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Exploring Postgraduate Students' Perceptions of Negotiated Curriculum

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore postgraduate students' perceptions of negotiated curriculum. The statement of problem is whether rigid curriculum is still relevant to postgraduate students' learning. As the postgraduates are adult learners, they are generally working, family, and have other commitments than typical undergraduate students. This in turn suggests for a negotiated curriculum. Boomer (1992:227) defines classrooms in which teachers invite and allow students to help construct the learning journey as "negotiating the curriculum". Comparatively, "curriculum negotiation involves giving students a voice in the choice and development of learning opportunities: both the "what" and the "how" of curriculum" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 171). A total of 30 TESL postgraduate students in UiTM participated in this study. An adapted questionnaire was used to collect the relevant data. Findings revealed that the respondents were aware of the existence of negotiated curriculum. It was also discovered that the main factor for the implementation of negotiated curriculum was hectic schedules of the postgraduate students. The major implication of negotiated curriculum is that it helps postgraduate students in managing their time to study and gives positive effect towards their learning strategies. The findings from this study will benefit students and also instructors at the same time through the implementation of negotiated curriculum in the classroom.

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1. Introduction

Boomer (1992:227) defines classrooms in which teachers invite and allow students to help construct the learning journey as “negotiating the curriculum”. The idea of a negotiated curriculum does not imply the abandonment of responsibility for curriculum making by academic staff, nor does it mean giving students, or any other group limitless power to make decisions. Comparatively, “curriculum negotiation involves giving students a voice in the choice and development of learning opportunities: both the “what” and the “how” of curriculum” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 171). Henceforth, negotiated curriculum gives learners opportunity to expose and share their needs, which at the same time assists lecturers in providing what is best for their learners.

Postgraduate students are usually amongst those who work, raise a family, and play other roles in the society. In other words, they have extra commitments besides commitments to their studies. Past researches have documented the challenges of the postgraduates (Wisker, 2011, Faizah et al, 2009).

The main purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of negotiated curriculum among postgraduate students. Therefore, the objectives of the study are to:

- Investigate the implementation of negotiated curriculum in the respondents’ classroom.
- Discover the reasons that lead to the implementation of negotiated curriculum in the respondents’ classroom.
- Identify how negotiated curriculum could assist the respondents’ learning.

This study pursued in answering the following research questions:

- Is negotiated curriculum implemented in the respondents’ classroom?
- Why is negotiated curriculum implemented in the respondents’ classroom?
- How does the implementation of negotiated curriculum assist students in their learning?

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Negotiated curriculum and critical thinking in English*

In a more focused scope on English language context, Hodge (2012) proposes an appropriate medium through which to introduce both negotiated curricula and critical thinking skills in English can be translation studies. By comparing and contrasting two English translations of the same original, non-English text, selected by the teacher or unit coordinator, students can apply their own knowledge, as well as skills learned in the course of the unit, to recognize new problems and ideas. These can then be applied to the unit's key outcomes, and their relevance compared to that of texts prearranged by the current curriculum, offering opportunities for debate over the curriculum's structure and content, as well as training students' abilities to assess unfamiliar texts by critical thinking.

2.2. *Negotiated ESL learning and collaborative social-learning environment*

Peer review allows student-student conferencing and negotiation of meaning which traditional feedback from teacher would lack. Moreover, the traditional approach detaches learners from interacting with the feedback source, while peer review encourages collaboration and interaction. The social dimension of peer review provides a vital interactive context for the students to swap ideas, negotiate meaning and learn from each other. Aside from improving the writing skills and linguistic competence, peer review was also found to improve the students’ social skills and self-growth. Focusing on the ESL students’ perceptions and processes in the composing effort is likely to assist writing teachers, teacher trainers and researchers in providing more practical and efficient techniques in the learning of second language writing (Abdullah and Abdalla Sallih, 2003).

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