

## Teaching Tasawwuf (Suffism) at Pre-University Level Using Contextual Approach

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**Abstract:** This research is a study in adopting a contextual approach as a specific teaching methodology in order to attract a greater number of students opting to study Tasawuf as a subject. This approach is designed to combine subject materials with the real life experiences of those involved, incorporating relevancy to the local environment. Exploratory research is the method chosen to measure the understanding at the contextual level of the subject by all sixth form teachers of *Usuluddin* in Brunei Darussalam. Questionnaires, interviews and observation were used in data collection. 144 participants consisting of 5 teachers and 139 students were involved in this research. A pilot study was carried out to check the reliability of the instrument and the value obtained was  $\alpha = 0.89$ . From the research undertaken, the level of understanding of the *Usuluddin* teachers and the Pre-university students towards the principles of contextual approach in their in their teaching-learning process is quite high.

**Key words:** Contextual Approach • Tasawwuf (Sufism) • Brunei Darussalam • Pre-university students

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### INTRODUCTION

Teaching approach is one of the important strategies in the process of Teaching and Learning (T-L). Without it, knowledge cannot be transmitted or disseminated effectively. With the introduction of the new education system for the 21st Century in Brunei Darussalam which is popularly known as SPN 21, it has been given a new paradigm shift towards teachers and educators in order for them to change their existing way of teaching and learning, in order to accommodate the objectives outlined in the SPN 21. In this new education system, there are three things which have been emphasised on, namely : re-designing new school curriculum, followed by the continuous assessment and approaches as well as strategies of teaching-learning in order to educate and promote the skills amongst students. All the three elements mentioned above are envisaged in enabling to produce students whom are highly skilled and at the same time possessing values and attitudes in accordance to the religion and the needs of the nation aside from promoting the culture of effective and active learning [1].

Teaching approaches should progress and change with time and the teaching of Islamic Education subjects is not an exception. Lack of creativity in teaching not only become the causal factor for students to be demotivated but it also shows the lack of effort among the educators in increasing and improving their qualities of teaching. The changes or shifts in teaching which are aimed to be achieved have not been accomplished completely. This can be reflected from the research done by Roslan (2002), where in his research it has shown that 84.5% of the teachers teaching Islamic Revealed Knowledge (IRK) in Brunei used mostly lectures in their lessons [2]. This phenomena too had been found in the research done by Khairul Azri [3].

In both of these researches, it was concluded that one of the causes why students do not perform well and are demotivated in their IRK subjects is due to the teaching approaches used by their teachers are not able to increase the students' interests and less emphasis was put on them (students) regarding the importance of these subjects in their daily lives.

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Various usages of teaching approaches as well as involving the students in class activities are believed to have positive effects towards the students' learning. In other words, students need meaningful learning and not merely relying on memorisation only. This does not mean that memorising during learning is not a good way of remembering facts and figures, as practised by the Muslim scholars earlier on. But, understanding of certain information is also practised in education. For instance, Ibn Khaldun, he himself found out that memorisation at certain level may jeopardise certain learning and ultimately it may cause the students to be passive especially when it comes to developing students' own critical thinking [4]

Generally, a lot of issues pertaining to religious education touched are on matters related to the learning outputs of the students which are reflected from the teachers' way of teaching. Learning process can be meaningful if the knowledge and skills taught by teachers can be fully utilised by students especially in their lives. Adversely, learning too can be unbeneficial if the knowledge taught and transmitted only for the sake of examination (ie. Exam oriented) or be applied during their school life only.

**Research Question:** This study aims to answer one research question only, namely, to what extent does the understanding of the teachers and students towards the concepts of contextual approach in the teaching of Tasawwuf (sufism) at the Pre-Universiti level in Brunei Darussalam.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To be able to answer the above research question, this study used descriptive approach through the questionnaires which were given to students and teachers in relation to the teaching and learning of Tasawwuf. Aside from questionnaires, researcher used interviews and observation of the teachers.

This study is an exploratory study whereby the researcher has identified one issue, phenomenon or new issue on the rules and regulations, in order to know, analyse or verification of the problems faced and phenomenon which is being researched on. Hence for exploratory study, qualitative approach will be done first followed by quantitative approach [5]

This study involved 5 teachers who are teaching the subject of Usuluddin and 139 students selected from 4 colleges and secondary schools in Brunei Darussalam as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Distribution of respondents : Teachers and Students

Schools	No.of teachers	%	No.of Students	%
School A	1	20	32	23
School B	2	40	76	54.7
School C	1	20	10	7.2
School D	1	20	21	15.1
Total	5	100	139	100

Table 2 : Interpretation of mean scores

Interpretation	Mean Value
Low	1.00- 2.33
Average	2.34 - 3.66
High	3.67 - 5.00

Source: Jamil Ahmad (2002)

Table 3 : Respondents involved for each instrument

Respondents	Questionnaire	Interview	Observation
Teachers	5	5	5
Students	139	-	Randomly selected classes

In this research, scores' interpretations for the level of questions posed to the respondents are categorised into : Low, Average and High (Table 2).

**Research Instrument:** In order to be able to answer the objective question in this study, researcher has used questionnaire, observation and semi structured interview to get that research data. Table 3 shows the number of respondents involved in the usage of all the three instruments namely questionnaire, observation and semi structured interviews.

The questionnaires were distributed to 5 teachers who are teaching Tasawwuf and 139 students whom are randomly selected from 4 secondary schools where the subject Tasawwuf is offered. There are two sets of questionnaires. For the questionnaires given to the teachers and students, items were constructed as to identify the teachers' and students' understandings on the contextual approach per se especially in the teaching of Tasawwuf. For the interview data, it was transcribed in verbatim and analysed according to themes. Data was interpreted qualitatively. For the observation data, researcher has come up with a check list which was later analysed quantitatively.

**Literature Review:** Tasawwuf as a subject is one of the components of *Usuluddin* and it is offered at the GCE 'A' level examination since 1978. The subject content taught at the pre-university level is a sequel from what have been taught at the Religious schools under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. When looked into the formal curriculum of teaching *Tasawwuf* in school, the main objective is

mainly channelled to the betterment of *akhlaq* and moral awareness amongst the students. In addition, the teaching approach by most teachers is purely lecture type in order to disseminate the information only and students' work is assessed through examination. Less emphasis was made on the mode of delivery hence making the students to be demotivated and not interested to study the subject. Therefore, here it can be assumed that the main objective outlined has not been fully achieved.

According to Center for Occupational Research and Development [5], Contextual Learning happens when a student processes new information or he has an existing understanding of the knowledge in accordance to his thinking framework. Hence through observation, Hart and Boydell (1994) defines contextual learning as a phenomena which can be identified by the students as part of their learning experience in their daily life.

As defined by Blanchard (2001), Bern and Erikson (2001), contextual teaching and learning is a conception of teaching and learning that helps teachers relate subject matter content to real world situations; and motivates students to make connections between knowledge and its applications to their lives as family members, citizens and workers and engage in the hard work that learning requires [6, 7].

Hence, from the above definitions, contextual is a teaching-learning concept which can aid teachers to relate the content knowledge taught with the happenings in life and therefore encourage students too to be able to make relationships of what they have learnt with the knowledge that they have and later instill them in their daily life. Further, Hull and Sounders (1996) defined contextual as:

- *“ In a Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), student discover meaningful learning relationship between abstract ideas and practical applications in a real world context [8]. Students internalise concepts through discovery, reinforcement and inter-relationship. CTL creates a team, whether in a classroom, lab, worksite, or on the banks of a river. CTL encourages educators to design learning environments that incorporates many forms of experience to achive the desired outcomes”*

Meanwhile according to Johnson [2], Contextual Learning is an educational process that aims to help students see meaning in the academic material they are studying by connecting academic subjects with the context of their daily lives, that is, with context of their personal, social and cultural circumstances.

From various definitions given above, it can be concluded that Contextual Approach is a learning approach which can give tangible relationship between what has been learnt by the students in class whereby this relationship is done through connecting the knowledge or the experience obtained outside school site with the cognitive application which has a direct connection with the real life experience.

There are several specific characteristics of Contextual Learning namely, relying on spatial memory, relating multi subject materials or multi discipline of knowledge, information assessed based on students' needs, connecting information with the existing knowledge the students have and real assessment through practicals or real problem-based solution.

There are 4 learning theories that emphasised on the philosophy of constructivism which Contextual learning is based upon. The 4 theories are, Learning Theory by Jean Piaget, Meaningful Learning Theory by David Ausubel, Cognitive Developmental Learning Theory by Vygotsky and Discovery Learning Theory by Jerome Bruner. According to Piaget, Constructivism Learning Theory is developed through personal information. It is a theory to explain how knowledge is constructed in the human being when information comes into contact with existing knowledge that had been developed by experiences. It has its roots in cognitive psychology and biology and an approach to education that lays emphasis on the ways knowledge is created in order to adapt to the world. Constructs are the different types of filters we choose to place over our realities to change our reality from chaos to order. Discovery, hands-on, experiential, collaborative, project-based and task-based learning are a number of applications that base teaching and learning on constructivism.

Ausubel, whose theory is particularly relevant for educators, considered neo-behaviorist views inadequate. Although he recognized other forms of learning, his work focused on verbal learning. He dealt with the nature of meaning and believes the external world acquires meaning only as it is converted into the content of consciousness by the learner. Meaning is created through some form of representational equivalence between language (symbols) and mental context. Two processes are involved:

- Reception, which is employed in meaningful verbal learning and
- Discovery, which is involved in concept formation and problem solving.

Ausubel's work has frequently been compared with Bruner's. The two held similar views about the hierarchical nature of knowledge, but Bruner was strongly oriented towards discovery processes, where Ausubel gave more emphasis to the verbal learning methods of speech, reading and writing.

Unlike Piaget and Ausebel, Vygotsky focused on the mechanisms of development. Knowledge is an internalisation of social activities. Jerome Bruner said that knowing is a process and so his work focused on the importance of understanding the structure of a subject being studied, the need for active learning as the basis for understanding and the importance of reasoning in learning. Bruner believed that when learners are presented with perplexing situations they will want to figure out a solution. This belief was the basis for creating discovery learning activities. Bruner suggested that teachers can nurture inductive thinking by encouraging students to make guesses based on incomplete evidence and then to confirm or disprove the guesses systematically. To apply Bruner's ideas in the classroom, teachers would present both examples and non-examples of concepts, help students see connections among concepts with questions, pose questions and allow students to find an answer and encourage students to make intuitive guesses.

**Contextual Approach in Teaching Religious Knowledge as a Subject Taught in School:** Contextual Learning is one type of learning concept which can aid teachers in their lessons that is by being able to relate the content taught with the real life situation and also by encouraging the students to make relationships between the existing knowledge that they have with the things practically done in their daily life.

Through Contextual approach, religious knowledge can be obtained effectively from students and ultimately the objectives of teaching religious knowledge can be met because in Contextual learning, one can relate the happenings around him with the knowledge that he has. In relation to this, Siti Rummanah (2009) has studied the importance of Contextual Teaching-Learning to be instilled in the teaching of Islamic Religious Knowledge (IRK) as a subject. This is important because IRK is one of the major component in Islamic Education and it requires clear understanding and precise explanation. Also, the essence of IRK subject emphasises on the moral development, personality and values of the students especially in matters pertaining to the way of life of a Muslim. Thirdly, in Islamic Education, a student should be

able to make relationships between the events around them and their cognitive skills (*aql*), affective (*ruh*) and psychomotor skills (*Jasmani*) in which a student should has.

There are 7 principles in Contextual Learning namely, the objectives, constructivism, application, problem solving, cooperative learning, discovery learning and relationship learning. These principles are not foreign in the world of Islamic Education because this approach has already been practised and used in the era of Ibnu Khaldun, Imam Al-Ghazali, Ibnu Sina Al-Farabi and Al-Qabisi. Ibnu Khaldun has put great emphasis on the importance of an educator to know the teaching techniques that can relate the content knowledge with the students' level of maturity. In addition, Ibnu Khaldun disagreed if the teaching process totally rely on textbooks (verbalists). According to him, the verbalism method in teaching and memorising must be avoided because students will not understand anything from they learnt through memorisation. Hence, Ibnu Khaldun is more determined to use teaching strategies in which students are able to argue and critically think on the lesson taught.

According to Ibnu Khaldun, there are several teaching techniques which should be preserved and practised, namely :

- Repeating and leveling method
- Using relevant teaching aids in teaching
- Encouraging students to find resources/materials from their visits in order to get direct experience
- Not giving complex information in which the students find them difficult to understand
- Able to connect or relate with other subject matters
- Not mixing two different disciplines of knowledge at one time during teaching

**Data Analysis:** This study aims to find out to what extent does the understanding of the teachers and students towards the concepts and implemetation of contextual approach in the teaching of Tasawwuf (sufism) at the Pre-Universiti level in Brunei Darussalam.

**Data Analysis:** From Table 4, data shows that majority of the teachers agree that the learning process should encompass elements pertaining to Contextual Approach, such as :

- Teaching and Learning process should be 'Real World Learning' in nature;

Table 4 : The summed scores on the Teachers' Understanding on Contextual Teaching-Learning Approach

Teaching and Learning should :	1	2	3	4	5
Has the characteristics of Real World Learning	0	0	0	3	2
Prioritise real experience	0	0	0	1	4
Has higher thinking level	0	1	0	3	1
Be student oriented	0	1	1	2	1
Need active, critical and creative students	0	0	0	1	4
Has real knowledge about life	0	0	0	1	4
Be closely related to real life	0	0	0	1	4
Emphasised on behaviour changes	0	0	0	1	4
Need students to be more practical and not memorising	0	1	0	2	2
Not has the concept of spoon feeding	0	0	0	2	3
Be oriented towards Problem Based Learning Approach	0	0	0	2	3
Move towards human development	0	0	0	2	3
Encourage students to Act and teachers will facilitate students to do so	0	0	0	2	3
Be able to measure students' abilities and not relying only on exams	0	0	0	2	3
Total:	3		1	66	
	4.28%		1.42%	94.28%	

1 = Strongly Disagree ; 2 = Disagree ; 3 = Not Sure ; 4 = Agree ; 5 = Strongly Disagree

Table 5: Students' Understanding towards Contextual Teaching Learning Approach (N= 139)

Teaching and Learning should :	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Has the characteristics of Real World Learning	0	5	38	54	41	3.95
Prioritise real experience	0	6	34	64	33	3.90
Has higher thinking level	0	4	21	79	35	4.04
Be student oriented	1	9	49	62	18	3.63
Need active, critical and creative students	0	2	10	67	60	4.33
Has real knowledge about life	1	1	10	70	57	4.30
Be closely related to real life	1	4	23	65	45	4.08
Emphasised on behaviour changes	0	0	13	66	60	4.34
Need students to be more practical and not memorising	1	3	22	58	55	4.17
Not has the concept of spoon feeding	4	13	22	56	43	3.88
Be oriented towards Problem Based Learning Approach	1	9	36	77	16	3.70
Move towards human development	0	1	46	71	21	3.80
Encourage students to Act and teachers will facilitate students to do so	1	2	18	80	38	4.09
Be able to measure students' abilities and not relying only on exams	0	2	17	55	65	4.32

Mean score = 4.03

- Great emphasis on real experience must be done;
- Students need to be active, critical and creative;
- Teaching and Learning process in school must be closely related to daily life example and emphasised on behaviour changes;
- Spoon feeding approach in Teaching and Learning must be avoided, instead it must be oriented towards Problem Based Learning (PBL) ;
- Teachers must be knowledgeable in encouraging to act and the roles of teachers are to guide the students on how to act.

Table 4 of the teachers agreed that Teaching and Learning process must practise higher thinking skills, more practical and does not apply a lot of

memorisation but more on understanding of the students which ultimately lead to student-centred process.

**Data Analysis:** With regard to the analysis of the students' data, it shows that the students too have positive thinking and knowledge towards Contextual Approach. On average, the value for the mean score is 4.03 which can be considered to be high (4.34 <Mean Score< 3.63). This means that the level students' understandings towards the concept of Contextual Teaching-Learning is high, for instance 90.7% of the students agreed that teaching and learning process must emphasised on behaviour changes, 57.5% agreed that the process must be student-oriented. Overall, it can

be seen that the students' and teachers' understanding on CTL are high and the teachers have actually used this approach in their lessons but they were not aware about it.

**Interview Data:** Data obtained through interviews are to support the data gotten from the questionnaires. According to the teachers being interviewed, there are some principles underpinning the Contextual Approach, namely :

**Principle of Interconnection:** In this aspect, most of the teachers mentioned the importance of a teacher being able to make links between what is being taught with their (teachers/students) experiences and this is also one of the important roles teachers should play. In addition, they believe that practicality in teaching-learning process must also be implemented so as to enhance the students' understandings about the topics taught where in this case refers to the teaching of Tasawwuf. In conclusion, according to the teachers, ability to make connections of the content knowledge with daily life examples is one of the way to instill moral education in students, can aid in increasing students' knowledge and greatly emphasised in teaching and learning.

**Principle of Objectives Explanation:** According to the teachers whom were interviewed, it is vital for the teachers to be able to explain to the students on what are the objectives that need to be met at the end of the lesson. In explaining the objectives in the lesson taught may require teachers to be able to make references from al-Quran and Hadith so that the explanations given are strongly supported especially for some aspects which are to difficult to be explained.

**Principle of Constructivism:** From the teachers' own experience, they usually encourage their students to be able to link or make relationships of what they are learning to what that have been taught to them (existing knowledge). They believe, is the students are able to make such connections, it would be easier for them to understand the topics and indirectly this approach will make the students to think critically which of course is much required for these Pre-University students. Not only that, through those connections can make the teachers' job easier especially in making the students to have a better understanding and consequently may leave positive impacts on the students.

Table 6: Checklist of the Data Obtained through Observation Made

Principles of Contextual Approach Available in the Teaching Objectives of the Teachers							
Statement	Teachers					Total	%
	A	B	C	D	E		
Principle of Objectivity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	100
Principle of Constructivism	✓	✓	✓	✓		4	80
Principle of Application	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	100
Principle of Problem Solving						0	0
Principle of Cooperation						0	0
Principle of Discovery						0	0
Principle of Connections	✓	✓	✓			3	60
Total						17	48.57

**Principle of Application:** Students must also be able to apply the knowledge that have been taught and what they already know in their daily life. This is one way that may motivate the students to learn and ability to apply is one mechanism of reinforcement in teaching and learning. In addition, this approach too can help the students to remember better.

**Observation Data:** From the data obtained from questionnaires and interviews, overall the teachers and students don't understand and agree upon the concept of Contextual Approach in the teaching and learning process. Coincidentally, data from observations made also support these results (Table 5). For observation, researcher has observed 5 teachers. From Table 6, several principles in Contextual Approach have been inserted in the objective part of the teachers' lesson and indirectly reflected in their lesson plans.

**Principle of Objectivity:** 5 teachers did mention the learning objectives of their lesson that is, *"to make the students understand the subject content and reasons why they have to study the topic taught"*.

**Principle of Constructivism :** 4 out of 5 teachers stated the construction principle in their teaching objectives that is, *" new knowledge should be linked with the students' existing knowledge or new learning must be built upon the students' past experiences"*.

**Principle of Application:** All the 5 teachers stated this principle in their teaching objectives namely, *" new knowledge learnt should be linked specifically to the application in real life"*

**Principle of Connections or Relationships:** *From observation, it can be seen that 3 out of 5 teachers mentioned this principle that is “ teachers should help students in looking at the relationships between the context and the content of the knowledge, knowledge with application and the connections between one discipline of knowledge to another”.* In conclusion, 48.57% of the principles in Contextual Approach were used and applied. Therefore, this gives a picture that teachers do have knowledge about Contextual Approach.

### CONCLUSIONS

From the results and discussions made above, it can be seen that the teachers' understanding in relation to Contextual Approach can be considered as high and the same goes to the students' understandings as well. This data is further strengthened by the data obtained from interviews and observations. It is vital to remember that the learning objectives put great emphasis on what had happened to the students, in other words their experience [9]. Therefore, Contextual Approach is one of the ways that is suitable and can motivate the students' learning process.

Also, this study shows that the teachers teaching Tasawwuf (Sufism) do have the potentials to instill and apply this approach in their teachings of other subjects of Islamic Religious Knowledge (IRK).

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