

THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: History subject is often seen as a boring subject. It has a lot of old facts that students find it difficult to memorize. This is the common complaint from secondary school students when asked about the History subject. This qualitative study is carried out to uncover the underlying reasons why History is seen as a boring subject. Methods such as observations, interviews and review of documents are used to gather the data. There are nine History teachers participated in this study. They have been observed, interviewed and the relevant documents were reviewed to find out their teaching approach and to identify the reasons for the approach to be implemented. The finding shows that these participants are using teacher-centred approach with conventional teaching activities and excessive used of the textbook. The main reason given for such teaching is the constraint of time. These teachers have to complete teaching the syllabus before the centralized exam being held. As a result of such teaching the values, especially the patriotic values, which was emphasized in the curriculum of this subject is last inculcated in the teaching. Based on the finding, it can be concluded that the examination is the underlying reason for the subject to be seen as a boring subject. These teachers do not have many options to change their approach of teaching History. Since the centralize examination is compulsory, therefore, teachers have to be creative and innovative in order to make the teaching of History more interesting for the students and the patriotic values can be inculcated.

Keyword: Teaching History, Teacher-centred, Traditional Teaching, Conventional Teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

The History subject has been in the Malaysian education system since a decade ago. It started as an elective subject before became a core subject under the new Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (ICSS). The status of this subject is further upgraded when in 2010 the government announced it as a compulsory subject to be passed in the Malaysian Certificate of Education examination starting in 2013. This examination is taken by students in their final year in upper secondary school. At this level students are at the age of 17 years old. Following the announcement, History has also become a core subject in primary schools by 2014 through the Standard Curriculum for Primary School. These efforts are the result of the government's strong commitment to produce a younger generation who understand the development of the nation and feel proud and appreciative to the country's struggles. History subject is chosen as a medium to convey government's intention because it is the only subject that teaches about the past which can be used to explain today's and tomorrow's events (Lowenthal, 2000), as well as use to instill the patriotic values among the younger generation.

To materialize the government's commitment, it is important to teach History in a way that encourage younger generation to really understand the history of their nation and to nourish their patriotic values. This study will look into the current teaching approach of the History subject in the classroom so that the underlying reasons can be identified and resolutions can be offered.

II. THE STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

As complaints uttered, this subject is a boring subject and it has a lot of facts to be memorized. Some previous studies mentioned most teachers are using the traditional way of teaching the subject in the classroom (Anuar, Siti Haishah & Nur Atiqah, 2009; and Azwan Ahmad, Abdul Ghani Abdullah, Mohammad Zohir Ahmad Dan Abd. Rahman Abd. Aziz, (2005). However, it is not stated precisely how History is actually taught, why is it taught the way it is and how the patriotic values, which the government has emphasized, are incorporated in the teaching of this subject.

III. OBJECTIVES

There are three objectives of this study. Firstly, to explore in-depth the way History subject is taught in the classroom, which resulting boredom among students and difficulty in understanding and memorizing the facts. This will elaborate the meaning of traditional teaching as mentioned in previous studies. Secondly, to uncover the underlying reasons for such teaching practice, and thirdly, to identify whether or not the patriotic values have been inculcated in the teaching as required by the government and stated in the curriculum.

IV. THE METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method is used to attain the objectives of this study. This method is believed to be able to provide the required data as it requires the data to be collected in a real setting, thus, the data presented is accurate (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). There are three data collection procedures used; the observation, the interview and the document analyses. History teachers teaching in rural secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia, are involved as the participants of this study. These participants have at least five years of experience teaching the subject, they are History options, and most of all they are willing to participate in this study.

The data collection begins with a participant being pre and post-interviewed, and observed while teaching History in the class room. Each observation focuses on the activities implemented by the participant at the beginning of the lesson, during the lesson development and at the closure of the lesson. A participant is interviewed and observed several times until the saturation of data is obtained. After that, the data collection moves to the second participant. The same process repeated. In this study, there are 9 participants involved before the data saturated. Saturation of data means there is no more new data received from the participants (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). There are 18 observations, 36 interviews, and 9 documents recorded and reviewed in this study.

The pre-interview with the participant is done to get the participant general view of his/her activities in the classroom. It is audio recorded. After the pre-interview, the participant is observed while teaching in the classroom. The observations are video-recorded. All observed activities and hunches are written in the observation protocol. A post-interview is followed after the observation to avoid distortion of information from the participant side. The post-interview is necessary to find out the reasons and meaning of each of the activities carried out in the teaching. The document analysis involves the review of the participant's lesson plan. The lesson plan is reviewed to confirm the data obtained from the observation and interview.

The data analysis is done simultaneously with the data collection. The pre-interview is transcribed before the observation to identify the focus to be observed during the observation. After the observation, the protocol is checked immediately as the entries will be used in the post-interview. Once the post-interview is done the researcher transcribed the interview and looks for possible keywords that need to be clarified by the respective participant in the second round of the data collection. All the keywords emerged from the observations; interviews and review of documents are checked and matched as to triangulate the data obtained from each of the procedure. This analysis method is called the within-case analysis. Once the within-case analysis is done, then all the keywords emerged from each participant is compared rigorously to identify the categories that suit to the keywords. This is again a way to triangulate the data among the sources as to increase its reliability and validity. This analysis is called the cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2001). The process explained above leads to the identification of the categories which then group to form the themes. These themes are used to explain the teaching of History in the classroom.

In conclusion, the data collection process has used three procedures, the observation, the interviews and the document analysis. All three procedures are used to triangulate and improve data reliability. Another triangulation method used in this study is a triangulation of sources. In qualitative research, data reliability can be seen through its dependability and stability or consistency (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

V. FINDINGS

Based on the data obtained from the cross-case analysis, there are three major categories in the teaching of each participant in this study. The categories are the beginning of the lesson, the development of the lesson and the closure of the lesson.

a. The Beginning of the Teaching

This category is known as the induction set (Gagne, 1985). There are two common activities carried out by these participants in this category. First, the participants inform the topic to be taught and write it on the white board. Second, the participants proceed by either asking questions pertaining to previous lesson or current issues related to the topic to be taught. After the answer from the students heard, some of the participants comment the answers and associate it with the topic while some just proceed with the teaching.

Among the reasons given for the commencement of such teaching is to secure students' commitment to the lesson, to motivate students, and to provide instruction to the students so that they can focus their attention to the lesson. These reason are matched with the reason put forward by Jones and Jones (2001); Zook (2001) and White(2002). They say the beginning of a lesson is necessary because it focuses on the students so students' attention is directed, lessen the disruption and to get full commitment from the students.

Obviously, in terms of starting the teaching these participants understand the theory to start a good teaching, but the activities are typically implemented by these participants. One participant skips the induction set. The participants of this study inform they cannot implement the activities they supposed to do in the induction set as learned while they were in the university because they have time constraints. The syllabus they need to teach is abundant and they have to complete it to prepare students for the examination. Besides, they are also having many responsibilities in school, thus, they do not have time to make proper planning.

"...Many school activities... so I do not have time..." (CM/03/27-7-11/6)

"We are instructed to teach the whole syllabus... if it is not completed, then it will not be taught anymore...the exam preparation is incomplete" (TIS1, int. 3:30-34)

These are the constraints experienced by the participants of this study. The data inform us the reason for making such induction set in the case of this group of teacher. They are forced to skip the induction set to accommodate for the teaching of the facts.

b. The Development of the Teaching

In the implementation of the teaching, the study found that all participants use teacher-centred approach. The most common activities carried out are asking students to read text books or the handouts containing the lesson encourage students to answer the questions asked and copy the note written by the teacher on the white board, and teachers explain the contents of the topic. As the response, the students passively do what the teacher asked them to do. They read the textbook, copy the notes, listen to the explanation, and answer the questions if they know the answer. The textbook and handouts are the main teaching aid used.

As revealed by the data the reasons for carrying out those activities are to help students to identify the key points that will be useful for them in the examination, to help students to make notes that are considered important by the teacher, and to ensure students understand the content of the lesson.

"... To reinforce what the students have read... usually students are just reading, but they do not understand what they read ...they do not know which content is important and unimportant. My explanation is on the important facts only. This way greatly assists them in the examination" (T3S3, Int. 3:29-32)

"These notes will be their main reference when they are preparing for their examination."(T3S3, Int. 1:96-97)

"These students are not going to make their own notes, where as we know notes are important in the subjects of History." (CY/02/14711/32-33)

"I ask questions to check whether they know or do not know what they hear or read. At the same time I'm checking whether they have obtained the lesson outcomes...and also I want to control their behavior." (T4S4, int. 2:37-39)

Of all the observations made there are two participants who undertake presentation activity. One of these participant request students to work in a group and refer to the textbook to identify the main points of the topic and present the points after the work is done. This activity is carried out because the participant believes that the topic is simple, thus, the students are able to do it.

"For a simple topic ... and I believe my students can do it I use discussion and presentation." (T3S3, int. 4:128-130)

The other participant uses presentation in the class because the students were asked to find the main points as their homework. The purpose of homework is to facilitate the classroom instruction in order for the participant to save time.

"I told them to do the work at home so that when the next class ready. This can save time and can smooth the instruction in the classroom "(T1S1, in t 2: 69-71)

Another activity in the lesson development is the question and answer activity. This activity is embedded during the explanation session by the participant. Usually when questions are posed the students normally give the answer in chores. The participant gives the correct answer if the students answer it wrongly. The questions asked are mostly related to the topic taught. Occasionally the participant asks whether or not the students have questions. Most of the time there is no question from the students. According to the participants the question and answer activity is carried out to test students' understanding of the topic and to evaluate students' attainment of the learning outcome.

"The questions I asked actually meant to know whether the students understand what is being taught or not...at the same time I also want to see the learning outcomes achieved by the students or not." (T4S4, in 39)

Throughout the implementation of the teaching, the main reference used is the textbook. There are two participants used handouts in one of their lessons. The textbook is used heavily because the participant said most of the examination questions are taken from the textbook.

"The exam or this paper, 99% of the questions is based on the textbook. (CY/02/14711/80)

The review of the participants' daily lesson plan shows that all lesson plans are done very briefly. The items seen in the plan are the title, the lesson objectives, and the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. The Implementation of the lesson by these participants is as simple as their plan. The reason given why their plan is as simple as that is they need to be economical because of the book limitation. They need to do 2or3lesson plans in a page. If they prepare a detailed

lesson plan they will not have enough pages to write their lesson plan until the end of the year. Another reason is that they are qualified teachers, so, there is no need for them to plan their lesson as detailed as they used to do during their training. Over all, the above explanation shows the typical way adopted by the participants in this study. Their routine activities are writing notes on the whiteboard, making explanation of the main points of the topic taught, a brief question and answer session and if time permit then they have group activities like presentation and discussion.

C. The Closure of the Teaching

The data show two ways of closing the lesson. Firstly, the participants conclude their lesson. They summarize the main points of the topic taught. They also mention the topic to be taught in the next class and remind students to be prepared by reading the topic before coming to the next history class. The second way of closing the lesson is asking students to make a conclusive statement of what they have learned in that period of time. Only a few students' representatives are allowed to give the statement. After the lesson conclusion has been made, the data show five of the participants have informed the patriotic values students should have obtained from the lesson.

The purpose of such lesson conclusion is to identify the students' level of understanding of the topic taught. The information of the patriotic values is meant to nourish students' sense of belonging to the country. And, to show teachers aware it's their responsibility to instill the values in the teaching of this subject.

“Emmh...Ok, one of the reasons history subjects was introduced is to instill the patriotic values of the students themselves, so I think as a teacher, I am responsible for instilling this value to the student so that the student may remember and practice it in their daily life.”(CM/27711/41-43)

As a whole, all the participants of this study have concluded their teaching as stated above.

VI. DISCUSSION

The participants of this study are basically known in theory the importance and the purpose of the induction set. But in practice they are doing the conventional way of opening a lesson which is asking questions related to the previous topic. Obviously, the lack of creativity has occurred in this section because of lack of time in planning the lesson.

In terms of the implementation, the data show the participants prefer to use teacher-centred approach in their teaching. The most common activities are asking students to write down the main points of the topic being taught in their notebook, and, explaining the main points with questions embedded to check whether students are listening to the explanation or not. The students' activities are responding to the teachers' activities, like copying the notes written by the teachers, listening to the explanation and answering questions posed by the teacher. These activities are repeated in most of these participants History class. In other words, these are the typical activities found in a traditional teaching. The finding of this study match with the finding from several previous studies and literature that states the teaching of history is mostly traditional with the used of teacher-centred approach. Their conventional method of teaching is explanation and question and answer (Chua, 2006; Maimun and Roslan, 2005). This kind of teaching does not help students to think and be creative (Fertig, 2005). Studies on students' preferences in the teaching of History shows that students want more student-centered approach to be implemented (Rosy, 2013). Since the teaching of History is so conventional, students brand the subjects as dull, difficult and boring.

The use of teaching material is also found to be typical and conventional. The common teaching materials used are the textbook, the workbook and some exercises written on a paper. According to Zahara and Nik Azleena(2007) history teachers have mastered the content of the History text book because they have indulged themselves in using it every time they are teaching History. However, Rosy (2013) found that students preferred the teachers to use other teaching materials than textbook because they themselves have the textbook and they can read the textbook themselves. They preferred technology to be involved in the teaching of History.

The teaching conclusion is another conventional practice. The activities noticed in this session are concluding the lesson, reminding students to read the topic for the coming lesson, and the participants stated the patriotic values that can be

learned from the topic discussed. Such a way is not helping students to appreciate the value. It has to be inculcated in the process of teaching and learning so that student's can appreciate the meaning and practice the values learned in their daily life.

The finding of this study clearly indicates the participants are aware of the theory required in teaching History in the classroom. However, due to the need to prepare students for the examination, they have to complete the syllabus before the examination time which is at the end of each year. In the teaching these participants are only focusing on delivering the content in the textbook. They do not have many options to make the teaching as interesting as possible. At the same time, the teaching of the values is also jeopardized. Ideally, teachers have to meet with individual needs because each individual has different intelligence as described by Gardner (1993). For a teaching to be successful understood and liked by the students, teachers need to fulfill the students' preferences.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study has strengthened the previous views that the teaching of History in secondary schools is still extensively used traditional, typical and conventional way. Such teaching did not fulfill students' expectations, thus, resulting in the subjects being considered as boring and difficult. The style of teaching should be modified to meet students' preferences. At the same time teaching History should be able to help students to become more appreciative to the country. Hopefully, by upgrading History as a compulsory subject to be passed will not hinder the application of new styles of teaching History in the classroom. And, at the same time the teaching of patriotic values will not be ignored. For teacher education institutions, they need to find ways how to inculcate the values in the lessons with the hope the performance can also be increased in the examination.

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