ESL TEACHERS’ PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE LITERARY TEXTS USED IN KBSM FORM FOUR AND FORM FIVE ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPONENT.

OTHNA SANUB (13329)

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Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
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<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>English Language Teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<td>IPBL</td>
<td>Institute Perguruan Batu Lintang (Batu Lintang Teacher's Institute)</td>
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<td>KBSM</td>
<td>Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah</td>
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<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
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<td>PMR</td>
<td>Penilaian Menengah Rendah (Lower Secondary Evaluation)</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>The Researcher</td>
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<td>SMB</td>
<td>Sekolah Menengah Bantuan</td>
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<td>SMK</td>
<td>Sekolah Menengah Kerajaan</td>
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<td>SPM</td>
<td>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian School Certificate)</td>
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<td>Teaching English as a Second Language</td>
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ABSTRACT

ESL TEACHERS’ PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE LITERARY TEXTS USED IN KBSM FORM FOUR AND FORM FIVE ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPONENT

Othna Sanub

This study is designed to investigate ESL teachers’ perception towards the literary texts used in KBSM Form Four and Form Five English literature component in relation to the needs and abilities of form four and form five students. These teachers’ perceptions were analysed in terms of the topic/content, language, culture and authenticity found in the literary texts. These four criteria were chosen based on the framework identified by Brumfit and Carter (1991), Carter and Long (1991), Duff and Maley (1991), Quinn (1992), Lazar (1993), Chitravelu et al. (2000) and Mckay (2001) as among the most important factors to provide good literary texts in classroom. In the attempt of data collection, semi-structured interview was designed with twelve questions which were divided into the four different criteria. A number of twenty five form four and form five teachers from fifteen schools in Kuching Division were interviewed. The findings appeared to indicate that on the whole the topic/content and the culture presented in the literary texts were perceived positively by the respondents. However, the language and the authenticity of the texts were viewed rather negatively by them. Thus, interesting strategies and activities need to be done by these teachers so as to match the language used in these texts with their students’ level of proficiency in the language if the effectiveness in the teaching and learning of this component is to be improved.
ABSTRAK

PERSEPSI GURU-GURU BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA TERHADAP TEKS-TEKS SASTERA YANG DIGUNAKAN DALAM KOMPONEN KESUSAESTERAAN KBSM BAHASA INGGERIS TINGKATAN EMPAT DAN LIMA

Othna Sanub

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

In March 2000, the Literature Component in English made a comeback not only into the Malaysian English Language Education Syllabus but also into the formal examinations in the Malaysian Secondary Schools. This return was due to the persistence of low proficiency in the English Language among Malaysian students. In order to overcome this problem the Ministry of Education had made it compulsory for all students to read literary texts by integrating the Literature Component into the English Language Syllabus. The Literature component was implemented in stages over a period of three consecutive years: in March 2000 it was included into Form 1 and Form 4 English Language Syllabus, in 2001 into Form 2 and Form 5, and into Form 3 English Language Syllabus in 2002.

According to the Ministry of Education's circular [KP (PPK) 018/4 JLD.13947] as cited in Ganakumaran (2003), the main aims of the literature component are to enhance students' proficiency in the English language through the study of a set of prescribed literary texts; to promote interest in reading in the English Language; to appreciate aesthetic values and the beauty of the English Language; and to know and understand other cultures and universal values.
Consequently, a variety of complete literary works in English, translations, and adaptations or simplified versions of novels are used in order to achieve these aims. In the year 2001, the Literature Component was tested at the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) level and in 2002 it was tested at the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) level. In both examinations, the Literature Component covers 20% (the weightage) of the total marks awarded for the English Language paper (ibid).

This move by the Ministry of Education showed that the English Language plays an important role in today’s world and the Malaysian Government is dedicated to improve the level of English proficiency among Malaysian students. However, it has to be stated that this move will only improve the proficiency level of learners if the literary texts used are readable, comprehensible and interesting (Chitravelu et al., 2000).

In accordance with the above, the publishing of literary texts compiled by the Ministry of Education has included texts from various genres such as short stories, poetries and novels. The literary texts in KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component for instance, have been used by ESL teachers since they were first published in 2000 (for short stories and poems) and 2001 (for novels).

The current scenario to this issue

Based on a research done by the Ministry of Education (Ganakumaran et al., 2003), 68.03% out of 500 ESL secondary school teachers and heads of English departments from secondary schools in five states (Johor, Pahang, Pulau Pinang, Perak and Melaka)
have received formal training and/or attended in-service courses in the teaching of literature. Formal training stated here includes degree and diploma programmes or courses. The rest (31.99%) have not received any kind of training in the teaching of literature.

Additionally, it also showed that 43% of the participants perceived their current situation in the literature classroom as “desperate” (for the respondents felt that they lack support from the Ministry of Education). Another 43% of them perceived their situation in the literature classroom to be less than desperate. Another 14% were indifferent towards the literature component and this group may prove to be far more damaging to the teaching of literature and the learners if compared to others. When asked about their current personal position towards teaching literature, 57% of them indicated that they would use the literature component examination paper as a benchmark of what to teach and how to teach it. Only 37% indicated that they would do otherwise. Another 5% suggested that they did not really know what aspect of literature to teach and how to teach them.

These data showed that an average of 50% of the participants (although it was not stated specifically from which group- trained or untrained) perceived to have received little or no help from any section of the Malaysian education structure in relation to the teaching of the literature component. This indicated that half of the participants still felt lost and needed help in teaching literature. This is indeed a serious issue, as these teachers regardless of their ability to teach and knowledge of methodology, are
required to teach the subject because it is a compulsory component of the ESL syllabus.

These data represented the current perceptions of ESL teachers towards the literature component in the Malaysian ESL syllabus for secondary school. Thus, the knowledge of this current scenario prompted the researcher to carry out a comprehensive research pertaining to this problem.

1.1 Statement of the problem

KBSM English skilled-based syllabus specified the skills to be achieved by learners in three areas of language use, namely the interpersonal, the informational and the aesthetic has been implemented for Form Four and Form Five since the year 2003. This implementation is complemented by providing the teachers with a set of prescribed literary texts used in KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component as a guideline in conducting their lessons.

The Ministry of Education (Ganakumaran et al., 2003) through a general research on teacher perception towards the inclusion of literature in the Malaysian ESL syllabus showed that 61% of the participants considered the literature component a relevant programme for Malaysian schools. It was also identified that 50% of the participants (regardless of whether they have received formal training or not) still felt lost and required help in using literature reading materials in order to teach their students. This means that this group of teachers was unable to utilize these materials in their teaching.
of literature with confidence. However these claims did not reflect the ESL teachers’ perceptions of the literary texts used in KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component.

A research done by Aslam Khan (2003) on the teaching and learning of literature in Malaysian schools indicated that based on observations and informal interviews, more than 50% of the teachers were intimidated by literature due to their inadequate literary competence and knowledge of teaching the literature components. As the result, this intimidation had indirectly affected their confidence in teaching literature in the class. Nevertheless, these teachers’ perceptions of the literary texts used in Malaysian schools were not revealed.

Therefore these scenarios have stimulated the researcher to investigate the perception of ESL teachers towards the literary texts introduced by the Ministry of Education in Form Four and Form Five English Language Syllabus and simultaneously contribute to the aim and objective of this research paper.

1.2 Research Objective
The objective of this study is to find out ESL teachers’ perceptions towards the literary texts used in the KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component in relation to the needs and abilities of the students. The teachers’ perceptions will exclusively be elicited based on the following four criteria: topic/content, language,
culture and authenticity thus provide the scope as well as function as the basis of analysis or framework to this study.

These four criteria are chosen because they are identified by Brumfit and Carter (1991), Carter and Long (1991), Duff and Maley (1991), Quinn (1992), Lazar (1993), Chitravelu et al. (2000) and McKay (2001) as among the most important factors to provide good literary texts in classroom. This means that other possible criteria which may also be found in the literary texts are not going to be perceived by the respondents. These criteria are further described below:

i. Topic/Content

Topics/contents need to be something familiar to the students to enhance comprehension of the issue presented (Silberstein, 1994). This is because a reading passage only makes sense to the students if they have the related information within their background knowledge.

The topics/contents (such as the life-styles or life-issues) of the literary texts have to be useful, meaningful (relevant) and interesting to the students (Kenji & Kathleen, 1997) so that the students could assimilate the new information to their existing ones.

ii. Language

The language used in the reading texts is also an important factor since it determines the readability of the texts to students (McKay, 2001). If the reading
texts used a lot of unfamiliar words or technical terms and complex sentences, these texts may cause comprehensible problem to its low proficiency students. Therefore, controlled language (vocabulary and grammar) used in the texts could avoid this problem among the students (Kenji & Kathleen, 1997).

iii. Culture

Readability is likely to be hindered not only by linguistic complexity but also cultural alienation (McKay, 2001). When considering this factor, think about how far the students’ cultural background and their social and political expectations will help or hinder their understanding of a text (Lazar, 1993).

On the other hand, it is also true that texts which may appear to be very remote in time and place from the world today may still have appeal for students in different countries around the world. In addition, many students may have a strong sense of curiosity about another culture and enjoy studying its literature because they believe it reveals key insights about that society (Brumfit & Carter, 1991).

iv. Authenticity

This factor should also be considered when using a literary text. Literature is expected to portray to students an authentic expression of life (real and meaningful life) and enable them to live and travel vicariously as literature is
supposed to provide them with glimpses of a range of lifestyles and this will broaden their world view (Lazar, 1993).

Additionally, authentic use of language is also necessary to familiarize the students to the use of language in real life situation (Ross, 1992). Students need meaningful inputs which are practiced outside of the classroom. By receiving the meaningful input students could see the rationale of learning the language through the texts.

1.3 Research Question

With regards to the objective of the research, the research question for this study is:

- What is the perception of ESL teachers of the literary texts used in the KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component in relation to the needs and abilities of Form Four and Form Five students, based on the criteria of:
  a. topic/content (suitability/relevance),
  b. language (level/appropriateness),
  c. culture (local/foreign/universal values),
  d. authenticity (originality/translation/adaptation/meaningfulness)

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will provide the ESL teachers some insights into the use of literary texts in the KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component.
These knowledge and understanding will help Form Four and Form Five ESL teachers in considering the required criteria when using the literary texts in the literature component. Additionally, it also helps to arouse awareness of the teachers in utilizing these literary texts as well as to take appropriate strategies in adapting them for their students.

The results of the study can also serve as an insight for the ESL teachers as it may provide some ideas to ESL teachers on what needs to be done to the teaching materials available in order to optimize their usage.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

Considerations must be given to the following limitations of the study:

This is a preliminary study of the topic therefore it is solely based on Form Four and Form Five ESL teachers and does not involve the students. This may affect the reliability of the study since in evaluating teaching material, the effectiveness of the teaching material to the intended students can only be gathered when feedback from them are obtained and observed. Besides, it will not be a complete study without students’ feedback. This is in line with what McDonough and Shaw (1993) state “...material evaluation is one of a complex process and that material once selected can only be judged successfully after classroom implementation and feedback.” Therefore, the complete study of this topic is to be done in the future which will include students’ perceptions in finding out the result.
The teachers' perception is solely based on the literary texts used in the KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component. Thus, the result of this study cannot be based on to make generalization on the literary texts used in other forms or years of secondary education because different forms would use different literary texts.

The results of the study are not meant to represent the whole population of Sarawak since the research is only done to samples from selected schools in Kuching division.

The perceptions of these selected ESL teachers are merely based on the four listed criteria: the topic/content, language, culture and authenticity which are found in the literary texts. These do not include perceptions on other possible criteria such as the illustrations and reading tasks which may also be found in the texts. Hence, the finding of this study should not be connected to other but strictly linked to these four criteria only.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

In the course of this study, several terminologies will be introduced. In view of this, it is vital that the definitions of these terminologies be clarified so that the meaning selected for this study is clear. However not all the terminologies are used repetitively throughout the study are defined here. The rest of the terminologies will be defined and explained as they appear in the context of use.
1.6.1 ESL Teachers

According to Chitravelu et al. (2000) a second language is not a native language of the country but is a language used for certain purposes and by certain people within the country. In relation to that, ESL teachers in this study refer to the teachers who teach English as a second language to Form Four and Form Five students who are not the native speakers of English.

1.6.2 Perception

‘Perception’ is defined as “a personal opinion or attitude; thought or comment on something” (Hornby, 2002). In this study, perceptions can be defined as the teachers’ personal views and opinions about the literary texts used in the KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component.

1.6.3 Literary Texts

Literary texts are referred to as “pieces of writing that may convey meaning through the ideas and information in its content and its form as well as by appealing to the senses, which may be seen, heard or felt” (Chitravelu et al., 2000). Quinn (1992) refers to ‘literary texts’ as “the literature that is not the use of everyday language but the play of words that capture the different level of meaning and purpose of the text.”

The literary texts mentioned in this study are poems, short stories and novels, as used in the KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component.
1.7 Conclusion

As a direct result of the introduction of the Literature Component in the English Language Syllabus, teachers are working towards fulfilling the aims and objectives of this programme. As such it is important that studies in this area be conducted to investigate and determine the problems L2 teachers encounter when teaching a literary text.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This study is concerned with seeking ESL teachers' perception towards the literary
texts used in KBSM English Form Four and Form Five Literature Component. The
aspects that are reviewed are:

1. The importance of teachers' perception in teaching literature
2. The significance of topics/content, language, culture and authenticity in
   utilizing literary texts
3. Related studies

2.1 The importance of teachers' perception in teaching literature

Teachers' perception in the teaching of literature is important because it contributes to
a number of essential issues which precede, accompany or follow the teaching in this
field. One of the most essential issues is the selection of suitable texts and materials for
use with their students.

2.1.1 Teachers' perception towards students' language proficiency and language
   in literary text

A teacher is the person who knows his/her students' level of linguistic proficiency best
so he/she can select texts and materials that suit them. With a good knowledge of, and
rapport with, a group of learners this usually works well (Lazar, 1993). It may well be that learners are classified as advanced and are able to communicate with ease in an English-speaking environment. Yet they might not be able to cope with the language of the text because it departs strikingly from the usual norms of language use; it includes rhetorical devices and metaphors; or it makes use of the dialect or register of a highly specialized field (such as law). Therefore, teachers may need to ask themselves questions such as the ones below when deciding whether or not to use a particular literary text:

i. Are students sufficiently familiar with the usual norms of language use to recognize when these are subverted?

ii. How much of the language in the text will students be able to infer?

iii. Will students find it useful and enjoyable to study the text, or will they feel demotivated by the difficulties of the language?

iv. Even if the language of the text is extremely difficult, will students be motivated by other factors to study the texts?

(Duff and Maley, 1991)

With the above in mind, teacher can better perceive whether a certain literary text is suitable for his/her students’ language proficiency.

2.1.2 Teachers’ perception on content of literary text

A teacher’s perception towards the content of a literary text is important in deciding whether or not the text would be appropriate for use with his/her students. The content of the literary text should be interesting enough to ‘hook’ the students to the text
(Brumfit and Carter, 1991). This means that teachers should consider the content presented in the text so that students are interested in it (or students' interests are closed to the topic or themes of text). The content presented in the text which refers to topics and themes should also be appropriate to the current scenario found in students' environment. As Chitravelu et al. (2000) put it, for the students to be able to 'inhabit' the world of the story, a sense of time and place is important. For example, in Bessie Head's short story “Looking for a rain God”, a seven-year drought has caused desperation which resulted in human sacrifice. This scenario may be a suitable topic to Malaysian students' current context if the country is facing an impending drought season. As the result, they would be able to empathize with the characters in the story. On the other hand, Shakespeare's “Sonnet 18” which has unfamiliar element such as 'summer day' may cause difficulty to Malaysian students since there is no change of season in this country. Thus, students cannot imagine the change of season due to their inexperience of such climate difference. This scenario may restrain their comprehension of the text. In brief, the perception that teachers have can in turn help students to choose the right text to be used in the classroom.

2.1.3 Teachers' perception on culture of literary text

Teachers' perception also helps them to think about how far the students' cultural background and their social and political expectations will help or hinder their students' understanding of a text (Lazar, 1993). It would be difficult, for example, for most students to make sense of Guy de Maupassant's “The Necklace” without having some knowledge of the class system and the values of the society they describe.
Teachers will also need to consider how much background they need to provide for their students to have at least a basic understanding of the text. A teacher should also consider that certain texts which may appear to be very remote in time and place from the world today may still have appeal for students. This is because students may have a strong sense of curiosity about another culture and enjoy studying its literature (Mckay, 2001). Again, it proves that teachers' perception is important in order to select literary text for classroom use.

2.1.4 Teachers’ perception on authenticity of literary text

Teachers' perception of a literary text may influence the authenticity of the materials used in the classroom. Based on the perception that they have, teachers may want to use the original version of the texts or adapted them by simplifying/summarizing the texts or use selected excerpts from the texts to teach literature (Quinn, 1992). Simplification is not generally favoured because of its reduction process. The original book is shortened in characters, situations and events, the vocabulary is restricted and the structures are controlled. Extracts are advantageous because they remove the burden of intensive lengthy reading. However, they are artificially isolated for teaching purposes and do not necessarily cultivate interest in reading in the ESL learner. A new solution is to use original simple texts which can be selected from a vast quantity of simple texts available within the body of literature in English (O'sullivan, 1991). With that, it is up to the teachers to select and decide based on their perception, what type of material is suitable for their classroom use.