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# Comparison of teacher licensing between the United States of America and Malaysia: Implementation and practical implication

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to address a conceptual challenge that arises to implement and the practical implication of teacher licensing. This paper will compare the practices of teacher licensing programs in Colorado, United States of America and similar teaching programs in Malaysia. It also addresses the challenge ahead to frame the teacher licensing application into the Malaysia education systems, particularly in teacher education programs. This challenge centers on articulating the teacher licensing program in Malaysia in terms of organization culture, teaching and learning practice, policy, and leadership. This paper is organized around three topics: (a) teacher licensing in Colorado, (b) challenges in adopting teacher licensing in Malaysia, and (c) discussion and recommendations.

**Keywords:** Teacher Licensing, Schools, Educational Development, United States of America, Malaysia

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of teacher licensing in the United States of America, particularly in state of Colorado emerged in the early of 80's as a major area of specialization in school systems. Many teacher education programs included teacher licensing as part of their programs with an approved number of subject and education credits, as well as supervised practice teaching. Albee and Piveral (2003) indicated that most teacher education programs in the US have a strong knowledge base, as evidenced by their grade point averages and their passage of teacher licensure exams. Additionally, in the US, teacher licensing requirements are set at the state level. Waks and Sandelands (2004) describe that the states formulate general policies for primary and secondary education, and then delegate implementation to local educational agencies. Thus, the college/school of education in the selected university awards bachelors or master degrees for their teacher education programs. Sass (2011) asserted as in many other professions, there are two components to the licensure of teachers in most states; there is a minimum education requirement and most states also require passage of one or more examinations for

teachers to become fully certified. Nevertheless, teacher licensing became a major focus of teacher education programs because it is important to provide qualification and teaching credential to qualify as a teacher. In the context of recognitions, most teacher license institutions in the US are accredited to meet certain standards and the measures of quality. Similarly, Waks, and Sandelands (2004) revealed that all states require an educational component for a teacher's license accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) or similar accrediting agency (CAEP, TEAC, INTASC).

In contrast, Malaysia's education system does not require a license for teachers to teach in school. Despite these initial requirements, the Malaysian education system is regulated such that teachers need to have an education certificate or higher in order to be appointed as a teacher under the Malaysian Civil Service. Mokshein, Ahmad, and Vongalis-Macrow (2009) point out that the role of preparing new teachers in government schools is undertaken by teacher training institutes and local public universities under jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

Both the teacher training institutes and public universities undertake the vision and mission of teacher education programs. In most of the cases, teacher education programs in Malaysia are based on the technical-rational model and a major part of the training is focused on the acquisition of generic teaching skills (Lee, 2004). However, there is considerable potential for improving the quality and efficiency of teacher education programs in Malaysia. In enhancing the quality of teacher education programs as a whole, a balanced emphasis should be given to both the theory and practical training included with a teacher license. Lee (2004) argued that teaching competencies in Malaysia are very much related to what have been emphasized in their initial training programs, but these survival skills are not enough to make an effective and competent teacher. To realize the potential will require preparing better teachers and influence policy makers to implement new policies that will enable them to improve teacher practices.

In an effort to improve teacher education programs in Malaysia, the purpose of this paper is first to compare the practices of teacher licensing programs in Colorado, US and similar teaching programs in Malaysia. Second, to frame the teacher licensing application into the Malaysia education systems, particularly in teacher education programs. Therefore this paper proposes an exploratory framework to illustrate how teacher licensing processes might be supported and enhanced within teacher education programs in Malaysia. We demonstrate this result using the example of the Colorado teacher licensing practices.

## 2. Teacher Licensing in Colorado

The Licensing Act of 1991, adopted May 12, 1994, was enacted “to establish the standards and criteria for issuance of licenses and authorizations to teachers, special services providers, principals, and administrators” (Colorado State Board of Education). The Act adopted rules requiring educators in all capacities to go through a three tiered process for licensing. Entry-level educators apply for an Initial License, then move to a Professional License as they gain experience, and finally, for outstanding educators, may voluntarily apply for a Master Certificate as show in Figure 1. A Colorado license or authorization is required for any teacher, special service provider or principal wishing to be employed in any Colorado public school or school district.

Applicants for licensure in Colorado must hold a Bachelor's degree or higher in the appropriate area they wish to teach. A recommendation from the institution from which the applicant completed an approved program must be completed (this can either be a Colorado approved program or a program approved by another state), and “successful completion of the State Board adopted content area assessment in the endorsement area being sought” (Colorado State Board of Education). A criminal background check is also required based on the submission of fingerprints to the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

Currently, the two board-adopted assessments are the

PLACE (Program for Licensing Assessments for Colorado Educators®) and the Praxis. The PLACE exam was developed to fulfill the requirement for the Educator Licensing Act. It is a criterion reference and objective based test “designed to measure a candidate's knowledge in relation to an established standard of performance” (PLACE, 2012). Similarly, the Praxis exam is designed “to assess subject matter knowledge and other competencies for individuals planning a career in teaching” (Teachers Test Prep, Inc., 2009-2012).

Alternative means of licensing in Colorado can occur if “Colorado school district(s), boards of cooperative services (BOCES), accredited non-public school(s), accepted institution(s) of higher education, non-profit agency, or any combination thereof” (Colorado State Board of Education), apply to the Board of Education for approval of an alternative teacher preparation program. Candidates seeking alternative licensure must be full-time employees for one to two years and “teach, receive training, and be supervised by a qualified mentor teacher and an appropriate support team” (Colorado State Board of Education). In addition, 225 clock hours of planned instruction and activities that meet performance based standards must be included in their experience for alternative licensing.

Once teachers hold the Initial License, they begin work to move to a Professional License. This license is issued to applicants who complete a Colorado State Board of Education approved induction program. An induction program is provided by “Colorado schools, school districts, some private and charter schools, approved facilities and/or BOCES and includes supervision by mentor teachers, ongoing professional development and training, including ethics, and performance evaluations” (Colorado State Board of Education).

Professional teaching licenses in Colorado must be renewed every five years. Candidates must complete six semester hours of college/university credit or 90 clock hours of Professional Development such as in-services through their school districts, conferences, or workshops). These credits or hours must be earned during the time the license is active.



Figure 1. Three tiered process for teacher licensing in Colorado.

### 3. Challenges in Adopting Teacher Licensing in Malaysia

Given the fact that Malaysia is going through a change in its socioeconomic structure, the role of teacher education is becoming increasingly important. Teacher education in Malaysia has always been an important benchmark of education development. Teaching, like any other profession, has its own set of challenges. While education has been an important issue in Malaysia for many years, one of the biggest challenges for implementing teacher licensing in Malaysia is the centralized system. Malaysia is known for implementing centralization in organization structure, including education sector. Johari, Yahya, and Omar (2011) indicated that centralized deals with the amount of power distributed among employees of various positions. Similarly, Rao, and Jani (2011) describe that administration structure of education system in Malaysia is a highly centralized system, and it is structured through federal, state, district, and school systems. Likewise, rigid rules and regulations are used to serve as a means of control in many public organizations. In order to implement teacher licensing in Malaysian teacher education programs, it is important to know the challenges and barriers.

#### 3.1. Organization Culture

Many organizations in the world, including Malaysia, have their own working and organizational culture. The work ethics are based on these cultures, beliefs, values, and norms that affect behavior and actions within the organization. In order to implement teaching licensing in teacher education programs, change in the organization need to occur. Rashid, Sambasivan, and Rahman (2004) argued that change in each organization is unique in each situation, due to the differences in the nature of the organization, business, and attitude of the employees. There is a need to change the organizational culture in order to implement something new like teacher licensing. With regard to the organizational management, educational administrations in Malaysia are divided into four levels: federal, state, district, and school. Each level of administration is structured and managed from 'top-down' policies. Salleh and Sulaiman (2012) claimed the organization in Malaysia needs to empower its employees and make a full commitment to them and their needs and support as part of the improvement. In order to implement the teaching licensing, independent parties should be assigned to assess and evaluate pre-service teacher performance. The independent party should not be subject to any of the administrative level and should stay self-governing.

#### 3.2. Teaching and Learning Practice

Implementation of teaching licensing in the teacher training institutes and public universities means change in mode of teaching and learning. Currently, an assessment for pre-service teachers in the teacher education programs is done through practicum. Pre-service teachers need to complete certain hours of engagement with public schools.

By doing this, pre-service teachers will gain experience necessary to become a teacher. Conversely, by applying teacher licensing programs like the Colorado teaching licensing program, pre-service teachers need to complete the three tiered process shown in Figure 1. In the first and second tiers, pre-service teachers need to get the initial license, once the induction process is completed, pre-service teachers are qualified to become a professional teacher. The first and second process should be synchronized with the bachelor degree program if the pre-service teacher is enrolled in the education program. In third tier, to make sure that teachers enroll in professional development courses after becoming a teacher, renewal of the teaching license is compulsory within five years. The present teaching and learning practice in Malaysia will have to change. Pre-service teachers must move away from the traditional practice in teacher education programs to a form that requires them to be accredited by an independent party for the teaching license. Thus, pre-service teachers need to be more concerned and take responsibility of their own learning process to become a teacher. At the same time, in-service teachers also need to prepare for professional development because of the renewal requirement in the teacher licensing process.

#### 3.3. Policy

One success factor in any new intervention, especially in teacher education programs, depends on the education policy. Policy is a key factor that drives the implementation, especially for centralized management systems like Malaysia. The Cabinet Committee Report on the implementation of *National Education Policy*, 1979 stresses the need to enhance teacher education for quality education (Malaysian Government, 2004). Similarly, the Malaysian Government (2012) in *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025* is committed to its long-standing policy of strengthening the teaching profession to make it a vibrant, rewarding, and prestigious profession. However, any policy-making process related to education will usually involve all parties, including the education department, higher management officer, and policy makers. Therefore, education leaders and policy makers at the federal level, especially in Ministry of Education, should take initiative and implement 'top-down' policy regarding the teacher licensing. Zaba et. al. (2011) argued that the policy-making in Malaysia is still using bureaucratic top-down system and is being made at the federal government level only. In contrast, Malaysian Government (2012) declared Ministry of Education will streamline and clarify decision-making rights between the federal, state, district, and school levels based on roles and responsibilities.

#### 3.4. Leadership

Leadership is very diverse topic especially in multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country like Malaysia. Most of the time it is dependent on the culture and external

environment that shapes the leadership style and qualities. The trait of leadership is not fixed, it depends on situations. Some traits are valuable in some situations but in another situation it becomes less important. One of the qualities that leader is sought to have is vision. A good leader should have a good vision and work towards that vision. In the new culture and environment settings, the role of a leader is to express a vision, get buy-in, and implement it (Morden, 1997). Being a leader with good vision would make a difference but how they accomplish the vision is another issue. Salleh and Sulaiman (2013) claimed the organization's performances are basically being scaled and evaluated by the success of the leader. In order to implement teaching licensing in teacher education programs, education leaders should have a good vision towards the advantages on having teacher licensing for Malaysia education systems.

#### 4. Discussion and Recommendations

The idea of implementation of teacher licensing in Malaysia is to promote quality in education systems involves all sectors of society. Based on the discussion above, there are two critical components that are important in teacher licensing process whether it is in the United States of America or to be implemented in Malaysia; teacher knowledge on subject matter and skills on delivery the subject matter. Subject matter knowledge had an influence that shapes the teaching and learning process of pre-service teachers; meanwhile skills on delivery are more focused on improving and strengthening the subject matter applications. Subject matter knowledge is essential for any teacher in developing intellectual resources to enable them to participate in the major domains of human thought and inquiry (Ball & McDiarmind, 1990). Greenberg and Walsh (2012) argued that effective instruction required that teachers have a well-grounded sense of students' proficiency in order to make an instructional decision and planning lessons. In contrast, Feiman-Nemser (2001) remarks that pre-service teachers begin to develop their skills on delivery by analyzing samples of student work, comparing different curricular materials, interviewing students to uncover their thinking, studying how different teachers work toward the same goal, and observing what impact their instruction has on students. In terms of training, teacher training should emphasize the subject matter. Based on findings in World Data on Education (2011), during pre-service training, each future teacher is trained in two subject areas, consists of 80 percent subject content and 20 percent education-related courses plus internship. Therefore, the teacher licensing should be designed to support the deeper content, performance, and skills demands expected of pre-service teachers.

The lack of articulation between pre-service teacher programs and in-service teacher programs underscore the coordination between subject matter and skills on delivery. The Malaysian Government (2014) asserted that improving

the quality of teachers starts with a clear articulation of what excellence in the teaching profession looks like. Ministry of Education as a higher authority body should oversee the problems and mandate a policy on this matter. Contrary, in the United States, while every state has own requirements, rules and regulations, there is great emphasis in the articulation of quality criteria of education including teacher education. Ingersoll (2007) asserted the framers of the U.S Constitution did not include education or schooling among the function of the national or federal government and, hence the provision of schooling began as the responsibility of the 50 individual states.

Apart from articulation, professional development also should be strengthened and compulsory for in-service teachers, regardless of position and amount of experiences. Feiman-Nemser (2001) concede that professional development is a transformation in teachers' knowledge, understandings, skills, and commitments, in what they know and what they are able to do in their individual practice as well as in their shared responsibilities. With the rapid technological change it is crucial for teachers to be in line with their knowledge with the latest trends and pedagogy in the education field. In-service teachers need to update their knowledge and skills in parallel with the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

In conclusion, a good teacher licensing program will produce high quality teachers with the substantial knowledge and skills to be successful educators. Additionally, strong support from top management included from various levels such as from the federal, state, district, and school can make a difference in terms of quality of teachers. Even though the implementation of teacher licensing in Malaysia is totally different in almost every aspect from the United States, it is not impractical to implement. Many aspects of current educational practice need to be evaluated rigorously. Further research should be considered if the Ministry of Education should be interested in proposing and implementing teaching licensing in Malaysia.

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