

Meet A Member of FAAM: Norlilawati (Lila) Mohd Noor



Lila's "Creating Shakespeare Book Cover" Class
With the Advance Class students

1. Tell us about yourself

I am the Language Head of my school SMKA Al Irshad, Kepala Batas, Penang where I have been teaching the English Language for the last 23 years. In total, I have been teaching for 24 years and I started at a multiracial co-ed school in Butterworth.

In 2011, I was selected to participate in the International Leaders in Education Program ("ILEP") and was based in the Northern Kentucky University in Kentucky.

By way of introduction, ILEP provides international teachers with unique opportunities to develop expertise in their subject areas, enhance their teaching skills and increase their knowledge about the United States. It consists of a semester-long non-degree, non-credit academic program at a U.S. University including seminars on new teaching methodologies, curriculum development, lesson planning, and teaching strategies. Participants will audit two courses in the host university's School or Department of Education and participate in a practicum in a U.S. secondary school near the host university.

Last year, I was one of the twelve Malaysian teachers handpicked to teach in Korea as part of the First Cohort Korea-Malaysia Teacher Exchange Programme ("KOMTEP") 2014. My teaching stint was featured in a magazine in the Korean Language.

2. Could you expand on the Korea-Malaysia Teacher Exchange Programme ("KOMTEP") 2014?

KOMTEP is an initiative of the Asia-Pacific Teacher Exchange for Global Education, under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (“APCEIU”), established in 2000 by the Government of the Republic of Korea and the UNESCO. It seeks to enhance global educational competence of participating teachers and schools through long and short-term exchange programmes for teachers in the region.

I was selected by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia and APCEIU UNESCO, Korea to teach Social Studies on Malaysia and the English Language to the students of Howon Elementary School, Gyeonggi, in Seoul from September 11 - November 29, 2014. The program, funded by the Ministry of Education Korea, Ministry of Education Malaysia and APCEIU UNESCO, has successfully enhanced teachers’ capacity in global education and cross-cultural communication skills through hands-on experiences. It has also helped to promote mutual understanding among countries and reinforce the educational competence of participating countries in the Asia Pacific region.

Each year, the exchange program continues to grow and to date, more than 300 teachers from Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Mongolia and Malaysia have participated in it.



Lila and her partner teacher in the midst of their Social Studies class with the 2nd Graders.

3. You have been teaching in the same school for the last 23 years. Tell us more about that.

I am passionate about teaching. I am passionate about my school, SMKA Al Irshad, Kepala Batas, Penang. I love my students. I have been teaching in the same school for the last 23 years. I recently received a promotion, which I declined, as the responsibility required me to relocate to another school.

I have seen my school grow, from a non-high performing to a high performing school. We achieved this in 2013 after much hard work. My experience in the US from ILEP has enhanced my teaching approach and contributed to this effort.

4. How did your experience from ILEP in the US shape and influence you, both professionally and personally?

I was based in the Northern Kentucky University in Kentucky. I was struck by the learning culture there. It was cordial, friendly, relaxing and this created a conducive environment for learning. My favourite class was a post-graduate reading class. The Professor for that class was very supportive and we became good friends.

One aspect that I found particularly interesting is the concept of service learning. It is a teaching and learning strategy which integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen the communities we live in. I have brought this back to Malaysia and inculcated the same in my school and my students.

At the same time, I had the opportunity to teach the English Language in a middle school in Kentucky. I have been teaching secondary school students in Malaysia. So, it was an enriching experience because I had to adjust the ways lessons were conducted to suit the younger middle school students.

On a personal level, I have grown as a person. I love exploring the world and learning new culture. I feel like a global citizen. Most importantly, I was reminded by a saying to the effect that "I went to the West and saw Islam...". There are many things we can learn from the West and similarly, the West from us.

I truly appreciate the opportunity and support given to me by MACEE.

5. You mentioned that you have brought the concept of service learning back to Malaysia. Could you share one of the initiatives you have started?

I have translated the concept of service learning into an initiative called "Connecting Classrooms Online Community". This is a way for my students and I to give back to the society. Every year, my students will conduct a learning camp to teach the English Language to underprivileged students. This year we will be with the 'orang asli' students in Tapah. I think this is an important step to promote volunteerism among our students.



Teaching basic English Language to Returnee; Yu Say (Japanese-Korean Parentage)

6. You were in Korea recently. What do you think of their education system and how would you compare that to our education system?

Korean students are given a 10-minute break in between lessons and I believe this helps students to relax and re-focus before the next lesson begins. The system is less focused on examinations. Additionally, the teachers in Korea have minimal non-teaching responsibilities and the classrooms are equipped with state-of-the-art technology and teaching aid. The students are also given the equivalent of RM400 per year by the Korean government.

The Malaysian education system is pivoting its focus from examinations to HOT (High Order Thinking) skills. Nonetheless, this has been met with cynicism by certain quarters. No system is free from flaws and I believe that this is a step in the right direction.

I am a firm believer that we have to continue to adapt and make the best out of what we have for the betterment and the future of our students.

7. You talked about the future of our students. As a teacher, what do you wish to achieve?

I wish for the ultimate happiness of my students. I want them to be good persons and responsible global citizens. I want them to continue to be curious, broad minded and fluent English speakers, of course!



Introducing the traditional game; “Congkak” to Korean students.

8. What advice would you give to aspiring teachers and future ILEP participants?

Go out and teach the world. Participate in ILEP to start with. I understand that some may be tied down by commitments and I hope that they have supportive spouses and family members who will help them soar.

9. As FAAM seeks to promote collaborative opportunities among members, what interaction would you find interesting?

I am excited about opportunities that would allow me to collaborate with anyone or in any project on the education system. Come and join us in Tapah to teach the English Language to the ‘Orang Asli’ students.

I would also like to welcome members of FAAM to my school, SMKA Al Irshad, Kepala Batas in Penang. I want you to share your stories with the students, as they need more role models. We look forward to receiving you!