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TEACHER-PUPIL PERCEPTIONS AND THEIR INTERACTIVE BEHAVIOUR IN THE CLASSROOM

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by

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This thesis attached hereto, entitled "Teacher-Pupil Perceptions and Their Interactive Behaviour in the Classroom" prepared and submitted by Rahil bte Hj. Mahyuddin in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science (Educational Psychology) is hereby accepted.

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to find out if there were significant differences between the perception of Democratic and Authoritarian teachers towards pupils who were academically good and weak and vice-versa and whether these differences affect their interactions in the classroom.

The subjects of this study consisted of standard six teachers who were perceived by their pupils as Democratic and Authoritarian teachers respectively; and pupils who were perceived as academically good or weak by their teachers; from twenty schools in the Federal Territory, Malaysia. Both teachers and pupils were randomly selected.

The grouping of teachers into Democratic and Authoritarian types was done by using questionnaires modified from statements prepared by Flanders. The questionnaires were answered by pupils. The perceived Democratic and Authoritarian teachers were interviewed using a prepared questionnaire on the perception of their pupils using the bi-polar construct of academically good and academically weak.

Ten Democratic and ten Authoritarian teachers were chosen. Four hundred pupils were also chosen basing on their teachers'

perception of their academic performance. Of these, two hundred were classified as academically good and two hundred as academically weak.

The observations of the classroom interactions were done through time sampling using regular classroom sessions. The frequency of interactions between pupils and teachers was recorded in prepared recording sheets and computed. A modified Brophy and Good Dyadic Interaction Observation System was used as a guide for scoring. The interactions were confined to initiatory verbal communication in the classroom.

In the analysis of data, two approaches were utilised. The frequency count, and the t-test.

It was found that teachers in general, interacted significantly more with pupils whom they perceived as academically good than those whom they perceived as academically weak ($t = 7.17$, $p < .01$). When teachers were grouped into Authoritarian and Democratic teachers; the Democratic teachers were found to interact significantly more with the pupils whom they perceived as academically good than those whom they perceived as academically weak ($t = 5.688$, $p < .01$). Similarly the Authoritarian teachers were found to interact significantly more with pupils whom they perceived

as academically good than those whom they perceived as academically weak ($t = 5.28$, $p < .01$).

With the pupils, it was found that they interacted significantly more with teachers whom they perceived as Democratic than with teachers whom they perceived as Authoritarian ($t = 6.01$, $p < .01$). When pupils were grouped into academically good and weak, the academically good pupils were found to interact significantly more than the academically weak pupils with all teachers ($t = 5.83$, $p < .01$). The academically good pupils as a group were found to interact significantly more with teachers whom they perceived as Democratic than those whom they perceived as Authoritarian ($t = 6.04$, $p < .01$). It was found that the academically weak pupils interacted only with the Democratic teachers and none with the Authoritarian teachers ($t = 1.923$, $p < .05$).

The study has, in some measure, highlighted the importance of interactions in the classroom teaching-learning process. It also shows that perception plays an important role in influencing the pattern of classroom interactions. This study also shows that there is an urgent need for reviewing the approach towards teaching in order to help pupils to benefit from the teaching-learning process.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The behaviour of the teacher and pupils in the classroom has been the focus of much attention. This arises from the fact that interaction between the teacher and pupils is one of the most important aspects of the teaching and learning process. The availability of facilities such as reference materials and audio visual aids does not ensure the desired learning outcomes. A more important factor is the nature of interaction between the teacher and the pupils. To facilitate teacher-pupil relationship, the teacher must be well-versed with various teaching techniques and be able to manipulate ideas as he interacts with the pupils. Only when the teacher has provided the conditions which stimulate thinking that the interaction between them may stimulate the pupils to think critically and participate enthusiastically the learning tasks so generated in the interactive process. Several findings have supported the view that patterns of teaching behaviours in the classrooms affect the way pupils behave.

The interactions between the teacher and the pupils depend on the former's perception of his role as a teacher as well as his perception of the latter. The pupils on the other

hand may respond to the teacher according to their perception of the teacher's behaviour. Consequently, the perceptions of both parties can affect the pattern of interactions and hence the amount and quality of teaching and learning.

In Malaysia, and in particular among the primary classes, it is believed that the nature of interaction is generally one-sided with the teacher as the main initiator. The pupils are seldom the initiators as can be observed from the limited responses. A recent development has been the tendency to stress pupil-centred styles where the pupils are the major participants and the teacher acts more of a facilitator. However, it is unclear as to whether this new development has changed the pattern and quality of interactions between the teacher and pupils.

Statement of the Problem

Studies on classroom interaction in Malaysia, is limited. Recent problems on learning efficiency among primary school children, particularly among rural areas have directed attention to a variety of resulting factors (Murad, 1973). Although one of the most significant factors discussed was the instructional effectiveness of teachers and learning capabilities

of pupils, the fundamental mechanism of the teaching-learning process i.e. interaction, was not singularly highlighted. Few studies on interaction, however, have been carried out by Charlesworth (1975), Rahimah (1977) and Arfah (1977), but further research is very much needed to bring out the various factors that may affect interaction. This study attempts to examine how far perception affects teacher-pupil interactions in the Malaysian classroom.

In the classroom, the teacher-pupil relationship may be affected by the social climate of the classroom which refers to the generalised attitudes toward the teacher that the pupils share in common despite individual differences. Pupils develop shared expectations about how the teacher will act and what kind of a person he is (Flanders, 1967). In the traditional teacher-pupil relationship which is that of superior-subordinate situation, the teacher makes clear to pupils of his classroom role and how he intends to behave and at the same time he is specifying how he intends the pupils to behave. The teacher tends to expect the pupils to be obedient, respectful, polite, formal, quiet, to pay attention, work hard, not to copy and show interest and enthusiasm (Hargreaves, 1972). This traditional view has been quoted by studies as the authoritarian way of teaching. On the opposite

pole is the Democratic teacher. Bradford and Lippit (1945), stated that the democratic supervisor tends to favour participation, opinion giving and decision making and he is concerned that his work is clearly understood. Praises and criticsms are always delivered objectively in terms of work result.

These teacher behaviours, either authoritarian or democratic, would be perceived by the pupils as such and this would influence their communication with the teacher.

In Malaysia, it is the general opinion that the class-room interaction follows the teacher-centred pattern. All lines of communication between the teacher and pupils follow the pattern of one teacher to one or many pupils with limited communication in the opposite direction or horizontally among pupils (Charlesworth, 1975). This passivity on the part of the pupils may be due to dominance of parents. An aspect of the Malaysian culture, requires children to respect the elders and that children are expected to follow the elders' directions without questioning; in other words complete obedience is demanded of them. These child-rearing practices which are supportive of the traditional values may come into conflict with what is taught in school.

School rules also count for this pupil passivity. In class they are not allowed to talk to one another nor walk about in the classroom, and the greetings between the teacher and pupils have to be formal. Teacher behaviours further contribute to this traditional pattern where the teacher demands respect, formality and asserts himself as the man of authority in class. All his instructions must be adhered to. Further, the syllabus-examination oriented education gives little opportunity for pupils to think for themselves. The focus is on subject-matter and transference of facts or content from textbooks or teacher-dictated notes (Charlesworth, 1975). All these factors, may perhaps be the reason why the traditional teacher-centred pattern in the classroom is perpetuated. Some of these factors may even result in the feelings of apprehension among the pupils toward the teacher. They may even lead to contempt and dislike for the teacher. Consequently the teacher will have difficulty in trying to get the pupils to participate actively in the teaching and learning process. The pupils may follow the lessons simply because they are expected to but at the same time they can be inattentive. Thus, there is only one-way communication.

The introduction of the democratic style of teaching which encourages the pupils to participate during lessons and to stimulate a two-way verbal interaction between the teacher and

pupils as well as pupils with pupils may change these traditional rules and practices related to teacher-pupil interaction. However, this depends on how far the teacher is willing to allow pupils to interpret their own work, trust them to work on their own without having to feel guilty that he is unable to control his class as may be wrongly perceived by others. He must also be willing to encourage pupils to question and give suggestions and opinions and to instil in the pupils the inquiry behaviour. It also depends very much on whether the teacher is ready to relinquish his traditional view of what the teacher should be and be a guide to the pupils and a good resource centre. The pupils too play a part, in the sense that they should be ready to work more independently, given the familiarity of the traditional pattern where they depend a lot on the teacher to provide them with the right answers.

In classroom situation, the perception of the teacher is significant in influencing teacher-pupil interaction. One of the most significant is pupils' academic performance. Most teachers are highly achievement-oriented and may view scholastic performance as a measure of success. Therefore when pupils do not perform well academically, it somehow affects the teacher's perception of the pupils as well as their interactive behaviour in class. Brophy and Good (1974) suggest that there is considerable evidence that

pupils of different achievement levels have very different kinds of interactions with their teachers. Hoehn (1954) found that high achieving students enjoyed more promotive and supportive contacts from their teachers than low achievers.

In this study academic performance is given emphasis as a factor affecting teacher's perception because in the Malaysian context, as mentioned earlier, the teaching has become very examination oriented. As such, teachers and parents invariably exhort the pupils to strive for excellence in academic performance. Therefore inevitably pupils' success in academic performance affect teachers' perception and subsequently their interactive behaviour in the classroom. This teacher perception and pupil's self-fulfilling prophecy may precisely account for the dropout rate as reported by Murad (1973).

As classroom interaction is an important aspect of learning, any weaknesses in the interactive process can considerably affect the teaching and learning system. With the knowledge of the importance of interaction, it may help teachers to improve pupils' way of thinking, encourage creativity and originality in particular and pupils' academic performance in general. It may also throw some light on teacher's positive roles in education as well as on the problems of discipline.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the teaching and learning process, in a classroom, usually there is a face-to-face relationship between teachers and pupils.

Teaching is the act of doing something for the pupils which will result in learning. As Scheffler (1960) said:

> "Teaching is an activity that is undertaken to try to get someone to learn something and actually succeeds in affecting the learning"

In trying to teach, various devices would have been employed to induce learning. Given this teaching situation, pupils appropriately react according to how they perceive of what is happening in the classroom.

In a learning situation the individual tends to behave in terms of the facts that the situation have for him. In other words the pupil is learning as he reacts to his environment. The teacher then seeks to improve that environment to maximise learning. According to Hurt, Scott and McCrosky (1978), evidence of student

learning occurs when students are talking or actively participating in the classroom. Learning then is a process whereby there is reciprocity between the teacher and pupils. In the learning process, pupils acquire changes in behaviour, improve performance, reorganise their thinking, discover new ways of behaving and new concepts and informations (Nash, 1976). If improved performance is anything to go by to measure pupil learning, then it can be said that reciprocity or teacher-pupil interaction is desirable.

The realisation of the importance of interaction in the teaching-learning process is relatively new. Its theory goes back in the fifties propounded by Bales (1950) and Homans (1950). Zander (1969) listed eight distinct systems in interaction, but then the concepts basic to interaction approach are activity, interaction and sentiment. However, for classroom interaction, Hargreaves (1972) stated that the basic unit of an interaction between a teacher and a pupil consists of one bit of behaviour emitted by one person (the teacher) followed by a bit of behaviour emitted by the second person (the pupil) which is contigent on the first person's behaviour. Yet the interaction is not always that simple. In the daily teacher-pupil relationship in the classroom, the interaction is not by any means uniform at all times.

In one study on the 4th and 6th grade classes conducted by Jackson and Lahaderne (1967), they found that in each of the classroom there were great inequalities in the distribution of teacher-pupil interactions. In each classroom there were one or two children who had fewer than one interchange an hour with the teacher while a few other pupils had so many.

This inequality of interaction may be attributed to perception. Perception as theorized by Ames and colleagues (1953), is a guide to action. Based on the study of physiological optics, this theory involves the recognition that experience plays an important role in perceiving. This pertains not only to specific objects but to the nature of the world in which the organism finds itself. Certain assumptions result and perception occurs in accord with these.

In the study of classroom interaction then, the perception of the teacher towards the pupils play an important role. The teacher's experiences and assumptions may be significant. Nash (1976) stated that to study teacher's perception is to know what aspects of the pupils' being the teacher takes to be significant and meaningful. Further he said that any study must therefore be concerned with asking teachers as individuals, to tell

us how they see their pupils.

Teachers often have preconceptions of their pupils. They possess set values concerning the way pupils ought to behave. When he takes a class, the teacher tends to perceive the pupils as 'good' who conform to his expectations and they generally are from high achieving classes and 'bad' pupils who deviate and are from low achieving classes (Hargreaves, 1972). His interpretations, experiences with the pupils and assumptions are discussed with other teachers who then made similar categorisation. Hargreaves further stated that these inferences which the teacher draws in such a highly selective way from the pupils' behaviour, act as a definition of the situation in which teachers and pupils find themselves. This definition provides the plan for all future interactions between the pupil and teacher.

Good and Brophy (1974) stated that classroom life was an uneven affair. Some pupils received more teacher contact then others. Also some pupils received qualitatively superior teacher treatment. Low achievement pupils for example usually received considerably less opportunity to respond than high achievement pupils. Teachers tend to pay more attention to the pupils whom they perceived as 'better' and that these pupils in turn respond

by talking more. This may be attributed to the fact that these 'better' pupils were more compulsive and they wanted to do well in school. Rothbart, Dalfen and Barret (1971), carried out a research specifically to find out how a classroom teacher behaved towards "bright" and "dull" pupils. Among other things they observed the teacher's allocation of time between "bright" and "dull" pupils and the resulting verbal output of the "bright" and "dull" pupils. Discussion groups were used and each group consisted of one teacher trainee and four high school pupils. Two of the pupils were designated as "bright" and the other two as "dull". The teacher was seated at the head of a rectangular table with the two pupils seated on either long side. The sessions were recorded on videotapes. The procedure called for the teacher to consider a literary passage with the pupils, first by asking specific questions and later through an open free all..type discussion. Accumulative record was made of the total amount of the time the teacher spent, among other things, speaking to the high and low expectation pupils. During the first half of the experiment all time measurements were made off video replay; during the second half of the experiment, all measurements were made directly in the observation room. The pupils' verbal output were obtained quantitatively during the general discussion. The teachers were