Approaches Adopted in the Teaching of Poetry for the Upper Secondary School Students in Tawau Town Area

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of conducting this study was to investigate the various techniques adopted among the teachers teaching poetry in the upper secondary schools in the Tawau town area. The researcher would like to find out the types of techniques that are preferred the most as well as the least in the teaching of poetry to the upper secondary school students and examine the factors that affect the selection of these techniques. The techniques put forward in this study that the teachers should have been exposed to are Language Based Approach, Personal Response Based Approach, Stylistic Approach, Information Based Approach and Moral Philosophical Approach. This survey research targeted forty-five English language teachers teaching the literature component to secondary four and five students at seven secondary schools in the Tawau town area. Three research instruments which were utilized in this study are the questionnaire, classroom observation and the interview. The result of the questionnaire was later triangulated using classroom observation and the interview, which was conducted with one representative (teacher) who was randomly selected from each school. It was found that the Moral Philosophical Approach was the most preferred while the Stylistic Approach was the least preferred technique. It was also discovered that some techniques advocated under each approach specified in this study were more preferred than others. Hence, the information gained has been used especially by the researcher and her colleagues in the teacher training college to propose practical suggestions and recommendations on how to improve the teaching processes using poetry

INTRODUCTION

English is an extremely influential language in Malaysia and the Ministry of Education is striving hard to make English more assessable to the students so that they are not only able to engage in meaningful information exchange for local and international trade and commerce, as well as technological transfer (Gill, 1993) but also be more open-minded and sensitive to human values and conditions.

BACKGROUND STUDY

The teaching and learning of the English language at the secondary school level is encountering some problems which may thwart the internalization of this target language among the learners. One of the problems involves the "detachment" in the teaching process. There is less engagement or involvement demonstrated in the teaching and learning process especially on the part of the students. Apart from that, some teachers still prefer the traditional and teacher-centred approach to the communicative approach when presenting the language to the learners.

Hence, it is timely that the pendulum swung again in support of literature teaching and literature was incorporated as part of the secondary school English language

syllabus beginning March 2000 as a rich resource for English language teaching. It is hoped that the infusion of the literary elements for the English language teaching in the English language programme would expose students to the model of the target language at it best and subsequently provide opportunity for self-expression and creativity among the students.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS PROJECT

The main aim of conducting this study is to investigate the various techniques adopted among the teachers teaching poetry in the upper secondary schools in Tawau town area and is served as a preliminary study to tap into the preferences of the English language teachers in Tawau town area in poetry teaching. There are several objectives to be looked into in this project. In this study, the researcher would like to:

(a) find out the types of techniques that are preferred most as well as least in the teaching of poetry to the upper secondary school students and
(b) examine the factors that affect the selection of these techniques.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Through the data collected and analysis carried out at the end of this project, the research would like to give satisfactory responses to the research questions formulated below:

(a) What are the techniques (approaches) that are highly preferred in the teaching of poetry among the teachers for the upper secondary school level in Tawau town area? Why?

(b) What are the techniques (approaches) that are preferred least in the teaching of poetry among the teachers for the upper secondary school level in Tawau town area? Why?

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Since the incorporation of the literature component as part of the English language syllabus for the upper secondary school level in March 2000, studies of such nature has not been conducted especially for those schools in the Tawau District. As a teaching staff of a teacher training college, it would be extremely enlightening and useful for the panel of the English Language department to be informed of the real situations and the problems encountered by the teachers especially those who have not been trained in English Language Teaching.

The findings and data collected will be used as some preliminary information for the college to formulate and plan some practical courses as well as workshops in order to assist the teachers from Tawau town area in improving themselves professionally.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is going to be conducted with a group of 45 teachers teaching the literature component for the upper secondary school students in Tawau town area. Thus, the

findings and data collected may not be applicable in other learning situations in Sabah particularly and Malaysia, generally. This is largely due to the differences in:

(i)   teachers' and students' cultural background and personal preferences,
(ii) teaching and learning environment in and outside the classroom, and
(iii) the types of educational facilities available.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces the values of poetry in the classroom and justification of adopting various approaches in the teaching of poetry in the Malaysian classroom.

Why Poetry in ESL Classroom?

Benton (1978) refers to the condition suffered by poetry in general English language teaching as "neglect where it needs attention and concern where it is left alone". As a matter of fact, poetry is "ordinary" and "familiar" not only in our daily conversation but also as a way to entertain ourselves. Babies like the physical act of producing a sound repeatedly and children are normally attracted to jokes and outrageous puns. Even adults enjoy football chants skipping rhymes, television jingles and many songs which possess the features of rhyme and rhythm (Hayhoe and Parker, 1988). Poetry, actually, has more to offer. Poetry, if it is chosen carefully and exploited creatively, may help the students in the **affective**, **communicative**, **cognitive** and **educational** aspects of their development.

Approaches and Techniques to Literature/Poetry Teaching

There are different types of approaches that can be adopted in the teaching of literature. Five approaches in the teaching of literature in ESL/EFL classrooms which are commonly adopted have been selected to be investigated in this study. They are:

(i)   **Information Based Approach**
      The teaching methodologies involved aim to expose learners to facts and information about a target country, culture and even the writer of the literary texts. This approach is very teacher-centred. They aim to teach and concentrate in "areas such as history and characteristics of literary movements; the social and historical background to a text; the biography of the author and its relevance to his or her writings; literary genres and rhetorical devices etc."(Lazar, 1993:35).

(ii) **Personal Response Based Approach**
      According to Carter (1987), they are more student-centred, focusing on an elicitation of individual response (in terms of experience, feelings and opinions) to a text. They are excellent stimuli for group work that can help students "to become actively involved both intellectually and emotionally" (Lazar, 1993) by associating the themes and topics portrayed in the literary texts with the students personal experience (Carter, 1987). Some of the techniques manifested under this approach are brainstorming, class discussion, group work and free expression of feelings, expression and opinion.

(iii) **Language Based Approach**
This approach encourages techniques which are learner-centred, activity-based and gives particular attention to the way language is manipulated. Some of the standard, widely-used and widely-known techniques of this approach are language activities, rewriting & creative writing, dramatic activities and reading aloud.

(iv) **Stylistics Approach**
According to Leech and Short (1981:74), stylistics approach 'uses the apparatus of linguistic description' for example special stylistic choices and patterns as well as metalinguistic items to analyze how meanings in a text are communicated. Widdowson (1975) suggests that learners need to be alerted to deviations from standard English and that this is best achieved through the comparison of literary discourse with instances of conventional writing. Apart from that, Bock (1993) advocates the benefits of alerting students to the stylistic choices and the patterning of features in the text, and then encourage them to explore the effect of these choices on the meaning.

(v) **Moral Philosophical Approach**
Moral Philosophical Approach adopted in poetry teaching enables teachers to lead learners in discussing the existence of moral values discernable in a text. According to Ricoeur (1995), teachers who guide learners read and interpret literary works under Moral Philosophical approach may help learners to reach self-understanding and self-realization. Apart from that, the task of interpretation of literary texts may further assist learners to explore how the texts projects and manifest the world we inhabit (Shin, 1996).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a survey research which is adapted from Davidson (1970) is adopted. Self-completion questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation are the main data-gathering methods in order to collect information based on the research questions formulated for this study.

SAMPLE

The targeted sample of this project consists of 45 English language teachers teaching literature component to secondary four and five students from seven secondary schools which are located within a 5km radius of Tawau town area.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data collected from the questionnaires is computed using SPSS version 12.0. The mean and mode of various approaches and techniques used in teaching of poetry are calculated.

As for classroom observation, a structured observation schedule is adopted to identify various techniques used in poetry lesson. A 3-point scale is available for each of the technique for the researcher to assess how well a teacher has carried out a specific poetry teaching technique in the classroom.

Interview is also conducted with the heads of department from the seven schools in this study. Head of department is the best personnel to get access on information pertaining to the English language teachers' teaching preferences and the plausible problems encountered by them. Key points based on the interview schedule are gathered and analyzed and this information is utilized to discuss the research questions in this study.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Discussion on the research questions formulated is put forward. Then, practical recommendations are suggested so that the teaching of poetry would be a fruitful experience for the teachers teaching English to students of upper secondary school level especially in Tawau town area.

"Which are the techniques and approaches that are highly preferred in the teaching of poetry among the teachers for the upper secondary school level in Tawau town area? Why?"

Through the data collected using questionnaires, Moral Philosophical Approach is the approach most preferred. This is due to the fact that discussing the values and the underlying issues in the poetry selected is a compulsory stage because they are going to be tested in the examinations. The teachers need to expose the students to the values and issues, either explicitly or implicitly so that they would be able to give appropriate responses to those questions of this nature.

Information Based Approach is not too popular among the targeted sample of this research except the technique of exploring the characters, setting or objects referred to in the poetic texts. Identifying the characters, setting and objects in the poems are essential because these would not only help the students to create better mental picture for them to internalize the content and meaning intended in the poems but also assist them in answering their examination questions on poetry better.

"Which are the techniques and approaches that are preferred least in the teaching of poetry among the teachers for the upper secondary school level in Tawau town area? Why?"

Stylistic Approach is the approach that the teachers preferred least in this study. Since the linguistic devices involved are not tested in the examinations, the teachers prefer not to bring the students through the process of analyzing them especially for those who are low in their proficiency. These devices are not common in their English language classroom. Therefore, exposing them to these students may further confuse them in the learning of poetry.

In addition, one common that trend could be identified through the data collected using questionnaires and interview protocols is that dramatic activities which is a technique advocated under the Language Based Approach is not favoured by teachers to teach poetry in the classroom. The notion of preparing students for dramatic activities is favourable by one of these teachers. This is because dramatic activities are not commonly used for every-day English language lessons by some of theses

teachers.   The implementation of these activities may demand teachers' extra time and effort.

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that poetry worth its existence and creates positive washback effect on poetry teaching for the upper secondary school students, alternative assessment is a better option.   Alternative assessments are more multidimensional in nature.   This new vision of learning and evaluation of student learning is broad-based, relevant to real life, process oriented,   and based on multiple measures which provide   a rich portrayal of student learning.

Apart from that, teachers may adopt some of these poems as the resource to teach English in their language classroom.   Such strategy may encourage students to think about how these features operate in non-poetical contexts and at the same time assist them in word-building.   In addition, some of these poems are useful stimulus for creative writing activities.

In order to create a positive classroom climate for the students to internalize the language as well as content more effectively, songs and other visual supports namely mind-maps, drawings, cartoons could be adopted.

CONCLUSION

Through this simple study, the researcher is able to gain insights on teachers' preferences in using poetry in their teaching, the approaches and techniques they prefer most as well as least in the teaching of poetry and factors involved in the selection of approaches and techniques in poetry teaching. It hoped that the information obtained can be used by the researcher and her colleagues in the teacher training college to propose and subsequently design practical suggestions on how to improve the teaching processes using poetry.

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