

CHAPTER 1

INRODUCTION

1.0 Reading Literature

The Children's Contemporary Literature Programme implemented by the Curriculum Development Centre of Malaysia in the year 2004 contributed immensely to the use of literary genres in Malaysian primary schools. This programme based on prescribed literary texts was introduced at upper primary level as a non-tested component. The rational was that the Literature Component, incorporated in English studies as an intensive reading lesson, would enhance students' proficiency in the language. Through the reading of a prescribed text, the literature programme would enhance students' understanding of the aesthetic aspects of the language content and at the same time, create an enjoyable learning environment in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

According to the Curriculum Development Centre of Malaysia by reading literary texts, students could acquire vocabulary and domain knowledge, and build a background of verbal and factual information that could help them to approach more complex materials related to the same subject. Apart from this, literature too might give students the opportunity to relate their personal

experiences to the content of the subject matter. Hence literary components encourage authentic linguistic communication, and the literary components will also help connect students with the contents on an emotional level.

There are researchers such as Tomlinson (1995) and Bolitho (2003) who try to find ways to apply different teaching methods so that students' second language ability could be enhanced to comprehend the subject matter in school. According to Tomlinson (1995) and Bolitho et al. (2003), one way was to develop literary and language awareness activities which probably could get the students to focus on the language features of a text they had just experienced. One of the most popular methods used to bring about literary and language awareness of texts read in classes is Content-Based Instruction (CBI).

Researchers and scholars consider CBI as an effective powerful method of ESL instruction, especially through the use of literature. This is because language in this approach is used as a medium for content which simultaneously provides the raw material for linguistic development. According to Brinton et al. (1989), CBI integrates a particular content for example, mathematics, science or social studies with second language. Collaborating CBI with literature in Malaysian primary classes might help students to enhance an 'appropriate' understanding of the valuable contents of a literary text. To ensure students' access to forms and meanings of the authentic texts, contexts and discourse of the subject matter that they are learning, CBI must offer both linguistic and conceptual scaffolding (Brinton et al., 1989).

This study looked at the effectiveness of CBI in literature-based reading classes in an urban primary school. The prescribed literary texts had been provided since the Children's Literature Programme had been implemented. This section in this chapter provides a brief background of the study. This chapter also looks at the background of the teaching of English literature in Malaysian schools. It is followed by discussions at secondary level, and the emergence of Children's Contemporary Literature Programme at primary level. This chapter further reports the aims and objectives of the Programme as well as the contemporary practice of teaching and learning of literature in ESL reading classes. Besides, the statement of the problem, the purpose and the significance of the study, together with the limitations of the study are also discussed.

1.1 The Background of English Literature in Malaysian Schools.

As stated in the English Language Syllabus of the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum "Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah" (KBSM, 2000), English had been a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary school curriculum in line with its status as a second language in Malaysia. The early foundation of literature as a complement to the English Language teaching and learning in Malaysian secondary curriculum and in schools can be traced from 1989. It was perhaps realized by the Ministry of Education that teaching of language and literature might have different goals but "using literature can help to teach language by providing interest, context and variety" (Compendium, 1989: 63).

An extensive reading programme, the English Language Reading Programme (ELRP) had been in existence in Malaysian schools since 1976. In this programme only one third of schools in the country participated as books for the ELRP were bought through school funds. In consideration to the survey, with a sampling size of 15, 054 conducted by academics from several universities in Malaysia, researchers found that Malaysians spent a mean monthly expenditure of RM 10.00 or below on books and magazines (Long et al., 1984: 129). In consideration to the existing ELRP and the survey done in 1984 further efforts were taken to inculcate the reading habit among Malaysians by the Ministry of Education. In 1992 the Class Readers Programme (CRP) was introduced to all secondary schools in the country. One class period was allocated to the use of the class reader out of the total number of periods allocated for English Language in a week through CRP. The aim of CRP was to encourage the reading habit among Malaysian secondary students and to expose them to elements of English Literature through reading. It was believed by the Ministry of Education that CRP would help consolidate skills taught in the ESL curriculum. With the introduction of literature in the ESL curriculum in the form of the small 'I' or 'class readers', the Ministry of Education believed would not only initiate student's interest in literature but would also widen their perception of the world.

1.2 Overview of English Syllabus at Malaysian Secondary Level.

The aim of the English Language Syllabus at secondary level was to extend learner's English Language proficiency for knowledge acquisition, to use in everyday life, and for future workplace needs. The English Syllabus also expects students to understand grammar of the

English language and be able to use it accurately. Students are required to speak internationally intelligible English with correct pronunciation and intonation. In accordance to the aims of the syllabus, it was stated in the English Language Syllabus of the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum, (KBSM, 2000: 1) that

This will enable learners to engage in wider reading of good works for enjoyment and for self-development, will also develop an understanding of other societies, cultures, values and traditions that will contribute to their emotional and spiritual growth.

Through literature students are also expected to fulfil the aims and objectives of the National Philosophy of Education and the Educational Act of 1996, which sought to optimise the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical potential of learners. A range of texts were officially selected and offered by the Ministry of Education as part of the secondary school curriculum's literature component, which covered Malaysian, British, Australian, American and African works. Learners were expected to be able to follow a story-line and understand a poem and to give their own response to literary texts. The English Language Curriculum for Secondary schools (KBSM), states that

The English Language curriculum is developed in line with the way English is used in society in everyday life, when interacting with people, when accessing information and when understanding and responding to literary works (KBSM, 2000: 2).

Together with the above curriculum expectations, the language use was also highlighted, and included to relate the relevance of language use with literature. The three areas of language use were:

1. Interpersonal Language Use.
2. Informational Language Use
3. Aesthetic Language Use.

Language for interpersonal purposes was aimed at enabling learners to collaborate with people to do certain things. Language for informational purposes was to enable learners to use language to obtain, process, and give information. Finally language for aesthetic purposes was to enable learners to enjoy literary texts at the level suited to their language and also to express themselves creatively with emotions and values of extra-linguistic phenomena.

The learning outcomes for the three areas of language use required learners to perform tasks and achieve outcomes both in oral and written form. The Language Content of the English Language Curriculum comprises the sound system, grammar and the text in the literature component. The learning outcomes of the Language Content prepared learners to meet the challenges of the real world by focusing on language use in society which lead the learners in preparation for the real world. Thus, literature classes were meant to utilise the subject matter and incorporate educational emphases to provide rich contexts for language use in second language acquisition. In a week twenty-percent of class time was allocated to the teaching of English through literature, a practice normally followed in all secondary schools. In the year 2000, it was made compulsory for all Form One students in the first year of secondary education to study all six selected texts which consist of three poems and three short stories (see Appendix 3.8).

Though literature exists at secondary level but its effectiveness in enhancing students understanding of both aesthetic and language aspects in literary texts, in the ESL classes were not really appreciated as a tool for developing second language acquisition. In the Malaysian

context when teachers have weak students especially in the ESL classes they are advised by the Curriculum Development Centre to help both pupils and teachers to focus on examination. In such cases, the focus on the examination and the literature component has to take a back seat (Kow, 2007). Rarely did teachers explore the text as a work of art (Allen et al., 1995).

1.3 Children's Contemporary Literature Programme in Primary Schools

The Children's Contemporary Literature Programme was initiated in the year 2003 by the Ministry of Education. In January, 2004 the programme was implemented by the Curriculum Development Centre of Malaysia whereby all Year Four students in primary schools nationwide are to be exposed to two prescribed texts. These texts in the form of storybooks were chosen to cater to all students of different levels of proficiency in English. The following year 2005 to Year Five, and by the year 2006 students of upper primary classes from Year Four to Six were all exposed to six prescribed texts in their ESL literature-based reading classes. The choice of two prescribed texts out of six different titles listed by the Curriculum Development Centre for Year 6 classes were provided to primary schools in different states in the country.

The programme was introduced as an intensive reading programme. Students were required to read and explore in-depth a total of two books a year. Each book was to be read over a period of four months in the classes by students with their second language teachers. Different

titles were recommended for different states in the country by the Curriculum Development Centre based on pedagogy, teachers and students. The goal of the programme was to provide an early beginning and a foundation in literature to young students after the first three years of primary education and to develop an understanding of other societies, cultures, values and traditions that would help them in their emotional and spiritual growth through intensive and shared reading.

1.3.1 The Aims and Objectives of the Children's Literature Programme

The aims and objectives of the Children's Literature Programme at Upper Primary Level were outlined in the Literature Module (2003) (see Appendix 3.7) by the Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, were as follows:

- to help students improve their English through reading simple fiction
- to provide a continuum for the literature component introduced in secondary school
- to create an enjoyable learning environment.

The objectives of the programme were as follows:

- to instil and inculcate the reading habit among students.
- to enrich students' vocabulary and language content.
- to enhance students' thinking skills.

- to promote cultural understanding in the Malaysian context
- to improve English language proficiency of pupils.
- to provide lively, enjoyable and high-interest readings.

While the aims and objectives were as above, the Curriculum Development Centre had listed the benefits of the Literature Programme to the students into three different gains in the Primary School English Syllabus (2004). The first relates to personal and emotional gains where literature gives enjoyment while it enriches student's understanding of themselves and the world around them. It develops imagination and help students make sense of their own experiences and it evokes one's feelings on issues related to life. Next, the learning gains where students benefit by learning new ideas and knowledge which adds to their understanding of concepts. The learning gains also allow students to understand cultural traditions, values and issues in life and help develop self and others. And finally literature programme encourages students to become aware of their audience. The third, the language gains help students develop an awareness of how language works in communication, and develop an understanding of the meaning of the words. It also allows them to experience new ways of using language that bridges the gap between written and spoken language and experience the forms of narratives.

1.4 Teaching and Learning in Literature-Based Reading Classes

In order to carry out the Literature Programme through intensive reading at the upper primary level, teachers were to read the literary text thoroughly with students. They were then to

encourage students to take note of the story-line, characters and message or moral of the story, and encourage the use of portfolios. In this way teachers were given the role of developing second language proficiency and to bring about language and literary awareness through content of the materials being read through simple oral and communicative activities. Hence, teachers had to devise activities suited to their students' proficiency level to create an enjoyable learning environment in their reading classes. In the reading classes at upper primary level the aims and objectives of the lessons conducted were to be fulfilled in accordance with the English Language Reading Skills (3.0), and sub-listed reading skills of the Primary School Curriculum "Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah" (KBSR 2000).

Though the content of the prescribed literary texts were to be taught via intensive reading yet literature would not be a tested component at primary level as it would be at all secondary level. Due to literature being a non-tested component, many Year 6 students probably failed to foresee the relevance to reading a prescribed text over time. They probably failed to foresee literature as a continuum for secondary education. Perhaps focus by ESL teachers at primary level were mainly on language rather than reading literature in order for students to produce good results in UPSR. Moreover, teachers spend all their time coaching weak students on techniques of passing UPSR English Paper for an impressive percentage of A's and passes (Kow, 2007). In such an environment where focus was mostly towards examination orientated lessons, the students in Year 6 reading ESL classes were perhaps deprived of reading a literary text in depth to explore the rich contents of which both aesthetic and language aspects were embedded.

Even if the teachers were in a way exposed to CBI and its benefits yet there seemed to be a common feedback among ESL teachers for not seriously considering reading as an important component in the English Language Syllabus in the Year 6 classes. The reasons given by the English Language teachers and the school authorities were:

- 1) the texts introduced were either too easy or too difficult for the students.
- 2) there was time constrain as all English periods needed to be utilised for the preparation for the national primary school assessments UPSR, which is in the month of September.
- 3) the prescribed text related to foreign cultural context was beyond students' knowledge.
- 4) a general view by English teachers that all students could read in English so there wasn't a need to spend a length of four months to read a text.
- 5) no follow-up through ministry on programme success and implementation as well as confusion among teachers about the the continuity and the importance of the programme in the future.

Keeping the above reasons in mind, a workshop was conducted in 2006 by the English Language Curriculum Unit of the Wilayah Persekutuan State Education Department. 139 ESL teachers attended the 2 days workshop which involved, ways and means of relating reading of the prescribed text, 'Clever Katya' to syllabus requirements and its connection to fulfilling academic objectives and achievements. The reading skills and the objectives involved creative ways of making use of content and creating materials to encourage the exploration of the above

mentioned text. The researcher herself was involved in introducing the creative ideas of utilizing the content in the form of task-based activities to the teachers, and related how the activities can be applied with the syllabus objectives, reading skills, thinking and creative skills and at the same time related how the activities fulfilled the academic objectives and achievement such as the UPSR examination.

From the feedback through observation and open discussion with the teachers it was found that most of them had a positive attitude towards the workshop conducted. They felt that they had gained a lot of ideas on how a single literary text could offer so much to the understanding of both literary and language aspects in accordance to academic and syllabus requirements. They requested for more workshops to be held in future especially in the area of creative ways of utilizing the contents, for second language acquisition.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

Reading literature related to the content could provide essential facts, ideas, and vocabulary in second language acquisition and proficiency. With information gathered through reading literary texts, students could probably acquire necessary factual, cultural and language background, making it possible to competently read and understand the content of the prescribed text.

It is interesting to note that a literary text contains layers of multiple meanings. In this way it could provide possibilities for numerous activities that could trigger the response potential in students who are poor in reading and understanding in the process of acquiring second language through reading. Thus learning a foreign language becomes a process of response (Collie et al., 1987).

In CBI-based curriculum language is the medium of transmitting content and content is the vehicle for learning language (Stroller and Grabe, 1997). This might be crucial especially among Year 6 Malaysian ESL students who are to end their primary education and lead themselves into secondary level where literature has been made compulsory and tested. As such there is a need to look into ways of developing awareness and understanding among students of how the content of a text can be made interesting and meaningful for future academic challenges. Perhaps the effectiveness of CBI in literature-based reading ESL classes in enhancing student's understanding of both literary and language aspects of the text being read among Year Six students, is an issue that not to be taken lightly, and there is a need for investigation.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to determine to what extent the use of Year 6 designed CBI in reading classes using a literary text help students to have an appropriate understanding of the prescribed literary text in both literature and language. Therefore, this study aimed at giving an interpretation of the effectiveness of CBI among students with a prescribed text in the form of

a storybook, associated with the Children's Literature Programme in an urban primary school in Kuala Lumpur.

1.7 Research Questions

The research questions raised in this study were:

1. How effective is content-based instruction in enhancing students' understanding of the aesthetic aspects in a literary text?
2. How effective is content-based instruction in enhancing students' understanding of the language in a literary text?

1.8 The Hypotheses Of the Research

The Hypotheses of the research were as follows:

- 1) The experimental group will not show statistically significant mean difference in their performance in comparison to the control group.
- 2) There will be statistically significant mean difference between the control and experimental group.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in identifying whether or not CBI, based on a prescribed text read was effective in consolidating the Year 6 students' understanding of a literary text. It would be a prevailing issue in ESL literature-classes to evaluate the effectiveness of a prescribed literary text that caters to the needs of the students in second language acquisition through the use of CBI.

This study will help to fulfil the syllabus objectives that is, to enhance the reading skills in English at upper primary level. As the reading skills are enhanced the love for reading, literature and the second language can also be instilled among the students. In other words, once the love for reading, literature and the second language has been instilled the hope of the Children's Contemporary Literature Programme to inculcate the reading habit and promote lifelong reading among students at upper primary level can be achieved.

1.10 Limitation of the Study

The findings of this study have certain limitations. Firstly, the study was carried out in an urban primary school in the district of Kuala Lumpur. Due to time constraint the study was not carried out nationwide in order to give a broader evaluation to the problems faced by the students and teachers in rural schools with regard to CBI.

Secondly, the study was carried out over a few weeks rather than a period of four months, as the school authority that is the headmistress and the head of English Panel did not allow the study to be conducted beyond the few weeks given to the researcher. Therefore the study did not comply with the time allocated by the Ministry of Education for a prescribed literary text to be read intensively over a period of 4 months. Thirdly, the selected school was only using two prescribed texts listed for Kuala Lumpur out of the six literary texts, introduced by the Ministry of Education, in five states nationwide. Therefore, the CBI used in this school based on the choice of the two prescribed literary texts cannot be applied to all the other literary texts and schools in general, nationwide.