

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The study of literature is important in an ESL class. Literature provides opportunity for learners to give their personal responses to text. It also enhances the process of teaching and learning a language. For example, students were able to give their own response as to why they thought Wilson was not able to kill himself at sixty in the short story "The Lotus Eater".

In addition, students would also be able to reflect and draw valuable moral values from the literary works and relate them to their life. For example from the short story "The Lotus Eater", learners would be able to learn that one needs to be practical and realistic in order to achieve success in life. Further, learners would be able to understand and appreciate other cultures. For example, the western culture which is depicted in the short story "The Lotus Eater" and "The Necklace".

Besides that, to enhance the study of literature, the use of social language learning strategies such as asking questions, cooperating and empathising with others is vital. This is because these strategies provide opportunity for talk or interaction which is essential in the process of teaching and learning literature. According to Mc Rae (1988), recent methodological advances encourage the learner to experience the literary text in interactive terms, hence encouraging reader response. Group work also plays an important role in a literature-based ESL class because it provides opportunity for talk or interaction, hence enabling learners to learn literature in an interactive manner.

This chapter will therefore briefly discuss the summary of the key findings of this study. It will also include the implications of the study and suggestions to enhance the teaching and learning of literature.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study was carried out to explore the social language learning strategies used by students in group work, their perceptions of these strategies and the outcomes of using these strategies in group work. Comparisons were made between fairly proficient and low proficiency students in a Literature-Based Form Four ESL classroom. The following sections will highlight the key findings of this study.

5.1.1 Social Language Learning Strategies Used By Students in Group Work

Social Language Learning Strategies involves asking questions, cooperating and empathising with others (Oxford, 1990). The study indicates that asking questions was prominent among both fairly proficient and low proficiency students during group work. However, low proficiency students used this strategy more often due to poor proficiency in the language and lack of confidence. As one student explained, "I am weak so I ask a lot of questions to learn" (translation). Perhaps the use of this strategy enhanced their confidence, thus giving them the reassurance of their ideas or opinions. Questioning in general reinforces and extends real teaching and learning of literature. This is because questions are a manifestation

of talk. Students questions which is related to talk indicates the students' engagement with the literary text, task or activities.

Besides that, cooperating with others was also a common feature among both groups of learners. Cooperative activities perhaps allowed students to explore literature together and it was a source of encouragement and motivation to learn literature. Through cooperation the students shared their ideas to perform the task. As one student said, "we shared our ideas to complete the literature task together" (translation). Extensive research on cooperative learning indicates that it is effective in increasing achievement on school tasks as well as fostering positive attitudes of students towards themselves and each other (Johnson, 1995). One student explained, "through discussion we remember better what we have learnt and we would be able to answer the questions in the examination" (translation).

In contrast, empathising with others was not common among both groups of students. Perhaps, time constraint was one of the factors, which hindered the development of this strategy. Perhaps the duration of this study, which was two months, was rather too short for the students to engage in this strategy. In addition, the activities designed might not have given the students the opportunity to "exercise" this strategy. Most of the activities focussed on the plot, characters or themes rather than the cultural dimensions of the short stories. However, students might have sub consciously used this strategy without being consciously aware of it.

5.1.2 Students Perceptions of the Use of Social Language Learning Strategies in Group Work

During group work students not only study and learn together but they also teach each other and correct their work. In this study, both groups of students perceived that peer teaching and learning was enhanced through the use of the social language learning strategies in group work. As one student explained, “I feel it’s better than to learn from teacher because sometimes we feel shy and shame when we don’t know and then friends are better to learn from”. However, peer teaching and learning was more evident among low proficiency students in this study. Perhaps weaker students needed more peer support to boost their confidence to learn literature. As one student said, “it gives us confidence because we can learn from our friends and come up with better answers” (translation).

In addition, the use of social language learning strategies in group work encouraged students to exchange their ideas or opinions, hence increasing students’ understanding of the literary text, task or activities. By exchanging ideas or opinions students also had the opportunity to use and practise the language, thus giving them the opportunity to learn about the language and to put the language learnt into use. One student illustrated, “I learnt more new words”. This is because when students are engaged interactively with the literary text, or fellow students or the teacher in performing tasks involving the literary text, students are obliged to pay careful attention to the text and to generate language in the process of completing the task.

5.1.3 Outcomes of the Use of Social Language Learning Strategies in Group Work

Motivation plays an important role in enhancing the teaching and learning of literature. Students who are highly motivated perform better and have a higher “drive” to learn. The use of these strategies allowed students to relate their experience with the text and with other members, thus increasing their motivation to read a particular text in some depth. As one student illustrated, “I’ll do preparation for the lesson and do preparation in home like check the dictionary, when teacher ask us to read the story them I will usually do preparation in my home”. Once students are motivated, they will be more willing to contribute, have increased concentration spans and engage more actively in the process of learning (Assinder, 1991).

Besides that, the use of these strategies increased students’ confidence to express their ideas, opinions, thoughts or feelings during discussions. This was more evident among low proficiency students. When students are more confident in voicing out their thoughts, ideas or feelings, there would be a greater exchange of ideas, thus enabling the students to learn more from each other. One student explained, “I am more confident to give my idea and we can ask them, our group member, how to do this, how to settle this and our friends can help”. In other words, a higher level of confidence encourages students’ “creative juices” to be verbalised. contribution during discussions, thus increasing students’ understanding of the literary texts, task or activities.

Moreover, students also produced better quality of work after using these strategies over a period of time. These strategies not only enabled learners to

produce better quality of work but also enabled them to comprehend the text and apply their understanding to suit the task or activity. Better quality of work also indirectly indicates that the students' thinking process or skills are more organised and directed in terms of both the text and task. Students would also be able to complete the task quickly as one student said, "we do group work we can finish our work in a short time".

5.2 Implications of the Study and Suggestions

With greater emphasis on reader response and student-centredness in ESL literature classes, group work is often suggested. This study yields useful insights into the practical dimension of using group work so that social language learning strategies feature on students attempt to engage with literary texts. The findings of this study have implications for all those involved in the process of teaching and learning literature such as teachers, students, teacher educators and material writers.

5.2.1 Implications for Teachers

The study indicates that the use of social language learning strategies in group work is important in the process of learning literature. Teachers, therefore play an important role in creating an environment for students so that they become familiar with and are able to apply these strategies to relevant learning activities. Teachers perhaps could select suitable literary activities or tasks which are group-oriented to enhance the use of these strategies.

Activities which promote cooperation, encourage learners to ask questions or empathise with others would be appropriate. For example, a jigsaw reading task on “The Lotus Eater” in groups could encourage students to ask questions and co-operate with each other to solve the task. This is because each group member has part of the story to read and together they have to figure out the entire story through a process of negotiating, questioning and co-operating, hence enhancing the social language learning strategies. Besides that, a discussion on the students’ feelings about the literary text or cultural elements of the text could perhaps enhance the skill of empathy. For example, before teaching the short story “The Necklace” perhaps the teacher could get a discussion going about the western social activity of going to a ball. Perhaps then the students could empathise with Mathilde as to how she felt when she did not have a new gown to wear to the ball.

Bialystok (1985) stresses that teaching strategies that correspond to the conscious aspects of learning are more useful in improving learning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to develop teaching strategies, which are in accordance with students’ social language learning strategies to further facilitate the process of learning literature.

5.2.2 Implications for Students

Cook (1997) stresses that, the use of the social language learning strategies encourages self directed learning, where the students take on responsibility for their learning. Class work in pairs and small groups are a way of giving learners greater responsibility for learning as it reduces the learners’ dependence on the

teacher and encourages greater independence on the learners' part (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1989).

Students, therefore need to change their attitude of relying on the teacher for input on literature. They perhaps could use these strategies to further enhance their knowledge on the subject. Perhaps students could discuss and “discover” on their own the social class distinctions in order to understand the short story “The Necklace” better. This short story depicts two different social classes: the working class (Loisel and Mathilde) and the upper class (The Minister of Public Instruction). Perhaps by understanding the social class distinctions, students would be able to empathise with Mathilde who had to work extra harder to pay back Madame Forestier when she lost the necklace that she borrowed from Madame Forestier. Students would then perhaps understand that the “working class” have to work hard in order to earn a living.

Besides that, Oxford (1990) states, “Self directed students gradually gain greater confidence, involvement and proficiency” (p. 10). As a result, students would be more aware of the processes involved in learning, thus enabling students to make conscious efforts in learning literature, hence encouraging the use of the learner-centred approaches towards learning.

5.2.3 Implications for Teacher Educators

Teacher educators play an important role in moulding young literature teachers. Teacher educators should be aware of the importance of these strategies in the process of teaching and learning literature. Teacher educators could perhaps train

teachers on how to use these strategies effectively in the process of teaching literature to maximise learning. Perhaps, they could train teachers on how to select suitable activities or tasks to suit the learners' learning style or strategies.

In addition, they could perhaps train teachers to design activities to promote the use of these strategies. Further, teacher educators could also highlight the practical dimensions of implementing group work during literature lessons. For example, they could explain whether it is suitable to use these strategies or group work during the, pre, while or post stages of a lesson. Bialystok (1984) argues that incongruity between strategies used by the teacher and the learner will minimise the benefits of teaching to a great extent.

5.2.4 Implications for Material Writers

Material writers could perhaps produce materials, which focuses on group work and the text rather than individual learners and the text to further enhance the use of the social language learning strategies. For example, students could discuss in groups the issue as to why Wilson became a misfit after sixty in "The Lotus Eater". Students would understand the literature text better if they work together to analyse it. Students would be able to refer back to and interact with the text, as well as interacting with their fellow students or the teacher if the activity requires group effort.

Activities related to group discussions may spark the creation of many more ideas, novel analysis and interpretations, hence making literature more meaningful and lasting (Harlin, Lipa and Lonberger, 1991). By providing students

with a multitude of vicarious materials, material writers could scaffold students' effort to increase their knowledge, while presenting new challenges so that they engage in new adventures.

In addition, such materials could bring variety, fun and enjoyment into the literature classroom. Moreover, it could enhance students' reading habits because students would be able to interpret the text through a series of materials or activities together. Students may perhaps be more motivated to read the text as a discussion will proceed in the literature classroom.

5.3 Conclusion

The study indicates that the use of social language learning strategies in group work in a literature-based Form Four ESL class is beneficial to both fairly proficient and low proficiency students. These strategies if used effectively can maximise the process of teaching and learning literature. In addition, it could further enhance the process of talk or interaction, which is vital in the process of learning. According to Brown (1994), "In the era of communicative language teaching, interaction is in fact the heart of communication . . . We send messages; we receive them; we interpret the main context, we negotiate meanings; and we collaborate to accomplish certain purposes." (p. 159). Therefore, it can be said that the best way to learn literature is through interaction itself. When the voices in literary texts come together with the voices of students and their peers new meanings emerge through transactions within the community of the ESL class.