Editorial

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Inclusive education--i.e. education that addresses the diverse needs of learners and embraces all learners regardless of their characteristics, disabilities, difficulties and disadvantages--and access to education for the underprivileged are important concerns in our present-day society. So are effective pedagogies for meaningful learning and the development of teacher self-efficacy. As we go deeper into the 21st century, we unearth new knowledge, discover new technologies, and witness the birth of a whole new spectrum of teaching and learning methods. As time progresses, education should evolve. Education today should not prepare students for the society that existed in the past. It should equip them with the abilities to live in and contribute to a society that is dynamic and will continue to change with time and technological advancements. In this issue, we address some of these 21st century educational concerns. They are examined through various research approaches and methods.

The first article in this issue, by Nur Fadzilah Muhammad Zamani, looks at high English literacy among Malaysian students from low socioeconomic background. Low socioeconomic background or status is recognized world-wide as a significant and important determinant of academic underachievement and social problems. Low SES is often associated with illiteracy, poor education, school dropout, and *"at-riskness"*. Despite the odds, there are some who excel. Based on three case studies, the study found that intrinsic motivation is the central force that drives effort and hard work to succeed. Supporting factors include positive personality traits, positive family environment, and positive learning environment. Challenges, on the other hand, include financial difficulties, confidence and unsupportive school variables.

The quasi-experimental study--by Nor Farhana Abu Hassan and Arifin Mamat--on the effects of storytelling on Arabic vocabulary learning and interest, marks a significant development in Arabic language teaching and learning which is often dominated by traditional approaches. The authors describe storytelling as an *ancient* technique, yet innovative and powerful for driving home content to young learners. Although in this study the control group showed higher mastery of Arabic vocabulary due to their higher academic ability, the

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pedagogical value of storytelling for vocabulary acquisition could be clearly seen through the gain score for the experimental group. The effectiveness of storytelling, however, is dependent on the teacher's delivery skill. Hence, proper teacher training on the art of storytelling is mandatory.

Fathiah Syahirah Khalid explores the challenges faced by English language teachers teaching slow learners in the Malaysian inclusive classrooms and their coping strategies. Through the analysis of face-to-face interviews with ESL teachers from three Malaysian secondary schools, five major themes emerged, two of which are related to the challenges in teaching slow learners in inclusive classrooms. The two themes are categorized as internal and external factors. Internal factors are those associated with the students learning capability and motivation, while external factors are those associated with the teaching and learning process, teacher training, the classroom physical environment and parental support. The coping strategies used by the teachers are enhancement of teaching skills, teaching resources and the use of remedial activities.

The next article by Rajiah Hassan and Tunku Badariah Tunku Ahmad, highlights the prevalence of internet plagiarism among Malaysian secondary school students. In a study involving 87 upper secondary (Form 4) students studying Chemistry in a Malaysian public school, the authors found that internet plagiarism is alarmingly high (ninety-nine percent of the students who participated in this study) at an average of ninety percent for Turnitin content similarity indexes. The reasons behind the high percentage of internet plagiarism, however, could not be ascertained. Student abilities in English and Chemistry were found to be weak correlates of plagiarism. As Malaysian students often regurgitate, word for word, what they learn from textbooks, it is possible that they do not consider it inappropriate to copy directly from another source of information. This is an aspect of 21st century education that educators need to focus on. As much as we want students to be ICT-literate and technologically savvy, we also need to balance this fervor with a good amount of ethics. In line with this thought, the authors suggested some measures to help curb plagiarism among school students. Among them are moving away from traditional assessment and making assignments authentic, educating students on the meaning and forms of plagiarism and Internet plagiarism, and teaching them how to write well, think critically and independently, and cite sources properly. The last two skills are the crucial elements of 21st century education.

The final article by Mohamad Sahari Nordin, Lilia Halim, Mohd Burhan Ibrahim and Enas Said Abu Libdeh looks at the relationship between mastery experience and teacher self-efficacy based on a meta-analytic review of 39 original studies at various educational levels in both Western and Asian educational settings. The meta-analysis brought forth several important findings. The first pertains to the relationship between the two variables, while the second relates to the influence of research design on the relationship. With regard to the former, the analysis

showed that Western teachers demonstrated higher self-efficacy in comparison to their Asian counterparts. This suggests the presence of possible mediators or moderators, which may be related to culture. More importantly is the finding that research design influenced the variability in the relationship, whereby experimental studies produced greater effects on the relationship between the mastery experience and teacher self-efficacy.

In summary, the issues highlighted in these articles are genuine issues that warrant research and concerted educational efforts. Their magnitude and gravity should drive educational institutions and practitioners to initiate changes that would help make education accessible to all and to raise greater consciousness to provide better quality education.