

TEACHERS' DESIRES AND CHALLENGES TO PERFORM ACTIVE TEACHING PRACTICES

Yusmarwati Yusof, Mimi Mohaffyza Mohamad and Adnan Zainorabidin

Faculty on Technical and Vocational Education.

Universiti Tun Hussein Onn, Malaysia

marwati@uthm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on teaching approaches that are currently implemented at polytechnic level and the issues surrounding the choice of those approaches. It reflects on teachers' teaching practices and their passion to their career and teaching traditions that they preferred to use. The aim of this paper is to explore and consider aspects/factors that influenced their teaching practices which indirectly give impact on students' academic performance and competencies. Six lecturers from three different polytechnics in Malaysia were involved in the semi structured-interview session. Generally, finding from this study shows that the pattern of teaching and learning process in majority of polytechnics under investigation are more to a teacher-centred climate. Data from interviews presented that, there are four main factors that become a challenge for lecturers to actively and effectively perform their teaching which are; students, lecturers themselves, curriculum and syllabus setting, teaching duration and teaching material, and facilities. Therefore, this study is significant as it provides a basis for more effective, active and systematic structure for teaching and learning process at polytechnic level to respond to the needs of excellent and competent students.

Field of Research: Teaching practices, students' academic performance, competency

1. Introduction

In line with Vision 2020, the Ministry of Education aims to develop an education system that is of high quality and world-class (Ahamad, 2003). From the perspective of education, these visions could be accomplished by increasing demand for more highly-skilled, multi-skilled workers; individual workers who have global mobility, who are highly competitive, flexible, independent and critical thinkers who can use knowledge as a commodity to survive in the intensified competition in the global scene (Ahamad, 2003). With the vision of becoming an industrialized nation by 2020, Malaysia must be prepared to provide well-educated, skilled and competitive workforce (Mustapha, 2002). Accordingly, the Ministry of Education has established a nationwide system of postsecondary education and training, namely polytechnic. Therefore, education and training program in polytechnics have to be planned and managed using a systematic approach to fulfill the work demands.

Since the development, Malaysia needs to explore and describe the current approach to teaching that will promote a learning environment which might help students to improve their learning achievement as well as their competent. It is a need for a good, efficient and effective educational system; the need for more learner centered teaching and learning; and the need for students to take responsibility for their own learning and be more skillful and qualified workforce and capable of adapting to changing technology and work demand (Abu Hassan, 2003). Meng (2003) stated, with the vast changing in technology and growing of information, the acquisition of skills knowledge is much more important than the acquisition of content knowledge. He added, the traditional way of learning may not be effective anymore in meeting the demand of students with 'higher analytical

and cognitive skills' (pg 31). As such, some fundamental changes must be made in a way to approach the teaching and learning process as a mean to improve teaching and to increase learning by all students.

Accordingly, this paper focuses on teaching approaches that are currently implemented in polytechnics, and issues surrounding the choice of those approaches. Problems encountered while performing the teaching will also highlight in this paper.

2. Statement of Problem

All countries included Malaysia are now faced with a reassessment of how education should be delivered to meet the needs of a changing economic order that will demand a more skilled workers and knowledge workers; a more flexibility and therefore lifelong learning skills; and more self starters in a more autonomous and team spirited working environment such as independent learning and key skills (Maier and Warren, 2000).

But those skills were found sorely lacking in today's graduates as reported recently by Yusof (2004). In his paper, Yusof (2004) reported that students in Malaysian universities find it difficult to acquire the required amount of knowledge effectively and therefore do not reach higher order cognitive ability. They also lack important generic skills, such as communication, thinking and interpersonal skills. Research conducted by Cheung and Wong (2006), showed that interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate are probably the most desirable skills which are expected by employers. Schools and institutions should be designed to be more career-oriented to help students acquire the necessary skills for the workplace. Therefore, it is essential to produce a workforce that equipped with competence based on the standard and requirement of the job market (Ahamad, 2003).

All of this results in a mass education system that is reassessing its learning and teaching practice and some of these experiences are reflected on teaching qualities which lead to an increased awareness of how we teach. This situation makes me realize that some fundamental changes must be made in a way to approach the teaching and learning process as a means to improve teaching and learning process in the Malaysian technical education system, specifically polytechnics, which calls for a more effective structure of teaching to respond to the needs of the learners.

As such, this study is paramount to explore the current approaches to teaching, challenges and obstacles facing by teacher while delivery a lesson and desire to perform an active and effective teaching practices.

3. Literature Review

A teaching approach refers to how curricular subjects are managed, planned, resourced and taught within the school contexts and is seen as a continuous system (Beverton *et al.*, 2005). It will guide the type of support and direction the teacher receives from subject co-coordinators and the emphasis given to a subject in the school's policies and development planning. Students have their own preferred learning styles and the effective teachers attempt to match their teaching approaches to the learning styles of the students. This will help to increase students' learning achievement.

Many studies have suggested that the traditional approach is a common method that is often used in the classroom. In this approach teaching focuses on a number of elements including lectures, case studies, team projects and so forth. Learning is conducted in a synchronous environment, meaning that the students must be in the same place at the same time in order to learn. Students derive motivation from the teacher as well as between the students themselves (Tilestone, 2000). The

current concern with assessment based upon factual knowledge and understanding has led to a preference for 'chalk and talk' approaches that underpin teacher accountability and promote pedagogic tidiness with learners covering the same material at the same pace (Bernstein, 1977 cited in Glover & Sue Law, 2002). These approaches also simplify relationships between teachers and taught because the teacher controls the learning process and students become passive recipients. Technical education is basically a pure science technical education with compulsory subjects of sciences, mathematics, English, engineering subjects and also computer. An excellent technical education system can help to propel a country and set the speed and direction of change for the new economy. As we find ourselves getting deeper into the era of globalization and knowledge economy, a comprehensive curriculum and a world class delivery system and educational infrastructure are significant to develop flexible and competent sub professionals such as engineering assistants, technical assistants, technicians, middle level executives and the like (Ahamad, 2003).

The system approach in technical subjects is concerned mainly with continuous system. In this system, the concept of learning is more to the traditional mode of instruction. In traditional instruction, content delivery is very much emphasized. Traditional instruction often utilizes one way communication media such as textbooks, OHP, slides, power point, and video tapes. Students are being taught what educational planners and educators think they need to know. Also, instruction is often delivered in a rigid, expository and passive manner (Meng, 2003). It needs to stress that, the way a person learns is very much affected by the learning environment s/he is in. What an individual can learn, and how they learn it, depends on what model they have available.

In this era where information is growing and changing at exponential rate, the learning of knowledge acquisition skills is certainly far more important than the acquisition of content knowledge itself (Meng, 2003). As we shift to a new age and a vastly different approach in the way businesses operate, we must also shift our thinking and change our approach in teaching. As such, the traditional mode of learning may not be effective anymore in meeting the demand of the new generation that requires higher analytical and cognitive skills. Based on this argument, there is a need to explore the current teaching approaches and examine a potential of new learning approaches to replace the traditional system to enable learning to be carried out in a more effective and meaningful way.

4. Research Methods and Instrumentations

The study is a case study at three polytechnics in Malaysia that focuses on approaches to teach engineering subjects. The Engineering subject that been chosen in this study is Concrete Technology. Six lecturers who were experienced in teaching the subject, with two lecturers from each polytechnic have involved and participated in a semi structured interview session. The purpose of the interviews was to help to investigate the teaching phenomenon and explores teachers view about the current teaching process. This method is expected to reveal few issues related to teaching and learning process that is important for this study, especially the challenge in performing good teaching practices.

Once permission had been sought and granted by the Head of the Department, appointment has been set with the participant. In carrying out the interviews, I arranged for separate meetings with the participants and also tape recorded the interviews having sought the participants permission. The interview was conducted in Malay language, therefore it is necessary to translate the interview into English to make it easy to analyze and transcribe for the purpose of this study. The transcript have been transcribe, categorized and look for the synonym and similar words, and grouped for few themes.

5. Findings and Discussions

Findings from the analysis have suggested that the challenge to promote active teaching and learning approaches basically attributed to four major factors which are; background of students, teachers enthusiasm and capability, the teaching duration and inadequate teaching resources, methods and facilities.

Students can be classified into two categories based on their school background (technical and vocational, art and science streams) and enrolment session (January and July intake). Majority of students come from technical & vocational school. This group of students seems to be privileged with regard to their previous learning experience which is an extra assets to help their study in polytechnic compare to art and science streams. Somehow, the learning experience, in fact, does not really help their learning at this level of education, and Schomburg (2007) has agreed that the type of secondary education may not be a sufficient measure to identify a success of students at further/higher education level. Therefore, teachers as an educator should always create better and more interactive learning environments to help all the students to be more excellent.

Lecturers in polytechnics under investigation not just solely play a role as a lecturer who deliver a lesson to students in their care, nevertheless, they also involved in administration job that also need for some attentions. This scenario become a tension faced by lecturers, when they have to involve between academic and non academic tasks. Lecturers feel they have to invest more time and energy on students problem and administration management. As they have had other tasks to concentrate, it might be not impossible lessen focus on their original task, and yet, might give an impact to students' learning capacity. Besides all the tasks, lecturers need to remain the standard grade and achievement to show a good reputation of each polytechnic which is one of the culture that reflect to the lecturers' teaching practice. Many of lecturers claim that working condition adversely affect what they are able to do in their teaching. Lecturers had several fundamental reasons for approaching the teaching of the Concrete Technology subject in such a manner.

Time is also considered as a crucial component in teaching this subject. Insufficient teaching time become an obstacle for lecturer to plan and prepare for more active learning environment. Time is the major issue faced by lecturers as the syllabus that they have is not conducive to creating more activity in classroom learning. According to Sandholtz et al (1997), time is considered as one measurement to determine students' engagement in learning, therefore a sufficient time allocations for the subject is important to gain students engagement. Some of lecturers claimed how the allocated time (8 topics to cover in 1 hour learning session) required them to only apply teaching methods that are available in a classroom, such as white board and Over Head Projector (OHP). Moreover, with this limitation, some participants become stymied at attempts to variety their mode of teaching as they felt pressure by time constraint and not pay back their preparation time. All these factors have led lecturers to accomplish their 'teaching mission' in more didactic and passive way. Although a lack of time typically did not stop lecturers from teaching, it sometimes kept them from progressing further (Haymore, 1997).

When inquired the lecturers about other choice of **methods and materials** to teaching, they showed their eagerness and temptation to employ them, but they really have to acknowledge whatever (methods and materials) available in a classroom. They are keen to implement many strategies as possible, but they have to admit to a reality of polytechnics teaching and learning phenomena. Lecturers have an initiative to variety their teaching practice, but they need more time and chance to perform their skills in teaching.

6. Conclusion

As a whole, it can be summarized that the pattern of teaching and learning employed in the majority of polytechnics under investigation was more of the typical traditional classroom teaching approach. It can be summarized that all those factors; students, lecturers, time and teaching facilities were related to each other and influenced each other on their contribution to successful teaching which could lead to successful learning. All these factors are important subjects that should be taken as the priorities while planning for classroom learning session that concern on students' active involvement and learning performance.

With the factors identified above, lecturers are place in a dilemma- there is a need for them to gauge their approach so that the aim to produce students not only with excellent academic performance but most importantly active, skilful and having a good attitude that ready to serve for the future life will be a 'dream come true'.

It was clear that all lecturers were well aware of their teaching practice and had high ambitions to help students in their learning. However, effective teaching was adversely affected by inadequate teaching infrastructure which remains a critical handicap to effective teaching and learning. Even though their pedagogical decision depends on their own choice and preference, but the teaching facilities also play a significant role to ensure the success of every teaching activity.

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