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A NEO-ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF TEACHING STYLES IN A LITERATURE CLASSROOM

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.



March 15, 2004

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ABSTRACT

Effective teaching styles are the most desirable styles of a teacher infuse in his or her teaching in capturing the interest of a student as well as to promote successful learning in an English language literature classroom. The neo-ethnographic study provides several interpretations of reality and alternative interpretations of data throughout the study because it is an in-depth investigation of a single case by a participant observer in the literature classrooms. The purpose of this study is to identify the teaching styles preferred and also identification of the factors that influence teaching styles. This method of observation is adapted from the Flanders's Interaction Analysis System (FIAS). The findings denote that the teacher's teaching styles have created a learner-centred learning environment in literature classrooms. The correlation between the teacher's teaching styles and the factors that influence teaching styles have been observed to be one of the influential learning climate for divulging the developmental levels of the students in terms of knowledge, interests, motivation, confidence as well as their learning styles in literature classrooms.





ABSTRAK

Kaedah pengajaran yang efektif adalah kaedah yang amat diperlukan oleh setiap tenaga guru untuk menarik minat seseorang pelajar disamping untuk mempromosikan kejayaan pembelajaran di dalam kelas sastera Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian neo-ethnografi memberikan beberapa interpretasi realiti dan alternatif interpretasi data sepanjang kajian dijalankan, ini adalah disebabkan oleh kajian secara terperinci yang dijalankan oleh seorang pemerhati di dalam sesuatu kajian didalam kelas sastera Bahasa Inggeris. Tujuan utama kajian neo-ethnografi ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti kaedah pengajaran yang bersesuaian dan juga untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pengajaran seseorang guru. Penilaian pencerapan untuk kajian ini adalah diadaptasikan dari Flanders's Interaction Analysis System (FIAS). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru yang dicerapkan amat prihatin terhadap kaedah persekitaran pembelajaran pelajar-pelajar di dalam kelas sastera Bahasa Inggeris. Korelasi antara kaedah pengajaran guru yang dicerapkan dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kaedah pengajaran di dalam kajian ini telah dikenalpastikan sebagai salah satu sebab utama yang mempengaruhi persekitaran yang efektif untuk membentuk perkembangan pelajar-pelajar didalam ertikata pengetahuan, minat, motivasi, keyakinan diri dan juga pembelajaran di dalam kelas sastera Bahasa Inggeris.





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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of literary texts in the language classroom in Malaysia calls for research in literature teaching styles so that the objectives of its implementation can be optimally achieved. This study is a preliminary enquiry of a teacher's teaching style in a Form One literature class in a school in Seremban. This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, objectives of the research, hypothesis, terminologies and limitations of the study.



1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In recent decades, a number of primary studies have been conducted to explore and assess teaching styles in literature classroom. Many researchers, as will be shown in this section, have pointed out the mismatches between the learning styles of students and the teaching style of the instructor. These mismatches inhibit learning from taking place, causing frustration and disappointment to both teachers and learners.

In a traditional classroom occasionally resembles a one-person show with a captive but largely uninvolved audience. The idea is that there is a fixed body of knowledge that the student must come to know. Students are expected to blindly accept the information they are given without questioning the instructor (Stofflett 1998). The teacher seeks to transfer thoughts and meanings to the passive student leaving little room for student-initiated questions, independent thought or interaction





between students. At times in a traditional classroom, activities done in a group do not encourage discussion or exploration of the concepts involved. As a result, this tends to overlook the critical thinking and unifying concepts essential to true literacy and appreciation, especially in a literature classroom (Yore 2001). This teacher-centred method of teaching also assumes that all students have the same level of background knowledge in the subject matter and are able to absorb the material at the same pace (Lord 1997). However, some general categories of teaching styles can help teachers to look at their own strengths and weaknesses. These will allow them to expand their variety of teaching styles they use. Moreover, students learn best when a variety of methods are used and respond best to more facilitative and less-assertive teaching. Therefore, it will promote self-understanding by the student.

In order to reduce teacher-learner style conflicts, some researchers in the area of learning styles advocate teaching and learning styles be matched (e.g. Griggs & Dunn 1984; Smith & Renzulli 1984; Charkins et al. 1985), especially in foreign language instruction (e.g. Oxford et al. 1991; Wallace & Oxford 1992). Dunn (1996) stresses that research on learning styles can be very effective tool for teachers to improve their own teaching styles that may adapt the learners' different learning styles and consequently improve their achievement. Kumaravadivelu (1991:98) adds that: "...the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater is the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes". There are many indications (e.g. Van Lier 1996; Breen 1998) that bridging the gap between teachers' and learners' perceptions plays an important role in enabling students to maximize their classroom experience. Some studies were carried out to investigate the characteristics of good teaching, their teaching styles, their roles, their motivations and attitudes in terms of teachers' style preferences in dealing with literature classroom. Good teachers do not only convey a body of knowledge to their learners, but they are also aware of how to convey that knowledge by connecting their own experience with their learners' experience of the world.

The dominant view of good teaching refers to teachers who effectively generate a varied repertoire of skills and techniques, which they use in skilful ways to meet the





changing demands of classroom needs. The belief about teaching: 'good teachers are born, not made' is not applicable in today's education milieu. This reveals that effectiveness is seen as a direct result of learning and teaching taking place in classrooms (Reynolds 1995).

Another factor that contributes to effective teaching and learning in the classroom is a teacher's personal identity such as culture, motivation, attitude, socio-economic background as well as learning styles. Both teachers and learners who share the same cultural backgrounds can foster a better learning atmosphere and establish their rapport easily with learners in the classroom. Normally, individuals within a culture tend to have a common pattern of learning and perception when members of their culture are compared to members of another culture. On the other hand, Humphreys (1993) emphasizes that education is not only about academic development but also deals with the emotional, social, behavioural and physical needs of each learner in the classroom.

The goal of teaching is learning. One way to facilitate learning is via teaching styles. Joyce and Weil (1992: 20) highlight in their book titled *Models of Teaching* that there exist several models of teaching such as informational teaching (e.g. 'advance-organizer' model), social teaching (e.g. 'group-investigation' model), personal teaching (e.g. 'non-directive' model) and behavioural teaching (e.g. 'contingency-management' model). These different models can be used if teachers are sensitive to their students' needs and characteristics.

Joyce and Weil (1992:20) also point out that teachers acquire a 'repertoire' of teaching models. The main reason is because there is no easy route to a single model that is superior for all purposes. Moreover, teaching styles are basically focused on the individual teacher as a person as well as a performer in the classroom (Brown 1994). Therefore, a teacher should use a variety of styles of teaching to cater for heterogeneity of student personalities. Planning, managing and instructing such a classroom, however, can be a mammoth task but optimal learning will take place in such a setting.





Teaching styles vary slightly from teaching mathematics to language or literature subjects. In mathematics, the teaching styles are based on theoretical material presentation, concepts or problem-solving algorithms, conceptual information and others. Teachers use the didactic model of teaching mathematics. They believe that the most efficient and effective way to teach mathematics was to impart knowledge of different mathematical procedures, using the blackboard, and then get students to practise these procedures individually. In mathematics, the students develop an inert type of knowledge so that they can respond to conventional pedagogic practices in mathematics that demonstrate specified routines that should be learned. These practices inculcate strategies which emphasise on procedural knowledge that they can use only in standard textbook situations.

The language class, however, cannot operate on the same paradigm. In a language classroom, the teaching styles are multifarious: academic approach, audio-lingual method, natural approach, eclectic approach, communicative approach, grammar translation method, and traditional EFL. Here teachers have to deal with students who have difficulties with language competence without worrying too much about theories or formulas. In literature, the teaching styles are equally wide ranging - the cultural model, language model, personal growth model, linguistic analysis of literary texts, stylistics, literary history approach, reader response approach, prediction, summary, forum, re-translation and others. The development of these models shows that teachers can avail themselves to various methods in the literature classroom.

Teaching literature is different from teaching language. According to Rosli Talif (1995), not all language teachers can teach literature effectively except those who are genuinely interested in teaching the subject. He adds that an effective teacher of literature must have the following qualities: an analytic knowledge of the language, appreciation of the nature of literature, and command of the techniques of teaching literature. Teachers also have to contend with students who do not have the interest or motivation in learning literature.





Students' learning styles and instructors' teaching styles are variables in the literature classroom. Dunn (1998) insists that teachers have to adjust their teaching styles according to their students' learning styles. He says that students' learning styles can be useful tools for teachers to develop their own teaching styles. Grasha (1996) adds that teachers should cultivate certain styles so that they can use approaches that are appropriate to the instructional situations and kind of learners they encounter. This leads to effective teaching and learning.

The above discussion proves that teachers are responsible for impacting knowledge in classrooms. Therefore, as agents of knowledge, they should develop more teaching styles that are appropriate to students. It is undeniable though, in the Malaysian context that certain problems exist for teachers. In a class of forty mixed-ability students, to what extent can the teacher accommodate the students' learning styles to her own? Personally, it would be ideal if students also adjust their learning styles with the teacher's teaching styles in classroom. This kind of negotiation will enhance positive learning climate in the classroom. Furthermore, the diversity in a classroom should serve as a catalyst for intellectual and emotional growth both for teachers and the students in literature classroom. Therefore, the teacher can provide equal and fair access for students from all walks of life in her classroom.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Researchers from the teacher training programmes have conducted a number of studies on methods and instructional activities, and these studies covered numerous educational issues in their quest to prepare prospective teachers for excellence in instruction. Nevertheless, there is a significant area that is often neglected and that is the study of teaching and learning styles in classroom.

The investigations of styles are essential for teachers as well as for students so that both can improve their teaching and learning styles in the classroom. In a classroom, the most common problem is the mismatch between the teachers' teaching





styles and the learning styles of their students. This hinders effective teaching and learning process.

In discussing teaching styles, we have to be aware of the teacher herself as constituting an assortment of qualities such as physical appearance, culture, attitude, motivation, and intellectual background. The behaviour of the teacher probably influences the character of the learning climate more than any other single factor. A teacher's teaching style is by definition the behaviour of the teacher which influences the character of the learning climate or the environment created in the classroom. The learning climate that the teacher creates in a literature classroom is therefore reflective of her own teaching style. The mismatch of teacher's teaching styles with his or her students' learning styles in a classroom may result in conflicts of the teaching outcomes. To get a positive end result, the learning climate needs to be one that is learner-centred. By creating a positive learning experience, the teacher will give students the opportunity to incorporate the knowledge in their daily living.



My contention is that teaching style in the classrooms is an integral part of teaching literature. Before embarking on a specific style, though, it is essential for teachers to gather a profile of their students' problems in learning literature. Some of the common problems are lack of interest, low motivation and low proficiency in the target language. Carter and Long (1991) claim that if language remains a major problem in reading or understanding literary texts, the teacher should consider teaching literature from simplified texts. Therefore, their simple language will ultimately help learners to develop fluent reading skills in the target language. Based on the problems, the assumption could be made that teachers who possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes need to predict, recognize, and meet students' needs and to direct learning activities to adequately address those needs.

The purpose of this descriptive study is to identify the teaching styles preferred and also identification of the factors that influence teaching styles. The reason is because the success of teaching and learning literature in the classroom depends greatly on the teacher. It is the teacher's responsibility to acquire some suitable





techniques of teaching literature so that learners will treat literary texts as vehicles for practicing skills (Yopp and Yopp 2000). In other word, the teacher plays an important role in the classroom because she influences her students' learning styles as well as enhances their interests in learning literature.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Teaching effectively is crucial. If teaching style is one factor in teaching students effectively, teachers will benefit from knowing what their teaching style preference is and what factors influence their teaching style in literature classroom. This is especially important in the Malaysian context since the implementation of literature in the language classroom.

Literature in ESL was introduced in March 2000. The Education Ministry introduced literature as a compulsory component in English language class and these texts are also examined in national examinations. The main goal in the implementation is to enhance the learning of the English language by providing interesting language in context for students. However, teaching literature in schools has triggered several problems among teachers as well as students. The problems are different from one to another but when it concerns with the teaching literature, it turns out that both teachers and students share almost the same agony.

Problems faced by the teachers are mainly due to these: the lack of knowledge of teaching literature; the absence of confidence in teaching literature subject; the constraint of time; the lack of motivation because teachers are pressured to teach literature; the examination requirements; the low English proficiency of students; and extracurricular commitment in school which weighs down teaching.

The problems faced by the students are mainly due to inadequate knowledge of the target language, lack of interest in learning literature, and difficulty in connecting literary texts with their lives. The fact that the literary component is examined in the



national examinations causes much anxiety which further inhibits a love for literature which consequently leads to a mental block for learning to take place.

These are some realities faced by the teachers in Malaysian schools. However, these problems will decrease if the teachers teach in the urban areas. The reason is because in urban areas where students who come from better backgrounds of English exposure. They may speak English at home and with their friends. Therefore, they can easily perceive the meaning and find no difficulty in communicating. The problems such as lack of interest and no motivation in learning literature will be less minimal compared to those in rural areas. The students from rural areas already grappling with low English proficiency find it a double hurdle trying to understand literary texts. However, teachers still have to face these daunting consequences and try their best to teach literature effectively in such an environment. By adjust their teaching styles; teachers can create an encouraging learning climate for students in the literature classroom.

1.5 OBJECTIVES

One of the objectives of this study was to take into account the teaching style preference of teachers. Since teaching style of the teacher had been identified as an important factor in student learning, it was crucial for the profession of educators to assess the teaching style of teachers engaged in teaching students.

The second purpose of the study was to assess the effect of some of the factors that may have influenced the teaching style preference of teachers in literature classroom. Factors affecting teaching style may have been the genres of literary texts, the level of mixed ability students, the time management, the teacher's education and cultural background, characteristics, motivation and the length of service.

Therefore, this study evaluated the relationship of the above factors with teaching styles preferences in literature classroom. By analysing the Flanders's



Interaction Analysis System (FIAS) scores, this study also identified whether teachers' teaching style preference is teacher-centred or learner-centred.

The hypothesis was that teachers who are teaching students without adequate formal preparation of teaching literature would face difficulties in creating a learner-centred teaching style in the classroom. However, the overall FIAS scores would be reflective of a teacher-centred teaching style. It was hypothesized that the more years of teaching would produce teachers who created more learner-centred environments in the literature classrooms in which they teach as indicated by the FIAS scores. It was also hypothesized that the characteristics of effective teachers would generate teachers who created more effective teaching and learning styles in the literature classrooms in which they teach as indicated by the FIAS scores.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study will answer the following research questions:

- What is the teaching style preference of the teacher?
- What factors contribute towards her teaching styles in literature classroom?

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Classroom activity

The level at which an individual teacher presents, interprets and adapts a given set of materials to fit the needs of a particular students group.

English as a Second Language ESL

A situation in which English is not the mother tongue of the speakers but is still considered as important and is used regularly, especially in business transactions (Rosli Talif 1995: 8)





Learning climate

The teacher creates a positive learning experience for students in a literature classroom. The learning climate needs to be one that is learner centred and therefore reflective of her teaching style.

Learning styles

Learning styles involve learners' different cognitive affective and physiological traits that determine how they perceive and respond to tasks and learning environment. Learning styles have very little to do with the student's motivation or attitude toward the class or the material.

Literature in ESL

In the context of ESL, it is more appropriate to exploit literature as a resource rather than as an object of study. Apart from personal development and growth and other literary aims, the use of literature in ESL instruction is to foster a greater interest and learning activities and exercises. Therefore, depending upon the proficiency level of the students, complete literary works in English, translations and adaptations or simplified versions of the classics could be considered for this purpose (Rosli Talif 1995: 8).

Teacher's characteristics

Teacher's characteristics are associated with teacher's behaviour in the classroom such as the verbal and nonverbal behaviour or the communication acts of pupils in the classroom activity which influence learning climate.

Teaching styles

Teaching styles, theoretically, are constructs used to characterize the teacher-student interaction (Fischer & Fischer 1979). Teaching styles are made up of methods and approaches with which teachers feel most comfortable; if they try to change to completely different approaches, they would be forced to work entirely with unfamiliar, awkward, and uncomfortable methods.





1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study by no means investigated all the teacher factors of teaching styles in teaching literature. It is only restricted to one particular English language teacher in a secondary school. The sample comprised of a teacher who teaches English for Form One only. The results therefore reflect on the teacher only and may not be generalized for other English teachers of the school in Seremban. This study may not reflect findings for different teachers teaching different forms. The sample also does not represent the whole community of teachers. The validity and reliability of the study could be improved by increasing the number of subjects. This is because the study is micro in nature and limited in its scope due to the constraint of time, this include planning suitable time slots to replace for the school's semester break and also the public holidays.

