CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

Much has been written about the shaping nature of teachers' beliefs in classroom practice. This study explored the relationship between teachers' beliefs and teachers' practices pertaining to vocabulary development. Having investigated the beliefs and practices of three key teacher informants and observed vocabulary teaching during six reading comprehension lessons, I shall in this chapter, attempt to summarize the key findings and discuss their implications.

5.1 Key Findings

This study was an investigation into three teachers' beliefs and practices in a Malaysian school focusing specifically on the area of vocabulary development in reading comprehension lessons to gain insights into teachers' beliefs and determine if these were congruent with their classroom practices. The key findings indicated that there are several differences as well as similarities. In this section the teacher beliefs of Puan Sharifah, Puan Nadia and Miss Ann will be discussed in relation to their practices of teaching vocabulary to their form five students. This section will highlight significant aspects of these beliefs and practices pertaining to these three teachers.

5.1.1 Importance of Vocabulary Teaching

All three-teacher informants believed that vocabulary teaching played a very important role in the learning of a second language especially in reading comprehension lessons. Furthermore, they all agreed that the vocabulary component in language learning was not as difficult to teach in comparison to the grammar or other components. The teachers
in this study revealed various differences about the usefulness of teaching vocabulary in reading comprehension lessons. Despite the fact that they taught vocabulary during reading comprehension lessons, they saw its value as extending beyond facilitating reading. One major difference was Miss Ann’s beliefs in vocabulary teaching, which she viewed as a practical use in students’ daily communication. Puan Sharifah and Puan Nadia on the other hand were more examination oriented. They believed that vocabulary teaching would help upgrade the students’ repertoire and enrich their knowledge in new words, which in turn will help them score better marks during essay writing.

The findings of this study also suggested that the teachers believed that the SMK Bandar Baru Sentul students viewed English as a difficult language and have minimal motivation to learn it. Subsequently, when the Ministry of Education announced that passing English in the government or national examination is no longer one of the requirements for obtaining a certificate; English no longer enjoys the high status it once had in the educational system. Therefore the level of motivation and enthusiasm among students to learn English has dropped. Being unable to attain mastery in vocabulary has been further aggravated and making reading an even greater task.

To shed light on the issues of motivation, studies by Gardner and Lambert (1972), in William (1989), have related in their findings to two basic kinds of motivation, which they call ‘integrative’ (intrinsic motivation) and ‘instrumental’ (extrinsic motivation). The former is distinguished as a learner who has a genuine interest in the second language community. The learner wants to learn the language in order to communicate with natives more satisfactorily and to gain closer contact with them and their culture. These kinds of learners were apparent in Puan Sharifah and Puan Nadia’s classes. Puan Nadia is especially more
interested in how second language can be a useful instrument towards furthering other goals, such as doing well in examinations, thus gaining a necessary qualification or improving employment prospects. This is also true of Miss Ann’s as the topics chosen for her students were well tailored to their needs. Since most students in Malaysia, have a mix of both integrative and instrumental motivation, English is mainly learnt as an international language rather than with reference to a community of English native speakers. Therefore it is not surprising if integrative motivation is not so significant as the learner’s instrumental reasons for wanting to learn the language in Malaysian classrooms is more dominant.

5.1.2 Techniques for Teaching Vocabulary

Studies have indicated that it is the classroom teacher who primarily decides on the teaching techniques suitable for actual classroom learning. In this study, the teachers' practices were examined in relation to the categories of vocabulary teaching identified by Watts (1995): definitional, contextual, organizational/semantic framework, mnemonics, structural and other techniques as described in Chapter Two.

The key beliefs probed of the three teachers namely, Puan Sharifah, Puan Nadia and Miss Ann, revealed that there were some similarities and differences across cases. One major similarity across the beliefs, shared by all three teachers was that they were convinced that language learning should be aided by the use of a dictionary. The teachers believed that at the juncture of difficulty, most students were expected to immediately refer to a dictionary. However sitting at the back of the class allowed the researcher to observe and note that a very small number of students referred to dictionaries. Most of the students waited for the answers while only a handful actually referred to their dictionaries.
Although one may argue that the text itself may be viewed as a guide to the meanings of unknown words, teachers and students will need information for more productive purposes, such as essay writing. The dictionary may be the only help available. This study unfolds through investigation that the teachers' beliefs place dictionaries as of prime importance in ESL language learning. However, in reality, during practically all the classroom observation, the researcher failed to observe the maximum use of dictionaries. In any language learning situation, it is not only important that an ESL student keeps a dictionary handy but choosing the right dictionary is very important too. The use of bilingual dictionaries as suggested by Gethin and Gunnemark (1996), has been a useful aid to second language learning.

5.1.3 Phase During Which Vocabulary is Taught

During Puan Sharifah’s, Puan Nadia’s and Miss Ann’s actual classroom practices, there were sometimes a congruence and sometimes a difference across cases. Among them were the conclusion that most of the vocabulary taught by all three teachers featured during the pre-reading phase of the lesson. Generally, studies have found that pre-teaching vocabulary has a significant effect on comprehension and to ensure success, teachers should be aware of the comprehension strategies designed to help nonnative readers to become interactive readers. However, pre-teaching vocabulary may be of doubtful value as claimed by Nation and Coady as cited in Carter and Carthy (1988). Pre-teaching vocabulary may result in the discouragement of strategies such as guessing, or ignoring unknown words, as readily accessing meaning requires attention. Vocabulary instruction observed during the classroom practice in this study indicated that the new words occurred primarily as a pre-
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reading activity. In any case if vocabulary instruction occurred as a post-reading activity, it typically involved completion of exercises specifically designed to provide practice with the new vocabulary items as revealed in Puan Sharifah and Puan Nadia’s classes.

This study concludes that during most of the observations the teachers used text completion (cloze) or multiple choice questions at the end of the lessons. These may prove effective tools of assessment type measurement when assessing vocabulary at the end of the lesson. The effective use of the vocabulary taught in natural speech was given little attention and in some classes, not witnessed at all. Although the teachers in this study believe that vocabulary acquisition is crucial in reading competence, the reality of their practice displayed otherwise. This may be due to the fact that the teachers’ objectives when teaching reading comprehension were for students to merely be able to answer various comprehension questions as closely as possible drawing from the text to ensure maximum marks are obtained in examinations as the students in SMK Bandar Baru Sentul were weak in the language.

5.1.4 Role of Teacher During Vocabulary Teaching

All three teachers believed that their role was that of a facilitator in vocabulary teaching. However, during the observations, the researcher discovered otherwise. The three teachers were the ‘life wires’ in their respective classrooms. They dominated the lessons. Therefore, this study concluded no congruence between the teachers’ beliefs of their role as facilitator as the students were observed rarely exchanging information with one another independent of the teacher. The teacher usually led the students into a discussion with her. To ensure talk the teacher would ask more questions to elicit answers with hope of starting a
discussion. However, rarely, the verbal interaction surrounding the word characterized by sufficient length and degree of student involvement could be considered a discussion. After each question posed by the teacher, the most frequent occurrence was for a student to respond with a full or partial meaning of the target word. The teacher then repeated the student’s definition in the student’s own words and proceeded by adding more information. The other students almost always joined the exchange only after being asked or called upon by the teacher. On only a few occasions did the student initiate entrance into the conversation by volunteering information. Nevertheless, all three-teacher informants kept up the verbal discourse despite their beliefs pertaining to the students’ background.

During the interview sessions the teacher informants blamed the deteriorating level of competence and language proficiency in ESL to the lack of motivation and initiative amongst the students. However, despite the fact that the teachers were aware of the language ability and proficiency level of the SMK Bandar Baru Sentul students, these teachers made great efforts keeping the talk in the classes going. Besides keeping in mind the fact that most of the SMK Bandar Baru Sentul students do not come from English speaking backgrounds, a strong pattern of verbal interaction between the teacher and the students emerged from the data. There was a clearly defined method for beginning to talk about new words that was consistent across classrooms. The discourse began with the question posed by the teacher such as “Does anybody know what [the target word] means?” or “What does [the target word] mean?” In most cases the questions posed by the teachers were presented to the group, rather than the individual. This question then usually initiated talk about the target word.
5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The insights from this study indicate that the main congruence between the teachers' beliefs and practices of Puan Sharifah, Puan Nadia and Miss Ann showed some similarities, besides difference, that may help shed some light for aspiring novice teachers and teachers in service. As a result of the insights obtained by the researcher, the following are some implications to three relevant groups of ESL education: ESL teachers, to shed light on some pedagogical implications useful during classroom practices; ESL curriculum developers, to highlight various directions for the production of materials; and ESL teacher educators, to enhance pre-service training.

5.2.1 Implication for the Teachers

It can be concluded from this study that in reality, teachers plan their lesson by visualizing the particular class and specific target of students they are about to teach rather than basing their objectives on teacher training programmes and teaching routines. This indicates that the teachers' beliefs, assumptions and levels of awareness may change according to the experience gained in teaching a particular class rather then the number of years in service. Therefore it is crucial for the teachers to consider what is successful in their teaching so that they are aware of what they can draw for future lessons. Teachers should be more reflective of their practices so that these real life experiences can shape the development of their teaching.

Teachers should be aware of the theories that are the foundation to better reading. The theories of reading are classified to two groups of processing strategies which are, firstly, the use of effective bottom-up processing mode and secondly, the top-down processing mode.
Typically ESL learners are poor decoders since their vocabulary knowledge is weak while, at the same time, they are already literate in their mother tongue, and are familiar with top-down processing.

Teachers may use learner-initiated vocabulary to increase learners’ word power. As suggested by Palmberg in Kral (1994) learners’ receptive and productive word power may be increased by making them aware of the possible available associational links that exist between words. For example, students may be asked to arrange words into nouns, adjectives, or verbs into groups of words that rhyme with one another, similar to their mother tongue, words that they think they would need in the near future or words that are new to them. This may help make vocabulary learning and practice as enjoyable for the learners.

During classroom practice, trying to deduce the meaning of unknown words from the text is one valuable strategy in understanding language, and so is dictionary use. However, it is only by repeated exposure that a word can enter a person’s active vocabulary, whether in first or subsequent acquisition. Teachers may also promote the use of bilingual dictionaries. (Gethin and Gunnemark (1996), recommended that) students learning English as a second or foreign language should use a bilingual dictionary. They suggest that through a bilingual dictionary the word in the student’s own language will immediately summon up the idea of a particular reality; there will be no barriers in the way (p. 105).

5.2.2 Implication for the Curriculum Developers

Curriculum developers need to be aware that students come from a wide range of backgrounds. Therefore, the use of language for different purposes by these students needs to be catered to accordingly. Hence curriculum developers need to be aware of this fact when
designing the curriculum with specific focus on the teaching and learning of vocabulary. The need for a whole range of various teaching techniques in vocabulary during reading comprehension lessons should be offered in the form of activities not only to match the teachers' beliefs but to also cater for individual students' needs.

The following are some examples of strategies that can be included in materials production. A student-centered method to enhance vocabulary teaching and learning as suggested by Carter and Mc Rae (1996), is through the usefulness of a vocabulary notebook. Through it learners can become aware of how many words they wish to consider passive, and how much active. Using quotations as memory aids can be encouraged here. The evaluation of lexical choice and the discussion of why one word is used rather than another, which the learner might use, is a vital awareness-raising exercise in the appreciation of lexical variety may be included in the notebook..

5.2.3 Implication for the Teacher Educators

The development of beliefs over time is the teachers' long-term comprehension of different contexts for teaching which is difficult to predict, control or influence. Therefore teacher educators should not routinize teaching or teach teachers recipe-like pedagogical methods, which could be closely monitored and regulated. Furthermore, trying to impose, change or shape teachers' beliefs would mean causing teachers and prospective teachers become less reflective and self-conscious of their beliefs.

In view of the teaching of vocabulary, teacher educators may teach novice teachers using a self-reflective form proposed by Richards (1995). This checklist is recommended for novice teachers after each micro or macro teaching lesson during their classroom or mock
practices. This will give them an avenue for deliberate reflection upon their beliefs against their practices.

5.3 Conclusion

The main insights were that there are congruences and discrepancies between teacher beliefs and practices. For example, the three teacher informants upheld the role of the dictionary in vocabulary development, at the same time saw themselves as facilitators used a limited variety of techniques while teaching. Furthermore, techniques used in teaching vocabulary mainly revolved around three major techniques, namely, definitional, contextual and tapping on students’ prior knowledge. Mainly these techniques were chosen by the teachers based on their experience with their particular classes and what they believed was ‘good’ for their students. Perhaps it is an indication that years of experience may be less influential than the deliberate reflection. Teaching cannot be treated as behaviour separate from the reasoning on which it is based. To understand teaching, we must look at how it is conceived, at the thinking on which it is based.

Ultimately this study concludes a mixed degree of congruence between the three teacher informants’ professed beliefs and their practices. This may be explained as follows. Beliefs are declared at the outset before actual lessons, but actual practices during lessons are carried out drawing from on-the-spot teacher thinking and decision making. As the process of teaching passes through three conceptions of teaching, from the scientific-based, theory-based and the value-based thinking to art/craft, teaching cannot be treated as behaviour separate from the reasoning on which it is based (Freeman and Richards, 1993). Therefore, teachers are encouraged to think philosophically about the reasoning, which underlies their
teaching, and hold on to their professed beliefs in relation to the teaching and learning of ESL. Deliberate reflection to understand teaching is urged irrespective of teaching experience to help shape and develop ESL in general and of vocabulary teaching and learning in particular so that classroom practices are ultimately responsive to the real-life needs of students.