

**LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING ENGLISH  
THROUGH METAPHORS**

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**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS  
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## ABSTRACT

Learners and teachers often hold deep beliefs about language learning (Mariani, 2010) resulting in complexities based on attitudes, experiences and expectations (Riley, 2009). Effective language learning can potentially take place when the learners' needs are met by the teachers through different classroom approaches. In the context of postgraduate teaching, learners come from various nationalities. Therefore, it is crucial to understand their perceptions on what constitutes language learning process and language teachers' roles, especially in various socio-cultural educational settings (Borg, 2006) to ensure successful implementation of theoretical teaching methodologies (Sykes, 2011). Perception studies, however, revealed that examining the metaphors used by second language (L2) or foreign language learners are still under-explored.

This research aims to tap into the cognition of postgraduates on their experiences and perceptions of learning English and the roles of language teachers using the indirect means of eliciting metaphorical responses from the participants. This study employs metaphor analysis as a significant educational and applied linguistics research tool in listening to the personal 'voice' of learners' experiences. Metaphor-elicited questionnaires and retrospective interviews were conducted with 47 postgraduates from a Malaysian higher learning institution, mostly from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics and a few from the Faculty of Medicine. A thematic analysis was conducted on the metaphorical expressions and entailments given for the learning dimensions and teacher roles.

The qualitative analysis revealed that a majority of postgraduate learners shares metaphors of Cognitivist learning dimension, depicting learning English from a Cognitive perspective (thinking process). The major emerging themes that derived are 'Internal' and 'External' goals. A minority of postgraduate learners express metaphors

under the Behaviourist paradigm, reflecting learning English as a repetitive, skill-acquisition process. None seem to conceive learning English as a social process under the Situative learning dimension. These results are complimented with the metaphors provided by the same participants on their views of a language teacher's roles. A majority of the learners perceived language teachers as a 'Provider' and 'Instructor', while very few perceived them as a 'Co-worker' and none as a 'Culture Transmitter'.

The findings from these metaphors serve as stepping stones and insights to broader curriculum design in postgraduate teaching and learning, taking into considerations the learners' personal language learning experiences.

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## ABSTRAK

Pelajar dan guru kebiasaanya mempunyai kepercayaan yang mendalam tentang pembelajaran sesuatu bahasa (Mariani, 2010) serta melahirkan perbezaan pendapat masing-masing berdasarkan sikap, pengalaman dan harapan tersendiri (Riley, 2009). Pembelajaran bahasa yang berkesan bakal berlaku apabila keperluan pelajar dapat dipenuhi oleh guru melalui pelbagai pendekatan bilik darjah. Konteks pengajaran dan pembelajaran pascasiswazah melibatkan pelajar yang berlainan warganegara. Oleh yang demikian, amatlah penting untuk memahami persepsi setiap pelajar pascasiswazah tentang proses pembelajaran bahasa dan peranan guru bahasa, terutamanya dalam konteks kepelbagaian latar belakang pendidikan sosio-budaya (Borg, 2006). Langkah ini penting untuk memastikan kaedah pengajaran dapat dicapai dengan jayanya (Sykes, 2011).

Kajian persepsi, bagaimanapun, mendedahkan bahawa kajian berkenaan penelitian atau analisis metafora yang dilahirkan oleh pelajar dalam mempelajari bahasa kedua (L2) atau sebagai bahasa asing masih kurang diterokai. Seseengah persepsi dan tanggapan mungkin terletak di bawah ambang kesedaran yang tidak boleh dilahirkan secara mudah (Ellis, 2002). Kajian ini menggunakan analisis metafora sebagai alat penyelidikan linguistik pendidikan yang penting untuk mendengar 'suara' dan persepsi peribadi para pelajar.

Teknik soal selidik bagi mendapatkan metafora dari subjek kajian dan temu bual dijalankan ke atas 47 pelajar pascasiswazah di sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi di Malaysia. Majoriti pelajar adalah dari Fakulti Bahasa dan Linguistik manakala sebilangan kecil dari Fakulti Perubatan. Satu analisis tematik telah dijalankan ke atas pendapat dan ekspresi metafora yang telah dilahirkan bagi melihat dimensi pembelajaran dan peranan guru. Analisis kualitatif menunjukkan bahawa majoriti

pelajar pascasiswazah lebih menjurus terhadap tahap pemikiran yang lebih tinggi seperti yang diterangkan dalam dimensi pembelajaran '*Cognitivist*' dengan tema utama *Matlamat Dalaman* dan *Matlamat Luaran*. Minoriti peserta bertanggapan bahawa pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris merupakan proses kemahiran rutin seperti yang digambarkan dalam tema *Praktis* di bawah paradigma '*Behaviourist*'. Tiada subjek kajian yang menggambarkan dimensi pembelajaran '*Situative*' yang berasaskan komuniti. Analisis kajian turut menunjukkan bahawa majoriti subjek menganggap guru bahasa berperanan sebagai '*Provider*' dan '*Instructor*' sementara sebilangan kecil melihat watak guru sebagai '*Co-worker*' dan tiada guru yang dilihat sebagai '*Culture Transmitter*'.

Hasil kajian ini dapat menjadi batu loncatan sekaligus menyumbang kepada perancangan kurikulum masa hadapan, terutamanya dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran pascasiswazah. Persepsi dan pengalaman peribadi para pelajar dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris akan diambilkira dalam perancangan kurikulum pengajaran pascasiswah yang lebih relevan dan berkesan.

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**To God be the glory.**



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.  
– Robert Frost (1920)*

### 1.1 Introduction

Learners and teachers often hold deep beliefs about a language and the process of language learning (Mariani, 2010). Effective language learning can potentially take place when the needs of the language learners are understood and succinctly met by the teachers through the different classroom approaches employed. Thus, uncovering learners' deep perceptions about the way language is learnt became one of the means to understand the language learning phenomenon. Different steps have been employed to understand the thoughts and perceptions of language learners through several methods such as direct closed-items questionnaires on perceptions and observations. Moving on from the traditional methods using Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) by Horwitz (1988), researchers have now explored the beliefs of language learners through the lens of metaphors. This shift of embracing the metaphor analysis in English Language education is a significant tool in listening to the personal 'voice' of the learners as well as teachers (Block, 1999; Cameron & Low, 1999a, 1999b; Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos & Harrington, 1998). In this metaphor- elicitation mode, the researcher asked for concrete comparisons which closely matched the learners' beliefs on language learning.

Teachers and learners bring along their own set of views of the target language into the classroom, expected tasks, teaching methods and the power dynamic relationship between teacher-student. According to Williams and Burden (1997), teachers are greatly influenced by

the interrelated factors of their personal beliefs, values, world views and their conceptions of the surroundings. On the other hand, the nature of learners' beliefs in language learning is equally important and essential to ensure successful implementation of theoretical teaching methodologies (Sykes, 2011). The beliefs that learners hold individually would highly influence their perceptions and become greatly evident especially in the presence of conflict or mismatches between the perceptions of the learner and the teacher (Roswell, 1992).

## **1.2 Background of study**

A review of literature has revealed that learner beliefs can be investigated from various theoretical perspectives with cognitive and socio-psychological perspective at both ends (Sykes, 2011). From the former perspective, learner belief is an autonomous state of the mind which is usually stable and resistant to change. Each learner belief is formed by the individual and is unique to the learner. However, from the socio-psychological context, learner beliefs exist on both the mental and social continuum, with both being stable and changeable. Learner beliefs here are formed as a result of socio-cultural interactions, the experiences of an individual within a learning context (Gabillon, 2005).

According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) in their study on Metaphor Analysis, "metaphors provide 'windows' for examining the cognitions and feelings of learners. Since they are usually employed without consciousness on the part of the learners, they are less subject to false-representation than learners' direct responses about learning" (p.313). The second language (L2) learners' metaphorical responses on comparing their own language learning to another notion would carry less subjective probability to false-representations as metaphors are often fashioned indirectly with less consciousness in contrary to learners' direct comments elicited on language learning through closed-items questionnaires. Metaphor

analysis allows researchers to uncover the learners' cognitive and affective aspects of learning a language, which may otherwise be left unexpressed in other traditional methods of eliciting responses such as closed-item belief questionnaires (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Metaphors generated by learners are a reflection of how they conceptualize the language they are learning and their views of language teachers. This was supported by Lakoff and Turner (1989) who presumed that basic metaphors were '*conceptually indispensable*' and '*often concerns the thought*'. It generally functioned as a main source of allowing humans to make meanings of the social world around them. In addition, metaphors serve as an aid to language teachers, learners and even researchers in organizing their conceptualizations and beliefs as they reflect upon their different roles in the classroom.

### **1.2.1 Individual learner differences and their perceptions**

According to Mitchell, Myles & Marsden (2013), second language learners refer to children and adult learners who embark on the learning of an additional language after acquiring their first language. The context of language learning can occur formally in school or colleges, universities, or informally 'picking it up' while playing in the playground, socialising in the Internet or workplace. Mitchell, Myles & Marsden (2013) proposed three main sets of priorities among second language learner researchers concerning the domain of the learner: i) linguistic and psycholinguistic perspective which deal with modelling language structures and processes within the mind, ii) socio-psychological perspective which is concerned with modelling learners' individual differences and their implications for learning successes, and iii) socio-cultural perspective which is concerned with learners as social beings belonging to social networking.

### **1.2.2 The roles of metaphor analysis in perception studies**

It is of utmost importance to capture and understand the thoughts and perceptions of language learners and teachers to ensure successful teaching-learning process takes place. “Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our conceptual system, of how we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.3). Metaphors form a large part of the learners’ belief systems in language learning. Therefore, an awareness of these learners’ metaphorical conceptions towards language learning can add substantial values to teachers in dealing with language learning problems and their possible drawbacks.

Majority of research on beliefs about learning and teaching were traditionally dependent on cognitive analogies with predetermined ideas and closed-item questionnaires or semi-structured interviews (Horwitz, 1985; Williams & Burden, 1999, as cited in Wan et.al., 2011). However, such conventional mainstream research approaches received criticism for disconnecting and fragmenting learners’ beliefs from the contexts of real authentic contexts and thus unlikely to produce accurate reflections of participants’ beliefs within an unnatural discourse (Barcelos, 2003). In view of these drawbacks of the conventional direct research methods, metaphorical analysis which functions as a significantly new educational research tool is now used in analysing second language learners’ perceptions on language learning. The use of thought-elicitation device by completing a prompt in the questionnaire with a metaphor about learning the English Language is justified through the validity of the survey and the reliability of the data elicitation. According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), when participants are approached through indirect means of metaphors, their responses are more forthcoming, authentic, better taken for trustworthiness and credible information. In the past, metaphor was only perceived as a unique type of literary expression often used in the art of

poetry which usually incorporates the element of ‘fancy language’. It was by the end of the seventies that researchers Lakoff and Johnson (1980) strongly opined that metaphors are not just *functional* to language but also reflects the *cognitive* aspect of the human mind and the *affective* beings of the language learners.

The three major research areas which incorporated the use of metaphor analysis are namely in SLA researchers’ concepts, teachers’ perspectives, and L2 learners’ perceptions of their own learning (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Several prominent studies which employed metaphors to examine and describe prevalent perspectives on education included Cook-Sather (2003) which proposed two dominant metaphors in the education system in the United States with “*education as production*” and “*education as cure*” and Ellis (2002) who explored six beginner learners’ beliefs of German as an L2. The findings included five themes which emerged as “*Learning as a journey, struggle, puzzle, suffering and work*”.

Some local setting studies included Oxford (2001) who studied personal narratives of 473 foreign language learners and identified all the metaphors used about approaches in teaching the language and the study by Nikitina & Furuoka (2008). Among the metaphors which were recorded under former included the ‘autocratic teaching approach’ such as ‘*teacher as manufacturer*’, ‘*teacher as tyrant*’ and ‘*teacher as judge*’. Different metaphors such as ‘*teacher as a mother*’ were found to reflect the ‘democratic teaching approach’ while metaphors which depict certain dysfunctional aspects of the ‘laissez-faire teaching approach’ were recorded as ‘*teacher as blind eye*’. Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) elicited metaphors by students about their language teachers and further examined the dimensional ground in which they are aligned to. The students’ metaphors were analysed and categorised into the four aspects of Social Order, Cultural Transmission, Learner-Centered Growth, and Social Reform

(Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008). Majority of the students described their language teachers under the Learner-Centered Growth as *nurturer, entertainer or giver*.

### **1.2.3 The Context of Study**

This study is conducted in the University of Malaya (UM), the oldest tertiary institution in Malaysia with its early beginnings in 1949. The university, over the last decade or so, has been actively engaged in internationalisation efforts, particularly in the area of research and collaboration, forming strategic alliances, and academic staff and student mobility. In terms of foreign student enrolment in Malaysian Public Higher Education Institution (PHEIs) in 2015/2016, UM records over 3,000 international postgraduate students who come from more than 80 different countries. The institution believes that a multicultural and multinational campus will enrich students' social and cultural diversity experiences.

The Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, was first established on 9 March 1972 as a service centre that conducted language courses to students from different faculties to meet the requirements at the university. The faculty began to offer undergraduate programmes (Bachelor of Languages and Linguistics) with specialisations in eight different languages. Today, the faculty also offers postgraduate studies comprising Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D) programme, Master of English as a Second Language (MESL) and Master of Linguistics. The increasing number of applications from both local and international students attests to the success of these postgraduate programmes which foster a strong and active research culture among students and their instructors. The faculty answers the call to achieve its mission to be a renowned teaching and research institution in the field of languages and linguistics in line with national aspirations and global importance.

### **1.3 The Problem Statement**

The Malaysian education system has recently observed a gradual change of objective with the shift of emphasis towards ‘competencies’ as an important skill to be acquired by learners. This objective of competence development among learners constitutes an ambitious perspective as it drives the learners and teachers beyond the basic assimilation of knowledge or skills, but also involves a third higher dimension of knowledge application. Learners have to make sense of the acquired knowledge and to be better equipped to use them in other relevant contexts beyond the school setting. Thus, individual differences such as learners’ beliefs and attitudes would leave a contributing factor to ensure that the application of knowledge competencies can be achieved. It is a compelling reason for teachers to understand the beliefs and attitudes of learners as a central component of achieving language competence successfully. This is in response to previous researches which clearly depicted the powerful impact of how conflicting beliefs and attitudes between teachers and learners affect the effectiveness of teaching objectives, methodologies and approaches employed (Horwitz, 1988; Cotterall, 1995; Nunan, 1995; Peacock, 1998).

Equally important is the complexity of teachers and learners who often bring with them differences of personalities, past experiences and personal expectations, reflecting their own beliefs about language learning (Riley, 2009 as cited in Wan et al., 2011). In this recent age of “enlightened eclecticism” (Brown, 1994), the lack of clear instructions on how to organize language classroom has resulted in a void in language pedagogy. This could possibly be addressed by revisiting the focus of the teacher (Sowden, 2007). In the context of postgraduate teaching as highlighted in this study, learners come from a myriad of cultural backgrounds. Thus, effective postgraduate teaching demands multicultural competencies and understanding. With this in mind, it is crucial to comprehend what language learning and the

language teacher means, from the voices of the learners themselves, particularly in different socio-cultural educational settings (Borg, 2006).

Studies on metaphors have explored the views of school teachers and teacher trainees: pre- and in-service ESL teachers of various teaching experiences from different countries including Malaysia (Hasim, Tunku Mohtar, Barnard & Zakaria, 2013; Saban, Kocbeker, Saban, 2007). Another group of studies encompassed learners and this included Malaysian university undergraduate students (Kamberi, 2013; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008). Teachers' years of teaching experiences and learners' different English proficiency levels as well as various cultural backgrounds were among the variables studied (Wan, Low & Li, 2011; Martinez, Sauleda & Huber, 2001; Horwitz, 1999; Perclová, 2003). This present study addresses the gap of exploring the postgraduate learners' perceptions of English language learning and teachers' roles using metaphors in a local Malaysian higher learning institution.

#### **1.4 The Purpose of Study**

This exploratory study seeks to tap into the thoughts of postgraduate learners and examine the prevalent themes captured through the learners' metaphors about English Language learning and language teachers' roles. It aims to provide rich metaphorical data which could possibly be useful for a better understanding of this multicultural phenomenon on learners' perceptions and ultimately for the future development of a more encompassing language curriculum in postgraduate higher education.

The researcher also intends to explore the learners' different cultural backgrounds of different nationalities to mediate the types of metaphors they may have on learning and language teachers. The personal individual demographic details of the informants are further



expounded to filter and derive at the possible factors that lead to the various metaphors generated by the learners.

Due to the nature of the open-ended elicitation device, there would be multiple angles of responses describing different orientations of views with some describing the process of learning English, some about the language itself while others would describe the reasons for learning English. However, it is the deliberate intentional nature of the researcher to employ such device to draw authentic responses which cover as wide scope of information as possible from the participants.

This present study is different from most previous studies which have delved on the teachers' perceptions and not the learners, particularly the postgraduate students. Besides, this study explored both the learners' metaphorical perceptions on English language learning as well as language teachers' roles concurrently.

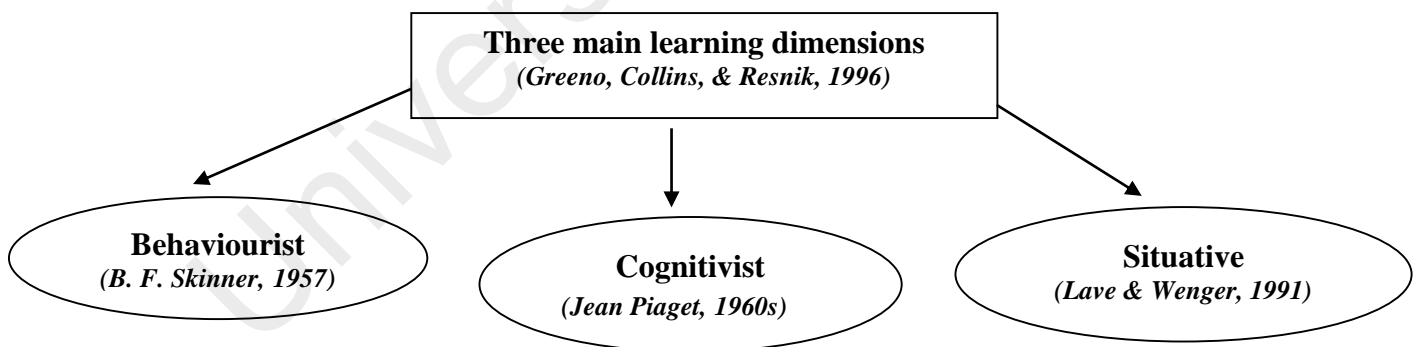
### **1.5 Research Questions**

In response to the research objectives above, this study sets out to answer these research questions distinctively:

- i) In what ways do the learners' metaphors reflect the different learning dimensions of *Behaviourist*, *Cognitivist* and *Situative* perspectives? What are some of the themes that emerge from the categorizations?
- ii) How do the learners metaphorically conceptualize the roles of English teachers? What are the conceptual categories of language teachers' roles that emerged?

## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study of learners' preferred metaphors is explored and interpreted based on the three major paradigms of learning dimensions (*Behaviourist, Cognitivist, or Situative perspectives*) which served as a suitable frame of reference for the researcher. Sfard (1998) made distinctions between two basic metaphors which reflected: (1) learning as an individual effort of acquiring knowledge and applying newly acquired knowledge to new contexts subsequently, and (2) metaphor of learning which involved participation of learner in a social community. In view of this, the *Behaviouristic* and *Cognitivist* perspectives of learning fit with the first group of metaphors, while the *Situative* learning perspective belongs to the second. This paradigm of learning dimension allows the researcher to perceive learners' metaphors as a i) cognitive and ii) social phenomenon (a comprehensive approach) as recognized by Cameron (1999). These two aspects are not independent nor separate, but have a dialectic relationship, that is, between cognitive and social realm whereby the learner's mind, as depicted by the metaphorical conceptualizations, are seen as results as well as contributory factors of the social environment or culture.



**Figure 1.1:** Framework of analysis for learning dimensions (Martinez et.al., 2001)

The categorisations of learners' metaphorical data in this study were based on the three main learning paradigms above (Figure 1.1). The *Behaviourist* dimension perceives knowledge as a result of stimulus-response (S-R) connections and experiences. It is a learning

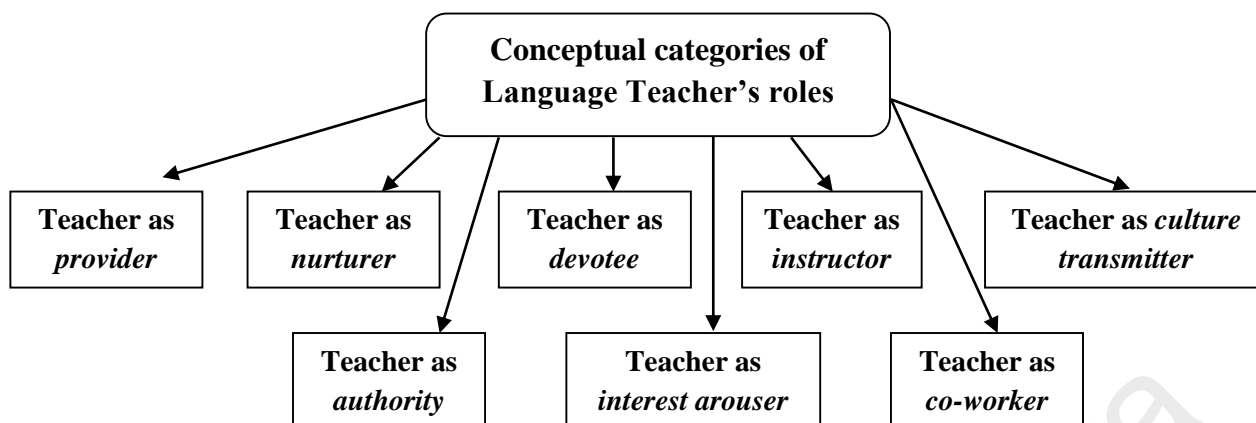
theory that primarily highlights observable behaviours objectively and disregards other mental activities. In other words, the Behaviourist defines learning as the acquisition of change in the intended behaviour. The mind is metaphorically perceived as a clean slate by which experiences are gradually engraved and painted over time. This perspective embraced the learners as passive ‘agent’, a reversible role played by a *Cognitivist* learner. Examples of metaphors from this traditional Behaviourist view of learning included “Learning is like a *traveller, a video camera, a sponge or writing into a new notebook*” (Martinez et al., 2001).

Au contraire, the *Cognitivist* perspective views formation of knowledge as a result built on interrelated schemata (previous knowledge learnt as background knowledge). It is a learning paradigm that is founded on the premise that by reflecting on one’s experiences, one constructs their own understanding. Learners inductively and actively develop new schemata based on their daily experiences and encounters, thus making learning a continuous process of schemata construction. This involves gestalt psychology, a psychological perspective that the human consciousness cannot be deciphered in broken pieces, but rather as a ‘whole’. The *Cognitivists* propose that the mind is constantly pro-active, seeks to find solutions and interpretative, which explains the active construction of meanings by changing old knowledge into new ones or building new knowledge from past experiences. Among some examples of learning metaphors which fall under this perspective included “Learning as a *detective*, learning is like *setting the bricks of a house* whereby the learner is like *a silkworm*” (Martinez et al., 2001).

The third learning dimension of this framework is the *Situative* perspective which operates on the basis of authentic involvement in a community of practitioners, bringing in the element of culture which indirectly informs the mind (Bruner, 1996). The ‘situated learning’

concept is rooted within the socio-historic perspective which “views knowledge as distributed among people and their environments, including the objects, artifacts, tools, books, and the communities of which they are a part” (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996). As knowledge is not confined and limited in the minds of an individual, learning is essentially social, and is tied to the individual context or situation. It is during the learning process that the individuals and community acquire knowledge and skills. Examples of *Situative* learning metaphors are “*Learning is a joint work like the ants do when they collaborate to achieve a result, teaching is like a tourist guide who negotiates a route with the tourists*” (Martinez et al., 2001).

The second part of the analysis involved the learners’ metaphorical conceptions of teachers’ roles. In addition to the metaphorical view of learners’ perceptions on learning English, this study also incorporated the views of learners on the roles portrayed by their language teachers. The study of teachers’ roles as perceived by learners is important to enable teachers to be acquainted with learners’ metaphors and meet the expectations of learners’ conceptions. The categorizations of learners’ metaphors on ‘a language teacher’ in this study were done based on eight conceptual “teacher roles” categories generated based on the metaphors and the entailments given by the respondents. The eight conceptual categories of a teacher as adopted in the framework of this study are ‘Teacher as *provider, nurturer, devotee, instructor, culture transmitter, authority, interest arouser, and co-worker*’ (Wan, 2011) as shown in Figure 1.2.



**Figure 1.2:** Framework of analysis for Language Teacher's Roles (Wan et al., 2011)

### 1.7 Significance of Study

This metaphor study of examining students' perceptions on their language teacher and language learning experiences affords an alternative dimension in capturing the learners' thoughts. This is in response to the opinion that some beliefs are discretely present and therefore cannot be easily and directly expressed (Ellis, 2002). The engagement with metaphors in the study of learners' perceptions will indirectly raise consciousness about the different conceptualisations or beliefs held by the group of postgraduate students, or about their learning problems encountered. Learners' awareness of their own metaphors indirectly places significant emotional implications which may orient them towards more independent and self-sustained learning.

### 1.8 Scope and limitations of study

This study involved postgraduate learners in a local tertiary institution, University of Malaya, currently pursuing their Masters or Doctors of Philosophy (PhD) in the field of Languages and Linguistics and Medicine. A large portion of the participants involved students undertaking Master in English as a Second Language (MESL) or Master in

Linguistics while a small portion involved Master and PhD students in Bio Sciences. In regard to providing a platform for postgraduate learners' 'voice' to be heard, this study is set within the parameters of only the learners' perceptions on learning English and the roles of language teachers, excluding those of the teachers' views which have been previously covered in related studies. University of Malaya is chosen as the context of this study because it represents a multicultural learning environment with international students of Higher Education.

As this is a qualitative study with a relatively small sample of 47 participants, the findings were also limited by the nationalities of the students, who were largely from Malaysia, China, Iran, and Thailand. Thus, the findings derived from this study cannot be generalised to the greater population of international students in Malaysia.

Besides that, it is assumed that the learners' perceptions are captured in the metaphors expressed by the learners themselves and interpreted most accurately. The data collected from the open-ended questionnaires and interviews relied on the responses provided by participants. In such instances, the researcher is aware of the potential risks that the participants may respond in the way they believe they should, and not in the most accurate way that resemble how they really feel. Nevertheless, using questionnaires and retrospective interviews, as well as a peer-review session and validation from an expert in the field further enhanced the reliability of the findings and enabled triangulation of the data.

## 1.9 Definitions of the Terminology

The following definitions of term are provided to facilitate the understanding of the intended meanings of certain expressions or phrases used by the researcher with reference to the context of this study. The use of appropriate abbreviations may be used by the researcher where applicable in the study. The key terms used in this study is defined as follows:

**English as Second Language (ESL) learners** is defined as learners whose primary or first language spoken mainly at home is not English, and would thus require further assistance in English language assistance to build listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

**Metaphor** is, in the cognitive linguistic view, defined as an expression used in understanding one conceptual target domain (learning the English Language and the roles of language teachers) in terms of another conceptual source domain (Lakoff and Turner, 1989). The working definition of this term will be further explored in Chapter 2.

**Learners' perceptions** on language learning is referred to as the pre-conceived ideas, attitudes and knowledge that students bring into the classroom that may influence the language learning process and their ultimate success (Breen, 2001).

**Culture** is referred to as the language, ethnicity, race, social class, gender, ideations, behaviors, values, and beliefs shared by a human group (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2002; Nieto, 2000).

**Conceptualisation** is used in a broad sense, as a single representation of a person's mental activities, such as beliefs, concepts, and understanding (e.g., Armstrong, 2007; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002).

**Metaphorical entailment**, in this study, refers to the explanations given by participants for their rationale of establishing the correspondences between the sources and the targets in their metaphors (Kramersch, 2003).

**Elicited Metaphor** is used to indicate a specific type of metaphorical linguistic expression, in which a participant is asked to complete a metaphor-like prompt such as "Learning English is like \_\_\_\_\_".

## **1.10 Chapter Summary**

This study sets out to answer two main research questions which delve deeper into capturing the thoughts and perceptions of postgraduate learners on learning the English Language and roles of language teachers. This introductory chapter outlined the background of the study as well as provided the statement problem. In addition, the research objectives along with the research questions were explained. Finally, the significance of the study was discussed. The following chapters are as follow: Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature on language learning beliefs as well as learner perceptions. This is followed by Chapter Three which presents a discussion on the methodology used in this study. The findings of this study are discussed in Chapter Four while the final chapter, Chapter Five, summarises the key findings of the study and their implications as well as recommendations for future research.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*Education is a social process.*

*Education is growth.*

*Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.*

*- John Dewey (1897)*

#### 2.1 Introduction

The literature review begins by looking at the overview of beliefs, knowledge and language learning with the emphasis on the learners' perspective. The researcher gives a brief historical development on the different approaches of measuring learners' beliefs starting from the Normative, Metacognitive, Contextual and the recent Metaphorical approach. This chapter highlights the fact that there is a lack of empirical studies looking at postgraduate learners' perceptions of English language learning using metaphors expressed by the learners themselves. The objectives of this study thus seek to further explore this research gap.

This study takes its cue from existing research into learner beliefs and perceptions. The notion that the cognitive and affective aspects of individual learners hold a crucial role in the process as well as product of language learning (Horwitz, 1987; Ellis, 2008) has prompted investigations into learner beliefs and the language learning process as well as into learner attitudes or perceptions towards contextual aspects of their learning situation. This chapter lays out the theoretical framework of the study and reviews the literature related to the beliefs and perceptions held by language learners. To begin with, the review of the literature summarizes existing research, starting with a discussion of beliefs and learning. Within the same topic, the summary of research moves on to cover different definitions of beliefs about language learning, which leads to an overview of the approaches used to measure this construct. The sections on beliefs with regards to language learning close with a detailed

discussion of the BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1987) and the findings of several relevant BALLI studies in different learning contexts. After the discussion of literature related to beliefs about language learning, the literature review proceeds to discuss on learner perceptions. Finally, the literature review ends by reviewing several studies which are pertinent to the context of international students learning English in Malaysia.

## **2.2 Beliefs, knowledge and learning**

A distinction was made between the terms ‘beliefs’ and ‘perceptions’ as used in this study, with the former being used to describe learners’ notions about learning a language generally, and the latter referring to the way learners view the specifics of their learning context. However, what is termed as ‘beliefs’ in this study has been studied under many different terms by various researchers. Bernat & Gvozdenko (2005) cited various terms which looked into language learning beliefs, including ‘conceptions of learning’ (Benson & Lor, 1999), ‘assumptions’ (Riley, 1980), and ‘mini-theories’ (Hosenfeld, 1978). Wenden (1998) has also referred to the same construct as ‘metacognitive knowledge’. While these terms have been used specifically in terms of language learning, learning psychology has also looked at learner beliefs about knowledge and knowing in general, also known as ‘epistemic beliefs’ (Beuhl, 2008). In terms of language learning and teaching, however, the terms ‘metacognitive knowledge’ and ‘language learning beliefs’ are the most commonly used terms to refer to the preconceived ideas about learning a language that learners bring into a language course.

## **2.3 Learner differences in language learning**

A close observation to real-life learning phenomena aptly implies that L2 learners differ greatly in their rate of learning and their achievements despite following a common cognitive developmental route. Psychologists believed that the differences in the eventual outcomes

achieved by every learner in a similar controlled learning environment could only be explained by individual differences among learners in language learning. Among some of the most prominent *cognitive* and *affective* (emotional) factors which have been claimed to influence the second language learning process as well as their ultimate eventual successes are learners' language proficiency level, language aptitude, language learning strategies employed by each individual, language attitudes, and motivation levels among different learners.

### **2.3.1 Second language (L2) learner**

Educational research in second language refers to learners who pursue the learning of another additional language several years after the acquisition of the first language. In this aspect, the 'second language learners' may include young learners or adults, learning the target language either formally in school or college, or acquiring it informally in the playground or social media. The pursuit of another highly used language might enable the second language learners to adapt better into a local speech community; or the target language might ensure the means to a better economic and public life with the mastery of a wider communication language relevant internationally.

In the area of analysing and modelling the inner mental mechanisms available to the individual learner, it is crucial to consider the perspectives of L2 learner in processing, learning and storing new language knowledge. Understanding the learners' perspectives is a step closer to learner-centred classroom approaches instead of the traditional teacher-centred approaches. Researchers in the discipline of language learning are interested in documenting the developmental route which the learners travelled and their degree of success in learning the second language. Their main aim is to tap into the universal mental processes which

happens in all normal human beings in the quest to understand the L2 learner as a language processor.

It is important to consider the significant role of L2 learner as social beings who possess some universal as well as unique individual characteristics. L2 learners are ultimately social beings who are involved in structured social networks and social practices which indirectly affect the process of second language learning. In addition, the relationship between the learner and the social context of learning is viewed to be constantly changing.

## **2.4 Learner beliefs and perceptions about language learning**

### **2.4.1 Learner beliefs**

Learner beliefs are part of the epistemological belief system, our understanding of what knowledge is, and how it can be acquired (Schommer-Aikins, 2004). Learner beliefs are also defined as metacognitive knowledge, often used interchangeably. However, learner beliefs, are considered a subset of metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1999), formed based on values and are usually held longer.

Entering the language classroom, each learner brings with them more or less well-defined concepts about the right methods, materials and even about teachers. They have perceptions about themselves as learners too: their own intellectual capacity, aptitude and persistence. In other words, learners hold beliefs about all the ‘participants’ in the classroom and ‘ingredients’ of their learning (Lazar, 2013).

#### **2.4.2 The importance of learners' beliefs and perceptions about language learning**

The area of second language learner beliefs and perceptions has thus far been a negligible variable in the research of language acquisition despite many studies conducted in other related areas (Wenden, 2001). Language educators or teachers have long recognised that different individuals bring along a myriad of personalities, experiences, personal expectations, beliefs and different ways of learning into the classroom. There is an overwhelming effect implied from various ideas and beliefs held by language learners in the context of second language learning. This is because individuals often act or behave based on their beliefs which have long embedded in their minds.

Learner beliefs, like most beliefs, are not objective truths or premises, but what the individual gives credence to, what he or she perceives as true. 'Belief' according to Longman online dictionary, is defined as 'the feeling that something is definitely true or definitely exists' (Lazar, 2013). 'Learner beliefs' is an important area to be studied as it reveals the idiosyncratic features and is listed among individual differences within the field of language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). It is undeniably true that there is a growing interest of researches in exploring the nature and types of beliefs as it is deemed to influence language learning powerfully.

It is important to gather and understand learners' beliefs about themselves and about their learning of foreign languages because they are a fundamental reflection of the learners' progress. Learners generally hold deep ingrained beliefs and perceptions about language and the language learning process itself. Statements such as "*French grammar has more rules than English Grammar*", "*Some languages are easier to learn than another*", "*You need a*

*special gift to learn a language efficiently*”, express the learners’ thoughts and feelings about the experiences of learning and using languages.

Understanding the beliefs perceived by different learners is essential to tap into a deeper revelation of learner strategies and to enable the planning of appropriate language instruction. Knowing the views embraced by the learners will then enable teachers to design and plan a curriculum that is meant to fit the communicative learning needs of the learners. Thus, the views of learners and teachers are of high importance as they are directly engaged in the teaching and learning of one or more languages in a formal school setting. The beliefs and attitudes portrayed by learners and teachers require combined efforts for this complicated process to yield the expected positive learning results.

Learner beliefs held by different individuals would indirectly affect the strategy used (Yang, 1999; Chan, 2002) in language learning and ultimately affect the learners’ achievement motivation. The higher the learners perceived the knowledge garnered, the clearer goals with better results would be obtained. The reverse is true for learners with negative perceptions of their language learning experience. It is thus noticeable that learner beliefs have an indirect effect on the potential successful achievements of the learner (Gardner, 2001).

#### **2.4.3 Approaches to measuring beliefs about language learning**

In general, there are three distinctive methods that have been used in the identification and classification of learners’ beliefs, namely the normative approach, metacognitive approach and the contextual approach (Ellis, 2008; Barcelos, 2000). An additional approach introduced by Ellis (2008) is referred to as ‘the metaphorical approach’ which is the focus method of this

study. The discussion on approaches to studying language learning beliefs will begin with one of the most commonly used approaches, which is the normative approach.

#### **2.4.3.1 Normative approach**

A review on past literature has shown that most studies using this approach measured language learning beliefs quantitatively using BALLI (Horwitz, 1987), adaptations of the BALLI or other closed-item questionnaires. Proponents of this method agreed that beliefs were viewed as ‘preconceived ideas, myths or misconceptions’ and can be explored through Likert-scales questionnaires (Ellis, 2008).

#### **2.4.3.2 Metacognitive approach**

The metacognitive method views beliefs in generally the same way as in normative approach. Pioneered by Wenden, the metacognitive approach was based on her conception of beliefs on theories of knowledge about learning proposed by a cognitive psychologist, Flavell (Wenden, 1999). Wenden (ibid) also refers to Vygotskian socio-cultural theory, which highlights the social setting of a learning environment.

Studies of learner beliefs from the metacognitive perspective usually employ open-ended interviews as a means of data collection (Ellis, 1998). The advantage of metacognitive approach to measuring language learning beliefs is that the semi-structured interviews and self-report data collection techniques allow learners’ beliefs to be stated in their own words. They are not restricted to expressing opinions on beliefs selected by a researcher, as in the normative Likert-type questionnaires in BALLI. However, this approach has been criticised for using learner statements as the only source of data, thereby isolating learner beliefs from their context and treating as abstract mental states (Barcelos, 2000). Critics of both the

normative and metacognitive approach have thus advocated measuring learner beliefs using the contextual approach which will be discussed next.

#### **2.4.3.3 Contextual approach**

The contextual approach, or the socio-cultural approach (Bernat, 2008), advocates a holistic approach to measuring learner beliefs. Beliefs are perceived as “embedded in students’ contexts” (Barcelos, 2000:60), instead of as metacognitive states that can be measured by questionnaires and presented as quantitative data. Beliefs are viewed as ‘socially-constructed representation systems’ and therefore cannot be studied in isolation from context. This approach utilises qualitative research methods, most often comprise multiple data collection methods, which allow researchers to examine learner beliefs in context. It provides rich data, going beyond the measurement of beliefs to examining the experiences that lead to conception of beliefs. Studies using this approach are usually conducted on a small-scale because the focus is more on a deep understanding of several learners’ beliefs and their underlying factors, rather than measuring the beliefs of large groups of learners.

In addition to the above three approaches discussed, there have been a number of studies which use metaphor to get an understanding of learners’ conceptions of matters related to learning a language. This approach will be further discussed in the next section.

#### **2.4.3.4 Metaphorical Approach**

According to Ellis (2008), a fourth approach to measuring learner beliefs involves using metaphors to draw out learner beliefs about language learning. This approach views belief as being covert and best studied indirectly. It entails analysing the learners’ metaphors to reveal



their learning and represents a covert way of identifying their beliefs. Ellis (2008) describes metaphors as the windows through which learner beliefs can be viewed and analysed. Studies using this approach generally apply qualitative research methods in metaphor analysis to examine language learning beliefs, for example, studies by Ellis (2002), Nikitina & Furuoka (2008) and Farrell (2006).

The metaphorical approach most often utilises questionnaires and journals to collect data, from which metaphors are identified during analysis. Metaphors are then grouped under main themes. Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) gave a list of incomplete sentences (e.g. A language teacher is like...) to 23 learners of Russian at a Malaysian university to identify learner perceptions of language teachers. The 27 metaphors, that resulted, which included items such as '*vitamins*', '*discovery channel*' and '*big lorry*', were then grouped according to four emergent aspects. Ellis (2008) reported on his 2002 metaphor study in which six adult learners of German kept language learning diaries. These diaries were later analysed for metaphorical language to examine learner perceptions of the language learning process (Ellis, 2008). The most common metaphors found in the data were of 'Learning as a *Journey*' and 'Learning as a *Puzzle*'. The metaphorical approach was less commonly used in studying language learning beliefs in the past. However, its use is now becoming more common and acceptable. The metaphorical approach had particular significance to this study as it was used to collect data on participants' beliefs about language learning and language teachers' roles.

Although many researchers have opted to investigate learner beliefs exclusively from one side of the cognitive-sociocultural divide, other researchers are now advocating a more inclusive perspective using both normative or metacognitive approach and the socio-cultural approach. For instance, a researcher may employ a mixed method approach by combining a

questionnaire with interviews or observation and allow emerging patterns in learner beliefs to be identified while facilitating the examination of learner beliefs on an individual level. Similarly, Gabillon (2005) asserts that no single approach is sufficient to account for the complexity of learner beliefs.

## **2.5 Defining metaphor**

To paint a clearer picture of what a metaphor entails, the researcher thus provides the scope for the parameter of a ‘metaphor’ as used in this study. When people generally think of a metaphor, they visualise a linguistic or literary device that associates one idea to another. In other words, metaphors used in this study are defined as understanding the concept of learning a language (target) in terms of another conceptual domain (source). The understanding of a metaphor as a resemblance of thoughts instead of metaphor as a pure literary device (Moser, 2000; Slingerland, 2004) reflects the Cognitivist premise that individuals normally understand the unknown (new) in terms of the known (old). In short, metaphors are recognized for their capability to capture complex mental constructs and consciousness-raising among educators.

### **2.5.1 Metaphor as an analytical tool**

Metaphor analysis, the research tool used in this study, is a method of discourse analysis which originates largely from the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) whereby they studied the use of metaphors in human cognition. This methodology is used with the rationale that by examining the metaphors that humans use in expressing their thoughts, researchers may be able to uncover the underlying meanings as intended by the writer.

To illustrate, Moser (2000) claimed that metaphor analysis is an effective means for accessing implicit information and for exploring social and cultural elements while Bullough and Gitlin (1995) emphasised the power of analysing metaphors to afford further clarifications into assumptions made (Bullough, 1991). Metaphor analysis is indeed a productive approach, which seeks to unearth learners' understandings in a dissimilar world, understandings that leave rich implications for their conducts as language instructors.

### **2.5.2 Metaphor as a cognitive tool**

From the "cognitive theory" perspective, metaphors function as powerful mental models which enabled people to understand their world by associating complex phenomena to something previously experienced and concrete. It is the process of building connections between two notions (the source domain and the abstract) onto another schema (the target domain of the metaphor) that makes a metaphor an effective cognitive device.

### **2.5.3 Metaphor as an affective tool**

The choice of 'vehicle' terms in the linguistic metaphors often carries the notion of evaluations, attitudes, values, perspectives or beliefs which seem to indirectly express their feelings about what they are saying. When describing a phenomenon in relation to something else, it is commonly depicted that the choice of that 'something else' is emotionally affective with patterns that reveal the speakers' attitudes, emotions or perceptions.

## **2.6 Learning theories (Behaviourist, Constructivist, Situative)**

Studies on learning theories have highlighted the Behaviourism and Cognitivism as the two movements in educational psychology that have significant implications on learning. Situative learning, on the other hand, traces its foundation back to phenomenological thinking

which emphasises apprenticeship, coaching, and collaboration (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989).

### **2.6.1 Behaviourist**

Behaviourism is a learning theory that focuses on the behaviour portrayed by the learners for the purpose of identifying its determinants. In other words, Behaviourism focuses on mechanism as the central unit of analysis which assumes behaviour as portrayed by a finite set of physical laws. This learning dimension applies the stimulus and response metaphor to interpret the learners' physical behaviours.

The concept of 'classical conditioning' was pioneered by a Russian psychologist, Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) with the type of learning based on the association of two stimuli repeatedly experienced together. For instance, if a student constantly experiences unpleasant situations in an English lesson such as difficult tasks, authoritative teachers, failures in the examination, the student may gradually dislike the subject.

Operant or instrumental conditioning is one way of learning, often defined as "Behaviour that brings about a satisfying effect (reinforcement) tends to be performed again, whereas behaviour that brings negative effect (punishment) is apt to be suppressed" (Morris & Maisto, 2001). In short, reinforcement often enhances a behaviour while punishment weakens it.

### **2.6.2 Cognitivist**

The Cognitivist paradigm was a response to Behaviourism, the predominant school in experimental psychology then. The proponents of this learning dimension are Ivan Pavlov, B.F. Skinner, and other physiologists who argued that psychology is best studied objectively

with the condition that it is done through an individual's overt behaviour. Since the cognitive realms are not overtly observable, behaviourist psychologists avoided the individual's mental processes details. Cognitivism also attempted to go beyond Behaviourism to explain how people think, understand, and know. This learning dimension also attempts to explain how learners reason, make decisions, and remember. They emphasize on discovering how individuals make sense and define the world within themselves. The way our minds construe the world around us also would impact our behaviour indirectly.

The Cognitivist approaches learning from the angle of a change in learners' mental structures, enabling them to change in their behaviour. Among some of the internal processes include thinking, awareness, remembrance, and encoding. According to Martinez (2001), the mind is constantly active and informational with examples of metaphors as Learning is like '*setting the bricks of a house*' and '*learning to walk*'. Different forms of assistance offered are crucial in the process of acquiring how to walk until the learner can gain confidence and reach independence stage.

### **2.6.3 Situative**

According to the Situative learning perspective, learners should be able to interact with the physical world. Situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) emphasises the idea that much of what is learnt is specific to the situation whereby learning takes place. This learning paradigm proposes the idea that learning is situated in the activity as sums up by the concept 'Learning is doing'. Meaningful episodes of learning only occur when they are embedded in a situation (Brown, et.al, 1989 & Oliver, 2000). In short, situated learning happens in authentic tasks that involve learners in real-life setting (Winn, 1993).

The metaphors under this category ought to reflect the view that learning is situated in the context used. For instance, the teacher is seen as the '*North Star*' guiding the explorer (learner) to find their way during their journey of learning. In other words, teachers and learners perform a joint job like *ants*, working collaboratively or like a *tourist guide* negotiating the route with the tourist (students) (Martinez et al., 2001).

## **2.7 English Language Teaching Methods**

According to Lightbrown and Spada (2008), although second language learners are not usually aware of their own individual learning styles (kinaesthetic, audio, or visual), they virtually have strong inclinations about how language learning should be implemented. These preferences of various English Language teaching methods are usually derived based on learners' past experiences that a specific type of instruction seem to suit them best in learning the language successfully. This study looks at learners' choice of English Language teaching methods, specifically the Grammar Translation (GT), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), or the Audio Lingual (AL) and how it may potentially affect their perceptions of learning the language.

The Grammar Translation (GT) method, or also known as the Classical method was a traditional technique used to teach text-translation, grammar and vocabulary in Latin and Greek during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Lessons were usually conducted through rote learning, void of the oral communication aspect of a language. In other words, this technique emphasises solely on the linguistic perspective of learning a language without listening and speaking components. Just as the name suggests, learning takes place through translating texts in different languages, and vocabulary is learnt through direct translation from the first language. Some of the characteristics of a GT approach in a language class include: i) the use of mother

tongue in class, with little or minimal emphasis of the target language, ii) the vocabulary is presented in lists of isolated words, iii) long and detailed explanations of grammatical rules and structures are given.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was initially designed to ESL contexts, in the late 70s, where English teachers inculcated the discovery-oriented, collaborative approach in their lessons (Holliday, 1994). The central theoretical concept proposed in this method is communicative competence. In other words, learners' ability to converse in the language for the purpose of meaningful communication is enhanced through pair and group work in small language classes. One of the tenets of the CLT encompasses activities which involve interaction between learners instead of individualistic approaches to learning (Richards, 2006).

On the flip side of meaningful communication is the emphasis of structural acquisition often found in sentence patterns in common every day conversations. The Audio-lingual (AL) teaching method was widely practised in the 1950s and 1960s with the assumption that learners can be conditioned using the reinforcement system based on Skinner's Behaviourism Theory. The speech patterns drilled during the lessons are usually prompted, reiterated and confirmed until the learners' responses are automatic. Some characteristics of this method include the use of drills to teach structural patterns, memorisation of phrases, emphasis on pronunciation, minimal grammatical explanation, use of audio-visual aids and immediate positive reinforcements of correct responses. Until today, the AL method is still in favour among language teachers to be incorporated as a segment of an individual lesson since it is usually relatively simple, considerably predictable by the learners and effective learning outcomes.

To sum up, learners' preferences for learning as a result of their opinions about how languages are learnt will inevitably affect their choice of teaching methods to learn a new material. Teachers can then benefit from this information to assist learners expand their learning repertoire and increase their flexibility of adapting different language learning methods (Lightbrown & Spada, 2008).

## **2.8 Past studies on learners' perceptions in language learning and the methods employed**

Learner perceptions, as discussed in literature, have been commonly associated with two target views: perceptions of the learner per se, and perceptions with regards to the language learning phenomenon. The former included how learners view and make sense of themselves as an agent of a student (Liskin-Gasparro, 1998; Williams and Burdens, 1999). Additionally, learners' perceptions on the learning situation encapsulate the learners' experience in the classroom and the instructors' behaviours (Brown, 2009 cited in Pamela, M.W., 2012). Although these two types of learner perceptions are indirectly connected, this study draws on the literatures which further explore the later- learners' perceptions of the language learning experience. Important instruments employed in past studies included Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1988), Foreign Language Attitude Scale (FLAS) (Bartley, 1970), and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et.al, 1986).

### **2.8.1 Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) method**

One of the most extensively employed instrument to measure learners' learning beliefs, is the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), a questionnaire originally birthed by Elaine K. Horwitz in the 1980s to measure the language learning beliefs of language



teachers in the United States. The “Teacher BALLI” initially comprised 27 statements on various aspects of language learning process, and was later developed into two other versions. The version most often used is the ESL BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) which lists 34 statements on five different themes identified by Horwitz, as a result of brainstorming sessions with teachers, and with language students. The themes in the BALLI questionnaire are: Foreign Language Aptitude, Difficulty of Language Learning, the Nature of Language Learning, Language Learning Strategies and Learning and Communication (Horwitz, 1987). Applying this instrument to different groups of language learners at the University of Texas, Horwitz identified the learner beliefs and found commonality across different learner groups (Horwitz, *ibid*).

Although Kuntz (1996) pointed out that the BALLI originated from teachers’ opinions of what language learners believed, and, therefore is not entirely appropriate for measuring the language learning beliefs held by learners, Horwitz (1987) stated that the later versions of the BALLI were tested in focus groups which included both foreign language and ESL learners from a variety of countries. Since the BALLI offered researchers the opportunity to measure the language learning beliefs of large groups of learners, it has been used on a variety of learner groups throughout the world over the last two decades. Some of these studies will be reviewed in the next section.

Over the years, the BALLI has been used by many researchers to explore the language learning beliefs of different learner groups, with varied target languages and learning contexts. However, due to the extensive use of the BALLI, only those studies conducted on learners of English or considered relevant to the context of this study will be highlighted here. For the

purpose of this study, no distinction will be made between ESL and EFL, and the term ESL will be used to refer to the learning of English regardless of the context.

### **2.8.1.1 BALLI studies in Malaysia**

In Malaysia, Nikitina and Furuoka (2006, 2006a, 2007) have conducted BALLI studies with Malaysian university students learning Russian as a foreign language. While there were common findings with other BALLI studies, Nikitina and Furuoka also found that there were some contextual constraints (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2006) which indicated the probability of socio-cultural factors and language learning beliefs. For instance, beliefs about foreign language aptitude were less salient in Malaysian subjects than among the American learners in Horwitz's study (Horwitz, 1987). Aligned with this, the researchers suggest that the multilingual nature of Malaysian society could have resulted in the differing beliefs, as many of the Malaysian students were bilingual, or multilingual individuals.

Another local study that utilised the BALLI was conducted by Mary, Chong, Hanisah and Tan (2006), who looked into the pre-service English teachers' beliefs at the Institut Perguruan Bahasa Asing (Institute of Foreign Language Teaching), Malaysia. The findings of the study in relation to foreign language aptitude strengthen the findings of Nikitina and Furuoka (2006) that Malaysian students do not have strong beliefs in foreign language aptitude, which may be related to the multilingual society of this country. The students in Mary, et al.'s (2006) study had strong beliefs in the other BALLI themes, and the female students tended to see learning English as easier than did the male students.

However, while there have been several BALLI studies in Malaysia, there seemed to be none on international students learning English in the literature search. As depicted in the

review of BALLI studies in Malaysia, the BALLI has been applied in several contexts, including that of foreign language learners of Russian and pre-service English teachers. The versatility of this instrument has made it possible for researchers to include other factors in their studies of language learning beliefs which will be further reviewed subsequently.

#### **2.8.1.2 BALLI studies with other factors**

In addition to the BALLI to identify learners' beliefs about language learning, researchers have studied other variables alongside measuring language learning beliefs, often with the purpose of identifying possible links between these variables. Among the variables that have been studied are gender (Bernat & Lyod, 2007), learning stage (Tanaka & Ellis, 2003) and strategy use (Park, 1995; Truitt, 1995; Yang, 1999; Hong, 2006; Shen, 2006; Mokhtari, 2007).

Many researchers have also modified the BALLI or used it with other instruments to gain more insights into learner beliefs and any other variables. Truitt (1995), for example, added open-ended questions to the BALLI in her study. Hong (2006) and Park (1995) used the BALLI to investigate the correlation between the beliefs and strategies employed by ESL learners in Korea. Shen (2006) conducted a similar study on school children's beliefs and learning strategies in remote areas of China. Her findings also showed that there was a moderate relationship between learner beliefs, as measured by the BALLI and learner strategies, as measured by the SILL (Shen, 2006).

In addition, Shen (2006) also found that gender and time spent learning English had some influence on the participants' language learning beliefs. All the studies summarized in this section found some relationship between learner beliefs and learner strategies. In addition, other variables such as gender have also been found to influence learner beliefs about

language learning. The BALLI studies cited in this section, have contributed some important knowledge in the area of learner beliefs about language learning. However, over the years, certain weaknesses of this instrument have been highlighted by several researchers. The following section will describe the criticisms of the BALLI.

### **2.8.2 Weaknesses & criticisms of the BALLI**

The BALLI has been credited with providing researchers with a useful systematic tool to investigate learners' beliefs in language learning. However, there were some issues raised about its development and other potential weaknesses in the instrument. For example, Kuntz (1996) pointed out that the initial version of BALLI was generated from brainstorming sessions with language teachers not learners, and therefore, the statements on the BALLI comprise language teachers' perceptions of what learner beliefs are. However, Horwitz (1998) states that "The BALLI was developed in several stages from free-recall protocols of foreign language and ESL teachers of different cultural backgrounds, students (both foreign language and ESL) focus groups, and additional beliefs supplied by teacher educators from a variety of culture groups" (Horwitz, 1988:284).

The second criticism that has been brought up by a number of researchers (Kuntz, 1996; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006) was that Horwitz's five themes were not statistically generated from learner responses. Furthermore, Kuntz (1996) pointed out that the labelling of the BALLI themes was not explained. In response to these criticisms, researchers such as Yang (1999) and Nikitina & Furuoka (2006) have conducted factor analysis of BALLI results to determine the statistical structure of the BALLI. Other researchers such as Truitt (1995), Yang (1999) and Honh (2006) have conducted a factor analysis on the BALLI and found different results and themes than those proposed by Horwitz. These differing results could be

indications that culture and ethnicity influence the shaping of beliefs. In addition, they suggest the structure and sets of beliefs may differ from one sample to another (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006, 2007). In Nikitina and Furuoka's BALLI study of Malaysian students learning Russian at university, the four factors which were extracted corresponded with four of the five BALLI themes. Only one of Horwitz's themes, 'nature of language learning', was not aligned to Nikitina and Furuoka's study, which led them to conclude that the BALLI could be considered suitable for research on exploring language learning beliefs in a variety of cultural contexts (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008).

It is thus noticeable that studies which delved into the beliefs of language learner was first pioneered by Horwitz (1988) who used the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) test to explore the five areas of language learning (Lazar, 2013). However, as admitted by Horwitz herself, the effectiveness of BALLI method is confined only to a "static and cross-sectional view of learner beliefs" which is therefore not comprehensive enough as a research tool. This drives a need for further research which would cover the idiosyncratic, situation-dependent nature of beliefs based on the socio-cultural perspectives of learner beliefs as reflected in case studies, self-report, diaries and other qualitative longitudinal studies.

A recent approach by researchers who heed this challenging call of research area is the study of learners' perceptions using the tool of metaphors, started off by Ellis (2002) who studied the diary entries of six learners undertaking a language course, focusing on their feelings as expressed metaphorically in their diaries. This study generated an overview of five metaphors in reflection of the learning experiences: a JOURNEY, a STRUGGLE, WORK, SUFFERING and PUZZLE. With these interpretative new sets of findings, Ellis believed that

the metaphorical analysis method proved superiority over Horwitz BALLI (1988) test as it was able to address the authentic learning situations and reveal learners' affective beliefs alongside the cognitive ones.

Ellis (2008) compared the findings of three studies, one applying mixed-methods (Tanaka, 2004 cited in Ellis, 2008), his own metaphor study (Ellis, 2002), and a case study (Zhong, 2008 cited in Ellis, 2008). The results of the three different studies clearly indicated that only the belief questionnaire used by Tanaka (2004) yielded unsatisfactory results, unable to indicate the dynamic nature of beliefs. On the contrary, both other studies applied qualitative methods; Ellis' metaphor study (2002) and Zhong's case study, provided ample evidence for the dynamic and situational nature of beliefs (Lazar, 2013).

### **2.8.3 Research on perceptions based on metaphor analysis**

Metaphor is regarded as a tool through which we make sense of the world and conveys our essential thoughts and learning. Thus, it has the potential to function as a significant tool for exploring the learners' understanding and conceptions of various inter-related educational components such as the teacher, learner and the subject course book. Many researchers and educational psychologists have come to realise and acknowledge the underlying potential of metaphors used in research in English Language education. This literary device is a great tool in helping teachers and learners "construct representations of themselves and their experience" (Kramsch, 2003). Ellis (2002) has pioneered an indirect approach to the research which views beliefs as covert and best studied through 'Metaphor Analysis'. This approach acknowledges the functions of metaphors which are not only used for language embellishment purposes, but also to unveil the hidden ideologies held unconsciously by learners.

Several significant past studies that employed metaphors to describe prevalent perspectives on education include Herron (1982) who identified two basic metaphors in describing the curriculum theories in foreign language education. They are “the mind-body metaphor” where understanding a language is perceived as a brain exercise to enhance the learners’ minds and “the production metaphor” whereby the aim of learning was to produce independent and capable workers.

Researchers in the past have made several attempts on the area of defining language teaching process as well as the important role of a language teacher in the classroom. According to Block’s (1992) study, some common metaphors gathered in describing a teacher were ‘*a contracted professional*’ and ‘*a providing parent*’. This showed that teachers were very much looked up to as the respectable figure person of a knowledge- giver as well as one who cared and provided for the learners just like how a parent does for the children. Swales (1994) conducted a prominent research on adult female learners’ viewpoints of learning the English Language in Dubai British Council. In this study, participants drew cartoons which depicted their perceptions and emotions on learning a foreign language. Findings from this study concluded that the images portrayed were close representations of the social and political struggles as women in developing countries went through. Some common themes depicted from the metaphors were symbolic of ‘nature, village life, family, social power and status’ provided by education.

Oxford et al. (1998) have done a comprehensive and detailed study on language teaching and learning with the use of metaphor analysis. The researchers developed a typology of metaphors which explored different perspectives on the concept of what a language teacher entails through personal narratives elicited from students in written or verbal forms, teachers

as well as former students. From the study, 14 discrete metaphors used for teachers were identified with teacher as '*manufacturer*', '*conduit*', '*nurturer*', '*acceptor*', '*entertainer*' and '*learning partner*'. The metaphors were then categorized into the four philosophical perspectives of education.

There were quite a number of studies done on teachers' educational metaphors and images on language learning. Martinez et al. (2001) investigated teachers' metaphorical conceptions on their perceptions of learning. Most of the metaphors gathered fall under the '*Behaviourist and Empiricist*' category which interprets the mind as an empty slate onto which our past experiences in the world is accumulated into knowledge. In the local Malaysian and setting-specific studies, Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) elicited metaphors produced by students about their perceptions on language teachers and further examined the teacher categorization they are each aligned to. These studies are meant to help teachers identify and construct their own images as well as their teaching knowledge to promote an authentic self-awareness of the practices of the teaching profession. Ellis (2002), on the other hand, explored the metaphors generated by beginner L2 German learners' thoughts kept in their diaries for a duration of six months.

## **2.9 Significance of using metaphor analysis in learner perceptions studies**

'Metaphor is an analogy device used to perceive something in terms of another' (Burke, 1945: 503). The definition above vividly spells out in simple terms the significant function lies in the heart of metaphor. Two distinct ideas are involved and one idea (usually concrete) is used to better express understanding of the other (usually abstract). With these 'seeing...in terms of' process engaged, metaphors possess three unique functions used as a research instrument with its expressibility, compactness, and vividness qualities. In describing a



students' learning experience to "*climbing the Everest*", it conveys an image of the learners' hardship and constantly gripping in fear of failure while at the same time relating the importance of persevering and proceed steadily up towards achieving the summit or the main goal in learning the language.

Metaphors make it possible to help people relate or express their difficult, emotionally intense or uncommon experiences through a comparison of two dissimilar notions. Human cognitions and language evolve greatly around the use of metaphors as researchers examined their everyday thoughts and language (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By capturing and closely examining learners' mental thoughts and ideas through metaphors, researchers can access into their minds (Saban, 2004; Tobin & Tippins, 1996). This proves that metaphors do not merely function as a rhetorical device, but an indication of every individual's internal mental thought which is largely metaphorically bound, as reflected by the way we think and what we do. Gwyn (1999) analysed the metaphors used by severely ill as they relate their personal experiences and concluded on their opinions and emotions based on the metaphors used. Metaphors are highly reflective of individual personal interpretations of phenomena such as facing an illness, learning a language, as influenced by the lenses of gender, race, ethnicity, educational and life experiences.

According to Shuell (1990) cited in Saban et.al, (2007), "If a picture is worth 1,000 words, a metaphor is worth 1,000 pictures! For a picture provides only a static image while a metaphor provides a conceptual framework for thinking about something". This illustration aptly captures the core of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) "*cognitive theory of metaphor*". The writers proposed that not only as a mere literary device (substitution theory) or a condensed simile (comparison theory), metaphors form our minds, ideas, and actions.

The use of metaphor allows researchers to investigate analogies, notice similarities, and perceive a situation in terms of another image. Metaphor functions as a lens, or a filter through which an object is reviewed and becomes a blueprint model for thinking about an idea in light of another.

## **2.10 Traditional and Contemporary View of Metaphor Analysis**

The word “metaphor” is derived from the Greek word *metapherein* (to transfer); which symbolises “to bear, to carry”. Aligned to that origin, the word “metaphor” is reflected as “a transfer of meaning from one thing to another” (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008 p.194). Traditionally, metaphors are viewed as part of speech that ‘decorates’ the language of the speaker literary until recently when linguists have started to embrace and recognize metaphors as an essential tool used to uncover the cognitive realm of human communications (Kamberi, 2013). Classical theories viewed metaphors as a matter of thought, not language. It was until 1993 that Lakoff dispelled the belief that regarded metaphors as merely a figurative language and showed that metaphors are primarily conceptual in human thoughts and function in ordinary language.

Metaphor analysis is a method used in discourse analysis as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) with the premise that by examining the metaphors people used in conveying their beliefs and experiences, their underlying meanings and thoughts set forth by the speaker can be uncovered. In other words, metaphors have the ability to reflect unique “images of natural phenomenon” through “mapping two non-related domains with each other” (Kramsch, 2003). In relation to the field of language teaching and learning, metaphor maps the target domain of language learning experience (abstract) to a source domain of a shared past experience (concrete).

Since the dawn of 1980s, metaphor analysis has served as an effective tool in investigating the thoughts of teachers and learners in the field of education as well as applied linguistic enquiry. Three prominent areas of research on the use of metaphors done by scholars are in relation to SLA researchers' use of dominant metaphors such as the 'input-black box-output' concept in explaining L2 acquisition, teachers' conceptualization of their classroom pedagogy and L2 learners' reflections on their learning experiences. The underpinning conceptual framework of this study denotes how metaphor analysis allows learners to tap into the connectedness of social complex world and linguistic utterances in learning a language. Teachers and learners perceive different kinds of beliefs about teaching and learning which is crucial to be untapped through various research instruments in second language acquisition. Every individual learner's conceptual system is largely metaphorical (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and therefore their thoughts, the things they experience which may lead to the decisions and actions made can be conveyed through the channel of metaphors in revealing the hidden ideas of the learners by analyzing the metaphors they produce.

### **2.11 Conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)**

The recent development of theory in the field of metaphor analysis-based research is the notion of conceptual '*blending*' (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002 as cited in Cameron & Maslen, 2010). The human mind operates with the aid of 'mental spaces' which are fluid areas carrying meaning. 'Mental spaces' refers to an area of the mind which we construct and form mental representations of the world, as we daily process information in the mind. According to Cameron and Maslen, '*blending*' occurs when a thought shares or uses more than one mental space. This occurrence can be observed in a 'metaphor' whereby a word or image which carries a literal meaning (representing one mental space) is juxtaposed with another different (usually abstract, second mental space) context. The '*blending*' of two different

mental spaces then creates a third mental space, carrying the meaning of the metaphor. For instance, Kovecses (2002) argues that the linguistic metaphor *Steam was coming out of his ears* creates an image, of a person with steam literally flowing out from the ears, which does not exist in neither the source domain of heat nor the target domain of anger. The image depicted by the metaphor can only exist in a third mental space, whereby the elements of both the source and target domains are fused.

## **2.12 Past studies on perceptions and language learning using metaphor analysis**

### **2.12.1 Metaphorical perception studies involving university learners**

Metaphors can be a useful assistance in uncovering the perceptions of learners by helping students enhance learning and perceive unfamiliar concepts through the research tool of metaphors.

Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) examined the metaphorical views of 23 Malaysian undergraduate university students about language teacher using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study aimed to examine whether the metaphor produced by the learners can fall into the four categories uncovered by Oxford (1998) as well as to explore if gender plays a role in the metaphor production of learners. The findings of the study depicted that the metaphors produced by the language learners in the Asian educational context are relevant and could fit into the four philosophical perspectives by Oxford et al. (1998) on the concept of a language teacher. The qualitative analysis of the study depicted that metaphor can be gender-related whilst the quantitative stage did not reveal significant difference in the metaphors produced with regards to gender.

Pishghadam (2011) also employed the metaphorical approach as an indirect research tool to delve deeper into the Iranian MA university students' beliefs about their various perspectives of teaching and learning a language in ideal and current contexts. The study aimed to gather the various metaphors produced by MA students about themselves as learners and their professors in the present and idyllic scenarios. The metaphors created by the learners are first collected using the sentence prompts "A university student is/ should be like....." and "A university professor is/ should be like...." The MA students' perceptions of language learner and professor expressed through the diverse metaphors were then identified and analyzed. The analysis helped researchers to access into the learners' hidden beliefs and reveal the reasons that may potentially affect the learning process. The learners' metaphors were then categorised into three learning perspectives of *Behaviourist*, *Cognitivist* and *Situative* learning which reflected the MA students' different pre-conceived ideas and expectations towards the role of professors and students and allowed them to uncover their true ideas about teaching and learning. The findings revealed that MA students' choice of metaphors about lecturers in the present teaching scenarios reflected a majority of behaviourism approach with classical roles of teachers (*dictator, clergy man, manager*).

Oxford (2001) studied the conceptual metaphors of 473 foreign or second language learners expressed through their narratives based on three teaching approaches; *Autocratic* approach, *Participatory/ Democratic* approach, and *Laissez-Faire* approach. The metaphors which reflected teachers who adopt the autocratic approach include teacher as '*manufacturer, tyrant, and judge*'. The second approach gathered metaphors which resembles teachers as '*family member, challenger and catalyst*'. The Laissez-Faire approach produced metaphors which portrayed teachers as '*blind-eyes, bad baby-sitters*'. The researcher encapsulated that

different learners preferred different teaching approaches represented by their choice of metaphors (cited in Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005).

### **2.12.2 Metaphorical perception studies involving school teachers and teacher trainees**

Metaphors produced by teachers which reflect their perceptions on teaching hold a significant role in painting unspoken insights into their teaching experiences and assist teachers to reflect their own practices from the lens of an external viewer. (Pishghadam, 2011).

Martinez, Sauleda and Huber (2001) expounded on the co-reflections of 50 experienced teachers' metaphorical conceptions of learning produced in collaboration of small groups. The study also surveyed the comparison of metaphors gathered between the prospective (new) and experienced teachers by incorporating another 38 prospective teachers pursuing the same degree course on instructional psychology. The metaphors were categorised based on three main learning dimensions; the *Behaviourist/ empiricist* perspective, the *Cognitivist*, and the *Situative or socio-historic* perspective. The *Behaviourist* perceives learning as a process of stimulus-response formation and symbolises learners as passive recipients whilst teachers as transmitters of knowledge. The *Cognitivist* defines learning as a process of constructing schema between teachers as facilitators and students as active participants in constructing knowledge. The final dimension (*Situative*) holds the perspective that learning is embedded in contexts, achieved through participation of activities in a community (social process). The findings of this study showed that majority of the teachers were more inclined towards the traditional views of teaching and learning as *Behaviourist* (transmission of knowledge), followed by a moderate group which fell into the *Constructivist* metaphors, and a minority which conceived teaching and learning as *Situative* (social process).

The studies above illustrated a range of approaches to the study of metaphor in the area of perceptions in language learning and teaching. The last fifteen years have observed the publication of several studies exploring the connection between the choice of metaphor and the educational professional practices. Most of these studies have included various stakeholders such as teachers (Block, 1992; Cortazzi and Jin, 1999; de Guerrero and Villamil, 2000, 2002), learners (Block, 1992; Oxford et al., 1998; Wan, 2007; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2008), and even parents (Bialostok, 2008).

### **2.13 Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the main concepts of learners' beliefs and perceptions through the broad definitions provided by various researchers in the discipline of language learning. To encapsulate, numerous past studies were done based on the metaphorical conceptions produced by school teachers' (pre- and in-service teachers) perceptions and beliefs on language learning using metaphor analysis as an enquiry tool (Leavy, Mc Sorley & Bote, 2007; De Guerrero & Villamil, 2001; Mahlios & Maxon, 1998; Oxford et al., 1998). On the contrary, studies which delve deeper on the metaphorical perceptions of learners' attitudes towards language learning and the complications encountered throughout the process are still relatively limited (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008; Saban, Kocbeker & Saban, 2007; Oxford et al., 1998) . Studies which look into learner factor among postgraduate students in the field of Linguistics who are also currently teaching the language to younger learners in school or higher institutions, have yet to be extensively covered. It is with this in mind that the researcher aspires to contribute from this study, a suitable curriculum design that fits the learners' perceptions of learning in the university.

The next chapter on research methodology included the discussion on research design which encompassed the sample of participants, instruments, procedures of data collection, sample of data analysis adopted in the study. A brief discussion on the result of pilot study conducted with ten undergraduate students to generate an idea of their perceptions on English language learning and teaching based on the questionnaire. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness of this study were also put forward.

University of Malaya



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*The most important knowledge teachers need to do good work  
is a knowledge of how students are experiencing learning  
and perceiving their teacher's actions.*

*- Steven Brookfield (2007)*

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study aims to offer authentic perspectives of postgraduate learners in the discipline of English language teaching and learning as one of the means to assist language teachers in making decisions that would meet the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) in the university. The research design, research method and procedures which were used in this study to collect data and seek answers to the research questions are further explained in this chapter.

#### 3.2 Research design

This study reflected a qualitative research design with some quantitative analysis in examining the two aspects of learners' perceptions in English language learning and language teachers' roles metaphorically. This qualitative study mirrored the exploratory design in nature, whereby the researcher attempted to explore the essence of personal experiences from participants (Creswell, 2003) from the voice of postgraduate learners in a local institution. The exploratory stance is deemed appropriate because unveiling learners' perceptions using metaphorical analysis is still currently an under- explored area of study. Apart from gathering detailed background information from the participants through a survey, in the form of a questionnaire, the researcher further probed real-life experiences from the participants through interviews and then grouped the collective information into relevant categories and

themes. The researcher attempted to construct an in-depth understanding of the learner's perceptions of English language learning and the preconceived views on the roles of an English teacher through the underlying meanings as depicted by the learners' metaphors.

Literature has shown a number of published metaphor studies examining teachers' and learners' perceptions in teaching and learning experiences. Such studies gathered participants' perceptions from natural discourse data such as learner's diaries or teacher journals (Oxford et al., 1998; Ellis, 2001, 2002) or a deliberate elicitation of metaphors by completing a sentence cue (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000, 2002; Farjami, 2012; Skyes, 2011; Wan et al., 2011). De Guerrero and Villamil (2002) examined the basic conceptualisations of ESL teaching and learning, using the socio-cultural theory approach. The study provided nine distinct conceptual metaphors of an ESL teacher namely *Co-operative leader*, *Provider of knowledge*, *Agent of change*, *Nurturer*, *Innovator*, *Provider of Tools*, *Artist*, *Repairer* and *Gym Instructor*. Farjami (2012), on the other hand, explored images and metaphors produced by 125 adult English learners of at least one year language learning experience specifically in the area of Vocabulary learning. Participants completed sentence cues which started with '*Learning English vocabulary is like.....*' in either Persian or English, whichever was more comfortable to them to prevent restriction in the flow of their mental images. Similarly, the qualitative study conducted by Skyes (2011) ascertained whether learners' written explanations and interviews were representative of their implicitly held beliefs with regards to different language learning practices.

Spontaneous metaphors captured from learner discourses through oral or written narratives, interviews or diaries had the advantage of being derived naturally in conversations or writing whilst the explicitly elicited metaphors enabled metaphor identification process to be made in

a more straight forward manner. Both methods too, spell out their respective disadvantages; the former needs a considerable quantity of data to collect enough spontaneous metaphors and the latter has the possibilities of yielding unsuccessful responses- no answers given, no metaphors used or no explanatory reasoning provided in the questionnaires (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). Realising their merits and limitations of both approaches, the researcher decided to employ the latter - a survey method to elicit qualitative open-ended data and completion of two metaphorical prompts. This method ensured that all respondents produced a metaphor and identifying the metaphors was not obscure as in naturally occurring data (Cameron & Low, 1999). Subsequently, the principal recurring metaphors were categorised into relevant metaphorical themes of learning dimensions and teacher roles categorisations. The researcher's interpretations of learners' metaphorical conceptions were further substantiated by two peer reviews, retrospective interviews with the participants concerned through e-mails, telephone calls or face to face interviews and finally validated by an expert in the field of metaphor. These specific steps were crucial to ensure reliability and triangulation of the researchers' interpretation on the metaphorical data, to establish a common understanding between the researcher and the participants' intended meaning. Thus, the final categorization of learners' metaphors into the learning dimensions and their perceptions of language teachers' roles were most accurately depicted.

### **3.3 Selection of Participants**

This exploratory study adopted a purposive sampling of participants among postgraduate learners in a local tertiary institution. Proficient postgraduate learners in English language who were able to express themselves, reflecting their views and thoughts about language learning were selected. Most previous qualitative applied linguistics researchers have conducted surveys on a group of participants within the range of 50 to 150 participants. This

study encompassed 47 postgraduate students from the University of Malaya. A majority of participants were pursuing their Master and Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) studies in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics (FLL) and a minority from Faculty of Medicine. The postgraduate students (41 Females and 6 Males) who responded were from multicultural backgrounds (33 Malaysians and 14 International students).

Individual learner backgrounds that had the potential to shape the learners' perceptions of the English language learning process were among the essential key ingredients further explored by the researcher. These included their nationalities, cultural backgrounds, first language, the age when they first encountered the English Language, field of study, the different reasons for learning English in their respective countries, the teaching and learning methods they find most influential in helping them learn English. There were a total of 32 Malaysians, mainly Chinese (14), Malay (10) and a handful of Indians, Sikhs and Punjabis; and 15 International students, mainly from China (12) and a small sample from Iran, Iraq and Thailand. Participants come from a wide range of age, from 23 to 57 and are heterogeneous in gender. (Refer to Table 3.1 below for a graphic representation of the selection of participants in this study).

**Table 3.1:** Sample of Participants

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Sample of Participants</b>
Postgraduate Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) University of Malaya</li> <li>ii) Faculty of Languages and Linguistics (42) Faculty of Medicine (5)</li> <li>iii) Master and PhD students</li> <li>iv) Local (33) and International (14)</li> <li>v) Mixed gender (41 Female, 6 Male)</li> <li>vi) Age range (23-57 years old)</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study consist of an open-ended metaphor-elicitation questionnaire and a retrospective interview.

#### 3.4.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised two sections: Section A, the participants' demographic profile and Section B, two metaphorical prompts on the participants' perceptions of learning the English Language and the roles of a language teacher (*Appendix A*).

This metaphor-elicitation questionnaire was adopted from Lawley and Tompkin (2004) who proposed very simple questions with maximal use of the participants' exact words and minimally presupposed other information. Simple sentence-completion prompts were asked to elicit participants' use of metaphors to depict their English learning perceptions based on their personal experiences. The survey questionnaire included 24 questions on demographics and two metaphorical prompts on participants' perceptions and ideas about (i) Learning the English Language, and (ii) The roles of a language teacher.

The demographic questions comprised information such as: (a) gender, (b) age, (c) nationality, (d) ethnicity, (e) first language spoken, (f) current profession, and (g) the age when they were first exposed to and learnt English. In addition to the demographics, questions also focused on the participants' English teaching and learning experiences: (h) their teaching experiences, if any, (i) participants' preferred choice of learning method (CLT, GT, or AL method) which most influenced their learning of the English language and their reasons. An open-ended option in the questionnaire was provided for any other learning methods the participants may have experienced in school in addition to the three specified

methods. Since this is an exploratory study, the questions above were collected to explore the plausible explanations of results later.

The participants completed two sentence prompts “*Learning the English Language is like....because.....*” and “*A Language Teacher is like.....because.....*” by using a metaphorical expression (a word or a phrase) which best described and reflected their perceptions on English language learning and a language teacher. This technique was favourable as it neither contaminated nor distorted the learners’ authentic views through their metaphorical expressions (Cameron & Low, 1999).

### **3.4.2 Retrospective Interview**

The list of interview questions were initially field tested with two students as a means of evaluating the participants’ reactions and types of answers to the possible questions asked. These two students were not included as participants in the study. The researcher used probing or follow-up questions to extract vital information and confirmed the meaning of the interpretation on the participants’ chosen metaphors in the questionnaire. The researcher was aware that the retrospective interviews were not conducted out of neatly structured steps but rather of jointly constructed encounters meant to elicit and interact with the participants. The follow-up retrospective interview served the purpose of establishing a common interpretation of the metaphor and the entailments between the researcher and the participants.

### **3.5 Data Collection Procedures**

The first part of the data collection involved the dissemination of questionnaires. After obtaining all proper data collection permission from the faculty (*Appendix B*), the researcher disseminated the questionnaire online to all intended postgraduate participants through the

students' university e-mail. The researcher sent out the questionnaire to 220 MESL students and 177 Master in Linguistics students' siswa mail throughout the process of online questionnaire collection. Learners were given duration of one week to reflect and ponder upon their own learning experiences and who they perceived their language teachers to be metaphorically. The learners then provided a metaphor and a clear explanation or rationale related to their choice of metaphor they had written. The whole process of answering the questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes.

However, towards the second month of the data collection, only 37 participants responded to the online questionnaire administration. Due to the challenges of getting adequate respondents, the researcher had to resort to distributing questionnaires in hard copies. Ten postgraduate students from FLL responded to questionnaires in hard copies. Hence, 47 participants' responses were collected for this study. A total of 94 metaphors were collected in allowing the researcher to expound the two paradigms of learning English and language teachers' roles.

The second phase of this research involved a follow-up retrospective interview with the participants to clarify their choice of metaphor and the background 'reasons' for learning English and the roles of a language teacher. The interview session served as a metaphor-checking step with the participants to establish a common understanding of data interpretation between the researcher and the respondents. This means that the interpretations of the metaphors were decided upon based on a collaborative effort between the researcher and the respondent. Besides that, the interview also attempted to understand the background of the respondents to better capture the metaphors and the socio-context they might

potentially represent. This added richness to the researcher’s interpretation of the data collected.

An interview usually involved three different aspects: opening, exploring and moving on from one topic to another (Heigham & Croker, 2009). In this study, the researcher adopted three main approaches during the interview, namely ‘checking or reflecting’, ‘following-up’ and ‘probing’ to seek more clarification from the participants (Heigham & Croker, 2009). During the interview, the researcher checked his own interpretation of the participants’ metaphor and their entailments by making statements such as “*So you’re saying that....*” or “*What do mean when you say....*” to confirm the participants’ intended meaning. The researcher also employed follow-up technique by prompting “*Could you say a little more about....*” whenever necessary. As the participants shared their personal experiences, the researcher probed for more details by quoting an opinion or evoking memories for more in-depth information (Refer to Figure 3.1 for a graphic representation of the steps taken for data collection and analysis in this study).

The two phases of data collection were conducted for this study between May 2014 and January 2015. Table 3.2 below lists the time for the data collection of each phase, data collection methods and the selected research participants involved for the preliminary and the main study. An in-depth discussion on the pilot study and its preliminary findings were covered in Section 3.9 of this chapter.

**Table 3.2** Data collection Phases for the Preliminary and Main Study

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Collection Methods</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Pilot 1	May 2014	Questionnaires (Hardcopies) and Follow-up interviews	Ten Form 4 students
Pilot 2	June 2014		Nine Undergraduate students
Main Study	December 2014- January 2015	Questionnaires (Online and hard copies) Follow-up interviews	47 Postgraduate students



### 3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

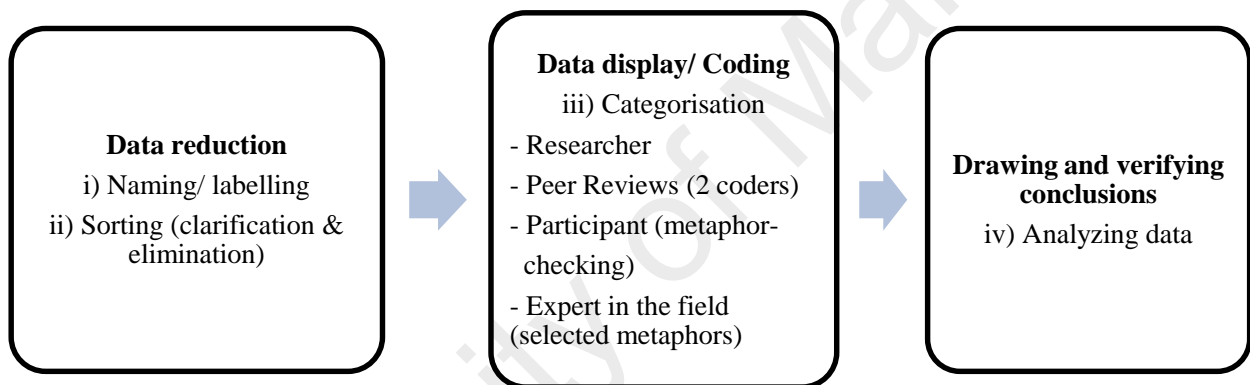
The researcher employed the data transformation method in further segmenting and analysing the data of phrases or sentences given in the entailments. It involved creating codes and themes by highlighting the keywords or main recurring ideas as emerged in the qualitative text found in the data. For instance, the response *Learning English is like 'water' because it never stops, never finishes* (S16) is highlighted as underlined to further emphasise the notion of 'Routine' under the theme 'Practice'. The participants' metaphorical responses and their entailments from the metaphor-elicited task were first tabulated with the list of metaphors and their entailments to allow a deeper understanding and insights into their perceptions.

The data analysis in this study adopted the traditional approach as proposed by Cameron and Low (1999). It involved "collecting examples of linguistic metaphors, generalising from them to the conceptual metaphors, and using the results to suggest understandings or construct people's beliefs". The researcher followed the steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). They comprised namely these three main procedures, i) data reduction, ii) data display and iii) drawing conclusion/ verification. Based on this framework, the four steps involved throughout the whole data analysis procedure were: (i) naming/ labelling, (ii) sorting (clarification and elimination), (iii) categorisation, and (iv) analysing data. (Saban et al., 2007).

Throughout the process of sorting, the researcher filtered out participants' metaphors as not all the metaphors given were analysable and valid for data purposes. An example of such instance was the response *Learning English is like 'understanding is always greater than speaking'* by a Malaysian postgraduate student. The researcher had to put aside this response

as it did not adhere to the definition of a metaphor as stated in the framework adopted in this study. According to Cameron, 2003 and Steen et.al, 2010, the two conditions that marked a linguistic metaphor included (i) a contrast in meanings between a vehicle and the topic, and (ii) a connection or transfer of meaning between the two notions.

The researcher's analysis of the collected data was not altogether a linear process of merely progressing from one phase to the next, but a recursive process. The details of the analysis steps are depicted as below (Figure 3.2). In addition, it was a gradual process that develops over time (Ely et al., 1997) and not done hurriedly.



**Figure 3.1** Data analysis procedures of this study (Miles and Huberman, 1994)

The explanations below further illustrated the stages of each data analysis procedure taken in this study:

i) Naming/ labeling stage:

The researcher identified and tabulated all the metaphors and their entailments provided by the participants for both aspects of learning English language and language teacher's roles. If a researcher could not identify a metaphor in the participants' response or the participant did not provide a metaphor at all, the researcher remarked 'no metaphor'.

*Learning English is like.....because (reasons).....*

**Table 3.3** Sample identification of learners’ metaphors and its entailments (English Language learning)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Metaphor</b>	<b>because.....(entailments)</b>
1	<i>a life journey</i>	They have large number of vocabulary needed to be <u>remembered</u> and <u>used</u> .

*An English teacher is like .....because (reasons).....*

**Table 3.4** Sample identification of learners’ metaphors and its entailments (English Language teachers’ roles)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Metaphors</b>	<b>because.....(entailments)</b>
1	<i>an online dictionary</i>	He/she has to <u>update</u> their <u>knowledge every day</u> , and <u>explain</u> quickly and completely the <u>meaning of vocabulary or grammatical rules</u> to his/ her student.

ii) Sorting (clarification and elimination) stage:

The researcher went through the data again and characterized each metaphor into its elements: (1) the topic, (2) the vehicle, and (3) the ground. For example, the ‘topic’ is the subject of the metaphor (ie. *English Language learning* or *Teacher’s Role*). The ‘vehicle’ is the term to which the topic is compared (*a life journey, acquiring luxury, a online dictionary*), and the ‘ground’ refers to the nature of the relationship between the topic and the vehicle. This step was meant to further break down each metaphor into analyzable parts, as well as for the researcher to look for salient features or common elements among various metaphors. Some of the participants’ poorly structured answers (with the features of these criteria) were not included for analysis:

- i) Plain description with no mention of a metaphor at all. (Example: *An English teacher is like ‘teachers must use technology for English language teaching’ because ‘it can attract the attention of student’*).
- ii) Mention of metaphor but no provision of a rationale.

- iii) Vague or ambiguous metaphors with difficulty in placing the metaphor under one clearly recognizable theme (Example: *A language teacher is like ‘a shooting star’. When you look at them, you know that you already give them hope in a way that they will help you out by enlighten you to understand*). The researcher contemplated whether to categorise the metaphor ‘a shooting star’ as the ‘Instructor’ or ‘Provider’.

iii. Categorization stage :

The researcher first coded the keywords found in the metaphor and the entailments given by the participants and categorised them based on the coding schemes of learning dimensions and teacher roles’ categories. The next phase of categorisation involved two other peers from the same field of languages and linguistics study to categorise a sample of 20 metaphors (20% of total 47x2 =94 data collected) based on the same coding schemes provided by the researcher (*Appendix C*). Each categorisation from the researcher, first and second peer is tabulated as below:

*Learning English Language is like..... (metaphor) because ..... (reasons)*

**Table 3.5** Sample categorization of learners’ metaphors for learning dimensions

Metaphor	because.....	Learning Dimensions		
		Researcher	1 <sup>st</sup> Peer	2 <sup>nd</sup> Peer
<i>White water rafting</i>	At the beginning, you will experience <u>difficulties</u> keeping the boat on the right direction and avoiding the whirlpools, but after sometime, you will <u>learn to manoeuvre</u> and keep the boat heading to the right direction.	Cognitivist	Behaviourist	Cognitivist

*An English teacher is like.....(metaphor) because ..... (reasons).*

**Table 3.6** Sample categorization of learners’ metaphors on language teachers’ roles

Metaphors	because.....	‘Teacher’s role’ Conceptual category		
		Researcher	1 <sup>st</sup> Peer	2 <sup>nd</sup> Peer
<i>an online dictionary</i>	He/she has to <u>update</u> their knowledge every day and <u>explain quickly</u> and <u>completely</u> the <u>meaning</u> of <u>vocabulary</u> or <u>grammatical rules</u> to his/ her student.	Provider	Provider	Provider

iv. Analyzing stage:

During the analysis stage, the researcher carried out retrospective interviews with the participants whose metaphors reflected a discrepancy in the categorizations between the researcher and the two peer coders. This was to ensure reliability in the coding process and enhance rigour of the final categorizations.

Some of the metaphors and their entailments given by the participants involved a straight forward analysis, as they pointed to a clear learning dimension or teacher role categories. For instance, the metaphor ‘*martial arts*’ and the entailment ‘*it requires constant practice*’ (S17) reflected the Behaviourist learning dimension. The metaphor ‘*an online dictionary*’ who has ‘*...to update their knowledge and explain the meaning...*’ (S1) depicted the teacher role category of a Provider.

On the contrary, some of the metaphors given by the participants revealed the characteristics of “hybrids” which displayed combination attributes of more than one theoretical learning perspective. For instance, the metaphor learning the English language is like “*learning any new skills*” incorporated the aspects of learning as empirical roots of knowledge gained through practices (Behaviourist) as well as the influences of internal

information-processes by the learner to know and understand the underlying concepts (Cognitivist). The researcher then grouped these metaphors under the ‘hybrid’ category and confirmed the interpretation through the peer reviews, metaphor-checking interviews with the participants and finally reviewed by an expert in the field of metaphor analysis.

Below is a sample of interview script as conducted with the participant who likened the learning of English to ‘*white water rafting*’. The researcher sought to triangulate the metaphorical response as either a *Cognitivist* or a *Behaviourist* learning dimension by probing several questions to the participant.

**Table 3.7** Sample of learners’ metaphors and entailments

<b>Learning English is like....</b>	<i>White water rafting</i>
because....	At the <u>beginning</u> , you will experience <u>difficulties</u> keeping the boat on the right direction and avoiding the whirlpools but after sometime, you will <u>learn to manoeuvre</u> and keep the boat heading to the <u>right direction</u> .

Q1: What are some of the ‘difficulties’ experienced in learning English in the beginning?

A1: *The difficulties I have experienced in learning English in the beginning are the grammatical rules that I need to understand and using the appropriate words to create a sentence. I had problems understanding the grammatical rules when I was in primary school.*

Q2: How do you ‘manoeuvre and keep the boat in the right direction’ in the process of learning English?

A2: *I asked my parents if I encountered problems in learning English and they taught me a lot as well as correcting me if I made mistakes. In addition, I used the dictionary that they bought for me to look up the meaning of words which I do not understand. Back then, the dictionary is an important book for me as I learned new words every time I flipped*

*the pages in the dictionary.*

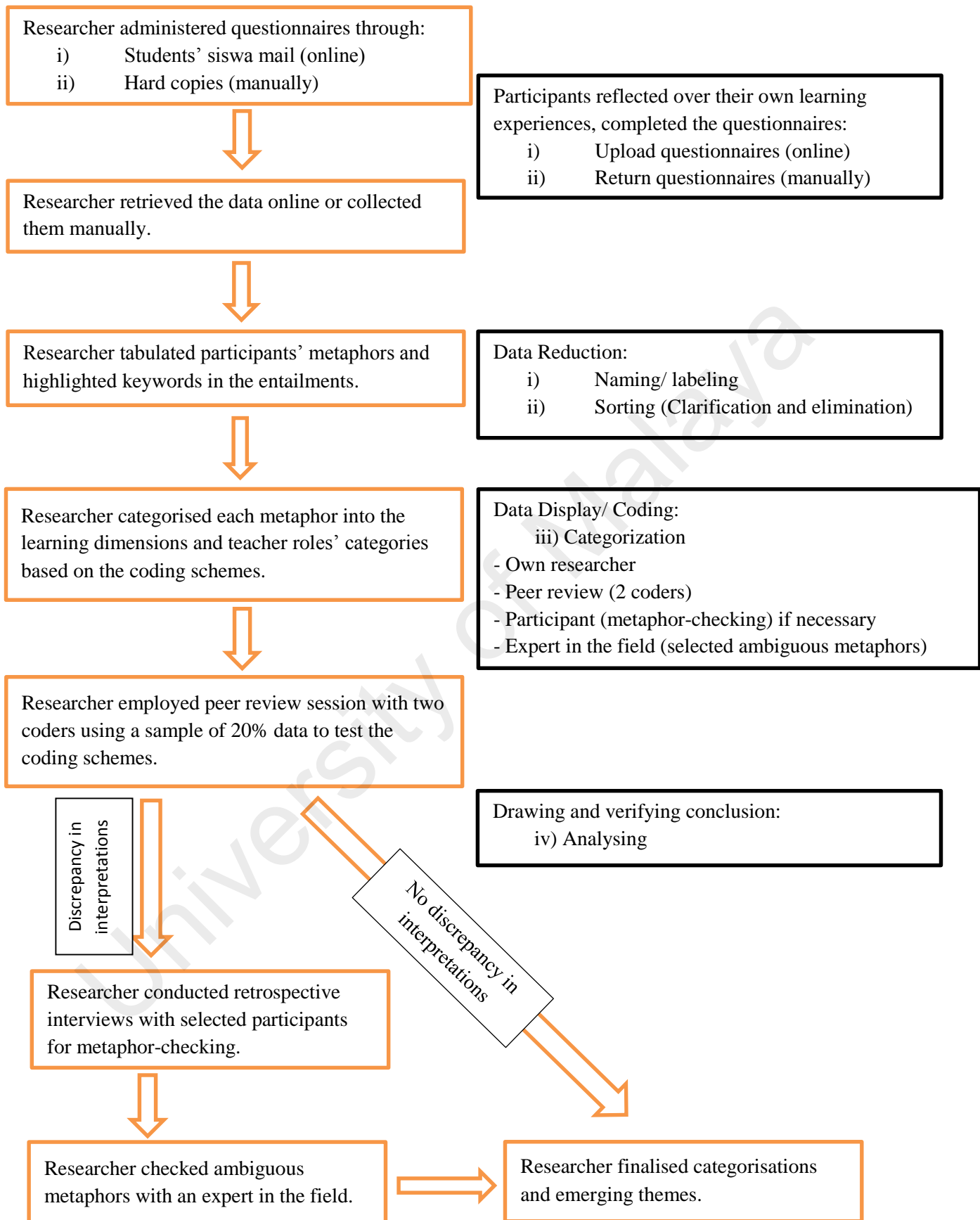
Q3: Did you manage the process to ‘head in the right direction’ individually through a change of knowledge in the mind or after repeated series of mechanical skill acquisition?

A3: *No, it took me some time to ‘head in the right direction’. I received guidance in the process of heading in the right direction. I remembered when I was in Primary 1, my tuition teacher told me the difference of past and present tense, I was confused. I took some time to understand the usage of past and present tense. Eventually, after numerous exercises she gave me every week, I understand what she had taught me in class.*

[Sample interview with S5]

Based on the retrospective interview with the participant (S5) and after much detailed recursive analysis, the researcher deduced that the learner’s metaphor ‘*white water rafting*’ belonged to the Cognitivist learning dimension under the sub-theme ‘Stages of Improvement’, as reflected by the theme ‘Internal Goal’. Some of the finalised themes derived in this study were borrowed from past literature, while others were created based on data-driven.

The flow chart below (Figure 3.2) further illustrated the whole data collection and data analysis procedures intertwined as the nature of a qualitative study required an on-going recursive process until a finalised theme is achieved.



**Figure 3.2** Steps taken for data collection and analysis  
(Adapted from Miles and Huberman, 1994)



### 3.7 Framework of Analysis

This study explored how various teaching methods and the different learner backgrounds represented by every individual may potentially influence the respondents' perceptions on language learning and the roles of a language teacher. The framework of analysis adapted in this study was depicted from these two take-off points: the 'language learning dimension' and the 'teacher role dimension' as inclined by each learner shown through the choice of metaphors. Further clarification with examples of metaphors and the entailments is explained in (*Appendix D: Analysis of Learners' Metaphors on Learning Dimension*) and (*Appendix E: Analysis of Learners' Metaphors on Language Teachers' Roles*).

In relation to the first angle of this study, the postgraduate learners' metaphors were explored and interpreted based on the three paradigms of learning dimensions (*Behaviourist, Cognitivist, or Situative perspectives*). The coding schemes (*Appendix F: Coding Scheme of Learning Dimensions*) for this interpretation and categorization of learners' metaphors were adopted from Martinez et.al., (2001) which looked at metaphors as blueprints of thinking about teaching and learning from the perspective of 50 experienced and 38 prospective teachers. This framework of analysis allowed the researcher to view the learners' metaphors from a comprehensive approach, as both cognitive and social phenomenon (Cameron, 1999).

In addition to the learning dimensions, this study also looked at the metaphors that reflected teachers' roles as produced by the postgraduate learners. This enabled language teachers to realise the learners' pre-conceived conceptions formed on language teachers' roles. The second part of this analysis involved categorization of postgraduate learners' metaphors on 'a language teacher' based on eight conceptual "teacher roles" categories (Teacher as 'provider', 'nurturer', 'devotee', 'instructor', 'transmitter', 'authority', 'interest

*arouser*', and *'co-worker'*) as found in **Appendix G: Coding Scheme of Teacher Roles Categories** as proposed by Wan, W., 2011. This framework of analysis was chosen for this study as it pictured a majority of the teacher roles as shared by the views of postgraduate learners from this study.

To delve further into the possible reasons behind the learners' choice of metaphors on their language learning perceptions and the perceived roles of a language teacher, the researcher explored deeper into the individual learners' diverse backgrounds. The participants' backgrounds were explored through their nationality, ethnicity, teaching experiences, various English Language teaching methods exposed throughout their school learning experience and the method that influenced them the most. For the various teaching methods, this study identified three types of teaching methods mainly employed in Malaysia and other countries; namely the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, the more traditional Grammar Translation (GT) method and the Audio Lingual (AL) method (Huang, 2010; Raissi & Nor, 2013). The CLT emphasised the fluent communicative aspect of the language in real-life context, GT focused on memorizing vocabulary, sentence structures and grammatical rules; while the AL prioritised learning new materials through repetitive dialogues, use of tapes, videos and visuals with great effort to help learners produce error-free utterances (Littlewood, 2007; Huang, 2010). The implications of different perceptions among university students of different cultural backgrounds were supported by previous studies as expounded by Ramburuth, P., (2009) in an Australian university.

To sum up, the table below further encapsulates the research objectives with each research questions and the specific research methodology adopted for this study.

**Table 3.8** Overview of research objectives, research questions and methodology.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Seeks to examine and understand the prevalent themes found in Postgraduate learners' metaphors about:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) English Language Learning.</li><li>ii) Roles of English Language Teachers</li></ul></li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>In what ways do learners' metaphors reflect the different learning dimensions of <i>Behaviourist, Cognitivist</i> and <i>Situative</i> perspectives?</li><li>What are the themes that emerge from the categorizations?</li></ol></li><li><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>How do learners metaphorically conceptualize the roles of English teachers?</li><li>What are the conceptual categories of language teachers' roles?</li></ol></li></ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Online and hardcopy questionnaires</li><li>Retrospective interview</li><li>Online and hardcopy questionnaires</li><li>Retrospective interview</li></ul>

### 3.8 Ethical Procedures and Considerations

As a language researcher, ethical procedures were taken into considerations as an integral part of this study right from its inception to its culmination.

First of all, the researcher sought ethical written permission (*Appendix H*) from the faculty to conduct this research by disseminating the online questionnaire to the postgraduate students' siswa mail list. With the approval granted, the researcher was provided with the list of postgraduate students' siswa mail for data collection purposes. Participants' consent was also obtained through the online questionnaire whereby the students indicated their voluntary agreement to take part in this research. This included permission from the students to be interviewed for further clarification when the need arose. In addition to the participants' consent, their privacy and confidentiality were taken care of as they were given pseudonyms in the data analysis and discussion.

### 3.8.1 Validity and Trustworthiness

Throughout the study, the researcher considered various possible factors which could potentially affect the validity of the results by looking into the four crucial elements underlying the process of establishing and ensuring trustworthiness: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). According to Maxwell (1996), validity is seen as ‘the correctness or credibility of description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account’ (p.87). Researcher bias is another factor that could potentially threaten validity. Thus, with all these potential factors in mind, the researcher strategized means to ensure trustworthiness of the findings and implications of this study as a whole.

The researcher employed a three-step validation process to further enhance the triangulation method of this study. A ‘peer-review’ session which involved the opinions of two peers in the similar field of linguistics study was conducted to cross-check a sample of 20% of the researcher’s own categorizations of the data. The relevant coding schemes were provided to both the peer reviewers during the peer-review session. This was to avoid any inaccuracy or researcher biasness in interpreting the data. Upon conducting the peer-review session, any discrepancy of interpretations between the researcher and the two peer-coders were further confirmed through the interview session (metaphor-checking) with the relevant participants.

All the interviews conducted by the researcher and the participants were recorded and verbatim transcriptions were done for every relevant part of the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English as all the participants were English major students. During the interview sessions conducted with several selected participants, the researcher clarified the

participants' intended meaning of the choice of metaphor and its related context. Based on the metaphor-checking or interview session, the researcher then re-examined the initial categorizations of the metaphors and re-categorized them into another category as necessary which depicted the participants' intended meaning in a more accurate manner. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed the importance of participant-checking in qualitative study as it establishes credibility of its results. Thus, the researcher constantly referred back to the participants either through e-mails, telephone or face-to-face to obtain further clarification and confirmation throughout the analysis of the data gathered.

During the interview session, where possible, participants were probed to further elaborate and provide necessary details on the metaphorical expressions, in order to keep to the true meaning they wish to convey and to minimize the threat of misinterpretation. The researcher also constantly self-examined own sets of beliefs and preconceptions while interpreting the data to reduce the risk of bias. Different ways of asking questions were employed to the participants as a means of cross-checking if the researcher's own explanations and personal judgements were congruent with the participants'. The researcher started the interviews with simple informal warm-up questions to reduce the barrier or influence as a researcher on the participants. This method "allows the respondent to practice talking to the interviewer in a relaxed manner while providing valuable information about how the respondent construes the general characteristics of the context" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.270).

The final step of checking the categorizations and emerging themes of the metaphorical data involved the validation of a fourth coder who is an expert in the field of metaphor analysis in language learning and teaching. The expert is a lecturer who has been teaching

English for a number of years in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics and has published papers in the area of metaphors.

### 3.8.2 Reliability

The reliability of the researcher's categorization was further ensured by employing a peer-review session with two coders and verification from an expert in the field of analysing metaphors. The researcher provided a sample of 20% data (Hruschka et al., 2004) to two coders (postgraduate students in Languages and Linguistics) who independently coded the metaphors based on the same coding scheme. Establishing the inter-rater reliability between the researcher and a fourth coder (an expert in the field of analysing metaphor) ensured the consistency of a coding system as carried out in this research.

To estimate the inter-rater reliability rate, the researcher adopted Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula, depicted as below:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of agreement}}{\text{Total number of agreement + disagreement}}$$

According to the analysis done on the collected data, 47 metaphors of language learning perceptions and 47 metaphors of language teachers' roles were classified first by the researcher and then validated by two peer coders. Miles and Huberman (1994) proposed that the final inter-coder agreement rate in qualitative data analysis should approach or exceed the rating of 90% to be accepted as of reliable findings while Storch (2001) indicated that the level of agreement in discourse studies is often in the vicinity of 80% of the data coded. In this study, the researcher adopted the latter; inter-coder reliability between the researcher and the coders were reached at 75%<sup>1</sup> (*Appendix C*). Discrepancies of interpretation were confirmed with the participants during metaphor-checking interviews (Armstrong et.al, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup>Storch (2001) indicates that in discourse studies, the level of agreement is often in the vicinity of 80% of the total data coded

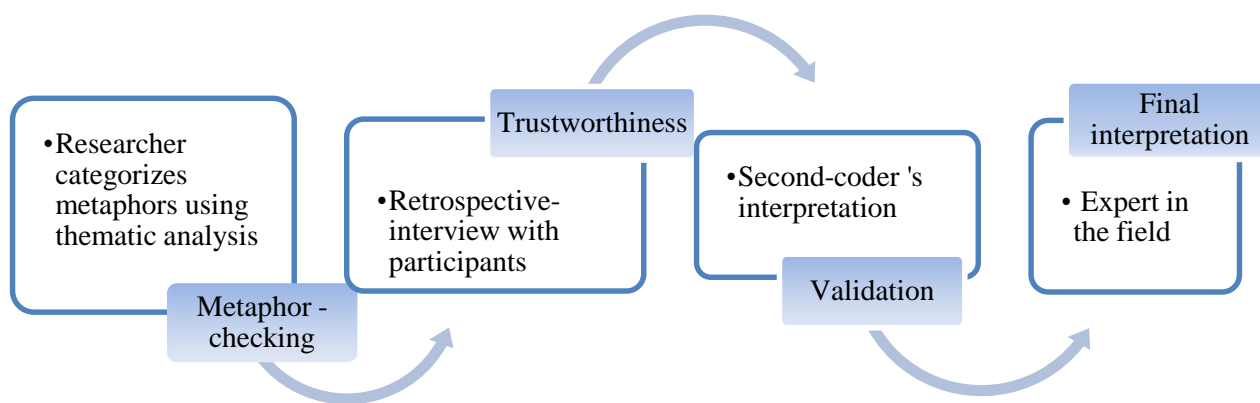
Three ambiguous metaphors (*opening new windows, a samurai, a shooting star*) were further clarified with the fourth coder, an expert in the field (a senior lecturer in Languages and Linguistics).

To illustrate, the researcher placed the metaphor '*white water rafting*' under the 'Cognitivist' learning dimension whilst the second and third coder situated it under the 'Behaviourist' and the 'Cognitivist' respectively. Thus, the reliability of the findings in this study is accumulated as follow:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Reliability} &= \frac{15}{20} \times 100\% \\ &= 75\%\end{aligned}$$

### 3.8.3 Triangulation

The researcher ensured the process of triangulation by “collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods” (Maxwell, 1996, p.93). Eisner (1991) claimed that multiple data sources are required to give credence to a researcher’s interpretations of data gathered. In this study, the first set of metaphorical data gathered from the questionnaires, both online and hard copy, were triangulated through the retrospective interviews with the participants who have given their consents through e-mails or telephone conversations. The researcher’s own categorisations of the learners’ learning dimensions and roles of English teachers into the relevant themes were confirmed during the interview sessions. The various methods and sources which involved the reviewers of two peers, confirmation from the participants and validation of an expert in the field were to bring out different perspectives on the topic of learners’ metaphors as targeted in this study.



**Figure 3.3** Triangulation method of this study

### 3.9 Pilot Study

The researcher conducted two pilot studies among a group of ten Secondary Four school students and nine First Year Undergraduate students in a local tertiary institution, University of Malaya.

The pilot study was designed to investigate how participants responded to the metaphor-elicitation questionnaire on their views of learning the English language. Participants' responses revealed their understanding of the required tasks in providing the information needed in the questionnaire. Questions which led to more successful answers were maintained in the main study and those which needed more clarity were refined.

In addition to the purpose of testing out the participants' understanding of the questionnaire administered, the pilot study also served as a means to gauge participants' required proficiency level in answering and expressing their views metaphorically. Learners' ability to provide analysable metaphors, reflective of their thoughts and perceptions, or otherwise seemed to be of higher English proficiency levels. The secondary school students' proficiency levels were identified based on the school's streaming system while the undergraduate students' were determined from their MUET examination score.



The preliminary findings from both pilot studies allowed the researcher to analyse and ensure rigour in triangulating the methods of interpreting the metaphors and entailments provided by each learner. With reference to the coding schemes adapted from Martinez et.al (2001), the researcher analysed and interpreted the participants' learning dimensions and the emerging themes based on the metaphors and entailments given.

Two preliminary studies were conducted where metaphors on learning were collected from ten secondary school students and another ten undergraduate students from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya. The researcher disseminated the original hard copy questionnaire which examined one metaphorical prompt on the participants' perceptions of learning the English Language (*Learning the English Language is like.....because.....*).

The researcher then collected the participants' responses and tabulated their metaphors and entailments as described in the pilot analysis below (*Appendix I*). Keywords which occurred in the participants' responses were highlighted and analysed based on the three learning dimensions of *Behaviourist*, *Cognitivist* or *Situative* paradigms of learning.

The researcher sought the opinion of an expert in the field of English language learning and teaching as the second coder in validating the categories of the participants' learning dimension. The number of agreements between the researcher and the second coder was recorded as 7/9; the inter-rater reliability was achieved at 78%. In cases whereby the second coder disagreed with the researcher's interpretation of the participant's metaphor, a retrospective interview was carried out with the participant to further clarify the intended meaning of the metaphor and entailments given. The researcher then further re-categorised

the learners' metaphor into a new learning category. A sample of data analysis for the pilot study is captured in Table 3.9 below:

*Learning the English Language is like.....(metaphor) because.....(reasons)*

**Table 3.9** Sample data analysis of students' metaphors on language learning (Pilot Study)

Student	Metaphors	because.....	Coding (Refer to the coding scheme)	Learning Dimensions	2 <sup>nd</sup> Coder (Inter-Coder Reliability)
Student A (SPM: A, MUET: 4)  Proficiency level: Satisfactory	<i>Practicing Tae Kwan Do</i>	The <b>more</b> you <b>practice</b> , the <b>better</b> you <b>get</b> . It is all a matter of <b>how frequent we practise</b> . We may learn the grammar rules and all the skills required to speak English, but <b>if we don't practise, we will never speak as good as the native speakers</b> . Even native speakers are so good because they <b>use it every day</b> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Practice</li> <li>✓ Frequent</li> <li>✓ Grammar rules</li> <li>✓ Skills</li> <li>✓ Everyday</li> </ul>	<b>Behaviourist</b>  (Theme: School activity)	Agree

After a close analysis of the preliminary findings from the pilot study, several changes were made methodologically as well as the instruments used in the actual study. Firstly, the researcher added another metaphorical prompt to the questionnaire on language teachers' roles (*A language teacher is like.....because.....*). This served to allow a deeper understanding into any possible connections between these two dimensions of learners' perceptions on learning the language and their expectations of teachers' roles. The researcher also added more demographic questions such as nationality, first language spoken and methods used in learning English, to gather more background context the participant may represent.

Secondly, there was a change of participants selected for the actual study. The researcher decided a purposive sampling on postgraduate students who were able to express their perceptions and thoughts in the two areas metaphorically. The choice of postgraduate learners served to fill the research gap of seemingly under-explored group of university learners' perceptions in the field of English language learning and teaching.

As for the changes made in research methodology, the actual study involved online implementation as well as hard copies distributed manually. This is to enable a wider distribution of data collection through the students' online siswa mail.

To ensure a higher level of inter-rater reliability, the researcher employed an additional peer-review session with two peers from similar background of study before conducting the retrospective interviews with the participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

*One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers,  
but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings.  
The curriculum is so much necessary raw material,  
but warmth is a vital element for the growing plant  
and for the soul of the child.*  
- Carl Jung (1943)

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and findings of the overall aim of this study- to tap into the cognitions of the diversified local and international postgraduate learners' perceptions about English Language learning and the roles of language teachers through the use of metaphors. Understanding the perceptions of learners in these two areas are the core of this exploratory study. The researcher lays out the findings framed throughout the two overarching research questions as spelt out in the first chapter of this study. A discussion on the emerging themes and various factors in relation to the different types of metaphors produced by the learners is also provided in the analysis.

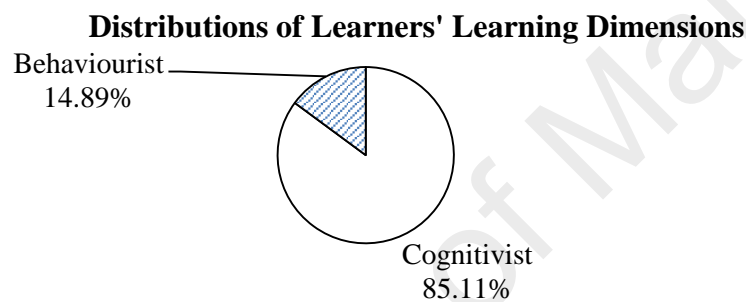
The discussion below describes the postgraduate students' perceptions captured in the lens of metaphors on learning the English Language and their perceived roles of a language teacher. The entailments (reasons) for each of the metaphors given depicted a broader view of the learners' intended meaning encapsulated through the metaphors. In answering Research Questions 1 and 2, the researcher's interpretations of the metaphors and entailments were shown in the learning dimensions (*Behaviourist, Cognitivist, or Situative*) and the Teacher Roles Conceptual Categories (*Provider, Nurturer, Devotee, Instructor, Culture Transmitter,*

*Authority, Interest arouser, or Co-worker*). The emerging themes for each of the metaphors were further discussed in relation to each of the categorization.

#### 4.2 Emerging themes from learners' metaphors on learning English

RQ1: In what ways do the learners' metaphors reflect the different learning dimensions of *Behaviourist, Cognitivist* and *Situative* perspectives? What are the themes that emerge from the categorizations?

*Learning English Language is like..... (metaphor) because.....(reasons)*



**Figure 4.1** Distributions of Learners' Learning Dimensions (Cognitivist, Behaviourist, Situative)

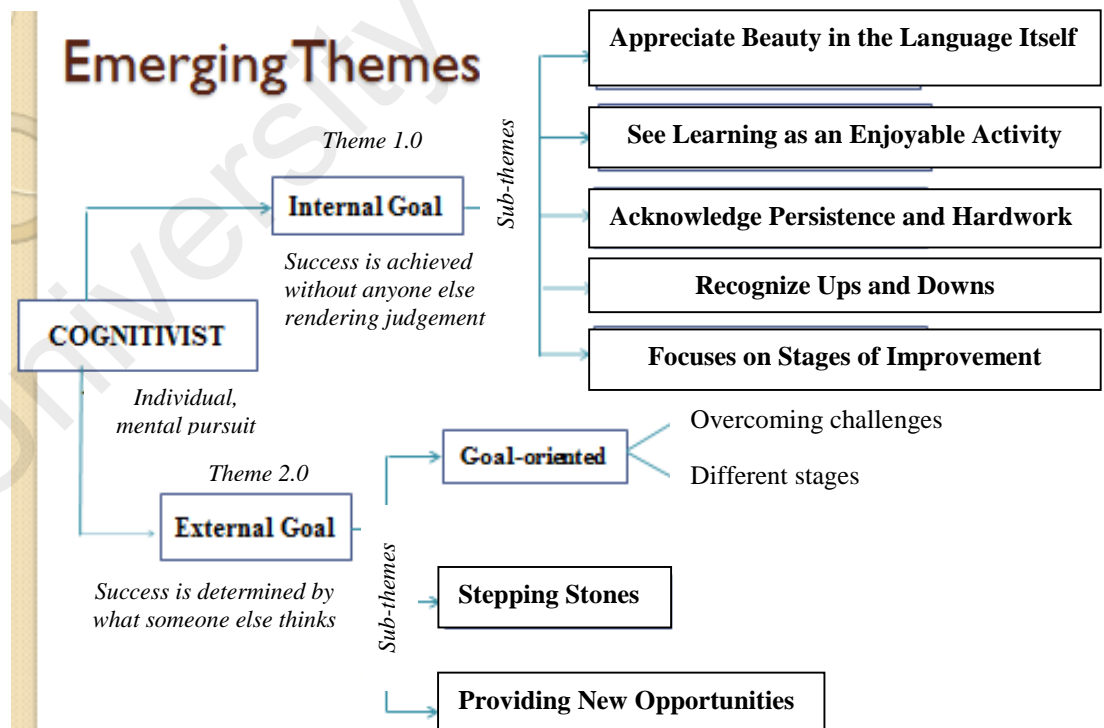
A number of salient features that arose from the learners' keywords depicted the individual's inclination towards a particular learning dimension. The learners' metaphors were then discussed in relation to each learning dimension based on the keywords and overall intended meanings as depicted in the entailments (*Appendix H*). Relevant emerging themes deduced from the keywords were extracted and discussed with reference to the different learning categorizations. Each theme described below had an accompanying description taken as verbatim quotes from the data.

From the findings of this study, a majority of postgraduate students depicted the features of the Cognitivist learners (40/47 or 85.11%) with the emphasis on individual, inner mental

pursuit in learning English. This is followed by the Behaviourist (7/47 or 14.89%) who focused on the mechanisms of skill-acquisition in learning English and interestingly none belonged to the Situative (0%) learning dimension which acknowledged the importance of authentic participation of community in learning. A detailed discussion of the postgraduate learners' metaphors according to the learning paradigm and their emerging themes is painted in the following description.

#### 4.2.1 The *Cognitivist* learners' perspective

The postgraduate learners who perceived learning English as a Cognitivist perspective seemed to derive these two major themes: I) Internal Goal, and II) External Goal. These learners often displayed an active role in restructuring experiences, focused on inner mental processes, achieving understanding as an independent learner. The metaphors and entailments illustrating both themes will be further explained below.



**Figure 4.2** Emerging Themes from Cognitivist Learning Dimension

#### 4.2.1.1 Internal Goal

Learners who perceived learning English as an internal goal see attaining success in language learning as an achievable goal without anyone else rendering judgement that matters. They found enjoyment and satisfaction in the process itself and not the external rewards. The five sub-themes that emerged from this theme included learners who (a) Appreciate Beauty in the Language Itself, (b) See Learning as an Enjoyable Activity or Experience, (c) Acknowledge Persistence and Hard Work, (d) Recognise the Ups and Downs, and (e) Focus on the Stages of Improvement. Each sub-theme with its examples from the participants is further explained below.

##### a) Appreciate beauty in the language itself

Four learners who perceived learning English as an internal goal realised that language is something aesthetically beautiful to be pursued and appreciated. The metaphors that reflected this perception were ‘*listening to your heart, speak aloud*’ (S24), ‘*an escape*’ (S28), ‘*having different flavours of ice-cream in a day*’ (S18), and ‘*walking in a garden full of flowers*’ (S45). All the four learners acknowledged the figurative purpose of language through the lens of its beauty, thus depicting that English language served more than just the literal purpose of communication, it is also beauty personified and to be appreciated.

According to S24 who perceived learning English as ‘*listening to your heart speak aloud*’, “*every language is beautiful and it has its own melody. We need to learn it by heart in order to master it” (S24). In other words, one needs to internalise and appreciate the beauty of English by heart in the process of learning it. Based on her entailment, she was able to see the underlying beauty of English language as something that needed to be internalised and owned personally as a learner; not something that can be learnt from afar by merely*

memorizing and regurgitating it without fully appreciating it. This reflected the internal self-initiated goal of learning English achieved by a postgraduate student.

Besides that, S28 perceived learning English as '***an escape***' because "*it makes me think differently and use a different language*"(S28). Ironically, the metaphor 'escape' reflected the underlying positive power of English Language as a route of negative 'escapism' made available for the particular student who speaks Malay as her first language. With the knowledge of English language, it allowed her to think differently as she speaks another different language apart from her first language. Learning English also enabled the language user to delve deeper into the culture of the native speakers. As an English teacher herself, she strongly believed in the capability of impacting a learner's mindset through the powerful use of language conveyed in a creative and interesting manner. The teaching method that most influenced her English learning was the Audio Lingual method which incorporated the use of media such as tapes, videos and visuals in learning new structural patterns. According to her, these learning experiences were interesting as English was captured in the contexts of its uses without formal instructions. This depicted the power of English in providing a route of escapism for ESL learners to immerse themselves in the beauty of English itself .

On another interesting note, S18 expressed her understanding of learning English as '***having different kinds of ice-cream flavours in a day***'. Her entailments were described as "*It has different varieties. Some may love the strong flavours and some may love the unique taste of ice-cream, same goes for English Language*" (S18). The learner painted an interesting metaphor which drew the researcher's attention to the varieties of ice-cream flavours and its uniqueness. In other words, the learner's perception of learning English was beautifully flavoured as a unique personal experience. The feelings of having different



varieties of ice-cream flavours is associated to the beauty of English in an interesting and versatile manner. According to this student, her curiosity of what made English language so interesting had led her to further her postgraduate studies at the present moment.

Another student, S45 compared the experience of learning English to '*walking in a garden full of flowers*' and described her entailment as below:

*"It is so interesting and exciting as you get the chance to learn a lot about the language you speak, just as how you get the chance to discover a lot of different beautiful flowers in a garden full of flowers!"* (S45)

This comparison reflected the learner's personal experience of discovering the beauty of English as she ventured into the interesting realm of learning more of the language. Similar to discovering the different names of beautiful flowers in a walk through the garden, the journey of learning English is an interesting, fun-filled experience with its own pleasant surprises. For instance, the learner had the opportunity of discovering more about the language such as new vocabulary, interesting sentence structures and different genres of English writings. With every new discovery, it birthed a new excitement and kept her going in her quest of experiencing the journey of learning the English language.

**b) See learning as an enjoyable activity or experience**

Another group of learners perceived learning English as an enjoyable experience, portrayed in the metaphors '*eating*' (S10), '*being in a supermarket*' (S39), '*drawing and painting*' (S46), and '*a piece of cake*' (S6).

According to S10, the action of '*eating*' was an analogy to the source of learning English words, often done through reading books. "*I enjoyed reading, wasn't much of a talker, so*

*books were good friends. I picked up some knowledge through reading, some of it superfluous, and the books were a good teacher of grammar and sentence structure (not so pronunciation, I still frequently mispronounce words).*” Interestingly, the learner was aware that spoken English, specifically the pronunciation of words, was not dealt with through the reading activity as it was a silent, individual pursuit. The learner’s perception of learning English to ‘eating’ might be beneficial to develop her reading and writing skills with an increased repertoire of vocabulary but not much of her speaking and listening skills. Nonetheless, it was an activity or experience that the learner found pleasure in and associated the picking up of English words accomplished through reading.

Based on the retrospective interview session, the participant (S10) confirmed the reading activity as an individual mental pursuit as she clarified that any sense of negotiation, if there was any, would be derived from her first time reading, as compared to the second time reading the same material maybe months or years later. The only negotiation that would have occurred would be within her cognitive state individually. When probed further on how would ‘reading’ be related to the metaphor ‘eating’, the learner enlightened that *“I eat for enjoyment...just like how I read for enjoyment. I enjoy food. It looks good, it tastes good. Similar with reading, the book looks good. It’s well-written, it’s something that interests me. If the book is not well-written, it doesn’t interest me. I will put it down after a while.”* Just as how the learner picked her choice of books, she admitted that she was quite picky on food as well. As much as the choice of food was crucial to her diet, so were the selection of books or genres of reading materials which she chose to feed her eyes on. *“I choose my books. In the same way, I pick my food. Well, if given a choice, say between ‘kangkung’ and bittergourd, I would avoid the bittergourd. I’m a bit picky on what I read. If the book is too deep, I don’t go near the book.”* This seemed to imply how the learner perceived English language learning

process as an enjoyable experience done leisurely, driven by the learner's own self-interest. The interview conversation further clarified the researcher's interpretation of the learner's metaphor and entailments as the characteristics of a Cognitivist learner.

Secondly, it is interesting to note how learning English is perceived comparatively to the scenario of *'being in a supermarket'* by a postgraduate student, currently pursuing her Doctorate in Philosophy in Medical Science (S39). Based on her entailment, she expounded her explanation as such:

*"Once you have your foundation down, ie. your trolley, it's only a matter of selecting the items to take with you. You can stick to the standard list of items you always buy, or occasionally discover new items and try them out. There is almost endless list of items to choose from and if you ever need anything new you just need to look for it. There is also no one best item for something."* (S39)

The main idea of her metaphor and entailment reflected the similarity of a learner's independent self-discovery journey in learning English and the phenomenon of a customer in a supermarket. Just as how the customer in a supermarket had the free-will of either purchasing the standard list of items or be adventurous and choose from the endless list of items available, a postgraduate student too was expected to be independent, pro-active and responsible in her own learning. This reflected the high level of cognitive maturity possessed by the learner to comprehend the reality of being resourceful and independent in learning the English Language. In addition, it is also an enjoyable experience that a postgraduate learner undergoes in discovering more about the English Language. As there is "*no one best item for something*", the learner is trained to be resourceful and pro-active in their own learning.

Along the similar line of experiencing enjoyment in learning English, another learner (S46) perceived learning English to the analogy of *'drawing and painting'*. According to the

learner, “*It was a new experience. We draw based on what we already know then we apply it like we paint to be more fun and awesome.” This depicted the learner’s application of knowledge learnt in a practical manner as a means of enriching the English learning experience just as how painting added the fun element to a piece of art. The aspect of drawing upon previous background knowledge in English Language learning could be potentially derived from the learner’s first language spoken at home, being the Malay language. Therefore, she would unconsciously reflect on the rules of her first language as a means of understanding the English Language, the second language.*

Interestingly, another postgraduate learner (S6) perceived the effort of learning English as ‘*a piece of cake*’. For a learner to perceive language learning as a piece of cake, she must have experienced it as an enjoyable pursuit as concurred in her entailments: “*I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience of acquiring it. It is the first language that I speak at home, with my family and friends. I have always loved learning the English language as it is definitely one of my favourite subjects in school as well” (S6). Since English was one of her favourite subjects, the learner developed deep fondness and a sense of satisfaction in learning English. In addition, it was also her first language acquired and spoken among her family members. It was therefore a natural language acquisition process from her young age. During the retrospective interview with the participant, the researcher confirmed the learner as a Cognitivist learner pursuing English mentally, bringing a change of knowledge to the mind because it had to do with the purpose or intention of learning English. The learner opined that learning English can occur individually without any social interactions among others as “*we question the sanctity of the usage of English in our daily lives to the extent that we unconsciously have debates about it in our minds.*”*

To sum up this sub-theme, the four metaphors ‘*eating*’, ‘*being in a supermarket*’, ‘*drawing and painting*’, and ‘*a piece of cake*’ aptly reflected the notion of seeing learning English as an enjoyable activity or experience within the learners themselves.

**c) Acknowledge persistence and hard work**

The third sub-theme calls for learners’ awareness of two crucial element in learning the English Language- persistence and hard work. Four learners perceived persistence and hard work as the essential ingredients in pursuing this internal goal. The four learners’ metaphors that reflected these were ‘*a journey*’ (S42), ‘*journey to the west*’ (S13), ‘*climbing a mountain*’ (S31) and ‘*a life journey*’ (S1). It is also interesting to highlight the learners’ entailments in this sub-theme that connote a negative notion in the quest of learning English “*We need to find the way*” (S42) and ‘*It is an extremely long journey....I will face a lot of problems like vocabulary deficiency, grammatical and structural problems. I need to find the way out. ...It seems like never end until I die*” (S13).

The metaphors in this sub-theme seemed to carry a negative notion whereby the learners recognize the element of persevering through the hardships of learning English. For instance, the metaphor ‘*a journey*’ (S42) with the entailment “*We need to find the way*” clearly denotes perseverance and hard work throughout the long process of learning the language. This is further supported by the metaphor ‘*journey to the west*’ (S13) because “*it is an extremely long journey. First, I need to get ready to learn the language. The reason is English is my second language which I learn formally when I was in kindergarten.*” This depicted the first stage that the learner needed to go through mentally by preparing her mind to learn the language as it is not the first language spoken at home. The learner acknowledged the possible challenges along the way, as “*I will face a lot of problems like vocabulary*

*deficiency, grammatical and structural problems. I need to find the way out.*” As a Cognitivist learner, the learner played an active role in restructuring her experiences through *much thinking and information-processing in order to find the correct answer. The expression “Until now, I am a postgraduate student; I am still learning the language. It seems like never ending until I die”* depicted an unending pursuit in learning the English language throughout every phase of her life.

On the other hand, S31 expressed her views of learning English with the metaphor ‘*climbing a mountain*’ as “*you need to climb up step by step.*” The student believed that just as one needs to put in effort continuously to climb a mountain, there is no short cut to language learning as it takes continuous perseverance and hard work to invest in a good foundation of learning English. Delving deeper into her background, she is an International student from China and her mother tongue is Mandarin. She shared the opinion that Grammar Translation method is the most suitable method that influenced her English learning process. Her inclination towards the conventional memorization of vocabulary items and grammatical structures could have perhaps influenced her view that learning English is indeed a step by step continuous process that requires hard work in her quest to master the language.

Along the sub-theme of perseverance and hard work is portrayed by another International student from China (S1) who perceived learning English as ‘*a life journey*’ with the entailments “*They have large number vocabulary needed to be remembered and used*”. The words ‘remembered and used’ revealed the need to actively engrave in the memory the various repertoire of words learnt and to use them in daily lives. According to the learner, her first language was Mandarin and English language was learnt as one of the main subjects in school as a requirement to pass her examination.

To sum up, it is worth to note that based on the demographic background information of the participants, all these four learners under the sub-theme ‘Perseverance and Hard Work’ did not speak English as their first language. Thus, it is with much constant additional effort that enabled them to have eventually climbed up the academic ladder into postgraduate studies.

**d) Recognize the ups and downs**

In addition to the persistence needed in learning, another group of six learners recognized the journey of learning English as one that was often sprinkled with its moments of ‘ups and downs’. The metaphors expressed under this sub-theme are ‘*riding a bicycle*’, ‘*riding a roller-coaster*’(3), ‘*walking in the forest*’, and ‘*a journey*’.

For instance, a learner shared the view of undergoing different episodes of ups and downs in the English learning process as expressed in her metaphor ‘*riding a bicycle*’. Her entailments “*It is sometimes easy, but sometimes hard to understand*” (S44) revealed the reality of learning English often filled with unpredictable circumstances. Similarly, the activity of riding a bicycle can be a breeze when the path is straight and easy while at the same time challenging when the cyclist is confronted with mountainous terrains on the pathway. The uniqueness of English is portrayed through its irregularities of grammatical rules and spelling of words. For instance, the plural of box is boxes, but the plural of an ox is not oxes but oxen. As a learner whose first language is Malay, it is also a challenging task for the learner to fully understand the usage of English Language as the sentence structures of both languages are derived quite differently.

Besides that, three learners associated English learning journey as ‘*riding a roller coaster*’ as “It brings me ups and downs” (S37). The entailment expressed by S37 painted a picture of her going through successes and failures in learning English. In addition, “*It is a thrilling yet daunting experience*” (S23). In other words, the process that every language learner had to undergo was exciting yet strenuous to cope with the challenging phases. “*Deciding to ride a roller coaster can be an exciting yet intimidating experience to some. It is similar to the decision made in learning a second or third language*” (S23). The meaning conveyed by this metaphor and the explanation is supported from the interview with the participant.

Researcher: What are some examples of such ‘*thrilling yet daunting*’ experiences in the process of learning English?

Student 23: *Learning any of the second or third language can be a thrilling yet daunting experience...Examples: The thrilling part is by learning a foreign language such as English, it helps widen my networking as I will be able to communicate with more people from all over the world and it enables me to better understand and appreciate western civilisation and culture through reading literature, watching documentaries or movies, listening to songs and news. Another thrilling experience will be having instructors to continuously provide you with corrective feedback that will help you greatly improve your English skills. Daunting experience is when I have to sit for language proficiency exams and am expected to perform well in four language skills. (Interview: S23)*

Based on the student’s explanation, there were two parts of experience in learning the English Language. The positive part comprised the ‘thrilling’ experiences whilst the negative part referred to the ‘daunting’ experiences as described in her responses.



According to S20, learning English is similar to the roller-coaster ride as *“The ride is not a pleasant journey. But the self-satisfaction and confidence escalates every time the journey comes to the end and it can be experienced again and again”* (S20). The learner seemed to depict the notion of a cycle, experienced throughout the learning process. However, after undergoing the tough stages of difficulties, the learner would eventually evolve stronger and refined with an increased level of self-satisfaction and confidence. At the end of every ride, the learner emerged a better user of the language, filled with expectancy to experience yet another new learning curve.

The language learning process was also like *‘walking in the forest’* with episodes of peaceful and dry sceneries *“Sometimes, you do feel joyful when you see the fancy scenery, but sometimes you do get crazy due to the lack of water and food. However, it is a fascinating journey with tears of joy and sorrow”* (S15). The learner attached the emotion of joy or happiness as she ascertained success in her quest of learning English when she “sees the fancy scenery” along her pathway. The learner also faced low moments or failures (get crazy) due to the lack of guidance (water and food).

During the interview session, she shared her opinions that the joy of learning English can be quenched with franticness when a postgraduate learner lacked the proper research guidance and materials needed as depicted through her words “sometimes you do get crazy due to lack of water and food”. This could be inferred that some postgraduate learners may seem to portray a quiet and reserved posture of learning in class but often time hiding a desired need, grappling for help and guidance in the area of research from the lecturer. It is ultimately a learning experience with both its good and hard times.

Besides that, it is also '*a journey*' whereby "*you learn, you use, you forget and you refer*" (S19). These seemed to point towards the element of positive and negative notions throughout the language learning process. In short, the learner was aware of the different stages he went through in learning English to understand the complexity of the language. An important characteristic found present here was the involvement of thinking, understanding and memory that occurred in the individual Cognitivist learners' mind; a probing step which was usually absent in the mind of a Behaviourist learner. The entailment given by the learner depicted the norms of a language learner's natural progression of applying the knowledge he had learnt in a real authentic context.

Interestingly, there was one learner who viewed learning English as a combination of two sub-themes: 'appreciating the beauty language itself' as well as one that was occasionally pricked with its 'ups and downs' challenges. The learner captured her experience of learning English as '*a rose with thorns*' with her entailment: "*A rose because it is beautiful. Thorns because of its challenges, even more when you're a Linguistic major*" (S25). A rose, universally acknowledged symbol of beauty, however in this context is often intertwined with thorns on its stems which symbolises the mental challenges that a learner has to undergo throughout the different learning stages. The challenges often present themselves in a more unacceptable manner especially for a postgraduate learner who majors in the field of Languages and Linguistics. This highlights the fact that the mental challenges of learning English is real, regardless of neither the learners' academic background nor level of academic achievement. Every successful language learner faces the challenges (the thorns) as part and parcel of mastering the language (the rose) in their own individual learning experience.

e) **Focus on the stages of improvement.**

The final sub-theme under the main theme of ‘Internal Goal’ focuses on the ‘Stages of improvement’ by a learner. It can be referred to as a learner who undertakes steps to ensure a better learning outcome. These were depicted in three participants’ metaphors ‘*an endless task*’ (S26), ‘*white water rafting*’ (S5), and ‘*learning to ride a bike*’ (S33).

An international student from China (S26) perceived learning English as ‘*an endless task*’ because “*there is always a possibility to learn more, know more, and improve*”. According to S26, she foresees an unending pursuit in her quest of learning English as a foreign language as there is certainly more new information to embrace and thus, there will never be an end to it. Every piece of new experience that a learner comes across is a learning opportunity as it stimulates knowing and understanding the concept. The opportunity to learn from previous mistakes, make corrections and improve as an English language learner is crucial to ensure perpetual learning in the Cognitivist paradigm. The learner’s metaphor ‘*an endless task*’ and her entailment reflected English learning to be on-going whenever a learning opportunity presents itself and she looks forward to an improvement from the teacher whom she perceives as an ‘*Instructor*’. This will be further discussed in the next section on learners’ perceptions on language teachers’ roles.

One Malaysian learner (S5) associated the English learning process with the metaphor ‘*white water rafting*’ as there were bound to be difficulties and obstacles in the beginning of the pursuit. Learners normally faced difficulties in the beginning but would gradually improve after some time.

*“In the beginning, you will experience difficulties keeping the boat on the right direction and avoiding the whirlpools, but after sometime, you will learn to manoeuvre and keep the boat heading to the right direction”.* (S5)

However, after much determination and time invested, the learner was able to progress and moved on effectively. This can be seen in the ‘white water rafting’ activity which is seemingly a daunting process in the initial stages and gradually becomes more rewarding as the learner develop the necessary skills with the passing of time.

According to the interview session, the participant explained that the initial difficulties he experienced in learning English were referred to the grammatical rules which he needed to understand as well as the use of appropriate words to create a sentence. *“I had problems understanding the grammatical rules when I was in primary school.”* Gradually, these difficulties were addressed through corrections and proper guidance from his language teacher and parents. *“I asked my parents whenever I encountered problems in learning English and they taught me a lot as well as correcting me if I made mistakes.”* Besides seeking help from his parents, he depended on the use of a dictionary to search for the meanings of new words. *“I learned new words every time I flipped the pages in the dictionary.”* These steps of receiving guidance and the dictionary allowed him to ‘manoeuvre and keep the boat in the right direction’ after some time. *“I took some time to understand the usage of past and present tense. After numerous exercises, I understood what she taught me in class.”* The later part of his understanding only came in after much of internal mental processing of the grammatical rules. This reflected the Cognitivist dimension of learning that is evidential by the change of knowledge gained.

According to an international student from China, learning English is like '*learning to ride a bike*'. "At the *beginning*, it is always *more difficult*, but *after that stage* it's *easy*" (S33). The learner believed that the 'down' moments usually occurred in the initial stages of learning when she usually held on tight to the guidance of the language teacher whom she viewed as the '*Provider*' of knowledge and new information. This however shall pass, as the learner would gradually be able to explore the language independently just as how she was able to ride the bike successfully.

In summary, all the three metaphors '*an endless task*', '*white water rafting*' and '*learning to ride a bike*' depicted events that took a process of time to develop gradually to produce the desired results. The learners were finally able to reap what they sow after they had gone through the different stages and not a quick attempt in learning English.

#### **4.2.1.2 External Goal**

On the contrary, learners who perceived learning English as an external goal see success to be determined by what someone else thinks and acknowledges. In other words, learners who perceived learning English as an extrinsically-motivated activity were more concerned with the results obtained. The three sub-themes that were derived from this theme included (a) Goal-oriented, (b) Stepping Stones, and (c) Provide New Opportunities. In the same manner as the 'Internal Goal' theme above, each sub-theme derived under the 'External goal' orientation is further explained below.

##### **a) Goal-oriented**

Learners under this category worked hard in order to achieve good results in the tasks assigned to them. Two sub-ideas that emerged from reaching for a goal were seen as i)

‘Overcoming Challenges or Obstacles’, and ii) ‘Different Steps or Stages’. The metaphors here reflected an external motivation with a tangible reward in mind whilst those in the ‘internal goal’ category were self-initiated and birthed out of own satisfaction.

**i) Overcoming challenges or obstacles**

In the process of striving towards the desired goals (to use the language fluently, gain benefits in education and work), learners realised the need to defeat the hindrances that may appear to hinder their progress of learning English. This was reflected in two students’ metaphor of learning English as ‘*scaling a mountain*’ (S9) and ‘*an uphill hike*’ (S27).

In other words, the journey of reaching for the peak or summit did not come easy without overcoming episodes of difficulties in ‘*scaling a mountain*’ as “*you will face obstacles but it is just part of the goal to reach the peak” (S9). It is interesting to note how the process of learning English is associated with the vigorous activity of ‘scaling a mountain’, which requires every ounce of physical strength and mental determination whenever the going gets tough. It is often times as such that the individual is clouded with uncertainties and doubts of ever reaching the top. One would never fully comprehend how strenuous these trials and challenges would be until he embarked on the climbing task. It is a personal encounter and experience that only every mountain climber who have conquered the summit would attest to. In this aspect, this postgraduate student expressed the natural occurrences of facing obstacles throughout the experience of learning English. However, these challenges were just stepping stones towards his goal of mastering the language. Similar to a mountain climber, the moment he reached the peak, the picturesque view was simply breath-taking and made all the effort of overcoming every challenge a worth-while achievement. The journey of this postgraduate learner is similar to scaling a mountain as she would not look back with regrets*

when she is finally able to engage herself in meaningful conversations using the English Language.

Concurring this sub-theme is another Malaysian postgraduate student who shared the perception that learning English is '*an uphill hike*'. "*One has to overcome the challenges along the way to get to the scenic peak where he or she is able to use the language fluently*" (S27). Both the metaphors denoted that the Cognitivist learning domain is one that came with 'overcoming challenges or obstacles' as a package along the learning journey. On a more positive note, the challenges and obstacles faced along the way are just temporal as nothing beats the scenic picturesque view once the learner reached the summit of '*scaling a mountain*' and '*an uphill hike*'.

## ii) Different steps/ stages

Apart from overcoming challenges, the external goal perceived in learning English is also a journey that has several phases from the beginning to the end. Two learners expressed that learning English is like '*gardening*' (S47) and '*a marathon competition*' (S11), elaborating the idea of gradual progressiveness that required more patience in the beginning.

Similar to '*gardening*', an international learner from Thailand (S47) perceived English learning as a process that "*starts with difficulty and ends with getting benefit.*" The learner explained in her entailments that "*language learners need to be hardworking, patient and routine in learning, studying and practising English Language, especially in the beginning.*" In other words, she portrayed the element of persistence in investing surmountable effort in her learning and took responsibility to work hard through regular practices in the initial stage. Just like the metaphor '*gardening*', it started off with many challenges getting rid of the

unwanted weeds surrounding the plant with much patience and persistence on a daily basis. In the same manner, learning English comes with its challenges of equipping oneself with the necessary grammatical rules especially in the initial stage. “And at the end of the attempt, his English language skill can give him benefit whether in education and working” (S47). Ultimately, the learner would reap the positive outcome of his journey in learning English as how he sows his effort and time in it.

The same scenario is depicted in the metaphor ‘*having a marathon*’ (S11) which “*begins with great passion and interest, full of energy to complete the rest of the match*”. Similarly, in expressing her perception of first embracing the English Language, she started off with much enthusiasm and passion, very eager to pursue and complete the Masters programme. However, “*after half the match, you feel bored and lose concentration just like you cannot see the end of English learning.*” In the same manner, throughout the process of the seemingly unending quest of equipping oneself with the relevant knowledge, the learner gradually lost hope in achieving her dream of mastering the English language proficiently. The next step that the self-motivated marathon runner takes is to “*encourage yourself not to give up the match, just like not giving up in learning English.*” As a postgraduate learner, she portrayed the attributes of an independent, self-motivated, goal-oriented ‘marathon runner’ with a pro-active mind to overcome the challenges and not give up easily. It is therefore by going through these stages that finally led the learner to achieve successful results of learning the language effectively, as expressed in her entailments “*Finally, you complete the whole match and reach your goals of learning English*” (S11). This scenario highlights the theme of going through ‘Different Stages’ and persevering through every stage in order to attain success in English Language learning. One added element reflected in this metaphor and entailment is the notion of the learner’s diminishing interest in learning the English language



whereby the learner lost his concentration halfway through the journey, often experienced by a marathon runner.

#### **b) Stepping stones**

Another group of learners viewed learning English from the angle of ‘stepping stones’ or platforms towards achieving something greater. For instance, three students chose the same metaphor ‘*building a house*’ as they believed in the importance of investing time in learning adequate knowledge of English language as a strong solid foundation. The other metaphors under the same sub-theme are ‘*building a lego stack*’, ‘*being on a diet*’, ‘*stamping the pages of a passport at each port of transit*’, ‘*finding your feet*’, ‘*acquiring a fundamental survival kit*’ and ‘*drinking water*’.

A Malaysian student (S22) expressed that learning English is like ‘*building a house*’ with the entailment “A strong foundation is utmost important before building the rest of the structure” (S22). In the case of building a house, laying down the firm foundation of bricks usually takes the longest duration before the rest of the building structure is gradually set up. Similarly, in the pursuit of learning English, the process of learning basic grammatical rules and high frequency words served as a solid foundation in building up one’s language proficiency. With a strong language proficiency in hand, the learner would then be able to ensure a better grasp or mastery of the language to achieve good results. Similar to the process of building houses, a solid foundation is crucial to ensure a high stability to withstand any unforeseen climatic change.

In favour of this sub-theme, another Malaysian student (S29) shared the same view of learning English as ‘*building a house*’ with the following entailment:

*“Laying a strong foundation is the first and most important step. In other words, you should read and speak English every day. Memorizing new words and phrases is also helpful. Of course, learning English takes some time, but we have to be patient in learning.”* (S29)

There were three main ideas raised in the entailment expressed above. The learner first acknowledged the importance of building a strong foundation in learning the language. Then, she elaborated on several useful learning methods that can help to strengthen the solid foundation of knowledge learnt such as memorizing new words and phrases. Lastly, the essentiality of time and patience as a learner was put forward. Indeed, learning English is a long process, where discipline and determination are greatly needed.

In addition to the above scenarios, another international student from China (S32) who shared the same metaphor ‘*building a house*’ further highlighted the importance of time and proper foundation in her entailment “*It takes time and good foundation*”. With mandarin as her first language, she perceived the teacher’s role to that of a ‘*Nurturer*’ in guiding and taking care of the student’s language developmental growth. These will be further discussed in the next section on teacher’s roles. It is also interesting to note that all the three learners (S22, S29 and S32) preferred the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method which encouraged students to speak and express their ideas fluently as the most effective method in helping them to learn English.

Echoing this idea of ‘stepping stones’ to achieve something greater is expressed by another student who chose the metaphor ‘*building a lego stack*’ (S7) with the entailment:

*“You can only reach the top or build the lego to be tall if you work hard and smart. The same goes for learning English, you need to work hard by reading many English materials and speak in order to be successful in learning English.”* (S7)

The two ingredients of successful English language learners as highlighted by the activity of building a lego stack were ‘working hard and smart’. According to S7, learners are responsible for their own success in learning English by reading many English materials as well as speaking in the language. This scenario depicts the learner’s persistence as a stepping stone to master the language. In other words, only learners who work hard investing time in reading and speaking English can reap success at a later stage. In addition to that, this reflects the Cognitivist learner who needs to constantly think of effective ways to take the best step or most suitable learning methods, just as how a player needs to be smart in building a high lego stack with the correct strategy.

Another learner who shared the idea of ‘stepping stone’ is captured in the metaphor ***‘being on a diet’*** as *“Only the one who is persistent and studious can succeed”* (S34). Indeed, many who desired to keep to a strict daily food intake have confessed that without perseverance and a disciplined mind, they would not have been able to keep to their strict diet. This reflects the notion of persistence and focus on the end goal of keeping a healthy body. Similarly, in order to succeed in mastering the English language, a learner has to keep to the discipline with a goal-oriented mind as it requires surmountable persistence as one of the essential ingredients to achieve fluency or competency in the language.

Interestingly, a learner aptly captured the idea of stepping stone in the metaphor ***‘stamping the pages of a passport at each port of transit’*** (S12). The learner believed that *“Understanding and grasping each the objective of each grammatical item in the English*

*language is a step closer to destination*". The learner has reached a higher maturity level cognitively as a language learner to be able to perceive language learning as an activity that involved a progression of tasks. According to the retrospective interview session with the participant, she explained that "*The learning process required gradual and concerted efforts; understanding how the grammar, vocabulary and other aspects of the English language as used collaboratively (stamping the pages of a passport) for purposeful and effective communication is an achievement (arriving at the destination).*" She also added that "*Passive learning may be at the initial stage of the learning process but the knowledge and skills should be reinforced with application by using the language in the field*" (S12).

Three other learners perceived learning English as stepping stone in enabling them to survive globally by communicating in the language as '*finding your feet*' (S14), '*acquiring a fundamental survival kit*' (S21) and to keep updated with social development by '*drinking water*' (S35). An international student from Iraq (S14), who speaks French and Arabic as his first language, learning English is like '*finding your own feet*'. He expounded his metaphor with the entailments below:

*"If you find yourself in a new country that is an English-speaking country, or even a country that English is not its first language, you will greatly need English so you may be able to communicate with the people, so that's why English is important because that will make you able to digest and overcome all the problems you may face."*

(S14)

Based on the learner's perceptions of what learning English meant to him, there was a sense of purpose in communicating the language to the surrounding community in the context of being in a foreign land. With the knowledge of English Language, it functioned as a 'stepping stone' which enabled him to make sense with the people in another country as English

became the common mediator between people of different nationalities. In short, English served a greater communicative purpose in a global arena and allowed him to stand on his own feet lest he was lost in another foreign country.

The learner's (S14) emphasis on the communicative purpose of learning English was also highlighted in his choice of CLT as the most influential English language teaching method. Students were given the opportunities to express their thoughts freely in real-life, task-based communicative activities. According to the learner, he was first introduced to this teaching method in his elementary studies when they were forced to use English in their real life situations. To him, this method was effective and influential in his English learning process as it 'pushed' him to practise using the language, and consequently enabled him to find out his own mistakes and ways to solve them. Thus, interaction with the community was one driving factor in being a successful English Language learner. The expected role of a language teacher was to him an *'Interest Arouser'*, someone who was able to attract the students' attention and get them interested in the English lessons.

Aligned with the notion of 'stepping stones' as well, a Malaysian postgraduate learner (S21) perceived learning English as *'acquiring a fundamental survival kit'*. *"It is the number one language used widely in the entire world. You can mostly survive anywhere in the world by communicating in English."* According to S21, a learner who possesses the ability to converse in English would have possibly survived almost any place since it is a widely spoken language and have acquired the basic communication tool for survival. There was a sense of participation in the context of surviving in the community that came with the purpose of learning English. This picture of survival was also reflected in her choice of CLT as the preferred teaching method that most influenced her English learning experiences

whereby students were encouraged to speak fluently in real-life, authentic activities in student-centered lessons. She was first exposed to these learning features from home as her parents often used and encouraged the use of English. She believed that she could naturally learn English when she was exposed to the language frequently. Since it is a universal language, students ought to make an effort to learn it for survival in a wider community level. Similar to the student mentioned above (S14), her perceived language teacher's role captured through her metaphor also depicted the category of an *'Interest Arouser'*.

Last but not least, another international student from China (S25) perceived the essential function of learning English as *'drinking water'* with the entailments *'I should keep up with social development'*. This student realised the emphasis of getting information and keeping updated with the social development while learning English. Just as how drinking water is essential for human hydration, learning English is compulsory in order for the learner to be constantly informed of the latest updates. According to S25, she first started learning and using English when she was 15 years old in school whereby she was encouraged to use the language in a communicative manner (CLT). She found this method effective as she could get information while learning English at the same time. Her perceived teacher role category was a *'Provider'*, the source of knowledge in assisting students to learn.

**c) Provide new opportunities**

As an extension from the previous 'Stepping stones' sub-theme, learning English was also perceived as a means to 'Provide new opportunities' for a better future. To put it in another way, it supplied an avenue for advancement in life as depicted in these four metaphors *'opening new windows'* (S3), *'acquiring luxury'*(S2), *'a door'* (S36), and *'having a vacation*

*overseas*' (S40). Mastering the global language is perceived to be the ticket to various opportunities in life which a learner may otherwise be deprived of.

A postgraduate student from the Middle East (S3) who speaks Persian as her first language expressed learning English as *'opening new windows'* because *"It gives you new opportunities in life."* Learning an international widely-spoken language such as English was perhaps an avenue for her to widen her perspectives by coming to another country to pursue her postgraduate studies. Instead of only confined to her own Persian-speaking community, learning English enabled her to be opened to other possibilities in life with the help of the language teacher as a *'Nurturer'*. This depicted that the Cognitivist learner was mentally-driven and was able to think of the long-term benefits in her quest of learning the English Language.

It is interesting to note how a Malaysian postgraduate learner (S2) conceptualised learning English as *'acquiring luxury'* because *"The future is gold (luxury) and filled with abundance."* In this case, she remarked that *"the English Language itself is gold (luxury) because it is valuable and therefore it provides us with the necessity to retain the pureness, the golden opportunity that comes in the future."* Therefore, the process of learning English is similar to obtaining the abundant opportunities in life when an individual has equipped himself with competency in the language. English Language in itself is a priceless asset in the future, equivalent to the luxurious material wealth gained. The metaphor *'acquiring luxury'* seemed to reflect the Cognitivist learner who perceived learning as an individual growth through the process of schemata construction, associated with an invaluable price tag attached.

On a similar note of providing new opportunities, an international student from China (S36) conceived learning English to the analogy of *'a door'* because *"It shows a totally different world to me"*. Despite being quite ambiguous in the metaphor and entailment, the researcher deduced the learner's ability to foresee another world that comes with the knowledge of English. Although English was not her first language, she was motivated to converse in the language as a means of connecting her thoughts and views with another community. According to the learner's demographic information, she was inclined towards the CLT method as it encouraged the students to speak and communicate in English fluently in authentic, real-life communicative, student-centred lessons. By engaging herself in such speaking activities, it enabled her to improve her English as she was motivated by her classmates and lecturers who spoke fluently in the language. Thus, learning English to her is *'a door'* which opens new opportunities of a different world to her.

Under the *'Stepping stone'* sub-theme as well, another Malaysian student (S40) expressed her opinion of learning English as *'having a vacation overseas'* because *"it enables you to travel and experience things that you are not exposed with"* (S40). With the knowledge of English, it widened her learning horizons by travelling to different parts of the world and enriched her experience that she may not be exposed to otherwise. In the context of travelling overseas, there is a sense of learning and experiencing the culture of another society. The enriching experience of living among the community in a foreign country is simply irreplaceable. Similarly, the experience of learning English would thoroughly enrich the perspectives of an individual learner. According to S40, she started learning English at the age of two years old and was exposed to the CLT method of learning the language. She was introduced to the use of flash cards and English books such as *'Peter and Jane'* whereby the learners were encouraged to speak aloud and express their thoughts freely through task-based



activities. She found this learning method the most influential in English because it was a fun way of exposing her to knowledge. Thus, her perceived role of a language teacher was also reflected as an *'Interest Arouser'* to the learners.

It is interesting to highlight the perspective of another Malaysian student (S8) who gave a similar metaphor *'building a house'* mentioned three times earlier. However, the emphasis given by the entailment is a combination of two sub-themes 'Stepping stones and 'New opportunities'. In other words, the student perceived learning English as an action or step that enabled an individual to progress towards other advancements in life.

*"Once you master the language, you can conquer the world. I just randomly choose this metaphor as building a house reflects our efforts in practising the language by communicating, writing, listening and reading so that we can master that global language. Just like building a house, it takes time to finish it and once you've done, you will take care of it as it gives you shelter to live comfortably. When you master the English Language, you can rule the world by expecting good jobs, good social skills, understanding cultures and etc."* (S8)

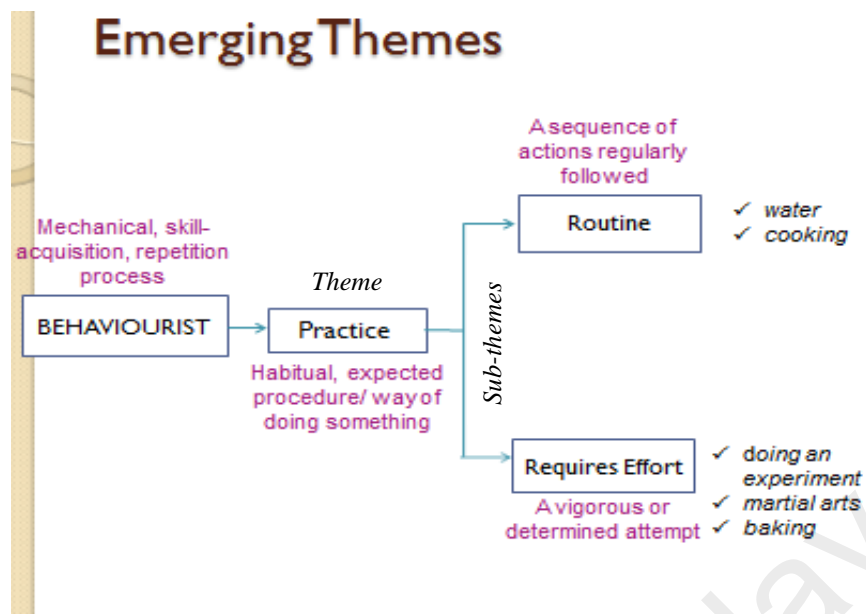
Based on the entailment given by the learner, an individual needs to first invest in practical efforts of practising all the language skills before one can master English as a global language. Similarly, the scenario of building a house demands a long duration of time for the necessary foundation and setting up to take its course. Upon completion of the house, it provides the owner a secured shelter and comfort. Thus, in the same manner, when a language learner has gradually mastered the English language, he or she would have been

assured a bright future with good-paying jobs and equipped with high social skills. This reflected the Cognitivist realm of a positive, extrinsically-motivated language learner.

In summary, the metaphors above depicted the provision of new opportunities for successful English Language learners. Mastering the global language was perceived to be the ticket to various opportunities in life which a learner may otherwise be deprived of without the language. It was a perceived future shared by these Cognitivist learners who focused on exploration of inner mental processes such as thinking, memory, knowing and problem-solving. In other words, the far-sighted, extrinsically-motivated learners may view learning English as a platform of opening new opportunities and bringing transformation in their lives.

#### **4.2.2 The Behaviourist Learners' Perspective**

On the flipside of the coin, seven postgraduate learners (14.89%) in this study were inclined towards the Behaviourist learning perspective with the emphasis on building mechanical, skill-acquisition process, often done in a repetitive manner. Learning was viewed as a process of individual behavioural growth through acquisition of knowledge, generating new stimulus-response (S-R) connections (Martinez et.al, 2001). The metaphors produced by the learners of this category seemed to be orientated around the main theme of 'Practice' (*Refer to Figure 4.3*).



**Figure 4.3** Emerging Themes from Behaviourist Learning Dimension

### 4.2.2.1 Practice

The learning feature under this theme is depicted as something habitual, an expected procedure or way of doing something. The two emerging sub-themes were (a) ‘Routine’ and something that (b) ‘Requires Effort’ as discussed below.

#### a) Routine

The idea of learning as a ‘routine’ reflected a sequence of actions regularly followed by the learner as a means of acquiring the language skills. The metaphors under this category were ‘water’ (S16) and ‘cooking’ (S41). Learning English is like ‘**water**’ because “*It never stops, never finishes*” (S16). This analogy presumed language learning to be a continuous process that never ends, similar to the constant flow of water from the tap. The metaphor and entailment depicted a neutral notion while the second metaphor ‘**cooking**’ connoted a negative tone “*Everyone knows English but not everyone is good at it*” (S41). In other words, learning English was merely an activity learners performed as a routine but not necessarily good at. Therefore, it is something habitual and mechanical but does not involve much of the

mental cognitive dimension of learning. For instance, a learner may be speaking English as part of the postgraduate studies requirement although he may not be proficient in it.

#### **b) Requires Effort**

Branching from the idea of 'Practice' is also the sub-theme of learning as something that 'Requires Effort'. However, this idea of 'effort' carries a slight difference from the sub-theme of 'Perseverance and hard work' under the Cognitivist Learning Dimension. The effort here referred to a vigorous or determined attempt done with the focus on skill-acquisition as compared to the continuing hard work with an internal goal in mind. The metaphors that reflected this idea of learning as a skill-acquiring effort were '*doing an experiment*' (S38), '*a martial art*' (S17 and S43), '*baking*' (S30), and '*learning any new skills*' (S4).

Among the five learners, two expressed a positive notion of learning English with the entailments "*The more I practice, the better my skills are*" (S43) and "*With lots of practice, you'll be baking like a pro*" (S30). Two reflected a neutral notion "*It requires constant practice*" (S17), and "*It's something that needs practice, besides knowing and understanding the concepts behind*" (S4) while another reflected a negative underlying tone of doing an experiment as "*...you won't get what you want...*" (S38). All the five metaphors reflected the need for a learner to invest in effort literally in a habitual manner.

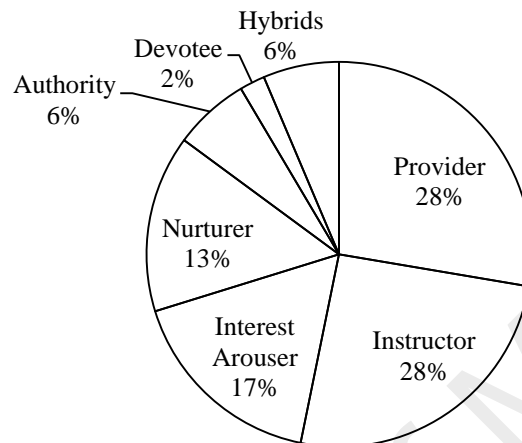
In summary, the findings above clearly highlighted that a majority of postgraduate learners view learning English as a Cognitivist approach. Bearing in mind the Cognitivist learning dimension as the highest preferred expressed by the postgraduate learners, the researcher now turns to the second research question on learners' perceptions on the roles of an English language teacher.

### 4.3 Emerging themes from learners' metaphors on language teachers' roles

RQ2: How do learners metaphorically conceptualize the roles of English teachers? What are the conceptual categories of language teachers' roles?

*A Language teacher is (like).....(metaphor) because.....(reasons)*

**Distribution of Language Teachers' Roles Categories**



**Figure 4.4** Distributions of Language Teachers' Roles Categories

Similar to the above analysis on learners' perceptions of language learning, this section explored learners' metaphors and entailments about the role of English language teachers' roles (*Appendix I*). Salient keywords highlighted their teacher roles categories based on the eight conceptual categories (Teacher as 'Provider, Instructor, Interest Arouser, Nurturer, Authority, Devotee, Co-worker, and Culture Transmitter') adopted from Wan et.al (2011). The hybrids (6%) represent metaphors which constitute a combination of two main categories such as 'Provider and Instructor'. The researcher analysed the learners' keywords and overall intended meaning conveyed through the metaphors and the explanations provided by the participants. Extracted excerpts from the participants' explanation and interview sessions were highlighted to substantiate the researcher's interpretation of the categorisations and emerging sub-themes.

Based on the findings of this study, only six conceptual categories applied to the sample of postgraduate students with the exceptions of two categories ('Co-worker' and 'Culture Transmitter'). Two teacher roles categories 'Provider' (27.66%) and 'Instructor' (27.66%) were highly experienced by the postgraduate students, followed by 'Interest Arouser' (17.02%), 'Nurturer' (12.76%), 'Authority' (6.38%), 'Hybrids' (6%) and 'Devotee' (2%).

#### 4.3.1 Teacher as 'Provider'

Teachers in this category were regarded as the source of information in various ways, providing knowledge to assist students' learning, thus the theme 'Fountain of Knowledge'. Learners on the other hand, were seen to take the role of a passive recipient of knowledge. Thirteen learners (27.66%) in this study perceived their language teacher's role as the provision of vocabulary meanings and grammatical rules ('an online dictionary', 'a walking dictionary', 'a walking Google', 'a book', 'a dictionary') and giver of answers ('a mobile Wikipedia', 'an encyclopedia' (2), 'someone who gets the ball rolling', 'a walking dictionary', 'an encyclopedia', 'google', 'a software engineer' and 'a Santa Claus'). Out of all the 13 students, a majority of 12 learning perceptions fall under the Cognitivist learning dimension except for one Behaviourist learner (S43).

Based on the data, two sub-themes were derived with regards to the types of language content provided by the teacher, namely (a) provider of vocabulary meanings and grammatical rules, and (b) provider of answers. As for the first sub-theme, a learner perceived the language teacher as '**an online dictionary**' (S1) as "*he or she has to update their knowledge every day and explain the meaning of vocabulary or grammatical rules to his/ her student.*" In addition, a language teacher is seen to be a '**a book**' (S44) as "*he or she gave me so many new vocabulary and phrases.*" Similar to the experience of reading a book,

the learner regarded the book as a language teacher who taught him many new words and expressions.

The second sub-theme reflected the emphasis of a teacher's role in providing general information or answers. For instance, a language teacher is perceived as '*someone who keeps the ball rolling*' as "you have to be always updated about the recent methodologies, be prepared 27/4 ready, if the students asks you anything, you must be able to know things like the back of your hand" (S14). In other words, the teacher needs to be constantly updated and prepared to answer any questions posed by the students correctly. This metaphor also reflected the teacher's role as an initiator in the learning process.

It is interesting to note that the same metaphor '*a walking dictionary*' appeared in both the first and second sub-theme but portrayed a slightly different emphasis from each other. As for the provider of vocabulary meanings and grammatical rules, a language teacher "need to know the word's spelling and also provide the meaning of that word. An English teacher also needs to remember the synonyms and antonyms of words" (S7). However, as a giver of answers, a language teacher "needs to have a fair knowledge of English. A dictionary is made up of the essence of a language. The word 'walking' is used to personify the dictionary as teachers usually walk around the classroom and are prepared to answer the questions by the students" (S23).

Besides that, a language teacher is interestingly perceived as a '*Santa Claus*' because "learning English should be like a gift of knowledge every day. Words in English itself have the power to bring joy, happiness and comfort like those gifts we get on Christmas mornings" (S18). Here, the language teacher is like a gift looked forward to by the students by providing

them with an access to the power of knowledge every day. As for the Behaviourist learner (S43), he perceived a language teacher as a *'software engineer'* as *"I need to programme a new language in a learner's brain."* In other words, the job of a language teacher involved the technical and mechanical process of programming a new language system into the learner.

#### 4.3.2 Teacher as *'Instructor'*

Another group of 13 students (27.66%) favoured the next category of teacher as an *'Instructor'* whereby the learners received guidance and assistance from the teacher in their learning. The metaphors that reflected this category were described as helpers (*a chef, a trainer*), a moral guide (*a lighthouse, a tour guide, a guide, the captain of the ship*), responsible for finding the right track for students to achieve their targets (*a navigation mark, a GPS, a guide*), and helping students to set study goals (*a coach*), *'a shooting star'*, *'a dictionary'*, and *'a mother'*. Interestingly, the same *'dictionary'* metaphor appeared in the *'Provider'* and *'Instructor'* category but with a different emphasis. The *'Provider'* perceived *'dictionary'* as *"you'll be asked for meanings"* (S19) while the *'Instructor'* regarded the *'dictionary'* to *"...help your students to learn"* (S33). The emphasis of a teacher as a *'Provider'* seemed to infer the student as a passive learner, while an *'Instructor'* guides and helps the students' learning progress.

##### 4.3.2.1 As Helpers

Language teachers' roles were described as helpers based on the metaphor *'a chef'* because *"They can guide you and show you but the outcome may be different"* (S41), an opinion expressed by a Malaysian student. From the metaphor and explanation given, the student acknowledged the role of a language teacher as a helper in guiding and showing the



means of learning the language, but the ultimate achievement depended on the student themselves. Besides that, a language teacher was also viewed as ‘*a trainer*’ by another Malaysian PhD student in Medical Science. According to her explanation, “*He or she trains someone to be proficient in English with their knowledge in English Language. He or she should know different people has to be trained differently” (S38). This depicted the underlying expectation of students towards their teacher to vary his or her teaching approaches in class as not one single method would appeal to every learner. The learner (S38) preferred the proponents of CLT method which she was exposed to during her tertiary education as she found it an effective manner of learning English.*

#### 4.3.2.2 As moral guide

Apart from being regarded as helpers, the postgraduate learners’ metaphors also represented the role of language teachers as a moral guide (*a lighthouse, the captain of the ship, a tour guide, a guide*). According to a Malaysian student (S5) who shared the metaphor ‘*a lighthouse*’, she expected the teacher to guide the students to gain more knowledge, similar to the role of a lighthouse in guiding the ships and boats at the sea. “*The teacher would provide knowledge and guide the students, thus helping them to gain more knoweldge just like the lighthouse guiding the ships and boats at the sea but still allowing them to move around in their own ways or to chart their own learning” (S5). The same metaphor ‘*a lighthouse*’ is also found in other groups of learners in previous studies that looked at Chinese university teachers and two groups of English major students (Wan et.al., 2011). In that study, third year university students perceived their teacher as a ‘*lighthouse*’ because “*they lead aimless students where to go*”.*

In addition, a language teacher is believed to hold the responsibility to guide the learners in the right direction by steering the wheel of the ship. According to a Malaysian student, as *'the captain of the ship'*, a language teacher *"steers the wheel of fortune into the great world"* (S2). The student (S2) further elaborated her idea of the 'captain' who referred to power or leadership that English teachers have as he or she educates the students. 'The great world' represented the global world where one needs to use English widely. Therefore, the important role of a language teacher as a key guide in shaping a learner's future is clearly depicted in the learner's metaphor and entailments.

Another Malaysian postgraduate student (S13) viewed a language teacher as a *'tour guide'*. Based on her entailments, *"She is the one who guide, assists, supervises the language learners in the whole journey. From the students' perspective, teacher is the one who know the best in English Language. Students expect teacher to be perfect in English. That is the reason, the students trust that the teacher is capable to guide them from the beginning to the end of the journey"* (S13). In other words, the role of a language teacher is similar to a tour guide who is most knowledgeable about the places that he or she guides and brings the tourists to visit. As a Cognitivist learner, this student placed high hope and trust on the capable language teachers to guide her using the best route.

#### **4.3.2.3 Finding the right track for students**

In addition, a language teacher is also seen as the one responsible for finding the right track for students to achieve their targets as described in these metaphors 'a GPS', 'a guide', and 'navigation mark'. A language teacher is like *'a GPS'* because he *"guides you to the right direction, and pulls you back when you are trapped"* (S16). This student painted a picture of a language teacher as the essential tool that not only pointed the 'driver' to the right

direction but also ‘recalculate’ the direction whenever she swayed from the intended route and set her back in the right path. Indeed, the role of a language teacher as an ‘*Instructor*’ never ceases in directing the students’ learning path to success just as how the GPS would continue to lead and emit directions to the driver until he or she arrives at the destination.

An international student from China (S26) believed that a language teacher is ‘*a guide*’ as “*how and what the teacher has been teaching will influence the students for a long time. If the teacher can guide students to the right direction(s), the students then focus on how to make the learning better. If it is the other way round, then the students need to suffer from looking the right direction and then keep on learning. It is an experience in making people grow*” (S26). The entailment depicted the crucial role of a language teacher by helping the learner to focus on the right learning direction, lest they are lost searching for answers without a guide. The learning journey with the guide is a beneficial experience for the learner to discover and grow as a Cognitivist learner.

The next metaphor provided by another international student from China (S15) depicted the role of a language teacher as a ‘*navigation mark*’. According to the student’s opinion, “*All the students won’t be lost under the correct navigated guidance, otherwise the flow of English learning probably will be deflected*” (S15). This student’s metaphor and entailment reflected the crucial role of a teacher to navigate and point the students to the right direction in learning English. Without the presence of the teacher in navigating the route, the students’ understanding of the language might be hindered.

#### 4.3.2.4 Help students set study goals

A language teacher is also viewed as the one who helped students to set their study goals just like ‘*a coach*’. With the guidance of a language teacher like ‘*a coach*’ as expressed by a Malaysian student currently pursuing her Doctorate of Philosophy in Medical Science, “*he or she equips you with the necessary tools, motivates and inspires you, but it is up to the student to make the most out of it*” (S39). As a coach, the language teacher is expected to equip the learner with the essential language skills technically as well as practically to enable the learner to perform competently. A language teacher also supports the learners emotionally by motivating and inspiring them whenever the learners face any setbacks in their learning journey. However, it is ultimately the students’ part to be receptive and cooperative in order to benefit from all the scaffolding effort invested by the teacher.

All these sub-themes are adopted from the previous study of students’ and teachers’ perspectives about EFL teachers’ roles (Wan et.al., 2011). The role of a language teacher as an ‘*Instructor*’ depicted the learning characteristics of Vygotsky’s (1978) fundamental perspectives about ‘scaffolding’ - a form of guided discourse and cognitive support given by adults (the language teacher). These support are progressively withdrawn as the learner moves towards mastery of a particular skill (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999 as cited in Wan et.al., 2011). The findings in the study reflected 13 postgraduate students were in favour of the scaffolding provided by their lecturers with emphasis on their roles as a guide, or helper in their students’ learning journey.

#### 4.3.3 Teacher as ‘*Interest Arouser*’

Metaphors in this category suggested that teachers were responsible in organising interesting lessons for the purpose of attracting students’ attention. Eight learners who shared

this perspective were ‘*a rainbow*’, ‘*an anchor woman/ man*’, ‘*a good novel*’, ‘*a book*’, ‘*an actor*’, ‘*a ray of sunshine*’, ‘*a candy shop*’, and ‘*a salesperson*’. It is also interesting to note that the same metaphor ‘*a book*’ re-appeared in this category as well as the ‘Provider’ category above, but with a different focus here. As an interest arouser, the teacher “....*always has something new to tell...*” (S35), while a provider “....*gave me so many new vocabulary and phrases*” (S44).

Among all the eight students under this category, only one perceived English language learning as a Behaviourist while the remaining were Cognitivist learners. According to the Behaviourist, a language teacher is like ‘*an actor*’ as “*you need to make your lessons interesting in order to get your students’ attention and interests on the language*” (S4). It is the role of a language teacher to ensure that the lesson is interesting to capture the students’ attention throughout the lesson, just like ‘an actor’ performing a show to the audience. According to S6, a language teacher is like ‘*a ray of sunshine*’ because “*He or she brightens up the room when it is pitch black in darkness due to the absence of the English Language*” (S6). In other words, a language teacher holds the responsibility to bring light to the students through their various interesting teaching methods.

Realising the challenges faced by the students in learning English, “*it is important for a language teacher to be creative and interesting so that the students will have fun while learning*” (S21). This is expressed by a Malaysian student with the metaphor ‘*a candy shop*’. According to S21, a language teacher must be exciting and inviting to help pull the students’ attention as learning the English language can be daunting and tiring. Besides that, a language teacher is like ‘*an anchor woman/ man*’ as “*he or she is excellent in narrating, and makes you listen and understand the magic of English*” (S40). In short, the metaphor ‘*a rainbow*’

aply described the characteristic of a language teacher as an '*Interest Arouser*' who injects the fun element into learning as "*we can always rely on him/ her for fun and colours*" (S28).

To encapsulate, the metaphors and entailments in this category highlighted the learners' view on the importance of teachers who were able to attract students' attention in the classroom with fun-filled and exciting activities. Teachers who succeeded in getting the learners' attention often made it possible for the students to retain what they have learnt in their memory for a longer duration such as the use of 'mnemonics' to enhance their memory in a systematic manner. In addition, through the creative teaching methods, the teacher creates challenges to bring about changes as the learner is an object of change and learning is change and advancement. The teacher moulds learners into different works of art as learners are raw materials who are moulded and shaped by the teachers (de Guerrero & Villami, 2002).

#### **4.3.4 Teacher as '*Nurturer*'**

The next category of a language teacher most perceived by six postgraduate students in this study depicted the role of a '*Nurturer*' (12.76%). Teachers in this category take on the role of facilitating the learners' personal growth and development, moulding the thoughts of young minds. This interpretation of a language teacher is consistent with the Chinese traditional proposition that teachers have a parent-like responsibility to guide students' lives (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999). Two sub-themes emerged as '*Patience as a needed quality*' ('*making a cake*', '*a gardener*' (2), '*a mum*') and '*Joy of seeing growth*' in the students' lives ('*a good gardener*' and '*a samurai*').

#### 4.3.4.1 Patience as a needed quality

Under the first sub-theme, a language teacher is like *'making a cake'* because *"you need the right amount of patience, compassion and skills"* (S9). Similar to the process of making a cake, the elements of patience, compassion and skills are the essential ingredients of teacher as a 'nurturer'. Besides that, a language teacher is perceived like *'a gardener'* (S31 and S32) with the entailments *"You need to nourish your students with patience"* (S31) and *"He is supposed to nourish the students with patience"* (S32). Just like a plant, a learner needs patience and the right skill from the gardener to trim and grow healthily. To further clarify the essence of patience, another student from China (S36) associated the role of a teacher to *'a mum'* because *"You have to be super patient"*. This conveyed the essential ingredient of patience as a language teacher's characteristic from the eyes of postgraduate students.

#### 4.3.4.2 Joy of seeing growth

Secondly, a language teacher is one who takes pleasure in seeing the growth in the learner's progress. According to a Malaysian student, a language teacher is like *'a good gardener'* (S45). Based on her entailment, *"They are able to see the potential in those young seedlings (the students) and enjoy watching them grow, develop and bloom."* As a good gardener who is concerned about the growth of his plants, he would help the plants (learners) to grow healthily and enhance their hidden potentials by pruning and trimming any unwanted 'weeds'. A nurturing teacher desires to watch the learners grow healthily towards a higher maturity level.

Similar to the second sub-theme of seeing joy in the personal growth and development of students' learning journey is portrayed by a Malaysian student (S17) who is currently a lecturer of more than four years teaching experience. According to S17, a language teacher is

like *'a samurai'* with the entailments: "*He does battle with the ignorance within his students and he strives to improve himself to bring his students towards enlightenment."* The explanation above depicted the important role of a teacher in nurturing the students' personal cognitive growth.

To encapsulate, all the five postgraduate students who perceived language teachers' roles as a *'Nurturer'* were Cognitivist learners themselves except for one who is a Behaviourist (S17). The language teacher's role is to nourish, influence, and foster the potential capabilities of the learner, just like a caretaker or a parent to the children.

#### **4.3.5 Teacher as *'Authority'***

Three learners (6.38%) expressed their perceptions of a language teacher as an *'authority'* who possessed the right or power to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. Teachers under this category were rule-based and did not tolerate any mistakes (*'a policeman'*, *'a monster in disguise'*, and *'god'*). The metaphors and the entailments carried underlying negative connotations such as "*...they penalize you*" (S10), "*...mean and cruel*" (S25) and sarcasm "*...how on earth can he/she master English so well*" (S37).

According to a Malaysian student (S10), a language teacher is like *'a policeman'* because of her past experiences with English teachers in both primary and secondary schools as "*people who laid down the rules: this is what you do- the lessons consisted of rote-learning and memorization of language rules, grammatical categories, etc*" (S10). These English learning experiences in school shaped her perception of a language teacher who often "*have a set of answers they expect you to cough up- and they penalize you if your answers do not correspond with theirs*" (S10). In other words, the metaphor and its entailments implied the



role of language teacher who emphasised on memorization and strict adherence to the rules during examination. A *'policeman'* does not portray a teacher with a friendly and approachable character. Instead, he or she is out to penalize marks wherever it is due.

In support with the view of a strict language teacher, another Malaysian student (S25) compared the role of a language teacher to *'a monster in disguise'* with these explanation: *"A monster because she is mean and cruel. Disguise because she does it for us to learn. Like cruel to be kind"* (S25). The metaphor *'a monster in disguise'* referred to a teacher with a cruel and mean nature, associated with someone filled with a threatenng demeanour, often lack in understanding. However, the learner acknowledged the sincere *'kindness'* behind every teacher's strictness as a way of educating his or her students from the entailment *"cruel to be kind"* (S25).

Another Malaysian student expressed her views of a language teacher's roles like *'god'* as *"how on earth can he/ she master English so well"* (S37). The metaphor and its entailments seemed to portray a sense of sarcasm on the absolute authorization and knowledge, seemingly impossible to comprehend, as possessed by an English teacher. In short, all the three metaphors implied a negative connotation of a rule-based, task-master English language teacher.

#### **4.3.6 Teacher as *'Devotee'***

The next category of a language teacher's role in this study reflected that of a *'Devotee'* as someone very enthusiastic or interesting in teaching. Only one learner's metaphor and entailment seemed to describe a teacher who is devoted to the vocation and often goes the extra mile in answering the call of teaching. The teacher has shown great interest and

enthusiasm just like *'a chef'* in “*creating recipes/ lessons until the best end product is produced*” (S30).

#### **4.3.7 Teacher as *'Interest Arouser and Instructor'***

The metaphor *'a guidebook'* expressed by an international student from China (S11) described the teacher as someone who “.....*should first arouse your interest in learning English.....Then the Guidebook will tell you what are the features and must see (must learn), guide you to the right track....*” (S11). The learner further explained that English teachers are like *'guidebook'* because they “*provide help at anytime you need just like the information needed in guidebook*.” These characteristics of a language teacher helped to enrich a learner's learning experience just as how it enhanced a traveller's experience. The metaphor *'guidebook'* depicted a combination of the teacher's role as *'Interest Arouser and Instructor'*. In addition to guiding the learners in their right learning track, a teacher should also inject elements of fun and interest by varying their teaching approaches to capture the attention of the learners.

#### **4.3.8 Teacher as *'Co-worker and Instructor'***

The metaphor of a teacher as *'an explorer who embarks on a mysterious journey'* by a Malaysian postgraduate student (S12) illustrated the underlying meaning of the teacher who collaborated with the students besides providing guidance and advice. She explained in the entailment that the destination for the teacher is the port of hope and knowledge. In addition, the teacher may discover precious gems and treasures along the way which will remain his mementos of that perilous adventure (S12). According to the retrospective interview (*Appendix J*), S12 explained that the teacher is faced with different challenges, goals, perspectives with each different class as well as a *'lighthouse'* that informs the vessels at sea

of the dangers at bay. A shared responsibility between the teacher and student is seen here whereby it encourages multiple viewpoints in a community of learners (Martinez et al., 2001).

*“Port of hope and knowledge refer to positive outcomes and successful achievements in all aspects- emotional, material- and becoming a well-rounded individual. Eg. Emotional gain: acquiring the necessary emotional intelligence and soft skills and sharing of the knowledge. Material gain: obtaining excellent results, awards, jobs, and re-investing the knowledge into the community”.* (Interview: S12)

#### **4.3.9 Teacher as ‘Provider and Instructor’**

The learner’s metaphor ‘*a boat*’ entailed both the idea of providing knowledge as well as guidance to the learners “*The teacher is an important person who gives knowledge, direction and suggestion...without the boat, the passengers cannot reach the coast” (S47). This metaphor provided by an international student from Thailand highlighted the role of a language teacher as an essential provider and guide to a learner in order to reach the other side of the coast. Without the teacher (boat) who provides the knowledge and guidance, it is not possible as the learner would be grappling for help to achieve success (reach the shore).*

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

To highlight the main points of the findings from this study, a majority of the participants’ metaphor were deemed to be deriving from the Cognitivist Learning dimension. In other words, they are ‘thinkers’ when learning a language. On the other hand, only a handful of the respondents were perceiving language learning from the Behaviourist learning dimension whilst none was from the Situative perspective. Based on this preliminary analysis, it is suggested that the idea of human individualism underpins the development of language learning among the postgraduate students; this is in contrast with an underpinning of social

collaboration. Another interesting finding revealed that a majority of the ‘Cognitivists’ came from a background which perceived their language teachers as ‘Providers’.

University of Malaya

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

*Be the change you want to see in the world.*

*~Gandhi (1909)*

#### 5.1 Introduction

This research was birthed and conducted as a means of enlightening language educators about the perceptions of higher level university students on English Language learning using metaphors. The two research questions addressed in this qualitative study in the context of postgraduate education in a local tertiary institution were as such:

- i) In what ways do the learners' metaphors reflect the different learning dimensions of *Behaviourist*, *Cognitivist* and *Situative* perspectives? What are some of the themes that emerged from the categorisations?
- ii) How do the learners metaphorically conceptualize the roles of English teachers? What are the conceptual categories of language teachers' roles?

The researcher employed online open-structured questionnaires through the use of metaphor-elicitation method as well as retrospective interviews to triangulate the categorisations of data. A peer review session and validation by an expert in the field of metaphor analysis were also conducted.

To answer the first research question, the researcher adapted the framework of analysis based on the three main learning dimensions of the *Behaviourist*, *Cognitivist* or *Situative* perspectives. The data analysis revealed a high majority of postgraduate learners as *Cognitivist* learners with the two main themes of (I) Internal Goal and (II) External Goal. The emerging themes derived under the first theme 'Internal Goal' are (a) Appreciate Beauty in

the Language Itself, (b) See Learning as an Enjoyable Activity or Experience, (c) Acknowledge Persistence and Hardwork, (d) Recognize Ups and Downs, and (e) Focus on Stages of Improvement. On the other hand, the second theme 'External Goal' undergirds these three sub-themes, (a) Goal-oriented (overcoming challenges and different stages), (b) Stepping stones, and (c) Providing new opportunities.

A smaller percentage of learners were *Behaviourist* learners who emphasized on mechanical, skill-acquisition, repetitive process of learning English. The learners in this category centred on the theme of 'Practice' with two sub-themes of (a) Routine, and (b) Requires effort. In other words, only a handful of learners perceived learning English as a habitual, expected occurrence. Interestingly, none of the postgraduate learners' metaphors reflected the views of a *Situative* learning perspective which focused on the participation of learners in a community.

The second research question revealed that a majority of the learners perceived their language teachers as '*Providers*' and '*Instructors*' whilst only a few as '*Co-worker*' and none as '*Culture Transmitter*'. This highlights the point that current postgraduate learners are still greatly dependent on the guidance and assistance provided by their teachers and lack individual self-sustaining learning skills of working together among their peers. This finding is a timely wake-up call for a revisit to the teaching and learning approaches used by instructors in higher learning institutions in order to inculcate a more community-based independent learning climate among postgraduate students.

## 5.2 Key Findings of Learners' Perceptions Using Metaphors

### 5.2.1 Summary of Learners' Perceptions on Learning English

Based on the findings for the first part of the study, a majority of postgraduate students (85.11%) formulated metaphors which were deemed appropriate under the *Cognitivist* learning paradigm. The two major themes that emerged from the data analysis were 'Internal Goal' and 'External Goal' (*Refer to Figure 4.2*). The remaining students (14.89%) formulated metaphors that reflected the *Behaviourist* learning perspectives and none belonged to the *Situative* ideas of learning English.

The *Cognitivist* domain referred to the notion of organization of knowledge, the active role in reorganisation of previous experiences and the development of general language skills such as reasoning, problem-solving, metacognition and intrinsic motivation (Martinez et al., 2001). The majority of the metaphors produced by the postgraduate students in this study were reflective of learning as individual development of information, based on interpretation of real-life experiences. The metaphors in this category reflected knowledge as a flexible, malleable construction, dependent on the students' interpretation of their available knowledge.

As the highest choice of metaphors produced, the *Cognitivist* domain is reflective of the sample of learners who were postgraduate students. As postgraduate students, most of the learners have reached higher thinking level and were able to perceive learning English from a Cognitive (individual, mental pursuit) perspective. Some similar metaphors from this study were also found in previous metaphorical analyses of conceptions on teaching and learning based on experienced and prospective teachers. These included the metaphor '*getting the bricks of a house*' (Martinez et al., 2001) which is similar to '*building a house*' in this study.

Both metaphors were categorised as '*Cognitivist*' point of view in language learning. Interestingly, the metaphor '*eating*' in this study under the *Cognitivist* dimension with the theme '*Enjoyable activity and experience*' is also found in the same metaphorical study based on the personal thoughts of veteran and prospective teachers. However, the metaphor '*Teaching is like eating, it satisfies a necessity*' in that study is categorised under the '*Behaviouristic*' point of view with the theme '*Learning as a process of digestion*'.

Fewer metaphors (14.89%) could be attributed to the '*Behaviourist*' learning paradigm and none belonged to the '*Situative*' dimension from the participants in this study. Only a handful of postgraduate students in this study perceived learning English as a process of drilling and repetition to acquire the language skills. This differed from previous study (Martinez et.al., 2001) whereby the majority of metaphors produced by the experienced teachers were reflective of the *Behaviourist* (57%), followed by the *Cognitivist* (38%) and the *Situative* (5%) while that of prospective teachers favoured more *Cognitivist* metaphors (56%), *Behaviourist* (22%) and *Situative* (22%). This revealed that the perceptions of teaching and learning differed between teachers and learners as both groups often entered the classroom with different expectations and background experiences. Postgraduate learners in this present study were more inclined towards many more *Cognitivist* metaphors as compared to in-service teachers who have taught for several years in elementary schools. A majority of the students in this study adopted the concepts of developing knowledge and their active role in reorganising knowledge based on their previous experiences. Conceptions of learning associated with the *Behaviouristic* idea of stimulus-response connections, with learner being perceived as the receiver of knowledge was rare among the postgraduate learners.



The findings in this study demonstrated that the ‘*Situative*’ paradigm which proposed the notion of social learning in a community of practice is generally not widespread and least favoured among the subjects. The possible reasons for this could be assumed in the contradictions between the principle of the theoretical position and teachers’ experiences in the classrooms. In other words, the idea of human individualism, could have been deeply engrained in the Malaysian culture. This calls for much attention among postgraduate language educators today to bring more awareness of teaching approaches that considered the idea of situated cognition among the learners. This lack of preference shown among postgraduate learners to the idea of situative learning was also illustrated by another published metaphor study on teaching (Tobin & Tippins, 1996) by another group of teachers’ perceptions. The teachers in that study were compared to a ‘*fencer*’, whereby this metaphor represented “social constructivism, equitable distribution of power between the teacher and students” in an educational context. There were difficulties in relating the situation of a duel between teacher and students, whereby the classroom was seen as a community of practice.

In another study among Iranian PhD students about language learning, a majority of the metaphors (44%) about their professors represented the notions of *Behaviourist* ideas, while the percentage for *Cognitive* and *Situative* metaphors were 28% respectively (Pishgadam, R., 2011). Similarly in another study on metaphorical analysis of Iranian MA University students (Pishgadam, R., 2011) about lecturers and students in their present situations revealed that Behaviourism dominated the current environment in the teaching process (61.3%). A majority of the metaphors chosen by the MA students reflected their professors holding typical roles of teacher as a leader (*dictator, clergy man, manager*), provider of knowledge (*comprehensive book, computer, cassette player*) which were all associated to the *Behaviourism* idea of teaching and learning. As concluded by Pishgadam and Navari (2010),

*Behaviourism* is the dominating conviction among educators and learners in Iranian schools as teachers are still inclined to maintain the power distance between the students and themselves. However, the metaphors produced by the postgraduate students in the Malaysian context reflected the *Cognitive* ideas of learning while the *Situative* approach did not stand a notable place among the metaphors of the postgraduate learners. This depicted an absence of a right understanding of teaching and learning in higher education level which would ideally adopt the eclecticism approach with a combination of different approaches to suit the needs of international and local students in various socio-cultural settings (Borg, 2006).

### **5.2.2 Summary of Learners' Perceptions on Teacher Roles**

Based on the findings of this study, both '*Provider*' and '*Instructor*' teacher roles categories were equally most chosen by the postgraduate students with 27.66% respectively (Refer to Figure 4.4). Most of the students under these two categories were '*Cognitivist*' learners with only four '*Behaviourist*'. This reflected that the postgraduate students still preferred the teachers to convey knowledge and provide information as well as guidance despite being a Cognitivist learner.

In comparison with another study on EFL instructors and learners' metaphors to determine the teacher's roles in the classroom, the third year university students most preferred the Teacher as '*Instructor*' category followed by '*Culture Transmitter*' (Wan, Low & Li, 2011). On the contrary, the '*Culture Transmitter*' and '*Co-worker*' categories were absent in this study. Comparatively, the two categories of Teacher as '*Interest arouser*' and '*Co-worker*' were not identified in the previous study on metaphor analysis of beliefs about EFL teachers' roles from university students' and teachers' perspectives in China.

Interestingly, the metaphors in the category of Teacher as '*Culture Transmitter*' were highly favoured by the first year students in China. Metaphors in this category required the teachers to "*pass or bridge the English culture with the language knowledge to the students*". Besides that, the learners anticipated their teachers to introduce interesting learning methods such as '*My teacher is like a TV*' and to deliver information of studying overseas '*My English teacher is like a preacher*'. However, no culture-oriented metaphor could be recognised among the postgraduate students in this study probably because most of the learners who responded were Malaysians with only 14 international students. The '*Co-worker*' metaphor was not mentioned in this study probably because the students were not aware of the positive contributions that students may have, and subscribed to the traditional '*Provider*' category. In another study, the '*Co-worker*' metaphors likened teachers to collaborators, in contradiction of the conventional hierarchical system in the lessons and supported the positive interpersonal teacher-student rapport on the basis of impartiality.

The '*Provider*' metaphors were similar to the previous study such as '*book, encyclopedia*' to convey knowledge in various ways, and to assist students to learn as '*dictionary*' (Wan et.al, 2011). The metaphor '*dictionary*' appeared in both studies with the explanation of a teacher as someone knowledgeable whereby "*you'll be asked for meanings*". As for the '*Nurturer*' category, the same gardener and parent metaphors such as '*a gardener*', '*a mum*', '*a good gardener*' from this study were found in the previous studies as well. The teachers were considered as facilitator of personal growth and development who took care of students and nurture their budding abilities.

### 5.3 Implications

Considering these significant facets of metaphorical discernment, it is assumed that metaphors exert influential impacts on education planning, specifically affecting teachers' thinking about teaching and learning. Therefore, the metaphors about English learning and the roles played by language teachers can function as blueprints of thinking, to lead and assist university lecturers' view of what it means to learn from the learners' viewpoints. It enables university teachers to consider the learners' perspectives while determining their teaching materials, pedagogy and approaches in the classroom. In short, perception studies using metaphor analysis serves as a catalyst for the enhancement of more progressive and effective postgraduate teaching and learning.

The highlights of this study might be useful and enlightening for educators, especially in light of related works on perceptions. Herrington and Curtis (2000), cited in Armstrong (2008), commented that educators need to consider students' multiple perspectives and design curricula and classroom practices accordingly. "Metaphors might be effectively used as a tool to increase self-reflection and critical awareness" (de Guerrero and Villamil, 2000, p.117).

In conclusion, the findings from this study suggest that metaphor analysis can be used as a means to elicit postgraduate learners' perceptions about teaching and learning English. As stated by Ellis (2008), one of the most effective ways of conducting metaphor analysis study is to experimentally elicit the metaphors from the subjects in order to describe their teachers or learners. As a significant tool for qualitative research methodology, metaphor analysis employed in this study helped the researcher to uncover hidden beliefs and analyse the ideas behind them.

#### **5.4 Limitations**

The researcher is aware of the limitations and shortcomings found in this study conducted among this group of participants. As this is a qualitative study with a purposeful small sample of students, the findings of this study are not generaliseable to a wider populace of the postgraduate learners in higher learning institutions. It is assumed that the learners' perceptions gathered in this study are captured accurately in the metaphors as expressed by the learners themselves.

Based on the data collection method, there were limitations to experimentally-elicited metaphors as compared to natural-occurring metaphors as found in oral or written narratives such as learner diaries or interviews. Experimentally-elicited metaphors used in this study may yield unsuccessful responses due to these possibilities: i) no answers given by the participants, (ii) no appropriate metaphors used, and (iii) no explanatory reasoning or entailment is provided by the participant. However, the researcher has taken proper steps of metaphor identification method in the data analysis stage and addressed these limitations to ensure the reliability of the findings.

#### **5.5 Further Research**

Further research on metaphors that look into the viewpoints of both language teachers and the postgraduate students are worthwhile, to identify if there is any possible similarities or mismatches between the two groups. The implication of metaphors in the education system is inevitable and it is assumed that the atmosphere in the classroom is often controlled or authorized by the teacher's favoured educational metaphor. For instance, if a teacher favours the '*policeman*' metaphor, he or she will most probably exert stern authority over the learners and expect students' strict adherence to the rules in the classroom. However, a teacher who

prefers the '*Interest arouser*' metaphor will adopt a friendly and fun-filled approach in the lesson (Tobin & Tippins, 1996). Realising the inherent prospective of metaphors to influence teachers' educational conduct, it is highly appropriate to explore the collaborative methods in comparison to individualised learners' perceptions of learning English.

On hind sight, the researcher has gathered that delving deeper into the individual learners' background on their preferences of English Language teaching method (CLT, AL, GT) could be another reason for a retrospective interview with the participants to confirm the researcher's interpretation of their metaphors. For instance, a learner may express a metaphor which reflect the '*Cognitivist*' learning paradigm and select his or her inclination towards the CLT teaching method that proposes interactions among other learners. In this study, the researcher conducted a retrospective interview with the participants only when there was ambiguity in deciphering the metaphor and entailments given. Therefore, an interview to further prob the learner's personal view before deciding on an inclined learning dimension would be a possible additional step in future studies.

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