

EFFECTIVE AND ORDINARY TEACHERS: VOICES OF MALE STUDENTS TOWARD THEIR TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Students' opinions are often neglected even though technically they are the teachers' primary clients. Teachers seldom ask for their students' opinions, particularly in what concerns the effectiveness of their teaching methods. This study attempts to listen to the opinions of male students towards the effectiveness of their teachers' instructions. This was done by exploring the perspectives of eight male students. Using the qualitative research method, three male students were selected and interviewed followed by a focus group with an additional five male students. The data was then transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Qualitative approach helps to provide rich, in-depth and useful data for the study and presents a better understanding of the issue. The findings suggest that there are two types of teachers, namely, the effective and the ordinary. Participants also described what they liked and disliked about their teachers and the types of teachers that motivate them to learn. Selected participants in this study had poor academic records and were from families with low incomes.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession is both difficult and challenging. It is difficult because the effectiveness of teachers only truly manifests after ten or twenty years later. The responsibility is great in view of the long and lasting effects of education, and therefore hard to shoulder. Among the great challenges of teaching is managing the cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of students. Such factors play a role in the overall attitudes of students. Teachers are expected to mould these factors to such an effect that they support educational aims. Abd Ghaffar Mahmud (2011), the Director General of Education, Ministry of Education Malaysia described:

“Profesional guru adalah ‘orang besar’ — besar peribadinya, besar akalnya, besar jiwanya, besar jati dirinya dan besar sumbangannya — dalam kalangan ciptaan Tuhan, diiktiraf bukan sahaja oleh penghuni bumi malah penghuni langit”.

“Professional teachers are “big persons” with big personalities, big minds, big souls, big self-confidence, and contribute greatly to God’s creation; a contribution which is recognized in this world and in the hereafter”.

In short, teachers are personalities that perform sizable works that affect their students’ lives in this world and the next.

A number of studies have emerged that address the role and effectiveness of teachers. Studies by Wright, Horn and Sanders (1997) found that the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. Effective teachers appear to significantly influence student achievement, regardless of the level of heterogeneity in their classrooms. Mujs and Reynold (2001) in their study of student achievement in mathematics found that effective teachers spent their time teaching the whole class, rather than allowing students to work by themselves through worksheets. Effective teachers structured their lessons by having clear objectives, clearly stressing the major points of the lesson, and summarising the lesson. They ask many questions and combine between high and low order cognitive questions. Effective teachers use a variety of teaching strategies to suit the different abilities and different learning styles of students.

Statement of Problem

Effective teachers are defined as good teachers who at various times are called ideal, analytical, dutiful, competent, expert, satisfying, respected and responsive to diversity. They have particular set of characteristics which affect positive change within students. They often love the children, listen to their needs and complaints, are kind and gentle, love their work, have positive relationships with other colleagues and continuously strive to improve their professionalism. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standard (NBPTS) USA proposed five core propositions that every teacher should possess, to be called an effective teacher. The five propositions can be summarized as follows:

- a) Teachers are committed to students and their learning: they believe all students have the right to and can learn, treat students fairly, understand their needs, develop their learning and attitude;

- b) Teachers should know the content of their subjects: they must understand their subjects, have knowledge of other disciplines, develop student critical thinking, and use various methods to convey the subject matter;
- c) Teachers have a role in managing and monitoring student learning: they create positive learning environments, are aware of ineffective practices, assess student growth, and are able to communicate with parents;
- d) Teachers should think systematically about their practices and learn from their experiences: they should exemplify the virtues to inspire students, make decisions based on research and experience, and be lifelong learners trying to improve their teaching;
- e) Teachers are members of learning communities: they work collaboratively with others, evaluate progress to conform to the policies, work with parents and the community to engage them in school activities. (Page 2-3)

Danielson (1996) suggested that the quality of teachers can be measured in four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. This raises the important question of how to measure teacher effectiveness? Some people believe that teachers are born to be teachers; that they are naturally affectionate about children and have lots of patience and passion. Others believe that teaching is a skill that can be learnt and as such the quality or effectiveness of teachers can be developed, maintained, and enhanced. Teachers can be motivated both through material and emotional support to become effective persons.

Various studies suggest that teacher perceptions regarding male and female learning influences their relationship with their students. Zalizan (2005) for example, found that male teachers were less biased towards girls and boys. However, female teachers tend to favour girls over boys. Female teachers were also found to be more satisfied with their profession and more rigid in following the curriculum compared to male teachers. In addition, female teachers tend to focus more on learning and examinations compared to male teachers. In his interview with male students, Slade (2001) found that boys think teachers show a preference towards girls over boys. Many boys think they were actively discouraged, regularly ridiculed and humiliated, told that they were not clever, not well suited to the work, and made to feel that they did not belong. Mike and Younger (1996) state that teachers commonly perceive boys as reluctantly involved in the classroom. They

believe teacher attitudes, classroom interactions and the school environment contribute to male underachievement. They also found that teachers are likely to help girls more than boys in the classroom. This could be because boys were assumed to know what they were doing because they were less likely to ask for help compared to girls. In brief, teacher professionalism involves many issues such as teacher influence, teacher quality, teacher attitude, teaching method, and the teacher's relationship with their students. As little research has explored the views of male students toward their teachers, this study attempts to fill this gap by exploring the views of male students in class.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are:

1. To explore the views of male students toward their teachers regarding the learning and teaching process in the classroom;
2. To understand the problems they face in regards to their teachers and learning;
3. To suggest to teachers ways of improving their image and effectiveness in regards to male students.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs the qualitative method with the aim to explore the perceptions of students regarding their experiences with teachers and learning. The qualitative method is deemed suitable for exploration purposes. Bamberger (2000) suggested the use of the exploratory or qualitative approach to study human behaviour in their peculiar contexts where the issue takes place within cultural, economic and social environments. Miles & Huberman (1994) describe the qualitative approach as a method to understand how the world is perceived by particular individuals or communities, thus the term qualitative itself suggests a method without pre-constructed theories and hypotheses.

The use of the qualitative method is an attempt to explore the unique experiences of students in Malaysian public high schools in order to explore the experiences, perceptions, and feelings of male students in their particular environments. To achieve this, the researcher conducted an exploratory qualitative study by interviewing three boys and conducting a

focus group with an additional five boys. Qualitative research typically deals with a small chosen group of participants who are able to provide informative data. In qualitative research, the focus of attention is on the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The names of the participants in the study were suggested by the school discipline teacher and school counsellor. Two boys from Form Four (+16 years) and one boy from Form Five were selected from poor performing classes and average classes. Focus group interviews were conducted with five boys to explore their schooling experience and their perceptions about issues pertaining to their education.

The researcher transcribed the most important points in the interview (verbatim). The researcher continued the analysis to get a sense of the entire database by reading the text and comparing the notes to the audio tape interview several times. In this initial phase, the researcher wrote memos (short phrases, ideas and key concepts). In the coding step, concepts that explain the ideas or categories were connected to the main idea. Cresswell (2000) describes the process as "winnowing" which means to discard some of the data perceived as not useful. From the lean coding or raw coding, categories are developed by combining and reducing the main ideas from the data. The categories then emerged into themes or the combination of a few categories into a single theme. The name of the categories were derived from participants themselves but themes were developed by the researcher from that which best describes the information (Cresswell, 2000).

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH Teaching And Learning

The participants describe their teachers' methods as being predominantly boring and not interesting. They often accused teachers of excessive speech which made the students lose interest and sleep. Teacher pedagogy was also regarded as being poor as disinterested students were often encouraged to sleep lest they disturb others.

Kadang suruh keluar..ada setengah cikgu tu ha..kamu tak nak belajar. Tak nak bisung keluar.Tak nak tidur.Kalau tak tidur keluar...kan..dia orang keluarlah..selalu dia orang tidurla dalam kelas kalau tak nak belajar. Tidur dalam kelas

(DU 121)

Teacher often relied on text books for their instruction and seldom provided sufficient explanation and elaboration, particularly in regards to the English subject. Since this is a Form Five class, teachers mostly taught based on the expected examination questions and would often provide the answers.

Ha.. biasala. ajar .Masuk terus bagi latihan terus. Bagi latihan.

Lepas habis latihan Kita orang dah tulis semua kan. Last baru dia beri jawapan.Lepas tu dia keluar.Adala dia ajar sikit-sikit (DU 178)

Participants described their teachers teaching method as not interesting, depend on text book, did not demonstrate how to do, giving to much lecture. In brief, focus too much on the teacher themselves. They described their experienced below :

Tak tahulah tapi rasanya sebab dalam buku ada..Cikgu tak tunjukkan. Kita orang pun jadi kurang fahamla. Tula. (DU138)

Setahun tak de eksperimen Maccam cikgu tu ajar..boring..bosan..cerita je..jadi bosanla. (:DU 24)

Dia datang masuk..lepas tu dia baca..okay bukak buku ni baca. Baca kita orang pun baca. tengok-tengok sat gi dah baca semua Tanya soalan. (DU 296)

Cara pengajaran. Sebab dia tak banyak ni..dia banyak sembang. Banyak cerita.Kita orang...bila dia banyak cerita kita orang jadi macam mengantuk... Kalau macam buat latihan ke apa. Buat latihan ada..last-last minitla dia bagi. Nak keluar kelas lagi sepuluhh minit dia bagi.Dia suruh hantar. (DU 70)

Good Teaching Methods

Participants describe good teaching methods when teachers effectively communicate with the students. In their eyes, good teachers give it their best and treat them like friends. Good teachers also teach well and are easy to understand (DU 94). Furthermore, the participants stated that they would prefer to learn through collaborative methods such as group discussions, group presentations, and group work which involve peers. (DU142). However, the participants explained that only the Bahasa Malaysia subject employed this techniques and as a result, they liked the subject.

Menarik tu macam dia ajarpun kita senang masuk. Dia ajar pun betul-betulkan. Dia ajar senang masukkan. Kira Macam spontanla.. dengan kita macam boleh berinteraksi senangla. Buat macam... kita anggap dia macam kawanla.. walaupun dia cikgu kita anggap macam kawan..kita senang masukla dia ajar..dia cakap dengan kita pun okay. Borsk sporting semua...camtu menarika (:DU94)

Gunakan tangkankan..bagi-bagi kerja.ok buatni, buatni..kau bagi marker buatni..kau bagi kertas buatni. Bagi tugasla.Kalau dah siap keninggu depan,ada pembentangan. ok. Bulan ni keluar kumpulan kita orang keluar. Buatkan.Kira bentang la kat kawan-kawan semua sembangla. Sembang dengan kawan. Cakap. Terangkan apa tajuk yang kita orang dapat buat. (:DU142)

Subjects In School

The participants felt that most of the important subjects like English and Science were not taught properly. Only the Malay Language is described by the participants as being interesting. The participants' responses to the subjects are associated with the teaching methods of the subjects. The participants stressed that they liked Science because it involved experimentation in the lab. However, as the teacher failed to conduct any experiment, the participants quickly lost interest in the subject.

Bmla..gunakan tangkankan..bagi-bagi kerja.ok. buatni, buatni..kaubagi marker buatni..kau bagi kertas buatni. Bagi tugasla. Kalau dah siap ke minguu depan,ada pembentangan. ok. Bulan ni keluar kumpulan kita orang keluar. Buatkan.Kira bentang la kat kawan-kawan semua sembangla. Sembang dengan kawan. Cakap. Terangkan apa tajuk yang kita orang dapat buat. (:DU142)

Macam Matematik dulu memang saya tak suka sebab cikgu ajar dia. Sebab tahun ni saya SPM kan..cikgu tu tekan sangatkan tekan..bagi kita orang belajar. belajar. belajar. Kita orang fikir fikir fikir.Baru nak belajarkan..masa depankan. (:DU108)

kadang-kadang sejarah tak suka. Tengok la tak suka. Bukan tak suka..suka tapi macam cikgu tu ajar.. boring..bosan..cerita je..jadi bosanla (:DU24)

Tapi dah setahun tak ada eksperimen. Tak buat lagila..Form five ni takde (:DU128)

Ha..English. Sir biasa aje. Dia ajar-gjar cam tu aje.Ajar asas je. Ha..biasala. ajar .Masuk terus bagi latihan terus. Bagi latihan. Lepas habis latihan Kitaorang dah tulis semuakan. Last baru dia beri jawapan.Lepas tu dia keluar.Adala dia ajar sikit-sikit. (:DU148-150)

Homework And Assignments

The participants admitted that they seldom completed their homework. Sometimes they would complete it the next morning (the last minute) and at times they would simply copy from friends. This is because most of their time is spent outside the house. They usually loiter until midnight leaving little to no time for homework. As far as learning is concerned, they depend on the exercises given during class. They made specific mention of the history subject whereby the teacher would assign homework at the end of class. The participants preferred finishing all the work at school (knowing that they would not have time to do it at home)

Tak tahu.Salah satu mungkin luar. Kadang dok rumah pun tengok tv je. Malam keluar rumah. Keluar. Lepak dengan kawan-kawan.Lepas tu balik.Cukup time sayabalikrumah.Tidur. Besokbaru buat.Buatkatsekolahkan.lasminitela. Kira buat kerja last minute. (:DU142)

Kalau macam buat latihan keapa. Buat latihan ada..last-last minit la dia bagi. Nak keluar kelas lagi sepuluh minit dia bagi. Dia suruh hantar.Jadi bosanla macamtu. Kalau nak buat buat ka tsekolah okay jugak (Appendix F:DU21)

(menggeleng) takbuat? (:DU142)

ha..tengok tapi homework kurang sikitla (:DU162)

kurang .banyak dalam buku biasa. Buku latihan. Exercise guna buku tu. (:DU164)

Preferred Learning Method

The participants explained that they particularly enjoyed hands on subjects. For example,they prefer science since the teacher teaches in the lab. This indicates that the participants enjoy a change in the learning environment from simply sitting in the same class. They particularly enjoyed the Malay language since the modes of instruction involve hands on activities, discussions, and presentations. This multidimensional approach led to positive performance in this subject. In conclusion, the participants prefer to learn subjects that involve hands on activities and adopt a range of teaching modes. The level of enjoyment is however dependant on the methods used by teachers.

Saya suka dengar satu buat satu . dua-dua tulah. Kalau macam sains ada eksperimen saya sukala (:DU123)

Cikgu bawa pergi Mckrnal (:DU125)

Bmla..gunakan tangankan..bagi-bagi kerja. ok.buat ni, buat ni..kau bagi marker buatni..kau bagi kertas buatni. Bagi tugasla. Kalau dah siap ke minggu depan, ada pembentangan. ok. Bulan ni keluar kumpulan kita orang keluar. Buatkan. Kira bentang la.kita kawan-kawan semua sembangla. Sembang dengan kawan. Cakap. Teranġkanpataiqik yang kita orang dapatbuat. (:DU142)

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The findings arising from the qualitative phase of this research reveals that boys learning in Malaysian public high schools are significantly influenced by their teachers' teaching methods. The boys reported negative experiences with their teachers while a relatively few number of teachers were considered good. The sampled boys determine good teachers based on the ways they manage students in class and the teaching methods employed to deliver lessons. This finding supports existing literature that arrived at similar conclusions such as studies by Slade & Trent (2000), Griffith (1996) and McDonald, and Saunders and Benefield (1999). In addition, the findings also suggest that boys themselves are not motivated to learn and have difficulty concentrating in class.

Table 1: Summary of the qualitative findings

Theme	Summary of the findings
Good teaching method	Easy to understand Teacher communication with students Teacher-students relationship Teachers are hardworking Methods of teaching are interesting (use various method)
Teaching and learning in the classroom	Boring method equates excessive speech Reading from text and asking questions from the same text Do exercises and give the answer Not sufficient elaboration and explanation about the topic Exercises given at the last minute Do not use demonstration methods as in the syllabus Teachers encourage students to sleep to reduce disturbance
Subjects taught in class	Malay Language is an interesting subject because teachers used different methods of instruction Mathematics is hard but can be interesting after the teacher gives a good deal of motivation English is not interesting since the teacher does not teach well and has poor teaching methods History is a boring subject Science is an interesting subject because it is a hands-on subject and learning takes place in the lab. However, throughout the entire year the teacher did not conduct any experiments
Homework and assignment	Last minute Homework is not assigned properly by the teacher Did not do the homework or did it poorly School work should be finished at school Activities after school hindered them from doing the homework
Preferred subjects	Malay language Hands-on subjects Learning outside the normal classroom Subjects which involve different methods of teaching
History	Bored Teacher talks too much
English Language	Exam oriented style Not sufficient explanations Homework not properly assigned
Malay Language	Good methods of teaching Interesting
Science	Poor method of teaching as throughout the year no experiments were conducted
Mathematics	The teachers stress on the importance of learning this subject. Participants became interested because of the motivation given

A study by Martino & Chiarolli (2007) describes boys as having problems with teachers. One of the participants was particularly expressive as he said "the teachers reckon they deserve respect without earning it. Good teachers are hard to come by" "schools suck and I think the teachers are up themselves and power freaks" The inverse of these statements indicate that teachers are among the most important factors in learning. There are good teachers and bad teachers. Unfortunately, good teachers are hard to find.

Findings of the study suggests there are two categories of teachers namely effective teachers and ordinary teachers. The effective teachers are preferred by the student because they have the right attitude, communicate well with the students, have good relationship with the student and employs effective pedagogy in the classroom. On the other hand, the ordinary teachers are the opposite of the effective teachers. The characteristics of each category of teacher are described in the table below:

Table 2: The Difference between Effective Teachers and Ordinary Teachers

Important points	Effective Teachers	Ordinary Teachers
Attitude	Try their best and are hardworking	Just ordinary
Relationship	Warm	Ordinary
Communication	Can talk with the students Make jokes Understand the students better	-
Teaching Method	Use various methods Collaborative learning	Boring method Teacher centred Lecture method
Pedagogy	Make classroom interesting Motivate students to learn	Ask the student to sleep to avoid disturbance Nag Give insufficient explanation to students on the topic Did not assign proper homework

CONCLUSION

Students in the classroom are differentiated by their gender, abilities, socio-economic background, knowledge and motivation. Each one of them is unique to himself. Thus their level of understanding towards knowledge are differentiated by their background. Meanwhile, the teachers and the education system in Malaysia do not attend so much to the differences of the students. One size fits all has always been used by the teacher in the classroom. At the teacher training institute seldomly differences in culture or gender have been discussed. All the teachers accept the same method of instructions and are expected to know by themselves how to use right pedagogy or method. There is a need to change these views since many studies showed that there is large difference between the students thus there needs to be a different approach from the teachers. Teachers need to examine their practices in school such as their beliefs, attitudes, teaching methods, and overall activities related to their male students.

At the policy level, the Ministry of Education has to seriously address the problems pertaining to the academic achievement of male students and behaviour in school through a review of the curriculum and the re-evaluation of teacher training that is sensitive to gender differences. This aspect of effectiveness should be further explored, particularly the dimensions of student-teacher relationships, teacher teaching methods, teacher experience, and teacher attitudes and beliefs. I strongly recommend that future research explores the methodological aspects of teacher effectiveness and the academic achievements of boys.

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