

Teacher's Approaches in Teaching Literature: Observations of ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the approaches employed by teachers in teaching Contemporary Children's Literature Program to upper primary school. Using classroom observations and interview as research instruments, this paper evaluates the approaches of five ESL teachers teaching Year 5 students and examines the various challenges faced by them in the teaching of literature. Preliminary findings on the approaches revealed that the incorporation of literary elements in the classroom was minimal. Teachers were lacked creativity and fully utilized the modules provided by the Curriculum Development Centre. The Pre, While and Post-Reading was not employed effectively due to the lack of textbook provided by the school. Nevertheless, the program provides great potential for enhancing students' language learning in the classroom. This study contributes to the field of curriculum and pedagogy for authentic learning from the evaluation of teachers' approaches in the classroom learning.

Keywords: *Approaches, Challenges, Contemporary Children's Literature Program, Literature in Education, Literature Component*

INTRODUCTION

The literature component in English is aimed at enhancing students' language proficiency, and it is also geared for the purpose of generating the aesthetic part of the language that is personal response from students. The English language Curriculum Specifications stated that the aim of literature is not only meant to address the interpersonal, informational aesthetic value of learning but also the learning of the English language in general. Similarly, this objective is in line to the curriculum of the Malaysia Ministry of Education (2009) that spells out the objectives of the introduction of literature component into the English language syllabus are to enable students to improve their proficiency through reading, respond to text, draw lessons and insights from slices of life, understand and appreciate other culture, relate to events, characters and own life as well as expose students to models of good writing.

Literature in Education is aimed at developing the potential of students in a holistic, balanced and integrated manner encompassing the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects in order to create a balanced and harmonious human being with high social standards. It is therefore, the primary aim of incorporating literature into the English Language syllabus is to improve students' language ability. As stated in the English Language Curriculum Specification, the CCL Program is aimed to help students improve their English through reading simple fiction, to provide a continuum for the literature component introduced in school and to create an enjoyable learning environment. In relation to this, literature is not only meant to address the interpersonal and informational aesthetic value of the learning, but also beyond that where the students learn about people, culture, ethics, behaviors and other social norms. Hence, the implementation of children's literature would help children to expand their imagination and to acquire literacy in their

learning.

There is a need to discover if the literature component in English is taught in line with its aims and objectives. Thus, a focus on the approaches employed by teachers in the teaching of literature component in English would be of great value and interest. This study focuses on teacher's approaches and challenges in the teaching of CCL Program in primary schools. The study will focus on the approaches employed and challenges encountered in the teaching of literature to upper primary students.

Review of Literature

The Role of CCL in Primary Schools

The Malaysia Ministry of Education (2006) defines children's literature as the material created for and widely read, viewed and heard by children that have an imaginative element. Cheng (2008) defines children's literature is meant for children, be it read, viewed or heard. She added that children want to derive fun from reading a book and there is a need for children's book to teach good moral values.

The CCL Program was implemented in the year 2006 as an intensive reading program by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) of Malaysia, with the main objective to improve English language teaching through the introduction of story books or children's literature. The program will provide students basic foundation of early learning literature and increase an understanding, thoughtful, and appreciative of other societies, cultures, values and traditions in order to assist them in the emotional and spiritual growth. The main aim of the program are (1) to help pupils improve their English through reading simple fiction, (2) to provide a continuum for the literature component introduced in Secondary school, and (3) to create and enjoyable learning environment. And, the learning objectives outlined by the CDC for literature component are to (1) instill and inculcate the reading habit among pupils, (2) enrich pupil's vocabulary and language content, (3) enhance pupil's thinking skills, (4) promote cultural understanding in the Malaysian context, (5) improve English language proficiency of pupils, and (6) provide lively, enjoyable and high-interest readings.

The program is taught for students in Year 4 (aged ten), Year 5 (age eleven), and Year 6 (age twelve) in a single period a week. Each student will read at least two books in a school year, and they are introduced to two different genres: short stories and poems.

Literature is meant to be enjoyed, as literature can be employed as a tool to promote literacy and proficiency in the language. It assists students to deal with problem of social, cultural, racial or problem that deals with life in the real world. The CDC of Malaysia Ministry of Education (2006) provides three benefits of having children's literature in primary schools' learning in the implementation of CCL Program. They are (1) the personal and emotional gains which offer enjoyment, enrich children understanding of themselves and the world around them, develops imagination, helps children make sense of their own experience and evokes one's feelings on issues related to life, (2) the learning gained allows children to learn new ideas and new knowledge, adds to their understanding of concepts, allows children to understand cultural traditions and values and issues in life, allows children to develop respect for self and others, and encourages them to become aware of their audience, and (3) the language gain which help children develop an awareness of how language works in communication, develop an understanding of the meaning of words, allows them to experience new ways of using language that bridges the gap between written and spoken language and allows them to experience the form of narratives.

The Role of Teachers in the Teaching of CCL Program

The CDC advocates teachers to read the story thoroughly with students and highlights the storyline, characters, message, or moral of the story. Teachers are required to perform activities suggested in the modules provided by the CDC, and encouraged to develop worksheet for students, as well as plan activities that students can be placed in their portfolio. Teachers are to evaluate the portfolio which students have completed within a period of time. Other than that, teachers are encouraged to create an enjoyable learning environment by developing activities suited to students.

The CDC recommends that teacher reads the poem thoroughly and introduces the subject of the poem. This is to arouse students' enjoyment in listening to the poem by reading then aloud in class and getting students to follow along as the teacher rereads the poem. As the poem becomes more familiar,

teachers are recommended to discuss new vocabulary in order to help students to understand the poem, and to use the text to teach aspects of language in the learning.

On the side of the students, the CDC suggested that students read the book or poem and talk about it with friends, to get involved in classroom activities and complete all exercises given by their teacher. Students are required to write down all the new words they have gained and learnt in a vocabulary book. Further, they are advised to keep portfolio that has the components of (1) Table of Contents, (2) Pupil’s Work, (3) Dates, (4) Drafts and Final Pieces, and (5) Reflections. Students are encouraged to carry out self assessment to reflect on their own learning.

The Curriculum Development Board has provided resources for the CCL Program implementation in order to ensure the program is employed effectively in classroom instruction. Materials provided for the teaching of CCL includes power point slides and a guide, which allow teacher to go through the plot, setting, characters, lesson learnt and the feelings evoked by the story. The Pre, While, and Post-Reading activities are suggested in the modules provided by the CDC, which include WH-questions, gap filling, sequencing and rearranging of pictures to form a story. At the same time, the incorporation of higher order skills is also employed such as writing a diary for a character. The framework of CCL Program from the CDC is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

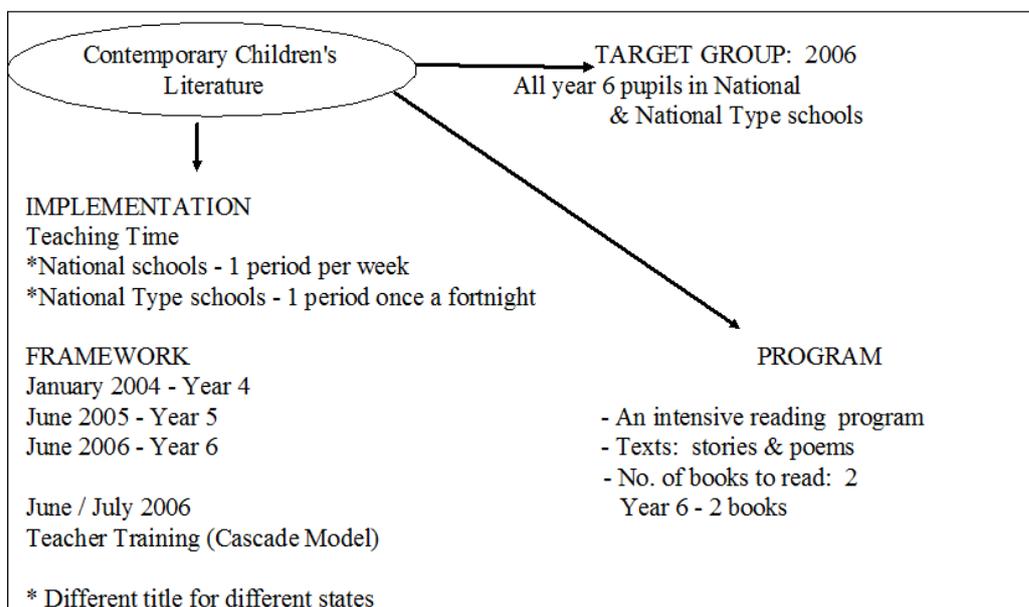


Figure 1: The framework of Contemporary Children's Literature for Primary School 2006 adapted from Curriculum Development Centre of Malaysia.

Teacher’s Approaches in the Teaching of Literature in Schools

Carter, R. and Long (1991) stated that there are three models in the teaching of literature: (1) The Cultural Model which view literature as a teacher-centered and source of facts where teacher delegates knowledge and information to students, (2) The Language Model which allows teacher to employ strategies used in language teaching to deconstruct literary texts in order to serve specific linguistic goals, and (3) The Personal Growth Model where the focus is on a particular use of language in a text and in a specific cultural context. These models have been incorporated in various approaches in the teaching of literature. There are six approaches in the teaching of literature. They are the (1) Language-Based Approach, (2) Paraphrastic Approach, (3) Information-Based Approach, (4) Personal-Response Approach, (5) Moral-Philosophical Approach, and (6) Stylistic Approach. Each of these approaches is related to the teaching of CCL Program in classroom instruction.

Literature in Education in the Malaysian schools syllabus consists of the teaching of prose which involves novels and short stories, teaching of poetry and also the teaching of drama. Malaysia Ministry of

Education (2003) has specified that the syllabus in the literature component is made up of aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the course. The syllabus is aimed to develop in students the ability to read, understand, and respond to literary texts. These can be done by exploring the issues portrayed in the literary text where students will understand the human values and concerns. The MOE has outlined objectives of literature in education are to develop in students (1) an awareness of the value and pleasure of reading good literary works, (2) an appreciation and deeper understanding of important human concerns and human relationships, (3) an ability to appreciate values which would enhance an understanding of themselves and their relationship with others, (4) an initial ability to communicate their response to texts supported with reasons, and (5) an acquaintance with an appreciation of the main forms of literary expression and of literary devices used.

The learning outcomes of literature teaching are the expected skills, experience, attitudes or language that students need to gain. The outcomes are the fundamental elements that students need to attain in the objectives of literature learning. In the CCL Program, students are introduced to short stories, which is known as one of the components in prose, functions as a continuous piece of writing which consist of both fiction and non-fiction. Authors of short stories utilize language to raise issues related to human interest. Students are required to learn good values in them by comparing and contrasting different short stories. In order to achieve the learning outcomes of literature teaching and learning, the Malaysia Ministry of Education (2003) has specified the learning outcomes of the introduction to short stories as to (1) understand the content of the text, (2) recognize and understand the issues presented in the text, (3) understand the themes and messages in the text, (4) understand the plot in the text, (5) describe the characters and interpret their interactions and relationship with another, (6) understand and interpret the contribution of setting to the story, (7) understand the author's point of view, (8) identify common literary devices authors employ to achieve their effects, (9) communicate and inform personal response to the text, and (10) produce a piece of work in response to the text studied. Therefore, it is important to determine the approaches employed by teachers in the teaching of CCL Program in order to ensure the incorporation of models of teaching literature is taken place in classroom instruction, as well as to find out types of approaches utilized by teachers in the teaching of literature. Hence, the integration of Literature in Education and short stories' learning outcomes will be assessed as to what extent the implementation of CCL Program has achieved the objectives of each learning outcomes.

Statement of Problem

CCL Program is implemented resulting from the implementation of the teaching and learning of Mathematics and Science in English language. At the same time, it is also an attempt to curb the declining levels of achievement in standard assessment of English proficiency in recent years in primary schools (Basree, 2009). Outlined with six learning objectives for the literature components, Cheng (2008) states that the study of literature aids in language acquisition by developing the children's awareness on how language works in communication and experiencing the form of narratives. The MOE has given good support in the implementation of children's literature into the school systems. Without the belief and support of the MOE in the importance of literature as a component in the syllabus, the death of literature is a sure thing (Cheng, 2008). Literature component was incorporated into the ESL syllabus with the main aim of enhancing students' language proficiency. After ten years in the syllabus, teachers should be able to teach literature effectively. However, the incorporation of literature component is still argued and debated amongst teachers, students, researchers, parents as well as the policy makers (Radzuwan Abdul Rashid & Vethamani, 2010). In addition, Basree (2009) in her study states that the child-centered approaches and activities required by CCL were largely ignored as teachers continued in their usual teacher-centered patterns. There were limited opportunities for pupils to initiate talk due to the failure, on the part of teachers, to build upon pupil contributions. Teachers did not differentiate between more and less proficient students. The more proficient children complained about being bored by inappropriate activities.

It is therefore, in the present study, based on the statistics and previous studies provided, the researcher would like to investigate as to what extent student's reading abilities and language proficiency has been carried out in the implementation of CCL Program by looking into the context, input, process and product of the program in primary schools.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the theories of cognitivism and constructivism as well as the social cognitive theory which provides the underlying principles of the study, underpinning the whole theoretical framework are integrated. The theory of cognitivism by Piaget plays a great role in understanding the learning process. Piaget sees the child as continually interacting with the world around them solving problems that are presented by the environment, and learning occurs through taking action to solve the problems (Phillips, 1969). These relationships exist between the cognitivism and the language learning process in classroom learning.

Another theory outlines is the constructivism theory, which challenges the traditional goals of education and proposes restricted, innovative teaching approaches in which students will construct knowledge themselves rather than simply receiving it from knowledgeable teachers (Roblyer, M.D., Edwards, J. & Havriluk, 1997). It is significant to understand the theory of constructivism and how it is related to learning process due to its belief that people actively construct new knowledge as they interact with new environment. The theory of Vygotsky's Learning Theory (1986) is underlying in the present study. For the purpose of curriculum to be developmentally appropriated, a teacher must plan activities that include not only what children are capable of doing their own but what they can learn with the help of others. In this situation, teachers can use information about both levels of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in organizing classroom activities via cooperative learning activities and scaffolding via a well-planned instruction.

The Schema Theory of Rumelhart (1980) stated that all knowledge is packed into units, which is called schemata. It represents knowledge about concepts of objects and the relationships they have with other objects, situations, events, sequence of events, actions and sequences of actions. In other words, this theory states that all knowledge is organized into units, and within these units of knowledge, or schemata, information is stored in the learning process. It is therefore, these theories are relevant in understanding students' development in language learning particularly, in learning literature as discusses in this study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research utilized qualitative methodology. A descriptive research methodology was employed and it used a mode of classroom observation as the primary instrument, and semi-structured interview as secondary instruments. The sample population used in this study consisted of five randomly selected schools located in Kuala Selangor in the state of Selangor in Malaysia. In each school, one ESL teacher teaching Year 5 under the CCL Program was randomly selected, after securing permission from the school principals and the state education department. Hence, the sample population consisted of five ESL trained teachers teaching Year 5 ESL classroom.

Each ESL classroom was observed three times. In this study, the five teachers are referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, and Teacher E. The first observation for each class was not taken into consideration to avoid what researchers call the researcher's paradox. Only data from the second and third observations were used for this study. All the classroom observations were audio recorded and field notes were taken to provide additional information on the classroom context. At the end, a total of 10 classroom observations were used for the purposes of data analysis. The semi-structured interviews conducted with classroom teachers looked into aspects of challenges encountered in the teaching of CCL Program. The research objectives of this study are:

1. to evaluate approaches employed by teachers in the teaching of Contemporary Children's Literature Program?
2. to examine challenges encountered by teachers in implementing the Contemporary Children's Literature Program?

Research Instruments

An observation checklist adapted and adopted from Hwang & Embi (2007) of Approaches to Teaching the Literature Component was used. The checklist consisted of observation on the approaches and activities employed by teacher in the teaching of literature component. The checklists were then summarized, compared and interpreted. A semi-structured interview is designed in order to determine the challenges faced by teachers in implementing CCL Program in the school. The interview questions were categorized and coded into few constructs. They are (1) demographic profile of teachers, (2) approaches and activities employed by teachers, and (3) factors challenges teachers in implementing the program. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed and interpreted.

Data Analysis and Procedures

This study focuses on teachers' approaches and challenges in implementing CCL Program. From the classroom observation and interviews, it required qualitative data analysis. Classroom observation checklist were summarized and compared in order to illustrate appropriate conclusions and interpretations. The interview transcripts were grouped, coded and quoted in order to find the basis of argument.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of Teachers

Participants were teachers who taught English for Standard Five. Only five teachers were selected to participate in the study. Of the five respondents, four of the respondents were Malay and the other one was Chinese in terms of races, and they were all females. Three of the teachers were below the age of 30 while another two were below the age of fifty-five. Two of the teachers were having more than thirty years of teaching experience, while another three were having less than twenty nine years of teaching experience. Two of the teachers were having more than thirty years of teaching English, while another three were having below than twenty years of teaching English experience.

Approaches Employed by Teachers

The analysis of the data from classroom observation reveals the current teaching approaches in upper primary schools in the district of Kuala Selangor. In this study, the Information-Based Approach and the Paraphrastic Approach were among the most favored approaches in the teaching of literature. The Information-Based Approach was the most favored by teachers in this study as it ensures students acquire enough knowledge and information on the literary text studied and expanded their understanding on the subject matter. Teachers explain the content of the text to class, as well as provide students with background of information related to the teaching of CCL Program. The Paraphrastic Approach was also the most favored among the other approaches in the teaching of literature component. In order to ensure students understand and provide good feedback from the teaching process in the classroom, teachers were re-telling the text to students to help them understand the literature component, and use simple terms to explain what the story is about to students. These two approaches were found among most favored in the teaching of CCL in upper primary schools of the five selected schools.

The Moral Philosophical Approach was the second most favored approach employed in the teaching of literature component in classroom. This goes in line with the National Philosophy of Education to integrate more humanistic values among the students, as included in the KBSM (Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School).

The findings do not reflect a study conducted by Radzuwan Abdul Rashid & Vethamani (2010), which stated that the Information-Based approach and Moral Philosophical Approach were among the most favored in the literature lesson. This is due to different sample of study which focused on less proficient students where it was observed in the study that teachers taught the students totally in their mother tongue. Thus, Paraphrastic Approach was less employed in the literature classroom. Hwang & Embi (2007) in their study stated that the Paraphrastic Approach was the most favored approach in the teaching of literature. This study has similar findings with the present study where the Paraphrastic Approach is also among the most

favoured approach by teachers. Perhaps, these similar findings were mainly due to the same sample of study that is, the teaching of literature component in the classroom. However, in the present study the Information-Based Approach is also the most favored by teachers in the teaching of literature to upper primary schools in the teaching of CCL Program. Of the five respondents from the two observations, the number of approaches employed by teacher in the teaching of CCL Program is shown in Table1:

Table 1: Approaches Employed by Teachers

Approaches	Frequency
Information-Based Approach	
1. Elicit information from students about the text.	4
2. Explain the content of the text to the class.	8
3. Ask questions to check students' knowledge based on what they have read.	6
4. Provide students with background information.	8
Personal-Response Approach	
5. Encourage students to relate the themes to personal experiences	4
6. Elicit students' response to a text	6
7. Encourage students to express feelings towards the issues of the text	10
Language-Based Approach	
8. Guide students to express their opinions towards a text	2
9. Set language activities in literature lesson	2
10. Encourage students to actively participate in the process of understanding the meaning of text	6
11. Students work with their classmates in the process of understanding the text	4
12. Generate language practice using the text	2
Paraphrastic Approach	
13. Re-tell the text to students to help them understand	10
14. Use simple terms to explain what the story is about to students	10
15. Discuss what the author says in the text	2
16. Get students to tell the storyline of the text	4
Moral-Philosophical Approach	
17. Incorporate moral values in lessons	10
18. Ask students the values they learn from the text	6
19. Get students to search moral values from a text	4
20. Raise students' awareness of values derived from the text	4
Stylistics Approach	
21. Guide students to interpret a text by looking at the language used by the author	0
22. Get students to mark any linguistic features from the text that are significant to their reading	0
23. My literature lesson looks at the language of the text, thus, encourages language awareness	0
24. Encourage students to discuss beyond the surface meaning of the text	4

Teachers did not conduct any interesting and creative activities in the lessons. The findings from classroom observation reveals that the students expect their teachers to conduct interesting activities in the

lesson, other than focusing more on modules provided by the CDC in the teaching of CCL Program. Students were expected to be the passive listeners during the teaching so that they could make full use of understanding the literary text before activities is taken place. Finding shows that teachers employed Paraphrastic Activities of translation of text using first language (L1) in the classroom. Other than that, activities such as comprehension question exercises, brainstorming session, small group discussion, language activities, re-tell story to students, students re-tell story to the class, tell moral values to students, and identify adjectives that describe a character were the medium activities employed in classroom. Teachers were focusing more on students' understanding of the literary text than developing creative and interesting activities in the lesson. The number of activities used by teachers in the teaching of CCL Program from the two observations is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Activities Employed by Teachers

Activities	Frequency
Information-Based Activities	
1. Comprehension questions exercises	8
2. Lecture sessions	2
3. Read notes from workbooks/handouts with students	2
Personal-Response Activities	
4. Explain a text to students	6
5. Journal writing	2
6. Brainstorming sessions	8
7. Small group discussions	6
8. Writing about feelings/reactions towards an issue	2
Language-Based Activities	
9. Group work	6
10. Language activities (cloze, jigsaw puzzle, prediction exercises)	8
11. Debate	4
12. Performance activities (drama, role play, poetry recital)	4
Paraphrastic Activities	
13. Translation of text using L1	10
14. Re-tell story to students	8
15. Students read paraphrased notes in the workbook/handouts	4
16. Students re-tell story to the class	8
Moral-Philosophical Activities	
17. Reflective sessions	2
18. Discussions on moral dilemmas	2
19. Tell moral values to students	6
20. Conduct self-evaluation activities	2
Stylistics Activities	
21. Identify linguistics features (eg. vocabulary, tenses) in a text	0
22. Discuss different meanings of a text	2
23. Extract examples from a text that describe a setting	4
24. Identify adjectives that describe a character	8

Challenges Encountered by Teachers

Interview sessions with the five teachers revealed that all of them were aware of the aims and objectives of the CCL Program and were able to express the benefits that literature could bring into their ESL classroom. Teachers agreed that CCL could help improve their students' language proficiency as well as students' reading abilities.

The respondents stated that the Pre, While, and Post-Reading activities were suitable and appropriate to enhance students language proficiency. All of them were aware of the importance of these activities in classroom instruction. However, Teachers A, B, and D felt that some books were insufficient for all the students. Hence, teachers were making photocopies of the book in order to ensure the activities run as planned by the CDC modules. According to Teacher B, "photocopied books are not in color and perfect like the real one. It is not attractive too. So, students feel less interested to read the book." Teacher C and Teacher D agreed with statement made by Teacher B.

Another finding stated by Teacher E, the language use to some books was, to some extent difficult for weaker students. It is therefore, the incorporation of translation using L1 is employed to ensure those weaker students understand the literary text used by the teacher in the teaching process. According to Teacher E, students' limited proficiency was among the main issues that bring the incorporation of using L1 is higher in the classroom.

Teacher A and B stated that the insufficient supplementary materials and trainings were considered an issues of challenges encountered by them in the teaching of CCL Program. Teachers in their schools made full use of the Language Laboratory provided by the school management, but due to certain budget constraints, the supplementary materials were not provided well in the teaching of CCL Program. Teachers were required to fulfill the objective of the program implementation that is, language proficiency by employing approaches in the teaching of literature. Thus, teachers need to be creative in order to have interesting classroom activities. Teacher A added that, "it is the teachers own initiative to come up with creative and interesting materials, be it activities with students to develop something, or activities using physical movement. So that student won't get bored in the learning process".

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicated that teachers employed variety of approaches and activities in order to ensure students' understanding of literary text. Classroom observations indicated that the Information-Based Approach and Paraphrastic Approach were among the most favored by teachers in the teaching of CCL Program. The incorporation of using translation of L1 is considered as an option for teachers to help weaker students to understand the text, and thus, to guide them to analyze the literature element of the text. This can be seen as to support students who have limited proficiency in the language to learn literature. Nevertheless, teachers could not integrate the activities of Pre, While and Post-Reading due to their inability of using the language. Learning process could only be done in the classroom with teachers.

Further analysis revealed that teachers' communication was mainly on Q & A comprehension activities. Teachers were seen to use list of questions provided in the text to ensure student understands the learning. Students were instructed to utilize all materials provided by teachers and to finish the task in time. Less exploration of thinking abilities is enhanced during the learning.

Since the children's literature in primary schools was launched in 2008, quite a few teachers started to do it in their schools (Sarala A/P Subramanyam, 2012). This is due to some reasons of different perception in the teaching of children's literature. Literature should be taught in a way out of examination oriented. Thus, students will have an opportunity to express out their thinking abilities creatively and critically. According to Salina Mustakim & Othman Lebar (2012), often thinking is not given a prominent place in teaching and learning process even though one of the objectives outline by the CC is to enhance students' thinking skills. This is due to its main focus of implementation of intensive reading program.

This study has indicated that the authentic learning from the evaluation of teachers' approaches and challenges in the classroom learning of CCL Program. It can be seen that the program provides great potential

for enhancing students' language learning in the classroom activities via the approaches employed by teachers in the classroom instruction.

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