

Pre-service Art Teachers' Perception of Multicultural Art Education and Teaching Students from Multicultural Background: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

This study is an exploratory study designed to: (a) examine the current scenario and content of the Craft section in the Visual Art syllabus, (b) measure the preparedness of art teachers in teaching art among multicultural students and (c) identify the challenges that pre-service art teachers face in teaching multicultural art education. The Purposive Sampling method was employed where four (4) pre-service art teachers from the Art Education department from the Education Faculty of Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia were chosen to be involved in the study. The data were collected via interview; hence, the research method for this study is predominantly qualitative in nature. Analyses of the data are explained based on the answers provided to the research questions.

INTRODUCTION

The general purpose of this study is to study pre-service art teachers and their experiences in a multicultural environment in Malaysian government high schools. This study will look into the experiences of the pre-service teachers in school and how they overcome the many kind of issues among multicultural students. At most times, an educator or a person can only recognize their own culture yet very little of others. This often happens due to limitation of personal and social experiences. In the Malaysian

context, we can find people who come from both single and multicultural background. The former usually makes up the majority, whereas the latter, who often come from families with parents of different race, are generally lesser in number.

Background Research

For the past decades, Malaysia has always been a melting-pot of various cultures and this is very much reflected to the overall population census, which classifies the nation to be made up of these various races; Malay, Chinese, Indian, Orang Asli, Kadazan, Ibanese, etc. According to the Department of Statistic's Malaysia (2016), the Malay and Bumiputera are the dominant community groups compared to the others; the Chinese makes up one third of the population, whilst Indians are about 7%, and others is 0.7%. Although the statistics shows that our nation is very multicultural in nature, however, how many of us are very well aware of each other's culture? This is a very pertinent question to be asked because regardless of the fact that Malaysia is a multicultural country, for some reasons there are still barriers between races due to different cultural backgrounds and lack of exposure to know other culture. According to Siti Zuraida Maaruf, Saedah Siraj, Khadijah Said Hashim & Voviana Zulkifli (2013), a major concern that needs to be consistently addressed in the Malaysian educational system is to strengthen the tolerance among students of different ethnic groups.

Banks (2010) introduced the Human Relation Approach which may minimize the gap between cultures in pursuit for similarities among individuals. This approach is promising because it utilizes feedbacks from students with regard to culture, ethnicity, disability, gender, and social class by identifying students of stereotype characteristics. Hence, gender, social class, ethnicity, race, and cultural characteristics should be incorporated in the multicultural education and should have an equal opportunity to be learned among the students in school. Austin (2007) stated that multicultural education is concerned with the cultural importance of all students; it pervades all aspects of schooling including the curriculum, instructional strategies, inclusion of diverse faculty and staff, and inclusion of family and communities. This particular kind of education is not only being practiced in Malaysia, but it is being practiced internationally such as Australia and America, just to name a few. Today, many researches have been carried out on Multicultural Education but only at the surface level (Sharifah

Norsana, 2012). On this note, this research investigates the perceptions of pre-service art teachers regarding their experiences in teaching culturally diverse students in Art Education.

Statement of the Problem

Living in a multicultural country, an educator should be well aware of their own and other cultures in depth. Some educators have exposure to more cultures and some are not having the same opportunity. An example given by Zeichner and Hoeft (1996) shows that a majority of teachers are white, middle-class, and monolingual and bring little intercultural experience from their suburban and small-town backgrounds, grew up in a life where they are not exposed to other cultures locally. Being not exposed to other cultures is a disadvantage and being able to adapt and understand another individual from a different background and upbringing is a challenge. "Educators do not consciously express the appreciation of different cultural groups; more often, I believe it is done out of ignorance. In not availing ourselves of varying world views which influence organizational structures for learning and language systems as relate to art criticism in educational settings, we fail our students and ourselves", (Congdon, 1989). Some of us are fortunate enough to be exposed to other cultures other than our own; as well as being able to learn other culture. Jenks, Lee, and Kanpol (2001) stated that unless educators are themselves cross-culturally competent, students will have disrespectful behaviors towards the minority groups, as the result of their schooling experience. This is due to the fear to explore and encounter "culture shocked" when facing an unfamiliar culture. According to Badrul Isa (2006), political leaders and policy makers nationwide should emphasize on the importance of integration and unity among the different races in the country. The May 19th tragedy has made some significant impact on educational policies, whereby politicians; policy makers and academics realized that an ideal education system should be a tool to promote integration and unity. However, the question that we are facing now is whether the current syllabus of art education at colleges and universities have prepared students to face the multicultural society that we have? Based on this rationale, the aim of this study is: (a) to examine the current scenario and content of the Craft section in the Visual Art syllabus, (b) to study the preparedness of art teachers in teaching art among multicultural students and (c) to identify the challenges that pre-service art teachers face in teaching multicultural art education.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection for this research was carried out through qualitative method. The reason of using such method is due to the nature of this research, where the main data involves analyses of feedback given by the selected respondents. This method is also parallel with the objectives of this research as it involves a “detailed, verbal descriptions of characteristics, cases, settings, people or systems obtained by interacting with, and interviewing and observing the subjects.” (Thomson, 2007; Thomson & McLeod, 2015). Thus, this will also help to identify and to understand the teacher’s experience in teaching culturally diverse students.

The instrument employed in this study is interview. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2007), interview is an important way for researchers to check the accuracy or to verify the impressions that one has gained through observation. Patton (1990;2002) says that interview is done to find out from respondents, other things that the researchers cannot directly observe, like feelings, thoughts, and intentions. The researchers elicited specific answers from respondents to be compared later on during analysis. In this study, the researchers chose to conduct semi-structured interviews to gather information that is complex, mostly of opinions, attitudes, and personal experience (Sulistyo, 2013).

The researchers employed purposive sampling to select the participants from the population of the current pre-service teachers of art education department from the Faculty of Education, UiTM, Section 17 Shah Alam. The sample of this study consisted of 4 pre-service Art Education teachers. These respondents were aged between 23 to 27 and have completed their 6th semester during their third year of their degree. At the point of the research, they were also carrying out their teaching service in secondary school in Shah Alam. Data collected from interview session were recorded through Voice Memos Apps. Respondents realised that their opinions were recorded and the information collected were strictly confidential for the use of academic purpose only. Hence, data from the interviewed were collected and transcribed into Microsoft Word program to be analysed according to the themes.

FINDINGS

The aim of this study is: (a) to examine the current scenario and content of the Craft section in the Visual Art syllabus, (b) to study the preparedness of art teachers in teaching art among multicultural students and (c) to identify the challenges that pre-service art teachers face in teaching multicultural art education

1. The pre-service art teacher's perception of teaching craft in visual art education.

The finding that has been gathered here concludes that these pre-service art teachers have taken the initiative to expose students to other cultures in their teachings rather than concentrating solely on Malay artworks. The common answer given, for example, is the usage of materials such as *Songket* (Malay), *Sari* (Indian), and *Cheong Sam* (Chinese) for the subject of *Songket* and *Tenunan* when teaching the topic of Traditional Clothes, Wood Carving and Weaving. Pre-service teacher D had mentioned that showing a variety of examples of different culture helps the students to make comparisons; in which Pre-service Teacher A also mentioned that this may spark interest in the students and they would feel a sense of pride of their own culture when it is presented in class.

"I did, but I used it in the wood carving topic. Wood carving is, actually, more on the aboriginals. Indians also have it in their craft such as the statues but it is not wood carving. I used that as an example so that it wouldn't offend their religious sensitivities. That can give them a sense of pride." (Pre-Service Art Teacher A)

Besides that, they agreed that the syllabus/content/books/examples seems to lean more towards the Malay and Bumiputera culture rather than that of the minorities. Pre-service Art Teacher A made his/her point by stating that book authors are not sensitive towards other cultures, in other words "bias"; saying there were so many opportunities for content from other cultures to be included into our context if only the author had been more aware of this. On the other hand, Pre-service Teacher D, has a slightly different view of this. He believes that the textbooks/references have been

written quite fairly and that it has included some of the minority cultures besides the Malays and Bumiputera. Even though he/she did agree that it does lean more towards the Malay and Bumiputera culture, there were also examples that relate to the artwork of the minority groups.

“50/50; because, if we were to say that those things focus on Malay only, then, not really because there are some topics that integrate the Indian, Chinese, and other races. However, there are a lot of topics on bumiputra’s culture, especially Malay’s culture... as compared to Sabah’s and Sarawak’s bumiputera with Chinese and Indian... although it looks like it emphasized on Malay only, but sometimes in one topic, we see that the majority of it is about Malay, but they do insert a little bit about other races.”-Pre-service Art Teacher D

During the observation, the pre-service art teachers were eager to share their ideas and thoughts of what can be improvised for the context of the syllabus. Pre-service Art Teacher C stated in his/her previous feedback that the syllabus should be updated in order for it to be more interesting with a more balanced input. More multicultural elements should be included in art lessons and also art materials/books that are being published.

“We maintain what we already have, we add the Chinese culture and find out more about the arts that they have in Malaysia. The same goes with Indian, Sabah and Sarawak will make it more interesting. Even like me, I am a Kadazan, but in Kadazan culture, they have other natives like Murut, Pinampang Kadazan, in Kota Belut there’s Dusun Tindal...”- Pre-service Art Teacher C

2. The readiness of pre-service art teachers being professionally prepared to teach art towards multicultural students.

The next interview question asked not only of teachers’ preparedness to teach a classroom with differing cultural background but also the teachers understanding of what multicultural in art education is all about. The findings show that a majority of them only have a rough idea of what constitutes multicultural art education.

“Let’s just say from my side of opinion multicultural in the art education it refers to the arrangement of ideas on how teachers observe their students background and even teachers’ power of understanding their student’s lifestyle and the students own culture. That’s the most important role for a teacher to have and it would help to make an extra credit or even makes it easier to teach and being able to adapt with all the sensitivity of one’s culture.”- Pre-service Art Teacher A

“... We try to integrate between all of the three main races. Thus, from arts education itself, we can introduce culture from each race group. It can be an in-depth introduction or just the basic one by which the students could identify every culture themselves.”- Pre-service Art Teacher D

The finding also concludes that their perception regarding multicultural art education are mostly positive where all of them agree that the whole concept of multicultural education should be applied into our education system. Pre-service art teacher A shared his/her experience saying that only the Malays (and Siamese) were interested in the art syllabus while the Chinese and Indians were least looking forward towards the subject. Pre-service teacher C could not express how much the younger generations could learn by having multicultural education.

“My perception is that there is a lot of things but we’re not really exposed that to those things in our education in art. We are just focusing on one certain culture only. This is my perception.”- Pre-service Art Teacher C

Pre-service art teachers personally perceived and were indeed not professionally trained to teach the culturally diverse students.

“Since the university years, I can say that there are professional preparations for craft. So are you trained to teach cultural diverse students? No, not really. We just teach according to the books. So we are not required to go to school for this probation period. I am not really sure about the professional preparation because in terms of books and syllabus that we were taught in university focuses more

on Malay's culture. Instead of multiracial, since we are in Malaysia, so we focus more on Malaysian's scene "- Pre-service Art Teacher

3. The perception of pre-service art teachers of multicultural art education for educators.

For the next research question, the researcher focused on the trainees' perception of how significant is it to have multicultural art education, and their opinions on integrating the multicultural elements in our local curriculum and education system or teaching approach. Overall, the pre-service teachers agree that multicultural education is indeed very significant. Pre-service teacher A reminds the researcher regarding of a historical incident that happened in May 13th 1969, the time where Malaysia faced the worse racist feud against the Chinese and the Malays. He pointed out why multicultural education is so important as to prevent such incident from reoccurring. We should mould the nation at an early age to be more sensitive to one another and be respectful of other cultures.

"Firstly, it acts as a bridge in integrating students. Other than that, from the perspective of philosophy of education, multicultural education will produce well- balanced students from the aspects of Physical, Emotional, Spiritual and Intellectual. So, when we introduce to them the cultural diversity, we are actually helping them to shape or to fulfill their needs (in terms of Maslow hierarchy of needs). They could learn about the importance of cultural diversity not only from the family, but from the society as well ... it is a very good thing; we could help to bridge the gap between races"- Pre-service Art Teacher D

In addition, the researchers also gathered data regarding opinions on integrating the multicultural elements in our local curriculum and education system or teaching approach. Based on the data, the trainees suggested that there is a need for change in order to make our local curriculum and education system or teaching approach more integrated with multicultural element. Pre-service teacher A mentioned about the types of schools we have in our country; the national schools and vernacular schools. However,

pre-service teacher B says it doesn't matter if it's a singular ethnic school or a national school; as long as there are multicultural elements that our teachers are aware and are able to educate the students about this diversity.

“From my opinion, it has to be arranged in a curriculum because not just that is a compulsory to me but as we can see there's even three kinds of primary schools which known as SJKC (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina), SJKT (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil), and even SK (Sekolah Kebangsaan). This simple thing will contribute and make the student to have less awareness of other ethnic groups because the thing develops since they were young. Where they already have this mentality and it's deconstructing, it's hard for us to put them together when the student enters high school. Because they're usually with their own race and it's very difficult for them to absorb either accept other races or cultures in their community. Basically, I support those parents who send their children into Chinese school even if they're Malay and the best part even the Malay students who studied in a Chinese school. They do have Islamic education class in Chinese school. But it's only a few Malay parents who send their children into Chinese school but none of other ethnic groups went into SK (Sekolah Kebangsaan), so far there are only two Indians in my school but none Chinese. In this case, basically they have no problem at all with the Malay cultures. It's just that we are just wasting our time and completely pointless when we want to combine them in secondary. The fact that Siamese students look exactly like Malay student up to the extent the Malay students can't even differentiate Siamese student. The only thing that makes them different from each other is the way Siamese student dressed up. Reform and opening-up to the early childhood plays a big role and it has to be implemented from the very beginning of their school years. Because it will be too late to apply when they're already in secondary school.” - Pre-service Art Teacher A

“... When we include all the multicultural elements, then, it will become more equal and fairer. Every race will have a better understanding and respect towards each other. There will be no misunderstanding in every action that we do. So, I think, it's good if we apply the multicultural elements. Even if it's not in all types of

schools, it doesn't matter if it is a national school or Chinese and Indian school. Multiracial is important in our education system. Even if the teachers are from different races, they should expand their knowledge about other religion... "- Pre-service Teacher B

4. The challenges pre-service art teacher faces towards multicultural art education.

The final interview question looked at the challenges of teaching in a culturally diverse classroom. The most common answer for this question is the lack of knowledge; pre-service B, C, and D states that they were not fully aware and prepared enough to teach the students. This they claim, is the most challenging thing to face which is being less knowledgeable of other cultures. Of course, the image of being an educator is someone who would know all the answers to every inquisitive and curious student. This is what students expect of their teachers, but the trainees fear if they could not answer the questions posed by the students, they might disappoint them and of course destroy the respect that the students have for them. Another challenge they have mentioned is the attempt to have the students interacting with other ethnicities in schools.

"...my preparation as an art teacher. A teacher should know about... may be not all of it... but at least half of the arts there are out there in Malaysia... not just one race, but all of them. However, as an art teacher, we are perceived as a creative person, a knowledgeable person and a person who knows everything regarding to arts. If we are not knowledgeable, then, how are we going to teach? Like suddenly, I give you an example, if the Chinese students ask you about the art from Sabah and Sarawak or ask you about Orang Asli and then you say you don't know. That will be something that will disappoint the students. That's why we have to have knowledge ..."

"The students' acceptance when we teach craft is different from other subject such as math and science. We cannot just teach them theory. We have to have the examples and then we have to practice – the meaning of practice here is; we have to demonstrate and let

the students experience it themselves... There are many ways and methods of acceptance, some are okay, some are not, but if the students are not interested, then what are you going to do about it? With the Chinese/Indian... the non- Malays I think for the school that I went, the Chinese students are in the middle. Sometimes they accept, sometimes they know... but for the Indians, it's a bit hard for me to teach because some of them are not trained to understand about other cultures. For them, if it is not related to their culture, then, they won't be interested. Seriously, they're not interested. They will be like... "let it be, it's not my culture"... That is not a good attitude. Maybe, this is maybe... I don't know maybe there is something in their everyday life that teaches them to be that way and then, but as an art teacher; we have to attract their interest. We need to push them so that some of them will change their mind."- Pre-service Art Teacher C

"... when we have to teach students from different races from us, so, we have to take our own action in learning of that particular race before we teach them. Reason being, students, nowadays, have a higher level of curiosity and the tendency for them to ask unexpected questions is high. We cannot expect the kind of questions that the students will ask, so, the teacher has to learn more."- Pre-service Art Teacher D

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the researchers were able to explore all three objectives of this study; (a) to examine the current scenario and content of the Craft section in the Visual Art syllabus, (b) to study the preparedness of art teachers in teaching art among multicultural students and (c) to identify the challenges that pre-service art teachers face in teaching multicultural art education. For the first objective, the findings indicate that the current scenario and content of the Visual Art syllables is negative as it correlates with past researchers' findings that our textbooks and curriculum lack the integration of the vision of multicultural education, although very few of them disagree and stood by insisting saying that textbooks do integrate some other cultures other than Malay. This has been proven by Khairul

Aini (2012) that our textbooks' content and activities is indeed lacking of cultural diversity elements. The second objective is found that the pre-service art teachers were not fully knowledgeable enough to teach art among multicultural students as most of them are in their 20s, and would still have to self-educate themselves about other cultures. If they were asked to elaborate on arts if different cultures in their classroom, they would need to surround themselves more with their fellow peers of the different races, to learn and observe and most importantly, to be more aware of the basics, "what is what" to elaborate to the younger generation rather than relying only on what is taught at the university. This has been proven by Mohd Yusoff (2005) where he found the lack of implementation of multicultural education practice in Malaysian schools and that many teachers did not know or understand what constitutes multicultural education, many do not know how to use effective multicultural education practices, hence were less motivated to learn effective multicultural education practices, and not realize their full responsibilities as educators to use effective multicultural education practices. Therefore, the researchers believed that students should be taught more of the international multicultural elements as part of their undergraduate syllabus, as it has been proven that trainees these days, lack knowledge of even the basic cultures in Malaysia and they are not even familiar with simple terms and descriptions of art of other local cultures in the country and this is worrisome. Finally, the third objective correlates to the reason why the pre-service art teachers face challenges and the reasons behind their lack of knowledge of other basic local cultures.

The intention of this research is to spread the awareness of the seriousness in having multicultural education, and the participants themselves expressed their beliefs that this issue is very pertinent and needs to be addressed by the relevant divisions in the Malaysian Ministry of Education. With proper methodological and content exposure on this matter, teachers will definitely experience a boost of confidence to teach among culturally diverse classroom and this is important for the sake of the younger generation, in order for them to learn to be more sensitive and respectful of all the different cultures in the country.

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