

Inculcating Heart Intelligence in English Communication Workshop for Day-care Educators

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Abstract

Teaching is a noble job that not everyone aspires to do. Many join the teaching force as a last resort. For early childhood education, this can be detrimental as literature shows that early learning requires special attention because it lays the foundations for lifelong learning. Heart Intelligence is a module which introduces Spiritual, Emotional and Social Intelligence, enhanced by the notion of 'Man as Caliph (i.e. leader)' and his role to harmonise and protect the world. This Heart Intelligence module enhances the beliefs and understanding of spiritual, emotional and social skills of the educators. The purpose of this study is to examine how this module gives impact to the educators and how it helps the educators to have more control on their job engagement. A qualitative research design was employed to collect data through an open-ended questionnaire from 26 educators who voluntarily participated in this study. Participants were required to apply the elements of Islamic teaching during English Communication Module and apply them to their students when they get back to their workplace. They provided positive feedback especially after they have implemented the Heart Intelligence

Module (Anita, 2016). From the responses, there were positive changes in the educators especially when dealing with their students at school. The module helps them to decrease stress at workplace, work better with the students and feel satisfied with their job. They also suggested some new ideas for the module throughout the teaching and learning session as to introduce the concept of human and 'caliph'.

Keywords: Heart Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence, Motivation, English Educators, English Communication Module, Job Engagement.

Introduction

Teaching is a noble job. Yet, not everyone aspires to become a teacher. Some who join the teaching force did so due to the lack of options. However, in early childhood education, this can be detrimental as literature shows that early learning requires special attention because it lays the foundations for lifelong learning. In the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025 published by the English Language Standards and Quality Council, the Ministry of Education (2015: 23), it was reported that "special attention has to be paid to early learning because this is when the foundations are laid for lifelong learning."

A high-performing education system is highly dependent on a high-calibre teaching workforce. McKinsey & Company who studied how countries created high-performing education systems reported in September 2007 that three major success factors mattered the most. They are:

1. Getting the right people to become teachers
2. Developing them into effective instructors
3. Ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

(Source: the Roadmap 2015: 28)

According to the Roadmap (2015: 28-29), ideally, the right people for teaching are recruited from the top third of each cohort graduating from the school system, and "are characterized by high academic achievement, good motivation skills and high motivation for teaching". Without high-caliber teachers, the implications may be severe, particularly during the earlier years of schooling, and what more, the foundational years. "Shaky foundations in English will make it difficult for the child to ever develop a high level of competence in English later on; while on the other hand firm foundations provide the child with the means to achieve excellence" (The Roadmap 2015: 23).

The reality of the matter is that many day-care educators fall into the profession as a stepping stone before embarking onto other careers. Furthermore, due to the perception that childcare providers were only child minding while parents are at work, "rather than providing a stimulating environment for children to grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally" (Chiam 2008: 8), traditionally, day-care providers were not required to be highly educated. Therefore, the education background of day-care providers was not of essential importance. That is why it is not surprising that "the vast majority of the child care providers had little or no education and they were not trained as child care providers. Only 1% had university or professional qualifications but not in the area of early child care and education. Expectedly, the great majority of them, especially those in the estates, were child-minding." (Chiam 2008: 32)

However, nowadays, the job of a day-care provider is not limited to providing care anymore. They are now considered early educators as children who spend time at day-care centres are also exposed to early childhood education. The participants of this study, who were members of Pahang State

Caretakers Association (PPNP), is now known as the Pahang State Early Childhood Educators Association (PPAKK). The early childhood education that is being used is the PERMATA Negara curriculum.

PERMATA Negara Curriculum

PERMATA Negara is an education programme specifically designed for the physical and intellectual development of children below 4 years old. Neuroscience studies as reported by (Kuhl, 2011) have shown that the success of a child's future depends on the exposures he or she receives during the formation years. Formation years refer to the stage before the children reach 4 years of age. It is found that synapses or interconnection of brain cells or neurons at this age are formed when they are stimulated. The more they are used, the more permanently connected they will be (PERMATA website).

In view of this, the PERMATA Negara programme aims to provide exposure in terms of learning and social interaction opportunities to enable more synapses to be formed and become permanent before they are ready to begin formal schooling. The programme underscores the National Education Philosophy and focuses on five primary aspects namely (a) active interaction and communication (b) mind stimulation and literacy (c) child empowerment (d) independent learning (e) monitoring of a child's abilities and potential, and (f) learning through play (PERMATA website).

Background of Study

As the PERMATA Negara programme considers educators to play "a central role in shaping the personality of a child particularly when he is just learning to know himself, his emotion and his capacity for social interaction" (PERMATA website), day-care providers who opt to implement the PERMATA Negara programme at their centres are required to attend the PERMATA course for the duration of six weeks.

Although the day-care educators under PPNP had undergone the PERMATA training, and were not limited to using Malay, many providers were not using English at their centres. Most of the providers' academic qualifications were at SPM level. It was not surprising that they lacked confidence to use English with the children under their care. Furthermore, the PERMATA training they received was conducted in *Bahasa Malaysia* and they were taught to interact with the children also in *Bahasa Malaysia*.

Another problem highlighted by PPNP was that many educators had low motivation level. This was a problem as the lack of job engagement would manifest itself in the interaction with the children. The questions that arose were, "How can we rehabilitate or reform teachers whose first choice was not teaching, whose grasp of English is basic or whose confidence level to use English is low? How can we elevate their status to become the 'right' people and to develop them as effective instructors?"

This is where the KTP KINDY programme steps in. Based on the needs of PPNP, KTP Kindy is a two-year knowledge transfer programme designed to transfer not only English Communication Skills and effective storytelling techniques in English for day-care educators but also Heart Intelligence awareness. Heart Intelligence (HI) is a module which introduces Spiritual Intelligence (SI) and Emotional Intelligence (EI), enhanced by the notion of 'Man as Caliph (i.e. leader)' and his role to harmonise the world. This HI module enhances the beliefs and understanding of spiritual, emotional and social skills of the educators.

The KTP Kindy programme which consists of numerous added values is a holistic module that does not only embrace communication skills and storytelling techniques but also attends to the motivation and spiritual intelligence of the early childhood educators who have signed up for the knowledge transfer programme. In this paper, the focus is the HI Module which has two main elements. This first element of the HI module is the aim to enhance the beliefs and understanding of spiritual and emotional of the educators. The second is to increase the educators' motivation not only towards their job but also in realigning their perceptions towards the nobility of their profession and perceptions towards the children they are caring for. This HI Module is delivered at all three levels of both modules.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the module gives an impact to the educators involved and how it helps the educators to have more control on their job engagement. In order to achieve this, a qualitative research design was employed to collect data through an open-ended questionnaire from 26 educators who voluntarily participated in this study.

Literature Review

HI in this context of study is a combination of SI and EI only. Vaughan (2002) defines SI as "being concerned with the inner life of mind and spirit and its relationship to being in the world", at the same time inferring that SI has the ability to create meaning based on deep understanding of existential questions, and awareness of and the ability to use multiple levels of consciousness in problem solving. It also induces a person's attitude (Weber, 1958) and moulds a person's capability and behaviour (Kripner & Welch, 1992) which contributes to performance (Zohar and Marshall, 2004).

Research shows that there is a relationship between SI and wellbeing; that people with higher level of spirituality have healthier, happier and more productive lives at work (Tischler, Biberman & Mckeage, 2002). Others examined the significant relationship between SI and personality (Hill & Pargement, 2003), psychological wellbeing (Anita, Haslinda, Fatimah, Imaduddin & Aini, 2017) and also work performance (Alexander, 1993). Susan, Anantharaman and David (2011) extended their SI study with EI and how it relates to employee workforce. The findings show that SI persons are motivated on what they do.

According to Powers, Cramer and Grubka (2007), employees with SI displayed positive attitude and experienced less negative effects in workplace. Piedment (2001) in his research showed that ratings of well-being, life satisfaction and health are significantly related to spirituality. SI also enhances worker effectiveness (George, 2006) and work performance (Anita, Imaduddin & Mohd Rashid, 2013). Furthermore, it promotes the capacity to care, tolerate and adapt; to develop a clear and stable sense of individual identity within shifting workplace relationships; to determine the meaning of work and events; to identify and align personal values with a sense of purpose; to live one's personal values; and to understand how ego can sabotage one's values and purpose (Christ-Lakin, 2010).

On the other hand, EI persons can understand emotions, are able to regulate them and express feelings accurately and are able to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Many studies have positively related the ability EI in daily life, including mental and physical health, social functioning, academic and workplace performance (Cabello, Sorrel, Fernandez-Pinto, Extremera & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2016).

Heart Intelligence Module

Heart Intelligence in this context of study is a combination of SI and EI which is used to enhance the beliefs and understanding of spiritual, emotional and social skills of the educators. HI is when

people are able to manage their emotions and experience calmness in daily functioning and well-being using their spiritual, emotional and social awareness. In Islam, the heart is a place to control one's behavior. The Prophet Muhammad SAW said "Beware, in the body there is a flesh, if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt and behold". (Shahih Muslim).

The aim of this module is to highlight the importance of a sound heart. In Islam, it is also emphasised that a sound heart can enter *Jannah* (heaven). It is stated in the holy Al-Quran, "*To the righteous it will be said: O peaceful and fully satisfied soul, return to your Lord. You are well-pleased (with your good end) and well-pleasing (in the sight of your Lord). Join My (righteous) servants and enter My Paradise*" (89: 27-30).

It is important to have a session where participants are able to learn how to have a sound heart as it can help them to stay calm and make good decisions in whatever they do. This includes the ability to choose the correct way of thinking and expressing oneself. This calmness and sound thinking will also help participants to be more patient in their interactions with the children and the children's parents. The participants were taught a do'a from selected verses from the Quran and told to apply it in their daily life and they were required to take note of the changes they experienced.

The second part in HI module is the Motivation module. The module is designed for the participants to make them feel happy and cheerful throughout the workshop. The objectives of these topics are to allow the participants to unleash their potential in the workshop. When the participants are motivated, and the confidence level is increased, they will be less shy to communicate in English with the children. During the programme, the participants were shown videos and introduced to words of wisdom in order for them to feel good about themselves, their physical appearance and their ability in using English. Participants were encouraged to learn from their own mistakes, improve them and become better at communicating each time they attended the workshops. They were also given the chance to ask questions, share feelings and their aims in developing their confidence in using English Language in their daily life in particular at their workplace. Participants' positive responses were reflected in their laughter and willingness to engage in the activities conducted with them. They were excellent participants, and were very co-operative during the entire programme.

The module itself which has been validated by experts in Islamic studies, was developed in 2016. Based on the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad SAW, the HI module highlighted the meaning of life to the participants through lecture and discussions. This module also emphasised the purification of heart using selected verses in Al-Quran and how to be a better Muslim.

Methodology

In order to examine the impact of HI module on the participants and how the module has helped them to have more control on their job engagement, a qualitative method was selected during the research inquiry procedures. A qualitative research method is best employed to understand the human experience (Richardson & King 1991). For data collection, a purposive sampling was adopted for this study. The sample of the study were the participants of KTP Kindy programme which was a collaboration between Universiti Malaysia Pahang and PPNP.

However, as one of the participants was a non-Muslim and three of the participants did not respond to the qualitative questionnaire distributed, only 26 of 29 educators voluntarily participated in this study. The educators' academic qualifications are varied. From the total of 26 educators, only three of them are Bachelor's Degree holders while seven of them are Diploma holders. Half of the participants' highest qualification is the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) and one is a

Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education (SRP) holder. Only one has other academic qualification. These group of educators came from various districts in Pahang. Of the 26 educators, 14 of them are based in Kuantan. 8 educators are from Temerloh and 2 from Rompin. For Muadzam Shah, Kuala Lipis, Jengka, Bera and Cameron Highland, only 1 educator represents each of these districts mentioned. The participants are represented by R1 to R26 in the next section.

The programme required the participants to undergo six different workshops. Each workshop began with the HI module and followed by the motivation part of the module. In the sixth workshop, an open-ended questionnaire which aimed to gauge the impact of the HI module on participants' were distributed to 29 participants, excluding the non-Muslim participant. Even though she participated in the HI workshops, she did it for additional knowledge as all of her students were Muslims. The questionnaire was divided into three parts; emotional aspect, relationship with God (Allah The Almighty) and relationship with others.

Results and Discussion

Some participants answered in Malay and some in a mixture of both Malay and English. For this paper, the answers were translated and reconstructed for ease of understanding and checked for accuracy. All answers with similar trend were coded and the results were categorised into three categories as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Impact of HI Module on Educators

Theme	Respondent	Percent (%)
A. Changes in Emotional Aspects		
Anger Management	26	100
Happiness	3	11.5
B. Changes in Relationship with Others		
Colleagues	21	80.7
Surrounding People	8	30.7
C. Changes in Relationship with God (Allah The Almighty)		
Acceptance (<i>Redha</i>)	3	11.5
Worship (<i>Ibadah</i>)	24	92.3
Gratitude (<i>Syukur</i>)	2	7.7

Changes in Emotional Aspects

All the respondents answered that they have learned how to manage and control their anger. They expressed they were calmer and more patient in their daily life. This result is similar with Tichler's et al. (2002) and Anita's et al. (2017) studies which showed that a person with high spiritual intelligence has a good psychological well-being and he or she would be emotionally balanced. In this study, participants expressed their feelings as follows:

R01: *I feel calm most of the time and I am able to minimize my anger.*

R10: *I feel calmer, my emotions feel better and comfortable, I am less angry.*

R12: *My emotions are in control, I don't get angry easily, my soul feels calmer.*

R19: *My emotions are more controlled, my soul is calmer, I can better control emotions and anger.*

R24: *I feel calm even though having problems. Soul affected with the calmness as if problems do not exist before this.*

Three of the respondents (11.5%) admitted that they were happier, friendlier and had more confidence at their workplace as expressed by the respondents below.

R03: *I feel happy a new day arrives.*

R19: *My mood is happy and calmer to start the day.*

This shows that the practice prescribed by this module has helped the respondents to have stability in their emotions. As mentioned by Cabello et.al (2016), persons with high EI can help them to be better in mental and physical health, social functioning and workplace performance. They are more motivated in their work as they are happier and confident.

Changes in Relationship with Others

This study shows 80.7% of the respondents revealed that their relationship with their colleagues has improved. The educators sensed that the reason why their relationships were better was because they were now happier at the workplace. This helped to create a better working environment with their colleagues, as stated by Piedment (2001). They have also adopted a positive perspective towards criticisms and have become more open-minded at the workplace. They cared more about their co-workers and their relationship with them has become better as expressed by the following respondents:

R5: *My relationship with my friends is getting better.*

R8: *I feel happy looking at other people's happiness and I think I have many friends now compared to before.*

R13: *I feel more happy, friendly and loved among friends.*

R15: *My relationship with friends is getting better.*

R21: *I want to help friends without reward from them and Allah.*

Apart from colleagues, relationships with their spouses, parents and neighbours have also improved. Eight of the participants (30.7%) said that they felt thankful for the people surrounding them. They talked less about condemning others and appreciated life better as expressed by the respondents below.

R9: *I feel confident in front of others.*

R11: *I feel more love towards the children under my guidance.*

R14: *My relationship with others feels closer and I receive advice often with a calmer soul.*

The results explain that all respondents have upgraded their relationship with others due to this module. It has been highlighted by many research that people with SI show positive attitude and display less negative effects at the workplace (Powers, Cramer and Grubka, 2007). Specifically, they are more caring, tolerant and adaptable with others (Christ-Lakin, 2010). Furthermore, it can also be concluded that a person with high level of SI also possesses good EI and SI.

Changes in Relationship with God (Allah The Almighty)

In terms of changes in their relationship with God, 11.5% of the respondents reported that they were now more engaged in their prayers which resulted in a closer relationship with Allah. They felt more ashamed of themselves with Allah, and they remembered Allah more often and had a higher level of faith in Allah.

R08: *I feel more diligent to pray early and feel bad if I miss my extra prayer.*

R12: *I no longer feel that prayer is a chore.*

R13: *I want to feel closer to Allah, that Allah is nearer.*

R19: *I want to do more additional voluntary prayers.*

R20: *I feel happy in praying.*

R25: *I feel closer to Allah. I want to complete all my compulsory prayers and start reciting the Quran every day.*

Three respondents (11.5%) felt more accepting of their fate (*taqdeer*) in life that is destined by Allah. This is reflected in the statements below.

R01: *I feel closer to Allah and always feel grateful and contented with Allah's decision.*

R19: *I feel more at peace with my fate.*

R25: *I know Allah is the best planner.*

This is supported by 6.89% respondents who realized they are now more grateful and contented in their interconnection with Allah. This demonstrates that this module had helped the respondents to improve their relationship with Allah. As also mentioned in the holy Al-Quran, "Only in remembrance of Allah will your heart find peace." (Surah 13; Verse 28). Majority of the educators (92.3%) also revealed that the module has help strengthened their relationship with Allah. This is seen based on their increased willingness to perform prayers five times a day, and not postponing their prayers as can be seen by the statements below.

R08: *I am no longer lazy to do worship, not like before.*

R12: *I have no problem to pray at the beginning of prayer time.*

R17: *I am happy I have the strength to perform night prayers.*

Findings also show that the respondents also become more grateful for their lot in life. Two respondents (7.7%) expressed their feelings as shown below:

R05: *I am thankful now that I am an educator.*

R23: *I feel grateful that I like my job.*

The importance of this module is to have a closer relationship with God. In Islam this is the level of SI that they should reach. The results shows that the module has helped the participants to be better Muslims. Vaughan (2002) had mentioned SI persons are concerned with the inner life of mind and spirit and its relationship to being in the world. In this context, Muslims are able to create meaning based on deep understanding of their existence in the world. As a result, they are aware of their responsibilities as Muslims, employees and as part of the community and will try hard to fulfill their multiple duties.

Conclusion

This present study has some limitations in terms of the research instrument used and the number of participants recruited. First, the data collected was from open-ended questions only. Second, the sample size was rather small as it involved only the KTP Kindy participants. Third, there was no interviews conducted with the participants. For future research, interviews can be conducted with participants to collect richer data and more early childhood educators should be involved in the study. To further validate the enhancements claimed by the educators, interviewing their immediate superiors may also give better insights.

From the study, it can be concluded that the Heart Intelligence Module (Anita, 2016) has given an impactful influence on the well-being of the early childhood educators particularly on their job engagement at their respective preschools. It has been claimed that the module has successfully enhanced the educators' beliefs and understanding of their spiritual needs, emotional well-being and social skills. The educators were reported to be able to decrease their stress level experienced at

their workplaces. In addition, interactions with the children at their preschools have improved in which they felt more responsible, more motivated and more positive in their attitudes towards the children under their care. These positive changes eventually increased the educators' job satisfaction levels and hence, these educators began to design better and quality teaching and learning activities and create conducive environment at their preschools.

As early childhood educators, their roles in the children's upbringing are essential. Being the role models for the children, these educators' ways of behaving, controlling emotions and having a good relationship with God (Allah the Almighty) are being closely observed by the children at their preschools. Therefore, the Heart Intelligence Module which aims to shape educators to be good leaders or 'caliphs' through possessing and exhibiting positive values will significantly help mould our children's characters and personal development.

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