

Presage, Context, Process And Product: Influencing Variables In Literature Instruction In An ESL Context

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Abstract

The premise of this research is on the theoretical assumptions that teachers' mental constructs can have significant pedagogical consequences (Clark and Peterson, 1986). It is necessary to describe the thinking and planning strategies so that one can fully understand classroom processes. National Institute of Education or NIE (1975a) cited in Clark and Peterson (1986) proposed a rationale for a program of research on teachers' thoughts and processes. They assert that innovation in the contexts, practices and technology of teaching be mediated through the minds and motives of teachers. As teachers are able to understand and observe (thought processes) classroom behavior, student's cognitive processes, students' level of capability and ability and students' inert interest and motivation, they can steer and adjust the classroom learning process according to the needs of the students. The success of any learning and teaching situation will depend a great deal on the teachers (Safiah Osman, 1992). Improving the ability of students to understand what they read is a never-ending process. Based on the theoretical premise and the consensus of views of other researchers, teachers' thought processes have significant pedagogical consequences. The purpose of this research is to investigate systematically and empirically the teachers' level of belief, background knowledge, attitude and perception towards literature and literature teaching, the extent of the influence of student factor and evaluation factor on literature teaching, the forms of teaching; student centered or teacher centered.

Keywords: literature, language education.

Introduction

Prior to the 1980s, there was little discussion about the relationship between language and literature teaching and about the role of literature teaching in an ESL setting. Carter and Long (1991) stated that the importance of literature was only fully realized sometime in the mid 1980s where extensive debates and discussions took place. Since then, the situation for learning and teaching has changed radically and literature is presently being reconsidered within the language teaching profession (Carter and Long, 1991). This changed attitude towards literature and its importance has also affected the Malaysian national curriculum. In 1992, Literature in English was first introduced to Form Four students. Subsequently, this has led to the re-introduction of literature into language classrooms in the year 2000, and is now an integrated element of the English language component. The year 2003 saw the introduction of the use of the English language as the

medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science subjects for Form One and Primary One students. These moves and developments are positive efforts on the part of the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of students' English language proficiency (The Star, May 2nd 2005).

The rationale offered for incorporating literature into language classrooms among others includes the inculcation of the reading habit, and in particular, to promote the acquisition of English (Hall, 1994). Students are expected to not only read, understand and to master the language, but to also gain interest and appreciation towards literary texts. Literature in English has the main aim of fostering in students the 'love for reading literary works, and to develop attitudes and linguistic abilities that will enable them to respond effectively to these literary works' (KBSM, 1991).

Any serious attempts to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning of literature in schools must start from an understanding of what people in classrooms do at present (Whitehead, 1968). There needs to be an attempt to picture or imagine what happens in classrooms between teachers and learners. The learning process is no longer a 'one way street' whereby the teachers' role is merely to provide knowledge to students. As classrooms are for learners, teaching should be more learner-centered than teacher-centered (Nunan, 1989). A two-way communication is crucial for teachers and learners to participate interactively to create a harmonious learning environment. This will encourage learners to negotiate in an interactive learning process within the conventions of the teacher's teaching methods. However, according to Nunan (1989) there is lack of evidence about what happens in classrooms: how and what teachers teach and how and what students learn, and the extent to which the English language is actually used. A review of the literature reveals that research on this situation is scarce in the Malaysian ESL context. Thus, this study aimed at describing how teachers teach literature in Malaysian classrooms.

A Model of Teachers' Thought and Action

It is beneficial to look at teacher's thought processes (Figure 1) as it could increase our understanding of how and why the process of teaching looks and works as it does. Teacher thought processes complements the larger body of research on teaching effectiveness: this is because how teachers think, act and react determine effective teaching (Clark and Peterson, 1986).

Teachers' actions and their observable effects are important as what is inside the teachers' head is translated here. Therefore, this model depicts two important domains that involves the teaching process. Each domain is represented by a circle. The first domain is the teachers' thought processes comprising teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions, teacher planning (preactive and postactive thoughts) and teachers' theories and beliefs. Teachers' thought processes occur "inside teachers' heads" and therefore they are unobservable and they are **measurable**. The second domain contains teachers' actions and their observable effects comprising teachers' classroom behaviour, students'

classroom behaviour and student achievement. The phenomena involved in the teacher action domain are more **easily measured** and are more easily subjected to empirical research methods than are the phenomena involved in the teacher thought domain. Thus the variables for this particular research contained in both domains.

The relationship between teacher classroom behaviour, student classroom behaviour and student achievement are reciprocal and therefore it is represented as cyclical or circular. This is because teacher behaviour affects student behaviour, which in turn affects student behaviour and ultimately student achievement. Alternatively, students' achievement may cause teachers to behave differently toward the student, which then affects student behaviour and subsequent student achievement.

Teacher's interactive thoughts and decisions and their preactive thoughts and decisions are important because they determine teachers' interactive teaching. Teachers think differently during interactive teaching compared to their thinking while not interacting with students. Teacher planning includes the thought processes that teachers engaged in prior to and after classroom interaction. Teachers' theories and beliefs represents the rich store of background knowledge teachers have that affects their planning and their interactive thoughts and decisions.

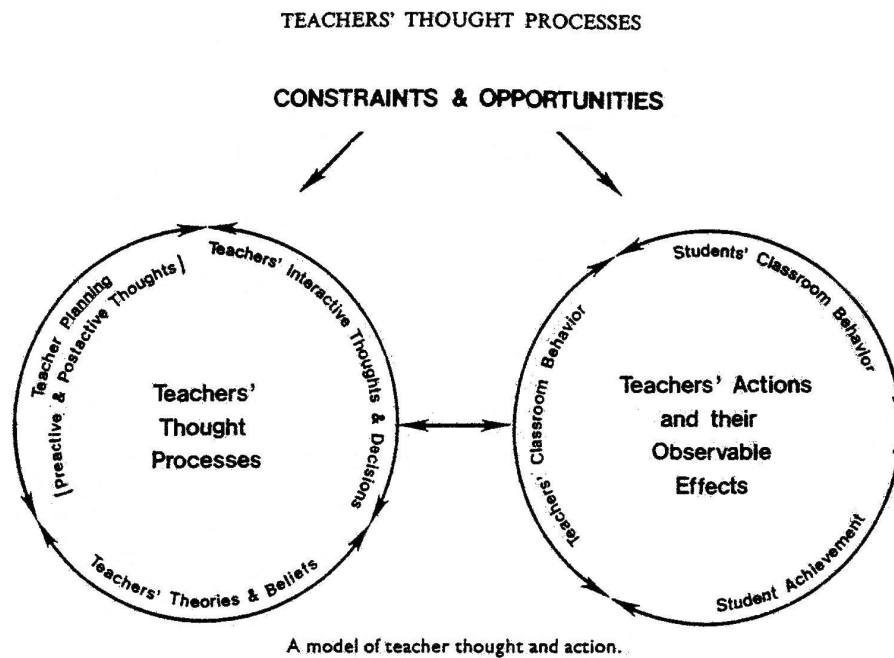


Figure 1: Teacher's thought processes. Source: Clark & Peterson (1986). In Wittrock. M. C. *Handbook of research on teaching*. New York: McMillan Publication Co.

Variables of the Study

The independent variables of this research study are belief, background knowledge, attitude, perception, student factor and evaluation factor while the dependent variables are student-centered teaching and teacher-centered teaching.

i. Presage variables

Presage variables concern traits that teachers have that affect the teaching process (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974; Clark and Peterson, 1986). They further clarified that presage variables consist of teacher formative experiences, their training experiences and their personal attributes. Teacher formative experiences are inclusive of all the incidences and situations that teachers go through that can mold and shape their behavior and mental reactions. For instance, teacher's race, religion, culture and family background that has led their classification into ascribed positions in society. Their training experiences include the events that they went through while attending college or university. These events include the undergraduate courses taken, post-graduate education, teaching practice experience, in-service and all evidence that have the possibilities of shaping their beliefs in the teaching profession. Teacher attributes include their beliefs, attitude, perception and background knowledge toward the whole teaching/learning process. These properties are presumed to characterize the individual teachers because they carry these traits within themselves (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974). They are embedded deep within themselves that they serve to explain the teachers' behavior in response to a variety of situations.

An attitude is a state of readiness, a tendency to act or react in a certain manner when confronted with a certain stimuli (Oppenheim, 1973). Attitude is reinforced by beliefs (the cognitive component) and often attracts strong feelings (the emotional component) that will lead to particular forms of behavior (the action tendency component). Gardner (1985) defines individual attitude as 'an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude/object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinion about the referent'. According to Frankfort et al. (1996) as cited from Parilah Shah (1999), attitude is referred to as a person's inclinations, prejudices, ideas, fears and convictions about any specific topic. It is further described by their context (what the attitude is about), their direction (positive, neutral or negative feelings about the object issue in question) and their intensity (an attitude may be held with greater and lesser vehemence).

Background knowledge in this research refers to the knowledge that teachers have that they bring to class and relates them to students. It comprises the related curriculum and literature components as prescribed by the Ministry of Education. It also describes the teachers' familiarity with and awareness of 'what' to teach. Shulman (1986) defines pedagogical content knowledge as subject matter knowledge for teaching. He sees it as an important way to understand the knowledge base of teaching. He further adds that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge influences teachers' classroom practices, which in turn influences students' learning and achievement. Strong pedagogical content

knowledge is found to be positively linked to students' achievement (Carpenter et al. 1989).

Teachers' perception is considered important variables in this research and forms part of teachers' presage variables. Klazky (1984) as cited in Woolfolk (1999) defined perception as the processes of determining the meaning of what are sensed. Perception occurs when teachers interpret a given meaning to stimuli in their classroom environment or in the students' classroom behavior. Perception is important in a teaching and learning situation as it reinforces teachers' decision-making on how to handle classroom situations. Past research has shown that thinking (perception) plays an important part in teaching.

Borg (2001) generally defines belief as a proposition, which is consciously or unconsciously held and accepted true by the individual holding it and which serves as a guide to thought and behavior. It also helps to frame our understanding of events. However, in reference to teachers' beliefs, Borg specifically defines it as teachers' pedagogic beliefs that are relevant to their teaching. Richardson (1996) believes that teachers' beliefs come from three different stages of their educational career: personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction (pedagogical knowledge) and experience with formal knowledge.

ii. Context variables

Context variables consist of student factor and evaluation factor. Student factor and evaluation factor concern conditions to which teachers have to make personal adjustments. Context variables consist of the nature of the pupils and the physical or instructional situation or setting in which the educational process is taking place. With these two factors combined, maximum input learning could be achieved (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974)

Student factor comprises the nature of the social background of the students- their attitude, motivation, interest and proficiency level that determine the nature of the classroom the teachers have to face. Their prior knowledge, goals, beliefs and dispositions they bring into class with them have a great impact on their learning. Like the teachers' early formative experiences, the students' social status and family background can determine classroom interaction (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974). They further say that it is advantageous if teachers could observe and identify the nature of their students: their background and disposition they bring into class to reciprocate with teaching methods suitable for them to attain maximum learning.

The evaluation factor concerns the teaching hours available for literature teaching, preparation for examinations and choice of text. Given the nature of the evaluation factor, the researcher postulates that this would be a contributing factor in informing teachers' literature teaching behavior in the English language classroom. O'Sullivan (1991) asserts that evaluation is a strong driving force that pushes teachers to organize their teaching practices so that students will obtain maximum benefit. It is believed that teachers'

performance is reflected in the students' achievement making teachers' work difficult with the little teaching hours available to achieve the desired results.

iii. Process variables

Process variables examine the actual activities that take place in classrooms. They comprise the observable behaviors of both pupils and teachers. As often assumed, the success of teaching is in the teachers' hands. Therefore, how and why the teachers behave in class matters. Process/product variables concern the actual activities of classroom teaching- what teachers and students do in class.

The methods employed are either teacher-centered or student-centered learning. This refers to all the observable activities that take place between teachers and students in class; how teachers teach, how students respond and so forth. Fung and Chow's (2002) review on pedagogy and classroom practices revealed that the teacher-centered and student-centered teaching methods are basic to most theoretical and teaching propositions. It is believed that much of the success in teaching in classrooms lies in the teachers' hands because they are responsible in stimulating students' interest and in gearing the mood and flow of the class. This is the final phase where the outcome of what and how teachers have performed in classrooms are shown. This outcome depends largely on the nature of the teacher's instruction and on the students' reception. It is the observable changes that come about in students as a result of their involvement in classroom activities with their teachers and other students. The teacher-centered teaching method is inclined to be more traditional where the teacher leads the class most of the time, while the student-centered teaching method takes on the more progressive channel that allows for students maximum participation.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to:

1. investigate the level of teachers' (i) belief in (ii) attitude towards (iii) background knowledge about, and (iv) perception of literature and literature teaching (prose)
2. investigate the extent of the evaluation factor influence on literature and literature teaching (prose)
3. investigate the extent of the student factor influence on literature and literature teaching (prose)
4. investigate the preferred literature teaching (prose) method in teaching prose: teacher-centered or student-centered teaching

Research Framework

The participants for this study were the English language teachers teaching non-residential day schools in Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur. The student population comprised Form One pupils from non-residential day schools in WPKL. Based on information from *Unit Data dan Maklumat, Jabatan Pendidikan Wilayah Persekutuan*

Kuala Lumpur, as of 31st January 2003, as a whole, 969 teachers were teaching the English language. Out of 969, the number of teachers whose major option was English was 817 and the number for the non-major option was 120. The number of Form One students attending the non-residential secondary schools was 21,966. There were 83 non-residential schools in WPKL. The major instrument used to collect relevant data was questionnaire. Descriptive statistics in the form of frequency, percentage and mean were used to present and to summarize the data. To interpret the level of the mean scores, the researcher looked at the frequency, percentage and mean scores directly from the 5-point Likert scale. The researcher also looked at the mean score and level of very low, low, moderate, high and very high to look at the level of the teachers' and students' variables. The level and interpretation of mean scores are described in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Interpretation of mean scores of variables

1.0 - 1.80	very low
1.81 - 2.60	low
2.61 - 3.40	moderate
3.41 - 4.20	high
4.21 - 5.0	very high

Source: Score category breakdown adopted from Siti Rahaya and Salbiah (1996).

Results

Descriptive statistical analysis – teachers' survey questionnaire

The demarcation point of the mean score is set as seen from Table 1. The overall mean scores of the variables ranged from a moderate level of 3.30 with a standard deviation of 0.32 to a high of 4.20 with a standard deviation of 0.4. As reflected from these scores, it shows that teachers have very positive attitude towards literature and literature teaching. This seems to be a clear sign that teachers are aware of what is expected of them and how they should gear their teaching. Challenges that they have to confront did not seem to deter their spirit. Their positive outlook and concrete personally held views they hold give them strength and courage to accomplish their responsibilities.

Background knowledge has a mean score of 3.60 with respondents believing that teachers should have a fair amount of knowledge to teach students and kept them well inform on literature teaching materials. Having a substantial amount of background knowledge is crucial as it is the foundation for both content and pedagogical, as it is the foundation to the teaching profession. Teachers' belief has a moderate mean score of 3.30. Though at moderate level, this does not suggest that they do not perform well in their teaching. Results detail show that some aspects of their teaching produce high percentage input, an indication that they were aware of what was expected of them.

Research results revealed that teachers have a very positive (mean=4.19) attitude towards literature and literature teaching. They have concrete personally held views that could not deter their spirit to accomplish their responsibilities. They have positive attitude with a strong perception that what they are doing is correct, driving classroom actions and influencing the teacher change process. Richardson (1996) posits that attitude and beliefs are a subset of a group of constructs that name, define and describe the structure and content of mental states that are thought to drive a person's actions. Thus, the attitudes they possess drive much of the literature teaching method in classrooms. The teachers who possess these criteria, are able to process new information and react to the possibilities of change and teach.

Research result for background knowledge revealed that teachers with strong pedagogical background knowledge were found to represent content more accurately and to focus on children's understanding and respond with appropriate explanations. This research revealed that literature teachers in urban Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur have a high level of background knowledge. Demographic data showed that more than half of the respondents were TESL graduates. The non-graduate ones comprised teachers who were very experienced, with at least six years minimum and 20 years maximum. Having had enough background knowledge exposure on literature teaching, teachers were comfortable with the exposure they received. They felt that they had adequate knowledge to teach the subject effectively, thus teaching with utmost confidence.

Research results revealed that teachers' perception towards literature teaching is at the high level (4.19). They were aware that literature is seen as a vehicle towards understanding life because prose offered in texts most of the time taught them to be critical thinkers and subsequently to be more 'human'. They must have a well-defined and clear perception of the literature texts that they were teaching to enhance their teaching process.

Research results indicate that teachers possessed a substantial amount of beliefs, though at moderate level (mean=3.30), towards literature and literature teaching and about the use of teaching choice in classrooms. Results also show that respondents are aware of their duty and responsibility to teach literature. They believed that literature is important for their students' development, having been aware that a variety of teaching techniques would benefit for students' learning. Like attitude, beliefs were thought to drive actions and to improve students' learning.

Evaluation factor in this research are the teaching hours allocated for literature classes, the anxiety teachers faced to teach in preparation for examinations, and the resource materials/texts provided and recommended by the Ministry of Education. These elements determined and confined teachers' teaching to a certain extent. Research results revealed that evaluation factor had a moderate influence on literature teaching. Though moderately driven, teachers still showed emphasis and concern for these aspects as they had a strong influence on how teachers accomplished their teaching tasks.

Examination is a curriculum evaluation often regarded as a test of attainment. Roles of examination are wide. They informed students' progress to the students themselves, to the parents and to the teachers. They assist students to reflect and evaluate their general level of attainment. They assist teachers for the purposes of diagnosis for individual students so that appropriate action can be taken. They assist the authorities and curriculum implementers to evaluate the success of curricula and to find out if it has achieved its aims.

In this research context, teachers were urged, naturally within themselves that they were teaching for examination purposes aside from sharing their knowledge with students. Thus the feelings of tense towards examination was apparent to ensure that students did well in their subjects, in which, if students did well or not, would reflect the nature of their teaching. Expectations from various quarters: students, parents and head of schools could burden teachers. Subsequently, when teachers and students were concerned about marks and performance, the pleasure of enjoying teaching and learning literature were lost to the pressure of trying to pass examination.

The number of teaching hour allocated for teaching literature was, more often than not, insufficient. When teachers had to rush through a text, naturally they omitted some points, in which connections might be lost on the way. Research results revealed that in the midst of enjoying a simulation or role-play or while engrossed in a heated discussion, the bell rang and they had to stop. It could be more meaningful if more time were given where students could enjoy learning without interruption, which could leave behind a pleasant learning experience. The challenge here is to work within the time frame.

The texts allocated for literature could be made more diversified having themes values and culture closer to home, which allowed them to understand better. The authorities could consider prescribing reading materials relevant to students' life experiences. Otherwise, when students were not familiar with text, it could stumble their interest and motivation to go further. Currently, the texts allocated for Form One students seemed relevant having local culture and setting. The only imperfection is that the variety of texts is limited though the Ministry has spent millions on the prescribed texts. The Ministry of Education (MOE) could have catered a wider range of texts for teachers to choose for their students accordingly. Research revealed that not only texts were catered from a limited range, resource materials were also insufficient for students to make revision. Subsequently, they have to buy workbooks from bookstores that have excellent exercises and illustrations, and they are cheap.

Student factor has a mean score of 3.54. Being aware of the nature of students bound by culture and traditions that had molded their attitude and behavior to a certain extent, teachers have a clear idea of how to approach students. In general, teachers are aware of their students' capability: to what extent they are proficient, responsive, motivated or interested. Consequently, they tailored their teaching to meet the students' requirements as reflected in the high scores of the student factor variable.

Evaluation has a moderate mean score of 3.38. As the criteria of evaluation was originally derived from the higher authorities; examination, teaching hours, nature of

textbooks, etc, things were not within their means to change. As such, teachers had to perform task under limited circumstances. They had to adapt to situations to the best of their abilities. Student factor and evaluation factor were important determinants how teachers could gear and focus on their teaching. The nature of the students and the nature of the implementation of the evaluation criteria provided a good platform for teachers to determine the best way to choose a teaching method. The level of background knowledge in the urban area of Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur was statistically high. This was expected as almost 86.0% of the teachers were TESL graduates acquiring all the content and pedagogical during their training and university years.

Table 2: Frequency, percentage and mean scores of teachers' variables

Variables	Frequency	And	Percentage			Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
	Mean Score 4.21-5.0 (Very High)	Mean Score 3.41-4.20 (High)	Mean Score 2.61-3.40 (Medium)	Mean score 2.61-3.40 (Low)	Mean score 1-1.80 (Very Low)			
Teachers' Belief on literature and literature teaching	4 (1.4%)	84 (29.9%)	192 (68.1%)	2 (6.7%)	-	3.301	.323	Moderate
Teachers' Background Knowledge on literature and literature teaching	30 (10.6%)	171 (60.6%)	75 (26.7%)	6 (2.1%)	-	3.609	.489	High
Teachers' Attitude on literature and literature teaching	121 (4.29%)	155 (55%)	6 (21.8%)	-	-	4.198	.370	High (positive)
Teachers' Perception on literature and literature teaching	129 (45.7%)	148 (52.5%)	5 (1.8%)	-	-	4.202	.411	High (Positive)
Student Factor	12 (4.3%)	168 (19.5%)	98 (34.8%)	4 (1.4%)	-	3.547	.384	High
Evaluation Factor	8 (2.8%)	23 (8.2%)	138 (48.9%)	13 (4.6%)	-	3.382	.430	Moderate
Teacher-Centered approach	79 (28.0%)	173 (61.3%)	29 (10.3%)	1 (0.4%)	-	3.926	.466	High
Student-centered approach	41 (14.5%)	117 (41.5%)	111 (39.4%)	12 (4.2%)	1 (0.4%)	3.537	.579	High

Teacher-centered teaching method has a high mean score of 3.92. Some teachers were aware of the benefits and importance of delivering through teacher-centered, as they believed students could gain maximum learning. Student-centered teaching is also at the high range score of 3.53. This method offered students a more diversified kind of learning where students are given the opportunity to maximise learning – students' involvement was optimal. The difference in means scores between teacher-centered and student-centered was 0.38. This suggests that teachers preferred to employ teacher-centered teaching method.

Ideally, it is best to have a combination of both teacher and student-centered teaching method (Carter and Long, 1991) in literature classroom teaching. However, contrary to people's expectation and to the generalisation of the urban population, these research findings revealed that teachers more often employed teacher-centered teaching. This was not without a cause. Generally teachers will conduct student-centered teaching only with the good classes (the first or two good classes), as students from these classes were generally quite proficient and were quite interested and motivated. These students would normally attempt to participate in classroom activities creating a two-way involvement, stimulating both teachers and students to interact.

There have been studies that indicate that poor or weak students were highly motivated to learn English but had to face difficulties. With the weak classes, teachers had to conduct teacher-centered teaching because of the nature of the students: passive, insufficient proficiency and unmotivated. This is evident in the high-level range of the student factor variable with a mean score of 3.54 and a standard deviation 0.38 where teachers had to consider the nature of the students before taking a stance on which method to employ. Students in the weaker classes would not participate voluntarily having been aware of their own incapability. Being unable to participate voluntarily is a drawback for some students as they were proven to be good in other subjects except the English language.

Summary of descriptive statistical analysis – students' survey questionnaire

Generally set against the demarcation points for mean rating scores determined from Table 1, the overall mean scores for each of the variable varied from a moderate 4.22 (attitude) to 3.29 (teacher-centered teaching method). Students were able to perceive that teachers' attitude were very positive towards literature and literature teaching. This evidence was apparent with the variable attitude having a very high level mean score of 4.22. The variable teaching atmosphere was also at the high level with an overall mean score of 3.77. As the teachers' attitude was positive, and the teaching atmosphere was very conducive, the impact of the classroom teachers' teaching was very strong. The overall mean score for this variable was at a high 3.79 as such students felt comfortable learning in a very conducive and a non-threatening situation.

Results also show that students noted teachers using student-centered literature teaching method more often compared to teacher-centered. This was apparent as shown in the

high-level mean score of 3.70 for student-centered teaching compared to 3.29 for teacher-centered teaching method.

Table 3: Frequency, percentage and mean scores of students' variables

Variable	Frequency And Percentage					Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Level (Interpretation)
	Mean Score (Very High)	Mean Score (High)	Mean Score (Moderate)	Mean Score (Low)	Mean Score (Very Low)			
Teachers Attitude	202 (53.6%)	146 (38.7%)	28 (7.4%)	1 (0.3%)	-	4.22	0.52	Very high
Teaching Atmosphere	55 (14.6%)	257 (68.2%)	63 (16.7%)	2 (0.5%)	-	3.79	0.65	High
Impact on Students	148 (39.3%)	163 (43.2%)	57 (15.1%)	7 (1.9%)	2 (0.5%)	3.98	0.65	High
Teacher Centered	39 (10.3%)	126 (33.4%)	14 (37.5%)	62 (16.4%)	1 (2.4%)	3.29	0.70	Moderate
Student-Centered	69 (18.4%)	209 (55.4%)	91 (24.1%)	8 (2.1%)	-	3.70	0.50	High

Findings on the variables

Clark and Peterson (1986) and Dunkin and Biddle (1973) developed their own respective model of teachers' thought processes and they complemented the mental models into research teaching. The Clark and Peterson (1986) model depicts the two domains that are significantly involved in the teaching process. They are the thought processes domains and the other one is the teachers' action and their observable effects. The domains differ in the extent to which the processes are observable or non-observable. Teachers' thought processes occur in the teachers' head and mind and therefore they are unobservable. While teachers' actions and their behavior and students' behavior and their achievement performance are all observable and unobservable phenomena.

Dunkin and Biddle (1974) developed teachers' mental processes through presage, context, process and product variables. His model is similar to the model by Clark and Peterson (1986) as both focused on teachers' mental processes that affect teachers' behavior towards students and how they shape the teachers' teaching. Teachers behave in a certain way in classrooms and these behaviors have certain effects on students. Dunkin and Biddle (1974) believed that teachers' classroom behavior might affect students' classroom behavior and in turn affect students' behavior and achievement. Teachers' thought processes are encompassed within the cognitive domain. They consist of

teachers' planning, teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions and their theories and beliefs. Teachers' planning includes thought processes that they engaged in before and after classroom interaction. Teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions are engaged during classroom interaction and this is an important factor because whatever thoughts and decisions the teachers have will determine the classroom atmosphere.

Thus, the variables involved in this research involved teachers' thought processes (teaching) and the context factors (student's learning) closely related to the teaching and learning process. The variables, which will be discussed below are the teachers' belief, attitude, background knowledge and perception. The other two variables are student factor and evaluation factor.

The dependent variables involved in this research were belief, background knowledge, attitude, perception, student factor and evaluation factor while the independent variables were student-centered teaching and teacher-centered teaching. The dependent variables were called presage/context variables while the independent variables process/product variables. The positions of the variables, as they complement each other in this research, are illustrated in the Research Conceptual Framework in Figure 1.

Banos and Elia (2003) see attitude as the individual prevailing tendency to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object (persons or group of people, institutions or events) where it can be positive (values) or negative (prejudice). They believe that three components shape teachers' attitude; cognitive component, the knowledge about an attitude object, whether accurate or not; affective component, feelings towards the object; behavioral component, the action taken towards the object. Object here refers to the student in class. Thus teachers' attitude build up from the three-component play an important role in shaping teachers' classroom postures towards students. Sparks (1988) showed that improving teachers have a positive attitude towards classroom teaching. They are more than ever willing to experiment with recommended practices learned during in-service training and seminars compared to the non-improving ones.

Povel (1992) asserted that prior experience and knowledge of pre-service teachers are crucial in determining their teaching performance. He noted that in-service teachers felt insecure about their level of subject-matter knowledge and indicated that they needed to know more subject matter before entering the classroom. Having had enough background knowledge, the teachers maintained confidence to teach literature effectively. This is because they know exactly what to teach the students and how to do that. This research revealed that teachers in WPKL have a high level (mean=3.60) of background knowledge. This showed that the teachers received their background knowledge from various sources indicating that they bring in this knowledge through from past experience as well. Teachers were aware of the various teaching methods available indicating that they are well informed on current issues.

Zitlow (1990) as cited from McLure and Zitlow (1991) finds that perception affects the teaching approach and the learning environment. They said that teachers' perception on aesthetic education emphasized on what is most important and what is basic. The teachers believe that students should be allowed to be co-readers and co-creators of meaning,

having the opportunity to select, explore and connect ideas they respond to text. Eisner (1978) stands on the belief that when reading literature text, there must be a human contribution of the synthesis of past and present, an interaction of all the knowledge system we have that are appropriate to the expressive form we attempt to read. This idea is relevant to Rosenblatt (1980) whose belief in aesthetic reading, sound and rhythm and association and sense are perceived together, blended into an experienced meaning.

How teachers think and believe is crucial as it determines the nature of the on-going classroom of their actual behavior towards students. Teachers' beliefs towards literature and literature teaching determine how their behavior could influence students' motivation and interest. Pajares (1992) noted that teachers' beliefs are central to determining their actual behavior towards students. If teachers can identify the level of students' capabilities, they will try to select and adjust their behavior and instructional choice accordingly. Research conducted by Flowerday and Shraw (2000) confirmed Pajares's (1992) findings related to instructional choices and assert that instructional choices ranged from function of content areas, topic of study, reading materials, methods of assessment, activities, social agreements to procedural choices. From the researchers' literature research reading, all of the variables mentioned above were consistent with the recommendations for students' choice made by educational researchers.

Borg (2001) says that teachers who possess knowledge of subject matter have a significant effect on their beliefs on instructional choices. Teachers who possess strong background knowledge are confident to deliver their presentation as they accept the realistic awareness about their teaching task. Their instructional choices are clear and specific having a wide repertoire of teaching methodologies to suit the variety of learning styles within any classroom. Shulman (1987) cited in Borg (2001) conducted a study on teachers' background knowledge and instructional choices. The study revealed that a teacher who possess a well-developed understanding of literature but who was uncertain of her understanding of English grammar displayed strikingly different teaching behaviors during literature and grammar lessons; in the former, she was interactive and learner-centered while in the latter she was deductive and teacher-centered.

Grossman, Wilson and Shulman (1989:28) cited in Borg (2001) also reported in their study that the English teachers who were uncertain of their own knowledge of grammar tried to avoid teaching wherever possible. They say that teachers' lack of content knowledge can also affect the teaching style of instructions. In teaching material they are uncertain of, teachers may choose to lecture rather than soliciting questions from students for fear of not being able to give the correct responses. In teaching grammar, a teacher raced through a review of the homework avoiding eye contact with the students she thought might ask difficult questions.

Students' Perception of the Teacher's Classroom Teaching

Results revealed that students saw their teachers having positive attitude towards literature and literature teaching. They felt that teachers took full responsibility in

carrying out their task. Their teachers manifested their concern on the students' progress and achievement in the subject. Teachers were always there to give assistance when needed in whatever form. This showed that teachers always tried to cultivate an atmosphere that was cooperative rather than competitive. Students were allowed to give their views and opinions, thereby, creating a receptive classroom atmosphere to give maximum learning input. This was generally perceived to be non-threatening.

The literature component class had also given a great impact on the students. Most students felt that somehow or other, the literature class had triggered their interest to read more materials in English. Some felt that their proficiency level had improved, giving them some confidence to interact with others. They felt that they were able to communicate better and they were more willing to speak up than before. However, many researches conducted noted that students' perception of literature lessons were mixed while the students' perception on the literature in language classrooms appeared to be bifurcated. They felt that the programme left much to be desired claiming that it has not improved their reading habit.

Students perceived that they experienced more student-centered teaching compared to teacher-centered teaching. This was because they were given group and pair work activities more often and they noted that they were given opportunities to voice out their opinion. Role-play was also often carried out becoming evidence that student-centered teaching was used. Data generated from the interviews revealed that teachers wanted students to be independent learners, stimulating their thinking all the time. The teachers thought that this mode of learning would bring out the confidence in the students. Though teacher-centered teaching was less often carried out, teachers still practiced 'the custodian of knowledge' whenever necessary. As the teachers' attitude was positive and the teaching atmosphere was very conducive, the impact of the teachers' classroom teaching was very strong.

Conclusion

This study has implications for the formulation of strategies to address the problems pertaining to current literature teaching practices in urban English language classroom contexts. The data from the study yields some illuminating issues, which have implications for action. This calls for the involvement of the Ministry of Education, the curriculum planners, and the implementers of pedagogies in classrooms.

Teachers' acceptance and their interpretations of recent major policy changes in the English literature component nationwide were basically positive but with mixed feelings despite the fact that they had to admit they struggled through the process. They shared their struggles, confusions, worries, and hopes with other teachers along with the attempt to level with outcomes, proficiencies, indicators, criteria and standard. Their relative success or failure carries consequential evidences visible to parents and public, which proved to be a formidable task. This research revealed that teachers possess a high level of background knowledge and hold positive attitude and perception on literature and literature teaching. They demonstrated a sense of responsibility towards their students.

The high level of student factor was an evident that they were concern about them. This implied that they were generally optimistic towards the success of the running of this program. This finding is consistent with local research conducted by Ganakumaran et al. (2003).

Teachers' positive attitude and perception towards literature and literature teaching seemed to drive much of the literature curriculum gearing on teaching strategies that they adapted sensitively to the needs of our non-native tongue students of literature in English. Their level of background knowledge was high suggesting that they possessed a greater sensitivity and sense of awareness indicating a relative greater understanding of the world. Subsequently, these teachers were capable of stimulating a greater interest and involvement among subjects. Being one of the covariates, teachers' experience impacted classroom-teaching practices deserving the term wise and learned teacher who can create a clear avenue for literature learning among learners. Student factor had a strong influence upon teachers' teaching agenda: their choice of text and teaching methods especially. Understanding the nature of our students socially and culturally is crucial to gauge into appropriate teaching perspectives. The high level of teacher-centered and student-centered teaching method proved that teachers take on the pro-active role to cater students according to their capability level and their students' receptiveness.

Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and background knowledge are important considerations in understanding classroom practices and conducting teacher education programmes designed to help prospective and in-service teachers develop their thinking and teaching practices. The higher authorities could look at teachers' education programs that are designed to focus on how pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and teachers who attended related courses could change their outlook towards these variables. This should be the major construct of interest in studying teachers' ways of thinking and their ways of classroom practices. To understand classroom realities, the influence of, the explorations and formations of teachers' beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and background knowledge on teaching practices must continue and be continuously supported and developed.

It is crucial that they hold focused and concrete perspectives on these variables because these are the crucial variables building the teachers' characters and dispositions, being the implementers of classroom lessons. Efforts in the development of fully cultivated teachers in all aspects have to begin at the training or pre-service level, policy level and followed by clear planning strategies with regards to implementations. More important is to create awareness among teachers a sense of responsibility towards students. And the models regarding the construct perspective must come from the upper echelon of the educational hierarchy.

Suggestions for Future Research

Knowledge currently available on teachers' belief, attitude, perception, background knowledge is acutely under research as there is scarce documentation on them in the

Malaysian context. Very few studies have attempted to provide concrete and comprehensive discussion about the factors affecting teachers' behavior and thought processes in the second language context in Malaysia precisely on language and literature teaching. Therefore, it would be beneficial if isolated research is conducted on teachers' belief, attitude, perception and background knowledge in order to comprehend their behavior and thought processes in determining classroom behavior.

A broader aspect on the nature of our students could be researched at a more in-depth level. This could be addressed through their gender, age, culture, socio-economic background, and interest and ability level. Our students have been known to be passive, coiled up behind their tables when they see their teachers. It would be interesting and beneficial to focus research on teaching and learning from the perspective of the students as to why they behave and act the way they do, and to focus on the effectiveness of the teachers' teaching. Consequently, students' needs and expectations could be examined within the constraints of the literature teaching and learning processes. Correlation research between students' attitude, motivation and achievement with teachers' literature teaching practices should be encouraged to see the extent of the effectiveness of their teaching.

Another important research that could benefit the Ministry of Education (MOE) is to have an ongoing evaluation and re-evaluating teacher-training module. Emphasis should be placed upon the course content quality related upon and appropriate to students' needs. Teacher training participants must take the utmost initiative to grasp as much learning materials to be applied to their teaching classrooms, and also for their in-house information. Training course must not be taken for granted as 'time-off' from school to holiday destination as perceived by some teachers. Training instructors should prepare comprehensive teaching materials, which could be well delivered, easily understood by trainees.

These findings indicate that staff developers and course trainers may want to consider teachers' philosophical receptivity to new practices when presenting workshops. The trainers receptive to teachers' varying opinions and the willingness to discuss conflicts may result in the increased value most teachers came to accept. Thus, improving teachers are willing to experiment with recommended practices and in their self-efficacy. In contrast, the non-improving teachers are rather recalcitrant or indifferent towards constructing improvements in their classrooms. They tended to maintain their 'old' style of teaching, attempting few changes or not at all and to have lower expectations for themselves and their students. This kind of teachers not only had given up, not only on the students but also on their own ability to help students learn. Therefore, the consequences of attending courses is crucial as it sheds some light for teachers who have a fixed set of mental framework in the ways they teach and are convinced that they are the best: they refused to be exposed to techniques which are recognized as effective. Teachers should be prepared for change and innovation in language teaching. Therefore, teachers who are willing to venture into new avenues are normally flexible in the ways they see changes. A number of experimental studies indicate that when teachers

participate in academic in-service training programs, both their subject matter knowledge and the achievement of their students increase.

This research also offers some recommendations to develop teachers' receptivity to new practices and try to dissolve any resistance. Trainers and practitioners should sit down and discuss how new practices differ from the teachers' current practices. These could be eye openers for both parties to improve on their current practices. Also, discussion could revolve around new strategies proposed and see what the expected influences are of the new strategies on the students. They could hold small group discussions in which teachers share their positive and negative reactions to the recommended practices. It is necessary for teachers who are involved in the literature in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in Malaysia to be exposed to more literature courses (Rosli Talif, 1995). The course components should focus on the development of teaching strategies and literature teaching approaches.

As a conclusion, with the emergence of the 21st Century, teachers and educators are searching for ways to better address and serve the population of diverse learners in our classrooms. Recalls for reform in education have recommended that teachers evaluate how they teach, why they teach, how students learn and what literacy to teach. To prepare students to take their places in a literate society, teachers must dialogue and to research to meet the demands, visions, and innovations required of them and their students. It is imperative that they search for appropriate solutions assuring that students receive the essentials of education.

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