

Literature Instructions in Secondary Schools: A Case Study

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Abstract— Literature component has been made clear by the Ministry of Education (2012) in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 to promote active learning and enhance learning. However, some studies show that learners might not be interested in literature lessons in schools for many different reasons. Their reactions and responses during the literature lessons show their lack of interest. This research was undertaken to investigate learners' reactions during literature lessons. This qualitative case study was carried out on two mixed ability classes, consisting of 53 high school learners from two schools in Johor Bahru district and four English teachers. Lessons were observed and videotaped, and the participant-teachers were interviewed and audiotaped to seek responses on their learners' reactions and responses during lessons. This research provides new insights on how learners perceive literature lessons in schools which promotes language learning.

Keywords: : literature learning, reactions, secondary learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is one of the important components in the English curriculum in the secondary schools and teaching literature to learners will expose them to the authenticity of the language (Ministry of Education, 2012). Kaur and Mahmor (2014) agree that literature plays a vital role in helping learners to increase their proficiency in the four skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking in English. However, acquiring a second language might not be easy and learning literature might be a challenge for high school learners. Learners might face difficulties during the teaching and learning process which can make them feel unmotivated to learn, and reactions and responses displayed by the learners could be one of the signs of being uninterested (Dişlen, 2013).

In this study, reactions could appear to be either positive or negative. These reactions and responses during lessons could give teachers insights whether the lesson should or could be improvised to make learners more willing to learn literature (Dişlen, 2013). Therefore, this study seeks to find out learners' reaction during literature lessons. The result could help English teachers retain learners' interest to learn literature in the second language classroom. As revealed by Rashid, Vethamani and Rahman (2010) in their research about literature teaching to less proficient learners, learners reacted to lessons differently and teachers found this challenging. They also concluded that teachers should already

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know how they should execute literature lessons as literature has been incorporated in the English syllabus since 19 years ago, and learners' reactions should not be a barrier for them to teach literature without any difficulty.

Besides that, Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy et al. (2009) discovered that reactions from learners could affect their language learning through literature lessons. They added that having difficulties while reading literary texts could prevent them to fully understand the text and result in misunderstanding and demotivation. Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy et al. (2009) also suggest in their study that positive reactions from learners should be maintained and negative reactions could be changed by teacher by using various methods to boost the learning process. Ni (2012) explains that interest also plays an important role during learning process, which the roles are to help them to invest their effort and obtain knowledge about certain knowledge. Thus, discovering reactions, either positive or negative could contribute in improving literature lessons.

The objectives of this study are to explore how learners react during literature in the second language classrooms.

II. METHODOLOGY

This section will address the methodology employed to conduct this study. Firstly, the respondents of the study and research instruments will be elaborated and explained in detail. Next, research procedures that were used during the study will be described. Last but not least, data analysis method will be presented.

Purposive sampling was used to choose the respondents of this study. The populations for this study were a total of 53 high school learners from two mixed ability classes from two schools in Johor Bahru district. These two classes are labelled as Lesson A and Lesson B where 24 and 29 learners were in each class respectively. Apart from high school learners, another group of population for this study was four experienced English teachers.

Two research instruments were used to obtain detailed, justified and meaningful data of what is going to be studied, which includes observations and interviews. Observation sessions were conducted to obtain data on how learners react during a literature component class and to assist a more thorough lesson transcription while interview sessions were carried out to discover whether reactions given by learners really took place during literature lessons. Walshe, Ewing and Griffiths (2012) mention that observations done for a



qualitative study can help detect learners' behaviour, action and roles, and understand why they act that way. During observation sessions, an observation checklist was brought into class, where the checklist consisted of 12 reactions. The checklist was adopted and adapted from Tri-Valley Central School District (n.d). Then, the 12 reactions were classified into three categories: 1) individual reactions; 2) relationship with peers; and 3) rapport with teacher. This checklist was marked according to its occurrences during lessons. After that, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face to four English teachers after observing Lesson A and Lesson B. These interview sessions were carried out to seek further information on learners' reactions in literature class that the teachers have encountered. Stimulated recall methodology was used to conduct the interview. According to Gass and Mackey (2000), this methodology is very useful to make respondents reflect on what they did or experience a certain act.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

First of all, before observation and interview sessions were conducted, an observation checklist and interview questions were constructed. The observation checklist was adopted and adapted from a classroom observation checklist by Tri-Valley Central School District to ensure learners' reactions are valid during lessons. Next, interview questions for respondents were also constructed. Questions constructed for the interview were based on learners' reactions that were present throughout the lessons and asking for teachers' opinion regarding the reactions. Two literature classes were observed and recorded, which were identified in this study as Lesson A and Lesson B. After the observations had taken place, face-to-face interview sessions with four English teachers were conducted. Interview sessions with teachers were recorded in audio format, transcribed and analysed to gain information for the study. The observation checklist, transcriptions and analysis of interviews contributed to factors that can enhance learners' motivation level in learning literature component at school.

Data were collected from observation checklist and interview sessions that were conducted. The data from observation checklist were further analysed and interview sessions were transcribed. The data that were collected were analysed through categorical data analysis. To analyse all the information collected, triangulation of data was also used where data from observation of literature component lessons which consist of learners and interviews of English teachers were contrasted. Triangulation of data is a method where mixing of data or methods so that various point of views cast light upon the topic (Olsen, 2004). The data that were collected from interviews with English teachers were contrasted with observations done to achieve a result on whether learners' reactions do occur in lessons, and are motivated to learn language through literature component.

III. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section will elaborate and discuss about the findings of this study obtained from observations and interviews conducted to high school learners and English teachers. This

section will focus more on both results from interview sessions and observations. Therefore, this section presents about learners' reactions during literature lessons and confirmation by teachers about reactions by learners in class.

A. Learners' Reactions

In this subsection, learners' reaction during literature component lessons are tabulated and analyzed based on interviews and an observation checklist marked during observations. The following table presents a summary of learners' reaction while learning literature component according to Lesson A, Lesson B, and teachers interviewed:

Table 1. Learners' reaction in literature lessons identified from Lesson A, Lesson B and teachers interviewed

Learners' Reactions	No. of Occurrences
Individual Reactions	
Volunteered to answer questions	1
Volunteered to read aloud	0
Cooperated with teacher's lesson	3
Read literature texts beforehand	6
Completed activities given	2
Relationship with Peers	
Explained to peers about the lesson	0
Explained to peers about the activity	0
Worked together with peers during activity	7
Shared opinion with peers	1
Rapport with Teacher	
Responded to teacher's questions	3
Asked the teacher about the lesson	0
Responded to teacher's instructions	5

The number of occurrences of learners' reactions show how frequent they happened during class, and they include the positive and negative occurrences. Positive occurrence is when learners reacted positively in class, while negative occurrence is shown when learners gave negative feedback during the lesson. In a study by Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy et al. (2009), they elaborated on positive feedback where learners enjoy reading short stories so they participated in classroom activities and completed their homework. Negative feedback was also elaborated by the researchers where learners were not attracted to poems and novels which made them lose motivation to learn and participate less during the lesson.

In total, the results showed only 8 out of 12 reactions from the observation checklist were present in class and noticed by teachers. The results were taken from the observation list and interviews done with English teachers. The most occurred reactions were working together with peers by 7 occurrences with the most positive reaction and reading literature texts beforehand with the most negative reaction by 6 occurrences. These showed learners prefer student-centred activities which involve movements and hands-on activities which are autonomous and they do not favour reading texts before class (Muthusamy, Salleh and Michael, 2017). Learners also responded to teacher's instructions during the lesson. In contrary to the three reactions, the other five reactions were



not as obvious compared to the first three reactions. Teachers reacted positively during the interview and had no difficulties in conveying knowledge to learners. However, there are a few learners that still reacted negatively during the lesson such as not responding to the teacher's questions and instructions, not completing activities given due to time constraint, and not cooperating with lessons which made lessons hard to be conducted smoothly.

B. Individual Reactions

This subsection elaborates more on individual reactions that were given by learners during literature lessons. As stated in the previous subsection, it is discovered that the most occurring individual reaction by learners is "read literature texts beforehand". This reaction has a total of six negative occurrences where all four of the English teachers interviewed agreed and this reaction was also present during classroom observations. Extract 1 and 2 below show that Teacher 1 (T1) and Teacher 4 (T4) agreed that this reaction was present in their literature lessons:

Extract 1:

T1: So, to grab their interest to read the material, it's very difficult. Moreover nowadays teenagers are really not into reading so it's really challenging to teach literature

Extract 2:

T4: My students don't really read poems and short stories at home when I asked them to. They all read it in class, which slowed down my lesson.

In Extract 1 and 2 showed that learners do not prefer reading literature texts. T1 mentioned that the possibility could be because of current learners' attitude that does not possess the habit of reading. Beliaeva (2009) reported in her research where learners no longer read as much and no longer motivated to familiarize themselves with literature of high artistic quality which might explain the reason why learners do not read literature texts as told by teachers. Whereas mentioned by T4, some learners expressed that they do not understand the content of the literary texts. Difficulties in understanding texts could bar them from reading them and result in not learning the language. There could be several reasons behind not understanding texts, which could be due to cultural differences (Chen, 2002) and advance level of diction used in the text.

Other than this reaction, "cooperated with teacher's lesson", "completed activities given" and "volunteered to answer questions" also occurred, but not as frequent as "read literary texts beforehand" and with more positive reactions than negative.

C. Relationship with Peers

Meanwhile, in terms of building relationship with peers, it is found that "worked together with peers during activity" item was more frequent to happen in class. This reaction appeared with 7 occurrences. Out of the 7 occurrences, six of them were positive while the balance was negative reaction. This shows that learners tend to cooperate and engage with lessons that use student-centred approaches. Student-centred approaches will incorporate activities which require learners' active participation rather than having them to sit down and listen to teachers' teaching. These kinds of activities will not

just involve learners during the lesson, but also make learners to become more independent while learning and which can help better learning and grades (Kahu, Nelson & Picton, 2017). Extract 3 and 4 by Teacher 3 (T3) below express how student-centred activities can help language learning and misbehaviour:

Extract 3:

T3: My students really like activities. I see that they become more interested with the lesson if I include interesting activities like round robin or snakes and ladders. I think activities are really helpful in my class.

Extract 4:

T3: Although most of my students like activities and games, there are one or two students who do not cooperate with the activities because of large number of students. They don't like it if activities are carried out in big groups. Some of them might become passerger.

Extract 3 and 4 showed the positive and negative reactions that Teacher 3's learners showed during her lesson. Based on Extract 3, student-centred activities were really helpful as learners were involved and were responsible for their own learning. That would help them to learn better. In language learning context, activities like these will make learners to use the language, which will help to speed up their language acquisition. According to Extract 4, large groups could have the possibility of learners to not participate. Hence, learners are not involved with the activity and use the language.

D. Rapport with Teacher

The final category in the learners' reaction checklist is rapport with teacher. In this category, there are three reactions such as "responded to teacher's questions", "asked the teacher about the lesson" and "responded to teacher's instructions". The most frequent reaction in this category was "responded to teacher's instructions" with 5 occurrences, where 4 out of 5 occurrences are positive reactions. Extract 5 shows one of the statements by Teacher 2 (T2) regarding this reaction:

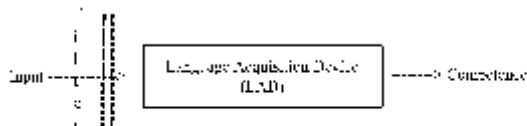
Extract 5:

T2: So far, my students managed to share their opinion and response when I asked for them. I believe this is because there are a variety of activities that I used during the lesson which made them to respond well in my class.

Teacher 2 explained in extract 5 that her learners gave full cooperation when she asked them questions or opinion. She was really satisfied with her learners' participation. But, she believed that was due of the activities she conducted in class because her learners were found to enjoy her lesson. Therefore, learners participated in her activities. This can be related with Krashen's Affective Filter as illustrated in Figure 1 where when a learner is motivated to learn, the learner will have low affective filter, which the learner will have high confidence and low anxiety level to learn, which can boost learning (Stevick, 1976). Learners find fun in learning, which can help them to acquire the language better. Figure 1 below illustrates Krashen's Affective Filter, as explained by Stevick (1976) that if a filter is high, input that was given to the learner



will be hard to reach their Language Acquisition Device (LAD):



IV. CONCLUSION

IV. The findings of this study disclose that learners' reactions could give insight to teachers to see if they are completely engaged or interested with literature lessons. 8 out of 12 reactions listed in the observation checklist were present during literature lessons and accepted by English teachers. Results obtained also conclude that learners prefer student-centered activities rather than teacher-centered activities during lessons. Student-centred activities are proven by many scholars that they are good for active learning and also to enhance learning. Teachers acknowledge and are aware of reactions that were expressed during literature instructions. Learners' reactions could give insight to teachers and help teachers to improve their literature lessons in the future.

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