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Understanding Collaborative Teacher Growth from the Lens of Digital Learning Agility: A Pathway to Educational Excellence

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Abstract: This study explores collaborative teacher growth through the lens of *Digital Learning Agility* (DLA) and its impact on teaching practices and professional development. Using qualitative methods and thematic analysis, the research highlights how fostering collaboration among educators can enhance instructional approaches and student outcomes, ultimately creating a supportive and innovative educational environment.

Keywords: Digital Learning Agility, teachers, Professional Development, Collaboration

1. Introduction

The quest for innovative methods to improve pedagogical practices and increase student learning experiences is an ongoing endeavour in the dynamic and ever-evolving educational landscape of today. As teachers learn to work in the digital world, a new idea called "Digital Learning Agility" (DLA) is taking shape (Khambari et al., 2022). Despite being largely unfamiliar, this paradigm has the ability to impact how educators utilise technology, adapt to changing learning settings, and enhance student accomplishment. One of the highlighted areas of DLA is collaborative teacher growth. It is important to highlight that integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into teaching poses various challenges for Malaysian teachers, as evidenced by experiences shared by secondary school teachers (Sulaiman, 2024). Assessing the use and attitudes towards ICT among Malaysian teachers is crucial in designing effective technology integration training programs (Islam et al., 2019). Additionally, constraints in online collaborative learning in tertiary ICT education in Malaysia highlight the need for improvements in incorporating such methods into teaching practices (Said et al., 2013). Thus, the objective of this study is to explore the role of collaborative teacher growth in enhancing teaching practices and professional development through the lens of DLA, with a particular focus on how collaboration fosters innovation and cross-cultural learning in Malaysian schools. The research question for this study is how does collaborative teacher growth within the DLA impact teaching practices, cross cultural learning, and professional development in Malaysian educational settings?

2. Literature Review

This section will discuss the multiple studies that highlight the collaborative growth that takes place when educators join forces to enhance their skills. The study by Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikhahmadi (2016) highlights the significance of creating structured learning environments that encourage collaborative communication among teachers. According to their research, moving from working alone to working together can greatly improve teachers' professional development and job happiness. Furthermore, they found that study groups and observing

peers are particularly effective methods. In STEM education, Milner-Bolotin (2018) highlights the positive impact of collaboration on student engagement, the creation of supportive learning environments, and the influence on educational policy. This highlights the importance of professional development in enhancing teaching methodologies and promoting student engagement. Moreover, Yu and Chao (2022) explore strategies for enhancing active participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Their study highlighted the significance of fostering environments that promote idea exchange and the sharing of practices. Nevertheless, scholars hold varying viewpoints on the potential benefits of collaboration, as it is influenced by numerous factors and may not consistently result in the desired results. A study conducted by Vangrieken et al. (2015) cautioned against collaboration that lacks structure, as it can result in superficial interactions that do not effectively contribute to professional development or student outcomes. These studies show how teacher collaboration can greatly improve educational practices. However, they also acknowledge the difficulties and restrictions, indicating that the effectiveness of collaborative efforts depends on the organisation, excellence, and circumstances of the collaboration.

3. Research Methodology

This study utilised qualitative methodologies such as semi-structured interviews, observations, and picture analysis to investigate the collaborative growth of teachers. In addition, the purposive sampling method was used to gather a total of 10 secondary school teachers, 10 primary school teachers, 5 school administrators, and 20 parents from different locations in Malaysia as a means to capture diverse perspectives on collaborative teacher growth and its impact on educational excellence. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding and categorizing responses to identify common themes related to teacher growth, cross-cultural learning, and innovative teaching practices. The triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and photographic evidence ensured the validity of the findings.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis revealed three key themes that exemplify the role of collaboration in fostering teacher growth within the DLA framework: enhanced efficiency, cross-cultural learning, and innovative teaching practices.

4.1 Enhanced Efficiency through Collaborative Synergy

The study discovered that collaborative teams of teachers experienced improved efficiency, enhanced discussions, and accelerated progress. This collaborative approach not only speeds up educational processes but also encourages effective teaching practices and simplifies workflows, ultimately resulting in enhanced efficiency in educational delivery. For instance, a secondary schoolteacher, SM_C2, noted: "When we actually collaborated, we worked faster together... when we were in a team, we were quicker because we had these back-and-forth sessions..." Similarly, primary schoolteacher SR_S2 added: "We separated tasks when conducting co-curricular activities so that it worked out well. One teacher took the introduction part, and I handled another part." This finding aligns with previous research that highlights the benefits of collaborative efforts within digital frameworks in terms of saving time and resources to achieve educational goals (Gbolliie & Gong, 2018).

4.2 Cross-Cultural Collaborations and Learning in Education

The study also emphasises the importance of international collaborations in broadening teachers' horizons and promoting shared learning experiences. Working with colleagues from various backgrounds, both within and across schools, enables the sharing of teaching methods, the exchange of ideas, and mutual support in adapting to online learning

environments. This sub-theme highlights the importance of working together to promote cultural diversity, improve educational practices, and create a vibrant learning environment for educators and students. As secondary schoolteacher SM_N1 shared: “When we collaborate, we usually learn something new from them... I’ll learn something from them, and they’ll learn something from me.” This finding also aligns with studies that have shown that when people from different cultures work together, it can result in the development of more creative and culturally sensitive teaching methods (Park et al., 2020).

4.3 Innovative Teaching Practices through Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration among educators has proven to be a key factor in fostering innovative teaching methods, promoting professional development, and facilitating ongoing learning. The collective efforts of educators fostered the growth of subject-specific teaching methods, promoted the sharing of resources, and cultivated a mindset of ongoing enhancement. This sub-theme highlights the importance of collaborative teacher growth in shaping educational experiences, promoting effective teaching methodologies, and fostering a culture of innovation within educational settings. For example, secondary schoolteacher SM_S1 shared: “We organized a ‘Virtual English Camp’ involving five schools... collaborating with other teachers was refreshing because it helped introduce new ideas.” Research indicates that working together in collaborative environments can greatly facilitate the implementation of innovative practices that may be difficult to accomplish on one's own (Mokhets’engoane et al., 2024).

5. Conclusion

In general, the study provides valuable insights for teachers, administrators, and policymakers. Promoting collaborative synergy among educators can boost efficiency, embrace cultural diversity, and unlock innovative teaching practices. Teachers gain valuable insights and enhance their teaching methods through the exchange of knowledge, different viewpoints, and working together, resulting in more effective instruction and increased student involvement. Ultimately, promoting teamwork among teachers is crucial in establishing a nurturing and inventive educational atmosphere that improves teaching methods, boosts student achievement, and enriches the overall educational journey for everyone involved.

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