



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human
Development**

**TECHNIQUES USED BY EXPERIENCED ENGLISH TEACHERS
TEACHING LITERATURE IN THE MALAYSIAN SECONDARY
CLASSROOMS**

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by

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This final year project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
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The project entitled **Techniques Used by Experienced English Teachers Teaching Literature in the Malaysian Secondary Classrooms** was prepared by Lyndy Tan and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Education with Honours (Teaching English as a Second Language).

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ABSTRACT

TECHNIQUES USED BY EXPERIENCED ENGLISH TEACHERS TEACHING LITERATURE IN THE MALAYSIAN SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

Lyndy Tan

This study aimed to identify the techniques/classroom activities used by the more experienced English teachers teaching literature. For the purpose of these study, experienced English teachers were teachers with more than 5 years experience teaching literature. The objectives of this study were to identify the techniques/classroom activities used by the more experienced teachers to encourage students' active participation. Next was to identify the verbal reinforcements used and lastly to find out ways experienced teachers used to overcome weaknesses faced by students in literature classroom. Participants of this study were 16 experienced teachers teaching literature from 4 secondary schools in Kuching. A survey research design was chosen using interviews and observation as instruments. Interview questions were mainly about the techniques/used by the more experienced teachers to encourage students participation, the verbal reinforcement used and ways to deal with students weaknesses in literature lessons. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Based on the transcript, similar pattern from the data was identified and group according to the interview questions. Observations were done twice with each selected teacher using an observation checklist whereby data collected was analyzed to find out if it supports data from the interviews. The result of the study was group based on the research objectives. The techniques/classroom activities most used by the more experienced teachers to encourage students' active participation were such as discussion and question and answer. The most used verbal reinforcements were such as well done and very good. Different learners used different ways to overcome their weaknesses depending on their needs. Tried and used methods were provided by the more experienced teacher in this study. Implications were it gives further insights to newly-qualified teachers, improving their teaching and learning process of literature.

ABSTRAK

TEKNIK YANG DIGUNAKAN OLEH GURU BAHASA INGGERIS BERPENGALAMAN DALAM MENGAJAR KESUSASTERAAN BAHASA INGGERIS DI SEKOLAH MENENGAH

Lyndy Tan

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti teknik/aktiviti yang digunakan oleh guru yang berpengalaman dalam pengajaran kesusasteraan Bahasa Inggeris. Objektif-objektif kajian adalah mengenalpasti teknik/aktiviti yang digunakan oleh guru berpengalaman untuk menggalakkan penglibatan aktif para pelajar, mengenal pasti galakkan lisan yang guru-guru berpengalaman gunakan dan cara-cara guru berpengalaman menyelesaikan masalah yang dihadapi oleh pelajar dalam matapelajaran kesusasteraan Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini melibatkan 16 guru berpengalaman dalam matapelajaran kesusasteraan Bahasa Inggeris. Instrumen yang digunakan ialah temuramah dan pemerhatian. Temuramah direkodkan dan dibuat transkripsi. Berdasarkan transkrip, penyelidik mengelaskan data mengikut saolan temuramah. Pemerhatian dilakukan dengan menggunakan senarai semak. Data didapati daripada senarai semak dianalisis. Penyelidik menyemak sama ada data didapati daripada pemerhatian menyokong data daripada temuramah. Keputusan kajian disebarkan berdasarkan objektif kajian. Teknik/aktiviti yang paling kerap digunakan oleh guru berpengalaman untuk menggalakkan penglibatan aktif pelajar-pelajar adalah seperti perbincangan serta soal dan jawab. Bagi galakkan lisan yang paling kerap digunakan oleh guru berpengalaman adalah seperti cemerlang, baik dan syabas. Bagi cara menyelesaikan masalah yang dihadapi oleh para pelajar dalam matapelajaran kesusasteraan Bahasa Inggeris, didapati bahawa setiap pelajar mempunyai keperluan individu yang berbeza. Teknik yang telah dicuba dan digunakan oleh guru berpengalaman dalam menghadapi masalah yang ditemui oleh para pelajar dalam matapelajaran kesusasteraan Bahasa Inggeris telah diberikan dalam kajian ini. Implikasi kajian ini adalah memberi wawasan dan panduan kepada guru baru mengajar kesusasteraan Bahasa Inggeris.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| CRP | Class Reader Program |
| FYP | Final Year Project |
| LCE | Literature Component in the English Language |
| LEP | The Literature in English Programme |
| PMR | <i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i> |
| SPM | <i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> |
| MELTA | Malaysian English Language Teachers Association |
| TESL | Teaching English as a Second Language |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the setting of the research problem. Consequently it explains the purpose and objectives of the study, the operational definitions of terms and also the significance of the study.

1.1 Setting of the Research Problem

The teaching of literature has been resurrected as a vital component of English language teaching in the year 2000 as the Ministry of Education makes effort to bring literature back to the Malaysian classrooms. All students from Form 1 to Form 5 are required to learn this component while students in Form 6 are given a choice to take or not to take this subject. It started of in the year 2000 with the introduction of Literature Component in the English Language syllabus (LCE) in Malaysian secondary schools. The aim of LCE is to enhance students' proficiency in the English language through the study of prescribed literary texts. "...the literature component was introduced as a compulsory module for secondary school students in 2000 to help students enhance language proficiency"

(Curriculum Development Centre, 2007). This is due to the fact that literature is beginning to be viewed as an appropriate vehicle for language and development since the current focus is on authentic language and situations.

As students read the prescribed literary text they will be more aware of the language. According to Collie and Slater, (1987), 'reading literary works exposes students to many functions of written language...'. Other than that, literature also makes a contribution to the students' personal development and character building since literature requires personal involvement of students.

However before the introduction of the literature component two fundamental programs were introduced. There were the Class Reader Program (CRP) and The Literature in English Programme (LEP). CRP was introduced in 1989 while the latter in 1992. Both these programs aim to revive literature in our Malaysian classroom.

CRP, a reading programme provides students with a chance to read English literary materials. This programme was rather successful but it was just a bridge for literature studies. It can only be "used to introduce concepts such as plot, story, characterization, point of view and so on" (Nesamalar et al, 1995: 262)

In consequent, LEP was offered as an elective subject as an effort by the Ministry of Education to promote literature in secondary schools. However it received poor response from school as it is not a compulsory subject and was excluded in examinations. "... only 3 schools chose to offer LEP to their students in Kuching," (Stuel, D.T, 2000).

The Literature Component in English was introduced in the year 2000 through 3 different stages, beginning from Form 1 and Form 4 in the year 2000, Form 1 & 2 and Form 4 & 5 in the following year. By the year 2002, all classes ranging from Form 1 to Form 5 are required to learn literature. It is also included in the public examinations namely PMR and SPM and is tested through 3 modes which are

multiple-choice questions, open-ended objective questions and lastly free-response type questions.

Benefits of learning the literature component are to improve students English language proficiency as claimed by the Curriculum Development Center. Other than that, literature is beginning is an appropriate vehicle for language and development since the current focus is on authentic language and situations. Another benefit of literature is it make a contribution to the students' personal development and character building since literature requires personal involvement of students.

However, many students seem to view it differently, believing that it is a difficult subject hence making teaching literature challenging for teachers.

In addition, teachers themselves were also having negative perceptions towards literature. "...the component was initially perceived as an unnecessary burden as it not only added to the workload of the teachers but also brought them new problems to grapple with, including teaching complex themes and difficult language to students with low English proficiency" (The Star, 2007). This statement was supported by a quote from Galea (2004). "Teaching literature in an ESL context can be a daunting task where young students who lack the mastery of the English language struggle to deal with their literary texts...' (Galea, 2004).

Literature is undeniably a subject which might at times be rather challenging not only in learning but also in teaching. These situations create problems for English language teacher teaching the literature component as many teachers faced dilemma in teaching literature. Teachers from various secondary schools teaching literature posted their viewpoints on forums regarding the problems and challenges faced, for instance in MELTA, 2007 states that one of teachers main dilemma is students proficiency in the English language. "The primary problem was that many of the students did not have the required proficiency to understand or take in the aesthetic elements of the language" (Teh, 2007). Their different level of difficulty

made it difficult for teacher to teach at the same time and to make students understand.

Other than that, most students look at literature as a difficult subject and they often gets very low exposure to literature in life (Shasha, 2007). This increased the weight on teachers teaching literature as the less motivated students are the worse they will perform.

The other major dilemma teachers faced in teaching literature includes time constraints in trying out different techniques to teach all necessary and important elements of literature as teachers are too busy trying to finish up the syllabus. This will only increased students' negative view in literature. These are dilemmas posted by teachers on a forum in MELTA. It also mentions that newly qualified teachers often lack experience when it comes to teaching in real life situations and these teachers need to spend time to prepare relevant teaching materials in order to make the students motivated to learn (Cheah, P. G., 2006).

Experience teachers on the other hand, having real life experience dealing with students weaknesses in learning literature are often more able to use a wider range of classroom activities to evoke students participation as well as motivate students to higher their level of interest towards learning literature. Experience teachers also adopt a number of techniques in teaching literature to help students to help students understand better and to keep them actively participating in class. In a forum in MELTA 2007 teachers state that experience teachers are better aware of their responsibility and more capable in figuring out ways to overcome students' weaknesses.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The literature component was first introduced in the year 2000. Teachers of secondary schools who are given the responsibility to teach the literature component faced dilemma. 'These teachers considered teaching literature problematic as teaching the literature component is considered parts and parcels of the English language (Roo, 2000). This is due to the reason that a major difference between teaching English and teaching literature is, in a language lesson authentic context are always used. However in teaching literature, learners need to be emotionally involved in the action that takes place in the reader's imagination(Roo, 2000).

However, teachers participating in MELTA forums 2007 mentioned that teaching literature is actually quite distance from teaching the English language. This can be seen through the aims and objective of the literature component which are separated from the English language in the curriculum specification. It is not only to develop students' language competence but also to create awareness and understandings of issues, cultures and traditions.

Different techniques are employed to teach literature in order to achieve its aims and objectives. However teachers faced problems in deciding the appropriate techniques used but this problem reduced in line with teachers experienced. Many secondary school teachers pointed out these issues in forums. Deciding on the techniques used is one major obstacles faced by newly-qualified teachers.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher hope to find out the effective techniques adopt by the more experienced teachers in teaching the literature component.

In consequent, the researcher would like to look at the classroom activities used by the more experienced teachers in order to encourage students' participation in class as students' in the Malaysian classroom are often passive learners.

Verbal reinforcements are also used by the more experience teachers in teaching literature to encourage the more passive students' participation would also be looked upon.

Students often faced problems in learning the literature component. Students view this component as a difficult subject. "...the effectiveness in teaching the component is undermined by the fact that many students find the texts boring and depressing" (The Star, 2007). Therefore it is a need to look at how the more experienced teachers deal with weakness faced by students.

In schools, where newly-qualified teachers lack exposure to teaching the literature component, more difficulties are met. These teachers are to select appropriate techniques, compatible with the students' needs and level of proficiency in order to meet the aims and objectives outlined in the 2006 English language syllabus.

1.3 Research Objectives

In the teaching of literature, no specific technique can be considered best or most suitable in teaching literature. Different teachers in schools prefer to use different techniques in teaching literature. Therefore in this study, the researcher wishes to:

- i. Identify the techniques and classroom activity most used by the more experience teachers to encourage students' participation in class.
- ii. Identify the verbal reinforcement used by the more experienced teachers.
- iii. Find out the different techniques experienced teachers use to help students' overcome their weaknesses and problems encountered in a literature classroom.

1.4 Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will be guided by the following questions:

- i. What are the techniques and classrooms activities used by the more experience teachers to encourage students' participation in class?
- ii. What are the types of verbal reinforcement teachers practiced in their literature classroom to encourage students in learning literature?
- iii. What techniques do the more experience teachers employ to help students overcome problems encountered when learning literature?

1.5 Operational definition of terms

The following are operational definition of terms for the purpose of this study.

Newly-Qualified Teachers

Newly-Qualified teachers for the purpose of this study are any teachers who have less than 1 year experience of classroom teaching experience in a public secondary school whereas for the purpose of this study experience teachers are teachers with more then 5 years experience in teaching. Teachers who have 1-5 years of teaching experience were excluded in this study.

Techniques

Richard, J.C, Platt, J. & Platt H (1992:20) confirmed that techniques are “different kinds of classroom activity”. In consequent, this refers to the tasks that the teachers used for teaching and learning in classrooms.

A wide variety of exercises, activities or devices used in the language classroom for realizing lesson objectives. (Brown, 1999)

For the purpose of this project, the researcher will adopt Brown’s (1999) definition of techniques. For the purpose of this study, techniques and classroom activities are used interchangeably.

Classroom Activities

Classroom activities for the purpose of this study refer to the activities students carry out in the literature lesson. For the purpose of this study, techniques and classroom activities are used interchangeably.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement is the use of consequences to strengthen behaviour. Positive reinforcement is strengthening behaviour by presenting a desired stimulus after the behaviour. (Woolfolk, 2004)

Verbal Reinforcement

Some type of positive comments teacher follows after students’ action or responses to show that what they say is important and increase the degree of student participation. (Moore, 2001). For the purpose of this study, some examples of verbal reinforcements are such as good, well done, very good and excellent.

1.6 Significance

Practically the significance of this study is to compile a variety of common techniques used by the more experienced teachers and classroom activities which the more experienced teachers used to teach literature. These techniques and classroom activities could be a guide or a choice for the newly-qualified teachers to adopt in their literature classroom. Teachers in MELTA forums 2007 mentioned that teachers who lack experienced in teaching literature often feels that teaching literature is a burden as they are unclear of how exactly should literature lesson be carried out. Therefore this study can serve as a guide for the newly-qualified teachers teaching literature in secondary schools.

Other than that it is to identify the different types of verbal reinforcement which experienced teachers use in their teaching in literature classrooms. These could also be useful to the newly qualified teachers and also teachers in general. Students need to be motivate in literature classroom as many students think that literature is a boring and difficult subject. This is confirmed by Galea & Kaur (2004). Students often faced difficulty in learning literature as mentioned in the study done by Galea & Kaur (2004).

Lastly the significance of this study is to gain a further insight on how experienced teachers deal with the common problems faced by students and ways to overcome the students' weaknesses. These findings can be helpful to the newly-qualified teachers and also teachers teaching literature in general.

1.7 Scope of study

The scope of study for this research are to look into and identify the techniques/classroom activities used by the more experienced teachers in teaching literature to encourage students active participation. For the purpose of this study, experienced teachers are teachers with more than 5 years experience in teaching. Next the researcher will identify the verbal reinforcements practice by these experienced teachers teaching literature to encourage students participation. Then the

researcher will look into the common problem faced by students in literature lessons and ways these experienced teachers used to overcome the weaknesses faced. The participants selected for this study are 16 more experienced teachers teaching literature in 4 different secondary schools in Kuching. The instruments used for collecting data are interviews and observations. Each participant will be interviewed for about 30 minutes and each participant will be observed twice during their literature lessons. Teachers with 1 to 5 years experience will not be involved in this study.

1.8 Limitations

The main limitation of the study will be due to the limited number of schools and teachers selected as the 4 schools and the 16 teachers will not give a complete view of teaching literature in the large number of schools both in the state level and the national level.

Observations conducted might also not be able to give the students a complete view of how literature classes are conducted. The presence of the researcher might disrupt the students and the teacher. Both the teachers and students might not act as their usual self. This would prevent letting the researcher see the actual literature lesson being conducted.

1.9 Summary

Literature is now a compulsory subject which will be tested in all examinations, school-based examinations and also in public examinations such as PMR, SPM and STPM. However both teachers and students are still encountering problems in the teaching and learning of literature. Students view it as a difficult and boring subject mainly due to their level of proficiency in the English Language. Teachers on the other hand, need to use various techniques to help students learn literature, to encourage students' participation in class and to help them overcome their weaknesses in literature. Therefore this study is to look upon the techniques and classroom activities used by the more experienced teachers in teaching literature and

how students' participation in class is encouraged. The researcher also shows concern on the verbal reinforcements used and ways to help students overcome difficulties in the literature classrooms. This can then serve as a guide for the newly-qualified teachers.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature component in English in the Malaysian context. It describes the techniques in teaching literature practiced by teachers in the public secondary schools. This chapter also identifies the classroom activities used in teaching literature. Lastly, it identifies ways teachers help students overcome students' weaknesses when learning literature.

2.1 Literature component in the Malaysia

Literature was taught in schools when English was the medium of instruction in the 60's and the 70's (Rosli, 1995). The importance of literature in schools started to decline when the objective of language study changes its focus to the proficiency achievement. Its' role became even less important when the government replace English with Bahasa Malaysia, our national language through the Educational Enactment Bill in 1997.

However when literature was brought back to Malaysian secondary classroom in the 1990s', its aim is to 'enhance students' English language proficiency level' (Curriculum Development Centre, 2007)

In addition, learners will also learn about various cultures in the world through literature. This will help students' tolerate the differences between cultures, traditions and religions. This is an important aspect in our multicultural society.

In the English Language Curriculum Specification from Form 1 to Form 5, literature is categorized under aesthetic purposes. This goes in line with the aspiration of the National Educational Philosophy to produce holistic individuals in terms of intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical development.

Literature was first brought back to our Malaysian classroom in 1989 through Class Readers Program (CRP). The aim of this program is to expose student to literary text leading to higher level of language proficiency. It is viewed as a stepping stone in the revival of the literature component. 'Class Readers Programme is not literature but it is just a stepping stone to introduce to the students about the concepts such as plot, point of view, story, characterization and others in storybooks' (Nesamalar, Sitnamparam, 1997).

In 1992, another program known as the Literature in English Program (LEP) was introduced to students in higher secondary school. Its aims are to increase students' capability in reading literary texts, comprehend the literary text read and to appreciate the literary texts. LEP is included in the external examination but it was not a compulsory program.

In March 2000, Literature Component in English was introduced. It is made compulsory for all Form 1 and Form 4 students. In 2002, all secondary students are to study this component. Its aims are to engage students in reading for both self development and enjoyment. It is also to help students understand the customs and traditions of the society and to optimize the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical potential of learners. (The list of literature texts used in secondary schools can be found in Appendix A.)

Teachers teaching literature will be guided by the aims and objectives of the Literature Component in English. Its aims are stated in the English Language Curriculum Specification. It includes improving students' English language proficiency, for learners' personal development and character building and also to widen students' knowledge regarding other cultures and world views based on the Curriculum Development Centre.

Teacher plays a major role in achieving the aims and objectives of teaching the Literature Component in English. Teachers need to take into account students' learning ability, learning environment as well as approaches used to present their literature lessons. However the effectiveness of the Literature Component in English is affected by various factors. These factors include the techniques used and classroom activities conducted.

2.2 Approaches for Teaching Literature in the Malaysian Classroom

Teaching literature is different from language teaching. McRae (1991) states referential texts are always used whereby the emphasis is on language that is inclined to everyday real-life situational use. However, in the teaching of literature he points out that representational text are used because it brings about personal interaction between the text and reader. The differences mentioned need teachers to take into consideration the approaches used to present their literature lesson.

The approaches that are suggested by the advocates of literature are; the language-based approach, reader-response approach and the stylistic approach (Carter and Long, 1991, Lazar, 1993 and Brumfit and Carter, 1986)