PROBLEMS FACED BY PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN TEACHING LITERATURE COMPONENT: THE SHORT STORY

by

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Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

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Families and friends, your support and encouragement have enabled me to keep going. Thank you very much.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL SHEET</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLES OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. CHAPTER 1

**INTRODUCTION**

1.0 Background of the study 1
1.1 Statement of Problem 5
1.2 Research objectives 7
1.3 Significance of the study 8
1.4 Limitation of the study 8

2. CHAPTER TWO

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.0 Introduction 10
2.1 Contemporary Literature in Primary schools 10
2.2 Literature in English 12
2.2.1 The importance of literature 13
2.2.1.1 Language development 13
2.2.1.2 Cultural awareness 15
2.2.1.3 Personal development 16
2.3 Teachers roles and challenges in teaching short stories 17
2.4 Related studies 19
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.0 Selected short stories in Sarawak National schools.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1 (a) The titles for contemporary literature in National Schools.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1 (b) The titles for contemporary literature in National Schools.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1 (c) The titles for contemporary literature taught in SJK Schools.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1 (a) Respondents Years of Teaching Short Stories</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1 (b) Respondents years of teaching experience</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1 (c) Students level of proficiency</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1 (d) Respondents courses, seminars, workshops attended</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2.1 Teachers’ problems with the language in the texts</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2.2: Teachers’ problems with the Resources</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2.3: Teachers Trainings and Experience</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2.4: Teachers’ problems with the students</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3.1 Respondents’ Suggestions</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Problems Faced by Primary School English Teachers in Teaching Short Story

Tingai Lewen

This study aims to find out the Primary school English language teachers problems in teaching short story in Kuching-Samarahan Division. It also seeks to find out the causes of the problems faced by these teachers in implementing this literature component in schools. Apart from the above, this study investigates whether there are any differences in problems faced between experienced and newly employed teachers who are teaching English. Sixty English Language teachers teaching this component were involved in this study. Data was collected through the use of questionnaire as well as the semi-structured interviews. Based on the findings, there are many problems faced by these teachers and these problems are divided into four categories. The four main aspects of problems identified are the resources, trainings and experience, teachers' problems with the students and language. Concerning the problems faced by the experienced and the newly employed teachers, they shared the same types of problems. Recommendations and suggestions were given to undertake the identified problems which involved the Education Department, teachers and the schools.
ABSTRAK

Masalah-Masalah yang dihadapi oleh Guru Bahasa Inggeris Sekolah Rendah mengajar Komponen Sastera bercerita

Tingai Lewen

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

The Children Contemporary Literature was introduced to the Primary Schools English Language Syllabus starting January 2004 (Curriculum Development Centre, 2004). The aims and objectives stated in the Curriculum Development Centre 2004 are:

- To help pupils to improve their English through reading simple fiction particularly the short stories.
- To provide a continuum for the literature component introduced in secondary school.
- To instill and inculcate the reading habit among pupils.
- To enhance pupils thinking skills.
- To promote cultural understanding in the Malaysian context.
- To enrich pupils’ vocabulary and language content.
- To improve English language proficiency of pupils.
- To provide lively, enjoyable and high-interest readings
- To provide an early beginning and a strong foundation in learning literature.
• To enable the pupils to develop an understanding of other societies, cultures, values and traditions at an early stage that will help them in their emotional and spiritual growth. To continue a follow-up program to the structured reading program for Year 1 and 2 pupils that has been carried out.

Apart from the above, the CCL will also benefit primary school students as stated in the Curriculum Development Centre, 2004 and they are as follows;

• It provides personal and emotional gains which gives them enjoyment, develops their feelings and imagination as well as to help them to make sense of their own experience.

• It offers the pupils learning gains. This is useful to the pupils that permits them to learn new ideas and knowledge, adds to their understanding of concepts and allows children to understand the cultural traditions and values and issues in life in this world.

• It also offers pupils language gains. The language gains that they acquire will help children to develop an awareness of how language works in communication, helps them to develop an understanding of the meaning of words, allows them to experience new ways of using language that bridges the gap between written and spoken language, allows them to experience the shape of narratives and encourages them to become aware of their audience.
Contemporary Children literature in primary school is taught in Year 4, 5 and 6 classes. The literature component that is implemented in the Primary School Syllabus is only the short story. Only one 30 minute English language period is allocated for the teaching of this literature component out of the seven English Language periods per week.

As a start, the Ministry of Education is directing the English Language teachers to teach three short stories within a period of one year. The short stories were being pioneered to only the Year Four students in 2004. They will continue to have the short stories component until the reach secondary school level.

It is introduced into the primary school level because it can bring many advantages to the primary school pupils as being proved by the following people. Lazar (1994, p. 123) stated that literary texts can be used to extend the language knowledge and skills of the students at lower level. Lazar’s statement is been supported by Coolie and Slater (1987, p. 4) where “…reading literary texts will expose the students to many functions of written language…” and this will eventually widen the students perspectives of the world.

According to Saratha Sithamparam (2002) literature is a very useful resource for language learning. McRae (1991) added that by learning literature, it helps to develop the students’ the four language skills and their critical thinking skills. McRae (1991,
p. 19 - 20) went on further that reading Literature is believed to help students read the world and become better individuals in the society. Research has also been carried out by Lazar (1994, p. 116) and it is proven that literature component brought positive impacts to its learners regardless the young or adult learners.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher divided these possible problems into four main categories. The four categories are the teachers' language, teachers' problems with students, trainings and experiences as well as the problems of resources.

Some examples that fall under the teachers' and experience as well as the language aspects are the techniques, approaches, exposure and also their knowledge of literature component. McRae (1991, p. 10) stated that some English language teachers feel threatened by their own lack of knowledge.

Under the aspect of teachers having problems with their learners, some challenges faced would be their proficiency, learning styles and their interest in the literature component. Lazar (1994, p. 116) stated that Literature needs to be exposed to the students at the lower level to expand their overall language awareness. He continues on that the introduction of literature at the lower level will encourage them to draw on their personal opinions and experiences.
Regarding the aspect of resources, problems regarding the availability of reference books, text books, modules, activity books and other supplementary resources are investigated.

These are the following short stories taught in the government primary schools throughout some selected schools in Malaysia.

**Table 1.0 Selected short story in English subject for primary schools in Sarawak National schools.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Writer</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coral Bay Surprise</td>
<td>Barbara &amp; David</td>
<td>Rima Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Everyone is Good At Something</td>
<td>Peter Etherton</td>
<td>Falcon Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Humble Prince</td>
<td>Kumara Vellu</td>
<td>Oscar Book International</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.1 **Statement of Problems**

When the short story was introduced into Malaysian primary schools last year, many teachers were "caught unaware". As some teachers involved in the study said, "I was very surprised and confused when asked to teach this component that I have little knowledge". Teachers especially the non-optionists in particular, simply felt at sea as if they were navigating uncharted waters. Some discovered that they were asked to go
down the road that was overgrown with shrubs and bushes. Teachers didn’t expect literature would be taught at primary school level.

Some of these teachers might have no knowledge about literature whereas those who were being exposed to the basic literature during their past teachers training in colleges might not have enough confidence in applying their long lost knowledge to their students.

The problems that they might have such as the teaching techniques, problems with the provided texts in finding other sources to help them in teaching literature and devising relevant activities for their students, limited teaching and learning modules and minimal exposures.

Teachers’ problems can also be caused by their own students especially in terms of time management. Teachers might face problems with their students because of the students’ negative attitudes and physical disabilities. The problems caused by the students as mentioned above will cause the teachers to reorganize their time table before they can proceed to learn more short stories the following year. Apart from that, teachers need to finish teaching the three short stories within nine months which is approximately three months spend on each short story.
Based on the researcher's personal observations, experiences and informal discussions with some primary school teachers who are involved in this program, the researcher wishes to investigate on problems faced in teaching the literature component particularly the short story.

This study seeks to look into what are their problems and why are they facing these problems. Besides that, the researcher wishes to look into the prominent problems faced, differences in problems face in different areas and also whether there are any differences in problems faced by experienced and newly employed teachers. The data collection in this study requires teachers to provide feedback pertaining to the problems they faced, why are they are facing such problems as well as to give some recommendations or suggestions to remedy their problems faced.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are stated as follows:

1. To identify the problems faced by primary school teachers in teaching literature component and also to find out the causes of these teachers problems in schools.

2. To identify the differences of problems face between those teachers with more experiences and the newly employed teachers in teaching English subject.
1.3 **Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the study will be able to identify the problems faced by teachers and become a stepping stone or an eye opener for teachers to improve themselves in every aspect the lack of. Besides that, this study will provide an insight for the Ministry and school authorities to take measures and suggest ways to overcome the problems that were identified. Apart from the above, the results of this study will provide any interested researchers strong foundation to carry out further research in this area of study by involving bigger number of samples as well as at other places in our country.

1.4 **Limitation of the Study**

This study is only limited to some rural schools in Kuching-Samarahan district. Therefore, the result does not represent all the primary schools in Sarawak as well as in Malaysia as a whole. Besides that, the samples of this study were mainly from rural schools where their surroundings and problems faced from their peers in the urban area are very much different. Teachers from the rural area are much more disadvantaged compared to their peers in the urban area that will make the findings inappropriate to be generalized in all primary schools. Furthermore, since this program is newly implemented in our country, related studies in this area is very limited. The researcher will have difficulties in searching for literature reviews to support his findings. In addition, the time allocated to carry out this research is much shorter where the researcher has to rush out for the data, data analysis as well as for
the discussions. Apart from that, the researcher has to obtain letters of approval from the ministry at the state and ministry levels within three months before data collection is able to carry out in schools.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction
In this chapter, several aspects are discussed. The focus on what is the programme about, literature in English, the advantages of short story and the roles of teachers in teaching the short stories. Apart from that the challenges faced by the teachers in implementing the short story in the English Language classroom is also investigated.

2.1 Contemporary Literature in Primary schools
This programme is an intensive reading programme based on 3 prescribed texts per year. The texts consist of short stories and poems. Every pupil is provided with three books which will be completed within nine months. Different texts are given for national and national type school. The study on the following texts listed is expected to help inculcate values and increase students’ outlook for their social life.

Ganakumaran (2003, p.33), the reading material used in this programme includes especially those that are contemporary, mostly written in the 1990s, appeal to young learners, about children and their adventures, and those that tap into the learners’ imaginative potential. Peggy Heck cited in Hunt (1991, p. 19) said that literature brings the child into an encounter with language in its most complex and varied
forms. This will familiarize the students to the different types of genres in the English Language syllabus that need to be covered. Each type of genres have its’ own values and purpose which have the connection with the students interactions in their real-life situation. This will enable the students to function in the society they are in when they are going out and perform later.

Table 2.1 (a) The titles for contemporary Children’s literature in all national school in Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Perak, Selangor, Wilayah Persekutuan, Negeri Sembilan, Johore and Melaka.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Writer</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tidy Your Room, Tanya</td>
<td>Pamela Rushby</td>
<td>Kasma Productions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tales and Tall</td>
<td>Hyacinth Gaudart</td>
<td>Gapura Cita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The little Blue Boy</td>
<td>Fatou Keita</td>
<td>Danalis distributors</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 (b) The titles for contemporary Children’s literature in all national schools in Pahang, Terengganu, Sabah, Sarawak, Kelantan and Labuan.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The Humble Prince</td>
<td>Kumara Vellu</td>
<td>Oscar Book International</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.1 (c) The titles for contemporary Children’s literature taught in all the vernacular schools in Malaysia (SJK).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Writer</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caught in the Act</td>
<td>Patricia Sealey</td>
<td>Johor Central Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Old House</td>
<td>Sandra Clayton</td>
<td>Rekatext Publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A Wise Man</td>
<td>Chan Siew Mei</td>
<td>Mika Canggih</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Literature in English

Carter and Long (1991, p. 3) defined Literature in English as the use of the literary texts as a resource for teaching English Language. They discussed further that literature can be a special resource for personal development and growth, an aim being to encourage greater sensitivity and self-awareness and greater understanding of the world around us. Their study was supported by Saratha Sithamparam (2002) where she agreed that Literature is regarded as a very useful resource for language learning.

Wong (2003, p. 141) perceived that through literature, we can learn about ourselves, other people, other places and other times. Ronnqvist and Sell (1994, p. 125) said that reading literature encourages students to use their brains in an effort to acquire the new knowledge they need in order to understand passages which puzzles them. This will enable some optimistic students to use and stimulate what they have acquired from their readings in their development of an integrative motivation in their teaching learning process. Collie and Slater (1987, p. 3) agreed that literature is an authentic
material whereby learners are exposed to the language that is as genuine and undistorted as can be managed in the classroom context. This will allow the students to have a first hand contact with the materials which are more original and having the latest data available.

This will lead to the discussion on the advantages of teaching literature component particularly the short story in primary schools which are discuss under three sections, language development, culture awareness and personal development,

2.2.1 The Importance of Literature

The introduction of literature into the school curriculum promotes the students development in many different aspects. Some of their identified developments as stated by Saratha Sithamparam (2002), Collie and Slater (1987), Carter and Long (1991) are their language, culture and personal development. These importances are again being discussed by Lazar (1993. p. 14 – 19), that literature not only can educate a person linguistically but can educate a person as a whole. Gurnam Kaur Sindhu (2003, p. 90) posited that literature is a mirror of life where it engages learners intellectually, emotionally and linguistically.

2.2.1.1 Language Development

Carter and long (1991, p. 2) stated that literature is an instrument for use in connection with the teaching of specific vocabulary or structures or for language
manipulation. It enables the students to be developed in all their four language skills as well as to promote their critical thinking skills. Students exposed to literature teaching will put the students in touch with some of the more subtle and varied creative uses of the language which will help the students to find ways into a text in a methodical way and for themselves.

Coolie and Slater (1987, p. 4-5) added that reading literary texts help students to familiarize them with many features of the written language – formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas – which broaden and enrich their own writing skills. They continue on elaborating that students learning literature should become more creative and adventurous as they begin to appreciate the richness and variety of the language they are trying to master and begin to use some of that potential themselves (Coolie and Slater, ibid, p. 5).

The Curriculum Development Centre (2004) agreed that bringing in the literature component into the English primary school syllabus provides the pupils learning gains. This is useful to the pupils that permits them to learn new ideas and knowledge, adds to their understanding of concepts and allows children to understand the cultural traditions and values and issues in life in this world. Besides that literature also offers students language gains. The language gains that they acquired will help children to develop an awareness of how language works in communication,
helps them to develop an understanding of the meaning of words, allows them to experience new ways of using language that bridges the gap between written and spoken language, allows them to experience the shape of narratives and encourages them to become aware of their audience.

2.2.1.2 Cultural Awareness

According to Carter and Long (ibid, p. 2), literature enables students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space and to come to perceive tradition thought, feeling and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows. Ronnqvist and Sell (ibid, p. 125) agreed to what Carter and Long have said whereby reading a literary text gives learners a chance to contextualize on the basis of the cultural knowledge they already have.

Brumfit and Carter (1986, p.17) stated the different cultures will value different things that students from other cultures, attention needs to be given selection of materials which on the one hand is the representative of different tradition discourse types, writers in English literature but which on the other is valued appropriately by the readers to whom it is taught.

Coolie and Slater (ibid, p. 4) believed that literature is best seen as a complement to other materials used to increase the foreign learners insight into the country whose language is being learnt. Through involving in the literature world, readers can access
to other people cultures by reading the literary texts written by any individual writers. It is also from here that readers have clear understanding of other people cultures which would enable readers to be more aware of the differences to avoid any possible misunderstanding.

McKay (1982, p. 531) believed that literary texts may facilitate “a greater tolerance for cultural difference for both the teacher and the students” whose understanding of a foreign culture may increase through examining the literature of that culture. McKay cited in Brumfit and Carter (ibid, p. 193) stressed on that examination of a foreign culture through literature may increase students understanding of that culture and perhaps spur their own imaginative writing. Lazar (1993, p. 62), said that exposing students to literature from other cultures is an enriching and exciting way of increasing their awareness of different values, beliefs, social structures and so on.

2.2.1.3 Personal Development

The Curriculum Development Centre (2004) stated that introducing literature into the English language syllabus provides personal and emotional gains which gives them enjoyment, develops their feelings and imagination as well as to help them to make sense of their own experience.

Carter and Long (ibid, p. 3) suggested that literature teaching enables to carry the students beyond the classroom an enjoyment and love for literature which is renewed
as they continue to engage with literature throughout their lives. This statement is supported by Lazar (1994, p. 116) where students need to be exposed to the literary texts to encourage them to draw on their personal opinions and experiences. They continue on believing that learning and appreciating literature will enable students to have a lasting pleasure in reading. Besides that it could inculcate a deep satisfaction in a continuing growth of understanding of our society and culture and of ourselves as we function within the society and culture.

Coolie and Slater (ibid, p. 6) mentioned that literature can be helpful in the language learning process because of the personal involvement it fosters in the readers. While the readers are reading a literary text, they are eager to find out what happens as the events unravel. They could feel how the characters in the texts experience as the events unfold by sharing their emotional responses. Maley and Duff (1994, p. 10) asserted that literature can make people react personally to other people’s ways of seeing things and can engage both their intellect and their feelings.

2.3 Teachers roles and challenges in teaching short story in English Language Class

Since this component is new in the primary school English Language subject, the roles of teachers must be very challenging. Even the secondary school teachers who are supposed to have better literature methodology were having much difficulty, what more to be compared to the primary school teachers who have no formal training in