TEACHERS’ PREFERRED PRACTICES IN TEACHING LITERATURE COMPONENT IN KUCHING – SAMARAHAN DIVISIONS SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Education with Honours (TESL)

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The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled “Teachers’ Preferred Practices in Teaching Literature Component in Kuching – Samarahan Divisions Secondary Schools” is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except where due reference is made.

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Najah Binti Ramlan
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ABSTRACT

TEACHERS’ PREFERRED PRACTICES IN TEACHING LITERATURE COMPONENT IN KUCHING – SAMARAHAN DIVISIONS SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Najah Binti Ramlan

Literature component is one of the content that is included in the new English language curriculum for all secondary schools in Malaysia. The curriculum goals have stated clearly that literature component should engage students in reading for enjoyment and self-development. However, it is actually very rare to see that these aspirations being implemented during the teaching of literature component in the real English language classroom setting. The respondents of this study are the English language teachers who have been teaching the subject for more than 8 years. This study aim to identify the kind of practices that the English language teachers use when teaching literature component in class, the reasons behind the selection practices being used and also the teachers’ views on the extent of the practices being used meet the aspirations of the new national secondary school English curriculum goals. In this study, the practices being chosen are greatly determined by their students’ level of proficiency in the language. The reason was mainly because the students did not have the language so it is hard to vary their practices especially towards communicative way. Examination also became one of the concerns in teaching literature to students. They could not teach something without referring to examination because results were important. Lastly, all teachers knew that their practices would not meet the aspirations but they just could not avoid for reasons as mentioned previously.
KAEDAH MENGAJAR YANG DIGEMARI OLEH GURU-GURU SEMASA MENGAJAR KOMPONEN SASTERA BAHASA INGGERIS DI SEKOLAH-SEKOLAH MENENGAH DI KAWASAN KUCHING DAN SAMARAHAN

Najah Binti Ramlan

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study is conducted to find out the preferred practices that English language teachers in Kuching - Samarahan divisions use in teaching literature component to their students. It shall also include the reasons behind the selection of activities that the teachers use in teaching literature component in a language classroom. Furthermore, the teachers’ views on to what extent do their designated practices in teaching literature component meet the aspirations of the new national secondary school English curriculum goals shall also be reported. For this introductory chapter, it will consist of several parts or sections which are the background of the study, statement of problem, objectives of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, scope of the study, and also the definitions of key concepts.

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature is said to be a form of art that reflects the various aspects of society and it is not just a mere entertainment source (Clandfield, 2003). It signifies high status to many countries and cultures around the world. Many years
ago, literature holds a very great ‘power’ and it is so powerful that it comes to take the central role in English civilization. Some may view literature as a ‘body of knowledge’ that should ‘be learnt for its own sake’ (O’Sullivan, 1991) while some may possibly see it as a ‘sine qua non’ especially to the educated individuals (Carter & Long, 1991). Furthermore, literature is believed to be the best model or medium to learn the target language and integrating literature in the language classroom can be very beneficial especially to the language learners (Adamson, 1989). It also able to provide a medium that can motivates language learning, develops empathy and promotes creative and critical thinking skills among the language learners (Aly, 2003). In addition, literary texts are also believed to be able to initiate and generate the language learners to actually learn and see the different aspects of culture and have a new insight about others and their uniqueness (Mills, 1997).

Despite all those positive views about literature, there are still many contradicting notions about literature being debated especially regarding the issue on integrating literature to the language classroom. Questions do arise on the competency that the learners should have in order to comprehend the literary texts that they have to read. Linguistic difficulty often becomes the ultimate barrier in implementing literature into the language teaching (O’Sullivan, 1991). Literary texts are usually referred to be very complex with so much ‘compression’ in meanings and the language being used are usually of ‘high style’ with all the ‘loftiness’ and ‘grandeur’ in the arrangement and use of words, sentence structures, conversation, metaphor and so on (Miles, Bertonasco & Karns, 1991). Teachers might need to think very hard when deciding on whether to include literature into their language classroom or not. O’Sullivan (1991) describes two most vital points that need to be taken into consideration before integrating literature in class, which are:

1. the requirement for a learner to posses the knowledge of the intricacies of language, and
2. the need to acquire an inherent interpretative ability to gain the writer’s message.

Traditionally, these might be the issues that haunt many educators on whether to include or not to include literature in the language classroom. However, as time goes by, many believe that literature does serve a lot of benefits especially towards the development of the learners’ language ability and proficiency. Adamson (1989) believes that the role of literature in a language classroom can be fully utilized if the idea that the ‘literary language’ is more complicated and ‘contorted’ than the familiar and typical spoken language is neglected. Furthermore, Carter and Long (1991) reveal that the usage of literature especially in the ESL and EFL contexts can really help in achieving three main learning objectives through the use of three models; (i) the language model, (ii) the cultural model and (iii) the personal growth model.

According to Carter and Long (1991), when teaching literature based on the language model, teachers can expose the language learners with various linguistic features available in the target language. For that reason, literary texts become the best example or sample to be used in class to teach learners about syntax, morphology, mechanics, stylistics, registers, et cetera. Meanwhile, with the cultural model, they indicate that the language learners will be able to understand, appreciate and get to know about the differences of each culture and try to relate that with their own culture to broaden their views about the uniqueness and the distinctiveness of cultures that are available around the world. In addition, the personal growth model is suitable for teachers who really believe that literature teaching can allow students to engage and ‘interact’ with the literary texts and be able to develop a sense of enjoyment in reading literature pieces (Carter and Long, 1991). As it is more of a student-centred approach, learners’ motivation can be increased by letting them to read the literary texts and relate the issues available in the texts with their own background knowledge and personal experiences.
Looking at the potential of literature to promote learning in a language classroom, educators in the ESL / EFL fields believe that integrating literature in the language classroom can be very beneficial to the second or foreign language learners. Saraceni (2003) describes in his work that literature is an important component in a foreign language courses for many years already. It can helps in promoting linguistics development, cultivating personal growth and encouraging cultural enrichment among the foreign language learners. Furthermore, he also mentions that literature is also seen as a resource for language teaching as it is authentic and undeniably more interesting to be used in teaching the foreign and second language learners. According to Chan (2003), English language can be very interesting to be taught and learnt via drama activities as the activities are more ‘contextualized and purposeful’. He also added to this point that drama activities allow foreign language learners to use the language and communicate with each other by using the target language. Through this way, learners will be able to practice using the target language and also develop their language accuracy and fluency.

In Malaysia, literature has been recognized positively by the local educators as beneficial especially in term of developing students’ language proficiency. Various reading programmes such as Class Reader Programme (CRP) and Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca (NILAM) are being introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) who believes that literature can enhances target language learning and also encourages extensive reading. In the year 2000, new curriculum that has been introduced integrates literature into the English language syllabus and it is one of the compulsory components in English subject for all forms in the secondary schools level. The other components that are included in this new syllabus are reading, writing, listening and speaking. Literature is integrated into the new English language syllabus since it is the best model or resource for second language learning and it can also develops interest in students to enjoy learning English (Centre of Curriculum Development, 2000; Chitravelu, Sithamparam & Choon, 1995). Based on those and many other
reasons, the literature component in English language programme (LiEP) is designed with the aims to teach students to read and enjoy prose, poems and plays, to inculcate the elements of literature in language learning and to develop their writing skills (Centre of Curriculum Development, 2000; Vethamani, 2004). It is also hoped that through this new component, language learners will be able to appreciate literature, to enjoy reading literary texts, to express themselves and the most important of all is to develop a holistic self-development in them.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Literature component in the English language syllabus is one of the content that is included in the new English language curriculum for secondary schools in Malaysia. It involves various literary texts from various genres (novel, short story and poem) and also from various cultures (African, American, Malaysian, et cetera). The curriculum goals have clearly stated that literature component should engage students in reading for enjoyment and self-development (Centre of Curriculum Development, 2000). However, it is actually very rare to see that these aspirations being implemented during the teaching of literature component in the real English language classroom setting. Therefore it is important to see whether the teachers feel that their practices meet those aspirations or not.

According to Subramaniam, Shahizah and Koo (2003), some teachers feel that the teaching of literature component is not relevant at all and they are very worried on the kind of damages that they might bring when teaching it as they are lacked of knowledge on the methodology of literature teaching. They also add to the point that because of those factors, the teachers will have to closely referring to the examination questions in order to teach the literature component. In addition, teachers will face a lot of difficulties and problems in achieving those aspirations because they have to keep track on the syllabus and also the exam-oriented mindset of the society where the numbers of A’s become the determiner
on whether a student is successful or not. As this is happening, teachers will have to forget about including the fun aspects of learning literature but just to go through with the ‘exam style’ in teaching the literature component which include giving notes and doing a lot of exam-formatted questions in class.

In the part of students, they do not enjoy learning the literature component and these are due to some reasons such as the teacher is dull and boring and the activities being employed during the lesson are merely consisting of worksheets and workbook’s exercises by which they consider those activities as unchallenging, boring, simple and a ‘nightmare’ (Sidhu, 2003). This eventually leads to the downfall of students’ interest in learning literature in class. The facts that teachers usually employ similar and conventional teaching practices such as chalk and talk, note taking, et cetera even when teaching literature makes the learning experience not encouraging and ineffective to the students (Narasuman, 2006). However, when the teachers employ different styles in teaching the literature component namely class discussions and other fun activities, students feel that they are having fun and they could learn something out of those activities which are actually reflecting the aspirations and the demands of the literature component curriculum goals (Sidhu, 2003; Narasuman, 2006).

Therefore, this study was conducted to find out the English language teachers’ views on literature, literature teaching and the kind of practices that the teachers used in class when teaching literature. This study was also conducted to know the reasons for teachers to use those practices and to compare on whether the practices that were designed to teach literature component in class met the aspirations as written in the new national secondary school English curriculum goals or not.
1.3 Objectives of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

- to identify the practices that the English language teachers usually use in teaching literature component in class,
- to examine the reasons behind the selection of practices that the teachers employed in the teaching of literature component, and
- to find out the teachers’ views on the extent of the practices being used as to whether they meet the new national secondary school English curriculum goals.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is conducted in order to seek for the answers for the following questions:

1. What are the preferred activities that the English teachers in secondary schools designed and conducted in teaching literature component in class?
2. What are the reasons for the teachers’ selection of activities that they have planned and conducted to teach the literature component?
3. To what extent do the teachers feel that the lesson they have designed feed to the new national secondary school English curriculum goals?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings from this research can add valuable information to the existing data about literature component teaching’s situation in Malaysia specifically in Kuching and Samarahan divisions’ context. In addition, the findings can offer helpful information for anyone who is interested to know the current situation of the literature component’s teaching in Malaysia. This study will provide insights on the practices that the secondary schools’ English
language teachers use when they teach literature component in a language classroom and also the rationale for the selection of activities that they use.

Besides, the findings can also provide feedback to the Ministry of Education so that they can take further actions in helping to improve the current literature component teaching’s situation in Malaysian secondary schools especially in ensuring that the new national English curriculum goals will be accomplished successfully as it should be happening. This will then give the opportunity for MOE to see the actual or real situation in schools and then evaluate based on the findings.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can help to raise the awareness among the English language teachers on the importance of literature in learning the target language especially to the second language learners in Malaysia. Through the interview sessions, it is also hoped that the teachers will be aware of their own literature component’s teaching and then self-evaluate as to whether the practices that they use meet the aspirations or not.

1.6 Definitions of Key Concepts

1.6.1 The New National Secondary School English Curriculum Goals

Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (ICSS) or in Malay; Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM), is introduced since 1989 with new aspirations and goals. It tries to include a holistic development in students through its new curriculum which is more general and integrated. The main concern of this new curriculum is to develop learners spiritually, emotionally, physically and intellectually as a whole (holistic self-development) and not in isolation. For the English language subject, the syllabus revolve mainly to develop students’ language proficiency in term of Language for
Informational Purposes, Language for Interactional Purposes and Language for Aesthetic Purposes (Centre of Curriculum Development, 2000).

For the purpose of this study, the aspirations or goals that are designed especially for the teaching and learning of literature component which is Language for Aesthetic Purposes, will be used to take a look at the teachers’ views on the extent of the practices that are being used in teaching literature component as to whether they meet the new national secondary school English curriculum goals or not. Specifically, the new national secondary school English curriculum goals for integrating literature component are as follow (Centre of Curriculum Development, 2000):

1. To develop in learners the ability to enjoy and appreciate the aesthetic value of the literary works being studied.
2. To inculcate values and broaden learners’ outlook.
3. To express themselves creatively and imaginatively in the target language.

1.6.2 Literature Component

According to the definition as stated in the new ICSS for English subject (Centre of Curriculum Development, 2000), literature component is defined as the literary texts for learners to read and they are expected to ‘be able to follow a storyline and understand a poem and give their own personal responses to the text’. It is also known as ‘literature component in the language classroom’ (Vethamani, 2004) or simply known as the ‘literature component’. Literature component is one of the language content available in the new ICSS for English subject along with other components namely reading, writing, listening and speaking with specific learning outcomes which is language use for aesthetic purposes.
The aesthetic purposes of language use involve a very holistic view on students’ development and this also includes the moral value that is particularly being emphasized here. It refers to literature with small ‘l’ and it is used to enhance students’ proficiency in the target language. Literature component is taught to all forms in the secondary schools (Form One until Form Five) and it is compulsory for students to learn it during the English language class. For the purpose of this study, literature component will refer to any literary texts that are compulsory for the learners to read and learn in a language classroom namely the short story, poem and novel.

1.6.3 Practices

For the purpose of this study, practices are the means by which teachers deliver their literature lesson to students and how the teachers approach the literary texts to students and with students. It will also indicate the techniques that teachers use to tackle and draw students’ attention towards literature learning. The practices can either be conventional or by electronic means, and it can either be in reading, writing, speaking or reading (Chambers & Gregory, 2006). This word can also be replaced with words such as activities, ways and techniques but the meanings are equally the same. The practices include chalk-and-talk, worksheets, comprehension questions, classroom discussion, debate, mind-mapping, role-playing, group work, et cetera.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study shall involve the English language teachers who are teaching in the secondary schools around Kuching and Samarahan divisions as the participants. To be more specific, only 20 English teachers with the experiences in teaching English subject for more than 8 years will be chosen to be the participants in this study. The participants will be gathered from selected schools.