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Genealogies of Learning: Family–Community Influences on Pedagogical Practice in Malaysian Primary Schools

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Abstract

Educational practices in primary schools are not formed in isolation from social and cultural heritage. In Malaysia's multi-ethnic society, shaped by colonial history, diverse migration genealogies, and intergenerational transmission of familial and community values, the pedagogical orientations of teachers and the learning dispositions of students are deeply embedded in historical and cultural processes. This study examines how family–community genealogies, cultural heritage, and intergenerational educational narratives intersect with teacher training practices, specifically learner autonomy promotion, teacher-as-facilitator orientation, and flexible learning environment creation, to shape pedagogical practice in a multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. A qualitative interpretive research design was employed. Eight participants, seven experienced primary school teachers and one student representative were purposively selected from a multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews guided by four thematically organised dimensions drawn from the genealogy of education framework and analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Four interconnected themes emerged: (1) convergent cross-genealogical endorsement of learner-centred pedagogy despite diverse ethnic community educational inheritances; (2) the teacher-as-facilitator role as the most genealogically resonant pedagogical shift from colonial transmission traditions; (3) flexible learning environments as inspirationally valued but materially constrained sites of genealogical negotiation; and (4) the perceived inseparability of facilitative practice and positive student learning outcomes. The findings illuminate how historically situated family–community genealogies shape the reception and enactment of contemporary pedagogical practices in Malaysia's post-colonial, multi-ethnic primary school context.

Keywords: genealogy of education; learning opportunities; Malaysian primary schools; family–community identity; migration heritage



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1. Introduction

Education is never a neutral transmission of skills. It is a historically situated, genealogically shaped practice through which family values, community aspirations, ethnic identities, and migration histories are reproduced, contested, and transformed across generations (Bernard 2026; Sande 2026). In Malaysia, a nation whose demographic composition reflects centuries of migration, colonial encounter, and ethnic coexistence, primary

schooling occupies a particularly significant charged position in the genealogy of social reproduction. The Chinese, Malay, Tamil, and indigenous communities that constitute Malaysia's multi-ethnic society each carry distinctive intergenerational narratives about education's purpose, the appropriate relationship between teacher and learner, the nature of academic aspiration, and the role of family in shaping children's educational trajectories (Careemdeen 2024; Huang et al. 2024).

These genealogical inheritances understood here as the intergenerational transmission of values, identities, and dispositions that shape how families and communities relate to formal schooling are not merely background context for educational research. They constitute the cultural substrate within which pedagogical practices are received, interpreted, and enacted. A teacher's shift toward learner autonomy promotion, for instance, carries different valences in a family context where Confucian educational values emphasise deference and collective achievement than in one shaped by Tamil migrant narratives of education as individual liberation from socio-economic constraint (Huang et al. 2024; Howard et al. 2021). A flexible learning environment may resonate differently with students whose families have experienced the spatial disruption of migration than with those rooted in stable community geographies across generations (Sande 2026).

Despite the richness of Malaysia's genealogical educational landscape, qualitative research that explores how teachers in multi-ethnic Malaysian primary schools experience and make sense of learner-centred pedagogical practices and how these experiences are shaped by family–community genealogies, with student voice offering a supplementary perspective, remains limited. Most studies of pedagogy in Malaysian primary education adopt survey or experimental designs that provide statistical patterns but cannot capture the lived meanings, intergenerational narratives, and cultural interpretive frameworks through which teachers and students understand and enact classroom practices (Grobler and Dittrich 2024; Careemdeen 2024). This study addresses that gap through a qualitative interpretive inquiry that foregrounds participant voices and genealogical context.

Despite the richness of Malaysia's genealogical educational landscape, existing research on pedagogy in Malaysian primary schools has focused predominantly on measurable outcomes, curriculum implementation, and the structural dimensions of teacher effectiveness. Studies have examined learner performance across ethnic groups, the adoption of learner-centred curricula mandated by national education policy, and the socio-economic correlates of educational achievement (Careemdeen 2024; Grobler and Dittrich 2024). While this body of work has established important baseline knowledge about what pedagogical approaches are used and how they correlate with student outcomes, it has done so largely through survey and experimental designs that yield statistical patterns across populations. What these studies have consistently overlooked is the intergenerational, family–community dimension of pedagogical reception: the ways in which the migration genealogies, ethnic educational histories, and intergenerationally transmitted values of Chinese Malaysian, Tamil Malaysian, Malay, and indigenous families shape how teachers actually experience, interpret, and negotiate learner-centred practices within the classroom. The lived meanings, cultural interpretive frameworks, and genealogical negotiations that determine whether a facilitative classroom resonates or conflicts with a family's educational inheritance remain largely unexamined in the Malaysian primary school context. This study addresses that gap through a qualitative interpretive inquiry that foregrounds participant voices and genealogical context, offering theoretically grounded and transferable insights into how family–community genealogies mediate the reception of contemporary pedagogical practices in one multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan.

This study takes the intersection of genealogy and pedagogy as its starting point. Drawing on semi-structured interview data from eight purposively selected primary school

teachers and a student representative in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, it examines how three dimensions of teacher training practice—learner autonomy promotion, teacher-as-facilitator orientation, and flexible learning environment creation are experienced, perceived, and genealogically situated by practitioners within one multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. In doing so, it contributes to the emerging field of genealogy of education, which examines how historical processes of family formation, ethnic identification, migration, and intergenerational narrative transmission shape the conditions and outcomes of formal schooling (Bernard 2026; Grobler and Dittrich 2024).

The study is structured as follows. Section 2 situates the research within the literature on genealogical approaches to education, family–community influences on schooling, and the specific historical–cultural context of Malaysian primary education. Section 3 presents the qualitative methodology. Section 4 reports the four thematic findings. Section 5 discusses findings in relation to the genealogy of education literature, and Section 6 concludes with implications for research and policy.

Research Objectives

This study was guided by three qualitative research objectives:

- To explore how teachers in one multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan understand and experience learner autonomy promotion as a teacher training practice, and how these understandings are shaped by family–community genealogies of educational aspiration.
- To examine how the teacher-as-facilitator orientation is perceived and enacted by teachers in one multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan, and how this reception is mediated by colonial and post-colonial educational genealogies that have historically shaped teacher professional identity.
- To investigate how flexible learning environments are experienced by teachers in one multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan, and how these experiences are informed by spatial and cultural genealogies ranging from deep-rooted community belonging to migration and resettlement.

2. Genealogies of Education: Theoretical and Contextual Framework

2.1. The Genealogy of Education: Family, Community, and Historical Process

The concept of educational genealogy, as developed within the interdisciplinary literature of family studies, migration research, and critical education theory, holds that schooling practices and outcomes cannot be understood apart from the long-term historical processes of migration, colonisation, ethnic formation, and class stratification through which families and communities have come to understand education's purpose and possibility (Sande 2026; Bernard 2026). This perspective extends genealogical analysis beyond the tracing of biological lineage to encompass the intergenerational transmission of educational values, aspirations, dispositions, and narratives that constitute families as sites of cultural and intellectual reproduction.

Intergenerational transmission of educational values is particularly salient in migrant and diasporic communities, where families carry educational narratives forged under specific historical conditions, colonial schooling systems, economic migration imperatives, and ethnic minority status across generational and geographical distance (Bernard 2026; Sande 2026). In such contexts, the relationship between family genealogy and school practice is not one of simple alignment: families may transmit aspirations for educational achievement alongside cultural values, respect for authority, collective orientation, and linguistic heritage maintenance that sit in tension with the individualised,

autonomy-promoting pedagogies increasingly promoted by contemporary teacher training (Huang et al. 2024; Howard et al. 2021).

The genealogy of education literature thus positions school as a meeting ground where family-transmitted cultural inheritances encounter institutionally mandated pedagogical practices, generating complex negotiations of identity, authority, belonging, and aspiration (Bernard 2026; Grobler and Dittrich 2024). Qualitative research in this tradition examines how naming practices encode family histories (Adetòmíwà et al. 2026), how colonial linguistic genealogies shape heritage language maintenance (Bernard 2026), and how migration histories produce layered educational subjectivities across generations. Given the conceptual breadth of the genealogy-of-education framework outlined above, the present study does not claim to exhaust its analytical possibilities. Rather, it offers a focused, qualitative entry point grounded in one multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan through which selected dimensions of the framework are empirically examined, with the expectation that future larger-scale studies will elaborate its fuller potential.

2.2. Malaysia as a Genealogical Laboratory: Migration, Ethnicity, and Schooling

Malaysia's educational landscape is a product of intersecting genealogical narratives that span centuries. The Chinese communities whose ancestors migrated to the Malay Peninsula primarily during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under British colonial labour recruitment carry educational genealogies deeply marked by Confucian values of filial piety, collective achievement, and education as the primary vehicle of social mobility (Huang et al. 2024; Careemdeen 2024). Tamil communities, whose migration genealogy is tied to the British rubber plantation economy, carry educational narratives shaped by caste, economic vulnerability, and the transformative aspirations of post-independence ethnic minority politics. Malay communities, as the constitutionally designated majority in the post-colonial state, navigate educational genealogies shaped by both pre-colonial Islamic scholarly traditions and the post-independence Malay language nationalism that restructured the schooling system in the 1970s.

These intersecting genealogies produce a primary school context in which teacher-student relationships, family educational expectations, and the meaning of pedagogical authority is shaped by multiple factors arising from historical processes that extend far beyond the classroom. The shift toward learner-centred, autonomy-promoting pedagogies advocated by contemporary teacher training discourse (Aktoprak and Hursen 2022) thus encounters a genealogically complex reception: for some families, learner autonomy represents an aspiration consistent with migration-driven educational narratives of individual agency and self-determination; for others, it may be experienced as a departure from inter-generationally transmitted values of collective learning, teacher authority, and disciplined academic effort.

Colonial educational genealogies add a further layer of complexity. The British colonial schooling system established the structural foundations of Malaysian primary education and transmitted a particular genealogy of pedagogical authority that positioned the teacher as knowledge-possessing expert and the student as passive recipient—a transmission model that shaped multiple generations of Malaysian teachers' professional identity (Grobler and Dittrich 2024). Contemporary teacher training programmes that advocate facilitative, student-centred approaches thus intervene in a genealogy of teacher professional identity formed under specific historical conditions, and their reception by teachers and families cannot be understood apart from this historical substrate.

2.3. Learner Autonomy and Intergenerational Educational Narratives

Learner autonomy understood as the capacity and disposition to take ownership of one's learning, including goal setting, activity selection, and self-regulation carries distinctive genealogical resonances in multicultural educational contexts. In families whose migration genealogies are characterised by economic precarity and social exclusion, education may be narrated intergenerationally as a structured, disciplined pathway requiring authority-mediated guidance rather than autonomous self-direction (Careemdeen 2024; Volkotrubova et al. 2023). Conversely, families whose genealogies include experience of community-led schooling, diaspora education, or resistance to colonial pedagogical authority may transmit more receptive orientations toward autonomous learning.

Research in multilingual and multicultural primary school contexts suggests that learner autonomy is not a culturally neutral pedagogical value but a contested one whose meaning is negotiated through family–community genealogies of educational experience (Howard et al. 2021; Bernard 2026). Teachers who promote learner autonomy in Malaysia's multi-ethnic primary schools are thus not simply implementing a technically superior pedagogy; they are engaging in a genealogical encounter between institutionally transmitted training values and family–community transmitted educational narratives, the outcomes of which are determined by the specific historical trajectories of the communities they serve.

2.4. Teacher as Facilitator: Colonial Genealogies and Pedagogical Transformation

The shift from teacher-as-transmitter to teacher-as-facilitator represents a significant genealogical rupture in pedagogical identity. The transmission model carries the genealogical mark of colonial schooling systems that positioned indigenous knowledge as subordinate to institutionally authorised European curricula, and the teacher as the authorised channel through which legitimate knowledge flowed to passive students (Grobler and Dittrich 2024; Sande 2026). Facilitator-oriented pedagogy, which positions teachers as scaffolders of student-led inquiry and collaborative sense-making, thus represents not merely a technical shift in instructional method but a genealogical reorientation of the teacher–student relationship away from colonial transmission hierarchies.

In Malaysia, where colonial educational genealogies intersect with post-independence national identity politics and the ethnic plurality of the student body, the reception of facilitative pedagogy is shaped by multiple overlapping genealogical narratives. For teachers trained within institutional traditions that valorised authoritative transmission, becoming a facilitator requires a form of genealogical identity work, a renegotiation of professional self-understanding in relation to historically transmitted models of teaching. For students from families that transmit Confucian or Islamic scholarly educational values, the facilitative classroom may require a corresponding renegotiation of learner identity in relation to family-transmitted educational genealogies (Ruijuan et al. 2023; Ainjärv and Laas 2024).

2.5. Flexible Learning Environments and Spatial Genealogies

The concept of a flexible learning environment intersects with genealogical analysis at the level of spatial identity. For students whose families carry migration genealogies, who have experienced displacement, resettlement, and the negotiation of belonging in new spaces, classroom environments that accommodate diverse learning styles, spatial configurations, and modes of engagement may resonate with intergenerationally transmitted values of adaptability and spatial flexibility (Sande 2026; Bernard 2026). Conversely, for students from communities with deep roots in particular localities and stable spatial genealogies, the flexibility of the classroom environment may be a less genealogically charged dimension of educational experience.

Research on the relationship between migration genealogy and educational space suggests that spatially flexible, resource-rich learning environments can function as sites of genealogical negotiation—places where students whose identities are shaped by displacement, ethnic minority status, or cultural hybridity find room for expression and belonging (Sande 2026; Huang et al. 2024). In Malaysia's multi-ethnic primary schools, where students' spatial genealogies range from deep-rooted community belonging to recent migration and urban resettlement, the flexible learning environment thus carries distinctive genealogical significance as a potential site of inclusive identity negotiation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive research design, consistent with the established tradition of genealogy of education scholarship, which employs qualitative, narrative, and ethnographic methodologies to illuminate the intergenerational transmission of educational values and identities (Bernard 2026; Sande 2026; Grobler and Ditttrich 2024). Qualitative interpretive inquiry is particularly well suited to the theoretical objectives of this study: it enables exploration of the lived meanings, contextual understandings, and biographical narratives through which teachers and students make sense of pedagogical practices that are themselves genealogically embedded (Creswell 2013; Braun and Clarke 2022). Where quantitative approaches can describe patterns across populations, a qualitative design is required to understand how specific individuals, in a specific genealogically complex context, experience and interpret the pedagogical practices that training programmes prescribe.

The study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which holds that social realities are multiple, context-dependent, and constructed through meaning-making processes that are historically and culturally situated (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This paradigm is aligned with genealogy of education theory, which treats educational experience as inseparable from the historical, familial, and community processes through which participants understand themselves as learners, teachers, and members of genealogically distinct communities. The study does not seek to generalise findings to a population; it seeks to generate theoretically grounded and transferable insights into how genealogical processes operate in one bounded, genealogically rich educational context.

3.2. Research Setting

The study was conducted at a primary school in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, a state whose multi-ethnic composition makes it a theoretically productive site for genealogy of education research. Negeri Sembilan is home to substantial Chinese Malaysian, Tamil-Malaysian, and Malay communities, as well as smaller indigenous populations, each carrying the intersecting migration genealogies, colonial educational histories, and intergenerational educational narratives described in the theoretical framework. The school was selected through purposive criterion-based sampling, with the criterion that it serves a genuinely multi-ethnic student and teacher population, enabling the study to engage with the genealogical diversity that the theoretical framework foregrounds.

3.3. Participants

Eight participants were recruited through purposive criterion-based sampling, a qualitative sampling strategy that prioritises informational richness and theoretical relevance over statistical representativeness (Patton 2015; Creswell 2013). In qualitative interpretive research, sample sizes of 6–12 participants are widely recognised as sufficient for in-depth thematic analysis within a bounded institutional context, particularly where the sampling

is purposive and the theoretical framework provides an organising structure for analysis (Morse 1994; Guest et al. 2006).

Seven participants were qualified classroom teachers with a mean of 11.3 years of teaching experience (range: 4–22 years), selected to provide rich practitioner perspectives on learner autonomy promotion, facilitative teaching, and flexible learning environment creation as experienced within Malaysia's multi-ethnic primary school context. Among teacher participants, four held postgraduate qualifications in education (M.Ed. or equivalent), two held undergraduate teaching degrees, and one held a professional teaching diploma, a range of professional formation contexts that enriched the qualitative diversity of perspectives. One participant was a senior student representative, selected to provide the learner's perspective on how pedagogical practices are received and experienced within the classroom. Four participants identified as male and four as female. No personal identifying information, including ethnicity, was collected, consistent with ethical requirements for anonymised research; however, the multi-ethnic composition of the school's teaching body means that the participant group reflects, at least in part, the intersecting Chinese Malaysian, Tamil Malaysian, and Malay educational genealogies that the theoretical framework examines.

3.4. Data Generation

Data were generated through semi-structured individual interviews, the primary qualitative method for accessing participants lived experiences, interpretive frameworks, and meaning-making processes in relation to educational phenomena (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015). Semi-structured interviews were chosen over fully structured instruments because the genealogy of education framework requires sensitivity to the biographical and contextual particularities of each participant's relationship to the pedagogical practices under examination: the same practice, learner autonomy promotion, for example, may carry entirely different genealogical meanings for a teacher whose family history is shaped by Confucian collective educational values than for one whose biography includes experience of diaspora schooling or colonial educational resistance.

An interview guide was developed comprising open-ended questions organised around four thematic dimensions derived from the theoretical framework: (1) perceptions and experiences of learner autonomy promotion and its relationship to family–community educational values; (2) the experience of adopting a teacher-as-facilitator role and how this intersects with professionally and genealogically transmitted models of teaching; (3) the meaning and experience of flexible learning environments, particularly in relation to participants' own spatial and cultural educational histories; and (4) how participants understand the relationship between these pedagogical dimensions and student learning outcomes in Malaysia's multi-ethnic primary school context. The guide was used flexibly, with follow-up probes adapted to each participant's responses to ensure depth and genealogical specificity. Interviews were conducted in a setting familiar and comfortable to participants and lasted between 45 and 70 min. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and transcribed verbatim.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis, the most widely applied and methodologically explicit framework for qualitative thematic inquiry in educational research; recent literature has similarly drawn on thematic and co-word analytical methods to synthesise literature on learning and development in children's educational contexts (Mee et al. 2026). The six phases were implemented as follows.

In Phase 1 (familiarisation), interview transcripts were read repeatedly, with initial analytic observations recorded in reflective memos. In Phase 2 (generating initial codes), data were coded systematically, with codes assigned to any segment relevant to participants' perceptions, experiences, or genealogical interpretations of the three pedagogical dimensions. Coding was data-driven rather than purely deductive: while the four interview dimensions provided a loose initial framework, codes were allowed to emerge from participants' own language and meaning-making rather than being imposed from the theoretical framework. In Phase 3 (constructing themes), initial codes were reviewed and sorted into candidate themes, with attention to the genealogical interpretive lens: themes were evaluated not only for their descriptive adequacy but for their theoretical significance within the genealogy of education framework. In Phase 4 (reviewing themes), candidate themes were reviewed against the full dataset to ensure they were grounded in and representative of the data. In Phase 5 (defining and naming themes), themes were refined into the four named themes reported in Section 4. In Phase 6 (writing up), themes were developed into analytical narratives integrating data extracts with genealogical interpretation.

Methodological rigour was ensured through theoretical transparency (explicit articulation of the genealogical interpretive lens informing analytical decisions), reflexive memo-writing throughout the analytical process, thick description of themes grounded in participant language, and member-checking of preliminary theme summaries with two participants (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Creswell 2013).

3.6. Ethical Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the INTI International University Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. All participants provided voluntary informed consent, including consent to audio-recording and verbatim transcription. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. All transcripts and identifying information are stored securely with access restricted to the research team. No personally identifying information, including names or ethnic community identification, appears in any research output; all participants are referred to by role descriptor (e.g., Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Student Representative). Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

4. Findings

Thematic analysis of the interview data generated four interconnected themes that illuminate how teachers in this multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan experience, interpret, and genealogically situate learner-centred pedagogical practices, with the student representative's account providing a supplementary learner perspective. Each theme is presented with illustrative participant extracts and genealogical interpretation.

4.1. Theme 1: Convergent Cross-Genealogical Endorsement of Learner-Centred Pedagogy

The most striking finding across the eight interviews was the consistent and strongly expressed endorsement of learner autonomy-promoting, facilitative, and flexible pedagogical practices, practices, evident across participants' diverse professional backgrounds and the genealogically varied community contexts in which they worked. Despite the theoretical expectation that different ethnic community educational genealogies might produce divergent perceptual orientations toward learner-centred pedagogy, participants converged in articulating its value and meaningfulness.

Teacher participants repeatedly described learner autonomy as not merely a training prescription but as a practice that ‘makes sense’ in their classroom experience. One teacher with 18 years of experience described the shift in her practice:

“When I first started, I thought teaching meant I stood up there and gave them everything. Now I understand—if I let them find their own way to the answer, they remember it. It becomes theirs. No matter where they are from, that works.”

This articulation of learner ownership as transcending community difference is genealogically significant. It suggests that despite the theoretical heterogeneity of educational genealogies present in this multi-ethnic setting, the perceived value of learner-centred practice operates as a point of convergence rather than contestation. Other participants echoed this convergent orientation, with several framing learner autonomy in language drawn from their communities’ educational aspirations educational achievement, self-improvement, preparation for a competitive world suggesting that the genealogical inheritances of different ethnic communities, despite their distinct historical formation, share a common aspiration for student empowerment that finds expression in learner-centred pedagogy.

The student representative offered a complementary perspective, describing how autonomy-supportive practices produced a qualitatively different experience of learning: “When the teacher lets us choose how to do something, I think harder. It feels more important, like it matters what I decide.” This sense of elevated personal investment is consistent with what the genealogy of education framework would predict for a student whose family narrative positions educational achievement as a vehicle for self-determination and community aspiration.

4.2. Theme 2: The Teacher-as-Facilitator as the Most Genealogically Resonant Pedagogical Shift

Across all seven teacher participants, the shift from teacher-as-transmitter to teacher-as-facilitator was described as the most significant and meaning-laden dimension of their professional development. While learner autonomy and flexible environments were valued, it was the question of what kind of teacher to be, transmitter or facilitator, that generated the most sustained and emotionally engaged reflection. This finding is interpreted as evidence that the facilitative role carries particularly deep genealogical significance in this post-colonial educational context.

Several teacher participants described the transmission model as something they had ‘inherited’ from their own schooling experiences, using language that directly invokes inter-generational pedagogical reproduction. One teacher with 22 years of experience reflected:

“My own teachers—they were the authority, full stop. You don’t question. So when I started teaching, that’s what I did too. It took time to understand that I could be something different. That being a guide is not being weak—it’s actually harder, and I think better for the children.”

This account of professional transformation as a rupture from an inherited pedagogical identity is precisely what the genealogy of education framework theorises as the ‘genealogical identity work’ required by the shift to facilitative pedagogy (Grobler and Dittrich 2024). The teacher’s description of the transmission model as something received from his own teachers and initially reproduced unreflectively illustrates the mechanism of intergenerational pedagogical transmission: teachers teach as they were taught, reproducing the genealogical models of their own educational formation until professional development interrupts that reproduction.

A younger teacher with four years of experience described the process differently, suggesting that for teachers trained in more recent pre-service programmes that already emphasised facilitative approaches, the genealogical rupture was experienced less as a

personal identity struggle and more as a negotiation with the expectations of families and communities:

“In my training, we learned to be guides, not lecturers. That feels natural to me. But some parents—especially older ones—they ask me, why are you not teaching? They think a good teacher talks a lot, gives a lot of notes. It’s their idea of what school should look like.”

This account reveals the genealogical layering of the facilitation question: even when teachers have internalised the facilitative model, they encounter the transmission model’s persistence in the educational expectations of families whose genealogies were formed under pedagogical systems that valorised authoritative transmission. The genealogical rupture is not only an internal professional identity negotiation; it is a negotiation with the community whose educational genealogy transmits different expectations of what teachers should do.

4.3. Theme 3: Flexible Learning Environments—Aspiration and Material Constraint

Participants consistently endorsed the value of flexible learning environments in principle, but their accounts revealed a significant gap between the genealogical aspiration for spatial flexibility and the material realities of primary school classrooms in Negeri Sembilan. This theme illuminates an important dimension of the genealogy of education framework that pure perceptual endorsement cannot capture: the structural and material conditions within which pedagogical genealogies are enacted.

Several teachers described the ideal of a flexible classroom: rearrangeable furniture, diverse learning stations, and varied spatial configurations as something they understood and valued, but which was constrained by the physical organisation of their school buildings. One teacher explained:

“I know flexibility is important. Especially for the children who have moved around—some come from other states, other countries. The classroom should feel like it can change, like there’s space for different ways of being. But our tables are fixed. We have forty students in a room that was built for thirty. I do what I can.”

The genealogical reading of this account is illuminating. The teacher’s reference to students who have ‘moved around’ from other states, other countries situates the aspiration for spatial flexibility explicitly within migration genealogies: the flexible classroom is understood as a pedagogical response to the spatial disruption and resettlement that characterises many students’ family histories. That this aspiration is frustrated by material constraint does not diminish its genealogical significance; rather, it reveals the gap between the theorised significance of flexible environments and the institutional capacity to realise them.

Another teacher, reflecting on her own family’s migration history, offered a more personal genealogical framing of the flexible environment ideal:

“My grandmother came from China. She always said school was the one place that was the same wherever you went. Maybe that’s not always a good thing. If the classroom can adapt to who the children are—where they are from, how they learn—that is more respectful, I think. More honest about the fact that they are different.”

This account draws the genealogical thread directly from family migration history to pedagogical aspiration: the grandmother’s experience of school as a standardising institution is reinterpreted by her granddaughter as a teacher to become an argument for flexibility and responsiveness, a transformation of the intergenerational educational narrative that the genealogy of education framework identifies as the mechanism of genealogical rupture.

4.4. Theme 4: The Perceived Inseparability of Facilitative Practice and Student Learning

Across teacher and student interviews, a fourth theme emerged that was not explicitly framed as a research question but arose organically from participants' accounts: the perceived inseparability of facilitative, autonomy-supportive teaching and positive student learning outcomes. Participants did not understand these as separate phenomena, pedagogy on one hand, outcomes on the other but as constitutively linked: the kind of teaching described in themes 1 and 2 was understood by participants as inherently generative of the kind of learning they valued.

The student representative articulated this link with clarity:

"When the teacher trusts me to work it out myself, I learn more. Not just the subject—I learn how to think. That feels different from when I just copy notes. When I copy notes, I forget. When I figure it out, I remember because I had to use my mind."

Teacher participants described the same inseparability from the practitioner's perspective. A teacher with 15 years of experience who had made a deliberate shift toward facilitative practice over the preceding five years reflected:

"I can see the difference in my students now compared to when I was more traditional. They ask more questions. They argue with each other in good ways. They come back to tell me they explained something to their parents. That's learning that goes somewhere. That's learning that connects to their life, their family."

The reference to students explaining content to their parents is genealogically significant: it describes a form of intergenerational knowledge transmission in which learner-centred classroom practices generate educational conversations that cross the boundary between school and family, potentially creating new intergenerational educational narratives. The genealogy of education framework identifies this boundary-crossing as a mechanism through which pedagogical transformation at the school level can begin to reshape family educational genealogies over time.

Participants also identified the facilitative teacher–student relationship as foundational to this learning–outcome connection. Several described how the relational quality of facilitative teaching—the trust, the mutual respect, the positioning of the student as capable rather than deficient—was itself experienced as educationally generative. One teacher observed: "When children know I believe they can do it, something changes. It's not just technique. It's a relationship. And I think that relationship comes from being a guide, not a lecturer."

5. Discussion

5.1. Convergence Across Genealogical Difference: What the Themes Tell Us

The four themes generated by this qualitative study illuminate a consistent picture: within this genealogically complex Malaysian primary school context, teachers across diverse professional and community backgrounds converge in valuing, endorsing, and experiencing as meaningful the learner-centred, facilitative pedagogical practices that contemporary teacher training promotes, a finding corroborated by the student representative's account. From a genealogical perspective, this convergence is the study's most theoretically significant finding. The genealogy of education framework, in emphasising the diversity of ethnic community educational genealogies in Malaysia, might lead to the expectation of greater divergence of Confucian-heritage teachers resisting autonomy promotion, or Tamil-heritage families experiencing the facilitative model as culturally foreign. Instead, the qualitative data reveal convergence, and the participants' own language explains why. It is important to acknowledge an alternative explanation for the convergence observed in Theme 1. In Malaysia's national curriculum context, learner-centred pedagogy is not merely

recommended but institutionally prescribed; teachers operating within this framework would be expected to endorse it as a condition of professional practice. The convergence documented here may therefore partly reflect institutional compliance rather than genealogical conviction. What the present analysis adds to this straightforward account is the observation that participants did not articulate their endorsement in institutional terms as policy adherence but in genealogically specific terms, connecting their valuation of learner-centred practice to familial narratives of educational aspiration, community experiences of colonial transmission pedagogy, and intergenerational reflections on what effective teaching means within their specific ethnic and migration contexts. It is this genealogical texture, the diverse routes by which different participants arrive at the same institutional position, that constitutes the analytical contribution of Theme 1, rather than the convergence itself.

Participants described learner-centred practices not as culturally foreign impositions but as consistent with, or even as expressions of, their own communities' deepest educational aspirations: achievement, self-improvement, empowerment, preparation for a competitive world. This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that facilitative pedagogy, when implemented within culturally responsive frameworks, can resonate across diverse community contexts by connecting to shared educational values rather than requiring the abandonment of community-specific ones (Ruijuan et al. 2023; Hayashi et al. 2025; Ainjärv and Laas 2024). The genealogical interpretation offered here extends this finding: the convergence is possible because the multiple distinct educational genealogies present in Malaysia's multi-ethnic primary schools share a common aspiration for educational quality and student growth that learner-centred practices can address, even while the specific meaning-making through which participants reach that endorsement is genealogically particular.

5.2. *The Teacher-as-Facilitator as Genealogical Identity Work*

Theme 2—the teacher-as-facilitator as the most genealogically resonant and reflectively engaged pedagogical dimension—is consistent with the theoretical argument that this shift represents a genealogical rupture in pedagogical identity, requiring practitioners to renegotiate professional self-understanding in relation to historically transmitted models of teaching (Grobler and Dittrich 2024; Sande 2026). The interview data provide rich qualitative evidence of this rupture as a lived experience: teachers described inheriting the transmission model from their own teachers, enacting it unreflectively in their early careers, and gradually—through professional development, peer learning, and reflective practice—developing a facilitative professional identity that felt more authentic and more effective.

The account of the younger teacher whose professional formation had already emphasised facilitation, but who encountered community resistance rooted in families' transmission-model expectations reveals the multi-directional nature of genealogical negotiation. Genealogical rupture at the level of teacher professional identity does not automatically produce genealogical rupture at the level of family–community educational expectations; rather, the facilitative teacher must navigate between her own transformed professional genealogy and the unreformed educational genealogies of the families she serves. This finding suggests implications for local teacher training practice: professional development programmes that successfully shift teachers toward facilitative practice would benefit from also equipping teachers to communicate this shift to families and communities whose educational genealogies may construct facilitation as a diminishment of pedagogical authority.

5.3. Material Constraints on Genealogical Aspiration

Theme 3's revelation of the gap between the aspiration for flexible learning environments and the material constraints of classroom infrastructure adds an important dimension to the genealogy of education framework that the theoretical literature does not fully address. The framework theorises flexible environments as genealogically significant sites of negotiation for students with migration histories and diverse spatial genealogies, and the interview data confirm that teachers understand this significance, a view echoed by the student representative. But the data also reveal that this genealogical aspiration is frustrated by material realities—overcrowded classrooms, fixed furniture, inadequate resourcing—that the framework does not theorise.

This finding points to a broader implication: genealogical processes in education do not operate in a material vacuum. The historical and political-economic conditions that produced Malaysia's diverse migration genealogies are the same conditions that have shaped the uneven resourcing of its primary school system. A genealogy of education that attends only to the cultural and symbolic dimensions of intergenerational transmission, without attending to the material and infrastructural conditions within which educational genealogies are enacted, is incomplete. Future qualitative genealogy of education research should integrate attention to the political economy of school resourcing alongside its characteristic focus on cultural and narrative genealogies.

5.4. Facilitative Pedagogy and Intergenerational Educational Transmission

Theme 4's finding that participants experienced the facilitative teaching-learning relationship as constitutively linked to positive learning outcomes and that this link was understood as operating through trust, relationship, and the student's sense of being seen as capable extends the genealogy of education framework in an important direction. The framework has primarily examined how family genealogies shape students' reception of school practices; this finding suggests that school practices when they are sufficiently relational and facilitative can themselves generate new intergenerational narratives.

The teacher's account of students explaining classroom content to their parents is a small but significant indicator of this generative process: facilitative learning that produces deep, transferable understanding creates the conditions for students to bring new educational experiences back into their family narratives, potentially reshaping the intergenerational transmission of educational values over time. This is what Bernard (2026) identifies as 'genealogy-as-pedagogy', the capacity of educational practice to become a site of genealogical reconstruction rather than merely genealogical reproduction. The qualitative data from this study provide grounded, context-specific evidence of this reconstructive process in operation.

5.5. Contributions to the Genealogy of Education Literature

This study makes three contributions to the genealogy of education literature. First, it provides qualitative empirical grounding for the theoretical claims that genealogy of education scholarship has primarily advanced at an abstract level. By generating interview data that directly captures participants' genealogical meaning-making in relation to specific pedagogical practices, the study demonstrates how the framework's theoretical constructs, genealogical rupture, intergenerational transmission, and colonial pedagogical inheritance operate as lived realities in a specific educational context, not merely as analytical abstractions.

Second, it establishes Malaysia's Negeri Sembilan region as a theoretically rich site for qualitative genealogy of education research. The intersecting Chinese, Malay, Tamil, and indigenous educational genealogies each shaped by distinct migration histories, colo-

nial encounters, and intergenerational narrative transmission create precisely the kind of genealogical complexity that the framework is designed to illuminate, and the interview data demonstrate that participants in this context are themselves articulate genealogical thinkers, capable of connecting their present pedagogical practices to their own and their communities' educational histories.

Third, the study identifies a productive direction for future qualitative genealogy of education research: the integration of attention to material and infrastructural constraints alongside cultural and symbolic genealogical processes. The gap between the genealogical aspiration for flexible environments and the material conditions that frustrate that aspiration points to the need for a political–economic dimension in genealogy of education inquiry that goes beyond the framework's current primarily cultural focus.

5.6. Limitations

A further limitation concerns the proportionality of the participant sample. The inclusion of seven teacher participants and only one student representative creates a notable imbalance in perspective, with findings weighted substantially toward practitioner accounts. While the student representative was purposively selected to provide the learner's perspective, a single participant cannot be considered representative of the diverse student genealogies present in a multi-ethnic primary school. Future research should incorporate a more proportionate student sample through dedicated student interviews or focus groups to ensure learner experience receives analytical weight commensurate with its theoretical significance within the genealogy of education framework.

A further limitation concerns the relationship between the theoretical framework and the empirical data generated. Section 2 establishes a conceptual apparatus capable of supporting analysis of deeply layered, multi-directional genealogical exchanges including the student-to-teacher direction of influence that the genealogy-of-education framework theorises as significant. The present data, derived from seven teachers and one student representative, can only partially illuminate these dynamics; the richer bidirectional analysis the framework promises requires a substantially larger and more proportionate participant sample across multiple school sites.

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. The purposive sample of eight participants, while appropriate for in-depth qualitative interpretive research within a bounded institutional context (Creswell 2013; Morse 1994), limits the transferability of findings: the four themes are specific to this Negeri Sembilan school context and cannot be assumed to characterise Malaysian primary education more broadly without replication in additional sites, particularly schools serving communities with different genealogical compositions. The absence of explicit biographical data on participants' own ethnic community backgrounds not collected for ethical reasons of anonymisation means that cross-genealogical comparisons within the dataset cannot be made, limiting the granularity of the genealogical interpretation.

A more fundamental limitation concerns the relationship between the theoretical framework and the empirical design. The genealogy-of-education framework deployed in Section 2 identifies ethnicity, migration history, intergenerational oral traditions, and family-centred cultural contexts as analytically indispensable parameters for understanding how pedagogical practices are received in a multi-ethnic school. However, these parameters were not systematically collected: participant ethnicity was not recorded, migration histories were not formally elicited, and the interview protocol did not include structured prompts for participants to situate their pedagogical perceptions within their specific community genealogies. This means the intersectional analysis the framework theorises across ethnic, generational, and migration-history lines remains at the level of theoretical framing

rather than empirical demonstration in the present study. Additionally, the selection of a single senior student representative, while providing a supplementary learner voice, is unlikely to capture the diversity of student-community genealogical perspectives that the framework identifies as significant, particularly given the demographic richness of Negeri Sembilan's multi-ethnic, multi-migratory population. Future research in this context should incorporate a larger, ethnically and generationally diverse participant sample; systematically collect genealogical demographic data within an appropriate ethical framework; and consider participatory or narrative inquiry designs that enable participants to co-construct their genealogical accounts in greater depth.

Theme 4.2 reveals a further limitation in the study's analytical reach. While all teacher participants had transitioned from transmission-based to facilitative pedagogical orientations, the individual genealogical pathways by which this transition was achieved—the specific moments of resistance, accommodation, and reorientation shaped by each teacher's ethnic, familial, and professional heritage—remain substantially investigated. The interview protocol, guided by four thematic dimensions, did not include structured prompts designed to elicit the temporal narrative of each teacher's pedagogical journey. Future research should incorporate life-history or narrative inquiry methods that enable participants to reconstruct their individual transition pathways in genealogical depth, situating moments of pedagogical change within the specific ethnic, migratory, and familial contexts that the genealogy-of-education framework identifies as analytically central.

The semi-structured interview format, while well suited to accessing participants' interpretive frameworks, does not capture the long-term, intergenerational processes through which educational genealogies are formed and transmitted: participants' accounts of their own and their families' educational histories are retrospective and potentially shaped by present orientations. A longitudinal or life-history design would provide richer access to the genealogical processes that this study can only glimpse. Finally, the single-researcher analytical process, while supported by reflexive memo-writing and member-checking, would benefit from additional analyst triangulation in future research.

6. Conclusions

This qualitative interpretive study examined how three dimensions of teacher training practice—learner autonomy promotion, teacher-as-facilitator orientation, and flexible learning environment creation are experienced, interpreted, and genealogically situated by teachers and a student representative in a multi-ethnic Malaysian primary school. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis guided by the genealogy of education framework, four interconnected themes were identified: convergent cross-genealogical endorsement of learner-centred pedagogy; the teacher-as-facilitator as the most genealogically resonant and reflectively engaged pedagogical shift; flexible environments as aspirationally valued but materially constrained sites of genealogical negotiation; and the perceived inseparability of facilitative practice and positive student learning outcomes.

The genealogical framing advanced here reframes these findings beyond technical educational measurement. It positions the classrooms of one multi-ethnic primary school in Negeri Sembilan as sites where family–community genealogies of educational aspiration forged through generations of migration, colonial encounter, ethnic identity formation, and intergenerational narrative transmission encounter institutionally mandated pedagogical practices. The qualitative data reveal that this encounter, in this context, is characterised more by resonance than resistance: participants across diverse genealogical contexts find in learner-centred, facilitative pedagogy an expression of educational values that their own intergenerational narratives transmit, even as they navigate the material constraints and community negotiations that implementation involves.

Future qualitative research should pursue three directions: first, narrative genealogical and life-history studies that trace how specific Malaysian families' educational histories shape their engagement with contemporary schooling across multiple generations; second, comparative genealogy of education research across Malaysia's ethnic communities to examine how the specific migration genealogies of Chinese Malaysian, Tamil Malaysian, Malay, and indigenous families produce distinctive relationships to contemporary pedagogical practice; and third, ethnographic studies that situate pedagogical practice within the political economy of school resourcing to examine how material constraints shape the realisation of genealogical pedagogical aspirations. Such research would advance scholarship using genealogical theory and methodology to examine historical processes as they shape the deeply genealogically embedded domain of primary education.

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