

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

One of the major concerns of Form 1 English teachers is the decline in students' achievement in reading and writing. An area of particular concern is the topic on description of places of interest in the Form 1 syllabus item. This particular area is considered more difficult for ESL students than learning other aspects in the English Language because they have the inability to describe explicit descriptions of places even when it is in their mother tongue.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the selected Form 1 students were able to read and write descriptions of places of interest accurately using the materials designed by the researcher. The materials in the module comprise of three units which incorporate teaching, reading, and writing activities on the descriptions of places of interest based on a three-week lesson.

The Form 1 students chosen for this research are from S.M.K. Section 9 in Shah Alam. S.M.K. Section 9 is a unique school with a modern-designed building in the middle of the urban Shah Alam. True to its name, the school is situated in Section 9, a section which is well-known for being the commercial center of Shah Alam.

This school is unique because, besides its modern-looking building, it is also a pioneer project of the government, called "Sekolah Projek Sinar". This

means that the primary and secondary school share the same ground as well as other common facilities such as the school field and the staff car park.

Since it was only established in 1997, there are 30 classes ranging from Form 1 to Form 3 in this school. The school started with nine Form 1 classes in 1997 (now, these Form 1 students are in Form 3) and has build up the other 2 forms (Form 2 and Form 3) after 3 years. Eight classes are allocated for Form 1, 13 classes for Form 2 and 9 classes for Form 3. The total number of students in this co-ed school is approximately 1151 students. This means that an average size class can accommodate about 35 students or more.

Nearly half of the students who study here have parents who work as professionals such as architects, lawyers, doctors and engineers. Another one third of the student population here are from the nearby police and air-force base where their parents work as police officers and military air-force officers.

All in all, the ability of the students in the English Language subject is commendable as most of the students in S.M.K. Section 9, Shah Alam are able to communicate quite well with the teachers as well as to other students in the English language. This is probably because of their family background where most of their parents studied overseas for their tertiary education and therefore creating an environment where they speak English to their children at home. Therefore, these children have more than enough practice of the English language at home.

1.2 Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to design a module for teaching Form 1 students based on one of the units in the KBSM syllabus that is to read and write descriptions of places of interest. This module consists of a three-week lesson plan which is approximately 600 minutes (10 hours).

It is observed that these students did not perform well when the teacher decided to use the textbook as a mean of teaching and carrying out reading and writing activities on the descriptions of places of interest. The students seemed unmotivated by the textbook's design of activities as they felt that the activities were too dull, rigid and formal. The module designed by the researcher is to improve the ability of these students in the specified area as it is different from the activity designed in the textbook. It is also a change in the usual and routine textbook work that the students were used to doing.

The significance of this research is for English teachers to be aware of students' motivation and interests towards learning the language. Students need constant exciting and interesting ways in learning the language proficiently so that they are able to use it communicatively.

One of the English teacher's tasks is to design specific modules for different levels of difficulties in the English Language KBSM syllabus in order to achieve this objective successfully.

1.3 Review of Related Literature

The fact that these students are weak in reading and writing descriptions, particularly on places of interest, the researcher should consider a few things when designing materials.

According to Nunan (1988), the first thing that a material designer should consider is that “the materials should be clearly linked to the curriculum they serve”. This means that when designing materials, one cannot design without a proper guideline. Without the curriculum guideline, the materials designed would not be suitable to students as it does not have appropriate objectives. If the goals and objectives are clearly stated, the students learning the materials might not have a definite direction in learning the subject and this might cause some confusion to these students.

Nunan (1988) also stated that the materials designed should be authentic in terms of text and task. This is because when students learn in class, the language that they use is in a formal context. While learning the language, students cannot escape the formal use of the language as they are in the classroom. Hence, it is very important for them to focus on the formal aspect of the language. However, students should also be taught to be able to interact outside the classroom. When they are out in the real world, they would have a problem as most people do not use the formal way when they speak English. If, however, the text and task are designed to be authentic in nature, the students might be able to “replicate or rehearse the communicative behaviors outside the classroom” (Nunan, 1988).

Also, when designing materials for the students, one should keep in mind that the materials need to be “**magic**” according to Lai (1985). “**Magic**” is the acronym of “*memorable*”, “*accurate*”, “*graded*”, “*interesting*” and “*contextualized*”. All these characteristics are important when designing materials as they make lessons meaningful to the students while learning the English language.

“**M**” is for “memorable” meaning that the materials should “aid memory when taught” (Lai, 1985). So, when the teacher teaches a subject, having materials to aid students learning and memorizing the subject help both the students and teacher.

“**A**” according to Lai, is for “accurate” as “the learners are taught to use the target language accurately” (Lai, 1985). When students learn a language appropriately, “accuracy is embedded in it” (Lai, 1985). To assist accurate usage in the language, one way to do it is to separate language items that are easily confused by the students so that it would be easier for them to learn the language.

Lai also stated in her article that the acronym “**G**” is for “graded” so that “students will go from simple to complex materials as the sense of achievement is a very important motivating factor in learning and to the student” (Lai, 1985). When students completed their simple tasks successfully, they would want to achieve a greater sense of achievement. Therefore, they will move on to a more complex material so that they can feel that they are ready and able to do a more difficult task. If they are right – that is, if they can do the task easily, they would

feel that they have already achieved something more difficult than the ones they did before. This helps the students to be motivated in learning the language.

The acronym “**I**” according to Lai (1985) is for “interesting”. This means that most of the students felt unmotivated when they learn boring and dull materials. In order to make these students learn more than they had, the materials used while learning should be fun and interesting in order to capture their attention throughout the lesson.

“**C**” is for “contextualized”, meaning that the language forms should be taught in a proper context, for example in real-life situations, to integrate the forms and functions of the language. When language is taught in context, learning is enhanced through the whole concept introduced.

Materials that have local color and feel are also important according to Lee, 1994. She says that these kinds of materials have advantages as students are more familiar and are able to respond faster to it than other materials. She also found out that when students use these materials they are able to interact with it in a more meaningful way because they can “cull from their own experiences and cultural heritage” (Lee, 1994). Therefore, the students would not be surprised to see a new and different way of life or culture being portrayed in the materials. These kinds of materials also help the students with the sense of security as the students would not deal with too many unknown words at one go thus, making it easier for them to learn the language. These materials also help the students to develop a sense of cultural awareness and a sense of pride in their own unique culture identity. This means that the students need not learn new cultures or

change their ideas when they learn new languages, they can learn from their own culture when they are learning other languages.

When designing materials for students, one is recommended to use authentic materials for teaching writing skills. Drabble (1981) considered using authentic materials – “materials which are drawn from real-life situations, and use the language that a member of the target language-speaking group would apply to that same situation”, (Drabble, 1981).

According to Drabble (1981), authentic materials can be derived from newspapers, magazines, advertisements, pamphlets, leaflets, brochures and many everyday items that can be found written in the target language – in this case English. To summarize, authentic materials should be:

“(a) about a topic which is relevant and interesting to the students; (b) used to present a task which is at the right level of difficulty for the students, and (c) in a form which can easily be presented to the students.”

(Drabble, 1981)

The researcher has to keep in mind all these characteristics of material design to develop a comprehensive and meaningful module for the students. In short, when one is designing materials for the students to learn from, the materials should have certain objectives and goals not for it to be “fun” all the time. It would be a plus if the materials are to have the “**MAGIC**” rationale with a little local color and feel. Putting all these characteristics together, the researcher

designed a module which consists of activities for Form 1 students on the descriptions of places of interest.

1.4 Subjects

The sample for this study were selected from the total of 295 Form 1 students at S.M.K. Section 9, Shah Alam. These students were chosen out of the eight classes of Form 1 in this school. Form 1 Cekal, known as the best class in Form 1 has 34 students in the class where 21 students are girls (17 Malay, 2 Chinese and 2 Indian) and the remaining 13 are boys (8 Malay and 5 Chinese).

Form 1 Cekal is highly reputed among other Form 1 students because nearly half of the students achieved 5A's in their UPSR examination. Form 1 Cekal's average level of proficiency in the English Language is high intermediate (with the exception of three to four students who are in the lower intermediate to the low level of English language proficiency).

About 22 students (64.7%) in this class achieved an "A" in their English Language subject for their previous Standard 6 UPSR examination. Another 8 students (23.5%) obtained a "B" while the other 4 students (11.8%) earned a "C" or a "D" in their UPSR English examination. None of these students failed their UPSR English Language examination.

1.5 Instrument

The 34 students are to use a module which is a three-week English Language lesson designed by the researcher in order to find out whether they are able to learn better using the module rather than their usual textbook. Upon completing teaching descriptions of places of interest, the students are to complete several reading and writing tasks. The success or the failure of the students to complete the task would determine whether the students have grasped the concept of describing places of interest effectively or not.

1.6 Procedure

Prior to doing the activities in the module designed by the researcher, the students have learned describing places of interest from the textbook. These students were given exercises from the English textbook (Appendix 8) and it is seen that they did not grasp the skill of describing places of interest successfully.

A module was designed by the researcher based on the result of the students' work from the textbook to see the big or small difference in the students' achievement after they completed the module. If no improvement is seen in the students' performance, the researcher would make amendments to the module in order to create a better one for the students. If there is a vast improvement in the students' performance, no amendments will be made.