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THE USE OF GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR PROMOTING  
CRITICAL THINKING AMONG YEAR 6  
PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS  
IN MALAYSIA



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GAYATHIRI A/P ELAMKHOVAN

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2022



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THE USE OF GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR PROMOTING CRITICAL  
THINKING AMONG YEAR 6 PRIMARY SCHOOL  
STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

GAYATHIRI A/P ELAMKHOVAN

DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE IN  
EDUCATION (TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE)  
(RESEARCH AND COURSEWORK MODE)

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATIONS  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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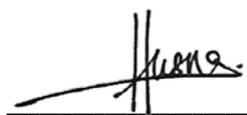
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## APPRECIATION

First of all, I would like to thank the God for being present throughout my life and granting all my prayers for strength and success. Secondly, I would like to thank to my academic advisor, Dr. Noor Alhusna Madzlan, a gracious mentor and advisor, who never give up on me, providing me guidance and assistance from the beginning to the end of my journey of completing this study. I also would like to thank all my family members, my father, Mr Elamkhovan Miniandy, my mother, Mrs Letchumy Sellan, My husband, Mr Sarawanan Elumali and all my siblings for their endless encouragement, love and trust throughout my whole life. Apart from that, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues who had always put words of encouragement and motivated me in completing this study. Not to forget to all my lecturers who had directly or indirectly shared the knowledge in completing this study. At the same time, I wish to extend my great appreciation to other parties whom had unselfishly shared their experience, knowledge and ideas throughout the process. My great appreciation also goes to all Year Six students and teachers who involved in this study for their great favours and involvement. Thank you for being a part of my journey in completing this study.





## ABSTRACT

The significance of critical thinking has progressively been perceived and brings many advantages to the practitioners in different fields. Critical thinking in the sector of education allows learners to think about and assess their own learning and behaviors. Literature study can be an effective method of fostering critical thinking among language learners. One of such method is using graphic novels in the classroom to promote critical thinking among students. They support critical thinking by enhancing discussion and providing varied and thought-provoking subject matter. However, the use of graphic novels still require a lot of empirical evidence to support the success of its use in promoting critical thinking. Thus, this research aimed to investigate the potentiality of using graphic novels in promoting critical thinking skills among students in the English language classroom. Target participants of the research were 50 Year Six pupils from three schools. They were selected through purposive sampling technique. The findings of this study were determined through the use of quantitative and qualitative research using observation forms, questionnaires, and interviews. The analysis of observational data showed gradual improvement in answering questions critically as the pupils venture further into the graphic novel. Besides that, 10 out of 12 statements in the questionnaire have mean of more than 4.0. This shows that the pupils think that the graphic novel is very effective in promoting critical thinking. The analysis of interview data shows that the combination of text and images, colour, gutters and short dialogues helped the pupils in answering the higher order questions. Thus, it is clear from this study that the use of graphic novels can be very effective in fostering critical thinking skills in elementary students. This study shows that different and new reading materials such as graphic novels should be explored to increase students' motivation.

**Key Words** : Graphic novels, critical thinking, English, primary school





## PENGGUNAAN NOVEL GRAFIK UNTUK MENINGKATKAN PEMIKIRAN KRITIKAL DI KALANGAN MURID TAHUN ENAM SEKOLAH RENDAH DI MALAYSIA

### ABSTRAK

Kepentingan pemikiran kritikal secara progresif telah membawa banyak kelebihan kepada para pengamal dalam bidang yang berbeza. Pemikiran kritikal dalam sektor pendidikan membolehkan pelajar berfikir dan menilai pembelajaran dan tingkah laku mereka sendiri. Kajian kesusasteraan boleh menjadi kaedah yang berkesan untuk memupuk pemikiran kritikal di kalangan pelajar bahasa. Salah satu kaedah tersebut ialah menggunakan novel grafik di dalam kelas untuk meningkatkan pemikiran kritikal di kalangan pelajar. Novel grafik menyokong pemikiran kritikal dengan meningkatkan perbincangan. Walau bagaimanapun, penggunaan novel grafik masih memerlukan banyak bukti empirik untuk menyokong kejayaan penggunaannya dalam meningkatkan pemikiran kritikal. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji potensi menggunakan novel grafik dalam memupuk kemahiran berfikir kritis di kalangan pelajar dalam subjek bahasa Inggeris. Reka bentuk kaedah campuran telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. 50 Tahun Enam murid dari tiga buah sekolah telah dipilih melalui pensampelan bertujuan untuk menjalankan penyelidikan ini. Hasil kajian ini ditentukan melalui penggunaan penyelidikan kuantitatif dan kualitatif dengan menggunakan borang pemerhatian, soal selidik, dan temu bual. Analisis data pemerhatian menunjukkan peningkatan beransur-ansur dalam menjawab soalan secara kritis semasa murid meneroka lebih jauh ke dalam novel grafik. Selain itu, 10 daripada 12 pernyataan dalam soal selidik mempunyai min melebihi 4.0. Ini menunjukkan murid beranggapan bahawa novel grafik sangat berkesan dalam menggalakkan pemikiran kritis. Analisis data temu bual menunjukkan gabungan teks dan imej, warna, talang dan dialog pendek membantu murid menjawab soalan aras tinggi. Keseluruhannya, hasil analisis data menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan novel grafik boleh menjadi sangat berkesan dalam memupuk kemahiran berfikir secara kritis kepada pelajar sekolah rendah. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa bahan bacaan yang berbeza dan baru seperti novel grafik harus diterokai untuk meningkatkan motivasi pelajar.

**Kata Kunci :** Novel grafik, pemikiran kritikal, Bahasa Inggeris, sekolah rendah



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HOTS	Higher Order Thinking Skill
MOE	Ministry of Education
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction

Developing the potential to think critically is an important aspect of the current education approaches and models. The importance of critical thinking has become more recognized, as it provides numerous benefits to practitioners in a variety of professions. This research intends to investigate the use of graphic novels for





promoting critical thinking among primary school students. In this chapter, the areas covered are problem statement, background and justification, research method, significance of the research, research questions, and definition of terms and purpose of the study.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

Over the earlier decades, the industrial economy dependent on the manufacturing field has moved to an economy driven by information, knowledge, and innovation. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, economic achievement is progressively founded on the powerful use of elusive resources, such as information, aptitudes, and innovative potential as the distinct advantage for the upper hand (Economic and Social Research Council, 2005). Internationally, various initiatives are undertaken to improve the economic results by preparing citizens equipped with knowledge, skills and innovative potentials. One of the major initiatives undertaken by the nations in this economy driven world is the creation of an aligned, 21<sup>st</sup> century education system that helps to develop skills, knowledge and potentials related to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globally, relying solely on the three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic in educational institutions is no longer sufficient for a student. The emphasis is no longer only on knowledge, but also on the development of higher-order thinking skills. The implementation and sustenance of the 21<sup>st</sup> century education system is vital because it produces young generations who can contribute to the nation's economic success. One of the instruments that





education can provide for these young people in the 21st century is critical thinking. It gives them the abilities they need to satisfy the ambitions of the nation in an increasingly dynamic worldwide setting.

Realizing the importance of critical thinking, Malaysian Government has launched the Education Blueprint 2013-2015 to raise global education standards, to better prepare the youngsters for the requirement of the 21st century, and to meet the social expectations of education policy. Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 aims to develop Malaysian students who are capable of mastering higher order thinking skills (HOTS), including critical thinking, creative thinking, innovation and reasoning (MOE, 2013).



In Benjamin Bloom taxonomy, critical thinking was identified several decades earlier (Duron, Limbach, & Waugh, 2006; Lauer, 2005). It was considered that a greater degree of cognitive ability involving critical thinking is found in the levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, while a lesser degree of cognitive ability, namely knowledge, understanding, and application, involves only remembering, relating, and applying information (Duron et al. 2006).

Critical thinking is often misjudged as a scheme of criticism, but it relies on the capacity to follow logical measures and reach a crucial and suitable result. Critical thinking in the education sector allows learners to think about and assess their own learning and behavior on education-related problems. It also enables





learners to create sensible and defensible choices about problems related to self and society.

As stated above, critical thinking is essential in the new knowledge economy. Information and technology are the major forces in the global knowledge economy. One must be able to cope with changes effectively and quickly. The new economy places a big demand on versatile mental abilities as well as the capacity to analyze information and incorporate various forms of knowledge in problem-solving. Good critical thinking encourages such thinking abilities, which is crucial in the rapidly changing environment.



Many sectors, particularly the technical and industrial sectors, have been experiencing rapid changes in Malaysia. So, thinking skills must be focused as one of the educational goals in which students have to be educated to make sense of new information and not just acquire the knowledge. Therefore, the responsibility resides in education, where it is crucial that students should be trained for critical and creative thinking.

Therefore, promoting critical thinking in the teaching and learning process is one of the most important tasks of educators nowadays due to its high importance. Fostering critical thinking in the context of English language teaching is of great importance for several reasons. First, when language learners can take responsibility for their own thinking, they can monitor and recall their own learning methods more



effectively. Second, critical thinking enhances learners' learning experience and makes language learning more meaningful to them. Third, there is a strong correlation between critical thinking and learners' achievement (Rafi, 2013). Learners can become proficient language users if they are motivated and guided to show critical thinking in using the foreign language, which means that learners need to reflect on their production of ideas, and they can critically support these concepts with logical explanations (Rafi, 2013). Language development and thinking are closely related, and teaching higher order thinking skills should be an essential part of an L2 curriculum. The importance of enhancing higher-order thinking skills in foreign language learning institutions has been highlighted by educators, and empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of teaching critical thinking skills (Chapple & Curtis, 2000).

In reality, language learners who have acquired critical thinking skills can do tasks that may not be capable of by other students. Mahyuddin et al.'s (2004) research imply that language learners with critical thinking skills are able to think critically and creatively to achieve the goals of the teaching and learning process; they are able to make decisions and solve problems; they are able to use their thinking skills to understand the use of the language or its content; they are able to develop thinking skills as lifelong learners; and finally, they are intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually balanced. Paul and Elder (2013) also published a list of characteristics and features of critical thinkers. They list the features of critical thinkers as follows: raises essential questions and issues, formulating them explicitly and accurately; gathers and evaluates appropriate data, using abstract ideas to explain it efficiently;

comes to well-reasoned discoveries and alternatives, evaluating them against appropriate requirements and standards; thinks openly about alternative solutions and acknowledges them; communicates effectively with others in finding the solutions for complex issues (Paul & Elder, 2013).

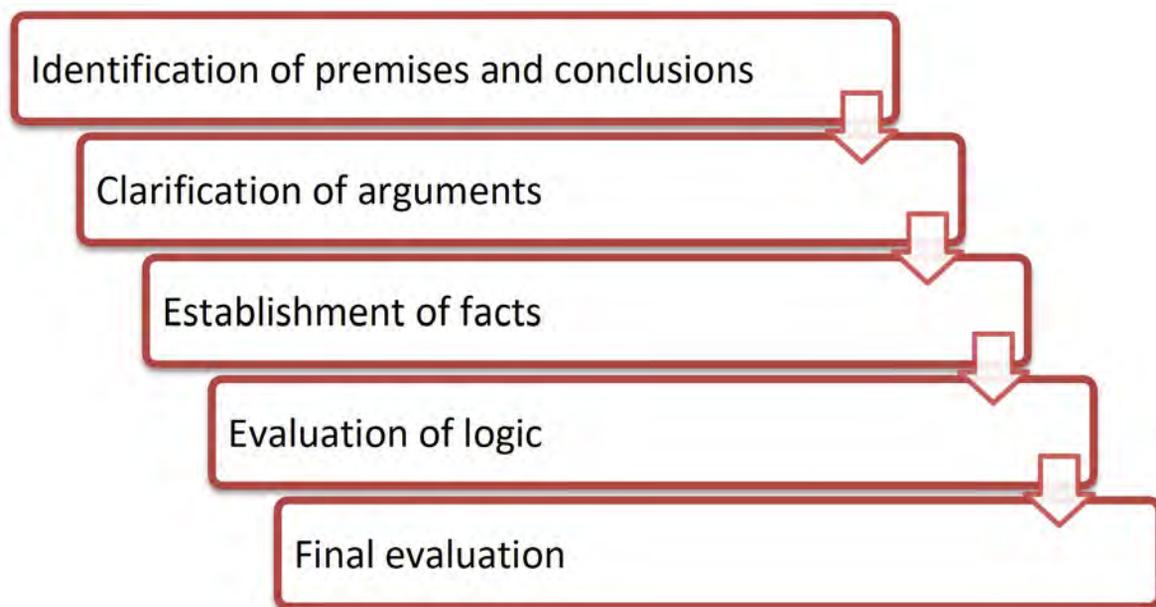


Figure 1.1. Elements of Critical Thinking. Adapted from Herr, 2007

Figure 1.1 shows the elements of critical thinking as proposed by Herr (2007) in his book. According to Herr (2007), critical thinkers draw conclusions only after defining their conditions, distinguishing reality from opinion, asking appropriate questions, making thorough observations, and uncovering hypotheses. Critical thinkers create assertions by looking at solid evidence and sound logic. Critical thinkers break arguments into fundamental statements as to the first aspect and derive logical implications. Critical intellectuals then analyze the



information by finding ambiguity and vagueness in statements and proposals. Critical thinkers then determine if the premises are appropriate and recognize information that has been ignored or not gathered. They determine whether the consequences are logical and look for possibly contradictory information. As for the fourth component, critical thinkers determine whether the premises sustain the hypothesis. The findings must be accurate in deductive arguments if the premises are valid. The findings are plausible in inductive arguments if the premises are valid. Finally, the evidence and arguments are weighed by critical thinkers. The weight of an assertion is based on supporting information, logic, and evidence. Contradictions and the absence of evidence reduce the weight of an assertion. Critical thinkers do not acknowledge ideas if they believe there is more evidence against them or if the reasoning is uncertain, omits significant information, or has incorrect premises or poor logic.



Literature study can be an effective method of fostering critical thinking among language learners. Wille (2014) stated that literature is created when the writers use their words to imaginatively record, explain, record and shape their experience and feelings. Understanding literature requires intelligent judgments and choices centered on sensible and reflective thinking. In order to understand literature, the readers need to have wider imagination so that they can interpret the idea as well as the meaning of the literature conveyed by the writers. Thus, literature is an efficient instrument to engage learners in critical thinking. By educating students to analyze and assess literary materials suitable to their age and preferences, we can assist them to acquire critical thinking abilities. This includes seeing interactions between events, making inferences, analyzing events, synthesizing evidence, and





assessing the content of a text and the language used to convey the thoughts embedded within it. To substantiate the importance of literature in Malaysian classrooms, the Ministry of Education has incorporated literature elements in the new Curriculum Standard for Primary Schools for English. As stated in the Education Blueprint, the upper primary level students will be introduced with literature genres starting from year 4 in which they will be exposed to short stories, poetry and graphic novels. The general objective of the 2011 Primary English curriculum as described in the 2011 Primary English Language Curriculum is to equip students with basic language skills to allow them to interact efficiently in a multitude of contexts appropriate to the level of development of students (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2010). The Education Blueprint (2013) shows literature as a resource paradigm where literature is seen as an instrument and resource for promoting English language learning. Thus, it is important for the teachers to fully utilize the components of literature so that the students will be able to gain knowledge through literature.

Graphic novels were implemented in 2011 by the new Curriculum Standard for Primary Schools in Malaysia as a genre to be taught in the Language Arts module of English in primary schools. The Jungle Book and Gulliver's Travel are being used as the reading material in Year Four and Five, respectively. On the other hand, The Wizard of Oz is used in Year Six. The Wizard of Oz is chosen as the reading material for this study since the study involves Year Six students.





The Wizard of Oz is written by Joshua George. The novel is about Dorothy, who lives in Kansas with her uncle, aunt, and a dog named Toto. One morning there was a tornado, and all things went in circles. After the wind stopped, she opened the door and found she was in a different place. Everyone thanked Dorothy because she saved them from the wicked witch by landing her house on the wicked witch. Glinda, the good witch, told Dorothy that she was safe there. However, Dorothy wanted to go back to Kansas, so Glinda told her to meet the wizard at the Emerald City because the wizard could help her get back to Kansas. Meanwhile, the wicked witch was very angry with Dorothy because Dorothy was wearing her sister's shoes and landed on her sister. On her way to meet the wizard, she met the scarecrow. The scarecrow followed Dorothy because she wanted to ask the wizard's brain. Then they met up with the Tin Man. The Tin Man followed them because he wanted to ask the Wizard for the heart. On their way they met the lion. The lion also followed them because he wanted to ask the wizard for courage. When they arrived at Emerald City, they finally met the wizard. They told the wizard their wishes. However, the wizard gave them one condition before he could help them. The wizard asked them to get the magic broom from the wicked witch. On the way, the wicked witch sent a band of monkeys to stop them from coming to her. Everyone fought with the monkeys. However, the monkeys were able to grab Dorothy and Toto and take them to the castle. The wicked witch took Dorothy's magic shoes away. Meanwhile, Toto quietly snuck out of the castle to get help and rescue Dorothy. The wicked witch noticed this and used her wand to turn the scarecrow into the fire. Dorothy threw a bucket of water to save the scarecrow. The witch was splashed with water, and she turned into a puddle. Everyone made their way to the Emerald City with the wicked witch's broom. The wizard told them that he could not help them as he was just an ordinary





man. They were very sad, but he said that he could give them something. Then he gave the Scarecrow a certificate, the Tin Man a watch, and the Lion a medal. The Wizard helped Dorothy fly back to Kansas in his hot air balloon. However, during the day when Dorothy and Toto were ready to return to Kansas, Toto suddenly jumped out of the basket, and Dorothy jumped after Toto. She was very sad because she could not go back to Kansas. Suddenly another good witch appeared and said that she could help her go back to her home. She asked Dorothy to tap her shoes three times while saying, "There's no place like home." After tapping three times and saying that, Dorothy was already in Kansas.

Besides these three novels, numerous graphic novels can be used as the reading materials in the primary classrooms. The use of graphic novels in schools is seen as a shift from traditional textbooks, which are usually mono-modal in design, to multimodal texts. As such, graphic novels adopt many diverse modes such as words, pictures, colors and page layout (Serafini, 2012). Although the concept of using graphic novels as a new element of literature in the primary school curriculum is still unfamiliar and new to both educators and students, the distinctive combination of the two rich forms of the medium - the linguistic and the graphic - makes it an efficient pedagogical instrument.

Both students and teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) aim to make language learning an enjoyable process. To accomplish this, graphic novels can be the best choice to be added to ESL lesson plans for everything from basic





education to vocabulary development to cultural education. Learning a second language is similar to learning a first language in terms of basic instruction, especially for beginners. Usually, all students begin reading with a picture book because pictures are more appealing than unfamiliar words. This is also true for ESL learners. By using graphic novels, students are able to link pictures with the action in a book, which helps them understand the meaning of the story and become familiar with new words.

Graphic novels also play a crucial role in increasing students' vocabulary. Graphic novels can introduce them to non-standard words and phrases not normally found in traditional textbooks. For example, graphic novels often use everyday language used in conversations, such as slang, idioms, onomatopoeia, abbreviations, and so on. Mastering these elements of the English language is important in order to navigate a new culture.

Understanding the culture is equally important for an ESL student to learn the language itself. In this case, graphic novels are valuable because they can showcase certain characteristics of one's culture. For example, a graphic novel set in a typical American high school can portray typical characteristics of American teenagers. Middle and high school students can use such graphic novels to compare and contrast with their own culture, which stimulates discussion in the classroom.





Graphic novels are a unique educational experience for a student, giving them not only the literary tools necessary for success, but also social and cultural concepts that can be lost in other literary formats. English Language Learners (ELLs) are one of the fastest-growing populations in our education system, with students from diverse backgrounds coming from non-English speaking households. Traditionally, ELLs may find it difficult to acquire the language, not only because of the academic demands of learning English, but also because of the social constructions and conversational demands required to speak fluently. Prose texts are not simply designed to teach students the importance of idioms, facial expressions, and body language, all of which are associated with the English language. However, the text-image literacy that reading graphic novels requires gives students the tools they need to understand the English language layer in ways that are not accessible through traditional texts.



English teachers have the opportunity to introduce students to a form of literature that is uniquely situated between the old and the new, offering perspectives not captured by traditional literary discourse. Graphic novels not only offer diversity in content, but also in reading practices and can be a more accessible and therefore less intimidating way to experience literature than the traditional novel. Chun (2009) explains that the teaching of critical literacy can take place while students develop reading skills through exposure to these texts so that they are better equipped to handle more traditional texts.





Sulaiman, Ayob, and Sulaiman (2015) claimed that learners are prepared to develop their higher-order thinking skills when provided with opportunities to learn English through different learning methods. Through the use of graphic novels, it is said that learners can acquire critical thinking skills as they support critical literacy or critical thinking by encouraging discussion and providing varied and thought-provoking topics. Coiro (2003) points out that graphic novels are typically nonlinear, interactive, and incorporate multiple media forms. Each of these features offers new possibilities, but also presents a number of challenges that require new thought processes to create meaning. Unlike conventional novels, graphic novels are polysemous and require readers to recognize notions of time, intertextuality, visual literacy, and hypertextuality (Cromer & Clark, 2013). This cross-discourse reading and writing experience can benefit all students, and as Chun (2009) points out, the added benefit for ELL students is that much of the language in a graphic novel is contextualized and acts as a support system to guide the reader through the language learning process.

Students frequently struggle to grasp abstract ideas like inference, metaphor, and social context. They are usually taught through classroom discussion, which might be difficult for visual learners, kids with limited language skills, and concrete learners with limited higher-order cognitive abilities. Graphic novels can aid in the development of visual and verbal signals, concrete metaphors, and more compelling and natural ways to construct conclusions and increase comprehension. Numerous subjects become more comprehensible as a result of the motivating and visual elements found in graphic novels (Edwards, 2009). They also provide verbal and



visual signals that help visual learners understand and reinforce verbal learners' learning (Crilley, 2009).

Graphic novels have the capability to improve critical thinking among students. Therefore, this paper focused on the use of graphic novels in promoting critical thinking among primary school students.

### 1.3 Statement of Problem

One of Blueprint's primary goals is to reshape and transform the education system to aid Malaysia to attain the position of developed nation by 2020. The Blueprint maps Malaysia's education policies and strategies for the next 17 years and relies on 11 shifts to improve the education system. The Blueprint is intended to ensure the capacity of Malaysia to compete with other developed nations worldwide.



Figure 1.2. Six attributes of every 21<sup>st</sup> Century student. Adapted from The Education Blueprint (2013)

The Education Blueprint (2013) outlines six attributes needed by the students in order to be globally competitive (Figure 1.2). The six key attributes are knowledge, thinking skills, ethics and spirituality, national identity, bilingual proficiency and leadership skills. Our education system has put an emphasis on critical thinking as it is one of six primary attributes for students anchored on by the higher education system, as mentioned in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). However, this emphasis is seemed to be unsuccessful as studies indicate that Malaysian students lack higher order thinking skills and problem-solving abilities as well as are not able to apply knowledge and to think critically in new situations (MOE, 2012). This statement is further supported by a research conducted by AKEPT in 2011, which revealed that only 50 per cent of 125



lessons observed in 41 schools across Malaysia engaged students in higher order thinking skills. Implementing critical thinking skills in rural regions is far more critical. According to the preliminary report of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the results for primary school public examinations indicate that the difference between urban and rural learners is nearly 4 percentage points in favor of urban schools (Ministry of Education, 2012). Although critical and creative thinking skills are nothing new, our system has failed to produce such students.

Is it possible for our university students to think outside the box? Or are they just regurgitators of facts, recyclers of ideas, and passive information recipients? When it comes to students' ability to think critically, these are just a few questions that strike every educator's mind. Aside from the fact that students do not have enough opportunities to practise critical thinking in the classroom, our educational system is frequently blamed for future graduates' low thinking skills (Rosyati & Rosnah, 2008). As a result, graduates who emerge from the Malaysian education system are unable to meet the expectations of employers because they lack critical thinking skills (CTS) and communication skills, so they are unable to adapt to the demands of the world of work, which is the main cause of the high employment rate in our country (Rosyati & Rosnah, 2008). Since our existing education system is deemed overly exam-oriented and theory-heavy, graduates' capacity to think critically and their lack of English language skills impede their ability to come up with original and creative ideas (Norshima, 2011). Students have become rote learners who passively accept what is drilled into them and regard their lecturers or teachers as providers of knowledge who should not be questioned as a result of the





pressure and obsessive pursuit of good scores. They are turned into followers and have a limited worldview because of the exam-oriented system that puts academic achievement on a pedestal. This has affected their ability to express their thoughts confidently and think from different perspectives, which reduces their employability in the eyes of potential employers in Malaysia (The Star, 2012). Therefore, our future graduates are often compared to young professionals from abroad as they are more advanced in critical thinking, are more innovative, display a more global mindset and show an understanding of the changing trends in the world.

These findings are further reinforced by the report submitted by Kestrel Education (UK) and 21st Century School (USA) in November 2011, which states that the thinking level among teachers and students in Malaysia is at a very low level (Curriculum Development Division, 2012). According to a report by UNESCO in 2011, the thinking level of Malaysian students is tied to the exam-oriented teaching of the teacher. This is supported by Nik Nur Fariyah and Zamri (2013), who explains that the problem of dependence on this examination has raised an issue over the initiative in shaping generations which was intended according to the Philosophy of Education National (FPK). As a result of its low performance, Rosnani (2012) states that the performance of our country is at the lowest one-third level in the world, even more backward than Thailand. Utusan Malaysia report dated 6 September 2013 explains that the achievement gap in academics is getting wider compared to other countries. Chew Fong Peng and Shashipriya Nadaraja (2014) states that the inclusion of thinking skills is a major weakness in our education system where the existing system only gave birth to fewer students who are capable of applying scientific





knowledge and critical thinking in a context outside of academics. This also coincides with the views of Munir and Azlena (2003), who expresses that the thinking process is a form of skills that need to be mastered but is often taken lightly.

Ministry of Education had taken numerous initiatives and concerted efforts to include critical thinking skills in curriculum and courses at all levels of education. Despite that, the students continue to lack this soft skill. According to a study on the level of critical thinking among Malaysian students, students are still unable to use critical thinking in school or in the real world after eleven years of education (Rosnah and Suhailah, 2003; Konting et al., 2007, cited in Ibrahim, Kamariah, Nor Hayati & Othman, 2013). This is also corroborated in a large-scale study conducted by Aliah Suraya Mohd Yunus et al. (2005, cited in Rosyati & Rosnah, 2008), which examined the critical thinking skills and abilities of students from seven public universities in Malaysia. It was found that the critical thinking skills of these students were at a low moderate level. Another study conducted by Nuraihan and Zamnah (2004) on Malaysian and international students from International Islamic University Malaysia also shows that critical thinking skills were comparatively low among Malaysian students compared to their international peers.

Various studies have been conducted to determine the reasons behind the lack of thinking skills among students. A study by Hayes (2014) shows that teacher performance contributes mainly to the achievement of the student compared to other characteristics. The findings indicate that less than 3% of external variables such as





family background, socio-economic, size of the class, educational status, and experience of teachers contribute to student achievement. This implies that 97% is directly linked to teachers' performance or attitude (Hayes, 2014). Thus, teachers play a prominent role in the development of students' critical thinking skills. Creating opportunities that promote critical thinking through appropriate activities and teaching strategies require much effort and commitment from teachers. It is important for teachers to reflect on and adapt the practice to ensure that we provide a learning environment that meets the demands of the world we are living.

Considering the problems identified, graphic novel is chosen as the tool in this study to investigate its effectiveness in promoting critical thinking among primary school students in Malaysia.

#### **1.4 Aim of Study**

Due to the problems identified, as well as the advantages and benefits that graphic novels have, the aim of this study is to investigate the potentiality of using graphic novels in promoting critical thinking skills among students in the English language classroom.





## 1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out to what extent graphic novels can be used to promote critical thinking
2. To investigate students' views on the use of graphic novels in promoting critical thinking
3. To study the factors in graphic novels which contributes to critical thinking



## 1.6 Research Questions

This research attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent can graphic novels be used to promote critical thinking?
2. What are the students' views towards the use of graphic novels in promoting critical thinking?
3. What are the factors in graphic novels which contributes to critical thinking?





## 1.7 Definition of Terms

The following are the definitions of terms used in this study.

### 1.7.1 Graphic Novels

Graphic novel is an organization of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or to dramatize a concept (Carter, 2007). The immediate proximity of the experience of prose reading is offered by a well-done graphic novel, in which pictures and words work simultaneously, making a graphic novel something not only read but also seen, like reading and watching a film at the same time (Gallo and Weiner, 2004).

### 1.7.2 Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the capacity to reason clearly and rationally, as well as to comprehend the logical relationship between ideas. Critical thinking has been the subject of much debate and thought since the time of the early Greek philosophers





such as Plato and Socrates, and continues to be an issue in modern times, for example the ability to spot fake news.

It is the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking (Kurshumlia & Stavileci, 2015). It also involves the ability to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe. Essentially, critical thinking requires one to use one's ability to think. It is about being an active learner rather than a passive receiver of information. Critical thinkers rigorously question ideas and assumptions rather than accepting them at face value. They will always seek to determine if the ideas, arguments, and findings represent the whole picture and are open to finding that they do not. Critical thinkers identify, analyze, and solve problems systematically rather than by intuition or instinct.



Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gained or generated through observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a guide to persuasion and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend disciplines: Clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.





### 1.7.3 Reading

Reading is making meaning from print. It involves word recognition, comprehension and fluency. Word recognition involves the identification of the words in print. Comprehension occurs when the readers construct understanding from the words. Then, the readers achieve fluency when they coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate. Thus, reading is a complex and interactive process between the reader and the text, which brings about comprehension (Kurshumlia & Stavileci, 2015). It shows that reading is not only about decoding the symbol or words but interpreting the meaning of a text to a deeper level. To comprehend written material correctly, students need to be prepared to (1) decode what they read; (2) create links between what they read and what they already know; and (3) think thoroughly about what they have read (Davis, 2011).

### 1.8 Limitation of the Study

This study employed a mixed-method research design, involving both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the effectiveness of using graphic novels to promote critical thinking among primary school students.





First, the constraint of this study would be on the main independent variable, which would be the graphic novel. This is because only a graphic novel, *The Wizard of Oz* was used as the main source of discussion in this study. Since only one graphic novel was used in the study, it might propose that the results of this study are conclusive for generalization on the overall implementation of graphic novels regardless of type and language. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the researcher's reason for selecting *The Wizard of Oz* is that the graphic novel is the pioneer for the implementation of graphic novels at the primary school level in Malaysia. It is being used as a teaching material for Year 6. Besides, by focusing on a novel, in-depth analysis can be obtained.

Besides, another limitation of this study is that only 50 respondents were involved in answering the questionnaire, although it is a minimal standard. Not only that, only 9 students were chosen for the observation and 6 students for the interview.

Next, the considered limitation of this study lies within the findings gathered through the interview from 6 students on the factors in graphic novels which contributes to critical thinking. Inevitably, biasness tends to occur when it comes to providing a point of view on a certain matter. Most of the students might provide overly positive reviews and opinions regarding the factors in graphic novels that contribute to critical thinking. However, since the researcher is not afflicted personally to the students and their names were kept anonymously, most of them could speak freely without any limitations. They could voice out their opinions without hesitation, and most of the findings gathered from the interview are



considered genuine. Besides, not including the teachers' perception on the general evaluation of the graphic novel is also another restriction of this study.

In short, although there are limitations, the findings gathered in this study are believed to provide invaluable insights for the MoE and teachers to maximize the use of graphic novels for promoting critical thinking among primary school students.

### **1.9 Significance of the Research**

This research attempted to examine whether graphic novels will promote critical thinking skills among primary school students. This study is expected to provide its significance, at least in three points of view such as theoretical, practical and professional, as suggested by Creswell (2014).

Theoretically, this study is anticipated to enhance empirical support to the existing theories, concepts, literature, and scientific research results linked to graphic novels, particularly to improve critical thinking among primary school learners.

Practically, this research can guide teachers to decide which material and strategy could be used in promoting students' critical thinking. Moreover, this study can also provide some insight on the students' views regarding the use of graphic

novels in the classroom. The feedback would provide some ideas to English teachers and thus allow them to define some viable measures to enhance their teaching.

Professionally, this study is anticipated to assist educators to improve their current teaching techniques by integrating engaging materials and innovative teaching into their classrooms. It provides educators with some perspectives on maintaining an interesting learning atmosphere to keep learners engaged in the class.

This research also would benefit the students as they may improve their critical thinking through the use of graphic novels in the classroom. It is hoped that through the use of graphic novels, learners will be able to apply their critical thinking skills in understanding the content of the story better towards answering higher order questions. For example, students will be able to answer higher order thinking questions that focus on the analysis, creation and evaluation of Bloom's Taxonomy. This could help the students answer the higher order thinking questions incorporated in the English examination. Thus, with the application of graphic novels in the classroom, both teachers and students will get advantages as learners would develop their critical thinking skills while teachers would accomplish better in the classroom.



## 1.10 Summary

This chapter has introduced a research that focuses on the use of graphic novels for promoting critical thinking among primary school students. In this chapter, the background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, purpose of the study and definitions of terms have been discussed. The next chapter deals with the related literature review and studies.

