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TEACHERS SHAPE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS'
BEHAVIOURS THROUGH THE USE OF LEARNING
THEORIES: THE CASE OF MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to explore the understanding and the application of learning theories among the teacher in shaping students' behaviour. In-depth one-to-one interviews with five experienced teachers were carried out to collect the data. Collected data were analysed based on a qualitative approach by using John Hattie's eight-mind frame in order to build consistent data. Two themes and twelve sub-themes emerged from the interviews, including mindset (mind-frame 1 to 8) and practices (punishments, rewards, approaches the students, and way of thinking). The findings demonstrated that while teachers' perspectives on learning theories varied, they are largely consistent with Hattie's mind frame. When perceptions and beliefs are shared, Hattie's mind frames may prove the way of thinking, and it can identify a successful teacher's style of thinking. Learning theories are important for students' learning, according to the teachers in our study, however, it depends on the practices and how the teachers apply the practices in learning theories. Going forward, this research adds to the moulding of school students' behaviours by allowing teachers to use these learning theories in a novel method that could become a new teaching practice in the school system.

Keywords:

Learning Theories, School Teachers, Student Behaviour, Teachers' Mindset, Malaysia

Introduction

Education has always encouraged educators to create new ideas in teaching and learning. Educational psychology aims to provide educators with knowledge of the students' background as well as apply the new skills to enhance understanding of what impacts students' learning and students' behavior (Santrock, 2018). In other words, educational psychology allows educators to understand individual differences in intelligence, cognitive development, affect, motivation, self-concept, and self-regulation.

In an educational setting, a number of theories are used. Psychology learning theories can be grouped into four categories, namely behaviorism, cognitive, humanistic and social learning theories. All of these theories are common in today's education system. Behaviorism is focused on observable behavior, cognitive learning refers to the mental state and mental development of a person, humanistic theories believe that emotion and affect play an important role in the learning process, and social learning theory is based on the way humans learn and do activities in a group (Persians, 2012).

A theory is an idea that has been designed to explain certain facts or events. While it is possibly true, a theory has not been proven to be true. The growth of theories over the decades is an interesting discussion. Some theories were developed as negative reactions to earlier ones. Others were built upon foundational theories that looked at specific contexts for learning or took them to a more practical level (Persians, 2012). Theories are systematic and general attempts to explain something. Psychology temporary theory in psychology acts as a guide on understanding individuals, ideas and events (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013). Learning theories are common in the teaching and learning process at schools, especially among school teachers.

Teachers have an important role in schools as they are the main instructor to practice learning theories in an everyday classroom. Additionally, in Malaysia, learning theories are the main reference that teachers refer to during foundation training. This is because the method of teaching, teaching styles and all of the teaching foundation are described in the learning theories (O'Donnell et al., 2011). Western psychologists who are experts in their own field of studies have developed these theories. Teachers should be able to apply the learning theories and articulate their understanding of learning theories in developing the learners' knowledge and behaviors. Teachers are also able to use learning theories appropriately in order to achieve their own goals.

As a teacher, you must understand the mindset and beliefs of the learning theories in order to put them into practice and obtain the intended results. Teachers with a behaviorist mindset consider the classroom to be a teacher-centered setting, with teachers, textbooks, and other enrichment resources serving as the primary source of knowledge. Additionally, mindset refers to the idea that the teachers' knowledge is derived from their own belief on something; according to DeYoung (2015), teachers have their own expectations from their students and have their own standards to be fulfilled. Individuals acquire ideas by reasoning or thinking of what they know. Mindset is an important element because through mindset, people learn abstract ideas. In other words, understandings of the teachers exist in the mind and beliefs (Schunk, 2012). Furthermore, mindset might be developed from experiences that an individual faced in their lives. Due to different mindsets, the teachers' practices of learning methods in learning theories might be different in shaping students' behaviors.

All of the approaches in the learning theories explained the method of handling students' positive behavior in order to perform well in the learning process. Students' behaviors are a common interest in the educational setting (O'Donnell et al., 2011). If teachers do not practice learning theories efficiently and their mindset is not in sync with their goals to build positive behavior, it can lead to misbehavior among students. This is because the right action taken without the right skills and the right mindset, cannot succeed (Crawford & Hagedorn, 2009).

Despite the prevalence of the behaviorist mindset in learning theories, Kohn (1993) stated that extrinsic incentives at school, such as tangible awards, may only produce transitory conformity rather than a fundamental shift in performance. They viewed curricula as a more intensive teaching guideline in which text-based activities are planned and produced with purposeful direction, frequent repetition and revision, and increasing degrees of difficulty. Today's classrooms do not solely utilize one learning theory over another, but instead incorporate multiple theories throughout the learning experience. Each theory has its own strengths and limitations, especially considering the realities of education in the 21st century. Teachers must walk the narrow line between creating a student-centered classroom and meeting rigorous learning standards.

According to Hattie (2012), "it is important for teachers to know and recognize their impact on student learning and to evaluate that impact. An effective teacher knows and understands the learning of his/her students and subsequently is able to make decisions about student learning based on his/her insight". The positive consequences and the negative consequences are dependent on how the teacher understands the approaches in learning theories and their practices in shaping students' behavior. Against this backdrop, it is important to investigate the teachers' mindset about learning theories. What about their practices in shaping students' behaviors? Is there any connection between the teachers' mindset of the learning theories and the actual practices in shaping students' behaviors? To address the issues and answer these questions, this research aims to explore the teachers' mindset and practice of learning theories in shaping students' behaviors, as well as the connection between both teachers' mindset and actual teachers' practices in shaping the students' behaviors.

Methodology

A qualitative research method was employed to provide in-depth explanation of the teachers' experiences, beliefs, and behaviors. The vital focus of this research was the experiences of the teachers because their statements contributed towards the conclusion and the aims of the study. This study is based on the phenomenal study method where the researcher interviewed experienced teachers. Participants were asked about their experience in teaching profession to share their mindset and beliefs that they felt understood by the knowledge they had gained as a teacher.

Research Procedures

Before the researcher started with the interview sessions, the researcher went through the documentation in which the researcher identified the problem statement of the study to clarify the issue at hand and found some findings from the previous studies on the selected issue. After that, the researcher proceeded to the process of selecting the respondents. The researcher chose the respondents based on a purposive technique where the respondents were selected based on their learning theories knowledge and their experience in the teaching profession. Next, the interview sessions started with the first respondent who is a teacher from a boarding school,

followed by a teacher from a secondary school and lastly a teacher from an international school. Before the interviews started, the researcher provided a brief introduction to the research intentions. The interviews were conducted individually via face-to-face interviews. In addition, permission was obtained from respondents to record their voices during interview sessions. Adequate time and places were chosen according to the respondents' comfort. The researcher did ask whether respondents were comfortable using English as the medium language throughout the session or would prefer using Malay language. The researcher then ensured that the words used throughout the interviews were accurate when transcribing the data. Finally, the data and the transcripts were analysed using the coding process.

Participants

The researcher used a purposive technique to choose the best respondents to fulfil the aims of the study. Three experienced teachers were selected, consisting of two female teachers and one male teacher. Additionally, they were from different domains, namely secondary school teachers, boarding school teacher and international school teachers. It is the researcher's intention to choose teachers who had furthered their studies at University Putra Malaysia (UPM). The teachers were all experienced teachers. They had been in the teaching profession for five years and more. According to Cuban (2010) who was in the teaching profession for 41 years, it takes three years to really get on step with a new level. The fourth year is when teachers walk in knowing the needs for that level. Only by the end of the fourth or fifth year of teaching, teachers become competent and confident in figuring out lessons, knowing the details and circumstances of classroom management, as well as taking risks and challenges in performing the routines of daily teaching. In addition, in order to make the data reliable, the respondents were chosen based on their knowledge in the foundation of teacher training.

Instrument

In this qualitative study, the researcher used a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview accommodates the research goals by reflecting questions, prompts and reliable resources to draw the respondents more fully into the aims of the study. The driven questions intend to provoke the experience of the participants and elicit the particular discipline that the researcher wanted to study. Each interview question is clearly connected to the purpose of the study and complete in-depth exploration of the phenomenon study. The interview questions were validated by experts before the interview. To ensure the validation of the answers given by the respondents, the researcher used probing questions or repeated the questions until the researcher felt satisfied that the data gained was clear.

Data Analysis

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. For teachers' mindset objectives, the data was analysed by using John Hattie's eight mind frame in order to build consistency in the data. The collected data was then analysed using the coding process. The coding process makes it easier for the researcher because it classifies the outcome of the interviews into specific categories and different terms in relation to this study (Merriam, 2015). The first phase in the coding process is open coding, where the researcher read the transcription frequently and figured out the event or idea that is related to the variables of this study. During this first phase of coding, the researcher defined the categories and sub-categories from the data obtained, which formed the basic units of the analysis. In other words, the researcher broke down the data into the first level categories, subcategories, and verbatim. Categories originated from the suitable concepts found in the transcription data, subcategories are the subtopics

related to the concepts and verbatim are the examples of the concepts listed. In open coding, the researcher focused on the text to define concepts and categories.

The second phase is axial coding where the researcher related the first phase with the second phase to categorize the idea into several categories. In axial coding, the researcher used own concepts and categories while re-reading the text. In this phase also, the researcher confirmed that the concepts and categories are accurate based on interview responses. Axial coding helps to ensure that the researcher has identified all important aspects.

The third is a selective coding phase or close coding phase where the researcher chose and identified the primary categories that are related to the aims of the study. For this study, based on the findings revealed, several categories and sub-categories were identified. The researcher transferred final concepts and categories related to the study into a table. This is a very effective way to organize results and discussion in a research paper. Finally, after both data was obtained, further analysis on the connection between teachers' mindset and teachers' practices in shaping students' behavior were explored. Figure 1 illustrates the categories of the transcription.

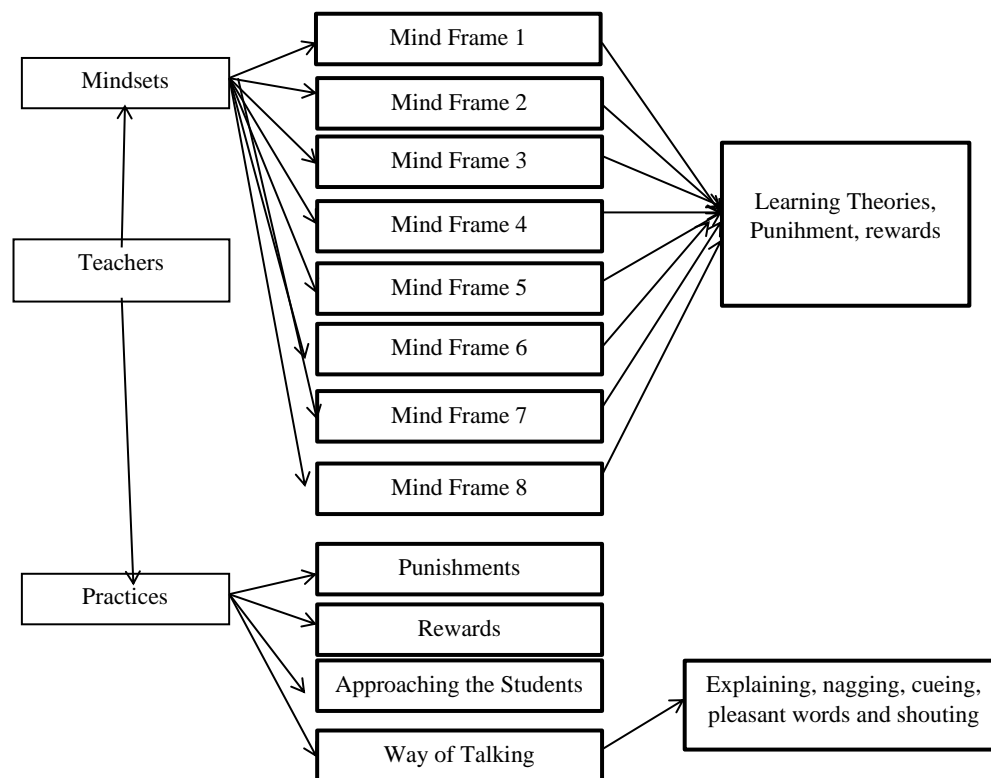


Figure 1: Categories of the transcription

Results and Discussion

Based on the results, teachers' mindsets on learning theories are different in every teacher. With the help of Hattie's eight mind frame, it was found that teachers' mindsets align with Hattie's mind frame. This is supported by the study done by DeYoung (2015), where every teacher's mindset was found to be mostly aligned with Hattie's mind frame. DeYoung (2015)

claimed that Hattie's mind frames can indicate the way of thinking when perceptions and beliefs were shared; it can identify the way of thinking of an effective teacher. According to the teachers, learning theories are essential for students' learning but it depends on the situation and also depends on how the teachers handle the methods in learning theories. Teachers believed that understanding learning theories before starting the class or the lesson is important as it is not just about the subject matter only. In addition, the application of the learning theories can provide chances for students to learn as they wish because teachers are then more open in the teaching and learning process. It is supported by Kara (2009) who suggested that individuals with better understanding of the learning process are better at perceiving the nature of learning, more open to learning, have higher expectations about what they will get from learning and exhibit less anxiety in relation to learning.

Teachers also think that rewards and punishment should exist. Embarrassing punishments and physical punishments are not relevant and should be avoided. According to them, these can lower students' self-esteem. Punishment also should be considered before implementation, and it cannot be applied often because it can result in negative outcomes. However, they believed that punishment should be in a positive way. In addition, teachers believed that punishment is not suitable in the teaching and learning process. While punishment is suitable for young students, it is better to reward older students. This is supported by Papadakis and Kalogiannakis (2017), where punishments are for bad behavior rather than enhancing engagement and motivation. However, it is different than the findings of Moberly et al. (2005), who found that even if the teachers used good instructional practices to shape students' behaviors, some of the teachers used extrinsic rewards and punishment to develop an acceptable behavior and students' motivation.

Teachers also believed that rewarding students can build a positive classroom environment in the learning process. It is also can enhance students' trust, motivation and excitement to learn. This is supported by many studies, where students use manners after applying the reward system and the students used appropriate manners while interacting with others. According to the teachers, students need appraisal, encouragement and pleasant words to enhance their positive behaviors. In addition, teachers should build rapport and understand the students well before starting the learning process. They should be a good friend to the students and encourage them in a proper way using an appropriate tone, because students will not cooperate if teachers scold or talk inappropriately. Sherman (as cited in Doe, 2005) stated that students rewarded with praise for acting desirably continued that behavior frequently and engaged less frequently in undesirable behaviors compared to the students that were ignored.

Teachers are more likely to choose reward and punishment as their practices in shaping the behavior of the students. Moberly et al. (2005) support this were responding to practice rewards and punishment to develop positive behavior and enhance students' motivation. Teachers practiced negative punishment such as adding homework and embarrassing punishment like letting them do the tasks while sitting or standing in front of the class. However, teachers are more likely to choose positive reinforcement by giving something pleasant to the students including praise, gifts, stickers and so on, as well as choose negative reinforcement by taking away unpleasant things such as letting them stop doing additional tasks and giving them free time. Next, there are other practices that teachers use in order to shape students' behaviors, including approaching the students and by engaging in appropriate ways of talking. Teachers

approach the students to investigate the problems faced by the students. Furthermore, teachers tend to talk by explaining, nagging, cueing, pleasant words and shouting.

The connection between teachers' mindsets and teachers' actual practices in shaping the behavior of the students is somewhat connected but it is not connected in certain practices. Teachers' mindsets about the reward system are connected with their practices where teachers reward their students by giving incentives to boost their energy to learn. However, the belief in embarrassing punishment is not linked with the practices of one of the teachers where she implemented the embarrassing punishment. According to one of the teachers, embarrassing punishment is still needed but it is not suitable in a classroom setting. Teachers' mindsets on the usage of appropriate words were connected to the practices of teachers, but some of it were not connected. The reason why some of the teachers can practice the way they think is not explored but teachers also face the problem of implementing theories at a time when they are required. Researchers have further claimed that learning theories and their practices in learning are stimulated with conditioning learning and the complexity of behavior. Anderson et al. (2018) found that only one in five respondents reported that they deeply integrated mindset into teaching practices.

At school and in the classroom, teachers are the most influential person in students' learning. Therefore, as a teacher, it is important to be aware and recognize the practices that can have an impact on the students. According to Hattie (2012), teachers who are able to reflect on their own mindset and beliefs are more likely to have a major impact on students. Carol Dweck suggested that teachers might be influenced by something according to their mindset and beliefs (Gutshell, 2016). This study speaks on behalf of the teachers' voice on their perspective about learning theories that they have learned in their teaching foundation. Also, this study gives opportunities for them to share their beliefs about the greatest impact on students' behaviors and learning. Indeed, teachers could share their own experiences or practices of the learning theories in shaping the behavior of the students. By listening to teachers' perspectives, effective practices in shaping the behavior of the students can be gained. In short, teachers can grow their own desired positive mindsets and implement it in their practices with the students.

Effective teachers do not just have a positive mindset towards students' learning, but also practice their thoughts in order to get a positive outcome from the students. However, effective teachers do not just practice in the way they are thinking but it should be even deeper. This means teachers should have positive beliefs and never overgeneralize their students without investigating (DeYoung, 2015). This study also revealed other practices that can shape the behavior of the students such as the way of talking and the way teachers approach their students. Communication strategy is an aspect that educators should consider. A decent manner and speaking appropriately to the students can enhance their positive values and encourage students to become more respectful to the teachers. As teachers use appropriate and respectful language, it can also create a friendly environment in the learning process. Shouting and nagging on students' mistakes can hamper the building of social aspects between students and teachers. Vygotsky established a connection between speech and cognitive development (Hagedorn & Crawford, 2009).

The language that teachers use with the students shapes their feelings and mindset, as well as leads to the formation of behavior (Hagedorn & Crawford, 2009). The tone of the teachers should be appropriate and encouraging words are needed to develop positive behaviors among

students. By approaching their students, teachers demonstrate an intention to understand their students well. The teacher-student relationship is an important aspect in an everyday classroom. A positive relationship between a teacher and his or her students can influence students to perform well, behave in a proper way and improve their ability to adjust at school. Therefore, teachers are a crucial agent in guiding students to grow, develop and learn effectively. Being genuine and proactive can develop a strong and meaningful relationship that will be beneficial for both parties in the future. The best and successful teachers are those who respect, care and believe in their students.

This study also revealed teachers' mindset about rewards and punishments. Rewards and punishment helped teachers to encourage students to behave in a positive way. A reward system can give students plenty of opportunities to perform well in the classroom because they are interested in the rewards that the teachers give to them. They will easily volunteer to do the tasks given by the teachers because they need what they want. However, teachers claimed that rewards and punishments should be considered before being applied and it also depends on time and situation. This is because if rewards are given too often, students will take it for granted and they will become too dependent on the teachers. In punishment, students are more likely to adapt their behavior because they want to avoid the punishment, rather than trying to change their behavior to what is acceptable. Teachers' also claimed that learning theories are not permanent. According to Cangelosi (1997), students can learn from punishment, but they might learn how to avoid the punishment through lying and cheating behaviors.

Furthermore, Cangelosi (1997) mentioned that while teachers have been focused on modifying desirable behaviors with rewards and punishment, teachers have neglected the character that students develop. Also, the rewards and punishment system as the agent of behavior modification system is dependent on a system of extrinsic rewards and punishment which has no connection to the intrinsic aspect of the students. According to Cangelosi (1997), a study of fifth-grade teachers showed that "more of the students of a teacher who facilitated an intrinsic orientation asked for additional work and exhibited less frequent off-task behaviors, in comparison with students of a teacher focusing on a more extrinsic orientation". So, this study gives a new insight that should be considered which is students should learn intrinsically rather than just extrinsically in order to shape their positive behaviors. Not only that, this study intends to shed some light on Islamic educational thought and methods of teaching in general.

In shaping student's behaviors, it has to change them from the inside. This means that they have to create their own intention to change rather than to create their own desire for something in order to change. In Islam, the aspect of the soul is crucial in the human process of learning. The purpose of education in Islam is to harmonize the good behavior and the bad behavior in the human soul as well as to ensure that the body, mind, and soul of an individual are balanced. In shaping the students, self-discipline is important. According to Yaacob (2013), "self-discipline means a training to inculcate good traits in the soul through simple and continuous practice and finally with the intense struggle until good action is manifested". The Malaysian education system today is more likely to concentrate on the cognitive aspect of the students. According to Yaacob (2013), this practice makes teachers forget about inner purification and the emotional stability of the students. To develop both of these aspects, educators should learn and understand the Holy Quran because God has designed a very appropriate curriculum for all mankind. Learning guidelines by Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Al-Attas, as well

as from As-Sunnah are the best way to improve teaching and learning methods and obtain strategies to shape students' positive behaviors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored the mindset of teachers on learning theories, teachers' actual practices in shaping the behavior of the students and explored the connection between these two variables. Theories of learning are attempts to clarify how secondary school students' behaviors learn. Different theories are based on varying assumptions and appropriate in explaining certain learning situations. Consistent relationships should exist between theoretical beliefs and classroom practices because it is not always clear which comes first, and teachers will react and make assumptions based on their own practices rather than theoretical knowledge. In shaping students' behaviors, teachers should apply various approaches that can enhance positive behaviors in their studies. Negative behaviors can result in unwanted effects on the students, teachers, and schools. Students could be left behind in their studies due to their negative behaviors, teachers might become stressed from handling misbehaving students in classroom, the learning process in class will not be smooth and the school will be seen as a problematic school with the badly-behaved students. However, it is not enough for the students to change extrinsically. Students' inner states also should be changed because in this way, students will get a deeper understanding and good intention to behave properly. Islamic approaches by referring to the Holy Quran, As-Sunnah and Islamic Scholars are effective methods to be considered to improve teachers' intention of teaching and students' misbehavior at school.

For future research, a study on the implication of the teachers' practices in shaping students' behavior should be done. Future researchers are suggested to interview more teachers or conduct a survey on several teachers to obtain valuable data in studying about the mindset and practices of teachers. Furthermore, a study on Islamic approaches in shaping behaviors and shaping good teaching methods as well as skills should be done to follow the guidelines that God designed for mankind.

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