

**EPISTEMOLOGICAL BELIEFS OF THE EDUCATOR AND THE LEARNERS IN A  
DIALOGIC TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTEXT IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

**By**

**ANIS BINTI SHAARI**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts**

**July 2013**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Alhamdulillah, my gratefulness to the Ultimate Lover, Allah the Almighty, for I finally reach this very page. I learn that without His love and permission, I would have no strength to wake up, to read, to think, to write, and to do every single thing that contributes towards this research completion. This journey of knowledge seeking has been a wonderful one with the helps He has been offering me. Thank you Allah for loving me, despite my only little deeds in showing my love to You.

My sincere gratitude and prayers also go to both my parents – Hjh. Khatijah Ishak and Hj. Shaari Awang Besar. Your never ending prayers have been the best and the most accepted of all. This is not to forget my supportive family members, for the care, concerns and prayers, which are priceless!

Allow me to express my heartfelt thankfulness to Universiti Sains Malaysia for sponsoring my journey throughout, under the scheme of USM Fellowship. Without this financial aid, I might have to postpone the intention of pursuing my postgraduate studies.

Besides, I owe a heartiest appreciation to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Hairul Nizam Ismail for the knowledge and experiences shared throughout the guidance. I would like to also thank my other GURUS – Dr. Aswati Hamzah, Associate Professor Dr. Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan Abdullah, Dr. Siti Hawa Abdullah, Professor Lim Chap Sam,

Dr. Hazri Jamil, Dr. Norizan Esa, Dr. Amelia Abdullah and Associate Professor Dr. Abu Bakar. Thanks for being there whenever I look up to you.

My gratitude also goes to my dear friends and supporters – Sister Maudah Ali, Brother Mohd. Shamsurry Yahaya, the brilliant NADI kids, Berlian Nur Morat, the members of AN-NUR home and the PERSILA Committee Members. You are all my unsung heroes!

On the final note, I must thank all groups and individuals who took part in realising this study, including the participants and Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam. For those whose names are not mentioned, but have willingly helped me in completing this meaningful study, I truly appreciate your contributions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
ABSTRAK.....	xiii
ABSTRACT.....	xv
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION .....	1
Overview .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	9
The Unclear Description of the Practice of Dialogic Teaching and Learning.....	11
Epistemological Issue between Educators and Learners in Catering to the Need of Meaningful Teaching and Learning .....	12
Research Objectives .....	14
Research Questions.....	15
Significance of the Study.....	15
Limitations of the Study .....	16
Definition of Terms .....	17
Dialogue .....	17
Dialogic Teaching and Learning.....	18
Epistemological Belief.....	19

Educators .....	20
Learners .....	20
Higher Learning Institutions .....	20
Dialogic Classroom .....	21
Summary of the Chapter .....	21
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW .....	23
Introduction .....	23
Knowledge: Connecting Learning and Teaching .....	24
Learning: Definitions, Conceptions and Dichotomies.....	26
Teaching: Complementing Learning in Knowledge Seeking .....	31
Dialogue as a Teaching and Learning Mediator .....	34
Dialogue: Enhancing thinking.....	35
Dialogue: A learning how to learn tool.....	36
Dialogue: Allowing the not-knowing to know .....	38
How to Dialogue? .....	39
Dialogue in Classrooms of Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions: A Scenario.....	42
Epistemological Beliefs in Teaching and Learning.....	43
Freire's Theory of Dialogue .....	45
Vygotsky's Theory of Social Constructivism .....	48
Theory of Community of Practice .....	51
The Conceptual Framework .....	55
Previous Related Studies on Dialogue .....	58

Previous Related Studies on Epistemological Beliefs .....	62
Summary of the Chapter .....	67
CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	68
Introduction .....	68
The Researcher's Paradigm in Conducting Research .....	69
Research Design.....	70
Research Site and Participants .....	72
Data Collection.....	75
Interviews .....	75
Document Analysis .....	80
Classroom Observations.....	80
Pilot Study.....	82
Data Analysis .....	85
Research Matrix .....	89
Authenticity and Trustworthiness.....	91
Research Ethics .....	92
Reflection on the Researcher's Position, Biases and Subjectivity .....	94
Summary of the Chapter .....	95
CHAPTER FOUR - FINDINGS.....	97
Introduction .....	97
Participants' Background.....	98

Educator .....	99
Learners .....	100
The Practice of Dialogue as a Form of Teaching and Learning in a Malaysian Higher Learning Institution Milieu.....	103
Observational Findings .....	103
Educator’s Perspective .....	110
Learners’ Perspectives.....	119
The Beliefs Educators and Learners Hold towards Teaching, Learning and Knowledge in a Dialogic Context .....	151
Educator’s Beliefs .....	151
Learners’ Beliefs .....	162
Summary of the Chapter .....	188
CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	190
Introduction .....	190
Summary of the Study.....	190
Research Question 1: How is dialogue being practiced in the context of teaching and learning in a Malaysian higher learning milieu? .....	191
Research Question 2: What are the beliefs educators and learners hold towards teaching, learning and knowledge in a dialogic context? .....	192
Revisiting the Previous Research: A Comparison and Contrast with the Findings of the Current Research.....	193
Conclusions and Implications of the Study .....	196

A Process of Setting the Stage: Catering for Learners' Unfamiliarity of the Dialogic Teaching and Learning Method.....	197
Between Learners' Epistemological Beliefs and Learning Practices: Equality and Mismatch .....	199
Similarities and Disjunction between Educator's and Learners' Beliefs .....	202
Practicality of Dialogue Employment for Young Adult Learners.....	203
A Multi-dimensional or Multi-perspectives Method of Teaching and Learning .....	206
A Shared Responsibility .....	207
The Element of Social Constructivism within the Dialogic Process.....	208
Dialogue and the Concept of Community of Practice .....	211
Dialogue as an Introduction to a More Challenging World beyond the University Border.....	212
The Role of Dialogue in Injecting Humanistic Values into the Education System ...	213
Adapting to the Postulation of Dialogue: Banishing the Local Culture of Learning and Teaching? .....	216
Recommendations for Future Research .....	219
Expanding the Number of Educator(s) Involved .....	219
Employing a Longitudinal Study .....	219
Enhancing Findings by Conducting Critical Discourse Analysis .....	220
Recommendations for Practice.....	220
Introducing 'Meta-Dialogue' .....	220
Developing an Educator Training Module .....	221
Postulating Dialogic Teaching and Learning at Earlier Formal Learning Stages.....	222
Summary of the Chapter .....	223



CHAPTER SIX - A BRIEF REFLECTION .....	224
REFERENCES.....	227
APPENDICES .....	233

## LIST OF TABLES

	<b>Page</b>
Table 2.1 Four stages of epistemological development (Hofer & Pintrinch, 1997)	43
Table 2.2 Anatomy of Competence – in Establishing and Developing a Community of Practice (Wenger, 2002).	54
Table 2.3 Previous Related Studies on Dialogue	62
Table 2.4 Four approaches to teaching and learning (Carnell, 2007)	65
Table 2.5 Previous Related Studies on Epistemological Beliefs	66
Table 2.6 Subtopics in the review of literatures	67
Table 3.1 Sample of the Coding Matrix	86
Table 3.2 The Research Matrix	90
Table 4.1 List of Interviewed Learners According to Courses they Undertook	100
Table 4.2 Observation Schedule	103
Table 4.3 Interview responses on learner empowerment	121
Table 4.4 Dialogue- allowing different perspectives	122
Table 4.5 Dialogue as a harmonious discussion	123
Table 4.6 Schemata as a part of dialogue requirement	124
Table 4.7 Dialogue stimulators	126
Table 4.8 Perceived educator’s roles	126
Table 4.9 Educator’s positive qualities	130
Table 4.10 Learners’ roles other than listening, giving opinion and asking questions	132

Table 4.11	Reasons of dialogue participation	134
Table 4.12	Dialogue role in expanding knowledge and understanding	138
Table 4.13	Negative impacts of dialogue	141
Table 4.14	Challenges of dialogue	143
Table 4.15	Educator qualities	153
Table 4.16	Features characterise a successful teaching	154
Table 4.17	Learner qualities	156
Table 4.18	Process of knowledge attainment	161
Table 4.19	Moralities underlying learning	167
Table 4.20	Characteristics of successful learning	169
Table 4.21	Sources of knowledge	177
Table 4.22	Means of knowledge attainment and expansion	181
Table 4.23	'Softer' elements of knowing	183
Table 4.24	Learners' views on educators' roles	186
Table 5.1	Four approaches to teaching and learning (Carnell, 2007)	196

## LIST OF FIGURES

		<b>Page</b>
Figure 1.1	Benefits of Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) to national higher education	2
Figure 2.1	Contradictory educator-learner relationships between the banking education and the problem-posing education	46
Figure 2.2	Characteristics of the group in a community of practice	52
Figure 2.3	The conceptual framework	57
Figure 2.4	Carnell's two-way continuum of teaching (2007)	64
Figure 3.1	Flowchart of the research methodology	96
Figure 4.1	Educator's Perspectives on dialogue	110
Figure 4.2	Dialogue execution procedure	111
Figure 4.3	Purposes of dialogue employment	111
Figure 4.4	Elements of dialogue	112
Figure 4.5	Roles of educator	113
Figure 4.6	Educator's attributes	115
Figure 4.7	Learners' perspectives of dialogue	119
Figure 4.8	Presentation flow of findings (research question 2)	151
Figure 4.9	Educator's epistemological beliefs	151
Figure 4.10	Characteristics of successful learning	157
Figure 4.11	Learners' beliefs about learning	163
Figure 4.12	Sub-themes of learners' Beliefs about Knowledge	173
Figure 5.1	Carnell's two-way continuum of teaching (2007)	195

**KEPERCAYAAN EPISTEMOLOGI PENDIDIK DAN PELAJAR DALAM KONTEKS  
PENGAJARAN DAN PEMBELAJARAN DIALOGIK DI PERINGKAT PENGAJIAN TINGGI  
DI MALAYSIA**

**ABSTRAK**

Pendidikan merupakan suatu aspek penting dalam kehidupan seseorang individu dan survival sesuatu bangsa, secara umumnya. Sinonim dengan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran, pendidikan diharapkan dapat memenuhi permintaan banyak pihak termasuk komuniti masyarakat, sesebuah institusi pendidikan itu sendiri dan negara, amnya. Dalam konteks pengajian tinggi, proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran dikaitkan dengan pelbagai kaedah penyampaian. Antara lain, pengajaran dan pembelajaran dialogik didapati menjadi salah satu metod pedagogi yang sesuai serta menjanjikan berbagai-bagai faedah. Seorang pendidik telah dikenalpasti mempraktikkan metod tersebut dan adalah menjadi salah satu objektif penyelidikan ini untuk menerangkan dengan terperinci amalan pengajaran dan pembelajaran berbentuk dialogik ini. Selain itu, penyelidikan ini turut bertujuan mengenal pasti kepercayaan epistemologi dalam kalangan pendidik dan pelajar dalam konteks dialog. Menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif secara menyeluruh, penyelidikan ini membabitkan seorang pendidik dan 41 orang pelajar yang terlibat secara langsung dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran tersebut. Secara spesifik, kesemua 41 orang pelajar tersebut telah bersetuju untuk dicerap. Mereka turut berkongsi pandangan mengenai proses dialogik melalui beberapa siri entri penulisan jurnal. Walaubagaimanapun, hanya tujuh daripada mereka, bersama dengan seorang pendidik, telah ditemubual. Daripada ketiga-tiga prosedur pengumpulan data ini, proses analisa bertema digunakan. Hasil dapatan, daripada perspektif pendidik, secara keseluruhannya menggambarkan bahawa dialog yang dipraktikkan merupakan sebuah manifestasi kepercayaan epistemologi yang dipegang bahawa proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran bukan hanya berpusat kepada guru semata-mata. Dalam kata lain, pendidik tersebut dipercayai mengamalkan apa yang dinyatakan oleh Freire (1970, 1997) berkenaan elemen kesamarataan peranan dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Daripada perspektif pelajar pula, suatu kesimpulan dapat dibuat bahawa

amalan dialog masih belum benar-benar berlaku secara keseluruhan walaupun mereka didapati mempunyai kepercayaan epistemologi yang sama dengan pendidik. Para pelajar boleh dikatakan mengesahkan secara teoretikal falsafah yang terkandung di sebalik kaedah dialogik namun mereka tidak sepenuhnya mempraktikkan kepercayaan-kepercayaan tersebut. Dapatan-dapatan ini, secara tidak langsung, memberi beberapa implikasi pedagogi dan seterusnya menyarankan beberapa cadangan atau sumbangsaran untuk penyelidikan akan datang serta amalan pengajaran dan pembelajaran.

# **EPISTEMOLOGICAL BELIEFS OF THE EDUCATOR AND THE LEARNERS IN A DIALOGIC TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTEXT IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **ABSTRACT**

Education has always been an integral part in an individual's life and in a nation's survival, at large. Being equated to the process of teaching and learning, it is always expected to meet the demands of many parties including the community, the educational institution itself and the country. As for a higher learning milieu, the teaching and learning process is enlightened with various methodologies in lesson delivery. Among all, dialogic teaching and learning is found to be a suitable pedagogical method which offers a great deal of benefits. An educator was identified to practice such a method and it was one of the objectives of this research to uncover the practice in a Malaysian tertiary education context. Besides, the study was also conducted to explore the epistemological beliefs both the educator and her learners hold within the dialogic process. Employing a fully qualitative approach, the research generally implicated an educator and 41 learners of whom were directly involved in the dialogic teaching and learning. In particular, all the 41 learners agreed to be observed and they also shared their views pertaining to the dialogic practice through a series of journal entries. However, only seven of them, together with the educator were interviewed. From the three data gathering procedures, thematic data analysis was used. The results, from the educator's perspective, generally demonstrated that the dialogue was a practice of belief in which it rejects the idea of transmissionary view of teaching and learning. In other words, the educator was found to conform to Freire's (1970, 1997) notion which propagates the idea of equality of roles in a teaching and learning process. As for the learners, it could be concluded that the practice of dialogue was still not pervasive enough, despite the similar belief they held in comparison with the educator's. The learners could be said to theoretically approve the philosophy underlying the dialogic approach yet not to fully practically exercise such beliefs. The findings, thus, suggested a number of pedagogical implications and invited several recommendations for future research as well as practice.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*“People want to do the right thing – stand with them, people want to find better ways of doing things – empower them” ~ (Maxwell, J.C., 2008, p. 45) ~ and it is with this encouragement that I decide to make other people’s problem my problem~*

#### **Overview**

Malaysia is among a great many countries that sees education as one big aspect that contributes to the development of Malaysian nation. It is as stated in the mission of the Ministry of Higher Education (2011) that is “to develop and put in place a higher education environment that encourages the growth of premier knowledge centers and individuals who are competent, innovative with high moral values to meet national and international needs”. The idea of developing the nation, in lieu of the development of the country, is also stressed in the National Philosophy of Education.

Education in Malaysia is on-going efforts towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonic, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large (Ministry of Education, 2011).



Both the mission of the Higher Education Ministry and the education philosophy outlined by the Ministry of Education are moved towards the same direction that is to enhance the quality of individuals, hence the quality of the country, at large. Besides achieving the two, the Ministry of Higher Education is also making numerous efforts in meeting its very vision, which is “to turn Malaysia into a center of excellence for higher education” (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011). Among them is the establishment of Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) on 1 November 2007, which is “to implement the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) as a basis for quality assurance of higher education and as the reference point for the criteria and standards for national qualifications” (Malaysian Qualification Agency, 2011). This is to ensure quality practices and accreditation of national higher education. In short, the establishment of MQA is seen to contribute to human capital development and benefit the National Higher Education in several ways (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1. Benefits of Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) to national higher education (MQA, 2011)

Besides the establishment of MQA, it is also crucial to highlight the current progress of Malaysia as a developing country towards meeting its goal of Vision 2020 - that is to be recognised as a developed nation by the year 2020. The current Malaysian government, which is led by Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd. Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, has introduced the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) as a catalyst to leverage Malaysia towards a better progressing future (Performance Management and Delivery Unit, PEMANDU, 2010). The GTP contains six thrusts and among others, 'improving students' outcomes' is given great emphasis. Even though its initial implementation focuses on pre-school, elementary and secondary educations, the outcome of higher learning institution students is also believed to be of importance.

Anticipating good achievement of such vision, mission and philosophy, higher education sector in Malaysia is expected to be one of the great contributors. In conjunction with 'Majlis Anugerah Akademik Negara 2008' held on 5 August 2009, the Minister of Higher Learning, Y.B. Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, in his speech, highlighted that it is academicians' responsibilities in developing teaching approaches that are able to produce quality and holistic graduates (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009). In line with that, the quality of education in Malaysia needs to be levered and improved until it achieves the stated quality level. Therefore, it has become every individual's responsibility especially Malaysian educators to put extra efforts in realising the expectation of making Malaysia a centre of educational excellence in this region.

High quality teaching and learning processes is one of the great contributors towards the achievement of the national aims and philosophy of education. Hence, educators need to take initiatives that promise the process of imparting knowledge is always in high-quality status. Needless to say, educators have to play important roles in educating as well as

shaping the people to be intellectual nations that are able to apply their self-potential holistically.

To illustrate, one of the objectives of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) is to produce competent graduates to fulfil national and international manpower needs with 75% of the graduates employed in their relevant fields within six months of their graduation (MOHE, 2011). However, it is widely reported these days that there is a large number of unemployed and unemployable graduates in Malaysia (Cheong, 2005; Hazman Shah Abdullah, 2005; Kuldip, 2005). It is believed that this scenario is due to many important factors. Most of today's unemployed or unemployable graduates are said fail to meet the expectations of employers in terms of both qualifications and certain characteristics that they should possess (Cheong, 2005; Hazman Shah Abdullah, 2005; Kuldip, 2005). The reality is that, it is not that there is no job out there in the real world; it is the graduates themselves who do not really fulfill the requirements required by the employers.

Most employers expect graduates to possess and portray the complete package of a quality soon-to-be employee. Based on several research findings, the package includes communication skills, proficiency in English, good interview skills and willingness to learn (Kuldip, 2005). On the other hand, Hazman Shah Abdullah (2005) highlights causes like low quality of enrolment and graduates; and graduates with low critical thinking and creativity. Other than that, Cheong (2005) stresses high unemployment is basically due to unmarketable and unskillful graduates. This somehow shows that the factors vary from one perspective to another and it can be concluded that the factors of unemployment can source from the education that the graduates undergo throughout their studying years in higher learning institutions, besides the pressing external conditions.

It is the aim of every university to have students who graduate with flying colours (Maizam Alias & Ahmad Faizal Mohd. Zain, 2005). However, according to Hasnah Abdullah (2005), the proliferating number of the institutions, together with the number of students enrol in each institution has brought about many educational issues that relate to the declining quality of education. The main concern here is 'the declining quality of education'. It is obvious that quality of students produced is a large part of education that is now viewed by many as diminishing, for the quality of graduates is very reflective of the quality of the higher learning institutions. Partly, this, in a way, manifests the process of teaching and learning throughout the university or college years because a higher learning institution is always viewed as a platform that prepares individuals with richer knowledge and higher academic attainment.

The education of higher learning institutions, specifically the process of teaching and learning carried out in the classroom must be performed accordingly in line with the current need of the country. In Malaysia, human capital as well as critical thinking skills are very much necessary (MOHE, 2009; Rahil Mahyuddin, Zaidatol Akmaliah Lope Pihie, Habibah Alias & Mohd Majid Konting, 2004). Hence, Rahil Mahyuddin et al. (2004) believe that thinking skills ought to be made as one of the educational goals, for education is about making sense of new information besides acquiring knowledge. Not only that, Idalovichi (2009) describes that today's modern education must expand the learners' capacity for inquiry and reflective thinking as one of the most important tasks. Thus, it is clear that the responsibility lies in education where learners be trained to think critically and to present themselves well especially in the employment world and in their own life survivals.

As to meet the objective of producing quality beings of the country, educators of higher learning institutions are seen to play the role to initiate the action. This is due to much of the time they spend in the teaching and learning process and it is during this process that the

educators meet the learners mostly, on a regular basis. Again, the question is 'How to enhance the teaching and learning so that it is able to produce such quality graduates, besides merely delivering the content of the subject matter?'

In order to answer this question, there is a need to look at today's education, with special regard to teaching and learning in classrooms of higher learning institutions. It could be seen that parts of what life and employment world require of learners are lacking in terms of real practice in the university or college years, specifically of the Malaysian setting. Learners are mostly taught the subject matters at the surface level without much attention being given to skills and deeper sense of knowledge.

In much education, there is a tendency for learning to be treated simply as the delivery of knowledge and values by those who know more (teachers) to those who know less and know it less expertly (learners). In other words, teachers transmit and learners ingest a commodity called knowledge. Consequently, learners are frequently attributed with passivity; are deemed to have little experience and understanding that is relevant to the situation and are seen to have a capability to learn that is likely to respond only to incentives and deterrents (Harkin, Turner & Dawn, 2001, p. 36).

Learning is very much viewed as a simple process which requires learners to passively receive the knowledge being transmitted. It could be equalised to a situation when learners come to class, have their seats, listen to the lecture, jot down notes, receive a form of assignment or task and go home when the class session ends. At the end of the semester, the learners are to seat for examination and that is the time when they recall what have been taught or lectured and simply write the answers. This by some means indicates that learning is the act of passively receiving and retrieving something. This is because learners are not actively engaged in the process of making knowledge a part of them. The term teaching, on

the other hand, is very much influenced by the way learning is viewed. In contrast of the defined learning, teaching is viewed by many as the act of giving something to the learners.

Therefore, here, it could be seen that the teaching and learning is nothing else beyond the action of giving and receiving, by the educator to the learners. This is very much reflective of what Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educationist, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) terms as “the banking concept of education” (p. 58). In a banking system of education, the educators are seen as the depositors while learners are regarded as the depositories. Knowledge moves in a one-way stream from the educator to the learners. Teaching is active while learning is passive. This unfair system of education would not produce such individuals who are able to be challenged and become experts in their field.

Being the case of today's practice in the teaching and learning process employed in higher learning institutions, there is no chance to see learners as co-constructors of knowledge. The current system would only allow learners to be ignorant while the educator acts as an expert in the subject matter. The concern here is whether learners could possibly become experts and skilful one day if they keep on receiving knowledge without actively engaging themselves in the process of knowledge sharing and attainment.

It is then seen that having a solution that accommodates learners' needs of deep knowledge and certain skills is highly essential. Instead of making the teaching and learning a one-way process, it ought to be made a more flexible one in which learners are expected to actively participate in the teaching and learning activity. Harkin, Turner and Dawn (2001) argue that effective learning is a dynamic process in which people are deemed as not only reactive yet also proactive for they are engaged in determining their own path of life and anticipating their future. Skills like communicating effectively, working collaboratively with others, solving problems as well as taking responsibility for one's own learning and work performance which

are termed as process skills could only be developed through a regular learning practice (Harkin, Turner & Dawn, 2001).

From a constructivist perspective, learning requires learners to construct knowledge by themselves. Educators are expected to facilitate learners in engaging themselves as the constructors of knowledge. With respect to that, Lev Vygotsky, a social constructivist emphasises the importance of social interactions, for it is believed that it is through interactions with others that learners are able to construct knowledge (Santrock, 2005), thus learning is said to occur.

Several literatures therefore recommend that the teaching and learning process be conducted dialogically. A dialogic form of teaching and learning is believed to be amongst the possible pedagogical methods to assist learners in knowledge acquisition and skills development (Feito, 2007; Harrison, 2006; Wegerif, 2006; Young Joo Kim, 2004). Dialogue refers to an in-depth discussion between individuals involved throughout the processes of teaching and learning. Requiring critical thinking and knowledge constructions of certain topics of discussion, dialogue provides equal space and chance for both learners and educator to query about or to utter any idea on certain matters throughout the discussion, and the idea would be 'dialogued' or discussed upon until it leads to another probable related idea. This is done through a series of questions and answers. In a dialogue, an idea or knowledge is expanded through a collaborative contribution and shared understanding that take place between the educator and every single participating learner. Bakhtin (1986, cited in Wegerif, 2006), postulates that "if an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself; it falls out of the dialogue" (p.58).

Dialogue rejects the idea of a teacher-centred classroom where educator plays the major role in disseminating knowledge, for it is believed to be a medium that gives opportunity for

learners to have their voice heard in certain discussion-based classroom settings. Allowing learners to talk therefore enhances learners' critical thinking skills (Alexander, 2004; Freire, 1970; Rule, 2004; Skidmore, 2006; Wegerif, 2006). Freire (1970) also stresses that "only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking; and without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p. 81).

In a nutshell, the hope that every teaching and learning stakeholder, and in fact the larger community, have towards having a 'true' education makes the researcher feel the need to further discuss and explore dialogue, as an effective form of teaching and learning. It is the time to transform the 'banking' system of education into a more constructive system. The aim of making education in Malaysia a sector that develops quality beings would probably remain an aim should learners remain passive and inactive. Would Malaysian education be willing to suffer from the implications of not having a dialogic teaching and learning?

### **Statement of the Problem**

Albeit the effectiveness of dialogue as a form of teaching and learning, the term dialogue itself still seems unfamiliar to those who are involved with the teaching and learning business when asked randomly by the researcher. Wells (2010) indicates that there have been several studies, for example of Galton et al. (1980); Lemke (1990); and of Nytsrand and Gamoran (1991), that noted the dearth of dialogue throughout the years of schooling. This, according to Wells (2010), is believed to be due to the misconceptions about the nature of knowledge, in which knowledge is viewed as a commodity that can be transmitted, itemized, quantified and measured.



It could be said that the conception of teaching and learning as merely a transmission and reception of knowledge exists everywhere in the world and this includes Malaysia. To illustrate, the teaching and learning in higher education in Malaysia is often associated with tutorials, lectures, printed materials, reference book and notes (Norizan et al., 2010). Lee Lik Meng (2007) states that many lecturers, regardless the seniority in the field of teaching in a tertiary education setting, are having problems in producing quality graduates out of the teaching and learning process. It is undeniable that each of them is expertise in his or her field, yet getting a doctorate does not necessarily assure effective teaching. Lee Lik Meng (2007) adds that lecturers often fail to encourage interaction and questions from the students. This portrays that the emphasis of the teaching and learning is on the end product rather than the process. The end product, in this context, construes the examination grade whereby learners are expected to score well at the end of the teaching and learning process, and the attention towards the process of gaining knowledge itself is taken for granted. Knowledge is mostly 'fed' by educators rather than sought or constructed by learners. This is undesirable, because mistakenly conceptualising and evaluating learning as the product, or outcome, of instruction often impedes rather than facilitate learning (Wells, 2010).

Henceforth, dialogue should be brought forefront as it allows learners to undergo learning as a process. Having features that are similar to that of aspect of constructivism, dialogue is believed to engage learners more actively and deeply in a teaching and learning process. Although most research on constructivism, which involves articulating thoughts among the learners, show positive effects in facilitating learning, teachers frequently feel difficult to employ constructivism in their teaching and learning process (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005). This indirectly indicates that dialogue has not become among the preferred ways in teaching and learning.

However, based on several works that show the effectiveness of dialogic teaching and learning (Feito, 2007; Harrison, 2006; Wegerif, 2006; Young Joo Kim, 2004), the education of higher learning institutions are enlightened, for there are still a number of educators who advocate dialogue as a form of teaching and learning. They choose to dialogically teach their learners despite the difficulties they face in employing it. This has actually brought the researcher to study the phenomenon of dialogue, which is believed to be a rare practice among today's teaching practitioners.

This research is basically proposed as it is actually a unique case that teaching and learning be made dialogic despite the challenges they might face in employing it. In studying dialogue as the main event, the researcher decides to explain the problems specifically as follow:

### ***The Unclear Description of the Practice of Dialogic Teaching and Learning***

It is interesting to ponder upon the meaning of a dialogic orientation to teaching and learning as Young Joo Kim (2004), who has transformed her perspective from curriculum as knowledge dissemination to dialogic learning, has suggested. With regard to the matter of understanding dialogue, Feito (2007) believes that cultivating a better discussion remains an enduring problem in liberal education and to identify ways in which it could be achieved, the understanding of what really happens when the learners discuss together should be first deepened.

Many research studies have been conducted studying the issue pertaining to dialogue (Alexander, 2004; Feito, 2007; Rule, 2004; Skidmore, 2006; Skukauskaite & Green, 2004; Wegerif, 2009). However, most studies found by the researcher were conducted outside the Malaysian setting. Many studies have been done to look at the concept of dialogue in school

setting and extensive education context (adult learners), yet little has gone deeper as to probe and understand the possibilities of how dialogue becomes a means and an end towards the process of teaching and learning in a setting of young adults as learners.

Only when the understanding of the phenomenon is achieved that proper recommendations could be made in order to better implement the method of teaching. The unclear description of the dialogic teaching and learning phenomenon would bring the concept nowhere in the educational body of knowledge and practice.

### ***Epistemological Issue between Educators and Learners in Catering to the Need of Meaningful Teaching and Learning***

Having discussed the phenomenon of dialogic teaching and learning, it is undeniable that there exists various feelings and attitudes among educators and learners when the teaching and learning be conducted in an unusual way. It is quite obvious that dialogue is out of the ordinary teaching and learning practice in today's higher learning education. To illustrate, Petress (2001) states that student reticence, or fear of interacting are among the feelings and attitude of the non-participating learners when classroom discussion is held. This is among the findings of those who refuse to participate in a dialogue, and the researcher is also concerned at what really leads them to have such feelings. The researcher is also eager to know how learners who actively engaged in a dialogue feel, besides as well interested in the educator's feelings towards the process of dialogic teaching and learning. These various feelings and attitude they have towards the dialogic teaching and learning are rooted from the epistemological beliefs they hold (Kinchin, 2004).

To better understand a teaching and learning process, particularly in a dialogic setting, Kinchin (2004) indicates that identifying students' epistemological positions is a vital part. It

is essential to first acknowledge how a learner conceives learning and knowledge in order to explain their attitudes towards this dialogic phenomenon.

Besides looking at learners' attitudes towards a dialogic classroom, the dearth of dialogue in the teaching and learning has drawn the researcher's attention. Wells (2010) believes that this is to be caused by the misconceptions that exist about the nature of knowledge. Perceiving knowledge as commodity that can be transmitted, itemized, quantified and measured (Wells, 2010) or as something that can be transacted through the process of banking in and out (Freire, 1970) are of the transmissionary views, in which classroom dialogue is seen as unnecessary and a waste of time (Wells, 2010). Hence, this study seeks to comprehend whether the epistemological beliefs both educators and learners have influence the practice of dialogue and their participation in it.

On the other hand, in predicting meaningful teaching and learning, Kinchin (2004) expresses the importance of having parallel classroom philosophies between educators and learners and the failure of developing corresponding educators' and learners' beliefs would result in 'epistemological gap' as termed by Tsai (2003, in Kinchin, 2004). This mismatch has the tendency to create difficulties in achieving meaningfulness in teaching and learning (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996 in Carnell, 2007). Again, uncovering the way educators and learners conceive teaching, learning and knowledge is rather crucial, for a dialogic teaching and learning process aims at nothing but the success and meaningful learning.

"Different conceptions are held by different people or by the same person in different circumstances and for different purposes" (Carnell, 2007, p. 26) and it would be interesting to be able to find out the conception or beliefs held by educators and learners in a dialogic setting of teaching and learning, for the different circumstances a dialogue offers in comparison to the traditional or ordinary classroom.

All in all, although dialogic teaching and learning is often associated with the construction of knowledge through critical examination and discussion over an issue, the essences and the underlying meanings attached to it and the epistemological beliefs held when undergoing it need to be explored deeper especially from the perspectives of both educators and learners within the context of higher learning institutions. The thought that products of higher learning institutions are such valuable assets to the country has led the researcher to choose one of the higher learning institutions in Malaysia as the context of this study. It is with this notion that the scope of dialogue in classrooms of higher learning institutions, and how the teaching, learning and knowledge are perceived over the phenomenon, has to be further widened and need to be researched upon.

### **Research Objectives**

This research is mainly aimed to explore the phenomenon of dialogic teaching and learning and the epistemological point of view held by educators and learners over the phenomenon. Henceforth, the specific objectives of this research are as follow:

1. To describe the practice of dialogue as a form of teaching and learning in a Malaysian higher learning institution milieu.
2. To explore the beliefs educators and learners hold towards teaching, learning and knowledge in a dialogic context.

## **Research Questions**

This research will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent is dialogue being practised in the context of teaching and learning in a Malaysian higher learning milieu?
2. What are the beliefs educators and learners hold towards teaching, learning and knowledge in a dialogic context?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is hoped to be significant in several ways. First, the study is anticipated to contribute to enrich the body of knowledge in educational field, specifically in the area of teaching and learning in Malaysian higher learning institution. The unclear description of the concept of dialogue among Malaysian educators and learners needs to be addressed. The findings obtained from this research is hoped to be impactful in providing knowledge related to the concept of dialogue in education, as there is still a deficiency of research conducted in this area, particularly in Malaysian tertiary education context. This would probably help to fill the gap that exists in this field, as well as to extend or to enrich the knowledge that emerges from the existing literatures.

Second, this study is also important in highlighting the current philosophical views towards the process of teaching and learning. As stated earlier in the statement of research problem, the dearth of dialogue exists when many still view teaching and learning simply as a process of knowledge transmission and reception. This research finding on the epistemological beliefs is hoped to provide the way teaching and learning is viewed among the practitioner of dialogue in their teaching and learning process.

Third, this study would probably contribute to the field of educational research, especially in terms of its methodological aspect. The use of qualitative approach would give better insights and deep findings in order to describe the practice and uncover the essences of feelings among those who are attached to the phenomenon of dialogue. Being an inquirer herself, the researcher would be able to seek for the answers to the research questions more appropriately using the qualitative approach, rather than the positivist approach which inclines towards quantifying things. Thus, this study is hoped to provide an appropriate methodological framework in studying the practice and feelings related to a phenomenon.

Fourth, in terms of practice, this research is hoped to give an impact on the process of teaching and learning – to both learners and educators. By contributing to the field of knowledge sharing, the study is expected to give such a new paradigm to be practised in Malaysian discussion-based classrooms, especially in the setting of higher learning institutions. It is crucial to stress that Malaysian education needs to be improved specially in producing quality individuals. University students are important assets to the country as to help achieve the expectations that have been put forward by the government. Learners therefore need to be empowered. Therefore, the findings of this study would provide insights and understanding on the phenomenon of dialogue and how it is able to facilitate teaching and learning. It is hoped that this would aid the educators in enhancing their teaching and learning practice. This is in line with Skidmore (2006), who argues that a dialogic mode of engagement with learners has the potential to bring about a narrowing of the gap in the educational outcomes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Due to the researcher's limited knowledge of those who practise dialogue in the teaching and learning at the undergraduate level, it is hard for the researcher to identify lecturers and

students who are involved in such phenomenon. Considering the time and location constraints, the identified lecturer and students, who are of the Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, are deemed as the only reachable participants for this research. If the researcher is able to get more lecturers and students to become the participants, the findings will be more thorough and reflective of the research title.

This study is hence considered as a case study. Henceforth, it can only be viewed as to get an insight on how dialogue is practiced and how it is perceived or felt by both educators and learners. In other words, the results gained are only applicable to a specific group of people in a particular related situation. In short, as in line with the purpose of this qualitative study, the findings cannot be generalised to a wider population of educators and learners of higher learning institutions in the country. Also, the findings might not be applicable in other context of teaching and learning.

Another limitation that needs to be addressed in this research is the matter pertaining to researcher's bias. Since the researcher herself obtained her bachelor's degree from the same institution, it is inevitable that many aspects discussed are prone to highlight the phenomenon from her own perspective. However, efforts were made to ensure that the researcher does not neglect the aspect of authenticity and trustworthiness of the research.

## **Definition of Terms**

### ***Dialogue***

To define the term 'dialogue', Freire (1997) in his book 'Pedagogy of the Heart' stresses that it is "a requirement of human nature" (p. 92), in which it has been a nature that people in the world live out their lives with and through communication. Freire (1997) also refers dialogue



to an act of opening minds to discovery and to knowing more. It could be seen that dialogue for Freire is a tool in getting oneself, in a cumulative group or community, more and more knowledgeable.

In further defining dialogue, it is also interesting to highlight Lipman (1991) who quoted Martin Buber's claim – dialogue is a discourse that is contradict to “monologue, which is self-serving; debate, in which it treats the other as a position rather than as a person; conversations, in which one is primarily concerned to make an impression on the other; friendly chats, in which each considers himself absolute and legitimate and the other relativized and questionable; and lovers' talk, in which each is concerned with enjoying his or her own private, precious experience” (p. 236). In other words, dialogue is a serious activity which one considers the others as a person with knowledge and experience or a contributor of knowledge enrichment, where sharing is much of a concern in dealing with certain issues. Both parties are deemed as only one entity, for everyone in the dialogue process is heading towards the ‘winning’ state over an issue or a problem.

Thus, being the case or phenomenon of the study, dialogue, as the path to knowing more, refers to the in-depth discussion about a particular topic employed throughout the teaching and learning process. It involves some important elements such as inquiries or questionings, thinking, postulating of ideas and also communicating opinions or thoughts as to respond to the questions or issues posed or discussed.

### ***Dialogic Teaching and Learning***

The term ‘teaching’ is rooted from the word ‘teach’ while the term ‘learning’ comes from the word ‘learn’. Both terms refer to actions committed by teachers and learners, in which the former has often been associated with more power than the latter. Freire (1970, 1993, 1997,

1998), nonetheless, has greatly emphasized that the power of both teaching and learning should be made equal. In fact, Freire (1998) in his book 'Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage', propagates that learning has always preceded teaching, for there would be no teaching without learning. This notion suggests that educators, who are synonymous to the action of teaching, should not receive more power than the learners. Teaching and learning ought to be viewed equally or in other words, both the teaching and the learning should construe one another.

It is due to this equality, that in this study, the researcher operationally defines the term dialogic teaching and learning as only a single entity, which refers to the process that involves both educators and learners in a formal classroom setting, in which knowledge is constructed and instilled into learners through a dialogic construction of it (knowledge), instead of merely delivered by educators and received by learners.

### ***Epistemological Belief***

The researcher decides to agree with the definition given by Harteis, Gruber and Hertrampf (2010), which refers the phrase 'epistemological belief' to "individuals' convictions about knowledge and knowing" (p. 201). In other words, it refers to "individuals' beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the processes of knowing" (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 117, as cited in Muller, Rebmann & Liebsch, 2008). In this research context, the epistemological beliefs in the phenomenon of dialogic teaching and learning are studied of two different dimensions: of educators and of learners who have undergone or who have experienced the phenomenon. The term epistemological beliefs is very much related to the second research question stated earlier in which the research intends to answer 'how' the educators and the learners internally believe in knowledge throughout the process of teaching and learning when dialogue is employed. In answering the research question, the term epistemology is

expanded and researched upon within three dimensions: beliefs about teaching, beliefs about learning and beliefs about knowledge.

### ***Educators***

The term 'educator' could be referred to as someone who is involved in the process of educating people. Educating, an activity associated to educators, is generally a process of making someone or learners learn, relearn and unlearn something – be it knowledge, be it skills, or in other words - be it in terms of worldview or actions. In this study, educators are lecturers who have experienced teaching using dialogue in their lessons. To be more exact, lecturers chosen in this study are of those who teach learners at the undergraduate level in higher learning institutions.

### ***Learners***

Contradictory to the term 'educator', learners could be defined as those who learn, relearn and unlearn something, with the process of learning be complemented by the educators. Learners, in this study, are those who have registered formally any programmes at the Bachelor's degree level in higher learning institutions. In addition, learners, too, are those who have experienced the dialogic form of teaching and learning in their formal classroom lessons.

### ***Higher Learning Institutions***

As the name implies, 'higher learning institutions' are post-school formal institutions that offer learning opportunities for those who have finished their compulsory secondary schooling.

Also termed as institutions for tertiary education or universities or colleges, higher learning institutions are not a mandatory to Malaysian citizens. However, the existence of the higher learning institutions and the enrolment of students in these institutions are now mushrooming in the country. Different institutions offer different programmes at various levels, namely pre-university or foundations, certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, Doctorate and post-doctoral levels. Nevertheless, this study only involves educators and learners who have experienced the dialogic form of teaching and learning at the Bachelor's degree programme. This is due to its large enrollment of learners at this particular level as compared to the others, and the completion of it being among the criterion most employers use in hiring employees.

### ***Dialogic Classroom***

A classroom refers to a setting or a condition where the activity of dialogic teaching and learning takes place. In this research context, the dialogic classroom is of the courses taught at Bachelor's degree level in a higher learning institution. To enable a dialogue session to occur, the classroom is expected to be not that large and not too small. This dialogic classroom should be able to accommodate the capacity of 15 to 40 participants. In this current research, the size of the class participants is depending on the division of groups, which are based on the number of students enrolled in the programme.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

To summarise, in this chapter, readers are first enlightened with an overview of higher education in Malaysia and how dialogue comes into the picture before the problems are put forth. Later in the chapter, research objectives and research questions are discussed. This chapter also outlined the significance in conducting this research and the limitations of the

study. Besides, the definitions of terms are also provided as to ensure comprehension and to enhance understanding of the whole research.

In a nutshell, in the attempt of achieving Malaysia's ambitious goals, the contribution of higher education is expected to be urgent and pervasive. In improving the quality of higher education, educators and learners are to be empowered. To ensure the empowerment, the fundamental problem - that is the 'banking system of education' (as coined by Freire, 1970) - needs to be addressed. Being a possible approach catering to the need of higher education to date, dialogic teaching and learning seems to benefit the higher learning stakeholders in several ways. Nonetheless, its practice is still a dearth in Malaysian context. Having identified educators who employ this approach is such an enlightenment to the study of higher education pedagogy. From the problems highlighted, this study seeks to find out how dialogue is practised in classrooms of higher learning institutions in Malaysia. They also warrant the researcher to explore the beliefs both educators and learners hold towards the dialogic education – let alone when the issue of epistemological gap in the effort of having a meaningful education is evident. Despite some limitations, the study is hoped to offer benefits in several means: knowledge enrichment, philosophical view over teaching and learning, methodological perspective and pedagogical practice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*“Iqra’ – Read! And your Lord is the Most Honourable, Who has taught the use of the pen, has taught man what he knew not” ~ (Surah Al-Alaq: 3-5, Al-Quran Kareem)*

#### Introduction

Higher education in Malaysia is designed to help individuals equip themselves with certain knowledge and skills. This is as to prepare them for the real world survival. Not only higher learning institutions are viewed to help people for their life development, yet also as a stepping stone in preparing quality workforce in economic development of the country. It is not in a vacuum that an education exists. Instead, “it is part of a wider social fabric of values, employment and civic life” (Harkin, Turner & Dawn, 2001, p. 5). Walker (2006) expresses her anxiety when the issue of higher education is discussed, for the perspective on higher learning as fostering economic development and economic life, as well as nurturing ‘educated hope’ and ethical and critical citizens seems increasingly at risk.

Learners, largely, according to Harkin, Turner and Dawn (2001), fail to achieve their potential because they are mostly found unengaged with the real-world learning. They further argue that “much education is an agony of irrelevance and boredom” (p.4) and they believe that learners are expected to be interactively engaged with issues matter to them in order to ensure useful knowledge to be applied in the career and life periods. It is the time to ponder and act upon ways to take both education and practice forward in a progressive direction (Walker, 2006).

From the perspective of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1999), education is constituted by three fundamental elements: the process, the content, the recipient; and he believes that 'man' or the recipient is the most important element of all, followed by the content and the process. In this context of research, the recipient is equated to the learners, the content reflects the knowledge within the teaching and learning activities, while the process refers to the methodologies, approaches or techniques in instilling the content into the recipient, which involves the educators role in such a formal learning context.

Since the current study aims at describing the practice of dialogue (the process) and the epistemological beliefs (the content) the educators and learners (the recipient) hold towards dialogic teaching and learning, this chapter attempts to review the existing literature in the area of teaching, learning and knowledge, epistemological beliefs, and dialogue as a form of teaching and learning. Certain theories related to dialogic teaching and learning as well as previous relevant studies would also be reviewed.

### **Knowledge: Connecting Learning and Teaching**

In a formal classroom context, teaching and learning are two processes which fail to be separated. It has always been an expectation that learning occurs in line with the teaching. In reality, it has been a question whether it is really so. Discussing the processes of teaching and learning, knowledge is another element that is attached within the processes. It is not a separate single entity, for learning and teaching value nothing without knowledge being regarded 'the ball of the game'. It is the matter of how to make the 'ball' become larger and useful in any circumstances in life.