

Issues and Challenges in 21st Century Learning of History Education

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Abstract

In the current era of globalization, our country is facing issues and challenges in the education world as a result of the development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Traditional approaches are less suitable to be used in teaching today due to rapid pace of modernization which has led to a new revolution in teaching and facilitating method. Therefore, new approaches need to be implemented at all levels of education to ensure that 21st century learning can be applied by teachers in the classroom. The selection of appropriate approaches in History subject will enhance the students' achievement in this particular subject. This concept paper will be discussing on the teachers' mastery in implementing 21st century learning in teaching and facilitating, in the aspects of teacher readiness as well as the provision of teaching aids in the classroom. Previous studies conducted on the implementation and the effectiveness of 21st century learning methods in improving soft skills especially in the History subject are taken into discussion. This concept paper will conclude on the effectiveness of 21st century learning methods on students' achievement in History subject as well as suggestions that can be taken in improving students' achievement in History subject in Malaysia.

Keywords: 21st Century Learning, Teacher Readiness, Teaching Aids, Soft Skills

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the whole world whether in developed or developing countries is expected to experience rapid economic, political and social development. Alvin Toffler, a well-known author, states that 'the illiterate of the 21st century are not those that cannot read or write, but those that cannot learn, unlearn and relearn'. According to him, 21st

century education will be more challenging because students need to think more creatively and innovatively, be able to solve problems and think critically. In the 21st century of teaching and facilitating (PdPc), teachers need to find new methods, approaches, strategies and teaching techniques so that students can now have better understanding of the teaching and learning content delivered by the teacher.

Among of the shifts in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) are to provide equal access to quality education of an international standard and to leverage ICT to scale up the quality learning across Malaysia. In response, 21st century skills are one of the aspects that the Ministry of Education emphasizes in producing competent future generations of Malaysia. The challenges faced by the educators in keeping up the pace of the rapid process of globalization has led to the reformation of the education system in the country. History subject are one of the required subjects that students must learn in school. History subject is created to foster patriotic spirit which to instil a sense of love for the country within the students. Implementation of History subject lesson should be nurtured while students are still in school in hope to promote tolerance at the early age between different races in Malaysia.

In Malaysian context, the need for 21st century learning in History subjects has become a new paradigm shift in ensuring that student-centered teaching and learning activities will help teachers to present the subject content in the classroom better. In general, 21st century learning is a form of learning that requires students to master content while producing, synthesizing and evaluating information from a wide range of subjects and sources by understanding and respecting different cultures (Mek Nahakar Bakar, 2016). In short, there are four main principles of 21st century learning which includes student-centered teaching, cooperative learning, contextual learning and community integration.

Teaching and learning in the 21st century require students to think, plan, discuss, design and make decisions. Therefore, teachers need to diversify into 21st Century teaching and learning methods that focus on four main skills which are critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills as well as creativity. Conversely, a comprehensive understanding of 21st century learning skills and teacher readiness to provide students with the necessary input and teaching skills is becoming an issue and challenge that has taken 21st Century learning aback from developing these skills.

2. Teacher Skills in Using the 21st Century Pedagogy for History Subject Teachers

Teaching pedagogical knowledge means that every teacher needs to have a range of skills and knowledge related to teaching pedagogy. In teaching, students need to feel that their teachers have a higher level of competence and should be the master of the subject in which learning methods and strategies should be in line with student thinking. Teachers should, therefore, before entering the classroom, prepare a strategic plan with an emphasis on the subject matter and the

interests of the students should be taken into account. Some of the skills required for History subject teachers are:

2.1 Teaching Approaches:

In the context of teaching and learning, History Subject teachers will often adopt a conventional or traditional approach that emphasizes on deductive, inductive and communicative teaching. History subject teachers in particular need to delve into the current and relevant teaching approaches to the diversity of the pupils based on their cognitive level and interest as well as the relevance of the topics that they wish to convey in the classroom. Teachers can use various approaches such as collaborative, mastery, contextual and cooperative learning. 21st Century learning has made teachers act as facilitators in building students' knowledge by encouraging them to actively participate in the classroom as well as leading them to carry out every learning activity. For example, in constructive learning, students will be able to build knowledge by comparing new information presented by teachers with their existing information to solve problems. Constructive approaches can also offer the right and the opportunity for students to learn by building Knowledge within their own mindset and thus learning outcomes will be easier to be achieved.

Also, elements of 21st century skills are to promotes literacy in information and communication technology (ICT). Neo and Neo (2013) state that the use of technology and multimedia enables children to become creative authors and designers and thus directly engage them in determining their learning direction. This study demonstrates the importance of teachers as agents of change which play as a very important role in guiding students to engage them in digital literacy by giving them tasks in which they need to find the materials related on the internet, youtube, or any other educational web. Teachers as well need to emphasize on the positive values on the importance of information and communication technology. The benefits of using this technology can also trigger the students' soft skills in communication and develop their social interactions skill. This skill is very much needed in preparing the students before they move on to a more challenging level which is the working environment. According to Lejah Kiamsin & Rosy Talin, (2018), it has been proven that students are more interested in student-centered teaching because it enables them to become fully engaged while teachers act only as the observers. This study demonstrates that the student-centered approach used by teachers, able to create a conducive learning environment in the classroom.

2.2 Teaching Methods and Techniques:

Teaching techniques are skills that teachers need to master in delivering teaching and learning content which includes the implementation of the suitable teaching method. Some of the teaching techniques that teachers can use are storytelling, lectures, discussion, demonstration, practice drills, questioning, brainstorming and even games. One of the goals of using a variety of teaching techniques in teaching is to arouse students' curiosity and to interest them so that the teaching and learning objectives can be fulfilled. If a teacher is not capable of mastering the techniques of teaching, it is unlikely that the goal of producing highly knowledgeable students will not be achieved. For example, storytelling techniques for History subjects usually focusing on details of certain important events which requires students to develop their listening and thinking skills in order to get the gist of the story. In addition, discussion is techniques is also one of the prominent techniques used in 21st century learning. This technique emphasizes on the goals and objectives of the teaching and learning, the ideal group size, the classroom layout and the selection of appropriate topics. If teachers are able to apply this technique in the classroom maximumly, the discussions will enhance the students' thinking skill and help them to develop the content understanding, which will actively stimulate student engagement and later help them to master communication skill effectively.

2.3 Teaching Strategies:

Teaching strategies are an important aspect of a teacher's effort in implementing 21st century learning. The role of teaching strategies is to identify students' interests and to track their achievements during the teaching and learning process based on their cognitive levels. For example, in the classroom there are often groups that differ in terms of their understanding and knowledge of a topic, so teachers need to think of a teaching strategy that includes a variety of teaching methods to meet the needs of all the groups. Teaching strategies can be either teacher-centered, student-centered or materials-based. Each classroom has obstacles and challenges that teachers have to face such as the physical condition of the classroom, the facilities in the classroom, the norms and the background of the school and students itself. Therefore, student-centered activities practiced in 21st century teaching need to be more systematic and structured to make teaching practices easier by optimising the existing materials provided.

Challenges in implementing these teaching strategies require teachers to think about appropriate steps to use other methods such as questioning, giving and asking feedback as well as through discussion. Urban and rural school technology gaps should not be a hindrance for teachers to apply 21st-century learning practices especially in

History subject lesson because teachers can always make use other techniques such as brainstorming by implementing the I-Think Maps which is a form of learning that can sharpen students' thinking skills. According to Haini Shafikah & Khalijah Ahmad, (2016) has stated that the use of sharp maps shows positive effects on remembering historical facts through the use of materials such as cardboard and other related materials. This proves that 21st century learning is not just focusing on the use of digital learning but the use of hard materials such as cardboard also provides students with an opportunity to actively engage themselves in the classroom in order to develop their soft skills.

3. Issues and Challenges of History Teachers in 21st Century Learning

In this 21st century, information and communication technology (ICT) plays a very important role in the process of producing highly skilled students. As viewed in the past, learning only involves reading, writing and counting skills. However, the current modern educational world has changed the pattern of learning digitally. According to Johari and Fazliana (2011), many teachers have found problems with the use of technology-assisted activities in the PdPC process in the classroom. As such, teachers play an important key role in guiding students on how to maximise the use of the internet in searching for digital learning materials, and how to choose the right software in order to create global awareness in this digital age. In fact, some of the main challenges that the teachers and the schools have to face are that the provision of adequate technology and the size of the classroom which usually make it more difficult for teachers to implement the 21st century learning. The key concept of 21st century classroom is to create a classroom with creative learning space which enables the students to compete and to learn cooperatively as well as collaboratively. The rapid wave of digital games today should not be a challenge for the learning world somehow teachers can make use of the students' skills in operating the digital gadgets in creating a more interesting and fun learning. Therefore, teachers need to implement more of kinesthetic learning in the classroom so that students can come up with their own ideas, comments and suggestions while playing digital educational games which make learning more interesting.

Second, teacher readiness in facing 21st century challenges are also a major challenge. According to Lejah Kiamsim & Rosy Talin (2018), the History subject contains many facts of the past and that the main reasons which makes it difficult to remember. Until now, History subject has not been able to gain interest among students due to the less effective presentation style used by teachers in the teaching and learning process (Nur Syazwani, et al., 2016).

Thus, teachers' readiness should be taken into account in any new educational program as it will lead to the huge impact on the success of the program. In addition, teachers need to be prepared to face the ever-changing educational world which in line with the rapid development of the technology that demands teachers master and learn new knowledge. As a result, this will positively give impact on the teaching skills of the teachers that will eventually attract students to come to school.

Third, the challenge for educators in dealing with 21st century learning is to bridge the perception and knowledge gap between teachers and students in teaching and learning. It is undeniable that the world without borders and the effect of globalization have had a profound impact on the effectiveness of the education system in Malaysia. Internet accessibility and the sale of a variety of low-cost mobile devices are increasing and if not being used properly will lead to negative impact. Therefore, teachers need to take advantage of students' skills in using technology to make teachers' teaching and learning more effective. The effectiveness of 21st century education is not just about classroom infrastructure and layout but the key determinants of success are from student-centered teaching and learning activities. According to Mr. Naufal (2017), there are ten features of 21st century learning that educators need to understand and apply. Among them is a student-centered approach that places students first and teachers only as facilitators. Furthermore, learning features require students to be actively involved either through peer discussions or student responses to teaching materials. In addition, a conducive environment and collaborative learning are also important features of 21st century learning.

4. Suggestion and Improvement

In my opinion, suggestions and improvements are needed to ensure that the 21st century learning process is implemented effectively and efficiently. In order to achieve the nation's desire to develop a 21st-century skills generation, a teacher or educator needs to be committed to several aspects that are expected to generate first-class human capital. In meeting the challenges of the 21st century education, first, teachers need to master various fields. Teachers need to be prepared to master various knowledge and practice the learning so that teachers are constantly updated on the current developments and changes in the national education system. Teachers also need to be able to combine their own knowledge with other fields so that learning in the classroom does not only focus on just one area. For example, in History subjects lesson, teachers can make use video-based learning aids or interactive quizzes in order to promote holistic engagement of the students.

In ensuring that the 21st century teaching and learning is a success, teacher can also collaborate with their colleagues through a brainstorming method called the 'Professional Learning Community'. This method will engage all teachers regardless the subject they teach by generating a discussion of specific problems that occur during the teaching and learning process in the classroom. After that, the teachers will work together in finding the best solution for the problem. Then, the teacher will carry out the solution discussed with the help of another teacher as an observer and record the teacher's teaching for any rooms of improvements. If this method is well implemented by the teacher as a result the teaching of the History subjects will becoming more attractive as variety of aids and teaching techniques are used. In addition, teachers need to be creative and innovative in finding ways to encourage students to think and to promote collaborative learning among the students which will results in creating a more conducive learning space.

5. Conclusion

Changes to the national curriculum or better known as a curriculum transformation are things that are expected to happen. The country's aspiration to achieve high-status and high-income country certainly requires strong support from all parties, especially professionals in the education system. Therefore, various aspects need to be emphasized in gaining students' interest to learn History subject which includes the effectiveness of the approaches and methods used by teachers, the ICT skills used in making the teaching and learning more fun as well as the effectiveness of the pedagogical knowledge implemented. Teachers should also strive to improve their teaching practice by actively participate themselves in courses related to teaching pedagogy organized by the District Education Office (PPD) or Ministry of Education Malaysia. This will not only benefit the teachers themselves but the students as well in generating first-class human capital as what we are aiming for.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia has made a reform in the country's education by introducing the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The Malaysian Education Blueprint is created in line with the intention of the Ministry of Education Malaysia to increase academic achievement (Ainun et al., 2017). The Malaysian Education Blueprint (PPPM) outlined six essential aspirations for students to create a balanced human capital in line with the National Philosophy of Education. The six aspirations of the students are that each student has knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual skills, ethics and spirituality as well as national identity. Not only that, the PPPM 2013-2025 also outlined five aspects of the system which include access,

quality, equity, unity and efficiency. Therefore, teachers need to be well aware with their clients' need which is the students in term of their learning environment, the context of the students as well as the best approach to use in optimising the teaching and learning process. The appropriate use of the 21st century teaching and learning practices can promote positive impact on students' understanding of the subject matter as well as can help teachers achieve better teaching experiences.

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