

Report: 2015 Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program (Malaysia)

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Staff	2
Preparation	3
Participants	5
School and Institute Visits	6
Participant Research	7
Participant Feedback	9
Conclusion	10
Appendix: Proposal	11

Introduction

From April 4-11, 2015, a group of educators and seven Al Qasimi Foundation staff visited Kuala Lumpur for a teacher exchange program to investigate and learn from the Malaysian education system. The formal proposal is located in the appendix. The results of the exchange are below.

Staff

The following staff were selected for their particular skills and were assigned roles for the exchange:

Name	Position	Responsibilities
Mr. Luke Zimmermann	Program Manager for Teaching and Learning, Al Qasimi Foundation	Team leader, main contact with school managers, leads staff briefings
Dr. Cambria Russell	Assistant Professor of Education, American University of Ras Al Khaimah	Research leader
Ms. Hanadi Mohammed	Program Coordinator for Teaching and Learning, Al Qasimi Foundation	Translator, participant care
Ms. Jessica Andrews	Community Engagement and Outreach Associate, Al Qasimi Foundation	Logistical supervisor, photographer
Mr. Petrus Layarda	Former Research Intern, Al Qasimi Foundation	Cultural and language advisor, photographer, navigational support
Mr. Ahmed Al Dhamani	Vice Principal, Al Munaei Secondary School	Translator, participant care
Ms. Rafe'aa Al Dhahouri	Administrative Assistant, Al Qasimi Foundation	Participant care, photographer

Preparation

In 2013, the Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program selected Malaysia for its second collaboration. The Ministry of Education, Malaysia was consistently polite and helpful, and all of the Foundation's requests were granted graciously.

Preparations for a Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program partnership with the Ministry of Education, Malaysia began in September 2013 with the Consulate General of Malaysia in Dubai, UAE. The Foundation then submitted a formal teacher exchange proposal to Malaysian representatives, which was approved by the Director-General of Malaysia's Ministry of Education in March 2014 (see appendix).

With actual planning details underway, the Ministry confirmed that three Foundation staff members could make a planning visit to the Ministry of Education and select schools in Malaysia June 22-27, 2014. Below is the itinerary for the planning visit, which included Mr. Zimmermann, Ms. Andrews, and Mr. Layarda.

Date	Itinerary	Location	Time
22 June 2014 (Sunday)	Arrive in Malaysia	KL International Airport (KLIA)	
23 June 2014 (Monday)	Briefing from MOE Malaysia	Policy & International Relations Division, 7th Floor, Block E8, Federal Government Complex, Complex E, Putrajaya	9:30 A.M.-11:30 A.M.
	Visit to primary school	SK Jalan 3, Jalan 3/4, Section 3, Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor	11:30 A.M. onward
24 June 2014 (Tuesday)	Visit to high-tech secondary school	SMK Aminuddin Baki, Jalan Kampung Pandan, Kuala Lumpur	9:30 A.M.-11:30 A.M.
	Visit to vocational secondary school	Kolej Vokasional Setapak, Jalan Genting Setapak, Kuala Lumpur	2:30 P.M.-3:30 P.M.
25 June 2014 (Wednesday)	Visit to English Language Teaching Center Malaysia (ELTC)	English Language Teaching Center Malaysia (ELTC), Kompleks Pendidikan, Bandar Enstek, 71760 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan	9:30 A.M.-11:30 A.M.
	Visit to Institute of Teacher Education International Language Campus	Institute of Teacher Education International Language Campus, Lembah Pantai, 59200 Kuala Lumpur	2:30 P.M.- 4:30 P.M.
26 June 2014 (Thursday)	Visit to PERMATA Pintar, gifted and talented secondary school	Pusat PERMATApintar Negara Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia 43600 Bangi, Selangor	9:30 A.M.-11:30 A.M.
	Visit cultural significances	Putrajaya, Kuala Lumpur	2:30 P.M. onwards
27 June 2014 (Friday)	Depart to UAE	KL International Airport (KLIA)	

The planning trip took place from June 22-27. During the trip, Ms. Andrews and Mr. Layarda made logistical notes for the larger exchange delegation related to transportation, tourism, etc.

Based on six school visits, the Foundation team narrowed the focus of the teacher exchange to four institutions, including a primary school (SK Jalan 3), secondary school (SMK

Aminuddin Baki), teacher-training institute (Institute of Teacher Education International Language Campus), and vocational school (Kolej Vokasional Setapak).

The Ministry of Education in Malaysia confirmed that Ras Al Khaimah educators could tentatively plan to visit Kuala Lumpur schools in February 2015.

As Ms. Andrews coordinated logistical arrangements for the planning trip, Mr. Zimmermann and she also met with Dr. Russell in early June 2014 in order to prepare for the research component of the exchange program, which Dr. Russell had been selected to lead based on her experiences as an educator, researcher, education professor, and teacher trainer.

From October to November 2014, the Foundation accepted applications for the program, which were reviewed by the selection committee in order to determine which applicants should be interviewed for the program.

During this planning phase, the Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone determined that the exchange should take place in April 2015, during school holidays, and the team requested that the Ministry of Education, Malaysia amend the exchange dates to April 6-10, 2015. Their approval was granted in November 2014, and the following agenda was developed.

Date	Itinerary	Location	Time
4 April 2015 (Saturday)	Arrive in Malaysia	KL International Airport (KLIA)	2:10 P.M.
5 April 2015 (Sunday)	Cultural tour of Kuala Lumpur	KL Tower, local shops, Independence Square	8:30-1:30 P.M.
6 April 2015 (Monday)	Visit to primary school	SK Jalan 3, Jalan 3/4, Section 3, Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor	8:30 A.M.-1:30 P.M.
7-8 April 2015 (Tuesday, Wednesday)	Visit to Institute of Teacher Education International Language Campus	Institute of Teacher Education International Language Campus, Lembah Pantai, 59200 Kuala Lumpur	8:30 A.M.- 4:30 P.M.
9 April 2015 (Thursday)	Visit to high-tech secondary school	SMK Aminuddin Baki, Jalan Kampung Pandan, Kuala Lumpur	8:30 A.M.-1:30 P.M.
10 April 2015 (Friday)	Visit to vocational secondary school	Kolej Vokasional Setapak, Jalan Genting Setapak, Kuala Lumpur	8:30 A.M.-1:30 P.M.
11 April 2015 (Saturday)	Depart to UAE	KL International Airport (KLIA)	9:45 A.M.

The selection committee interviewed applicants from January to February 2015. The committee then extended invitations to 13 applicants, who signed contracts governing their participation in the program.

In addition, the team held four mandatory workshops for the selected educators to attend in preparation for the trip and as part of the professional development course that accompanied the visit to Malaysia. The workshops took place from February to March 2015 and consisted of the following:

- an introduction to the Malaysian education system;
- a cultural inventory evaluation and group discussion;
- a learning and research goals training session; and
- a logistics meeting and expectations exchange.

Participants

Candidates were required to fill out an application form indicating their research interests and were subsequently interviewed. Based on their diversity of professional experiences, applications, and interviews, the following candidates were invited to join the exchange program:

	Title	Surname	First Name	Position
1	Ms.	Abbas	Fatema Mohamed	English language teacher
2	Mr.	Abou El Enien	Reda El Sayed Ahmed	Math teacher
3	Mr.	Al Asam	Ali Mohammed Salem	Vice principal
4	Ms.	Al Blooshi	Asma	English language teacher
4	Ms.	Al Blooshi	Noora	English language teacher
6	Mr.	Al Najjau	Gehad Ismail	English language teacher
7	Ms.	Al Shehhi	Aamna	Information technology teacher
8	Ms.	Al Shehhi	Sumayya	English language teacher
9	Dr.	Al Tunaiji	Faisal Obaid Ahmad	Head of Educational Affairs, Ministry of Education
10	Ms.	Al Zaabi	Asma Abdulaziz	English language teacher
11	Mr.	Husni	Mohammed	Instructional Leadership Coordinator
12	Mr.	Rabbaa	Saeed Ahmad	Vice principal
13	Mr.	Sabah	Khaled	English language teacher
14	Mr.	Said	Mokhles	English language teacher

School and Institute Visits

The group visited a primary school (Monday, June 6), a teacher-training institute (Tuesday-Wednesday, June 8-9), a secondary school (Thursday, June 9), and a vocational secondary school (Friday, June 10).

Visits began with a welcome from the school, which often included banners with "Welcome to the Ras Al Khaimah Delegates" and, at the primary school, a traditional Malay welcome with a drumming band and a dance performance. In every case, the group was then led into a meeting room for formal introductions and a multimedia presentation about the institution. Usually, this was followed by a question-and-answer session, a guided tour of the school or institute, and classroom observations. Participants gathered information relevant to their research during all of these activities.

The institutions' principals and directors were extremely accommodating. Apart from sharing their time and expertise, they provided us with unforgettable experiences including an extraordinary 20-minute musical performance by primary school children; an English carnival program organized by future educators at the teacher-training institute; a co-curricular, character-building program (camping, sport, dance, cooking, rappelling skills, etc.) held at the same teacher-training institute; and hospitality characterized by delicious local food and relationship-building among Malaysia and UAE educators.

Participant Research

All participants were expected to conduct research while in Malaysia and report the results upon return. The purpose of this activity was:

- To focus participants' thinking and observations while in Malaysia;
- To encourage individual critical reflection;
- To stimulate reflective conversations about school visits;
- To focus on the information participants would share with their colleagues upon return; and
- To introduce participants to research methods they can employ in their educational practice and/or sharpen research skills of participants already familiar with research.

Process

In the preparation phase, Dr. Russell presented basic research concepts to the group. Dr. Russell introduced criteria for evaluating research projects and discussed limitations of these research projects. With Dr. Russell's guidance, participants identified a broad subject of interest, narrowed their topics, and created research questions and instruments. This process began in a session held at the Al Qasimi Foundation and continued online via email and the Ras Al Khaimah Teachers Network. Outside of the sessions, participants either developed data collection instruments or found appropriate instruments from scholarly sources. Most groups discussed the instruments with Dr. Russell and revised them according to her feedback.

In Malaysia, the participants collected data through interviews, surveys, observations, and documents. Each day, they reflected on their data collection in the debriefing meetings.

Upon return to the UAE, the participants continued to analyze data and prepare presentations. About half of the participants sent works in progress to Dr. Russell for feedback and guidance. Details of the projects can be found below.

Research Projects

Participant	Topic	Product
Fatema Mohamed Abbas	Differentiation	Presentation for colleagues and English carnival at Al Dhait Secondary School
Asma Abdulaziz Al Zaabi	Differentiation	
Reda El Sayed Ahmed Abou El Enien	Differentiation	Presentation for teachers at Al Dhait School
Mohammed Husni	Classroom Management	Newspaper
Sumayya Al Shehhi	Differentiation	Pending
Saeed Ahmad Rabbaa	Differentiation	Presentation for other participants and teachers at Al Dhait School
Ali Mohammed Salem	Scheduling/ Structure of School Day	Presentation for selected members of his staff
Asma Al Blooshi	Teacher Professional Development	Presentation at AQF award ceremony Integration of data from the trip into master's thesis project
Noora Al Blooshi	Teacher Professional Development	Presentation at AQF award ceremony
Khaled Al Sabah	Teaching English	Presentation for students and administrators at his school
Mokhles Said	Teaching English	Presentation at his school
Aamna Al Shehhi	IT Curriculum	Integration into master's thesis

Results

By re-visiting the purposes outlined above, the success of the research component of the trip is clear.

To focus participants' thinking and observations while in Malaysia. According to team observations, journal entries, and data collected, the participants focused on their topics during the school visits. They asked topic-appropriate questions and used their data collection instruments.

To encourage critical reflection/reflective conversations about school visits. According to the staff's observations, journal entries, and data collected, all participants engaged in critical reflection at some point in the process. The debriefing sessions and casual conversations on the bus were the most common venues for this reflection.

To focus the information participants would share with their colleagues upon return. Most of the twelve participants (who went to Malaysia) have sufficiently covered their research in their presentations, and the remaining projects are pending completion or revision.

Research skills development. All participants who went to Malaysia collected and analyzed data.

Participant Feedback

During a final participant debriefing after returning to Ras Al Khaimah, a number of other suggestions were made to improve the exchange:

- During one of the pre-trip workshops, prepare participants on how to ask questions during the school visits and to gather information for their research. This could include role-playing and modeling appropriate research techniques.
- Choose the best research project from a previous exchange and ask its author to present the project to the participants who are planning to take part in the upcoming exchange.
- In the schedule, include a visit to a school that specializes in students who have special needs.
- After the exchange, hold a ceremony in the Ras Al Khaimah Chamber of Commerce and invite all RAKTN members to see teacher exchange participant projects, which should be completed within 45 days of the end of the trip.
- Schedule school visits to observe and watch presentations of teacher exchange participants.

In this final debriefing, the trip received the following positive feedback:

- Observing classes, spending time with teachers, and collecting information from those teachers were a positive experience for educators from Ras Al Khaimah.
- The decision for staff to sit with their small groups on the bus and to ask for feedback on how the participants were faring personally and in terms of their research goals helped to reduce stress and build relationships on the trip.
- Moving participants into different research groups for each afternoon's meetings (research discussion workshops) so that they could exchange ideas, information, and opinions worked well.
- On the bus ride back to the hotel from the final school visit, participants were given the opportunity to share with the group what they benefitted from during this trip, and this time encouraged everyone.

Conclusion

Overall, the Al Qasimi Foundation team agreed that the Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program with Malaysia was a success. One of the criteria of success was that the Malaysian educators would be interested in visiting Ras Al Khaimah. At the end of every school visit, an invitation was extended to the institution and met with a positive response.

On the return from the last school visit, Mr. Zimmermann thanked all the participants and offered the microphone to anyone for comments. Dr. Faisal Al Tunaiji, the Head of Educational Affairs at the Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, gave a speech thanking the Foundation and encouraging participants to submit their research to the Ministry for further consideration. Other participants also gave warm comments about their experiences in Malaysia.

Upon their return to Ras Al Khaimah, participants shared their research insights from Malaysia with their education communities and enjoyed the support of the Ministry of Education in Ras Al Khaimah, represented by Dr. Al Tunaiji.

Appendix

Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program, An Initiative of the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research

Ras Al Khaimah/Malaysia Exchange Proposal

Overview

The Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program provides opportunities for educators in Ras Al Khaimah government schools to further develop their knowledge and skills of pedagogy and learning environments through exchange visits with schools in other countries. The exchange allows participants to experience different cultures and educational systems, as well as a variety of viewpoints from teachers, students, parents, and others within the education sector.

Through conversations with educational professionals in the host country, participants are encouraged to explore the differences and similarities between schools in the United Arab Emirates and those overseas. Effective teaching practices, community relations, diversity, integration and participation, inclusion, and parent communication are examples of issues that might be addressed through the exchange program and its associated activities.

Due to its reciprocal nature, the Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program runs every two years. During the first year, Ras Al Khaimah teachers go overseas to visit schools in the host country and learn about its educational system and practices. During the second year, the program invites teachers from the host country to come to Ras Al Khaimah to learn about the educational system, culture, and practices of the United Arab Emirates, should that complement their own educational objectives.

The Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program was formally launched in 2011 in collaboration with Pädagogisches Zentrum Basel-Stadt, an institute for teacher development in Basel, Switzerland. That year, a group of 11 educators from Ras Al Khaimah traveled to Switzerland for a week-long visit. The exchange series was completed in September 2012 when 20 Swiss Teachers visited the United Arab Emirates to meet Ras Al Khaimah educators.

The next series of international visits in the Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program is scheduled to take place during the 2015 calendar year. Under the approval of the Director-General, the Al Qasimi Foundation is pleased to partner with Malaysia's Ministry of Education for this exchange series.

Objectives

The overarching goals of the Ras Al Khaimah Teacher Exchange Program are to:

- Provide opportunities for distinguished teachers to deepen their knowledge and skills related to effective pedagogy and different learning environments;
- Create an international network of teachers and school administrators that fosters collaboration between overseas educational institutions and government schools in Ras Al Khaimah; and
- Promote cross-cultural exchange that sparks curiosity, new ideas, and creates understanding.

More specifically, the Al Qasimi Foundation believes that Malaysian and Emirati educators have much to offer each other. Both Ras Al Khaimah and Malaysia are striving to continuously improve their educational systems while emphasizing English as a second language. Culturally, both education systems serve students and communities in a Muslim context and so could offer relevant cultural insights to one another. Our educational contexts, in summary, share similarities and yet have distinctions that would make a collaboration between us enlightening and enriching.

Dates and Capacity

Teacher Exchange Part 1: April 6-10, 2015

It is our hope that our teachers from Ras Al Khaimah can, with Foundation team members, visit Malaysian schools in the first part of 2015. We agree that the first full week in April is ideal, after looking at the Malaysian calendar with the Ministry of Education Malaysia.

This spring, we expect to bring approximately seven Al Qasimi staff members and 15 local educators.

Teacher Exchange Part 2: Fall 2015 or Spring 2016

Ras Al Khaimah educators and the Al Qasimi Foundation would be pleased to host Malaysian educators in the Emirates.

Points of Interest

Our teachers would benefit most from observing four types of institutions: **a primary school, a vocational school, a high-tech school, and an institute for training teachers**. In particular, staff have made preliminary visits (with the Ministry of Education, Malaysia) to these schools and would like to bring our teachers to the following institutions:

1. Primary school: **SK Jalan 3, Jalan 3/4, Section 3, Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor;**
2. Secondary school: **SMK Aminuddin Baki, Jln Kampung Pandan, Kuala Lumpur;**
3. Vocational secondary school: **Kolej Vokasional Setapak, Jalan Genting Setapak, Kuala Lumpur;** and
4. Teacher training institute: ***Institute of Teacher Education International Language Campus* Lembah Pantai, 59200 Kuala Lumpur.**