

Navigating the teaching of thinking skills in English language education through Visible Thinking Routines (VTRs) : Exploring diverse teacher voices in Malaysia

In English language education, certain pedagogical constraints hinder thinking skills development and these include limited opportunities for student-led learning, reflection and thinking practice; the dominance of an examination-oriented culture; and finally, teacher knowledge and confidence on how to teach thinking skills. In light of these complexities, we sought to explore the voices of English language teachers from diverse contexts across Malaysia based on their experiences of engaging with Visible Thinking Routines (VTRs) at the secondary school level. VTRs offer a powerful set of tools to make students' thinking visible and promote deep learning. Through these routines, teachers can facilitate students' intellectual growth making them more reflective, independent and engaged. In this study, data were collected through sixty-five open-ended surveys and eight in-depth interviews to gain teacher perspectives on navigating the practical use of VTRs. Two themes emerged which related to the openness and acceptance of teachers towards VTRs. This was due to observing their suitability for diverse learners and benefits to student thinking. Teachers recognized that VTRs had the potential to develop different kinds of thinking skills (particularly higher order thinking skills) and could engage students with deep thinking tasks. However, time constraints were cited as a significant challenge because teachers had to contend with limited face-to-face classroom time, the proficiency level of students, and requirements to cover textbook content. Considering these local voices are important for language policy and pedagogy and highlighting these teachers' stories may encourage broader adoption of the use of these thinking tools to nurture thinking skills development in English language education.