English Language Reading Preparation for Higher Education

Harison Mohd Sidek

Faculty of Major Languages Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to determine the effectiveness of Form Four English language textbooks in preparing students for tertiary reading in English. The data is in the form of reading comprehension passages from the selected English language textbook. In this study, reading instructional design in the English language textbook is analyzed in terms of types and the length of passages with regards to grade-level. Using the data acquired from the review of this mandated textbook, the author argues that the reading of comprehension and instructional design in English language in the national Form Four English language textbook as part of the English language reading curriculum only partially prepares the upper secondary students in meeting the demand of reading in English at the tertiary level.

Keywords: Higher education, reading comprehension instruction, reading curriculum, textbook, instructional design, ESL, upper secondary, expository texts

INTRODUCTION

Reading skill is one of the most critical skills to academic success (e.g, Weideman & Van, 2002) considering it facilitates access to printed information that enables learners to use and mediate the information that they have acquired (Pretorius, 2002). As such, it is imperative that students be prepared to process information. The task is crucial

for their future educational careers (Grabe, 2001). The findings of English as the first reading language (L1) studies implicate that it is essential to train students at the school level with reading instruction that addresses the reading demand at university level (e.g., Feathers & Smith, 1983; Nist & Kirby, 1986). For example, asking students to process expository texts might increase students' efficiency in processing such type of texts which they have to regularly process in their content areas (e.g., Carrell, 1985; Pugh, Pawan & Antomarchi, 2000). In a similar vein, training students to process

grade-level texts in reading comprehension instruction may assist them in reading and comprehend grade-level texts in the content areas (e.g., Boling & Evans, 2008). Understanding reading texts is paramount to academic success (Best, Floyd, McNamara, 2008). Thus, reading instructional design should emphasize the use of relevant text type and grade-level texts in reading comprehension instruction in order to assist students with reading comprehension in the content areas especially at the university level.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING: THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

In Malaysia, English is learned and taught as a second language (English as a second language or ESL). The number of less proficient students in the English language is becoming more prominent in Malaysia (Powell, 2002). Many students at the university level in Malaysia are unable to read well in English although reading in English in meeting the academic demand at higher institution level in Malaysia plays a significant role (Kaur & Thiyagarah, 1999). Many studies on English language reading within the Malaysian setting find that university students' academic performance correlates with their English language reading ability in content areas (e.g., Faizah, Zalizan, & Norzaini, 2002; Kanagasabai, 1996; Ponniah, 1993). Past studies in Malaysia have also shown that many students are unable to process academic texts at the university level due to the significantly lack of familiarity with

academic texts discourse (e.g., Nambiar, 2005, 2007; Kaur & Thiyagarah, 1999). Such inability in dealing with content area texts is due to insufficient direct exposure to the discourse structure of such text type at the school level (e.g., Ting & Tee, 2008). Such situation suggests that students enrolling in Malaysian universities merely have developing academic readiness due to a lack of English language reading comprehension ability. Such academic readiness could be most likely the result of a lack in the use of expository type of texts at grade-level in reading instruction at the secondary school level, which condition may adversely affect the students' academic performance.

In line with Beck, McKeown, Sinatra, and Loxterman, (1991), many English language researchers within the Malaysian setting also contend that the flaws in English language reading comprehension preparation at the secondary school level could be one of the explanations why many university students in Malaysia have difficulties when reading in English (e,g., David & Govindasamy, 2006; Seng, 2007; Seng & Hashim, 2006; Pandian, 2000); a situation that is similar to other settings in which English is not the first language or non-English speaking countries (e.g., Chen, 1998; Day & Bamford, 2005; Vlack, 2009). Due to this similarity between Malaysia and other non-English language speaking countries, the findings from the present study may have implications not only to the Malaysian setting, but also to other settings of similar nature.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What types of reading comprehension passages are provided in the Malaysian Form Four English language secondary textbook and used in the English language reading comprehension instruction?

2. To what extent are grade-level passages used in the Malaysian Form Four English language secondary textbook and used in the English language reading comprehension instruction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Texts Types

Sidek (2010) reviews text types and finds that there are two major text types; narrative and informative (e.g., Avaloz, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascon, 2007; Gaddy, Bakken, & Fulk, 2008; Grabe, 2008; Koda, 2007). Reading researchers have come to a consensus that the common features of narrative text commonly include characters, settings, problems or conflicts encountered by main characters, plots, and affect patterns (e.g., Gurney, Gursten, Dimino, & Carnine, 1990; Zhang & Hoosain, 2001). On the other hand, informative or expository texts are often written for the purpose of getting its efferent values (Koda, 2005). According to Bakken, Mastropieri, and Scruggs (1997), narrative texts are more consistent in structure while the structure of expository texts is rather varied. Expository texts often use text structures such as cause and effect, problem and solution or compare and contrast (e.g., Meyer & Freedle, 1984; Meyer & Rice, 1984; Taylor, 1980). For example, the aim for a cause and effect type of text is to highlight the reasons or causes and the corresponding results or effects. The text structure for problem and solution explains problems to readers and the solutions to those problems. Expository texts in the form of compare and contrast present readers the comparisons when things are alike and contrast two things when they are different.

The findings of past studies have suggested that second language (L2) readers' familiarity with text structure correlates with their level of text comprehension (e.g., Bakken, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2002; Cook, 1983; Pullido, 2007). Successful text processing that maps onto the author's intended meaning requires an efficient integral coordination of underlying processes of reading including discourse processing (e.g., Cook & Gueraud, 2005; Cook & Myers, 2004). As such, the level of exposure to a text type may significantly affect students' ability in the discourse processing of that particular text type (e.g., Anderson & Armbruster, 1986; Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008; Koda, 2005). For example, if narrative texts instead of expository texts are more frequently used in reading instruction, students might be able to process narrative texts in a more efficient way than processing expository texts due to structure familiarity and frequent processing practices of narrative texts and vice versa. Bakken et al. (1997) contends

that in order for students to be able to read and process the discourse of expository texts effectively in the content areas, explicit training on expository texts is crucial. Therefore, to increase students' text processing efficiency of expository texts at the university level, regular training on the processing of expository texts should take place at the school level.

Grade-Level Texts

In terms of grade-level texts measured by the length of the texts, the findings of past studies indicate that shorter or simplified passages may better facilitate L2 reading comprehension (e.g., Leow, 1997; Shook, 1997; Young, 1999). On the contrary, Oh (2001) who studies the effects of elaborated text, that is commonly longer than the authentic and simplified texts, finds that such modification may also assist text comprehension. Due to the mixed findings of past studies on the roles of text length in reading comprehension (e.g., Crossley, Louwerse, McCarthy & McNamara, 2007; Tomlinson, Dat, Masuhara, & Ruby, 2001), it is inconclusive whether shorter or longer texts would be best used in L2 reading comprehension instruction (Day & Bamford, 1998). Within the L2 reading context, the question is how the length of passages used in general L2 reading comprehension instruction would affect students' ability to read at grade-level in the content areas which texts are commonly long and complex in nature (e.g., Beck, McKeown, Sinatra, & Loxterman, 1991).

As contended by Sidek (2010), the importance of L2 readers reading the appropriate type of L2 texts at grade-level, particularly in relation to academic performance, has not yet much examined in the field of L2 reading. More often than not, the focus of L2 reading research is concentrated on how L2 learners can comprehend L2 reading texts without much consideration of the type of text and the importance of comprehending grade-level texts. The majority of past studies on L2 reading which examine text length hardly examine the importance of training students to process grade-level texts (e.g., Crossley & McNamara, 2008; Crossley, Louwerse, McCarthy & McNamara, 2007; Rott, 2007). Sidek (2010) examines the reading comprehension instructional design in the Form Five English language textbook and concludes that the upper secondary students in the Malaysian setting are only partially prepared for reading in the content areas involving English at the university level in relation to processing expository text at grade level. However, such conclusion is made without the investigation of the Form Four English language textbook which is also part of the upper secondary level in the Malaysian setting. Since the upper secondary school level in Malaysia comprises the Form Four and the Form Five, as an extension to Sidek's (2010) study, the present study examines the reading comprehension instructional design reflected in the Form Four English language textbook with regards to text types and grade-level text. The findings of this study

will enable a more conclusive inference on how the Malaysian upper secondary students are being prepared for the academic demand involving the English language reading in the content areas at the university level.

Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

Sidek (2010) revises Richards and Rodgers' (2001) model of language teaching analysis to provide a framework of how English language reading comprehension can be analyzed at the Design and Approach levels. Based on Richards and Rodgers' (2001) model, language teaching can be analyzed not only at the approach and design levels, but also at the Procedure level. Sidek (2010) develops a model of method analysis for English language reading at the level of Approach and Design but not at the Procedural level. For this study, Sidek's (2010) model is further revised by including the Procedure level as in Richards and Rodgers' (2001) model. However, this study does not examine the method of English language reading instruction at the Approach level. Therefore, the model used in this study comprises the Design level of Sidek's (2010) model and Richards and Rodgers' (2001) Procedure level. This study adds to Sidek's (2010) model the analyses of the types and length of reading passages reflected in the English language comprehension reading instruction. The new revised framework serves as a model to analyze the method of the teaching of reading in terms of its Design and Procedure as reflected in the EL4 textbook within the parameter of preparing secondary school students for academic reading at institutions of higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A document analysis and classroom observation methods are conducted for this study. Past studies examining second language curriculum review curriculum documents like textbooks (e.g., Alwan, 2006; Hung, 2006) and observe classroom instruction (e.g., Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; McKeown, & Beck, 2004; Salataci & Akyel, 2002). In line with the theoretical model used in this study, the review of curriculum documents provides data on the method of reading instruction at the Design level (Sidek, 2010) while classroom observations provide data on the method of reading instruction at the Procedure level (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The current study examines a textbook as one of the Malaysian English language curriculum documents and classroom reading comprehension instruction. As stated in the Form Four English language Curriculum Specifications document (Malaysian Ministry of Education [MOE], 2003), one of the main goals of the Malaysian English language in secondary curriculum is to prepare students with English language literacy skills that they may need at the tertiary level. The Form Four English language Curriculum Specifications document, developed by the Curriculum Planning and Development Division under the MOE, provides instructional guidelines for English language instructional material development and classroom instruction.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to offer suggestions on how the Malaysian Form Four English language reading curriculum may effectively prepare the upper secondary school students for the English language reading demands they will encounter in institutions of higher education. In order to make such suggestions, English language reading comprehension instructional design in the Malaysian Form Four English language textbook and the texts used in reading comprehension instruction are analyzed.

Instrument

The current study examines English language reading curriculum using key curriculum documents through document review in line with the practice of past studies of similar nature (e.g., Alwan, 2006, Hung, 2006; Su, 2006). In addition, this study also conducts classroom observations because past studies examining reading comprehension use classroom observation (e.g., Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Beck, & McKeown, 2001). Therefore, following previous studies, the Form Four English language textbook as one of the key curriculum documents is reviewed and analyzed in this study in order to obtain data related to the reading instructional design in the Form Four English language textbook. Reading comprehension instruction is observed and also analyzed.

The Form Four English language secondary textbook is selected as a sample of a standardized instructional material approved by the Textbook Division under the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Based on the description on the MOE Textbook Division (http://www.moe.gov.my/bbt/bukuteks_konsep_en.php), the textbook is organized by topical chapters based on the themes specified in the Form Four English language Curriculum Specifications document. Therefore, the passages used in each chapter are related to the topic of the chapter under the selected theme. The Form Four English language textbook must also conform to instructional guidelines stated in the Form Four English language Curriculum Specifications document. All mandated textbooks by the MOE were written by independent authors affiliated to a publishing company which the ministry appointed to develop the textbooks. The same procedure applies to the development of the Form Four English language textbook. However, there are also no specific guidelines on the selection in terms of types and lengths of passages that should be included in the Form Four English language textbook. Hence, it can be concluded that it is entirely up to the authors' discretion in determining the types and lengths of passages as long as the passages conform to the themes specified in the Form Four English language Curriculum Specifications document. The format of presentation in the Form Four textbook is similar to the Form Five English language textbook in which each reading comprehension passage in the Form Four English language textbook is also followed by comprehension questions divided into four sub-sections: supporting details, main ideas, inference, beyond the text and summary.

The national Form Four level is also selected for analysis considering it is part of the upper secondary school which represents the continuity in education between secondary school level and the tertiary level. Therefore, students' ability to read in the English language at the Form Four level serves as their existing information literacy skill in the English language which they bring with them to the Form Five level. Henceforth, the Form Four English language textbook will be referred to as the EL4 textbook.

Data Collection

To acquire data on text types used in the EL4 textbook, passages that are meant for reading comprehension are elicited from the EL4 textbook. Passages that are provided in the textbook for other purposes such as writing, fluency or grammar practices are not considered as reading comprehension passages; thus, these passages are excluded. The passages collected from classroom observations also use the same procedure of textbook passages selection. For example, if a teacher uses a passage only for pronunciation practice or grammar in reading instruction but not for reading comprehension, such passage is excluded. The passages collected from classroom observations are those used for reading comprehension purpose. Each text type and length of text is recorded in two separate tables (see Appendix A).

Procedure and Data Analysis

In order to determine how English language reading comprehension instruction at the secondary school level applies to tertiary academic contexts, qualitative analyses of the English language textbook and reading comprehension instruction are conducted in terms of passage types and grade-level. Such analysis may provide insights into the English language reading comprehension preparation process at the secondary school level. Within the context of current study, reading passages in the EL4 textbook that are not related to the purpose of reading comprehension instruction such as reading passages for grammar, vocabulary, and writing practices are excluded from the analysis of English language reading passages.

To answer the first research question in this study, reading comprehension passages in the EL4 textbook is also categorized as either narrative texts or expository texts. Texts with features such as characters, settings, problems or conflicts encountered by main characters, plots, and affect patterns (Gurney, Gursten, Dimino, & Carnine, 1990; Koda, 2005) are labeled as narrative texts. Passages with informative content (Koda, 2005) and with text structures such as cause and effect, problem and solution or comparison and contrast (e.g., Meyer & Freedle, 1984; Meyer & Rice, 1984; Taylor, 1980) are labeled as expository texts. The total frequency of each passage type is converted into percentages based on

the total number of reading comprehension passages in the textbook. In addition, data on the types of passages are also acquired from classroom observation and analyzed in the same manner as the data from the EL4 textbook. Two ESL experts rate the text types. The inter-rater reliability for text types is 0.92.

To answer the second research question, similar to Sidek's (2010) study, grade-level texts in this study are examined in terms of text length using Leslie and Caldwell's (2004; 2006) Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI 3 & 4). Sidek (2010) uses these inventories as proxies due to unavailability of current published inventory for grade-level texts in terms of length for L2 reading. Based on these inventories, the grade-level length of reading texts for upper secondary should be between 470-550 words. The means of length of reading comprehension passages for expository and narrative text types are calculated and served as the indicator of the extent to which grade-level passages for upper secondary level are used in the EL4 textbook for both text types. Data from classroom observation are analyzed in the same manner as data from the EL4 textbook. Therefore, if the means of text length of both types of passages from the data sources are less than 470 words, the texts are considered as not grade-level texts for the Form Four level and vice versa.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion of results of this study are presented according to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What types of reading comprehension passages are provided in the Malaysian Form Four English language secondary textbook and used in the English language reading comprehension instruction?

Tables 1 and Table 2 present the analyses of types and length of reading comprehension passages in the EL4 textbook. Table 1 provides the analysis of the narrative texts and their corresponding lengths while Table 2 exhibits the analysis of the expository texts and their corresponding lengths.

TABLE 1
Analysis of Narrative Passages in the Form Four English Language Textbook

	Title of Passage	Length
1	Azurah's Diary	366
2	Sonnet 18	113
3	A Story by Keris Mas	56
4	Poem 'Dreams'	32
5	All Summer in a Day	98
6	There's Been a death in the Opposite House	65
7	I shall not Pass This Way Again	57
8	Look at Me	410
9	Dear TZ	149
10	The Drover's Wife	65
12	Newspaper report- Man Dies in Fire	167
13	The Lotus Eater	79
14	Pride and Prejudice	112
15	The Road Not Taken	27
16	As I Was Passing-extract	155
17	Looking for a Rain God	70

17 Narrative Passages (46%)
Mean of passages length = 118 words

TABLE 2

Analysis of Expository Passages in the Form Four English Language Textbook

	Title of Passage	Length
1	Amazing Sarawak	358
2	No Ordinary Souls	354
3	Whales	75
4	Interview with Gerald Read	450
5	Durian	200
6	Nelson Mandela	93
7	Down Syndrome	287
8	Usher's Syndrome	112
9	Talk on Who is Who on Science and Technology	112
10	Huggie Erskine	443
11	Disability Facilities-Letter of Complaint	358
12	Dynamic Eight Malaysia Plan Takes Off	340
13	IT-My Silicon	158
14	For the Common Good	338
15	Map Reading	31
16	International Youth Leaders	167
17	In Search of Self	549
18	Message from Prominent Figures in the United States	479
19	Song in Space	68
20	Vision of the Future	444

20 Expository Passages (54%)
Mean of passage length = 271 words

In terms of types of passage in the EL4 textbook, Tables 1 and Table 2 indicate that the English language reading instruction at the Form Four level exposes students to both narrative and expository texts. Altogether, there are 37 passages for reading comprehension in the EL4 textbook. Seventeen of the passages are narrative passages (46%) and 20 expository passages (54%). This finding indicates that the English language secondary reading curriculum exposes students relatively more to the expository type of passages than to the narrative passages. In relation to reading in English language at the university level, the findings of textbook analysis in this study are incongruent with the finding of Sidek's (2010). However, these findings seem to be in line with the aim of the curriculum in preparing students to read texts in content areas which are primarily expository texts (e.g., Pugh, Pawan & Antomarchi, 2000). Nevertheless, in order to significantly enhance students' expository texts processing skills, extensively additional expository texts should be provided in the textbook s than narrative texts. Nonetheless, the data from classroom observation show that 90% of the passages that teachers used in the English language instruction for the Form Four is the narrative type while only 10% is the expository type. The practice is in contrast to the aim of the curriculum in preparing students to read texts in content areas at higher education institutions.

Past studies show that narrative and expository texts require different cognitive processing and cognitive demands (e.g., Baretta, Tomitch, McNair, Lim, & Waldie, 2009; Horiba, 2000; Trabasso & Magliano, 1996). As such, if English language reading comprehension instruction at the secondary level highly focuses on training students on reading expository texts, students might face less difficulty in processing expository texts. Therefore, English language reading comprehension instruction should highly expose students to expository texts in order to assist them to efficiently process such texts

in the content areas. In contrast, the finding from classroom observation indicates that almost 90% of the texts used in the English language reading comprehension instruction are narrative passages. This finding shows that classroom implementation, as reflected in the text types in the EL4 textbook, is not in alignment with what is suggested in the English language reading curriculum.

Research Question 2: To what extent are grade-level passages used in the Malaysian Form Four English language secondary textbook and used in the English language reading comprehension instruction?

The mean of passage length for the narrative type is approximately 118 words while the mean length for the expository passages is about 271 words. Similar to the findings

in Sidek's (2010) study, in this study, both narrative and expository passages used in the EL4 textbook are also below grade level. The Textbook Division of the MOE states in the textbook specifications section (http://www.moe.gov.my/bbt/bukuteks_konsep_en.php) that the content of the textbook should be at the target students' grade level. According to the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA), Form Five in the Malaysian setting is equivalent to 12th grade in the American setting. Therefore, Form Four in the Malaysian setting can be inferred to be equivalent to 11th Grade in the American high school. Based on this grade level comparison, the mean length of the expository and narrative passages does not conform to the students' grade level as suggested by Leslie and Caldwell (2004,
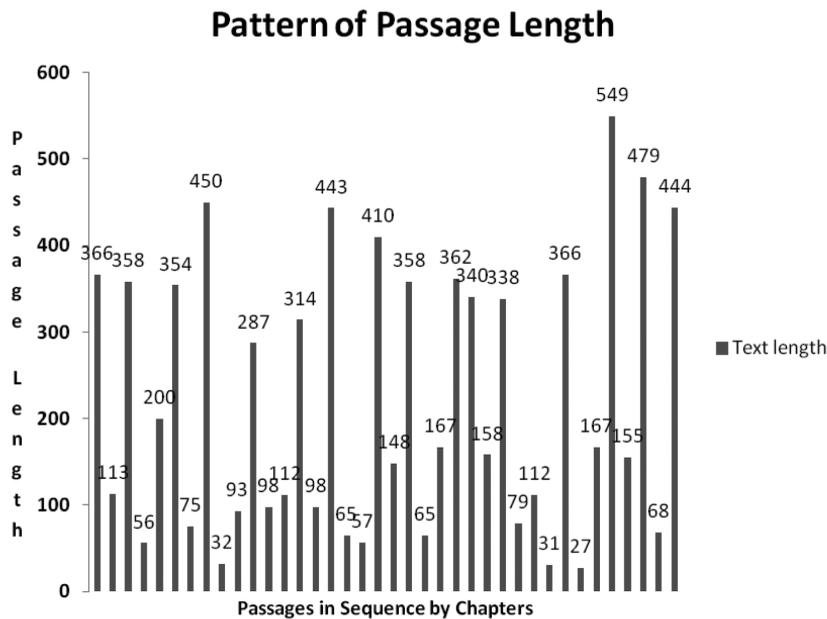

Fig.1: Pattern of Reading Passage Length in the Form Four English language Textbook

2006) and not in alignment with directive from the MOE.

The Form Four English Language Curriculum Specifications specifies developmental instruction in which language activities are divided into different levels from elementary to a more sophisticated level. Hence, if instruction is presented developmentally from a lower level to a higher level, the length of reading passages in the textbook should be in graded pattern from shorter to longer passages. However, the length of passages in the textbook does not follow such pattern. The bar graph in Fig.1 shows the irregular pattern of reading passage length as appeared in the textbook.

TABLE 3
Length of Passages in Sequence as They Appear in Chapters 1-15 in the English Language Textbook

Chapters	Number & Types of Comprehension Passages per Chapter	Length	Type of Passage
1	1 (E=1; N=0)	366	E
2	4 (E=2; N=2)	113	N
		358	E
		58	N
		200	E
3	2 (E=2; N=0)	354	E
		75	E
4	4 (E=3; N=0)	74	E
		450	E
		32	N
		93	E
5	3 (E=2; N=0)	287	E
		98	N
		112	E

TABLE 3 (*continue*)

6	3 (E=0; N=3)	314	N
		98	N
		120	N
7	3 (E=0; N-3)	443	N
		65	N
		57	N
8	2 (E=0; N=2)	410	N
		148	N
9	4 (E=1; N=2)	358	E
		65	N
		167	N
10	1 (E=1; N=0)	362	E
11	1 (E=2; N=0)	340	E
		158	E
12	4 (E=2; N=2)	338	E
		79	N
		112	N
		31	E
13	3 (E=1; N=2)	366	N
		27	N
		167	E
14	2 (E=1; N=1)	549	E
		155	N
15	3 (E=1; N=0)	479	E
16	2 (E=2; N=0)	68	E
		444	E

Key: E- Expository N= Narrative

Fig.1 and Table 3 show that there is no developmental pattern in terms of passage length from the first to the last unit in the EL4 textbook. Considering the high irregularity of passage length in the selected EL4 textbook, the importance of grade-level passage length seems not to have been given appropriate attention in the textbook planning and development.

Fig.2 also indicates that there is irregularity in the number of narrative and
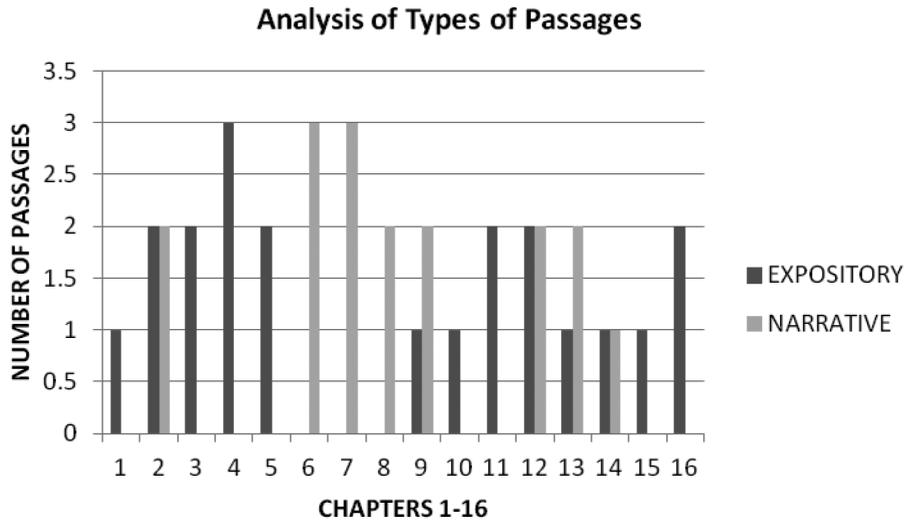
Analysis of Types of Passages

Fig.2: Analysis of Types of Passages

expository texts in each unit of the EL4 textbook. Some units in the textbook only have expository passages (Units 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 15, 16) while some units (Units 6-8) only use narrative passages. Such finding raises the question on how the decision on the number of expository and narrative types of passages for each unit is made at the textbook development level.

Form Four students should be trained to read and comprehend passages in the English language that is somewhat equivalent to the corresponding grade level of English as first language readers. The range of words for upper secondary should be between 470-550 words (Leslie & Caldwell, 2004; 2006) to enable them to read at grade-level at tertiary education level. However, there are only about 15 passages (41.7%) that meet the grade level word range while the other 21 passages (58.3%) are far below grade level. University students have to read materials in the English language in their content areas similar to native speakers do in order to be academically successful. Therefore, English language reading comprehension instruction that does not use appropriate reading materials may not prepare students with the English language reading skills that they need at the tertiary level.

Table 4 presents the analyses of types of reading comprehension passages teachers use in English language reading comprehension instruction.

TABLE 4
Analysis of Types of Passages from Classroom Observation

Total number of observations = 14
Expository Passages = 2 (14.3%)
Mean of passages length = 305 words
Narrative Passages = 12 (85.7%)
Mean of passages length = 400 words

Total number of observations = 14

With regards to the vocabulary presented in the reading passages, vocabulary learning

is addressed as a component of reading comprehension in the form of finding the meanings of words in context., The majority of the passages in the EL4 textbook are expository texts. Therefore, it seems that vocabulary related to expository texts is more emphasized than vocabulary that is related to the narrative texts. Nonetheless, the English language teachers, in majority use narrative texts in their reading comprehension lessons, do not implement the relatively more emphasis on expository text proposed in the EL4. Considering that students primarily have to read expository texts at the university level, the lack of emphasis on expository vocabulary in classroom instruction at the secondary school level might cause them the difficulty in understanding expository texts when reading in content areas (e.g., Pugh, Pawan & Antomarchi, 2000).

IMPLICATIONS

Material selection in terms of reading passages should be given an equal appropriate attention in order to prepare students to read in English language at universities (e.g., Cheek, 1983). The type of passages used in reading instruction may influence learners' reading comprehension ability with such text type (e.g., Williams, 2005). However, the findings show that students are primarily exposed to narrative passages and not consistently trained to process grade-level passages in the classroom. English language reading comprehension instruction which highly focuses on narrative English language reading passages more than the

expository passages may have adverse implications because, the content area texts at the university level are commonly in the form of expository rather than narrative (e.g., Pugh, Pawan & Antomarchi, 2000).

In addition, based on Leslie and Caldwell's (2004; 2004) reading text length taxonomy according to grade level, the mean length calculation shows that the expository and narrative passages are below the grade level for the Form Four or Tenth Grade. Therefore, within the Malaysian English language secondary reading context, the gap between the types of materials used in the English language reading comprehension instruction at the secondary school level and the type of reading materials that students are frequently required to read at the university level should also be addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fig.3 and Fig.4 provide the recommendations for the revision in the reading instructional design in the English language textbook as well as in classroom instruction. The findings of the study indicate that currently the EL4 textbook is designed with the emphasis on expository passages; however, below grade-level. The English reading comprehension instruction includes extremely few expository passages and the majority of the passages used in the classroom are below grade level. In synthesis, these findings suggest that current reading instructional design in the English language secondary textbook and reading comprehension instruction only partially prepares students for tertiary reading in the
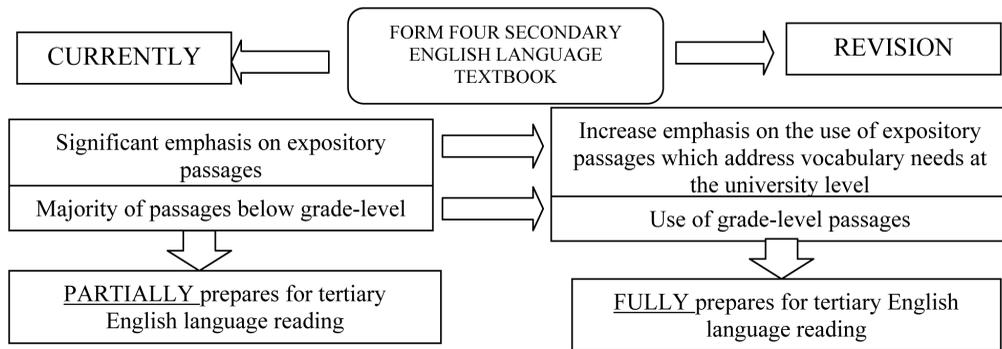
Fig.3: Recommended Revisions for the Form Four English Language Textbook
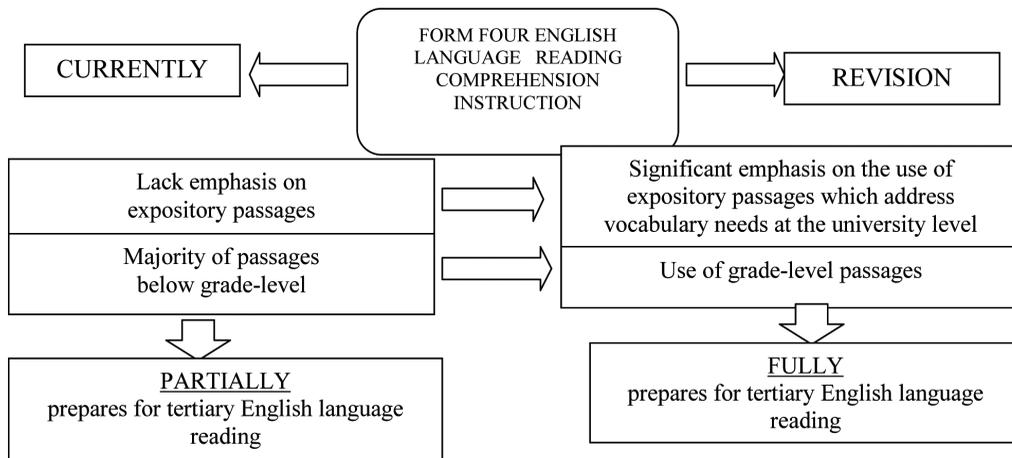
Fig.4: Recommended Revisions for the Form Four English Language Reading Comprehension Instruction

English language. A revision in the English language textbook instructional design and classroom practice is required in Malaysia in order for the secondary reading curriculum and instruction to fully prepare students for tertiary English language reading. The textbook and classroom instruction should place significant emphasis on the use of grade-level expository passages that address students' vocabulary needs at the university level. The goal of the English Language Secondary Curriculum to prepare students for English language reading at the university level could be achieved with such revisions.

CONCLUSION

Sidek (2010) finds that narrative passages are more emphasized than the expository passages in the English language Form

Five textbook. In contrast to Sidek's, the findings of the present study indicate that the reading instructional design, in terms of the selection of passage type and length in the Form Four English language textbook, seem to place relatively more emphasis on training students to read expository texts. Nonetheless, the expository texts on average do not meet the grade level. The finding on text length is congruent with the findings of Sidek's (2010). The findings of the current study also provide insights into how the types and length of passages used in the Form Four English language reading comprehension instruction not in alignment with the textbook instructional design in terms of material selection. It may contribute to the persisting English language reading comprehension problems at the university level, particularly in Malaysian setting. Thus, a revision of the reading instructional design in the Form Four English language secondary textbook in terms of the grade-level of passage selection and the use of expository text at grade-level in the classroom are called for as a step to improve the effectiveness of the English language secondary reading comprehension instruction with the implications on academic preparation for English language reading at the university level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Alwan, F. H. (2006). *An analysis of English language teachers' perceptions of curriculum change in the United Arab Emirates*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED503767).

Anderson, T. N., & Armbruster, B.B. (1986). Readable textbooks, or selecting a textbook is not like buying a pair of shoes. In J. Orasanu (Ed.), *Reading comprehension: From research to practice* (pp. 151-162). Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

Applebee, N., Langer, J.A., Nystrand, M., & Gamoran, A. (2003). Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding: Classroom instruction and student performance in middle and high school English. *American Educational research Journal, 40(3),* 685-730.

Avaloz, M. A., Plasencia, A., Chavez, C., & Rascon, J. (2007). Modified guided reading: Gateway to English as a second language and literacy learning. *Reading Teacher, 61*(4), 318-329.

Bakken, J. P., Mastropieri, M. A., & Scruggs, T. E. (1997). Reading comprehension of expository science material and children with learning disabilities: A comparison of strategies. *The Journal of Special Education, 31*(3), 300-324.

Baretta, L., Tomitch, L. M. B., McNair, N., Lim, V. K**.**, & Waldie, K. E. (2009). Inference making while reading narrative and expository texts: an ERP analysis. *Psychology & Neuroscience, 2*(2), 137-145.

Beck, I. L., & McKeown, M. G. (2001). Text Talk: Capturing the benefits of read-aloud experiences for young children. *The Reading Teacher, 55*(1), 10-20.

Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., Sinatra, G. M., & Loxterman, J. A. (1991). Revising social studies text from a text-processing perspective: Evidence of improved comprehensibility. *Reading Research Quarterly, 26*(3), 251-276.

Best, R. M., Floyd, R. G., & McNamara, D. S. (2008). Differential competencies contributing to children's comprehension of expository and narrative texts. *Reading Psychology, 29,* 137-164.

Boling, C. J., & Evan, W. H. (2008). Reading success in the secondary classroom. *Preventing School Failure*, *52*(2), 59-66.

Carrell, P. L. (1985). Facilitating ESL reading by teaching text structure. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*(4), 727-745.

Cheek, D. H. (1983). ERIC/RCS: Secondary reading materials: Selection criteria for the classroom teacher. *Journal of Reading*, *26*(8), 734-736.

Chen, H. (1998). Constraints of English proficiency on understanding English ambiguous sentences in Chinese ENGLISH LANGUAGE learners. *Modern Foreign Languages*, *2*, 1–16.

Cook, L. K. (1983). *Instructional effects of text structure-based reading strategies on the comprehension of the scientific prose.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Cook, A. E., & Meyers, J. L. (2004). Processing discourse roles in scripted narratives: The influences of context and world knowledge. *Journal of Memory and Language, 50,* 268-288.

Cook, A. E., & Gueraud, S. (2005). What have we been missing? The role of world general knowledge in discourse processing. *Discourse Processing, 39*(2 & 3), 265-278.

Crossley, S. A., & McNamara, D. S. (2008). Assessing L2 reading texts at the intermediate level: An approximate replication of Crossley, Louwerse, McCarthy & McNamara (2007). *Language Teaching, 41*(3), 409-421.

Crossley, S. A., M. M. Louwerse, M., McCarthy, P. M., & McNamara, D. S. (2007). A linguistic analysis of simplified and authentic texts. *Modern Language Journal, 91*(2), 15–30.

David, M. K., & Govindasamy, S. (2003). Language education and 'nation building' in multilingual Malaysia. In J. Bourne & E. Reid (Eds.), *Language education: World yearbook of education 2003,* (pp. 215-226). London: Kogan Page.

Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Day, R., & Bamford J. (2005). Reaching Reluctant Readers. *English Teaching Forum*, *3*8(3). Retrieved from http://eca.state.gov/forum/vols/ vol38/no3/p12.htm.

Faizah, A. M., Zalizan, M. J., & Norzaini, A. (2002). *Selected Malaysian adult learners' academic reading strategies: A case study*. Retrieved from http://www.face. stir.ac.uk/ Majidp61.htm

Feathers, K. M., & Smith, F. R. (1983). Teacher and student perceptions of content area reading. *Journal of Reading, 26*(4), 384-354.

Gaddy, S. A., Bakken, J. P., & Fulk. B. M. (2008). The effects of teaching text-structure strategies to postsecondary students with learning disabilities to improve their reading comprehension on expository science text passages. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 20*(2), 100-121.

Grabe, W. (2001). Reading–writing relations: Theoretical perspectives and instructional practices. In D. Belcher and A. Hirvela, (Eds.), *Linking literacies: Perspectives on L2 reading–writing connections,* (pp. 15-47). University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor.

Grabe, W. (2008). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press: New York.

Gurney, D., Gersten, R., Dimino, J. A., & Carnine, D. (1990). Story grammar: Effective literature instruction for learning disabled high school students. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 23*(6), 335-342.

Horiba, Y. (2000). Reader control in reading: Effects of language competence, text type, and tasks. *Discourse Processes, 29*(3), 223-267.

Hung, V. D. (2006). Learner-centeredness and ENGLISH LANGUAGE instruction in Vietnam: A case study. *International Education Journal, 7*(4), 598-610.

Kanagasabai, S. (1996). *Proficiency in ESL: A study of Indian urban and rural learners*. MESL Thesis. University of Malaya Kuala Lumpur.

Kaur, S. K. & Thiyagarajah, R. (1999). *The English reading habits of ELLs student in University Science Malaysia*. Original ultiBASE publication. Paper presented at the Sixth International Literacy and Education Research Network Conference on Learning, Bayview Beach Resort, Penang, Malaysia 27 - 30 September 1999.

Koda, K. (2005). *Insights into second language reading: Across-linguistic approach*. Cambridge Press: New York.

Koda, K. (2007). Reading and language learning: Crosslinguistic constraints on second language reading development. *Language Learning, 57*(1), 1-44.

Leow, R. P. (1997). The effects of input enhancement and text length on adult's L2 readers' comprehension and intake in second language acquisition. *Applied Language Learning, 8*(2), 151-182.

Leslie, L., & Caldwell, J. (2004). *Qualitative Reading Inventory - 3*. Boston: Pearson Education Company.

Leslie, L., & Caldwell, J. (2006). *Qualitative Reading Inventory - 4*. Boston: Pearson Education Company.

Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE). (2003). *The Form Five English language Curriculum Specifications*. Retrieved from www.moe.gov.my.

McKeown, M. G., Beck, I. L., & Sandora, C. A. (1996). Questioning the Author: An approach to developing meaningful classroom discourse. In M. G. Graves, B. M. Taylor, & P. van den Broek (Eds.), *The first R: Every child's right to read* (pp. 97-119). New York: Teachers College Press.

Meyer, B. J. F., & Freedle, R. O. (1984). Effects of discourse type on recall. *American Educational Research Journal, 21*(1), 121–143.

Meyer, B. J. F., & Rice, G. E. (1984). The structure of text. In P. D. Pearson, R. Barr, ML Kamil, & P. Mosenthal (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research,* (pp. 319–352). New York: Longman.

Nambiar, G. R. (2005). Why don't they read the way they should? Online submission. (*ERIC Document Reproduction Service* No ED 4903379). Retrieved from http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=radha+nambiar-gopal

Nambiar, R. M. K. (2007). Enhancing academic literacy among tertiary learners: A Malaysian experiences. *3L Journal of Language Teaching, 13*. Retrieved from pkukmweb.ukm .my/~ppbl /3L/.../5_Nambiar%203L2007revised.pdf

Nist, S. L., & Kirby, K. (1986). Teaching comprehension and study strategies through modeling and thinking aloud. *Reading Research and Instruction, 25*(4), 254-264.

Oh, S-Y. (2001). Two types of input modification and ENGLISH LANGUAGE reading comprehension: Simplification versus elaboration. *TESOL Quarterly, 35*(1), 69-96.

Pandian, A. (2000). *A study on readership behaviour among multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Malaysian students*. A paper presented at the seventh International Literacy and Education Research Network (LERN) Conference on Learning, RMIT University, Melbourne, 5-9 July 2000.

Ponniah, K. S. (1993). *Improving academic reading ability of ENGLISH LANGUAGE students at tertiary level*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

Powell, R. (2002). Language planning and the British empire: Comparing Pakistan, Malaysia, and Kenya. *Current Issues in Language Planning, 3*(3), 205-279.

Pretorius, E. J. (2002). Reading ability and academic performance in South Africa: Are we fiddling while Rome is burning? *Language Matters*, *33*, 169-196.

Pugh, S. L., Pawan, F., & Antommarchi, C. (2000). Academic literacy and the new college learner. In R.F. Flippo & D.C. Caverly (Eds.), *Handbook of college reading and study research* (pp. 25-42). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Pulido, D. (2007). The relationship between text comprehension and second language incidental vocabulary acquisition: A matter of topic familiarity? *Applied Linguistics, 28*(1), 66-86.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rott, S. (2007). The effect of frequency of input-enhancements on word learning and text comprehension. *Language Learning, 57*(2), 165-199.

Salataci, R., & Akyel, A. (*2002*). Strategy training in L1 and L2 reading. *Reading in a. Foreign Language, 14*(1), 1-17.

Seng, G. H. (2007). The effects of think-aloud in a collaborative environment to improve comprehension of L2 texts. *The Reading Matrix, 7*(2), 2-45.

Seng, G. H., & Hashim, F. (2006). Use of L1 in L2 reading comprehension among tertiary. ESL learners. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 18*, 29-54.

Shook, D. (1997). Identifying and overcoming possible mismatches in the beginning reader-literary text interaction. *Hispania, 80*(2), 234–243.

Sidek, H. M. (2010). An analysis of the EFL secondary reading curriculum: Approaches to reading and preparation for higher education. Retrieved from http://etd.library.pitt.edu/ETD/available/etd-11282010-184303/

Su, Y-C. (2006). English Language teachers' perceptions of English language policy at the elementary level in Taiwan. *Educational Studies, 32*(3), 265-283.

Taylor, B. M. (1980). Children's memory for expository text after reading. *Reading Research Quarterly, 15,* 399-411.

Ting, S-H. & Tee, P-F. (2008). TESL undergraduates' ability to handle academic text-type at University Malaysia Sarawak. *Asiatic, 2*(2), 85-100.

Tomlinson, B., Dat, B., Masuhara, H., & Rubdy, R. (2001). ENGLISH LANGUAGE courses of adults. *ELT Journal 55*(1), 80–101.

Trabasso, T., & Magliano, J. (1996). Conscious understanding during comprehension. *Discourse Processes*, *21*(3), 255-287.

Vlack, S. V. (2009, June 11). *Eye on English (6): Better English through reading*. The Korea Herald. Retrieved from www.koreaherald.co.kr/NEW KHSITE/data/...2009061100 53.asp

Weideman, A., & Van Rensburg, C. (2002). Language proficiency : current strategies, future remedies. *Journal for Language Teaching*, *36*(1&2), 152-164.

Williams, J. P. (2005). Instruction in reading comprehension for primary grades: A focus on text structure. *The Journal of Special Education, 39*(6), 6-18.

Young, D. J. (1999). Linguistic simplification of SL reading material: Effective instructional practice? *The Modern Language Journal, 83*(3), 350–366.

Zhang, H., & Hossain, R. (2001). The influence of narrative text characteristics on thematic inference during reading. *Journal of Research in Reading, 24*(2), 173-186.

APPENDIX A: A SAMPLE OF CODING FORM FOR TEXT TYPES AND LENGTH

NARRATIVE PASSAGES

No	Title of Passage	Length

EXPOSITORY PASSAGES

No	Title of Passage	Length