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# The Effectiveness of Lesson Study in An English Language Classroom for Lower Secondary Schools

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#### **Abstract**

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of a Lesson Study in an English Language classroom for lower secondary schools. Teaching English as a second language has always been a priority in Malaysian education system. Therefore, as its prominence and awareness grow, there was an interest to make its teaching objectives achievable not only in the classroom but also in the outside world. The activities involved in the Lesson Studywere mainly student centered which are in line with the 21st Century Learning. Instruments used were that of the pre and post tests and the improved grades (in the post test – which showed better results) that were produced after using this strategy. Data collection were based on analysis comparing the two tests on the sample of 33lower secondary students with percentages and frequencies, observations during the teaching and learning process and interviews with the samples. There were different recommendations and suggestion from teachers teaching this level of mediocre to weak students. Lesson Study can beimprovised from time to time if the need arises to accommodate learning outcomes. The strength of this strategy was students will enhance their content knowledgeand also, they will have to go through the next cycle during the teaching and learning process of this subjectin order to get the lesson objectives achievable whereas the weakness is simply that Lesson Study takes most of their time to complete the cycle. The results and findings proved that Lesson Study is indeed an effective way for both the teacher and students as the learning outcomes set before the students were indeed achievable and teachers become more dedicated as well as committed towards the teaching profession due to the process they go through in Lesson Study. The implication of this study showed that this study has potential to bring effectiveness towards students' learning approaches as well as the teachers' pedagogy aspects. In conclusion, a lesson study which involves a group of teachers who collaborate to make a lesson plan can be an effective strategy in Professional Learning Community as far as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaning is concerned.

**Key Words:**Lesson Study, strategy,English Language classroom, Secondary Schools, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, Professional Learning Community

#### INTRODUCTION

This study sought the effectiveness of a Lesson Study among Lower Secondary school students in an English Language classroom. The Ministry of Education (2011) as cited in Iksan et al (2014) had stated that lesson study's implementation has teachers involved in a group to collaborate for a lesson plan based on the set goals. Numerous reasons have also been attributed in the literature for the general decline of English Language standards among secondary school students (Nor Hashimah, et al, 2008). Many interventions can and has been taken to improve English Language achievements among secondary school students. Some of the reasons given in literature include students' attitude towards English Language, lack of usage of the language, usage of improper pedagogy and students' socio-economy background, etc. In this research, teachers will be developing the Lesson Study in the context of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) which is in the domain of Professional Development program for teachers.PLC is an approach or a term given for a whole lot of strategies where teachers come together to review their teaching or other pedagogically related activities. The strategies adopted to review their practice may be in the form of Lesson Study. According to Rosenholtz (1989), PLC which began in the 1980s brought teachers' strategic planning in the quality teaching and learning processes that were more effective for those involved in it compared to those who were not. She also carried out a study on 78 schools and found an increase in the teaching and learning process which happens collectively and not individually. Little and McLaughlin (1993) reports that schools and panels that are effective are those which carry out PLCs that are steady and steadfast.

Generally, PLC consists of a group of individuals, especially teachers, who come together collaboratively (Ministry of Education, 2011) with different ideas to produce or improve a lesson plan or strategy in the school's context for a particular class and also to see to its effectiveness. Then when the lesson or learning strategies are carried out, there will also be a group of teachers observing the lesson product in different ways and strategies (who are involved in their respective levels which comprises of 8 to 10 teachers including the same teachers who planned the lesson plan), after which, comments and some input will be gathered again for more improvements from what had been observed. This will be done through another meeting to further improve the lesson plan or strategy.

In PLC, the Lesson Study simply means teachers getting together to plan a lesson . They then carry it out and critique it afterwards with shortcomings, weaknesses and strengths. After the improvements have been made, the lesson plan is used to teach again to acquire the learning outcomes specified for the betterment of the students.

In a nutshell, it can be said that this study is an issue dealing with both the students as well as the teachers because it is one of PLC's strategies for students' achievement involving teachers' collaborative activity.

# BACKGROUND

This research attempted to investigate the effectiveness of the Lesson Study strategy in the teaching of English Language for Lower Secondary School students. This study was carried out in a secondary school in a district in the state of Negri Sembilan which involved a class

from that school (Form 2 – I4 years of age) and Four (4) English Language teacherswho went through the process / cycle of the Lesson Study. These teachers were part of the Lesson Study team who looked into the lesson study as participants in the processes of commenting and reflecting on the observed lesson and supported its activities with a Knowledgeable Others (KO) involved in it as well. This research also outlined the background of the research limitations of the research. The research method in this case-study were based on an approach that was a mixed method which had both the qualitative and quantitative method. Interviews and questionnaires were administered besides having the Lesson Study being carried out with all its procedures for the reports of the findings.

#### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The low acquisition level in English Language, especially among students that are weak in English Language had always aroused the anxiety among English Language teachers. This weakness had caused the teaching and learning process for further skills, such as vocabulary, listening and speaking, writing, reading and such be interrupted. For this, Lesson Study can help students acquire thinking skills in these English Language elements by incorporating skills and strategies needed by them to think critically and creatively which students themselves will be equipped during the Lesson Study implementation itself for an English Language lesson. Support from the schools can help in acquiring these skills by keeping up with the technology advances which keep changing so that students themselves would gain and understand information efficiently (Cox, 2009)).

Therefore, choosing and carrying out a proper Lesson Study strategy as an approach is a good measure to enhance the learning of English Language skills learnt that can be incorporated by the students, which can also gather great support from schools. If Lesson study, which involves teachers planning for a lesson in a collaborative manner (Perry, Lewis and Akiba, 2002) is not implemented in schools, lessons will be the same monotonous process during any teaching and learning process as there may not have any improvement in achievement for the students in English Language.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

In this study, the researcher has three main objectives which areto:-

- i) Investigate the perceptions of students towards learning English Language in the lower secondary schools through the Lesson Study approach,
- ii) Investigate the students' performance in learning English Language through the Lesson Study method in the lower secondary schools, and
- iii) Investigate the relationships between perceptions and the performance / achievement of students in the learning of the English Language in the lower secondary schools.

# **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- i) What are the perceptions of students towards learning English Language in the lower secondary schools through the Lesson Study approach?
- ii) How are the students' performance in learning English Language through the Lesson Study method in the lower secondary schools, and
- ii) How are the relationships between perceptions and the performance / achievement of students in the learning of the English Language in the lower secondary schools.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

# WHAT IS A LESSON STUDY?

For this study, the researcher has chosen the Lesson study strategy to enhance the teaching and learning process of the English Language in a Malaysian secondary school and its effectiveness. Lesson Study was originally implemented in Japan for Mathematics and now it is being used as a strategy in other subjects as well, and English language is one of the subjects involved (Bahagian Pendidikan Guru, 2012). Professional Learning Community(PLC) which had existed in the early 60s refers to the educators' efforts who are committed who work collaboratively as well as on an ongoing process to make inquiries to achieve better for their students DuFour, Eaker and Many, 2006).

The teaching and learning process in English Language will be more focused towards its improvement efforts with the school learning culture that is governed and administered by the education officers and school heads, instead of school organizational restructuring and the implementing of changes that were proposed. Here, the head of the Language Department and Panel of the school play an important role in ensuring the smooth flow of the Lesson study with the right procedures and the process that is adhered to and supported by quality leadership with vision. It is through the Lesson Study, the standard of English can be raised.

In 2011, the Teachers' Education Division (BPG) implemented PLC with the Lesson Study strategy that was carried out in 289 panels in 289 schools. This culture for teaching and learning in a collaborative way among teachers were very motivating in increasing teachers' professionalism at the school level. This effort was then pursued in 2012 to 107 more panels in 107 schools.

Lesson study serves as a professional development strategy (Doig and Groves, 2011, p77) for a long term whereby teams of teachers mutually plan, research or systematic investigation, and study their lesson for the teaching and learning process and this is to determine in which way students learn best. The interaction of a school's professional learning community is deepened and this is through the development of the habits in self-reflection and critical thinking through very personal combination with their colleagues (mainly teachers) and structured observation of their students during the teaching and learning process. The life of a school (through teachers) can be transformed through a quality lesson study (Nishio and Kenichi, (2012). Lesson Study takes into account the teachers who collaboratively sit to plan for the teaching and learning process (Dudley, 2014). They carry it out, observe, record the

findings and reflect on what has been observed. The pedagogical approach can be refined or innovated for students' learning improvement and achievement.

Abdullah and Ghani (2014) stated that to succeed in the management of a school, teachers should always be willing to learn to make changes and only through these effort, such successful changes can take place. They cited that Hord (1997) and Hipp& Huffman's (2003) PLC model shows that there is incorporation of the changes in the phase of theoretical development (Fullan, 1991) and this can result in the planning of the students' achievement and school improvement which refer to the three levels of initiation, implementation and acculturation.

**Onset Phase**: At this phase, teachers and leaders find time to sit to discuss the lesson study and also the time when the lesson should be carried out for which class.

**Implementations Phase**: Here, teachers will get together to discuss the lesson study. Lesson study planned is based on the level of capabilities of the students.

**Practice Phase**: This is the phase whereby the lesson will be carried out after which a post mortem is done to see the effectiveness of the whole PLC process and achievement of the students.

For all these phases, the researcher will observe the dynamics involved when teachers are interacting with one another. The researcher also interviews and creates questionnaires and check lists to validate this research.

# **Characteristics of A Lesson Study**

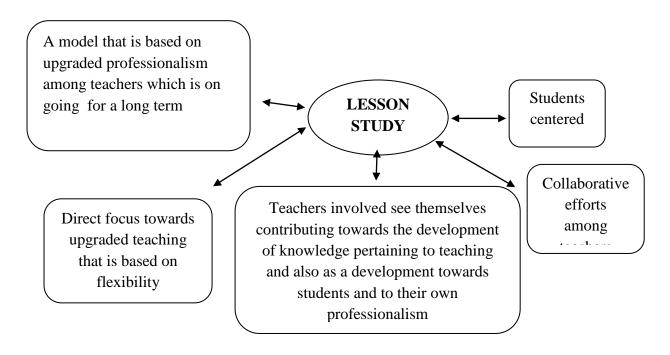


Figure 1

Figure 1: Characteristics of A Lesson Study (Translated fromBahagian Pendidikan Guru, 2012)

Figure 1 is based on the book "The Teaching Gap" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). The characteristics above are parallel with the teachers' Professional Development principles which outlines students centeredness that emphasizes on the learning outcome besides giving opportunities to teachers to contribute and develop their teaching knowledge and skills towards students' achievement and their own professionalism through their collaborative efforts among themselves. Collaboratively, problems are solved because it is involving upgraded teaching and learning process that is flexible, which are school based and this needs on-going moral support from all the authorities in the school. Lesson Study fulfills the criteria of a model for an effective teachers' upgraded professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Loucks – Horsley et al, 1996; Guskey, 1997; Hawley & Valli, 1999).

# **Lesson Study Cycle**

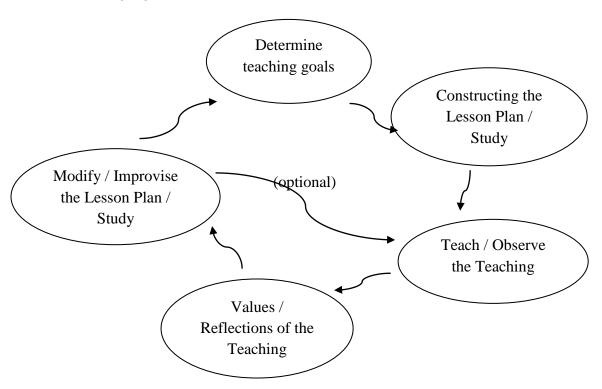


Figure 2 (Translated from Bahagian Pendidikan Guru, 2012)

Figure 2 shows how Lesson Study is carried out collaboratively. Overall, how the Lesson Study is operationalised in Schools according to the figure above is as follow:

In the beginning, all the teachers involved would sit and plan the lesson collaboratively taking into account the teaching goals and objectives derived from the curriculum / syllabus, students' ability and strategies. Constructing the plan must be in detail to suit the students as well as the teaching and learning process. Then, the teaching is carried out accordingly with the teacher selected to teach and others observing and taking down their own respective aspect they have to see into. After teaching is done, reflections and values of the lesson that was carried out has to be looked into. For this, all teachers involved would give their own feedbacks on that lesson. If modification has to be done, then the teachers get back together

to rectify the lesson plan and carry it out again until the desired objective and goal is achieved towards the students' achievement.

#### TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

English was the instruction medium until 1979 and this programme for language conversion completed in the Form 5 in 1980 (Talif, 1991). Before independence, the education system was more on Islamic and religious mode. At that time, English became the main medium of instruction due to the British influence. In 1957, after independence, Bahasa Malaysia was the main and official language and English became the second most important language. It was in 1971, due to the establishment of the "National Education Policy", English which was the second language and eventually it declined. Asmah (1992) stated that the decline was due to the fact that English was only used to teach English and other subjects were all in Bahasa Malaysia and this has lead to less exposure in English. In 2003, English began to be used for the teaching of Mathematics and Science for the Year One, Form 1 and Lower Six which was officially announced by the Cabinet on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2002 under the PPSMI (Pengajarandan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematikdalam Bahasa Inggeris - Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English Language) scheme which lasted only for a decade. This was replaced by a newer policy named "Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris" (MBMMBI) which is "Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and Strengthen English Language" to enhance the students' Science and Mathematics through the usage of English language to face the future of the nation. Currently, the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) is aligned in the teaching and learning process of the English Language so that students would be in par with the international standards (Hazlina Aziz, 2016) which consists of three levels which are Basic (A1 - A2) - A2 to be achieved by the end of primary school, Independent (B1 - B2) - B1 to be achieved by the end of secondary school; high B1 or B2 before entering the university and Proficient (C1 – C2) – B2 or C1 as they graduate; and for this, all skills taught will be tested at every level. This Roadmap for English Language Education Reform in Malaysia spanning 2015 to 2025 is an initiative with Cambridge English and the Education's English Language Teaching Centre Ministry that is playing the major role here to boost the English level in Malaysia.

Much had been said about the English teachers' poor competency and proficiency in the language as well as teaching it (The Star Online, 2016) Those who are better grounded in the language structure experienced the traditional syllabus. The current English Language teachers are the product of the 1972 syllabus. From 1970s, when the changes took place, the English standard was declining drastically. It is a known fact that Malaysian students don't speak well in English using good grammar and vocabulary (Raynaud, 2012). Ideas and strategies at a higher level are not being expressed by many of them. So there is no quality of students and teachers who come into any public university and this is very clear if we notice that there's definitely a wide gap in terms of students' entry into the public university and this may be probably because the elite group would have chosen the private universities instead due to their poor English. Students nowadays are incompetent in English language, and perhaps do not have the right aptitude or attitude (Davis, 2016) and this is due to the poor quality of English language teachers. Besides that, English is not spoken during the English

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lesson by the teacher when the teacher her/himself is considered to be the English ambassadors in schools. They speak in other languages instead during the teaching and learning process of the English lesson.

The current scenario in which learning takes place in an English Language classroom is one of the main cause for the "downhill" of English proficiency in Malaysia. This is due to the fact that when parents (especially non-native speakers) are mingling and communicating or getting involved with their children, they do not speak in English at home while they are educating their children in their daily lives instead they use the Malaysian Colloquial English. Peers also do contribute to the decline of fluency in the English Language among students, unless they speak in fluent English Language, because, most of the students / youngsters dare not speak up or converse in the English Language(Fitriana, 2018), due to the fear that their peers / classmates would either make a mockery (inferiority complex) or even ignore them when they cannot speak fluent English. English should be encouraged at all levels since it is the international language and globalization is always practiced everywhere (English as a Second Language Resource, 2013).

Teaching English Language in Malaysia as the second language is carried out in all schools throughout the country for a student's 11school years from Year 1 to Form 5, emphasizing on the Listening and Speaking, Writing, Reading(which had been implemented since 1974 (Darmi and Albion, 2013), Grammar and Literature skills (which was implemented in 2004 as a literary genre for primary schools and this is stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025 (2013) for secondary schools). The standard British English is used for spelling, grammar and pronunciation.

Presently, English is the official second language which means it is second in importance to Malay and considered a vital link internationally (Talif, 1991). Where globalization is concerned, students have to be fluent in English within their 11 school years, with good leadership qualities and ethical decision-making skills in order to face the competitive world, and for this, English Language teachers play an important role. For students to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perseverance, critical creative and innovative thinking and current information and Communication Technology skills(ICT) are to be developed through the inculcation of these language skills and elements in the learning process using the English Language.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This research is a qualitative as well as quantitative research whereby results are based on findings and data analysis.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is based on a Quasi-Experimental research design, whereby, there will be pre-test and post-test. The results are measured before the Lesson Study (treatment) is carried out and after it is implemented.

#### PARTICIPANTS / SAMPLES

Participants / Samples were from the mediocre to weaker group of students in Form 2 (14 years of age – 33 of them, co-ed). They were not chosen randomly but due to their weakness in this subject, they were experimented on. They were given a pre-test on some of the English Language skills taught. Then, the teaching and learning process (at least 2 to 3 lessons – because it is not through only 1 lesson, an achievement is expected) to see the effectiveness. After that, a post-test (same questions – but modified a little (for understanding purpose) / worksheets) was conducted to see if the students performed better than the pre-test.

# **The instruments** employed in this study were:

- (i) Observations and Interviews Interview data were collected from the random selected weak students to explain and support why English Language is not an interesting subject to learn. One-on-one in-person interviews took place. Interviews were approximately 15-20 minutes in length. These students interviewed were based on their performances in class and their achievement as well as their interest in the subject. It is because of the low interest that these students have in learning English Language that prompted the researcher to select these weak students. Simple questions were asked at random. Observations were also made during the teaching and learning sessions.
- (ii) Pre and Post Test –
  Samples (who are weak students from Form 2 -aged 14(fourteen) were asked to do the pre and post-test. The pre-test was given before teaching and learning process is done (Without Lesson Study) and the post test is done after the teaching and learning process is done (with Lesson Study).
- (iii) Data Analysis Comparisons were made for each student for the pre and post test. A comparative study was made for the pre and post tests, whereby data was analayzed between the vast differences and those with less differences (and also with the ones without any changes).

#### The Process and Procedures

- (i) Level 1: Firstly, I will teach using a normal lesson plan constructed by myself based on a specific language content.
- (ii) Level 2 : Pre-test
- (iii) Level 3: Based on the results of the Pre-Test, the teaching and learning process is then conducted using a Lesson Study (same language content but with slight changes to the teaching method based on the constructed Lesson Study).
- (iv) Level 4: Post test same set of questions to see if students remembered what was taught. The questions can/should be modified if necessary.
- (v) Level 5 : Interviews.

#### DATA COLLECTION PROCEDUREAND DATA ANALYSIS

As mentioned earlier, pre and post tests were conducted together with interviews and observations. After these 2 tests were done, a comparison was made to see if there were any vast or small differences (or no change at all). The procedure for data analysis was explained for the following:-

- (a) Frequencies and percentages would be used to determine the samples' perceptions for the Lesson Study that was conducted in the English Language lesson. (Research Question 1)
- (b) Frequencies and percentages would be used to determine to see to what extend this teaching method could solve attitude and motivation towards learning English Language through Lesson Study for a better performance. (Research Question 2)
- (c) Frequencies and percentages would be used to determine the success in the Lesson Study approach during the teaching and learning process through the difference between the pre and post test (Research Question 3)

#### **FINDINGS**

I saw that the students enjoyed the lesson very much and even the weak students were very enthusiastic because they were learning indirectly through a Lesson Study which involved not only one teacher, but a few. They even had the sense of belonging with one another besides facing the spirit of competition to perform well during the lesson which had different ideas from the different teachers involved who knew the students' mixed abilities and capabilities. This creativity in constructing a lesson maintains motivation which does not limit to the teaching approach but the activity through excitement of the activities that were planned during the Lesson Study sessions under PLC to suit the students.

Students were also attentive and active in excitement and enthusiasm while the lesson was being carried out by willingly listening to the instructions. Thus, listening and understanding the differentEnglish Language elements and skills were also enhanced simultaneously. The tables below show the responses and data obtained from the students based on the pre and post tests:

GRADES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES (%)	TOTAL STUDENTS	OF
85 – 100 (A)	-	-	-	
70 – 84 (B)	-	-	-	
60 – 69 (C)	1	3.03	1	
50 – 59 (D)	1	3.03	1	
40 – 49 (E)	6	18. 18	6	
01 – 39 ( F)	25	75.75	25	
			33	

**Table 1: Pre-Test** 

GRADES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES (%)	TOTAL STUDENTS	OF
85 – 100 (A)	2	6.06	2	
70 – 84 (B)	4	12. 12	4	
60 – 69 (C)	4	12. 12	4	
50 – 59 (D)	2	6.06	2	
40 – 49 (E)	6	18. 18	6	
01 – 39 ( F)	15	45.45	15	
			33	

Table 2: Post-Test

It is obvious from the 2 tables above show that the achievement in the tests is much better and had increased. Students have gained positively in the knowledge of the English Language elements and skills were taught through Lesson Study. They participated actively and were ready to face the post test (with modified questions).

In the Pre-Test, only 8 students passed the test (1 student had C, 1 student had D and 6 students had E), whereas in the Post-Test, 18 students passed (2 students had A,4 students had B, C and 2 students had D, while 6 students had E) – Research Question 2. All of them agreed that this teaching method could solve attitude and motivation towards learning English Language through the interview that was carried out – Research Question 1. All the 33 samples / students (100%) have perceived that learning English Language had a great impact to the little achievement they have had for the Post-Test through the Lesson Study that was conducted—Research Question 3.

# **DISCUSSIONS**

It is doubtless that this research has given more insights and proved the many ways which can be implemented to impart content teaching into students' learning in English Language through the Lesson Study approachwhich is a good strategy that I used among the Form 2 students (mediocre to weak group) and this too, the students looked forward to each lesson knowing that different methods were involved using the Lesson Study. This was to enable them to be interested not only in the content that is being taught and but the vital skills that were to be learnt. The low acquisition level in English Language, especially among students that are weak in all the skills using versatile methods in schools, had aroused the anxiety among English Language teachers. This weakness among students had caused the teaching and learning process for further skills, such as speaking, listening, writing, reading and such be interrupted.

Therefore, choosing the Lesson Study as an approach to study in is a good measure to gather great support in schools in order to enhance the learning of any subject. If it is not used creatively in schools, lessons will be the same monotonous process during any teaching and learning process as there may not have any improvement in achievement.

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#### **CONCLUSION**

To summarize this article, constructing a Lesson Study for an English Language classroom is one of the strategies schools can adopt for school improvement through restructuring the school culture and this can be carried out as an important element and strategy in PLC for the teachers' Professional Development. The Lesson Study is also an ongoing as to develop teachers' leadership, administrators and the school supporting staff in the teaching and learning process for English Language and it has to be evaluated in depth in order for its effectiveness to take place with good achievement amongst students. In fact, some of the literature review showed that students and local community are involved in the Lesson Study practice. Thus, with the involvement of all parties in the Lesson Study, when performing tasks, English Language teachers will be able to improve their leadership capacity, pedagogy aspects as well as get their learning objectives achieved for the sake of students' achievement.

It is recommended that more studies on Lesson Study are to be conducted in depth where lessons planned should be embedded with more 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning elements to cater for the newer generation of students in the country.

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