

Teaching Practices Among Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia

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Abstract. This study was carried out to investigate the teaching practices in Malaysian secondary schools, particularly in determining whether or not they are still bound to conventional teaching methods, or have they shifted to newer alternative models. Respondents involved consisted of 12 secondary school teachers who teach a variety of subjects from four states in the northern region of peninsular Malaysia. The schools selected for this study include urban, suburban and rural areas. Participating schools also have a variety of backgrounds, such as High Performance Schools, Excellence Cluster Schools, Sports Schools and Ordinary Daily Schools. Data collected through the 'Questionnaire of Teacher Teaching Practices' were then analyzed qualitatively. Results obtained show that the teaching practices employed by these teachers were still very much bound to conventional teaching methods, in addition to still being teacher-centered.

Keywords: Teacher, Teaching Practices, Teaching Method, Secondary Schools.

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, education is one of the six National Key Result Areas (NKRA) identified by the government. The NKRA represents a combination of critical short-term and long-term priorities set by the government to further enhance the development of the country. The Malaysian government is now more focused on aspects which provide the biggest impact on student performance such as school stewardship and the quality of teachers, in addition to the teaching processes in the classroom. Plans to upgrade the attractiveness of the teaching profession, as well as producing the best teachers, have been included in the Tenth Malaysia Plan, such as quick promotion opportunities based on efficiency and performance, systematic continuous professional development (CPD) to all the teachers and a more solid performance management approach. Nevertheless, if the willingness of the teaching community to incorporate changes in order to transform the educational system in the country is still at a minimum, all of the changes planned by the government will only go to waste. Nevertheless, all of the changes planned by the government will only go to waste if the willingness of teachers to make changes to transform education in the country is still at a minimum.

However, in a study conducted in 1996, the Federal Schools Inspectorate (Jemaah Nazir Sekolah Persekutuan, 1996) found that although most teachers (70%) have good knowledge, understanding and skills of the teaching contents, including a variety of teaching methods or techniques, the prevalent teaching style still remains teacher-oriented. From a pedagogical point of view, this teaching practice is found to be similar to that practiced in the old curriculum policy, which emphasizes on rote learning methods (Jemaah Nazir Sekolah Persekutuan, 1996). According to Salleh (in Tengku Zawawi et al., 2009) some teachers play the part of "conformist" professionals, who prefer to continue the role as tradition-bearers instead of being creative or innovative, whilst others prefer a more traditional classroom approach during the teaching and learning processes instead of alternative teaching practices, which require more effort, more creative thinking and more time-consuming. The traditional or conventional teaching practices, which have an inclination towards a teacher-centered teaching, tend to adopt a one-way communication, and have been proven a failure when it comes to developing students' thinking abilities, in addition to being unable to exploit/explore students true potential (Maruli & Wayan, 2007).

In a study reported in 1997 (Kember, in Hativa & Birenbaum, 2000), it has been found that in general, teachers adopted five approaches in their teaching practices:

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Approach	Explanation
1. Reveal the information	Teaching by delivering information. Teachers using the lecture method, relying on notes prepared in advance. Students are completely ignored and treated like as a conduit for where the knowledge is poured into.
2. Deliver structured knowledge	Teaching still done via information delivery but quality of performance accentuated. Teacher structures and organizes knowledge to be presented in a clear, logical and easily understood manner for students. Therefore, it attracts and motivates students further. More students acquire information compared to the first approach, but they are still passive recipients.
3. Teacher-student interaction	Focus on interaction between teachers and students and emphasizes on student understanding and discovery. Teachers emphasize learning activities such as experiments or problem solving in the classroom.
4. Foster mutual understanding	The main role of the teacher changes to help students to learn. Students identified as individuals who have different needs.
5. Concept changes / Intellectual development.	The main role of the teacher is to change the student's concept within an environment that can provide support and understanding.

There is a significant relationship between the methods of teaching to student learning approaches (Trigwell et al., 1999). A student-centered strategy is vital because teachers have to be aware that they cannot impart a new view or concept of the world directly to students. Dart et al. (in Mohammed, 2002) reported that there exists a significant correlation between the secondary school students deep approach of learning and their classroom environments, which encourages active participation and investigative learning skills. Appropriate teaching methods have the potential to produce more positive attitudes toward learning among students (Griggs & Dunn, 1996).

2. Research Objective

The objective of the research was to investigate the teaching practices in Malaysian secondary schools, particularly in determining whether or not they are still bound to conventional teaching methods, or have they shifted to newer alternative models.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted on 12 teachers who teach a variety of subjects, selected randomly from a variety types of secondary schools such as High Performance Schools, Excellence Cluster Schools, Sports Schools and Ordinary Daily Schools from four states in the northern region of peninsular Malaysia, namely Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak. The schools selected for this study include urban, suburban and rural areas. The required information were collected through the administration of the validated 'Questionnaire of Teachers Teaching Practices', which consist of 12 related items, given to the respondents during the negotiation period. They were explained about the purpose of the study and asked to give the answer as sincerely as possible. The data obtained were then analyzed qualitatively.

4. Findings

Results showed that 58.33% of the teaching practice in the research area was at a minimal level of interaction, whereby it is the teachers who do much of the talking and teaching, while very few students get to speak up and contribute views. The remaining 41.67% of the teaching practice was shown to be more moderate, whereby teachers and students get to speak at an equal level. It was also found that most of the teachings processes in schools are still dominated by teachers who are more inclined to practice a one-way communication, which can be described as the direct delivery of information from the teacher to the student.

The study respondents stated that 91.67% of classroom discussions occur between the teacher and the students, and that discussions between students occur only 8.33% of the time. This indicates that students have not been provided with the much needed opportunity to discuss and interact between each other during the process of learning.

The results also showed that 100% of the respondents stated that their teaching is based on their (teachers') own ideas. These findings imply that the teaching practice in schools is still traditional in nature, whereby most of the discussions occur as a result of the teacher's own ideas, while students remain passive and contribute very little to the education process.

A total of 58.33% of the respondents confirm that they still practice a one-way communication, which thrives on the passive physical condition of the students. Physical bodily movements are rare and students are obliged to sit back at their desks and simply listen to the lessons presented to them by their teachers. In contrast, 41.67% of respondents admit to having performed a two-way communication, in combination with other activities such as group discussions, experiments and working in groups. These findings imply that most of the teaching practices in Malaysia still revolve around a one-way, teacher-centered education approach and that the majority of the students are expected to behave in a passive manner while attending the classroom. Thereby, the Federal Schools Inspectorate report (Jemaah Nazir Sekolah Persekutuan, 1996) states that although most teachers (70%) have good knowledge, understanding and skills of the teaching contents, including a variety of teaching methods or techniques, the prevalence of a teacher-centered education format has been substantiated and predominantly remains so to date. This is a rather worrisome fact as after almost 15 years of this report being published, the education system in our country still practices the traditional and teacher-centered approach.

The study also found that 100% of the recorded teaching practices reveal that teachers are the only individuals who are entitled to make any decisions about the teaching practices applied in the classroom. Based on the results obtained, teachers tend to use their autonomy to decide on what should happen in the classroom, without the allowance of neither space nor opportunity for students to voice out their views.

A total of 91.67% of the respondents agreed with the statement that the teacher is the main source of information for students, while only 8.33% agreed that the main source of information should come from both the teachers and students. In general, Malaysian students are perceived to be more inclined to receive knowledge or information sources from their teachers, rather than being the builders of their own knowledge and understanding.

The results showed that 66.67% of the respondents are more likely to use the competitive learning method (individualistic), while the remaining 33.33% practice teaching approaches comprising both the competitive and the cooperative methods. It clearly shows that the preferred teaching practice still tends to incline towards the traditional method, which involves its own procedures, individual procedures and procedures that require the individual competition (Cooper & Boyd, 1994). In this regard, it has been found that 83.33% of the respondents possess the inclination to use extrinsic motivation, while only 16.67% are inclined to apply both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational boosters into their teaching process.

In the context of student evaluation, 91.67% of the respondents tend to use comprehension-based assessments, while 8.33% utilize both the process and the comprehension based assessments. Through the comprehension based assessment, teachers are inclined to provide exercises and questions to students. Students who manage to answer correctly are considered to have successfully passed the conducted assessment, while students who fail to answer correctly are regarded as still being unable to achieve the prescribed standards. However, using this method, students are only evaluated using one set of standards, which doesn't take into consideration the individual student's development as a whole.

In terms of the contents delivered via the teaching practices, whether it is focusing on facts and principles that can be memorized or simply emphasizing on learning skills, thinking skills and problem solving skills, as well as the required learning content for students, the results showed that 50% of the teachers only lay out the facts and principles that are required for students, while the other 50% emphasize on study skills, thinking skills and problem solving skills, in addition to the required learning contents for the students. Therefore, the results showed that 58.33% of the teachers practice knowledge-based teaching

practices while the remaining 41.67% lifts this practice up a notch by further emphasizing on student comprehension.

The final evaluation was on the problem solving skills method incorporated by the teachers into their teaching practices. Problem-solving skills can be divided into two main forms: problem-solving skills in the form of formulas; and creative problem-solving skills. The solution to problem-solving in the form of formulas involves the clear presentation of questions and problems, and it is rather obvious that students are very familiar with this format and have frequently been asked questions of this nature before. For creative problem solving, the types of questions and problems presented are relatively new to students. Questions involving creative solutions methods typically have open-ended answers, requiring students to find a variety of information and to discuss amongst themselves to resolve questions of this nature. Based on the study, the findings showed that 91.67% of respondents indicated using problem-solving skills in the form of formulas, and only 8.33% of the respondents use both the problem solving method involving formulas and also the creative problem solving methods in their teaching practices.

5. Conclusion

From this study, it can be concluded that, in general, most of the teaching practices applied in Malaysian schools still takes place in a condition whereby the teacher still dominates over the students, and in most cases, this phenomenon occurs in a linear way. This shows that the practice of teaching in schools is still bound by traditional methods compared to newer alternative methods. Teachers have been observed to prefer using teaching methods that abide by the theory of "tabula rasa" (Suastra et al., 1998). This is consistent with previous findings that show that teaching practices in Malaysia still center around teachers and are bound by the traditional method (Abd. Razak et al., 1996; Jemaah Nazir Sekolah Persekutuan, 1996; Voo, 1996; Wan Mohd Rani, 1999). This fact is extremely worrisome as after almost 15 years of this report being published, the education system in our country still practices the traditional and teacher-centered approach. The refusal on the part of the teachers to shift their paradigm and behaviors by making the teaching and learning process more interesting would be detrimental to the government's intention of developing human capital capable of competing globally.

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