THE ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN INDEPENDENT CHINESE SECONDARY SCHOOL (MICSS): THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS' TRAINING

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ABSTRACT:
This study aims to identify the characteristics of teacher training of Malaysian Independent Chinese Secondary School (MICSS). Two different scale MICSSs are composed of the research samples, and the eight informants include two MICSS administrators in charge of teacher training and two MICSS teachers with different teaching experience. Document analysis and semi-structured interviews are adapted to collected data, and the thematic analysis approach is used to analyze data. Finally, progressive timeline and effort toward implementation are used to conclude the characteristics of MICSSs' teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

The multivariant society in Malaysia nurtures multi-linguistic nature of its people, and it constitutes several school types in the country (Hoque et al., 2020). There is the "Sekolah Kebangsaan", which primarily uses Malay as the medium of instruction; the vernacular school, which uses respective mother tongue (namely Chinese and Tamil) as the medium of instruction; and the Malaysian Independent Chinese Secondary School (MICSS), which uses Mandarin and simplified Chinese in teaching and daily communication. MICSS is a by-product of the enactment of government educational policy in the 1960s, and its ripple effect to MICSSs' development still last to this day.

In 1956, before the establishment of the Malaya, the British colonial government issued the "Razak Report," which outlined that all of its colonial

subjects in the Malay Archipelago, regardless of their ethnicity, shall embraces Malay as the medium of instruction to promote unity among its people. In 1957, the newly formed Malayan government issued a new education policy, "The Education Ordinance,1957", which stipulates that it is mandatory for all Malaysian secondary schools to teach in Bahasa Malay or English. The new policy almost brought a catastrophic end to Chinese secondary schools, which had different fundamentals of schools'operation model.

In 1961, the Malaysian government promulgated "The Education Act, 1961", which since 1962 classified all primary and secondary school into the Malay medium "Sekolah Kebangsaan" and non-Malay medium "Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan". Chinese secondary schools are forced to choose to conform to either school type or lose government assistance altogether (Brown, 2007), many of them succumbed to the high-handed policy and shifted their systems and shifted their systems to "Sekolah Kebangsaan", while 60 schools chose to resist the policy, became the "MICSS". Significant progress have been made by many MICSSs ever since, in particular the area of overall teaching quality and number of students intakes (Siah et al., 2018).

The increase of students requires higher caliber faculty. Teachers need to be better prepared for an increasingly diverse classroom culture, and higher learning requirement (Mu et al., 2018). In present days, teachers are required not only to impart knowledge on academic subjects but also to teach cognitive and non-cognitive skills through daily learning. These skills include creativity, critical thinking, communication, interaction, cooperation, and civic education (Cheah et al., 2019). In order to enhance MICSSs' teaching quality and meet students' growing needs as much as possible, as well as achieve sustainable development of the Malaysian Chinese education, all MICSSs have been following a unified system, syllabus, and examination (Chen et al., 2016).

Yet, researchers (Bautista et al., 2015; Garrett & Steinberg, 2015; Somprach et al., 2017) propose that no matter how well-drawn and meticulously planned a curriculum is; or how ever distinguished and well-resourced an institution may be, it is the teaching quality that is the linchpin in students' education. Even in any educational reforms, teachers remain the most significant "agent of change" and economic growth of the country, as well as the determinants of its students' achievement (Goh & Blake, 2015). A quick reality check (Table 1.1), however, shows that most MICSS teachers did not even cross the first threshold - to be an education major graduate before relevant qualifications (Kruse & Johnson, 2017; Toom et al., 2017), that is required of them.

Table 1.1 MICSSs teachers graduate from teacher education (2014-2019)

Year	Education Major	Non-education Major	Total
2014	1712 (39.57%)	2614 (60.43%)	4326
2015	1917 (42.56%)	2587 (57.44%)	4504
2016	2186 (47.14%)	2451 (52.86%)	4637
2017	2347 (49.53%)	2392 (50.47%)	4739
2018	2610 (53.74%)	2247 (46.26%)	4857
2019	2552 (52.92%)	2270 (47.08%)	4822

Resource from: https://www.dongzong.my/v3/book/dongzong-book

The United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong) has expressed concern that having a large number of non-qualified teachers without professional knowledge in education taking charge of the classrooms will eventually see the growth of MICSS stagnate. Seeing that ongoing in-service professional learning as an essential strategy to strengthen teaching quality and student learning (Tan & Hairon, 2017), Dong Zong has in 1983 set up a teacher education committee to advise on building a strong pool of MICSS teachers by exploring various approaches (Huey, 2015).

What Dong Zong has done for MICSS teachers' professional development, and what are the characteristics of MICSSs' teacher training are the purpose of current research. Specifically, the objectives and the research questions are to identify the characteristics of MICSS teachers' training.

METHODOLOGY

According to the research purpose, the qualitative comparative case study approach is employed. This part starts with the research design, which is followed by detailed information about research setting and informants. Next, the descriptions of data collection phases and data analysis procedures are illustrated in detail.

Research Design

As a standard catalog of case study designs has yet to emerge (Yin, 2017), the current research design's formation is mainly based on the research question. There are: Determining the research problem, research objectives, research question, and research methodology by reviewing the previous relevant document and talking with some MICSS principals and teachers; Selecting the final two MICSS samples, four informants, document, and suitable data collection and data analysis methods; Designing data collection phases and suitable data analysis procedures; Confirming the interview questions and final documents based on the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria (Gross, 2018).

Research Setting and Informants

As the qualitative case study requires to collect, analyze data, and report findings within the definite bounded system (Merriam, 2001), this research's focus is MICSS teacher training, two MICSSs that selected according to the purposive sampling technique (Given, 2008), therefore, became the visible boundary of current research, and the unit of analysis is the two MICSSs' teacher training.

Two MICSSs selected, one located at Port Dickson (PD), and another one at Klang Valley (KV), Malaysia. In this research, they will be named as MICSS-1 (K.V.) and MICSS-2 (P.D.). Four informants from the two MICSSs will be interviewed to offer contextual insights on the research question, and they are

two administrators who charge teacher training issues and two teachers with different years of teaching experience, and the corresponding participant pseudonym (Merriam, 2009) is used.

Data Collection

For the current research, semi-structured interviews and document analysis will be adopted. Document analysis is conducted to investigate existing teachers' training and supports in MICSS. Semi-structured interviews are conducted to triangulate the result answered by document analysis and to conclude the characteristic of MICSSs' teacher training.

a) *Documents Analysis* of the two MICSSs' teacher training records (2016-2019) to explore existing teachers' training and supports in MICSS. Compared to other qualitative data collection methods, documents have already existed before researchers attempt to use them as research data and may contain more information (Atchan et al., 2017) about MICSSs' teacher training, there is no doubt to use document analysis.

b) *Semi-Structured Interview* starts with forming open-ended worded interview questions. Through on-site observation strategies and purposive sampling (Merriam, 2009), two teachers and two administrators are selected and composed of the final research informants. It is followed by sending the official permission letters and precise information about the research. During the semi-structured conservational interview, teachers will describe what professional training they have had and how they were evaluated. The administrators will be asked what channels they have leveraged to help their teachers achieve professional growth.

Data analysis

Data analysis, an essential aspect of the whole research process, is used by researchers to comb and interpret data (Merriam, 2009). For the current research, all the data will be stored and organized through ATLAS.ti™8 and then will be analyzed using a thematic analysis strategy (Given, 2008).

a) *Document Analysis*: aims to identify existing teachers' training and supports in MICSS. Initially, 376 teacher training records (250 are collected from MICSS-2, and 126 are got from MICSS-1) are collected, and their authenticity (Merriam, 2009) is then assessed. It is followed by establishing three inclusionary criteria: MICSS-1 and MICSS-2 teachers have attended the training; precise training contents; the training is organized for teacher professional development, reduced irrelevant records; and 122 documents selected for further analysis.

After that, the researcher established the exclusionary criteria (Gross, 2018): the training is for the in-service MICSSs' teachers to determine the final document samples, encompassing 106 documents (MICSS-2 50, MICSS-1 56). Next, according to the year that teacher training organized, integrated the

final documents samples, named the table as "school name – year TPD "(such as MICSS-1-16TPD) and loaded into the ATLAS.ti ™ project.

With the purpose of document analysis in mind, the researcher used open coding and axial coding (Given, 2008) to code all the documents separately, and finally 38 emergent codes and five categories (codes group) are formed. The aggregation analysis approach defined is then used to determine the joint category themes, and there are five category themes (Trainer; Training Contents; Training Methods; Training Organizer; Training Purpose) applied to address how MICSS teachers achieve their professional development.

b) *Interview Analysis*: The semi-structured conversational interview occurred from July 4, 2020 until July 22, 2020. After the interview is completed, each interview is first transcribed using the transcription phone application named Recording to Text Assistant, and then translated from Chinese to English. Once completed, the native speaker who can master both Chinese and English is employed to check the translated data word by word. Next, Braun and Clarke (2006) defined the thematic analysis procedures adopted to coding, categorizing, and interpreting all data obtained through interviews. Next, the detailed descriptive findings for each research question will be shown.

FINDINGS

Non-government organizations, Dong Zong, MICSSs, universities or colleges, and other social organizations offered training to help MICSS teachers achieve their professional development. Among them, the two selected MICSSs teachers attend more training activities organized by Dong Zong, in which more trainers from Taiwan or mainland China are invited. These trainers primarily through the lecture to explain educational theories: HOW to transfer knowledge to students; HOW to interact with students and form a deep understanding of textbook knowledge. The civil study, workshops, teaching demonstration, and classroom observation are the actual operation training method types. The information about "the existing teachers' training and supports in MICSS" will be triangulated using several rounds of semi-structured interviews.

When asked "how do MICSS teachers achieve their professional development", Hock the MICSS-1's head of the teaching and researching department, described:

Hock: *One is school-based training… Another one is provided by Dong Zong…*

Researcher: *Do MICSS teachers have any chance to attend training activities organized by the government?*

Hock: *That's absolutely impossible.*
(Hock.M1.040720.L4-L7)

When the same question asked to Kim, she supplied similar but more detailed information:

"Besides teachers' professional qualifications courses…Dong Zong also rganizes courses for subject teachers, class tutors, or novice teachers…the discipline training, professional training, and the teaching training composed of MICSS1's school-based training"
(Kim.M1.110720.L21-L24)

Although the two samples MICSSs different in their school scale and operation philosophy, MICSS-2's four informants hold the same perception on their teacher training to MICSS-1's interviewees.

"In MICSS-2, teachers are encouraged to attend education diploma courses organized by Dong Zong… in the school-based training; we have invited foreign or off-campus trainers to give us some training..."
(Loo.M2.220720.L2-L4)

Goh, who has 36 years of teaching experience in MICSS-2, responded from the perspective of the whole evolution process of MICSSs' teacher training, in which the non-governmental organizations of Chinese at home and abroad in Malaysia have played a very important role, especially Dong Zong, she said:

"MICSS teachers cannot participate in any training courses set by government. Therefore, in the early days, Dong Zong invited professors from abroad to give lectures…now, besides Dong Zong, regional and school-based teacher training also helped..."
(Goh.M2.170720.L2-L5)

Similar to the literature proposed, due to the uniqueness of its system, MICSSs cannot get any support from the government, and it's totally self-reliant. Toward the existing teachers' training and supports in MICSSs, Hock shared:

"The teacher training plan that we currently adopted is shared among 10 MICSSs... yet, in the past, each MICSS still use its own resources to organize teachers' training…. competitions are rampant at that period. Nowadays, most MICSSs are more willing to share…"
(Hock.M1.040720.L45-L48)

In this case, Kim expressed the same opinion:

Kim: *…the cooperation among MICSS is limited to the region teaching sharing. We have not reached the stage of inter-school execution.*

Researcher*: Why not?*

Kim: *Each MICSS have their way of running, which makes MICSSs are not a group that can cooperate…no authority says MICSSs must do this or do that… including Dong Zong…*

Researcher*: Is it because there is no assessment mechanism?*

Kim: *Yes…However, I believe it would be found, and the cooperation among MICSSs will be frequent.*

(Kim.M1.110720.L205-L213)

Although serviced at different MICSS, MICSS-2's informant also mentioned the cooperation trend among MICSSs' teacher training.

Loo: *"We do it by ourselves, and most of the time, we organize training activities in collaboration with neighbor MICSSs..."*
(Loo.M2.220720.L39-L40)

Goh: *"... in order to strengthen the cohesion of teachers, the regional training activities are organized, and the organizer will formulate their training courses after gathering the trainee's needs, which can effectively enhance the teaching effect and meet teachers' needs..."*
(Goh.M2.170720.L56-L59)

With the information about MICSS's existing teacher training, the informants are asked to describe their training target. In this case, Hock said:

Researcher: *When sorting out the teachers' training records, I found more activities in MICSS2 than in MICSS-1.*

Hock: *MICSS-2 probably have not been thinking about whether it is relevant to them. On the contrary, MICSS-1 would evaluate then to determine which program is useful.*

Researcher: Why?
Hock: No particular reasons ..… In the past, we probably did the same as what MICSS-2 is doing..…All I am saying is perhaps MICSS-2 or other smaller-scale MICSSs are still figuring out their teaching direction; however, MICSS-1 is clear …..The extra-large scale MICSS in K.V. has very targeted teacher training programs because the school has abundant funds…Perhaps another factor is teachers' turnover. MICSS-1 has a relatively stable group of teachers; however, in MICSS-2, turnover is higher…
(Hock.M1.040720.L110-L122)

As Hock said, the target of MICSS's teacher training may be influenced by the school funds and teachers' turnover, the assertion of Hock has been supported by Kim:

"...In recent years, MICSS-1's teachers' training has begun to combine theory with practice…The future direction is to improve teachers' discipline professionalism, which includes let teachers know what they have to do, and what kind of students they need to cultivate…"
(Kim. M1.110720. L208-L211)

MICSS1 has formed clear teacher training targets to improve teachers' effectiveness in knowledge transferring. The MICSS-2's informants told they are still exploring their target:

"We are still exploring our training target. So far, we are exposed to many pieces of training, some of them may be irrelevant…"
(Loo.M2.220720.L165-L166)

About Loo shared with the researcher about MICSS-2's current teacher training satiation, Goh approved and then added:

"I think the purpose of MICSS-2's teacher training is gradually targeted, in the beginning, an aim to improve teachers' subject knowledge, now, and it gradually tends to teach how to stimulate students' learning motivation and how to transfer the knowledge to the students effectively…"
(Goh.M2.170720.L153-L156)

Yet, MICSS-1 and MICSS-2 also show the difference in training contents implementation, as Hock said:

"…Teaching methods introduced by trainers are based on their local contexts; it is a challenge to fully integrate the new skills into Malaysian context…"
(Hock.M1.047020.L124-L125)

When the same questions are asked to Kim, she answered from the different aspects:

"I think MICSS-1 still needs efforts in this part…because there are more teachers with 3-5 teaching years, and it is difficult to require the younger teachers master teaching skills quickly..."
(Kim.M1.110720.L143-L145)

There are some different challenges faced by MICSS-2 teachers. As Loo said:
"Firstly, the funding… there would be limited training for BM and English teachers…Many MICSS-2's teachers are old; hence, they are not entirely receptive to new ideas."
(Loo.M2.220720.L111-L113)

Goh also mentioned that funds are the biggest challenge faced by small-scale or medium-scale MICSSs.

"Funds are the big problems; MICSSs mainly rely on social fund-raising to maintain daily expenses. Small-scale or MICSSs in remote areas cannot provide the extra funds for teachers' training…"
(Goh.M2.170720.L18-L20)

DISCUSSION

As has already been said, this study aims to identify the existing teachers' training and supports in MICSSs, and teachers' evaluation of these training that supports their professional growth. How informants evaluate the current

teacher training activities that they have received are collected, and their evaluation becomes the emerged themes to conclude the characteristics of MICSSs' teacher training.

Progress Timeline; is the first emerged major theme to answer the characteristics of MICSSs' teacher training, which means that the two-sample MICSSs are both following its principles to conduct teacher training step by step to make the teacher training more professionalization. MICSSs cannot get any support from the government requires the two self-reliant samples to gradually advance their teacher training in due order to truly satisfy their teachers' professional development needs. And two subthemes emerged from this major theme, namely, from isolation to cooperation gradually in due order, making target clear gradually in due order.

From isolation to cooperation gradually in due order; Teachers' isolated teaching behavior is challenged to meet the current social development needs, so teachers must cooperate with others, which has become a critical factor for any field (Ní Shúilleabháin, 2015). Therefore, cooperation becomes the trend of MICSSs' teacher training these days; Although serviced at totally different MICSSs, the four informants with varied years of teaching experience have formed a consensus on MICSSs' teacher training trend, from isolation to cooperation gradually in due order. The cooperation among MICSSs is no longer limited to organize the training activities jointly or invite the teacher to participate in training activities but aims to promote more in-depth cooperation through teaching sharing. The cooperation among MICSSs is essential, as the healthy development of MICSSs' education can be realized through MICSSs' cooperation.

Make target clear gradually in due order; Without the teacher training guidelines from the government, MICSSs can only, according to the school running principle and the core concept of students' cultivating, introduce a variety of training activities, select the suitable training events, and make the teacher training target clearer. As the informants expressed, because of the school scale, school funds, and the teachers' income, the two samples MICSSs' teacher training at a different development stage, that is, the large-scale MICSS-1's teacher training is developing toward the targets, the medium-scale MICSS-2's teacher training is at the stage of target exploration. On another note, the extra-large MICSS mention by Hock has a well-equipped teacher training system. Therefore, it can be said that with the different school scales, the different development stages of teacher training are obtained, and teacher training of the whole MICSS system is in the process of advance gradually in due order.

Effort towards implementation; is the second emerged major theme to answer the characteristics of MICSSs' teacher training, which means teachers serviced at the two simples MICSSs are trying their best to implement what they have learned from the series of training activities. For MICSS-1, three factors, namely, the forming background of the training content, the younger teacher group, and the training arrangement, lead the training contents cannot implement well. For MICSS-2, there are also three factors, namely, school

funds, the old teacher group and less training supplied to non-mandarin speaking teachers mentioned, lead the training contents cannot implement well in MICSS-2.

CONCLUSION

The existing teachers' training and supports in MICSS are: given the fact that they cannot attend any government training activities, the two MICSSs' teachers mainly obtain support from Dong Zong to achieve their professional growth. Among all the training activities, trainers from Taiwan or mainland China are invited, in which the trainers use lectures, workshops, or forums to help trainees enhance their daily teaching practice.

The characteristics of MICSSs' teacher training are progress timeline and effort towards Implementation. Moreover, two subthemes emerged from the first major themes: transfer isolation to cooperation gradually in order to organize the training activities with one another and make target clear gradually in due order to introduce related training activities and indeed help teachers achieve their professional development.

This study's finding could be useful for extending our understanding of how and why MICSS teachers achieve their professional development and expand the literature of teachers' professional development in the Malaysian context. Those significances are also motivating the researcher to do this study.

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