An Investigation of Teachers'Approaches Employed In Teaching The English Literature

Jothimalar Krishnasamy
INTI International University (Laureate International Universities)
Persiaran Perdana BBN, Putra Nilai, 71800
Nilai, Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus, Malaysia
Email: jomalar19 [AT] yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT---- *There is very little research which uses 'process perspectives of what is really happening in the classrooms.' This research has a five pronged purposes; therefore, it is expected that this study can contribute to the field of study especially teaching literature for school students. Research was done by way of survey questionnaire, classroom observations, interviews and expert check list. The respondents of the questionnaire were teachers who teach English in schools. These teachers were involved in teaching the Literature in English. A series of classroom observations were carried out by the researcher. This was conducted in randomly selected schools every week. Thus, the researcher observed 13 lessons with three sets of lessons each for a period of four weeks. Teachers, namely English option and non-English option from National schools and National Type schools, which consist of Chinese and Tamil schools from all the 7 districts in the state of Negeri Sembilan was observed three times each. The same sample was interviewed to ensure validity and reliability of the results obtained from the classroom observation and survey questionnaire results. To this end, the study aimed at analyzing the extent to which teachers' approaches in teaching literature is understood among teachers and students in the Malaysian schools. In addition, the study aimed at exploring, through field investigations, the manner in which teacher and school related variables respond against approaches employed by the teachers in teaching the literature. Ultimately, its findings are meant to help teachers, researchers, key educational policy-makers and other education experts, to explore possibilities of developing more effective ways of utilizing active learning approaches at school level. Apart from that, the study is to gather a general overview on the approaches employed by teachers in teaching the English Literature in schools. It is essential to look at the approaches the teachers use to teach literature in their respective classrooms. The findings would provide useful information for the Ministry of Education to identify the current literature teaching situation in the ESL classroom. The findings of the study will also provide valuable information for the Ministry of Education to examine and counter-act on the discrepancy, if there is any, so that the teaching of the English Literature component in schoolscan serve its function well. The study will also open up ways for future researchers to conduct in-depth studies on the methodological aspects of the teaching of the English Literature in schools. In doing so, it is hoped that teachers will be able to contribute to more effective teaching and learning of the teaching of the English Literature in schools in the ESL context.*

Keywords--- Teaching approach, curriculum/syllabus, methodologies, module

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language policies in countries all over the world go through changes as time passes. What determines the path of these changes depends mainly on a number of issues. Taylor et.al. (1997) as cited in Gill (2004) asserts that "educational changes do not occur in a void, nor do educational policies materialize out of thin air". They go on to claim that the ideological, political, social and economic climate, together influence the shape and timing of educational policies and their outcomes (Taylor et al. 1997). As a result, the policies would reflect the balance between the nation's desire to retain its national identity and the unceasing pull towards global competitiveness (Gill 2004). Similarly, in Malaysia, the language policies have undergone tremendous changes. The English Language which functions as the second language is taught as a compulsory subject in government primary and secondary classrooms in Malaysia.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Literature has been an important component of foreign language courses for a very long time (Saraceni 2003). A number of scholars have identified some areas where literary texts can be used as language teaching resources in beneficial ways (Collie & Slater 1987; Lazer 1993; McRae 1991; Widdowson 1992). Among these would be in the areas of language development, personal growth and cultural enrichment. With this in mind, the Ministry of Education incorporated the Children's Contemporary English Literature Component in primary schools. The main aim is to address the issue of poor language proficiency among Malaysian students as well as to cultivate a reading culture and inculcate moral values. This incorporation came at the right time as there was an increased concern at the sharp decline in the standard of the language among students at all levels (The Star 1999).

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows:
1. To evaluate the key components of the current module.

2. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current module of Children's Contemporary English Literature component in primary schools' in terms of teaching the children's contemporary English Literature component in primary schools.

3. To identify the supplementary approaches and activities used by teachers to teach the children's contemporary English Literature component in primary schools.

4. To identify the motivations for these supplementary approaches and activities used by teachers to teach the children's contemporary English Literature component in primary schools.

5. To identify the challenges faced by teachers teaching the children's contemporary English Literature component in primary schools and the possible solutions.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the objectives of the study, the researcher aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the key components of the current module?

2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current module of Children's Contemporary English Literature component in primary schools' in terms of teaching the children's contemporary English Literature component in primary schools?

3. What are the supplementary approaches and activities used by teachers to teach the children's contemporary English Literature component in primary schools?

4. What are the motivations for these supplementary approaches and activities used by teachers to teach the children's contemporary English Literature component in primary schools?

5. What are the challenges faced by teachers teaching the children's contemporary English Literature component in primary schools and the possible solutions?

5. METHODOLOGY

This questionnaire survey was conducted in 300 urban and rural, National and National Type primary schools in the state of Negeri Sembilan DarulKhusus. There are 7 districts altogether in Negeri Sembilan DarulKhusus. They are namely Jelebu, Jempol, Kuala Pilah, Port Dickson, Rembau, Seremban and Tampin. The study was carried out for a period of nearly two months. The questionnaires were administered personally at all the schools and they were collected two or five days after that, which depended on the availability of the Head of English Panel and the teachers involved. As for the case study, the classroom observations were carried out every week. Thus, the researcher observed three literature lessons for a period of four weeks. After the observations were completed, the researcher proceeded with two sessions of focused interviews with the selected teachers from each school.

6. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

From the research findings it can be summarized that teachers applied the overall approaches of teaching literature at average level. Approaches in every statement also show that most of statements of approaches are at average level. The findings also summarize that teachers apply teaching activities in the literature at average level. Likewise, teaching activities in every statement also show that most of activities employed at average levels. The findings also summarize that teachers apply approach and activities in the literature lesson at average level. Most of statements of approach-activities also show that most of activities were employed at average levels.

      Inference statistics analysis shows that there is no significant difference between male and female in approaches, teaching activities, and approaches-activities, and there is no difference between groups of academic qualification in

mean scores of approaches, teaching activities and approaches-activities.These findings indicate that academic qualification does not give any effect to approaches, teaching activities and approaches-activities. However, the findings shows that option English teacher obtain higher mean score than non-option English teachers in Approaches and activities but there is no a significant difference between Option English teacher and Non-option English teacher in approaches-activities.

The result of *Pearson correlation* analysis shows that the analyses findings show that there is a significant positive relationship between approaches and teaching activities. These findings signify that the approaches of teaching literature improve activities in literature lesson. However there is no relationship between teaching activities and approaches-activities and between approaches and approaches-activities.

For children, encounters with literature should retain characteristics of play, children's most natural activity. This principle is well illustrated in the exuberance of color and design in children's books and in themes that align the natural and the fantastic. John Dixon (1987) describes the maturing responses of young readers as "drawing on parts of the imaginary world in their play (and progressively, in drama and writing) and thus trying to explore complex situations and characters from the inside; talking and writing about personal and other familiar experiences that chime in with what's been read, thus approaching them from a new perspective; raising questions about the imaginary world and its people, discovering new connections between the imaginary and the real world, and thus discussing what human experience is actually like"(p.764). Probably the most frequently given advice for stimulating creative reader response is simply to surround children with good reading. Martin, (1987) proposes a supportive, non-analytic approach to literature of which two major components are oral reading and an abundance of interesting books. Reading would develop "by osmosis," he writes. "Without consciousness of how or why…the reader is forever rummaging and scavenging through the pages for a glimpse of self…for the pleasure of finding a closer relationship of the outer world to the inner world and vice versa. For the intense satisfaction of finding a special book that speaks to both the heart and the mind"(p.18).

Apart from the above approaches, Timucin (2001) and Savvidou (2004) propose an integrated approach to teaching literature where some or all of the above-mentioned approaches are reconciled in a systematic way. It seems that this alternative approach can be very promising for EFL/ESL classes. Timucin (2001) adopted an integrated approach comprising language-based approach and stylistics in the Turkish EFL context. He investigated the students' attitudes towards this integrated approach and how much it agrees with their tastes. The results of his study indicated that there was a significant relationship between the methodological approach the researcher adopted and the students' level of motivation, involvement, and appreciation of the literary texts. Savvidou (2004) offers the following as the stages in her integrated model :

Stage 1 : Preparation and Anticipation
Stage 2 : Focusing
Stage 3 : Preliminary Response
Stage 4 : Working at it - I
Stage 5 : Working at it - II
Stage 6 : Interpretation and Personal Response

Each of these stages is conducive to the betterment of teaching literature in EFL/ESL classes. According to Duff and Maley (1991) as cited in Savvidou (2004), there are three main rationales namely linguistic, methodological and motivational for adopting such an integrated approach to teaching literature. A more recent model for integrating literature in language classes is proposed by Khatib, Derakhshan & Rezaei (in press). They provided how task-based language teaching stages can be applied to literature as an input for language classes through a "Whole Literary Involvement" experience.

The findings have indicated that teacher act as a dominant figure who reads the story, retells the story, explains, questions and gives answers to the students. The findings reflect a concomitant setting to earlier studies conducted by Siti Norliana (2003) and Suriya Kumar (2004), whose findings also manifested that the teacher was always in control, and they tend to spend their time to deal with students' comprehension and by spending much time in dealing with students' comprehension and clarification of the literary text discussed.

Most teachers in teaching the story were seen to constantly used three main activities in their approach to teaching literature. First and foremost is listening and reading aloud by the students. Students were normally given turns to read a paragraph while other students listening. Secondly, teachers normally reread and paraphrased and explained the literary text as a way of telling the story again to the students. Teachers' main resources were literature text and workbook. In short the activities tend to be in the passive mode.

Teachers were seen to use the similar type of activities throughout their literature lessons. Activities related to language and triggering students' response were not conducted in any of the classroom observations. It can therefore be concluded that the activities witnessed throughout the 13 lessons were a less active even have the extreme tendency to passive mode.

Literary texts can present teachers and learners with a number of difficulties including text selection – text need to be chosen that have relevance and interest to learners. Linguistic difficulty – texts need to be appropriate to the level of students' comprehension. Length – shorter texts may be easier to use within the class time available, but longer texts

provide more contextual details, and development of character and plot. Cultural difficulty – texts should not be so culturally dense that outsiders feel excluded from understanding essential meaning. Cultural appropriacy – learners should not be offended by textual content.

Duff and Maley (2007) emphasize that teachers can cope with many of the challenges that literary texts present. If these teachers are requested to respond to a series of questions to assess the suitability of the text which is used for certain group of students, the questions may cover: a) whether the subject matter is likely to interest this group, b) if the language level is appropriate, c) whether the text has the right length and can be covered in the available time, d) whether it requires much cultural or literary background knowledge, e) if the content is culturally offensive or not, f) if it can b they ask a series of questions to assess the suitability of texts for any particular easily for language learning purposes.
Teachers can creatively exploit literary texts in numerous ways in the classroom. While classroom activities with literary works may involve pre-reading tasks, interactive work on the text and follow-up activities. To support this, Pulverness (2003) provides some useful advice: the first one is by maximizing pre-reading support. In this part, teachers can introduce the topic or theme of the text, pre-teach essential vocabulary items and use prediction tasks to arouse the interest and curiosity of students. The second thing is to minimize the teacher's intervening students' reading activity. The third one is to draw attention to stylistic peculiarity followed by helping students to have literary appreciation. In this phase, the teacher helps the students to learn and understand the ways the writer use the language to give particular effects. The fifth things is to provide framework for creative person, and the last one is to invite the students to imagine themselves as the writer or to modify the text.

One of the main challenges in learning literature are caused by the text itself, such as the language of the text, especially when there is a mismatch between the texts selected and students' language ability. Most of the teachers disagreed on the type of texts that should be taught. However, they generally agree that the texts should promote intellectual development, independent thinking, are interesting to adolescents and meet certain cultural and aesthetic standards (Agee, 1998). Struggling readers share the same problems which are weak comprehension, lack of interest and confidence (Arvidson & Blanco, 2004). They spend a lot of time looking up or guessing meanings of words which might result in regressive eye movement, losing sight of the plot or the bigger picture by the time they reach the bottom of the page or the end of the story. To avoid frustration and students' lack of participation, it is vital to ensure that the language of the text match students' proficiency level and that there should not be any discrepancies between linguistic expectations in the language syllabus with those of the literature component syllabus (Ganakumaran, 2002 p.65). Furthermore, unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure hamper students' understanding of texts. Students tend to misinterpret key words or fail to recognize them and focus instead on the less important part of a text (Fecteau, 1999). When faced with unfamiliar or difficult words, phrases or sentences, students use their lower-level reading skills where they look at a sentence or phrase for clues instead of using higher level skills such as inferencing or relying on the context to a guess a word's meaning (Sarjit Kaur & Rosy Thiyagarajah 1999). Hence, Brown (2004) in her study highlight that if teachers want to be successful in incorporating literature in the classroom, the main point that must be considered is the works selected for the students. Furthermore, she emphasized that the too-easy materials will lead to students' boredom and teacher's difficulty in creating enough activities, while on the other hand the too-difficult materials will frustrate the students.
Literary style and structure pose a problem for students in trying to comprehend literary texts (Davis et al 1992). If the writer is from a different background, students need to be aware of the cultural norms in the author's world to be able to identify language deviances and their significance, especially in poetry. Students also need a good grasp of the target language to appreciate choices and deviances in the text. Poems are generally disliked due to the abundance of figurative language and images which students fail to interpret (Wan Kamariah, 2009). Linguistic structure in poems can be especially confusing such as the use of irregular punctuation capital letters and organization. Students generally feel that poetry does not help their language development compared to other genres such as short stories and novels. Although literary texts provides contexts in which ESL students can learn more about the L2 culture (McCafferty, 2002), unsuitable texts can create distance between the text and the readers, especially culturally (Saraceni, 2003). Besides linguistic skills, students also need background knowledge to fully comprehend literary texts (Horowitz, 2002) which are written by authors who assume their readers share the same background knowledge, similar values and norms. When students encounter unfamiliar cultural aspects, they tend to interpret the meaning based on their own culture, which might results in inappropriate cultural representation. Sometimes students are faced with a cultural reference that is totally alien to them, which has no parallel in their own culture, such as the notion of the African background to the Malaysian students, as found in Fatou Keita-Danalis Distributors, The Little Blue Boy. At other times, students come across something familiar to them which might represent something else in another culture, such as death which is symbolized by the colour black in Western society but associated with white among Muslims. Understanding culture is made even more difficult as the values which shape and influence characters and their point of views are not explicitly portrayed in literary texts. Students' misunderstanding is due to the teachers' lack of cultural awareness, the lack of support material that address cultural issues and introductory classes that pay minimal attention to the cultural elements of the texts (Gurnam Kaur,2002 & Ganakumaran et al, 2003).
Besides cultural values, the topic of the texts can be remote to the students, not only in terms of experience but also historically, geographically or socially. Students prefer reading texts that address issues of youth, relationship and

changes in social values. Texts favoured are those with clear language, careful organization and thought-provoking themes. Students feel more motivated to read literature if they are given a choice or allowed to negotiate the texts that are to be included in literature classes (Davis et al, 1992). Although teachers might feel that students do not select 'quality' works, it is important to make sure the texts suit students' interest.

Good grasp of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and understanding students' interests and needs are some of the requirements needed to teach literature competently (Agee, 1998). Students favour teaching techniques that encourage them to respond personally, give their own opinion, and concentrate on the content of the text as opposed to analyzing details of language structure as well as having class discussions (Davis et al, 1992). Students enjoy imagining themselves as the characters, writing letters as one of the characters and retelling the story from others' point of view. Students indicate negative attitudes towards activities that require them to memorize facts, answered multiple-choice questions, read aloud, drilling and teacher-centred classes where interpretations are provided only be the teacher (Wan Kamariah, 2009). Studies on teaching methods in Malaysia found conflicting results. Fauziah & Jamaluddin (2009) found that teachers used more students-centred approach in class compared to teacher-centred strategies which created a better learning atmosphere and improved students' perception and motivation towards literature. However, Daimah (2001) found the methods used by teachers in literature classes are mostly teacher-centred. Teachers agreed that their classes were usually divided into three stages which started with explanation by the teachers, followed by discussions in groups or with the whole class and concluded with some form of exercises. A teacher-centred approach is necessary in order to save time and finish the syllabus in time. Another reason cited was students' low proficiency level which prevented teachers from using students-centred techniques like group discussion, debates and role plays. Students' unwillingness and anxiety to speak or answer questions about the text for fear of providing the wrong replies also did not help. Gurnam Kaur (2003) found that students viewed teaching strategies used by their teachers as boring, dull and uninspiring as it involved mainly doing written work, especially among students with higher proficiency level. Students with lower proficiency could not understand the texts and therefore found literature lessons boring. This could be due to teachers who had very little experience and knowledge in teaching literature. Ganakumaran et al (2003) found that 48% of the teachers surveyed said that they lack knowledge about literature teaching methodology while only 51% indicated they had enough knowledge of literature. Language teachers also lack confidence to teach literature as they perceive as only competent to teach language due to their training (Katz,2001).

Teachers usually explained "about the text", referring to the writer's life or his purpose for writing the text. Teachers did not seem to emphasize on the cultural elements of the texts, perhaps due to time constraint or the lack of supplementary materials. There did not seem to be a variety of activities during literature classes. Almost all the classes had similar sequence of activities during literature. For weaker classes, the teacher would read aloud and sometimes asked students to take turns to read. Teachers then asked questions and checked if students had any queries about the text. Then, there would be an explanation by the teacher, followed by note taking. For very weak classes, teacher apparently "always translated word by word" while for average class, teachers only translated unfamiliar words. Finally, students were given exercises and sometime asked to do these in groups.

7. CONCLUSION

The embarkation of the Children's Contemporary English Literature Component in Primary Schools into the English Language Syllabus in primary schools was legitimized in 2004. Yet, this newly embarked programme opens up interesting discussions amongst teachers, students, researchers, parents as well as the policy makers. This study allows one to see and understand how the Children's Contemporary English Literature Component is taught in primary schools. More importantly, it exposes the fact that teachers who are at the front line of teaching, are faced with different circumstances leading to their choice of approaches, for example, the language proficiency of students and the exam-oriented culture in the typical Malaysian school setting. Yet, these teachers are also placed in a dilemma – there is a need for them to gauge their approaches so that the aims and the objectives of the Children's Contemporary English Literature Component in Primary Schools will be attended to and hence, successfully accomplished.

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