

Reframing Police Training in Malaysia: A Multi Theoretical Approach to Learning Design in the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre

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Abstract

Police training in Malaysia is central to train competent, ethical and operationally ready officers. In Malaysia, police training has existed for approximately 219 years, yet its pedagogical foundation appears to have undergone limited theoretical renewal, particularly in the application of learning theories across the various types of training modules. Current instructional practices remain largely shaped by Behaviourist oriented traditions, with some Cognitivist elements, through discipline, repetition, procedural instruction, memorisation and structured knowledge transmission. Although these approaches remain useful for physical, procedural and performance-based training, they may be insufficient for law related modules that require legal reasoning, critical reflection, communication, problem solving and contextual judgement. This conceptual paper proposes a more balanced and module-sensitive application of learning theories in the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre. Rather than arguing that one theory should dominate police education, the paper emphasises the need to align learning theories with the specific nature, objectives and competencies of each training module. For law modules, particularly those involving legal interpretation and application, the integration of Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is proposed as a more suitable pedagogical direction. These approaches are relevant because they promote active learning, collaborative knowledge construction, authentic problem-solving, reflective discussion and practical application. Conceptually, this paper contributes to police education in Malaysia by reframing instructional design from a predominantly behaviourist tradition towards a more theoretically grounded, module-sensitive and practice-oriented model of police training instruction.

Keywords: Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre, Social Constructivist, Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Behaviourism, Cognitivism.

Introduction

Police training globally continues to face persistent pedagogical challenges, particularly in aligning academy-based instruction with the realities of contemporary policing.

Modern police work increasingly requires cognitive, interpersonal and ethical competencies rather than purely physical or procedural skills, including communication, negotiation, emotional regulation, professional judgement, rapid decision-making, critical thinking and problem-solving under pressure (Cleveland & Saville, 2007; Chappel, 2008; Oliva & Compton, 2010). These demands indicate that police education must move beyond passive knowledge transmission towards learning approaches that develop trainees' capacity to interpret complex situations and apply knowledge in dynamic, uncertain and context-specific policing environments.

Despite these changing expectations, much of police education remains shaped by conventional, teacher-centred, didactic and procedural forms of instruction. Although such approaches remain important for discipline, standardisation and procedural compliance, they may limit reflective practice, critical thinking, knowledge transfer and problem-solving among recruits when used as the dominant mode of instruction. A systematic review by McGinley et al. (2019) highlights that police recruit training literature remains heavily focused on academic and field training components, while the quality of evidence on training effectiveness is still uneven. This concern is reinforced by studies showing that police trainees often experience a disconnect between theoretical learning in the academy and the practical knowledge required in the field, particularly when training does not sufficiently reflect dynamic and uncertain policing situations (Eliasson, 2020; Staller et al., 2021; Cohen, 2021).

In response to these limitations, recent scholars increasingly call for police education to move beyond traditional instructional models towards more active, reflective, scenario-based and problem-oriented learning. Such approaches are important because effective police training should not merely transmit procedural knowledge, but should develop trainees' analytical capacity, professional judgement and readiness to apply knowledge in complex field situations. Accordingly, contemporary police education requires pedagogical approaches that can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world policing practice, particularly in modules that demand interpretation, judgement and contextual application (McGinley et al., 2019; Belur et al., 2019; Buhrig, 2023).

These global pedagogical concerns are also relevant to the Malaysian police training context, where the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre plays a central role in preparing trainees for legal, procedural and operational responsibilities before they are certified, sworn in and entrusted with public duties (Arahan Ketua Polis Negara [KPN 135/1], 2006). In Malaysia, officers undergo between four and nine months of training, depending on rank, before certification (Arahan Ketua Polis Negara [KPN 135/1], 2006). The quality of this training is critical because police work involves complex, risky and legally sensitive decisions, including the exercise of lawful authority, arrest, intervention and discretion in real-life situations. It is also closely linked to the professionalism and performance of officers, which in turn influence public confidence in the Royal Malaysia Police (Pitchan & Osman, 2024). Therefore, pedagogical renewal within police training centres is necessary to ensure that trainees are not only disciplined and procedurally competent, but also capable of making ethical, legally sound and context-sensitive decisions in practice.

Within this context, teaching and learning in law-related modules are particularly important because they contribute directly to trainees' legal knowledge, professional

judgement and practical readiness. However, the effectiveness of such modules has been questioned, especially in relation to the instructional methodologies employed (Staller et al., 2021). Traditional teacher-centred and rote memorisation-based approaches are increasingly viewed as insufficient for fostering deep understanding, critical reflection and practical application among trainees (Denada & Andromeda, 2023). This issue is particularly relevant to the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre, where instructional practices have been shaped by long-standing institutional traditions developed over 219 years of police training in Malaysia, yet appear to have undergone limited pedagogical renewal in response to contemporary policing demands.

Accordingly, revisiting instructional design in police training requires a critical examination of the learning theories that shape teaching strategies, learning activities, assessment practices and trainee engagement. Behaviourism, Cognitivism and Social Constructivism remain dominant theories in instructional design (Burhanuddin et al., 2021), but their application should be considered according to the nature of specific training modules and learning objectives. While Behaviourist-oriented practices may be useful for discipline, procedural routines and standardised responses, Cognitivism can support information processing, conceptual understanding and legal reasoning. Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning are particularly relevant for modules that require collaborative interpretation, reflective discussion, authentic problem-solving and the application of knowledge to real policing situations. Therefore, a more balanced and module-sensitive pedagogical approach is needed to strengthen the design and delivery of learning modules at the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre.

This need for pedagogical reorientation is consistent with broader educational developments that emphasise a shift from passive, transmission-based learning towards more socially constructed, learner-centred and problem-oriented approaches (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). However, it remains important to determine whether one theory is most appropriate for police training or whether Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning should be selectively integrated according to module type and learning objectives (Hanna, Ferworn, & Abhari, 2017).

Hence, this conceptual paper critically discusses Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning within the context of the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre. It seeks to examine how these learning theories and approaches are reflected in current instructional practices according to specific training modules, while also focusing on the potential disconnect between espoused theories and theories-in-use. Such a distinction is significant because training practices in institutional settings may be shaped less by explicit pedagogical foundations and more by inherited routines, procedural traditions and normalised instructional practices (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

The originality of this paper lies in its module-sensitive positioning of Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning within the specific context of Malaysian police training centres. Rather than treating police training as a uniform instructional process, this paper argues that different training modules may require different theoretical orientations according to their learning objectives, content characteristics and practical demands. More specifically, the paper contributes to a pedagogical renewal for law-

related modules by proposing Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning as relevant foundations for strengthening legal reasoning, collaborative knowledge construction and problem-solving in authentic policing contexts. Its scholarly contribution lies in extending social science discussions on learning theory and professional education into the context of police training, particularly by clarifying how pedagogical theories and learning approaches can inform instructional design and delivery within a police training institution.

Therefore, this paper aims to:

- i. To examine the dominant learning theories currently reflected in instructional practices at the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre.
- ii. To propose a more module-sensitive application of relevant learning theories to strengthen the pedagogical design and instructional delivery of learning modules at the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre.

Problem Statements

Police training worldwide continues to face a persistent pedagogical challenge, particularly in relation to the weak alignment between academy-based instruction and the complex realities of contemporary policing. Much of police education remains dominated by traditional, lecture-based, classroom-centred and teacher-centred instruction (Syahputra, Gani & Fretes, 2023). These conventional approaches often emphasise one-way knowledge transmission, memorisation and fragmented factual learning, which may limit trainees' engagement, critical thinking, problem solving ability and application of knowledge in authentic policing situations (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001; Oliva & Compton, 2010; Herndon, 2016).

This issue has become increasingly critical as modern policing now requires broader competencies, including community engagement, de-escalation, mental health crisis response, cultural sensitivity, procedural justice and human rights awareness (Lavoie et al., 2025). Despite the growing need for experiential, reflective and practice-oriented learning that can develop professional judgement, problem-solving and field-based decision-making, police education continues to face challenges in moving beyond conventional instructional practices (Cohen, 2021; McGinley et al., 2019). Although competency-based, simulation-based and technology-enhanced training has been widely advocated, its implementation remains uneven due to institutional constraints, instructor readiness and limited evidence of training effectiveness (Cohen, 2021).

These global concerns are highly relevant to Malaysia, where police training has existed since approximately 219 years ago and has developed within a long institutional tradition. Despite this historical legacy, police education in Malaysia remains largely associated with teacher centred, lecture-oriented and procedure-based instruction that leans towards behaviourism theory. Such an approach may limit learning effectiveness, particularly when trainees are expected to apply legal, operational and ethical knowledge in complex real policing situations.

Although direct empirical evidence on Malaysian police training centres remains limited, related studies on crisis preparedness, disaster management and inter-agency operations reveal persistent weaknesses in coordination, role clarity, communication,

decision-making under pressure and practical readiness. These weaknesses suggest that existing training approaches may be insufficient if they continue to rely mainly on conventional instruction, procedural explanation and memorisation rather than authentic, scenario-based and practice-oriented learning (Nordin et al., 2023; Saadatmand et al., 2023).

Within the Malaysian context, the learning issue is further reflected in the need to strengthen trainees' exposure to inter-agency learning, policy literacy and digital readiness. Police officers are required to coordinate with multiple agencies, understand national security frameworks, operate within disaster-management structures and respond to increasingly technology-driven policing environments. Understanding directives and frameworks is therefore essential to ensure coherent action among security agencies (Sarkam et al., 2023; Mohamad et al., 2021). At the same time, police training must also respond to digitalisation by developing digital literacy, analytical thinking and adaptability to technological change (Cheok & Li, 2022; Tan & Lee, 2023).

Therefore, the issue in Malaysian police education is not merely a matter of curriculum content but concerns the effectiveness of the pedagogical approach and learning theories used to help trainees learn, apply and transfer knowledge into real policing practice. Police education in Malaysia needs to move beyond passive knowledge transmission towards more active, authentic and problem-based learning approaches that emphasise real-case scenarios, collaborative problem-solving, reflective discussion, community engagement, policy literacy and digital readiness. Such reform is necessary to bridge the gap between academy-based learning and actual policing demands, while strengthening trainees' capacity to apply legal, ethical and professional judgement in complex operational contexts (Cohen, 2021).

Police education in Malaysia should be strengthened through learning theories and approaches that promote interaction, collaboration, reflection and contextual application, particularly in law modules. Social Constructivist Theory and Problem-Based Learning are therefore relevant, as both emphasise knowledge construction through social interaction, guided learning, authentic problems and active learner participation (Vygotsky, 1978; Herndon, 2016; Agustin et al., 2023). Such an approach may enhance trainees' cognitive development, professional competence and readiness to meet the practical realities of contemporary policing.

Literature Review

Learning theories provide an important conceptual foundation for understanding how trainees acquire, process and apply knowledge within police training environments. In the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre, instructional practices are currently perceived to be largely shaped by Behaviourist and Cognitivist orientations, particularly through repetition, procedural instruction, structured knowledge transmission and cognitive processing. However, for law-related modules that require legal reasoning, critical reflection, communication and problem-solving, this paper proposes the integration of Social Constructivism through Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a more suitable pedagogical approach. The following discussion examines Behaviourism, Cognitivism and Social Constructivism in relation to their pedagogical relevance and potential application across police training modules.

Behaviourism Theory

Current teaching, learning and training modules in law enforcement education remain strongly influenced by Behaviourist and Cognitivist approaches. Core subjects such as criminal law, search and seizure, report writing, geography, patrol methods, sexual harassment, cultural diversity, community awareness and police-community relations are often organised around cognitive models of learning (Birzer, 2003). At the same time, conventional law enforcement training frequently relies on repetitive drills to reinforce desired responses, reflecting key principles of Behaviourism (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2013). Consequently, many police recruits graduate from academies having experienced predominantly teacher-centred and behaviouristic forms of instruction (Werth, 2009).

Behaviourism emerged prominently through John B. Watson's 1913 paper, *Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It*, with Watson widely recognised as a foundational figure in the development of Behaviourist thought (Malone, 2014). In general, Behaviourism views learning as a change in observable behaviour shaped by experience, practice, external stimuli and reinforcement, rather than by internal mental or cognitive processes. From the 1920s to the mid-1950s, Behaviourism became a dominant school of thought in psychology and exerted significant influence on education and social policy (Staddon, 2014). Its major figures include John Watson (1878–1958), Edward Thorndike (1874–1949), Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) and B. F. Skinner.

Behaviourism is commonly discussed through three major strands. Methodological Behaviourism, associated with Watson, argues that psychology should focus on observable behaviour because mental states such as beliefs and desires are private and cannot be empirically measured. Psychological Behaviourism, associated with Pavlov and Thorndike, explains behaviour through external stimuli, responses, learning history, behavioural change and reinforcement. Analytical Behaviourism, associated with Gilbert Ryle (1900–1976) and the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), considers behaviour in relation to mental concepts, beliefs and meaning. Overall, Behaviourism conceptualises learning as behavioural change produced through environmental conditions, repeated practice, stimulus-response patterns and reinforcement.

Cognitivism Theory

Cognitivism emerged as a major learning theory after Behaviourism, particularly from the late 1950s, when attention shifted from observable behavioural change to internal mental processes such as thinking, problem-solving, concept formation, language and information processing. Jean Piaget is widely recognised as a leading figure in Cognitivism, as his theory of cognitive development remains influential in explaining how learners construct knowledge and develop thinking abilities (Piaget, 1936; Alahmad, 2020). Unlike Behaviourism, which explains learning through external stimuli and behavioural responses, Cognitivism views learning as a process of knowledge acquisition, mental structuring and information processing, involving how learners receive, organise, store and retrieve information (Bower & Hilgard, 1981). It therefore provides a stronger basis for understanding complex learning processes such as reasoning, problem-solving and conceptual understanding (Jonassen, 1991; Schunk, 2012).

In instructional design, Cognitivism shifted attention from merely controlling learning materials to supporting learners' cognitive processing, prior knowledge, planning, goal setting

and knowledge organisation (Merrill, 1991; Winne, 1985). This makes Cognitivism particularly relevant to law-related subjects in the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre, such as the Penal Code, Police Act and Malaysian general laws, which require trainees to understand legal concepts, process information, reason logically and apply knowledge to specific situations. Effective cognitive-based instruction requires instructors to recognise learners' prior experiences, connect new information with existing knowledge and provide practice with feedback to support assimilation and accommodation within cognitive structures (Stepich & Newby, 1988).

Nevertheless, Cognitivism has several limitations. From a Behaviourist perspective, it is criticised because mental processes and abstract thoughts cannot be directly observed. Piaget's theory has also been criticised for giving limited attention to social interaction, culture and environment in cognitive development (Alahmad, 2020; Saether, 2024; Khan et al., 2023). Methodologically, his work has been questioned due to limited participant diversity, reliance on observations of his own children, flexible clinical methods and insufficient reporting of socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Miller et al., 2011; Lilienfeld et al., 2013). Alahmad (2020) further argued that Piaget may have underestimated children's cognitive abilities through difficult tasks and confusing terminology.

Overall, Cognitivism offers an important theoretical foundation for explaining how police trainees process information, construct understanding and solve problems. However, its limited emphasis on social interaction and cultural context suggests that it may not be sufficient as the sole foundation for police training. While relevant for law-related modules that require conceptual understanding and legal reasoning, Cognitivism should be complemented by theories that emphasise collaboration, social interaction and authentic learning environments.

Social Constructivism

Social Constructivism may be understood as an extension of Cognitivism because it gives stronger emphasis to the social, cultural and contextual dimensions of learning, which were less fully addressed in Piaget's cognitive theory. Developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), Social Constructivism challenges the view that learning is primarily an individual cognitive process by arguing that knowledge is first constructed through social interaction before being internalised by the learner. Vygotsky (1978) explained that higher mental functions, including attention, logical memory and concept formation, first appear at the social level through interaction with others before developing at the individual level.

From this perspective, learning is an active and socially mediated process in which learners use prior knowledge, experience, language and cultural resources to construct meaning and apply knowledge in real-world contexts. Vygotsky (1978) further emphasised that socio-cultural factors, including community, culture and language, shape how individuals understand, communicate and interpret reality. A central concept in this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what learners can achieve independently and what they can achieve with guidance from adults or collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, Social Constructivism provides a strong theoretical basis for police training because it supports guided interaction, collaborative

problem-solving and meaningful learning that can move trainees beyond passive knowledge acquisition towards higher levels of understanding and professional competence.

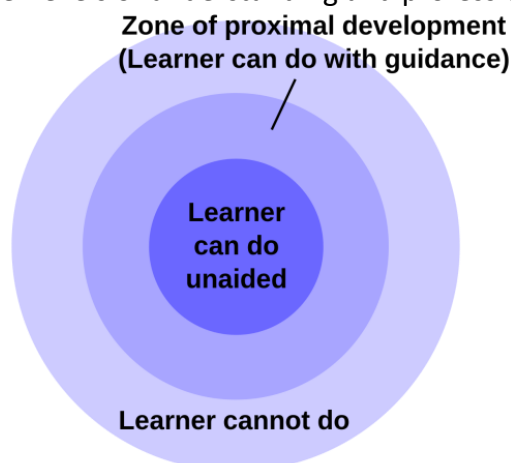


Figure 1 Conceptual Illustration of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky’s (1978) Social Constructivist Theory has strongly shaped educational thought by conceptualizing learning as a social and cultural mediated process. He argued that learning is fundamental to the development of culturally organized psychological functions and, like Piaget, viewed learners as active constructors of knowledge through curiosity, discovery and interaction with their environment (Vygotsky, 1978; McLeod, 2018). However, the theory has been criticized for its assumption of cultural universality, as scaffolding practices, particularly those relying on verbal instruction, may not operate similarly across diverse cultural contexts and learning traditions (Rogoff, 1990).

Comparative Perspectives on Behaviourism, Cognitivism and Social Constructivism

There is a clear conceptual distinction between the three major learning theories in the field of education. Understanding these distinctions is important for educators, particularly those involved in designing, developing, or modifying instructional design within a specific learning environment. Table 1 presents a summary of the key differences between Behaviourism Theory, Cognitivism Theory, and Social Constructivism Theory.

Table 1
Differentiation of Behaviourism Theory, Cognitivism Theory and Social Constructivism Theory

	Behaviourism Theory	Cognitivism Theory	Social Constructivism Theory
Pioneer Scholar	John B. Watson (1913)	Jean Piaget (1936)	Lev Vygotsky (1978)
Socio Cultural Context Stages	Not Emphasize	Less Emphasize	Strong Emphasize
Key Processes in development & learning	Strong emphasis of change of behavior	Strong emphasis on stages of development	No general stages of development proposed
	Behavior acquired through conditioning/ response to	Equilibration; schema; adaptation;	Zone of Proximal Development; Scaffolding;

	environmental stimuli shape particular action (Krapfl, 2016)	assimilation; accommodation	Language; tools of culture
Role of Language Teaching Implications	Very Minimal or none Learners will portray intended behavior when being given external stimuli repeatedly	Minimal Support Children to explore their world and discover knowledge	Major Establish an opportunity for children to learn with the teacher and more skilled peers
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Focus on observable measurable behaviors ii. Scientific and replaceable iii. Useful for modifying behaviors in real world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Enhance learning ii. Has many practical application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Learners are actively involved in learning ii. Concentrate on learning how to think and understand iii. Learners have ownership on what they learn iv. Learning from authentic real-world problem
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Does not account biological influences ii. Does not consider moods, thoughts, or feelings iii. Does not explain learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Considered weak due to the abstract nature of thought and difficult to explain ii. Refer to cognitive process that we cannot directly observe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. May not be able to form abstractions and transfer knowledge and skills in new situations (Merrill, 1991) ii. Learners are not always actively constructing meaning and building an appropriate knowledge structure (Merrill et al., 1991)

Problem Based Learning

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centred approach in which learning is driven by real-world problems, while instructors act as facilitators who guide discussion, collaboration and inquiry (Barrows & Wee, 2010). In PBL, the problem is not merely an object to be solved, but functions as a stimulus for learners to identify learning needs, integrate and synthesise information, apply knowledge and construct understanding collaboratively (Walsh, 2005). Similarly, PBL begins with authentic problems through which learners generate

ideas, examine known facts, identify learning issues and determine appropriate action plans (Cleveland & Saville, 2006).

This approach is particularly relevant to police training because it promotes communication, problem-solving, decision-making, creativity, self-confidence, collaboration and active learning, all of which are essential for responding to complex and unpredictable policing situations (Hendriana et al., 2018). Since PBL requires learners to work in teams, it also supports the social construction of knowledge through collaborative inquiry and shared problem-solving (Sawyer, 2014). Empirical literature further suggests that PBL can make learning more engaging, strengthen skill development, support long-term knowledge retention and improve problem-solving ability (Albanese & Mitchell, 1992; Dochy, Segers, Van den Bossche, & Gijbels, 2003; Norman & Schmidt, 1992; Regandla, Zaman & Leddo, 2024). Accordingly, integrating PBL into teaching and learning practices at the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre may enhance trainees' knowledge, practical skills and professional competencies required for real-world policing.

Evolution of Theory in Police Training Instructional Design

The shift from Behaviourism and Cognitivism towards Social Constructivism has been driven by the limitations of Behaviourism in explaining complex behavioural change, the increasing role of educational technology, and the growing emphasis on constructivist principles in educational policy and practice (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Bush, 2006; Weegar & Pacis, 2012). However, law enforcement education continues to be shaped by militaristic, teacher-centred and behaviouristic traditions, despite the need to develop officers' problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills. Student-centred learning has been shown to enhance creativity, critical thinking, achievement, participation, satisfaction, self-esteem, motivation and learner retention (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009). Accordingly, police training academies should move towards learner-centred and problem-based approaches that better prepare officers for complex, unique and unpredictable policing situations (Basham, 2014).

Nevertheless, many law enforcement training modules remain influenced by Behaviourist and Cognitivist assumptions, particularly in subjects such as criminal law, search and seizure, report writing, patrol methods, cultural diversity and police-community relations (Birzer, 2003). Conventional training also continues to rely on repeated drills to reinforce desired responses, resulting in many police academy graduates being trained through teacher-centred and behaviouristic approaches (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2013; Werth, 2009). Therefore, instructional curricula in the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre should be reconsidered by integrating student-centred and Problem-Based Learning approaches that promote active, meaningful and professionally relevant learning particularly in law modules. Proposed applications are as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Current Applications of Learning Theories in Malaysia Police Training Centres and Proposed Alternative Theoretical Approaches

Training Module		Current Theory	Proposed Theory	Rational
Laws (Penal Criminal Procedural Code (CPC), Police Acts, Inspector General Standing order (IGSO) and General Laws of Malaysia)	Subject Code,	Predominantly Behaviourist, with some Cognitivist elements	Social Constructivism through a Problem-Based Learning approach	Law-related modules require more than memorization and procedural recall. Trainees need to develop deep conceptual understanding, legal reasoning, communication and problem-solving skills. Authentic and real-world legal problems should be used to help trainees understand legal principles and apply them meaningfully in policing contexts.
Marching		Heavily Behaviourism	Behaviourism	Marching requires uniformity, discipline, repetition and accuracy of movement. Therefore, Behaviourist-oriented instruction is appropriate because trainees learn through demonstration, imitation, repeated practice and reinforcement.
Shooting Skills		Heavily Behaviourism	Behaviourism and Cognitivism	Shooting skills require accurate physical movement, procedural discipline and repeated practice, which align with Behaviourist principles. However, Cognitivism is also important because trainees must understand when, why and under what circumstances the use of firearms is justified.

			Not all policing situations require the use of weapons; therefore, decision-making, judgement and situational understanding are essential.
Physical Training	Heavily Behaviourism	Behaviourism	Physical training requires consistency, discipline, repetition and correct execution of movement. Behaviourist-oriented instruction is suitable because trainees develop physical competence through observation, imitation, repeated practice and reinforcement by instructors.

Potential Pedagogical Advantages of Integrating Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning

Most law enforcement training centres continue to rely heavily on Behaviourist and Cognitivist approaches in their instructional design (Birzer, 2003). Police training is often structured around rules, organisational procedures and doctrinal values, which may limit intellectual stimulation and reduce the broader educative value of training. Police recruit education has also been criticised for its overreliance on teacher-centred strategies and its limited emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, community relations, crime prevention and decision-making skills (Birzer, 2003; Chappell, 2008).

However, no single learning theory should dominate all aspects of police training (Nifaoui, 2020). Behaviourism may be suitable for technical and procedural subjects such as marching, where repetition and imitation are required (Hunter-Johnson & James, 2012). Behaviourism is useful for developing specific procedural skills through repetition, reinforcement and structured practice. This approach is particularly relevant for training activities that require automatic and consistent responses in high-pressure situations, as it focuses on shaping observable behaviour through rewards and punishments (Skinner, 1953).

Cognitivism, in contrast, focuses on internal mental processes such as information processing, knowledge organisation, retention and application. It supports the teaching of complex legal principles by helping trainees understand, organise and apply legal knowledge more effectively. This approach is important in strengthening problem-solving skills and critical thinking among recruits (Bruner, 1963; Ausubel, 1968).

Nevertheless, law-related subjects such as the Penal Code require more than procedural recall or factual memorisation. They require deeper understanding, legal

reasoning, communication and problem-solving skills. This distinction is important because remembering is not the same as understanding. Complex motor skills and high-stakes decision-making require more than rote recall of procedures (Nota & Huhta, 2019). Remembering allows trainees to respond only to familiar situations, whereas understanding enables them to manage varied and unpredictable real-world policing situations. Since many challenges faced by 21st-century law enforcement officers require cognitive rather than merely physical skills, police training must place greater emphasis on learner-centred and problem-oriented approaches (Cleveland & Saville, 2007).

Within this context, Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning offer significant pedagogical advantages for law modules instruction in the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre. Social Constructivism, particularly from Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, emphasises learning through social interaction, collaboration and contextualised experiences. In the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre, this theory could support group discussion, peer learning and collaborative problem-solving, which can enhance trainees' understanding of legal concepts and their ability to apply knowledge in real-world policing situations.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) on the other hand, further strengthens this process by placing authentic, real-world problems at the centre of learning. PBL exposes trainees to authentic problems, promotes peer interaction and supports meaningful knowledge construction. This is in line with the view that constructivist and sociocultural theories underpin PBL as a locus for active knowledge construction, with learning facilitated by more knowledgeable others and scaffolded to reach the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Wang et al., 2024). Through PBL, trainees are encouraged to apply legal knowledge actively, analyse complex situations, collaborate with peers, and develop critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980; Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Social Constructivism operationalised through Problem-Based Learning as an approach are therefore highly relevant in police training instructional design, particularly for law related modules. A systematic map of police recruit training describes a shift from purely disciplinary content toward domains emphasising problem-solving, decision-making and interpersonal exercises, consistent with learner-centred approaches (McGinley et al., 2019). This aligns with Social Constructivism and PBL's aim of situating knowledge within authentic, ill-structured problems that resemble on-the-job challenges (McGinley et al., 2019).

In this regard, police training centres should reconsider their instructional design by integrating various learning theories in a balanced and purposeful manner. Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Social Constructivism, social learning and adult learning may each contribute to effective police education when applied to suitable subject areas (Hanna, Ferworn, & Abhari, 2017). For the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre, effective instructional design should not rely on one dominant theory but should instead match each theory with the specific knowledge, skills and competencies required in each training modules.

Therefore, the integration of Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning in law modules instruction provides a practical and comprehensive pedagogical direction for the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre. While Behaviourism remains useful for procedural and

technical training, and Cognitivism supports the organisation and application of complex legal knowledge, Social Constructivism and PBL are particularly valuable for developing legal reasoning, collaborative learning, critical thinking, problem-solving and practical readiness. Such an approach may enhance trainees' cognitive development, professional competence and preparedness to meet the complex realities of police work.

Implications for Police Training Centre

The integration of Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Social Constructivism and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach within the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre provides a balanced and module-sensitive pedagogical direction for police training. This approach implies that instructional design should not be treated as a uniform process across all modules. Instead, different learning theories should be aligned with the nature, objectives and expected competencies of specific training modules. Behaviourism may remain relevant for discipline, procedural accuracy and standardised responses, while Cognitivism can support conceptual understanding, information processing, legal reasoning and decision-making. Social Constructivism and PBL are particularly useful for modules that require collaborative discussion, contextual interpretation, reflective learning and authentic problem-solving.

This module-sensitive integration represents the practical novelty of the paper because it moves police training beyond a one-size-fits-all instructional model towards a more flexible, theory-informed and contextually responsive pedagogical framework. In law-related modules, this is particularly important because recruits must not only memorise legal provisions, but also interpret legal elements, analyse factual situations and apply legal knowledge in complex policing contexts. Therefore, aligning learning theories with specific module requirements can help the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre develop a more meaningful, practice-oriented and professionally relevant learning environment. Such an approach supports the preparation of recruits who are procedurally competent, cognitively capable, ethically aware and better equipped to meet the realities of contemporary policing. By leveraging the strengths of Behaviourism, Cognitivism, and Social Constructivism, while incorporating PBL as an active learning approach, The Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre can provide a more dynamic and meaningful learning environment. This approach not only supports the acquisition of essential legal knowledge but also prepares recruits to apply their skills effectively in authentic policing situations, in line with the vision and mission of the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) to produce world-class police officers who are competent, knowledgeable, and capable of serving the community effectively.

Conclusion

The integration of Social Constructivist approaches and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) offers significant pedagogical potential to enhance the teaching of law modules at the Royal Malaysia Police Training Centre. Law-related subjects such as the Penal Code require more than memorisation and procedural recall as they demand deeper understanding, legal reasoning, communication, collaborative problem-solving and practical application. In this regard, Social Constructivism and PBL are particularly relevant in law modules because they promote interactive, reflective and application-oriented learning that can better prepare trainees for the complex realities of policing.

This conceptual paper argues that instructional design in police training should adopt an integrated and module-sensitive approach rather than rely on one dominant learning theory. Social Constructivism and PBL may be more appropriate for law-related modules that require reasoning, discussion and problem-solving, while physical or procedural training may still benefit from Behaviourist-oriented approaches that emphasise repetition, discipline and performance accuracy. Through the proposed theory application presented in Table 2, this paper contributes conceptual insights into how learning theories can be applied more purposefully to strengthen pedagogical effectiveness, develop trainees' analytical, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and support continuous improvement in police training in Malaysia.

Future Research

Future research should examine instructors' views, perceptions and experiences in implementing new pedagogical approaches within police training environments, particularly because student centred and problem-based learning can better prepare police officers to manage the unpredictable nature of day-to-day policing. Future studies should empirically test this integration through qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method designs involving instructors and trainees.

Such studies should examine instructors' readiness, beliefs and pedagogical challenges, as well as trainees' experiences in developing legal understanding, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and decision-making skills. Research should also be expanded across several Royal Malaysia Police Training Centres to compare instructional practices, contextual constraints and implementation readiness. Finally, the proposed conceptual framework should be developed into a structured instructional model or module that can be tested, refined and validated, particularly for law subjects such as the Penal Code.

Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirm that there is no conflict of interest in the preparation and publication of this article. The first author was responsible for developing the main conceptual idea, identifying the research gap, preparing the initial manuscript and constructing the discussion on learning theories, Social Constructivism, Problem-Based Learning approach and police training instructional design. The co-authors contributed to strengthening the theoretical framing, refining the literature review, improving the academic structure of the manuscript and providing critical feedback on the coherence of the arguments. All authors reviewed, revised and approved the final version of the article for submission.

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