage V is an optional stage.

Stage I that deals with the programme design or definition will look into five aspects based on the input-process-output structure. The five variables that will be evaluated on are selection, facilities and resources, contact hours, teaching and learning, and performance. This stage is to establish programme standards that will become the programme design. These variables stated are based on the elements of The Pro-ELT Programme. Stage II, also known as the programme input, emphasises on the comparison between the programme performance and the standard. Two variables are identified, namely the selection, and the facilities and resources. This study will evaluate on the selection of consultant based on the expertise, selection of staff based on qualifications and experience, and selection of participants based on test results and prerequisite requirements. Besides selection, facilities and resources provided will also be evaluated at this stage. The aspects that will be looked into are the suitability of the training venue, the suitability of the testing venue, as well as the quality of the training module. In order to evaluate the programme process in Stage III, two variables need to be given considerations, which are the contact hours, and the teaching and learning process. Since the Pro-ELT Programme uses blended learning mode, therefore both variables will incorporate the elements of face-to-face and online interactions. The last stage, Stage IV, will evaluate the programme output or the product. The variable emphasised here is about the performance of the programme participants. Two elements that will be evaluated consist of the completion of assignments given, and the results achieved in the Aptis test.

Variables mentioned in Stages II, III, and IV (that act as the programme performance) will be compared to the variables in Stage I (that acts as the programme standard). The conceptual framework can be represented as shown in Figure 1 below:

![Conceptual Framework for Evaluating Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme](image)

Based on the built conceptual framework, the objective of this study is to evaluate the professional development programme based on the first four stages of DEM which is programme design/definition, programme installation, programme process, and programme product. As for the research questions, a total of 17 research questions are proposed according to the stages of evaluation.

Stage I has five proposed research questions as follows:

**RQ1** : What is the programme design for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme which has been prescribed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia in terms of selection?

**RQ2** : What is the programme design for Professional Upskilling Of English Language
Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme which has been prescribed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia in terms of facilities and resources?

RQ3: What is the programme design for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme which has been prescribed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia in terms of contact hours?

RQ4: What is the programme design for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme which has been prescribed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia in terms of teaching and learning sessions?

RQ5: What is the programme design for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme which has been prescribed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia in terms of participant’s performance?

As for Stage II, six research questions are proposed:

RQ6: To what extent the programme installation implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of the selection of consultants based on the expertise?

RQ7: To what extent the programme installation implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of staff selection based on qualifications and experiences?

RQ8: To what extent the programme installation implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of participant selection based on prerequisite requirement?

RQ9: To what extent the programme installation implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of the suitability of the training venue?

RQ10: To what extent the programme installation implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of the testing venue equipment?

RQ11: To what extent the programme installation implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of the quality of the training module?

Stage III will have four suggested research questions on programme process:

RQ12: To what extent the programme process implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of the number of face-to-face contact hours?

RQ13: To what extent the programme process implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of the number of online contact hours?

RQ14: To what extent the programme process implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of face-to-face teaching and learning sessions effectiveness?

RQ15: To what extent the programme process implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of online teaching and learning sessions effectiveness?

Lastly, for Stage IV, these two research questions are proposed:

RQ16: To what extent the programme product implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of the number of assignments completed?

RQ17: To what extent the programme product implementation for Professional Upskilling Of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Programme meets the standards prescribed in terms of the participant’s performance in the Aptis Test?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the purposes of this study, the approach to be used is convergent parallel mixed-method design. The use of convergent parallel mixed-method design through concurrent transformative strategy is more practical in this study because of the need to collect both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously in answering the research questions thoroughly. Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, a sample of 370 out of 9,000 participants will be involved in this study as well as the programme staff and the trainers. The sampling technique that will be used is stratified random sampling and cluster random sampling. The proposed research venue is the east coast states of Peninsular Malaysia consists of Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan as students in these states are students with low achievement in English language paper based on public examination results (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2011; Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2012). Participants will be chosen based on the training venues/centres in these states.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Data will be collected by using interview protocol, questionnaires, observation checklist and document checklists. Interviews will be conducted with the programme managers to obtain information related to the programme standards. Besides interviews, document analysis will also be conducted.
to get more information on the programme standards. Most of the programme standards are available in the forms of minutes of meetings, proposal paper, and reports. Therefore, document checklists are crucial in gathering relevant information not only in Stage I but also other stages as well. In Stages II and III, questionnaires will be administered and interviews will be conducted to two different groups consist of the programme staff and programme participants to elicit more information on the programme installation and programme process. Besides that, observations will be conducted in Stage III during the teaching and learning sessions. Stage IV will concentrate on getting information through documents. The quantitative data from questionnaires will be analysed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). For the qualitative data, Nvivo will be used to analyse interview transcriptions. Besides interviews and questionnaires, document checklists need to be prepared in analysing relevant documents. As for observation, field notes obtained will be analysed. During the installation, process and output stages, the performance of the programme will be compared to the programme standards built in the design stage to find any differences that exist. These differences, known as discrepancies, will be used to assist the programme management team to make rational decisions whether to amend, review or terminate the programme.

**Conclusion:**

The proposed conceptual framework can serve as a guide to make some amendments and improvements to the programme based on the discrepancies identified. Previous studies in programme evaluation usually used the traditional experimental design in conducting programme evaluation (Provus, 1971). By conducting a different methodology in this study, it is hoped that this study will be able to evaluate the programme more holistically. With the use of a different research methodology which can assist in evaluating the programme as a whole, and the use of a less popular programme evaluation model, this conceptual framework is expected to add to the knowledge and growing body of literature on programme evaluation. Therefore this conceptual framework will be able to enhance our understanding of conducting a programme evaluation.

**REFERENCES**


