TEACHERS’ IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARD-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM IN YEAR 1 BASIC LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN PAHANG, MALAYSIA

SURIATI BINTI SULAIMAN

FPP 2016 15
TEACHERS’ IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARD-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM IN YEAR 1 BASIC LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN PAHANG, MALAYSIA

By
SURIATI BINTI SULAIMAN

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2016
All material contained within the thesis, including without limitation text, logos, icons, photographs and all other artwork, is copyright material of Universiti Putra Malaysia unless otherwise stated. Use may be made of any material contained within the thesis for non-commercial purposes from the copyright holder. Commercial use of material may only be made with the express, prior, written permission of Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Copyright © Universiti Putra Malaysia
Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

TEACHERS’ IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARD-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM IN YEAR 1 BASIC LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN PAHANG, MALAYSIA

By

SURIATI SULAIMAN

August 2016

Chairman : Associate Professor Tajularipin Sulaiman, PhD
Faculty : Educational Studies

The standard-based English language curriculum was fairly new in Malaysian primary schools. Thus, this study investigated teachers’ implementation of the new language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction in selected schools in Pahang. The study described what the participants perceived about: (1) the new curriculum, particularly the standard-based English language curriculum, phonics approach and teacher professional knowledge; (2) needs; (3) concerns; and (4) challenges that they encountered, and how they actually implemented: (1) lesson planning and preparation of basic literacy instruction; (2) basic literacy instruction; and (3) assessment of pupils’ learning progress in basic literacy skills. A multiple-case study was carried out that involved five teachers from five national primary schools to explore these issues through seven research questions and data were analysed from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and corresponding documents.

The research findings suggested that the participants had positive perceptions of the SBELC, phonics approach, and their professional knowledge despite their needs for instructional materials, instructional technology, and professional development trainings. The findings also revealed that the expert and proficient participants expressed their concerns for pupils’ learning, the competent and advanced beginner participants were more likely to have concerns about teaching, while concerns for self were identified in the novice participant. As they implemented the curriculum, the participants encountered some challenges in relation to teaching strategies, activities, instructional materials, mixed-ability groups of pupils, and school textbook.
The instructions were planned and prepared in the short term and as such the participants were still at the LoU III of Mechanical Use level. Yet, the lesson plans complied with the curriculum standards and conformed to the district standard format. The participants’ instructions aligned directly with the determined learning standards. The participants used numerous teaching strategies and corresponding instructional materials for which they received positive feedback from the pupils. To assess the pupils’ learning progress in basic literacy skills, the participants carried out three types of classroom assessments, namely activity-based, reading, and written assessments continuously and in informal way while the teaching and learning sessions were still going on. Multiple types of assessment instruments were designed according to the types of assessments and often, the instruments were adapted from various sources, but one participant sometimes self-designed the instruments.

Based on the findings, some changes were proposed to improve basic literacy instruction in lower primary schools. This study provided awareness of Year 1 teachers’ perceptions of the new language curriculum, needs, concerns, and some challenges that they faced in respond to curriculum change and implementation which would help the Ministry of Education, as the sponsor of my study to gauge teacher’s perceptions of the new language curriculum and later gives each individual teacher necessary support to ensure success of its implementation. The findings also provided scientific evidence of the current and quality of curriculum implementation that educational leaders could use to drive decisions and actions before they launch the revised SBELC in 2017.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PELAKSANAAN GURU TERHADAP KURIKULUM STANDARD BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM PENGAJARAN LITERASI ASAS TAHUN 1 DI BEBERAPA SEKOLAH TERPILIH DI PAHANG, MALAYSIA

Oleh

SURIATI SULAIMAN

Ogos 2016

Pengerusi : Profesor Madya Tajularipin Sulaiman, PhD
Fakulti : Pengajian Pendidikan

Kurikulum Standard Bahasa Inggeris adalah agak baru di sekolah-sekolah rendah di Malaysia. Oleh itu, tesis ini mengkaji pelaksanaan guru terhadap kurikulum baru ini dalam pengajaran literasi asas Tahun 1 di beberapa buah sekolah terpilih di Pahang. Kajian ini menerangkan persepsi peserta kajian tentang: (1) kurikulum baru, khususnya Kurikulum Standard Bahasa Inggeris, pendekatan fonik dan pengetahuan profesional guru; (2) keperluan; (3) kebimbangan; dan (4) cabaran yang dihadapi oleh mereka, dan bagaimana mereka melaksanakan: (1) perancangan dan persediaan pengajaran literasi asas; (2) pengajaran literasi asas; dan (3) penilaian perkembangan pembelajaran murid-murid dalam kemahiran literasi asas. Satu kajian kes pelbagai telah dijalankan dengan melibatkan lima orang guru dari lima buah sekolah kebangsaan untuk meneroka isu-isu di atas melalui tujuh persoalan kajian dan data telah dianalisis daripada pemerhatian di bilik darjah, temu bual separa berstruktur, dan dokumen yang berkaitan.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa peserta kajian mempunyai persepsi yang positif terhadap SBELC, pendekatan fonik, dan pengetahuan profesional mereka walaupun mereka masih memerlukan bahan bantu mengajar, teknologi pengajaran, dan latihan pembangunan profesional. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa peserta kajian pakar dan mahir menyuarakan kebimbangan mereka tentang pembelajaran murid, peserta kajian permulaan lanjutan dan kompeten adalah lebih cenderung untuk mempunyai kebimbangan tentang pengajaran, manakala kebimbangan terhadap kompetensi diri dikenali pasti terdapat dalam kalangan peserta kajian baharu. Semasa melaksanakan pengajaran literasi asas, peserta kajian menghadapi beberapa cabaran yang berkaitan dengan strategi pengajaran, aktiviti, bahan bantu mengajar, kumpulan murid yang berbeza keupayaan bahasa Inggeris mereka, dan buku teks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was made possible through the inspiration, encouragement, and support from many people whom I cannot name them all. Yet, some people were especially important in this study and therefore I would like to express my deepest and sincere gratitude to them for their involvement.

First, I am indebted to the Chairman, Associate Professor Dr. Tajularipin bin Sulaiman, who has never doubted my ability. I appreciated his scholarly direction, exceptional assistance, constant support, and unhesitating guidance throughout the course of the study. Dr. Tajul has always been there for me whenever I needed his assistance. To my co-supervisor, Dr. Fadzilah binti Abd Rahman who supported me from the beginning to the end of my study. I am grateful for her valuable advice and concern that guide me along my journey. Thank you to Dr. Moomala binti Othman, for her kindness and endless support over the years;

In gratitude, I would like to thank the seven outstanding teachers who have enormously supported me through their tireless participation in the study. Their generous sharing has provided meaning to this study and friendship for me. Special appreciation is accorded to each person whose names unfortunately cannot be disclosed for the purpose of anonymity.

To all the lecturers and staff of the Faculty of Educational Studies and the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, I truly appreciate your knowledge, assistance, advice, and teaching throughout the duration of my study at UPM.

Special gratitude and appreciation is rendered to my family for their love and understanding especially my husband, Khairunnidzam bin Bahruddin who has never hesitated to motivate me when I face significant challenges. Your endless support has made it possible for me to finish this study in a timely manner. To my parents, Sulaiman bin Yacob and Azizah binti Jaafar, I am truly grateful for your encouragement and prayers for my success. To my children, Nur Farah Izzati, Nur Farah Hidayah, Ariff Adham, Ahmad Ariff Aiman, and Ahmad Ariff Akram, this is dedicated to you all with the hope that it will inspire you to further your studies.
I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 30 August 2016 to conduct the final examination of Suriati binti Sulaiman on her thesis entitled "Teachers' Implementation of the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum in Year 1 Basic Literacy Instruction in Selected Schools in Pahang, Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

Arshad bin Abd Samad, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairman)

Nooreen binti Noordin, PhD  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Internal Examiner)

Nor Hayati binti Alwi, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Internal Examiner)

James Dean Brown, PhD  
Professor  
University of Hawai at Manoa  
United States  
(External Examiner)

\[Signature\]

NOR AINI AB. SHUKOR, PhD  
Professor and Deputy Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
Date: 22 November 2016
This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

**Tajularipin bin Sulaiman, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairman)

**Fadzilah binti Abd Rahman, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

**Moomala binti Othman, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

---

**BUJANG KIM HUAT, PhD**  
Professor and Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
Declaration by graduate student

I hereby confirm that:

- this thesis is my original work;
- quotations, illustrations and citations have been duly referenced;
- this thesis has not been submitted previously or concurrently for any other degree at any other institutions;
- intellectual property from the thesis and copyright of thesis are fully-owned by Universiti Putra Malaysia, as according to the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Research) Rules 2012;
- written permission must be obtained from supervisor and the office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) before thesis is published (in the form of written, printed or in electronic form) including books, journals, modules, proceedings, popular writings, seminar papers, manuscripts, posters, reports, lecture notes, learning modules or any other materials as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Research) Rules 2012;
- there is no plagiarism or data falsification / fabrication in the thesis, and scholarly integrity is upheld as according to the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013) and the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Research) Rules 2012. The thesis has undergone plagiarism detection software.

Signature: _______________________  Date: ________________

Name and Matric No: Suriati binti Sulaiman , GS32600
Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:
- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013) are adhered to.

Signature:  
Name of Chairman of Supervisory Committee:  
Associate Professor Dr. Tajularipin bin Sulaiman

Signature:  
Name of Member of Supervisory Committee:  
Dr. Fadzilah binti Abd Rahman

Signature:  
Name of Member of Supervisory Committee:  
Dr. Moomala binti Othman

DR. MOOMALA OTMAN  
Pensyarah Kanan  
Jabatan Pendidikan Bahasa & Kemanusiaan  
Fakulti Pengajian Pendidikan  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1 Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2 Standard-Based English Language Curriculum</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Problem Statement</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Objectives of Study</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Research Questions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Significance of Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Limitations of Study</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Operational Definitions</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.1 Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.2 Standard-Based English Language Curriculum</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.3 Basic Literacy Instruction</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.4 Basic Literacy Skills</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.5 Teachers' Perceptions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.6 New Curriculum</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.7 Needs</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.8 Concerns</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.9 Challenges</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.10 Classroom Assessments</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.11 Curriculum Implementation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.12 English Language Teaching</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7.13 Primary Schools</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Chapter Summary</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Standard-based Curriculum</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Standard-based Assessment</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Theory and Practice of Basic Literacy Instruction</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Approaches to Teaching Reading</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Approaches to Phonics Instruction</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3 Synthetic Phonics Approach</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Concerns-Based Adoption Model</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4 Research on Curriculum Implementation 53
2.5 Conceptual Framework 56
2.6 Chapter Summary 58

3 METHODOLOGY 59
3.1 Research Design 59
3.1.1 Qualitative Research 59
3.1.2 Case Study 60
3.2 Sampling 62
3.2.1 Research Site 63
3.2.2 Research Participant 65
3.3 Data Collection 67
3.3.1 Observation 70
3.3.2 Interview 72
3.3.3 Document Analysis 73
3.4 Research Protocol 74
3.5 Pilot Study 75
3.6 Research Procedure 76
3.7 Data Analysis 76
3.8 Trustworthiness 79
3.9 Chapter Summary 82

4 RESULTS 83
4.1 Profiles of Research Participants 83
4.2 RQ1: New Curriculum 85
4.2.1 Perceptions of SBELC 86
4.2.1.1 Progressive Curriculum 86
4.2.1.2 Pragmatic Curriculum 88
4.2.1.3 Outcome-based Curriculum 92
4.2.2 Perceptions of Phonics Approach 94
4.2.2.1 Helpful 94
4.2.2.2 Fun Learning 95
4.2.2.3 Challenging 96
4.2.3 Perceptions of Professional Knowledge 98
4.3 RQ2: Needs 103
4.3.1 Instructional Materials 103
4.3.2 Instructional Technology 104
4.3.3 Professional Development Trainings 104
4.4 RQ3: Concerns 110
4.4.1 Concern for Self 110
4.4.2 Concern for Teaching 110
4.4.3 Concern for Pupil 112
4.5 RQ4: Challenges 113
4.5.1 Teaching Strategies 113
4.5.2 Activities 114
4.5.3 Instructional Materials 115
4.5.4 Mixed-Ability Groups 115
4.5.5 School Textbook 116
4.6 RQ5: Lesson Planning and Preparation 117
4.6.1 Short Term 117
4.6.2 Allignment with Curriculum Standard 118
4.6.3 Standard Format 120
4.7 RQ6: Basic Literacy Instruction 123
  4.7.1 Learning Standard Allignment 124
  4.7.2 Teaching Strategies 133
  4.7.3 Instructional Materials 140
  4.7.4 Pupils’ Feedback 142
4.8 RQ7: Classroom Assessments 144
  4.8.1 Implementation of Classroom Assessments 145
  4.8.2 Types of Assessments 146
  4.8.3 Assessment Instruments 150

5 SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND
  RECOMMENDATIONS 153
5.1 Summary 153
  5.1.1 RQ1: New Curriculum 153
  5.1.2 RQ2: Needs 154
  5.1.3 RQ3: Concerns 154
  5.1.4 RQ4: Challenges 154
  5.1.5 RQ5: Lesson Planning and Preparation 155
  5.1.6 RQ6: Basic Literacy Instruction 155
  5.1.7 RQ7: Classroom Assessments 155
5.2 Discussion 156
  5.2.1 Teachers’ Perceptions of New Curriculum 156
  5.2.2 Teachers’ Needs 157
  5.2.3 Teachers’ Concerns 158
  5.2.4 Challenges in Curriculum Implementation 159
  5.2.5 Lesson Planning and Preparation 160
  5.2.6 Basic Literacy Instruction 161
  5.2.7 Classroom Assessments 163
5.3 Implications for Practice 163
5.4 Conclusion 165
5.5 Recommendations 167
  5.5.1 Recommendations to Stakeholder 167
  5.5.2 Recommendations to Teacher 167
  5.5.3 Recommendations for Future Research 168

REFERENCES 169
APPENDICES 178
BIODATA OF STUDENT 201
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS 202
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Number of Schools Based on Band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Number of Schools Based on Group and Band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Research Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Data Collection Methods for Individual Case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Profiles of Research Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Teacher Formal Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Lesson Plan 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Lesson Plan 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Learning Standards for Year 1 Basic Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Teaching Strategies Employed by Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Instructional Materials Employed by Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Classroom Assessments Employed by Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Assessment Instruments Employed by Teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Modularity of English Language Curriculum</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Framework of Reading</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Concerns-Based Adoption Model</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Stages of Concern</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Levels of Use</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBCPS</td>
<td>Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSSR</td>
<td>Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBELC</td>
<td>Standard-Based English Language Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLL</td>
<td>Second Language Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPSR</td>
<td>Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (Primary School Education Test)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBSR</td>
<td>Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBAM</td>
<td>Concerns-Based Adoption Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>English Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESL</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEDL</td>
<td>Southwest Educational Development Laboratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoC</td>
<td>Stages of Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoCQ</td>
<td>Stages of Concern Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoU</td>
<td>Levels of Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>Sekolah Kebangsaan (National School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKPM</td>
<td>Standard Kualiti Pendidikan Malaysia (Malaysia Education Standard Quality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJK</td>
<td>Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (National-type School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Second Language Acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>Innovation Configuration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPG</td>
<td>Institut Pendidikan Guru (Institute of Teacher Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>Research Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELL</td>
<td>Teaching English Language and Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELC</td>
<td>Integrated English Language Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPD</td>
<td>Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(District Education Office)

JPN   Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri
     (State Education Department)

KPM   Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia
     (Ministry of Education, Malaysia)

PdP   Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran
     (Teaching and Learning)

LCD   Liquid-Crystal Display

LINUS Literacy and Numeracy Screening

ICT   Information and Communication Technology

SKM   Sekolah Kurang Murid
     (Less Pupil School)

BRLI  Basic Reading Literacy Instruction

TPD   Teacher Professional Development

INSETT In-Service Teacher Training

ELMs  English Language Mentors

PTs   Participating Teachers (of English)

NKRAs National Key Result Areas
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study which encompasses lengthy information on problem statement, purpose of study, research questions, significance of study, limitation, and operational definition that is relevant to the study. Brief information on the current trend of primary education in Malaysia with the implementation of the Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools or locally known as KSSR and the new English language curriculum for national primary schools which gives emphasis on the Standard-based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) is also included.

1.1 Background

Malaysia undertook a comprehensive reform of the primary education system which encompasses structural and curriculum change by introducing KSSR (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah) or the Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools (SBCPS) in 2011 starting Year 1 (seven-year old) cohort. Implementing a new curriculum demands teachers to move from the former programme to the new programme. Hence, implementing the new curriculum is difficult and takes times because educational leaders need to convince teachers to accept and implement the curriculum as intended.

Furthermore, curriculum implementation is a change process and part of the change requires teachers to acquire new knowledge about the curriculum; however, mastering the new knowledge is not the only requirement for the teachers to change (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Teachers also need to change their attitudes and instructional practices in response to the curriculum change. Often teachers resist change because they are used to the former curriculum and are thus, in a comfort zone. If teachers are required to adopt the new curriculum, they need to change their knowledge, attitudes and instructional practices, and such expectation itself makes them feel uncomfortable. Therefore, to be able to change, teachers as key players in the curriculum implementation process need at first to understand the change and how it works.

McNeil (2009) identified several types of curriculum change according to its complexity: substitution, alteration, perturbation, value-orientation change, and restructuring. Substitution occurs when a new element substitutes the other which is already present, such as teachers are required to substitute a textbook for an old one. Undoubtedly, this kind of change is the easiest to do by teachers and in fact, it is the most common type of change occurs in schools. Alteration exists when new content, items, materials, or procedures
are added up into existing materials and programmes. The change usually is minor, and thus, schools usually can adopt it instantly.

Perturbation is change that may at first interrupt the existing programme but later it can be attuned accordingly by teachers to the on-going programme within a short time span. For instance, teachers are entailed to renew their class schedules. The change may affect the time allocated for teaching other subject or it may affect other teachers’ class schedules but it can be adjusted shortly. Value-orientation changes takes place when teachers are sought to adopt the new fundamental philosophies or curriculum orientations. The change can occur if only the teachers are willing to accept the new values otherwise the change will be short-lived.

Restructuring occurs when the change modifies the whole school system, such as schools introduce a new curriculum to their teachers and pupils. The change demands the teachers to adopt new concepts of teaching role, new curriculum content, and new textbooks. In Malaysia context, the change in the new English language curriculum can be classified as restructuring since it involves structural and curriculum change in which it modifies the existing curriculum documents and organization as well as introduces four language areas as the new curriculum content and this change takes place nationwide.

To ensure that the curriculum change is successfully implemented, teachers should be dedicated to any change occurs in the curriculum and committed to implementing the new curriculum in their school (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Respectively, they should demonstrate positive reactions to the new curriculum. However, in the process, teachers may refuse to accept the change for various reasons. According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2014), frequently teachers view change as something that requires them to do more work which adds up to their already overloaded schedule. To them, curriculum change means they have to do extra work in the existing routine and this seeks them to sacrifice their time, energy, and even money to meet the new curriculum demand. Teachers may also deter change because nobody values their effort for they do not earn extra money or get any reward even though they do extra work or sacrifice their time, energy or money to cope with the curriculum change.

In fact, many teachers view new curriculum programmes signify new teaching skills to be learned, or new competencies to be developed which demand them to attend extra courses and workshops. It may be possible that teachers resist curriculum change because they do not have the knowledge and skills required by the new curriculum but at the same time, they do not want to be told that they are incompetent to teach the new curriculum. Furthermore, there is the likelihood that the new curriculum is implemented after a short notice or without providing sufficient training to
teachers due to budgetary or time constraints. Consequently, teachers are not adequately equipped with professional knowledge before they are ready to deliver the new curriculum to their pupils.

In an effort to promote mastery of 100% basic literacy after three years of schooling at foundation level, the Ministry of Education has adopted the standard-based English language curriculum. The learning standards of Year 1 and Two address basic literacy using the phonics approach. With reference to the curriculum implementation, a question arises as to whether schools have implemented the new language curriculum particularly in Year 1 basic literacy instruction as required. Realizing this is central to understand teachers’ implementation of the new language curriculum, how they cope with the change and the barriers that the teachers place between themselves and change efforts, the researcher proposed a comprehensive study on the implementation of the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction in selected national schools in Pahang. The study specifically aims to investigate teachers’ perceptions and their daily instructional practices in implementing the SBELC in Year 1 basic literacy instruction.

1.1.1 Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools

In the process of transforming the primary school curriculum, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia (MOE) has conducted benchmarking with school curriculum of several developed countries, such as Singapore, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and Australia to ensure that the new primary school curriculum does not only cater local needs but also meets international benchmarks so that the primary education in Malaysia will be on par with the global education. The Malaysia MOE also obtained inputs from various stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations, industry, academicians, and parents. Based on the inputs, the concept of standard-based curriculum for primary schools was then developed.

The concept of standard-based curriculum for primary schools was approved in the National Curriculum Committee meeting on October 2, 2009. The new curriculum was launched as the Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools or locally known as KSSR (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah). The KSSR was developed based on the principles of the former primary school curriculum, Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) or the Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools, the National Education Philosophy and National Education Policy. To ensure that the new curriculum is well established, a pilot study was administered at selected primary schools throughout the country.

KSSR takes into account the global challenges of the 21st century, the New Economic Model and present-day learning theory. The new national
curriculum also adopts UNESCO four pillars of education, namely learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Through the standard-based curriculum, KSSR aspires to produce balanced individuals in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, social, and physical aspects which further create responsible citizens, global players, and knowledgeable workers.

Yet, KSSR still upholds all principles of the KBSR curriculum which are included: (1) integrated approach; (2) individual development as a whole; (3) fair education for all pupils; and (4) education for life. Such principles are sustained as they are still appropriate and relevant to produce balanced and holistic individuals. The main focus of KSSR is the curriculum contents are delivered in integrated approaches. The elements of knowledge, skills and values are combined as to create unity in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects. The integrated concept may occur through skills cohesion either in one subject or between subjects. For instance, in the teaching of English language, the four main skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing are emphasized. However, in one teaching and learning session, cohesion of only two skills is highlighted, for example, listening and speaking or reading and writing. Cohesion between subjects can occur, for example, song is used in teaching English.

Besides, KSSR is formulated in order to ensure that all subjects including the English language play important roles in fulfilling the physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social needs of the pupils. According to Gardner (2004), every pupil is a unique individual with at least eight core intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. Yet, individual potentials cannot be developed in isolation (Armstrong, 2009). Hence, in English language classroom, pupils may develop their potentials holistically providing that they are given opportunities to master the English language through varied teaching strategies and learning activities.

In addition, KSSR gives fair opportunity to all pupils to acquire the knowledge and skills that are comprehensive and well balanced. In this context, the English language is taught to all pupils in primary schools as a compulsory subject. KSSR also provides the knowledge and skills needed by pupils as a basis to meet the challenges of everyday life and lifelong education. As far as English language teaching and learning is concerned, pupils are trained to master the four basic language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills so that they are able to comprehend any kind of information either in spoken or written language in their daily life.

On top of that, KSSR aims to produce a balanced, creative, critical, and innovative individual through six strands: (1) communication; (2) science and technology; (3) physical and aesthetic development; (4) personal skills; (5)
humanity and spirituality; and (6) attitudes and values. The concept of strand focuses on the formation of balanced human capital in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social. The strands represent areas of knowledge, skills, and values that form the basis for the development of a creative, critical, and innovative individual; hence, need to be mastered by all pupils. Each strand is mutually interconnected and integrated.

However, the strand of communication is very significant to this study because it deals with the English language curriculum indeed. The strand gives emphasis on establishing a process to combine the language skills in the forms of verbal and non-verbal during interaction. Furthermore, it focuses on specific language skills, such as listening and speaking, reading and writing, as well as the value-added skill that is reasoning skill. Pupils need to master these skills in order to help them in the process of acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values in other strands. Mastering in language skills will prepare the pupils to make accurate and systematic language choice in social interaction in future.

With the establishment of KSSR, the standard-based English language curriculum (SBELC) was designed and was first enacted to Year 1 cohort in 2011. At the time of this study, the new English language curriculum was being implemented in Year 1 to 4 of Malaysian primary schools. SBELC is seen as an innovative and potential curriculum for further developing pupils’ proficiency in the English language. The significant change in national curriculum has great implication on the English language curriculum and classroom instruction which requires significant change in teachers’ knowledge, attitudes, and instructional practices.

1.1.2 Standard-Based English Language Curriculum

English is taught as a second language (ESL) in all Malaysian primary schools. Pupils usually acquire the first language that is something other than English, such as Malay, Chinese, and Tamil. They are referred to as second language learners (SLL) and are often designated as ESL in order to receive accommodation and support with their second language acquisition goals. The mastery of English is seen essential for pupils in order to gain access to information and knowledge written in English. In ESL classroom, pupils are usually taught to become fluent in written and spoken English. The expression second language also connotes that English is the second most important language in Malaysia, after the national language, Bahasa Malaysia and the first foreign language learnt by many pupils after their mother tongue as well (Chitavelu, Sithamparam, & Choon, 2005). Furthermore, English is offered as a core as well as compulsory subject to primary school pupils.
The new English language curriculum for primary schools is expected to produce pupils who will be more proficient in the language. Generally, the goal of the new English language curriculum is to help the pupils acquire the language so that they can use it in their daily lives, to further their studies, and for work purposes (Curriculum Development Division, 2011). What is more, in this era of globalization, mastering the English language is an advantage to pupils since they can have easy access to information that is available on the electronic media such as the Internet for English is the dominant language used in such media.

Hence, the standard-based English language curriculum addresses four basic language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing to enable pupils to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts that is appropriate to their level of development (Curriculum Development Division, 2011). According to the Curriculum Development Division (2011), pupils should be able to communicate with peers and adults confidently and appropriately in formal and informal situations, read and comprehend a range of English texts for information and enjoyment, write a range of texts using appropriate language, style, and form through a variety of media, appreciate and demonstrate understanding of English language literary or creative works for enjoyment, and use correct and appropriate rules of grammar in speech and writing, once they have completed their Year 6. This information implies that to determine who is and is not proficient in the language, depending on to which extent pupils could achieve the underlying objectives of the curriculum.

As far as English language teaching is concerned, teachers are recommended to use Standard British English. It should also be used as a reference tool for spelling, grammar, and pronunciation for standardization. In Year 1, the English language curriculum emphasizes on the development of strong foundation in basic language skills so that pupils may further build their proficiency in the language in Stage Two. At this foundation level, pupils of national primary schools spend about 300 minutes per week to cover four modules: (1) listening and speaking; (2) reading; (3) writing; and (4) language arts. The design of these modules is meant to help the pupils develop specific language skills under each module as early as in their first year of primary education.

The introduction of the SBELC in primary schools has involved some significant changes in curriculum document and organization. At foundation level, the KSSR English language curriculum for national primary schools was documented comprehensively in the Standard Document of Primary School Curriculum: Core Module of Basic English Language for National Primary Schools or Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Sekolah Rendah: Modul Teras Asas Bahasa Inggeris SK. The document which serves as the blueprint lays out the English language curriculum for Year 1 to 3. As for former English language curriculum, the syllabus, objectives and learning outcomes were documented in the Curriculum Specifications.
Another significant change in the standard-based English language curriculum is the curriculum organization. SBELC was designed in a modular structure with modularity of focus and this is reflected in the organization of the content and learning standards. Figure 1.1 shows the modularity of the new English language curriculum. By organizing the language curriculum into four modules, Year 1 pupils are able to focus on the development of specific language skills under each module through purposeful and meaningful activities. This modular approach includes integration of skills. However, skill integration is exploited strategically to enhance pupils’ development of specific language skills as described in the content and learning standards in the module.

In order to make learning more meaningful and purposeful, English language input is presented under themes and topics which are appropriate for Year 1 pupils. Three broad themes identified in the lower primary English language curriculum are: (1) world of self, family, and friends; (2) world of stories; and (3) world of knowledge. The themes and topics are covered in all four modules: listening and speaking, reading, writing, and language arts.
The interrelated modules contain content and learning standards that describe the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils need to demonstrate as they progress through the different stages of schooling. The standards specify the knowledge and skills that pupils need to demonstrate as they talk, listen, read, and write in English. When pupils are engaged in English language learning experiences as described in this curriculum, they will develop the ability to speak, listen, read, and write in English meaningfully, purposefully, and confidently.

Change in curriculum organization also involved inclusion of basic literacy, phonics, penmanship, and language arts as the new curriculum content. The emphases on those language areas are prescribed in learning standards for reading (basic literacy and phonics), writing (penmanship) and language arts (language arts). The learning standards of Year 1 for reading begin with the development of pupils’ phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken words. This ability to recognize letter sounds is an essential and useful early reading skill. Pupils are taught to be aware of the relationship between phonemes (the sounds of spoken language) and graphemes (the letters and spelling that represent those sounds in written language) in phonics. The ability to recognize letter sounds is further developed by blending individual sounds to build words. After pupils have begun to read words, this ability is further honed by reading rhyming phrases. In order to spell, pupils are taught segmenting, in which pupils segment or break the word into individual sounds.

As pupils begin to read words, phrases and then move on to simple sentences, their skill in reading will be supported by appropriate reading materials which will further develop their reading ability. This further enables them to increase the pace of their reading and equally, enables them to comprehend a text more effectively and efficiently. However, in a second language context, it is appropriate for teachers to begin phonics instruction by first letting pupils listen to rich language input in English. The guiding principle in using phonics to teach reading is for the pupils to enjoy the activities selected. Hence, the use of songs, rhymes, poems, stories, and pictures to make phonics instruction more enjoyable is encouraged.

Teachers are encouraged to gauge the reading literacy level of their pupils in Year 1. If pupils are able to read well, teachers will not have to deal with the phonemes individually. Teachers can then develop challenging language activities and games which will hone their vocabulary development. If pupils have difficulty articulating particular phonemes then, teachers will have to deal with problematic phonemes individually although pupils may be reading well.
The learning standards for writing in Year 1 begin with pre-writing skills which address penmanship or the formation of letters, words, as well as numbers in clear print. Penmanship is another new element in the present curriculum content. Specific learning standards are attributed to penmanship so that even from a young age, pupils are taught good writing habits. Special attentions is given in order to strengthen the muscles of the hand, develop visual skills, enhance gross and fine motor skills, as well as develop hand-eye coordination to help pupils acquire penmanship. Correct formation of letters of the alphabet is important in order to help pupils write neatly and later write words, phrases, and sentences legibly. Specific writing activities devised during lessons will enable pupils to begin writing for a purpose as stipulated in the learning standards.

For language arts of Year 1, the learning standards explore the power of story, rhyme, and song to activate pupils' imagination and interest, thus encouraging them to use the English language widely. This component will ensure that they benefit from hearing and using language from fictional as well as non-fictional sources. Through fun-filled and meaningful activities in this component, pupils will gain a rich and invaluable experience in using the English language. When taught well, pupils will take pride in their success. They will also benefit strongly from consistent praise for effort and achievement by the teachers with the aim of making their learning as rewarding as possible. Pupils will also be encouraged to plan, prepare and produce simple creative works. In addition to that, the module of language arts provides the pupils an opportunity to experiment and apply what they have learnt in the other modules in fun-filled, activity-based, and meaningful experiences.

However, this study focused on basic literacy and phonics for due reasons. Literacy in English is part of the key feature of Shift 2 in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 which seeks to ensure that every pupil is proficient in the English language (Ministry of Education, 2012), and key to literacy is reading development which is addressed using the phonics approach as proposed by the new language curriculum. Thus, basic literacy in reading and phonics become the focal point in this study. The teaching of basic literacy using the phonics approach at foundation level of primary education is anticipated may increase English literacy rates among all lower primary school pupils with exception of special needs pupils (Curriculum Development Division, 2014).

English literacy becomes the core element in the new language curriculum because the best time to address literacy problems in national primary school is at the foundation level of learning, which is Year 1 to 3 (Curriculum Development Division, 2014). The Ministry of Education believes that by nipping the problem at its bud, illiteracy in English can be eradicated and pupils will be able to read proficiently by the end of their primary schooling. The language acquisition experts even suggest that the best time to start
learning a second language is as early as possible before they reach puberty (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Furthermore, majority of the Malaysian pupils do not attain literacy in the English language until they go for formal schooling because they do not grow up in English-speaking environment (Gan, Muniandy, & Wan Yahaya, 2013). Hence, teaching basic literacy to young learners in lower primary schools is crucial in the new language curriculum.

As stipulated in the Curriculum Standard Document, teachers have to reinforce the language learning using the phonics approach. Accordingly, teachers are expected to teach phonemes and graphemes to develop letter-sound correspondence and decoding skills in pupils (Curriculum Development Division, 2011). Learning phonics is the main component of the KSSR reading skills and phonics itself is part of the English language curriculum for primary schools. Hence, phonics approach is suggested to be used as a strategy to instil basic literacy skills in young pupils. The phonics structure should be followed through systematically in the sequence as outlined in the English language curriculum standards.

In addition to that, teachers are recommended to explicitly teach one sound at a time and all 44 sounds of the English language are covered in two years in national primary schools. According to Curriculum Development Division (2014), the phonics instruction should place emphasis on the synthetic approach. In a nutshell, with the enforcement of the standard-based English language curriculum in national lower primary schools, teachers are recommended to employ the phonics approach particularly synthetic phonics approach to teach basic literacy to Year 1 and Year 2 during reading lesson.

The implementation of SBELC is a phenomenon affecting all teachers and pupils in Malaysian primary schools. Once a new curriculum is implemented throughout the entire school system, it is expected that its effectiveness will increase as time goes by. In the process, teachers may gain experience and adjust to new curriculum content and teaching methods. However, according to Kim (1977), in some cases, a new curriculum that proven to be effective in the pilot stage may turn out to be less effective once it is fully implemented throughout the education system. It seems that though pilot study has proven its effectiveness, the similar result may not probable at implementation stage.

After three years of its implementation, teachers are expected to implement the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction confidently and effectively. To determine that the new language curriculum contributes to the attainment of the educational goals of the nation, the implemented curriculum entails proper and continuous monitoring by interested parties who need to know where and how to improve the curriculum product (Lewy, 1977), and as such, someone must monitor what
is occurring and determine whether these actions are appropriate (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014), and this is where this study comes in.

Curriculum implementation is a change process (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014), and whatever change or reform being implemented in school is regarded as innovation (Hall, Dirksen, & George, 2013), and putting an innovation into practice is difficult and demanding task (Anderson, 1995). The standard-based English language programme indicates through its curriculum content a significant change from the demands of the old language curriculum. Change in curriculum content will therefore affect corresponding change in teachers’ knowledge and instructional practices and teachers naturally resist change for some reasons (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Hence, change may cause conflicts to the teachers and may result in some challenges during the curriculum implementation because according to Anderson (1995), change is not an easy process and often brings dilemmas.

Likewise, teachers have to change their knowledge and instructional practices in the wake of the standard-based English language curriculum. Respectively, teachers have to comprehend the phonics approach, plan different teaching strategies, design fun learning activities, and prepare new instructional materials and assessment instruments to ensure that the goal of the new English language curriculum is achieved. The curriculum implementation requires teachers to change not only their knowledge and practices but also their attitudes (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014), as such it requires hard work and it may take a lot of time over an extended period of not months but years. Acknowledging that there is no specific information regarding some challenges that teachers encounter as they implement Year 1 basic reading literacy instruction, this study takes the action to find out.

Furthermore, teaching is dynamic in nature that it keeps on changing over time. From time to time a new curriculum will be introduced to schools as to meet the global and national needs and challenges as well. Accordingly, teachers have to be personally interested in the implementation process and devote large amount of time and effort to implement it. For curriculum change to be successfully implemented, teachers should feel committed to curriculum change and implementation of the new programme (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Yet, there is a lot to be concerned about at the early stage of curriculum implementation. Thus, it is important to pay attention to curriculum implementation for several years because it takes at least three years for early concerns to be resolved and later ones to emerge, and moreover, teachers need to have their self-concerns addressed before they are ready to implement a new curriculum (Loucks-Horsley, 1996). Since there is no specific knowledge on teachers’ concerns in response to the curriculum change, this study makes it possible to examine their concerns which signify their readiness to implement basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach as envisioned by the new English language curriculum.
Some teachers want to change; yet they are also afraid of change, especially if it comes quickly or if they are lack of competencies to cope with the change (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Consequently, the tension between the ideal and what teachers can actually achieve occurs. It may not be surprising, hence, if teachers feel pressure with so many initiatives, expectations and targets to contend with despite their needs to put the programmes into action effectively. According to Ornstein & Hunkins (2014), the change introduced must address teachers’ needs for the new curriculum to be accepted; therefore, one must attend to what teachers require. Yet, there is no specific information on what teachers need in order for them to accept the curriculum change and implement basic literacy instruction confidently and effectively; hence, this study is essential to figure out the needs.

Since curriculum implementation occurs mostly in the classroom and teachers are the key players in the implementation process, the initial concern should be the teachers’ reactions towards the new language curriculum. The new curriculum can succeed only if teachers accept it. The acceptance by teachers of an educational programme is a prerequisite for its success. If teachers do not accept the programme, one can hardly expect that it will be properly implemented (Soto, 1977). Likewise, teachers are more likely to teach basic literacy using the phonics approach successfully if they have positive outlook of the new curriculum. To determine whether the teachers accept the new curriculum and are ready to implement it, one should gather data on teachers’ perceptions (Kim, 1977). Furthermore, teachers’ perceptions typically shape their concerns.

By acknowledging teachers’ perceptions of SBELC, phonics approach, and professional knowledge, the educational leaders may anticipate whether the teachers accept the new English language curriculum and are ready to implement it or not because teachers’ perceptions are the early indicators of teachers’ acceptance and readiness. However, there is no specific data on Year 1 teachers’ perceptions of the new curriculum in terms of the standard-based English language curriculum, phonics approach, and their professional knowledge; for which reason this study is proposed.

1.2 Problem Statement

A new curriculum, the standard-based English language curriculum was introduced to Year 1 cohort in Malaysian lower primary schools in 2011. Likewise, basic literacy and phonics approach was presented as the new curriculum content. Since teachers are the key players in curriculum implementation process, a study conducted by Barrett-Mynes (2013) investigated first and second grade teachers’ perceptions and practices in implementing English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in their literacy instruction. Findings from this study provide information about the implementation of the ELA CCSS in literacy instruction and the enacted literacy curricula. Findings suggested that multiple levels of
context influenced the ELA CCSS implementation, including teachers’ perceptions. They also suggest that while teachers may teach from a standardized curriculum, the literacy learning opportunities differ in each class. The study on teachers’ perceptions of implementing ELA CCSS and actual implementation of ELA CCSS supports the notion that a research on teachers’ perceptions is necessary for teachers’ perceptions somehow will influence the curriculum implementation process, and teachers may provide different learning opportunities to the students despite the fact that they teach the same curriculum.

Likewise, a study made by Nguyen (2013) investigated teachers’ perceptions and actual curriculum implementation. The study examined first grade teachers’ perceptions of their levels of knowledge in literacy concepts and development in terms of the *Big 5 Ideas* and the possibility of their influence on actual daily instructional practices. The findings revealed that there were strong relationship between the observed first grade teachers’ perceptions of the *Big 5 Ideas* and their actual implementation of the *Big 5 Ideas*. The study also sees teachers’ perceptions of a curriculum should be examined for their perceptions may influence their actual implementation of the curriculum.

Another study of English language curriculum implementation in public primary schools was conducted by Yanik (2007). The study aimed to investigate how English language curriculum of the sixth, seventh and eighth grades of public primary schools was implemented by teachers and how it was experienced by students. The major areas of investigation were the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the curriculum goals and content, instructional strategies, evaluation and assessment procedures, learner attitudes and the problems encountered during the curriculum implementation. The findings revealed that the implementation process of the English language curriculum showed differences in relation to the facilities of schools and classrooms, teacher and student characteristics and perceptions. It seems that the study also examines teachers’ perceptions and actual curriculum implementation.

Evidently, those studies on English language curriculum implementation in primary schools not only investigated the implementation of English language curriculum, but also examined teachers’ perceptions of the curriculum. With great importance is placed on curriculum implementation; however, in Malaysia context, no-evidence-based research has examined Year 1 teachers’ perceptions about the new language curriculum and its implementation in actual basic literacy instructional practices. In other words, in searching for the literature on the implementation of the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction, there is no previous research in the area of Year 1 teachers’ perceptions of the new curriculum and their actual implementation of SBELC. This information implies that the current literature on teachers’ implementation of the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy
instruction using the phonics approach is still insufficient. Therefore, a need exists for researchers to examine the gap between Year 1 teachers’ perceptions and how teachers implement their basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach in actual classroom setting. With the aim of addressing this gap, the following research objectives were the focus of this study.

1.3 Objectives of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain more knowledge and understanding about the new language curriculum as well as its implementation by teachers. Respectively, this study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

(1) To investigate teachers’ perceptions towards the implementation of the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction; and

(2) To investigate teachers’ actual implementation of Year 1 basic literacy instruction in the wake of the standard-based English language curriculum.

1.4 Research Questions

To look into teachers’ perceptions and implementation of the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction, this study addressed the following questions:

(1) What are teachers’ perceptions of the new English language curriculum?

(2) What are teachers’ needs in order to implement the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction confidently and effectively?

(3) What are teachers’ concerns in implementing the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction?

(4) What are some challenges that teachers encounter as they implement the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction?

(5) How do teachers plan and prepare Year 1 basic literacy instruction?

(6) How do teachers actually implement Year 1 basic literacy instruction in the wake of the standard-based English language curriculum?
1.5 Significance of Study

The standard-based English language curriculum is the recent language curriculum for primary schools in Malaysia. The curriculum introduces basic literacy, phonics, language arts, and penmanship as the new curriculum content. Given no previous research in the area of Year 1 teachers’ perceptions of the new curriculum and their actual teaching practices using the phonics approach, this study is necessary. Since curriculum implementation occurs mostly in classroom and teachers as the key players in the curriculum change and implementation process, this study can provide information of what teachers perceive about the new language curriculum in order to determine their readiness; whether they are ready or not to implement the current language curriculum particularly basic literacy instruction. Respectively, this study can provide some basic information about teachers’ perceptions of the standard-based English language curriculum, phonics approach, and their professional knowledge.

The research findings can disclose what teachers need in order to implement basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach confidently and effectively. Attending teachers’ needs is necessary in order to ensure the new curriculum is implemented successfully (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). The study could give some inputs to the Ministry of Education Malaysia regarding what teachers require in their classroom instruction for the Malaysia MOE to consider this issue before they launch the revised Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR) in 2017.

Change in curriculum requires change in teachers’ knowledge, attitudes and instructional practices (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Through their changed behaviours and perceptions, the instructional practices change. However, according to Ornstein and Hunkins (2014), change occurs when teachers’ concerns are identified and made known. To get the teachers ready to teach basic literacy using the phonics approach, the educational leaders must find out and then address teachers’ concerns. This requires gathering data, and thus this study could provide the Ministry of Education with some information regarding teachers’ specific concerns either about self, or teaching, or pupils as discussed in the Concerns-based Adoption Model.

The use of new curriculum in schools is an example of school innovation (Yin, 2009). In fact, any change or reform being implemented in schools is regarded as an innovation (Hall et al., 2013). So, the implementation of basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach in national primary schools is considered as an innovation. Even a new programme for teachers is considered as an innovation (Hall & Hord, 1984). Accordingly, the standard-
based English language curriculum as the new language programme is an innovation. Yet, there will be some problems that teachers need to cope with the innovation because according to Anderson (1995), change will bring dilemmas. Respectively, the findings can reveal some challenges that have come across as the teachers are implementing basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach in Year 1 of national schools.

The findings of the research can give new insight and emphasis not only to the implementation of the standard-based English language curriculum in general but also a new perspective towards the implementation of basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach in enhancing literacy rates among primary school pupils at foundation level. In other words, it could give feedback about how basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach is perceived and implemented by teachers, how teachers plan and prepare their lesson to successfully implement the new curriculum, and how they assess pupils’ learning progress in basic literacy skills. At the same time, the research findings could help Year 1 English teachers to better formulate their teaching and learning strategies and techniques to be more effective in basic literacy instruction.

As one of the few studies investigating teachers’ implementation of basic literacy instruction, this study could contribute to the insufficient literature on current language curriculum implementation in lower primary schools. Additionally, this comprehensive study on the standard-based English language curriculum implementation in Year 1 of national schools and the identification of the pedagogical issues lie within basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach could provide perspective for any study of the new English language curriculum and its implementation that emphasizes on different language areas or different levels of learning in future.

Furthermore, this study could contribute to the present body of knowledge and theories concerning curriculum implementation. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) is one of the many models used by researchers and educators to measure curriculum implementation. Since this study aimed to investigate teachers’ perceptions and curriculum implementation in schools, CBAM offers the most appropriate model to meet the purpose of this study. The model used in this study was developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). To measure implementation in schools, SEDL has proposed the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) to measure teachers’ reaction to an innovation and focused interview with specific rating procedure to measure teachers’ use of the innovation.

Since teachers’ implementation of basic literacy instruction is a behavioural phenomenon, the most suitable way to assess teachers’ perceptions and their daily instructional practices is using qualitative method. Considering the facts that the researcher is not trained to use the SEDL’s instruments and...
this study covers a small scale of research sites and participants, it is plausible to document teachers’ perceptions and their actual instructional practices through direct classroom observations, semi-structured, one-to-one interviews, and document analysis.

On top of that, this study is significantly timely as it was conducted after three years the SBELC implementation. Moreover, the Ministry of Education is in the process of implementing the new language curriculum at all levels of learning by 2017. Thus, the results obtained about the basic literacy instructional practices in relation to teaching strategies, learning activities, instructional materials, classroom assessments, as well as teachers’ perceptions of the curriculum, needs, concerns, problems, and suggestions made by teachers could provide useful information to the Ministry of Education in their future attempts to revise the current English language curriculum in 2017. This study could also be used as a reference study in not only TESL courses in universities and institutes of teacher education but also in pre- and in-service teacher professional development programmes offered by the Ministry of Education at national, or state, or district level.

1.6 Limitations of Study

This study was conducted with a few limitations. First and foremost, the participating schools involved in this study were limited to five primary schools. The schools become the context of this study where five Year 1 teachers adopted the same innovation (implementing the standard-based English language curriculum in their basic reading literacy instruction). Malaysian primary schools are rated yearly as Band 1 (good school) to Band 7 (poor school) based on their performance in the public examination, namely UPSR or Primary School Education Test and SKPM or Malaysian Education Standard Quality (Ministry of Education, 2012). The study focused on two good performing schools and three average schools because the participating district did not have underperforming school. School band is taken into consideration in this study because it features academic performance of the school which according to Mckinsey (2007) is determined by the quality of its teachers who can affect pupils’ achievement and performance (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The schools in the participating district were clustered into seven groups, but the study focused on national schools, thus the last two groups which involve national-type schools were excluded from this study. So, the study covered five groups which generally indicate their location in the participating district. By looking the curriculum implementation at different bands and cluster, the study could examine different instructional practices at different types of schools.
Furthermore, the literature revealed that the implementation process of the English language curriculum differs in relation to the facilities of schools and classrooms, teachers’ and pupils’ characteristics and perceptions (Yanik, 2007), and as such, the study only includes national schools due to the fact that basic literacy instructional practices might vary from national schools (SK) to national-type schools or Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (SJK). Moreover, there is discrepancy in term of teaching and learning period of the English language. Pupils of SK spend 300 minutes (10 periods) per week to learn English. On the other hand, the pupils of SJK spend 150 minutes (5 periods) for English lessons. Besides, basic literacy instruction through the phonics approach is implemented in Year 1 and Year 2 at SK, and in Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 at SJK. Accordingly, teachers from both primary schools might employ different basic literacy instructional practices. Teachers might as well have different needs and concerns, and confront different problems during the implementation process. Considering such circumstances, the study focused on five national primary schools in the participating district.

In addition, the sample size was small with five participants who have been identified to be information-rich. This limited sample size might have an effect on the interpretation of the findings since these five Year 1 teachers’ perceptions of implementing SBELC might not be representative of the population of Year 1 teachers. Yet, it is typical in qualitative research to focus on relatively small samples (Meriam, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2011; Patton, 2002; Mason, 2002), or even a few individuals or a few cases because the main intention is to provide an in-depth rather than superficial perspectives (Creswell, 2012). In this context, teachers are the key players in implementing Year 1 basic literacy instruction to respond to implementation of the SBELC. Respectively, the researcher selected five Year 1 teachers who were teaching English at five selected national schools in Pahang as the main unit of analysis, being addressed by the research questions, and each individual teacher was the subject of an individual case study. In other words, the individual teacher was the case being studied, but the study as a whole covered five teachers and in this way used a multiple-case study design. The researcher decided on five cases because Yin (2009) stated that a study in such aggregate could predict contrasting results and attain a high degree of certainty about the multiple-case results.

Moreover, collecting qualitative data and analysing it takes considerable time, and the addition of each individual or site only lengthens that time (Creswell, 2012). In other words, a larger sample requires more time to collect and analyse data and that is beyond what the study could handle. Considering the fact that the researcher and the research participants had time-constraints plus this was an educational research, the researcher decided on five participants for case selection. Still, the research findings attained from this study could not be generalized to the whole population of Year 1 English teachers in all national primary schools in the participating district as well as in Pahang and Malaysia.
Additionally, the five teachers were selected based on the five stages of teacher expertise development proposed by Berliner (2004). Berliner categorized teacher expertise development in teaching field according to their teaching experiences. In this study, the teachers were selected from every stage; hence, the study consisted of five research participants.

Besides, this study also limited its focus to investigating the implementation of basic literacy instruction. Though four new language contents: basic literacy, phonics, penmanship, and language arts were introduced in the SBELC, the study focused on basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach as literacy in English is part of the key feature of Shift 2 in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and key to literacy is reading development. Therefore, this study investigated how Year 1 teachers at the participating schools perceived the SBELC and basic literacy instruction and transformed the curriculum standards for basic literacy into pedagogical activities in language classroom.

The findings also aimed at insight about the specific phenomenon in specific setting that is teachers' implementation of Year 1 basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach to respond to the SBELC. Considering that the findings might be different if the study focused on other levels of learning such as Year 2 and Year 3, the study, thus, restricted its focus to implementation of the SBELC in Year 1 basic literacy instruction. Furthermore, it is at this level of learning pupils are first introduced to basic literacy curricula, hence, teaching basic literacy using the phonics approach at this initial stage of primary education is considered vital. Moreover, Nguyen (2013) stated first grade teachers play an important role in shaping the necessary foundation for early literacy skills.

On top of that, the study was carried out in approximately fifteen weeks. Hence, the data were collected from brief classroom observations (fifteen observations), semi-structured interviews (ten interviews) and document analysis (field notes, lesson plans, pupil hand-outs and products, instructional materials, audio-visual recordings, and assessment instruments). Consequently, the findings only portrayed part of the teachers' actual basic literacy instructional practices throughout that particular year. Yet, fifteen weeks are adequate enough to provide detailed information for the study because according to Mertler and Charles (2010), in an educational research done by graduate students, the duration usually should not stretch out more than two months to obtain detailed information.

1.7 Operational Definitions

It is important to document and standardize the operational definition in any research paper. Hence, the operational definition applied in this study is used to describe exactly what the terms are and how they are measured in
order to avoid misunderstanding and inappropriate interpretation. The terms defined in this section are included:

1.7.1 Standard-Based Curriculum for Primary Schools

Standard-based curriculum for primary schools in this study refers to the new national curriculum or locally known as KSSR that was first introduced to all Malaysian primary schools in 2011 beginning Year 1 cohort. The national standard curriculum aims to produce a balanced, creative, critical and innovative individual through six strands that are communication, science and technology, physical and aesthetic development, personal skills, humanity and spirituality, as well as attitude and values. Curriculum change in national curriculum involves all core and elective subjects offered by national and national-type primary schools. However, this study focused on the English language curriculum. English is one of the core subjects offered to the Year 1 pupils of national primary schools.

1.7.2 Standard-Based English Language Curriculum

The standard-based English language curriculum or SBELC in this study refers to the new English language curriculum that was being implemented in all Malaysian primary schools including the participating schools since 2011 starting Year 1 cohort. At the time of this study, it was being implemented in Year 1 to 4. The SBELC was designed to produce pupils who are more proficient in the language. The goal of the new English language curriculum is to help the pupils acquire the language so that they can use it in their daily lives, to further their studies, and for work purposes (Curriculum Development Division, 2011).

The new curriculum is organized in terms of content and learning standards. Teachers describe what their pupils have been learning using the standards. Content standards specify the essential knowledge, skills, understandings and strategies that pupils need to learn. Learning standards describe in detail the degree or quality of proficiency that pupils need to display in relation to the content standards for a particular year. The curriculum content gives emphasis on four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In addition to that, four language areas were added as the new curriculum content: basic literacy, phonics, penmanship, and language arts which are embedded in the curriculum standards for reading (basic literacy and phonics), writing (penmanship), and language arts (language arts). However, the main focus of this study was basic literacy in reading and phonics.
1.7.3 Basic Literacy Instruction

Basic literacy instruction in this study refers to the teaching of basic literacy in reading using the phonics approach. Basic literacy is taught in Year 1 and Year 2 at national schools. Literacy in English is part of the key feature of Shift 2 in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 which needs to occur to ensure that every pupil is proficient in English. Basic literacy instruction focuses on developing pupils' phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. The reading lessons are expected to be designed to reinforce the learning of language using the phonics approach.

1.7.4 Basic Literacy Skills

Basic literacy skills in this study refer to decoding skills which denote the ability to apply the knowledge of letter-sound correspondence to correctly pronounce written words. Understanding the correspondence gives the pupils ability to recognize familiar words quickly and figure out words they have not seen before. Since this study focused on basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach, it explored reading instruction that helps to develop decoding skills in Year 1 pupils particularly word recognition and word attack skills using picture and phonemic clues.

1.7.5 Teachers’ Perceptions

Teachers’ perceptions in this study refers to the personal opinions and/or views held by Year 1 English teachers of national primary schools in Malaysia which are rooted from their beliefs and thoughts about the new language curriculum, needs, concerns, and challenges that they encounter in implementing Year 1 basic literacy instruction in the wake of the standard-based English language curriculum.

1.7.6 New Curriculum

New curriculum refers to what the teachers perceive about three major areas of investigation: the standard-based English language curriculum, phonics approach, and their professional knowledge of basic literacy in terms of content and pedagogical knowledge.

1.7.7 Needs

Needs in this study refers to what the teachers require in order to teach basic literacy using the phonics approach confidently and effectively in their reading classroom.
1.7.8 Concerns

Concerns refer to what the teachers perceive as important that makes them feel worried and they are affected by it while implementing the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction. Teachers’ concerns reflect specifically their concerns either for self, or teaching, or pupils.

1.7.9 Challenges

Challenges refer to some problems which are related to classroom instructional practices that the teachers face as they implement the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction.

1.7.10 Classroom Assessments

Classroom assessments refers to formative assessments which are conducted for judging whether the learning objectives have been met while teaching and learning session of basic literacy in reading is still in progress. The assessments aim at gauging each pupil’s learning progress in basic literacy skills from everyday classroom activities. Thus, the assessments often reflects teaching and learning task in language classroom.

1.7.11 Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation in this study refers to the process of implementing the standard-based English language curriculum in Year 1 basic literacy instruction in language classroom. The process involves transforming the content and learning standards into pedagogical activities in language classroom. The curriculum implementation is carried out to achieve the expected content and learning standards of basic literacy in reading as outlined in the Curriculum Standard Document.

1.7.12 English Language Teaching

English language teaching in this study refers to the teaching and learning of English as a second language as well as a core and compulsory subject in the participating schools. In Malaysia, the pupils are regarded as second language learners. English language teaching in national primary schools aims to equip pupils with basic language skills to enable them to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts that is appropriate to the pupils’ level of development (Curriculum Development Division, 2011).
1.7.13 Primary Schools

Primary schools in this study refer to National primary schools or locally known as *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (SK). In Malaysia, primary education is served by National primary school and National-type primary school or *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan* (SJK). The national primary schools, including the participating schools, use Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction. Primary education is divided into two stages, Stage One and Stage Two and lasts for six years. Stage One refers to Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 and Stage Two represents Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6. Yet, this study restricted its focus to Year 1 of national schools.

1.8 Chapter Summary

The background of the study explains and provides the premise for the study. The new demand for education excellence and school reform results in the changing of curriculum content and education emphases in English subject curriculum. Accordingly, teachers are expected to change and become competent to sustain curriculum change. Since the standard-based English language curriculum and basic literacy instruction using the phonics approach are still new in Malaysian national primary schools, the study then aims to investigate what the teachers perceive about the implementation of the new language curriculum particularly in basic literacy instruction, and how they actually implement it in Year 1 language classroom.
REFERENCES


Nguyen, N. V. (2013). *First grade teachers’ perceptions of the five strands of effective reading instruction and their possible influence on daily...*


Steiner, J. (2013). *Why have a standard-based curriculum and what are the implications for the teaching-learning-assessment process?* Manuscript submitted for publication.


