

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 BACKGROUND

The recent implementation of the *Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris* (MBMMBI) [To Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and To Strengthen English] program in all Year 1 classrooms in Malaysia has triggered great interest in the teaching and learning of English in the Malaysian classrooms. Initiated in response to the widely-publicised discontinuation of Teaching Mathematics and Science in English policy, also known as the English in the Teaching of Mathematics and Science (ETeMS) program, MBMMBI strives to “produce Malaysians who are proficient in BM and English in all aspects of communication be it in their daily conversations, when conducting official matters and seeking knowledge or in their respective careers.” (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2010a, p.18)

MBMMBI is also to be utilised in resolving the dispute between progress-driven Malaysians who wish to see greater use of English in schools so as to equip learners with the proficiency needed to compete in a globalised world and nationalist Malaysians who see an increased use of English in schools as a threat to the national language, Bahasa Malaysia. MBMMBI addresses both issues by making changes to the pedagogy used in the teaching of both English and Bahasa Malaysia.

One of the important pedagogical implications of MBMMBI is the introduction of the new syllabus, *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* (KSSR) [Primary School Standard Curriculum], the implementation of which sees the inclusion of a new component, Language Arts, in the English subject. Building upon the notion of literature developing literacy, Language Arts activities are those which cultivate learners' interest in short stories, poetry and music. To promote the development of literacy, Language Arts will see the use of aesthetic reading materials, including contemporary literature for children and graded readers, as described below in the MBMMBI handbook (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2010a):

Entertainment in learning – The Language Arts Model emphasises on entertaining learning aspect and language appreciation. Attractive and effective language teaching and learning is done through activities such as singing, jazz chants, choral speaking, drama, music and other teaching aids. Aesthetic reading material such as Children's Contemporary Literature, Structured Preliminary Reading materials and Extensive Reading are provided to expose students to various English genres. (p.15)

The emphasis on children's literature as part of the MBMMBI program is a recognition of stories as valuable language learning tools and extensive reading as valuable language learning strategy. Story reading has long been regarded as an important language-learning mechanism and that engagement with story reading accelerates one's development of language. This is especially so among young learners who have just begun to explore the world of literacy. For example, in a study of how storybook reading affects pre-schoolers' acquisition of novel words, Justice, Meier & Walpole (2005) were able to draw positive links between storybook reading and word learning among weak readers. In the study, it was noted that teacher's elaboration on target words facilitated word gains among the participants.

As a language educator myself, experience has shown that young learners who find joy in reading story books and poems usually develop their general proficiency and competency in the language at an accelerated pace. However, while the efforts made by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOEM) to promote extensive reading and encouraging young readers' engagement with children's literature are timely - especially with the growing concerns that Malaysians do not read enough - the efforts are not without challenges.

Two issues that could serve as stumbling blocks are comprehensibility and cultural-relevance of reading materials. The first issue, comprehensibility, is bound to affect learners in the rural areas of Malaysia where English is minimally used and where contact with the language is generally confined to the English classroom. Engagement with literature outside the classroom, while not entirely unheard of, is a journey of many challenges, especially for young readers who have just begun to explore the world of literacy.

In this exploration, readers not only have to manoeuvre stories which are written in a foreign language, but also stories which are situated in culturally-unfamiliar settings. In response to these challenges, this study explores the issues of text comprehensibility and cultural relevance. As this study is to be viewed through the lenses of the Malaysian schooling system, it is important that a brief background of the system be provided here. The following section provides a brief explanation of the Malaysian primary education system and the teaching of English in the Malaysian primary school.

## 1.1 THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN MALAYSIA

The primary school system in Malaysia is made up of two types of schools, each characterised mainly by the language used as the main medium of instruction. National schools, also known as *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (SK) [National School], use Malay as the main medium of instruction while national-type schools – also known as *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan* (SJK)[National-Type School] - use Mandarin or Tamil.

SK and SJK schools are also characterised by pupils' ethnicity. The majority of pupils in SJK (Chinese) schools and SJK (Tamil) schools are Chinese and Indians respectively. In many SK schools across Peninsular Malaysia, Malay pupils make up the majority of the population. In Sabah and Sarawak, the majority of pupils in some SK schools are of local indigenous descent, such as Iban, Kadazan, Dusun, Bajau and Kelabit.

In SK schools, two languages are taught as part of the core curriculum, English and Malay. Mandarin and Tamil are offered in selected schools as part of the Pupil's Own Language (POL) subject and the classes are conducted once a week outside regular schooling hours. In SJK schools, Mandarin or Tamil is included in the core syllabus and is taught during regular schooling hours.

Pupils in SK and SJK schools attend school from the age of 7 (Year One) until 12 (Year Six). In Year Six, all pupils sit for the *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR)[Primary School Assessment Test]. In SK schools, pupils are tested on five subjects. They are *Bahasa Malaysia Pemahaman* [Malay Language Comprehension], *Bahasa Malaysia Penulisan* [Malay Language Composition], English, Mathematics and Science.

In SJK schools, pupils sit for seven papers: *Bahasa Malaysia Pemahaman*, *Bahasa Malaysia Penulisan*, Mandarin/Tamil Comprehension, Mandarin/Tamil Composition, English, Mathematics and Science. As SJK schools include an additional language in the curriculum, the time allocated for the teaching of all subjects is reduced. The chart below shows a comparison of the time allocated for the teaching of English and other language subjects in SK and SJK schools per week, when KSSR is implemented in 2011, beginning with Level 1 classes:

Table 1.1 Time allocated for the teaching of English in SK and SJK schools.

<b>Level</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>SJK</b>
English	300 minutes	150 minutes
Bahasa Malaysia (Malay Language)	360 minutes	300 minutes
Mandarin / Tamil		360 minutes

Source: Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2010(b)

The limited teaching and learning hours for English in SJK schools is a concern to many English teachers in SJK schools. With the implementation of the new syllabus and the subsequent focus on extensive reading, pupils are to be encouraged to independently engage in contemporary children's literature, even outside the regular schooling hours.

It is therefore imperative that English teachers in SJK schools take measures to ensure that pupils engaging in extensive reading are not held back by text comprehensibility. In the next section, text comprehensibility is further examined from the 'meaning' angle. It discusses where meaning is situated in a text and how it is transferred to the reader.

## 1.2 READING COMPREHENSION: WHERE ARE MEANINGS HIDDEN?

In his book, *Cultural Analysis of Texts*, Lehtonen (2000) addressed two schools of thoughts influencing the study of reading comprehension. The first states meaning as existing within the text itself, in which case meaning is definite and rigid. This school of thought sees meanings as solid objects with a degree of tangibility. Meanings are situated in texts and readers are able to grasp the meanings in a text solely by referring to the text itself. Such a view holds texts themselves responsible for delivering meanings and readers act as discoverers of those meanings.

In contrast, the second school of thought views meaning as existing within the act of reading. Meanings do not exist as singular, definite objects but instead as multiple meaning potentials. This school of thought places great importance on the interaction between texts, contexts and readers, allowing meanings to be negotiated and re-examined, depending on the prior experiences of readers and the contexts in which the texts are read. While the first school of thought sees meaning as definite, the second school of thought posits that every text is subjected to varied interpretations.

The present study subscribes to the second school of thought as the study acknowledges the role of existing knowledge of culture in determining comprehension of texts. In fact, modern-day beliefs of reading comprehension are largely influenced by the notion of meaning-making as the result of an interaction between the reader, text and context. Griffith, Beach, Ruan & Dunn (2008) for example, described comprehension as “looking between the lines, seeing how the meaning one is building fits with one’s own experiences and with what one knows, thinking about the ideas, and making some sort of judgement about them” (p.116).

This implies an elusive nature of meanings, one which could only be grasped when readers bring together their past experiences and use them to make evaluations of the texts read. Catts (2009) further underscored this interactive nature of comprehension by assigning the term ‘coherence building’ to comprehension. The author described meaning making as developing coherent mental models. The mental models are created as a result of readers’ prior knowledge merging with new information gathered from texts. Comprehension, therefore, is “not simply remembering the content that is presented, but rather involves combining this content with past knowledge... “(p.179). Meaning is believed to materialise as readers combine previously gathered knowledge with new information from a text read.

Griffith, Beach, Ruan & Dunn (2008) adopted Duchan’s (2004; in Griffith, Beach, Ruan & Dunn, 2008) database metaphor to explain the roles of background knowledge in reading comprehension. Information useful to meaning-making is stored in databases. Three types of databases are described, the first being one which keeps ideas and concepts such as food, people or feelings. The second database stores familiar events and experiences such as going to the beach. The third database is where information about different text types are kept, for example fables, informational texts or recipes are kept. During the process of meaning making, readers actively extract information from these databases. The ease with which one retrieves information from these databases affects one’s comprehension of texts.

Culturally-acquired prior knowledge then plays a significant role in filling up the databases described by Griffith et.al. One’s engagement with cultural artefacts and practices provide the mental frameworks that are to be used when one constructs meanings out of texts.

Beyond offering an explanation of how meanings come to be, the studies mentioned above draw attention to the essential role of prior knowledge in delivering meanings. When children read, they attempt to utilise prior knowledge as points of reference, regardless of how scarce the prior knowledge may be.

### **1.2.1 Variables Affecting Reading Comprehension**

Apart from prior knowledge of culture, there are other factors responsible for variability in comprehension level. These other variables need to be addressed as they each play a role in a reading process. Early childhood researchers Griffith, Beach, Ruan & Dunn (2008) listed reading strategies, language proficiency and background knowledge as important prerequisites of reading comprehension. When describing the roles of reading strategies, Griffith et.al suggest that arriving at a meaning is made more efficient when readers possess skills such as predicting, connecting parts of texts, connecting texts to prior knowledge and experiences, making mental pictures, drawing inferences based on information in texts, asking questions to clarify, summarizing and monitoring one's own understanding.

McNamara (2009) agreed with Giffith et.al. and further pointed out that reading strategies provide “the means to tackle complex problems in more efficient ways, and with practice, the strategies lead to skills that become more automatic and quick over time”(p.34). In reference to reading comprehension, McNamara's definition of strategies underscore the important problem-solving role that reading strategies play in the process of comprehending a text. Other parts of reading skills such as fluency, word recognition and understanding of grammatical structure also affect learners' comprehension (Snow & Sweet, 2003).



In the ESL classroom, vocabulary size in the target language also remains as one of the most important factors affecting reading comprehension. Burgoyne, Kelly née Hutchinson, Whiteley & Spooner (2009) tested monolingual and second language learners of English on comprehension skills and found that the poor reading skills in children learning ESL are largely due to the lack of vocabulary rather than the lack of decoding skills. As such, to compensate for the limited vocabulary, reading strategies that focus on lexical processing are crucial for optimum comprehension. Young readers with poor comprehension skills are unable to integrate information in texts therefore not able to infer meanings of new vocabulary (Cain, Oakhill & Elbro (2003).

Fraser (1999) for example examined the effects of three lexical processing strategies on second language reading comprehension: consulting a dictionary, ignoring unknown words and making inferences. While the drawbacks of over-reliance on dictionaries are acknowledged, the author maintained that consulting a dictionary over unknown words does increase comprehension, especially when applied with other lexical processing strategies. Other reading strategies that have proven to improve comprehension of second language texts are previewing and a discussion of keyword prior to reading (O'Donnell, Weber & McLaughlin, 2003).

For second language learners too, it has also been found the mastery of reading skills in native language has a positive impact on target language reading comprehension (Nikolov, & Csapó, 2010). Young learners who have learned to read in the native language have acquired the ability to draw links between printed symbols and spoken words (Linse, 2007).

This gives them the tools for meeting the first demand of reading comprehension, that is extracting. Cross-linguistic transfers are also possible with young learners who have mastered some reading skills in their native language (Garcia, 2003). This allows learners to transfer reading strategies from their native language to the second language.

In essence, learners with a good grasp of strategic reading strategies possess comprehension skills that allow them to comprehend more sophisticated written texts as they would be able to use the strategies to assist them in making inferences and drawing conclusions, leading to a better, more accurate understanding of the written text. In their study, Cain, Oakhill & Elbro (2003) reasoned that young readers with poor comprehension skills are unable to integrate information in texts and are therefore not able to infer meanings of new vocabulary.

It has also been suggested that oral language proficiency affects one's performance in reading comprehension. Readers who have developed verbal competency in the target language are usually found to engage with the meanings in written texts more effectively. This is consistent with the findings from other studies (e.g. Asfaha, Beckman, Kurvers & Kroon, 2009) which have shown a link between general language proficiency and reading comprehension.

An efficient use of working memory capacity has also been found to assist reading comprehension. Perfetti & Lesgold (1979) observed that "skilled reading does not imply a larger working memory capacity, but rather, a more effective use of this capacity" (p.59).

The researchers suggested that working memory is applied efficiently when readers demonstrate adequate long-term memory, especially those of vocabulary and knowledge of the world, good speed and automation of decoding and efficiency of reading strategies. Similar findings were reported by Suchey (2009) who found that oral reading fluency correlates with performance in comprehension tests. Building one's comprehension skills, therefore, would involve increasing the vocabulary and knowledge of the world in one's long-term memory and ensuring that one is able to retrieve the information efficiently when the need arises.

Text genre has also been found to affect comprehension. Best, Floyd & McNamara (2008) examined the effects of world knowledge and decoding skills on third graders' comprehension of narrative and expository texts. Results indicated that the participants comprehended the narrative texts better than the expository texts. However, it was also found that world knowledge and decoding skills had different effects on each genre. The narrative texts appeared to be most influenced by decoding skills while the expository texts were most influenced by world knowledge.

To conclude, comprehension of texts is the result of a reader's interaction with the text read. Meaning is constructed using various skills and strategies. In order for the construction of meaning to take place, different variables come into play. The variables discussed in this section are culturally-acquired prior knowledge, reading skills and strategies, lexical processing strategies, oral language proficiency, working memory capacity and text genre. Of all these variables, lack of familiarity with the cultural settings in English language storybooks is one of the pressing issues affecting text comprehensibility in the Malaysian primary school context. To further explain how this came to be, the following section explains the roles of culture in language learning.

### 1.3 CULTURE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

In his book *Cultural Foundations of Education*, philosopher Brameld (1957) purposefully paid tribute to anthropologist Edward B. Tylor who defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871; in Brameld, 1957). This definition of culture underscores the wide-ranging entities that make up culture. Culture, as this definition proposes, is not only about those elements which are tangible and immediately observable, but also includes internal values and viewpoints which are reflected through one’s actions.

More than three decades later, Pai (1990) gave similar - albeit more contemporary - definitions of cultures. Summing up culture as a system of norms and controls, Pai (1990) defined culture as a “pattern of knowledge, skills, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs, as well as material artefacts, produced by a human society and transmitted from one generation to another” (p.21). Having established themselves in a society over a period of time, the patterns of knowledge, skills, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs form norms and standards that help to arrange human behaviours.

Culture may also be defined as being static or dynamic in nature. Culture, when defined as being static, is accepted as being made up of artefacts and institutions that are tangible and may be visually recorded. However, the danger in viewing culture as static is that it is equivalent to limiting cultural knowledge to mere unchanging facts (Liddicoat, 2005).

A dynamic view of culture on the other hand, sees cultural knowledge as “sets of variable practices in which people engage in order to live their lives and which are continually created and recreated by participants in interaction” (Liddicoat, 2005, p.31). Culture, from this point of view, consists of processes and activities engaged in by a group of people, rather than of mere tangible objects.

In the context of learning, Pai (1990) argued that culture may be seen as a map, an essential guide for understanding the needs and expectations of learners. The map may contain explicit information about learners’ skills, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs – their system of norms and controls – which are highly valuable to teachers. Metaphorically, with this map, English language teachers in multi-cultural English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms will be able to locate the key to the culturally-responsive classroom. In the literal sense, having this map will allow language teachers in multi-cultural settings to understand and respond not only to variations in learners’ home languages but also to learners’ varied viewpoints, practices and beliefs.

While there have been many views proposing the superiority of one view of culture over the other, a recognition of both allows language teachers to be more fully committed to culturally-responsive pedagogy. In fact, in the teaching of language, an acknowledgement of all static and dynamic aspects of culture – the norms and values as well as the artefacts and institutions - will assist teachers in addressing the cultural barriers to language learning.

In a study of cross-cultural barriers to second language reading comprehension, Lin (2004) highlighted culturally-developed internal barriers that leave an impact on one's second language comprehension: thought patterns, values, outlook on individualism and independence. Using Chinese learners of English as examples, the author drew attention to the ways cultural background affect second language learners' approach to reading comprehension. In an ESL classroom, another prominent barrier to second language acquisition is the rigid, pre-determined sets of behaviours expected out of learners, which according to Xu & Drame (2008) is biased against multi-ethnic, multi-cultural learners. The situation is further aggravated by teachers who hold the Deficit Model point of view with regards to English language learners, assuming that learners who have difficulties in picking up English are learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (Holmes, Rutledge & Gauthier, 2009).

In the Malaysian context, the need for a culturally-relevant pedagogy in the teaching of English, or any language for that matter, is crucial. Most of our classrooms are multi-racial and learners come into class with a large spectrum of cultural beliefs and experiences. The following discussion takes a closer look into culturally-relevant pedagogy and how it affects the teaching of a second language reading comprehension.

### **1.3.1 Culturally-Relevant Pedagogy**

A culturally-responsive pedagogy is especially important in the second language classroom, which involves working with two or more cultures simultaneously (Scarino, 2008). Irvine (2010) aptly defined culturally-responsive pedagogy as “effective teaching in culturally diverse classrooms” (p.57).

The goal of culturally-responsive pedagogy is self-explanatory and that is to respond to the unique needs and interests of culturally-diverse learners, which in turn, is expected to improve the academic performance of culturally-diverse learners (Howard, 2003). Culturally-responsive pedagogy includes teaching methods which recognize the roles that culture plays on learning. Culturally-responsive pedagogy influences not only teaching approaches and materials but also the dynamics of classroom interaction and teacher expectations of learners.

Evidence of the benefits that culturally-responsive pedagogy brings to the multicultural classroom is aplenty. Conrad, Gong, Sipp & Wright (2004) mediated a culturally-responsive pedagogy in three second-grade classrooms through the use of text talk. Guiding reading sessions with open-ended questions that draw attention to the cultural elements in the books read, the researchers found that participants' responses grew to be more insightful. A similar response was noted by Hefflin (2002), who recorded changes such as more meaningful and sophisticated responses, increasingly perceptive journal entries and elaborate post-reading discussions as outcomes of a culturally-relevant pedagogy.

To translate culturally-relevant pedagogy into real classroom practice, Howard (2003) suggested a reflective teaching practice. Rationalizing that reflective actions make teachers aware of their own prejudices and stereotypical views of cultural groups and practices, the author listed the steps necessary for quality reflections that bring about the best of culturally-relevant pedagogy.

The steps include making sure that teachers are aware of the complex nature of race, ethnicity and gender, that they realize the never-ending nature of reflection and that they recognize that teaching is not politically neutral. The remaining two steps are to be explicit about one's reflections and to avoid reductive notions of culture.

An important pillar of culturally-relevant pedagogy is the selection of culturally-appropriate teaching and learning materials. In the ESL classroom, texts which respond to classroom cultural diversity should come hand in hand with culturally-appropriate teaching methods and strategies. In the next section, the roles of culturally-diverse texts are further discussed.

### **1.3.2 Culturally-Diverse Texts**

In second language learning, the teaching of culture, both native and non-native, is inevitable because texts are culturally-embedded. Lehtonen (2000) highlighted the intricacies of narration when he noted that stories are loaded with judgments. Every sentence is a conscious choice made by authors, shaped by none other than cultural viewpoint and prior experiences. To fully comprehend culture laden narrative texts, one needs access to the cultural practices and viewpoints of the specific culture.

Many studies on reading materials have also highlighted the inadequacy of some language-learning materials in responding to the unique cultural needs and backgrounds of English language learners (Wu & Coady, 2010; Otlowski, 2003). In fact, criticisms have been made upon language learning materials which either represent very little of minority learners' native cultures or are laden with stereotypical representations of the minority (Baker, 2003).



Al-Hazza & Bucher (2008) studied the predicaments of Arab American teenagers whose cultural identities were marred by the 9/11 attacks. The participants shared how very few stories depicting their native culture are available in English and how that led to an assumption that when one is in a foreign land, one is supposed to be reading stories about foreign people and not of anyone one could culturally identify with. The participants also spoke of the terrorist-stereotype thrown against them after 9/11, an unfortunate post-attack effect that could have been avoided if the curriculum had reflected better culturally-diverse practices.

The under-representation of non-mainstream cultures in language learning materials and children's literature also raises the question of fairness. Are language-learners from non-Western worlds biased against when assessed using culture-laden texts about ranches and rodeos? Are reading tests made more difficult to learners from minority cultural groups because of the lack of cultural relevance?

Of course, this in no way suggests that there is a staggering lack of culturally-diverse reading materials for English language learners. English storybooks set in diverse societies are visible in most libraries and bookstores. Culturally-diverse storybooks are also getting more recognition from the literary world. For example, *A Single Shard* (Park, 2001) a tale set in Korea and *Kira-Kira* (Kadohata, 2004), a story of a Japanese American family won the Newberry Medal prize in 2002 and 2005 respectively.

This recognition is a positive response to the growing number of studies linking culturally-diverse reading materials to inter-cultural tolerance. Morgan (2009) for instance, maintained that the use of culturally-diverse picturebook biographies fosters "positive cross-cultural attitudes" (p.225).

Young readers, when exposed to stories and struggles of heroes from different cultural groups appear to demonstrate better intercultural tolerance. This tolerance may manifest as reduced stereotyping and prejudicial views, which according to Al-Hazza & Bucher (2008), begins with the introduction of multicultural children's literature in the elementary classroom itself.

However, while the studies may have pointed out a valid concern, they discuss little of an acceptable level of cultural responsiveness. What is an acceptable level of cultural responsiveness? How relevant is a culturally-relevant text? Ebe (2010) provided an answer to this with a cultural-relevance rubric. Developed for language teachers, the rubric consists of eight items deemed influential in setting the cultural relevance of a text. They are ethnicity of characters, setting, year, age of main characters, gender of main characters, language or dialect used, genre, genre familiarity and background experiences.

While it can be argued that language teachers – those with an awareness of culturally-diverse pedagogy, at least – could highlight misrepresentations and discuss stereotypes in culture-laden texts, it has to be reminded that learners' interaction with such texts are not merely confined to the classroom walls. In fact, texts met during independent reading are of wider topics and do not necessarily have multi-racial readers as intended readers. Culture-laden narrative texts may contain cultural beliefs and practices foreign to the reader and even elements that contradict a reader's own cultural system. Without the neutral, culturally-conscious language teacher to explain, the readers must find ways to make sense of the cultural elements and bring themselves to a state of equilibrium again.

#### **1.4 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

With the immediate implementation of the KSSR in Malaysian schools, English teachers are expected to push for a reading culture that extends beyond the classroom walls. To establish this, it is proposed that children's literature be given more importance in the classroom. Short stories and picture books are to be made available and accessible for children's enjoyment.

However, in the Malaysian multi-cultural context, access to English language stories and picture books that are culturally-relevant continues to pose as challenge. With a good majority of quality reading materials reflecting the cultural values and artefacts of societies where English is the native language, ESL learners have to navigate through foreign turfs as they try to make sense of the stories read.

This, inevitably, leads to the issue of comprehension. Given the roles of cultural schemata in assisting comprehension, it is a concern that ESL learners may face comprehension blocks when reading culture-laden stories situated in foreign cultures. The situation is further aggravated in communities where low socio-economic background denies ESL learners the opportunity to learn about foreign cultures and acquire their cultural schemata. As a result of poor comprehension, ESL teachers may observe that learners are not motivated to read and even perform poorly in reading assessments.

## **1.5 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

In view of the fact that storybooks situated in Western cultures take dominance of the contemporary children's literature market, it is imperative that ESL practitioners understand the effects of culturally-acquired prior knowledge on reading comprehension. Beyond merely assuming that stories situated in foreign cultures are 'difficult' for young children, ESL practitioners ought to be equipped with the knowledge of what causes the difficulties and how young learners actually address the difficulties. This study attempts to provide answers to this.

The first purpose of this study is to establish the effects of culturally-acquired prior knowledge on the reading comprehension of young ESL learners in a semi-urban Tamil vernacular school in Selangor, Malaysia, as assessed through comprehension tests and story retelling. The results would serve to inform ESL practitioners the extent to which young ESL learners independently comprehend culture-laden narrative texts situated in familiar and unfamiliar cultural settings.

The second purpose is to check if comprehension gaps are observed when young ESL learners retell culturally-laden narrative texts and the extent to which the gaps stem from the lack of cultural knowledge. The third purpose is more pedagogical in nature and that is to check the value of story retelling as a form of comprehension assessment, especially in assessing the comprehension of culture-laden narrative texts.

## **1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The purposes of the study can be formulated as the following research questions:

1. To what extent are young ESL learners able to comprehend narrative texts situated in native and non-native cultures as demonstrated through their ability in answering comprehension questions and retelling stories?
2. What inaccuracies are demonstrated in the retelling assessment and to what extent can they be attributed to the lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge?
3. In assessing comprehension of culture-laden narrative texts, how does performance in story retelling correlate with performance in comprehension test?

## **1.7 DEFINITIONS**

### **1.7.1 Native and Non-Native Cultures**

For the purpose of this research, ‘culture’ is defined as the ‘behaviour, attitudes and the social knowledge that people use to interpret experience’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Native and non-native cultures are defined within the scope of one’s cultural heritage. Native culture is defined as the culture in which one was raised in and in which most of one’s early years socialisation took place. By this definition, a non-native culture is a culture in which one was not raised, but may be acquired through observation. This includes non-native cultures that are acquired through socialisation in the later years, as in the case of migrants.

### **1.7.2 Narrative Texts**

In this study, narrative texts are defined as written stories that are usually read for pleasure. The texts contain setting, plot and characters. The narrative texts used in this study are excerpts from short stories written for children.

### **1.7.3 Prior Knowledge**

For the purpose of this study, prior knowledge is defined as ‘the sum of an individual’s learning and experiences’ (Mariotti, 2010, p.87). Culturally-acquired prior knowledge in this study refers to ‘culturally-bound prior knowledge’ (Garth-McCullough (2008, p.7). More specifically, it represents the awareness and understanding of the values, traditions, customs as well as artefacts of a particular culture.

### **1.7.4 Comprehension**

In this study, “comprehension” is operationally defined as the scores achieved in three comprehension tests and three story retelling tasks. The comprehension tests consist of two types of questions, text-explicit and text-implicit. The former questions assess readers’ understanding of facts, vocabulary, dates, times and locations and are usually presented in a straightforward manner (Day & Park 2005). The latter questions, on the other hand, are questions that require readers to merge information presented in various parts of the text with readers’ own existing knowledge.

## **1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

In the Malaysian school context, although substantial research has been conducted in the field of reading comprehension, few attempts have been made to link culturally-acquired prior knowledge and comprehension of culture-laden texts. There also appears to be a noticeable gap in the specific area of cultural relevance of text and its impact on the teaching of English as a second language in multicultural Malaysia. This study responds to this gap by providing an insight into the effects of cultural familiarity on the reading comprehension level of young ESL learners in a vernacular school in Malaysia.

More importantly however, findings from this study may be immediately used to inform English teachers in primary schools across the country as the MBMMBI program kicks off and the new syllabus for the teaching of English comes into effect. As extensive reading and the use of children's literature are emphasized in the new syllabus, results from the study will not only assist teachers in selecting appropriate children's literature to be used in the classroom but also in planning for effective reading lessons.

## **1.9 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

As this was a single-school study conducted in a Tamil vernacular school, only participants from a single ethnic background were used. The choice to conduct the research with only those from the Malaysian Indian background was largely motivated by logistics reasons. The researcher is serving as an English teacher in the Tamil vernacular school in which the research took place.

Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of studies conducted among pupils of national-type schools in the country. While it is likely that similar results would be reflected if the exact study is conducted with participants from a different ethnic background - with all the materials and procedures to be kept the same except for the native narrative text - it is premature to make such a conclusion without actually executing the research. The small number of participants in the study also limits the quantitative data collected. It was not possible to increase the number of participants due to the lack of candidates with the proficiency level necessary for the research in the school where the researcher worked.

This research is situated upon the belief that children's literature serves as effective reading comprehension material. As Section 2.5 of Chapter 2 will show, contemporary children's literature comprises of texts in various forms, for example short stories, picturebooks and poetry. In many primary schools, picturebooks are possibly the most widely-read type of children's literature as the combination of textual print and visual print appeals to young children.

However, since only three texts were used in this study, the quantitative findings from this study do not hold the statistical weight to be generalized with other studies. A repeated measures design using more texts was initially considered, but due to the large amount of data expected from participants, especially in the comprehension tests and the retelling sessions, such a design was rejected on the grounds that it would likely cause test fatigue.



## **1.10 CONCLUSION**

In the teaching of English as a second language, the role of culturally-acquired prior knowledge is significant. Culture-laden storybooks written by native speakers of English may contain artefacts and beliefs that are culturally-distant to second language young learners. In schools, teachers may be able to guide learners should comprehension gaps occur due to lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge. However, when young learners engage in independent reading, comprehending a culture-laden text places great strains on the learners if the culture upon which the text is set upon is unfamiliar to the learner.

In this introductory chapter, this issue was discussed in relation to the teaching of English as a second language in Malaysia. The introduction of the new English syllabus which calls for the use of children's literature in the English classroom and the development of a culture that is supportive of independent reading among young learners were first discussed.

They were then followed by an overview of the teaching of English in Malaysia. The rationale for conducting the study in a national-type school was discussed in relation to the introduction of the new English syllabus as prescribed by the KSSR. In the following chapter, a literature review of past studies related to the present study is presented.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

Reading comprehension is a complex process involving different levels of processing and is dependent on numerous factors. This study focuses on the cultural knowledge factor and attempts to draw links between level of culturally-acquired prior knowledge and familiarity and level of comprehension of culture-laden narrative texts, as demonstrated through a comprehension test and a story retelling assessment. In this chapter, a review of literature pertaining to reading comprehension and the roles that cultural knowledge play in helping readers comprehend texts is presented. The chapter begins with a discussion on the different views of what ‘reading’ encompasses.

#### **2.1 VIEWS ON READING**

In any study pertaining to reading, such as this one, it is pertinent to revisit the two major views on reading: the narrow view as well as the broad view. The two views place importance on different aspects of reading and studies on reading typically reflect either one of the two views. Researchers conducting studies on reading would be able to deliver a more cohesive study when the view upon which the study is situated is reflected clearly.

The narrow view of reading defines reading solely as the process of recognising the sounds and shapes of words. It “restricts the scope of reading to word recognition alone” Kamhi (2009, p.176 ). Learning how to read, according to the narrow view, entails a systematic process of assigning the correct sounds to the correct word shapes. Readers then refer to their internal vocabulary to further assign the correct meanings to the sounds made. The broad view, however, adds the comprehension dimension to reading. Reading, according to the broad view, involves not only the process of deciding how joint letters sound, but also includes comprehension processes such as identifying themes, main topic and characters.

Responding to the issues of reading failure in schools and the factors accountable for poor reading performance in standardized reading assessments, Kamhi (2009) suggested that the narrow view of reading be adopted, on grounds that it simplifies reading into a process that is teachable and easily quantifiable. Decoding is a skill that can be taught, whereas comprehension skills are mostly acquired as learners interact with texts.

Kamhi (2009) also pointed out that most reading assessments have not been accurate as they subscribe to the broad view of reading, subsequently failing to differentiate learners’ competency in decoding texts from their competency in comprehending texts. Focusing solely on decoding, however, would allow teachers to make fairer assessments of learners’ reading skills. Comprehension, Kamhi suggested, should be taught through content subjects.

According to Kamhi, (2009) ‘rejecting the broad view of reading and embracing the narrow view of reading’ (p.176) will lead to better reading instructions and more accurate assessments of reading performance. The researcher responds specifically to the issue of misdiagnosis of reading ability. Subscribing to the narrow view of reading allows teachers to focus on word recognition alone. This means that reading ability is assessed from a child’s ability to verbally decode written texts.

Following Kamhi’s argument for the case of the narrow view of reading, Catts (2009) pointed out that Kamhi’s opinion on the narrow view of reading actually leads to the broad view of reading by placing significant focus on the need for specific instructions for teaching comprehension skills. While Kamhi acknowledged that comprehension remains an important goal of literacy, it was suggested that instead of collating the teaching of comprehension skills together with the teaching of decoding skills, comprehension skills be taught in domain-specific content areas (p.176).

In summary, both the narrow and broad views of reading recognize comprehension as an important educational goal. The difference between the narrow view and the broad view is that the former places comprehension outside the scope of reading. This study subscribes to Catts’ (2009) notion that the ‘narrow view of reading is actually a broad view of comprehension’ (p.181). The following section explains the processes involved in reading comprehension as suggested by the broad view of reading.

## **2.2 READING COMPREHENSION AS EXTRACTION AND CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING**

Flippo (2003) described reading comprehension as “the process by which we read and get information and/or meaning from text; it is also the result (product) of our reading of text” (p.113). Here, reading comprehension is viewed as both a process and a product. While the product of comprehension may easily be demonstrated, such as through the ability to answer comprehension questions and the ability to retell what was read earlier, the process by which the product is realised is somewhat more elusive.

Although Flippo’s (2003) definition of reading comprehension does not explicitly address decoding as part of reading comprehension, it also does not appear to reject the significance of decoding in reading comprehension. By referring to reading comprehension as a process through which meaning is acquired, the author opens reading comprehension to all possible means of meaning acquisition. The means may include assigning the correct sound to a group of letters put together (decoding) and then assigning meanings to the sound identified (comprehension).

Similarly, Snow & Sweet (2003) cited both decoding and comprehension in their definition of reading. They explained the process of reading comprehension as “simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning” (p.1). In what appears to be the process of decoding, readers ‘extract’ by assigning sounds to printed words and ‘construct’ by formulating an idea with the information presented.

In other words, readers ‘extract’ when they pronounce the word ‘cow’ as */kau/* and ‘construct’ when they successfully associate the word with the four-legged farm animal that produces milk. The latter process, which requires readers to associate the sound with a particular mental representation, is known as comprehension.

The idea of extraction and construction was also applied by Grellet (1981) who defined comprehension as extracting required information and processing it in an efficient manner. While this definition may be specific to reading for factual information, it still highlights the active role that readers play in making meaning out of the texts read.

Reading comprehension as the result of extraction and construction of meaning may be explained by the Schema Theory. In the following section, Schema Theory is used as a framework for discussing the development of reading comprehension. More specifically, the discussion describes the processes of extraction and construction of meaning, as prescribed by Schema Theory.

### **2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION: SCHEMA THEORY**

How reading comprehension develops has been the subject of contemplation by many linguists and educational researchers. One influential theory explaining the development of reading is Schema Theory. The reader, as Schema Theory proposes, constructs the meaning of texts by analysing texts and putting the analysis within his or her own existing frames of knowledge, otherwise known as schemata (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

In the process of reading, comprehension occurs when learners are able to appropriately select and activate existing schemata. Non-comprehension happens when the existing schemata is insufficient to process the new information gained. In this situation, the existing schemata has to be modified, resulting in new schemata. (Heilman, Blair & Rupley, 1998).

Schemata develops as learners gain new experiences. For example, as young learners encounter a new learning experience, such as witnessing the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly, their schemata of life cycle goes through modifications to include this new realization that some animals and insects go through metamorphosis. The new, improved schemata is then stored and retrieved later – as prior knowledge – when they read, for instance, Eric Carle’s (1969) *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

Schemata may also be acquired through formal schooling. School experience increases learners’ knowledge of various subjects subsequently developing their schemata of a wide-range of topics. Content subjects like Science, Geography and History are all responsible for helping readers develop content-subject schemata, which will then be applied as readers construct meanings in a reading activity. Knowledge of the life cycle of caterpillars gathered from Science for example, would enable young readers to effectively construct meanings when reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* while prior knowledge of American presidents would facilitate readers’ understanding of *So You Want to Be President?* (St. George & Small, 2000). Prior knowledge of popular folk tales also plays an important role, as in the understanding of *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001), a tongue-in-cheek adaptation of the classic tale of three little pigs whose houses, except for the last pig, were blown off by a hungry wolf.

While schooling experience helps learners to acquire content schemata, engagement with society helps learners to develop cultural schemata. Such means of developing one's schemata is explained by cultural theory. Carrell & Eisterhold (1983) wrote about the cultural specificity of prior knowledge, suggesting that our assortment of prior knowledge reflect the cultural setting in which we socialise. This is because as we grow, our schemata is shaped by the beliefs, values and behaviours observed within our culture.

It is then natural that one's schemata advances when exposure to culture is maximised. This is especially evident in children learning a non-native language and culture, such as in the case of migrant children whose struggles include the need to acquire new cultural artefacts, verbal routines, social expectations and rules of appropriate usage of language. In a study of migrant learners' acculturation in America, Saville-Troike (1985) noted that adequate access to cultural input is crucial in helping second language learners acquire the target culture. Young migrant learners make quick progress in acculturation when American customs, traditions, holidays and values are explicitly taught. Apart from locality, culturally-acquired prior knowledge is also related to one's class membership, ethnicity, neighbourhood and economic resources (Snow and Sweet, 2003), all of which carve a reader's comprehension of a text. This suggests that differences in prior knowledge exist not just between cultures but also within cultures.

Prior knowledge is actively used as readers attempt to comprehend a text. Hence, under Schema Theory, the development of reading comprehension is largely focused on training readers to effectively engage in their role as active readers. For young learners, Linse (2007) suggested a two-way approach and that is through the use of phonics-based instruction and literature-based instruction.



The teaching of phonics develops extracting skills, helping learners to associate written symbols with their correct sounds and individual meanings. Using literature-based instruction, language teachers assist young readers to construct meanings not just for individual words but also whole texts. The success of the meaning-construction process is dependent on the readers' ability to apply the required schemata.

Given the roles of schemata, it is important that comprehension activities, materials and assessments take readers' schemata into account. McKay (2006) argued that young readers' performance may be affected if they are not allowed to bring their own schemata into play when reading.

Hence, emergent literacy programs usually begin with words which learners are already familiar with, such as those related to family, food, animals and daily activities. Environmental print such as labels and signs are also often used in introducing literacy to young learners. Such familiar texts are more easily decoded and can be made meaningful as they already exist in learners' vocabulary.

Similarly, the use of texts depicting cultural artefacts and practices familiar to readers enable better and quicker decoding of meanings. To effectively construct meanings of texts, readers also need substantial background knowledge of the cultural framework of texts. Therefore, it is crucial that the development of reading comprehension skills includes strategies for activating and applying background knowledge and personal experiences when reading. Ketchum (2006) for instance developed a 3R reading model, "Read Research Relate", to be used as strategies for analysing African francophone poems.

The participants, who were not native to African culture, had to conduct basic researches on the cultural components of African culture before attempting to comprehend the poems. The training was found to successfully develop learners' background knowledge of the foreign texts, reduce pre-conceived notions and stereotypical images and bring better understanding of underlying cultural perspectives. These findings point to the importance of awareness and understanding of the cultural framework within a text in facilitating text comprehension. The following section discusses the influences of culturally-acquired prior knowledge on reading comprehension in greater detail.

#### **2.4 INFLUENCES OF CULTURALLY-ACQUIRED PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ON READING COMPREHENSION**

Recent developments in studies of second language reading have suggested a relationship between culturally-acquired prior knowledge and reading comprehension. Culturally-acquired prior knowledge has been found to positively affect one's reading comprehension (e.g. Moteallemi, 2010; Bock 2006). Familiarity with the values, norms and traditions portrayed in a reading text enables readers to process the text more efficiently, possibly because the schemata needed for the processing are already in store. In other words, the readers have built and stored substantial amounts of culturally-acquired prior knowledge necessary for understanding the text.

Such effects of culturally-acquired prior knowledge were also reported in a cross-cultural study on reading comprehension conducted by Steffensen, Joag-Dev & Anderson (1979). In this study, two groups of participants, Indians in India and Americans in America, read two texts, one describing a typical Indian wedding and the other describing a typical American wedding. The study was conducted in participants' native countries and participants' exposure to the wedding traditions of the opposite group was recorded as minimal.

Results from the study revealed that participants recalled more idea units from texts situated in their native culture. The study also illustrated the possibility of misinterpretation when readers try to comprehend texts situated in a culture they are not familiar with. In this study, what enabled participants to recall idea units from native texts more efficiently is their culturally-derived prior knowledge of the text.

Culturally-derived prior knowledge has also been a subject of interest for researchers gathering information about factors affecting comprehension. In a study of the differences in moral theme comprehension of European-based stories, Bock (2006) found that comprehension of moral themes is dependent on readers' level of cultural knowledge. Native and European American readers from Grades 4-8 participated in the study by reading eight short stories from the European cultural orientation. Measurements of theme comprehension, moral reasoning, reading comprehension, perceived teacher support and perceived peer support were recorded.

Analysis of results showed that European American participants demonstrated better grasp of the story themes compared to the Native American participants. Bock (2006) suggested that the differences in story theme comprehension could be attributed to ethnicity and cultural orientation. Native American participants and European American participants may have used their cultural knowledge to navigate the texts and make interpretations of the texts read. Since the texts are situated in the European culture, the European American participants had more of the culturally-acquired prior knowledge necessary for the correct interpretation of the moral themes for each text.

A positive correlation between culturally-bound knowledge and comprehension was similarly recorded by Garth-McCullough (2008), who suggested that high cultural knowledge assists learners in comprehending narrative texts. In her study, 117 African American high school students were given six short stories from different cultural orientations – African America, Chinese American and European American – before having their comprehension of each story assessed. An inventory of participants' reading skills was taken and participants' prior knowledge of the three cultures was measured before the reading assignment. The measurements were then used to draw relationships between reading skills, culturally-bound prior knowledge and reading comprehension. The results confirmed that the level of culturally-bound prior knowledge correlates positively with one's comprehension of a text.

More interestingly however, is the dominance of prior-knowledge over reading abilities in participants with low and average reading skills. Participants with low reading abilities but high level of cultural knowledge scored better in the comprehension test as compared to participants with average reading abilities but low level of cultural knowledge.

The effects of cultural influences on reading comprehension are not limited to the schemata developed from being in ethnic cultural groups alone. Being part of a social group also leaves an impact on our reading comprehension, as illustrated by Ketrick-Gillespie (2007). Youths from three institutions - a juvenile detention centre, an inner-city middle school and a suburban middle school – all of whom had similar ethnic backgrounds but socialised in groups with observable different socio-economic backgrounds and viewpoints, read a text with controversial elements in it. When asked to point out the moral of the story, the participants' responses showed differences in opinion between the three groups. The fact that the participants responded similarly to the members of their own group despite the tests being conducted individually highlights the effects of socially-derived schema on reading comprehension and narrative interpretation.

While the studies mentioned above used native speakers of English as participants, studies conducted with non-native speakers of English have also yielded similar findings. Cultural knowledge has been found to facilitate second language reading comprehension. Singaraveloo (2004), for example, studied the roles of culturally-acquired prior knowledge in the general ESL reading comprehension of Form 6 students. Using the pretest-posttest method, the researcher found that culturally-acquired prior knowledge does facilitate comprehension of culture-laden texts. It was also discovered that culturally-acquired prior knowledge facilitates participants' ability to answer textually-implicit and scriptually-implicit comprehension questions.

Such findings concur with the findings from a research conducted by Safiah Osman (1985) in which cultural schemata was tested as a variable in determining reading comprehension ability of second language learners. Two culturally distinct groups were used, Malay and Chinese, both reading two of the same texts. One text was set within the Malay cultural framework while the other was set within the Chinese cultural framework. Results from the study suggested that existing schemata helped to improve comprehension.

It was also noted that existing schemata assisted participants in answering text-implicit questions the most. Interestingly, it was also discovered that in answering text-implicit questions, prior knowledge of culture plays a greater part than reading ability, suggesting that even without high reading ability, readers are able to comprehend the text-implicit information in a text if they have the necessary cultural schemata. This is very much similar to the findings reported in Garth-McCullough (2008), as discussed earlier.

For second language learners, the multiple layers of meanings in texts with cultural elements serve as challenges to readers. Unravelling each layer requires readers to draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences – if any – with the culture dealt with. It is hardly surprising then, that readers may have different interpretations and appear to comprehend such texts differently.

Leung (2003) studied the responses of four Chinese-American students to a narrative text with cross-cultural Western-Chinese elements. The four participants all shared the same ethnicity but have been in America for different lengths of time and have had different amounts of exposure to their native culture. All participants were found to construct unique ideas of Chinese culture. Despite being part of the same ethnic community, the schemata used by the participants to comprehend and interpret the cultural elements in the text differed.

The issue of cultural elements in texts - more specifically how the elements could be misinterpreted - does affect the choice of materials used in second language classrooms. Given the cultural load in literary texts – contemporary children’s literature included – it is understandable that some teachers are cautious when assessing the suitability of literary works that were written with native speakers as the intended readers. Tasneen (2010) for example, studied the use of literary texts in an international school in Bangkok and found lack of cultural familiarity as one of the major hurdles that readers face when attempting the texts. This may pose as a dilemma for language teachers who are caught between giving learners access to authentic literary works and works that are linguistically and culturally accessible.

Although numerous studies have been carried out to test the effects of culturally-acquired prior knowledge on second language reading comprehension, most have only looked at comprehension levels as measured by comprehension test scores and retelling scores. Very few have taken a step further to analyse the comprehension errors made by young readers, leaving a noticeable gap in the area of second language reading comprehension. Little has also been researched on the types of comprehension errors made by young readers and the factors that could have contributed to the errors.

There is also a lack of studies linking culturally-acquired prior knowledge and second language reading comprehension conducted specifically in the Malaysian setting, especially with young learners from the national-type vernacular schools. With the implementation of the new KSSR and the subsequent increase in the use of children's literature in the classroom, it becomes more imperative that studies be carried out to help teachers maximise the potentials of children's literature in the classroom. These potentials are discussed in the following section.

## **2.5 CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS LANGUAGE LEARNING RESOURCE**

Children's literature is perhaps the most valuable language-learning resource for young children. The ability to engage young learners in new adventures and discoveries promotes children's literature as an essential language learning tool. What sets children's literature apart from other types of literary works is that it has its primary audience, the children, clearly articulated in its plot, themes and characters.

Hunt (1999), in his definition of children's literature, highlighted the central focus on children as the primary target readers of children's literature. While acknowledging that some of the world's greatest literary works are enjoyed by both children and adults, Hunt (1999) defined children's literature as "books read by, especially suitable for, or especially satisfying for, members of the group currently defined as children" (Hunt, 1999, p.6).



Being works written for a population of such vast differences in proficiency levels and reading skills – the differences in reading skills and interest between a child of five and a child of ten are greater than those between an adult of thirty and an adult of thirty-five – children’s literature do not necessarily employ written text as its main tool of communication. Picturebooks, for example use verbal and picture narratives, ranging from predominantly verbal narratives to predominantly pictorial narratives (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000). Given the use of both verbal and pictorial communication, picturebooks are especially demanding as they require learners to deconstruct messages in words as well as visuals.

Verbal or pictorial, picturebooks are only a branch of children’s literature. Other genres include traditional literature, chapter books, fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Of these genres, traditional literature is possibly the most accessible genre, it being part of one’s culture and to which we are exposed from a young age. Lukens (2007) defined traditional literature as coming from the ordinary person, an anonymous storyteller, and existing orally rather than in writing. Traditional literature has distinct features, including universally recognizable settings such as ‘the land far far away’, a brief closing such as ‘and they lived happily ever after’ and progressive plots.

Lukens (2007) also stated that the characters in traditional literature are often flat and take on stereotypical roles, for example the patient, soft spoken protagonist Bawang Merah as opposed to the harsh, evil antagonist Bawang Putih in the Malaysian traditional story of *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*. Despite being culturally-specific, traditional literature across different cultures often bear universal themes.

When discussing children's literature, it is important that focus is given to the role of setting. This is because the growth of multiculturalism has made traditional literature from different cultures more accessible. For example, in this era of globalization, stories set in Africa and ancient Egypt are commonly read by young learners in South East Asia. Such stories not only portray foreign physical settings but also foreign cultural settings.

Lukens (2007) argued that while the physical setting in traditional literature is often vague - describing stories as taking place in a kingdom, a village or a town - the cultural setting within which the story is set upon is usually specific and detailed. Prior knowledge of cultural setting is therefore crucial when reading culture-laden stories.

For this particular reason, the use of culturally-diverse children's literature is encouraged in the classroom. There is a need to diversify the narrative texts used in the second language classroom as young learners need to be exposed to materials beyond those from the cultural world of the target language.

In fact, children's literature set within young readers' native culture may elicit a higher level of interest from the readers. Conner (2009) drew this link between culturally-responsive reading materials and learners' level of interest in a case study on the impact of the Sowing S.E.E.D.S. program. Results from the study – gathered from interviews with the teachers involved, classroom observations and scores from a standardized test – showed that culturally-relevant teaching approaches and materials generate a higher level of interest in learners, leading to higher motivation to do well academically. Multi-cultural children's literature may also be effectively used as tools to help immigrant children learn the new, mainstream culture, as described by Akrofi, Swafford, Janisch, Liu & Durrington (2008).

An anticipated challenge in the use of multicultural children's literature in the language classroom ironically lies in the diversity of the texts themselves. Lehtonen (2000) noted that when writing stories, authors often have intended readers who are well-versed with the contexts upon which the stories are set. The contexts may be familiar to the intended group but appear completely foreign to another. Here, the role of culturally-acquired prior knowledge is greatly emphasized. Those who possess the cultural schemata necessary for understanding the contexts will find the stories easier to comprehend compared to those who know very little of the contexts in which the stories are set.

For Asian learners of English, learning the language also means embarking on a journey into many foreign cultures, but predominantly, the Western culture. This is because Asian culture in children's literature written in English is under represented and mostly limited to cultures of selected countries such as Japan, Korea, China and India (Yokota, 2009).

Challenges in comprehension are therefore expected when children's literature from Western countries – mostly written with the native speaker of English in mind – are used in an ESL classroom. In a study of the role of children's literature in the teaching of English in Taiwan, Chang (2008) discovered that most of the reading materials used in the 23 lessons observed are culturally distant and linguistically complex for young Asian readers. The researcher also observed that children's literature written for the first language learner brings little positive impact to the language development of second language learners.

Assessment of comprehension is also another anticipated challenge in the use of children's literature in the second language classroom. The potentials of children's literature in the second language classroom can only be fully exploited if fair and effective assessment systems are used. In the following chapter, story retelling is discussed as a possible way to assess reading comprehension.

## **2.6 STORY RETELLING AS COMPREHENSION ASSESSMENT**

A constant issue in comprehension assessment is the need for an assessment type which goes beyond asking readers to answer comprehension tests. A more authentic assessment or "multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation and attitudes on instructionally-relevant classroom activities" (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996, p.4) is needed to ensure that a true representation of readers' comprehension is made. In the actual classroom, reading assessments are usually made up of testing, teacher observations and written responses (Jia, 2004). Testing is presented in a variety of forms, including vocabulary quizzes, short grammar tests, as well as formal and informal reading comprehension tests.

To address the issue of authenticity, oral retelling is often used to assess reading comprehension (e.g. Montoya, 2008; Nicholas, 2007; Moteallemi, 2010; Romaine, 2009; Cruz de Quiros, 2008 and Seeger, 2009). There are many strategies for conducting oral retelling as a comprehension assessment. O'Malley & Pierce (1996) suggested the use of story maps, describing them as particularly appropriate for ESL and bilingual students who may not be familiar with the structure of a text or who simply may need to sketch their ideas out in writing before beginning to talk about a story or text.

When used with young learners, oral retelling poses many challenges. Quality story retelling requires linguistic knowledge, cognitive organization and regulatory control (Gabig, 2008) of the components that make up a story and to a certain extent, linguistic skills. Young learners with very limited oral language or who lack story retelling techniques may not have the capacity to demonstrate their comprehension through retelling. However, as story retelling is made up of skills, it is possible to gradually develop the skills in young learners. Spencer & Slocum (2010) noted in their study how narrative intervention that involves explicit teaching of story grammar elements of characters, problems, internal responses, actions and consequences through the use of visually attractive materials, active responding activities and instructor support was able to improve the retelling performances of preschoolers.

The type and format of texts used in story retelling have been linked to performance in story retelling. For young readers, retelling assessments appear to work better when narrative texts are used. As opposed to factual texts, narrative texts are easier to comprehend because they have a recognisable story structure (Flippo, 2003). Young readers, after being exposed to story reading, would have built an internal sense of story structure. For readers with low proficiency, texts presented in electronic forms were found to result in an increased performance in oral retelling (Pearman, 2003).

The application of oral retelling is not limited to the domains of comprehension. Klein, Moses & Jean-Baptiste (2010) highlighted the use of retelling in assessing aspects of young learners' general language development such as in the production of complex sentences.

Davis (2007) used story retelling to extract information about learners' construction of the world. The abundance of data yielded from a story retelling session – data which tell us about readers' comprehension of a text, their oral proficiencies as well as their understanding of the world – makes story retelling a favourable assessment techniques in the language classroom.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the narrow and broad views of reading have been discussed. The broad view of reading, which looks at reading as both the decoding of written symbols as well as the construction of meanings of the decoded symbols, is highlighted as the view subscribed to in this study. In this chapter as well, the construction of meaning is linked to Schema Theory, which holds that comprehension is made possible by schemata – otherwise known as prior knowledge- stored in the brain. Cultural schemata or culturally-acquired prior knowledge that we have of cultural artefacts, practices, values and traditions assist in our comprehension of texts.

The chapter then continued with an overview of past studies linking culturally-acquired prior knowledge to reading comprehension, at the end of which two research gaps were identified, the first being the lack of focus on analysis of comprehension errors made by young children and the second being the lack of research conducted in the Malaysian national-type primary school setting. The chapter ended with a discussion of children's literature as a valuable language teaching and learning tool in the second language classroom as well as an overview of the use of story retelling as a tool for assessing comprehension.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. The chapter begins with a discussion on the research design followed by the research questions, theoretical framework and hypotheses set for the study. The materials and instruments used to collect the data are also discussed, followed by a section describing the participants and context in which this study is situated. Finally, the procedures for data collection and data analysis are described.

#### **3.1 DESIGN**

This study employs mixed methods, in which a non-experimental quantitative design is combined with a qualitative design. A similar design was used by Goering & Baker (2010) who studied the effects of dramatic oral reading interventions on reading fluency and comprehension. The quantitative data collected in the study are used to determine the extent to which participants are able to answer comprehension questions and to retell narrative texts situated in native and non-native settings. Quantitative data from the study are also used to determine if story retelling assessment has high or low predictive value of text comprehension. The qualitative data collected from the study is used to describe the inaccuracies that appear in story retellings and the possible reasons for the inaccuracies.

The independent variable in this study is the cultural settings in which the narrative texts are situated while the dependent variable is participants' comprehension test scores and retelling scores. As the independent variable is already in existence and not randomly assigned, the study takes a non-experimental design. The design used for this study is adapted from Garth-McCullough (2008), whose study examined the effects of culturally-acquired prior knowledge on comprehension scores (please see Chapter 2, Section 2.4).

In the study, the participants completed a demographic survey and a prior-knowledge assessment before reading the short stories. The participants then sat for a written comprehension test for each short story before completing a post-test questionnaire on interest level, difficulty level and familiarity. The test scores were then used to draw relationships between level of prior-knowledge and comprehension test scores.

Garth-McCullough (2008) used a repeated measures design, which was necessary as the study looked at within-group variability of participants of different achievement levels. While the overall effects of culturally-acquired prior knowledge were clear cut as shown in the test scores – all participants performed significantly better in the comprehension test for native texts - the differences in the scores between participants were less apparent. A second measurement therefore was necessary in order for the researcher to generate more valid findings on within-group variability in the effects of culturally-acquired prior knowledge on comprehension. The present study, however, does not seek within-group variability. All participants are of similar proficiency levels therefore a repeated-measures design was believed to be unnecessary.



### **3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The aim of this study is to investigate the comprehension levels of young ESL learners when reading narrative texts situated in native and non-native settings. Using cultural setting as the independent variable, the study strives to outline the differences, if there are any, in the extent to which young ESL learners comprehend narrative texts situated in native and non-native settings. The study also investigates the value of story retelling as a method for assessing young ESL learners' comprehension of narrative texts.

The specific research questions are:

1. To what extent are young ESL learners able to comprehend narrative texts situated in native and non-native cultures as demonstrated through their ability in answering comprehension questions and retelling stories?
2. What inaccuracies are demonstrated in the retelling assessment and to what extent can they be attributed to the lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge?
3. In assessing comprehension of culture-laden narrative texts, how does performance in story retelling correlate with performance in comprehension test?

### 3.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is set within the Schema Theory framework. As discussed in Section 2.3 of Chapter 2, from the schema theory perspective, comprehension is assisted by schemata or mental frameworks, upon which new information received is fitted into existing schema. Having accepted new information, the ‘old’ schema will then undergo changes and improvise. Underpinning this study is the belief that culturally-acquired prior knowledge is responsible for participants’ comprehension of narrative texts (Steffensen, Joag-Dev & Anderson, 1979; Bock, 2006; Safiah Osman 1985).

The narrative texts used in this study bear cultural references that would require a certain degree of schemata for efficient comprehension. Based on similar studies that have been conducted in the past (e.g. Garth-McCullough, 2008; Singaraveloo, 2004) differences in comprehension levels are expected, as participants have different levels of culturally- acquired prior knowledge for the native and non-native cultures framing the narrative texts used in this study.

The Schema Theory framework is used in this study mainly for its resilience in answering the all important question of how comprehension occurs when one reads. In a paper discussing the strengths and weaknesses of Schema Theory in present time, McVee, Dunsmore & Gavelek (2005) argued that Schema Theory has always been and is still widely held and used to explain reading processes. In the Malaysian primary school context, the teaching and learning of English is very much grounded by Schema Theory, as evident in the emphasis on drawing upon “constructivism”, that is to “build new knowledge and concepts based on existing knowledge or schema” (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2010(c), p. 14)

### **3.4 HYPOTHESIS**

Proponents of Schema Theory have argued that narrative texts situated in cultural settings familiar to readers are more easily comprehended compared to texts from foreign cultures. Readers attempting texts situated in a culture familiar to them would already be equipped with the schemata required for meaning construction. The first hypothesis grounding this study therefore is that the participants would be able to comprehend and retell the text situated in their native culture better than the texts situated in non-native cultures.

To be able to retell texts, readers not only have to grasp all important parts of the story but also to arrange them in sequential manner and make judgements as to which detail in the story are important and worth mentioning in their retellings. As such, familiarity with the cultural setting and having access to the values and beliefs underpinning a text may be able to help. When readers have solid access to the information about the culture upon which a narrative text is set upon, the information serves as an advantage in their retelling.

On the contrary, when readers have limited exposure to the cultural setting framing a narrative text, it is reasonable to expect gaps in their comprehension, which may be observable in their retellings. Thus, the second hypothesis for this study is that inaccuracies would be observed as participants retell texts situated in non-native cultures.

As discussed in Section 2.6 of Chapter 2, story retelling is an authentic method for assessing comprehension. The potentials of story retelling as the primary formative assessment however, have been little explored. One of the purposes of this study is to explore these potentials. Used to measure comprehension of culturally-laden narrative texts, it is believed that story retelling reveals valid and reliable results that are comparable with results gathered through other instruments such as comprehension tests. The third hypothesis of this study therefore, is that performance in story retelling correlates significantly with performance in comprehension test.

### **3.5 MATERIALS**

In selecting the texts for this study, the most important factor that had to be considered was the level of cultural relevance portrayed in each text. Ebe (2010) provided a valuable checklist for evaluating cultural relevance of texts. The checklist consisted of eight items. They are ethnicity of characters, setting, year the story takes place, age of characters, gender, language or dialect, genre, exposure to this type of text and readers' background experiences. The closer the items match the reader's own experiences - for example, if the ethnicity of the main character is the same as the reader – the more culturally relevant the text is thought to be.

For this study, a procedure for selecting texts was developed using ideas adapted from Akrofi et.al. (2008), who drew up a list of picturebooks with high cultural content to be used as tools for helping immigrant students in the US integrate more effectively with the mainstream culture. The procedure began with a search at places participants mostly turn to for books: school library, public libraries and the Internet. Ebe's (2010) checklist was consistently referred to in the process.

The texts that were finally chosen to be used in this study are excerpts from three short stories from the Indian, Philippine and Great Plains Indian cultural orientations. The short stories are *The Goddess with Her Hands Full* by Vayu Naidu (Naidu, 2000), *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth* by Augie D. Rivera and Jason Moss (Rivera & Moss 2001) and *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* by Tomie dePaola (dePaola, 1988).

Each excerpt contains 20 sentences, with an average number of 186 words per excerpt. In this research, the narrative texts used are excerpts taken from picturebooks, but were presented only in the textual form. To ensure that all three texts are of similar level of difficulty, a Flesch-Kincaid Readability Test was done on all three excerpts. The number of words, sentences, Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Reading grades are shown in Table 3.1. For the full excerpts, please see Appendices A, B and C.

Table 3.1: Description of texts

TEXT	NO .OF WORDS	NO. OF SENTENCES	FLESCH-READING EASE	FLESCH-KINCAID READING GRADE
Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth	178	20	83.2%	3.7
The Goddess with Her Hands Full	181	20	85.0%	3.6
The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush	187	20	84.3%	3.8

*Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth* and *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* are situated in the participants' non-native cultures while *The Goddess with Her Hands Full* is situated in the Malaysian Indian culture. A detailed description of the participants' native culture is given in Section 3.7.

*Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth* is from the Roman Catholic Filipino culture. The story revolves around a boy growing up in a Catholic church. *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* is a Native American legend and revolves around the life of a boy growing up in a Great Plains Indian tribe. In *The Goddess with Her Hands Full*, the story takes place largely in a Hindu temple and describes a boy's observations of the happenings in the temple.

The excerpts all contain culturally-bound references. In *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth*, for example, there is Sister Margarita, a Catholic nun, while in *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*, there is the wise shaman, a spiritual healer and mediator in the Great Plains Indian culture. In *The Goddess with Her Hands Full*, there is Kali Amma, a Hindu goddess known for her fierce outlook and protective nature. All texts chosen also portray a single, male child character as the main character. Each of the excerpts selected has three story events with themes that are relevant to primary school children (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Themes, main characters and story events in texts

TEXT	THEME	MAIN CHARACTER	STORY EVENTS
Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth	Acceptance	Benito	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Benito is helpful and kind, but sad because his enormous teeth were being made fun of.</li> <li>2. One night, he was visited by the tooth fairy and he asked the tooth fairy to change his teeth but the tooth fairy refused to do so.</li> <li>3. Benito decided to get rid of his teeth by eating sweets.</li> </ol>
The Goddess With Her Hands Full	Politeness	Tenali Rama	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tenali Rama is described as a cheeky boy.</li> <li>2. Tenali Rama was told to go to the temple to ask for birthday blessings.</li> <li>3. Tenali Rama saw Goddess Kali and laughed at her.</li> </ol>
The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush	Gifts and talents	Little Gopher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Little Gopher is described as smaller than his peers, but was talented in making things.</li> <li>2. When he grew up, Little Gopher went to the hills.</li> <li>3. He had a vision of an Indian woman holding a rolled-up animal skin and an old man holding a paintbrush.</li> </ol>

The decision to give the participants excerpts rather than the full stories is largely for keeping the three texts as similar as possible, therefore minimising the effects of variables other than the independent variable being tested. The original stories are of different lengths and this may affect the participants' comprehension level.

In this study, the texts are limited to 200 words and 20 sentences, similar to Gillam, Fargo & Robertson (2009) who used texts of 150 words in 15 sentences in a comprehension study among 4<sup>th</sup> graders. An average of 186 words per text is deemed appropriate as this is also the average number of words that the participants are expected to read in a single text in school.

In studies measuring comprehension, texts are sometimes modified to meet the demands of the research questions. For example, in a study which examines inferencing abilities, Laing (1999) modified story passages to carry more inference load. In the present study, the cultural content in each text was also adapted so that no text was significantly more culture-laden than the other.

The original stories are more linguistically sophisticated. Therefore, the excerpts had to be adapted to ensure that they were suitable for participants' level of proficiency and that the language difficulty level is similar for all three texts. The adaptation process was largely based on the Decrease Reading option, which proposes that the amount and density of texts be reduced for learners to ensure smooth reading (Dyck & Pemberton, 2002). For each text, long sentences were broken down into multiple shorter sentences and words that were believed to be unfamiliar to the participants were replaced with similar, but simpler words. For example, the sentence "They rolled on the ground asking the Gods to forgive their sins" was rewritten as "They rolled on the ground. They asked the Gods to forgive their sins".



Then, the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Test was conducted on the text to check its readability. This process of adapting the texts and checking its readability is repeated until a readability grade range is achieved. As the participants were in Year 3, a Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade of between 3.5 to 3.9 was deemed suitable.

## **3.6 INSTRUMENTS**

### **3.6.1 Prior Knowledge Assessment**

The purpose of the prior-knowledge assessment is to establish the participants' existing knowledge of the three cultures represented in the selected texts. The assessment took the form of individual interviews using general and content-specific questions (Garth-McCullough, 2008) about the Indian, Roman-Catholic Filipino and Great Plains Indian cultures. The general questions were used to establish the learners' awareness as well as exposure to the cultures while the content-specific questions were developed based on specific cultural references made in the texts.

For example, a general question for the Roman-Catholic Filipino based text was "Who takes care of a church?" while a content-specific question was "What do you know about tooth fairies?" All questions were developed by the researcher based on cultural references made in each text. The cultural references in each text and the corresponding questions asked during the interview are shown in Appendix D.

### **3.6.2 Comprehension Test**

Comprehension tests are among the most frequent type of comprehension assessment administered (Jia, 2004). In this research, comprehension tests consisting of multiple choice questions and binary questions were used. As the three texts used were adapted, no comprehension questions were readily available. Therefore, all comprehension assessment questions were self-developed by the researcher using the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) model.

The Question-Answer Relationship model is useful in ensuring that comprehension questions developed would yield the information required (Herrell & Jordan, 2008). The QAR model used is the Text-Explicit and Text-Implicit Questions Model (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; in Herrell & Jordan, 2008). In this model, questions developed are either text-explicit or text-implicit. While literal and reorganization questions are often text-explicit, questions that require readers to infer, predict, evaluate and give a personal response to are usually text-implicit. Explicit and implicit questions are deemed appropriate question types as they are typically-used in school level assessment and in the National Type Primary 3 English textbook. For copies of all three comprehension tests, see Appendix E.

Apart from the question type, the question format for comprehension assessment was also designed to reflect the format typically used in the National Type Primary 3 English textbook. This was to ensure that the participants were familiar with the question format and would not be negatively affected by the assessment format.

Ten multiple choice wh-questions and five binary questions were prepared for each text. Five of the multiple-choice questions and two of the binary questions were text-explicit questions while the remaining were text-implicit questions. A similar design for comprehension assessment was used by Gillam & Fargo (2009), who assessed the comprehension of expository texts among fourth graders with six questions - three explicit and three implicit, and by Schisler (2008) who used five inferential questions and five literal questions to assess the comprehension of elementary students.

To ensure that all questions were correctly identified as text-explicit or text-implicit, two TESL practitioners individually categorized the questions after being briefed about the nature of text-explicit and text-implicit questions. Only questions which were correctly labelled by both were accepted, while the others were modified. The validation process was repeated until all the question types were unanimously agreed on.

Multiple-choice questions and binary questions were selected as the question format for specific reasons. Apart from being the question format frequently used in studies of comprehension (for example Schisler, 2008; Goff, 2004;), multiple-choice questions are easier for learners with low proficiency in the target language (Day & Park, 2005). Although the participants of this research have demonstrated age-appropriate reading abilities, they have yet to achieve high levels of writing and oral skills which are needed for answering open-ended questions. Observations during pilot testing showed that the participants struggled when open-ended questions were used and gave only minimal answers.

However, when multiple-choice questions were used, the participants were able to demonstrate their understanding of texts more clearly and confidently. Binary true-false questions were used to add variety to the question type. Binary true-false questions also make less demand for creative expressions, making them suitable for participants who are not verbally expressive (Skarakis-Doyle & Dempsey, 2008).

### **3.6.3. Story Retelling Assessment**

Numerous studies on comprehension have applied story retelling as a method of assessment. In Romaine's (2009) study, for example, participants listened to a story on tape accompanied by a wordless book and retold the story heard before taking a ten-question comprehension test.

Montoya (2008) had a group of sixth graders reading a levelled story paragraph before asking them to retell the story read. Pearman (2003) used story retelling to check the differences in comprehension of second graders when reading texts presented in print and electronic formats. Prompts are commonly used in retellings (Montoya, 2008; Nicholas 2007; Moteallemi,2010 ), but are kept minimal and carefully recorded.

In the present study, participants were asked to retell the story read in their own words and the sessions were video recorded. The procedures used in the retelling session were kept similar to the procedures used in the School-Based Oral Assessment (SBOA), which all pupils have to go through twice a year. In SBOA, the tasks vary from naming objects in pictures to retelling stories and experiences, all of which must be done in English. In the present study, participants were given the option of retelling the texts read in either English, Bahasa Malaysia or Tamil.

This is to ensure that the participants had the option of retelling the stories in the language they feel most comfortable communicating orally, subsequently reducing the possibility of their retelling being affected by oral language proficiency. All participants however chose to retell the texts in English.

In the story retelling assessment, participants were assessed using Narrative Retelling Summary Sheets, based on Morrow's 10-Point Scale. (Morrow, 1986). The instrument awards points for characters, setting, main events, problems and sequence, similar to other retelling instruments used by Montoya (2008), Cruz de Quiros (2008) and Seeger (2009). The retelling instrument was also adapted to include number of t-units, or terminable units. T-units have been used widely in assessing story retelling (e.g. Cruz de Quiros, 2008; Scott, Roberts & Krakow 2008). Please see Appendix F for a copy of the Narrative Retelling Summary Sheets.

### **3.7 PARTICIPANTS**

This research employed a purposeful sampling design. The participants for this research are 21 Year 3 pupils (average 9 years of age) from a Tamil vernacular school in Sungai Buloh, Selangor, where the researcher works as an English teacher. The school uses Tamil as the main medium of instruction and most of the pupils speak Tamil as their mother tongue. All participants speak Tamil at home but have one or both parents being able to converse and read in English. For most of the pupils in the school, Malay Language and English are studied as the second and third languages respectively.

The participants in this study belong to the Malaysian Hindu Indian community, the third largest ethnic group in Malaysia. Although many similarities between the Indian community in Malaysia and the Indian community in India may be observed in terms of cultural practices, language and food, it would be inaccurate to view the Indian community in Malaysia as an exact representation of the Indian community in India.

Being part of a multicultural country, the Indian community in Malaysia is exposed to multicultural influences which are bound to leave an impact on their lives. Even without active participation in the cultural practices of other ethnic groups in the country, a typical Malaysian Indian would have had the opportunity to observe the cultural artefacts and practices of other ethnic groups in Malaysia.

The participants selected for this research are from the same class, 3 Melur, and to eliminate the effects of different proficiency levels, only pupils with high level of proficiency in English – as reflected in the 2010 mid-year English examination scores - were selected. The scores were deemed as appropriate representations of the participants' proficiency level as the examination paper was prepared and validated by English teachers from all Tamil schools in the Gombak district in Selangor. The same examination paper was used in all Tamil schools in the district.

A minimum score of 70, or a high B, was set as the cut-off point for participant selection. Out of 31 students in the class, 21 scored a minimum of 70 marks in the mid-year English examination. All 21 pupils also scored the maximum score in the School-Based Oral Assessment conducted in the current mid-year. Nine of the participants are males, while the rest are females. All participants were given consent forms which were written in English as well Tamil (see Appendix G).

## **3.8 PROCEDURE**

### **3.8.1 Piloting**

Piloting was done in September 2010 with a group of four young learners, two boys and two girls, aged nine. The procedure used in the pilot testing was identical to the procedure in the real data collection. Firstly, the four young learners were individually interviewed to assess their level of prior knowledge of the Malaysian Hindu Indian, Great Plains Indian and Roman Catholic Filipino cultures. During the interview, it was discovered that the participants were not able to effectively verbalize many ideas about the Great Plains Indian and Roman Catholic Filipino cultures. The phrases “Great Plains Indian”, “Filipino”, “The Philippines” or “Roman-Catholic” appeared to be foreign to the four young learners. The researcher then decided to give the four young learners an image depicting each of the three cultures (please see Appendix H for the images).

The young learners were able to recognise and connect the images to the correct cultures and were subsequently able to share more ideas about the cultures.

The pilot testing also helped to iron out technical issues, such as the location for the interviews and the time taken for each retelling session. During the pilot testing, the interviews and retelling sessions were conducted in the school library. However, as the library was constantly occupied by pupils from other classes, it was found to be too distracting. Thus, it was decided that the retelling and interview sessions were best held in an empty room attached to the participants’ classroom.

It was also found during the pilot testing that each retelling session was longer than the time initially allotted. The researcher then made adjustments to the length of time needed for the completion of all interview and retelling sessions. As for the comprehension tests, the pilot testing revealed that the instruments used were suitable. No changes were made to the comprehension test questions.

### **3.8.2 Data Collection**

#### **3.8.2.1 Practice Sessions**

The data collection for this study began in October 2010. Upon receiving all consent forms from participants' parents, two practice sessions were held before the actual data collection took place. In the first practice session, participants read an adapted excerpt from *One Good Meal Deserves Another* while in the second practice session, participants read an adapted excerpt from *The Purse of Gold*.

*One Good Meal Deserves Another* is a West African folktale while *The Purse of Gold* is from Jewish culture. The first excerpt contains 195 words in 18 sentences while the second excerpt contains 182 words in 21 sentences. Each practice session began with an informal interview with the participants to check their familiarity with the themes and cultural orientations of the story.

Once the interview sessions were completed, participants were called up for an individual retelling session with the researcher while the others remained in the class with another teacher. Participants did not have the chance to discuss the texts read with each other.



The story retelling sessions were completed within a day. The following day, participants read the text again and were given a set of questions to answer based on the text. For each text, participants answered ten multiple-choice questions and five true-false binary questions. The second text was given a week later and learners went through the same procedure of being interviewed, reading the text, retelling the story and answering the comprehension questions. The actual administration of the study is reported below and the procedures involved in collecting the data for this study are reported as tasks.

### **3.8.2.2 Task 1: Prior Knowledge Assessment**

Actual data collection began with the prior-knowledge assessment. Participants were individually interviewed by the researcher and the interview sessions were video-recorded. The interview sessions were conducted in a small room within the participants' classroom. While the interview sessions were taking place, nobody was allowed in the room except for the participant and the researcher. Lesson went on as usual in the classroom with another teacher conducting the class.

Participants had to return to their seats immediately after each interview session and were not allowed to discuss their interview sessions with their peers. The teacher conducting the class was asked to immediately assign tasks to participants who had completed their interviews. This helped to ensure that all participants were immediately occupied after the interview so that there was no opportunity for them to discuss the interview session with their peers.

The researcher used the Prior-Knowledge Assessment questions (see Appendix D) to guide the interview sessions, which were completed within a single day. After the prior knowledge assessment was completed, a two-week gap was placed before participants were given the next two tasks. This was to ensure that the participants' responses to the narrative texts were not influenced by the prior-knowledge assessment questions.

### **3.8.2.3 Task 2: Reading and Retelling**

After the two-week gap, participants individually read and retold one out of the three narrative texts. The reading and story retelling sessions were done prior to the comprehension test to eliminate the possibility of participants' retellings being influenced by the questions and multiple choice answers posed in the comprehension test. The retelling assessment was conducted in alphabetical order of students' names.

Each participant read and retold only one text per week. The retelling sessions were conducted during normal schooling hours and in an empty room attached to the participants' classroom. The researcher began the reading and retelling session by telling the participant, "I would like you to read this story. Then, I would like you to tell me the story in your own words. While you read, you may ask questions if you have any."

The participants were also informed that they could take as long as they needed to complete their retellings. Part of the story retelling procedure was to provide assistance for participants who appear to struggle while retelling a text. Participants whose retelling showed significant reductions were asked, "Can you tell me more?" or "What else happened in the story?"

The reading and retelling sessions were completed within three weeks. It was not possible to complete the sessions within a shorter time frame as the research had to be conducted within normal schooling hours and the school only granted the researcher 2 hours per week to collect the data. It was also not possible to keep the participants isolated from one another throughout the three-week period. Although the reading and retelling sessions were done in private, it was not possible to keep the participants from talking to one another about the texts read.

However, it was observed that while the participants were initially inquisitive about the texts and the task required of them, the interest quickly subsided. Participants who were called for the reading and retelling session later did not do significantly better than the participants who were called earlier.

#### **3.8.2.4 Task 3 : Comprehension Assessment**

After the reading and retelling sessions were completed, the participants sat for the comprehension assessment. Each participant was given a text to read and a set of comprehension questions to answer. All participants first sat for the comprehension test based on *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth*, followed by the comprehension test based on *The Goddess with Her Hands Full* and finally the comprehension test based on *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*. The participants were given 30 minutes to complete each set.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

This section explains the processes involved in analysing the data collected for this study. The analysis was conducted sequentially according to the research questions, beginning with Research Question 1 followed by Research Question 2 and Research Question 3.

#### **3.9.1 Analysis of Comprehension Test Scores**

The first research question, “To what extent are young ESL learners able to comprehend narrative texts situated in native and non-native cultures as demonstrated through their ability in answering comprehension questions and retelling stories?”, is made up of two parts. The first part investigates participants’ comprehension as demonstrated through comprehension test scores while the second part examines their comprehension as demonstrated through retelling scores.

To answer the first part of the first research question, participants’ scores for all three comprehension tests were counted. The scores were counted separately for explicit and implicit questions. The means and standard deviations for the scores were then calculated. To determine if there are any statistical differences in test scores across the three texts, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, in which the cultural orientation of the texts is the independent variable. The most common way for researchers to find out if there are significant differences between the means of more than two groups is through the ANOVA procedure, which is a t-test that is appropriate for using with three or more groups.

### 3.9.2 Analysis of Story Retelling Scores

To determine the extent to which participants were able to retell the texts read, all recordings of the story retelling sessions were transcribed. The Narrative Retelling Summary Sheet (see Appendix F) used consists of items that demonstrate one's understanding of a narrative text: setting, characters, main events, problem and sequence.

Under characters, the participants had to identify the main characters as well as the supporting characters, giving a total of 2 marks. For setting, participants were awarded 1 mark for giving an identifiable introduction to the story and an additional 1 mark for identifying the time and place for each text. Participants were given 1 mark for each of the 3 main events of each story, giving a total of 3 marks. Participants were also expected to identify the main problem or the climax of the story to qualify for another 1 mark. Finally, participants were given 2 marks for stories that were retold in a sequential manner. The maximum point for each retelling assessment was 10. Table 3.4 summarizes the mark allocation for the story retelling assessment.

Table 3.3 : Mark allocation for story retelling assessment

NO	ITEM		MARK ALLOCATED
1	Setting	Identifiable introduction	1
		Time and place	1
2	Character	Main character	1
		Supporting characters	1
3	Problem	Main problem	1
4	Story Events	Story events	3
5	Sequencing	Story retold in sequential manner	2
TOTAL			10

Once the calculation of scores was completed, the means and standard deviations for each story retelling session were calculated. To determine if cultural setting in a text affected participants' retelling scores, a one-way ANOVA was conducted.

### **3.9.3 Analysis of Story Retelling Inaccuracies**

The second research question is “What inaccuracies are demonstrated in the retelling assessment and to what extent can they be attributed to the lack of cultural knowledge?” The first part investigates the inaccuracies – if there are any – shown as participants retell the texts read. The second part of the question zooms into the inaccuracies and investigates the extent to which the inaccuracies are caused by the lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge.

To answer the second question, the researcher adapted a qualitative approach used by Seeger (2009), who performed qualitative evaluation of narrative retellings. The video recordings for all retelling sessions were revisited and inaccuracies demonstrated in each retelling were noted. An example of an inaccurate retelling for the text *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth* is “Benito’s sister takes care of him”. It was not Benito’s sister who took care of him upon his mother’s death, but a nun, Sister Margarita. The inaccuracies were then coded and assigned a possible cause.

During the coding process, inaccuracies resulting from breakdown in comprehension processes such as inferencing and integrating new to existing knowledge were distinguished from those resulting from lack of vocabulary of domain-specific knowledge, of word reading ability or of other reader capacities involved in comprehension. (O’ Malley & Pierce, 1996)

### **3.9.4 Analysis of Correlation between Comprehension Test Scores and Story Retelling Scores**

Finally, the third research question is “In assessing comprehension of culturally-laden narrative texts, how does performance in story retelling correlate with performance in comprehension test?” This question seeks to examine the value of story retelling as an alternative method for assessing comprehension of culturally-laden narrative texts.

To answer this research question, the extent to which performance in story retelling correlates with performance in comprehension test was investigated. This step was taken to check if a positive relationship exists between story retelling scores and comprehension test scores. A positive relationship would add to the validity of story retelling as a comprehension measurement. Using comprehension test scores and retelling assessment scores, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the extent to which scores from the two types of assessment correlate with each other.

### **3.10 INTER-RATER RELIABILITY**

As participants in this study are researcher’s own students and whose proficiency levels the researcher is well-aware of, there existed a risk of bias when scoring the story retelling protocols. To avoid assigning scores based on the researcher’s prior-knowledge of the participants’ proficiency levels, the researcher checked inter-rater reliability. To check inter-rater reliability in the scoring for the story retelling session, a postgraduate student pursuing Masters in Education (TESL) trained in scoring the Narrative Retelling Summary Sheet independently scored all story retelling protocols.

The postgraduate student first practised with protocols from the pilot sessions. The postgraduate student's scores were then compared with the scores given by the researcher. Whenever a disagreement in scoring occurred, both the researcher and the postgraduate student revisited the protocol in order to come to an agreement on the score.

### **3.11 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented an overview of the research design employed in this study. The mixed-method design applied in this study gathers both quantitative and qualitative data through analyses of comprehension test scores, narrative retelling scores and narrative retelling protocols. As this study looks at how participants respond to different cultural settings in texts, the texts themselves play a crucial role. Therefore, this chapter devoted a lengthy discussion to the texts used in the study and the measures taken to ensure that the three texts were suitable for the research. Other items discussed in this chapter are data collection measurements, participants, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, inter-rater reliability and limitations.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reports the findings gathered in this study in a sequential manner. It begins with the findings for Research Question 1, followed by the findings for Research Questions 2 and 3. Each section is preceded by the research question and includes all necessary tables and figures. The aim of this chapter is only to communicate the findings and to outline the answers to the three research questions. In-depth discussions of the findings are provided in Chapter 5.

#### **4.1 COMPREHENSION OF NARRATIVE TEXTS SITUATED IN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE CULTURES**

The first research question is “To what extent are young ESL learners able to comprehend narrative texts situated in native and non-native cultures as demonstrated through their ability in answering comprehension questions and retelling stories?” Scores from the three comprehension tests (please see Appendix I) reveal that the participants demonstrated more sophisticated understanding of the narrative text situated in the native culture compared to the narrative texts situated in the non-native cultures.

#### 4.1.1 Compehension Test Scores

Out of the 8 points allocated the 8 explicit questions in *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth* (henceforth referred to as *MB*), participants were able to score an average of 5.9 points, as seen in Table 4.2. For *The Goddess With Her Hands Full* (henceforth referred to as *GD*) and *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* (henceforth referred to as *PB*), participants scored an average of 7.38 and 6.43 points respectively. For the implicit questions, out of the maximum of 7 points allocated, participants scored an average of 4.14 points when attempting the questions based on *MB*. An average score of 4.0 was achieved for the questions from *GD* while an average of 5.00 was achieved for questions from *PB*.

Table 4.1 also shows the standard deviations for the scores of all three tests. When compared, it was found that the distribution of scores reflects a normal distribution. Participants' scores do not deviate much from the mean score. The standard deviation for the comprehension test based on *MB* is 1.13599 for explicit questions and 1.35225 for implicit questions. The standard deviation for the test based on *GD* stands at 0.66904 for explicit questions and 0.94365 for implicit questions while for the comprehension test based on *PB*, the standard deviations are 1.16496 and 1.09545 for explicit and implicit questions respectively. Clearly, the standard deviations were smaller for the implicit and explicit scores of the test based on *GD*, suggesting that between the three texts read, participants' understanding of the *GD* bears the most consistency.

Table 4.1 : Means and standard deviations of comprehension test scores

Text	N	Question Type	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max
Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth	21	Explicit	5.90	1.13599	0.5828	4	8
		Implicit	4.14	1.35225	0.5293	2	7
The Goddess with Her Hands Full	21	Explicit	7.38	0.66904	0.6097	6	8
		Implicit	4.90	0.94365	0.5233	3	6
The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush	21	Explicit	6.43	1.16496	0.6063	4	8
		Implicit	5.00	1.09545	0.5408	3	7

Although the test scores show that generally, participants demonstrated adequate comprehension of all three texts, it is also apparent that participants performed best when answering explicit questions based on *GD*. Interestingly however, for implicit questions, participants achieved the highest mean score when answering questions based on *PB*. The possible causes for this are discussed in Section 5.2 of Chapter 5.

To check if there are any statistical differences between the scores for the three comprehension tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. As there is a possibility that question type serves as a variable in the analysis, the ANOVA was conducted separately for both explicit and implicit questions. The significance level was set at 0.05 or less. Any significance level above 0.05 was considered as not meaningful. As shown in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 below, the ANOVA for the explicit questions showed a significance of 0.000 while the ANOVA for the implicit questions revealed a significance of 0.035. These figures point to significant statistical differences between the scores.

Table 4.2 : ANOVA of explicit comprehension questions

Text	Sum of square	dF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	23.617	2	11.808	11.447	0.000
Within groups	61.896	60	1.032		
Total	85.513	62			

Table 4.3 : ANOVA of implicit comprehension questions

Text	Sum of square	dF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	9.290	2	4.645	3.556	0.035
Within groups	78.375	60	1.306		
Total	87.665	62			

When the scores for explicit and implicit questions were combined the overall scores (see Table 4.4) for all three texts reveal that participants were able to achieve high scores in the comprehension test based on *The Goddess with Her Hands Full*, a text situated in the native culture.

Table 4.4 : Summary of overall comprehension test scores

Text	Total Score	Mean
Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth	211	10.04762
The Goddess with Her Hands Full	258	12.28571
The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush	240	11.42857

When comparisons were made between the scores achieved in comprehension tests based on native and non-native culture, it does appear that cultural familiarity serves as an advantage. As level of text difficulty, number of words and number of sentences in the texts used for this study have been controlled, it is possible that the statistical differences in the mean scores occurred due to the cultural content in the texts.

Culturally-acquired prior knowledge however, only appears to affect participants when answering explicit questions. In this study, the mean score for implicit questions based on a text situated in a distant, non-native culture was higher than the means score for implicit questions based on a text situated in participants' familiar, own native culture.

#### **4.1.2 Retelling Scores**

The second measure of answering the first research question was derived from participants' retelling scores. The mean retelling scores for the three texts differ by a significant margin (see Appendix J for the complete scores) and indicate that participants have better comprehension of *The Goddess with Her Hands Full (GD)*, the text situated in the native culture.

Out of a maximum of 10 points, participants only managed to achieve a mean score of 5.57 when retelling the excerpt from *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush (PB)*. A mean score of 6.76 was attained when participants retold the excerpt from *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth (MB)* while the mean retelling score for the excerpt from *GD* stood at 8.33.

The standard deviation for retelling scores of *PB* was the highest at 2.59945, followed by *MB* at 2.54764. As for the retelling scores of *GD*, the standard deviation is 1.1547. The relatively bigger standard deviations for the retelling scores of *PB* and *MB* suggest noteworthy differences in participants' ability to retell the two texts.

As shown in Table 4.5 below, there is a significant gap between the minimum and maximum scores achieved by participants in their retellings of *MB* and *PB*. Participants' oral retelling ability and comprehension levels may be used to explain this and will be discussed further in Section 5.2 of Chapter 5.

Table 4.5 : Mean and standard deviations of story retelling scores

Text	N	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max
Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth	21	6.76	2.54764	0.7851	2	10
The Goddess with Her Hands Full	21	8.33	1.1547	0.6762	6	10
The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush	21	5.57	2.59945	0.7561	2	10

To determine the significance of the differences between the scores, an ANOVA of the story retelling scores was conducted. A significance level of 0.001 was revealed by the ANOVA, indicating a significant statistical difference between the scores achieved in the three texts, as shown in Table 4.6 below:

Table 4.6 : ANOVA of story retelling scores

Text	Sum of square	dF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	80.490	2	40.245	8.280	0.001
Within groups	291.640	60	4.861		
Total	372.131	62			

In general, scores from the retellings reveal that participants had high comprehension of *GD* - a text situated in their own native culture - and that the participants were able to demonstrate this comprehension through their story retelling. The participants however showed low comprehension of the two texts situated in non-native cultures, *MB* and *PB*, as their story retelling scores were low for these two texts. As expected, familiarity with the cultural contents of a narrative text brings positive effects to one's retelling performance.

#### **4.2 INACCURACIES IN STORY RETELLING AS THE RESULT OF LOW CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE**

The second research question for this study is “What inaccuracies are demonstrated in the retelling assessment and to what extent can they be attributed to the lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge?” To answer this question, participants' prior knowledge of the three cultures depicted in the texts first had to be established.

#### **4.2.1 Culturally-Acquired Prior Knowledge**

Although the researcher has observed – through previous interactions with the participants – that the participants have low level of prior knowledge for the Great Plains Indian culture and Roman Catholic Filipino culture, it was not possible to completely disregard the possibility of participants already having developed adequate prior-knowledge of the non-native cultures through their interactions with society and the media.

A prior knowledge assessment was therefore conducted to establish the fact that the Roman Catholic Filipino culture and the Great Plains Indian culture are indeed non-native and relatively unfamiliar to the participants and of which participants have a certain degree of unfamiliarity. From the prior-knowledge interviews (for field notes from the interviews, see Appendix K) it was found that the participants' level of prior-knowledge of the native and non-native cultures were as predicted. All participants were able to verbalize more ideas and concepts related to their native culture compared to the non-native cultures.

Participants' depth of understanding for concepts belonging to the non-native culture was adequate. When asked about the church, 18 of the participants were able to identify its function as a place of worship. 15 participants were also able to name "Christians" as patrons of the church and 7 participants singled out "Sunday" as the day when Christians mostly go to church. Concepts such as Jesus, the cross, priests and nuns were also verbalized by the participants, although very briefly. For example, to the researcher's question as to how a church looks like, the replies varied, as shown in the examples below.



*“Like a plus sign.”*

*“Like a t.”*

*“Got a t.”*

Apart from the cross and the role of the church as a place of worship, the participants knew little else about the church. 4 participants claimed that nobody lived in the compound of the church while 6 believed that priests lived in churches to take care of the church compound. All participants, except for one, were not aware of the role of churches as shelters for orphans.

The only participant who knew that some churches also run orphanages attributed his awareness to his parents, who once brought gifts to orphans at a church. One participant used his knowledge of religious centres to make generalised statements about the church when he shared that people go to church to “pray for the exams”. As for the content-specific questions, all participants knew very little about tooth fairies, a concept popular in Western culture. Only one participant could explain the role of the tooth fairy.

When asked about the Great Plains Indians, participants demonstrated very low knowledge of the culture. When shown a picture of a Great Plains Indian female, all 21 participants claimed to have seen a similar person on television, but were unable to identify the ethnicity of the individual. Participants were also not able to give specific details about the activities conducted by the Great Plains Indians.

Confusion with other cultural groups was apparent, as demonstrated in the following exchanges, when the researcher asked about Great Plains Indians:

*“Orang Asli. In music class I practice the song ‘Hey ayoya, hey. (They) kill the people. Like, uh, in Genting Highlands I see in Buddhist temple.”*

*“ I see in Melaka. They first drink, they will blow the fire. Cowboy show. I like to see that.”*

4 participants also mistook Great Plains Indians for Hindu spiritual leaders, as shown in the following remarks:

*“After some person want to go on fire, they do. (They) live in rumah panjang [long houses]. Some person want to shave their hair, they can come and do in the temple.”*

*“They want to walk on fire, live in the jungle, catch the animals.”*

One participant was able to demonstrate a more sophisticated knowledge of Great Plains Indians. He noted that the group usually lives in the jungle and “at night they will sing and dance”. Another participant pointed out the similarities between the picture of the Great Plains Indian and Pocahontas, a Native American Indian character from a Disney cartoon.

As predicted, all participants were all able to verbalize more ideas and concepts when asked about the Malaysian Hindu Indian culture. All participants were able to eloquently describe the temple as a place of worship for Hindus and that there are many statues of different Gods at the temples.

When probed further about the do's and don'ts at the temple, participants were able to give details specific to the Hindu religious practices such as bringing flowers, singing *devaram* [Hindu religious hymns], removing one's footwear and washing one's legs before entering the temple.

All of the participants did not understand the meaning of the word 'vow', but when given examples of religious vows commonly made by Hindu practitioners, the participants were able to relate to their own experiences making vows at various temples. The participants cited carrying the *palkodam* [jar of milk] , *kavadi* [a structure made of pieces of wood and steel and decorated with peacock feathers and flowers, to be carried on one's shoulders as a symbol of one's devotion for the Hindu God Murugan] and 'walking on fire' as some ways of repaying the Gods for granting various wishes.

17 participants were also familiar with Kali Amma, describing the goddess as a protector against evil. The young participants also spoke of Kali Amma with high trepidation, using words such as "scary", "blood" and "kill" in their descriptions. The following examples of utterances illustrate the participants' regard for Kali Amma:

*"She likes to drink blood. Scary vampire teeth. Holding a head."*

*"She cut the anybody who naughty, she cut the head."*

*"Kill bad people."*

*"Like a ghost, but not a ghost."*

*"One hand has the katii [knife]."*

*"Scary God, she will kill the bad guys. She like angry like that, kill the bad people."*

One participant related a personal story of how Kali Amma was summoned to perform an exorcism rite at his house:

*“Saturday, Saturday, in my house, come the ghost, my pakcik [uncle] say go out go out, the Kali Amma already jaga [take care of] the house, jaga [take care of] the ghost.”*

As mentioned earlier, the aim of the prior knowledge assessment was to investigate the degree of familiarity that participants have over the cultural practices and artefacts depicted in the three texts used. Results from the assessment show that participants have low prior knowledge of the cultural elements depicted in *MB* as well as *PB*. Their understanding of the cultural elements portrayed in *GD* however, was more sophisticated. These observations indicate that participants had inadequate knowledge of the non-native cultures portrayed in the texts used for this study. This information is important as it may explain the inaccuracies that participants demonstrated in their retelling of the texts read.

#### **4.2.2 Inaccuracies in the Retellings of *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth***

To examine the inaccuracies, participants’ retellings of the three texts were transcribed and the inaccuracies listed separately for each text before being assigned relevant categories. Possible causes of the inaccuracies were then identified. Participants’ retellings of *MB* demonstrated greater number of inaccuracies compared to their retellings of *GD* and *PB*. However, the retellings for *MB* also yielded the highest number of t-units. For a complete list of the inaccuracies, please see Appendix L.

The most frequently demonstrated inaccuracy in the retelling of *MB* is participants' understanding of the Christian nuns. The 'sisters', being a concept which most participants have no prior knowledge of were identified by many participants as Benito's biological sisters. One participant demonstrated cross-cultural transfers when she noted that "One sister take (Benito)." The term 'sister', in the Malaysian Hindu Indian community usually refers to a respected female figure, commonly used by women to address each other in religious and spiritual contexts, such as in the temple.

Another inaccuracy that was frequently observed relates to the concept of the church as a provider of shelter for orphans. While participants appeared to understand the role of the church as a religious centre, there appeared to be confusion as to why Benito was at the church. One participant concluded that "(Benito) went to church to help the nuns", a partially correct observation. Others observed the church as a setting in which part of the story took place, but could not correctly identify the significance of the setting, that it was where Benito grew up. For example:

*"He would go to church."*

*"On Sundays he goes to church."*

Another concept that was retold differently than expected was the concept of a tooth fairy, the mythical character known in the Western world to trade baby teeth for money. Most retellings included the appearance of the tooth fairy, but the tooth fairy appeared in various forms in the retellings. One participant replaced the tooth fairy with "God" while another replaced it with "angel".

This commonly-used strategy of making connections between existing knowledge helped participants to compensate for the lack of prior knowledge. The strategy, however, was not applied by all. The tooth fairy was also interpreted as a man who comes to bestow Benito with teeth, as well as a friend who came to express regret over Benito's large teeth:

*"A man come and give the large teeth."*

*"His friend say to Benito, very sorry for your teeth."*

There were also participants who left out the tooth fairy entirely from their retellings, drastically changing the events of the story, for instance:

*"Pull the teeth himself."*

*"He told the teeth I don't want ugly teeth."*

*"He pulled the teeth."*

*"He go home, take his teeth and put another teeth."*

Inaccurate retellings due to lexical confusion were also observed in participants' retelling of *MB*. In the original text, Benito was said to have gone out to buy sweets, chocolates and gum in his effort to get rid of his large teeth. Some participants however, understood 'gum' as 'glue' for example:

*"He bought glue."*

*"Benito brings gum, scissor."*

Overall, the inaccuracies in the retellings of *MB* appeared as enhancements, omissions, alterations and substitutions. There were instances where learners enhanced the stories with their own ideas and assumptions, as well as instances where learners completely omitted parts of the text read. Alterations or changes to the events and characters were also observed, as well as replacement of characters with others which are similar but more familiar. The enhancements, omissions, alterations and substitutions shed some light on the participants' understanding, or rather the lack of, culturally-acquired concepts. Participants' inaccurate perceptions of Sister Margarita, the Periwinkle Sisters, the orphanage as well as the Tooth Fairy – the cultural load of the text – suggest that the inaccuracies are not entirely coincidental but are probably related to participants' lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge.

#### **4.2.3 Inaccuracies in the Retellings of *The Goddess with Her Hands Full***

Participants' retellings of *GD* bore fewer inaccuracies than their retellings of *MB*. The inaccuracies observed in *GD* were generally enhancements to the story read. These were especially observable when participants retold the scene where Rama witnessed the making of vows to the Gods at the temple. The enhancements include a scene of Rama and his mother taking part in the making of vows, such as:

*“Rama and his mother promises to the God . His mother promise can't eat meat. And take away the hair.”*

*“He goes to temple, he doesn't eat meat.”*

*“His mother every time go to temple.”*

Interestingly, the enhancements reported above do not appear to stem from participants' lack of prior knowledge but rather from their close relationship with the cultural routines involved when a Hindu goes to the temple. The participants themselves have taken part in making vows such as abstaining from meat and shaving off their hair. The idea of Rama and his mother making the same vows appear natural to the storyline.

Enhancements were also demonstrated when participants retold the scene where Rama met Kali Amma at the temple. After explaining that Rama met Kali Amma and told that her that it was his birthday, one participant added a cautionary line on Rama's behalf:

*"He (Rama) say I do not do naughty."*

This enhancement also suggests compliance to cultural norms. In the Hindu-Tamil culture, it is a common belief that God witnesses one's actions and that the actions are accordingly rewarded or punished. Therefore, although it is not explicitly stated in the text, the participant presumed that Rama communicated to Kali Amma to assure her of his good behaviour.

Alterations to the original text were also observed in the retelling. Details from the story were modified, some drastically changing the course of the story, for example:

*"He(Rama) rolled on the ground."*

*"Rama sat on a tiger."*

*"Rama goes home and tells many sins."*



Childish imagination may account for the alterations mentioned above. It could also be the result of lexical confusion, as the participant who demonstrated the inaccuracy explained that he meant “lies” when he said “sins”. The participant spoke of Rama as being mischievous and used the information to conclude that Rama told lies, even after vowing not to, at the temple.

Generally, the retellings of *GD* reveal inaccuracies which appear as enhancements and alterations. The enhancements made are probably the result of the participants’ own familiarity, out of which stem the assumptions of events such as Rama’s mother taking part in the making of religious vows at the temple. Unlike the enhancements made to *MB*, the enhancements made to *GD* are not culturally flawed.

#### **4.2.4 Inaccuracies in the Retellings of *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush***

Participants’ retelling of the excerpt from *PB* was significantly shorter than the retellings of the other two excerpts used in this study. Large chunks of the text were omitted, especially the part where the main character, Little Gopher, went to the hills for his coming-of-age ritual as well as the part where he dreamt of a young woman with a leather canvas and an old man with a paintbrush. The omission was so great in some participants that their entire retelling of the text was compressed into mere two to four lines, for example:

*“Many years ago there was a little boy. He called Little Gopher. He is smaller than his tribe. He however had a prize.”*

*“Many years there was a boy called Little Gopher. She was small than other children.”*

*“Many years ago there was a little Gopher. He so much smaller than the children in her tribe.”*

Even when the researcher prompted by asking “Can you tell me more?” and “What else happened in the story?”, the participants retold only minimal parts of the story were not able to give more information about the text.

Enhancements were also made by two participants in the retelling. The first enhancement was when one of the participants retold the scene where Little Gopher consults the village Shaman about his gift. In the original text, the village Shaman was said to be aware of Little Gopher’s gift and he advised Little Gopher to be patient as one day, he will be “remembered by the People”. The participant however, said that Little Gopher went to see the village Shaman to express his frustration over his being left behind by his peers, as reported below:

*“He asked Shaman why don’t everyone like him.”*

Inaccuracies that alter the events of the story were frequently observed when participants retold *PB*. One of the alterations gave a different dimension to the main character, Little Gopher, for example:

*“The boys always cheating him (Little Gopher). Then the boy think a thing to cheat the boys.”*

In this example, Little Gopher was constructed to be a victim of bullying who appears to have a vindictive trait. This is a significant assumption, as in the actual text, Little Gopher was only said to be left out by his peers who were bigger and stronger. It is possible that the participant had made the assumption based on universal playground norms because coincidentally, the participant who made this remark was a boy whose social experiences with his peers matched those of the ‘other’ boys portrayed in *PB*. The said participant was described by the class teacher as aggressive and had been reprimanded for minor bullying incidents in school.

Alterations to the original text were also observed when participants tried connecting the main character, Little Gopher to his reasons for making the journey to the hills. In the original text, Little Gopher was said to have gone to the hills to “think about becoming a man”. The original text also states that such a journey was a tradition of his Great Plains Indian tribe and all the men in his tribe undertook a similar journey. Some participants, however, retold this part incorrectly for example:

*“He likes to be a man.”*

*“He’ll think every time I will be a man.”*

In these two examples, the participants’ misunderstanding could be attributed to a poor understanding of the Great Plains Indians’ cultural practices. There was no schemata of the Great Plains Indian traditions upon which the participants could rely while processing the text read, subsequently leading to incorrect assumptions. Apart from altering events in the text, participants also demonstrated substitutions in their retelling of *PB*. Little Gopher’s ‘gift’ for example, was incorrectly described in the literal sense, for example:

*“He had a prize.”*

*“He get a present.”*

This inaccuracy was likely to have stemmed from lexical confusion and poor inferencing abilities. In the original text, it is stated that “The boy, however had a gift. He could make all sorts of wonderful things with his hands.” The examples given above showed that the participants were not able to infer that the ‘gift’ referred to Little Gopher’s talent in making handicrafts.

In the text, Little Gopher is also said to have dreamt of “a young woman” and “an old grandfather”. The term “grandfather” had most likely steered participants into reading it as Little Gopher’s own grandfather, as demonstrated in the following examples:

*“His grandfather keeps pots with brush.”*

*“He was sleeping, he dreamt of his grandfather.”*

Drawing from the prior knowledge assessment results which showed participants’ minimal familiarity with the cultural elements depicted in *PB* as well as the comprehension test results which showed lower scores compared to the other two texts, one is persuaded to attribute the disturbing omission of important events in participants’ retelling of *PB* to the lack of cultural familiarity. Having little prior knowledge of the Great Plains Indian culture, participants did not possess the schemata necessary for making solid connections between the story events, subsequently leading to a greater strain in remembering events in the story. However, there were also inaccuracies that were the result of lexical confusion and lack of inferencing abilities.

### **4.3 CORRELATION WITH COMPREHENSION TEST SCORES**

The third question that this study set out to investigate is “In assessing comprehension of culturally-laden narrative texts, how does performance in story retelling correlate with performance in comprehension test?” To answer this question, tests were run to establish if there were any significant correlations between comprehension test scores and story retelling scores.

Three Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient tests were conducted. A correlation of 0.1-0.3 was set as indicating a small degree of relationship while a correlation of 0.3-0.5 was accepted as showing a medium degree of relationship. A strong degree of relationship was set at a correlation of 0.5-1.0.

To conduct the Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient test, comprehension test scores for every participant were first added to get the sum of comprehension test scores. This calculation was done separately for explicit questions and implicit questions. Participants’ retelling test scores for every text were also totalled to get the sum of retelling test scores.

Table 4.8 shows a comparison between the sum of test scores for explicit questions and the sum of retelling test scores while Table 4.9 shows a comparison between the sum of test scores for implicit questions and the sum of retelling test scores. The level of Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient between the sum of test scores and the sum of retelling scores are also shown in Table 4.7 and Table 4.8.

Table 4.7 : Sum of explicit comprehension scores, retelling scores  
and degree of correlation

Text	Sum of test scores (Maximum score: 168)	Sum of retelling scores (Maximum score: 210)
Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth	124	142
The Goddess with Her Hands Full	155	175
The Legend of The Indian Paintbrush	135	117
PEARSON'S CORRELATION COEFFICIENT	0.6955	

As shown in Table 4.7, a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of 0.6955 indicates a strong, positive relationship between the scores for the comprehension test (explicit questions) and the retelling test scores. Such a degree of relationship is not at all surprising as participants who had done well in the comprehension tests generally did well in the retelling sessions, regardless of the texts used.

Table 4.8 : Sum of implicit comprehension scores, retelling scores and degree of  
correlation for all participants

Text	Sum of test scores (Maximum score: 147)	Sum of retelling scores (Maximum score: 210)
Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth.	87	142
The Goddess with Her Hands Full.	103	175
The Legend of The Indian Paintbrush.	105	117
CORRELATION COEFFICIENT	-0.0221	

The relationship between the scores for implicit questions and the scores for the retellings however is negative, as shown in Table 4.8. This indicates that participants who did better in answering implicit questions performed poorly in the retelling sessions. While there are many possible explanations for this puzzling finding, it is important to note that the relationship is statistically insignificant. However, at a correlation of -0.0221, the relationship may have occurred by chance.

When the scores for the explicit and implicit questions were combined and ran through a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient test against the retelling scores, a positive correlation was achieved, as shown in Table 4.9 below. At 0.45177, the relationship appears to be of medium strength and shows that participants who did well in the comprehension tests also performed well in the retelling assessment. Therefore, to answer the third research question, it can be concluded that in this study, story retelling scores do positively correlate with comprehension test scores.

Table 4.9 : Sum of comprehension scores, retelling scores and degree of correlation

Text	Sum of comprehension test scores for all participants (Maximum score: 315)	Sum of retelling scores for all participants (Maximum score: 210)
Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth.	211	142
The Goddess With Her Hands Full.	258	175
The Legend of The Indian Paintbrush.	240	117
PEARSON'S CORRELATION COEFFICIENT	0.45177	

Participants who were able to remember and retell details from the excerpts in correct sequence were also able to answer the comprehension questions. Similarly, when participants had difficulties in retelling an excerpt read, they also appeared to have difficulties in answering the comprehension questions based on the same excerpt.

What this ultimately informs us is that story retelling may be used as an effective method for assessing comprehension. As indicated by the correlation figures, story retelling assessment scores reflect participants' ability in answering comprehension tests.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

Findings from this study reveal that in the comprehension tests, participants were able to demonstrate good comprehension of the narrative text situated in the native culture. Participants performed better when answering questions based on the excerpt taken from a story belonging to their native culture. Similarly, in the retelling assessment, participants performed well when retelling the narrative text situated in their native culture. The low retelling scores recorded for the non-native texts suggest a possibility of participants' low prior knowledge of the non-native cultures affecting their retelling.

This study has also found that participants frequently made inaccuracies in their retellings. The inaccuracies may be categorized as enhancements, alterations, substitutions or omissions. More inaccuracies were recorded in the retelling of texts situated in non-native cultures, although the differences were not significant. What was significant was the glaring omission of details in most participants' retellings of *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*, leaving the retellings significantly shorter than the retellings of the other two texts.



While some of the inaccuracies may be attributed to the lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge, there were also inaccuracies that were the result of limited vocabulary and poor reading skills. The inaccuracies deriving from the lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge, however, occurred more frequently. Finally, the findings from this study also show a positive correlation between story retelling assessment scores and comprehension assessment scores. Participants' ability to retell texts read seems to match their ability to answer comprehension questions. This indicates that in assessing comprehension of culturally-laden narrative texts, story retelling is able to reveal similar results about readers' comprehension as comprehension tests would.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a discussion on the research findings. The chapter is divided into six sections, beginning with the summary of findings, Section 5.1. The following three sections, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 offer a detailed discussion of the findings for each of the three research questions. This is followed by Section 5.5 which is dedicated to the significance of cultural setting in narrative texts. The following section, 5.6, attempts to make connections between the findings from the present study and the notion of reading upon which this study is founded: that reading is an interactive process that requires readers to construct their own meanings for comprehension. In Section 5.7, the implications of the research findings, especially in the second language classroom, are discussed. Finally, in Section 5.8, suggestions for further research are listed.

#### **5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

As reported in Section 4.1 of Chapter 4, participants demonstrated more sophisticated understanding of the narrative text situated in their native culture. This is reflected in the comprehension test scores as well as the story retelling scores, but more so in the latter. Interestingly, the extent to which culturally-acquired prior knowledge affects participants' comprehension of a text is different for explicit or implicit questions.

Although the scores for both the comprehension test and story-retelling tasks appear to support the first hypothesis made in Section 3.4 of Chapter 3 - that in both tasks, participants would score higher for the narrative text situated in their native culture – it also appears that when answering implicit comprehension questions, familiarity with the cultural setting of a text is not the determining factor of success. Participants could answer implicit questions from a text of which culture they were not familiar with just as successfully as they could answer implicit questions from a text of which culture they had familiarity with.

Recordings of the story retelling sessions conducted as part of this study gave a further insight into the participants' understanding of the three texts read. The main purpose of the story retelling assessment was to understand in greater depth the miscomprehension that may occur as participants process narrative texts. As revealed in the story retelling sessions, miscomprehension appeared in various forms: enhancements and alterations to the original text, as substitutions for parts in the text and as omissions of certain elements in the text (see Section 4.1 of Chapter 4).

While inadequate culturally-acquired prior knowledge was found to be a major contributing factor to participants' inaccurate details in the retellings, other factors such as lexical confusion and complexity of sentences were also found to result in the miscomprehension. However, the fact that the least inaccuracies were detected in participants' retellings of the story situated in their native culture lends support to the second hypothesis, that inaccuracies occur more frequently in the retelling of texts situated in non-native cultures.

Finally, scores from the reading comprehension assessment were matched against scores from the story retelling assessment to seek a correlation between participants' performance in the reading comprehension and their performance in story retelling (see Section 4.3 of Chapter 4). A Pearson Correlation Coefficient test indicated that a significant correlation exists between the scores from the two assessments. This is in agreement with the third hypothesis made in Section 3.4 of Chapter 3, that the participants' retelling scores are highly correlated to their comprehension test scores.

## **5.2 COMPREHENSION OF TEXTS SITUATED IN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE CULTURES**

On the whole, the comprehension test scores for all three narrative texts make predictable revelations of participants' comprehension of all three narrative texts (see Section 4.1.1 of Chapter 4). However, a higher mean score for the comprehension test based on *The Goddess with Her Hands Full* (hereafter referred to as *GD*), a text set in participants' native culture, indicates a more comprehensive understanding of the text as compared to *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth* (hereafter referred to as *MB*) and *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* (hereafter referred to as *PB*).

This echoes the results obtained in Garth-McCullough's (2008) study, in which comprehension scores for texts situated in participants' native culture were found to be higher than the scores gained for texts situated in non-native culture. This, the researcher concluded, confirms a link between level of culturally-acquired prior knowledge and level of comprehension.

Garth-McCullough (2008) conducted the study on older participants and also used longer and more complex narrative texts (for a more detailed account of the study conducted by Garth-McCullough (2008), please see Section 2.4 of Chapter 2). The present study however was conducted with younger learners and used shorter texts with the complexity level controlled to match their proficiency level. The fact that similar results are obtained when participants of different age groups are involved and texts of different lengths and complexity levels are used indicates a strong reliability of the results.

Nevertheless, the relationship between culturally-acquired prior knowledge and the ability to answer comprehension questions as revealed in this study is not one that is straightforward. When examined separately as scores for explicit questions and scores for implicit comprehension questions, it was found that the highest mean score for implicit comprehension questions was achieved when answering questions from PB. Conflicting as it appears, participants performed better when answering implicit questions for a narrative text situated in a non-native culture. In this case, better familiarity with the cultural setting of *GD* did not serve to assist participants in answering implicit questions.

On the surface, this particular finding appears to oppose the notion that prior knowledge is a valuable resource used by readers to unlock implicit meanings in texts. As mentioned in Section 1.2 of Chapter 1, Griffith, Beach, Ruan & Dunn (2008) noted that comprehension is a process which requires readers to read for implicit meanings, using one's prior knowledge in the process. Prior knowledge therefore is valued as an important variable in the meaning making process and is expected to assist readers in meaning construction.

Findings from the current study however, reveal that this is only true when the meaning required is to be derived explicitly. As reported in Section 4.1.1 of Chapter 4, when answering implicit questions, participants did equally well in the test based on *GD*, with a mean of 4.90, as well as the test based on the *PB*, with a mean of 5.00. Culturally-acquired prior knowledge, as demonstrated through the present research findings, has no significant value when deciphering implicit information that needs to be inferred or predicted.

This revelation is in contrast with the findings of studies by Singaraveloo (2004) and Safiah Osman (1985), in which culturally-acquired prior knowledge was found to facilitate participants' ability to answer implicit questions (see Section 2.4 of Chapter 2 for a more detailed account of the studies). To seek an explanation for this, it is worth revisiting the variables affecting reading comprehension as discussed previously in Section 1.2.1 of Chapter 1.

Apart from background knowledge, the other notable variable that has been found to determine the extent to which one comprehends a text is readers' grasp of reading strategies (McNamara, 2009). Effective reading strategies help readers to make inferences, a much needed skill in answering implicit questions. This relationship between reading strategies and the ability to make inferences gives a solid reason to believe that sophisticated reading strategies could make up for the lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge.

What this possibly means is that in reading comprehension, reading strategies and inferencing skills are far more superior variables than cultural familiarity. Implicit questions require the use of inferencing skills. In this study, perhaps participants attempting implicit questions made up for the lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge with an efficient use of inferencing skills, thus allowing them to answer implicit comprehension questions despite not having the cultural familiarity.

However, given that no measurement of reading strategies was taken throughout this study, it is presumptuous to assert that participants had used sophisticated reading strategies while answering the implicit questions for *PB*. Having only the scores as references, it can only be speculated that differences in the level of reading strategies applied had contributed to the variance in the scores for the implicit questions.

Apart from reading strategies, the level of question complexity could have also affected the findings. Although the comprehension questions were thoroughly vetted by the researcher as well as two other experienced English teachers, it is possible that the implicit questions for the three tests were not equally challenging.

As reported in Section 4.1.2 of Chapter 4, the scores from the retelling sessions also indicate that participants were able to retell the narrative text from their native culture better than the narrative texts from the non-native cultures. The results are similar to those acquired by Steffensen, Joag-Dev & Anderson (1979). In their research, participants also recalled more idea units and gave retellings that were more accurate when they retold narrative texts from their own native culture (see Section 2.4 of Chapter 2).

In the present study, the retelling scores also reveal very poor performances by some of the participants as they retold the stories set in non-native settings. 3 participants achieved a minimum score of only 2 for each of the story, suggesting that a great strain was placed on the participants as they retold the stories. Field notes from the retelling sessions (see Appendix K) also show that some participants struggled to remember details from the texts situated in non-native cultures. The retellings of the text situated in native culture in contrast, was more fluid.

Overall, the comprehension test scores for all three texts reveal that participants had no major difficulties in comprehending texts from native and non-native cultures. Although differences in comprehension levels were observed, participants were still able to demonstrate minimum understanding of the narrative texts read, including the texts situated in the non-native cultures. This offers a valuable perspective as we try to find solution to the issue of comprehension of texts situated in non-native cultures.

As discussed in Section 1.4 of Chapter 1, the move to make children's literature an integral part of the English classroom and the push for extensive reading among young ESL learners in Malaysia have stirred concerns over the extent to which readers would be able to comprehend the texts they engaged with. While it is true that texts situated in native cultures are more readily comprehended, readers are also able to decode and comprehend other texts which are situated in foreign cultures given sufficient reading skills and strategies.



### **5.3 INACCURACIES IN STORY RETELLINGS: ROLE OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE**

This study is framed upon the notion of reading involving both extraction and construction of meanings. As discussed in Section 2.2 of Chapter 2, readers extract the symbols in a text in lexical processing and then use their prior knowledge to construct meanings for the symbols extracted. While the success of lexical processing generally depends on readers' decoding skills – skills which are applicable to all texts written in English – the success of meaning construction is dependent on the level of prior knowledge one has of the text read.

Therefore, the second hypothesis set for this study predicted that errors would occur as participants in this study attempted to construct meanings for the narrative texts. The miscomprehension was predicted to be the result of various factors, but largely due to the lack of cultural knowledge. To test this, a retelling assessment was conducted, in which participants' inaccurate retellings of the texts were noted, categorized and examined for possible causes.

The retelling transcriptions show that inaccuracies were indeed made as participants retold all three narrative texts. The inaccuracies appeared as enhancements, omissions and alterations and substitutions. Inaccuracies were detected in the retelling of all three texts but the retelling of the text from the native culture, *GD*, bore the least inaccuracies and whenever they did occur, the inaccuracies generally appeared as enhancements.

As pointed out in Section 4.2.3 of Chapter 4, the enhancements were found to stem from various reasons, such as compliance to cultural routines and norms, carelessness and lexical confusion. The inaccuracies detected are not culturally flawed – in other words, the enhancements made are not misrepresentations of the Indian culture. The enhancements made to *GD* highlight the significance of cultural routine and norms in reading comprehension. In this study, participants were affected by cultural routines, described here as regular activities performed by members of a particular group. In the retellings, they made assumptions and created events based on their own cultural experiences.

As the participants' experiences match that of the cultural setting in *GD*, the assumptions made and events created did not appear to be culturally-flawed. Similarly, participants applied their knowledge of the Malaysian Hindu Indian cultural norms while retelling the text. Participants used their familiarity of the cultural norms – defined as expected behaviours in a specific culture – to make their own conclusions about parts of the story.

In Section 1.3 of Chapter 1, culture was noted as serving a valuable map (Pai, 1990). The map, as Pai suggested, contains crucial information regarding learners' beliefs, expectations and needs and serves as a tool for teachers to 'learn' about the learners and cater teaching methods and materials to their specific needs. However, findings from this study have shown that more than serving as just a map containing information about participants' needs and beliefs, culture also serves as a tool to make predictions of readers' comprehension level. With knowledge of readers' culture, teachers will be able to predict the possible assumptions, generalisations and bias that may emerge out of readers' cultural viewpoints.

Given the relatively low prior knowledge of the Great Plains Indian culture, it does not emerge as a surprise then that the participants' retellings of *PB* were significantly shorter than the retellings of the other two texts and that they contained more inaccuracies. This echoes the findings by Steffensen, Joag-Dev & Anderson (1979) who found many generalisations, errors and bias in participants' retellings of texts situated in non-native culture. In this study, significant parts of the non-native narrative were omitted and most of the retellings appeared to be disconnected chunks of information.

This directs our attention back to the theory of schemata, as discussed in Section 2.3 of Chapter 2. More specifically, this highlights the importance of schemata on young readers' reading performance. As McKay (2006) noted, it is important for young readers to apply their own schemata while reading. Given their relatively limited world experiences and contact with cultures other than their own, young readers may not perform well if the reading texts are based on foreign cultures and the readers have yet to develop the necessary schemata to understand the texts.

#### **5.4 THE EXTENT TO WHICH STORY RETELLING SCORES CORRELATE WITH COMPREHENSION TEST SCORES**

In investigating the effects of cultural setting on young learners' comprehension of narrative texts, attention needs to be paid to the means by which the effects are assessed. Reading assessment in the English language classroom in Malaysia typically takes the form of standardized paper-and-pencil tests. While such an assessment type has its practicalities and is useful for placement purposes, it does not offer much information about readers' internal comprehension processes.

A widely-used alternative to the paper-and-pencil comprehension assessment is story retelling, as discussed in Section 2.6 of Chapter 2. Given the increasing popularity in the use of story retelling as a method for assessing reading comprehension, the third research question for this study aimed to highlight the connection – if there was any – between story retelling assessment and comprehension test assessment.

Findings from this study indicate that overall, a statistically significant, positive correlation exists between scores from the comprehension tests and scores from the story retelling task. Participants' story retelling scores generally correlated with their comprehension test scores. As participants' performance in the comprehension test was dependent on their reading skills, the positive correlation suggests that reading skills may be adequately assessed through story retelling. This shows that readers' ability to effectively apply mental schemata and organise information gathered from a reading may not only be examined through comprehension tests but also story retelling assessments.

While the comprehension test scores and retelling scores from this study have proven that indeed, culturally-acquired prior knowledge affects one's performance in reading assessments, they have also shown that when multiple assessments are used, the information gathered appear to be more representational of the true comprehension level of participants.

## **5.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL SETTINGS IN NARRATIVE TEXTS**

As discussed in the introductory chapter, this study aims to offer some perspectives on the two issues plaguing the use of children's literature in the classroom: comprehensibility and cultural relevance of texts. The premise of the study is that both issues are intertwined. Young readers engaging in culture-laden children's literature find difficulties relating to the cultural content of the stories situated in foreign cultures as they do not have the necessary cultural schemata and that this may serve as blockages to comprehension.

More than this, results from the study appear to solidify the significance of cultural setting in narrative texts. In other words, this study has demonstrated that cultural setting does leave an impact on young readers' comprehension of narrative texts. Although it can be argued that there are many children's literature which do not appear to bear significant cultural load, most narrative texts, whether they are written for adults or children, are written within a specific cultural framework. Therefore, the roles of cultural setting in determining one's comprehension of text must not be overlooked.

Nevertheless, it is also important to highlight the fact that cultural setting does not always serve as a blockade. Conversely, cultural setting in a narrative text can also be a useful tool for meaning construction. Unlike physical settings which are often vague, describing stories as taking place in a faraway land (Lukens 2007), the cultural setting in stories, especial traditional stories, are often specific and overtly shown.

This allows readers to quickly and efficiently activate the correct cultural schemata for meaning construction. When matched with readers' experiences, cultural setting can effectively assist comprehension by providing clues to implicit meanings and allowing readers to make accurate deductions of events in a text. Cultural setting in a text has also been linked to initial motivation. In this study, it is possible that participants did better when they retold the text situated in the native culture. The cultural setting in *The Goddess With Her Hands Full* is immediately recognisable and can be related to by the participants.

Nevertheless, while this study has established that cultural setting is a variable in determining reading comprehension, it has not been verified to be the single deciding variable. In fact, although the retelling transcripts show that a large portion of the retelling inaccuracies occurred due to unfamiliarity with the cultural setting in the narrative text, the relatively small amount of data gathered in this study is insufficient to assume that the cultural setting variable overrides other variables such as language proficiency. What can be asserted for sure is that cultural relevance in narrative texts does leave a positive impact on readers' comprehension.

## **5.6 READING COMPREHENSION AS AN INTERACTIVE PROCESS**

Chapter 1 began with a discussion of meaning in texts. Two ideas were proposed: meaning as existing in a text itself and meaning as emerging as a result of the interaction between the text and the reader. Adopting perspectives from Schema Theory, this study views meaning as a product of readers' engagement with a text. Therefore, underpinning this study is the belief that readers themselves are responsible for the meanings derived from texts.

When readers attempt to comprehend a text, they activate their existing schemata to construct 'meanings' in texts. These schemata are built and stored as prior knowledge. Having the necessary culturally-acquired prior knowledge of a text is therefore believed to make meaning-construction easier.

Findings from this research show that readers indeed construct their own meanings of narrative texts. The participants in this study demonstrated different levels of comprehension in the comprehension tests and made different enhancements as well as alterations to the texts in their retelling tasks. Such varying responses indicate that the participants had constructed different meanings to elements in the texts read. If meaning were to be accepted as existing within a text itself, the inaccuracies demonstrated in the retellings would have been identical, as participants' prior knowledge and personal experiences would have no effect on the meanings derived.

As readers attempt to construct meanings from texts, they apply their prior knowledge and experiences. When the meaning derived from the text does not appear to concur with readers' existing schemata, negotiations of meaning takes places. In this study, the negotiation was evident when participants retold parts of the narrative texts which they have little prior knowledge of.

In their attempt to still construct some sort of meaning out of the elements in the text, they gave inaccurate details, some the result of confusion with existing schemata. In this case, reading can be seen as an interactive process. Readers do not just decode words in order to gain comprehension, but also engage in an interactive dialogue with the text.

Cultural setting, as discussed in the previous section, is tied to this interactive nature of reading. Cultural setting determines the extent to which readers are able to engage with and respond to a text. Sound prior knowledge of the cultural setting framing a narrative text would open for a deeper engagement with the text. With familiarity of the cultural practices, artefacts and values framing a particular story, readers are able to effectively use their existing schemata to connect with the text, subsequently gaining better comprehension of the text. Comprehending the text will also be an easier task as learners already possess the necessary schemata needed.

## **5.7 IMPLICATIONS**

As stated in Section 1.5 of Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to provide English language teachers in the Malaysian multicultural setting with an insight into the challenges that young readers face as they engage with children's literature situated in diverse cultural settings. It is believed that with a sound knowledge of the challenges and the ways young readers respond to the challenges, language teachers will be able to more effectively assist readers in the process of comprehension. The following section transfers findings from the study into the classroom and offers some ideas for improving the teaching of comprehension using culturally-diverse literature.

As discussed earlier, participants in this study were observed to be constructing their own meanings out of the three texts given. From the retellings, it was clear that 'meaning' is the result of participants' interaction with the texts and that participants themselves are responsible for constructing meaning in the texts. Given this, it is deemed imperative that teachers create ample opportunities for young readers to engage in the process of meaning construction.



This, first and foremost, calls for a better commitment towards a reading culture. Young readers ought to be encouraged to read and to value reading as an enjoyable, rewarding experience. Apart from exposing readers to various types of narrative texts, a commitment towards the reading culture would serve to build internal motivation to read. This would in turn increase young readers' reading activities, which has been linked to a better grasp of comprehension strategies and subsequently, improved comprehension level (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala & Cox, 1999). Such exposure would greatly assist in the development of skills necessary for meaning construction.

Findings from this study also confirm that meaning construction is a skill that may be taught. Teachers may assist young readers in constructing meaning more efficiently by exposing young readers to various techniques and strategies for meaning construction. For example, readers may be taught to use the self-talk technique or the questioning technique as these techniques help to create avenues for 'dialogues' with the text read. This study has also shown that culture plays an important role in young readers' comprehension of narrative texts. Cultural knowledge, as the findings demonstrate, positively affects readers' comprehension.

Therefore, knowledge of readers' cultural background – knowledge which goes beyond stereotypes and superficial understanding – would serve as important guides for teachers. Language teachers in multicultural schools especially, may benefit from viewing culture as a map, as suggested by Pai (1990). The map may be constructed through various means such as by observing and participating in learners' diverse cultural practices and conducting informal interviews with learners to find out more about their cultural artefacts, values and expectations.

Having access to this ‘map’, however, is only significant when the map is utilised appropriately. In this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to gain information about participants’ prior knowledge of three cultures. When this ‘mapping’ exercise was done, the researcher found that the participants had high prior knowledge of the native culture but low prior knowledge of the non-native cultures. Cultural artefacts, values and practices that are familiar and unfamiliar to the participants were also noted. This map was then used to inform the researcher of the suitability of the texts.

In the classroom too, teachers may use such maps to inform them of the suitability of texts depending on the learning goals. Most definitely, this does not imply that only texts which fit into the ‘maps’ ought to be used. In fact, a deliberate use of culturally-irrelevant texts – decided by the ‘map’ constructed earlier – is useful in certain situations, such as when highlighting cultural bias and stereotypes.

This study has further strengthened the value of cultural setting in assisting comprehension. In multicultural classrooms of young ESL learners, it is important that teachers place proper consideration on cultural setting and relevance when selecting books to be used both in and outside the classroom. When using culture-laden children’s literature in the primary classroom, among the things that need to be considered are the relevance of characters, setting and cultural practices in a text to learners’ own lives. This, being part of culturally-responsive pedagogy as described in Section 1.3.1 of Chapter 1, is believed to effectively assist readers’ comprehension.

Participants' performance in this study highlights the need for skills to negotiate unfamiliar cultural settings. The retelling of *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*, especially, bore many inaccuracies that were the result of limited prior knowledge of the Great Plains Indian culture. In this study, the participants did not have the option of discussing the text with friends or looking at illustrations to assist their comprehension.

In a typical classroom however, such strategies may be encouraged as they help young readers to negotiate unfamiliar cultural settings. In a study of beginning English language learners, Iddings, Risko & Rampulla (2009) found that language brokering among young learners greatly assist in their comprehension. In the study, the participants were found to help one another comprehend a culturally-distant text by rephrasing the teacher's questions and making references to their personal experiences.

Knowledge of how cultural setting affects comprehension of culture-laden texts is also crucial for textbook writers and publishers of children's stories. In the Malaysian context, culture is integrated into primary school textbooks and workbooks, creating a balanced representation of all major cultural groups in the country.

The Ministry of Education, as developer of the curriculum as well as the materials that go with the curriculum, has taken great care to ensure that textbooks and activity books supplied bear cultural references that are familiar to the general Malaysian population.

However, the downside to this is that our primary school textbooks stimulate little interest in cultures other than our own. As our textbooks focus mainly on the Malaysian cultural setting, little is done to engage our young readers in the discovery of other cultures.

While the focus on local cultures may have been due to the belief that cultural familiarity facilitates language learning, this research has shown that lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge does not significantly impede one's comprehension of the text. Therefore, writers, developers and publishers of textbooks and activity books to be used in the Malaysian classroom may use findings from this research to assist in striking the balance between cultures that are native and non-native to the Malaysian young learner when producing the materials.

Finally, the positive relationship between the story retelling assessment score and the comprehension test score demonstrated in this study reflects the value of story retelling as a form of comprehension assessment. In fact, the amount of data gathered from the retelling session indicates that story retelling, when used as a comprehension assessment, is able to provide teachers with valuable information about readers' comprehension processes. Therefore in the classroom, it is recommended that teachers apply not only the conventional paper-and-pencil comprehension tests, but also utilise story retelling as a form of assessment.

## **5.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study was conducted on a relatively small scale, involving only three narrative texts and participants from a single ethnic group. The data have been adequate to answer the research questions. The findings have also shed light on several other issues pertaining the role of culturally-acquired prior knowledge in comprehension of culture-laden narrative texts. This section discusses these issues in relation to how they may be used to guide future studies.

For the purpose of this study, the effects of other variables apart from culturally-acquired prior knowledge were controlled. However, as discovered through the story retelling assessment, there is a possibility of other variables - such as lexical confusion and poor inferencing ability - affecting the extent to which culturally-acquired prior knowledge affect young readers' comprehension. Although studies of such nature have been previously conducted, those which were conducted specifically in the Malaysian multicultural setting have been scarce. Therefore, it is suggested that future research on the role of culturally-relevant prior knowledge include variables such as motivation level, proficiency level and vocabulary size.

In this study, the non-native texts used were selected based on the researcher's own observations and beliefs of what is non-native to the participants. Both texts feature cultural artefacts and practices which the participants have not openly interacted with.

In a multicultural society like Malaysia, however, it is highly possible for young readers to interact with and gain knowledge of cultural artefacts and practices of other ethnic groups within their communities. Even for cultures which are geographically distant, an engagement with mass media makes it possible for the learning of non-native cultures.

However, the extent to which knowledge of non-native cultures may be acquired and applied by young readers is a research avenue that has yet to be exploited, especially in the Malaysian classroom context. Future research therefore may wish to examine the level of inter-cultural knowledge of Malaysian young readers and the extent to which this knowledge affects their reading comprehension.

Young learners' strategies for navigating non-native cultures also merit further research. When reading texts framed within cultural settings which are not accessible, readers do not always give up and stop reading. Instead, as demonstrated in this study, readers often use various strategies to fill the gaps created by the lack of prior knowledge. Although the strategies used by the participants in this study were not adequate to override the effects that lack of culturally-acquired prior knowledge had on their comprehension, they point to the possibility of strategies playing a significant role in assisting young readers to comprehend texts situated in non-native cultures. A study on the strategies used would help to inform teachers of not only strategies which are already commonly used by learners but also strategies which learners have yet to grasp.

The backbone of this study is the constructivist perspective on comprehension. Meaning is seen as the result of readers' interaction with the text. While this study has shown that indeed, meaning is self-constructed by the readers through the activation of existing schemata, the exact processes involved in the construction of meaning have not been explicitly dealt with.

Future studies on the cognitive processes involved as readers make meanings out of texts may take the form of case studies, using thinking aloud protocol as data collection method. The impact that such studies would bring to the Malaysian classroom is tremendous. It would give teachers access to information regarding learners' cognitive processes as they negotiate meanings. This information will be valuable for developing effective reading lessons, diagnosing reading problems and strategizing solutions to reading difficulties.

## 5.9 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, perspectives on the role of culture in comprehension were offered, alongside a discussion on the interactive-constructivist nature of reading comprehension. The implications and suggestions for future research were then discussed in relation to the Malaysian multicultural context. Although this study was conducted only on a small scale and is limited to participants from only a single ethnic group, it is hoped that it is able to provide some useful perspectives for English teachers in primary schools in Malaysia

This study was designed in response to the introduction of the new English syllabus in Malaysia, the *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* (KSSR) [Primary School Standard Curriculum]. As part of the MBMMBI initiative, the implementation of the new English syllabus will see the use of children's literature in the classroom and the promotion of extensive reading outside the classroom.

What this means for English teachers in Malaysia is the immediate need to revisit principles for teaching second language reading. This entails reviewing methods for teaching second language reading, effective activities for building reading skills, valid and reliable methods for assessing reading as well as guidelines for selecting reading materials to be used in the classroom.

This research zooms into the area of reading materials and looks specifically at how different cultural settings in reading materials affect young ESL learners' comprehension. Given the wide availability of popular children's literature situated in predominantly Western cultural setting, the issues of comprehensibility and cultural relevance inevitably become concerns for many English teachers in Malaysia.

This research responds to KSSR by providing an insight into the role that cultural setting in children's stories play in assisting or impeding comprehension.

Popular beliefs have suggested that stories situated in native cultures are more easily comprehensible compared to stories situated in non-native cultures. This is true to a certain extent, as the findings of this research show. Level of comprehension, as far as the comprehension test scores and the retelling scores reveal, is positively linked to level of prior knowledge possessed of the culture framing the story.

However, the comprehension scores also reveal that when meaning is derived implicitly, level of culturally-acquired prior knowledge appears to have little significance. Readers, when making sense of a text of which cultural setting they have little familiarity with, appear to fill the gaps using cross-cultural information and a change in reading strategies. This information is crucial for English teachers in Malaysia, especially those teaching in rural or underprivileged areas where access to information about 'outside' cultures is scarce. In such situations, it is often the case that teachers lament the 'foreign' nature of texts available in school libraries.



However, as this research has shown, young readers do possess the capacity to process these ‘foreign’ texts with cultural settings that are not within their familiar scope. Inaccuracies in the readers’ comprehension of these ‘foreign’ texts are bound to happen but are likely to be manageable, provided teachers help the readers to develop and utilize strategies for negotiating unfamiliar cultural settings in stories.

This research has also strengthened the value of story retelling as a method for assessing culture-laden texts. In this study, story retelling was chosen as the method to supplement findings from the more traditional assessment that is comprehension test. This was largely motivated by the fact that story retelling is authentic and functional in nature. Results have demonstrated that performance in story retelling may be used to predict performance in comprehension test. In the ESL classroom, story retelling therefore, may be used as a secondary method for assessing comprehension of culture-laden stories.

With KSSR taking off in January 2011, it is hoped that positive changes transpire in Malaysian primary classrooms. The call for better use of children’s literature in the teaching of English ought to be seen as an opportunity to engage children more effectively, in literary texts. While issues such as low culturally-acquired prior knowledge and low proficiency level may serve as stumbling blocks, teachers may benefit from the many studies on second reading comprehension, which specifically address the said issues, such as this one.

## APPENDIX A

### Narrative Text 1 (Adapted from *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth* )

Benito was born with very large teeth.	1
His mother died when he was a baby.	
Nobody wanted to take care of Benito.	
Sister Margarita of The Periwinkle Sisters took him in.	
At the church, Benito helped the nuns.	5
He was a helpful boy but he had no friends.	
Benito’s teeth made children laugh at him.	
He was especially afraid of Sundays and would hide in the church garden.	
One night, the Tooth Fairy visited Benito.	
“I just want to say sorry for the big, ugly teeth.”	10
“Can you make me new ones?” asked Benito.	
“I just give teeth. I don’t pull them out.”	
Benito woke up and checked under his pillow.	
He thought the Tooth Fairy had left him something.	
He checked his teeth in the mirror.	15
They were still there.	
“If nobody can help me pull out these ugly big front teeth, I’ll pull them out myself!”	
Immediately, he went to the store by himself.	
He bought boxes of gum, jelly, strawberry jam and a jar of syrup.	
For a week, he did not eat anything else.	20

## APPENDIX B

### Narrative Text 2: (Adapted from *The Goddess with Her Hands Full* )

A long time ago, there was a boy called Rama.	1
Rama was well-known in the village for being cheeky.	
He lived with his mother who always asked him to go to the temple.	
Rama would go to the temple just to please her.	
Anyway, at the temple, he liked to watch the people visiting.	5
They rolled on the ground.	
They asked the Gods to forgive their sins.	
They made many promises.	
Some would promise not to eat meat.	10
Some would promise to shave off their beautiful hair.	
Rama knew that they would go home and do the same sins again.	
On his birthday, Rama's mother told him to go to the temple of Kali Amma.	
Coconuts and flowers in his hands, Rama went to see Kali Amma.	
Rama sat at the temple alone and watched the devotees.	
He looked at Kali Amma.	15
He told her it was his birthday.	
She was magnificent, with her dark face and large eyes.	
Kali Amma sat on a fierce tiger and had twenty long arms.	
Each arm held a weapon.	
Suddenly Rama began to laugh.	20

## APPENDIX C

### Narrative Text 3: (Adapted from *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*)

Many years ago, there was a boy called Little Gopher. 1

He was so much smaller than the children in his tribe.

He could not keep up with the other boys.

They were always riding, running, shooting their bows and wrestling.

Little Gopher would only be watching them. 5

The boy, however, had a gift.

He could make all sorts of wonderful things with his hands.

He used scraps of leather and pieces of wood to make toy warriors.

He loved to decorate smooth stones with red juices from berries.

The wise shaman of the tribe knew about Little Gopher's gift. 10

"Do not worry, Little Gopher.", the Shaman told Little Gopher.

"One day, you will be remembered by the People."

In a few years, Little Gopher was old enough to leave home.

He went out to the hills alone.

He had to think about becoming a man. 15

All the men in his tribe had to.

On the hills, Little Gopher had a strange dream.

He was visited by a young woman and an old grandfather.

She carried a rolled-out animal skin.

He carried a paintbrush and pots of paints. 20

## APPENDIX D

### Prior-Knowledge Interview Questions

TEXT	CULTURAL REFERENCES	QUESTIONS
Magnificent Benito And His Two Front Teeth	Church Nuns Sunday school Tooth fairy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Who goes to <u>church</u>? Why do people go to church? When do people go to church? Does anybody live in a church?</li> <li>b. Who takes care of a church? Are there any children living in a church?</li> <li>c. What is a Sunday school?</li> <li>d. What do you know about <u>tooth fairies</u>? What does a tooth fairy do?</li> </ul>
The Goddess With Her Hands Full	Going to the temple Sacrifices to wash sins Birthday blessing Gods and Goddesses (statues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Who goes to a temple? What do people do at a temple? When do people go to a temple? What do you see at a temple?</li> <li>b. What must you do at a temple? What must you not do at a temple?</li> <li>c. Mrs Rajan vows to walk barefoot up to the temple if the God helps her son to recover from his sickness. Have you heard of such vows?</li> <li>d. What do you know about <u>Kali Amma</u>?</li> </ul>
The Legend Of The Indian Paintbrush	Living in tribes Wise shaman Art on animal skin Going out to the hills as coming-of-age ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What do you know about Native Indians? Where do they live? What do they do? Do they live in houses like ours?</li> <li>b. Do you know that the Native Indians live in tribes? Why do you think they live in tribes?</li> <li>c. It is said that Native Indians paint. What do you think they use to paint? Have you seen any of their paintings?</li> <li>d. What do you know about <u>Shamans</u>?</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX E

### Comprehension Test Questions

#### MAGNIFICENT BENITO AND HIS TWO FRONT TEETH

NAME: ..... SCORE: .....

SECTION A. INSTRUCTIONS: Read the questions carefully. Circle the best answer.

1. What was Benito born with?

- A. Large teeth
- B. Large ears
- C. Large eyes

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

2. What happened to Benito's mother?

- A. She ran away.
- B. She died when Benito was a baby.
- C. She met with an accident.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

3. Who took care of Benito?

- A. The midwife.
- B. Some nuns from a church.
- C. Benito's sister.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

4. Where did Benito live?

- A. In his house.
- B. At the church.
- C. In his sister's house.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

5. Where did Benito meet the Tooth Fairy?

- A. In his dreams.
- B. At the church.
- C. At the store.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

6. What did Benito hope the Tooth Fairy had left under his pillow?

- A. A new set of teeth.
- B. Some sweets.
- C. Some money.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

7. What do you think would happen if Benito were given new teeth?

- A. He would be sad.
- B. He would be proud.
- C. He would be happier.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

8. What did Benito buy from the store?  
A. Some ice-cream.  
B. Some sugar.  
C. Some sweets and chocolates.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

9. What did Benito plan to do with his teeth?  
A. He wanted to pull his teeth out.  
B. He woke up upset and wanted to forget about the teeth.  
C. He wanted to eat many sweets so that his teeth would rot.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

10. Sister Margarita is....  
A. Benito's sister.  
B. A nun.  
C. A churchgoer.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

SECTION B.

INSTRUCTIONS: Write TRUE or FALSE

1. Benito wanted the Tooth Fairy to change his teeth. ....  
(Question Type: EXPLICIT)
2. The Tooth Fairy took Benito to Ali Chayong's Sari Sari Store. ....  
(Question Type: EXPLICIT)
3. Benito had no brothers or sisters. ....  
(Question Type: IMPLICIT)
4. Benito hid in the church garden every day. ....  
(Question Type: EXPLICIT)
5. The Periwinkle Sisters paid Benito to work in the church ....  
(Question Type: IMPLICIT)

**APPENDIX E - continued**

**Comprehension Test Questions**

THE GODDESS WITH HER HANDS FULL

NAME: ..... SCORE: .....

SECTION A. INSTRUCTIONS: Read the questions carefully. Circle the best answer.

1. Who did Rama live with?

- A. His uncle.
- B. His mother.
- C. His grandmother.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

2. Why was Rama well-known in the village?

- A. He was brave.
- B. He was naughty.
- C. He was hardworking.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

3. What did Rama like to do at the temple?

- A. He liked watching the people at the temple.
- B. He liked laughing at the people at the temple.
- C. He liked sitting outside the temple.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

4. How did Rama feel about going to the temple?

- A. He enjoyed it.
- B. He did not like it.
- C. He thought it was funny.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

5. Where did Rama go on his birthday?

- A. School.
- B. Kali Amma's temple.
- C. His grandmother's house.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

6. Why did Rama go to there?

- A. To ask for forgiveness.
- B. To get birthday blessings.
- C. To bring some food for Kali Amma.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

7. Why did Rama bring coconuts and flowers to the temple?

- A. To eat.
- B. To sell.
- C. As gifts to the God.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT



8. Who is Kali Amma ?  
 A. The person who takes care of the temple.  
 B. A goddess.  
 C. Rama's mother.

Question Type:  
 IMPLICIT

9. How many hands did Kali Amma have?  
 A. Ten.  
 B. Eight.  
 C. Twenty

Question Type:  
 EXPLICIT

10. Each arm held a weapon. What do you think the weapon is for?  
 A. To fight evil.  
 B. As decoration.  
 C. To scare thieves.

Question Type:  
 IMPLICIT

SECTION B.

INSTRUCTIONS: Write TRUE or FALSE

1. Rama lived in the temple. ....  
 (Question Type: EXPLICIT)
2. Goddess Kali sat on a huge elephant. ....  
 (Question Type: EXPLICIT)
3. Rama was afraid of Kali. ....  
 (Question Type: EXPLICIT)
4. The people at the temple gave Kali some money. ....  
 (Question Type: IMPLICIT)
5. Kali asked the people at the temple to shave their hair. ....  
 (Question Type: IMPLICIT)

**APPENDIX E – continued**

**Comprehension Test Questions**

**THE LEGEND OF THE INDIAN PAINTBRUSH**

NAME: ..... SCORE: .....

SECTION A. INSTRUCTIONS: Read the questions carefully. Circle the best answer.

1. What was the boy's name?

- A. Little Gropher
- B. Little Gopher.
- C. Little Gopher.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

2. Why didn't the boy join his friends as they play?

- A. He was too small.
- B. His friends did not like him.
- C. He could make toy warriors and paint stones.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

3. How do you think the boy felt about not being able to play with his friends?

- A. He was sad.
- B. He was happy.
- C. He was afraid.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

4. What gift did the boy have?

- A. He can paint.
- B. He can climb trees.
- C. He can make beautiful crafts.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

5. What did he use to make toy warriors?

- A. Plastic and stones.
- B. Leather and wood.
- C. Stones and berries.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

6. Who knew about his gift?

- A. His friends.
- B. His teachers.
- C. The village Shaman.

Question Type:  
EXPLICIT

7. The wise 'shaman' is...

- A. The village chief.
- B. The village doctor.
- C. The village teacher.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

8. The wise shaman said, “You will be remembered by the People.” Who are the “People”?

- A. The Gods.
- B. The villagers.
- C. The boy’s family.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

9. Who asked the boy to go up the hill?

- A. His mother.
- B. The shaman.
- C. Nobody. He went because it was the rule of his tribe.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

10. What do you think the dream meant?

- A. The boy must stop painting.
- B. The boy will be a great painter one day.
- C. The boy must go home and help his parents.

Question Type:  
IMPLICIT

SECTION B.

INSTRUCTIONS: Write TRUE or FALSE

- 1. The boy’s friends were always swimming in the river. ....  
(Question Type: EXPLICIT)
- 2. Nobody knew about the boy’s gift. ....  
(Question Type: EXPLICIT)
- 3. The wise Shaman was an important man. ....  
(Question Type: IMPLICIT)
- 4. A young woman lived on the hill that the boy went to. ....  
(Question Type: EXPLICIT)
- 5. The boy had to stay on the hills forever. ....  
(Question Type: IMPLICIT)

## APPENDIX F

### Narrative Retelling Summary Sheet

NAME: .....

TEXT: MAGNIFICENT BENITO AND HIS TWO FRONT TEETH		
ITEM	DESCRIPTION	SCORE
SETTING	Begins with an introduction	/1
	Gives time and space	/1
CHARACTER	Names main character	/1
	Identifies other characters	/1
PROBLEM	Identifies the story problem or conflict	/1
ACTION	1. Benito is helpful and kind, but sad because his enormous teeth were being made fun of.	/1
	2. One night, he was visited by the tooth fairy and asked the tooth fairy to change his teeth but the tooth fairy refused to do so.	/1
	3. Benito decided to get rid of his teeth by eating sweets.	/1
SEQUENCE	Retells story in order (2 pts – correct, 1 pt – partial, 0 – no evidence of sequence)	
	TOTAL	/10

**APPENDIX F – Continued**

**Narrative Retelling Summary Sheet**

NAME: .....

TEXT: THE GODDESS WITH HER HANDS FULL		
ITEM	DESCRIPTION	SCORE
SETTING	Begins with an introduction	/1
	Gives time and space	/1
CHARACTER	Names main character	/1
	Identifies other characters	/1
PROBLEM	Identifies the story problem or conflict	/1
ACTION	1. Tenali Rama is described as a cheeky boy.	/1
	2. Tenali Rama was told to go to the temple to ask for birthday blessings.	/1
	3. Tenali Rama saw Goddess Kali and laughed at her.	/1
SEQUENCE	Retells story in order (2 pts – correct, 1 pt – partial, 0 – no evidence of sequence)	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>/10</b>

**APPENDIX F – Continued**

**Narrative Retelling Summary Sheet**

NAME: .....

TEXT: THE LEGEND OF THE INDIAN PAINTBRUSH		
ITEM	DESCRIPTION	SCORE
SETTING	Begins with an introduction	/1
	Gives time and space	/1
CHARACTER	Names main character	/1
	Identifies other characters	/1
PROBLEM	Identifies the story problem or conflict	/1
ACTION	1. Little Gopher is described as smaller than his peers, but had talents in making things.	/1
	2. When he grew up, Little Gopher went to the hills.	/1
	3. He had a vision of an Indian woman holding a rolled-up animal skin and old man holding a paintbrush.	/1
SEQUENCE	Retells story in order (2 pts – correct, 1 pt – partial, 0 – no evidence of sequence)	
	TOTAL	/10

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Consent Form**

#### **RESEARCH CONSENT FORM**

#### **A STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ON YOUNG LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION**

Dear Parents,

I am pursuing a Masters in English as a Second Language (M.ESL) at Universiti Malaya. As part of my course requirement, I am conducting a research on the effects of prior knowledge on young learners' reading comprehension. The purpose of this research is to find out what comprehension strategies young learners use when they read stories from foreign cultures.

#### **WHAT YOUR CHILD WILL BE ASKED TO DO**

By participating in this research, your child will be asked to take a prior-knowledge assessment which involves a short interview session. Next, your child will take three reading comprehension tests. In each test, your child will read a story and answer 15 multiple-choice questions. Your child will also be asked to retell the stories read in his or her words immediately after the reading it. The interview and retelling sessions will be video-taped for analysis.

Your child will only be asked to sit for ONE comprehension test PER WEEK. It is expected that the research will be completed within 3 weeks. All tests will be conducted within regular schooling hours.

#### **HOW THE RESULTS WILL BE USED**

All results and video recordings are confidential and will not be disclosed to any parties other than myself as the research and my research supervisor (Associate Professor Dr. Mohana Kumari Nambiar, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University Malaya). Your child's name will not be disclosed in the research findings.

#### **HOW TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH WILL AFFECT YOUR CHILD**

By participating in this research, your child will gain an assessment of his or her reading comprehension strategies. Results from the comprehension tests will be sent to you as soon as the research is completed. Video recordings of your child's story retelling sessions and interview sessions will be sent to you upon request.

Taking part in this research is entirely up to you. Your child will not be penalised for not participating in this research or for withdrawing before the research is completed. Results from the comprehension tests will not be recorded in the academic report card.

If you want to know more about this research project, please contact me at 019-348 2683. This research has been approved by the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics at Universiti Malaya.

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Sawitri Shotiwuth Charun

Student,  
Masters of English as Second Language  
Faculty of Languages and Linguistics  
Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

### CONSENT STATEMENT

**I agree to allow my child, ....., to take part in this research. I understand what he/she will be required to do and that he/she may stop at any time.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name**

### AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE CONSENT

**I agree to allow my child to be *video*-recorded during the interview and story retelling sessions. My child has the right to see the video tapes before they are analysed for data.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name**



**ஆரம்பக்கல்வி மாணவர்களின் கருத்துணர்தல் ஆற்றல் மீது முன்  
அனுபவக்கல்வி ஒட்டிய ஆய்வுகள்**

அன்புள்ள பெற்றோர்களே,

நான் மலாயா பல்கலைக்கழகத்தில் ஆங்கிலமொழியில் முதுநிலை கல்வி பயின்று வருகிறேன். என்னுடைய பாடத்தையொட்டி நான் மாணவர்கள் வாசிக்கும்போது, அவர்களின் புரிந்துக் கொள்ளும் ஆற்றல் மீது முன் அனுபவக்கல்வியின் விளைவுகள் ஒட்டிய ஆய்வு ஒன்றை நடத்துகிறேன். இந்த ஆய்வின் நோக்கம், மாணவர்கள் வாசிக்கும் போது புரிந்து கொள்வதற்கும் கையாளும் வழிமுறைகளை அறிந்து கொள்வதற்கும் ஆகும்.

**உங்கள் பிள்ளைகள் என்ன செய்ய வேண்டும்?**

இந்த ஆய்வில் பங்கேற்பதால், மாணவர்கள் (உங்கள் பிள்ளைகள்) அவர்கள் இதற்குமுன் கற்றறிந்தவற்றை ஒட்டி நேர்காணல் முறையில் ஒரு தேர்வுக்கு உட்காருவர். பின்பு (உங்கள் பிள்ளைகள்) 3 வாசிக்கும் கருத்துணர்தல் தேர்வுக்கு அமர வேண்டும். ஒவ்வொரு தேர்விலும், (உங்கள் பிள்ளைகள்) கொடுக்கப்பட்ட கதையை படித்துவிட்டு 15 கேள்விகளுக்குப் பதிலளிக்க வேண்டும். (உங்கள் பிள்ளைகள்) வாசித்த கதையைப் புரிந்துக்கொண்டு, சுய வார்த்தைகளுடன் கதையை மறுபடியும் சொல்ல வேண்டும். இந்த நேர்க்காணல், மற்றும் கதை சொல்லுதல், ஆய்வுக்காக பதிவு செய்யப்படும். (உங்கள் பிள்ளைகள்) ஒரு வாரத்திற்கு ஒரு கருத்துணர்தல் தேர்வுதான் உட்காருவார். இதனால், இந்த ஆய்வு 3 வாரங்களில் முடிந்துவிடும் என எதிர்பார்க்கப்படுகிறது. அனைத்து தேர்வுகளும் பள்ளி நேரங்களில் நடத்தப்படும்.

**தேர்வு அடைவரிசையின் பயன்பாடு**

அனைத்து அடைவரிசை விபரங்களும், பதிவு செய்தவைகளும் இரகசியமானவை மற்றும் என்னையும் என் ஆய்வு கண்காணிப்பாளர் (Associate Professor Dr. Mohana Kumari) அவர்களையும் விடுத்து எந்த தரப்பினருக்கும் வெளிப்படுத்தப்படாது. உங்கள் பிள்ளையின் பெயர் விபரங்கள் ஆய்வு விபரங்களில் வெளிப்படாது.

**இந்த ஆய்வில் பங்கேற்பதால் எவ்வகையில் மாணவர்கள் பயன் அடைகின்றனர்.**

இந்த ஆய்வில் பங்கேற்பதால் மாணவர்களின் வாசித்து புரிந்துக்கொள்ளும் திறனை செய்யப்படுகிறது. இதனால் கிடைக்கப்பெறும் முடிவுகள் ஆய்வுகள் முடித்தப்பிறகு, பெற்றோர்களுக்கு அனுப்பப்படும். பதிவு செய்யப்பட்ட நேர்க்காணலும், கதை சொல்வதும் உங்கள் வேண்டுகோளுக்குப்பின் அனுப்பப்படும். இந்த ஆய்வில் பங்கேற்பது முழுமையாக உங்களை பொருத்துள்ளது. உங்கள் பிள்ளை இந்த ஆய்வில் பங்கெடுக்காவிட்டாலோ பின்வாங்கினாலோ தண்டிக்கப்படமாட்டார். இந்த வாசிக்கும் கருத்துணர்தல் தேர்வின் அடைவரிசை புள்ளிகள் பள்ளியின் மாணவர்கள் அடைவரிசை புத்தகத்தில் குறிக்கப்படாது.

மேல் விபரங்களுக்கு, என்னை 019-3482683 என்ற எண்களில் தொடர்புக் கொள்ளலாம்.  
இந்த ஆய்வு Faculty of Languages and Linguistics Universiti Malaya- யாவால்  
அங்கீகரிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது / அனுமதிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது. உங்களுக்கு சம்மதம் கடிதம்  
வழங்கப்படும் / அனுமதி கடிதம் வழங்கப்படும்.

**அனுமதிக்க கடிதம்.**

நான் என் பிள்ளை KAMINI A/P Segar, இந்த  
ஆய்வில் பங்கேற்க அனுமதிக்கிறேன். அவர் என்னென்ன செய்ய வேண்டும் என்பதையும்  
எந்த நேரத்திலும் பின்வாங்க முடியும் என புரிந்துக்கொண்டேன்.



(கையொப்பம்)

19/10/2010

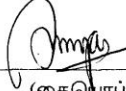
(தேதி)

R. Segar

(பெயர்)

**அனுமதிக்க கடிதம்.**

நான் என் பிள்ளையின் நேர்காணலையும் கதை சொல்வதையும் பதிவு செய்ய அனுமதிக்கிறேன்.  
என் பிள்ளைக்கு அவரின் பதிவை முன் பாப்பதற்கு அனைத்து உரிமைகளும் உள்ளது.



(கையொப்பம்)

19/10/2010

(தேதி)

R. Segar

(பெயர்)

## APPENDIX H

### Images Used in Prior Knowledge Assessment



IMAGE 1



IMAGE 2



IMAGE 3

## APPENDIX I

### Scores for Comprehension Tests Based on Type of Questions and Texts.

Participant	Comprehension Test 1 (Based on Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth)			Comprehension Test 2 (Based on The Goddess With Her Hands Full)			Comprehension Test 3 (Based on The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush)		
	E (Max 8 points)	I (Max 7 points)	Total	E (Max 8 points)	I (Max 7 points)	Total	E (Max 8 points)	I (Max 7 points)	Total
1	6	6	12	8	6	14	8	7	15
2	6	2	8	6	4	10	6	4	10
3	4	3	7	7	5	12	4	3	7
4	6	6	12	8	5	13	8	7	15
5	7	5	12	7	5	12	8	6	14
6	5	3	8	8	5	13	5	4	9
7	8	3	11	7	4	11	7	6	13
8	5	3	8	8	6	14	6	5	11
9	4	5	9	7	4	11	7	5	12
10	6	4	10	8	3	11	6	6	12
11	6	5	11	7	5	12	5	5	10
12	6	4	10	8	6	14	7	5	12
13	6	4	10	7	3	10	8	5	13
14	5	2	7	7	6	13	6	4	10
15	6	5	11	7	5	12	6	5	11
16	6	3	9	8	5	13	6	5	11
17	4	4	8	6	4	10	5	3	8
18	7	3	10	8	5	13	6	5	11
19	7	5	12	7	5	12	8	5	13
20	6	5	11	8	6	14	7	4	11
21	8	7	15	8	6	14	6	6	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>87</b>		<b>155</b>	<b>103</b>		<b>135</b>	<b>105</b>	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>211</b>			<b>258</b>			<b>240</b>		

E= Explicit Questions    I= Implicit Questions

## APPENDIX J

### Story Retelling Scores and T-Units Based on Texts

Participant	Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth		The Goddess With Her Hands Full		The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush	
	Retelling Score	T-unit	Retelling Score	T-unit	Retelling Score	T-unit
1	10	22	10	18	10	16
2	6	8	8	8	4	8
3	9	11	7	8	5	4
4	10	8	10	8	10	11
5	8	20	8	21	6	14
6	8	12	10	18	10	14
7	7	12	8	8	5	4
8	5	11	8	10	4	4
9	4	11	7	8	2	8
10	4	6	6	6	4	3
11	3	4	8	6	3	2
12	10	20	10	9	6	7
13	5	8	8	10	4	5
14	2	3	8	11	8	6
15	7	17	8	11	4	9
16	10	24	10	14	5	8
17	4	7	8	11	2	4
18	10	19	9	12	3	8
19	6	20	7	7	5	6
20	8	19	8	8	9	11
21	6	12	9	11	8	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>166</b>

## APPENDIX K

### Prior Knowledge Interview Field Notes

INTERVIEW 1 (FILIPINO ROMAN-CATHOLIC CULTURE)					
Student	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Others
1	Christians To pray Nobody lives in the church	The workers there No children living in the church	Extra class	If we break our teeth, put under pillow, midnight, come, take out our teeth, exchange with coins See on TV. Tooth fairy is not real	
2	Christians For pray the Jesus Sunday Father(lives there)	Father (takes care) No children	-	-	
3	-did not state who goes to temple- "Buddhe" They want to pray Seen on TV	Yes (there are children living in the church)	-	-	
4	Christians To pray Wed, Sun Cousin goes to church Clean, beautiful	Nobody lives there No children Guards (take care)	-	-	
5	Christians To pray Christmas	Nobody (lives) They all call "father, father" White colour shirt, white colour pants He say to all to pray		-	
6	Islam Quiet, pretty	-	-	-	-
7	Christians Pray their God I know I see but I cannot tell Sunday	Father (lives in the church) I think so (children living in the church)	-	-	
8	Christians Pray Sunday	Nobody (lives) Big people (take care of the church)	-	-	-
9	Like a temple To pray Very big and clean Like the plus sign	-	-		
10	Christians Pray	Fathers (live)			

	Thursday				
11	Christians Pray for their exams Put up an X	Father (lives) One father for the church, sometimes they call father in the church.	-	I see on TV, fairy statue	
12	Christians go and pray Plus Sunday	The owner of the church (takes care) – many owners Yes, there are children. They go to church on Saturday, Sunday Mon – Tue go to school	-	-	-
13	Christians Friday Triangle, have T	-	-	-	
14	Christians Yes, one time been there. My father is mix. Very big and have lots of chair and have red carpet and lilin, candle. They close their eyes and take the lilin.  Father/Sister/Mother  Mother is the ketua. They will see the God real Jesus.	If don't have mother father they'll live in the church.  They have house at the up. They also will come and pray.  My mother father supply food. Give toys also like control car.	Class for members of the church. The teach how to sing and pray quiet.	The cartoon. HBO.	
15	Christians Pray, Sunday, got a T Inside got God See in TV	Cannot see (CHILDREN IN CHURCH), see in TV,	-	-	
16	Pray Christians Sunday Big, inside got Father Plus	-	-	-	-
17	Mother – church mother Christians Pray Friday, look like house Seen in a book	Mother takes care	-	-	
18	Mother –church She wears the	Father and Mother (take care)	-	-	

	Christian's one. (identification) Very clean, big, so many candles and got.				
19	Christians Pray Cross on building I see TV	Nobody	-	-	
20	Christian people Sunday Pray	-	-	-	
21	Christian Cross Christmas Sunday	-	-	-	-

INTERVIEW 2 (MALAYSIAN HINDU INDIAN CULTURE)					
Student	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Others
1	Indians Pray like normal Sundays, Fridays	Bring flowers, fruits Be quiet, no noise Shouldn't run around	Not heard of vows	She likes to drink blood. Saw it in Pulau Pangkor. Scary, vampire teeth Holding a head Stepping on a body	
2	Indians Pray Friday & Tuesday	Pray the God Flower, fruits Do not do noise Don't run No shoes	Pray her son become normal	God I cannot tell in English Beautiful God She cut the anybody who naughty, she cut the head	
3	Don't know "temple" but knows "kuil" To pray	Cannot play	-	-	
4	Chinese and Indians Pray Thurs, Fri, Tues Very crowd (on festivals)	Very nice inside, very colourful Nobody (takes care) Be quiet, don't play Be polite	Some in Batu Caves Roll Like a knife, put in Must be good (why) Be safe (why)	Like a ghost, but not a ghost Attacking other people, bad people Very shock	
5	Chinese and Indians	See the Tuhan like Mariamma,	Rolling on the ground	Saturday Saturday In my house, come	



	Pray Give food, we can eat	Ganapathy, Siva Like batu batu They all God, they up we all If you don't pray, you want money, you do not you get	Api-api they walk They walk on the api They body already come God	the ghost, my pakcik say go out go out, the Kali Amma already jaga the house, jaga the ghost Like blue colour, five hands, ten hands, she is powerful got Kali Amma photo in pencil box	
6	Father, mother (go to temple) Pray Temple keepers	See God (do with stone) Pray Cannot play and run and shouting	They roll and ask God They ask want to be a good man and come to rich or want to smart reader, him, like that.  I see in TV (walk on fire).	Sivan or Krishna?	
7	Indians Pray	Many Gods (Saraswathy, Veenaii) They come to us and like talk. Must wear like Punjabi suit Cannot eat – they'll give in the temple	No (such thing as vows) But big people walk on fire. For good things, I have to be rich, I have to study very well. No (roll on the ground).	Not sure	
8	Indians Pray	People will play some instruments. Statue of the Gods (lists Gods) Cannot eat non-vegetarian inside	They will promise to take palkodam (milk inside the Kodak).  See in TV (rolling on fire).  They will promise something to the God, then when that happen, they must go	Yes (Kali Amma)  Green colour, sullam, kill bad people, two hands	
9	Indian Pray	Wash legs and hands	Batu Caves – kavadi	Tongue is red in colour	

	Friday Very big	Friday, Thurs Can see the God, like silaai, like not bergerak, many,  Cannot shout, cannot play.		Many hands One hand has the katii (Pisa)	
10	Indian Pray See Gods	Quiet Cannot be naughty Cannot run Cannot disturb	-	A god Angry	
11	Indians Pray	Can ask the God, exam do well.	Because they make the sun, get 7A. They ask something from the God, they need something. Sometime they lie down and pray.  Walk on fire, Batu Caves. No pain because think about God.	Make the bad things gone.  8 hands  Green colour.  Have one slam, catch 4 or 8 bad people, make it die.	
12	Indians Pray	Teacher can see people, koburum, sami, God  Silaii (cement), can pray, if we don't pray, we never get the sami's asivathan	See there in batu caves, so many people, they put for same vellaku, they promise Take palkodam Take kavadi  My mother promise, palkodam, my brother Standard 6, 7As	Red in colour The thief keluar, she take the slam then put in body 8 hands – knife, Can	
13	Indian Pray	Bow, I want to be good, nice.	My son gets 7A, I will	Scary god, she will kill the bad guys,	

	Statue	Cannot run, cannot put shoes, must put our national Dess, must wash our legs.  Punish Ayar live in the temple. Take care.	break the thengai, shave my hair, Batu Caves, they put fire stone and walk. They want to neitikardal	blood, with the slam, so many colours.  She like angry like that, kill the bad people.	
14	Indians Pray – Fridays and Saturdays	Ask the God my child will be the best in class.  The priest (takes care and lives)  Can see the statues.  Put thinurai  Cannot play, have house for the Gods, cannot go.,	Walk on fire, hundred steps, you must walk on your knees.  If we pray my son gets 7As, they must do.  Mother walk on their knees in Batu Caves.	Save the world 8 hands Hundred heads Aiyatham, sullam,  Will kill those who kill other people.	
15	Chinese, Indians Take the joss stick and put there Pray, see Gods - silaai	Pray Cannot shouting and run The God will punish	They put the slam at here (cheeks) because they prayed about their futures and they want to get some money.	Many hands, eight hands, ten faces, she wants to attack the bad people, knife, like slam,.	
16	Indians, pray Sat, Thurs,	Wash the legs, pray, cannot throw rubbish, cannot put slipper	Cut their hand, take the milk, walk on fire, we have like fever never go the fever, so they take. My children must take A	10 hands and steps the babe,	
17	Indians, pray, Friday Beautiful, see God, silaai,	Sing devaram Cannot play, run No sleeping in temple	Never heard of vows	The head is under the legs. Like a 'hantu'. 10 hands.	
18	Indians, pray, very big and very clean, has so many Gods, silaai.	Very quietly, cannot talk loudly and cannot run and cannot play	Kavadi, milk, God will help them first	6 hands, big knife, hold a plate, has the human head, blood.	
19	Indians Big clean	Must be good Shower	I see in Batu Caves	Green Very scary	

	Batu Caves Pray for luck and exams	Wash legs before go in	Thaipusam  Ask for things	Kill bad people	
20	Indian Silaaii See Gods	Bring flowers Be quiet and good Must put hands together and bow	Pray for exams Get UPSR all A's	Protects us Many hands	
21	Hindu people Tuesday and Friday Go and pray to Good	Cannot eat meat Cannot make dirty the temple Must wear clean clothes	Ask for healthy body, baby very good, no cry, exams get good marks  Get already, must say thank you	Green and scary Like a monster Very kind	

INTERVIEW 3 (GREAT PLAINS INDIAN CULTURE)					
Student	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Others
1	Pocahontas	-	-	-	-
2	-	-	-	-	-
3	-	-	-	--	-
4	Orang Asli In music class I practice the song "Hey ayoya,hey" Kill the people – like a In Genting Highlands I see in Buddhist temple				
5	-	-	-	-	-
6	Come. I see in Melaka. They first drink, they will blow the fire. Cowboy show. I like to see that.	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	-	-	
8	Live in jungle Kuddisei	-	-	-	-
9	-	-	-	-	-
10	After some person want to go on fire, they do. Live in the kampong, in rumah panjang.  Some person want to shave their hair, they can come and do in the temple.  CONFUSION!				
11	Live in like akampung Built from leaves	-			

12	See in Batu Caves, they do to Mariaman,	-	-	-	-
13	Live in jungle, night they will sing and dance.  Can see in Malaysia.	-	-	-	-
14	They want to walk on fire, live in the jungle, catch the animals.	-	-	-	-
15	Not sure				
16	-	-	-	-	-
17	Jungle, seeing TV, leaves houses, catch animals and cook				
18	-	-	-	-	-
19	Jungle, catch animals.				
20	Long hair, keeps animals, jungle.				
21	All the people very noisy.				

- *Empty boxes indicate that no response was given*

## APPENDIX L

### Inaccuracies Observed in Participants' Retellings

TEXT: MAGNIFICENT BENITO AND HIS TWO LARGE TEETH
He would go to church to help the nuns.
One sister take him (Benito) (to the church).
His sister take care him.
His sister takes him to church.
A man come and tell him to give the large teeth.
On Sundays everybody will smile at him.
One day he visited the tooth fairy.
He did not like the garden and church.
He spoke to God.
He saw an angel.
Under pillow, he doesn't see any teeth.
He has a sister.
Fairy tooth came to his house.
He has no friends to share.
A girl took him.
Pull the teeth himself
He bought glue.
Toy teeth.
He go home, take his teeth and put another teeth.
Many people don't want to take care of him.
One day, a princess/girl come and took care.
He go to school.
The friends did not like Benito.
He told the teeth I don't want ugly teeth.
His friend say to Benito, very sorry for your teeth.
He pulled the teeth.
See the teeth under the pillow.
He has two sisters.
He sees new teeth.
He every time hides behind church garden.
Benito brings gum, scissor.
He takes a box of chocolates.
He was eating.
He saw fairies

## APPENDIX L - continued

TEXT: THE GODDESS WITH HER HANDS FULL
When he reach he was the only one day.
Her mother say go to the temple but he don't want to go.
One day someone say do not to eat meat.
He likes to go temple and visit the people.
Then Rama goes home and tell many sins.
He say I do not do naughty.
Rama and his mother promises to the god. His mother promise can't eat meat. And take away the hair. And they do the same thing.
His mother every time go to temple.
He goes so they coming to see him He visit his ah people
Kali Amma has large eyes.
He goes to temple, he doesn't eat meat.
He sat on a tiger.
He rolled on the ground.

TEXT: THE LEGEND OF THE INDIAN PAINTBRUSH
He likes to be man.
He had a prize.
He'll think every time I will be a man.
He everyday his world was riding running.
Many year ago there was a boy called Little Angel.
The boys cheated Gopher and Gopher thought of a plan to cheat the boys back.
(He) love to put stones, live at home alone.
Don't know what is the gift.
His grandfather keeps pots with brush.
He play with the warrior.
One day he get a present.
He saw a kind woman. He told her one day you will remember to other people.
He was bored, he goes to the temple. He asked why everyone don't like him Shaman said after many years they will miss you.
He was sleeping, he dreamt of his grandfather

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