STUDENT DIVERSITY IN LEARNING: A NEED FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

Learning Islamic education is compulsory for all Muslim students at Malaysian schools. By imposing the teaching and learning of Islamic education in the school curriculum, it is expected that Muslim students will understand the core values and underlying principles of Islam as well as to internalize Islamic values into their daily lives. However, studies on Islamic education reported that students were not interested or had lesser interest to learn the subject at school. A qualitative study had been conducted to identify the factors that contribute to the lack of interest among students towards the subject. From the data, it was found that one of the factors was student diversity in learning. The students had different level of interest towards Islamic education and showed different responses while learning the subject. The findings indicated that learner diversity occurred in the classroom and needs attention from Islamic education teachers to deliver effective teaching. If not, student diversity will create a gap in learning and their interest towards Islamic education would decrease.

Keywords: Student diversity, effective teaching, interest in learning Islamic education

1. INTRODUCTION

Diversity can be found in many classrooms. Jarolimek, Foster & Kellough (2005) as cited in Jacobsen, Eggen & Kauchak (2006) asserted that the children we teach differ in significant ways, including physical characteristics, interest, home life, intellectual abilities, learning capacities, motor abilities, social skills, aptitude and talents, language skills, background experiences, ideals, aptitude, hopes, and dreams. Burton et al. (2005) also mentioned that students have always had individual differences in learning preferences and strategies, influenced by sociocultural factors such as ethnicity, culture, educational background, gender, geographical location, and socioeconomic status. It is important for teachers to value diversity in order to minimize the differences among students. Valuing diversity means teachers accept and respect the fact that each individual is different and unique in his own way. By recognizing their differences, teachers can help to create a healthy learning climate in the classroom.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF DIVERSITY ON STUDENTS’ INTEREST TOWARDS ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Previous researchs on Islamic education reported that most of the students in schools are less interested in learning Islamic education (see Nik Rosila 2007; Aiiri 2003; DK Nur Ashikin 2002; Sahari & Hassan Langgulung 1999; Abdul Aziz 1995). In this case, if Muslim students are not interested to learn about Islam, then, how are they going to know about their religion and to practice its teachings? Having
expounded the importance and advantages of Islamic education, it would be futile if
the Muslim students themselves do not want to learn it due to lack of interest. In fact,
the lack of interest among students to learn Islamic education will create a barrier
between them and the Islamic teachings.

In order to discover the reason behind this situation, six Form Four students from
a selected secondary school had been interviewed to gain a better understanding of
the research phenomenon. An in depth semi structured interview had been applied in
this qualitative study for collecting the data because it allows for focused,
conversation, two-way communication, which is preferable in exploring and
discussing one’s experience (Bogdan & Biklen 2003). The researcher also applied
one-on-one interview during the data collection process.

Based on the interviews, it was found that learner diversity occurred in the
classroom and it affects students’ interest and understanding of Islamic education.
The syllabus of Islamic education for Form Four comprises different components
such as Tilawah Al-Qur’an, Ibadah, Adab, Sirah and Tamaddun Islam. The variety
of lessons taught in Islamic education caught different interest from the students. In
other words, they have different level of interest while learning various lessons. Some
are interested in Sirah or Ibadah or Tilawah Al-Qur’an and some are not. It is very
clear that because of having no or less interest, they regard certain lesson as boring
and difficult to be understood. In fact, their initial interest to learn the lesson
influences their understanding. As mentioned by Sylvia (2006), when interested,
students persist longer at learning tasks, spend more time studying, read more
deeply, remember more of what they read, and get better grades in their classes. In
addition to that, Hidi & Renninger (2006) also stated that the level of a person’s
interest has repeatedly been found to be a powerful influence on learning. In this
case, students seek support from teachers to fulfil their individual needs.

3. A NEED FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING TO ENHANCE THE LEARNING OF
ISLAMIC EDUCATION

In coping with student diversity, teachers are encouraged to use a variety of
teaching materials to vary the learning experiences. Abdul Rahman Salih (1982)
asserted that the content of any curriculum cannot be learned efficiently unless it is
presented in a specific ways. Inadequacy of methods may handicap learning and
cause undue wastage of effort and time.

If we refer to our classical Muslim scholars, they also showed a great concern on
the methods of teaching. For example, Ibn Khaldun pointed out that the teacher
should first all know and understand the nature of his pupils and should bear in mind
their innate capacities. He advised teachers to begin the education of the child from
the simple things and later on introduce more difficult and complex things. Ibnu
Khaldun cautiously reminded teachers about the significant influence of proper
teaching methods in his words: “We have observed that many teachers are ignorant
of this effective method of teaching. They begin their instruction by confronting
the student with obscure scientific problems and require him to concentrate on solving
them. They think that it is the correct teaching method. In fact, they confuse him and
he loses all interest in the subject. Thus, lack of interest in some subjects is due to
faulty teaching and nothing else” (as cited in Alavi 1988).

The view of Ibn Khaldun concerning the teacher’s role to identify the nature of
students and their different abilities to encourage students’ learning has also been
highlighted by Borich (2004). He emphasized that every teacher need to become a reflective teacher. In this case, teachers try to identify individual differences and adapt the lessons to their learners’ needs, prior histories, and experiences. Regardless of their differences, teachers must teach all the students assigned to them.

In order to minimize students’ differences, educational researchers suggested that teachers use different kinds of instructional method to assist students’ learning. Researchers have discovered many instructional methods that when matched to the individual strengths of learners have significantly improved their performance (Corno & Snow 1986; Cronbach & Snow 1981). For example, ‘student-centered discussions’ may improve the achievement of highly anxious students by providing a more informal, nurturing climate, and ‘teacher-centered lectures’ may increase the achievement of low anxiety students by allowing for a more efficient and faster pace (as cited in Borich 2004).

Apart from that, teachers are advised to teach effectively in order to reinforce students’ learning. According to Heinich, Molenda, Russell & Smaldino (2002), different psychological perspectives have inspired designers to develop powerful frameworks for instruction. They listed successful instructional practices as follows:

i. Active participation: effective learning happens when students are actively engaged in meaningful tasks, interacting with the content.
ii. Practice: new learning requires more than one exposure to take root; practice, especially in varying contexts, improves retention rate and the ability to apply the new knowledge, skill, or attitude.
iii. Individual differences: Learners vary in term of personality, general aptitude, knowledge of a subject and many other factors; effective methods allow individuals to progress at different rates, cover different materials and even participate in different activities.
iv. Feedback: learners need to know if their thinking is on track; feedback may be provided by teacher correction of papers, electronic messages from a computer, the scoring system of a game, or by other means.
v. Realistic context: we are most likely to remember and to apply knowledge that is presented in a real-world context; rote learning leads to ‘inert knowledge’- we know something but never apply it to real life.
vi. Social interaction: fellow humans serving as tutors or peer group members can provide a number of pedagogical as well as social supports.

Even though the students have different levels of interest while learning Islamic education, the interest that resides within each individual can be developed by creating environmental factors or situational interest to provide meaningful learning experience. Islamic education teachers can benefit what has been mentioned by Ornstein (1990) to minimize students’ differences. Ornstein suggested the use of a variety of materials in a multimedia approach to vary the learning experiences. According to him, students have different interest and abilities that determine what they attend to and learn. But what they learn also depends on the ability of the teacher to capture their attention and spark their interest through the use of appropriate instructional materials and media. Indeed, Ornstein’s suggestion is very useful to regain students’ interest in learning Islamic education. Islamic education teachers should double their effort to support students’ learning by providing various
learning experiences for them in order to enhance the teaching and learning process of Islamic education.

REFERENCES


http://akademik.ukm.my/eda/projekge6553/islam.html


