

**Using Literary Text To Foster Vocabulary Acquisition : A
Case Study On The Relationship Between Reading And
Writing**

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**Penggunaan Teks Sastera Untuk Menggalakkan Perolehan
Perbendaharaan Kata: Satu Kajian Kes Mengenai
Perhubungan Di Antara Membaca Dan Menulis**

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**Tesis Yang Dikemukakan Untuk Memperolehi Ijazah Sarjana
Dalam Pendidikan**

Fakulti Bahasa

**UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

1 October 2006

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Praise and all glory to God the Almighty for blessing me with this opportunity to seek new knowledge in this esteemed university not for my own sake but for the benefit of our children who constantly need our help and guidance.

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ABSTRACT

Many language teachers do not realise the immense benefit of using literature particularly short stories as means to teach vocabulary and writing. Since the introduction of literature component for all secondary schools in the year 2000, the usage of these literary texts is focused mainly as a component for examination purposes. The study examined the effects of using critical reading strategy as a technique to read literary texts not only for text comprehension but function as a basis to foster vocabulary acquisition which in turn help students in their writing. The objectives of this study were: (i) to examine the effectiveness of reading modern short stories critically for vocabulary acquisition; (ii) to examine the level of effectiveness in using critical reading strategy for knowledge transfer; (iii) to identify factors that hamper learners' ability to reproduce the acquired knowledge; and (iv) to examine the significance of reading modern short stories critically towards correct word usage in one's writing. Qualitative data were analysed thematically while quantitative data were analysed with descriptive statistics. A major finding in this study was that the participating samples being ESL students from a rural school did manage to acquire an impressive amount of vocabulary from this reading strategy although they did not manage to use a majority of the acquired lexicon in their writing. Results of this study provide both theoretical and practical implications in the benefit of using selected literary texts as an alternative tool prior to the teaching of writing.

ABSTRAK

Ramai guru bahasa tidak sedar akan kelebihan penggunaan teks sastra khususnya cerpen sebagai cara untuk pengajaran perbendaharaan kata and penulisan. Semenjak pengenalan komponen sastra kepada semua sekolah menengah mulai tahun 2000, penggunaan teks-teks sastra hanya berfokus untuk tujuan komponen peperiksaan sahaja. Kajian ini menyelidiki kesan penggunaan pembacaan secara kritikal sebagai satu teknik untuk membaca teks sastra bukan hanya bertujuan untuk proses pemahaman tetapi berfungsi sebagai satu asas untuk pengayaan perbendaharaan kata yang akan membantu dalam penulisan pelajar. Objektif-objektif kajian ini termasuk: (i) mengkaji keberkesanan membaca cerpen moden secara kritikal untuk pengayaan perbendaharaan kata; (ii) mengkaji tahap keberkesanan membaca secara kritikal untuk pemindahan pengetahuan; (iii) mengenali faktor-faktor yang menghalang kebolehan pelajar untuk menggunakan apa yang diperolehi; serta (iv) mengkaji signifikasi membaca cerpen secara kritikal dalam penggunaan kosa kata yang diperolehi secara betul. Data kualitatif dianalisis secara bertema manakala data kuantitatif dianalisis secara statistik penerangan. Satu dapatan penting yang diperolehi daripada kajian ini adalah sampel-sampel sebagai pelajar dari sekolah luar bandar mampu memperoleh bilangan perbendaharaan yang tinggi selepas menggunakan strategi ini walaupun mereka tidak dapat menggunakan kesemua perbendaharaan kata ini dalam penulisan mereka. Dapatan kajian ini juga menghasilkan implikasi teori dan praktikal dalam faedah menggunakan teks sastra secara terpilih sebelum pengajaran penulisan dijalankan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SL	Second Language
UKP 6043	Naturalistic Inquiry
PP	Participants' Perception
PE	Problems Encountered
AVI	Vocabulary Index
P	Participant
WAq	Words Acquired
WR	Words Rehearsed
KBSM	Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah
Nilam	Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca

Chapter One

Introduction

Human civilization is often measured from its retrievable source of literature present in the form of writing. For over half a century, writing has been a central topic in applied linguistics and this remains an area of lively intellectual research and debate. Its complex, multifaceted nature seems constantly to evade adequate description and explanation, and many forms of enquiry have been summoned to help clarify both how writing works and how it should best be taught. Writing is central to our personal experience and social identities, and we are often judged and evaluated by our control of it. Judging at the various purposes writing has upon a community, then, and with the increasing complexity of its contexts of use and the diverse backgrounds and needs of those wishing to learn it, all these contributing factors push the study of writing into wider frameworks of analysis and understanding.

However, another crucial factor which directly contributes to the realisation of writing should also be taken into consideration. Those wishing to learn writing must first master the art of reading. Clay (1998) points out that each reading or writing act has the potential for providing a context for learning about each other, and, in this way, influencing each other.

Yet, with the myriad techniques and strategies present in the art of reading, the act of critical reading should receive a certain degree of attention.

In this study, the art of reading literary texts critically for the acquisition of functional vocabulary takes a centre stage. The driving force of this study was the notion that language learners would perform better in writing once they had had acquire sufficient vocabulary knowledge. There is extensive research indicating that a rich vocabulary is a critical element of reading ability (Brynildssen, 2000). Various studies have also point to the conclusion that reading does foster vocabulary acquisition (Zahar, Cobb & Spada, 2001; Coady & Huckin, 1997). Since vocabulary is the basic tool to actualise writing, the need to learn a certain reading strategy among students should be looked into so that they do not just read for text content but also for vocabulary.

However, in a study carried out by Goh, Chan, and Lee (2005) found that many undergraduates at Universiti Putra Malaysia were rated poor by their lecturers at using their own words to competently execute a certain idea in their academic writing. This phenomenon can be traced to the lack of mastery in ESL writing among secondary school students especially those from rural areas as I have observed in the past ten years of my teaching experience in rural schools. The realisation to the importance of English as a second language (L2) in Malaysia has picked up momentum when Information and Telecommunication Technology (ICT) begins to permeate millions of homes and offices around the globe. Coupled with the growing threat of globalization and the insistence of free trade by World Trade Organisation (WTO), a nation's basic defence against all of these obstacles is no other than the investment in human capital.

However, Lahur (2004) in her pilot study found that students who committed plagiarism were those with poor language skills especially in the area of writing. They could submit par excellent written assignments through the 'cut and paste' culture. Such culture if left unchecked may undermine a country's objective in achieving quality human capital. Many quarters blame the consequence of automatic promotion policy prescribed by the Education Ministry which leads to the rising of such negative culture. This policy has caused the so-called "passing the bulk syndrome" in which case students who still fail to acquire the necessary cognitive skills are still being promoted right up into secondary school. Anil Netto (2000) pointed out that under the system, pupils advance to a higher grade annually regardless of their performance in a particular year. Those who are weak academically usually become frustrated when they find it more and more difficult to cope as they go up to the higher grades. Students who are still weak in their reading and writing skills remain in their status quo and because of automatic promotion they are forced to face with the reality more challenging learning activities and vocabularies which are way beyond their mental capability.

The phenomenon concerning the prevalent problem of poor reading and writing skills among secondary school students stems from the poor attitude of students and their lack of interest in learning the English language (The Star. 2001, 3 January). This resulted in a reluctance to read materials in English thus limiting their exposure towards the language which only confines itself to the artificial classroom situation.

Ellis (2002) points out that learner's attitudes towards the target language and classroom settings have direct influence in the success of second language acquisition.

Examiners who are marking the SPM 1119 English Language Paper constantly lament particularly on the poor writing performance of many Malaysian students. They fail to express their ideas well mainly due to their insufficient vocabulary in English (Jenny Ho, 2006). In view of this, the Education Ministry had implemented two innovative programmes in an attempt to address the above problem from recurring. In 2000, the English Language curriculum in KBSM advocates the use of literary texts in the language lesson to enhance the learning of the language which is described as a strong second language in Malaysia. The Literature in English components complements previous efforts by the Ministry of Education to encourage the study of literature. It is also aimed to inculcate a healthy reading habit among students with a view to improve language proficiency and also to infuse an appreciation of literary works (Haji Senan Ibrahim, 2000). Soon the NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca) project has also been introduced to all urban and rural schools.

Unfortunately, a great number of students fail to realise the profound cross-influence reading has upon their writing abilities. Language teaching in classroom situations has always been compartmentalised into four language components of which they are learnt separately. Psycholinguists argued that the process of reading and writing is not a discrete mental activity but rather co-influencing. It is also learnt that these two activities co-influence each other so much so that one component cannot stand on its own but rather dependent on the other. It is said that one's skill in writing is the result of a direct influence of their reading habit as E.M. Forster (1927) wrote '...the words that generates an atmosphere, the idea, perhaps our subject are namely from the books we have read'.

There should be a quicker remedy language teachers can execute in order to overcome learners' lack of vocabulary which hinders their success in any writing activities. Since writing demands the essence of imagery which students conceived purely through their power of imagination, the act of imitating lexical usage by other writers through a particular reading strategy of their works should not be viewed as a shameless act of copying. Students should be taught to read literary texts analytically so that this may help them acquire new vocabulary which in turn helps their writing performance.

Robert Gagne (1985 cited in Gredler, 1997) points out in his theory that in the final phase of the nine phases of learning, the learner should be able to transfer what has been learnt to not only one but several new situations. By reading literary works, students receive new relevant stimulus. This newly learnt information would then be applied to other several contexts depending on the suitability of the environment. According to Gagne, information may be defined as (1) the reinstatement in speech or writing or (2) the reconstruction of the organised presentation of a verbal passage, including the main and subordinate ideas (Gagne, 1984 cited in Gredler, 1997). In view of Gagne's theory of learning, students should therefore first learn by imitating the manner of lexical usage by known writers and then ingeniously transfer them into their writing in accordance to their own context and environment.

This research was determined to provide evidence that by reading the works of other writers, it would eventually enhance and stimulate our very own power of imagination and language skills. It is believed that language teachers should ponder upon this plausible method of teaching writing by first fostering their students' vocabulary through the technique of critical reading activity. Teaching writing varies

from school to school and most schools only depend on workbooks available in the market to supplement this need. Hard pressured for exemplary school performance statistically, many teachers resort to the most common and orthodox method – memorisation of essays. Writing composition in whatever genre is deemed a boring task by most students as they are compelled to regurgitate sample essays that are usually adapted from workbooks.

From my experience as a language teacher, I found that many students actually fail to compose a decent piece of composition not because they were incapable of executing the mnemonic learning method but they lack the necessary vocabulary to enable text comprehension which is the major source of all working knowledge. Students would be executing a futile effort to memorise a piece of text read when they could not even comprehend the meaning of the words in it.

In view of this, Haynes and Baker (1993 cited in Coady & Huckin, 1997) pointed out that the most significant handicap for L2 learners is not lack of reading strategies but insufficient vocabulary in English. This major obstacle would certainly frustrate any type of ESL writing activity given by the teacher later.

Studies carried out by Scharer (1992), and Baumann, Hooten and White (1999) had shown that students undergoing literature-based instruction were more motivated and there were evidence of growth in attitudes towards reading. Language learners must be exposed to a purpose driven learning environment which provide a platform for improvement. It is therefore plausible that prior to the execution of any writing activity, students must first acquire sufficient amount of vocabulary from their reading especially materials from literary texts.

1.1 Background of Study

Writing competently in the second language (L2) has always been conceived as a difficult task for many secondary school language learners whose first language (L1) differs syntactically, phonetically, morphologically and semantically from the target language. Despite the various writing approaches that had been introduced such as process writing, power writing and guided composition, it failed to yield much desired results for one simple reason – lack of vocabulary in English. Silva (cited in Kroll, 1997) voiced his concern that L2 writing theory was based on the assumption that L1 and L2 writing processes are identical, and that the unique needs of L2 students were being misunderstood.

In the early 1970's, the teaching of writing was viewed as a process of translating preconceived ideas into words according to a set of prescriptive rules about the form of effective text. Learning to write involved how to transcribe language in a written form, learning spelling, vocabulary, and grammatical conventions; learning the principles of a good style by examining exemplary models; and learning conventional text structures. This set of practices and the assumptions underlying them were noted and called to question by several researchers. Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam (1999) as well as Hayes and Flower (1980) proposed that writing should be viewed as a process of problem-solving activity in which ideas were actively constructed to satisfy communicative goals. It involve a variety of cognitive skills including planning, translating and reviewing which were applied recursively under the control of a central executive or monitor.

The key ingredients of this approach to writing are the emphasis on the goals which texts are designed to satisfy rather than the linguistic characteristics which texts have. While learning rules for expression is still an important element of learning to write, this is seen as one element among many that knowledge about text is a resource to be used within the overall process of writing. However the key factor emphasised in this writing model proposed by Hayes and Flower (1980) was to approach writing as a particular construction and evaluation of ideas rather than on the input of particular ideas that requires acquisition of knowledge about text and is then a resource to be used within the process of writing rather than the conventional learning of fundamental skill of writing.

Therefore learning to write among Malaysian secondary school students should focus on how to coordinate ideas and word generation strategy in order to satisfy goals which vary as function of context, task and audience. Robert Frost (1962) once said 'all there is to writing is having ideas. To learn to write is to learn to have ideas.'

The persisting problems faced by secondary school teachers are not only the lack of idea generation but low L2 language proficiency especially lexical resource among secondary school students which hamper and frustrate many proposed writing activities such as: journal writing, peer conferencing, collaboration writing in small groups, brainstorming, outlining, free writing, multiple drafting, peer revision, writing for different audiences and class publication. Many quarters have indirectly accused students' poor writing performance and low language proficiency in English to the novel cause championed by the National Language Defenders League.

They called for a change in post-independent Malayan school language policy specifying that the medium of instruction for all academic subjects ought to be taught in the National language. This demand was well accepted and is reflected in the Education Committee Report of 1956 or better known as the Razak Report (1956) [cited in Gaudart, 1987] which made clear that although the intention of the government was to gradually introduce Malay as the national language, it also had full intentions of maintaining other local languages, and certainly attempting to ensure that every child was able to function in more than one language. The report also emphasised the importance of English as a second language which should be learnt by all school goers. However, in 1982, a survey carried out by the National Library found that the average Malaysian only reads a mere page or two per year. The STAR (8th August, 1999: pg.2) reported that another similar survey carried out in 1996 found that reading habits among the average Malaysian did improve a little with two books a year. Those who read materials in English were estimated to be lower.

Industrial players lamented that many locally trained graduates displayed poor reading and writing competence in English (Ridge, 2004). A recent survey conducted by Sarjit & Thiyagarajah (2000) found that many USM students undergoing the ELLS programme have poor reading habits. They discovered that many of the students read very little (except for some who read the daily newspaper) and seem uncomfortable when asked about their reading interests, citing the usual reasons of the lack of time and access to reading materials to account for the little time spent on this activity. Sarjit & Thiyagarajah (2000) also reported that there were instances when students came prepared for interviews and went to great lengths to explain a Shakespearean play or Dickens novel but often having read only the simplified

version. Among the difficulties identified for such poor performance were linguistic load, semantic problems and unfamiliar terminologies and words. It was the researcher's belief that in order to counter this prevailing stigma, corrective measures should be taken at school level in addressing student's insufficient vocabulary in English which could not only impaired their reading comprehension but also hampered their writing performance.

The researcher also believe that there is still room for improvement since research has shown that the artificial atmosphere created in classroom setting provides learners with opportunities to encounter input or to practise the L2. Classroom setting also creates in the learners a 'state of receptivity', defined as 'an active openness, a willingness to encounter the language and the culture' (Allwright and Bailey, 1991 cited in Ellis, 2002: pg 573). Long (1983 cited in Ellis, 2002: pg 614) argued that there is considerable evidence to indicate that SL instruction does make a difference. He claimed that studies suggested that formal instruction was advantageous (1) for children as well as adults, (2) for both intermediate and advance learners, (3) irrespective of whether acquisition was measured by means of integrative or discrete points test, and (4) in acquisition-rich as well as acquisition-poor environments. The classroom therefore serves as a place where interactions of various kinds take place, affording learners opportunities to acquire the L2.

This perspective therefore gives reasonable ground for using literary texts as an medium to spur students' skill in writing besides acquiring other language skills at the same time.

Carter and Long (1991: 2-3) points out that reading literary texts has many advantages and among them is its value in promoting language development. Literature can be

used as an instrument for use in connection with the teaching of specific vocabulary or structures or for language manipulation since true language proficiency can only be justified through one's ability to read and then write.

1.2 Statement of Problems

In view of the public outcry over the poor reading habits among average Malaysians, the Ministry of Education introduced the literature component on 18 February 2000 as a compulsory element for all students in secondary schools. It was aimed to improve students' English language proficiency as well as to promote the love for reading and to inculcate universal values such as patriotism, unity, cross-cultural understanding and diligence (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2000).

The Ministry issued a circular which outlined that out of the present five periods of English language per week, one is to be allocated for the teaching of literature. Apart from that, students will be tested on this component in the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) examination as well as in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination beginning in the year 2001 for SPM and 2002 for PMR.

A circular issued by the State Education Department of Perak also highlighted that 20% of the English language paper for both PMR and SPM examination is allocated for the testing and evaluation of the literature component. Students will be tested and evaluated on their ability to respond to a given situation argumentatively backed with evidence from the texts. Despite this novel move undertaken by the Ministry of Education in upgrading the English language proficiency level among