

The Relationship of Non-Option Teachers, Educational Leaders' Concern, and 21st-Century Learning Challenges on the Quality of History Teaching in Schools in Melaka

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ABSTRACT

The shortage of teachers in certain fields has led to the existence of non-option teachers who teach subjects outside their areas of specialization. Non-option teachers face various challenges and are often blamed when students' achievement in the subjects they teach is less than satisfactory. This study was conducted to identify the relationship between non-option teachers, educational leaders' concern, and 21st-century learning challenges in relation to the quality of History teaching in schools in the state of Melaka. The study employed a quantitative approach using a survey research design. A total of 90 non-option History teachers responded to the questionnaire provided. The study data were analyzed descriptively to obtain frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Inferential analysis was also conducted to identify the relationship between the knowledge and skills of non-option History teachers in teaching the subject. The findings indicate that the relationship of non-option History teachers, in terms of respondents' fields, is at a moderately high level, whereas in terms of gender and teaching experience, it is at a high level. The study also reveals a significant relationship between the knowledge and skills of non-option History teachers in teaching the subject. It is hoped that the findings of this study can serve as a guideline for various relevant parties in efforts to further enhance the knowledge and skills of non-option History teachers so that they can reach a level comparable to that of option History teachers, thereby ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning as well as students' performance are not compromised.

Keywords: Non-Option Teachers, Educational Leaders, Learning Challenges, Teaching Quality, History

INTRODUCTION

Education is a process that enables individuals to acquire and apply knowledge, noble values, and specific skills continuously. Therefore, teachers today play a crucial role as agents of change in educating and nurturing the next generation. Teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of providing quality education by creating effective teaching methods to ensure that the information delivered is meaningful to students, captures their interest, and allows them to easily remember and apply what they have learned. According to a study by Cecilia (2020), before the teaching and learning process takes place, teachers must ensure that they are well-equipped with knowledge and understanding so that the delivery of information can be conducted smoothly. A lack of knowledge and understanding may result in ineffective teaching. Teachers need to utilize relevant knowledge and methods to achieve their teaching objectives.

The issue of out-of-field teachers teaching subjects such as History continues to persist due to a shortage of teachers in these specific fields. This is caused by the uneven distribution of subject teachers (KPM, 2019).

Urban areas have an excess of teachers, while rural areas suffer from a lack of teachers for certain subjects, leading to non-option teachers being forced to take on these responsibilities. This situation affects students, as these teachers may not be able to deliver lessons effectively and comprehensively. However, these teachers have no choice but to comply with school administrators' instructions to fill vacant teaching positions without considering the long-term impact on students' learning (Anwar, Hazwan & Luqman, 2021).

Additionally, teachers may struggle to function effectively due to incomplete teaching materials for the subjects they are assigned to teach. This situation puts pressure on teachers, as they must learn subjects outside their field. As a result, they begin to view this as an extra workload rather than a responsibility. Consequently, teachers become unprepared to teach non-option subjects and rely solely on their existing knowledge without encouraging students to generate new ideas. In the same context, students may feel bored due to unengaging and uninspired teaching methods, leading to a lack of confidence in the learning process. A study by Richard (2017) found that 27% of teachers, or 5 out of 17 surveyed, were teaching History despite not being specialized in the subject.

Teachers should no longer adhere to outdated teaching methods, such as traditional chalk-and-talk techniques that rely solely on textbooks, which are no longer effective in testing and challenging students' cognitive abilities, skills, and imagination in this digital era. As educators, teachers must implement various approaches to ensure that the teaching and learning process in the classroom is effective, efficient, and meaningful for students. If the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory, the learning environment will become dull and uninspiring for students.

Thus, effective teachers and teaching processes are crucial in achieving successful learning outcomes. Teaching and learning involve competencies, skills, and attitudes in delivering educational content through well-structured speech, appropriate tone, and intonation in the classroom to facilitate student comprehension. If teachers fail to teach effectively, it will inevitably have negative consequences for students. This issue must be carefully considered before commencing lessons. Hence, the idea arises to analyze the impact of teaching on students' academic achievement. Some of the challenges faced by students include difficulties in understanding the subjects being taught and a lack of knowledge about the necessary learning tools. Therefore, this study will examine the relationship between non-option teachers, the concerns of educational leaders, and 21st-century learning challenges in relation to the quality of teaching in schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach through a case study research design. This method is appropriate for selecting respondents who meet the required criteria, namely 90 respondents from 30 schools across three districts in Melaka, consisting of 10 schools in Alor Gajah, 10 schools in the Melaka Tengah District, and 10 schools in the Jasin District. The quantitative method helps the researcher gain a detailed understanding (Creswell, 2012) of the Influence of Non-Option History Teachers, School Leaders' Concern, and the Challenges of 21st-Century Learning. This study determines the respondents and research locations through purposive sampling. According to Creswell (2012), purposive sampling is the most suitable method for qualitative research because respondents are selected based on locations and individuals that best enable the researcher to understand the key issues of the studied phenomenon.

Data in this study were obtained through a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, with 90 sets of questionnaires distributed for respondents to complete. The questionnaire was adapted from a study conducted by Hafizati Husna Ibrahim (2021). This allows respondents to answer the questionnaire according to an appropriate level for each given question. The questionnaire method helps the researcher systematically understand respondents' characteristics, enabling analysis of the findings. The generalization of sample characteristics to the population can be made using inferential statistics. This means the researcher can draw conclusions based on the data obtained from the distributed questionnaire.

The validity and reliability of the information are crucial in research to determine the extent to which the obtained information aligns with the actual situation of the studied subjects. According to Merriam (2001), validity refers to how well the research design can measure the intended data. If a research instrument can accurately measure the studied variable, then the instrument is valid as an appropriate measure for that variable. To determine the reliability of the study items, the Cronbach's Alpha value is used as a reference for measuring internal consistency (Cronbach, 1946). The pilot study analysis for all 75 items recorded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.963. Based on the collected sample data, the researcher applies inferential analysis to draw conclusions about the population characteristics based on the sample characteristics. Inferential analysis involves specific tests such as the t-test, ANOVA test, Pearson correlation test, and others. This study employs inferential analysis to describe the relationships between the variables in the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The KSSM History curriculum is a continuation of the content from the History subject at the primary school level. The arrangement of KSSM History content follows a chronological sequence of events. At the secondary school level, the KSSM History content is discussed in-depth, focusing on a comprehensive understanding of our nation's history. The selection of certain aspects of world history relevant to national history is also studied. Therefore, the content of KSSM History aims to develop students who appreciate historical events with empathy and patriotic spirit. Each topic in the Content Standard (SK) is translated into the Learning Standard (SP) based on a minimum allocation of 64 hours per year (Curriculum Development Centre, 2019). The implementation of the History subject follows the currently enforced Circular of Professional Guidelines. The table of contents can be seen in Figure 2.5 below:

- Form 1: Our History and the World
- Form 2: National Heritage
- Form 3: The Arrival of Foreign Powers
- Form 4: Nation Building
- Form 5: Malaysia and the Future

The allocation of teaching and learning hours for History is based on Circular of Professional Guidelines No. 9/2016: Implementation of the Standard Secondary School Curriculum in Stages Beginning in 2017, which stipulates a minimum of 2 hours per week, equivalent to 64 hours per year.

History Option Teachers and Non-Option History Subject Teachers

A History teacher is an educator with a strong background in history and adequate professional training in history curriculum and pedagogy. A History teacher must continuously seek ways to enhance their knowledge and stay updated on issues related to history teaching (Marsan Osman, 2016). Meanwhile, a non-option History teacher refers to a teacher who lacks formal qualifications to teach the subject but is assigned to do so due to placement needs. Their placement is based solely on the availability of subject vacancies. It is crucial for education graduates to be assigned according to their respective options to ensure the future of students' education is not compromised by teachers teaching subjects outside their expertise (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016). In this regard, teachers teaching subjects such as History must possess pedagogical knowledge competencies. Pedagogical knowledge refers to the various teaching-related knowledge that every teacher should acquire. In the teaching and learning of History, teachers must understand and master various modern teaching skills, including methods, approaches, techniques, and teaching strategies. Some of the latest approaches used include mastery learning, cooperative learning, collaborative learning, contextual learning, constructivist approaches, skills integration, interdisciplinary integration, and problem-based learning (Becta, 2018).

Through classroom teaching, students will recognize that their teacher is more knowledgeable and skilled in discussing the subject matter. This can be observed through the teaching pedagogy employed by the teacher (Janimah Suhaimin, 2017). Although there are many teaching approaches available for classroom use,

teachers often opt for conventional or traditional approaches due to familiarity and mastery of older methods. However, in 21st-century teaching and learning, teachers should explore contemporary teaching approaches that align with students' cognitive levels, learning diversity, topic suitability, and other relevant factors (Becta, 2018). Pedagogical knowledge is not solely based on experience or existing knowledge; teachers must also strive to apply innovative teaching pedagogies, such as computer-assisted learning. This is because a teacher's ability to apply innovative teaching and learning methods positively impacts students' progress and achievements (Lee, 2018). Therefore, teachers must be equipped with new 21st-century teaching and learning methodologies (Mahdi Shuid, 2016).

A foreign study by Richard Ingersoll (2017) states that secondary school teachers should have an educational background and training in the subjects they teach. Every teacher should specialize in a particular subject to effectively impart knowledge and achieve learning goals efficiently. In Malaysia, data shows that 41% (18 teachers) out of 42 teach within their specialization, whereas 27% (12 teachers) out of 17 are teaching non-specialized subjects such as Geography, Economics, Malay Language, and Political Science. This imbalance in subject specialization raises concerns as it directly impacts the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Consequently, teachers may struggle to deliver quality lessons due to a lack of comprehensive subject knowledge. If teachers are assigned to teach within their expertise, it would ease knowledge transmission and eliminate difficulties in lesson delivery.

Knowledge of Teaching History Subjects

A quality teacher will produce quality students. Emphasis on developing human capital with knowledge, skills, and appreciation of noble values among students is highly prioritized, especially as the nation faces the challenges of the 21st century, requiring strong identity and character in every student. The importance of history as a subject cannot be denied in this transformation process. The government's move to make history a compulsory subject in the national education curriculum has long been adopted and practiced by developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the United States, South Korea, and Japan. Therefore, the government's decision to integrate history as a core subject alongside others such as Bahasa Malaysia and Islamic Education or Moral Education aligns with the national goal of fostering unity through the education system (Solumuthu, 2022).

Furthermore, teachers who teach history, particularly at the secondary school level, should possess educational backgrounds and training in the subject they teach (Osman Muamat, 2016). Every teacher should specialize in their respective fields to ensure that knowledge is delivered effectively. However, some teachers assigned to teach history are not history specialists, as revealed in a study by Janimah Suhaimin in 2017. For instance, teachers specializing in accounting, science, and mathematics have been required to teach history. This issue arises because school administrators often overlook the importance of subject specialization, particularly for history teachers. Additionally, according to Chong Yee Pei (2020), some schools assign teachers from other subjects or newly recruited teachers to teach history due to a shortage of qualified or trained history teachers, merely to fill teaching schedules. This issue should be taken seriously by all stakeholders, as the primary goal of history education is to ensure that students receive knowledge from truly qualified teachers.

In this regard, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2019) outlines the key roles of history teachers as follows:

- History teachers as historians – Teachers should help students evaluate, consider, and argue the truth and accuracy of historical facts or information presented by authors or historians in history textbooks.
- Mastery of analytical and reconstructive skills – History teachers must be able to analyze and reconstruct historical knowledge from various perspectives.
- Proficiency in modern and interactive teaching methods – Teachers should utilize appropriate print and electronic media, such as LCD projectors, computers, tablets, e-Guru videos, VLE 1BestariNet, history blogs, and history bulletins.

- Creating a historical learning environment – Teachers should use Word Walls based on current learning topics and incorporate higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

The Practice of History Teaching in 21st Century Learning (PAK 21)

Teaching and Learning (PdP) in the 21st century was introduced in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013-2025. It was introduced in line with the implementation of the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) and the Secondary School Standard Curriculum (KSSM). Referring to the first wave of the PPPM 2013-2025, which focuses on transforming the system and supporting teachers by emphasizing core skills, the primary objective outlined is to enhance teaching standards through targeted teacher guidance, especially in core subjects. In this 21st-century era of globalization, the need to educate the current generation to become high-quality individuals is crucial. Most countries generally acknowledge that today's curriculum must encompass all aspects of skills and competencies that align with the needs of 21st-century education.

Meanwhile, according to the Buletin Anjakan: Bulletin of Malaysian Educational Transformation (Issue 4/2015), there are three key skills that students must master in 21st-century learning: learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills, as well as life and career skills. The characteristics of 21st-century learning are divided into four main elements: communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. The 21st-century Teaching and Learning (PdP) scenario was first piloted in Malaysia in 2015. In line with what is stated in the PPPM 2013-2025, the Action Plan for the Development and Application of 21st-Century Curriculum and Assessment is discussed in Chapter 4 under the title Student Learning. Therefore, the implementation of 21st-century PdPc (Teaching and Facilitation) in this country has gradually begun to develop, and studies on its implementation have also been conducted since 2015. A study conducted by Halif and Sakilah (2019) on the perceptions of parents and Year 4 and 5 students in a primary school in Batu Pahat regarding 21st-century learning found that all parents were aware of 21st-century learning and supported this learning process both at school and at home. The students also expressed enjoyment in 21st-century PdP methods and acknowledged that their parents provided support and assistance in their learning both at school and at home.

Similarly, a study by Azizah Mat Ali (2018) on the mastery level of scientific reasoning skills, science process skills, and 21st-century skills among secondary school students in Bachok, Kelantan, found that scientific reasoning, science process skills, and 21st-century skills can be learned and mastered through an effective PdP process. The teaching process plays a crucial role in exposing students to all the necessary skills beyond just facts and theories. This demonstrates the importance of embedding 21st-century skills in today's students to enable them to compete in the era of globalization. In 21st-century school education, PdP is increasingly student-centered, with teachers acting as facilitators. Therefore, teachers naturally become primary references for students. The ability to use computers, technology, and ICT is also essential for 21st-century teachers. Referring to a study by Ifran Naufal and Mohamad Tarmizi (2014) on the level of ICT skills and practices among teachers in Malaysia and its impact on PdP, it was found that teachers have proficiency in using the internet for information searching and sharing, possess a solid ICT foundation, and have internet skills for communication.

Sufficient and continuous training is necessary to ensure all teachers are competent in using ICT, thus producing students who are also skilled and proficient in ICT in the future. This study aligns with research by Fry and Seely (2021), which found that formative assessment in PdP is crucial, and teachers need training to effectively source information from various media so they can utilize existing digital resources to enhance content mastery and teach students 21st-century skills.

Challenges Faced by 21st-Century Teachers

Effective teaching and learning practices must begin with the teacher's ability to select various teaching methods and approaches. This ability can stimulate students' thinking and interest in classroom learning. A

skilled, creative, and competent history teacher can diversify teaching methods and techniques according to students' abilities and tendencies. This is an essential component that all teachers, especially history teachers, should emphasize. Numerous studies have been conducted on teachers to improve the teaching profession. A wise teacher conducts lessons in a way that is beneficial and engaging, using various stimuli such as appealing teaching aids, games, and voice modulation. By doing so, students become motivated and interested, ultimately achieving the day's learning objectives (Widad Othman, 2018).

Additionally, a study by Zahara Aziz et al. (2017) found that both trained teachers teaching KSSM subjects, whether as specialists or non-specialists, in 16 secondary schools showed no significant difference in their historical knowledge. This is because the more crucial factor is their readiness in the subject matter. Slavin (1987) identified four fundamental factors that teachers must consider before starting a lesson: teaching materials and resources, student interest and attitude, instructional goals and objectives, and assessment of the lesson. This illustrates that being a teacher is not an easy task. Teachers must study and understand students' interests, attitudes, skills, and available resources before entering the classroom.

Furthermore, during lesson delivery, teachers must be able to implement the planned methods effectively. However, one of the most common challenges in teaching and learning history is ineffective teaching methods. This indicates that there are still weaknesses among teachers that need improvement for better future teaching and learning outcomes. The practice of teacher instruction is closely linked to student achievement. However, for teachers who are not history specialists but are required to teach the subject for specific reasons, they should not feel less confident in delivering their lessons. Teachers must continuously utilize their creativity and abilities to the fullest while continually expanding their knowledge to improve their teaching practices. This, in turn, elevates the professionalism of teachers in line with the fourth shift in the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2016-2026, which aims to transform teachers into specialists in their respective fields, regardless of whether they are subject specialists or not.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 90 instrument forms were distributed to selected respondents based on the designated sampling procedure. The study findings were analyzed based on two main aspects: the respondents' demographics and the differences in teaching among non-option History teachers, the concerns of educational leaders, and the challenges of 21st-century learning on the quality of History teaching in schools.

Respondents Demographic

In this study, the respondents' demographics consisted of gender, teaching experience, educational level, and field of expertise. The details regarding the respondents' demographics are presented in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: Respondent Demographic

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	22	24.4
	Female	68	75.6
Teaching Experience	10 years or less	37	41.1
	11 to 20 years	30	33.3
	21 years or more	23	25.6
Educational Qualification	Diploma	-	-
	Bachelor	83	92.2
	Master	7	7.8

Field of Expertise	Science	30	33.3
	Art	38	42
	Economy	15	16.7
	Others	7	7.7

According to Figure 4.1, 22 respondents, or 24.4%, were male, while the remaining 68 respondents, or 75.6%, were female. In terms of teaching experience, 37 respondents (41.1%) had 10 years or less, 30 respondents (33.3%) had between 11 and 20 years, and 23 respondents (25.6%) had more than 21 years of experience. Regarding educational qualifications, 83 respondents (92.2%) held a Bachelor's degree, while only 7 respondents (7.8%) had a Master's degree. As for their field of expertise, 30 respondents (33.3%) were from the Science field, 38 respondents (42.0%) were from the Arts field, 15 respondents (16.7%) were from the Economics field, and the remaining 7 respondents (7.7%) were from other fields.

ANOVA Analysis

In this study, ANOVA analysis was conducted to identify the differences in teaching among non-option History teachers, the concerns of educational leaders, and the challenges of 21st-century learning on the quality of History teaching in schools. The detailed analysis of the differences in educational leaders' concerns based on teaching experience is presented in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2: Analysis of ANOVA Test on Knowledge Based on Teaching Experience

	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.(2-tailed)
Between Groups	18.85	25	0.754	1.238	0.244
Within Groups	38.973	64	0.609		
Total	57.822	89			

Based on Table 4.2, statistical analysis indicates that there were no significant differences in school leaders' concerns based on teaching experience among the studied group. The statistical formula is $F(25,64) = 1.238$, $p > 0.05$. The significance value is 0.244, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean level of school leaders' concerns based on teachers' experience.

Furthermore, the study also examined the differences in 21st-century learning methods based on the respondents' teaching expertise. The detailed analysis is presented in Table 4.3:

Table 4.3: Analysis of ANOVA Test on 21st Century Learning Based on Respondents' Field

	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.(2-tailed)
Between Groups	18.85	25	2.758	1.053	0.421
Within Groups	38.973	64	2.62		
Total	57.822	89			

According to Table 4.3, statistical analysis shows that there were no significant differences in 21st-century learning methods based on respondents' fields of expertise among the studied group. The statistical formula is $F(25,64) = 1.053$, $p > 0.05$. The significance value is 0.421, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean level of 21st-century learning methods based on respondents' fields of expertise.

Discussion

The findings of the respondents' demographic study showed that the majority of respondents surveyed were female, accounting for 76.6%, consisting of teachers with experience ranging from 10 years to more than 2

years. These non-option teachers predominantly hold a Bachelor's degree (92%) compared to 8% who hold only a Master's degree. Among them, literature was the most common field of study, with 42% of respondents, compared to other fields such as science, economics, and others. The analysis of general perception towards non-option History teachers indicated a positive perception. These teachers strongly agreed that educators should teach subjects aligned with their academic specialization and possess adequate knowledge of the subjects they teach. Additionally, teachers were found to be more creative in the teaching and learning process (PdPC) and effectively implemented 21st Century Learning (PAK-21) activities. They also demonstrated readiness to attend workshops or courses related to the subjects they were teaching. Furthermore, the analysis of teachers' implementation was positive, based on mean values and other indicators. Teachers had access to various resources to enhance their subject knowledge, utilized relevant teaching aids, adapted their teaching styles to students from diverse backgrounds, and were able to identify misconceptions among students when teaching non-specialized subjects.

Similarly, the findings on school leaders' concern towards non-option teachers were also positive. Respondents stated that school administrators practiced effective leadership by ensuring the school's vision and mission served as a guiding direction for all stakeholders. School leaders motivated staff to improve work quality and demonstrated consideration in assigning tasks. The implementation of 21st Century Learning (PAK-21) was also found to be positive, as teachers applied PAK-21 teaching methods and techniques in lessons. Teachers actively communicated with students as a sign of care and appreciation for their talents. Moreover, school infrastructure was adequately provided to support PAK-21 implementation. Regarding the hypothesis findings, the first hypothesis showed that there was no significant difference between male and female non-option teachers in terms of teaching performance. Both groups exhibited similar capabilities in delivering lessons outside their specialization. The second hypothesis indicated that school leaders demonstrated the same level of concern for teachers, regardless of their experience. It also showed that all teachers, irrespective of their field of study, could practice 21st Century Learning, even when teaching subjects outside their specialization. Meanwhile, the third hypothesis revealed no significant difference in the mean value of 21st Century Learning implementation based on respondents' fields of study.

Thus, this study concludes that non-option teachers remain optimistic and positive in their teaching, even when assigned subjects outside their area of expertise. Overall, this study is highly significant for various stakeholders, including the education department, schools, and teachers themselves, in organizing non-option teachers to handle subjects beyond their specialization. The implications are substantial for both teachers and students. Teachers must first equip themselves with extensive pedagogical knowledge, particularly in subject content and appropriate teaching methods. This is crucial as newly assigned non-option teachers may struggle to understand and deliver subject content effectively. The impact on students is considerable, especially for those preparing for major examinations, who require competent teachers well-versed in all aspects of the subject.

Therefore, the role of school and department administrators is crucial in addressing this issue. Leaders must be more attentive and seek the best solutions for all stakeholders. This is particularly important as administrators play a key role in providing 21st-century technology resources for non-option History teachers to deliver modern teaching methods effectively. Without strong support from senior leadership, teachers will face difficulties in implementing 21st Century Learning in their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Meaningful learning is often associated with the quality of a teacher's leadership role, whether in inspiring students, serving as a reference, or influencing them to achieve learning objectives. Hence, professional development courses for teachers should be conducted regularly and involve all educators, whether option or non-option. The course content must encourage teachers to improve their teaching practices and provide a variety of useful teaching methods for implementing 21st Century Learning. Upon completing these courses, teachers should be able to apply innovative teaching techniques characterized by fun, low-pressure, student-

centered learning, hands-on activities, and ICT integration. The District Education Office (PPD), State Education Department (JPN), and Ministry of Education (KPM) must take proactive measures to provide high-quality facilities, resources, and professional development courses. Additionally, mentoring programs and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) should be encouraged to enhance the quality of teaching practices. These platforms will facilitate knowledge sharing, expertise exchange, and collaboration among educators. Lastly, school leaders must play a vital role in fostering positive values by creating a stimulating environment and a supportive school culture for teachers.

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