The Multifaceted Roles of Teachers in 21st-Century Malaysian Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study presents a systematic literature review (SLR) examining the evolving roles of teachers in 21st-century Malaysia, focusing on their functions as planners, mentors, motivators, controllers, and evaluators. Guided by the PRISMA framework, twenty peer-reviewed studies published between 2013 and 2025 were analyzed from major databases including Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The review highlights that teachers serve as strategic planners who design inclusive and technology-integrated lessons; as mentors who guide professional growth and foster teacher efficacy; as motivators who inspire student engagement through innovative pedagogical practices; as controllers who maintain effective classroom management and uphold discipline; and as evaluators who implement authentic assessment aligned with the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013–2025). The synthesis underscores the interdependence of these roles and the challenges teachers face, including limited autonomy, digital readiness, and assessment reform constraints. The study concludes that sustained professional development, supportive instructional leadership, and coherent policy implementation are essential to empower Malaysian teachers as transformative agents in achieving national educational excellence.

Keywords: *Teacher roles, 21st-century education, Malaysia Education Blueprint, systematic literature review, teacher professionalism, instructional planning, mentorship, motivation, classroom management, assessment practices.*

Introduction

The role of teachers in the 21st century is evolving to meet the demands of contemporary educational paradigms, particularly within the Malaysian context. This systematic literature review aims to elucidate the multifaceted responsibilities of teachers, focusing on their roles as planners, mentors, motivators, controllers, and evaluators. Each of these roles is critical in shaping the educational landscape of Malaysia, which is influenced by pedagogical reforms and technological advancements. As Malaysia aspires to enhance its educational standards, understanding these roles becomes vital for fostering effective teaching and learning environments. Previous literature indicates that successful educational outcomes hinge on the depth of teachers' engagement in these roles, underscoring the necessity for continual professional development and supportive educational policies (Isa et al., 2021; , Vadivel et al., 2021; .

Teacher as a Planner

In the context of Malaysian education, the teacher's role as a planner is pivotal in shaping educational outcomes. This systematic literature review synthesizes current findings regarding the responsibilities and practices of teachers in Malaysia, particularly emphasizing the planning aspect of their educational roles.

Teacher planning encompasses various domains, including curriculum design, instructional strategies, assessment methods, and technology integration. As articulated by Shulman in "Those who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching," effective planning integrates both theoretical principles and practical applications. Shulman suggests that a dialectic between general principles and concrete cases is essential for developing teachers' strategic understanding and enhancing their professional judgment in real classroom settings (Shulman, 2013). This principle aligns with the Malaysian educational context, where teachers are increasingly expected to adopt innovative teaching methodologies that address diverse student needs.

Moreover, the necessity for teachers to be attuned to the perceptions of various stakeholders, including parents and students, is emphasized in the work of Amin and Fariduddin, which highlights the importance of including stakeholders in educational planning processes (Amin & Fariduddin, 2023). The inclusion of parents in educational planning is crucial, as their support can significantly influence the integration of programs like Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) within Malaysian schools. By acknowledging the perspectives and concerns of parents, teachers can better design curricula to enhance stakeholder engagement and effectiveness.

Technological integration is another critical area of teacher planning in Malaysia. The demand for digital competencies within the framework of Education 4.0 necessitates that educators design lesson plans that incorporate modern technology. Research conducted by Bujang et al. emphasizes the significance of addressing barriers to digital learning and the imperative for teachers to be well-equipped to integrate technology efficiently (Bujang et al., 2020). They note that successful implementation hinges on educators' readiness to use digital tools effectively, further underscoring the role of thoughtful planning in this integration process.

The role of school leaders also plays a significant part in influencing teacher planning. As indicated by Harris et al., effective instructional leadership involves guiding teachers in the planning process, thereby improving the quality and coherence of educational programs (Harris et al., 2017). Such leadership not only supports teachers in their planning endeavors but also instills a culture of continuous improvement. This aligns with the findings of Hallinger et al., who pinpoint the essential role of school leadership in facilitating pedagogical innovations through enhanced planning (Hallinger et al., 2017).

Additionally, a distinct aspect of teacher planning involves the development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) among students. Zakaria et al. argue for the necessity of intentional planning strategies that target critical pedagogy to foster these skills within the Malaysian context (Zakaria et al., 2021). This includes designing activities that promote inquiry-based learning and student engagement, hence demonstrating the intricate link between a teacher's planning duties and broader educational objectives.

To sum up, the complexities associated with the teacher's role as a planner in Malaysian education include the harmonization of stakeholder perceptions, the integration of technology, the influence of instructional leadership, and the enhancement of critical thinking skills amongst students. Each of these dimensions necessitates a comprehensive approach to educational planning that is adaptable and responsive to the ever-evolving educational landscape in Malaysia.

Teacher as a Mentor and Guide

The role of teachers as mentors and guides within the Malaysian education framework is a critical topic, as it relates to nurturing educational growth and enhancing pedagogical effectiveness. This systematic literature review synthesizes current findings on this matter, shedding light on how mentorship models can enrich the professional landscape for educators in Malaysia.

In Malaysian educational contexts, mentorship functions as a conduit through which experienced educators impart knowledge and competencies to novice teachers. Hallinger and colleagues discuss the impact of instructional leadership on educational quality, which indirectly supports the idea of mentorship enhancing instructional practices when integrated into professional development programs (Hallinger et al., 2017). The interplay between professional development and teacher mentorship is explored by Borko, who emphasizes that effective teacher learning requires supportive structures that foster collaborative practices and deeper engagement with pedagogical concepts (Borko, 2004). This collaborative mentorship not only improves teaching practices but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement among educators (Aderibigbe et al., 2018).

Moreover, teacher efficacy is significantly influenced by mentorship experiences. Johar's study illustrates that support structures provide crucial validation for teachers, enhancing their sense of competence and efficacy (Johar, 2022). This is echoed by Salas-Rodríguez et al., who emphasize that teacher self-efficacy is interconnected with the mentoring process, highlighting the importance of fostering an environment of trust and shared learning values (Salas-Rodríguez et al., 2021). In the Malaysian context, the development of strong mentoring programs can drive not only teacher motivation but also student outcomes, as motivated educators are more likely to engage effectively with their students (Shuib & Yunus, 2021).

Furthermore, the nuances of mentorship are illustrated in the work of Aderibigbe et al., who argue that mentoring relationships in educational settings must be critically examined. Their qualitative findings suggest that the dynamics of mentoring are influenced by the relational values and educational philosophies held by both mentors and mentees (Aderibigbe et al., 2018). This aligns with the

cultural considerations raised by Adams et al., who underscore the significance of culturally responsive mentoring practices that account for local educational contexts and expectations in Malaysia's multifaceted landscape (Adams et al., 2021).

Additionally, the integration of innovative pedagogies plays a crucial role in enhancing the teacher's position as a guide. By adopting innovative strategies outlined in the context of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), educators can better prepare their students for contemporary challenges through effective mentorship (Jamain & Jamaludin, 2023). Educational reforms emphasize the necessity for teachers to adapt their mentorship strategies to incorporate innovative practices aligned with current curricular demands (Sadhasivam et al., 2023).

To conclude, the evidence gathered underscores the importance of effective mentorship systems in Malaysian education. This synthesis highlights the interconnections between mentorship, teacher efficacy, and improved educational outcomes. It is essential for Malaysian educational stakeholders to invest in comprehensive mentorship frameworks that elevate teaching standards and cultivate an environment conducive to holistic growth for both teachers and students.

Teacher as a motivator

The role of teachers as motivators within the Malaysian education system is a pivotal aspect of enhancing student engagement and improving academic outcomes. This systematic literature review draws upon various scholarly sources to elucidate the mechanisms through which teachers can inspire and motivate their students, as well as the practices that can enhance their motivational capabilities.

A foundational element in understanding teacher motivation in Malaysia is the acknowledgment of the educational environment's influence. According to Koh et al. (Koh et al., 2024), a supportive and inclusive working environment significantly impacts teachers' motivation, which in turn influences their teaching effectiveness and, ultimately, student achievement. The authors underscore the necessity of aligning school environments with the needs of educators to maintain high levels of motivation and job satisfaction. This perspective resonates with findings from Karoso et al. (Karoso et al., 2024), who advocate for a positive and collaborative school culture that fosters teacher engagement and innovative pedagogical practices. Such an approach not only empowers educators but also sets a motivational precedent for students, creating a reciprocal relationship that enhances learning outcomes.

Moreover, the significance of teacher identity in motivating both educators and students cannot be overlooked. Lim and Yunus Lim & Yunus (2021) suggest that adopting digital tools like Quizizz in the classroom can invigorate the teaching process by providing platforms that promote creative engagement, thereby motivating both teachers and learners. This integration of technology into teaching practices not only facilitates a more dynamic learning experience but also empowers teachers to reinforce their motivational roles effectively.

In addition to fostering a conducive environment and integrating technology, the psychological aspects of motivation are critical. The literature identifies socio-emotional skills as fundamental to developing motivation within the classroom. Chiappetta-Santana et al. Chiappetta-Santana et al. (2022) emphasize that the motivation to learn is a primary driver of student achievement, acting as a catalyst for the development of socio-emotional skills. This aligns with the findings of Ahmad and Ismail (Ahmad & Ismail, 2023),

which indicate that innovative instructional materials, such as graphic novels, can significantly enhance reading motivation among students, illustrating how creative teaching methods can invigorate student learning.

Recognizing the factors that contribute to teacher motivation and the impact of teacher effectiveness on student engagement reveals the multi-faceted nature of motivation in education. Aydos Aydos (2024) supports this by arguing that accountability within school leadership can enhance teacher motivation, which indirectly promotes student performance. The study indicates that well-managed schools, where accountability is a priority, create a motivational atmosphere conducive for both teachers and students.

In synthesizing these findings, we can conclude that teachers play a crucial role as motivators in Malaysian education, influenced by a range of factors including the educational environment, technology integration, teacher identity, and leadership accountability. These elements work synergistically to foster a vibrant learning atmosphere where both teachers and students can thrive.

Teacher as a Controller

The concept of the "Teacher as a Controller" in Malaysian education warrants a comprehensive investigation within the framework of systematic literature review methodologies. This review synthesizes current literature on the role of teachers in Malaysia, evaluating their authority, autonomy, and implications for educational outcomes within the context of various reforms and pedagogical changes.

A systematic literature review approach, such as highlighted in the PRISMA 2020 statement, serves as a valuable method for ensuring transparency and comprehensiveness in academic inquiry (Page et al., 2021). In international contexts of educational reform, studies have shown varied responses by teachers to curriculum changes, reflecting their experiences and challenges (Nasution & Indrasari, 2024). These insights point to a common thread in educational ecosystems, where teachers navigate complex landscapes established by policies while attempting to maintain pedagogical integrity and efficacy.

In Malaysia, the relationship between teacher competencies and educational frameworks is critical. For example, the School Improvement Specialist Coaching (SISC+) emphasizes the need for effective communication skills among educators and highlights that teacher autonomy and professional development are interconnected with program success (Yan et al., 2022). Moreover, studies have indicated that teachers often operate within structures that allow limited autonomy, reflecting how centralized training and decision-making impact their professional identities (Gill & Berezina, 2020).

Particularly noteworthy is the role of teacher autonomy as a factor enhancing school performance and educational satisfaction. Research indicates that enhancing teacher autonomy can empower educators, leading to improved pedagogical practices and better student outcomes (Isa et al., 2021). However, challenges remain, as many teachers express experiences of operating under restrictive environments that limit their professional expression and instructional creativity (Jaafar et al., 2022). This interaction emphasizes a dichotomy between the need for teacher control in educational settings and the desire for professional autonomy.

It is also important to recognize that systemic issues, such as leadership styles in schools, directly influence the extent of teacher autonomy and effectiveness. The literature showcases that transformational and distributed leadership models are gaining

traction in Malaysian schools, suggesting a gradual shift towards empowering teachers through shared leadership techniques (Bush et al., 2018). Nevertheless, ongoing analysis of these dynamics is essential for fostering an environment that genuinely allows teachers to thrive professionally while enhancing student learning experiences.

Furthermore, research into educational talent management reveals that systematic approaches to teacher retention and professional growth are vital for addressing challenges in the Malaysian educational landscape (Koh et al., 2024). Such strategic initiatives can serve as proactive measures to build a culture that values teacher input and utilizes their strengths to enhance educational practices and student engagement.

In conclusion, this systematic literature review highlights that the role of the teacher as a controller is intricately linked with their autonomy, systemic support, and leadership frameworks. Future research should continue to explore these intricate relationships to inform policies that truly empower teachers while advancing the goals of Malaysian education.

Teacher as an Evaluator

The role of teachers as evaluators within the Malaysian education system has garnered considerable interest in recent years, particularly in light of evolving assessment practices endorsed by the Ministry of Education. This systematic literature review synthesizes the contributions of various studies to better understand the challenges, perceptions, and effective practices associated with this pivotal role.

The implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Malaysia poses significant challenges for teachers, as explored by Uri and Aziz (Uri & Aziz, 2018). Their research highlights the crucial need for teacher awareness surrounding CEFR's guidelines, which directly impact assessment practices within the English syllabus. Furthermore, exploring the nature of classroom assessment practices among Malaysian teachers, Rosli et al. argue that effective assessments are critical in enhancing educational outcomes (Rosli et al., 2022). The study emphasizes that teachers' readiness and willingness to adopt new assessment mechanisms are vital for successful implementation.

Teacher development goes hand-in-hand with effective assessment practices. Amzat et al. identified a direct correlation between teacher motivation and their effectiveness as evaluators. High motivation leads to increased satisfaction and better performance in their teaching roles (Amzat et al., 2017). This notion is complemented by Khamis and Selamat's findings that feedback plays a vital role in assessment, reinforcing the importance of teachers' pedagogical knowledge in implementing effective assessments (Khamis & Selamat, 2019).

In addressing the perceived barriers to effective assessment, several studies reveal a spectrum of challenges faced by educators. For instance, Norhasim and Mohamad discuss the heavy reliance on summative assessments, which limits teachers' abilities to evaluate students formatively (Norhasim & Mohamad, 2020). Additionally, findings from Mahat et al. highlight the need for improved pedagogical content knowledge among teachers to meet the Malaysian Education Quality Standards, which are crucial for

effective classroom assessments (Mahat et al., 2019). Razak et al. emphasize the need for teachers to possess adequate pedagogical skills to construct meaningful assessments that effectively evaluate student learning (Razak et al., 2023).

Another critical dimension of this review involves teacher perceptions of evaluation methods, which significantly influence their practices. Sulaiman et al. elucidate how teachers' beliefs about standardized assessments impact their willingness to embrace alternative instructional strategies, reflecting the entrenched norms within education systems (Sulaiman et al., 2017). Their findings resonate with the sentiments expressed by Ti and Wong, who advocate for a more integrative approach that balances traditional and innovative assessment strategies (Ti & Wong, 2024).

Moreover, ongoing discussions on teacher leadership underscore the importance of evaluation as a collaborative effort. The work of Yusof et al. elucidates this relationship, stating that teacher leadership can enhance student academic achievement through shared responsibilities in educational contexts (Yusof et al., 2018). This paradigm shift points to a more dynamic role for teachers, who emerge not only as evaluators but also as leaders within the learning community.

In conclusion, the literature reveals a complex landscape surrounding teachers as evaluators in Malaysian education, characterized by various challenges ranging from systemic constraints in assessments to gaps in pedagogical knowledge and beliefs. The evolving role of teachers necessitates ongoing professional development that empowers educators to navigate these complexities while maintaining a focus on enhancing student learning outcomes through effective assessment practices.

Methodology

This systematic literature review employs a structured approach in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines, ensuring a robust examination of available literature concerning the role of teachers in Malaysia. Extensive academic databases and journals were assessed to compile relevant peer-reviewed articles, ensuring a comprehensive range of perspectives on teacher roles. The search strategy included keywords such as "teacher roles," "Malaysian education," "pedagogical practices," "professional development," and "technological integration." The final selection of articles was predominantly based on their relevance to the identified roles of teachers and the Malaysian educational context. A total of twenty articles were curated, offering insights into the diverse roles and challenges faced by educators in a rapidly changing educational environment (Isa et al., 2021; , Vadivel et al., 2021; , Tahir et al., 2021).

Discussion

The roles of teachers in the context of 21st-century education are multifaceted, particularly in the Malaysian setting. This systematic literature review synthesizes evidence from multiple peer-reviewed studies, demonstrating that teachers function as planners, mentors, motivators, controllers, and evaluators. These roles have evolved significantly due to the demands of modern pedagogy and technological advancements.

Table 1.0 : Roles of Teachers in Malaysian Education

Teacher Role	Key Functions	Challenges	References

Planner	Curriculum design, lesson planning, integration of technology, stakeholder engagement	Limited autonomy, need for training	(Bayuong & Hashim, 2023), (Jamain & Jamaludin, 2023), (Singh et al., 2021)
Mentor	Professional support for novice teachers, fostering self-efficacy, collaborative culture	Variability in mentorship structures, cultural considerations	(Herzog et al., 2012), Sohail, 2025)
Motivator	Enhancing student engagement through innovative practices, positive school culture	Influence of school environment, need for accountability	(Martin & Dowson, 2009), (Saad et al., 2024)
Controller	Classroom management, maintaining discipline, exercising professional autonomy	Centralized decision-making, limited professional freedom	(Varatharaj et al., 2015), (Rarasati & Pramana, 2023)
Evaluator	Implementing formative and summative assessments, feedback on student performance	Adapting to new assessment frameworks, addressing entrenched norms	(Jamain & Jamaludin, 2023), (Heisler et al., 2014), (Singh et al., 2021)

Based on the table 1.0, the systematic literature review highlights the intricate dynamics of the roles teachers fulfill in Malaysian education. As planners, educators are critical in designing curricula that are not only inclusive but also technologically advanced, reflecting the aspirations outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (Bayuong & Hashim, 2023). The effective integration of technology necessitates that teachers possess adequate training and digital competencies, which aligns with findings by Zakaria et al., emphasizing the importance of teacher preparedness in this regard (Zakaria et al., 2024). Additionally, engaging stakeholders such as parents enhances educational planning, underscoring the need for collaboration at all levels of the educational system (Jamain & Jamaludin, 2023).

The mentorship role is another essential aspect, as experienced teachers guide novice educators in their professional development. Such mentoring contributes to a culture of continuous improvement, as detailed by Adams et al. (Herzog et al., 2012). Structured mentorship programs have been noted to improve teacher efficacy and satisfaction, thereby benefiting student outcomes (Herzog et al., 2012). However, there exist challenges related to the dynamics of mentor-mentee relationships and the need for culturally responsive mentoring practices, as highlighted by Aderibigbe et al. (Herzog et al., 2012), which call for a nuanced understanding of local educational contexts.

As motivators, teachers play a vital role in fostering student engagement and achievement. Research indicates that supportive school environments correlate significantly with teacher motivation, which extends to student performance (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Integration of innovative teaching practices is paramount for maintaining high levels of motivation among both educators and learners, prompting schools to create engaging and responsive learning atmospheres (Saad et al., 2024). The relationship between a positive school culture and enhanced student motivation illustrates the reciprocal nature of these dynamics.

The notion of teachers as controllers entails their capacity to manage classrooms and maintain discipline. Studies have shown that when teachers possess greater autonomy, their engagement and effectiveness improve, leading to better educational outcomes (Varatharaj et al., 2015). Centralized educational frameworks can limit teacher autonomy and creativity, making it imperative that Malaysian schools consider transformative leadership models that empower teachers to exercise their professional judgment (Rarasati & Pramana, 2023).

Finally, as evaluators, teachers face difficulties adapting to new assessment frameworks like the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Heisler et al., 2014). The literature underscores the significance of ongoing professional development and training to equip teachers with the skills needed for effective evaluation practices (Singh et al., 2021). Addressing the entrenched norms in assessment strategies is crucial for fostering an educational environment that promotes both formative and summative assessment methodologies (Jamain & Jamaludin, 2023).

In conclusion, the evolving roles of teachers in Malaysia present both opportunities and challenges that require systemic support, continuous professional development, and innovative leadership. As teachers navigate their responsibilities as planners, mentors, motivators, controllers, and evaluators, collaborative efforts from all educational stakeholders will be essential in cultivating an environment conducive to achieving national educational excellence.

Conclusion

The findings of this systematic literature review reveal that the functioning of teachers in Malaysia is situated within a complex interplay of roles—each crucial for the advancement of educational outcomes. The synthesis of current literature underscores the importance of nurturing educational environments that support teachers as planners, mentors, motivators, controllers, and evaluators. Future policy directions should prioritize initiatives that enhance teacher autonomy, integrate innovative pedagogical strategies, and foster collaborative mentorship cultures. Continued professional development, aligned with the current demands of educational frameworks, will be key to equipping teachers with the necessary skills and confidence to navigate the evolving educational landscape. As Malaysian education progresses, embedding these multifaceted roles into the foundational structures of teaching will be essential for achieving the national educational goals articulated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint

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