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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE LANGUAGE CURRICULA FOR LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CHINA AND MALAYSIA



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UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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LIM ZHI YI

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UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to study Chinese language curricula for secondary education from Malaysia and China. The curricula included were DSKP Chinese for Form 1, Form 2 and Form 3 students in Malaysia, and Standard Chinese Language Curriculum of Compulsory Education (SCLCCE) that devoted for students range from Year 7 to Year 9 in China. The main objective of this research to identify and analyze the similarities and differences between the curricula in order to provide more insights for both parties to learn from each other. The study was conducted by using the inferential content analysis by analyzing both of the curricula with 11 components as suggested by UNESCO International Bureau of Education. The components suggested are (i) Introduction, (ii) Curriculum Vision, (iii) Aims and Objectives, (iv) Values and Principles, (v) Philosophy of Teaching and Learning, (vi) Curriculum Architecture, (vii) The Importance of Competency, (viii) Areas of Learning, (ix) Teaching Methodology and Strategies, (x) Assessment. The contents from both of the curricula had been translated into English, and then reorganize in all 11 components as mentioned above. Based on the comparison, the researcher had analyzed the qualities of both curricula based on the descriptors that provided by Stabback based on the Tyler's Model. The results showed that DSKP appeared to possess the good qualities of curriculum in terms of "Values each child and holds that every child matters equally", "Comprises high quality, relevant and appropriate 'content' and contributes to the development of competence" and "Well organized and structured". Besides, both curricula also possess a good quality of "Underpinned by a set of assumptions about how children learn". The future research is suggested to expand the education level up until the upper secondary level, in order to study both the curricula from a boarder and profound perspective.

KAJIAN PERBANDINGAN KURIKULUM BAHASA CINA BAGI PENDIDIKAN MENENGAH RENDAH DI CHINA DAN MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji kurikulum bahasa Cina untuk pendidikan menengah dari Malaysia dan China. Kurikulum yang dibandingkan ialah DSKP Bahasa Cina untuk pelajar Tingkatan 1, Tingkatan 2 dan Tingkatan 3 di Malaysia, dan Standard Chinese Language Curriculum of Compulsory Education (SCLCCE) (SCLCCE) yang dikhaskan untuk pelajar dari Tahun 7 hingga Tahun 9 di China. Objektif utama penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti dan menganalisis persamaan dan perbezaan antara kurikulum bagi memberi lebih banyak pandangan kepada kedua-dua pihak untuk belajar antara satu sama lain. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan menggunakan analisis kandungan inferensi dengan menganalisis kedua-dua kurikulum dengan 11 komponen seperti yang disarankan oleh Biro Pendidikan Antarabangsa UNESCO. Komponen yang dicadangkan ialah (i) Pengenalan, (ii) Visi Kurikulum, (iii) Matlamat dan Objektif, (iv) Nilai dan Prinsip, (v) Falsafah Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran, (vi) Seni Bina Kurikulum, (vii) Kepentingan Kompetensi, (viii) Bidang Pembelajaran, (ix) Strategi Pengajaran dan (x) Pengajaran. Kandungan daripada kedua-dua kurikulum telah diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Inggeris, dan kemudian disusun semula dalam kesemua 11 komponen seperti yang dinyatakan di atas. Berdasarkan perbandingan tersebut, pengkaji telah menganalisis kualiti kedua-dua kurikulum berdasarkan deskriptor yang disediakan oleh Stabback berdasarkan Tyler's Model. Kajian ini telah menunjukkan bahawa DSKP memiliki kualiti kurikulum yang baik dari segi "Menilai setiap kanak-kanak dan berpegang bahawa setiap kanak-kanak penting sesama", "Mempunyai kandungan berkualiti tinggi, relevan dan sesuai serta menyumbang kepada pembangunan kecekapan" dan "Kandungan kurikulum tersusun dan baik". Selain itu, kedua-dua kurikulum juga mempunyai kualiti yang baik seperti "Didasari oleh satu set andaian tentang cara kanak-kanak belajar". Kajian masa depan dicadangkan untuk memperluaskan peringkat pendidikan sehingga ke peringkat menengah atas, bagi mengkaji kedua-dua kurikulum dari perspektif yang lebih luas dan mendalam.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DSKP	Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (Standard Document for Curriculum and Assessment)
HOTS	Higher Order Thinking Skills
KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools)
KSSM	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (Standard Curriculum for Secondary Schools)
KSSR	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools)
LOTS	Lower Order Thinking Skills
NTCSS	National-Type Chinese Secondary Schools
PTD	Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah
SCLCCE	Standard Chinese Language Curriculum of Compulsory Education
SEDC	State Education Commission of China
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysia Certificate of Education)
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (Malaysian Higher School Certificate)
SVM	Sijil Vokasional Malaysia (Malaysia Certificate of Vocational Education)
UPSR	Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (Malaysia Primary School Evaluation Test)



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is an ethnically and culturally rich country with Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, of which Chinese is the second largest ethnic group in Malaysia. Malaysia is one of the few countries worldwide with a complete Chinese language education system. In order to develop Chinese language education and improve the Chinese language curriculum, the Malaysian Ministry of Education is constantly reforming the Chinese language curriculum, which provides a rich resource for the author to compare the Chinese and Malaysian curriculum standards. However, the current comparative studies on China's curriculum and other curriculum standards are mostly confined to comparisons between China and developed countries, while there is a lack of studies on the curriculum between China and Asian countries such as Malaysia.

Based on Vision 2020 proposed by Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, the Malaysia government intended to cultivate the leaders of the nation in order to ensure a better future for the country (Ibrahim, 2008). Hence, the curriculum written for the national education system was intended to produce future leaders that can compete at the international level. Therefore, the curriculum written for the Chinese education system had a similar intention for cultivating young elites in the nation. Malaysia had composed its own curriculum for Chinese subjects that was different from the curriculum used in China, the “Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP)”, which was specially established for the Chinese subject under the national education system. In China, the education for the Chinese Language was conducted based on the curriculum named “Standard Chinese Language Curriculum of Compulsory Education (SCLCCE) (义务教育语文课程标准)”.

Based on the report of “Malaysia Educational Blueprint 2013-2025”, the Malaysian government intended to bring improve the previous curriculum by introducing the new curriculum named Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). DSKP was the document that stipulated all the standard syllabus and regulations in order to attain the objective of KSSM. As the KSSM was newly implemented starting from the year 2017, the efficiency of the curriculum was considered as unclear as the data and academic performances of students were scarce and insufficient to make a conclusion. Therefore, this research attempts to start with a comparative study of curriculum standards between China and Malaysia to explore their similarities and differences. Hence, DSKP for the Chinese language should be studied and analyzed to understand the similarities and differences between the curriculum itself and the curriculum from China. Moreover,

suggestions would be given based on the analysis to give insight for both curriculum designers to revise in the future.

This chapter provided an overview of the setting of the research. It depicted the background information about the Chinese Language curricula used in China and Malaysia. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the problem statements that underlined the rationale behind this research. This was then further discussed with the research questions and objectives formulated for this paper. This chapter also described the scope and major concepts of the research topic.

1.1 Background Information

In order to explore the education system of a country, the main element that always needs to study about is the souls within the education system, which is the curriculum. The national curriculum standards are the basis for the preparation of teaching materials, teaching, assessment and examination questions and are the basis for the state's management and evaluation of the curriculum. The language curriculum standards are a branch of the curriculum standards and are guiding documents in the form of an outline by the national education administration to regulate the language curriculum in accordance with the national education policy and education regulations. The language syllabus is a subset of the curriculum and is a guiding document for language teaching formulated by the national education administration. Summarising the above representative concepts, it is easy to see that language curriculum standards



and language syllabuses are overarching documents for national curriculum arrangements, teaching management, and evaluation.

Based on the “Malaysia Educational Blueprint 2013-2025”, the students under the national education system were expected to acquire the aspirations like “resilient, inquisitive, principled, informed, caring and patriotic” (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Hence, the new national curricula were introduced to equip the students with the aspirations mentioned before, namely *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* (KSSR) and *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* (KSSM) (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). KSSR and KSSM were implemented starting from 2011 and 2017, respectively.



introduced to replace the previous *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah* (KBSM). The newly implemented curriculum emphasized the teaching approach based on higher-order thinking skills. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 stated that learning opportunities in additional languages would be provided besides Malay and English (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Therefore, the Chinese language was set as an elective language subject with two hours of lessons to be conducted in a week, as stated in KSSM (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016a). Meanwhile, DSKP on Chinese Language for secondary school students had been published to integrate the syllabus and scopes designed for secondary school students. Seven types of strategies needed to be taught throughout the lessons, including listening and speaking skills, reading skills, classical Chinese literature, writing skills, fun languages, grammar skills, augmented learning and remedial teaching (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018).



DSKP emphasized that Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) be applied in teaching the Chinese language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016a). HOTS is an ability that helps students apply their knowledge, skills and values in problem-solving, decision-making and innovation (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016b). The application of HOTS in teaching was intended to cultivate future generations that can analyze and solve problems creatively and innovatively whenever they encounter any challenges. This was a very important quality that needed to be acquired by the students as it allowed them to be competitive in the new 21st century, which was also the objective of national education, in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Chinese education in Malaysia was affected by the education issues in China in the back days earlier. In 1956, China implemented the used of simplified modern Chinese characters (Du, as cited in Yap, 2013). Years after in Malaysia, the Committee of Simplified Chinese in Malaysia published a complete list of simplified Chinese in the year of 1972, which was precisely the same as the list published by China (Gong, 2017). This event implied that Malaysian Chinese language education tended to refer to and follow certain features of Chinese language education in China.

The education of the Chinese language is considered first-language education in national-type primary Chinese schools, but it is considered second-language education in national-type secondary schools as other languages are used as the medium



of teaching (Cui, 2015). However, the DSKP for Form 1 Chinese language stated that secondary education is the extension of primary Chinese education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016b). Therefore, Chinese education in national secondary schools should also be considered first language education at the secondary level. Under this premise, both curricula can be considered first-language Chinese education to be taught in their respective country. Hence, both curricula could be compared to find out the other's strengths and weaknesses for mutual reference.

The research done on SCLCCE were mostly compared between Macao, Taiwan and Hong Kong, or different version of the curriculum itself. For instance, Wang (2008) and Xie (2017) studied the Chinese language curricula in China Mainland, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. Zhang (2007) compared the curriculum in Hong Kong and China curriculum in Chinese education. Ma (2013) studied the comparison between the 2001 and 2011 versions of SCLCCE. Several studies have been carried out to compare the SCLCCE with the national language curriculum in other countries. For example, Liu (2019) and Zhuang (2020) compared the SCLCCE with the American national language curriculum, Dong (2015) compared the SCLCCE with Finland's national language curriculum, and Uuganbayar (2018) compared the SCLCCE with Mongolia's national language curriculum. However, the comparative research between SCLCCE and DSKP had not been found, which inspired the researcher to carry out this study.

On the other hand, as DSKP for Chinese language education has been just implemented for six years, the research about this curriculum is limited. For example, Seow (2020) studied grammar instructions in DSKP. Chong and Yeoh (2022) focused on the text selection in textbooks under DSKP and KSSM. Yeap (2011) studied and





compared the primary and secondary Chinese curricula in Malaysia, which included DSKP under KSSR and KSSM. Most of the research had not focused on the comparison between the SCLCCE and DSKP. Therefore, this created a research gap to be filled in and to find valuable knowledge by comparing both curricula.

In the field of Chinese language education in Malaysia, most of the research focuses on the political and social aspects of Chinese language education in Malaysia (Hou, 2011). There is far less research had been on Chinese language education in Malaysia from the perspective of educational practices, especially the DSKP for lower secondary education in Chinese subjects. It is well known that the external problems faced by Chinese language education can only be solved if education is done well from within. However, as can be seen from the above review, academic research in this area of Chinese language education in Malaysia, apart from limited research on teaching materials and teachers, is largely lacking, especially in the area of assessment. This can be seen in the considerable contrast in the extensive research on the SCLCCE in China. Apparently, SCLCCE, as the most critical curriculum standard in the China education system, had been implemented under different conditions as compared to the implementation of DSKP in the Chinese language in Malaysia. There are inherent constraints, such as the fact that SCLCCE involves both primary and secondary school students from all over China, while the DSKP only involves students from Malaysian government primary and secondary schools. There is also no comparison in terms of resources, especially the comparison for DSKP in Chinese for lower secondary education in Malaysia. In contrast, the Malaysian DSKP in the Chinese language lacks systematic and scientific comparative studies by scholars, so its progress is mainly driven by the Malaysia authorities and lacks versatility. Therefore, scholars who are





passionate about Chinese language education should take the initiative to study the DSKP from an academic perspective and do their part to improve the Chinese language education system in Malaysia. In contrast, while there are quite some cross-sectional comparisons of language papers in China's SCLCCE, there are almost no comparisons with the DSKP for lower secondary in Malaysia. In addition to demonstrating the lack of recognition of the DSKP in China, this is also a blind spot in the study of the DSKP from an academic point of view. This further supports the need to conduct such research to fill the research gap in the academic field.

By comparing the similarities and differences between the curricula from China and Malaysia, this research is expected to learn from the best parts of both sides to contribute to the reform and innovation of Chinese language curricula in both countries.

The purpose of comparative research is not to distinguish which is better or worse but to sort out and analyse the commonalities and differences in the process of comparative research between the curricula so that we can better compare and reflect on them and generate newer views and conclusions. We can only learn from each other by comparing the similarities and differences between both parties.

The SCLCCE of China will be revised after ten years of the implementation of the current edition that they are using right now. Therefore, in order to bring some useful insights for the next revision of the curriculum, it still needs to be revised and improved through theoretical research and practical tests. This is the same with DSKP in Malaysia; it was also newly implemented in 2017, and the rooms for improvement for this curriculum are yet to be known. Although the two countries are not the same, many of the doctrines in Chinese language education are the same and can be adapted





from each other. Hence, it seems to be a need for this research to find out the similarities and differences between the Chinese curricula from China and Malaysia, and hence to learn from each order to gain insights for future revision.

1.3 Research Objectives

As this was a comparative study of the Chinese language curricula for Malaysia and China, some objectives were established to deepen the knowledge on the topic. The research objectives were stated as follows:

1. To analyze and compare the Chinese language curricula for lower secondary education in China and Malaysia across the components as suggested by the International Bureau of Education;
2. To evaluate the qualities possessed by the curricula of Chinese language curricula for lower secondary education in China and Malaysia by using the criteria and descriptors under Category 2 as suggested by Stabback;
3. To identify the good features that be learnt from both the Chinese language curricula for lower secondary education in China and Malaysia.



1.4 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives as mentioned in section 1.3, there were some research questions had been formulated to guide the process of inquiry throughout the study, which stated as follows:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the Chinese language curricula for lower secondary education in China and Malaysia across the components suggested by the International Bureau of Education?
2. What are the qualities possessed by the curricula of Chinese language curricula for lower secondary education in China and Malaysia by using the criteria and descriptors under Category 2 as suggested by Stabback?
3. What are the good features that can be identified from both of the Chinese language curricula for lower secondary education in China and Malaysia?

1.5 Conceptual Framework

This study employed the method of comparative analysis to compare and evaluate the Chinese language curricula for secondary education in both countries. The conceptual framework employed by this study (as shown in Figure 1.1) was adapted from the model of comparative inquiry introduced by the prominent researcher in the field of comparative analysis, George Bereday (Philips, 2006).

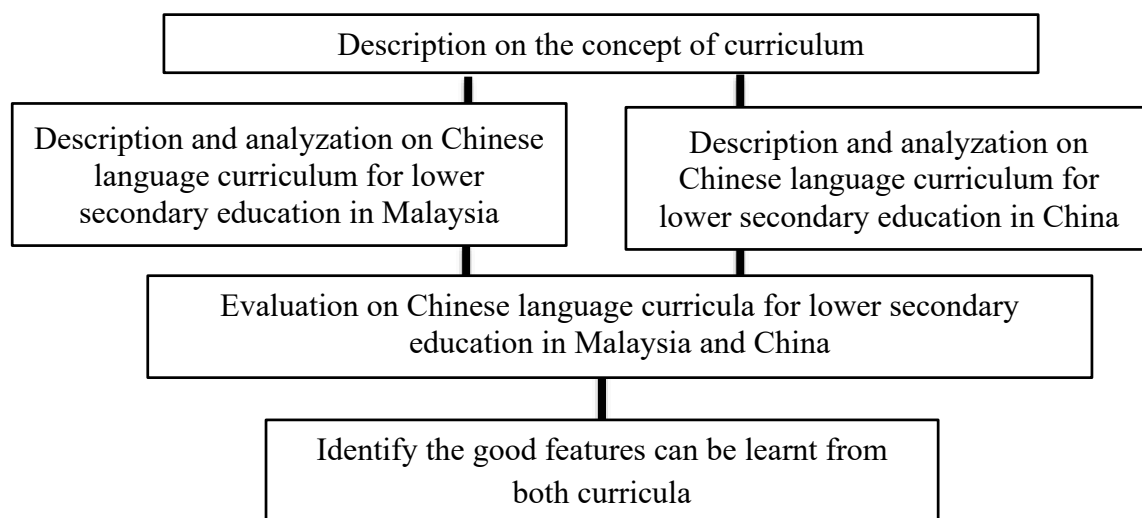


Figure 1.1. Stages of comparative inquiry adapted from Bereday's Model.

The study analysed the similarities and differences between two curricula from different countries regarding educational philosophies, structures and syllabi. The results from the analysis can be beneficial as they detect similarities and differences between both curricula. This could provide insights for future suggestions for the authorities from both countries to do the revision of curriculum in the future. Besides, the related comparative studies on both curricula were scarce to found in the field; therefore, this study was essential to provide a makeup for the research gap among the previous research.

1.6.1 Curriculum Development Division

With the results obtained from the study, the Curriculum Development Division would be able to gain insight to make future revisions to the current curriculum. The authority could refer to the differences between both curricula and bring positive changes to the curriculum. Hence, the local curriculum could be enhanced and more suitable to be implemented towards the students.

1.6.2 Malaysian Examination Councils

The Malaysian Examination Councils would be able to revise and design a set of examination syllabi that are in line with National Educational Philosophy. Besides, the authority could also improve the preparation of exam questions and materials based on the results and inferences provided by this paper.

1.6.3 Teachers

With the knowledge of the similarities and differences in the educational philosophies of both curricula, the local teachers could understand the suitability of adapting the China syllabus to local educational lesson plans. The teachers would be able to prepare their teaching materials according to the suitable curriculum.

1.6.4 Parents and students

The results of this study would be able to understand the similarities and differences among the curricula from both countries. With a deeper understanding, both parents and students could learn about the curriculum suitable for the children or preferred by the students. This could be a future reference for them to decide on their future academic patterns.

1.7 Limitation of Study

This research was conducted to study only Chinese language curricula for lower secondary education from Malaysia and China. The curricula included were DSKP Chinese for Form 1, Form 2 and Form 3 students in Malaysia. Meanwhile, SCLCCE is devoted to students from Year 7 to Year 9 in China. All the curricula mentioned were able to be downloaded from the official government websites of both countries.

1.8 Operational Definition

1.8.1 Comparative Study

A comparative study is conducted to provide an explanation and seek further knowledge about the creation of an occasion that involves two or more countries (Khakpour, 2012; Pickvance, as cited in Adiya and Ashton, 2017). Many approaches



could be applied in the comparative study. For this comparative study, the classic scientific approach was used to emphasize the comparison and analyzation between two curricula from China and Malaysia.

1.8.2 Chinese Language Curricula

Curricula, which is known as curriculum in singular noun. It is defined as the key reference and the only resource used by teachers (Westbrook et al., 2013). The curriculum used in this research was established and controlled by the authorities from both countries. The curricula contained the objectives, rules and regulations, syllabus, and other elements related to the teaching and learning process. In this research, the Chinese language refers to the official language that the Chinese use for most of the official occurrences. It was also known as “Mandarin”, “Hua Wen” (华文) or “Zhong Wen” (中文). However, in this study, the language would be collectively called the “Chinese Language”. Chinese Language Curricula, in this case, refer to the curriculum used by the schools to conduct the lessons on the subject of Chinese.

1.8.3 Lower Secondary Education

Lower secondary education in this study refers to the education system that was established for the students from Form 1 to Form 3 in Malaysia, mostly the age of 13 to 15. Lower secondary education in China was the compulsory education provided in junior middle school, with the students' ages were ranged from 12 to 15.



1.8.4 Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM)

The Standard Curriculum for Secondary Schools, or *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* (KSSM) in Malay, was the national curriculum for secondary school. KSSM aimed to produce students with good communication skills and leadership skills to prepare themselves for future challengers in the 21st century (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016a).

1.8.5 Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Dan Pentaksiran (DSKP)

DSKP was a document incorporating curriculum and assessment on the teaching approach based on the KSSM (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016b). The document stated the importance of Higher Order Thinking skills that are applied in the school syllabus. Furthermore, the document also contained the standard criteria to evaluate students' performances in different subjects and skills (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016b).

1.8.6 Standard Chinese Language Curriculum of Compulsory Education (SCLCCE)

SCLCCE was the curriculum that was used in China for the education of the Chinese Language in schools. The curriculum stipulated the objectives, teaching methods, and teaching materials that the teachers should use for the primary and lower secondary

school students. The curriculum used in this study was the latest version, modified and published in 2011.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided brief background information about the Malaysia education curriculum. It also explained the rationale behind the study, which was then considered as the problem statement of the study. Moreover, this chapter provided the research objectives, questions and conceptual framework that guided the research inquiry process. The chapter also explained and defined the jargon used throughout the study.