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Educational Challenges in the 21st Century: A Literature Review

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Abstract

As we are already in the 21st Century, there is a shift in the education system, especially in teaching English as a Second Language in Malaysia. This shift resulted in the challenges faced by both parties, teachers and students. This literature review paper highlights two main points: (1) information regarding Malaysia Education Blueprint to equip the teachers and students for 21st-century learning and (2) the challenges faced by both parties. There are some challenges faced by Malaysian teachers, namely, inadequate knowledge of 21st-century learning and teaching approaches, teachers' dependency on traditional approaches, textbook reliance, time-consuming in preparing the teaching materials and time-consuming in carrying out the activities. Moreover, currently, students experience challenges such as low English proficiency level, limited vocabulary repertoire, insufficient resources and high power distance. Thus, it is hoped that the teachers could plan some measures to prepare themselves in addressing those challenges. A comprehensive understanding of 21st-century learning skills will enable teachers to be more prepared in providing the students with the necessary input and selecting more effective teaching approaches. The authorities should provide sufficient infrastructure and experts to facilitate the teachers and students to address the challenges.

Keywords: Malaysia Education Blueprint, Challenges, 21st-century Teaching and Learning, Teachers, Students

Introduction

Globalisation and 21st century teaching and learning are the key factors which have transformed the education system to meet the global requirements to produce highly skilful and knowledgeable students. In accordance to that, many ESL teachers adapted the curriculum to nurture 21st century teaching and learning approaches in English classrooms. This opened many paths towards improving the teaching process where teachers need to change the conventional teaching styles into more engaging, interesting and productive ways to capture the students' interest in the ESL classrooms. Apparently, this 21st century teaching and learning approach has a great impact on the process of teaching English as a Second

Language (Noraieny & Normaliza, 2017). Therefore, many countries have developed education policy to prepare the teachers on this including Malaysia. This current approach resulted in many challenges faced by the English teachers. Thus, this literature review paper aims to highlight two main points: (1) information regarding Malaysia Education Blueprint to equip the teachers and students for 21st Century learning and (2) the challenges faced by them. There are some challenges faced by Malaysian teachers, namely, inadequate knowledge of 21st century learning and teaching approaches, teacher's dependency on traditional approaches, textbook reliance, time-consuming in preparing the teaching materials and time consuming in carrying out the activities. Moreover, currently, students experience challenges such as low English proficiency level, limited vocabulary repertoire, insufficient resources and high power distance. Thus, it is hoped that the teachers could plan some measures to prepare themselves in addressing those challenges.

In order to achieve this competency, teachers need to play their role significantly. Teachers' creativity in creating and implementing effective learning skills such as brainstorming, role-play, games and student-centered activities will develop the students' interest in learning English continuously (Julaihi & Hamdan 2019). However, a comprehensive understanding of 21st-century learning skills and teacher readiness to provide students with the necessary input and teaching skills is becoming a challenge that has taken 21st-century learning aback from developing these skills (Rifin et al., 2019).

Malaysia Education Blueprint

With regard to globalization in the 21st century, Malaysia Education Blueprint's priorities have paved a way for teachers and learners to become proficient to reach global requirements. The ministry of education is aimed to increase student and teacher performance by means of an efficient education system. Thus, the Malaysia Education Blueprint serves as a strategy to increase quality, equity and access to education.

As for the blueprint, the major emphasis is to raise the role of innovation and options to continuously raise English language proficiency. The blueprint states that the curriculum needs to include a new set of skills and competencies geared towards the 21st century and beyond. Thus, ESL teachers adapted the curriculum to nurture 21st century teaching and learning approaches in English classrooms. This opened many pathways towards improving the teaching process where teachers need to change the conventional teaching styles into more engaging, interesting and productive ways to capture the students' interest in the ESL classrooms. According to Melor (2018), Malaysian school educators have been using projectors, laptops and wireless internet in classrooms to activate learners. Apparently, this approach has a great impact on the process of teaching English as a Second Language (Noreiny & Normaliza, 2017).

Challenges Implementing 21st-century teaching and learning approaches in ESL Classroom Challenges Faced by Teachers

The implementation of 21st-century learning and teaching approaches in ESL classrooms has its ultimatum. Teachers and students have been the backbone of implementing these approaches successfully in lessons. However, there are some notable challenges in implementing them in ESL classrooms.

Inadequate knowledge of 21st-century learning and teaching approaches

To begin with, inadequate knowledge of 21st-century learning and teaching approaches among teachers hinders the process of implementation. Nisa et al (2017) stated that teachers'

lack of knowledge regarding Higher Order Thinking Skills is a setback in incorporating Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) during lessons. In a similar study, Lim (2019) clearly stated that teachers are expected to comprehend HOTS and its components, yet the majority of them are imparting knowledge based on their own understanding and interpretation, which prevents pupils from thinking out of the box. Shamilati et al (2017) also argued that the largest issue for teachers was teaching knowledge they do not fully understand and transfer the knowledge to students that they themselves do not master. They also mentioned that teachers who could not understand HOTS lacked the necessary competencies, which would influence their ability to innovate new ideas for teaching HOTS. Hence, it is crucial for teachers to learn and be properly trained on the necessary information and skills in order to carry out lessons incorporating HOTS effectively.

Teacher's dependency on traditional approaches

Another challenge is teachers' dependency on traditional approaches. Salamah (2019) argued that traditional approaches do not demand HOTS from participants as they are more teacher-centred and students are controlled through guided activities. Therefore, learners' creativity and inquiry-based learning is rather minimized. Al Zahrani and Elyas (2017) also argued that the traditional approach does not allow efficient learning, especially in language classrooms. However, old teachers regard HOTS based aims as intangible and they are quite selective in setting goals that require hard work from themselves. They are unwilling to transfer their comfort zone which is time and energy-saving into an active one that is a bit creativity demanding (Shamilati et al., 2017).

Over reliance on textbook

Textbook overreliance is also a setback for implementing 21st century teaching. Devkota et al (2017) claimed that textbooks are still used as the main tool which contributes to teacher-centred learning, so it basically stops teachers to conduct classes with modern approaches such as PBL. As teachers rely on textbooks as their main teaching reference, the usage of various teaching materials in the ESL classroom context is impeded. Devkota et al (2017) argue that the main reason for including projects in teaching is that teachers are concerned about curriculum and syllabus completion by taking creative activities for granted to save time. For instance, most ESL teachers prefer allocating time to syllabus completion where that prepares learners for exams by neglecting the aspect of HOTS in teaching and learning (Lim, 2019). Therefore, being centred on textbooks is a challenge for teachers to implement 21st-century approaches in their classes.

Time-consuming in preparing the teaching materials

Next, studies also discuss that preparing materials for 21st century teaching and learning approaches is time-consuming. Some teachers reported that material design and flipped classrooms require time and they get additional workload (Gokce & Murat, 2018). For example, for pre-recording video lectures teachers do research, synthesize the information, prepare illustrations and record a video that is a prolonged process. This is also supported by the study done by Ansori and Nahar (2019) where some teachers have pinpointed having difficulties in preparing the materials beforehand to be used in the flipped classroom and they hesitate to use modern techniques.

Time Consuming in Carrying Out the Activities

Likewise, students also find problem-solving activities to be time-consuming especially when required to complete an assignment in Problem-Based Learning (PBL) since students often need to make multiple attempts before eventually completing their project (Ahmad & Ahmed, 2018). As discussed, preparing materials for 21st-century teaching and learning takes time and teachers find it difficult to consistently practice in their teaching preparation and in carrying out the activities in their classrooms.

Another challenge in carrying out 21st-century teaching and learning approaches is the time limitation in our curriculum. Unscheduled events on the education calendar, which are time-consuming, impacted learning activities (Wiraningsih & Santosa, 2020). Other activities and events consume much of the teacher's time. The heavy workload of teachers contributes to the reduced implementation of HOTS. This is because teachers require sufficient time and resources to develop activities towards promoting thinking skills (Lim, 2019). Therefore, inadequate allocation of time periods in the curriculum for teaching and learning activities challenges teachers to practice 21st-century learning and teaching in ESL classrooms.

Challenges Faced by Students

Limited Vocabulary Repertoire

Besides teachers' difficulties, there are some challenges that students face. The first challenge is the limited vocabulary repertoire. According to Lim (2017) students are not able to think critically due to a lack of vocabulary as their language proficiency in English is low. Nisa et al (2017) claimed students who have insufficient proficiency in word bank find it challenging to learn a language. Consequently, this results in students' demotivation which hinders the implementation of flipped classrooms even if the teachers are prepared well (Ansori & Nahar, 2019). In fact, teachers faced the greatest obstacle in teaching pupils, learning about thinking, and learning for thinking, especially among impoverished students, not only in terms of cognitive but also psychomotor and emotional abilities (Shamilati et al., 2017). Thus, students' abilities and language proficiency levels influence their ability to grasp 21st-century teaching and learning approaches.

Insufficient Resources

Moreover, insufficient resources are also another challenge in implementing 21st century teaching and learning approaches. Based on the findings, Devkota et al (2017) concluded that the lack of resources like library and internet especially in schools in rural areas hampers the implementation of PBL. A considerable number of studies, technical and technological aspects reported that video lectures which are limited in their technical and pedagogical features, for example, poor audio quality, can negatively affect students' learning experiences in the flipped classroom (Gokce & Murat, 2018). Thus, it is important that teachers take into account the available resources while designing the lesson.

High-power Distance between Teacher and Students

Wiraningsih and Santosa (2020) proved that cultural influence like high-power distance is a challenge in implementing 21st-century teaching and learning approaches. Since the teacher acts as the dominant figure in the classroom, students become passive learners as they do not ask for the teacher's assistance. Students tend to be more courageous in expressing themselves in small groups. This is supported by the findings of the interviews by (Wiraningsih and Santosa, 2020). They found that some students are very quiet as they are scared of

making mistakes and not willing to seek help from teachers and turn to be passive and shy. Moreover, Devkota et al (2017) also found students who are used to traditional classroom teachings find it difficult to adapt to Problem-Based Learning and Project Based Learning. Therefore, as 21st-century learning fosters student-centered classrooms, the role of the teacher as a dominating figure hinders students from actively participating in the learning process.

Conclusion

This paper provides a literature review on the challenges in implementing 21st-century learning and teaching approaches in ESL classrooms. This is one of the main issues in the readiness and willingness in implementing 21st-century learning and teaching approaches in ESL classrooms, which has been in the limelight since Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 was introduced. There are some challenges faced by Malaysian teachers, namely, inadequate knowledge of 21st-century learning and teaching approaches, teachers' dependency on traditional approaches, textbook reliance, time-consuming in preparing the teaching materials and time-consuming in carrying out the activities. Moreover, currently, students experience challenges such as low English proficiency level, limited vocabulary repertoire, insufficient resources and high power distance.

The aim of this study is to provide a literature review on the challenges faced by teachers and students in implementing 21st-century teaching and learning approaches, especially in ESL classrooms. This could facilitate the Ministry of Education officers, teachers and students to work hand-in-hand to provide a better learning experience for the students in 21st-century learning classrooms. If the 21st-century teaching and learning approaches are not integrated well into ESL classrooms, students might not meet the mission and vision of Malaysia curriculum. Thus, these challenges should be addressed properly. Short courses on 21st-century learning are important to create teachers' awareness of preparing the materials and activities in their own classroom contexts. In addition, authorities should provide sufficient infrastructure and experts to facilitate the teachers and students.

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