Implementation of Arts Education in Malaysian Primary Schools: The Teachers’ Perspective

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Abstract

It is beyond doubt that the 21st Century will bring far-reaching influences on the livelihood and mankind. Most authorities agree that relevant content is needed in the curriculum as the old curriculum is not enough to prepare students for the 21st century. The first cycle of KSSR curriculum which was implemented in 2011 has ended, a review was done in 2017 and the Arts Education was introduced to the primary students. The purpose of this study was to elucidate the implementation of the new curriculum. More specifically, this investigation explore the factors influencing the effectiveness of the KSSR Arts Education (Pendidikan Kesenian). It attempts to contribut some valuable information for identifying strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the Arts Education in KSSR curriculum in the primary school level. Qualitative data were gathered via a survey and semi structured interviews were carried out to obtain further information and to validate data gathered from the questionnaires. The respondents were music teachers teaching in the primary schools in the area of Bandar Enstek and Seremban in the state of Negeri Sembilan. The study revealed that teachers feel that the level of knowledge in teaching both components of music and arts is not sufficient and more initiatives needs to be taken by the educational authorities so that teachers are more confident in their level of readiness. The paper ends with a discussion on the implications arising from the study.

Keywords: arts education, KSSR, music, visual arts, curriculum; implementation, Malaysia

Introduction

The primary education in Malaysian schools has undergone many reforms. The New Primary School Curriculum which started in 1983 with the aims to raise the literacy level of the students emphasized on mastering the skills of reading, writing and counting using integrated approach. The revised version of KBSR, the Integrated Curriculum for primary School took effect in 1993, while the Standard Curriculum for Primary School (KSSR) is the new system introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2011 after a comprehensive review of the national education system that led to the birth of Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The Primary School Standard Curriculum known commonly as Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) was formulated and developed based on these principles: To ensure students have the relevant knowledge, skills and values to face the challenges of the 21st century. The new curriculum emphasises on the holistic development which encompasses elements such as grooming for creativity and innovation, entrepreneurship and integration of Information and Communication Technology (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

The Arts Education introduced in the year of 2017 that group the Visual Arts and Music Education under one subject is one of the key learning areas in the KSSR curriculum. The curriculum designed with the aim to provide a balance between expression and experience and respond to visual arts and music which lead to sensory, emotional, intellectual and creative enrichment that contributes to the child’s holistic development in line with the Malaysian National Philosophy of Education.
The KSSR Arts Education Curriculum

The ultimate concern of the KSSR Arts Education is to develop self-potential students that are creative, able to appreciate and enjoy music and arts intellectually and enhance social and cultural development and enjoyment through a range of visual arts and musical activities. The Arts Education enables student to explore and express ideas, feelings, creativity and experiences through music and visual arts.

The Arts Education consists of two disciplines: Music Education and Visual Arts. The curriculum comprises of 4 modules: Module of ‘arts language’, module of arts skills, module of creativity and innovation; and module of arts appreciation. The Visual Arts comprises the strands of drawing, construction, printing, stamping, design and traditional craft. On the other hand, the Music program is designed to developed students’ potential in creative expression and aesthetic realisation. The music curriculum covers singing, percussion playing, music and movement, creative musical idea and music appreciation (Ministry of Education, 2016). The main principals encompassed in the KSSR curriculum is based on the set standards of learning that students are required to achieve the preset standards of knowledge, skills and values at the duration given at different levels of their schooling. The teaching-learning strategy of KSSR Arts Education includes the concept of integration, application of science and technology, especially in the areas of music and art works making, exploration, and creativity. Emphasis is also given to the development of skills and values. Discipline and participation in the practical sessions aim to enhance interactions and also interpersonal as well as intrapersonal skills.

The Status of Arts Education in KSSR

In the Malaysian school curriculum, Arts Education is accepted and categorized under the compulsory subject group in primary level. It is accorded the same status as other subjects like Malay Language, English Language, Mathematics, Science, Moral, Health and Physical Education in the curriculum though it is not a subject included in examinations. Formal and non-formal assessment for various components is carried out consistently. There is a total of 1 hour 30 minutes of instructions per week with 1 hour of visual arts and 30 minutes of music, which are equivalent to double and single period respectively.

Aims and objectives of KSSR Arts Education in Primary Level

The Arts Education in KSSR listed 5 main objectives.

1. To enable the students to apply the knowledge and understanding of arts language through a range of arts activities
2. To produce creative and innovative art works using various resources and technologies
3. To appreciate the aesthetic values of various art works
4. To apply arts knowledge and skills in art performances
5. To inculcate moral values through a range of arts activities

(Ministry of Education, 2015)

The Arts Education is an integral part of the school curriculum as well as an important component in the educational program contributes to the areas of self-expression, self-esteem, aesthetic awareness, social and cognitive growth in students. An effective and well-implemented Arts Education programme plays an important role in forging lifelong learning competencies, social attitudes and skills, enhancing self-respect and confidence, motivation and aspirations and contribute many far-reaching and developmental benefits to the students. Literature indicated that continuous investigation of the implementation of any curriculum can provide educators with a more holistic perspective of their programs and an increased ability to identify and disseminate effective program practices (Duerden and Witt, 2012; Cronbach, 1977; Nunan, 1993; Schriven, 1973). Monitoring the implementation of the curricula and its responsiveness to the challenges is crucial in
order to provide information for decision-making, and work towards continuous improvement. The Arts Education in KSSR has been implemented since 2017. It is essential to have a study of this programme implementation to link its objectives, input, implementations to get a clearer picture of the state of the programme.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the state of the of KSSR Arts Education in the primary schools through the music teachers’ perceptions. There are two main research questions: 1. Have the objectives listed in the KSSR Arts Education been met? 2. What are the barriers that prevent the achievement of objectives?

**Methodology**

The design of this study was constructed to assess the current status and practice of the Arts Education in public primary schools in Seremban, Malaysia. A survey instrument was conducted using a structured researcher designed questionnaire. Part one consists of items referring to the basic profile of the respondents. Part II contains items describing the context variables. The statements describing the variables could be rated on a five-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “very” depending on the respondents’ personal perception on each item. In order to attain reliability and validity of the questionnaires, a pilot test was carried out before the final draw up of the questionnaire. A total of 8 music and arts teachers from the surrounding primary schools were invited to participate as pilot-testing respondents. Respondents from the pilot test were encouraged to comment on the clarity of the questions as well as give suggestions on how and what to improve. From the comments made and the suggestions given, the questionnaire was revised.

The survey was administered to 78 Arts Education teachers from 52 schools around bandar Enstek and Seremban area in Negeri Sembilan. The lists of schools were obtained from the state education departments and approval to conduct was sought from the school principals. Questionnaires were mailed to the respondents though their respective headmasters or headmistress and some instrument was administered with the assistance of the trainee teachers that were having their teaching practicum and internship in the school. The study used a primarily quantitative approach to data collection using questionnaires, interview was also employed for cross checking and complimenting the information collected through the survey. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted on three school teachers.

**Data Analysis and General Discussion**

Among 78 valid responses, 41 % (32) of the respondents came from urban schools, 59% (46) were from rural schools. There were more female teachers with 79.4% (62) female verses 20.5% (16) male teachers. From the data, 44.4% of the teachers’ participated in this study were teachers having 1-10 years of teaching experience, and 55.6% were in the range of 11-20 years teaching experience. In examining the academic qualifications, the vast majority of the teachers (74.3%) have SPM qualification, and 11.53% are STPM holder; 14.1% hold a Bachelor’s Degree. As for professional qualifications, 100% of them obtained a teaching certificate. Among these teachers, majority (93.6%) do not have any visual arts certification, 28.2% (22) possess external music certification. Examining the experience of teaching visual arts and music, about 57.69% (45) of the respondents had experience in teaching music, and 29.4% (23) in visual arts.

**The Achievement of Objectives of KSSR Arts Education**

An analysis of the responses to items pertaining to the achievement of the objectives listed in the KSSR Arts Education curriculum is shown in Table 1. Overall, all the programme’s objectives were achieved with the cumulative weighted mean score of 3.77 (1= not at all, 5=very). Respondents expressed the most achieved objectives toward objective (5) To inculcate moral values through a range of arts activities (4.26). Likewise, the least achieved objective toward objective (2) To produce creative and innovative art works using various resources and technologies (2.61)
Table 1

Distribution of Teachers’ Perceptions on Achievement of Arts Education Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) To enable the students to apply the knowledge and understanding of arts language through a range of arts activities</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) To produce creative and innovative art works using various resources and technologies</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) To appreciate the aesthetic values of various art works</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) To apply arts knowledge and skills in art performances</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) To inculcate moral values through a range of arts activities</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cumulative Mean Score 3.77

Barriers Of The Arts Education Programme

Table 2 presents the responses to the items on barriers of the KSSR Arts Education Programme. Total of 10 items were listed to determine the barriers of the KSSR Arts Education programme are, each on a 5 point scale (1= not at all, to 5= very). Most teachers indicated item (5) teachers do not have all the knowledge and skills required to teach both the visual arts and music components in Arts Education syllabus (M=4.46) topped the rank of all the items describing barriers to the KSSR Arts Education programme followed by Arts Education not viewed as a serious core academic subject (M=4.42). Item (2) Lack of knowledge to integrate Music and Visual Arts (M=4.33) and (1) The scope of the syllabus is too broad (M=4.23) both ranked third and forth. Items (7) Insufficient periods of instruction and reinforcement for Music (M=4.22) and lack of facilities (M=3.98) ranked fifth and sixth respectively. Other barriers are item (4) students lack fundamental skills to follow fully in the KSSR Arts Education Programme (M=3.71), lack of adequate resources (M=3.67) and lack of support from the school (M= 2.67).

Table 2

Barriers of KSSR Arts Education Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) The scope of the syllabus is too broad</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Lack of knowledge to integrate Music and Visual Arts</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Lack of adequate resources</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Students lack fundamental skills to follow fully in the KSSR Arts Education</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Programme

(5) Teachers do not have all the knowledge and skills required to teach both the visual arts and music components in Arts Education syllabus

(6) Insufficient periods of instruction and reinforcement for Visual Arts

(7) Insufficient periods of instruction and reinforcement for Music

(8) Arts Education not viewed as a serious core academic subject

(9) Lack of support from the school

(10) Lack of facilities

Discussion

Results indicated that overall, the achievement of the objectives stated in the syllabus of the KSSR Music has been moderate with mean ratings between 2.61 to 4.26. However objective 2, to produce creative and innovative art works using various resources and technologies significantly need attention. Findings from the investigation and interview highlighted that students lack the foundation and hands on experience and involvement in this area.

The barriers that hinder the implementation of the curriculum need to be address accordingly in order to improve the achievement of the aims and objectives of the arts education programme. Based on the analysis from the survey and the interviews, barrier that tops the rank is that teachers do not have the expertise to teach both the visual arts and music components in the syllabus. This highlighted the issue of non specialist teachers having little confidence in their ability were assigned to implement the arts and music lessons. Generally, these teachers do not have the skills and expertise to conduct the arts classes as they were not trained accordingly. Some school administrators place responsibility for teaching the Arts Education on the class teachers and this teaching assignment seem unrelated to their domain of expertise and this consequently influenced the efficacy of the implementation of the curriculum. It is essential that teachers be given support in their professional development.

Another significant issue confronting teachers is Arts Education not viewed as a serious core academic subject, and the finding is in agreement with the study Figueiredo (2006); and Rusell-Bowie (2004). This predicament is fairly reflected as the survey indicated a mean rating of 4.42, ranked second of the barriers in implementing the arts education.

The broad curriculum scope and insufficient periods of instruction in the KSSR Arts Education curriculum needs to be addressed. Teachers find the curriculum places heavy demand on them as the curriculum is structured around 4 broad modules, which consist of module of ‘arts language’, module of arts skills, module of creativity and innovation; and module of arts appreciation. On top of that the curriculum required integration of skills and knowledge for the curriculum of music and visual arts. The allocation of time for visual arts is 60 minutes per week, and music education was reduced to 30 minutes or 1 period a week. Limited teaching period hindering teachers from covering the syllabus. A relevant and realistic syllabus is important for the programme to function effectively.

The lack of fundamental skills in music and art and insufficient exposure prevents the students from fully following the arts programme. More field trips for concerts and arts exhibition could enrich students ‘learning experience.

Findings from the study reviewed that the facilities, supporting curriculum resources were inadequate and insufficient. The predicament of the lack of relevant resources and facilities will affect the effectiveness of the implementation of Arts Education.

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The KSSR Arts Education, if properly implemented will offer many extended and developmental benefits to the students. For many students, participating in the KSSR Arts Education in school is the only source they get the chance to experience and learn music and visual arts. We need the support from the governing officials and policy makers to recognize the importance of Arts Education and ensure the arts receive the equity treatment as other academic subjects through allocation and funding and the provision of adequate and effective teacher training for the arts education to function effectively.

References


Biography

**Swee-Foong Liau**, Mimi received her doctorate in music education from the University of Malaya, Malaysia. She is a senior lecturer in the Social Science Department of Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus at Bandar Enstek, Negeri Sembilan. She received the award of “*Pensyarah Cemerlang*” for her expertise in music education. She lectures in music education courses, voice, curriculum and education courses. Her primary research interest include teaching and learning of music, curriculum implementation and teacher education