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A Review of Literature on Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

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Abstract: Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a new approach that has been immerged and developed quite recently. It is the combination of three words 'Neuro', 'Linguistic' and 'Programming', which was initially used by psychotherapist, but in an unstructured manner. Nowadays it has become very structured theoretically and technically. There are a number of techniques involve in NLP, which have been developed by its two co-founders, Richard W. Bandler and Dr. John T. Grinder. A number of researchers have explored the literature on NLP, the techniques, usage and advantages. This paper reviews those studies with the aim to look into the advantages of applying NLP in the Malaysian context, especially for teaching and learning. Several areas which have been discussed by previous researchers are included in this study to achieve its objective. Those areas are NLP in teaching and learning, NLP in communication and motivation, and NLP for coaching. There are also few researchers who claim that NLP technique is not as good as claimed by the practitioners, but they also claimed that further research need to be done to prove their findings. In Malaysia, there are very few studies found on NLP as it was popular just within few recent years.

Keywords: Neuro, Linguistic, NLP, Programming

1. Introduction

Nuero Linguistic Programming (NLP) was introduced around 1970s by Richard W. Bandler and Dr. John T. Grinder (Witkowski, 2012; Bashir & Ghani, 2012). According to Witkowski, 2012, Bandler and Grinder describe the NLP as a 'model', rather than a 'theory'. It was initially popular as a method of communication and personal development use in variety of professional fields like managers, counsellors, consultants, doctors and lawyers (Tosey and Mathison, 2003).

Tosey and Mathison (2010) clarify that Richard W. Bandler and Dr. John T Grinder were initially inspired by three different therapists with unique specialisation, namely Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson. With the combination of knowledge, observation and study, the two co-founder come out with structured model which later became a reference of multi-disciplinary tool called NLP.

Tosey and Mathison (2003) explain that NLP implies a person as a whole mind-body system with combination of internal experience (`neuro'), language (`linguistic') and behaviour (`programming'). It is then known as 'the art of communication excellence'. According to Bailey (2001), the word 'neuro' is derive from the Greek word *neuron* which means the nerves of the brain. 'Linguistic' is derive from the Latin word *lingua* meaning language, which has some connection with individual neurological processes. The word 'programming' refers to the process used in the sense of reorganization of an individual to achieve a particular goal.

Similarly, Campbell (2010) said that NLP explores the relationship among 'how one thinks' (Neuro), 'how one communicates' both verbally and non-verbally (linguistic) and 'the patterns of behaviour and emotion, (programs). Furthermore, Campbell (2010) also mentioned that awareness about NLP will help a person' observations and listening ability. According to

NLP Academy UK (www.nlpacademy.co.uk), NLP is the practice of understanding how people organise their thinking, feeling, language and behaviour to produce the results they do.

In Malaysia, one of the Gold Master Trainer of NLP claims that NLP is a systematic study of human behaviour (Mat, 2009). As quoted by Mat (2009), Bandler and Grinder (1976) mentioned that human have five sensory systems which are visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory. With knowledge on this sensory system, studies towards human behaviour become very systematic and much easier to be conducted and understand.

2.   NLP in teaching and learning

If we believe that every single learner has the ability to learn, then disabled learners do not exist. However technique and application might sometime be unsuitable to certain learners, which discourage them from learning. Therefore NLP offers some alternatives. Bashir and Ghani (2012) stated that there are numbers of NLP technique which can be applied to improve the teaching and learning environment, within the classroom or outside. This can be achieved mostly through effective communication between educators and the students. They also stated that NLP focuses on acquisition of knowledge on reciprocal basis and consider learning experience through improvement and modification of internal representation system.

Carey et al. (2010) reported on case studies which involves 24 teacher-led action using variety of NLP techniques with children from nursery classes to Year 13 students. Teachers involved with this project were given prior training on NLP and its techniques. Aspects of NLP introduced to those teachers include Well Formed Outcomes, Eye Accessing Cues, Modalities and Submodalities, Anchoring, Rapport (particularly through language), Relationship Rewards, Storytelling and Metaphor, Meta Model Questioning, Milton Model, Visualisation, Non-verbal Communication and Sensory Acuity. Each teacher involved was given freedom to choose any NLP techniques to be applied with their students. Some of them used single technique while others used combination method. Throughout this study, all teachers involved gave a very positive report on the application of NLP techniques with their children or students. As a summary, this study concludes that the use of NLP in teaching and learning give a lot of benefit to both teachers and children/students. Cordingley (2010) also pointed out that the use of NLP techniques mentioned above are useful in education from children to adult learners.

Thomas, P. (2014) simplified NLP as a methodology which helps individual to understand information received by way of 'see', 'hear', 'taste' or 'feel', and how those information influence their actions. According to him, NLP works as tools for individual to process the information received and turn them into advantage and that NLP is significant with Theory of Multiple Intelligences. He also pointed out that NLP is not only for students to get good result but rather for teachers, in delivering their material to suit their students. With NLP understanding and practices, teachers should be able to identify which learning style or representational system that their students preferred in order to optimise their students' ability to digest information.

Tosey and Mathison (2003) emphasized that the role of language and internal imagery in teacher-learner interactions, influences learners' beliefs. They suggested that NLP approach in teaching and learning is crucial as teaching process involved (a) creating 'states' that are conducive to learning (managing 'states' is the most basic NLP technique); (b) facilitating learners' exploration and/or enhancement of their internal representation (based on the five sensory systems: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory); and (c) leading learners towards the desired goal or outcome (learners oriented). In this study, Tosey and Mathison (2003) illustrated the effect of linguistic approach such as the use of adjective 'wrong' and adverb 'wrongly' that will give different response. The use of adjective 'wrong' seems to give severe effect than the adverb in the context of punishment. Teachers should be aware of this language usage in order to capture learners' internal imagery to make learning process successful.

Cordingley (2010) noted that the NLP communication model is useful to consider when teaching. The child, student or any level of learner, internal representation will make a major difference in the process of learning. As quoted by Pishghadam and Shayesteh (2014), Revell and Norman (1997) found 13 fundamental assumptions for language teachers to match their belief system, which include 'Mind and body are interdependent, each impacts the other one'; 'The map is not the territory'; and 'There is no failure'. Pishghadam and Shayesteh (2014) then concluded that teachers are able to open up their students' minds to greater possibilities and more opportunities in life with better learning strategies using NLP techniques.

Sharif and Aziz (2015) mentioned that effective learning takes place only when students are in a state of readiness and motivated to learn. Therefore motivation plays an important role in learning. A good motivator must be those with great communication skills.

3. NLP in communication

The understanding of five sensory systems mentioned earlier will help a lot in making good communication. Therefore knowledge of theory and practical are both needed in order to become expert. According to Pishghadam and Shayesteh (2014), NLP presumes a positive intention behind every single attitude which will lead to improvement of communication and life quality.

Campbell (2010) suggested that NLP enables a person to acquire the skill that they need to apply in conversations and interactions. In her book "7 Steps to Transform Your Life Using NLP, Coaching & Hypnosis", she shared her own experience of using NLP application for more than 20 years. The seven steps were (1) Commit, (2) Develop your support system, (3) Clearing the grounding, (4) The Here and now, (5) Creating a fabulous future, (6) Take action, and lastly (7) Keep moving.

Campbell is a hypnotherapist, a master practitioner of NLP and also a master coach. As an expert, she gave high consideration toward clients is every session to make sure client's objective is reach throughout their interaction phase. All the seven steps mentioned in her book were given detail explanation and example. For example in the 5th step: creating a fabulous future, the author has incorporated a number of exercises in order to help her clients to create a fabulous future. This includes exploring the individual habits, desire, goal, the road map and the future. Campbell summarised that NLP empowered a person to communicate more efficiently and support a journey of self-discovery through effective mental and emotional state.

Sharif and Abdul Aziz (2015) said that NLP can be used as a technique for doctor when talk to patients, the technique used by teacher to communicate with students, technique for a lawyer or a police officer talking to witnesses, a technique for politicians to influence subordinated and other various applications. These are common interactions between two different parties with two different objectives. It is quite common that they feel annoyed with each other, so how are they going to reach the target: to finish with satisfaction. The answer is NLP. This is because NLP technique require a person to know what they want (outcome), understand the sensory acuity and be more flexible. These three are the basic elements of excellent communicator.

4. NLP and coaching

To get an answer, one must have a question. 'Question' needs answer and therefore will force the brain to work, and which leads to thinking. This is a normal process that happen almost every day in our daily life, which many people are unaware of. That is why sometimes we need others to remind us. This is the area of coaching.

NLP-based coaching as mention by Linde-Pelz (2010), comprises of around 23 core practices, which include Milton Model, Metaphors, Anchoring and Reframing. Added in that

study, argument that NLP technique is a substantial and effective methodology to assist people to change how they think, feel and act. This is a basic principle of coaching.

According to Linder-Pelx and Hall (2007), NLP allows coaches to codify and react to their own and their clients' experience. As NLP is useful for revealing the intra-personal and interpersonal processes and outcomes, of transformative learning/change, both authors believe it is worthwhile for coaches.

A person's mind, body and emotion are interacting effectively if they have a clear picture of what need to be done. Failure to interact effectively will sometimes lead to disappointment. In coaching with NLP technique, the interactions of these three basic elements is closely monitored.

There is argument on the differences among coaching, counselling, consulting and others in the field. To explain this, Bandler et. al., (2011) took an example of a person with problem of driving a car. A therapist will explore what stops that person from driving the car; a counsellor will listen to that person worries about the car; a mentor will share tips from his/her own experience of driving the car; a consultant will advise that person on how to drive the car; a coach will encourage and support that person in driving the car. The different is that coaching will make a person to be able to think and act according to what they wanted with their own ability. This whole technique involves the exploration of subconscious mind.

Although the human brain is complex, NLP principles are straightforward. Our behaviours are a result of our beliefs combined with our own understanding of reality (Linde-Pelzk, 2010). This beauty of couching with NLP techniques will make a person to move on according to their own capabilities.

Kristina (2014) study on couching, found strong links between the fields of coaching and adult learning theory, specifically in transformation. The study than concludes that individuals can learn more effectively through the coaching process. Couching, learning, improving, and motivating are all positive adjectives that are very often found in NLP discussion.

5.   Conclusion

Study done by Sharif and Abdul Aziz (2015) has proven the application of NLP is effective in improving motivation of high-risk students in terms of their self-confidence, desire for change and a passion for learning. If the use of NLP system and technique is applied throughout all level of teaching and learning in Malaysia, it is almost certain that students will be motivated and able to produce better results. This will eventually help in achieving the national agenda of becoming knowledge nation.

According to Mat (2016), there are three key factors to improve or change ourselves, first: *I can change*; second: *I have to change;* and third: *I am the only one who are able to change it*. These three phrases need to be digests together with a strong believe that *nothing is impossible*. If this concept can be adopted by all Malaysians, the future of our nation and country will be in great success, socially and economically.

Nevertheless, there are few studies that do not quite agree with the successful of implementing NLP techniques. One example is study done by Wiseman, et al. (2012). This study was done on coding the eye movements of both liars and truth tellers talking. They found no significant differences in eye movement and of both liars and truth tellers. Therefore the researchers concluded that their studies do not support the claims of NLP technique on Eye Accessing Cues, where (according to NLP) certain eye-movements are reliable indicators of lying.

However, as mentioned earlier, out of hundreds of studies on NLP techniques, there are very few studies claimed that NLP techniques is worthless and argued negatively about NLP. Even then, some studies, like Wiseman, et al. (2012) did mentioned that further research need to be done to support their result.

In Malaysia, there are very few studies found on the use of NLP techniques in teaching, learning or coaching. Therefore further study need to be done on the adoption of NLP in

Malaysia to give awareness about these excellence technique. As the adoption of NLP will give more advantages, these techniques should be introduce to all level of nations starting with kids at kindergarten to senior citizens.

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