

# The Level of Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Primary School Teachers Towards the Implementation of Document-Based Learning (DBL) In History Teaching

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the level of knowledge, attitudes and practices of primary school teachers towards the implementation of Document-Based Learning (DBL) in History teaching. The DBL approach emphasizes the use of historical resources such as documents, maps, artifacts and pictures to help students think critically and build an understanding of history based on evidence. This quantitative survey study involved 300 primary school History teachers who were selected through stratified random sampling. A questionnaire instrument was used to measure the study variables. The findings of descriptive analysis showed that the level of knowledge (Mean=4.08), attitude (Mean=4.15) and practice (Mean=4.12) of teachers were at a high level. Inferential analysis also proved that there was a positive and significant correlation between attitude and teacher practice ( $r=0.521$ ). In conclusion, primary school teachers have a high willingness to implement DBL, but the success of its implementation depends greatly on the positive attitude of teachers as a driver of practice. This study implies that the Ministry of Education Malaysia needs to strengthen the provision of digital document resources to support teacher motivation in implementing historical inquiry pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Document-Based Learning (DBL), History Education, Teacher Attitudes, Teaching Practices, Historical Inquiry.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

History education in Malaysia has undergone various changes in line with the Ministry of Education Malaysia's efforts to strengthen learning based on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). The introduction of the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) not only emphasizes mastery of historical facts but also focuses on the development of historical thinking skills such as interpretation, evidence analysis and understanding the context of events.

In this context, Document-Based Learning (DBL) is viewed as a pedagogical approach that aligns with current curriculum aspirations. This approach requires students to interact directly with historical sources such as archival documents, maps, images and artefacts to construct evidence-based understanding rather than passively receiving information solely from textbooks.

Although DBL has long been applied at the secondary school level and in international contexts, its implementation in Malaysian primary schools remains limited. The reality of primary school classrooms, which involve students with diverse cognitive and literacy levels, requires teachers to adapt documentary materials to suit students' abilities. Therefore, teachers' readiness in terms of knowledge, attitudes and practices becomes a determining factor in the effectiveness of DBL implementation in primary school History education.

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## Problem Statement

The success of curriculum innovation implementation largely depends on teachers' readiness as grassroots implementers (Anuar Ahmad & Nelson, 2015). Although DBL has been proven to enhance the quality of History teaching and learning through primary source analysis, its implementation in primary schools remains limited and inconsistent. As highlighted by Kaviza (2020), there is a significant gap between the noble intentions of KSSR, which emphasize historical thinking, and the reality of teaching practices that remain comfortable with conventional methods.

The first issue concerns teachers' level of knowledge, where many primary school History teachers are still less proficient in scaffolding techniques to simplify complex historical documents. According to Nur Azuki et al. (2018), teachers' failure to master inquiry-based pedagogy results in authentic historical documents being inadequately interpreted according to primary students' cognitive levels. This inability to translate documents effectively leads teachers to revert to traditional textbook-centred methods perceived as safer and easier (Mohd Mahzan et al., 2017).

In addition, attitudes also pose a major barrier to the transformation of History teaching and learning. This is due to the perception among teachers that DBL is burdensome and requires extensive preparation time. A study by Harris et al. (2017) found that many teachers believe document usage is more suitable for secondary school students with higher linguistic and analytical skills. This sceptical attitude, coupled with concerns about syllabus completion, ultimately restricts teachers' creativity in exploring historical sources beyond textbooks (Anuar Ahmad, 2019).

The final issue relates to teaching practices, where external factors such as limited focused professional training and disparities in facilities between urban and rural schools influence the frequency of DBL implementation. Jamil Ahmad et al. (2017) emphasized that rural teachers often face constraints in accessing digital document materials and minimal technical support. Without sufficient exposure through quality in-service training (LADAP), DBL practice will continue to be perceived as a major challenge rather than a contemporary pedagogical necessity, particularly for History as a subject. Therefore, this study is important to identify the actual levels of teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices in bridging the gap between theory and practice in History education to produce historically literate generations (Kaviza, 2021).

## Research Objectives

1. To identify the level of primary school teachers' knowledge towards DBL implementation in History teaching.
2. To identify the level of primary school teachers' attitudes towards DBL implementation.
3. To identify the level of primary school teachers' practices in implementing DBL.
4. To analyse the relationship between teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices towards DBL implementation.

## Hipotesis Kajian

- **H<sub>01</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between teachers' level of knowledge and attitudes towards DBL implementation.
- **H<sub>02</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between teachers' level of knowledge and DBL implementation practices.
- **H<sub>03</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between teachers' attitudes and DBL implementation practices.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Constructivist Theory and Historical Inquiry

This study is grounded in Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes active knowledge construction through learning experiences. In the context of History education, the constructivist approach provides opportunities for students to interpret historical information through interaction with authentic materials rather than passively receiving facts.

The DBL approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) view emphasizing teachers' roles as facilitators within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Through gradual guidance, teachers assist students in interpreting historical documents according to their abilities. Simultaneously, Wineburg's (2001) Historical Inquiry Theory strengthens the rationale for DBL by emphasizing skills such as sourcing, corroboration and contextualization as foundations of authentic historical thinking.

The integration of these theories demonstrates that DBL is not merely a teaching strategy but an approach that shapes how students critically and meaningfully understand history.

### Concept of Document-Based Learning (DBL)

DBL is not merely the use of supplementary materials in classrooms but represents a pedagogical shift that places historical evidence at the centre of learning. It encompasses the use of various media such as letter transcripts, topographic maps, photographs and physical artefacts. Through this approach, students are taught to become "historical detectives" who seek truth based on evidence rather than accepting a single narrative from textbooks. Indirectly, numerous studies have acknowledged the effectiveness of DBL in enhancing historical empathy and patriotic values by providing more realistic learning experiences.

In the primary school context, DBL must be adapted to students' developmental levels. Documents used are typically simplified and supported with visual materials to aid comprehension. Although implementation requires careful planning, DBL has the potential to enhance historical empathy, critical thinking and students' interest in History.

### Previous Studies on Teacher Readiness

Overall, previous studies indicate that teacher readiness towards DBL is influenced by complex interactions between cognitive, affective and contextual factors. A local study by Norliza et al. (2020) showed that teachers with strong pedagogical knowledge are more inclined to diversify document usage in classrooms. However, Anthony and Jamaludin (2023) found that workload challenges and a lack of simplified authentic materials remain major barriers to consistent practice.

At the international level, Reisman (2012) emphasized that teachers' positive attitudes towards historical inquiry are critical determinants of DBL success. Teachers who believe that primary school students are capable of critical thinking tend to employ document analysis techniques more frequently than those who underestimate students' abilities.

### Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study employs a model illustrating relationships among variables, indicating that Knowledge and Attitudes influence teachers' Practices in implementing DBL. This relationship is based on the assumption that increased knowledge fosters more positive attitudes, which subsequently enhance the frequency and quality of teaching practices in classrooms.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

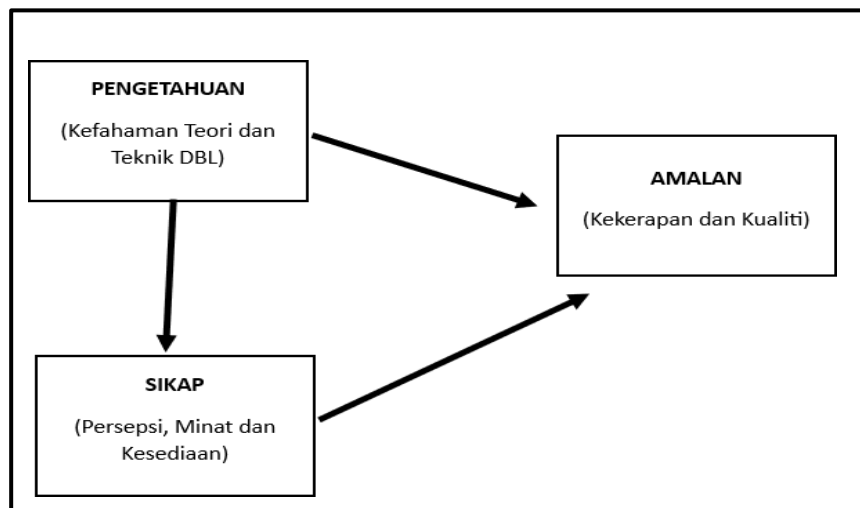


Figure 1 illustrates the relationship among the three main variables of the study. Knowledge and Attitudes act as independent variables expected to influence teachers’ practices (dependent variable). This relationship aligns with theories suggesting that cognitive mastery and affective disposition serve as catalysts for changes in professional behaviour when implementing pedagogical innovations such as DBL.

## RESEARCH METODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative approach using a survey design to assess primary school teachers’ levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices towards DBL. This design was chosen as it is suitable for obtaining a comprehensive overview of teachers’ perceptions and practices on a large scale. Stratified random sampling enabled balanced representation in terms of location and gender, thereby enhancing the reliability of findings. The questionnaire instrument underwent validity and reliability procedures to ensure data stability and relevance to research objectives. Although the survey method is effective in reaching respondents, this study acknowledges limitations related to reliance on teachers’ self-reported data. Therefore, findings should be interpreted with consideration of potential perception bias

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This section discusses findings obtained from data analysis involving 300 primary school History teachers in Malaysia. Findings are organized according to research objectives by examining teachers’ levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices towards DBL implementation, as well as analysing relationships among the studied variables. Interpretations are critically made with reference to previous studies while considering the actual context of primary school History education. Data were analysed using SPSS in accordance with procedures outlined by Pallant (2020).

### Respondent Profile

Demographic analysis indicates that the majority of respondents were female teachers (56.7%), while male teachers accounted for 43.3%. In terms of school location, respondent distribution was nearly balanced between urban (49.7%) and rural (50.3%) schools. This balance is important as school location is often associated with differences in access to teaching resources, technological facilities and professional training opportunities.

In this study, balanced respondent distribution allows findings to provide a more comprehensive picture of DBL implementation realities across diverse primary school contexts in Malaysia, consistent with Lim and Tan’s (2019) assertion that school environment factors influence History teaching practices.

## Level of Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Terhadap DBL

Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify teachers' levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices towards DBL implementation. Table 1 summarizes mean scores and standard deviations for each study variable. Jadual 1: Ringkasan Min dan Sisihan Piawai Pemboleh Ubah

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Knowledge	4.08	0.72	High
Attitudes	4.15	0.67	High
Practices	4.12	0.68	High

Overall, findings indicate that all three variables are at high levels. However, slight differences among mean scores suggest variations in teachers' readiness priorities towards DBL implementation.

### Teachers' Level of Knowledge

Findings show that teachers' knowledge level towards DBL is high with a mean score of 4.08. This indicates that most primary school History teachers possess good foundational understanding of DBL concepts, objectives and implementation principles.

However, this finding should be interpreted cautiously. Although the mean score is high, knowledge measured in this study is based on teachers' self-perceptions via questionnaires. Therefore, reported conceptual knowledge may not fully reflect teachers' actual abilities to conduct in-depth document analysis in classrooms. This aligns with Nur Azuki et al. (2018), who found that some teachers understand DBL theoretically but still struggle to apply it according to primary students' cognitive levels.

Nevertheless, this high knowledge level may be associated with emphasis on Historical Thinking Skills (HTS) elements in the History Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (DSKP) (MOE, 2020), which indirectly enhances teachers' awareness of inquiry-based approaches..

### Teachers' Attitudes

Study findings indicate that teachers' attitudes recorded the highest mean score of 4.15, reflecting very positive acceptance of DBL implementation in History teaching. Teachers generally believe that DBL can enhance students' thinking skills and make History learning more meaningful.

However, positive attitudes do not necessarily guarantee consistent DBL implementation. Such attitudes may be challenged by real school constraints such as time pressure, administrative workload and limited resources. Thus, findings support Harris et al.'s (2017) view that positive attitudes must be supported by conducive teaching ecosystems to translate into effective practices.

### Teachers' Practices

The mean score for teachers' practices is 4.12, indicating that DBL has begun to be actively practiced in primary school History teaching. Teachers reportedly frequently use visual materials such as images, maps and simplified documents to stimulate student discussion and inquiry.

However, this high practice level does not necessarily reflect comprehensive and deep DBL implementation. In actual classroom contexts, document usage may still be limited to supplementary materials and may not yet reach critical analysis levels akin to historians' methods. This finding supports Norazlan and Rahman's (2020) study, which found that historical source usage in primary schools remains basic and requires improvement in quality.

## Relationship between Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices

Pearson correlation analysis shows positive and significant relationships between knowledge and practices ( $r = 0.412$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and between attitudes and practices ( $r = 0.521$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings indicate that both cognitive and affective factors play important roles in influencing teachers' instructional practices.

However, the relationship between attitudes and practices is stronger than that between knowledge and practices. This suggests that while teachers may possess DBL knowledge, positive attitudes are a more dominant factor in driving actual classroom implementation. This supports Nordin et al.'s (2019) assertion that changes in teaching practices are more influenced by teachers' beliefs and motivation than technical knowledge alone.

In this context, teachers who believe in DBL effectiveness are more willing to invest time in sourcing materials, adapting documents and planning inquiry activities despite various constraints. This demonstrates that attitudes serve as key catalysts for pedagogical practice changes.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that primary school History teachers in Malaysia generally possess high levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices towards DBL implementation. These findings indicate a shift away from the long-held perception that primary school History teaching is passive and memorization-oriented towards more inquiry-based and student-centred approaches.

However, the stronger relationship between attitudes and practices compared to knowledge and practices suggests that DBL success depends not only on conceptual mastery but also on teachers' emotional readiness, confidence and motivation. Without continuous support, positive attitudes risk diminishing, potentially affecting the sustainability of DBL practices in the long term.

Therefore, the Ministry of Education Malaysia is recommended to emphasize teacher professional development that not only focuses on pedagogical knowledge but also strengthens teachers' self-efficacy through practical, classroom-based training. The provision of easily accessible digital document resources and simplified historical archives is also seen as a strategic measure to reduce teachers' preparation burden.

For future studies, qualitative or mixed-method research is recommended to explore in greater depth how DBL is implemented in real classroom contexts and challenges faced by teachers. Such approaches are important to ensure that reported quantitative findings genuinely reflect DBL implementation realities and its impact on developing primary students' historical thinking skills.

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