Feedback Patterns of Excellent Teachers in Creating Thinking Culture in Classroom

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Abstract

Although there is a growing interest in the culture of thinking in education, detailed information about classroom interaction that can incorporate thinking culture is lacking, particularly in the Malaysian context. Additionally, past studies do not focus on Islamic education. This study aimed to explore the feedback of excellent teachers in classroom interactions to incorporate a thinking culture. A qualitative case study approach was adopted on six excellent teachers (ETS) in Islamic Education using purposive sampling. Data were collected via teaching observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Thematic analysis revealed five themes that represented ETs' feedback in classroom interactions to enhance thinking culture: give praise, give reprimand and criticism, stimulate information seeking, evaluate information, and ask for clarification. This study added value to the description of teachers' feedback to create a thinking culture, especially in Islamic Education classrooms in Malaysia. The findings indicated that teachers need to increase open feedback, be willing to listen to students' views, use praise and criticism selectively, and be a trustee of students for a democratic classroom to be realized. This study is expected to strengthen the effectiveness of teaching that incorporates a thinking culture.

Keywords: *Teachers' Feedback; Thinking Classroom; Classroom Interaction.*

A. Introduction

The teaching and learning process mainly involves verbal interaction between teachers and students. In this process, students build knowledge, skills, values and beliefs, rules, and attitudes through observation and social interaction in the environment, according to Vygotsky's social cognitive theory (Schunk, 2012). Nevertheless, teachers need to help students be actively involved in the teaching and learning process to gain meaningful new understandings and change student behavior (Oza & Zaman, 2016).

Past studies have shown that teachers' responses influence students' classroom engagement and thinking culture (Pedler et al., 2020; Reeve & Shin, 2020). This feedback refers to how teachers react to students' questions, answers, or actions throughout the teaching and learning (T&L) session. It involves the quality of the interaction between teachers and students that can be identified through trust, risk-taking, rapport, friendliness, openness, cognitive level, and safety from a psychological point of view in the classroom (Costa, 1991). These interactions lead to the development of a thinking culture in the classroom.

Thinking culture is defined as a space where a group's collective and individual thinking is appreciated, visible, and actively promoted as part of everyone's regular, day-to-day experience. A culture of thinking comes from social practices that encourage thinking habits (Salmon, 2008). The primary key to implementing teaching to enhance thinking culture is the ability to listen to students' opinions (Daradjat, 2015). The characteristics of a good listener include not interrupting other people's conversations, not underestimating the spark of ideas, helping the generation of ideas by giving key clues, and listening actively, consciously, and attentively. On the other hand, authoritative teachers in teaching limit student participation. Students do not want to take the risk of asking questions, commenting, or arguing with teachers. This is because students think that the teachers do not like to be disturbed by questions during the class (Yamin, 2010).

There are three forms of teachers' feedback and their impact on students (Raths et al., 1986), as summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Teachers' feedback and the effect on students' thinking development

Feedback	The operational requirements of thought
Blocking	
• Instruct one by one on how to implement	Disables the thought process
• Scorn the idea	
• Make fun of the idea	
Limiting	
• Instruct students to give one correct answer	Remembering and reproducing memorization
• Repeat memorization	
Encourages thinking	
• Focus on reflection	Requires data processing and idea generation
• Examine the idea in more depth	
• Challenge students' ideas	

Feedback is one element of teacher guidance toward sharpening the skills that allow students to acquire more knowledge. It is the teachers' responsibility to instill students' trust to be willing to face the risks of thinking. This is because the involvement of teachers and students in critical thinking operations, such as forecasting relationships, predicting outcomes, drawing conclusions, and other high-level thinking, runs the risk of not being treated as an experiment (Beyer, 1997). By nature, no one wants to do things wrong. Therefore, this is where the role of the teacher is to minimize risk by displaying positive values in the effort to think even if it is wrong.

Feedback pattern research in education is generally based on behavioristic theory (Schartel, 2012). In this theory, the determined behavior is produced after a stimulus is given in reward or punishment. However, past literature related to teaching thinking stated that rewards such as complement in class are not suitable for students' thinking stimulation. This is due to the possible effect of compliments, which may create competitiveness among students and threaten the sense of security in expressing views among them (Costa & Kallick, 2014).

These related issues have encouraged the researcher to explore the study on feedback patterns in the classroom. This study is unique due to the

context in Malaysia, which implements HOTS at evolve level since it has only started to be explicitly documented in the curriculum in the year 2013. This is distinct from a study done in the West, in which the culture is embedded thoroughly in the system and the society.

Another unique feature of this study is the context selected, which focused on the Islamic Education context. The excellent teachers selected were among secondary Islamic Education teachers certified by the State Education Department as outstanding teachers implementing thinking teaching in the classroom. The feedback element being studied involved thinking stimulus on tangible matters and intangible and ukhrawi elements.

Past studies have shown that Islamic Education teachers use pedagogy that does not improve students' intellectual power and is doctrinalized (Idris & Tabrani, 2017; Mohd Zhaffar et al., 2016; Muhamad, 2020). Although there are studies that show teachers adopting a student-centered teaching approach, the activities carried out do not stimulate students to seek additional information and give less space for students to reflect on the lesson's content (Abdullah, 2011; Hashim et al., 2014). For example, Hashim et al. (2014) found that teachers' handling of T&L methods was less stimulating to critical thinking practices because teachers gave questions, further explanations, and answers during presentation and discussion sessions. While the students' presentation only served to present the contents easily found in the textbook. Therefore, the main issue here remains the same, i.e.; teaching does not give space to students to think critically toward appreciating the teachings of Islam.

In conclusion, previous studies have not provided instances of teaching feedback that can help the T&L process incorporate thinking culture, especially in the context of Islamic Education. It is argued that without a clear explanation of the feedback process, teachers cannot adopt or manipulate the situation occurring in the classroom to establish a culture of thinking. Additionally, the future development of higher-order thinking pedagogies may be distorted.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the feedback of excellent teachers (ETS) in classroom interactions to incorporate thinking culture. The research

question for this study is how do ETs give feedback in classroom interactions to incorporate thinking culture? Therefore, the outcome of this research should explain in detail the process of when, how, and what type of feedback feature that successfully stimulates thinking culture in the classroom environment in Malaysia. This should assist in comprehending the suitability of the type of situation of the class and feedback specifically for Islamic Education classroom, which involves *aqli* and *naqli* thinking materials.

B. Method

1. Research Design and Paradigm

This research used an exploratory qualitative approach in the form of a case study. It was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the feedback pattern that teachers offer to enhance the thinking culture in the classroom.

The researcher had a philosophical assumption to keep to a reality of a diverse nature. This study narrowed its focus with ideas that were general from the literature. The researcher's goal was to understand the phenomenon in detail based on the perspective of the study's participants (Cresswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The data were collected from multiple sources such as interviews, in-class observation, and related documents for analysis. Then, the data obtained were analyzed with the participants' interpretation, and the results were explained thoroughly in the research context. The experience of the participants and their interpretation were also taken into account in the context of the study. Consequently, the researcher reported on the diversity of such perspectives based on themes formed from the study's findings.

The research was conducted in a natural classroom setting of T&L practices. Using non-participant observation, the primary data were gathered. The researcher observed from the back of the classroom while the observation took place without interfering with the T&L activities. The T&L processes were recorded with a video recorder.

This study also involved semi-structured interviews in the data collection process. Face-to-face interviews between the researcher and participants lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. The interviews were

conducted in the Malay language. The researcher also interviewed students to gain feedback about the class activities. The researcher recorded the conversation with an audio recorder and wrote it down in a field note throughout the interview process. Interview data served as triangulation to observational data and document analysis. Triangulation was used to compare observation data, interview data, and data from documents to see whether they were in support or contrastive with each other. Other than that, a cross-check was done on various sources; for example, an interview was done on students to obtain different perspectives. Cross-check was also implemented on repetitive observation and a further interview on the participants at different times.

The documents analyzed in this study were from private documents produced by the participants, such as Daily Teaching Plans.

2. Research Sample

A purposive sampling technique was used for the research. The needs for selection were put on participants' potential in giving in-depth understanding specifically on the aspect of competency and experience. Based on a suggestion by Merriam (2009), the main criteria of participants' selection is determined by a few aspects. Among the characteristics are:

a. Displaying critical teaching in Islamic Education classroom by implementing student-based teaching, encouraging students to ask questions, and inculcating an 'open' environment such as using discussion method, encourage different perspectives from students in finding solutions and assist students in concluding.

b. It was in the service for more than five years. According to Berliner (2005), teaching experience relates closely to the quality of teaching. This is also found in the study by Muhamad (2020), in which it stated that experienced teachers showed better teaching practices than new teachers.

c. Easy to cooperate.

Due to the difficulty in identifying the characteristics related to the set of this criteria, specifically on teaching practice related to critical thinking in Islamic Education, the researcher has used the strategies as suggested by Merriam (2009), that is the network sampling to find the participants with the proper criteria. The researcher had obtained a list of potential participants from an officer at the Academic Division of Islamic Education and Moral Sector under Negeri Sembilan Education Department. This process was done with the presumption that the officer-related knew well of the potential and teaching quality of the teachers as the officer was frequently involved in teaching observation. Based on this list of information, the researcher had also met with an officer in the Education District Office and the related school principal to obtain views on attitude, performance, and the ability to answer the research questions. As a result, the State Education Department proposed six teachers' names based on the listed criteria. This research referred to six teacher experts who possessed homogeneous characteristics based on the same selection criteria. The demographics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The demographics of participants

Participants	Gender	Teaching Experience	Service Grade	Education Level
Teacher A	Female	20 years	DG48	Master
Teacher B	Female	24 years	DG48	Degree
Teacher C	Male	Eight years	DG41	Master
Teacher D	Female	14 years	DG44	Degree
Teacher E	Female	25 years	DG52	Degree
Teacher F	Female	18 years	DG48	Degree

3. Research Procedure

The study was approved by the Ministry of Education, State Education Department (Ref. no: KP(BPPDP)603/5/JLD.06(212)), school principals, and teachers involved in this study. Each study participant was provided with a previous description regarding the purpose of the study and the method of its implementation. In addition, explanations related to the ethics of confidentiality of information and entities that contribute data were provided. The participants signed a form of voluntary participation. The data collection lasted for 12 months.

4. Data Analysis

The data collection and analysis processes were carried out concurrently. Once the transcription of the observation reports and interview data were complete, the researcher began with the analysis of Participant 1. The categories and topics were developed using thematic analysis via the constant comparative technique. This comparison was made toward the pattern of feedback by participants at different times and among participants in different locations to identify pattern similarities and differences in data as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). At the beginning of the analysis, the researcher used open coding, which involved assigning meaningful codes to the participants' responses. These codes were also compared to a table of feedback pattern themes obtained from the literature. Based on the literature review, the table provided these codes with a more significant meaning. The codes were compiled under specific categories and themes. The comparison between findings in the first phase and findings from the literature allowed the researcher to determine the gaps that were not explored during the first observation and interview.

To ensure data validity and reliability, upon completion of the theme construction process, the researcher obtained the value of the degree of agreement from three experts as external evaluators. The mean value of the Cohen Kappa analysis of this study was 0.91. The researcher also conducted member checks with the study participants. This strategy was performed by validating the study participants on the transcript and verifying the researcher's interpretation of the summary of meaning from the data obtained. The last strategy used by the researcher was peer review. This process was executed with fellow researchers who also conducted qualitative research at the doctoral level.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Result

In general, there are five themes of teachers' feedback to enhance thinking culture in the classroom, which is: a) give praise, b) give reprimand and criticism, c) stimulate information seeking, d) evaluate information, and

e) ask for clarification. These themes were discovered during the data analysis. Similarities and differences in the feedback given by the teachers were described between each theme.

a. Give praise

In teaching that applies thinking culture, excellent teachers (ETs) use appraisal in four circumstances, such as:

1) When students start sharing specific ideas, from the class observation, teacher D mentioned, "*This is an example of a student who is ahead of time and an example of a wise student*!". In this regard, teacher D praised a student's efforts in finding and sharing additional information other than that found in a textbook.

2) Praise students' efforts to answer regardless of whether the answer was correct or not. The observational data showed that teacher A repeated one by one of the students' answers and said, "*Give applause to the two students who tried*," even though the students' responses were less accurate. Praise was given to the students' answers even if they were less accurate to increase students' motivation to try to share ideas in class. Teacher A stated, "*So when we praise him, even if he answers wrong, he seems to get a new spirit, his self-esteem increases. He wants to answer because the teacher will not be angry*".

3) Praise the questions students posed to classmates. Teacher C praised the students' spontaneous question during the discussion, "*Suddenly, a question from a female student broke the silence, can you defend the genie? Teacher C laughed while pointing at the student and saying, Haaa…new question! Great basic question!*" Understandably, ETs give praise to students for asking questions. This displays the students' curiosity and their current level of knowledge through the questions asked. The estimable questions are questions that involve consideration of essential things that contribute to in-depth discussion.

4) Praise students' information gathering attitude. Students were praised for confidently answering questions about divorce based on

knowledge from the e-fatwa website. "*You are good for referring to the website!*"

Manipulating compliments in certain situations in the class could encourage students to be more active, especially in information sharing, consideration and evaluation of ideas, and asking questions.

b. Give reprimand and criticism

ETs give reprimand and criticism in four circumstances, such as:

1) Criticize students' attitude of giving up from thinking after going through an in-depth discussion. When discussing the topic of *hadhanah*, "*The teacher asked, how Syahir? The student replied, unable to think. The teacher replied with a joking reaction, unable to think? Only animals can't think! The students laughed.*"

2) Reprimand students who refused to take a stand or took a stand without justification. Teacher C asked, "*Who did not lift their hand at all? Don't you have a stand? You should take a stand!*"

3) Reprimand students who asked for answers before thinking by giving advice, "*If we do not want to think, we are easily manipulated by the preaching of heretical doctrines that lead to shirk and the retribution of hell.*"

4) Reprimand students exhibited anger when they found out there were different views than theirs. From the observation, "*In a discussion of the evidence of a superstitious case, the student who presented showed an angry facial gesture, uttering eeeeeeeeeeeeei! While raising both his fists as high as his head. At the same time, another presenter tried to convince us that the event was a reality.* Teacher C said, "*Steady! Only then you can listen [to views]*". In this situation, teacher C acted as a mediator when both parties wanted to defend their respective arguments so that no one listened.

Reprimands and criticism given by the teachers in these situations helped develop behavioral rules in the classroom toward developing a culture of thinking.

c. Stimulate information retrieval

ETs give feedback by stimulating students' information seeking. Evidence from the observational data showed that when the students' group members replied, "*People used to believe that if a black cat passed in front of us, bad things would happen. If it's at the back, then it's okay*". Teacher C said, "*This belief may be related to the history of Ancient Egypt which showed the preference of cats. We can see from the historical signs and buildings like the Spinx Pyramid which displayed guards in the form of cats. We may have adopted the same belief in our country. You may ask teachers of other subjects watch documentaries or ask your parents about this*".

Teacher C associated the content of Islamic Education with History and Civilization in teaching. This process of merging further triggered questions in students to continue exploring and asking teachers of other subjects, asking parents and friends, or doing a further reading. The interview with Student A supported this, "*Ustaz's experience and knowledge, which are not in the textbook. So, curiosity is high*" and "*I asked about the belief regarding black cats to History teachers.*"

The teachers also asserted the importance of asking questions as a path to acquiring in-depth information. Students were encouraged to ask other teachers, parents at home, or even their friends. In this regard, the role of teachers is to stimulate students' thinking by combining the content of Islamic Education with other appropriate fields or disciplines.

d. Evaluate information

ETs frequently display concern for information as thinking materials in the classroom. Teacher D asked a student, "*Where did you get the source of the information provided? The student replied, the information was obtained from the national e-fatwa [website]. Teacher D nodded*".

In addition, authoritative writing for reference was explained to students, "*We have to make sure which publication the book is from because the books on the market, not all of them are reliable! We have to be good at choosing by looking at the publication company or institution. If the website is nonsensical, it cannot be used. There are good websites to refer to such as the Religious Council,*

Fatwa Department, or websites belonging to credible ustaz such as Ustaz Zaharuddin, Ustaz Kazim or Ustaz, who are known and whose knowledge are recognized".

The data showed that ETs put the criteria of information validity as the evaluation element in the data collection process. This criterion was absorbed by examining the source of information given by students.

e. Ask for clarification

Feedback to students' ideas or questions is also responded to by asking for further clarification. ETs act to ask for further clarification in four circumstances:

1) When students give a short answer of a few words.

Observational data showed, "The student stood and answered, influence. Teacher B asked further, what type of influence? The student continued, peer influence. Teacher B asked further, what kind of peers? The student answered, negative friends. Then teacher continued by saying, negative means bad attitude".

2) Ask students to define specific terms or concepts.

From the observation, teacher C asked about an element in the definition that the students presented, *"What is meant by nonsense in khurafat?"* The teacher's response was to avoid ambiguity in the discussion that might come from misconception.

3) Ask students to share how to get answers.

Teacher D stressed in the class session, *"Do not refer to unreliable websites. You can print the search materials to take to the next class if you are willing. If not, students can jot down the URL of the website you're referring to".* Students were asked to record the source of information, such as the website URL, the author of the article, and the name of the book referred to when answering a question.

4) Ask students for justification of the argument.

ETs also used provocative feedback to allow students to defend an argument and evaluate their stand, whether they were intense or otherwise. ETs provoked by asking for a reason for support. Therefore, students needed to think of justifications and evidence that supported the decision made. For

example, "*In teaching the topic of Superstition, group members explained evidence seen on television that had occurred in Indonesia. The husband killed the lizard that entered his house. Then, a child was born with scaly skin that resembled a lizard,*". Teacher C asked, "*There is no other evidence?*". This showed that the teacher asked for evidence, but the evidence provided was also evaluated for its strength to support the argument.

Based on the study's findings, a pattern of ETs' feedback was formed in applying the culture of thinking through teaching. The above themes are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Excellent teachers' feedback patterns in applying
a culture of thinking in teaching

Theme	Sub-theme
Give praise	Praise the contribution of ideas
	Praise the effort to answer.
	Praise students' questions
	Praise the information-gathering attitude.
Give reprimands/criticism.	Desperate thinking
	Refuse to take a stand
	Ask for answers directly.
	Angry with other different views
Stimulate information retrieval	Relate knowledge with other fields
	Asking as an information-gathering tool
Evaluate information	Research sources of information
	Evaluate criteria of information validity
Ask for an explanation	Short answers
	Define
	Share how to get answers.
	Justification of the argument

2. Discussion

The study found that teachers were creative in giving feedback in praise and criticism. Teachers praised students' actions that showed signs of improvement in terms of quality of thinking, such as daring to give an opinion for the first time even if it is one word, explaining the rules of thinking to achieve answers, giving different views from friends, asking questions to understand basics, triggering high-leveled questions, and looking for additional information. On the other hand, criticism and

reprimands were given in situations where students refused to contribute opinions in discussions, gave wrong answers, became angry when they had different views, and took a stand without reason. This finding was contrary to much of the literature on the teaching of thinking. According to Porter (2014), praise or criticism to students forms an atmosphere of assessment or judgment, which is less appropriate for improving students' thinking skills. On the other hand, it allows the emergence of a sense of competition among students and, in turn, threatens the safety of students. Furthermore, this situation seems to contradict the concept of critical thinking itself that there is rarely a correct answer (Jeremiah, 2012).

Nevertheless, in the researcher's opinion, this study is in a different context. Teachers were seen manipulating praise and criticism to motivate students to open their mouths in giving opinions. This is because teaching takes place in a classroom situation where students are not yet accustomed to following discussions and have not been able to accept differences of opinion and freedom of expression, unlike the context of students in the studies in Western countries. This is supported by teaching theories that encourage praise as a reward for students to work hard to broaden their understanding of a topic. In contrast, criticism is used to erode the negative attitudes that are in students (Vellymalay, 2015).

This use of praise and criticism coincides with the human nature that loves rewards in the form of pleasure and enjoyment and fear of pain and harmful consequences (Kurniawan, 2016). In this study, the teachers were criticized not only to discourage students from lazy thinking but also to explain the consequences to religious life and the rewards of the hereafter. Therefore, the concept of rewards and penalties that teachers used went beyond the development of the dimensions of student behavior alone and even included the development of faith in students' souls. This is in line with the concepts of rewards and punishments displayed in the Qur'an, yet in contrast to Western behavioristic theories.

The researcher believed that teachers need to be selective in giving praise or criticism in this case. For groups of students who are not yet accustomed to being involved in giving opinions in the classroom, teachers

need to stimulate these students with praise and criticism. Nevertheless, if the teacher finds that the classroom atmosphere has become active with the participation of students discussing ideas, praise and criticism can be gradually reduced, or feedback is given in the form of acknowledgment of student behavior that indicates good thinking characteristics. Recognizing feedback serves as information on developing student mastery and is constructive (Porter, 2014). This is so that student motivation is focused on the satisfaction of exploring ideas, discussing, and wallowing in mind-challenging tasks. Otherwise, it is feared that praise given all the time by teachers will damage students in the long run because they are too dependent on external rewards such as teachers' praise, as emphasized by Tricomi & DePasque (2016).

Through the implementation of developing thinking culture, the students gain guidance directly from the teachers on choosing the information to take note of and the types of information to ignore. This process is vital to interpret the pieces of information to be converted into knowledge. These findings align with Costa and Kallick's (2014) views, who presented the importance of teacher guidance to students related to information in this digital age. Similarly, these findings support the study of Dahari et al. (2019), who suggested that teachers guide students to filter information in building the concept of knowledge based on the Islamic framework.

The process of referring to the various types of information that teachers apply can indirectly stimulate students' creativity. In this regard, students are nurtured to be flexible in gathering information, as Ennis (1987) and Halpern (1998) recommended. The stimulation of creativity in gathering information encourages students not to be rigid in relying on only one source of information in decision-making. Information from various sources also helps students examine an issue from various angles, thus making them creative in predicting the best possible solution. These findings support the view of Ismail (2014) that critical and creative thinking are interrelated in the activity of processing information for consideration.

Meanwhile, emphasis is also given by teachers on sources of information. Students are encouraged to justify their arguments by considering

facts based on authority. The researcher believed that such feedback could form cognitive maturity and foster students' wariness before making a claim. If such exposure is continuously given practically in the classroom, the researcher expected students to be sensitive to the context of the debate of an issue. From here, critical thinking could be extracted. With this, the phenomenon of today's society regarding information confusion such as overload of information can be treated (Badron, 2009).

D. Conclusion

This study provided detailed information regarding the feedback of excellent teachers (ETS) in classroom interactions to incorporate thinking culture. This study showed that to create a culture of thinking during classroom interactions, ETs should provide feedback in the forms of praise, reprimand, and criticism, stimulate information seeking, evaluate information, and ask for clarification.

Additionally, this study contributed to the body of literature to identify elements needed when manipulating praise and criticism to establish a thinking culture in the classroom. This is beneficial in implementing higher-order thinking pedagogies in the Malaysian context since teachers are looking for patterns to incorporate thinking culture in the classroom effectively. Teachers must build relationships to gain students' trust. The interaction of teachers' feedback to students should be open, whereby teachers are willing to listen to students' ideas and views, not be sarcastic, and not threaten students' emotions. Students need to be trusted so that they do not hesitate in expressing their current views and interpretations.

Therefore, the researcher believed that openness and democratic culture are suitable to be nurtured in the soul of teachers and prevent teachers from squabbling and dominating interactions in the classroom. Accordingly, the teacher can have an answer framework in a feedback situation but should not force students to accept the scheme. Instead, students need to be helped to build their knowledge and beliefs. Therefore, the present study suggested that teachers increase openness to feedback, encouraging students to think.

This study benefits the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), Teaching Institute and Pre services Division, and Teachers Training. They should increase Training and practical courses for trainee teachers and teachers in specialized services for the mastery of strategies related to pedagogy to create a thinking culture in the classroom. Some programs under MOE, such as Teacher Professional Development Program and Professional Learning Community, can be organized specifically for this purpose. In addition, teachers need to structure their teaching by considering the form of feedback that can stimulate student engagement through thinking. It is hoped that this study contributes toward strengthening the effectiveness of teaching thinking in the Malaysian context.

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