

Local Studies Teachers' Perspectives of Information Literacy Education in Primary Schools

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Abstract. Information literacy (IL) education in Malaysia has been acknowledged by IL implementers and practitioners and claimed to be integrated in the school curriculum. However, it seems that the development and progress of IL education implementation tend to be quite slow. Therefore, this study attempted to explore local studies teachers' perspectives of IL education by employing qualitative methods and procedures. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The results showed that the participants had positive attitudes towards IL education. They believed that IL education was important and had the potential to make teaching and learning activities more involving and fun. The teachers identified their views and practices depending on other internal and external factors.

Keywords: information literacy, information literacy education, implementation, local studies, teacher, primary school

1. Introduction

Information Literacy (IL) education claimed to be embedded in the curriculum [1]. In terms of its implementation, IL education was considered as teaching students about learn how to learn skill. It was expected to be infused in the teaching and learning activities. The rationale of IL skills particularly, and learning skills wholly, is to assist students to learn independently with the learning that the students have mastered. The extent of IL education implementation depends upon the IL education implementers (such as teachers in the classrooms, library and media teacher (LMT) in the school resource center and collaborative teaching in classroom, and school head in administrative matters) to be made aware of the important of IL education to the students. The teachers and LMT were expected to continuously give emphasis on IL until the skills were practiced and internalized by the students. At the moment, the extent of IL implementation is not known due to the nature of its implementation, that is, infuses in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, this study attempted to explore the implementation of IL education among local studies teachers in Malaysian primary schools.

2. Literature Review

Various researchers and scholars have attempted to define IL [2, 3, 4, 5]. These definitions can be synthesized according to IL as a skill, a process, a way of learning, and a way of seeing IL based on context.

Teaching IL has taken a variety of forms: stand-alone courses, web-based tutorials, course-related instruction, or course integrated instruction. There were two proponents in IL instruction, namely the proponents of the 'stand-alone' approach within library settings and the proponents of 'integrated' approach within classrooms.

The teaching of information and searching skills within the library setting has traditionally served as a classical way of bibliographic instruction. Stand alone approach of teaching IL can be in the form of lectures or seminars or workshops. According to Breivik [6], stand alone courses were not always successful to teach IL because the students may opt not to enrol in the IL courses, if they were not made compulsory. This approach can be valuable, if it was done interactively, that is, from talk to demonstration after 15 minutes or so [7].

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Now, the trends are towards the integration of IL into the subject areas. Integration approach can be done in the form of course-related and course-integrated. According to Eisenberg and Berkowitz [8], educators must provide opportunities for students to learn information skills throughout the curriculum. This can be facilitated with the collaboration of teachers and librarians.

Two crucial questions that need to be answered by both approaches adopted to teach IL is, whether (a) the competence acquired can be applied in a context different from that in which it was learned, and (b) to what extent the competence was taught in schools. Goodin [9, cited in 8] examined the transferability of IL skills from high school to college in a study involving two groups of high school students. One group received instruction in library research skills in the context of IL, and the other group not. The students were given pre- and post-tests on college-level library and information skills. The participants in the study wrote research papers that were subsequently evaluated by college-level instructors. Goodin found that the students who received library skills instruction scored significantly higher in the post-test than students who did not receive instruction. She also found that the post-test performance of the first group of students were acceptable for college freshmen. This study provided an evidence of the value of IL skills in preparing the high school students for higher learning.

On the other hand, the issue of transferability of IL skills can be answered, if IL was taught to the student. The need to answer the second question, that is, the extent of IL is taught in schools, is crucial in order to see whether IL is given emphasis in teaching and learning process. In UK, a study by Merchant and Hepworth [10] found that, although there was evidence that teachers were information literate, this IL skill was not necessarily being passed on to the students. The students did possess skills in locating information, however, were not so skilful at using and evaluating information. There was also evidence within schools in UK that the teachers themselves took individual initiatives to integrate IL in their school programmes and activities [11, 12].

In Southeast Asia, the development of ILE through school libraries was first examined in 2005 by a project team, comprising members from Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand [13]. This project was sponsored under the Special Funds of the UNESCO's Information for All Programme. The results of this IL survey among the selected schools in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam were presented at a workshop held at the UNESCO office in Bangkok, Thailand on 19-22 September, 2005. According to this report, IL was a term that was difficult to be translated into national languages of the countries surveyed. At any rate, there was no proper implementation of IL taking place in school libraries in the countries involved. Among the obstacles to school library development highlighted in the study were:

Low literacy rate, classroom shortage, trained classroom teachers shortage, trained teacher-librarians shortage, limited school library collections, small or no budget for school libraries, lack of awareness among senior MOE officials about the role of school library programs, IL concept; shortage of space, limited facilities/ equipment; and few guidelines on how to integrate IL into regular teaching programs (p. 7).

Despite the volume of research on the relative merits of different instructional approaches to information problem solving skills, no study has ever been able to show one method to be superior over another [8]. Similarly, research on transferability of the IL skills focuses on the student learning, rather than the people who drive the skills. The most important was that the students benefitted from the information literacy instruction, particularly when it was taught in context and across curriculum [8]. However, without the experience and exposure to the skills, no one could ever benefit from it.

3. Research Methods

I employed the methods and procedures of the qualitative research tradition, within an interpretive philosophy. Interpretivism is a suitable epistemology for framing a study about process, which is widely agreed to be a complex, subjective, and abstract phenomenon that does not exist independently from people's activities. Therefore, in this study, an interpretive paradigm was chosen in order to produce deep insights into the research problem which was poorly understood: the way in which IL was implemented in the primary schools.

In this research, face-to-face interviews were used in order to gather in-depth information, clarify uncertainties, and be able to build rapport. Interviews were carried out with the participants. Interviews were semi-structured to allow a certain degree of flexibility for the researcher to probe and prompt.

Participants of this study were selected from the individuals who were responsible for the implementation of IL education in primary schools in one of the state in Malaysia. The participants were three local studies teachers purposively selected, with input from the school head to identify the ones who seem to be using constructivist approach to teaching and learning and was, therefore, more likely to be aware of or to incorporate IL in the classroom. Also important of course was willingness and time to talk. Following is the description of the participants.

Salmah was a local studies teacher in a primary school located in the northern affluent area of one of the state. As a qualified full time teacher, she has been teaching in the primary schools for 16 years. She held a bachelor degree in Malay language and linguistic. At the time of the study, she was the head of local studies panel in the school.

Mei Lan was a local studies teacher in a primary school in the northern rural area of one of the state. She has been teaching in the school for seven years. She particularly taught English and Local studies. She held a degree in Chinese language. In order to be a qualified full time teacher, she enrolled in post-degree course for teachers. After graduated from the teachers' college, she was posted to the school.

Kumari was a local studies teacher in a primary school in the suburb area of one of the state. She had 10 years of teaching experience. In the school, she taught Tamil language, science and local studies. At the time of the study, she was a new teacher. Formerly, she taught in a rural primary school which had a small number of student population. She viewed the students in the new school were highly competitive compared to her former students.

In qualitative study, data collection and data analysis are interrelated, not sequential type of process flow. The process is iterative and flexible. It is an analytic process which involves several stages. The data analysis in this study used the Miles and Huberman's interactive model [14] as a guide. It involved three components of data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusions. Analyses of the data took the form of examining the transcriptions of the recorded interviews and the extensive notes and documents acquired during the data gathering. The data were then matched against the preliminary model and elements of IL education implementation of Malaysian primary school that was used to guide this study.

4. Research Findings

In this segment, I present the research findings, and begin with a discussion of the stages of ILE implementation. Next, I identify the factors that facilitate or impede the implementation of IL education. The factors were identified in relation to the first research question: What are the factors affecting the implementation of IL education in primary schools? The factors presented were the views of the local studies teachers based on the individual interviews. Quotes from the participants' interviews are placed throughout the segment.

4.1. Stages of IL Education Implementation

Prior to the discussion of factors affecting the IL education implementation, it is crucial to identify the stages of IL education implementation of each participant. The intention is not to imply any causal relationship between the way IL education is implemented and the implementation factors. But, the aim is to obtain the variation of the participants by identifying their stages of IL education implementation and the factors affecting them. Based on the data analysis, the following levels have been established: Use, Early Use and Non-Use. Following is the report of the findings.

In terms of IL education stages of implementation, all participants indicated that they were either at the early use or use IL in their teaching and learning approach. Kumari used IL approach in her teaching because she saw the importance of IL.

When I enter the first class, I will only discuss about the overview of the topic. Just before the first class ends, I will tell the students the topic that I will teach them in the next class and ask them to go back and

read and find information regarding with the topic. Whenever I enter the class the next morning, it is easier for me... I will practice that every time I start a new topic... thrice a month. (UT_LsT!G21)

Mei Lan viewed herself as an early user because she attended a few KSSR courses, that is, the new revision of primary school curriculum which was more students centered in approach. She was trying to apply the new policy in her teaching.

4.2. Factors Affecting the Implementation of IL Education

This segment further discusses the factors impeding or facilitating IL education such as, the need for and clarity of the IL approach, the readiness of individual implementers, and the school administrative and leadership factors. Following is the findings' report.

All participants viewed that IL as an important skill to the teachers and students. Salmah expressed that the approach was 'good' and 'fun' for students. She also believed that 'students are able to learn more detail, more in-depth, and no spoon feed'. For Kumari, she changed her approach in teaching due to students' reaction to her traditional way of teaching. As pointed by her, 'In my first day of teaching, I taught my students in traditional way. The students showed bored faces...They asked me lots of questions and I could not answer them. So in the next class, I changed my teaching technique'.

Kumari and Mei Lan shared their views that by using the IL approach, they could easily complete the syllabus. In terms of the participants' clarity of IL approach, Salmah and Mei Lan were more familiar with the constructivist or student centred approach rather than IL. This is due to the fact that the constructivist approach is one of the learning theories. All participants were trained to apply various learning theories during their pre-service courses. On the other hand, IL is a concept which is often associated to the school library or school resource centre management and reading activities in the Malaysian schools. Therefore, only the Library and Media Teacher (LMT) is well-versed with the IL concept compared to the classroom teachers. Kumari viewed IL as a skill to search and 'use information in the computer'.

This study was also attempted to uncover the readiness of the participants. All participants expressed that they had not exposed to IL training. They said that they knew about IL related approach and activities through attending IL related courses during pre-service trainings or at "early years" as a teacher. Due to the absent of IL specific trainings, this probably could lead to the lack of knowledge and skill of the participants to implement ILE in the classroom. Salmah indicated that many teachers preferred teacher centred approach rather than IL related approach due to factors such as, '...with limited resources...and limited lesson time in a week, so the teaching approach becomes more teacher centred... the student centred approach is only about 20%... 80% from the teacher...'.

Moreover, other factors such as lack of fund and resources, lack of time, lack of ILE guides and resources, teachers' attitudes, heavy workload, lack of technical support, lack of IL knowledge and skills and have to meet school or academic target were consistent with the findings of previous studies [see 1, 15]. The factors highlighted by the participants were very much related to the lack of administrative and leadership support from the school, district, state and federal levels.

5. Discussion and Recommendation

Drawing from the issues discussed above, it appears that the participants were either do not really understand IL or may be not aware of the way to implement IL properly in the classroom due to lack of IL specific training. The local studies teachers' perceived needs for IL and perceived benefits of IL depended on their knowledge and skills on IL. Each participant has their role to play in order to ensure IL education implementation was a success. The lack of knowledge and skills can be linked to the organizational capacity. The school leadership should have proper delivery system (such as shared vision, shared decision-making and administrative support) and support system such as training and technical assistance in order to ensure proper implementation of IL education in the teaching and learning activities.

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