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**THE TEACHING OF CONTEMPORARY
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE PROGRAM IN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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**THIS PROJECT PAPER IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this report has not been submitted for any degree and the work described here is entirely my own except for excerpts and summaries whose sources are appropriately cited in the references.

14.10.2010



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In the name of God, the Compassionate the Merciful. Syukur Alhamdulillah.

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Abstrak

Penyelidikan ini dijalankan untuk mengetahui perspektif daripada murid Tahun 5 mengenai Program Contemporary Children's Literature dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Ianya juga untuk mengetahui samada buku- buku yang digunakan di dalam program tersebut menarik dan bersesuaian bagi murid-murid di sekolah rendah. Disamping itu, penyelidikan ini juga bertujuan mengetahui pendapat mereka mengenai aktiviti –aktiviti yang dijalankankan menerusi program ini bagi memperoleh peningkatan kemahiran dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Selain itu, ia juga dijalankan untuk mengetahui jenis bahan bacaan Bahasa Inggeris yang diminati oleh murid-murid .

Seramai 300 orang murid telah dipilih secara rawak di sekolah-sekolah rendah Daerah Kinta Selatan untuk menjawab kajiseidik ini. Data yg dikumpulkan telah dianalisa mengikut penganalisaan statistik. Keputusan dan analisa data tersebut menunjukkan frekuensi , peratus dan min bagi setiap soalan dalam kajiselidik ini.

Nilai signifikan dari analisa statistik ini menunjukkan pandangan responden-responden tentang “Contemporary Children's Literature Program” dalam penyelidikan ini. Kaji selidik ini memaparkan kekuatan “Contemporary Children's Literature Program” di sekolah rendah dan dapat mengetahui pilihan jenis bahan bacaan yang diminati oleh murid-murid Tahun 5 sekolah rendah.

Hasil kaji selidik ini telah menunjukan penerimaan dan pandangan positif daripada responden mengenai program tersebut di dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Penyelidikan ini juga menunjukkan bahawa program ini dapat mempertingkatkan sikap membaca mereka dalam buku sastera kanak-kanak Bahasa Inggeris.





Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the pupils' perceptions on the teaching and learning of contemporary children's literature in Year Five. It was conducted to find out whether the books prescribed in this program are suitable and interesting for the students to read and beneficial in their language acquisition. The study also seek to find out whether the literature program is successful in inculcating reading habits and in developing the language proficiency of Year 5 pupils. In addition, the study attempt to identify the type of materials which pupils prefer to read.

A total of 300 Year 5 primary schools pupils in Southern Kinta District were chosen randomly to participate in the survey. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis. The results are presented in the form of frequency counts and percentages of each item in the questionnaire.

Results of the survey showed that the respondents gave positive feedback on the books used and the activities carried out in this program. They perceived that the program has helped them in developing their language skills and abilities in English Language. Besides that, the survey also revealed the pupils' preference in the text selection for use in the classroom.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Distribution of Population

Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

English is widely used around the world as the world becomes smaller due to globalization. Thus, it is crucial for the young generation in this country to grasp this language efficiently. In Malaysia, English is a second language and is taught in all primary and secondary schools in this country. According to the Cabinet Committee Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Education Policy 1979, English is taught to enable pupils to use the language in everyday situation and work situation as well as to pursue higher education. Presently, English is the language of Information Communications Technology (ICT) and it has established itself as the language of international relations in a borderless world, whereby, students are able to access information on the Internet and other electronic media. As such, students are encouraged to establish network with other parts of the country and abroad for them to attain knowledge and information especially in this competitive era of globalization.

In realizing this need for global participation, the Ministry of Education has launched the Contemporary Children's Literature Program in 2004 for Year 4 pupils followed by Year 5 pupils in 2005 and Year 6 pupils in 2006. The Contemporary Children's Literature Program is introduced as part of the English Language





curriculum in primary schools in this country. It is in line with the aims and objectives of the English Language curriculum for primary schools that is to provide students with a strong foundation in the English language and use the language for various purposes. This literature program is to provide a continuum for the literature component introduced in the secondary school curriculum.

The Contemporary Children's Literature Program set by the Ministry of Education has outlined a few objectives. The program aims to:

- i. inculcate reading habits among pupils.
- ii. enrich pupils' vocabulary and language content.
- iii. enhance pupils' thinking skills.
- iv. improve English language proficiency of pupils.
- v. provide lively, enjoyable and high interest readings.
- vi. promote cultural understanding in Malaysian context.



This study investigated the pupils' perceptions on the teaching and learning process of contemporary children's literature. It is also aimed to gauge the appropriacy and relevance of the books prescribed in this program in promoting fun learning and enhancing the process of language acquisition.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Literature can be an effective tool in practicing and exploring the four language skills in teaching the English language. The standard of English proficiency





among Malaysian pupils is declining especially those who are in the rural and suburban areas (Kim Sook Hee, 2007). The pressing demands on learning Mathematics and Science in English language has prompted a number of educationists to urge the Ministry of Education in reviving the use of literature as a way of improving pupils' ability and proficiency in the English language. Saran Kaur Gill (2008) said that we have to be masters of English in order to gain more knowledge. She added that, if otherwise, we will be slaves to those who have knowledge. Her views support Tun Dr Mahathir's policy on teaching Mathematics and Science subjects in English in our attempt to gain a competitive edge globally.

The Contemporary Children's Literature Program has been introduced for five years now and it forms part of the English language period in Year 4, 5 and 6 of the primary school. There are only seven periods per week in national (SK) schools and only four periods per week in the vernacular schools (SJK (C) and SJK (T) schools). Therefore time plays an important factor to determine whether the implementation of the literature program in the primary school helps the pupils and whether it is successful. The question of whether literature is really taught in language classrooms and whether the literary texts are fully used in teaching the language are also issues which need to be addressed. According to Mashita Harun, (2001) some teachers are reluctant to teach literature as it demands time and practice.

With the implementation of *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR) and *Penilaian Kurikulum Berasaskan Sekolah Rendah* (PKSR), a great demand has been made by the school principals, parents and society on the achievement of the pupils. As such, there appears to be insufficient time for teachers to put extra effort in





implementing the literature reading program component. This is because much concentration is given to getting good grades in the examinations. Consequently, teaching English has become less interesting (Mashita Harun, 2001) as it is examination driven.

The literature component provides many interesting activities for pupils and teachers to explore the language in the learning process. It can be a platform to teach listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Not only that, it also stimulates pupils' critical thinking skills as well as develop the pupils reading habits (Brumfit & Carter , 1986).



This research investigated the pupils' perceptions on the teaching and learning of Contemporary Children's Literature in Year Five. It is aimed to find out whether the books prescribed in this program are suitable and interesting for the students to read and beneficial in their language acquisition.

The Contemporary Children's Literature Program is introduced as part of the English language curriculum and is incorporated with the language skills stated in the syllabus. Through this program, students are able to listen and enjoy rhymes, rhythm and sound of poetry and enjoy listening to fables and tales of imagination. The activities and skills include predicting outcomes and making their own conclusion.





The literature program is also believed to help the pupils in speaking skills. Teachers could ask students to tell and talk about the stories, characters, places and moral values found in the stories and poems. It also encourages pupils in primary schools to enjoy reading the stories and developed their ability to predict outcome and make their own conclusion based on the storybooks that they read. In addition, the literature program enhances students' abilities in problem solving by engaging in real problems that require mathematical and scientific skills presented in the literature books. Children who listen to the story can apply their own problem solving skills and perhaps also empathize with the characters in the story.

Exposure to all the vocabulary and sentence structures found in the story books could help in developing their writing skills as well. Their response to the moral values in the literary works provide a foundation for them to construct sentences either in simple or compound forms, as well as in writing longer text. The students would be able to express their thoughts and creativity once they receive input from their readings (Carter & Long, 1991).

Children's literature helps the pupils in their language content development which includes the sound system, sentence structure and grammar. In developing the oral competency, the students will be familiarized with the different associations between sound and spelling found in the storybooks and poems. In teaching grammar, teachers are able to utilize the grammar items used in the stories or fables. Therefore grammar is not taught in isolation but in the context of the text. Pupils can infer the sentence



patterns from the text and use the skill in their compositions using correct punctuation, vocabulary and sentence structure.

By engaging in this study, the researcher gained some insights on the progress of the pupils in the language through the Contemporary Children's Literature Program.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the pupils' perceptions on the teaching and learning of Contemporary Children's Literature among Year 5 pupils. The researcher also sought to gauge the pupils' perception about the Contemporary Children's Literature Program. According to Glazer (2000), children's literature can be a natural part of learning English as a second language and help pupils to learn the language. This is because the pattern and repetitive language structure in children's literature text help to facilitate meaning and help the pupils to be competent in the language.

The works of Ernst-Slant (1998), Krashen and Biber (1988), Ramirez, Yuen and Ramley (1991) demonstrated that the teaching and learning can be extended when pupils own experience (their language and culture) are mixed with these generalizations and conceptualizations offered in schools. Such acknowledgement often stimulates learning and helps students to construct in their second language. (Ernst-Slavit, Moore & Meloney, 2002).



Apart from that, the study provides the researcher with some information on pupils' background knowledge and the teaching and learning strategies that enhance the learning process for using Children's Literature in the primary level.

This study also attempted to find out if the books used are perceived as interesting by the pupils. Secondly, the researcher also aimed to investigate the pupils' perception on the activities used in teaching and learning literature. The present study also examined if the program help in improving pupils' proficiency level in learning the language. Finally, the study also identified the types of genre preferred by the Year 5 pupils.

1.5 Research Questions



The research questions which provided direction for the study are:

1. Are the books used in the Contemporary Children's Literature Program interesting for the students?
2. What are the pupils' perceptions about the learning activities conducted in this program?
3. Does the program inculcate reading habits and increase pupils' language proficiency?
4. What are the types of English materials and genres that the Year 5 pupils prefer to read?



The present study has highlighted some insights on children's literature used in the primary schools. This will provide teachers and educationists more information and data on how to improvise the learning activities in the Contemporary Children's Literature Program suitable to their ability levels..

1.6 Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Contemporary Children's Literature.

In general, children's literature is the collection of books that are read to and read by children. Glazer (2000) mentioned that literature for children is different from adult literature in degree rather than kind. The theme or topics set forth the same elements but the experiences and understanding of children determine whether the books are for them. Most of the authors for the children's literature write with a child audience in their mind.

Meanwhile, according to Hunt (1995), it is surprisingly hard to define children's literature. He writes,

“...The answer is that we all know what it is, but it is not very easy to tell what it is (or what it is not).... It is everything from a sixteenth century chapbook to a twentieth century computer-based, interactive device. It is everything from the folk tale to the problem novel, from the picture book to the classroom poem, from the tract to the penny dreadful , from the classic to the comic.”

(Hunt, 1995, p.ix)



Lesnik- Oberstein (2005) as cited in Lynch- Brown and Tomlinson (2005) explains the meaning of children's literature as "books which are good for children, and most particularly good in terms of emotional and moral values."

Basically children's literature means good quality trade books covering relevant topics and interest of children through prose and poetry, either fiction or non-fiction. Most children's books are written expressively for children. However there are books written intended originally for adults that have become popular with children such as *Sleeping Beauty in the Woods* by Charles Perrault and *The Arabian Nights* which have been adapted for children.

According to Temple, Martinez and Yokoto (2005), children's literature or books written by authors from and about African, Latinos, Asians, and other nations feature children from families of limited means and depart from the older stereotype of white, middle-class and two-parent homes. These books are written with greater sensitivity than in the past. In fact, it represents the multi-cultural works by authors from all over the world. It is a norm to find that contemporary children's literature texts are written based on the culture of the writers. They write their own books the way they would present themselves.

Children's books are also about the experiences of childhood, both good and bad. The contents are set in the past, present or the future that interest the children of today. Most of the fairy tales or folktales are adapted to suit the children's interest for instance *Clever Katya*, is a Russian folktale. The stories are told in simple sentences,





written with much humour and suspense appropriate and appealing to the young readers.

The books in the Contemporary Children's Literature Program used by the Malaysian pupils are selected by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC). They comprise short stories and poems as well as other non-fiction books for extensive reading for the pupils. Examples of the books are: *'Tidy Your Room Tanya!'*, *'Tails and Tales'*, *'The Little Blue Boy'*, *'Anansi and Turtle Share Dinner'*, *'Mr. Stofflees and the Painted Tiger'* *Dan's Secret Weapon'*, *'Clever Katy'* and *'Poems in Your Pocket'*.



The researcher believes that the Contemporary Children's Literature Program provides rich information and language structures and patterns for pupils to develop competence in the language. This research will provide information on pupils' perceptions on this subject.

This study also gives some significant information to the policy makers, teachers, parents and pupils especially on the use of children's literature in acquiring the language.





Children's literature helps pupils in their development especially in constructing their own meaning of life. According to Glazer, (2005), this is based on Jean's Piaget theory of children development. This also includes expanding their cognitive development as well as psychological theories which have close connections with Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of child development. It is a process of children working through important personality stages.

Literature also provides potential development in a holistic and integrated individual manner, whereby a person can be developed into one who is intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious.

Besides that, literature provides a variety of language activities and it develops the pupils' appreciation for the language. Pupils experience new understanding of the world and can share feelings with others. It also provides enjoyment and valuable experience to the pupils. This research is carried out to verify the claims that literature



does help pupils in enhancing their language proficiency.



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1.8 Limitation of the Study

In conducting this study, the researcher faced a few limitations. Only schools in Southern Kinta District are involved due to accessibility and time constraints as the schools are located quite far from each other. Apart from that, only Year 5 pupils are involved in the study. The respondents are from poor English background environment.





Most of the schools are considered a sub-urban and rural schools as the places are quite far from Ipoh town. Most of the pupils are from the lower income group such as blue collar workers and they hardly use English at home.

1.9 Summary

This study investigated the pupils' perception on the teaching and learning of contemporary children's literature in primary schools. This program was introduced to the Level Two of primary schools as it provides a rich source of teaching and learning the English language. This study also seeks to find out the pupils' perceptions on pupils language proficiency through the introduction of the literature component.

This chapter generally introduces the Contemporary Children's literature Program in the Malaysian classroom. The chapter also states the research purposes and research questions. The following chapter will discuss the review of literature for this study.

