School Improvement Specialist Coaches Plus (SISC+) Competencies in Pedagogical Aspects: A Perspective as the Front Line of the Education System in Malaysia on Improving the Quality of Teachers.

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Abstract

School Improvement Specialist Coaches Plus (SISC+) who started mentoring teachers in Malaysia's as early as 2013 are considered as frontliners in the education system of the new millennium. According to the District Transformation Programmed 3.0 (DTP 3.0), the roles of the SISC+ is underpinned by knowledge and skills in curriculum aspects. The aim of this study was therefore to identify the level of competence of SISC+ in the curriculum aspects. Quantitative study design using the survey method has been used in this study. Data were collected through a set of questionnaires distributed to 118 SISC+ in Sarawak and analyzed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics involving frequency, mean score, standard deviation and percentage were used in the study. The findings show that the SISC+ level of competence in pedagogy knowledge is at a high level with a mean score of 4.63, sd=0.469. The findings of this study indicate that SISC+ is competent and knowledgeable in the pedagogical aspects of the subject being taught. The findings of this study provide insight into the ability of SISC+ in coaching teachers in school and in their practice of quality teaching and learning. The authority must therefore provide support and cooperation to ensure that SISC+ continues to be competent in providing quality coaching to teachers. In line with their increasingly complex and challenging role, SISC+ certainly needs various support and guidance, especially from stakeholders such as policy makers and the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) and support for the infrastructure and welfare aspects of SISC+. Discipleship

Keywords

School Improvement Specialist Coaches Plus (SISC+), District Transformation Programmed (DTP), Instructional coaching, Teaching and Learning, Pedagogical knowledge

Introduction

Research has shown that developing effective teaching among teachers requires more than the mastery of the appropriate content knowledge. For example, Abdullah et al. (2020) argues that necessity for acquiring professional practical knowledge, which among others includes teacher practical knowledge, personal practical knowledge, and knowing-in-action. Balang et al., (2020) and Mohamad et al., (2017) further wrote on the need for pedagogical knowledge, which includes understanding of concepts, strategies for teaching, curriculum, and implementations of content that help the learner to learn. It has been further pointed out that

mastery of these additional knowledge and skills usually occur during the coaching process with teachers (W M R Wan Fadhlurrahman et al., 2020).

Coaching is typically noted as a relationship between coach and coached to get guidance, advice, support, and feedback are provided (Balang et al., 2020). (Abdullah et al., 2020) proposed a five-factor model for coaching comprising of personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling and feedback. Personal attributes refer to the coach's ability to display personal enthusiasm for guiding teachers and being able to inspire teacher to teach. It also includes the coaches being able to develop confidence to teachers and foster a positive attitude for teaching. System Requirements imply that coaches are required to have content expertise and knowledge of aims, policies, and procedures within curriculum documents. Such knowledge is linked to the education syllabus that aims towards quality control in teaching and learning. Understanding policies and procedures is considered a professional coaching ability. Pedagogical knowledge refers to the need for coaches to have practical knowledge for implementing effective coaching strategies. For example, strategies for classroom and questioning techniques are necessary for the coached implementation of teaching. An instructional coach with knowledge of programming can assist the coached in sequential planning for teaching. In addition, coach's knowledge of assessment provides valuable information for teaching. Coaches need to model effective teaching practices. Such modelling aims to demonstrate to the coached teaching knowledge, the teaching of a particular subject and syllabus. Coaches also needs to display enthusiasm for teaching. It is further argued that effective coaching occurs when coaches provide feedback to coaches, which commences with observing the coached teaching, and then, through oral and or written communication, provide constructive advice. Undoubtedly, a powerful form of feedback would be for the coaches to model what was discussed in the coached feedbacks, so that the coached can observe firsthand successful teaching practices.

This research only focused on the pedagogical knowledge aspect of instructional coaching among School Improvement Specialist Coaches Plus (SISC+). Thus, in this context, coaching program aim to provide coached with coaches who are knowledgeable about teaching (Mohamad et al., 2017) as coached usually develop pedagogical knowledge in the school setting. Pedagogical knowledge makes understanding of subject usable in the classroom (Lonsiong & Ag Kiflee@Dzulkifli, 2019)

Furthermore, in this research, as stated in the literature, pedagogical knowledge refers to the ability of instructional coaches to guide teachers on planning and teaching (W M R Wan Fadhlurrahman et al., 2020); timetabling lesson (Kho et al., 2019); teaching strategies (Kho et al., 2019); preparation for teaching Balang et al., 2020); problem solving (Wan Norhasma & Yusoff, 2019); classroom management (Kho et al., 2019); questioning skills (Wan Fadhlurrahman W. Md Rasidi et al., 2020); implementing effective teaching practice (Rani et al., 2019); assessment (Hui et al., 2020); and pedagogical approaches such as constructivism (Poobalan et al., 2021) in developing the coached subject based teaching. If instructional coaches lack of coaching skills, of which pedagogical knowledge is the key, problems can arise in the coaching relationships (Wan Norhasma Wan Hassan & Nurahimah Mohd Yusoff, 2019). An instructional coach's pedagogical knowledge of a subject must be more advanced

than a coached subject teaching knowledge if the instructional coaches is to be able to provide constructive feedback to ensure the progress of coached. An instructional coach's credibility and suitability may be questioned if their pedagogical knowledge of subject teaching is lower than the coached.

Although it is possible that the SISC+ in certain circumstances may have superior content knowledge than the coached for a given topic, SISC+ must have greater knowledge on how to teach a subject. This is a critical point of coaching relationship for the SISC+ to be able to fulfill their responsibility of preparing, negotiating, and enabling the coached teaching skills to improve to their higher level of competencies. Aguilar (2013) commented that generally, teachers who receive coaching perform better than those uncoached, especially in teaching instruction and classroom management skills. Therefore, in teachers preparation, school based coaching is a mean of enhancing their teaching efficacy (Amirullah, 2018). Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of coaching in teaching practice (Kutsyuruba & Godden, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on pedagogical knowledge among SISC+. This study is of practical importance, as by articulating the associated practices linked to pedagogical knowledge for coaching in teaching and providing strategies that may assist the process, it may be possible to define more clearly the SISC+ role for guiding and developing effective teaching.

Specifically, this research design set out to identify the SISC+ competencies in pedagogical knowledge in term of

(i) Planning and preparation of teaching,
(ii) Classroom management,
(iii) Implementing effective coaching practices
(iv) Questioning technique and
(v) Assessment

In this research, SISC+ refers to an educator specialist is more knowledgeable on teaching practices. The SISC+, through explicit coaching processes, seeks to develop pedagogical self-efficacy among themselves.

Research Objective and research Question

To identify the SISC+ competencies in pedagogy aspect and the research question is

What is SISC+ perception in curriculum and pedagogy aspect?

Literature Review

Instructional Coaching

Research on effective professional development has established the importance of using sustained, collaborative, school-based approaches (Knight & van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). Coaching (Neufeld & Roper, 2003) and instructional coaching as a particular type of

coaching (Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015), has emerged as an example of quality professional development. Coaching provides teachers with individualized, continuous, and extended support from a more knowledgeable other. The collaborative coaching conversations promote growth by inviting ongoing cycles of reflection and action—or praxis about how to effectively implement new practices in the classroom (Knight, 2009). Cornett's and Knight's (2009) review of research showed coaching positively improves (a) teachers' attitudes, (b) skill transfer, (c) feelings of efficacy, and (d) student achievement. Literacy and mathematics coaching research is becoming more rigorous, moving beyond self-report data (Ali et al., 2020);(Davrajoo & Letchumanan, 2019);(Kraft et al., 2018) assert, "While coaching may be new, it is no longer unproven." Nevertheless, coaching practices vary widely. Many questions remain about what coaching content, for what duration and intensity are the most effective for which teachers, in what setting, or for what purposes. The answers to such questions are pressing given today's politics around high-stakes accountability (Devine et al., 2013);(Lewis et al., 2011).

Instructional coaching focuses on improving classroom instruction. Instructional coaches (a peer, seasoned teacher, district leader, or external consultant) possess instructional expertise that they bring to bear in their work with teachers. Knight (2009), for example, views instructional coaching as a partnership defined by equality, choice, empowerment and respect, authentic dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. The coach–teacher dialogue is negotiated, evolving, and partnership specific, based in equity and shared expertise. Knight (2009) asserts instructional coaching generally focuses on four elements: classroom management, content, instruction, or ongoing assessment.

Review of Broader Problem

As a result of accountability pressures, school districts hire coaches to improve student achievement (Huguet et al. 2014; Wilder, 2014). The underlying interest in coaching results from the belief that coaches improve teacher efficacy, which in turn can improves student achievement (Polly & Mraz, 2013). *Teacher self-efficacy* refers to what a teacher believes he or she can or cannot do. As Yoo (2016) has noted, "Research has shown that a teacher's judgment of how much he or she can do affects student learning due to its impact on instructional choice and persistence" Yoo (p. 85). According to Vygotsky (1978), one of the ways in which learning may occur is through the interactions with someone who is more knowledgeable. School district leaders believe instructional coaches are a more knowledgeable resource (Wilder, 2014; Huguet et al. 2014).

The definition of an instructional coach varies widely amongst researchers. Yopp et al. (2011) broadly defined an instructional coach as a "person who works collaboratively with a teacher to improve that teacher's practice and content knowledge, with the ultimate goal of affecting student achievement. Leng (2015) defined the instructional coach as "an educator who acts as a resource at the school level to assist the principal and the faculty with efforts to improve instructional practices, for the purpose of improving student learning". Knight et al. (2012) stated that instructional coaching is a job-embedded, hands-on, ongoing strategy to address school reform, improve student achievement, and build capacity in teacher 20 expertise of

instructional practices. According to Instructional Coaching Innovations (2016), instructional coaches are on-the-job change agents who provide PD and differentiated coaching to improve teachers' instructional effectiveness by teaching and modeling implementation of research-based instructional strategies. Although the definition of instructional coach varies, each definition includes improving instructional practices. Instructional coaching is a school-based effort used to increase student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Yopp et al., 2011). Literature about instructional coaching dates to the works of Joyce and Showers in the 1990s. It was not called instructional coaching at the time, rather peer coaching. Research conducted by Showers and Joyce in 1996, found that teachers who experienced coaching by content experts or knowledgeable peers showed gains in collaboration with other teachers in common grade and subject areas, as well as an increase implementing instructional practices to address the needs of students.

Wilder (2014) stated "…collaboration with an instructional coach leads to a change in the attitude, beliefs, and practices of teachers and therefore improves student learning". Effective collaboration can result in the improvement of student performance.

Research has empirically connected the activities of instructional coaches to gains in student outcomes and an increase of teachers' embracing instructional practices (Yopp et al., 2011). A study by Bean, Swan, and Knaub in 2003, found that teachers' instructional practices changed positively when they had the opportunity to work with an instructional coach. Noted improvements were: (a) teachers asking more higher-level 21 thinking questions; (b) teachers implementing differentiated instruction; (c) teachers adapting instructional materials to meet the individual needs of the learner; and (d) teachers encouraging students to be actively engaged in the lesson. The improvements support that teacher must share responsibility for the outcome (Yopp et al., 2011).

Role of the School Improvement Specialist Coaches Plus @ SISC+.

Chin et al., (2019), found that SISC+ could stimulate changes in the instructional practices of teachers if they have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities, knowledge of instructional practices, mastery of coaching techniques, and an understanding of the adult learner. A coach helps teachers increase their content knowledge, build on their strengths, and improve instructional practices (Ali et al., 2018). SISC+ takes on several roles. Roles are inclusive of mentor, data coach, content expert, and professional learning facilitator (Smith & Lynch, 2014). Therefore, instructional coaches need to receive essential PD to support understanding of the varied roles they play in teachers' instructional practice (Garner et al., 2019).

Methodology

This research used mixed methods explanatory sequential design as a research design. The participants of the research are required to complete a questionnaire in the first phase of the research to determine the pedagogical knowledge of the SISC+ (Balang et al., 2020).

The Participants

The participants of this research in phase one consists of 118 SISC+ in thirty-one Education Office in Sarawak, Malaysia. After the data was analyzed in the first phase of the survey using the questionnaire the researcher conducted the second phase of the research by responding to quantitative data in phase one. The second phase of respondents was selected based on the recommendation of Creswell (2013). A total of six respondents were selected in the second phase which covered differences in terms of education, experience, workplace, and subject area.

Table 1: **Respondent Demography** n=118

Gender	**Total**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	52	89
Female	76	59.4
Years as A SISC+		
2013-2015	114	89
2016-2018	14	11
Experience as SISC+		
Less than 1 years	6	4.7
1-3 year	9	7.0
4-7 year	113	88.3
Academic level		
Diploma in Education	2	1.6
Degree	67	52.3
Masters	52	40.6
PhD	7	5.5

The Survey Instrument

The questionnaire used in this research comprised of twenty-three items from the Five Factor Coaching for Effective Coaching Survey Instrument by Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE, 2015) aimed at exploring the SISC+ perceptions of their coaching skills in pedagogical knowledge. The survey items had Likert scales responses, namely “Very Competent”, “Competent”, “Less Competent”, “Incompetence”, “Very Incompetence”.

Scoring was accomplished by assigning a score of 1 to items receiving a very incompetence to a score 5 for "very competent".

Data Analysis

In phase one research, only descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were derived for the data on the pedagogical knowledge using the software SPSS version 23. The results from analyzing the participants responses to the questionnaires would provide an indication of the degree of coaching competencies among SISC+ in pedagogical knowledge. The Cronbach Alpha value for the twelve items of the survey questionnaires was 0.98, indicating high reliability.

To strengthen the findings in phase one, the researchers conducted interviews with six selected respondents to explain and explore some of the data in phase one that required more in-depth explanation.

Results and Discussions

The results of analysis for Pedagogical Knowledge are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Pedagogical Knowledge Among SISC+

No	Items	VIc	Ic	Lc	C	VC	Mean	SD
C1	Guides GT to design a cover of T&L that fits the subject needs	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (3.9)	34 (26.6)	89 (69.5)	4.66	.553
C2	Guide GT to write lesson reflections well	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (2.3)	36 (28.1)	89 (69.5)	4.67	.519
C3	Guides GT to identify strengths and weaknesses in T&L	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (3.1)	32 (25.0)	92 (71.9)	4.69	.529
C4	Guiding GT determines improvement in T&L.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.6)	36 (28.1)	90 (70.3)	4.69	.498
C5	Guides GT to predict the effects of action based on	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (5.5)	48 (37.5)	73 (57.0)	4.52	.602

	evidence and plan appropriate interventions							
C6	Guides GT using reflection notes for improvement purposes	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (2.3)	41 (32.0)	84 (65.6)	4.63	.531
C7	Guiding GT detects T&L weakness through reflection notes	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (3.1)	44 (34.4)	80 (62.5)	4.59	.553
C8	Guiding GT provides continuous reflection notes	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (4.7)	49 (38.3)	73 (57.0)	4.52	.588
C9	Guiding GT determines the topic of further study after reflection has been made	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	11 (8.6)	44 (34.4)	73 (57.0)	4.48	.652
	Overall						**4.63**	**0.469**
Note :	1=Very Incompetence to 5= Very Competent							

Guiding for Planning and Preparation of Content Knowledge

This component of pedagogical knowledge was measured using two items as shown in Table 2. According to Lunsford, (2014) and (Massey et al., 2019), preparation for teaching is essential for implementing well-informed lessons and further elaborated that coached can enhance their teaching skills by talking about preparation for teaching. Kho et al., (2019) reported that instructional coaches are generally confident in guiding the coached with lesson preparation. The results of this research showed that 79.9% coaches did assist guided teachers in lesson preparation.

SISC+ which provides guidance in preparing lesson plans can make teachers more confident during in -class guidance. The opposite situation occurs if teachers do not receive SISC+ guidance they will certainly not be able to prepare an effective daily lesson plan. Even the teaching ability is feared not to show any change (Rani et al., 2019)

According to Sarabiah (2018), most of the components of instructional coaching are in the aspects of coaching and planning. Instructional coaches are those whose role is to guide teachers to provide quality lesson plan guidance to teachers. In the meantime, SISC+ is also considered to be able to guide teachers to implement planning in the preparation of effective and up -to -date teaching topics, methods, strategies, and pedagogical techniques (Amirullah, 2018);(Leng, 2015).

Guiding Teachers for Write Reflection

Effective lesson strategies are requisites to achieve successful lessons (Beaumont, 2014) and generally, teachers feel that acquiring good lesson plan is important to their experiences. Furthermore, Ali et al., (2018) reported that good lesson plan has long been concern of student teachers and beginning teachers. However, according to Hishan et al., (2020), SISC+ are usually confident in assisting teachers develop their skills and strategies for effective lessons in classroom. Findings in this study as shown in Table 2 indicated that well planned lesson plan for teaching were provided by a significant number of SISC+ is very competent.

Implementing Effective teaching Practices and Strategies

This component of pedagogical knowledge was measured by five items in the questionnaire. In this study showed that most SISC+ involved in the teachers teaching practice. Without doubt, teachers need to understand a range of teaching strategies to be able to plan and carry out appropriate and purposeful lessons (Poobalan et al., 2021);(McCarthy, 2016). Majority of SISC+ in this study discussed and guide teaching strategies with their guided teachers. Content knowledge is a key issues in teacher education (Smith & Lynch, 2014). Yet despite the paramount important placed on gaining content knowledge (McCarthy, 2016), SISC+ are likely to see their roles as one of analyzing and debriefing lessons and less likely to provide content knowledge (Garner et al., 2019);(Smith & Lynch, 2014). Learning subject matter is important for teachers in order to build a content knowledge repertoire (Lunsford, 2014). Young et al., (2021) advocates that SISC+ should be selected on their content knowledge, because if SISC+ struggle with content knowledge then their guided teachers are likely to have problems as well (Othman, 2019).

Each SISC+ has their own viewpoints for teaching and it is argued that SISC+ need to provide their opinions on effective ways to teach their guided teachers. For example, some SISC+ may view that teaching should be based on a transmission approach which emphasize on the knowledge to be learnt (Risko & Walker-dalhouse, 2011). Others may prefer a ‘discovery approach’ that aims at providing a rich ‘hand on’ environment (Young et al., 2021). Yet some looks positively at a ‘constructivist approach’ which scaffolds learning from prior knowledge and experiences (Lunsford, 2014). Therefore, SISC+ viewpoints are an integral element of coaching process. Articulating viewpoints on teaching provide a fuller understanding for SISC+ on the coaching possibilities. Reasons for these may include insufficient time, lack of knowledge of teaching viewpoints. There may also be some confusion as to what the current viewpoints for teaching are possibly because of the differing views between educators themselves. Nevertheless, SISC+ has a significant influence on a teacher practice and so the SISC+ opinions can affect the guided teachers teaching quality.

Summary and Conclusion

In general, SISC+ in this research indicated that they acquired adequate pedagogical knowledge to guide teachers. This research further argues that SISC+ must be competent in pedagogical knowledge to assist teachers with planning and preparation on teaching, guiding teachers do write reflection correctly and implementing effective teaching practices strategies such as teaching knowledge, problem solving strategies and developing viewpoints on pedagogy. A SISC+ would be able to assist the teachers to improve their teaching practices by focusing on these aspects. Expressing various viewpoints on teaching may also assist SISC+ to formulate a pedagogical philosophy for guided teachers. Having the confidence to guide effectively requires SISC+ to masters the pedagogical knowledge, which appears to be based on teaching beliefs, that is beliefs about how and what to guide. Jacobs et al., (2018);Piper & Zuilkowski, (2015) and Teemant & Tyra, (2014) emphasize the importance of developing self-efficacy among SISC+ and highlight the need for well planned and good coaching skills to coach successfully. This means that the SISC+ must be able to guide teachers in developing pedagogical knowledge and instilling confidence in teaching. Great SISC+ produce results (Balang et al., 2020) ;(Sarabiah, 2018);(Manit & Chowwalit, 2016).

This research argues that effective coaching can take place if SISC+ is knowledgeable on how and what to guide in teaching. Effective coaching may influence a teacher teaching belief and consequently develop the teacher's self-efficacy in teaching practices. In addition, equipping SISC+ with specific pedagogical knowledge for coaching in teaching may reduce the number of potential concerns or problems experienced by teachers. Undoubtedly, SISC+ will require furthers professional development to ensure that guided teachers receive adequate pedagogical knowledge for teaching, which will involve closer collaboration between SISC+ and teachers.

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