

A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR RESEARCHING NATIONAL CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Meng Yew Tee^a

Moses Samuel

Norjoharuddeen Bin Mohd Nor

University of Malaya

Shanthi Nadarajan

University Malaysia Sarawak

Abstract: Little continues to be known about what actually happens in classrooms, particularly from a national perspective. Descriptions of classroom practices from a national vantage point can provide a bird's eye view of salient patterns and variations within an education system, especially one as centralised as that of Malaysia. With these descriptions, especially if the primary data consists of video recordings, one can also begin to compare movements in classroom practices across time and space; theorise about the nature of practice within the system as well as inform policy deliberations. This paper examines key methodological decisions of conducting a national study to research classroom educational practice within Malaysia's public school system. The case is made for the use of such studies to gain a bird's eye perspective of classroom practices in a national system as well as to lay the foundations for inter-system comparisons. Potential implications and opportunities of these types of studies are also discussed.

Keywords: educational process, classroom practice, pedagogical practice, assessment practice, curriculum implementation practice, national study

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the methodological decisions in conducting a broad-based, national- or state-level study to research classroom practices. While there is a body of research of such nature (e.g. Alexander, 2000; Brückmann et al, 2007; Clarke et al, 2006; 2008; Janik & Seidel, 2009; Klette, 2009b; Lingard et al, 2001; Luke et al, 2005; Simola, 2005; Stigler et al, 1999), every broad-based study has to address the unique characteristics of the local system and context. It is against the backdrop of this existing body of research that we will describe key methodological decisions that went into shaping a study of classroom practice in Malaysia.

What plays out in classrooms within a national education system can and usually remains a mystery to the many education stakeholders, but this is particularly true with policy-makers and to a certain extent, educational researchers. We know, for example, that one of the single most important formal education determinants is effectiveness of teachers. This consensus has grown over the last three decades as research-based evidence continues to emerge (e.g., Hanushek, 1992; Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, & Rivkin, 2005; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Rothstein, 2009; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Singh & Sarkar, 2015; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

While teacher effectiveness is a critical factor, most countries do not have a finger on the pulse of what actually goes on in their classrooms. In Malaysia for example, most of the research on classroom educational practice investigates practices of individual teachers, classrooms, or schools.

^a Correspondence can be directed to: mytee22@yahoo.com or mytee@um.edu.my