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Contextual Learning to Enhance Collaborative Skills in Teaching the Malay Language among Form 4 Students

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Abstract

This research is implemented to identify the effectiveness of contextual learning to enhance the collaborative skills among Form 4 students in the Malay Language subjects. Collaborative is listed as one of five elements in 21st century learning which is important for students in learning the Malay Language. The teachers' capability and teaching efficiency is seen to be vital in equipping students with high collaborative spirits but the teacher's teaching strategy still appears to be conventional which is teacher-centred and focused on facts. This research is to identify the effectiveness of contextual learning towards the collaborative skills of Form 4 students in the Malay Language. This quasi-experiment research involves 80 students from two secondary schools in Manjung, Perak, Malaysia. Data is collected using the instrument of Students' Collaborative Skills Questionnaire. This is a quantitative research and its data is analyzed in descriptive and inferensi using Independent-Samples t-test. The research covers four teaching and learning sessions with Daily Lesson Plans built based on the themes in the Form 4 KSSM Malay Language textbook. Research findings show that collaborative skills among the students have successfully been increased with the mean 4.0. (s.d. .751) which indicates that contextual learning has succeeded in increasing the collaborative skills of Form 4 students in learning the Malay Language subjects.

Keywords: Contextual Learning, Collaborative

Introduction

In accordance with the change in learning environments to prepare competitive work forces with high-level thinking skills in solving problems (Lilia & Gomez, 2018) therefore, educational institutions namely primary schools must strive to form and create students that are creative, critical, possess collaborative skills, able to communicate well, and are skilled at teamwork in solving numerous problems in life, (Zain, 2015). Collaborative learning or teamwork is a trend which has to be implemented by teachers and students in 21st century learning, (Kartimi, Ari & Dindin., 2012). Collaborative is listed as one of five elements in 21st century learning which must be mastered by students in learning the Malay Language as stated in the education system of Malaysia (*Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran BM*, 2018).

Collaborative learning can be defined as the ability of students to work together in a small group (with two to five students in a group) in the effort to optimize self-learning and

learning with peers, to complete tasks, to solve problems, or produce products (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2018). Numerous activities have been suggested to be implemented and be part of classroom practices as an effort to encourage active collaborative involvement of students. It has also been quite some time, research has shown that this form of collaborative learning is effective in enhancing healthy social skills, encouraging critical thinking skills, (Anuradha A., 1995) increasing motivation and self-confidence, (Sislian, et al., 2015), and also enhancing students' academic achievements, (Abdullah & Tavsanli, 2018).

In applying teamwork skills, student-centred learning in an interactive classroom environment is exceptionally helpful, Jorion et al., (2016). The teachers' capability and teaching efficiency is seen to be vital in equipping students with high collaborative spirits (H. Le et al., 2018). However, the teacher's teaching strategy in the Malay Language still appears to be conventional which is teacher-centred and focused on facts (Lai, Chin & Chew, 2017; Zulkifli, 2013). According to Sousa (2017), the learning structure not only has to be focused on facts, but the teacher has to arrange his or her teaching to provide opportunities for students to build connections between the knowledge learnt and the knowledge acquired through their own generation of ideas such as in discussions and teamwork activities.

Among the suggested methods to activate student-centred learning and collaborative skills in 21st century learning is the application of contextual learning strategies (Kartimi, Ari & Dindin, 2021; Evi & Osman, 2017; Raub et al., 2015). According to Edy, Feria, & Muktar, (2017), contextual learning is suitable and effective to enhance the students' collaborative skills. Teachers who have applied contextual learning have succeeded in increasing their students' self-confidence and problem-solving skills. This is because teachers are capable of reducing the discomfort felt from their students' emotion imbalance during collaborative activities by discussing learning topics connected to real-life contexts experienced by the students (Jensen, 2008; Dumain, 2010).

In other words, it is essential for teachers to build connections between the knowledge learnt in the classroom with the students' existing knowledge experienced in real-life contexts to enhance the collaborative skills in teaching the Malay Language to students.

Background of Research

Contextual Learning

In making the education agenda of the 21st century a success, namely in the context of mastering the secondary school Malay Language, Malaysia's Ministry of Education through *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP) Bahasa Melayu Tingkatan Empat* (2018), has listed Contextual Learning as one of the Teaching and Learning Strategies of the Malay Language to fulfil the integrated concept of *Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan. Bahagian Perkembangan Kurikulum (BPK)*, (2018 pg. 14), has defined contextual learning as a learning method which connects the content learned to an individual's and the society's daily experiences. Learning takes place when students succeed in connecting the new knowledge in a meaningful way and are able to grasp the relevance of learning in their daily lives.

It is clear that contextual learning has to be implemented by teachers during the teaching and learning sessions of the Malay Language to grasp all the 21st century skills listed in the students' profiles which includes collaborative skills or teamwork spirit. Students are required to work together effectively and harmoniously with others, carry the responsibilities together, and also appreciate and respect the contribution of every team member. They then

acquire interpersonal skills through collaborative activities and this makes them better team members and leaders (DSKP, 2018 pg. 9).

Contextual learning which originates from the constructivist theory, normally upholds to the stand whereby knowledge acquisition is not only through memorization. Contextual learning is a teaching approach which helps teachers to build connections between the topic being taught and the students' real-life situations (Haryanto & Arty, 2019). According to Evi & Osman (2017), contextual learning involves five criteria which are relating, experience, application, collaboration and displacement. Learning activities such as solving problems, role-play, inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning are among suitable activities to be implemented in order to activate the students' collaborative activities.

Contextual learning offers to teachers and students a way to utilize and build connections between existing experiences and knowledge in solving problems faced while completing tasks given by teachers in school. The importance of solving problems is viewed to require students with high-level collaborative skills. According to Lilia (2018), students who are able to build connections between existing knowledge and the problems in the tasks at hand possess more self-confidence while working as a team. Those who are able to build collaborative skills are braver in taking risks and are able to form creative and critical thinking. To make it more meaningful, the knowledge acquired in the classroom is able to be benefited meaningfully in the students' daily life contexts.

Problem Statement

Teachers need to be aware that their capabilities in applying collaborative teaching strategies is considered unsuccessful if their students are physically sitting in groups but complete the tasks given individually, perform only a few discussions, and only allow certain students to make decisions and give ideas for the group (Laal & Laal, 2012). Teachers also face difficulties such as timetable constraints (Kartimi et al., 2021) and the difficulty in monitoring productive collaborative learning (Ha, Janssen & Wubbels, 2018) which definitely affect the success factors of collaborative learning in the classroom.

In teaching the Malay Language, the research by Abdul (2016), finds that the teacher's teaching practices in the Malay Language is average from the students' perspectives. The teacher mostly starts the teaching session with structuring rather than the effort of attracting, building motivation, and building connections. The Malay Language teachers are more focused on time management compared to the choice of methods and techniques, content grading, resource choices, and the suitability of activities. Furthermore, the teachers tend to create closures with cognitive connections rather than social connections. These findings were able to identify the scarcity of application of collaborative skills in the classroom whereas in the 21st century, children are said to require activities that are creative, active, and emphasize on the connection between knowledge and content to their real-life contexts.

Apart from teachers, students also face difficulties in making collaborative learning a success. Among the challenges faced are the inequality of involvement in implementing and completing group tasks (Freeman & Greenacre, 2010) and the lack of communication and collaborative skills among students (Li & Campbell, 2008). If the problem faced by students and teachers is not dealt with, collaborative learning is still said to fail in actively being implemented as according to Megamu & John (2015), collaborative activities are successfully achieved if the activities offer equal involvement for all students and teachers to work together in building new knowledge rationally, are connected to their lives, and possess good values.

Research also finds that there is a connection between the students' learning activities and emotions. A few causes for the disrupt in mastering classroom activities and collaborative skills include the emotional discomfort among students (Prokofieva, et. al., 2019). The emotional discomfort such as feeling inferior due to the difference in cognitive level while working as a team causes some students to remain quiet and do not express their opinions as they feel ashamed and worried that they will be pushed aside (Ha, Janssen & Wubbels, 2018). This sometimes create situations whereby only the smart, dominant, and influential students to actively give ideas which normally is unanimously agreed to without quality discussions before a decision is made and presented as completed tasks.

It is also clearly stated that there is a clear connection between the teaching method used and the students' achievements. The research findings of Kaildirim & Tavsanlı, (2018), stated that teachers who apply collaborative activities in their teaching and learning sessions have succeeded in enhancing their students' academic achievements compared to using traditional teaching methods. Students who are actively involved in collaborative activities have shown better performance in mastering thinking skills compared to students learning individually, (Anuradha, 1995).

It can't be denied that the teaching method used by teachers affects the students' 21st century learning skills (Ahmad et al., 2019). According to Khalil (2019), activities conducted by teachers which focus only on restricted language structures such as drilling can only benefit the students' short-term memory and are not able to enhance their communication skills; whereas collaborative activities such as independent discussions, task-based instructions, games, solving problems, drama, role-play, group activities, pair work, and oral reading, is said to be more effective in enhancing the students' social skills and calm their emotions which enables knowledge to be stored in their long-term memory actively. The one-way teaching method by teachers triggers unwanted results in the classroom and it also creates boredom during teaching and learning sessions. On the other hand, the brain achieves better performance with activities involving movements or active learning (Caine & Caine, 1991).

Research Objectives

1. To identify the effectiveness of contextual learning towards the collaborative skills of Form 4 students in the Malay Language.

Research Questions dan Research Hypothesis

This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of contextual learning compared to conventional learning for the sake of improving the collaborative skills of students in learning Malay. Specifically, this study answers the following questions and tests the following research hypotheses:

Research Question

1. Are there significant differences in terms of students' collaborative skills exposed to contextual learning with students receiving conventional instruction?

Null Hypothesis

1. There was no significant difference in terms of post-test scores of students' collaborative skills exposed to contextual learning with students receiving conventional learning.

Literature Review

Collaborative Skills

Teaching and learning sessions are the best platforms which must be benefited by teachers to check the students' work, get students involved in group activities, and also get them involved in Q&A sessions. Each existing interaction between teachers and students and activated with active collaboration between group members encourages thinking skills, communication skills, and practical experience, (Lilia, 2018). Through group discussions, students learn to listen to different views from group members and at the same time arrange information, review, analyze, and evaluate information.

The acquisition of knowledge through collaborative activities according to Ha, Janssen & Wubbels (2018), is not an easy task as it requires the teacher to identify the obstacles that cause the skills not to be applied effectively among the students. Among the obstacles listed are lack of collaborative skills, free-riding, competency status, and friendship ties. On the other hand; the obstacles existing among teachers are not determining the goal of the collaborative activity being implemented, its instruction, and its assessment. If teachers and students do not possess effective collaborative skills, the skills will then not be mastered.

Therefore, a few actions must be taken by teachers as suggested by the researcher to make collaborative activities and discussions a success. Teachers must set the objectives of the collaborative activities and share them with the students (Le et al., 2018) plan their lessons to ensure that students conduct discussion activities actively (Laal & Laal, 2011), use interactive teaching aids, (Tai et. al., 2014), give verbal responses while the students collaborate, (Willy et. al., 2021), and perform assessments during collaborative activities, (Jumiatmoko, 2020).

Contextual Learning

Research shows that contextual learning is a teaching method which provides opportunities for teachers to build connections between the knowledge content and the students' real-life situations in reality. Contextual learning is hoped to produce meaningful learning outcomes to students as they are able to implement what they learn in real life, (Hairun et al., 2020). The teacher's ability to activate and benefit from the students' existing knowledge, according to Caine & Caine, (1991) enables the students to activate the brain function and build comfort for them to share the information possessed with the teacher and other students. This sharing of knowledge provides opportunity for them to build very effective meaning fields for the knowledge to be remembered, understood, and stored in their memory.

Based on the literature review, it is stated that teachers who implement contextual learning have succeeded in developing multiple intelligences and enhancing personal skills in early childhood learning, (Khusnul et al., 2020), mastering problem-solving skills much better and enhancing creative thinking, (Andi et. al., 2020), enhancing communication skills in Mathematics, (Erif et. al., 2020), enhancing the students' thinking capabilities, and also increasing students' creativity and motivation apart from providing opportunities for students to feel an interesting teaching and learning experience, (Suhartini & Murni, 2018).

Contextual Learning and Collaborative Skills

There are researchers studying about contextual learning and its impact towards collaborative skills. Kartimi, Ari & Dindin, 2021, found that teachers in Indonesia who use contextual learning to teach themes in the textbook have succeeded in creating a more concrete teaching method and activating collaborative activities between teachers and

students in a more interactive classroom environment. This research finding is in accordance with the findings by Le, Janssen & Wubbels, (2018) who find that good collaborative activities encourage active involvement of students in constructing a much more flexible way of thinking and finding solutions to solve a problem. Students who learn by working together as a team will foster better values, understand the concept better, build self-confidence, gain life experience, and build very meaningful social interactions in helping them throughout their lives, (Rosita & Leonard, 2015).

Contextual learning according to Toheri, Winarso & Arif, (2020), has succeeded in enhancing collaborative skills and at the same time activate critical thinking skills compared to problem posing education and expository learning. The research based on the comparison between problem posing education, contextual learning, and expository learning finds that contextual learning provides opportunities for students to communicate, share ideas, and give opinions actively. However, teachers must provide clear instructions and guide the students on how to communicate and question effectively, explain how to give opinions and state what they think, do analysis, solve problems, assess ideas, debate and give justifications, and describe (Gillies, 2016).

Methodology

This quasi-experiments research used the quantitative method which involves 80 Form 4 students aged between 16 to 17 years old and two Malay Language teachers with 10 to 15 years of teaching experience from two secondary schools in Manjung, Perak. The sample choice was done at random as it is chosen from the class taught by the selected teachers. The research sample consisted of various achievement levels and races of boys and girls from the selected class. The Malay Language teacher selected has an education degree with Malay Language option with good teaching experience in Malay Language which ensured the mastery of content knowledge and makes it easier for giving guidance on language teaching methods by using contextual learning.

The students' current level of collaborative skills are measured by pre-test using the Students' Collaborative Skills Questionnaire. Through this instrument, the students' collaborative skills are measured based on six main constructs as stated in *DSKP BM* which are leadership skills, acting in a flexible manner, teamwork skills, group activity conducting skills, balanced involvement, and negotiation skills. Both instruments are constructed by the researcher by applying and modifying based on the KIT PAK21 module released by the *KPM* in 2017 and also the *Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP) BM*, 2018. The instruments are then examined and verified by four experts in the Malay Language in the 21st century learning context. The instrument consisted of a Likert 5 scale survey with the statements of "strongly disagree", "disagree", "not sure", "agree" and "strongly agree".

Four weeks were allocated for the teachers to teach based on lesson plans produced for 60 minutes in each session. For each teaching and learning session, the teacher is required to prepare tasks that activate collaboration, communication, and discussing critically and creatively to present the discussion findings, produce products, and build connections between the topic discussed and the new knowledge learnt with its application in real life. The topic selected was poetry recitation and creating activity to be used in events and also a short essay writing activity to promote a local product. Collaboration skills among the student will measures before and after teaching session. The research data is then analysed in descriptive and inferension using Independent-Samples t-test.

Research Findings

Prior to the teaching and learning sessions using contextual learning, the experimental group and the control group obtained similar mean scores on the pre-test using the Student Collaborative Skills questionnaire instrument. Based on table 1a, the mean score for the experimental group was 2.675 compared to the control group which recorded a mean score of 2.650. Whereas (refer to table 1a) based on independent sample t test, showed that the mean score difference for both groups was not significant ($t = .160$, $df = 78$, $p = .873$ and $p > 0.05$). This indicates that the collaborative skills of the students for both groups are equivalent.

Table 1a Pre-test Score: Students' Collaborative Skills Questionnaire for experiment and control group

Group	Number	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experiments	40	2.675	.729	.115
Controls	40	2.650	.622	.104

Table 1b Analyse Independent-Samples t-test Pre-test score Students Collaborative Skills Questionnaire for experiment and control group

Lavene Test				t-test				
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error difference	95% Confidence interval of difference	
							lower	upper
.638	.427	.160	78	.873	.025	.155	-.285	.335

After four weeks of teaching and learning sessions to all students involved for two topics which are creating and reciting poetry to be used in events and also writing short essays to promote local products with contextual learning. The experimental group received lesson based on contextual learning, while the control group received lesson of the same topic through a conventional approach. It was found that the mean score of the experimental group was 4.00 on the Likert scale compared to 2.65 for the control group. The results of the study were significant ($t = 8.52$, $df = 78$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.05$). There were differences between the two groups of students in terms of the collaborative skills mastered. The mean difference value indicates that the experimental compilation successfully mastered collaborative skills to a higher degree than the control group (refer table 2b). The differences in collaborative skills between the two groups were significant.

Table 2a Post-test Score: Students' Collaborative Skills Questionnaire for experiment and control group

Group	Number	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experiments	40	4.00	.751	.118
Controls	40	2.65	.622	.104

Table 2b Analyse Independent-Samples t-test Post-test score Students Collaborative Skills Questionnaire for experiment and control group

Lavene Test				t-test				
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error difference	95% Confidence interveel of difference	
							lower	upper
2.808	.098	8.52	78	.000	1.35	.158	1.034	1.665

This result shows that by using the contextual learning method in teaching and learning the Malay Language, is significant to enhance their collaborative skills compared to conventional teaching method.

Discussion

Based on the results of the students' 21st century skills Questionnaire after undergoing the Malay Language teaching and learning process by using contextual learning, it has been found that the value recorded is ($t = 8.52, df = 78, p = .000, p < 0.05$) which can be summarized that hypothesis null is rejected. Its means that contextual learning has succeeded in enhancing the students' collaborative skills through the Form 4 teaching and learning of The Malay Language which implements contextual learning as opposed to conventional learning. The mean score of collaborative skills of experimental group students increased from 2.675 in pre-test to 4.000 in post-test while control group students did not show any improvement of their collaborative skills in pre-test and post-test by recording the same mean score of 2.650. This suggests that contextual learning successful collaborative skills of students in Malay subject.

This is because this learning process has succeeded in activating student involvement in giving ideas and opinions, and its effects to activate group discussions. The learning method which connects the content learnt to an individual's daily experience encourages active involvement of students, (Caine & Caine, 1991). This finding supports the research findings obtained by the researcher and past researches in stating that contextual learning produces positive effects in the increase of the students' collaborative skills in STEM, (Kartimi, Ari & Dindin, 2021), enhances communication skills, sharing ideas and producing opinions more actively, (Toheri et al., 2020), developing multiple intelligences and enhancing personal skills (Khusnul et al., 2020), mastering problem-solving skills better and enhancing the students' creative thinking, (Andi et. al., 2020).

Contextual learning takes place when a teacher encourages the students to connect new meaningful knowledge with existing experiences and blends both of them to understand the relevance of learning in their lives. The result of that is to enhance and build self-confidence to share what is known and experienced with the teacher and friends, (Erif et al., 2020). Sharing information such as this indirectly creates opportunities for the students' active involvement during collaborative activities and group discussions (Evi & Osman, 2017). Whereas in classes that do conventional learning, collaborative activities and group discussion activities and contextual learning are not a priority. Teachers' teaching strategies place more emphasis on mastery of concepts without building relevance to the real-life contexts students commonly encounter. While the process of building knowledge that is more meaningful is to encourage students to relate the content of the lesson with the existing knowledge that students have gone through.

For example, to enhance active involvement and making language activities a success such as poetry; the teacher does not only show how to recite poetry but also give samples of poetry that the students are familiar with since they were little. Teaching aids such as links to suitable videos must be used to provide multiple situations which activate the students' memory and trigger their interests to be ready to learn and explore. Hands-on activities such as requiring the students to recite familiar poetry in the Malay culture, presentations, and displaying finished products in gallery walks enhances cooperation and creates a collaborative environment among students.

Calm and friendly learning environments related to the students' life contexts stimulate the students to be involved actively. Active learning strategies but somehow relaxed and interesting along with good relationships formed between the teacher and the students and also the students themselves are able to stimulate students to process information actively, (Fadil & Saleh, 2016). Therefore, the teacher's objective to enhance the students' collaborative skills will be achieved through contextual learning.

Summary

With this in mind, Malay Language teachers need to be exposed to contextual learning strategies. This is because this type of learning is able to find solutions to student involvement issues namely in giving opinions, sharing information and building confidence to be involved in discussions, working together in balance with each other, and also providing opportunities for students to carry the responsibilities as leaders. This learning approach is very simple to be implemented but it requires comprehension, commitment, and the correct choice of strategies to enhance the students' collaborative skills and language skills in the era of 21st century learning.

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