A STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE COURSE IN EAST COAST UNIVERSITIES OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

By
Hjh Thana Binti Hj Abdullah
Dr.Nawi @ Mohd. Nawi Bin Ismail &
Bazilah Raihan Binti Mat Shawal

ABSTRACT

This study aims to achieve two objectives namely; first, to investigate the effectiveness of teaching Philosophy of Knowledge course in public universities in East Coast region of Peninsular Malaysia. Second, to explore the perceptions on the Philosophy of Knowledgecourse through the teaching delivered to the students in universitiesEast Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Three public universities (IPTA) were selected for this study; UNISZA, UM NilamPuri and UMK. The methodology used in this study were library research as well as the field studies in the form of analysing facts, interviews and descriptive. Interview questions and questionnaires were used in order to get the answers as well as the perceptions of the academic staffs and students on some aspects related to the effectiveness of teaching the Philosophy of Knowledge course in higher learning institutions. These aspects were focusing on the contents of the course whether the course promote moral values among students, moulding personal traits, suitable to be taught to Muslim and non-Muslim, not offensive to any party or religion other than Islam, as well as the level of students' understanding through the teaching approaches applied by lecturers. This course is believed to be able to give positive impacts on students as it encourages the students to use higher order of thinking skills and therefore it should be remained as a compulsory subject in universities.

Hence, in order to answer the research questions in this study, a number of 300 questionnaires were administered to Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) students who attended the Philosophy of Knowledge course representing a total of 1193 students who registered for the course. Out of 300 forms distributed, 257 completed forms were returned to the researcher. The forms were gathered and the data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*) version 19.0. Several analyses were conducted to evaluate the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of the Philosophy of Knowledge course in universities.

The findings provide clear evidence that UMK is the only IPTA in East Coast region which offers the Philosophy of Knowledge course as a compulsory course for undergraduates. Most of the respondents in this study agreed that the course should be made compulsory to all undergraduates not only in UMK but also in all universities in East Coast region. This course also contributed to the ethnics solidarity in Malaysia as the contents are not offensive to any other religions in Malaysia. They also claimed that the teaching approaches applied by

lecturers to deliver the course were very effective. Besides, this course succeeded in empowering the students with high intellectual values as well as encouraged them to be more creative and innovative.

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of the implementation of Philosophy of Knowledge course in Public Higher Learning Institutions (IPTA) is the most important element in creating highly intellectual, creative and innovative undergraduates. This course explains the concept of knowledge and philosophy, the sources and classification of knowledge, human being and the state of mind, and the importance of knowledge in our life.

This study aims to explore and identify the effectiveness of the implementation of this course in public universities in East Coast region as one of the efforts to educate the IPTA students in Malaysia. Besides, this study also hopes to investigate whether this course is viewed as an important source of knowledge or vice versa. This is because the teaching of this course is the basis in producing highly intellectual, creative and innovative undergraduates. This course explains the concept of knowledge and philosophy, the sources and classification of knowledge, human being and the state of mind, and the importance of knowledge in our life. The students are exposed to different notions and school of thoughts in philosophy such as Rationalism, Emperism, and Skepticism and they can see how these notions affect human's life. The techniques to obtain the knowledge such like inductive, deductive and scientific as well as the use of scientific approach in problem solving are also exposed to the students who join this course. In addition, this study is also focusing on the factors that lead to the implementation of Philosophy of Knowledge course in universities; whether it is considered as a prominent discipline of studies or as an elective or optional to students.

Three public universities in East Coast region were chosen to complete this study and those universities were Universiti Sultan ZainalAbidin (UNISZA), Academy of Islamic Studies Universiti Malaya NilamPuri (UMNP) and Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To identify the effectiveness of teaching Philosophy of Knowledge course in public universities in East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia in order to produce effective module to be taught in all public universities in Malaysia.

2. To investigate the students' perceptions on the Philosophy of Knowledge course through the teaching delivered by the lecturers in universities in East Coast region.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling method was used in this study to determine the subject of research. This is because the population involved in this study was among UMK students from semester 3 to semester

6, academic session 2012/2013. These students already completed the course. For the time being, UMK is the only public university in East Coast region which offers Philosophy of Knowledge course as a university compulsory course to undergraduates.

a) Library Research

This method was used to gather data particularly related to the background and information on the problems and issues with regards to the teaching and learning of the course as well as the development, the theory of teaching and any others related issues. Several libraries were visited by the researcher and those were Main Library in UMK, Main Library inUniversiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Library of Academy of Islamic Studies in Universiti Malaya Nilam Puri Kelantan, Tun Sri Lanang Library in UKM, libraries in UM Kuala Lumpur, UIAM Kuala Lumpur, Kelantan State Library and Kelantan Council of Religion and Malay Custom library.

b) Survey

Survey refers to a direct study on the sample that has been chosen (Koentjaraningrat, 1977). The most common feature of survey is to collect data through the administration of questionnaires. Apart from questionnaires, the researcher also used interviews as one of the methods of data collection for this study. Interviews in this study were referring to a 'face-to-face' interaction between researcher and respondents in order to obtain information and to understand the respondent's stand regarding the topic. It requires direct communication between a researcher and respondents (Abdul HalimHj. Mat Diah, 1986). In this study, researcher interviewed some academic staffs and administrative officers from UNISZA, UMNP and UMK.

c) Pilot Study

A pilot study has been conducted in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the items used in the questionnaire. 10 students in semester 2 from UMK were selected randomly for this pilot study. The purpose of pilot study is to test the reliability of the instrument and to ensure that the items used in the instrument were able to achieve the research objectives as well as could be comprehended by the respondents. According to Mohd.Salleh and Zaidatun (2001), reliability is the scale to measure the ability of an instrument to deal with variables in a study consistently regardless of time, place and sample.

Meanwhile, according to Mohd.Najib (1999), having a pilot study prior to the real survey is beneficial in order to identify confusion and eliminate all irrelevant items in the questionnaire. The researcher will be able to identify the weaknesses of the instrument to ensure the objective of the research can be achieved. He added, the reliability coefficient is between 0.0-1.0.

If the reliability is approaching 1, then the items are considered reliable or valid. This means that if the alpha value is closer to 1.0, the higher reliability is. The coefficient of Cronbach Alpha in SPSSv.14.0 was used to obtain the reliability coefficient.

The reliability index value of each item in the questionnaire obtained from the pilot study was 0.868 and this has proven that the items used in the instrument have high reliability index and thus could be accepted.

d) Data Analysis

The data obtained from the survey were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0. A descriptive approach was used to gain input on comprehension, the student's acceptance, teaching approaches used by lecturers and students' perceptions on the course.

The 5-point likert scale was used in this instrument. The options in the scale were: 1. Strongly Disagree (SD); 2. Disagree (D); Uncertain (UC); 4. Agree (A); and 5. Strongly Agree (SA). In order to simplify the data analysis, categorisation of likert scale was made.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This study focuses on the effectiveness of teaching of Philosophy of Knowledge course in public universities in East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Three public universities were selected namely UNISZA. UMNP and UMK with the main concern was to identify whether the course is offered or not in the universities.

a) Analysis on the Teaching of Philosophy of Knowledge in Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UNISZA)

Universiti Sultan ZainalAbidin located in Terengganu is one of the public universities in Malaysia that offers bachelor programmes. The university implements the by-semester system in which the academic session is divided into two semesters; semester I and semester II.Besides these two semesters, there is one short semester namely semester III or also known as additional semester (Semester Khas) which is conducted during the final semester break. The Knowledge Enhancement Centre (PPI) in Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin is the centre that offers all of the university courses. It is a centre that responsible in shaping holistic and knowledgeable students not only in the subject matters but also students who are balance in terms of knowledge and personality. Students are exposed to a wider scope of global knowledge beyond their discipline of studies. Global knowledge means the knowledge is widen to the extent that involves communication skills, thinking skills, entrepreneurial skills and religious knowledge.

Besides, apart from exposing the students to national and civilisation aspects, students are also exposed to other areas such as foreign languages and entrepreneurship, with additional of basic religious knowledge particularly Islam through the introduction of faith (aqidah), moral standards (akhlak), ethical and moral (Interview with Senior Lecturer in UNISZA, on 27.4.2014).

Of all courses offered in UNISZA, the Philosophy of Knowledge course is not being offered to students. There are only two university compulsory courses offered to the students which are focusing on the concept of thinking and the Islamic faith namely Islamic Civilisation and Asian Civilisation with the code UIT 3012 and Faith and Moral Standards (Aqidah dan Akhlak) course, UIU 3012. Nevertheless, in terms of the quality and quantity, the students are also exposed to the discussions on philosophy in general as every course offered by university is actually integrating the concept of philosophy in a wider scope. As a matter of fact, there are two main objectives in teaching. The first one is to produce experts in the particular field or discipline and another one is to spread knowledge related to the field of study. The contents and teaching approaches for the aforementioned objectives are definitely different and should be distinguished.

In teaching Islamic Civilisation and Asian Civilisation course and Faith and Moral Standards, the objectives of teaching should be identified. In this situation, the objective of teaching is more towards producing students who are able to understand and justify academically with facts and evidences the issues related to philosophy, Islamic thoughts and any enquiries with regards to Islamic faith and beliefs (Interview with Senior Lecturer in UNISZA, on 27.4.2014).

b) Analysis on the Teaching of Philosophy of Knowledge course in Universiti Malaya Nilam Puri (UMNP)

Academy of Islamic Studies in Universiti Malaya Nilam Puri, Kota Bharu, Kelantan is one of the public universities that offers Islamic Foundation Programme in Malaysia. It is a branch campus in which the main campus is in Universiti Malaya Kuala Lumpur. The duration for the foundation programme is 4 semesters in which the average credit hours taken by students who join Foundation of Islamic Education, Syariah and Usuluddin is 15 to 16 hours per semester. Meanwhile, students of Foundation of Islamic Studies and Sciences need to take up to 18 to 22 credit hours per semester. (Interview with Senior Lecturer in UMNP, on 6.5.2014).

The Philosophy of Knowledge course is not offered in this university. There are only two faculty compulsory courses offered to the students which are based on Islamic thoughts and belief namely 'al-Tasawwur al-Islami', the subject code is IXAX 0101 and 'Usus al-Aqidah', the subject code is IXAX 0105. The courses are conducted in Arabic language as the texts used for the students are in Arabic language. First semester students are required to complete the 'al-Tasawwur al-Islami' course and the 'Usus al-Aqidah' course is offered to students in the fourth semester during the foundation programme. In terms of quality and quantity, the students are also exposed to numerous discussions related to the philosophy on regular basis. As the medium of instruction in teaching these courses is the Arabic language, it is important to deliver the lesson and translate the texts precisely to the students in order to avoid misinterpretations and misconceptions as they are extremely depending on the Arabic sources. (Interview with Senior Lecturer in UMNP, on 6.5.2014).

Generally, there are two important objectives in teaching. The first one is to produce experts in the particular field or discipline and another one is to spread knowledge related to the field of study. The contents and teaching approaches for the aforementioned objectives are definitely different and should be totally distinguished. In studying al-Tasawwur al-Islami and Usus al-Aqidah courses, the objectives of teaching should be identified. In this case, the objective of teaching is more towards producing students who are able to understand and justify with facts the issues related to philosophy, Islamic thoughts and any enquiries with regards to Islamic faith and beliefs (Interview with Senior Lecturer in UMNP, on 6.5.2014).

c) Analysis on the Teaching of Philosophy of Knowledge in Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan is the only university in East Coast Peninsular Malaysia which offers the Philosophy of Knowledge course to undergraduates. It is one of university compulsory courses and the code is USK 1042. All undergraduates are required to register for the course and pass it. This course is distinguished due to two factors. Firstly, the contents of this course are different and distinctive. Secondly, this course is compulsory to all UMK undergraduates regardless of their field of studies. This course explains the concept of knowledge and philosophy, the sources and classification of knowledge, human being and the state of mind, and the importance of knowledge in our life. Students are exposed to different notions and school of thoughts in philosophy such as Rasionalism, Emperism and Skeptism and they can see the impacts of these notions in human's life. The techniques to obtain the knowledge such like inductive, deductive and scientific as well as the use of scientific approach in problem solving are also exposed to the students in this course. Besides, in order to enhance the effectiveness of teaching this course, UMK normally invites lecturers from other universities to give a talk related to philosophical matters and the students are also exposed to case studies to facilitate the learning process. (Interview with Senior Lecturer in UMK, on 2.5. 2014 and 20.6.2014).

THE EFFECTIVESS OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE COURSE IN UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA KELANTAN

Geographically, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan is one of public universities located in East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Based on the findings, UMK is the only public university in East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia that offers Philosophy of Knowledge course as one of university compulsory courses to undergraduates. The questionnaire used in this study was constructed to get the demographic background of the respondents as well as to investigate the effectiveness of teaching Philosophy of Knowledge course in UMK. Thus, the validity of this study relies on the information obtained from the analysis of the instrument.

This section presents the findings of this study based on the questionnaires that have been administered to 257 respondents among UMK students in semester 3 to semester 6, session 2012/2013. These students already attended the course. Table 1 presents the data on

respondent's demographic background. Some of the background information obtained from the respondents were their gender, race, and religion.

Table 1: Respondent's Profile According to Gender, Race and Religion.

Background	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	81	31.5
Female	176	68.5
Race		
Malay	214	83.3
Chinese	19	7.4
Indian	12	4.7
Bumiputera Sabah	6	2.3
Bumiputera Sarawak	5	1.9
Others	1	0.4
Religion		
Islam	221	86
Buddha	16	6.2
Hindu	9	3.5
Christian	11	4.3
Others	0	0

Based on Table 1, it was found that majority of respondents were female in which the percentage showed that 68.5% were female and only 31.5% were male. Meanwhile, distribution for race showed the majority of respondents were Malay 83.3%, followed by Chinese 7.4%, Indian 4.7%, Bumiputera Sabah, 2.3% and Bumiputera Sarawak 1.9%. There was only one respondent who was an Indian Muslim. For religion, majority of respondents were Muslim which was about 86% followed by Buddha, 6.2%, Christian, 4.3% and the last was Hindu, 3.5%.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE COURSE

Students' perceptions were measured in the aspects of personality development, teaching and learning process (P&P), the establishment of relationship with non-Muslims as well as the conceptualisation of global perspective. The last item was focusing on students' preferences; to retain or discontinue the course as a university compulsory course. Below are the findings of overall frequency for all 12 items in the questionnaire. All items for this part were also using the likert scale format to standardise the research process.

The reason for using the likert scale was to facilitate the respondents in giving the most relevant responses which they think fit them well yet it is still flexible to them. The scale consisted of five options; 1= Strongly Disagree (SD)   2= Disagree (D)   3= Uncertain (UC) 4= Agree (A) 5= Strongly Agree (SA). The process of data analysis for this section was carried out in order to get specific responses based on the questions given.

Table 2: Overall Frequency of Items in Questionnaire.

Item		1 SD	2 D	3 UN	4 A	5 SA
Item1	The contents/syllabus in Philosophy of Knowledge nurtured moral values among students.	-	4	26	164	63
Item2	Philosophy of Knowledge encouraged me to be well-mannered	-	2	38	167	50
Item3	Philosophy of Knowledge helped me to adapt well among Muslim and Non-muslim	1	7	43	155	51
Item4	The contents in Philosophy of Knowledge are suitable to both Muslim and Non-muslim students.	-	4	39	140	73
Item5	The contents in Philosophy of Knowledge are not offensive to other parties or religions.	1	6	45	147	57
Item6	Philosophy of Knowledge course is important to increase solidarity in Malaysia.	1	4	39	144	69
Item7	I am satisfied with the teaching approaches practiced by my lecturer in the Philosophy of Knowledge course.	1	9	33	146	67
Item8	The concept of knowledge, philosophy and knowledge methodology were clarified clearly by my lecturer.	-	8	25	173	51
Item9	The concept of knowledge, philosophy and knowledge methodology can be accepted by students.	-	5	47	153	51
Item10	The contents in this course helped me in developing my understanding on the concept of knowledge and thoughts in Islam.	-	3	23	165	66
Item11	This course gave positive impacts on me as it encouraged me to use higher order thinking skills.	3	7	40	135	72
Item12	This course should be a compulsory university course.	12	26	92	103	24

1= Strongly Disagree   2= Disagree   3= Uncertain   4=Agree   5= Strongly Agree

In this section, the items investigated on five aspects and they have been categorised into the same aspects in the questionnaire. Item 1 and 2 asked on respondent's personality development, item 3,4,5 and 6 asked on solidarity development, item 7 and 8 asked on

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teaching approaches used by lecturer. Item 9, 10 and 11 asked on respondent's global perspective and the last item 12 asked on respondent's opinion whether the course should be a compulsory course in university.

Table 3: Students' Perceptions on Philosophy of knowledge Course

	N	Minimum & Percentage	Maximum & Percentage	Mode & Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
Personality Development	257	2 (1.6%)	5 (13.2%)	4 (66.5%)	4.07	.552
Solidarity Development	257	1 (0.4%)	5 (5.4%)	4 (62.3%)	4.03	.518
Global Perspective	257	1 (0.4%)	5 (8.6%)	4 (62.6%)	4.03	.518
Teaching Approaches	257	1 (0.4%)	5 (12.8%)	4 (66.9%)	4.04	.616
University Compulsory Course	257	1 (4.7%)	5 (9.3%)	4 (40.1%)	3.39	.955

* 1= Strongly Disagree   2= Disagree   3= Uncertain   4= Agree   5= Strongly Agree

Table 3 presented the descriptive analysis of students' perceptions on Philosophy of Knowledge course in several categories. Those categories included personality development, solidarity development, global perspective development, lecturer's teaching approaches and students' suggestion to make the course as a compulsory university course. Based on the analysis, it was found that a standard mode of 4 was obtained for all aspects investigated in the questionnaire. In terms of solidarity development, 62.3% or majority of respondents chose scale 4 (agree). For global perspective, around 62.6% or also majority of respondents chose scale 4(agree). For teaching approaches (P&P) 66.9% or majority chose scale 4 (agree) and for suggestion to make the course as a compulsory course, around 40.1% or majority of respondents chose scale 4 (agree). Therefore, based on the analysis, majority of respondents "agree" that Philosophy of Knowledge course contributes to personality development, solidarity development, and constructs their global perspective. In addition,   they also "agree" that the teaching approaches used by their lecturers were effective. In fact, it was

almost agreed by majority of respondents if the course becomes a compulsory university course. Mean scale for all categories were not the same yet all categories recorded almost similar scale in which personality development, 4.07, teaching approaches, 4.04, solidarity development and global perspective development, both were 4.03 and making the course compulsory, 3.39.

CONCLUSION

According to the analysis that has been carried out, it has been proven that all twelve questions posted in the questionnaire have been answered and this consequently meant that the objectives of this study have been achieved. The findings answered all twelve questions with regards to the contents in Philosophy of Knowledge course. To conclude,the contents in the course inculcates moral values among students, the course encourages students to be well-mannered and have good attitude, the course helps students in adapting well with Muslim and Non-Muslim friends, the contents are suitable to both Muslim and Non-Muslim students, the course contents are not offensive and applicable to all regardless of races, the course is important in developing solidarity among Malaysian, students are satisfied with the approaches used by lecturers, students could understand the concept of knowledge, philosophy and methodology of knowledge, as well as increasing their understanding on Islamic knowledge and thoughts, this course is helpful in guiding the students to use higher order thinking skills and finally, this course should be made compulsory to all undergraduates.

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