TESL Trainee Teachers' Positive Experience and Challenging Encounters in using Facebook Group as a medium of Reflective Practice.

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Abstract

The institution of teacher training is an important place in supplying the knowledge of pedagogy to the teacher trainees. However, applying this knowledge in a natural setting is another challenge which is going to be faced by the trainee teachers. Thus, there is a need to empower the capability of trainee teachers to refine their teaching skill independently. One of the ways to develop and cultivate this need is by improving how reflective practice is conducted during their teacher practice. The issue of improving the quality of reflective practice has been addressed especially through variety of mediums, such as the use of paper-based method and electronic-based method, and such as the use of blog sites, online forums and chat sites, and more recently social networking sites, like Facebook. However, the use of social networking websites, such as Facebook, have received little attention, even though a handful of studies have also reported on its many benefits for reflective practice. This qualitative study is meant to explore TESL trainee teachers' positive experiences and challenging encounters in using Facebook Group in writing reflections. Eight trainee teachers from a teacher education institution in Selangor who are undertaking Diploma in Teaching (Teaching of English as a Second Language) which later three of them will be selected as case studies. Based on the findings, Facebook does cater as a supportive virtual platform in promoting reflective practice as it provides moral support during teaching practicum session, close supervision from the supervisor and improve the capability to reflect.

Keywords: Facebook group, reflective practice, TESL, trainee teachers

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025), in today's global economy, a nation's success depends fundamentally on the knowledge, skills and competencies of its people. This quote shows that in order to elevate as a greater nation in pursuing sustainable economic and national progression, the development of education is essential to be equipped to its people. With greater knowledge, skills and competencies that are sufficient, the possibilities of an individual to improve his quality of living and eventually contributing to the nation growth might become a reality in preparing young Malaysians for the future. Realising the importance of education, the public raised tremendous debates and concerns about the effectiveness of education policy in Malaysia over the years especially in English language teaching. One of the issues raised are; the quality of teachers produced from teacher training programs.

There is an obvious necessity to mend the quality of teachers by looking at the teacher training programme, to track the source of the problem of this matter. As quoted in an article by Lim (2014), former secretary-general of the Congress of Teachers Union of Malaysia

Shahul Hamid Mydin Shah criticized the current training of teacher education as stated insufficient in producing good quality teachers. It is expected that teacher candidates should be versatile in terms of intelligence, emotional state and interpersonal skills. Despite the fact, the filtering procedures have been improved by introducing interview session, to get a well rounder candidate is somehow challenging. However, through the courses of teacher training, improving and elevating the teaching skills has its possibilities.

It can conclude that teaching profession face many challenges and changes from time to time. As a matter of fact, there is no stopping point and problems will always occur and progression is going to continue. This is where the capability to critically reflect through changes and challenges is essential and hopefully assisting future teachers to independently improve towards betterment. According to Belvis, Pineda, Armengol, & Moreno (2012), continuous teacher education is a key element to ensure the quality of teaching as well as providing appropriate responses to the changing demands of our society. One of the assessments that should be empowered in teacher training programme is through reflective practice. The empowerment of it should be considered further.

2.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In teacher training programme, reflective practice is a common and yet vital tool to improve and develop the teaching skill of trainee teachers. Jones & Ryan (2014) the concept of reflective writing has had increasing attention in research since mid-1970s and it is now well established as a characteristic of 'good teacher'. During the process of reflecting, trainee teachers will develop their methodology of teaching to be a 'good teacher'. Accordingly, throughout the process of reflective writing, the trainee teachers will examine the strengths and his/her weaknesses by writing reflections as a mode of documenting the problems or issues arisen. By gathering all the information, it allows the trainee teachers to analyse and implement actions on the outcomes of the lesson. This practice is commonly used during practicum session or also known as teaching practice where the trainee teachers get an insight of the authentic teaching and learning experiences.

Bruster & Peterson (2013) said that the emphasis on reflective writing challenges teacher educators to create programs that provide constructive ways for teacher candidates to engage in reflective writing. This practice allows its practitioners to think critically of any particular actions in order for improvement towards any problems. By training the trainee teachers to be more independent learners, it can help them in order to make better decisions during real-life working experience. By observing, analysing and deciding affair, it can improve teacher performance thus hopefully gives positive effect to the quality of teaching and learning process. It is adhered to what has been mentioned by Coulson Debra, Coulson, & Harvey (2013) that reflective writing is widely discussed in the literature as a tool for promoting learning and higher order thinking skills, developing professional practice and facilitating and structuring learning through experience.

There are various medium of reflective writing which are paper-based technique such as using diaries and composing portfolio to electronic-based technique like e-portfolio and blogging. Both reflective tools have an ambivalent opinion since none of the tool is a perfect tool. The rapid emergence of internet opens up the endless possibilities of knowledge accessing and multiple purposes especially in Malaysia. According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2016), internet users in Malaysia were utilizing internet in a number of activities such as social networks (84.3%), getting information about goods and services (79.6%), downloading images, movies, videos or music; playing or downloading games (76.1%) and sending or receiving e-mails (68.4%). Social networking sites or also known as SNS are hugely dominating the usage of internet especially in Malaysia. The involvement of internet has

definitely changed and transformed the way people communicate and so does the learning process.

Due to the nature of its features that cultivate content sharing, active interactions and participation, collaboration and critical thinking, researchers and educationists spot the potential and possibilities of utilizing social networking sites in this 21st century. As mentioned by Killeavy & Moloney (2010) they described online communities of practice as professionals engaged in the social production of meaning. Added by Wenger (1998) such communities of practice are characterised by sustained mutual relationships, shared ways of engaging in doing things together, rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation, and knowing what others can do. As exchanging immediate information and feedback can be achieved by electronic-based tools, there is a possibility to equip the strength the quality of reflective practice in order to empower trainee teachers during teaching practice which cannot be accomplished if the medium of reflective tool is paper-based. Thus, in this research, Facebook Group is utilized as a medium of reflective practice which derived to two research questions;

    i. What are the positive experiences of TESL trainee teachers in using Facebook Group as a medium of reflective practice?
    ii. What are the challenging encounters of TESL trainee teachers in using Facebook Group as a medium of reflective practice?

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research is conducted in qualitative manner because it is suitable and relevant to the nature of this research due to its capability to explore trainee teachers' positive experiences and challenging encounters in using Facebook Group as a medium of reflective practice. Concurrently, trainee teachers' reflections and activities in Facebook Group will complement the interview data. Case study is chosen as an approach of this research. According to Kumar (2011), a case could be an individual, a group, a community, an instance, an episode, an event, a subgroup of a population, a town or a city. In the same manner, Merriam (2009) added further that this approach is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. Relating these two definitions to this research, a case for this study will focus on three out of eight participants in this study. Based on the experience that they go through; the three participants are chosen in order to get an in-depth data through face to face semi-structured interview. Simultaneously, the researcher needs to determine an analysis of a bounded system which lead to a significant basis of choosing an accurate set of characteristics that represent the in-depth data of this study.

This setting of the research is the online space of the Facebook group discussion platform. The participants of this study are purposely selected from one of the private higher institutions in Selangor which is one of the private institutions that offer teaching courses managed by Faculty of Education which was existed since April 2008. All qualified trainee teachers are going to undergo teaching practicum for about fourteen weeks which is on their last semester. They are sent to certain primary schools whether in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan or Kuala Lumpur of their choice. Not only that, the appointment of each supervisor and teacher mentor in schools are appointed by this department too. In order to pass teaching practicum, the trainee teachers need to score B which denoted 3.00 CGPA.

The online or virtual setting of this research is Facebook Group discussion platform. Groups are Web pages where Facebook users are free to browse, create, join or subscribe any groups that pursue his/her particular interest. According to Abram & Karasavas (2018), this feature of Facebook allows the users to elect the audience that you prefer and communicate with those who have the same mutual interest. This setting for the trainee teachers to compose their weekly reflections will be in a Facebook Group called 'Weekly Reflection with Miss Tasha'. This particular Facebook Group is meant and acted as a medium where it serves several

purposes mainly as a tool to do their reflective practice, and to garner support, solidarity or simply to share the same goals or interest. This group is going to be managed by the researcher who acts as participant observer. This group was a closed group in Facebook which indicated that the administrator is the only one who can approve the request to join the group. Closed group is managed by the researcher to collect the data and to ensure privacy between the trainee teachers and the researcher. Other than that, it is to avoid irrelevant participants to join the group. Based on the studies that criticize the issue of privacy of profile data (Hew, 2011; Petrovic et al., 2016; Villiers, 2010; Wang et al., 2012), in this research the trainee teachers can choose to create new profile in Facebook or if they are comfortable and there is no issue regarding security, then they are allowed to use their real Facebook account.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In terms of frequency of logging into Facebook, Miss Aina and Sir Mir admitted to logging into Facebook on a daily basis, these two trainee teachers admitted that they utilized the time to compose the reflections and at the same time browsing information in Facebook looking for inspiration especially in teaching and learning materials. On the other hand, Sir Aus admits to logging into Facebook only on a weekly basis, just solely to compose the reflections and logging off. General purposes for using Facebook for Sir Mir and Miss Aina are to search for news updates and obtaining ideas and inspiration especially related to teaching aids. On the other hands, Sir Aus mainly used his Facebook account to compose his online weekly reflections, and not for other purposes. In terms of their awareness of the audience involved in Facebook group; They knew that there were two audiences in the Facebook Group which are the supervisor and the other trainee teachers who are under the same supervisor. Sir Mir added that he viewed his supervisor in that group as a prominent figure to impress through his reflections. Thus, it led him to compose his reflections by using formal language.

4.1 Positive Experiences of TESL trainee teachers in using Facebook Group as a medium of reflective practice.

Based on the research findings, three positive experiences can be felt by the participants of the research which are:

    a) Facebook Group can encourage proximity and support from the supervisor.
    b) Facebook Group can foster trainee teachers' capabilities and dedication towards composing reflections.

The interview transcript and the Facebook post will be discussed below.

a) Facebook Group can encourage proximity and support from the supervisor.

These trainee teachers believed that Facebook group allowed them to build rapport and get connected with the supervisor throughout the practicum session, and not only during teaching observations. Miss Aina claimed that the supervisor can have immediate conversations with the trainee teachers through the features provided by Facebook, such as like, comment and share features. She explained further that she can check the comments and share anything in the group. She mentioned that;

> *"You can comment anything, also, we can...we can check the comments, also share anything in the group." (Miss Aina, personal communication, Interview 1)*
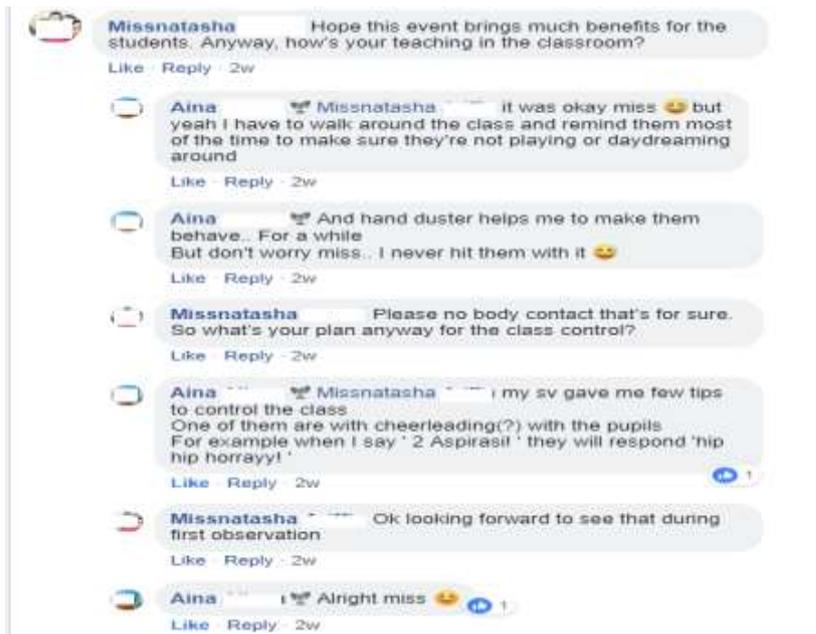
Based on this conversation thread between the supervisor and Miss Aina, the main concern of the supervisor was to know how her teaching in the classroom was. She replied it was an OK experience so far, but she did need to put an extra effort to walk around the class to monitor the students. She added further ending her reply with anxious laughing emoticon that she might use the hand duster to hit the students. Her supervisor advised her to avoid body contact at all cause. Miss Aina replied that her supervisor in school give her tips to us attention grabber in the classroom. Lastly, the supervisor ended the conversation by saying she is looking forward to seeing how well the attention grabber works during the first observation.

Sir Aus affirmed this positive experience in this research by commenting the same aspect as mentioned earlier by Miss Aina. He stated that;

> *"Positive things, easy to reach you. You monitor us closely." (Sir Aus, personal communication, Interview 1)*

In his second week reflection he mentioned that he did have problem regarding composing the lesson plan by using CEFR. Due to that, the supervisor did clarify with him on which part he did not understand yet which he replied that he understood about it already.

b) Facebook Group can foster trainee teachers' capabilities and dedication towards composing reflections.

For Sir Mir, he asserted that the positive experience he felt through online reflections that he composed in Facebook group was it motivated him to write a better reflection. It fosters his capabilities and dedication towards composing reflections. For Sir Mir, writing reflections of this teaching practicum experience on Facebook did create a healthy competition as it cultivated his dedication to compose more impressive reflections He stated that:

> *"It motivates me to take my reflection seriously. Like yesterday, I think mine was quite boring. I saw my friends put pictures. So, I add on a little bit. Make it more impressive." (Sir Mir, personal communication, Interview 1)*
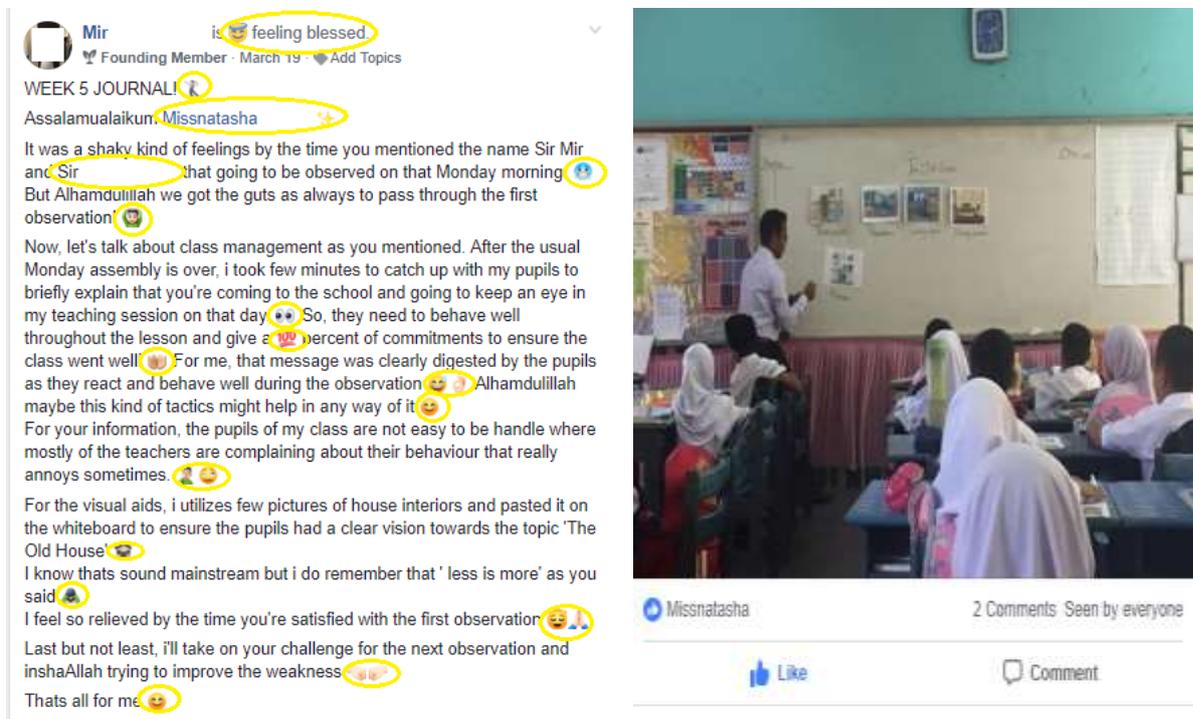
Referring to Sir Mir's post, he used three main features of Facebook. The features were circled in yellow. The first feature is feeling; he signified he was blessed. The second one, he tagged the researcher and one of the trainee teachers. Lastly, he used plenty of emoticons to showcased emotions in this particular reflection. This is due to his perception on the usage of Facebook features helped to make the reflection clearer.

4.2 Challenging Encounters of TESL trainee teachers in using Facebook Group as a medium of reflective practice.

Based on the research findings, three challenging encounters can be felt by the participants of the research which are:
   a) Problems regarding technical and internet connectivity.
   b) Distraction from advertisement.

    c)   Lack of familiarity to use the features provided.

The interview transcript and the Facebook post will be discussed below.

    a) **Problems regarding technical and internet connectivity.**

The firts problem encountered by the trainee teachers was related to technical and internet connectivity. For instance, Miss Aina had experienced late submission of her reflections in her fifth week due to her internet data being limited. She posted her apology due to her late submission. She showcased her apology by using 'feeling' (sorry) feature.
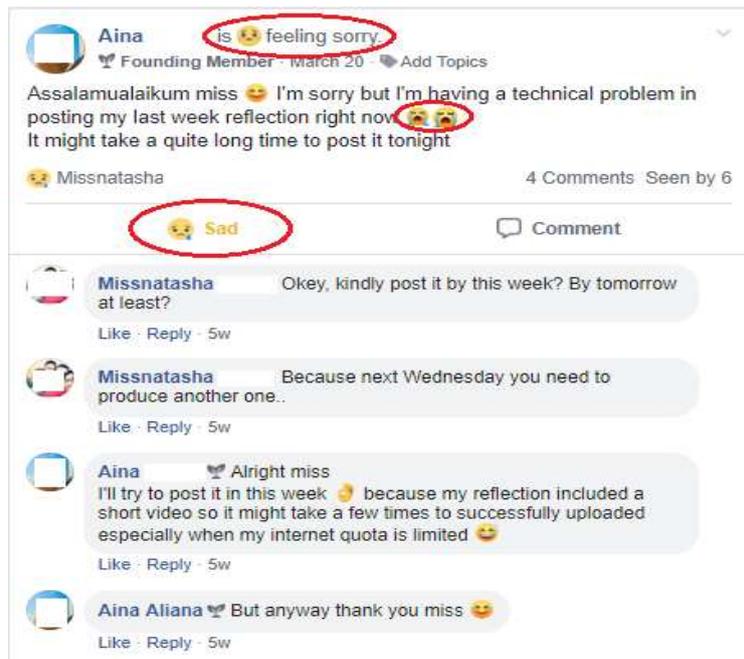
        On that week, she decided to upload a video to make her reflection more illustrative. However, due to the problem related to internet connectivity she experienced late submission. She showcased her disappointment due to this problem;

> *"Okay, one of the difficulties is because of my data limited. I am quite disappointed on that. Because my last week reflection I've included a video. Even though it is short video, but I could not upload successfully. So, I am quite disappointed, mad about that since Wednesday until now."* (Miss Aina, personal communication, Interview 1)

        This problem was encountered by Sir Aus too who claimed that Facebook Apps required a lot of internet data. Similar to Miss Aina, at the end of month, Sir Aus' internet data is merely low. He added further that the delayed loading was probably from abundance of advertisement that appeared. He emphasized about this issue below;

> *"Honestly speaking, the FB (Facebook) apps use quite a lot of data. Because the advertisement maybe. Take time to load especially when our internet data is low. At the end of the month la usually."* (Sir Aus, personal communication, Interview 1)

    b) **Distraction from advertisement.**

In addition, Sir Mir also were annoyed with distractions on Facebook, such as his encounters with unsuitable or violent videos in his Newsfeed where he found distracting, together with the unrelated advertisement.

> *"Okay as we know that violence, any violence video sometimes that really distract. So sometimes it's not really related to our reflections. So, the idea that we have composed might loose and go away just like that. Too many advertisements."* (Sir Mir, personal communication, Interview 1)

c) Lack of familiarity to use the features provided.

It is important to note that Facebook does have an option to control the content on what can appear on the user's Newsfeed. However, due to lack of familiarity on that option Sir Mir and Sir Aus encountered these difficulties. Their lack of familiarity on the safety and privacy features was probably the reason why these trainee teachers faced such difficulties. In the transcription below, Sir Aus admitted his lack of ability and familiarity of the feature.

> *"I don't think so. Just my problem on writing on Facebook just the ideas. Sometimes, ` we delay our reflections, of course. And I don't know the use of the features and everything. I don't know."* (Sir Aus, personal communication, Interview 1)

5.0 DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, it was found that two trainee teachers were active users of Facebook where they logged into Facebook on the daily basis while one trainee teacher only utilized it once a week just for the purpose of posting the reflections. This finding indicates a difference with previous study conducted by Sendurur, Sendurur, and Yilmaz (2015) which found out that 62.7% among 412 Information Technology trainee teachers logged in to Facebook as a daily basis which indicated it as the most popular social networking site, and that Facebook was popular because the trainee teachers were comfortable using it. However, this finding from Sendurur, Sendurur, and Yilmaz (2015) was contradicting with the findings of this research, in which trainee teachers mentioned that they are not in favour of using Facebook anymore due to its trendiness. It could be said that with the emergence of other social media like Instagram, the choices of the selection are more varied thus allowing the users to choose. One of the possible reasons why Facebook was not as popular to these trainee teachers anymore because with the existence other social media such as Instagram which they believed has more attractive features like picture filter and attractive interface. With the emergence of new social networking sites, Facebook is no longer the only choice that the users have. However, the usage of Instagram in in an educational platform is still indefinite.

Facebook was chosen as a platform of reflective practice in this study is due to its nature of limitless interactivity and up-to-date information sources. Facebook is popular because of its capability where people can share information, announcement, memories and knowledge (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012). Trainee teachers utilized Facebook from searching news updates to obtaining new ideas and inspiration related to teaching aids. Wilson et al. (2012) added the motives for engaging in specific behaviours, such as adding content or joining groups allowed the users. Due to these communicative and social functions, Facebook is often seen has its possibility as to be transformed in teaching and learning practices as it is more social, open and collaboration oriented.

In this study, Facebook group was chosen as a medium for the trainee teachers to write their weekly reflection for five consecutive weeks. They engaged in the same behaviours which was

composing weekly reflections. Based on the findings, all the trainee teachers acknowledged the audiences in this closed Facebook group were the supervisor and the trainee teachers under the same supervision. Based on the data obtained, the trainee teachers took only thirty minutes to one hour to compose the weekly reflection. The time spent was mainly used to write and drafting the content of reflection which was not taken much time.

In terms of their preferences on what to view and read in the Facebook group, they shared links, images or posts that are related to their professionalism and teaching practicum experiences. Based on the interviews, the trainee teachers preferred to read contents related to teaching aids, visually appealing images and mutual-shared problem with regards to their experiences in the teaching practicum. Consequently, the information shared assists them during the teaching practicum. However, there was a doubt on what was being shared by the other peers especially on the issue of the credibility of knowledge. The implies that trainee teachers perhaps only consider the supervisor, and not their peers, as a more knowledgeable authority in the Facebook group.

Hussain (2012) discovered that social media was used to promote collaboration in exchanging academic activities and developing social networks throughout the world. This notion was also aligned with the findings of this research. The positive experiences in using Facebook group are; it encourages proximity and support from the supervisor as well as fosters trainee teachers' dedication and their capability to reflect. Bosch (2009) stated that there are potential positive benefits of using Facebook in teaching and learning, particularly for the development of educational micro-communities. Based on this research finding, these trainee teachers believed that Facebook group allowed them to build rapport and get connected with the supervisor throughout the practicum session, and not only during teaching observations. These findings were supported by Prescott et al., (2015) who stated that that Facebook is a good site to communicate an easy and quick manner which led to an improvement on students' engagement in the class. In the case of this research, the rapport between trainee teachers and supervisor was encouraged and cultivated.

However, even though there are many positive findings from the study, the trainee teachers also reported some issues with the use of Facebook as a reflective platform. For one, this research found out that trainee teachers not only faced problems regarding external factors like technical and internet connectivity but also internal factors from themselves such as lack of confidence in their capabilities, distraction from the advertisement and lack of familiarity to use the features provided. The problem of internet connectivity was also mentioned as a downside factor that hampered the experience of using Facebook in these studies which affected the experience of the students in using Facebook.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Journals are common in teacher development programme as it promotes reflection and metacognitive process among trainees (Hernández-Ramos, 2004). Over centuries, technological advancement benefits the evolution of journal writing. Traditional paper-based reflection practices (such as diary, logbook and portfolio) is limited only to one audience which is the instructor and therefore trainees tend to be selective in their writing with the purpose of meeting the instructor's expectation (Hernández-Ramos, 2004). Nowadays, this limited traditional reflection writing has been replaced by electronic and online-based platform. Users (i.e. trainee teachers) can attach audios, images, videos and hyperlinks to their journals (Hernández-Ramos, 2004; Schroeder, 2005) which further maximise the process of recapturing their experience to the truest moment.

Online journals enhance trainee's reflection activity as it offers great autonomy to learners and creates opportunity for them to interact with peers (Williams & Jacobs, 2004, p. 244). The emergence of blogs, forum board and social network increases the interactivity of reflection as it allows learners to share their writing without borders. Borderless platform of information brings large "authentic" audience which boost learners' motivation to maximise their effort in writing (Jonassen, 2000). Readers from all over the world are able to leave comments and suggestions which encourage the discovery of new materials (Wolf, 2010). Moreover, the communicative features open the possibility to work collaboratively, share information and engage in constructive arguments (Roberts, 2003; Williams & Jacobs, 2004). This leads to more critical reflections as learners are exposed to more learning opportunities (Hernández-Ramos, 2004; Roberts, 2003) such as comparing solutions to problems, analysing readers' suggestions and draw connections between experiences. Consequently, online

reflection aids in improving trainees' self-esteem and professional development; and boost confidence in the "power and validity" of their ideas (Hernández-Ramos, 2004).

The development of reflective tool does revolve its nature of communication especially in improving the sense of interactivity which is lacking in the traditional approach is implemented. Based on the issues mentioned above, there is a need to develop an online support system to ease the supervisor to monitor trainee teachers' progress through composing reflections. As quoted from Bicen & Cavus (2011), educators are now turning to Web 2.0 tools, drawing upon their ability to assist in creating, collaborating on and sharing content. Due to that, reflective writing should explore the possibility in an attempt to improve trainee teachers' teaching skills.

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