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Teaching and learning methods of ethnic relations course: interactive or destructive?

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Abstract

Malaysia comprises of many ethnic groups, hence national unity is the ultimate goal and education is seen as the most effective tool to achieve this goal. Thus, Ethnic Relations course was introduced in the public and private universities in 2005 with the national unity as its goal. However, the aim and content alone are not sufficient to guarantee the success in achieving the goal. The question is what are the good teaching methods for this course in order to meet the demand?. Therefore, this paper aims to discuss alternative teaching methods that can be used. The questionnaire was developed and consists of four parts: perception of students towards existing teaching method, students' understanding, students' interest and students' motivation towards the Ethnic Relations course. Likert scale of 1 to 5 was employed and a total of 172 students responded. The study showed that the use of video, debate and forum in the teaching and learning of Ethnic Relations are among the effective methods.

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Keywords: Ethnic relations; media-based learning; problem based learning; teaching methods; youth

1. Introduction

A process of learning requires the interaction of four main components, namely, students, teachers, approaches adopted, and materials used (Azma A. Ahmad, 1990). Teaching, on the other hand, is a complex activity involving the use of various forms and types of skills. It also involves the relationship between teachers and students and between students with other students (Omardin Ashari, 1997). In general, teaching style consists of principles and methods used for instructions in teaching including participation of students in lectures, demonstration, reading, memorization, or a combination of them. Among various methods of teaching and learning adopted during the learning and teaching session are the uses of technology as well as the conventional methods like lecture or cooperative learning. Selection of appropriate teaching methods depends largely on the subject or skills being taught, students' learning styles, and their ability and commitment to learning.

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Ethnic Relations course was introduced in the public and private universities in 2005. The course was developed with the national unity as its goal due to the multiethnic population in Malaysia. Undoubtedly, national unity is the ultimate goal as far as the relation between ethnics is concerned, and education is seen as the most effective tool to achieve this goal. However, the aim and content alone are not sufficient to guarantee the success in achieving the goal. The understanding and awareness of the students on the subject are vital in achieving the goal. Good teaching and learning methods need to be employed in order to inculcate better understanding and awareness amongst students. Therefore, what is one of the best teaching methods for this course? Even though the Ethnic Relations course has been offered for quite sometimes, its effectiveness can be questioned when the initial survey revealed that students do not favour the lecture method because they are bored and burdened with the facts to be memorized. Consequently, this paper intends to discuss alternative teaching methods that can be used so that students motivation can be heightened.

2. Literature review

2.1 Teaching Methods

It is important to strategise teaching in the way that allows the adoption and implementation of various methods and techniques of teaching. Various teaching strategies are available not only in assisting the lecturers to improve their process of teaching but also in assisting the students to take more responsibilities in their own learning. Hence, it is vital to create an environment of learning which is more interactive, and to integrate technology as well as collaborative work into the learning experience of the students where appropriate. Knowledge and implementation of teaching styles expose students to a conventional as well as to a new and inventive ways of learning which consequently would enable them to excell in learning (Vaughn & Baker 2008).

2.2 Utilising Technology

Bates (1995) believes that there are four main purposes for utilising technology in the higher institutions, among others are to improve the quality of learning, to improve access to education and training, to reduce the cost of education, and to improve cost-effectiveness for education. However, the widespread use of technology in the field of education is influenced by the environment where the learning and teaching activities take place, i.e., the institution or campus, the group of teachers and students, and the community. Multimedia is the integration of elements such as texts, audio, graphic, animation, and video with computer as the presentation tool to enable a significant learning process. A teaching designed with the help of multimedia software helps to understand and improve the teaching processes systematically to obtain the goal of teaching.

Yusup (1997) is in the opinion of a good software must be appropriate with the objectives of learning and teaching. Compared to learning via lecture, learning via media, e.g., video requires lecturers to operate the video as a teaching tool for learning processes and compel the students to pay attention to the tool. Learning via lecture, according to Shahabudin, Rohizani & Mohd Zohir (2003) is a mere student-centred activity where the focus of teaching strategy is on the student as a key player in learning and teaching session. Students are encouraged to actively involve in each of their learning sessions, and more time is allocated for students to explore and solve their learning problems with the assistance from lecturers and tutors or facilitators.

2.3 Lecture

A lecture can be very effective when it is combined with an active learning strategy. This method has many advantages especially for a big size class, e.g., a lecture provides a way to deliver difficult information which otherwise is not obtainable by the students due to time constraint and/or inaccessibility to the sources or references. A short introductory lecture is needed in providing directions and purposes of learning, and in preparing students for further discussions on relevant topics. In a lecture, a lecturer can stimulate many ideas in a short period of time. A lecture is suitable for introducing new subjects, and for explaining background information of the subjects. In addition, a lecture is also suitable for delivering general understanding on important principles, theories, concepts and facts to students.

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