

**THE TEACHING OF EARLY READING IN ENGLISH USING THE  
PHONICS APPROACH IN MALAYSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS:  
TEACHER BELIEFS, KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES**

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

BAK	Beliefs, Assumptions, Knowledge
CDD	Curriculum Development Department
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CPD	Continuing Professional Coursework
CPT	Cambridge Placement Test
CSPP	Conventional Synthetic Phonics Programme
CVC	Consonant-Vowel-Consonant
DE	Diploma in Education
DfES	Department of Education, UK
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELL	English Language Learner
ELT	English Language Teaching
EPRD	Education Planning And Research Division
ESL	English as a Second Language
ITE	Institute of Teacher Education
KBSR	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (Previous Curriculum)
KSSR	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (Latest Curriculum)

L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LC	Language Comprehension
LINUS	Literacy and Numeracy Screening
LTC	Language Teacher Cognition
MCQ	Multiple Choice Questions
MEB	Malaysia Education Blueprint
MMR	Mixed Method Research
MOE	Ministry of Education, Malaysia
NICHD	National Institute of Children Health and Human Development
NITL	Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy
NRP	National Reading Panels
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PPP Pedagogy	Present, Practice and Produce Pedagogy
Pro-ELT	Professional Up-Skilling of English Language Teacher
Qual	Qualitative
Quan	Quantitative
SBA	School-Based Assessment
SBE	School-Based Experience
SEDL	Southwest Educational Development Laboratory Nichd
SES	Social Economic Status
SISC	School Improvement Specialist Coach
SSPP	Samveda Synthetic Phonics Program
SVR	Simple View of Reading
TED	Teacher Education Division
TEI	Teacher Education Institute
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TORP	Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile

# ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to understand and explore how the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices is developed in the teaching of early reading of English as a second language in Malaysia. It also investigated how the presence of knowledge as a mediator may influence this relationship. The study took place against the backdrop of Malaysian curriculum reform (Malaysia Education Blueprint) which promoted a phonics approach in early reading. In order to achieve this, a mixed methods approach to investigate four research questions was adopted.

For Phase 1, the study utilised a survey to elicit the beliefs, knowledge and practices from a large number of primary school English teachers ( $n=123$ ). From the survey's findings, it was found that teachers' beliefs of how English reading should be taught were mixed. They continued to favour the whole language approach as part of their pedagogy and at the same time acknowledged the phonics approach for contributing to early reading proficiency. In terms of their pedagogical content knowledge of the phonics approach, the results showed that this was somewhat lacking. The results also indicated that the teachers' demographic backgrounds (age, years of teaching experience, education level, gender and types of schools in which they taught) did not influence their beliefs and knowledge.

For Phase 2, an ethnographic study was conducted in two different schools (urban and rural) with four teacher participants ( $n=4$ ) involving interviews and classroom observations. The interview data were presented and analysed adopting a case study approach since individual teachers each had different stories to tell. Using Borg's (2006) framework as an analytical tool, the findings indicated that different teachers reacted to the curriculum changes differently based on their life experiences, their professional coursework experiences, and contextual factors. Despite having encountered the phonics approach indirectly in their previous life experiences through their children and previous job employment, part of their beliefs remains unchanged. What makes the teachers use the phonics approach, though they would seem to resent the implementation, are the statutory changes to practices. In this case, the presence of LINUS assessment as part of the

curriculum change plays a vital role to make sure the teachers have no option but to try and adapt the phonics approach as part of their practices.

Although teachers were positive about the use of phonics approach and did include it in their teaching of reading, there were misconceptions about how phonics pedagogy should be carried out, and the key principles of the approach advocated in the research literature were missing in the observed classrooms. The observations revealed that phonics seemed to be an 'add-on' strategy to a whole language approach rather than being explicitly taught with appropriate content, examples and materials. This is not surprising given the teachers lacked the pedagogical knowledge of the approach and received limited guidance to navigate the new syllabus. The analysis of the Year 1 English textbook suggested that it was also another cause of inconsistent phonics practice as it lacks appropriate phonics content in order to support teachers' teaching and pupils' learning of English reading.

The study revealed that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices are complex but should not be ignored as the discrepancy of what teachers believe and how they enact their beliefs can affect the degree of curriculum success. The findings imply that teachers need much more pedagogical guidance and professional development to deepen their pedagogical content knowledge and curriculum implementation. Such support, however, should also complement teachers' attitudes and beliefs in order to avoid superficial implementation.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

[b-ismi-llāhi r-rahmāni r-rahīmi]

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 policy (MoE, 2012) introduced a new strategy for the teaching of early reading in English as a second language through the introduction of a *phonics approach* in order to improve second language literacy (Malaysia Curriculum Development Division, 2011). These policy developments are noteworthy since there is a lack of sufficient evidence to support the effectiveness of using the phonics approach for literacy development amongst second language learners (Nuttall, 1996). Research related to the use of the phonics approach to teaching reading English has been conducted mostly in a first-language environment with English as a native language (c.f. Foorman et al. 1998; Stuart, 1999, 2004; Torgesen et al., 1999, 2006, 2019). This new approach replaced the *whole-language* approach to reading and literacy development that has been practised for many years in the English language syllabus in Malaysia. With the implementation of this new syllabus, this research aims to explore the current beliefs and knowledge that English teachers in Malaysia have about the teaching of reading English and the extent to which they have implemented the phonics approach in their English teaching.

### 1.2 Researcher's position

Growing up, I had never personally encountered reading English, except in school. Although my father was an English teacher, I cannot remember if I was exposed to English storybooks during my toddler years; I certainly do not recall having any collections of English storybooks at home. My mother, who is a Malay language teacher, told me that I started reading in Malay when I was four years old and always engaged with storybooks whenever possible. I grew up in Dungun, Terengganu, a state on the eastern coast of

Malaysia. People who come from the East Coast states are recognised as having a lack of English proficiency due to the social economic status (SES) of the states (Thang & Kumarasamy, 2006). Although this cannot be generalised to include people from all social backgrounds in these states, this perception still exists within society.

### **1.2.1 Teacher trainee experiences**

After I finished my secondary school, I applied for a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) undergraduate course in a private university in 2006. This course ran for four years with a foundation year. During the foundation year, we were equipped with basic language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – with an extensive emphasis on grammar. During my degree years, we had to undergo compulsory modules on the teaching of writing, reading, grammar, speaking, aural-oral skills, phonetics and phonology, second language learning pedagogy. For the teaching modules, we learnt about the underlying theory of each set of language skills, and our understanding of the module was through a mock teaching session as the practical part of applying the theories into practice. In each mock teaching session, I had to prepare two English lessons for primary and secondary schools according to the syllabus. There was no explanation of how to teach early reading when we became teachers. The lesson plan and the teaching were organised based on the *PPP pedagogy*, which constitutes present, practice and production stages of a traditional language teaching approach taken since the 1960s (Harmer, 2001). The teacher presented the targeted language input, pupils practised the language input, and in the next stage, students needed to produce back the language items that they learned either through language activities or worksheets. To assist the pre-service teachers, we used a local textbook entitled ‘English Language Teaching: Principles and Practice’ by Chitravelu et al. (2005). The book was written specifically for Malaysian training colleges and aimed at imparting knowledge of pedagogic theory and creating an awareness of the issues so that the teacher can make an informed choice.

During my undergraduate degree, I did a practicum in a primary school in my last semester. The school was located in a low-SES area and the students’ proficiencies in English were varied. The practicum lasted for four months. I was assigned to teach Year 1 pupils, taking over a class from another teacher because the school had a lack of English teachers during that time. I was not expecting to teach Year 1 pupils as during my undergraduate course

we never did a lesson plan for Year 1 as it was thought that this was too early an age for second language learning. I had no idea how to incorporate my pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1978) of what I learned in my teacher training course into the classroom practices. Then, I was reminded of how I learnt English in primary school with lots of singing of nursery rhymes, colouring, reading aloud, and copying and writing from the board. I did it exactly how I want an English class to be, remembering my primary school experiences, so the pupils would be excited and motivated to learn the subject. My initial goal was to boost their learning motivation. There were ups and down while planning and teaching the pupils as, sometimes, the lessons failed to keep the pupils' attention. To reflect on my previous training in order to become a teacher, I was not specifically trained to teach early reading and I was not exposed to the early reading pedagogy at all. The teaching of reading course was more focussed on academic reading, specifically developing the reading comprehension skill. The interpretation of reading at that time was that it was associated with vocabulary learning in order to develop comprehension. So, the more vocabularies you have which enable you to understand the text, you are considered as a successful language learner at that particular time. The experience that I went through during my schooling years was the same as my experiences when I trained as a language teacher.

After I graduated, I opted to teach in higher education institutions where I dealt with adult learners in a university. I was teaching Basic English skills and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for Diploma students. In 2011, I pursued my postgraduate master's degree in TESL as well. This was when the phonics approach was introduced in the primary English syllabus. Although the phonics approach was introduced in the primary school context, I could not help but wonder how the teachers responded to the change since they had been using the whole-language approach for a while. My father, who was still an in-service teacher at that time, was also sharing his concerns about the new pedagogy: he said his colleagues were complaining about it since they did not know how to use phonics as part of the reading pedagogy for Year 1. So, teachers opted to ignore the approach and kept teaching using the pedagogies that they were familiar with. Based on this issue, I did a small-scale research study for my master's dissertation and submitted a dissertation entitled, 'Teacher readiness in the implementation of teaching reading through the phonics approach in the ESL classroom'.

### 1.2.2 The break-through of phonics teaching

When I moved to a new university in 2013, I taught Teaching of English Reading module for primary school teacher trainees and this was my first exposure to the phonics approach. I had no idea where to start. I had never been to any professional development courses to enhance my pedagogical skill set in this field and had not yet developed pedagogical content knowledge in phonics. As usual, I turned to the Google search engine for help. I remembered having to search ‘How to teach the phonics approach?’, ‘How to plan a lesson with phonics approach?’, and ‘How to sound the syllables?’. There were lots of search results, but gaining an understanding of how to apply and use it effectively was trickier. Although I took phonetics and phonology modules during my undergraduate years, this was different to phonics *pedagogy*. This is because phonetics and phonology are all about the speech sounds and the technicality of how the speech sounds are produced, whereas phonics is a way of teaching children how to read and write (Ehri et al., 2001; Kilpatrick, 2017; Moats, 2010; Stahl, 1996). I was lost and I reflected on whether this is exactly how the English teachers in the primary schools felt when they were exposed to the same terminology. I ended up treating the phonics approach as part of the presentation content of the PPP lesson plan, regretfully realising that the teacher trainees on my course would eventually do the same with their students. I taught the teaching of reading subject exactly how I was taught during my undergraduate years as I depended on those experiences from university. I think I failed to deliver the module effectively and they were the victims of my incapability to provide them relevant content.

When I had the opportunity to pursue my PhD study in the UK around 2015, I was motivated to compare the teaching of phonics in UK primary schools with practices in Malaysia. I was hoping to conduct observations in the UK as well as in my home country. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and the direction that my study eventually took, I could not do a comparative study. As I started to explore the reading research literature, I was convinced that the phonics approach might be one of the pedagogies to help early reading in English. Throughout my PhD study, I have developed my own beliefs that the phonics approach, if done properly, can actually lead to a positive result for children’s early literacy. This is based on my informal interaction with experts on Twitter, informal observations of Malaysian children who were exposed to phonics teaching in the UK

setting, and my personal observation of the teaching phonics movement in the Malaysian setting. However, I felt that in order to develop this pedagogy in Malaysian primary schools, it was important to explore teachers' pedagogical content knowledge of this approach, to understand their existing teaching experiences, and what beliefs they hold on to while teaching English reading.

After six years of phonics implementation in primary schools (2011-2015), I wanted to explore the extent to which the introduction of the phonics approach had been successful. In my opinion, sound pedagogical content knowledge can change the way we perceive certain issues and eventually help us change the beliefs that we have. Since constructing beliefs is an on-going process, I was interested to explore the language teacher cognition in the teaching of reading English through the phonics approach; I was interested in their beliefs and the pedagogical content knowledge regarding the teaching of English reading and the implementation of the phonics approach as part of their classroom instruction practices.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Empirical research has shown that the explicit systematic phonics approach helps with children's early reading (Buckingham, 2016; Castle et al., 2018; Kilpatrick, 2015; Stuart & Stainthorp, 2016; National Reading Panel, 2000; Torgerson et al., 2006, 2019). This research argues that due to the complexity of the English language orthography, pupils need a strategy to crack those written symbols. This strategy depends on the language that they learn, and, for English, they need to know the relationship between sounds and letter symbols. The human brain works by making a connection between what is read (letters), sounds and comprehension (meaning). This requires a physical neurological connection between three related areas in the brain (Taylor et al., 2013). This might not be an issue for fluent readers since they are able to make this connection automatically whenever they read, but failing to do this will result in pupils falling into the struggling reader category, which will affect their reading accuracy and comprehension (Taylor, Davis & Rastle, 2017). If these issues are concerns for literacy policies in the English-speaking countries (the UK, the US and Australia), there are potentially even greater challenges where English is not the first language. Since English-reading pedagogy in Malaysia has never been

exposed to the phonics approach before, it will be a great challenge for the implementation to successfully integrate phonics within the new syllabus.

If curriculum reform is to be effective, it is crucial to consider the roles of teachers as they are the ones who translate policy into practice. Teachers have their own sets of pedagogical beliefs and have developed individual practices based on experience (Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2006). These experiences range from general life experiences, professional development courses, contextual factors and classroom practices (Borg, 2006). If the proposed reforms fail to acknowledge teachers' attitudes and beliefs, the result of the implementation could be superficial (Sikes, 2013). The research into language teacher cognition is scarce for the Malaysian education scene; if there is any, it only discusses what it is on a superficial level instead of the underpinning reasons. Most research has focused on changing teachers' behaviours and making the changes compulsory without any consideration of why they resist the changes in the first place. Therefore, it is important to understand the issues from the teachers' perspective, the opportunities and challenges that they face, in order to make sure the implementation serves its objectives and leads to a positive result concerning pupils' second-language literacy.

#### **1.4 The rationale and purpose of the research**

Because what language teachers think, know, and believe and its relationship to teacher classroom practices contribute greatly to educational reform (Borg, 2006), it is important to explore how and why the interaction between these domains occurred. Indeed, exploring the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices helps to make sense of the process of the reform (Wedell, 2003). Also, an understanding of the reform from the teachers' perspective should be established in order to understand why teachers do what they do in their classroom. If this is not addressed properly, the implementation is potentially ineffective and does not directly benefit the pupils.

The purpose of this research is to understand and explore how the relationship between beliefs and practices is developed and how the presence of knowledge as a mediator may impact on this relationship. In order to achieve this, the study firstly will implement a survey to elicit the beliefs, knowledge and practices from a large number of English teachers. Then, the trends emerging from the survey will be further clarified in follow-up

interviews. The interviews will also be complemented by classroom observation, and document analysis of the Year 1 English textbook. This process will help to investigate teachers' reported beliefs and practices and their actual practices, also enabling the examination of the internal and external factors which shape the relationship between the beliefs and practices in implementing the syllabus reform.

My research does not set out to pass any judgement on the teachers' classroom decisions and practices, but instead focuses on understanding and describing the rationale behind their actions, in the particular context in which they are located. It provides an understanding of what it is like to be a teacher and the factors which influence pedagogical practice. In the following sections, I refer to some of the literature emphasising the contribution of the phonics approach and then explicitly state the purpose and rationale for embarking on this study.

### **1.5 Research questions of the study**

The overall aim of this study is to explore the beliefs, practices and knowledge of English teachers with regards to the use of the phonics approach in the teaching of reading in English as a second language for young learners in Malaysia. It is centred around four principal research questions:

- i) What are the beliefs and knowledge of the English teachers in Malaysia concerning the teaching of reading English through the phonics approach?
- ii) To what extent and in what way do English teachers implement the phonics approach in their classrooms?
- iii) What are, according to the teachers, the contextual factors that influence their practices in implementing the phonics approach during English language teaching?
- iv) To what extent are the teachers' actual practices congruent with their stated beliefs about the phonics approach and the teaching of reading English?

### **1.6 Structure of the thesis**

The structure in this thesis reflects the fundamental areas of this research. The thesis comprises of nine chapters. The focus of each chapter is presented in the

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Description</b>
Chapter 1	Introduction	This chapter provides an overview of the research, outlining the aims and purpose of why this study will be conducted in the first place.
Chapter 2	Contextual background of the research	This chapter presents a contextual background of the Malaysian education system and the intended curriculum reform.
Chapters 3 & 4	Literature review	The literature review chapter is divided into two separate chapters. Chapter 3 - Language teacher cognition and the implications for curriculum reform and current research in the field. Chapter 4 –Research into teaching of reading, addressing the current debate and arguments on reading theory and pedagogy.
Chapter 5	Methodology	This chapter justifies the methodological approach and methods selected to conduct the study. It presents my ontological position, which leads to the choice of research design and methods, and ethical considerations.
Chapter 6	Phase 1 – Survey findings and analysis	Chapters 6 to 9 contain the findings and analysis of the collected data through a survey, interviews, classroom observation and the Year 1 English textbook analysis.
Chapter 7	Phase 2 – Teachers’ case studies	
Chapter 8	Phase 2 – Teachers’ classroom observation	
Chapter 9	Phase 2 – English Year 1 textbook analysis	
Chapter 10	Discussion	This chapter draws together the key issues raised in chapters 6-9 and discusses these in light of the literature review. It also returns to the research questions and proposes a conceptual framework that contributes to the knowledge field.

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Chapter 11	Conclusion	This is the concluding chapter, which includes the summary of the findings, the recommendation for policymakers, research limitations and recommendations for future research. It also includes my learning journey through the study and the PhD.
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Table 1-1.

Table 1-1: The Structure of the Thesis

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Chapter 11	Conclusion	This is the concluding chapter, which includes the summary of the findings, the recommendation for policymakers, research limitations and recommendations for future research. It also includes my learning journey through the study and the PhD.

## **1.7 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter provides a research background for this study and presents the reasons why this research was conducted in the first place. It also provides the purpose and rationale which leads to the construction of the research questions. The structure of the thesis is also outlined to provide a clear direction of the whole thesis. The next chapter provides an overview of the educational context for this study, particularly regarding English language education in Malaysia, in order to provide a broad understanding of the context of the research.

# CHAPTER 2

## EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN MALAYSIA

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes an overview of the Malaysian educational system, the policies and approaches that the Ministry of Education (MOE) has adopted in an attempt to sustain national educational achievement. This chapter is presented in four sections: (i) a snapshot of Malaysia as a country; (ii) the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB); (iii) an overview of the English language curriculum in Malaysia; and (iv) an overview of English teachers and the teaching context in Malaysia.

### 2.2 A snapshot of Malaysia

Malaysia is a country in South East Asia located in between Thailand and Singapore, which consists of 13 states and three federal territories. There are two main regions, which are separated by the South China Sea: Peninsula (west) and East Malaysia (Malaysia Borneo). Kuala Lumpur is the capital city of Malaysia, and Putrajaya is the administrative state where official administration of the country takes place. On the peninsula, the states are categorised as the East Coast (Terengganu, Kelantan, Pahang), the West Coast (Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka), the North (Penang, Perlis) and the South (Johor).

Malaysia's population is almost 32.7 million with a diverse background of ethnicities and cultures. Its population consists of the Malays (50.1 percent) which is the dominant ethnic group, followed by Chinese (22.6 percent), Indigenous (11.8 percent), Indian (6.7 percent) and others (11.8 percent) (Department of Statistics, 2019). Due to this, there are different first languages used on the basis of ethnicity, culture, religion, other beliefs, and the moral values practised by the population. The Malay language is the official language of the country, whereas English is declared as a second language. Of course, there are other native

languages spoken by the citizens, such as Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Foochow) and Tamil among others.



Figure 2-1: A map of Malaysian Peninsula.

### 2.3 Overview of English teachers and teaching context in Malaysia: Training and development

The Teacher Education Division (TED) in Malaysia is responsible for planning, evaluating, and developing the curriculum structure for teacher education in Malaysia, in particular for teacher education institutions (TEIs). Pre-service teachers are trained according to the courses offered to them, which include a specific level of education (primary or secondary school), and also a specialised subject domain with an elective subject (TED, 2007). The TEIs offer a three-year Diploma in Education. The continuation to a bachelor's degree in Education was only offered in local universities that offered Education courses. However, after 2008, the TEIs were upgraded to Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE) and were governed by a centralised administration under the MoE to standardise the quality. The course levels were also upgraded to a five-year programme involving foundation and degree elements for all pre-service teachers. Education courses continue to be offered by local universities as long as the syllabus follows the Teacher Education Curriculum set by the TED. Thus, practising teachers obtain qualified teacher status after completing courses from these various routes and types of higher educational institutions as long as they satisfy the MoE requirements.

Another pathway to enter the teaching profession, however, was through an alternative pathway: Diploma in Education (Extension) (DEE) introduced by the MoE in 2012 in order to overcome the shortage of teachers. This programme was targeted at university graduates with bachelor's degrees in any field who were interested in becoming teachers. Since they

did not have any education elements in their core qualification, they undertook a programme, which at selected ITEs lasted for about a year and a half (3 semesters).

The pre-service teachers who undergo teacher training programmes through ITEs have several school-based experience (SBE) placements during which they observe in-service teachers and conduct two practicum sessions in the later part of their training (semesters 6 and 7). The SBE lasts for around one month, while the practicum constitutes six months per semester. On the DEE programme, teachers have a shorter time to be in school and their learning courses are also packed into three semesters. This lack of time comes with some inevitable challenges. Research shows that most of the teacher trainees in Malaysia were unable to demonstrate their pedagogical knowledge of bridging together theory and practices as they were overwhelmed by the reality of the actual classroom situation (Ong et al., 2004).

Another issue related to pre-service training is the low-level proficiency of English language among English teachers. The MoE tries to address the teacher proficiency issue through several initiatives, such as the introduction of the Cambridge Place Test (CPT) for all English teachers and promoting teaching as a profession of choice by raising the entry bar for applicants. However, the results from the CPT test confirmed the teachers' 'ugly-truth' as it revealed that 70 percent of English language teachers in Malaysia were incapable of teaching the subject in school (The Star Online, 2013). Teachers who had a low CPT score were required to enrol back onto the English proficiency programme until they passed the targeted requirements. The Ministry of Education announced that the proficiency of the English teachers has improved by 76% from their previous pre-test result (The Star Online, 2015).

#### **2.4 Malaysia Education Blueprint policy (2013–2025)**

The education system in Malaysia is under the centralised direction of the Ministry of Education (MoE). The MoE is in charge of all national learning curricula and syllabi for all education levels in schools. National formal education starts at five years old continuing to 17 years old for a total of 11 years of schooling. Currently, the students are assessed through three national exams in Year 6 (12 years old) for primary school level, Form 3 (15

years old) for lower secondary school level, and Form 5 (17 years old) at the end of secondary school for their summative assessment.

The initial reason for the government's reform initiative, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MED, 2011), was to provide a comprehensive review of the education structure as the last one took place in 1983 with minimal revision in the intervening years. The MEB put forward five targeted outcomes for the education system: access, quality, equity, unity and efficiency. It also aimed to give all children in Malaysia equal access to education with the same quality and efficiency. Further details relating to these categories can be found in *Figure 2-2* below.



Figure 2-2: Five system aspirations for the Malaysia Education System (MEB, 2011)

The MEB is not only focused on students, as the transformation also aimed to transform teaching into the profession of choice and to upgrade the quality of school leaders (MEB, 2011, p.17). The education transformation programme was to take place over 13 years, with three waves: (i) the first wave (2011-2015) would give more support for teachers and focus on core student skills; (ii) the second wave (2016 – 2020) would build upon that progress; and the third wave (2021-2025) would give schools the authority to decide their school's progression and future.

Along with this initiative, the MoE, with the help of UNESCO and local universities, proposed a three-dimensional curriculum framework as guidance to align with international standards. These included the written, taught and examined curricula, which reflected the input and the targeted output of the curriculum reforms. The written

curriculum dealt with the knowledge, skills and values that formed the content, outlining what is to be taught by the teachers. The taught curriculum is the knowledge acquired, skills developed, and values inculcated in students upon getting it through from the teachers. Lastly, the examined curriculum is the assessment of students' knowledge, skills and values that they have learned either through formative assessment or the national exams that they sit.

The written curriculum is the core reference and should articulate a holistic education that can be represented as part of the international standard, aligned with the National Education philosophy. Both taught and examined curricula are a reflection of the written curriculum. so that what is taught in the classroom and examined at national level should match the intent of the written curriculum.

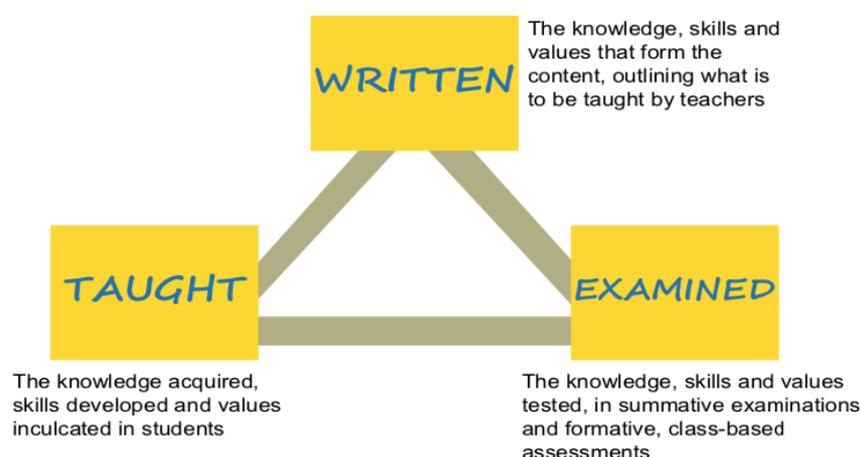


Figure 2-3: Three dimensions of curriculum (MEB, 2011)

In order to reflect this framework, the MoE has revised the current primary school curricula of *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR)* to *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR)* in stages, starting from Year 1. By 2016, the KSSR was fully implemented for all primary school years.

*The KSSR standard document is based on two components: contents standards and learning standards. The content standards specify the specific knowledge, skills, and values that students need to acquire. In comparison to KBSR, KSSR has an increased emphasis on skills such as reasoning, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.*

*Malaysia Education Blueprint (2011, p. 43)*

The main differences between the KBSR and KSSR components is summarised in the *Figure 2-4*.

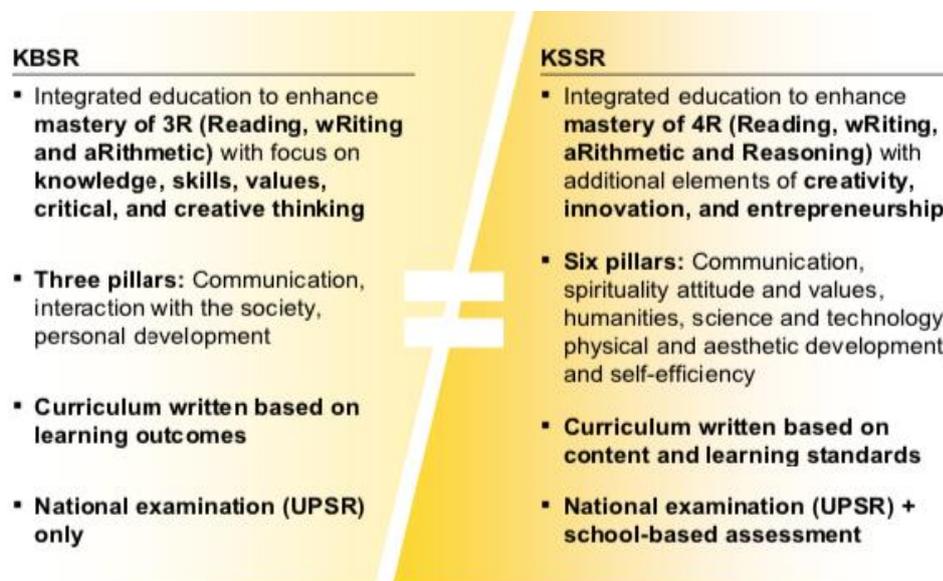


Figure 2-4: Main differences between KBSR and KSSR curricula (MEB, 2011)

It can be observed that additional skills were added to enhance the KSSR curriculum, such as the ‘reasoning’ aspect, the three values pillars (which give a more balanced approach to spiritual, social and technology aspects), the introduction of content and learning standards documents, and also a new practice of school-based assessment (SBA).

## 2.5 Overview of the English curriculum in Malaysia

One important agenda of the MED is to improve second-language literacy in the English language alongside the Malay language literacy among the students at all school levels. Apart from communication, strengthening literacy development is one of the main objectives in the KSSR in order to have a strong foundation for basic literacy, as it is essential to build pupils’ confidence in using the language in their daily life (Curriculum Development Division, 2011). By the end of Year 6, pupils should be able to communicate, read, comprehend, and write a range of English texts, enjoy using the English language beyond the classroom context, and use correct grammar rules in speaking and writing (Curriculum specification for English, 2017).

## 2.6 The differences between KBSR and KSSR syllabi

Although different terminologies are used for the KSSR, the actual materials are still the same as they were for KBSR. The same syllabus documents are used to guide the execution of English language subjects in primary schools although the organisation of the curriculum is different.

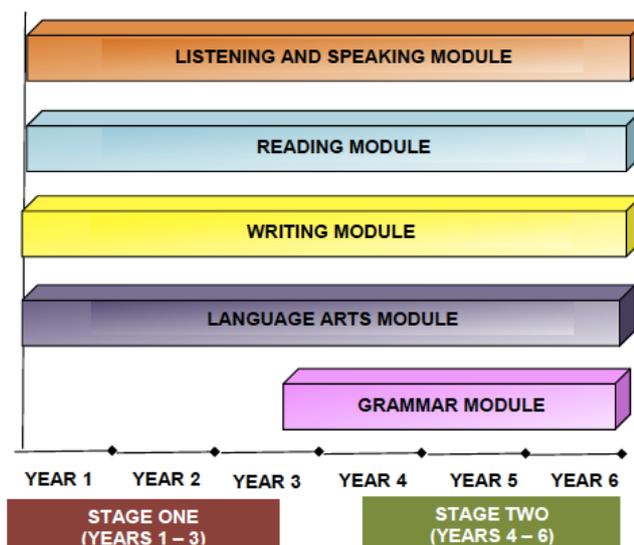


Figure 2-5: The modular structure of curriculum content (Curriculum specification for English, 2017)

First, the difference can be seen in the curriculum organisation where a modular structure is introduced (Figure 2.5). The reason why it is organised in such a way is for the pupils to be able to focus specifically on developing each of the language skills through purposeful activities in a meaningful context (KSSR, 2013). Second, to complement this change, the syllabus contents are represented through three broad themes in order to associate the actual context into the learning: (i) the world of self, family, and friends; (ii) the world of stories, and (iii) the world of knowledge (Figure 2.5). With the exception of grammar, which is introduced in Year 3, all other modules are introduced from Year 1.

Another thing that should be pointed out and the reason why this research was conducted in the first place is the introduction of the phonics approach as part of basic literacy. This approach is used specifically for reading skills ‘in order to enable the pupils to become independent readers’ (KSSR, 2013, p. 22). Thus, it is obvious that the inclusion of the

phonics approach as part of KSSR curricula is to improve the basic literacy problem in Year 1 (Sulaiman et al., 2015). The comparison between KBSR and KSSR is presented in table 2.1 below:

**Table 2-1 Comparison between KBSR and KSSR curricula (MEB, 2011)**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>KBSR</b>	<b>KSSR</b>
<b>Curriculum Documentation</b>	Syllabus Curriculum specification	Standard Document Content & learning standards
<b>Curriculum Organisation</b>	Language taught through three themes – the world of self, family, and friends; the world of stories; and the world of knowledge. Integration of skills -	Modular structure
<b>Curriculum content</b>	Focus on four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) Sound system Grammar in context	Focus on four language modules Basic literacy - Phonics Language arts Penmanship
<b>Approach</b>	Whole language approach	Phonics approach

## 2.7 Curriculum dissemination

For the KSSR curriculum, the MoE claimed that it was committed to upgrading the support system for teachers to improve the delivery of the curriculum. As such, they introduced the School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC), who based in local district education offices are teachers who expressed an interest in switching roles to become a trainer. The SISC coach is responsible for assisting the teachers regarding the new curriculum, classroom pedagogy and also assessment. This current mechanism for disseminating the changes in the curriculum and assessment system involves three tiers as compared to the five tiers previously. Formerly, the MoE used the cascade training method, by going through the national trainers, then to state trainers, before moving to the subject teacher representatives, and the representative eventually disseminating it among other subject teachers in their respective schools. As the delivery model has been condensed into three tiers through the SISC and directly to subject teachers from district schools it is hoped that

the written curriculum can be *translated more directly and accurately into the taught curriculum*.

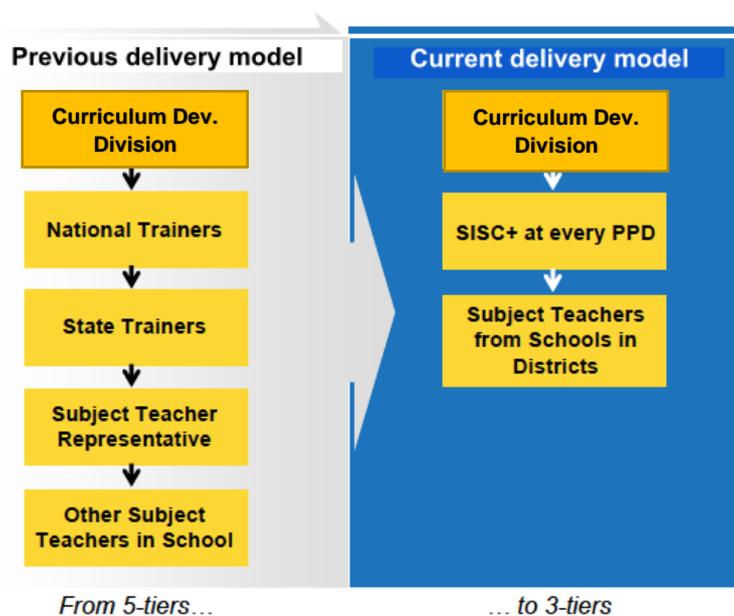


Figure 2-6: Comparison of the previous and current delivery models (MEB, 2011, p. 108)

## 2.8 Curriculum materials

For the KSSR, teachers were given two sets of curriculum materials: (i) the standard document (the syllabus); and (ii) the English Year 1 textbook. The standard document provides the curriculum aims and objectives, the content and learning standards of English Year 1 that need to be achieved, and the modular structure of the curriculum content. Whereas, the textbook consists of 24 units related to the three themes in the standard document. The textbook contents are complemented with an activity book for pupils. The activity book serves as additional material for pupils to practise their comprehension. Although the textbook serves as a reference, teachers still need to plan the lesson and prepare the relevant teaching materials according to the pupils' abilities. In Chapter 7, a detailed analysis of the textbook layout and contents are presented as part of the document analysis.

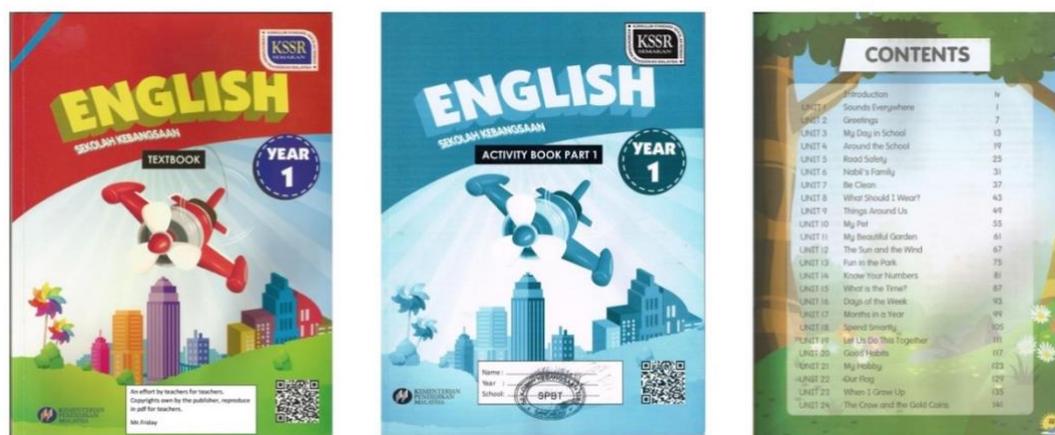


Figure 2-7: The English Year 1 textbook and activity book

## 2.9 The LINUS assessment

The Literacy and Numeracy Screening (LINUS) assessment has the aim of improving literacy and numeracy rates in the Malay language, English and Mathematics among all primary level pupils. Specifically, its objective is to provide an indicator for assessment, which enables pupils to acquire literacy in English. The LINUS assessment involves two screenings per year, which are usually held in April (pre-test) and August (post-test). English teachers need to conduct the screening within a designated timeframe given by the MoE. The screening is needed in order to record the current literacy progress of the students in Year 1 (MEB, 2011).

The National Exam Unit under the MoE prepares the screening instruments. It is the standardised instrument for all primary schools in Malaysia. There are 12 constructs that Year 1 pupils need to acquire. These include word-level up to sentence level. Constructs 1 to 4 are related to phonics assessment. Pupils need to sound out/read provided materials for the test. The teacher will record pupils' responses noting whether they manage to pass each of the constructs or not. There is a designated time to do the assessment.

Below is the flowchart of the LINUS assessment process in schools:

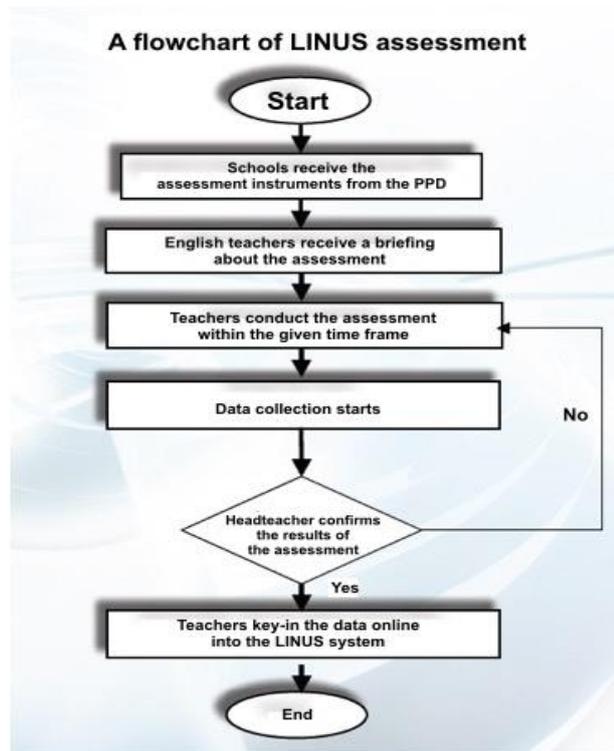


Figure 2-8: A flowchart of LINUS assessment process (Curriculum specification for English, 2017)



Figure 2-9: Example of how LINUS assessment was done in the classroom

**Table 2-2: List of the LINUS assessment constructs for Year 1 English**

Constructs	Aims	Constructs	Aims
<b>Construct 1</b>	Able to identify and distinguish letters of the alphabet	<b>Construct 7</b>	Able to understand and use the language at phrase level in linear texts
<b>Construct 2</b>	Able to associate sounds with the letters of the alphabet	<b>Construct 8</b>	Able to understand and use the language at phrase level in non-linear texts
<b>Construct 3</b>	Able to blend sounds into recognisable words	<b>Construct 9</b>	Able to read and understand sentences with guidance
<b>Construct 4</b>	Able to segment words into phonemes	<b>Construct 10</b>	Able to understand and use the language at sentence level in non-linear texts
<b>Construct 5</b>	Able to understand and use the language at word level	<b>Construct 11</b>	Able to understand and use the language at paragraph level in linear texts
<b>Construct 6</b>	Able to participate in daily conversations using appropriate phrases	<b>Construct 12</b>	Able to construct sentences with guidance

## 2.10 Summary of the chapter

This chapter helps to explain the policy context in which the study takes place by providing the educational background context of English-language education in Malaysia. An understanding of this contextual background, especially regarding the teachers' training pathways and how English is taught in Malaysia, will help us interpret the rationale the teacher participants in the study provide for their pedagogical decisions in the classroom.

# CHAPTER 3

## LANGUAGE TEACHER COGNITION

### 3.1 Introduction

This literature review section begins by introducing the history of teacher cognition research in general. It then outlines how the study of language teacher cognition grew out of this and how this field has gained recognition in educational research. It seems that by consequence of the numerous studies, an overlap in definitions and concepts have occurred, leading to confusion about terminology, at times. Therefore, it is also important to note the common conceptual issues in language teacher cognition study, the differences in the uses of terms, and the commonalities that glue them together as a concept. Once the definition and conceptual issues have been addressed, it proceeds to explore the potential relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices. These relationships are clearly not linear but can often be reciprocal in nature. These relationships can also explain how education curriculum reform might be affected due to the beliefs possessed by the teachers.

Moving to the a more specific domain of language teacher cognition, Borg (2003)'s LTC conceptual framework was elaborated, which served as a stepping stone to raise awareness and highlight key themes, gaps and conceptual relationships that are specifically related to language teachers, followed by a presentation of the revised framework in 2006. This chapter also presents the current empirical studies on language teacher cognition in the teaching of reading and adopting a phonics approach.

### 3.2 Background to the study of language teacher cognition

Language teaching education has received increasing attention due to the development and success of second-language teaching in second-language contexts. Against this backdrop,

new theories of learning in second and foreign languages have emerged in order to provide ample references for teachers who are teaching English as a second/foreign language, which include second-language teaching methodology (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Borg (2006) explains that the research focus has shifted from language classroom teaching to language teacher cognition. What was previously missing from the discussion of teacher cognition was a specific system for language teacher cognition that can represent what language teachers think, know, and believe in any aspect of their work and also how different elements in language teachers' cognitive systems interact with the other targeted domains identified so far. In this section the background history of the research field of teacher cognition, related conceptual issues, possible relationships between cognition and practices, language teacher cognition in the teaching of reading research, and current methodological approaches to language teacher cognition research are discussed.

This section provides an historical explanation of how language teacher cognition gained recognition. Some attention will be paid to models of teacher cognition from a generic perspective and how these influenced the language teaching field.

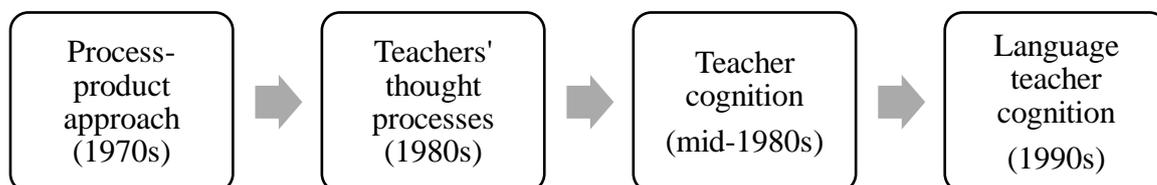


Figure 3-1: The development of language teacher cognition research

The development of language teacher cognition started with a paradigm shift in educational research in the 1970s (refer to *Figure 3-1*) wherein educational researchers were moving away from the typical process-product approach and paid more attention to constructivism and cognition psychology. The process-product approach, which focuses on the study of teacher effectiveness, primarily looks at how the teachers' and students' behaviours will influence students' achievements in the classroom (Borg, 2006). Learning was seen to be a product of teaching, and teaching was conceived of as behaviours performed by teachers in class. At that time, the goal of research into teaching was to describe these behaviours, to identify those which were effective and to study links between these behaviours and learning outcomes (Borg, 2006).

Later emphasis shifted to a thought-processes approach; teachers were seen as active decision-makers and teacher learning was viewed as a cognitive process involving individual and social construction of knowledge (Calderhead, 1987; Fang, 1996; Richardson, 1996). Among the earliest researchers who had an interest in this area of research were Clark and Peterson (1984, p. 13), who proposed this perspective should replace the 'process-product approach which dominated the relationship between teachers' classroom behaviour, students' classroom behaviour, and students' achievements. They called the cognitive process of teachers the 'teacher's thought process' and introduced a model of teachers' thoughts and actions as a way to explain the relationship of both domains rather than proposing it from the findings of an empirical study (Clark & Peterson, 1984). They explained that this model consists of two domains that influenced the process of teaching: (a) teachers' thought processes, and (b) teachers' actions and the observable effects. Whilst the domain of teachers' thought processes is an unobservable construct, since the process occurs inside the teachers' heads, teacher and student behaviour and student achievement can be observed and measured through empirical research methods. Consequently, this led to the domain of inquiry of teacher cognition: the study of what teachers know, think and believe.

There was an increase of teacher cognition research in the 1980s and 1990s which was located in the field of educational psychology before entering into teaching and education fields (Borg, 2009). In the 1980s, the concept of beliefs and knowledge dominated the study of teacher cognition and have 'remained as dominant concepts in the educational research in teacher cognition' (ibid, p. 2). This is when terms such as pedagogical content knowledge by Shulman (1987) and the concept of beliefs (Pajares, 1992), for example, led to different concepts of analysis, which collectively characterise the essence of this phenomenon (see Borg, 2006).

Although there is no distinct transition from teacher cognition (in generic terms) to language teacher cognition, in the 1990s, Freeman and Richard (1996) and Woods (1996) published books related to language teachers' thoughts and decisions. Their books discuss the influence of both domains for the classroom teaching. Freeman and Richard (1996)'s book focuses on teachers' learning and thinking and in it they examined how novice and experienced teachers thought about teaching, what their thoughts were, how they were shaped, and how they were applied in the classroom. Woods' (1996) book was more

focussed on teacher cognition in language teaching, specifically looking at the beliefs, decision-making and classroom practices. The result from Woods' study initiated a model of BAK network/systems (beliefs, assumption, knowledge). According to Woods, teachers develop their own individual systems of BAK through their experiences as learners and teachers, and each experience is different depending on individuals, with certain aspects implying or presupposing others; for example, teachers' instructional decisions. By having 'teacher cognition' in his book title, it brought this term to the wider attention of L2 researchers (Borg, 2009).

Since then, language teacher cognition research has dynamically developed merging different theories; for example, the inclusion of complexity theory and different context settings, which result in diverse interpretations from different perspectives and contexts. Within the past 20 years, the study of language teacher cognition has been, and is still, recognised as one of the major areas in the language-teaching field. It is important to explore language teachers' cognition, since it will influence what teachers do in their classrooms and it is a requirement to understand both teaching and teacher learning (Borg, 2003; Burns, 1992; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Golombek, 1998)

### **3.3 Conceptual issues in teacher cognition research**

Despite the recognition of the language/teacher cognition field, there is much debate amongst researchers about the conceptual terms 'cognition', 'beliefs', and 'knowledge'. This can be seen from an abundance of definitions in the literature used to describe similar or even identical concepts. Pajares (1992) expressed a concern about the messiness of the belief's constructs arising from the lack of a clear definition of the concept. He believes that the term 'teachers' beliefs' is too broad for a single definition;

*The construct of educational beliefs is itself broad and encompassing. For purpose of research, it is diffuse and ungainly, too difficult to operationalize, too context free. Therefore, as with more general beliefs, educational beliefs about are required – beliefs about confidence to affect students' performance (teacher efficacy), about the nature of knowledge (epistemology beliefs, about causes of teachers or students' performance (attributions, locus of control, motivation, writing apprehension, math anxiety), about perceptions of self and feeling of self-worth (self-concept, self-esteem), about confidence to perform specific tasks (self-efficacy) there are also educational beliefs*

*about specific subjects or disciplines (reading instruction, the nature of reading, whole language).*

*(Pajares, 1992, p. 316)*

Borg (2006) listed almost 30 different definitions in the literature that discuss the concepts of beliefs and knowledge. Some researchers interpreted both beliefs and knowledge as synonymous or interchangeable since the two terms are not always easily distinguishable (Borg, 2003; Calderhead, 1996; Kagan, 1990; Pajares, 1992; Verloop et al., 2001). However, another group separates these two by claiming beliefs are subjective and implicit, and knowledge is objective and explicit (Ford, 1994; Shulman, 1986; Woods, 1996). Pajares (1992) tried to gather other terms such as attitudes, values, perceptions, theories and images under the definition of beliefs, considering the abstract nature of these terms. Likewise, Kagan (1990, p. 421) refers to both as similar due to the ‘mounting evidence that much of what a teacher knows of his and her craft appears to be defined in highly subjective terms’. Verloop et al. (2001)’s suggestion on this issue is based on how these knowledges and beliefs are viewed. If knowledge is to be seen as truth, then beliefs and knowledge may be treated as separate entities, but if it is seen as a personal construct, they then can be referred to as overlapping concepts that are ‘inextricably intertwined’ in teachers’ minds. Another important reason for this debate is still ongoing in the literature due to the fact teachers often view their beliefs as knowledge (Grossman et al., 1989). They found out that, ‘while we are trying to separate teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about subject-matter for the purpose of clarity, we recognise that the distinction is blurry at best’ (ibid., p. 31).

However, Fives and Buehl (2012) have a different view of this issue. They believe that defining the terms is not difficult because most authors have done so very well throughout the years. In fact, the difficult part is to get the authors ‘to consistently define and use the terms within and across fields that examine these constructs’ (ibid., p. 473). If they were to categorise the definition, beliefs can be divided into five categories: a) implicit or explicit, relating to teachers’ awareness and consciousness of the influence of their beliefs on their practices; b) stable or dynamic, whereby beliefs can be stable and unchangeable, but they can also be dynamic, changing over time and under different influences; c) situated in contexts or generalizable across situations, depending on the external factors

that teachers have to deal with every day; d) knowledge or beliefs, relating to the relationship between both, either interwoven or separated; and e) individual or systematic, in which most are viewed as a system, that is unified and cohesive, but are sometimes personal or practical theories. Nonetheless, Borg (2018, p. 5) proposes that it is important for researchers ‘to be explicit about how “belief” is being defined, what particular kinds of beliefs are being examined and what (if any) the presumed relationship between beliefs and practices is’.

Since this study is also looking at teachers’ knowledge of subject matter, which involves teachers’ knowledge of the teaching of reading through the phonics approach, there is a need to discuss the notion of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). The field is well recognised due to Lee Shulman’s contribution to teacher knowledge research, specifically looking at the role of subject matter knowledge and how it is manipulated in teaching (Shulman, 1986). He argued that minimal attention was given to this field, while, in fact, subject matter knowledge is a central aspect of classroom life. Shulman’s (1986, 1987) research revolves around the source of teacher knowledge and how teachers apply this knowledge in the classroom. He also suggested seven other knowledge types that teachers might acquire, as they become teachers: (i) subject-matter knowledge, (ii) pedagogical content knowledge, (iii) general pedagogical knowledge, (iv) knowledge of learners and their characteristics, (v) curricular knowledge, (vi) knowledge of educational ends, and (vii) knowledge of educational contexts. Out of these, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) has gained the most interest in teacher cognition research.

PCK represents the idea that the teacher should be able to translate their subject-matter knowledge into a transcribe-able approach for classroom teaching (Shulman, 1987): ‘It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction’ (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). Furthermore, Shulman describes the processes as preparation, representation, selection, adapting and tailoring (*ibid.*, p. 16). Teachers will need to organise the teaching materials, which are also underpinned by their understanding of the subject. Next, they need to decide how the knowledge can be represented to the learners. At the same time, they also need to select appropriate approaches by adapting appropriate materials to tailor to the needs of the students. Here, we see how the personal decisions of the teachers, which could be framed

as ‘beliefs’, impact on PCK. In a sense, this is similar to Kelchtermans’ (2009) notion of subjective educational theory, whereby teachers make classroom decisions based on personal knowledge and beliefs about optimum pedagogical and teaching strategies. Teachers’ knowledge is usually gained through teacher education and in-service training, whereas their beliefs about how to apply this knowledge are personally developed through their experiences as teachers. Fundamentally, teachers make classroom decision based on their personal experiences of ‘what works’.

From the teacher cognition perspective, the concern is how teachers themselves construct the idea and concepts. There may not be a clear distinction between knowledge and beliefs (Andrew, 2003; Pajares, 1992; Tsui, 2003). It also depends on the interpretation of knowledge, where if knowledge is a personal construct, then it is a concept that overlaps with beliefs and it may thus be unwise to separate them (Verloop et al., 2001), but if it is seen as a truth, then knowledge and beliefs may be considered as separate entities.

### **3.4 Possible relationships between teachers’ beliefs and practices**

One of the objectives for conducting the current study is to understand in-service teachers’ cognition and to explain how this influences their classroom practices. Since teachers’ beliefs act as filters, frames or guides (Fives & Buehl, 2012) to classroom practices, it is typical for teachers ‘to digest and implement the curriculum depending upon their beliefs and environment context’ (Sakui, 2004, p. 155). Although it is obvious that teachers’ beliefs serve as a foundation for action and influence classroom practices (Borg, 2011), the relationship between both is complex (Li, 2013; Zheng, 2013). Several researchers have come to the conclusion that there is not only a linear relationship between both constructs but also that they are mutually informing and they can also become disconnected from one another (Phipps & Borg, 2007; Buehl & Beck, 2015). Basturkmen et al. (2004) have emphasised that teachers’ stated beliefs offered only a partial window to classroom practice. Thus, teachers’ beliefs should not be assessed only from what they say they believe, but it also should complement by observing what they actually do in the classroom (Borg, 2006).

By exploring this relationship, it helps to unveil the discrepancies between the two and also provides explanations and factors that influence both. Buehl and Beck (2015) have

conducted a review from published empirical research and found out four forms of relationships, as below:

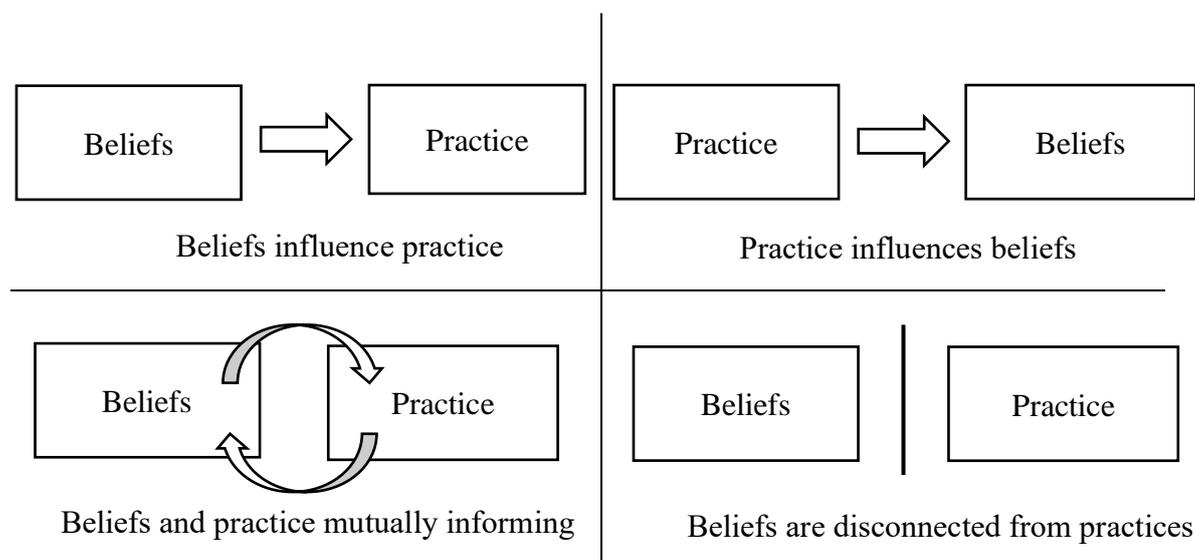


Figure 3-2: The relationship between beliefs and practices (Buehl & Beck, 2015)

Whilst the relationships between beliefs and practice can be complex, the top left-hand quadrant illustrates that this is not always the case. For example, a linear beliefs-practices relationship can be observed through research from Farrell and Ives (2015), who conducted a case study on one ESL teacher's beliefs and practices in his English for academic purposes (EAP) classroom. The findings suggest that the teacher's professed beliefs were aligned with the practices that she/he practised in the classroom. The teacher further stated that this was due to the prescribed textbook content that was presented according to his beliefs in the teaching of reading, which he thus found accommodating in helping him exercise his beliefs in the classroom. Kuzborska (2011) also found a similar finding in her research with eight teachers by comparing the beliefs-practices relationship in the teaching of reading to advanced learners. The result showed that teachers' beliefs were identified as congruent with practices which reflected a skills-based approach to reading instruction.

In contrast to a beliefs-practice relationship, this correlation can be overturned by proposing a practice that will eventually change the beliefs of the teachers themselves. This connection usually occurs when an intervention, such as professional development courses and workshops, is conducted to train the teachers in new pedagogy and implementation. However, there might not be any changes that occur if teachers are not supported after the interventions are given. Thus, 'the level of support that the teachers received during the

experience may determine if the beliefs will increase, decrease or remain unchanged' (Buehl & Beck, 2015, p. 69).

There are also cases where the beliefs possessed by the teachers are disconnected from their practices. Mostly, this is due to the contextual factors that they face around them making it difficult to practise the beliefs that they hold about teaching and learning. Roothoof (2014) studied 10 EFL teacher's beliefs and practices about oral feedback in the language classroom. The findings revealed that teachers' beliefs about oral corrective feedback did not generally match their practices. Although teachers believed that oral corrective feedback is important in order to improve students' oral performance, they expressed some reservation about this approach. One of the reasons was students' personalities in that the teachers thought that it might hurt the students' feelings when they received the corrective comments. The teachers also thought that by giving the direct feedback to the students, it would disrupt the classroom communication between teacher and students. Thus, the teachers opted for other practices which are more discreet, and which would accommodate the situation that they were in. Another example is from Graham et al. (2014), who investigated EFL teachers' stated beliefs and practices about listening in a foreign language. Findings revealed that although teachers were aware of effective listening skills from the literature and they were taught the way it should be, 'they infrequently reported using approaches and activities that the literature suggests for an effective listening skill development' (ibid., p. 53). This is because teachers were more concerned about curriculum demands, assessment and classroom management.

Last but not least is the mutual relationships between beliefs and practices; however, these are complex, as mentioned earlier. Buehl and Beck (2015, P. 70) also explained that 'this relationship may vary across individuals and contexts as well as the type of beliefs and practices being assessed'. Li (2013) and Zheng (2013) added complexity theory as a framework in their research to observe the relationship of the theory to teachers' cognition and practices. Zheng (2013) conducted a case study of a language teacher by adopting complexity theory to further explore the teachers' beliefs systems and how the beliefs system components contributed to the complex features of their beliefs. The findings show that the teacher in her study reported that she only 'adopted the names of certain practices without implementing them in real practice' (p. 340). This was concluded when the teacher seemed to misinterpret the original aim of the new English curriculum in China.

### 3.5 Teachers' beliefs and curriculum reform

Over the years, most curriculum reform has had implications for teachers' behaviours without considering the beliefs that they have. These reforms have indirectly challenged teachers to change their beliefs and practices, which have frequently been embedded in them for a period of time. Without considering the core point of why teachers are not responding to the calls for change, education reform will not necessarily achieve the desired impact. As a result, teachers' beliefs play an integral role in the translation of educational policy into practice as teachers are the mediators of curriculum goals through instructional practices. Therefore, it can be argued that teachers should be involved in policy reform as potential policymakers; otherwise, they may view the change negatively and refuse curriculum mandates in their classrooms (Wang & Cheng, 2005).

Research has shown that teachers' beliefs influence education reform due to several reasons (Fang, 1996, Freeman, 2002). First, teachers' beliefs heavily influence classroom practices, including planning the lesson plan, instructional choice and even pedagogy that they use during the lesson (Hoffman & Seidel, 2015). Thus, if the proposed reforms fail to complement teachers' attitudes and beliefs, the result of the implementation could be superficial (Sikes, 2013). Teachers will do whatever they feel is right because they have their own ideas, their own ways of doing things and their own preferences (Borg, 2012). This leads to the second reason, which is teachers' long experience in teaching (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Basturkmen, 2012; Sikes, 2013). Experienced teachers often react differently to change due to the core beliefs that they already have about teaching and learning (Basturkmen, 2012). The roles of core and peripheral beliefs also influence their reaction to change: 'Core beliefs are stable and exert more powerful influence on behaviour' (Phipps & Borg, 2009, p. 381), whereas, 'the peripheral beliefs are more personal in nature and they are less resistant to change therefore that can be mediated' (Gabillon, 2012:198). Teachers tend to act according to a well-established subjective education theory (Kelchtermans, 2009) and do not engage in the implementation of change (Hargreaves, 2005). On top of that, they show less commitment to practice as compared to novice or less experienced teachers (Dowrich, 2008), which means that they may be less inclined to experiment or innovate with practice due to the investment of effort required.

These attitudes are not only present in Western culture but also affect teachers in Asian settings (Goh et al., 2005; Underwood, 2012; Zhang & Liu, 2014). Orafi and Borg (2009) also believe that teachers may feel uncomfortable with change due to their lack of pedagogical content knowledge, which has made them feel less confident in implementing reforms in the classroom. This might be due to a lack of support from the government with professional development programmes that also fail to convince the teachers of the benefits of implementing changes in their teaching. Despite that, Yan (2012)'s finding shows different types of influence on teachers' attitudes. English teachers in her research showed a positive attitude towards the new curriculum implementation; however, the contextual conditions around them such as the students' attitudes, examination requirements, and lack of school support discouraged them from actual implementation. Altogether, these studies indicate the mismatch between teachers' beliefs and practices and curriculum reform. Thus, it can be concluded that teachers are often inflexible to change, and whether they execute or ignore the imposed curriculum reform can depend on their attitude towards the new implementation (Sikes, 2013).

Due to the diverse factors that can influence language teacher cognition, Borg (2003) took the initiative to evaluate the relevant factors and proposed a conceptual framework that would help to explain the interaction from language teachers' perspectives. He states that the framework would act as an initial guide for the researchers to understand the field better and it can be expanded and restructured according to different research studies (Borg, 2006).

### **3.6 Language teacher cognition framework**

Borg (2003) proposed a language teacher cognition framework because there was none available for language teachers in particular. This framework is built based on an extensive literature research that he conducted. In language teacher cognition research, there are similar recurring themes. What makes the results of the studies different is the degree of the interaction between the themes and to what extent teacher cognition influences their practices. Borg's framework is based on these recurring themes: teachers' experiences as a language learner (schooling); pre-service preparation/training in becoming a teacher; contextual factors; and professional coursework. These underlying factors, in addition to

those within a classroom context, shape teachers' personal knowledge and beliefs of how language learning should take form within their own classroom practices (see Figure 3-3).

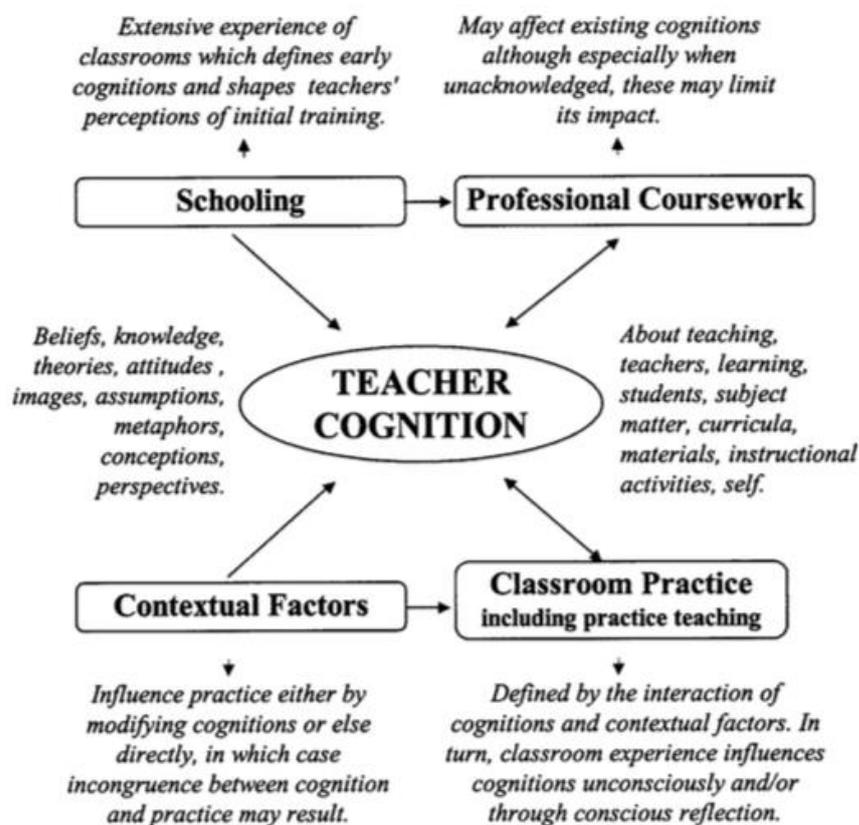


Figure 3-3: Borg's (1997) teacher cognition framework

Schooling deals with teachers' prior language learning experiences, which are accumulated from their early school period as a result of spending thousands of hours in language classrooms. Teachers themselves were exposed to the behaviours and teaching methodologies of their own teachers, which moulded their own perceptions of language learning. Teachers carry their schooling experiences into their professional coursework, which may or may not alter their former cognition about language teaching. Professional coursework refers to teacher training education, where they are formally introduced to the knowledge and pedagogy of teaching. At this stage, conflict and tensions may arise as they try to modify their pre-conceived ideas with the new ideologies or teaching methodologies presented in the teacher training/development courses. However, the impact of professional coursework may not last as long as contextual factors, which could be more influential. Contextual factors are considered as an important mediator in influencing teachers' practices as compared to schooling and professional coursework experiences.

These internal and external factors, mentioned by Borg (2003), may refer to but are not limited to teacher self-confidence, school climates, assessment, curriculum policy and change, colleagues, and the availability of resources. It is important to identify to what extent these contextual factors may influence teacher cognition and at the same time how they affect classroom instruction so that further suggestions could be provided to improve situations where needed.

Borg's work (2003) encompassed a review of 64 studies in language education published from 1976 until 2002. He analysed these studies using the four major themes from an earlier framework he produced in 1997 (*refer to Figure 3-3*). The themes were a) cognition and prior language learning experience, b) cognition and teacher education, and c) cognition and contextual factors, and d) cognition and classroom practice. In his 2003 paper, he concluded that teacher cognition research is a messy construct, suggesting that if it were properly identified and acknowledged, it may bring about positive changes to classroom teaching practices. These changes may stimulate positive transformations in teachers by identifying their reactions and behaviours towards any new implementations. It also serves as an indicator of the extent to which the innovation is having the intended impact. In terms of practices, if teachers show an ineffective pedagogy, by knowing their beliefs and studying them, it will help to understand why they resist change in the first place. Thus, the research could provide opportunities to improve teacher education at a pre-service level as well as professional development courses for in-service teachers.

Borg's 2003 publication paved the way for further work, published in 2006, which extended his review to 180 studies, which also included those from 2002 until 2006. Borg (2006) defines language teacher cognition research as studies that 'examine language education contexts, what teachers at any stage of their careers think, know or believe in relation to any aspect of their work and which additionally but not necessarily, also entail the study of actual classroom practices and of the relationship between cognition and these practices' (p. 54). The studies under review were analysed looking at 'substantive and methodological elements' (2006, p. 332). Substantive elements included areas such as grammar, reading and writing, and pre-service and in-service teachers. Borg also examined how different studies used different instruments to answer research problems. Borg critiqued a range of methodologies and methods ranging from self-report instruments to

observations and offered suggestions about how future research can adapt to produce a more inclusive method-driven study in future.

This systematic review ultimately led to an adapted framework on language teacher cognition, which was similar but significantly different to his earlier work. The new framework comprised the same domains. However, as we observe, (*refer to Figure 3-4*), there is more emphasis on the relationships between the different domains. He also reduced the number of domains from four to three in order to make it more concise, positioning classroom practice as part of contextual factors. Borg explained that contextual factors serve as the most influential domain that could alter teacher's classroom practices, hence the reason why these domains have been grouped together. More recently, Borg (2018) has argued that having a linear or non-linear relationship between cognition and practices is no longer the main concern since it is widely known teachers may not be able to respond to change due to internal and external contextual factors which may constrain what teachers do. The other changes to the 2003 framework are highlighted below in *Figure 3-4*. These include the replacement of 'images', 'metaphors' and 'perspectives' with 'decision making', 'principles', and 'thinking'. On the right-hand side of the framework, 'learners', 'colleagues', 'assessment', and 'context' were added and 'students' and 'instructional activities' were removed. In addition, Borg widened the interpretation of schooling to not only include the experiences from schools and of teachers, but also the roles of influencing adults, especially parents, during the teachers' language-learning experiences.

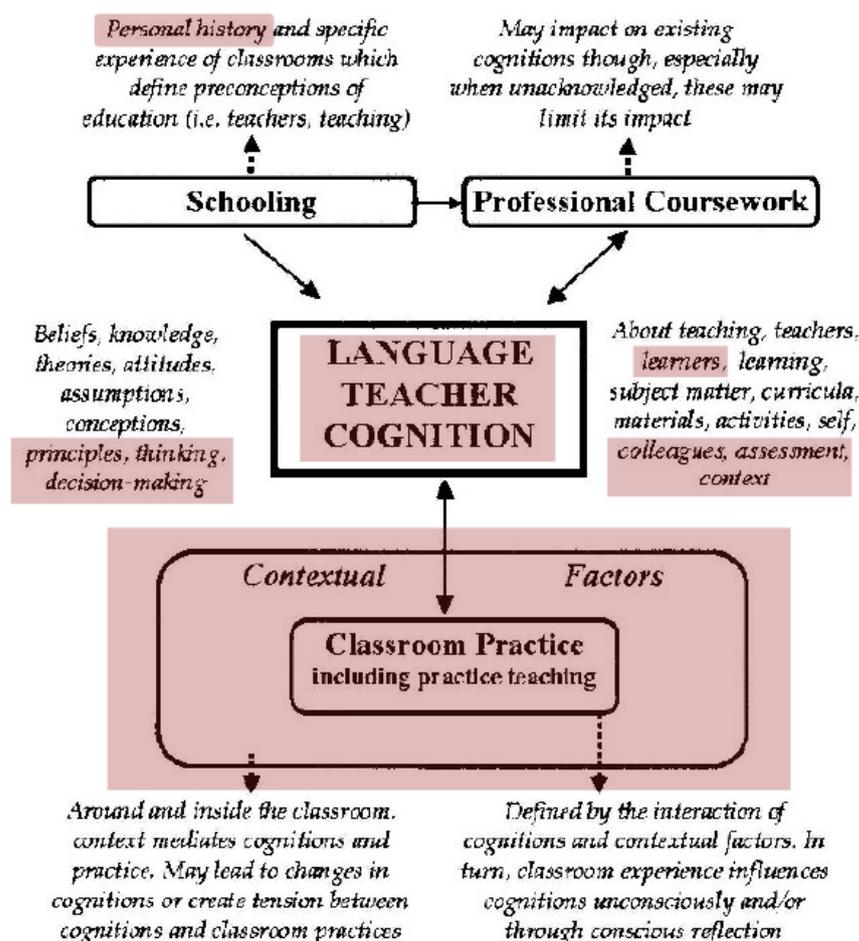


Figure 3-4: Borg's (2006, p. 333) revised language teacher cognition framework

Highlighted in red are the points that he revised in this adapted version.

Borg claimed that his revision of the framework was a way 'to impose some structure in the language teacher cognition field' and at the same time 'highlight[s] core themes, gaps, and conceptual relationships' (Borg, 2006, p. 30). Whilst he noted that there are still areas which are unexplored by researchers in language teaching, this framework can be used as an analytical tool for other researchers without the need to reinvent the wheel.

### 3.7 Language teacher cognition in the teaching of reading/phonics approaches

Research on language teachers' cognition has focused on various domains of English language teaching. These include teacher cognition in the teaching of English language skills, such as listening (Graham et al., 2014), writing (Crusan et al., 2016), speaking (Rahimi & Zhang, 2015), pronunciation (Baker & Murphy, 2011; Baker, 2014), the

teaching of grammar (Phipps & Borg, 2015), vocabulary teaching (Guo & Ma, 2011; Macalister, 2012) and reading (Kuzborska, 2011), just to name a few. It has also involved studying the cognition of classroom pedagogy such as in the implementation of communicative language teaching (Rahman & Pandian, 2018), task-based classroom pedagogy (Andon & Eckerth, 2009), and language classroom assessment (Berry, Sheehan & Munro, 2019). The research domains have been broad and diverse, not only looking at the subject-matter but also comparing pre-service and in-service teachers' experiences, while also examining theories such as complexity theory (Zheng 2013) and social cognitive theory (Kubanyiova, 2012). The shift of perspectives is clearly growing from focussing solely on the students and learning outcomes to include the teachers' mental states, which have offered more underlying meaning and reasoning for why teachers do what they do in the classroom (Borg, 2006).

Among all of these research domains, grammar and reading research have received substantial attention (Borg, 2003, 2006). As for reading research, there has been more limited representation in second-language contexts as most research findings came from the first-language context (*ibid.*, 2006). Grabe and Stoller (2002, p. 125) suggested that the lack of research in L2 field might be due to the nature of L2 research itself. Most reading research in L2 paid more attention to the roles of language proficiency and language knowledge for reading development, the transfer issues of L1 linguistic, strategic and content knowledge in L2 performance, and the cultural and instructional factors that influence reading development. Due to this, the early reading/ lower level of reading skill research are given little attention in the reading research field.

Most language teacher cognition research in EFL reading examines reading comprehension (Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014; Kuzborska, 2011), reading strategies and skills (Bamanger & Gashan, 2014; Johnson, 1992; Oda, 2017) and also reading instruction (Ko, 2013). For example, Kuzborska (2011) investigated the relationship between the beliefs and practices of eight teachers in the teaching of reading to advanced learners. The findings show that teachers mainly used a skill-based approach for teaching reading, emphasising vocabulary, translation and reading aloud, and focussing on the whole class discussion of the text (*ibid.*, p. 121). Meanwhile, Atai and Fatahi-Majd (2014) conducted a study on Iranian ELT teachers' cognition and practices in the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) reading comprehension. They found out that teachers used reading

comprehension strategies such as guessing the meaning of unknown words to help the students to comprehend the text that they read. These techniques were mostly influenced by the teachers' teaching experiences and ELT education backgrounds. Odo (2017) studied EFL teachers' beliefs about foreign language reading instruction and how their experiences shaped their beliefs. The findings from 21 Korean English teachers show that their biographical experiences and contextual factors, such as the learners and classroom context, influenced their reading practices in the classroom.

However, a limited number of studies have examined EFL teachers' beliefs about approaches to teaching reading/reading pedagogy or EFL teachers' knowledge of word recognition level constructs. Furthermore, most of the studies also viewed these domains separately in their own research objectives. When it comes to EFL teachers' beliefs in reading pedagogy, these are very mixed. Johnson (1992) found that ESL teachers in her study were seen to favour the function-based approach (CLT) to teaching reading due to the popularity of the approach at the time as compared to skills-based approaches (four English-language skills) and rule-based approaches (grammar approach). Lim and Torr (2007) found that their EFL teacher participants did not subscribe to any particular reading approaches and rather varied their classroom approaches according to the suitability of the lesson. They concluded that this might be due to the teachers' aim in the English classroom, which is to teach children to communicate and be able to express themselves freely using the target language. Fuchs et al.'s (2019) study on 167 Israeli teachers found out that the respondents were aware of the importance of the phonics approach for early learners, but somehow their practices were more focussed on reading fluency activities rather than the phonics approach activities. The same finding was established by Vaisman and Kahn-Horwaitz (2019) which showed that teachers admitted the importance of word recognition skills but were unable to fully utilise these in the classroom due to lack of knowledge in word recognition level. Instead, teachers emphasised the whole-language approach in order to reinforce proficient reading and spelling skills. Based on the selected studies above, it is apparent that teachers' stated beliefs and practices are frequently incongruent due to the reasons mentioned.

Apart from beliefs, knowledge on the subject matter also influences the way teachers conduct their lessons in the classroom. Vaisman and Kahn-Horwaitz (2019) discovered that teachers who possessed highest scores in basic language constructs in their survey

(i.e., phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics) spent more time teaching phonemic awareness and grapheme-phoneme correspondences, whereas teachers who had limited knowledge in basic language constructs spent more time on vocabulary learning rather than decoding, phonemic awareness and phonics, explicitly. However, a comparison of basic language constructs of EFL teachers in China and South Korea found that although some teachers possessed a good content knowledge level of constructs, they had limited pedagogical knowledge about how to teach using the phonics approach (Bae et al., 2019). This situation has indirectly imposed a limitation on their classroom practices whereby the Chinese teachers felt they were more confident in teaching vocabulary and their Korean counterparts felt competent in teaching reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Similar findings were also established in Zhao et al.'s (2016) and Lee's (2014) studies where EFL teacher respondents were unable to demonstrate pedagogical knowledge of the basic language skills although they managed to achieve good scores for the content knowledge questions.

Interestingly, a lack of teachers' knowledge in these basic language constructs is not a new phenomenon in the field of teaching early reading. Numerous studies from different countries have shown that even native English teachers are not well-prepared in teaching word recognition skills in the first-language context (Bos et al., 2001; Carlisle et al., 2011; Cunningham et al., 2004; Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2005). This was true in New Zealand, Australia and the UK when the phonics approach was newly adopted as part of early reading programmes replacing the previous whole-language reading approach. In conclusion, teachers cannot teach what they do not know (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012) and the absence of strong pedagogical content knowledge can not only affect classroom practices but also might influence students' reading achievements (Cunningham et al., 2004; Moats & Foorman, 2003).

### **3.8 Summary of the literature**

The discussion in this chapter has brought several implications for the study. First, on the understanding of how teachers' cognition interacts and influences with teachers' classroom practices especially when they have different life experiences, professional coursework that they attended, and the influenced of contextual factors which has shaped how they perceived new curriculum implementation. Given that teachers' beliefs influence their

classroom practices, there is a possibility that implementing curriculum reform without considering the ESL teachers' beliefs might not lead to the intended and desired outcomes the curriculum reform is seeking specifically in Malaysia context. The need to investigate Malaysian ESL teachers' beliefs is essential considering the new curriculum and syllabus implementation of the teaching of English reading for the Year 1 syllabus. This study will provide insights into whether their beliefs are congruent and compatible with the principles of the curriculum reform.

# CHAPTER 4

## THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH READING

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with the importance of reading in one's life and it was inspired by Castle et al.'s (2018, p. 1) suggestion to try to close the gap between 'the current state of research knowledge and the state of public understanding' about reading and the best way to teach it, especially for early readers. It is important to begin by outlining the importance of reading and the theoretical frameworks which explain the processes involved in becoming a skilled reader. This chapter also addresses the pedagogical debates in reading research – in particular, the whole language and the phonics approaches – while also presenting why phonics has been considered as a 'game-changer' in this field, based on empirical and scientific research available today. There is also a discussion about how these debates have influenced the reading policies in English-speaking countries.

Since second-language reading is the main focus of this study, it is also essential to look at the importance of reading in a second language and the differences in learning to read in the first and second languages. In addition, the review also discusses the influence of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the second-language classroom, the place of reading within this approach, and how it has correlations with the whole language approach. It also outlines how attention to the phonics approach in the second-language classroom is growing. Therefore, research on the phonics approach used in the second-language classroom is presented in order to support the notion.

### 4.2 The importance of reading

Reading is a complex process that mostly involves cognitive skills. In interacting with text, the human brain needs to actively construct meaning from written text (Anderson et al., 1985; Carrell, 1989; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Zhang, 2001). Grabe and Stoller (2002) define

reading as ‘the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret the information appropriately’ (p. 9). It is a complicated process that revolves around the understanding of letters and words, the knowledge derived from the text as well as the interpretation of the information from the written text (Scharer, 2012). Reading proficiency contributes greatly to the understanding of written texts. There are many positive benefits gained by a skilled reader, such as improving general knowledge (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998) and increasing reading and writing ability (Krashen, 1993). Besides this, being a fluent reader can also boost self-confidence and develop positive attitudes towards reading itself (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Nonetheless, Moats (1994) considered teaching reading like rocket science due to its challenges, especially when dealing with reading disabilities. In order to become more knowledgeable about appropriate teaching methods for reading, it is necessary to understand how reading skills are developed at different levels.

Rosenblatt (1982), in her ‘reading response’ theory, outlined the transaction process which occurs in reading that comprises of the relation between the reader and the text. The reader should be able to relate the text to his life experiences, schemata and current emotions in order to understand the ‘transaction’ process while they are reading. Although Rosenblatt’s theory is geared towards the reading of literature, this theory correlates with claims that the background knowledge of a reader helps to improve the comprehension of a text, hence emphasising the contribution of schemata in early reading. This is a shift from previous reading theory, which only focused on the importance of the text and author by ignoring the role of the reader (Davis, 1992). As Rosenblatt explains (1982, p. 2),

*I use John Dewey’s term, transaction, to emphasize the contribution of both reader and text. The words in their particular pattern stir up elements of memory and activate areas of consciousness. The reader bringing past experience of language and of the world to the task, sets up tentative notions of a subject, of some framework into which to fit the ideas as the words unfurl.*

Grabe and Stoller (2002) defined reading comprehension as a higher-level process. This is because readers who are able to engage in this way perceive reading as more than a text. They have already established a purpose for reading, use reading strategies, make inferences and critically evaluate information that are presented in the text (Grabe, 2009).

On the other hand, lower-level processing involves more specific skills in the linguistic capabilities in an individual (Grabe & Stroller, 2002). This involves word recognition, vocabulary, and grammar skills, which cannot be taken for granted and therefore need to be practiced and developed. Typically, these lower-level processing skills are more taxing for early readers who are not yet able to necessarily make sense of the printed text. As a result, instructional approaches to early reading should prepare young readers to start recognizing at least the alphabetic letters and sounds, how the sounds and letters are manipulated to be a word, and the ability to recall learned vocabulary according to context (New, 2003). Particular attention is required for the strategies needed by children to crack the code of the printed text in the early years. Grabe and Stroller (2002, p. 21) explain that second-language reading research is rarely discussed in terms of these lower-level processing skills and that this may be due to ‘a limited understanding of the role of rapid and automatic word recognition processes in reading’. In the section below, I outline theoretical frameworks that help to explain these complex processes in more detail.

### **4.3 Theoretical frameworks and research perspectives on reading development**

Preparing children for learning how to read and reading for comprehension are two distinctive approaches. Since reading is a complex process, most of us take it for granted and thus ignore the theoretical evidence that constitute these processes. In order to understand this further, it is important to introduce reading frameworks that clarify the interrelation between different components contributing to reading acquisition.

#### **4.3.1 Simple View of Reading (SVR)**

One of the most influential models in the literature on reading development is the Simple View of Reading (SVR), proposed by Gough and Tunmer (1986). They explained the framework through a mathematical equation:

$$\text{Reading (R)} = \text{Decoding (D)} \times \text{Language Comprehension (LC)}$$

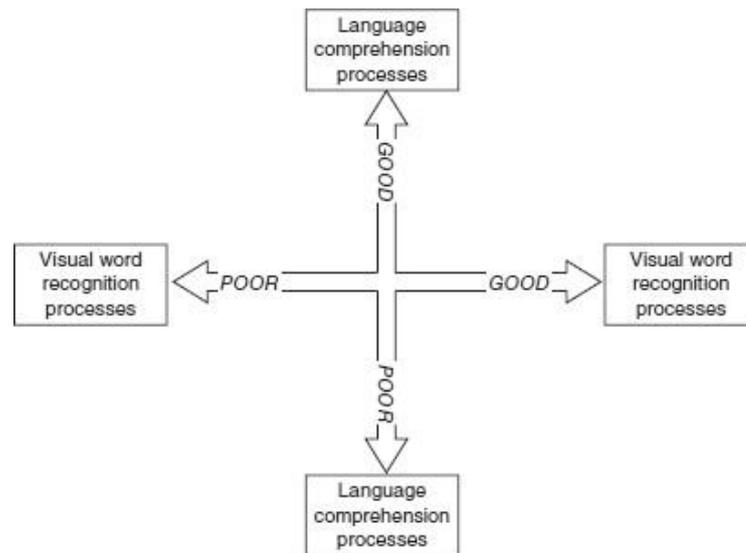


Figure 4-1: Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading

Thus, this framework suggests that a combination of decoding (i.e. word identification) and language comprehension skills will eventually contribute to reading comprehension. Decoding is a skill based on phonemic awareness and knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, which also includes lexical and cipher knowledge, whereas language comprehension involves meaning making of the decoded words. The SVR offers an interpretation that if a child can comprehend spoken language (LC) and at the same time is able to decode the text (D), she/he will be able to focus on reading comprehension (R). However, neither skill is sufficient on its own, and all three should be integrated. A child who can decode a text but shows weaker language comprehension skills will have a problem in reading comprehension; likewise, reading also cannot happen without decoding regardless of their linguistic comprehension level (Castle et al., 2018; Kirby and Savage, 2008; Stuart et al., 2008). This model also allows teachers to 'plot' their students' reading skills and knowledge (Waugh et al, 2015). Those who are good at language comprehension but show a poor word recognition would be placed in the top-left of the diagram. Whereas, if the students are weak in language comprehension but show a good word recognition process, then they would be plotted in the bottom right-hand side of the model. Plotting in this way will help the teachers to recognise what additional teaching is needed in order to help the students to improve their level in order to be placed in the top-right corner of the model. However, Castle et al. (2018) argue that SVR is not considered as a reading model. This is because 'it does not tell us how decoding and linguistic comprehension operate or how they develop' (p. 27). Thus, there is a need for a more precise model that can show a

detailed cognitive process of how both skills work in order to understand reading development fully (Castle et al., 2018).

### **4.3.2 Wren's (2000) Cognitive Foundations of Learning to Read Framework**

Another reading model that is worth mentioning is Wren's (2000) Cognitive Foundations of Learning to Read framework. The framework emerged from a funded project by the US Department of Education's Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) to examine early literacy practices and to prevent early reading failure. This framework serves as a reference for learning to read for teachers and was also created based on a large corpus of cognitive research literature on reading acquisition. The SEDL claimed that reading and learning to read are interrelated but different processes. Thus, the structure of the framework is organised in such a way that outlines the cognitive development that must take place for children to learn to read.

The core foundation of reading comprehension in Wren's framework is also based on the same reasoning as the Simple View of Reading (SVR) (see above, Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Wren divides his framework into domains. Each domain details elements that would enhance both language comprehension and decoding competencies, leading to improving reading comprehension. It differs to the SVR model in that it provides more detailed explanations of related domains in learning to read. In this review, more emphasis will be given to the decoding domain as this is most directly relevant to the research that is presented in this thesis.

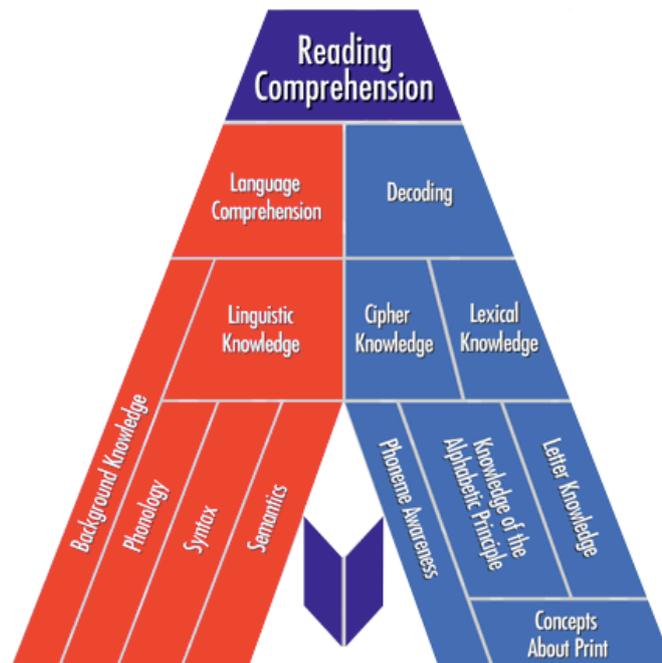


Figure 4-2: Wren's (2000) Cognitive Foundations of Learning to Read Framework

### 4.3.3 Decoding

Decoding is the process of reading the letters (graphemes) in print and transferring them into sounds (phonemes) which occurs through two main word identification processes involving cipher and lexical knowledge. This knowledge derives from other knowledge components in the framework relating to concepts about prints, phoneme awareness, letter knowledge, and knowledge of the alphabetic principle. Cipher knowledge is the ability of the children to read and pronounce regular words correctly (Wren, 2000), which is also concerned with the correspondences between letters and sounds (Kilpatrick, 2015). This latter term is used to differentiate its meaning from decoding. In the beginning, children will learn that there are valid and invalid letter combinations in English. Although initially they have limited vocabulary, they will be able to differentiate that 'cat' could be a word, but 'czt' is not a valid word. Later, young children will start to recognise the regular and consistent pattern of English letter combinations as their cipher knowledge develops.

If cipher knowledge describes a regular and consistent pattern of words, the lexical knowledge can be defined as a sight-word. A sight-word is a word that is instantly recognised from memory, regardless of whether the word is regular or irregular. This is also one of the ways to help the children to recognise and pronounce familiar, irregular

words (Wren, 2000). Irregular words are words that are spelt differently to the way its sound. This is because English pronunciation of the words is not consistent with how the word is spelt, such as the words ‘one’ and ‘once’. It can be sound as /w/ /u/ /n/, but English does not have the exact /w/ sound that can represent the letter ‘O’ in one and once. Thus, both are considered as irregular words and are learned as sight-word vocabulary. This lexical knowledge develops throughout a reader's life depending on the reader's experiences and exposure to reading. The children might struggle at first, but as time goes by, they will eventually recognise and correctly pronounce the sight words through experience with reading texts, and also feedback from teachers.

Below are other components that help to develop the decoding skill in Wren's reading framework.

#### **4.3.3.1 Phoneme awareness**

Phoneme awareness is a part of phonological awareness. It involves the skill of identifying and manipulating individual speech sounds within words (phonemes). Research has shown that children who have a strong phonemic awareness learn to read more efficiently than those who have weak phonemic awareness, and its absence is a common cause for reading difficulty (Scarborough, 2001; Shanahan, 2005). Children who can identify the first sound in a word have understood that words contain phonemes and reciting all phonemes in a word show that they are fully aware of the process (Stuart & Stainthorp, 2016). There are two essential skills in phoneme awareness for beginning readers, which are blending and segmenting sounds. As for blending, it is a skill where the children need to blend individual spoken sounds into words. For example, k-a-t is ‘cat’. Advancing in blending skills will help children to read fluently in reading texts. The segmenting skill is about segmenting the spoken words into individual sounds. For example, the segmenting of the word ‘phonics’ would be broken down into f-o-n-i-ks. Children who acquire phoneme awareness are advantaged because they can relate the relationship between phonemes and graphemes (letters) patterns that usually represent speech sounds in written language (Stuart & Stainthorp, 2016). They also learn to spell more efficiently as compared to those who have difficulty in spelling (Moats, 2010). It should also be noted that phonemic awareness is different from phonics. Phonics is a teaching approach, whereas phoneme awareness is a competence. More explanation of phonics will be discussed in Section 2.6.

### **4.3.3.2 Knowledge of the alphabetic principle**

Not all languages have an alphabet. Languages like Korean, Japanese, Chinese and Arabic have symbols that represent syllables instead of Roman script. Bahasa Malaysia uses Roman scripts/alphabets, but the difference lies in the individual phonemes (sounds) that represent the alphabets. For example, in English the letters ‘c’ and ‘k’ represent the same sound /k/, but in Bahasa Malaysia, ‘c’ is sounded as ‘/cha/’ and ‘k’ is ‘/k/’. As a result, it is important for students to understand that although English has the same orthographic writing as Bahasa Malaysia (for example), the English language itself still has its own individual letter sounds. More information on English orthography will be discussed in Section 2.6.

### **4.3.3.3 Letter knowledge**

Letter knowledge is fundamental to learning English reading. Children must be able to identify the letters in different fonts and type cases and the letter name itself, and they must be able to discriminate between the individual letters so there will be a meaningful relationship between the letter symbols and the sound representation (SEDL, 2000). They also should have learned to master the skills of penmanship in order to write the letters accordingly. For example, English has 26 letters and each of them have upper case and lower-case forms.

### **4.3.3.4 Concept about print**

Giving children exposure to the concept of printed books and text is also fundamental in helping children to read. In the early stages, children might be interested in pictures that appear on the pages and focus their attention on them. As they grow up and gain more experience with printed material, they will shift their attention to the pages that feature the text. Children who are exposed to books usually know that the book should be read from beginning to end and hold them the right-side-up. They also realise that the text is read from left to right, and from top to bottom, depending on the language of the text. This is usually influenced by their home environment, where they observe how adults read, and they later adopt a similar pattern as they grow older.

#### 4.3.4 Scarborough's (2001) Reading Rope

Another way to illustrate how reading develops and what constitutes reading comprehension is through Scarborough's (2001) Reading Rope. Scarborough's framework drew attention to the same components as Wren's. However, she gave more attention to the process represented by each of the strands. She simplified the word recognition components by focussing on three threads: phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition.

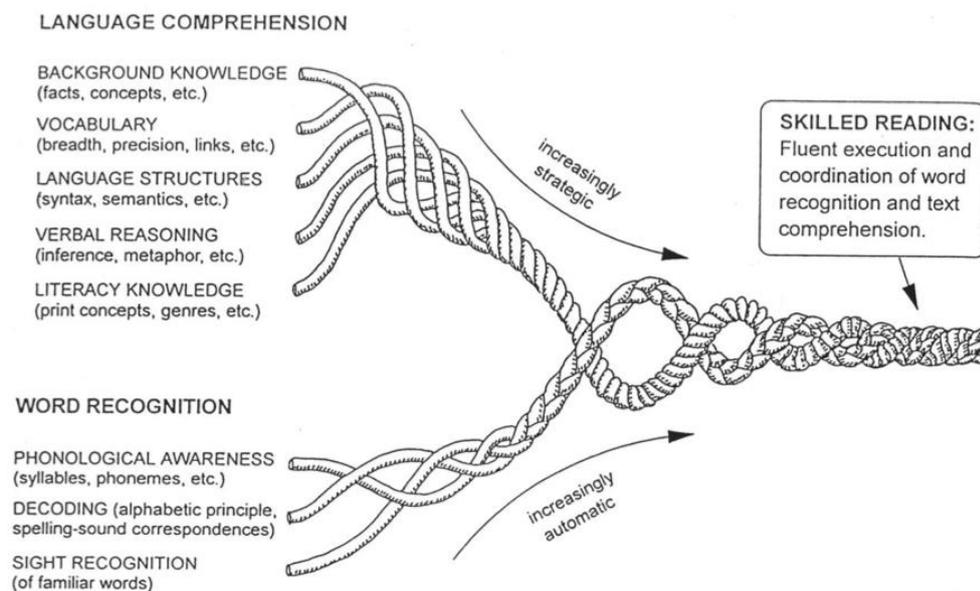


Figure 4-3: Scarborough's (2001) Reading Rope

Scarborough argues that most children who have problems in learning to read in the early years have weak development in word recognition strands. It will be difficult for children to grasp the alphabetic principle if they are unable to recognise the sounds (phonemes) presented in written words. She proposed that word recognition components will develop automatically as long as the children understand that letters produce sounds and know how to manipulate these letters and sounds in the written words. On the other hand, language comprehension will also increase strategically as the reader experiences more exposure through the learning process which contributes to become a skilled reader. Scarborough (2001) asserts that most children can easily acquire the word recognition process and they can focus on the comprehension process afterwards.

### 4.3.5 Findings from National Reading Panels (2000) in the US

In addition to the frameworks and models discussed above, it is also worth paying attention to a report published by the National Reading Panels (2000) as part of a National Institute of Children Health and Human Development (NICHD) funded project that was formed to assess and review the status of research-based knowledge on effective approaches to the teaching of reading for children (see NRP, 2000). The panels conducted a literature review in related published journals and concluded that children need to develop five important elements in order to become skilled readers. These elements consist of (i) phonemic awareness, (ii) phonics skills, (iii) oral reading fluency, (iv) vocabulary, and (v) comprehension. They also found that phonemic awareness is the most significant predictor to successful reading and children will have a problem with their reading and spelling if phonemic awareness is not developed. The evidence from the literature also proposed that phonemic awareness should be taught systematically and explicitly until the children can grasp the idea that words that we use for speaking are made up from smaller speech sounds, and these sounds are related to the letters of the alphabet.

Below (*see Table 4-1*) are details of the reading components suggested by NRP in enhancing reading proficiency.

**Table 4-1: Reading components suggested by NRP to enhance reading proficiency**

<b>Reading components/ Terminology</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Phonemic awareness</b>	Knowledge of, and capacity to manipulate, the smallest distinct sounds (phonemes) in spoken words
<b>Phonics</b>	Learning and using the relationships between sounds and letter-symbols to sound out (decode) written words
<b>Fluency</b>	The ability to read accurately, quickly and expressively: a fluent reader is able to focus on reading for meaning.
<b>Vocabulary</b>	The words children need to know in order to comprehend and communicate oral vocabulary is the words children recognise or use in listening and speaking. Reading vocabulary is the words children recognise or use in reading and writing.
<b>Comprehension</b>	Extracting and constructing meaning from written text using knowledge of words, concepts, facts, and ideas

Based on the model and frameworks above, it is important to note that in order to become a skilled reader, there are two domains that teachers and practitioners need to acknowledge: a word recognition and a language comprehension process. However, the literature suggests that neither process is sufficient on its own and, therefore, both should be taught not only separately but also in an integrated fashion later on. Nonetheless, although the models and frameworks above suggest the importance of phonemic awareness and attention to decoding for early reading, there have been controversies about the way in which reading should be taught and developed.

#### **4.4 The reading wars**

Due to the importance of reading, debates on how reading should be taught are always at the centre of education reform and syllabus implementation (National Reading Panel, 2000). Contrasting approaches, such as the whole language approach and phonics approaches, have received considerable attention regarding their effectiveness in developing reading skills in children in their early years. Proponents from each side claim that theirs are more engaging and effective in helping children to read, especially during the glorious years of the whole-language approach favoured in the 1980s which was later taken over by the phonics approach (see Pearson, 2004).

##### **4.4.1 Whole-language approach**

By definition, the 'whole-language approach' is a method of teaching children to read by recognising words as whole pieces of language. This approach which also known as the look-say approach, sight-word approach, and basal reading approach, gained its recognition during the era of Piaget's cognitive development theory (Johnston & Watson, 2014). Piaget's theory proposes that children have different developmental stages, and that children are actively able to construct their own knowledge (favouring a constructivist theory of learning). Although this theory resonates with the development of logical thinking, it has been adapted into reading practices due to the change of child-centred education philosophy in this particular period (Johnston & Watson, 2014). There is no definite definition of what the whole-language approach constitutes as its proponents agreed that it is more than just a method, an approach or even a practice (Altwerger et al., 1987).

Goodman (1986) saw the approach as ‘a set of beliefs’ that occur in a language-learning classroom. These beliefs are driven by the philosophy that language is used for communication and to derive meaning from oral and written works (Clarke, 1987). Therefore, language should be learned through a natural context and children should be exposed to and taught it as a whole rather than in pieces. Watson (1989) asserts that all of the language system should be intact in terms of the syntax, meaning and semantics in order to enable natural learning. ‘Natural’ in this case would describe the setting of the learning classroom, where the children can use the language freely without any restrictions or syllabus.

The influence of this approach can be seen through several remarks from established researchers and academicians during that time such as Kenneth Goodman (1982), James Britton (1970) and Shirley Heath (1983). The works of these individuals stressed the significance of active engagement between the reader and the text through social interaction within meaningful and integrated contexts into the classroom. From the language-learning perspective, the whole-language advocates propose that language is intact and whole. ‘Whole’ in this context can be well-defined as whole literature text without ‘any adaption, [or being] abridged or segmented’ (Shaw, 1991; Moustafa, 1993; Stahl & Miller, 1989; Jeynes & Littell, 2000) in order to preserve the authenticity of the reading materials. It is crucial to expose the children to meaningful contexts through the text as this exposure brings children to language more naturally (Stahl & Miller, 1989). As such, the objective of the lesson would not only cover reading as a stand-alone skill but would integrate more skills within the lesson. For example, children should also develop other necessary language skills such as listening, speaking and writing (Anderson et al. 1985; Rupp, 1986). Lamb and Best (1990) encourage teachers to integrate these skills as this would maximise the learning time of the children while exposing them to the many forms of language.

Other than that, the curriculum of the whole-language approach must be language-oriented and student-centred in order to be effective. A language-oriented classroom deals with a learning environment that offers abundant exposure to language learning either through oral communication or printed texts. The printed texts can be as simple as newspapers, magazines, short stories or even prints from the children’s environment (i.e. candy wrappers and road signs) (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1988). This will be the pathway where

the children can connect their prior knowledge with the resources available around them, thus helping them relate to the reading. By trying to engage the children's prior knowledge, it opens up more opportunities for the children to take control of the curriculum and learning. Whole-language advocates, such as Krashen (2002) and Goodman (1989) argue that this results in more active participation in the classroom with peers as they will be sharing their thoughts and ideas about the materials that they have read.

Since the whole-language approach is not a pedagogy, there are no guidelines on how to conduct it in the classroom and each whole-language class will be different (Goodman, 1986). However, through enough exposure and experience, teachers would be able to recognise the strength of this approach in order to apply it in the classroom. From the teaching perspective, the teacher should act as a facilitator, classroom researcher, participant, resource person and listener who is supervising the children in the classroom. This is due to the principle that reading materials should be decided by the children with the guidance of the teacher. This democratic environment around the children and the teacher is established in order to enable collaboration in setting up suitable goals for teaching and learning. This explanation reflects Goodman's (1989) assurances that whole-language teachers design children's learning experiences based on the backgrounds and experiences of the learners as this will be the bridge between the students and the outside world.

For example, Heath's (1983) book on 'Ways with Words: Language, life and work in communities and classroom' recorded her ethnographic research on two different small communities, Trackton and Road Ville. She observed a classroom ran by Mrs Jullian (a pseudonym) who was given 19 black first-grade children identified as 'potential failures' by the school before they had even started any formal lessons. She nurtured the children through classroom interaction, bringing the students' home experiences inside the classroom, and gave the students the authority to choose their reading. As a result, 18 out of 19 children improved their reading proficiency (Heath, 1983, p. 284). What she achieved with the children was arguably a living proof of how this approach works in a classroom, and this has become one of the most successful examples of a whole-language classroom.

All in all, the whole-language principles promote learner-centeredness and aim to develop the children to be independent learners and readers. It emphasises motivation and positive,

relevant experiences for the learner, making use of texts and language in real-life situations. This is also one of the reasons why whole language is embedded in most communicative language teaching (CLT) practice, especially in the second-language classroom (Fukada, 2018). Further discussion regarding the CLT practices will be discussed in section 2.9.

#### **4.4.2 The phonics approach**

Phonics is defined as the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken words (Chall, 1996; Ehri et al., 2001; Hempenstall & Buckingham, 2016; Kilpatrick, 2017). It can also be represented as an approach to teaching reading and spelling that emphasises the relationship between speech sounds and their representation in print, especially when it involves early reading instruction (Moats, 2010). The phonics approach focuses on the decoding skill, systematically (Ehri et al., 2001), and favours the teaching of reading synthetically, where children learn the sounds of the alphabet and adopt a bottom up approach. It involves grapheme-phoneme correspondence, pronunciation and blending to create the word in reading (Lewis & Ellis, 2006).

Although phonics can be a good starting point to learn how to read, 'unless you have phonemic awareness, it is impossible to gain much from the phonics instruction' (Harrison, 2003, p. 41). Phonemic awareness deals with the recognition of the sounds of phonemes (Johnson & Goswami, 2010). Children should be able to distinguish that letter b has a /b/ sound, which is different from letter p as in the /p/ sound. When they hear the word 'cat', they should be able to hear /k/ /@/ /t/. If the child can manipulate 'cat' into 'mat', 'pat' and 'bat', it shows that she/he has developed a good phonemic awareness skill. Playing with words, rhyming, manipulating sounds for effect and singing a song would be typical activities in the early-years setting to introduce and develop the sounds through a story, song and rhymes within the natural environment. If the children cannot hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words, they would face difficulty in learning how to identify the sounds with letters and letter patterns as part of a decoding practice (Serna, 2006).

Blending and segmenting activities should also be conducted during this stage. The blending skill is the skill that helps children read the printed word: in other words, blending is for reading (Glazzard & Stokoe, 2017). When practising this skill, teachers need to

encourage the children to say each phoneme sequentially until they are able to make an automatic link between phonemes and targeted words. Segmenting is the contrast activity to blending. Segmenting is the ability to split up the word into individual phonemes. The development of segmenting skills is also a way to develop spelling skills. ‘When children are developing their confidence as writers in early stages of writing, the focus should not be on producing correct spellings but simply on making a phonetically plausible attempt’ (ibid., p. 48).

Analytic phonics refers to the method of phonics teaching which in the main avoids sounding-out words, particularly in the initial stages of learning, and instead focuses on inferring sound-symbol relationships from sets of words (Clark, 2013). Simply put, the children will not pronounce certain letters in isolation but recognise the common sounds used in a set of words that is being studied (Torgeson et al, 2006). As Johnston & Watson (2004, p. 329) explain:

*Children learn letter sounds in the context of words that they have been taught to recognise by sight; the letters are generally taught first of all in the initial position of words and then the children’s attention is drawn to letters in all positions of words.*

Analytic phonics follows the whole-to-part approach, which in many respects contradicts the synthetic phonics approach (Torgeson, et al, 2006; Goswami, 2005). The focus in analytic phonics starts with initial sounds, moving to middle sounds and final sounds (Johnston & Watson, 2005). First, the teacher introduces whole words to the students and then points out the letter and sounds that are similar. Through exposing learners to words with the same initial sound, e.g. ‘cat’, ‘cook’, ‘call’ or the same final sound, ‘park’, ‘pack’, ‘back’, for example, it is hoped that the children become phonologically aware of the /k/ sound in the initial and final positions of the words. Emphasis on larger reading units such as rimes and syllables can be introduced at the next stage in an analytic phonics instructional sequence.

Wyse & Goswami (2008) argue that analytic phonics might be better suited to the English language than synthetic phonics. This is because the English language is too complex for the effective use of synthetic phonics on an exclusive basis due to its orthographic inconsistency of the alphabetic system and complicated phonological syllable structures

(Wyse & Goswami, 2008). Wyse and Goswami (2008) propose that the children should be taught larger units rather than solely concentrating on the phoneme and grapheme levels. Words should be divided into the initial consonant (onset, which includes the initial consonant sound) and the end string (rime, which includes the vowel plus any final consonant phonemes). For instance, 'chain', 'chair', 'chance' have /ch/ for the onset, and 'brink', 'drink', 'blink' have /ink/ as the rime. Words that share the same rime are also rhyming words. Children are taught to recognize that by changing the onset a whole family of words can be learned that share the same rime and, in many instances, the same spelling pattern for the rime.

However, the rime may have more than one spelling. For instance, the rime /eit/ can be spelled as 'ate' or 'ait'. However, these alternative spelling patterns form groups of rhyming words with the same spellings, (i.e., gate, hate, mate; bait, gait and wait). The critics of synthetic phonics also argue that children are believed to have an innate sensitivity to rime unit sound-spelling correspondence in the early stages of their word reading (Coyne et al., 2012). Following an analytics phonics approach, children, however, have to learn a large number of word patterns in order for them to recognise all sound and letter combinations (Goswami, 2005).

In spite of all of these arguments for analytic phonics, according to Torgerson, et al. (2007), there is no strong evidence that suggests that one type of phonics approach is better than another. The most essential point is that the approach applied should be systematic in nature (Castle, et al, 2018; Kennedy, Dunphy & Dwyer, 2012).

Phonics instruction therefore serves as a foundation for reading, but many have argued that it is not sufficient for it to be carried out in isolation. Critics of phonics argued that most phonics lessons are conducted in isolation, and in addition, they kill the enjoyment in reading when the children have to sound each of the words they read (Manning & Kamii, 2000; Wyse & Styles, 2007).

The critics of phonics also argue that phonics interferes with reading comprehension (Krashen, 2002; Wyse & Style, 2007; Wyse & Goswami, 2008). They justified their arguments in stressing that reading activity is a meaning-making process and by using phonics as part of a reading lesson, it excludes the comprehension part of the reading

activity itself. This is because most of phonics activities revolve around blending and segmenting activities (Wyse & Style, 2007; Wyse & Goswami, 2008) and sounding out the letters would not make the students understand the text. Krashen (2002) further emphasizes that children gain so much from reading as they will acquire the vocabulary knowledge, writing styles, grammar competence, and spelling, which are the fundamental aspects of Comprehension Hypothesis theory. The Comprehension Hypothesis theory claims that ‘we learn to read by understanding message on the page’ (*Ibid*, pg. 1). Furthermore, using phonics can be too complicated for the English alphabetic system since it is inconsistent and has a complicated phonological syllable structure (Wyse & Goswami, 2008).

Apart from comprehension and the nature of the language, a phonics lesson is claimed to be potentially boring and might turn children off reading (Meyer, 2001). A phonics lesson requires a regular repetition and drilling of the targeted sounds just so the children are able to link the sounds with the letter names provided. Through this activity, the critics feel that the process is neglecting the use of authentic reading materials that the children should enjoy during the lesson. On top of that, teachers are teaching the phonics skill in isolation, thus neglecting other reading skills such as vocabulary, fluency and comprehension, which are necessary to be embedded throughout the lesson (NRP, 2000).

Another criticism is related to the types of compulsory screening check assessment conducted in order to evaluate children’s literacy progress and their knowledge in grapheme-phoneme correspondences (Darnell, Solity & Wall, 2017). The screening check used in England and Wales aims to ‘identify children who have not learned to decode using phonics by the end of Year 1’ (DfE, 2012b, pg.5). The critics claim that this test has already pushed away the teaching and learning of creativity in the lesson as teachers are more focussed on preparing the children to pass the assessment. A report from the National Foundation of Education Research (NFER) on teachers’ perceptions about the assessment showed negative views from teachers explaining that the assessment did not represent the actual level of students’ reading ability and did not determine the reading standard achieve by students at the school level (Walker, et. al., 2015). This resonates with the concerns expressed by Davis (2012) and Clark (2013) who question if the assessment is valid and measures what it actually aims to measure.

However, Start and Stainthorp (2016) emphasise that this happens when there is a discrepancy between theory and practice in the classroom. They believe it can be improved by closing the gap between practice and how the theory should be applied in the classroom, thereby continuing to empower the teacher's cognition in order to conduct the practices. Hempenstall (2016) also proposes that phonics should be taught alongside other reading components as per the NRP's suggestions to include phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension in daily lessons.

Recently, a systematic literature review by Castle, Rastle and Nation (2018) presents additional, interesting evidence from research on reading. They explain that the objective of their literature review was to identify and summarise the findings on reading research from published empirical research. They examined studies and reports published from 1955 until 2018 looking into the results of different teaching methods for reading and the most effective ways to develop skilled readers. The review not only looked at early reading and phonics, but it also covered other aspects for children to learn in order to become expert readers (see Castle et al., 2018). Castle, Rastle and Nation (2018, p. 38) also concluded that there are two main reasons why there are still concerns around using the phonics approach in classroom practices: '(1) practitioners' limited knowledge about the nature of writing systems means that they are not equipped to understand why phonics works for alphabetic systems, and (2) the lack of exposure of these research findings to the lay public make them unaware of what has been found thus far'. Thus, they propose for future teaching and research to acknowledge the importance of knowledge of English orthography and that this should be included in pre-service teacher training programmes. They also called for a balanced literacy instruction to be implemented that suits the learning developments of different children. They hope that their extensive review 'will contribute to ending these reading wars, so that a further examination of the status of this debate 15 years hence will not be required' (p. 40).

## 4.5 The contribution of phonics and orthography in the teaching of English reading

Since evidence has shown the positive impact of phonics instruction, it is important to understand why phonics has been considered by some to be the ‘game-changer’ in the teaching of reading, especially to enable teachers to recognise the approach as one of the ways to help them create skilled readers in later years.

### 4.5.1 The complexity of the English language orthography

Researchers have pointed out that one of the reasons why phonics is important for English reading is due to the representation of the English orthography itself (Castle et al., 2018; Kilpatrick, 2015; Johnston & Watson, 2014; Stuart & Stainthorp, 2016).

Orthography, according to Kilpatrick (2015, p. 82) can refer to:

- i) The correct manner in which specific written words are spelled (e.g., Malaysia is a country, but Malaisia is not)
- ii) The writing system associated with a particular spoken language (English orthography, French orthography, Korean orthography)
- iii) Conventions of spelling, i.e. which patterns are permitted and/or which patterns are common (e.g., -ck usually ends a word rather than -k or -c alone)
- iv) An awareness of common patterns in words that are consistent across words but are inconsistent when using a letter-by-letter phonics conversion process, such as -ight, -alk, or -ing.

In summary, orthography refers to the patterns and principles by which spoken language is correctly represented in writing (ibid.). Having a regular one-to-one mapping between phonemes (sound) and graphemes (letters) is considered as shallow orthography. Languages such as Turkish, Finnish and Spanish have a direct orthography that represents exactly as how it is spoken and written, whereas irregular transcriptions and spelling such as in English are considered deep orthography. The English alphabet consists of 26 letters, which represent approximately 44 speech sounds, and phonics is the relationship between these letters and sounds. The individual sounds are known as phonemes, whereas the letters

are called the graphemes. The inconsistency of the letters and sounds is one of the reasons why English is considered a deep orthography language.

As a result, children who are learning English take longer to master reading compared to other children who are learning to read in Finnish, Spanish and Greek (Seymour, Aro & Erskine, 2003). Thus, Stuart and Stainthorp (2016) suggest that beginner readers should understand the relationship between an orthographic system and spoken language in a writing system in order to help them with reading. Similarly, Castle et al. (2018) encourage the audience to understand the nature of the English writing system in order to understand the function of phonics instruction in learning to read. They further exemplify how alphabets are codes that need to be cracked by children, and it is impossible to do so without a strategy. This strategy depends on the language that they learn, and, for English, they need to know the relationship between sounds and letter-symbols. Since English is well known as a language harder to learn and write, it is important for phonics to be introduced early, explicitly, systematically and regularly (Buckingham, 2016).

#### **4.5.2 The cognitive process of the brain and its contribution to reading**

Other than the English orthography, research on the cognitive process of the brain is also enlightening about reading development. Over the years, research on reading has been gathered from educational researchers, teachers, students, and classroom research perspectives. However, it is also helpful to attempt to answer the question of how reading is developed from neuroscience research, which offers different interpretations and evidence about the reading process.

Reading and speaking are two different skills sets. Although speaking can be learned through context, reading cannot. This is because the human brain is not wired automatically for the reading process to take place if the children are only exposed to printed texts (Wolf, et al. 2016). Learning to read changes the brain. In order to make the connection between what is read (letters), sound, and comprehension (meaning), it requires a physical neurological connection between three related areas in the brain (Taylor et al., 2013). It is common for skilled readers to create such a connection, but not all children have the privilege to be able to make these connections automatically whenever they read, especially struggling readers (Rupley et al., 2009).

Research by Yoncheva et al. (2015) shows that there was an increased activity of the brain related to reading when the participants were exposed to phonics instruction as compared to the whole word reading. They conducted the study in order to look at how the brain responds to phonics and whole word reading instruction. The participants were trained to learn through both approaches first. Then, they were given a different set of words in a reading test while the brain waves were monitored. They found out that a rapid response from the brain to these newly learned words was due to how the words were learned before. By using letter-sound instruction (phonics) to teach the words, the neural activity was biased toward the left side of the brain, which relates to visual and language regions, whereas for words that were learned through whole language instruction, there was activity on the right side of the brain. They further elaborated that a skilled reader will show strong neural activity in the left side of the brain, which is absent in struggling readers (p. 32).

Recent research from the field of cognitive development has shown a promising result that phonics improves not only reading accuracy but also comprehension (Taylor, Davis & Rastle, 2017). This research was done by administering a reading intervention to adults by observing their behavioural and neural activities when presented with different reading tasks which comprised of print and sound activities (phonics) and print and meaning activities (whole language). The result showed that the participants who underwent the meaning-driven method had more brain activity when the reading focuses on comprehension compared to the sound-related method's participants. Their findings also suggest that systematic phonics teaching not only improves spelling but is also important for developing reading comprehension in early reading.

Thus, it seems that different approaches have different impacts on the cognitive development of the brain and the ability to read. By using the phonics approach, not only is the language region of the brain (left hemisphere) activated but the student is prepared to become a skilled reader (Yoncheva et al., 2015). This is because our brain learns to read by identifying one sound at a time. Once it recognises the sounds, it speeds up the recognition process and perceives whole words. When we become fluent readers, we recognise the words faster, but the brain is still converting the letters that we read into sound (Shaywitz, 1996).

## 4.6 Controversies in the teaching of reading: history and development

In recent years, almost all English-speaking countries, such as the UK, the United States, Australia and Canada, have investigated the best way to teach reading in response to the sudden decline in the levels of literacy and reading from year to year. This situation has alarmed many governments, who have sought solutions to curb the problem, knowing how this issue would affect the countries in the long run if they continue to neglect the problem.

### 4.6.1 The development of literacy policies in English-speaking countries

In the UK, the phonics approach was recommended through the well-known ‘Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading’, simply known as the ‘Rose Report’ (2006). This review was conducted by Jim Rose, who investigated the best methods to teach early reading. Rose (2006) advocated the use of synthetic phonics. The recommendation was based on the Clackmannanshire study, which produced positive results in relation to the use of the phonics approach in 13 Primary 1 classes of children around the age of five in Clackmannanshire (Johnston & Watson, 2005, p. 16). In the study, the children were arranged into three main groups with different phonics interventions. The findings revealed that synthetic phonics had a positive impact on the children’s progress since they were able to read new words through a strong blending skill, which they were able to apply independently in the future. Johnston and Watson (2005) concluded that

*Overall, we can conclude that a synthetic phonics programme, as a part of the reading curriculum, has a major and long-lasting effect on children’s reading and spelling attainment. Indeed, these skills were found to be increasing many years after the end of the programme. It is evident that the children have learnt a technique that they can use for themselves, that they have learnt a self-teaching technique.*

*(Johnston & Watson, 2005, p. 70)*

However, Wyse and Goswami (2007) argue that the Rose Report was based on non-empirical research. This is because the report published by Johnston and Watson’s (2005) study is considered as a report for the government website instead of a research paper (p. 694). Also, there are also some inconsistencies with the methodology of the research which make it questionable (Wyse & Style, 2007).

Despite that, according to the premise of Johnston and Watson's study, the Rose Report (2006), which is the main reference point for the country's early literacy programme, promoted synthetic phonics as the sole approach for the teaching of early reading for children in the UK. This review led to the publication of 'Letters & Sounds', a phonics scheme resource (DfES, 2007) to support the teaching of phonics knowledge and skills for early reading to young learners in Key Stage 1 for children aged from five to seven years old. However, Jolliffe & Waugh (2012) argues that the DfES's objective in making sure children can read by the aged of seven years old (the end of Key Stage 1) was rather ambitious since it is obvious that there will be mixed-ability children in any classroom which would present diverse reactions to the applied approach. Thus, overgeneralising the children's reading abilities and achievements based on test results is not reasonable (Jolliffe, 2012).

Across the Atlantic in the US, the reading policy has been going back and forth between the phonics and whole language approaches since 1980 (Davenport & Jones, 2005). In the early 1980s to 1990s, the whole-language philosophy dominated policy and was implemented in all states as it fitted the political climate of progressive education and student-centred classrooms (*ibid.*). Yet, it was only temporary due to poor reading results and lack of evidence to support the effectiveness of whole language in the classroom, especially for at-risk students (*ibid.*, p. 53). The shift towards the phonics approach is apparent from the US National Reading Panel (NRP) on reading instruction, carried out by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NRP, 2000). It covers 'the research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read' (NRP, 2000, p. 1). One of the questions that they tried to address was on the effectiveness of the phonics approach as compared to a non-phonics programme classroom. The conclusion derived from a meta-analysis study (NRP, 2000), which stated that 'specific systematic phonics programs are all significantly more effective than non-phonics programs' (NRP, 2000, p. 93).

As in the US, the Australian Department of Education went to considerable lengths to establish a reading practice that would benefit the children. This became a concern after the government received an open letter from academics and concerned parties who were worried about the inconsistencies in reading instruction that were being practiced in Australian schools. They requested an independent review to examine the research

evidence relating to the teaching of reading and the extent to which current practices were based on evidence (Chen & Derewianka, 2009). Consequently, the Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (NITL) was established and published a report in 2005 concluding that more emphasis should be given to teacher education and professional development for teaching early literacy (NITL, 2005). Additionally, the report strongly recommended the use of a phonics-based teaching method as it is proven to give the best opportunity for children to learn to read and write in the early years of schooling (Nelson & Benner, 2005). The report cautioned against the exclusive use of the whole-language approach to the teaching of reading and finds it to be ‘...not in the best interests of children, particularly those experiencing reading difficulties’ (p.12 of the report). Coltheart and Prior (2006) also emphasise that the use of whole language is not the best instruction to be used in the classroom as children need to acquire ‘a basic building block’ which includes letter knowledge, phonological awareness and also alphabetic principles.

It is clear, therefore, that from the turn of the millennium, governments in the English-speaking world (UK, US and Australia) have supported the implementation of the phonics approach in early years settings. However, there is also growing recognition that it is important to have ‘a range of effective strategies and [knowledge about] how to apply them’ (Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005, p. 14).

#### **4.7 The purpose of reading in L2**

With the rise of English language’s status as an international and world language, the demand to be proficient in English language has become an imperative, especially for developing countries. This is due to the need for the language for academic and specific purposes (Abrar-ul-Hassan & Fazel, 2018) and communication in international trade (Marlina, 2018). English has also been regarded as a *lingua franca* in certain countries as they use the language to speak to each other, regardless of their own native language (Rose, 2018). In fact, most English speakers from non-native countries nowadays are ‘bilingual and multilingual speakers of English who should be viewed as *users* rather than *learners*’ (Marlina & Xu, 2018, p. 1). This is because some of them grew up using the language and in fact, English has becoming their first language at home although having a different

native language. Among other skills in English, reading is one of the most important that need to be accomplished by second-language speakers.

Reading in a second language, however, can serve multiple purposes. As Grabe (2009) explains, due to different purposes, ‘...is it not easy to define second language reading as a single notion or a unitary ability’ (p. 1). In fact, different purposes for reading would require different approaches to learning. For example, reading for academic purposes would include formal skills such as skimming and scanning for information, the ability to critique and evaluate reading texts and for basic comprehension. Whereas, reading for general understanding is the most basic purpose of reading but might not be the easiest to teach. This type of reading requires the reader to have an extensive vocabulary, the ability to recognise most of the words in the texts, have a good reading speed, and at the same time develop an appropriate reading comprehension level as they read the text (Grabe, 2009; Nuttall, 2005).

#### **4.8 The differences between first language and second-language reading**

According to Grabe and Jiang (2018), second-language reading differs from first-language reading based on three elements: (1) linguistics and processing differences, (2) individual and experiential differences, and (3) sociocultural and institutional differences. For linguistic and processing differences, the amount of linguistic knowledge of L2 learners is much smaller compared to L1 learners. Grabe and Jiang (2018) argue that this is due to the early exposure that L1 learners receive from their surroundings, and also that they would have heard and learnt most of the target language through speaking. L2 learners will not have developed this linguistic knowledge in the second language. This is when the transferred skills from their first language takes effect in the process of learning the second language. Extensive research regarding the L1 transfer process has been explored over the years (Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Grabe, 2009; Koda & Reddy, 2008) and has established a set of findings. From the findings, the transferable skills include cognitive skills, reading strategies, goals, and expectations (Grabe & Stroller, 2002; Nuttall, 2005). This means that the transferable skills not only involve a cognitive process but also psychological aspects of learning the reading language itself. However, this process will also be strongly influenced by reading ability in the first language and the student’s L2 language proficiency (Grabe & Jiang, 2018). There is also a list of other differences occurring in

linguistics and processing between L1 and L2 readers highlighted by Grabe and Stroller (2002, p. 42) below (see Grabe & Stroller, 2002, for detailed explanation);

- i) Differing amounts of lexical, grammatical and discourse knowledge at initial stages of L1 and L2
- ii) Greater metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness in L2 settings
- iii) Differing amounts of exposure to L2 reading
- iv) Varying linguistic differences across any two languages
- v) Varying L2 proficiencies as a foundation for L2 reading
- vi) Varying language transfer influences
- vii) Interacting influence of working with two languages

In addition to the above list, the individual and experiential differences between L1 and L2 readers are affected by the different processes of the individual learners. Grabe and Stroller (2002, p. 55) identify four differences that can influence L2 students' reading comprehension:

- i) The different levels in L1 reading abilities
- ii) The reading motivation levels possessed by the L2 students
- iii) The different kind of texts that they encounter in their L2 context
- iv) The different language resources for the L2 readers

They further explain that the level of students' L1 reading ability will influence their L2 reading. If the students are still weak in their L1 reading, they will not be able to transfer much skill from L1 to L2 reading. Other than that, the motivation and confidence levels of the students can also be determining factors. They might have some conflict with their self-esteem, their academic goals and their personal background as a learner. Other than that, the materials used in the L2 reading setting can also shape students' experiences, through the exposure to different kind of authentic texts and their familiarity with bilingual dictionaries. All of these points show that if teachers and researchers are not aware of these differences, it is difficult to apply appropriate strategies in the classroom in order to develop reading in L2.

Also, the socio-cultural and institutional differences can contribute to L1 and L2 reading development. The students' cultural background serves as additional baggage that has to be acknowledged and addressed whenever they learn a new language. This is because students who come from a background where little emphasis is placed on reading may not consider reading to be such an important skill. Other than that, L2 education institutions have different expectations when it comes to acquiring a second language. Some of them are more focused on speaking and communication skills. This might be due to the need for fluent English speakers in the job sector, where most of the time is spent dealing with social interaction, meetings, and discussion. Other education institutions may put more emphasis on an exam-oriented syllabus, attaching less importance to the ability of the students to learn and use the English language naturally outside the classroom setting.

Based on the points above, it can be concluded that the L2 reading process is not only affected by the internal factors of the learners but also is shaped by external factors in their social-cultural context. However, it is also important to note that, these differences can be overcome as L2 reading proficiency will increase through time (Grabe & Jiang, 2018). Grabe and Jiang (2018, p. 5) also conclude that the 'result of research on the component skills that support reading comprehension will likely apply across both L1 and L2 learner groups', as both experiences of learning the languages are mutually related to one another.

#### **4.9 The influence of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the second-language classroom**

The influence of communicative language teaching (CLT) was very much emphasised within ESL settings during the 1980s. This shift of attention from grammar-translation method to communicative language was due to an increased demand for fluent English-language speakers due to the changes in the sociopolitical world which involved commerce, travelling and also politics (H. Rose, 2018). The focus of the grammar-translation method is to teach the students to make grammar-free errors and accurate sentences in learning. This resulted in grammar being taught deductively where teachers mostly presented the grammar rules first and then proceeded with the practice and activity. It also encouraged teacher-centered classrooms in which the teacher is the source of knowledge and did the teaching, and the students would have just listened to the lesson with minimal participation.

However, in order to learn English especially for communication, it requires more than just grammar knowledge. Communication has to be meaningful and purposeful. Because of that, English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners need a different approach to serve the purpose of communication in the target language and improve their ability to use the language communicatively (Nunan, 1991; Loumbourdi, 2018; Wu, 2008). Since the principle of CLT is about using a language to communicate, the learners have to engage in real communication which requires them to be active, pragmatic, authentic and functional for meaningful purposes (Brown, 2000). As a result, the use of authentic materials as a support to learning is an essential requirement in the classroom. These materials provide opportunities to the students to understand the actual language used by native speakers. There is a selection of activities in CLT classrooms which can be developed through attention to spontaneous interaction of everyday usage of the language expression such as doing role-plays, drama, games, projects and also simulation. This will give an opportunity to the learners to practice the language in a supportive environment (Rao, 2002).

Other than that, CLT is also considered a well-rounded approach because one of its underlying principles is to combine all language skills in English into one lesson (reading, writing, listening and speaking). A typical lesson will start with the introduction of a topic using listening and speaking activities. Then, the practice stage will involve reading, and the production stage mostly involves writing tasks, depending on how teachers structure the classroom.

Interestingly, many of the principles of CLT are intertwined with the whole-language approach to reading and literacy. There are commonalities in terms of goals, objectives, language processes and teacher and learner roles (Fukada, 2018; Richards, 2001; refer to *Table 4-2* below).

**Table 4-2: The similarities of principles between CLT and Whole-Language approach**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Communicative Language Teaching</b>	<b>Whole-Language Approach</b>
<b>Goal of instruction</b>	Communicative competence	Reading comprehension
<b>Learning Objective</b>	Interaction between learners and environment	Relates to readers' background knowledge
<b>Language process</b>	Use everyday situation as part of learning activities.	Use of various authentic texts for familiarity
<b>Learner's Roles</b>	Meaning making	Comprehension driven
<b>Teacher's roles</b>	Learner-centered	Facilitator, manager, advisor

Thus, the methodology of teachers who are teaching English as a second language through CLT is influenced by the whole-language approach, and this has impacted on reading pedagogy (Nassaji, 2014). They have been exposed to the approach as English-language learners themselves and later through the pre-service and in-service training for becoming a teacher.

#### **4.10 Research and theoretical perspectives on the phonics approach used in the English as a second/foreign-language classroom**

Most of the reading research conducted for ESL/EFL has been focussing on young children educated in immigrant or immersion settings. In these settings, English is a presence beyond the classroom walls, thus creating more opportunities for the children to be exposed to the language through social interaction and their surroundings (Bruthiaux, 2010). In this case, the children are learning English as their additional language (EAL). Interestingly, a systematic literature review on the effectiveness of reading intervention with English-language learners (ELLs) by Snyder, Witmer and Schmitt (2017) found that phoneme awareness and phonics help children in learning to read in school, but they need additional interventions from teachers in order to help them. Thus, it is important to identify any available research conducted in the ELLs' environments as evidence of the effectiveness of phonics instruction for ELL learners.

Nishanimut et al. (2013) conducted an experimental study to look at the effectiveness of synthetic phonics instruction on literacy skills in English as an additional language in India. The study involved Grade 3 pupils from three underprivileged schools from Karnataka, India. The study aimed at modifying the conventional English phonics teaching by adding the sounds of their native language, Kannada Akshara, together with the sounds of English phonemes. The pupils were divided into three intervention groups: (i) the Samveda Synthetic Phonics Program (SSPP) – which exposed the children to both English sounds and Kannada Akshara sounds, (ii) the Conventional Synthetic phonics programme (CSPP) – which used a typical English phonics scheme, and (iii) the control group which was exposed to rote memorisation and reading aloud in every English lesson. These interventions lasted for five weeks, one hour per lesson every day. The findings showed that pupils who were exposed to SSPP performed even better than the CSPP intervention group, but the CSPP intervention group did a lot better than the control group who were taught by the traditional approach to reading. The study also concluded that ‘children can learn to read using two alphabetic systems where some of the letters sounds look similar but have a different pronunciation’ (ibid., p. 52). This shows that the phonics approach works in a second language classroom when it is conducted systematically and regularly in the English lesson.

Another study conducted by Okumura et al. (2017) also shows interesting findings regarding phonics training and reading ability in English in a foreign language environment. Okumura et al. (2017) conducted a case-study on a Japanese student who had a problem learning English in an EFL setting in Japan. According to their description of the student's ability, she displayed a low level of knowledge of how letters correspond to sounds in English, which hindered her language learning. They carried out interventions in three stages (A-B-B) and compared her progress. For stage A, the student was asked only to read words on the iPad. Then, in stage B, she was taught early reading using synthetic phonics. In the next B stage, she was exposed to the same instruction in B every week. Each practice took 10 minutes per day at home, seven days per week, for one method (A and B), and it took five weeks for each phase to complete the cycle. As a result, the student improved her reading accuracy, and the phonics intervention showed a progressive result in stage B, compared to the whole-language approach during stage A. Although this case study only involved one participant, which the authors admit as a limitation of the

study, it clearly shows that with a phonics intervention, the student was able to progress well with English reading.

Another intervention study took place in Malaysia on the effectiveness of phonics using one of the commercial phonics programmes, 'Jolly Phonics', also in ELF/ESL settings (Jamaludin et al., 2015). Lloyds and Wemham developed this commercial programme in 1992, promoting multisensory and fun activities in the package. The intervention followed a typical procedure involving an experimental test with experimental and control groups. The experimental group were exposed to 90 minutes of English lessons, which comprised of different learning activities within 14 weeks of intervention. Although both groups shared the same level of reading skill in the pre-test assessment, the findings showed distinctive progress in the experimental group. Students in the group were found to employ a structured decoding strategy and were able to read more fluently, compared to the control group. Other than that, by using the Jolly Phonics programme, it seems like they also had improved their vocabulary and comprehension skills. This is the result of having exposure to a lot of new vocabulary, word reading skills and also oral language from the material provided by Jolly Phonics. Although the students were foreign language learners, they were able to respond to the English decoding well and progressed to read more fluently with the help of the phonics programme through the intervention that they went through.

From the studies above, it can be seen that there is a growing interest in the ESL/EFL research field in looking at the effectiveness of phonics instruction. However, there were certain modifications in each of the cases presented, with respect to the phonics approach in L1. This suggests that phonics can be adaptable and adjustable, taking into account first-language background conditions (Kannada, Japanese and Malay) or different writing orthographies and typologies. It can be noticed that the way the interventions were done is similar in that they involved an explicit systematic regulation of everyday practice of the phonics pedagogy itself in the classroom setting. Thus, if this practice can be sustained in any language class, it might help the pupils to learn to read in English fluently.

#### **4.11 The summary of the chapter**

There seems to be a strong rationale for why phonics instruction is needed in English lessons for both first- and second-language learners although the critics of phonics approach do have strong arguments which counter these. The phonics advocates stress the importance of systematic synthetic phonics for early reading due to the complexity of English orthography and the demands on the cognitive process of the brain. Phonics teaching and learning help early readers to crack the written code of the text on a page. On the other hand, phonics critics claim that reading activities involve more than blending, segmenting, and repeating the letters' sounds. They maintain that reading should also involve the development of vocabulary knowledge, writing styles, grammar competence, and spelling. All of these skills will contribute to a meaning-making process. In their view, the main objective of reading is to develop comprehension, and phonics seems to interfere with this process.

It is time to reconcile the present needs of the children and to improve the effectiveness of teaching English reading itself. Phonics has been implemented in the English language syllabus in Malaysia and is part of the early reading approach used by teachers in lower level primary schools. My research objective is not to evidence which reading instruction can accommodate the teaching of reading and early readers. Instead, it focuses on how Malaysian English-language teachers' cognition reflect and adapt to the changes by using phonics instruction in teaching English reading in ESL classrooms and the challenges they face in implementing the phonics instruction in the new English syllabus. This also helps to justify what phonics instruction can bring to the table by having it properly implemented at school level rather than simply looking good in education policies and research papers.

# CHAPTER 5

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Introduction

As outlined in the introduction chapter, since the implementation of the Malaysia Educational Blueprint in 2013, a new primary English syllabus has been introduced for students in Years 1 and 2. Previously, the focus of English in primary school was on communicative learning. However, the objective of the syllabus has partly changed to emphasise early English literacy for early language learners. Due to that, the phonics approach has been embedded alongside the teaching of English reading skills, replacing the whole-language approach that had been used before. This sudden change in teaching reading practice raises concerns about whether the stakeholders involved in curriculum implementation, i.e. the teachers, are ready to adapt to the new approach.

In light of existing research that indicates that teacher cognition, which includes teachers' beliefs, experiences and contextual variables, impacts on their practices (Borg, 2003, 2018; Fives & Buehl, 2008; Pajeras, 1992), this study seeks to investigate the factors that are likely to impact on teachers' implementation of the reforms. As Borg (2012, p. 88) alerts us, without the knowledge and understanding of what teachers do, know, and believe, reform agendas are at risk of having minimal impact on the instructional choice. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of Malaysian primary-school English teachers' cognition in order to inform stakeholders (including policy-makers and the teaching community) about suitable curriculum development and appropriate professional development for teachers in this area.

To operationalise these aims, a set of research questions was formulated. These relate to teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading English, their pedagogical content knowledge in using the phonics approach, and their practices. In addition, the research aims to explore the teachers' experiences in adapting to the phonics approach and the related challenges that they faced. Thus, four research questions were constructed as below:

- i) What are the beliefs and knowledge of the English teachers in Malaysia concerning the teaching of English reading through the phonics approach?
- ii) To what extent and how do English teachers implement the phonics approach in their classroom?
- iii) What are, according to the teachers, the contextual factors that influence their practices in implementing the phonics approach during English language teaching?
- iv) To what extent are the teachers' actual practices congruent with their stated beliefs about the phonics approach and the teaching of English reading?

A mixed method sequential design was employed in order to answer four broad research questions. I collected and analysed the quantitative data (phase 1) from a survey to investigate the views of a large number of participants (teachers) who could not have been involved if the qualitative method alone were used (Bryman, 2016), and to map the territory of their perspectives. Subsequently, in the second phase of the study, qualitative data were collected to probe emerging perspectives from the survey, exploring personal, socio-cultural and contextual views of and influences on the participants (Basit, 2010).

A detailed account of the research paradigm, methodology, methods, procedures for data collection, and data analysis are described below, and the strategies adopted to enhance the quality of this study are discussed. This is followed by comments on issues related to ethical considerations. A reflection on issues and challenges faced throughout this educational study is also addressed as part of the chapter's conclusion.

## 5.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm as defined by Paltridge and Phakiti (2015, p. 15) is ‘the underlying philosophical view of what constitutes knowledge or reality as the researcher seeks to gain an understanding of a particular topic’. Broadly speaking, the ontology and epistemology of the researcher is embedded within the research paradigm. It is based on ontological and epistemological assumptions about reality that shape the way we view and interact with our social world. Traditionally, there are two camps of philosophers: positivism and constructivism. Positivism views reality as singular and as something that can be understood objectively, whereas constructivism views reality from multiple perspectives and as constructed through social interaction (Creswell, 2013; Robson & McCarten, 2017). A ‘paradigm war’ was even reported back in the 1980s, when each side argued that theirs were much better than the other (Gage, 1989). Rather than taking any side, a third paradigm has arisen: pragmatism, which is commonly implemented through mixed methods research (MMR).

Mixed methods and pragmatism are not new concepts (Denscombe, 2014, p. 159). They have been around since the 1980s and have been operationalised and upgraded, receiving prominence in the research field ever since (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). One of the reasons for MMR adoption is due to the needs of data combination (quantitative and qualitative) in order to answer multifaceted research questions and to improve interpretations of how we make sense of the world (ibid.). Pragmatism, in another sense, is generally regarded as the ‘philosophical partner for the mixed method approach’ (Denscombe, 2008, p. 273). To support this connotation, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) conducted a study by asking 13 prominent authors about their philosophical views in which the authors embraced pragmatism as part of MMR. Pragmatism offers a strong emphasis on research questions, communication, and shared meaning-making (Shannon-Baker, 2016). It also views knowledge as being constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and live in (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Most importantly, it deals with ‘what works’ in order to answer the research question. Pragmatism also proposes that ‘research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions’ (ibid.), and ‘there can

be both singular and multiple versions of the truth and reality, sometimes subjective and sometimes objective' (Cohen et al., 2017).

### **5.3 Ontological and epistemological considerations**

Most MMR researchers have moved on from the philosophical debates (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018) in the sense that they do not rely much on the ontological and epistemological issues but want to 'produce a clear pragmatism in their work' (Bryman, 2007, p. 17). To them, their reality is multiple and mutually evolving, based on the research they looked at and how they would arrive at the findings that the research has to offer. Their epistemology is more practical based on what works, and it offers a flexibility in design as long as it follows the guidelines of the adopted typology in MMR (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). It is common for a pragmatist to use survey research in the beginning of the study, followed by a case study utilising interviews and observations to follow up what was found through the survey data (Paltridge & Phakiti (2015, p. 19).

For me, it was hard to position my ontology and epistemology based on the traditional views of research paradigms in order to answer my research questions, and to offer different perspectives through triangulation of perspectives and methods. Since my research was conceived within the pragmatic paradigm and a pragmatist point of view, ontologically I did not bind myself to any system of reality nor my epistemological stance. Instead, I relied much more on the problem and related research questions (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015).

However, I realise that in some respects, I adopted different philosophical stances during each of the research phases. While conducting the quantitative phase, I took a more objective stance, trying to establish 'significant' findings in the data, depending on different correlations. I adopted statistical analysis procedures in line with positivist approaches. Although, during the qualitative phase of being an ethnographer, my data analysis was more interpretive, I also reflected on my own role and acts in the social setting that I was involved in and how this influenced my analysis.

#### 5.4 Methodological stance

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) propose ‘methodological pluralism’ in social research in order to fulfil its purpose of understanding social problems that occur within society. Taking a pragmatic approach in the adoption of MMR, I hoped to gain a holistic view of the issues under consideration. The different types of data obtained from contrasting methods can compensate one another. For example, quantitative data is helpful given that qualitative data typically cannot be generalised, and qualitative data can help to explain the relationships discovered by quantitative data (ibid.).

MMR is a method of integrating two methods (quantitative and qualitative) in ‘which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draw inferences within one single study’ (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007, p. 4). Moving away from the quantitative and qualitative methodology tradition, this third methodological movement, as promoted by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), has gained tremendous recognition due to its flexibility in research design in acquiring the answers for research questions. Researchers should have a clear rationale of why they want to employ such research design rather than adopting a single approach. Above all, it is noted that the literature on the MMR is generic (Creswell, 2009) with little reference to any context within the research field. The researcher therefore has to understand the foundation of MMR and its purposes before adapting the design to her particular field.

On this basis, a mixed method sequential design typology was adopted to set the broad trends of the research issues. As Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018) explain, an explanatory design commonly uses qualitative data to explain the results from the quantitative data. Therefore, for phase 1, a quantitative approach – namely, a survey – is used in order to gain a general overview of teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, and practices about the teaching of reading English using the phonics approach as part of a new syllabus implementation. For phase two, I used ethnographic tools such as teachers’ interviews and observations, to discover the experiences of the English teachers in using the phonics approach through the teaching of reading English over an extended period of time. Ethnography tools like observation and interview have been used to explore the ‘experiences’ of how teachers adapt to the new curriculum and the challenges that they face in employing the phonics approach in the teaching of reading. Throughout the process, it is interesting to find out

how beliefs are translated into practice due to the influence of contextual factors around them. The differences from what was said and done can be captured holistically by positioning myself close to the teachers. *Figure 5-1* maps out the explanatory design I adopted in my study:

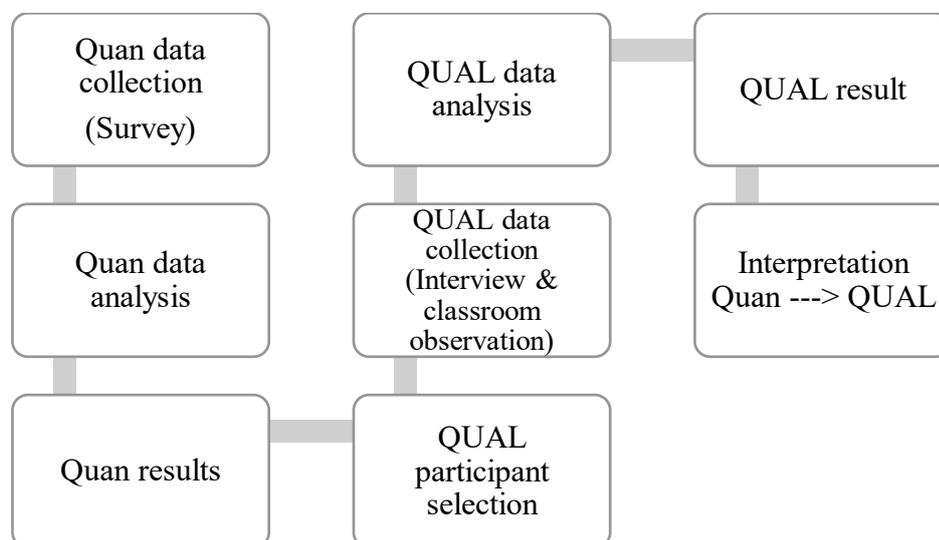


Figure 5-1: Explanatory Design: Follow-up explanations model adapted from Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007, p. 73)

## 5.5 Methods

### 5.5.1 Phase 1: Survey approach

The survey approach has been widely used in education research for many years. This method is prevalent due to its efficiency; it manages to evaluate results based on a large number of respondents and the data can be analysed quantitatively (Wagner, 2015). Borg (2006) compiled a comprehensive review of previous research that included survey as part of its research instrument. He outlined 14 examples of studies that used surveys from 1988 until 2002, specifically looking into teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching. These included teachers' beliefs about early literacy, grammar teaching, attitude, and foreign language learning, just to name a few. Therefore, using a survey is already prevalent in the research tradition of researching language teachers' cognition.

Nevertheless, a survey reports what the teachers ‘say’ they believe, know and do. The responses may reflect as the ‘ideal’ practices rather than the ‘actual’ practices occurring in the classroom (Borg, 2006). Robson and McCartan (2017) outline that one of survey’s drawbacks is that it might not accurately report what they really believe, know and do. The respondents may not treat the questions they are given seriously, thus undermining the actual purpose of conducting the survey in the first place.

#### **5.5.1.1 Sampling**

According to Wagner (2015), a key issue in survey research is sampling. In this case, I am trying to find out information about the current beliefs, knowledge and practices of primary-school English language teachers of the teaching reading English in Malaysia. It is impossible to survey the whole country due to time constraints and my capability as a sole- researcher. Thus, this study was conducted in two different districts in Malaysia, Dungun and Gombak. The decision to choose these particular districts was based on feasibility, practicality, capability and familiarity with the context. Moreover, the regions were selected based on their different geographical natures: urban and rural. Dungun district is considered part of a rural community on the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia, whereas Gombak district is situated in the urban environment of the capital state, Selangor. The initial aim was to explore if there were any influences of local context on English teachers’ cognition and practices. Although choosing schools that occur naturally within the population is considered cluster sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), the next stage was done purposively by targeting the English teachers from a list of schools in each district obtained from the respective local education offices.

A more detailed description of the process used in distributing the survey will be given under heading 3.5.1.4 (Administering the survey).



Figure 5-2: Map of Peninsular Malaysia

#### 5.5.1.2 Designing the survey

A combination of a test and questionnaires were utilised in order to explore the English teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices in the teaching of reading English in Malaysian classrooms, and particularly in using the phonics approach. There were four sections in the survey which comprised items about the content and pedagogical knowledge, beliefs, practices, and demographics of the English teachers. The items in the survey were selected and adapted from previous research which focussed on similar variables: (a) Cheesman, McGuire, Shankweiler and Coyne's (2009) work influenced the content knowledge items; (b) Carlisle, Kelcey, Rowan and Phelps' (2011) work influenced the pedagogical knowledge items; (c) the beliefs items were adapted from Westwood, Knight and Redden (1997); and (d) the practices items were adapted from Sandvik, van Daal and Ader (2014). The last section sought demographic data (gender, education level, school, teaching experience, etc.), allowing for the investigation of possible relationships between these and teachers' beliefs, knowledge and classroom practices.

**Table 5-1: Summary of adapted sources for the survey**

Section	Items	Types of questions	Adapted sources
<b>Section A</b>	Content knowledge items	Multiple choice questions	Cheesman, McGuire, Shankweiler and Coyne (2009)
	Pedagogical knowledge items		Carlisle, Kelcey, Rowan and Phelps (2011)
<b>Section B</b>	Teachers' beliefs about early literacy	Point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.	Westwood, Knight and Redden (1997)
<b>Section C</b>	Teachers' practices in the teaching of English reading	Point scale from never to always indicator	Sandvik, van Daal and Ader (2014)
<b>Section D</b>	Demographic data of the participants	-	-

#### a) **Section A**

Section A consists of the questions on pedagogical content knowledge wherein the teachers need to answer multiple-choice questions (MCQ) to investigate their substantive content knowledge (six items) and pedagogical knowledge (four items) related to the phonics approach. The MCQ allow for quick statistical analyses to generate response frequencies from the recorded responses (Cohen et al., 2013). This form of test is usually used to measure teachers' knowledge in certain aspects of teaching such as the teaching of grammar (Wray, 1993) and reading (Cheesman et al., 2009; Carlisle et al., 2011) and were mostly conducted with pre-service teachers. Borg (2015) also raised a concern on how this kind of test would affect in-service teachers considering that they are experienced teachers and that it might challenge their teaching abilities and knowledge levels in delivering the content knowledge of the subject. Thus, conducting a knowledge test should be done in a sensitive manner, especially the need to properly explain what and why it was tested in the first place. To comply to this sensitivity, I explained about the objective of overall research and the pedagogical content knowledge test in the participants information sheet. I also stated that their answers would be anonymised, that participation is voluntary and that they should not discuss their answers with others while completing the section. They were also given the option to withdraw from the study if they feel uncomfortable with what they shared.

**Table 5-2: Multiple-choice questions test utilised in the survey**

<b>Examples of MCQ for Content Knowledge</b>	
1.	A phoneme is .....
(a)	the smallest part of written language
(b)	the smallest part of spoken language
(c)	a word that contains a vowel sound
(d)	I'm not sure
2.	Phonemic awareness is.....
(a)	the same thing as phonics
(b)	understanding the relationships between letters and the sound they represent
(c)	the ability to identify and work with the individual sounds in spoken words
(d)	I'm not sure
<b>Examples of MCQ for Pedagogical Knowledge</b>	
1.	Mr. Shafee noticed that some of his second graders are having difficulty reading common irregular words. To address this problem, Mr. Burnett created sets of words or students to practice.
	Which set is most suitable for this purpose?
	a. when, until, which, after
	b. sweet, sugar, milk, banana
	c. because, does, again, their
	d. light, house, my, they
2.	Mrs. Zaini uses several different tasks to help her students identify sounds in words. Which directions indicate the use of a blending task?
	a. "Put the sounds together to say the word. /t /a//p/."
	b. "Tell me the first sound of 'tap'."
	c. "Say tap'. Now say it again but don't say /t/."
	d. "Say each sound in 'tap'."

**b) Section B**

Section B deals with the teachers' beliefs about early literacy. There are 10 beliefs items in section B and the respondents were asked to respond to statements on a 10-point scale indicating the strength of agreement from strongly agree to strongly disagree relating to stating their own beliefs on how reading should be taught. This type of point-scale is mostly used to discover what people think, their attitudes, beliefs and values (Cohen et al., 2013; Dörnyei, 2007). This type of scale is also widely used in the teacher cognition field as early as 1985, when DeFord developed her Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) questionnaire, which is used to measure the orientation of a language teacher's beliefs

around the teaching of reading English. This section is adapted in order to explore the current beliefs of teachers regarding early literacy.

**Table 5-3: Ten-point scale questions utilised for beliefs section in the survey**

Statement	Strongly Disagree										Strongly Agree
1. There is very little difference between the skills needed by the beginning reader and those used by proficient readers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2. Children learn to read in the same natural way that they acquire oral and aural language skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3. Devoting specific time to word study in isolation is undesirable since this practice decontextualizes a component skill of language.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

### c) Section C

Section C consists of 13 items which explore the current practices in teaching reading in an English classroom using ‘never’ to ‘always’ as the indicator. The same 10-point scale indicator is utilised to record the teachers’ reported practice responses. For this section, the teachers need to rate their practices in teaching reading from ‘never’ (1) to ‘always’ (10).

**Table 5-4: Ten-point scale questions utilized for practices items in the survey**

Items	Never										Always
1. I use pictures alongside written text in books.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2. I talk about how the pictures relate to the text.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3. I ask children to relate their own experiences to the story I read.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4. I demonstrate how print works (e.g. words are read left to right).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

In further assessing the appropriateness of the constructed survey, I shared the survey and sought advice from an expert in the education and literacy field based on her previous research on a similar topic. She gave the opinion that certain items were unclear and redundant. Thus, the items were either rephrased, revised or dropped before I piloted the survey.

### **5.5.1.3 Piloting the survey**

Piloting is an effective tool in any research. It helps the researcher to make sure the survey used is more reliable, presentable and informed by feedback (Wagner, 2017, p. 89). I conducted the pilot study with random English teachers (n=30) who were attending an English course organised by an education office from another district. I took this opportunity, sought permission from the officer in-charge, distributed the survey to be completed and gathered their opinions about its clarity and appropriateness. They answered the survey and at the same time gave feedback, stating that the knowledge section was hard to understand, especially the section on pedagogical knowledge due to the technical terminology used in relation to the phonics approach. In light of this, I revised the knowledge section by combining the content and pedagogical knowledge test items in section one.

### **5.5.1.4 Administering the survey**

As mentioned before, I chose Dungun and Gombak districts as the targeted populations. For this purpose, I obtained a list of all primary schools in both districts from the respective local education offices. I printed and distributed 300 questionnaires, 150 copies for each district. I put together a pack with a cover letter introducing myself and the purpose of the study, along with participants information sheets, detailed instructions about how to go about answering the survey and five questionnaires in sealed envelopes. The schools were selected from both school lists in each district. In distributing the envelopes to the targeted schools, I requested some help from literacy coaches based in the district education offices. They were going to visit most of the schools for their official duties and so they helped me pass the envelopes on to the English subject coordinators. Another way of distributing the survey was by going to some of the schools myself. I requested permission from the various headteachers to meet the subject leaders for English language. I explained about the survey

and asked for their cooperation. The respondents who answered the survey had to return the survey by putting it in another provided envelope to protect the confidentiality of the recorded responses. After a week or so, the envelopes were collected from the school offices.

I chose this process because I wanted to give the participants ample time to respond to the survey without any pressure to participate. It is also one of the ways to avoid insincere answers, when respondents answer the survey items based on what they believe, their ideas, thoughts and opinions (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). There are 48 primary schools in Dungun, and 52 primary schools in the Gombak area. Throughout all of these schools, I managed to distribute the questionnaire to 15 schools in Dungun and 20 schools in Gombak. In the end, I received a total of 123 completed surveys which comprises a 41 percent return rate. A large percentage of the surveys came from the urban schools (78 percent) with only 22 percent coming from the rural district.

#### **5.5.1.5 Data analysis procedure for phase 1**

The data were analysed using the computer-assisted software IBM SPSS Version 21. The reliability and normality tests of the survey data were conducted to assess the overall reliability and normality of the data. After that, a descriptive analysis was conducted as it is necessary to have a general characteristic of the data based on the frequency numbers, mean and standard deviation. ‘Descriptive statistics offer a tidy way of presenting the data we have’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 209), and ‘it reports what has been found in a variety of ways’ (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, in order to describe the data, I analysed the percentage of demographic variables in section D to get the proportion of gender types, ages, education levels, teaching experiences and the types of schools of the survey respondents. For the content and pedagogical knowledge section (section A), the percentage of responses were recorded based on the correct and incorrect answers that the respondents provided. For sections B and C, descriptive statistics of mean, median, mode, variance and standard deviation were calculated to summarise the response patterns from the English teachers.

For the Beliefs and Practices sections of the survey, descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were calculated to summarise the response patterns of the survey. For the beliefs section (table 6.3), the mean scores were used to indicate teachers’ beliefs about

early literacy. In SPSS, the data was recorded as to 1 – 10 for each individual response. Then the mean scores were generated for each statement. Mean scores below 5 (<5) indicate agreement with the statement, and above 5 (>5) indicate disagreement with the statement. The nearer the mean score was to 10 was an indication of teachers' greater orientation towards a whole language approach and the nearer to 0, an indication of a greater orientation towards a phonics approach

For the Practices section (table 6.4), the same procedures as used in the Beliefs section applied in analyzing the data. However, the Practices statements were looking at the frequency of the practices from never (1) to always (10) that the teachers used in the classroom, either using more phonics pedagogy or more whole language pedagogy. The cut-off mean scores for the practices section are below 5 (<5) indicate less of that practices were used in the classroom and above 5 (>5) indicate more frequent use of the practices during the teaching and learning activities. Each practice statement was analyzed individually in order to get an accumulative mean score for each statement recorded by the participants

The scoring of each statement is coded as favouring a phonics or whole language approach for both beliefs and practices sections was based on the scoring for the validated survey instruments of Westwood, Knight and Redden (1997) and Sandvik, van Daal & Ader (2014).

I used SPSS to calculate the score by using descriptive analysis in order to determine the mean scores for each individual statement. Also, a total mean score for each section (beliefs and practices) were generated in order to get an overall mean for each section. There was no separate score computed for phonics and whole language items as Table 6.3 only represents the arrangement of the statements in an orderly manner for an easier viewing of the statements.

Since descriptive analysis can only describe and is unable to make any generalisation of the data, I conducted inferential statistics in order to 'to make inferences and predictions based on the data gathered' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 727) for the second part of data analysis. Inferential statistics are mainly concerned with testing the statistically significant differences between variables available in the survey questions. In doing so, four

hypotheses were constructed. The first three (**H 1-3**) were that there were statistically significant differences in respondents' knowledge, beliefs, and practices in relation to demographic variables as independent variables. Meanwhile, the fourth hypothesis (**H4**) was concerned with the relationships between variables.

As for the inferential analysis in table 6.5 and 6.6, statistical tests (t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson's Correlation) were used in order to answer the research hypotheses on page 126. The dependent variables (knowledge, beliefs and practices) were analysed using one-sample t-tests when comparing the mean with regard to teachers' gender and type of school and one-way ANOVA when analysing age, years of experience and education level (as the latter demographics items on the survey questionnaire had more than two possible responses). The mean scores were generated separately for each section before comparing the other variables in order to answer the research hypotheses. For the independent variables (age, years of experiences, education level, gender, and type of schools), the data were transformed into codable codes on SPSS. Then, I conducted the correlation, t-test and one-way ANOVA as to compare the mean scores from the independent and dependent variables according to the hypotheses for the relationships of both domains.

The hypotheses were as follows:

**H1:** There is a significant difference in the level of respondents' knowledge in terms of their age groups, years of teaching experiences, education levels, and the types of school.

**H2:** There is a significant difference in respondents' beliefs in terms of their age groups, years of teaching experiences, education levels, and the types of school.

**H3:** There is a significant difference in respondents' reported practices in terms of their age groups, years of teaching experiences, education levels, and the types of school.

**H4:** There is a relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and their reported practices in teaching English reading.

A one-way ANOVA test was used to analyse the variables in order to answer hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 (**H 1-3**). The function of the test is to compare more than two groups of variables. For demographic variables (age groups, years of teaching experiences, and education levels), a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were statistically

significant differences in the variables towards the knowledge, beliefs and practices respectively. A t-test was used for gender and types of school data. The function of a t-test is similar to one-way ANOVA but slightly different in terms of characteristics of the test as it deals with only two groups due to the characteristics of the survey questions themselves, which only require two categories of responses, either female or male, or urban or rural schools. For the fourth hypothesis (**H4**), I used a Pearson's correlation test to give answer to the hypothesis. Pearson's correlation is used to examine if there is any relationship in between participants' knowledge, beliefs and reported practices. The emerging trends recorded in phase 1 were probed further in phase 2, the qualitative phase.

**Table 5-5: Summary of data analysis for phase 1**

Data analysis	Type of data	Type of test	Data presentation
<b>Descriptive analysis</b>			
i) Content knowledge test	Raw scores	Descriptive statistic	Percentage (%)
ii) Pedagogical knowledge test			
Teachers' beliefs items	Interval scale data	Descriptive statistic	Mean ( <i>M</i> ) and standard deviation ( <i>SD</i> ) scores
Teachers' reported practices items	Interval scale data	Descriptive statistic	Mean ( <i>M</i> ) and standard deviation ( <i>SD</i> ) scores
<b>Inferential analysis</b>			
Hypotheses H1 -2	Interval scale data	One-way ANOVA	Level of significant observed ( $p < 0.05$ )
Hypothesis H3	Nominal scale data	t-test	Level of significant observed ( $p < 0.05$ )
Hypothesis H4	Interval scale data	Pearson's Correlation	Level of significant observed ( $p < 0.05$ )

### 5.5.2 Phase 2: Ethnographic case study

Ethnography is one of the qualitative research approaches which describe and interpret a culture and social structure of a targeted community (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The main reason to employ ethnographic research is because it offers a 'thick' description of cultural meaning from the participants' perspectives (Dörnyei, 2011), which then allows outsiders to understand what is happening within the circle (Bryman, 2008). Although ethnography is prominent in cultural anthropology, it has become one of the conventional approaches used in second-language teaching and learning research (Harklau, 2005). It is

an approach where the researcher has to spend a prolonged time in the research field, engage with the participants in their natural context and setting, and approach the subject of research according to participants' perspectives (Cohen et al., 2018; Dörnyei, 2011; Robson & McCartan, 2016). In the study of language teacher cognition, a combination of methods and prolonged engagement in the field are crucial because it can counteract the limitations of any individual strategy. Borg (2006) shares his views on this by emphasizing how important it is to distinguish 'an ideal instructional practice in relation to instructional realities'.

*Self-reported instruments and verbal commentaries are not grounded in concrete examples of real practice, which may generate data which reflect teachers' ideals; data based on and elicited in relation to observed classroom events may better capture teachers' cognition in relation to actual practice. This distinction between ideal-oriented cognitions and reality-oriented cognitions is supported by studies which have found discrepancies between what teachers say (e.g. in completing questionnaires) and do (in the classroom). (p. 329)*

To complement ethnography as a research tool, I included a case study approach, where I examined language teacher cognition in the teaching of reading English by looking at four individual teachers. The teacher case studies were of an instrumental nature (Stake, 2005), whereby the researcher examines a particular case in order to gain an insight into a wider issue, i.e. the implementation of the phonics approach and the factors affecting this.

Generally, ethnography and case studies share the same research techniques. However, both of them are different in nature. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) highlight the differences of both which lie in the context in which they are represented: the perspective and time spent in the field. An ethnographer is expected to spend a longer time in the field and try to experience the context through an emic (insider) perspective, whereas case study 'is not a methodological choice but a case to be studied' (Stake, 1995, p. 236). A case study can be an in-depth study of one setting (Denscombe, 2014) and 'can be set in temporal, geographical, organization, institutional and other contexts' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 376) which can be limited to a specific case. Therefore, in order to build and understand a case, the focus is not on the time spent, but rather on the multiple sources of data collection which enable the researcher to understand the case in a short period of time (Yin, 2009). Parker- Jenkins (2018) argues that rather than debating on the time spent in the field, it is

better to focus on the immersion of the context and the data collected from the field. She further explains that prolonged engagement in the educational setting such as schools ‘may not be required or appropriate’. She proposes the term ‘ethno-case study’, which adopts the essences of the traditional ethnography and case study, but is ‘limited in terms of research time, engagement with the data and the extent of the findings’ (p. 29).

Hence, I would not consider my study as a traditional ethnography, except in that I have used the ethnographic tools to explore my participants in their natural context within a set timeframe. My research aims to reflect this definition by providing a detailed and rich description of the practices and cognition of English teachers in their natural context, in the school and the classroom. It is not enough to ‘capture’ language teacher cognition by only using a positivist approach. In order to understand how and why they operate in certain ways, it is useful to observe their classroom practices in a regular context, talk with them about the issues they face, and analyse the guidance documents which inform their practice. Ethnographers adopt a range of data collection techniques, which include interviews, observation, and diary keeping with field notes, depending on what they are looking for. These techniques can also be supplemented by video and audio recordings, and authentic documents (Dörnyei, 2011). At the same time, the researcher will try to position herself within the community so that she can observe, follow and understand the behaviours of the participants as an insider, taking an emic perspective (Starfield, 2015). During my involvement in the field, I felt that there was an expectation of me from the community to attend weekly assembly, cultural events and school activities in order to break the wall, understand the community and obtain a holistic picture of the culture.

### **5.5.2.1 Sampling and selection criteria**

Sampling in qualitative research can be considered as non-probability sampling since it focuses on relatively small samples. Other than that, a non-probability sample strategy serves the situation where ‘the researcher samples individuals because they can help the research generate or discover a theory or specific concepts.’ (Creswell, 2012, p. 208). Dörnyei (2007, p. 126) also shares the same thoughts about choosing ‘individual[s] who can provide rich and varied insight of the phenomena as to maximise what we can learn’. The English Year 1 teachers were specifically chosen for this research as they are directly involved with the implementation.

**a) The teacher participants**

Selecting the right participants for the research was crucial at this stage to get a better explanation and justification for phase 1's results. Due to the nature of the ethnographic case study, I needed teachers to volunteer to take part since I had to spend a great deal of time with them, following them around the school, which could possibly 'intrude' on their personal space. I started within my circle of friends who are English teachers by profession, asking to introduce me to their friends to participate in the study. I decided to approach the teachers individually, adopting convenience sampling where the teachers were easy to access and were potentially prepared to volunteer to join the research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Once the approached teachers agreed to participate, I then requested permission from the gatekeeper (the headteacher) to conduct research in their schools. By using a 'bottom-up' approach like this, I found it easier to recruit participants according to the criteria needed. It was also a favourable approach as it did not involve the influence of the authority (the gatekeeper) over the teachers in the first instance.

Whilst teachers' participation was entirely voluntary, and I took a convenience approach in sampling, certain inclusion criteria were applied: i) they should be in-service English teachers, teaching in a primary state school, and ii) the English teachers should teach English to the Year 1 class. The reason why I selected Year 1 classes is because the phonics syllabus for Year 1 provides the foundation of their learning. In Year 1, I could observe whether teachers were able to carry out lessons based on this basic syllabus. In addition, although the phonics approach is also on the Year 2 syllabus, I learned during my informal visit that Year 2 teachers might not adopt the phonics approach. Due to this, I decided to only focus on Year 1 English classes for the rest of the research period.

For the 'City School' in Gombak, I initially recruited Iman and Farah following a recommendation from a friend who thought that both of them would be a good fit to participate in the study. Before I visited the school, I personally contacted Iman asking for her permission to make an informal visit. During the social visit, I met the gatekeeper and explained about my study and the ethical requirements in relation to consent, and I also handed the gatekeeper an information sheet. Once the gatekeeper granted access to the school through signing a consent form, I made an appointment to meet Iman and Farah, so I could explain what the study was all about, my expectations, and ask about their

willingness to allow me to participate in their everyday activities in school. I recruited the third teacher, Naima, during my second week in the school. She volunteered to be a participant after we had a few conversations about my research. Iman was the person who convinced her to participate after she mentioned that my study is about exploring the teachers' practices rather than evaluating or judging their practices in the classroom. I was delighted with her participation because she is an experienced English teacher and has been teaching English for more than 20 years. It was interesting to explore if her cognition and practices have changed with the new syllabus implementation. Specifically, how did she alter her practices to meet the current demand of the curriculum and what were her views about this?

For the 'Rural School', I recruited Hannah through a contact of a friend of mine. She fitted the criteria and jokingly said that now she had a new assistant in the class (referring to me). When she made the remark, I honestly felt relieved because this shows that she would not feel the burden of my presence in her classroom. I employed the same procedures as with Iman and Farah in getting the gatekeeper's permission for access to the school. Initially, I had another English teacher, Tasha, whom I observed alongside with Hannah. She was teaching English to Year 2, and phonics is also a part of the Year 2 syllabus programme. It was a bit difficult to juggle their timetables because Hannah's classes were in the morning session, but Tasha's were in the afternoon. Tasha taught one Year 2 class and two Year 3 classes. I managed to organise my schedule with Tracey when she offered that I could observe her Year 2 class. However, after I analysed her data, I noticed inconsistencies and differences between the Year 1 and Year 2 syllabi, which made it difficult to analyse their teaching practices. Tracey did not teach phonics at all in her teaching of reading. Most of her Year 2 lessons revolved around exam and assessment, thus I was unable to find a common ground with the Year 1 lesson practices. Hence, after much consideration, I decided to withdraw her data from my analyses and focus on the teachers who were teaching Year 1 English.

Although the number of teachers represented in each school was not balanced (3:1), and they are all female, I felt that each one of them had their own stories to tell and were able to provide rich information about the phenomena and issues under study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This is the essence of qualitative research where a great emphasis relies on the participants' experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). Other than that, this also contributed to the

flexibility that I mentioned earlier when adopting a pragmatic approach in my research. I tried to comply, navigate and adapt to the current situation during my data collection, so that I was still able to provide answers to my research questions. In having one teacher in the sample in a rural setting, I was able to compare teachers' beliefs in different contexts, giving a fuller understanding to the research field. However, I realise that I cannot generalise from this comparison given the limitations of the small sample.

## b) Background of the participants

**Table 5-6: The participants' background information**

Participant	Participants' General Background
<b>Iman</b>	<p>Iman holds a bachelor's degree in finance. In 2005, she decided to take up a teaching job when the government needed more English teachers in schools due to increasing demand. She took the preparatory course for English teaching for a year at a local university. Iman has been teaching for more than 10 years at the school. She has been the subject leader for Year 1 English for three years. She taught two Year 1 classes in English and another two Year 1 classes in Physical Education.</p> <p>Other than teaching, she also has administrative roles, such as preparing English exam papers for Year 1 and keeping track of students' records and attendance, and she is responsible for the computer lab administration.</p>
<b>Farah</b>	<p>Farah holds a bachelor's degree in computer science. She shared a similar professional pathway as Iman, i.e. she is a career-changer. She took the same teaching opportunity and did her diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language. She has been teaching for six years since she completed the teacher training and has taught at the current school ever since. She taught three Year 1 classes this year.</p> <p>Other than teaching, she is responsible for the computer lab in the school as part of her administration portfolio, and Iman was her assistant.</p>

**Naima**

Naima graduated from a teacher training college in 1988. She holds a degree in Teaching English as a Second Language and has been teaching English for more than 20 years. Naima's education background is a typical pathway for an English teacher in Malaysia in that she underwent the training in a teacher training college. She taught three Year 1 classes this year.

**Hannah**

Hannah holds a bachelor's degree in environmental sciences. She also came from a different education pathway and trained to be a science teacher. During her first placement in her first school, she was assigned to teach English instead of science due to the lack of English teachers. She has been teaching English for 10 years. She is also the subject leader for English in Year 1. She taught two Year 1 English classes and one Year 1 science class.

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\*names are all pseudonyms

### 5.5.2.2 Interviews

The interview is a common method used in qualitative research due to its practicality in getting direct information from the respondents. Cohen et al. (2018) discuss the nature of interviewing in qualitative research and conclude that it is still one of the more valuable approaches to educational enquiry due to the rich data that can be directly obtained from participants. Furthermore, it serves as a main method when it comes to understanding 'the experiences, opinions, attitudes, values and processes' of the research participants (Rowley, 2012). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher is able to understand and query further about the participants' perspectives based on the replies. Depending on the replies, further probing by the researcher on the issue can help them explain and justify their perspective, thus mutually sharing the realities that they are facing in the research field (Copland & Creese, 2015). Despite these advantages, it is important to be aware of the limitations of interviews in qualitative research, which have been criticised as being 'unreliable, impressionistic and not objective' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 12) due to the heavy influence of interpretation. These were the arguments made earlier by the positivists during the so-called paradigm wars, raising concerns about the subjectivity and credibility of the process and interpretation, and generalisation of the data collected (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Kvale, 1996). Over the decades, qualitative proponents have justified how

interviews can add value to qualitative research (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Silverman, 2010). Interviews can provide in-depth data which cannot be measured using surveys and give the opportunity to the interviewer to probe for further responses from the respondents (Cohen et al., 2018; Silverman 2010). However, in order to minimise subjectivity or bias in interpretation, the researcher has a responsibility to make the research process transparent, thorough and systematic, and also to practise reflexivity throughout the study (Bourdieu et al., 1999).

Most of the interviews were informal with the aim of giving more flexibility to the participants to express what they felt regarding the research issues as we worked alongside one another. I used an unstructured interview strategy but prepared some of the themes and questions as opening questions to elicit the participants' stories. I rarely interfered while they were talking and only did it when I needed more explanation and justification for certain responses. Dörnyei (2007, p. 136) approves of this practice as part of how an interviewer tries to get into the 'deep meaning of particular phenomena or when some personal history of how a particular phenomenon had developed is required'. As I was immersed in the context of the ethnographic research, the practice turned out to be more like a sharing session and informal conversation between colleagues. I felt that the rapport that had developed between us helped to generate trust from the participants (Fetterman, 2009) to share their views regarding their teaching they encountered. I also recorded the informal conversations (after getting permission before the recording occurred) as long as it was related to the research topic and treated these as research data. Towards the end of my period in the school, I requested to have more formal semi-structured interviews with the teachers in order to further confirm and re-evaluate some of the findings that were emerging from the informal interviews. Most of the questions asked during this session revolved around their previous schooling, education, and teaching experiences. This was a way for me to check my understanding of the data that I had collected (in both informal interviews and observations) and to make sure I managed to obtain insights on issues that I aimed to explore at the beginning of the research.

Another important thing that I thought would be valuable to mention is the location of the interviews. Since most of them were unstructured, the locations of the interviews also varied according to where we (the teachers and I) sat at that time.

**Table 5-7: Interview locations around the school compound**

Location	Explanation
a) Personal space within the school	<p>Most of the time, Iman and Farah were in their ‘personal space’ within the school, since both of them were responsible for taking care of the computer lab. They shared a room in the lab and considered it as their staff room. Usually, the informal interviews and sharing sessions occurred in this room, where they seemed to be ‘just themselves’ without any interference from other teachers. This would happen while they were preparing their lesson plans, marking exam papers or even marking the students' exercise books.</p>
b) Staff Room	<p>As for Hannah, she invited me to the staff room for her interviews. I had the impression that she was not being transparent with her responses and kept giving ‘safe answers’ to my questions since others could overhear hear. With Hannah, everything was a bit formal, and sometimes I struggled in getting responses from her. Later, she started to open up after one of her lessons.</p>
c) While walking	<p>Sometimes, information came from the teachers while we were walking out of the classroom, walking to the canteen and walking from one place to another within the school compound. It was such a spontaneous occurrence where teachers shared their reflections on their teaching and commented on the students’ behaviour. I took these chances to probe further with questions whenever I felt it was necessary and when they were related to the themes that I wished to explore. They were more talkative and willing to share more of their experiences until we were disturbed by others or arrived at the destination.</p>
d) Near the stairs	<p>On one occurrence with Naima, she shared her experiences near the stairs. We sat at the nearby bench for nearly one hour as I listened to her previous experiences with her teaching, approaches, students and school. This was a continuation from</p>

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the classroom observation which led to an immediate reflection from Naima.

e) At the canteen

Another place that teachers were keen to share their responses to questions was at the canteen. This was the only time where they had their break in between class, and we would talk over lunch. I vividly remember my first meeting with Farah at the canteen. She was willing to talk about her experiences as a teacher and share her thoughts on the issue. Although the environment was not conducive due to the loud noise of the students, she was not bothered with it and treated the session as a typical conversation between colleagues.

Although these locations were random and served as a place to sit and talk, I believe these were the places where my participants felt most comfortable during the respective conversations, making them more open in sharing their thoughts on the issues that were discussed. This is an advantage of interviewing in ethnography research, where open-ended questions were asked in any setting depending on the participants' willingness to answer the questions (Harklau, 2005).

### 5.5.2.3 Classroom observation

Classroom observation is a complementary data collection procedure for the researcher to experience the 'real' and 'live' data from a natural social situation (Borg, 2015; Cohen et al., 2018). Observation also acts as an additional source confirming the data generated from the interview, because teachers might say some things in the interviews but act differently while teaching (Borg, 2015). This is also one of the reasons why both instruments are frequently combined. I decided to use unstructured classroom observation in order to explore what was really happening in the classroom. I either noted down key points of the lesson or recorded any interesting aspects and further reflected on these later. Parts of these referred to the time of the lessons and students' interaction with the teachers (Hopkins, 2008). Although the observations were unstructured, I remained clear on their objective, which was to observe the actual practices of the teachers in the teaching of reading English through the phonics approach. I have to admit this was a risky decision because there was

a likelihood, I might not have observed what I was supposed to. To accommodate this, I depended on other data sources: for example, the teachers' interviews, the diary of field notes, teachers' lesson plans, and audio recordings. All of these materials provided an 'external insurance' and were used for data triangulation in the analysis stage (Cohen et al., 2018; Robson & McCartan, 2017).

Initially, I positioned myself as a non-participant observer. I sat at the back, pretending to do my own thing with a pen and a small notebook, and occasionally jotting down my field notes. To further capture what was happening in the classroom, I turned on my voice recorder on my phone throughout the lesson. I decided to do this after I finished my first observation. With so many things going on in the classroom, it felt impossible for me to notice everything. With the help of the voice recordings, I managed to record the teachers' talks in the classroom, especially their instructions and interactions with the students. During my second week, I started to get involved in the classroom, especially when teachers gave exercises and activities to the students. This is considered as 'observer-as-participant' by Cohen et al. (2018). They define this role as 'not a member of the group, but [one] who may participate a little or peripherally in the group's activities, and whose role as researcher is clear and overt, [but] as unobtrusive as possible' (ibid., p. 543). I decided to do this in order to help teachers to focus on teaching when some children were not paying enough attention. Often students who sat at the back were found doing something else: for example, talking with their friends. The teacher did not always notice this, especially if there were large numbers of pupils in each class. I assisted and helped students who sat nearby me with their work, reminding them to keep quiet and listen to the teachers, and I had a chat with them because they were also curious about me being in the classroom as well.

However, my 'interference' with the lesson also depended on the ability of the classes that the teachers were teaching. Usually, the top sets had no problem in completing the tasks given and were independent, but it was a different story with the lower-ability class. On one occasion, I called a student from Hannah's class to sit next to me, and I guided him with his work because he kept disturbing other friends. He obeyed my instruction and finished his exercises despite being reluctant to do it in the first place. I was worried if I overstepped the boundaries as a researcher in the classroom, but it seems like the teachers appreciated my effort as they introduced me as an English teacher to the students.

Nevertheless, Davies (2008) agrees that personal involvement by reacting to the situation is typical when doing ethnographic work. The shift from being a non-participant to participant observer is the result of time spent in the field and it is unavoidable (ibid.).

Nevertheless, Robson and McCartan (2017) warn of typical observational bias that might influence observation in the field. They outlined four factors that seem to interfere throughout the observation process: (1) selective attention, (2) selective encoding, (3) selective memory, and (4) interpersonal factors. To overcome these biases, certain precautionary measures were taken. Firstly, to overcome selective attention, I opted to use unstructured observations. I also used thematic analysis rather than pre-determined codes to allow the findings to emerge from the data itself. In addition, I attempted to hinder selective memory by keeping the data in different forms, such as through audio recordings and my fieldnotes. I also participated in school events in order to develop interpersonal relationships as a member of the school community so that teachers would feel comfortable about my presence in the classroom and therefore behave as ‘naturally’ as possible.

#### **a) Classroom Space**

In the first school, Iman and Farah conducted most of their lessons in the computer lab. Since it is a bit further from the regular classroom, my presence was rarely noticed by other teachers, which seemed to make the observations less intrusive. The same situation occurred with Naima's class. However, during Hannah's observation in the second school, her teaching was carried out in a regular classroom. Thus, it attracted other teachers to stop by and query my presence. Sometimes, the lesson stopped for a while because of the sudden attention that was paid to me in the classroom. Nevertheless, the curiosity ended in the second week when everybody acknowledged my presence as part of the teacher and school community. Some of them even thought that I was a teacher-trainee who was on a school practicum. Another fundamental goal of an ethnographer is to be able to blend in with the community as soon as possible. This is to ensure that I can settle down and start doing my work rather than entertaining the questions relating to my background, including where I came from, where I studied, and so on. I noticed that when I shared this information for the sake of social interaction, the community perceived me differently. When they showed an acceptance of my presence, the questions they asked me were no longer about my personal background but revolved around the current events in the community. They

invited me to certain school events, talked informally about their students and teaching, and sometimes shared their own personal problems.

### **b) Document analysis**

Document analysis acts as an additional resource to data analysis in order to help the triangulation of the existing data collection (Bowen, 2009). Bowen further highlights the uses of the collected documents in order to provide supplementary and context-based data, to further verify the findings, and to compare the documented and actual practices. The document analysis in this study involved scrutiny of the curriculum materials, such as the English syllabus, teachers' lesson plans, and the Year 1 English textbook. This helped me explore and understand the teaching of reading and phonics practices taking place in the classroom, in particular to examine the extent of the influence of materials on their teaching (e.g. the textbook). For example, I referred to my observation notes on a particular day and compared these with the teacher's lesson plan in order to verify whether there was a diversion from the planned lesson and the actual teaching. The lesson plan was also used to confirm the objective of the lessons and compare it with what took place. I also compared the syllabus with the English textbook in terms of the synchronisation of the content of both documents since in interviews, participants had raised concerns about the inconsistency of the syllabus and textbook that they have to follow.

As Denscombe (2007) notes, it is important to assess the authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning of documents. For these reasons, I principally analysed 'official' documents in the public domain. The teachers' lesson plans served as interpretations of the syllabus.

### **c) Fieldnotes**

Field notes were recorded in a research journal and served as the researcher's personal data. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stress the importance of developing this written account as to collect and reflect the researcher's experiences, what she/he sees, hears and thinks throughout the duration whilst in the research field. It also one of the fundamental instruments in ethnography research (Dörnyei, 2011; Fetterman, 2010) due to its purpose as a research tool, which relies on detailed, accurate, and extensive records. As I mentioned

in the classroom observation section, sometimes I scribbled some notes as I observed the teachers and sometimes, I wrote reflections if I saw something amusing regarding the classroom interactions and students' behaviours. The recorded notes served as a descriptive description of classroom behaviour and actions, as well as my reflection on the situation.

## **5.6 Data analysis procedures for phase 2**

Qualitative analysis is never a straightforward process. Creswell (2005) describes this as 'an eclectic process', and it can immediately occur when the researcher listens, reads and transcribes the interviews and classroom observation data. In the first instance, I analysed one data set at a time. Firstly, I analysed the interviews and then the notes from my observations. I later analysed the content of my diary and particular documents. I used NVivo software to help me organise all transcripts and themes emerging from the audio recordings (interview and observation). First, all audios were transcribed in the original language of the interviews and observations, which was a mixture of Malay (native) language and English. Then, I translated the native language parts to English.

After I finished with the data transcription, I started to code the interview data. I worked with one transcript at a time to give full attention to the details shared and to fully understand what they were trying to convey through the interview. Whilst I used NVivo at the outset to investigate themes emerging from the data, I later printed the transcripts and used highlighter pens. I felt that this traditional technique helped me to understand the data better as I was also able to scribble reflections and interpretations. As I began to aggregate codes, I noticed that many of them fitted with Borg's (2006) framework for language teacher cognition. This ultimately became my analytical tool for the interviews, which I used to build four teacher case studies. Hence, I identified and coded data that belonged to teachers' schooling experiences, their professional coursework, contextual factors that influenced them, and their classroom practices. However, there were additional codes that emerged from the data that were not part of Borg's (2006) framework: for example, teachers' personal emotions, and teachers' experiences with parents.

After I was satisfied with the structure of writing up the case studies, I shifted my focus to the observation data. The objective of analysis here was to specifically examine the phonics teaching approach whilst at the same time examining the general structure of the reading

lessons. In this process, I used thematic analysis to identify the similarities and differences between the teacher's practices. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, describe, analyse and report themes and patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved generating categories, themes and patterns in a way that presented a conceptual mapping from the data source. This time, I fully utilised the NVivo software as the data was organised through emerging themes rather than by teachers' individual cases. For example, I also coded the challenges that the teachers mentioned and faced in their attempt to follow the phonics approach in the classroom. This was when I realised the importance of my field note dairies in the whole picture as they would complement the observation data. Although the lessons were audio recorded and transcribed, the overall evaluative descriptions of the lessons were captured through my writing of field notes. I was grateful that although it was not the primary source of the data, it still provided valuable insights.

Whilst my data analysis of the observations was arguably inductive in nature, I also referred to the literature in the process of settling on codes. In effect, I kept going back and forth with the deductive and inductive approach in order to make sense of the data. During this analysis process, I also took notes of the initial thoughts and ideas I recorded. This can be considered as an iterative process, with the codes and themes continually being redefined, labelled, reconsidered, eliminated and regrouped. Whilst it was not without complexities, I felt that it helped me to organise a coherent and comprehensive synthesis of the findings.

As for the document analysis, I chose to evaluate and analyse the English Year 1 textbook, specifically looking at its structure and content, and how it complements the English Year 1 syllabus, the teaching of English reading skills and the phonics approach. General criteria for textbook evaluation usually revolve around the internal content of the textbook, the aims and approaches, the supporting sources it offers and the physical appearance of the textbook (Cunningsworth, 1995; Ellis, 1997; Tomlinson, 2003; McGrath, 2002). For this analysis, I decided to utilise Cunningsworth's approach to textbook evaluation since it is a straightforward evaluation and process. He proposes eight criteria of evaluation as follows: (i) aims and approaches, (ii) design and organisation, (iii) language content, (iv) skills, (v) topic, (vi) methodology, (vii) teacher's guide, and (viii) practical consideration. These serve the purpose of doing the evaluation in the first place. Following the selected criteria,

it would be easier to observe how the textbook, as one of the teaching materials influencing the language teaching in the classroom, does so not only through its content but also the teacher's pedagogy.

### **5.7 Data triangulation for both phases**

This study employed a sequential explanatory design wherein I first collected and analysed quantitative data and proceeded with the second phase of data collection and analysed it in order 'to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative result obtained in the first phase' (Ivankova et al., 2006, p. 3). There are a few options on how to integrate both phases. For example, the researcher can choose to combine, compare and convert the results based on the research questions of the study (Bazeley, 2017). For this study, data sources were analysed separately and later combined during the discussion of the outcomes of the entire study in order *Table 5-8* below. Visual model for mixed-methods sequential explanatory design procedures to enhance and complement the quantitative findings (Creswell et al., 2003). Through the process, it is unavoidable that there is a weightier focus on the second phase of analysis and findings. Ivankova et al. (2006) explain this as a decision that should be made by the researcher, and there is no obligation to solely emphasise the quantitative phase. Above is the summary of the study's research design model adapted from Ivankova et al. (2006) for my research procedures and data triangulation.

**Table 5-8: A summary of the sequential mixed method approach process**

Phase	Procedure	Product
Quantitative Data Collection	- Cross-sectional survey ( $n=123$ )	- Numeric data
Quantitative Data Analysis	- Data screening (parametric data) - Descriptive analysis - One-way ANOVA - Pearson's Correlation	- Descriptive statistics - Hypotheses testing - Relationship between variables
Connecting quantitative and qualitative phases	- Purposely selecting 4 participants. - Developing interview questions and classroom observation schedules	- Individual case study ( $n=4$ )
Qualitative Data Collection	- Individual in-depth interviews - Individual classroom observations - Curriculum documents	- Text data (interview and transcripts, fieldnotes, curriculum documents)
Qualitative Data Analysis	- Coding and thematic analysis within individual cases - Coding and thematic analysis across case theme development - Cross theme analysis	- Four individual case studies - Observation analysis - Document analysis of the curriculum documents (textbook)
Integration of the quantitative and qualitative results	- Interpretation and explanation of the quantitative and qualitative results	- Discussion - Implication - Future research

## 5.8 Validity and mixed-methods design

Cohen et al. (2018) emphasise that a mixed-method research paradigm has its own approach to guiding the research framework. These include its paradigm, ontological and epistemological stances, and methodologies, to name a few. Hence, in order to ensure the validity of the study, I decided to follow Creswell and Plano-Clark's (2018) definition of validity and how to approach it from a mixed-methods research perspective. This decision is based on their credibility as prominent contributors in mixed-method research who have discussed and published extensively in the field.

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018, p. 251) address four general principles of validity in MMR design. First, they insist that the term 'validity' is suitable to be used in the context of mixed-method research due to the familiarity and acceptance of the term in both the qualitative and quantitative fields. They also agree that validity in both approaches mutually serves as 'the purpose of checking on the quality of the data, the results and the author's interpretation of the data result' (p. 216). Second, there is a need to address the specific types of validity checks associated with quantitative and qualitative data collection. For both phases of my study, I tried to be very detailed in describing the procedures undertaken while conducting the quantitative and qualitative approach.

In quantitative phase, I conducted the pilot study, then ran the reliability and normality tests of the collected data. For the qualitative phase, I used a member-checking strategy (Cohen et al., 2018) by going back to the participants in order to check my interpretations of interviews and observations. Other than that, I also employed data triangulation from several sources such as interviews, classroom observation, diaries of field notes and related documents that were associated with the teaching and learning. Third, Creswell and Plano-Clark also outlined potential threats to validity and suggested strategies to minimise the threats as described in *Table 5-9* below. Fourth, the validity threats for the mixed-method research should be addressed based on the specific type of mixed-method design employed by the research. In this case, I used the explanatory sequential design, wherein the results from the quantitative phase were addressed with the further explanation and justification needed in the qualitative phase.

**Table 5-9: Adapted from Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018, p. 252)**

<b>Validity threats</b>	<b>Strategies to minimize threats</b>	<b>Researcher's justification</b>
1) Failing to identify important quantitative results	Consider all possibilities for the explanation of results (e.g. significant and non-significant predictors)	I have outlined the reason for adopting a sequential research design and the need to follow-up with phase 2 of my research. A detailed description of this is presented in the findings chapter.
2) Not explaining surprising, contradictory quantitative results with qualitative data	Design qualitative data collection questions to probe into the surprising, contradictory quantitative results	Phase 2 of this study is designed to further investigate the findings from phase 1. To accommodate the process, various data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis were used in order to provide explanations for the contradictions in the quantitative results.
3) Not connecting the initial quantitative results with the qualitative follow-up	Purposefully select the qualitative sample using the quantitative result to identify participants from the sample of quantitative participants who can provide the best explanations.	Data triangulation is undertaken, and the process is explained in section 3.6

The table above presents the validity threats and strategies to minimise the threats based on Creswell and Plano-Clark's (2018) suggestions. I added an additional column to illustrate how these strategies were implemented throughout the research.

I have carefully considered the validity threats listed above and offered my justification in the extended column. As mentioned earlier, for the quantitative phase, I have explained the steps thoroughly from planning the project to designing, piloting, administering and analysis of the survey. Meanwhile, for the qualitative phase, I offered transparency about the design I used and the process of analysis in gaining and maximising the trustworthiness of this phase. I used multiple sources of data to avoid biases and judgements, and I tried to write a detailed and in-depth description so that the reader can have a holistic view of the current situation of the teachers and the classroom contexts. The data collection for the second phase took about three months to complete with a one-month attendance in each school. This extended engagement in the field helped me to fully immerse in the context through my daily presence at the school and participation in additional school activities. I kept close and continuous engagement with the teachers through emails and the WhatsApp application even after I withdrew from the setting. In so doing, I believe that I developed a trusting relationship with the participants, who accepted me as somebody who was part of their community. This helped to minimise the Hawthorn effect (Cohen et al., 2018; Dörnyei, 2011) in observations, whereby the observed person/people potentially act differently due to the presence of an observer and enabled more open responses from the teachers in interviews.

## **5.9 Ethical considerations**

Ethical consideration is crucial in education research. It is a researcher's duty to inform the organisation and participants about the research aims, benefits of the research and also the risk of getting involved with the research. It is also essential for the researcher to obtain informed, voluntary consent before researching in order to avoid a problem in the later stages of the process. Informed consent is an individual permission to either participate or reject their involvement in research after they are aware of the risks and consequences from it (Cohen et al., 2018). It also offers guidance as an initial introduction to what the research is about, what to obtain from the participants and the background of the researcher, depending on what information the researcher provided in the information sheet.

### **5.9.1 Context based**

Although this research was carried out in Malaysia, I still needed to consider appropriate ethical considerations aligned with the institution that I was based in. From the UK education perspective, I had to submit an ethical application to the Liverpool John Moores University's research ethics committees in order for them to review the related documents needed in reference to the conducted research. In this process, I submitted participants' information sheets and consent forms which were related to the gatekeepers (potentially, headteachers or teachers) before I could conduct the research. In the information sheet, I explained about my research and what I expected the potential participants to do after they read the information. Once they agreed to the request, they needed to return the consent form as part of the agreement to be included in the research.

As for satisfying Malaysian requirements, I had to apply for research approval from the Education Planning and Research Division (EPRD) from the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, who acted as gatekeepers. I submitted my research proposal and related documents for their approval as well. Once I was granted permission, I started to approach the local district education offices in Gombak and Dungun for further access to the schools in the districts. I wrote an additional cover letter, attached it together with the approval from the EPRD, and the consent forms for the headteachers to gain access to the school. Nonetheless, it was my experience that the schools did not feel under pressure to participate in the research due to the EPRD approval. In fact, some schools declined my request to participate during the first phase of the study. Also, I applied for the informed consent of the children since I will also directly be involved with them in the classroom. Initially, an information sheet and a consent form would be given to the Year 1 students so that their parents would be informed about the research. However, upon my meeting the headteachers in the schools, they gladly offered themselves as the gatekeepers of the students since my research data did not directly involve the students, hence acknowledging my presence in the classroom as part of the research.

### **5.9.2 Data collection instruments**

Once I gained approval from the gatekeeper, I distributed the survey to the teachers. I had an additional cover letter at the front of the survey as an introduction of who I am and what

and I was seeking their cooperation for and why in answering the survey for my research. There was also a section at the bottom of the cover letter asking for their consent to answer the survey and if they agreed, they just needed to put an X in the bracket [X] available.

Further consideration was given during the second phase of the study, where the data collection involved interviews, classroom observation and related documents such as teachers' lesson plans, which can be viewed as personal information. For my phase 2, I used a bottom-up recruitment process, whereby I approached the teachers first, before seeking an official permission from the headteachers in the schools. I obtained an informal consent from the teachers, as I initially approached them through a mobile messenger application. Once I met them during my social visit to the schools, then I presented the participant information sheet and consent form for phase 2 so they could read and understand it further. Note that I approached the teachers first, then obtained their informal consent, before I proceeded by officially requesting official permission from the headteachers of each school. Thus, there was no issue where the teachers being pressured by their headteachers to participate in the research.

### **5.9.3 Confidentiality and privacy**

All participants and school names, except the location of the districts, remain anonymous. The names of the participants mentioned in the interviews and classroom observation were pseudonyms. The returned surveys were sealed in an envelope and stored securely in a locked cabinet in my PhD office. The interview and observation transcripts were stored in a password-protected computer files, which could only be accessed by me.

### **5.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive discussion of my ontological and epistemological position, describing the research design, explaining the methodological stance that I used, outlining the methods used in collecting and analysing the data, the trustworthiness of the study, and the ethical considerations. I will present the findings of these data in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 6

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### PHASE 1: QUANTITATIVE STUDY

#### 6.1 Introduction

A survey was used and distributed to participants (n=123) in phase 1 to explore patterns in teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices related to early reading, particularly in using the phonics approach in the teaching of English reading. There were four sections in the survey which comprised of questions about knowledge, beliefs, practices and demographics. In the knowledge section, teachers were asked multiple-choice questions in order to investigate their substantive content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge related to phonics. For the beliefs and practices section, the respondents were asked to respond to statements on a 10-point scale, indicating the strength of agreement. The items in the survey were selected and adapted from previous research which focussed on similar variables; Cheesman, McGuire, Shankweiler and Coyne's (2009) work influenced the content knowledge items and Carlisle, Kelcey, Rowan and Phelps' (2011) work influenced the pedagogical knowledge items. The beliefs items were adapted from a study conducted by Westwood, Knight and Redden (1997) and the practices items were adapted from the work of Sandvik, van Daal and Ader (2014). The section that asked about demographic data allowed for the investigation of possible relationships between these and teachers' beliefs and knowledge and classroom practices.

#### 6.2 Method of Analysis

The data were analysed using computer-assisted software: IBM SPSS Version 21. A descriptive analysis was conducted in the first instance, as it is necessary to have general characteristics of the data based on the frequency numbers, mean and standard deviation.

Descriptive analysis is also important in data analysis to check the reliability and the normality of the data (Pallant, 2016; Field, 2009). Then, the inferential statistical analysis took place to investigate statistical differences in relation to different demographic variables.

### 6.3 Reliability & Normality of the data

**Table 6-1: Reliability ( $\alpha$ ) and normality of the survey data**

	Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	Skew	Kurtosis
<b>Knowledge</b>	Content	0.39	0.161	-	-0.7	-0.29
	Pedagogical	0.39	0.178	-	0.26	-0.35
<b>Beliefs</b>	Phonics Approach	6.03	1.81	0.819	0.29	0.31
	Whole-language Approach	5.24	2.64	0.848	0.34	-1.13
<b>Practice</b>	Phonics Approach	7.35	1.00	0.550	-0.34	-0.02
	Whole-language Approach	7.43	1.04	0.425	-0.76	0.59

*Note.* *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha; Skew = Skewness

There is a discrepancy in the Cronbach Alpha's values for the beliefs and practice constructs. Ideally, Cronbach's alpha coefficient is considered highly reliable if it is above .7 (DeVellis, 2003), and above .5 is still moderately acceptable to social science study for questionnaire items (Hinton et al., 2004; Pallant, 2016). Pallant (2016) further asserts that if the items within the constructs are below ten items, it is possible to get a low Cronbach value of .5. Thus, for the beliefs constructs, the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is above .7, which indicates the survey items are highly reliable. As for practice constructs, both Cronbach alphas ( $\alpha$ ) are below .6 which show low reliabilities, and this is probably due to the lack of items in the constructs itself. Cronbach's alpha is not relevant for the knowledge constructs, as they are not scaled items. Normality of the data was assessed by examining the skewness and kurtosis for each of the variables. Skewness and kurtosis values within the range of +/- 2 are generally considered normal (Field, 2009; George & Mallery, 2003; Hahs-Vaughn & Lomax, 2012). Hence, given the values of the data; skewness is within the range of -.757 to .337 and kurtosis is within the range of -1.128 to .595. Thus, skewness and kurtosis are in an acceptable range for being normally distributed.

## 6.4 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was generated for all variables involved: demographic data (*Table 6-2*), knowledge about phonics and the teaching of phonics (*Figure 6-1*), beliefs and reported practices.

### 6.4.1 Demographic Variables

**Table 6-2: Demographic analysis of the respondents**

Demographic Variables		N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	24	19.5
	Female	99	80.5
	Total	123	100
Age	23-30 years old	30	24.4
	31-40 years old	54	43.9
	41-60 years old	39	31.7
	Total	123	100
Education Level	M. Ed	31	25.2
	B. Ed	64	52.0
	Non- B. Ed	2	1.6
	Diploma in Education	26	21.1
	Total	123	100
Teaching Experience	1 – 5 years	26	21.1
	6 – 10 years	39	31.7
	11 & above years	58	47.2
	Total	123	100
Type of School	Rural	27	22
	Urban	96	78
	Total	123	100

*Table 6-2* shows that 80.3% (N=99) of the participants were female, and 19.5% (N=24) were male. Interestingly, middle-aged teachers (26 – 40 years old) constituted 43.9% (N=54) of the participants and are thus the most significant contributors to the survey. In terms of teaching experience, most participants had been teaching English for a considerable period with more than five years and above (78.9%, N=97). There is an uneven proportion of the type of schools as 78% of the respondents came from urban schools compared to only 22% from rural schools.

## 6.4.2 Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) about the phonics approach

The survey investigates two distinct knowledge components: content knowledge about phonics and pedagogical knowledge in teaching English reading using the phonics approach (as explained in 3.5.1.2a). These multiple-choice questions (MCQ) of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) questions were used in order to explore teachers' knowledge of the phonics approach and the teaching of phonics in the English reading.

### 6.4.2.1 Content knowledge of the phonics approach

Figure 6-1 illustrates the percentage of correct and wrong answers provided by the teachers as they responded to the content knowledge questions in the survey.

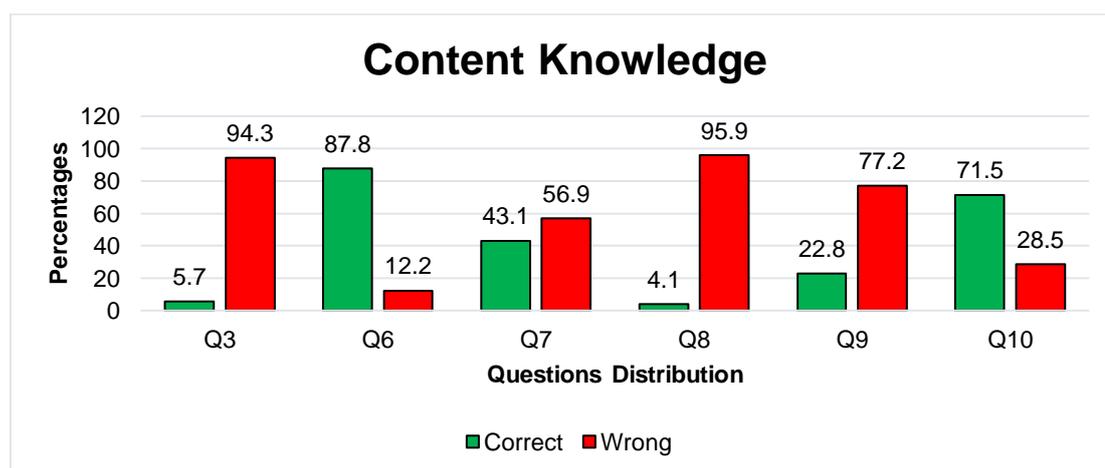


Figure 6-1: Teachers' responses to questions about content knowledge

There were six questions about content knowledge (Appendix B). Questions 3 and 9 investigated teachers' ability to count phonemes in written words with consonant blends. Question 6 asked respondents to select a definition of a phoneme. Questions 7, 8 and 10 investigated the ability of the teachers to identify and match the phonemes in written words. The results indicate that the teachers had no problem in giving the correct definition for the phonics approach (Q6) since **87.8%** of them were able to provide a correct answer for the question. However, teachers were seen having difficulty in counting numbers of sounds presented in words *freight*, *ship*, *nation* and *grape*. This is based on the results of Q3 and Q9 where most of the teachers provided wrong answers for both questions with

94.3% and 77.2% incorrect responses respectively. **Q7** and **Q8** asked the respondents to identify a matching sound for a group of words. More than half of the respondents (**56.9%**) were unable to match the same final sounds, perhaps because the spelling is not representing each other. Most of the respondents selected words with matching final letters (*house-hose; of-off*) instead of sounds (*please-buzz*). Similar to **Q8**, **95.9%** of the respondents were unable to choose a correct group of words that had similar vowel sounds. Most of the answers paid attention to similar spellings (e.g. *paid, said, main*) instead of similar sounds made by the vowels (*son, blood, touch*). As for **Q10**, most of the teachers (**71.5%**) managed to choose a correct word that contains a short vowel sound (*slip*). Overall, it can be concluded that teachers may have difficulty in distinguishing the sounds of speech from the letters that imperfectly represent them.

#### 6.4.2.2 Pedagogical knowledge of teaching using the phonics approach

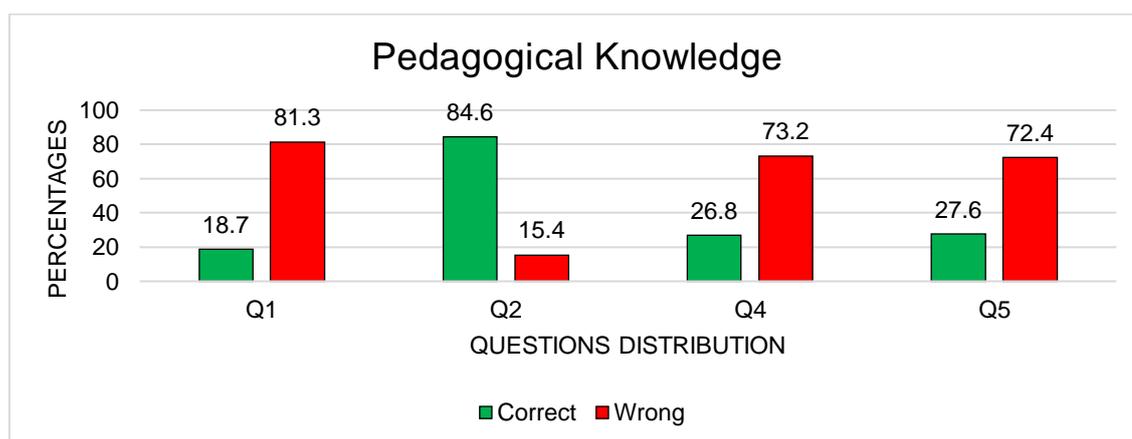


Figure 6-2: Teachers' responses to questions related to pedagogical knowledge

There were four questions on pedagogical knowledge of teaching using the phonics approach. Questions 1 and 2 investigated the ability to identify activities promoting phonics awareness. Although both questions are measuring the same skill, different results can be seen from the responses. For **Q1**, **81.3%** of the teachers were unable to suggest a set of irregular words for their pupils who are having difficulty in reading, whereas, for **Q2**, **84.6%** managed to choose a correct practical blending task to be used in the classroom. Meanwhile, **Q4** and **Q5** are concerned with applying pedagogical knowledge in a real classroom situation, and most of the teachers (**73.2%** and **72.4%**) answered both questions incorrectly. From the results, it can be concluded that teachers were familiar with blending activities, but when it comes to providing an alternative to help the pupils with early

reading based on the pedagogical questions in the survey, they were unable to suggest appropriate answers for the classroom situation.

Based on the data relating to teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, it can be concluded that the teachers are more exposed to general knowledge of phonics pedagogy rather than the explicit knowledge of phonics approach and teaching. They seem to have a certain level of theoretical knowledge of phonics, such as the definitions, sounds counting, and blending activities (explicit knowledge). However, when the questions were manipulated, they were unable to display their pedagogical knowledge appropriately. Lack of basic understanding of the concepts related to teach reading skills have led to a poor classroom instruction (Binks, et, al., 2012; Bos et, al., 2001; Moats, 1994; Spear-Swearling & Brucker, 2003) since basic language constructs are considered essential for early reading success (Binks et, al., 2012; Moats, 1999).

### **6.4.3 Teachers' Beliefs**

*Table 6-3* illustrates teachers' beliefs about early literacy. There are 10 items with a scale from strongly agree (1) until strongly disagree (10). Six items (4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10) were statements supporting the phonics approach while the other four items (1, 2, 3, and 8) supported the whole-language approach. The lower the mean score, the more they agreed with the statement and vice versa.

**Table 6-3: Teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading pedagogy survey items**

	Item	Beliefs	Mean	SD
<b>Phonics Approach statements</b>	4	Learning to read should involve attending closely to the print on the page.	5.18	2.94
	5	Sight vocabulary learnt in isolation does transfer to text reading	6.11	3.0
	6	The beginning reader should be taught phonics skills	4.32	3.2
	7	For effective learning, literacy programs should be organized to allow for the specific study of separate skills such as comprehension, word recognition and phonics.	4.41	3.13
	9	It is important to separate words into sounds?	6.11	2.6
	10	It is important to decode words in a lesson?	5.34	2.4
<b>Whole-language approach statements</b>	1	There is very little difference between the skills needed by the beginning reader and those used by proficient readers.	7.55	2.4
	2	Children learn to read in the same natural way that they acquire oral and aural language skills.	6.70	2.5
	3	Devoting specific time to word study in isolation is undesirable since this practice decontextualizes a component skill of language.	6.33	2.6
	8	Proficient readers pay very little attention to the details of print when reading.	5.89	2.7

The results suggest that teachers have mixed beliefs about the early reading and the teaching of reading. This can be seen from the whole-language statements where the mean scores were recorded at  $>5$  and above. Whereas, for the phonics approach statements, the mean scores recorded lower  $<5$  and higher  $>5$  for certain statements. It can be concluded that teachers have a certain degree of agreement and also disagreement when it comes to both approaches especially for the phonics approach.

#### 6.4.4 Teachers' Reported Practices

Teachers were also asked to rate the practice items on a ten-point scale, 1 (never) to 10 (always). It is apparent from the table that the mean scores of all items are above 6, which indicate regular practices of both phonics and whole language approaches in the classroom. This supports the previous findings about teachers' beliefs in which their views in implying whole language and phonics approach were mixed. The highest mean score in the table is for item 7 ( $M = 8.59$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ), *I read aloud to children in the class*. This is not surprising

because reading aloud is a long-established practice in the early language classroom (Sandvik et al., 2014).

Taken together, these results suggest that teachers favoured both (almost contradictory) practices. It is not clear whether this is a deliberated practice based on the teachers' beliefs or whether there is an overlap between the implementation of the new approach and the previous whole language approach. This finding is further explored in the analysis of the phase 2 data.

**Table 6-4 Teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading pedagogy survey items**

	Item	Practice	Mean	SD
<b>Whole Language Approach practices</b>	1	I use pictures alongside written text in books	7.64	1.874
	2	I talk about how the pictures are in relation to the text.	7.89	1.413
	3	I ask children to relate their own experiences to the story I read.	7.70	1.873
	4	I demonstrate how print works (e.g. words are read left to right)	8.01	1.781
	7	I read aloud to the children in the class.	8.59	1.425
	10	I teach children the letters in their names.	8.01	2.303
	11	I help children write the letters of the alphabet.	8.45	1.964
<b>Phonics Approach Practices</b>	5	I demonstrate the sounds letters make.	8.17	1.519
	6	I help children sound out words. (i.e /buh/ + /oy/ = boy)	8.17	1.519
	8	I point out rhyming patterns when I read stories.	8.46	1.752
	9	I provide additional opportunities for pupils to practise pronunciation (e.g. pairwork) without explicitly teaching phonics.	7.27	2.131
	12	I use cue cards and visual aids to teach blending sound.	7.66	1.885
	13	I notice children enjoy the lesson with sound activities	7.96	1.826

## 6.5 Research Hypotheses

In order to look at the relationship between the variables, four hypotheses were constructed.

The hypotheses were as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant difference in the level of respondents' knowledge depending on their age, gender, years of teaching experience, education level, and type of school.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a significant difference in respondents' beliefs depending on their age, gender, and years of teaching experience, education level, and types of school they are teaching.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** There is a significant difference in respondents' reported practice depending on their age, gender, years of teaching experience, education level, and types of school they are teaching.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** There is a relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and their reported practices in English language reading.

The first three hypotheses (H<sub>1-3</sub>) were that there were statistically significant differences in respondents' knowledge, beliefs and practices in relation to demographic variables as the independent variables (IV). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were statistically significant differences between ages, years of teaching experience, and education levels. The teachers' ages ranged from 23 to 60 years old and were divided into three categories, which were 23-30, 31-40 and 41-60 years old. Years of teaching experiences were also divided into three levels, which were 1-5, 6-10, and 11 +. For education level, it was grouped into Diploma in Education, Bachelors Degree, Masters Degree and non-education degree. For the types of school (urban and rural) and teachers' gender, an independent t-test was run to determine if there were differences in their reported beliefs and practice as well. Meanwhile, for the fourth hypothesis (H<sub>4</sub>) of knowledge, beliefs and practices, a Pearson's correlation test was conducted, which was concerned with relationships between the variables.

**Table 6-5: ANOVA and t-test results from Phase 1 data**

	Knowledge		Beliefs		Practices		
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	
Demographic Variables	<b>ANOVA</b>						
	Age	0.317	0.729	2.074	.130	0.324	0.724
	Years of experience	0.195	0.823	0.863	.424	0.037	0.963
	Education level	1.560	0.203	3.270	.240	0.628	0.598
	<b>t-test</b>	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>
	Teachers' gender	-1.30 (121)	0.122	-.533 (121)	.196	- .914(121)	0.658
	Type of school	-1.34 (121)	0.008*	3.99 (121)	.000*	-0.086 (121)	0.931

*Note.*  $p < 0.05$ \*

The results showed that there were generally no statistical differences between the age, years of teaching experiences, the education level, teachers' gender and types of the school in relation to teachers' knowledge, beliefs and reported practices total scores. However, the exception was that there was a statistically significant difference in beliefs scores between schools in urban and rural areas, with teachers in urban schools ( $M = 7.07$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ) presenting a higher score than rural ones ( $M = 5.44$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ),  $t(121) = 3.993$ ,  $p = .000$ . This means that, statistically, the teachers in the urban schools' beliefs leaned more towards the whole language approach. The higher the mean scores, it indicates teachers' beliefs are more towards the whole-language approach and the lower the mean scores, the more they believe in the phonics approach as part of an early literacy strategy.

Not only that, another significant difference was also found in types of school and their knowledge, with teachers in urban schools score ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) and teachers in rural schools score ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(121) = -1.32$ ,  $p = 0.008$ . However, even though statistically significant, there is a small difference between the mean scores of both groups (rural = 3.59 and urban = 4.02), and the level of teachers' knowledge in both types of schools were still low.

As for Hypothesis 4 regarding the relationship between the variables (Table 6-6), it is found that there is a negative correlation between knowledge and beliefs  $r(123) = -.048$ , and that there is a negative correlation between knowledge and practice  $r(123) = -.011$ . There is also a statistically significant correlation between beliefs and practice relationship albeit negative for  $r(123) = -.250^*$ .

**Table 6-6: Relationship between the variables.**

	Knowledge	Beliefs	Practice
Knowledge	-	-.048	-.011
Beliefs		-	-.250**
Practice			-

*Note.* \*\* $p < .01$ .

In fact, the mean score for the reported classroom practices showed a preference for whole language practices ( $M = 7.39$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ). It is also interesting to note the significant negative correlation between beliefs and practices  $r(123) = -.250$ . Teachers' beliefs about early reading practices are recorded at  $M = 5.79$ ,  $SD = 1.98$  (table 6.7), which indicate that they have mixed beliefs of both approaches about how early reading should take place in the classroom.

**Table 6-7 The overall mean scores for beliefs and practices sections**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Practices section	7.3921	.89563	123
Beliefs Section	5.7951	1.98457	123

## 6.6 Discussion of Phase 1 findings

From previous literature research, it has been identified that beliefs, knowledge and practices are interrelated with each other (Borg, 2003). References from the literature have found out that the influence of demographic variables and contextual factors such as age, teaching experience, level of education, gender and location of school had an influence on knowledge, beliefs and practices (Blomeke et al, 2014; Borg, 2003; Decker & Kaufman, 2008; Hermans et al, 2008; Nishino, 2012; Woods & Cakir, 2011). However, it seems like these are not significant from the results derived from the analysis of the Phase 1 sample.

In terms of the level of knowledge, the survey data indicate that the level of phonics knowledge of the teachers is still low despite the courses that they have attended so far (not included in the demographics analysis above, but a questions was asked about professional development courses in the survey). This is perhaps because the whole language approach has been used for so much longer than the phonics approach. In fact, teachers' initial teacher education (ITE) is unlikely to have prepared them in terms of the pedagogical aspects and content knowledge of phonics teaching. Further investigation of teachers' knowledge will be carried out through interrogation of the data collected in Phase 2

In addition to further investigation of teachers' knowledge, the researcher believes that further investigation of teachers' beliefs is also crucial in understanding their implementation of curriculum reform (Borg, 2012). Borg and Phillips (2007) point out that those beliefs are inconsistent. They change according to the situation, and sometimes, beliefs do not transform into the teachers' practice. This is important since although teachers may hold some stable beliefs, many can change depending on contextual factors, such as the available resources and the pupils. For this reason, different data collecting methods such as interviews and classroom observations need to be adopted to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs in implementing the phonics approach

With the changes in the English syllabus, teachers are expected to use the phonics approach in the classroom but given the other demands of teaching a second language, which involves developing different skills and the pressures of testing pupils' proficiency in the English subject, the phonics approach may be lower down on their classroom agenda. Further research is also needed in phase 2 since the distribution of the sample is uneven,

with more respondents working in urban schools compared to rural ones. This distribution could influence the result. Further, respondents may not have answered the questions honestly, which could be one of the factors why the result indicated no significant correlations. This interpretation is based on the researcher's observation that many of the responses to the survey were similar for many items.

Nevertheless, since the study is focussing on the teaching of English reading specifically in using the phonics approach, these findings show how knowledge, beliefs and practices of the teachers do not yet seem to be aligned with the new syllabus implementation although it has reached the second wave of the implementation (6<sup>th</sup> year). It is hoped by venturing into phase 2 of the study, a more in-depth understanding of possible relationships between teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practices will be gained and also that data will be collected to answer the rest of the research questions. An ethnographic case-study with interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis of Year 1 textbook were used in phase 2.

# CHAPTER 7

## PHASE 2: QUALITATIVE STUDY

### 7.1 The implications of phase 1 findings for phase 2

From previous literature, it seems that teachers' beliefs and knowledge influence practices in the classroom (Fives & Buehl, 2012). However, the results from phase 1 of this study would seem to contradict these findings and thus evoke the researcher's curiosity to delve further by using a qualitative approach with interviews and observations. I feel that there is a need to investigate further why the results of the phase 1 study demonstrated insignificant relationships between these variables. Is it the case that teachers do not have particular beliefs about the teaching of reading, have limited knowledge of different reading approaches and employ various practices in the teaching of reading? Furthermore, the questionnaire only collected data regarding teachers' reported practices rather than providing evidence of what they 'really' do in the classroom (Borg, 2009). Observational research in phase 2 will help to triangulate the findings from phase 1, rather than seeking answers as to 'why' the teachers showed (i) inconsistency of beliefs in the teaching of reading, (ii) inadequate knowledge in the pedagogical content knowledge of teaching phonics, and also (iii) insignificant relationships between their beliefs and practices from the quantitative data results. The extended findings for RQ 1 and the remaining research questions (RQ 2 and RQ3) which were not answered in phase 1 will be explored.

- i) What are the beliefs and knowledge of the English teachers in Malaysia concerning the teaching of English reading through the phonics approach?
- ii) To what extent and how do English teachers implement the phonics approach in their classroom?
- iii) What are, according to the teachers, the contextual factors that influence their practices in implementing the phonics approach during English language teaching?

- iv) To what extent are the teachers' actual practices congruent with their stated beliefs about the phonics approach and the teaching of English reading?

For phase 2, an ethnographic case-study design was adopted to investigate the teaching and learning of reading English using the phonics approach in an actual classroom practice. Robson (2011) emphasises that, in getting an insider perspective, it is essential to be in 'its natural setting and take part with what goes in there' (p. 144). The observational research of the reading instruction in the classroom involved teacher participants (n=4) in two different types of school. The teachers were selected and approached from schools that participated in the phase 1 study (refer to Chapter 3 for further details). Data were collected using multiple instruments, which were semi-structured interviews, observation and stimulated recall interview. The reason for using these instruments concurrently throughout phase 2 was to continuously corroborate with semi-structured interviews the information obtained through classroom observation and recorded in field notes.

During the observations, I tried to focus on the following activities in each observed lesson: (1) the implementation of the phonics approach in the teaching of reading (e.g. teaching strategies, activities, materials); (2) student-teacher instructional interaction (e.g. teacher's use of language, pupils' responses and behaviours); and (3) general climate in the classroom (e.g. classroom management, classroom environment in promoting early reading). Before the observations took place, initial interviews were conducted with the teachers to discuss their general beliefs and practices about the teaching of reading. They also were asked about the professional development courses organised by the district education office they had attended.

When observing, I positioned myself as a teaching assistant in the classroom. I did not interfere with the planning of the lesson, and they also introduced me as an English teacher to the pupils. I believe that the close relationship with the target teachers helped to make them feel comfortable with me in the classroom, and they were at ease when the observations and interviews were conducted. I spent one month in each school for the field study.

Phase 2 of the study should reveal critical issues relating to the practical application of the phonics approach in English in a second-language primary classroom as well as implications for future teacher development.

## **7.2 Analysis of language teachers' cognition in the teaching of English reading**

The teachers' interviews were analysed using Borg's (2006) language teacher cognition framework. The framework was used as an analytical tool in order to organise the data obtained from the teachers, while at the same time acting as a filter for the data analysis process. These factors can come from their life experiences and the professional development courses that they attended, contextual factors that they deal with every day and their (evaluated) experience of classroom practices. In Borg's original framework, he included schooling as one of the teacher cognition domains. Since the participants are in-service teachers, I have replaced the schooling domain with life experience as to give wider attention to the factors that occurred in teachers' life. This term is used so as to describe in diverse terms teachers' personal experiences of becoming ESL teachers, their childhood experiences as ESL learners, their schooling, previous work experience, and also experiences of acting as parents. I will present the interviews of the four teachers as individual cases, in order to understand their individual cognition and experiences as teachers so far. Below is a brief summary of the teachers' demographic information for background reference (detailed information is presented in Chapter 3).

**Table 7-1 : Brief summary of the teachers' demographics**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Hannah</b>	<b>Naima</b>	<b>Iman</b>	<b>Farah</b>
Education Background	Diploma in Science Education	Diploma in TESL*	Diploma in TESL*	Diploma in TESL*
Years of teaching experience	10 years	29 years	7 years	5 years
Classes taught	Two Year 1 English classes (top and lower level class) One Year 1 Science Class	Three Year 1 English classes (intermediate level classes)	Two Year 1 English classes (top and lower level class) Two Year 1 classes in other subjects	Three Year 1 English classes (intermediate level classes)
Type of school	Rural school	Teaching in the same urban school: the three of them are colleagues		

\*Note: TESL – Teaching English as a second language

### 7.3 Hannah's Case Study

#### 7.3.1 Influences from life experiences

Hannah was honest in that she revealed that she was not a good language learner during her school years. She always found English difficult. She remembered that her former teachers used shared reading as a teaching strategy and always required them to work with a dictionary for comprehension.

*Usually, we got a passage from a textbook or storybook, and the class would read the text aloud together. My teacher would guide the reading and correct our pronunciation. We also had to work with a dictionary alongside the reading. We also occasionally needed to repeat the text over and over again.*

Reading has been associated with comprehension and reading aloud seems to be considered part of reading practice by teachers. By doing reading aloud as a practice drill, they believe that it will enhance pupils' pronunciation. The use of the bilingual dictionary and drilling techniques for reading aloud are a standard practice for second-language classrooms in Malaysia.

## 7.3.2 Influences from professional coursework

### 7.3.2.1 Diploma in Education

Hannah graduated with an environmental science degree; therefore, her background has nothing to do with English teaching. Hannah's decision to become a teacher was influenced by the opportunity to train as a teacher through a Diploma in Education offered by the Ministry of Education. She tried her luck and was accepted. After serious consideration, she accepted the offer to further train as a primary science teacher.

A local teacher training college offered a one-year education diploma under the provision of the Ministry of Education. At this time, the ministry offered this alternative pathway to increase the employability of the bachelor's degree graduates within the teaching field. Another objective of the programme was to increase the number of teachers in schools and at the same time to promote teaching as a profession of choice. Hannah described this as an excellent opportunity since it was hard to get a job in her field. Her additional motivation was to help Malaysian pupils to develop their interest and improve their results in science. She was trained to be a science teacher as her major and English as her minor subject. She explained the rationale for this:

*During the training year, my major was science, and I was trained to be a science teacher. Previously, there was this new policy implementation to teach science in English. It was a shift from learning the subject in Malay as a medium of instruction to English as the language of instruction. Because of that, they offered English to me as my minor.*

However, Hannah further explained that most of her courses revolved around science content and pedagogy rather than the teaching of English. English courses took up a relatively small portion of the time and mostly the classes focused on public-speaking skills, pronunciation and the teaching of grammar rather than pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1979) for teaching English. There were no structured lessons when it came to English courses, and the lecturers just lectured at the front of the room.

*The lecturers organised the classes in lectures and did not go into depth about the English topics and subjects. For example, with phonics, I remembered they did touch on it but did not provide further guidance about how to apply phonics in a language classroom. They focussed more on*

*pronunciation and grammar. It was more like an English proficiency class rather than the teaching of English classes.*

Consequently, Hannah's experiences during her Diploma in Education did not include the opportunity to develop her pedagogical skills in teaching English, especially in teaching primary English. The minimal exposure that she received during her teacher-training year was not enough to influence her cognition in English teaching during her in-service years. Thus, her cognition of teaching English is likely to have been more directly and positively influenced from other elements.

### **7.3.2.2 Continuing professional coursework (CPD)**

Throughout her teaching years, Hannah attended a 'Professional Up-skilling of English Language Teacher' (Pro-ELT) course which was made compulsory for in-service English teachers with the objective of raising the level of English language proficiency among Malaysian English teachers. The English instructors continuously assessed the teachers through assignments and classroom participation. The teachers also needed to take a proficiency test at the end of the course. They would get a one-off monetary incentive if they achieved excellent results, at the end of the course. Hannah felt that she learned a lot about the pedagogy of teaching English during the course and started to apply methods and techniques that she learned in her teaching. She claims that phonics was mentioned theoretically as a part of the module, but it was not enough to cover the practical part of how to use it in the teaching of reading English. Besides this, when attending the Pro-ELT course, phonics was not yet part of the new syllabus implementation in schools.

*During the course, the trainers were English native speakers and were from the British Council since the programme was a collaboration between the Ministry and the British Council. The trainers emphasised phonics teaching a lot. They would have no problem with teaching phonics since English is their mother-tongue. However, for us, it is quite hard to implement it during the lesson, mainly because the children are not familiar with this approach.*

### **7.3.2.3 Professional learning community (PLC)**

In addition to her professional coursework, I asked Hannah about the professional learning community (PLC) in the school, which usually is led by the subject coordinator. She explained that the subject coordinator does CPD with the teachers. Usually, the subject

coordinator will attend a course and then return to school to conduct the in-house training for other English teachers as cascade training in order to share the course content with all the teachers. Somehow, it is not how it is supposed to be.

*We do have that but usually, they only discuss the theory and not the practicalities. Usually, they talk and do a demo on how to do it. They also simplified a three-day course to a one-day CPD in school, which is of course not enough for us to learn many things. The same thing happened when phonics was first introduced in the syllabus. Only one teacher went to the training, and she came back and held a briefing for us in school.*

It seems that teachers follow the instructions without much debate and are left confused as to how to implement the phonics approach in the teaching of reading. The CPD and PLC seems to be a major influence on teachers' cognition; this was especially the case when the new implementation occurred. However, it is important to make a continuous effort to track teachers' progress after they attended the course in order to maintain the knowledge that they had and by providing support to the teachers in order to avoid superficial adaptations to change (Sikes, 2013).

### **7.3.3 Influences from contextual factors**

#### **7.3.3.1 Classroom factors**

##### **a) Mixed abilities of pupils**

Hannah's pupils came from diverse family and home backgrounds and had different academic abilities. With the knowledge of her pupils, Hannah had to prepare differentiated lesson plans according to the pupils' varied proficiency levels; in this case, she needs to revise her lesson objectives to ensure they are adaptable to the pupils' situations. For the top set, she expects more engagement and the ability to respond to the lesson well, whereas for the bottom set, more activities are needed in securing pupils' interest in the lesson. The school takes the initiative to lessen the number of pupils in the weakest class, so the teachers will be able to pay extra attention to them. However, it is not as easy as it may seem.

*We minimise the pupils in the weaker classes, but then teaching them individually to recognise the alphabet is a struggle as well. They still cannot remember most of it, let alone read a sentence independently.*

To avoid frustration with the learning, Hannah decided to be more flexible with her teaching and to try to be more creative. From one of my observations with her weakest class, she used a total physical response activity, which requires the pupils to move around the class to solve a puzzle. She also frequently spoke in the Malay language rather than using the target language all the time, so that pupils were able to comprehend and execute the task that she set during the lesson.

*I hardly have any problems with the top class. Although some of them are also weak in reading, they still able to respond to my instructions in English. As for the weakest class, I have to repeat multiple times just for simple instructions and end up feeling desperate and frustrated. Then I shift to using the Malay language in the classroom.*

This situation shows that other than specifically focussing on phonics, Hannah needs to deal with different situations in the classroom. All of these might be the reason why she found it hard to fully incorporate phonics in her reading teaching because lower ability pupils do not understand English very well. Therefore, she needs to focus on pupils understanding of the English language she used, which means that she has little time for phonics.

### **b) Teacher's independent initiative**

Hannah admitted that she lacked pedagogical content knowledge for her classroom teaching and also for the phonics approach. She opted to implement their own initiative because of the nature of the classroom itself. She wanted to improve her classroom pedagogy as she believes that is what a teacher should do, to continually upgrade their teaching techniques and skills so that the pupils will get the benefits. She started looking for alternatives to help her to cope with this gap in knowledge and settled for online resources and social media for her teaching materials. She continually refers to a Facebook page of another English teacher, Teacher Dilla, and a blog by Teacher Fiera, for ideas in teaching. Both teachers share ideas, methodology, lesson notes and even materials for teaching, such as teaching aids, on both internet platforms. Both platforms are useful for teachers to download teaching aids and providing activities to be used in the classroom.

Hannah admits that it saves a lot of planning time as she can find activities that will interest the pupils.

### **7.3.3.2 School- and district-level factors**

It is also undeniable that school context plays an influence on how policy implementation is performed in schools (Borg, 2006). Hannah believed that reading skills were essential for the pupils, especially at an early age. However, it seems like her school was far from being a conducive environment in which to promote the English language and reading proficiency at an early age.

#### **a) The absence of reading culture in schools**

Promoting beginning to read requires a literacy-rich environment (Bruce, 2005). This is not only to improve reading but also to positively influence speaking and writing skills. However, reading culture did not seem to be part of the school. They did have a whole school reading programme for the pupils, but independent reading activities were left at the discretion of the teacher

*There is no reading culture here. We are rushing more to finish the syllabus and prepare the pupils for exams. If not, parents will get angry if there is no exam, no grade for their children.*

As an observer in Hannah's class, I did not notice any books or other reading materials other than the textbook or the photocopy handouts that were to be completed and pasted in the exercise book. This suggests that the teaching and learning of reading were carried out for assessment purposes only.

#### **b) Lack of English teachers**

In Hannah's school, there were eight classes for Year 1 in 2017. Hannah taught English to three of the classes and one class in science. Due to a lack of English teachers in the school at the lower primary level, other teachers, with different subject-related teaching backgrounds, have no choice but to cover the remaining classes. According to Hannah, the other teacher had to teach English as well, although her major was the Malay language.

One mathematics teacher covered another class and an Arabic language teacher was responsible for the remaining classes. This shows that the expertise of these teachers does not contribute where it is supposed to, and this raises questions about subject knowledge competence. The non-specialist background of the teachers might have impacted the teachers' cognition in teaching English and phonics during the English lesson. This is one of the contextual constraints that led to Hannah teaching English in the first place despite her education qualifications in science.

**c) Lack of training from the education district office**

Lack of training from education district offices can be a significant cause of teachers feeling isolated and incapable of delivering the phonics lessons. Hannah recalled that they used to have regular training, although it was on a different focus for teaching. As for phonics, she has not been to any proper training to improve her pedagogical skills. This is due to budget constraints. Sometimes, they were also not entitled to a training course as the office will pick schools which they think need more help and her school had been neglected in this process.

*It is due to a limited budget, so they are not able to accommodate all teachers for the training. At least by attending the training, the teacher will learn something new, and it also can act as a refresher for us regarding the previous pedagogies that we learned before.*

Hannah also outlined that most of the courses prepared by the education office are related to teaching for the exam: for example, how to teach pupils to score in English writing and reading comprehension. These courses are more focussed on the upper primary classes in Years 4, 5 and 6 rather than early primary teaching courses specifically for a teacher like her.

**d) Lack of support from home**

Hannah observed another factor that influences pupils' reading proficiency, which is the support from the home environment. This includes the parents' support and the social-economic status of the pupils' families. She raised concerns about this, as she believes a conducive home environment would enhance not only language learning but also academic learning in general. The supportive home environment will make the pupils familiar with

the use of language, but not all families and parents come from a well-educated background. Sometimes, when Hannah used English in the classroom, the pupils asked her to speak in the Malay language instead.

Another concern she raised is that pupils are off for a long school holiday. This usually happened at the end of every year in December, where the students will have a month off for their school break. When returning in the new year, more pupils are unable to recognise the sounds or the words or are even unable to read. Hannah concluded that the pupils did not do any revision during the period. This situation is frustrating.

*For Year 1 going to Year 2, the Year 2 teachers will blame us when they conduct the LINUS assessment for them in April; the pupils cannot recognise the sounds that they have learned even though they did pass it during Year 1. After the break, they really cannot remember much. They did not do any revision at home during the break. No drilling, no support at home.*

### **7.3.3.3 National and state-level factors**

Hannah experienced two different primary syllabi: The Primary School Integrated Curriculum (KBSR), and the new Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum (KSSR). The KBSR was more focussed on the communicative and whole-language approach to learning English while the latter one, which was introduced in 2011, has included the phonics approach as part of teaching reading and promotes second-language literacy as one of the English subject objectives. Having spent years as both a student and teacher under different curricula, it is probably unsurprising that adjustment to a new one has its challenges.

#### **a) English syllabus implementation**

Between 2011 and 2017, the KSSR English syllabus was revised twice. During the first year of implementation, the teaching of phonics was included under the reading skills section which is a norm, but in early 2017 the revised English language syllabus positioned the phonics approach under the listening and speaking skills section, which had confused Hannah.

*Through a revised syllabus starting this year (2017), phonics is placed under listening and speaking, which I found 'weird'. Previously, it was under reading. It is pretty messed up by this revised syllabus, which was given to us this year. As a teacher, I'm not sure how to integrate phonics during the listening and speaking skills section during the lesson.*

She did not feel comfortable with the changes. She also realised that teachers are more concerned with finishing the English syllabus in the textbook. Because of that, each topic in the textbook should be covered within a week before the teacher moves to the next one.

*The system is different now. We're trying to keep up with the syllabus, and there is too much content for primary school pupils to learn. Maybe it's more suitable for pupils in the city because they might be already fluent in English since they're exposed to lots of things, but if it's in the rural school area like we are, they will not be able to catch up with this pace. Even the teachers feel it is a burden and that they are rushing when teaching in the classroom.*

As she observes, pupils seem less interested in the lessons now. Although this is her opinion, she also believed that parents thought the same with regards to the learning environment in school. The parents compared their child's experience of learning English during kindergarten to their experience in primary school.

*I received complaints from parents before about their children. When they're in their kindergarten, the children enjoyed it and learned well. So now when they're in Year 1, they're feeling down and not focused in school. Maybe because she [the child of the parents who complained] feels bored learning the same thing? Before this, the girl was excellent in kindergarten. She had an A in English and could read well. When entering Year 1, the child stopped making progress.*

Here we see a contextual constraint whereby teachers were unable to carry out their preferred practices due to the way the syllabus is organised. Nonetheless, teachers might opt to leave out what they perceive to be the unnecessary parts of the syllabus and do what they feel is right because they have their own ideas, experience and preferences in teaching (Borg, 2012). At the same time, they also need to cater to the students' needs in the classroom.

### **b) Exam-oriented syllabus**

With the new KSSR syllabus, school-based assessment was introduced to replace the standardised exam in school. It was implemented in stages, starting with Year 1 and Year 4 in 2011. However, this initiative was not entirely welcomed by the stakeholders, especially parents. They still expected to receive exam results for their children each term. They requested the school organise an exam, as it is considered the benchmark to evaluate their children's learning.

*The exam is not compulsory now, but parents request an exam because they want to know the results. We use a band-scale to record the pupils' progress and achievement. For example, Band 1 for English shows pupils hardly achieve the curriculum target even with much support, and Band 6 shows pupils exceed expectations of the curriculum target. When we allocated these band-scales individually for the pupils according to their progress, the parents still want an exam, what mark did their children score, etc. When I went for a course, the trainer commented that Malaysia is an exam-oriented country. So, we need to have an exam too.*

Parents seem to play a major role in influencing a school's decisions regarding assessment despite the new changes to the curriculum. It seems like school administrators also have their hands tied, expected to follow the requests of parents to conduct an exam even though it is not necessary to do so. This indirectly affects teachers as they now feel obliged to prepare the pupils for the examination, rather than focus on the learning itself.

### **c) LINUS assessment**

LINUS, which stands for Literacy and Numeracy Screening, is a programme to improve pupils' basic language skills in both the Malay and English languages, and in mathematics after the third year of their primary education. The assessment is done in April (pre-test) and August (post-test) every year to record the pupils' progress. For English, teachers need to evaluate each of the pupils based on certain constructs outlined by the assessment template. Hannah described this process as tedious because of the time constraints and the extra work put on teachers as they need to do this on top of their teaching responsibilities in order to complete one cycle of the assessment.

*In order to make them pass, we need to drill the pupils for the test. Call them one by one and ask them one by one. By doing that, they will then remember the phonics sounds, and the blending and segmenting activities. For writing, we are required to complete the test within two weeks. Moreover, of course, two weeks are not enough. We can at most evaluate or test 10 pupils for two days. Imagine if we have 40 pupils per class, and each teacher at least teaches three classes. We still need to teach the regular syllabus on top of the assessment. We really don't have much time and choice with the assessments other than to do it.*

In addition to carrying out these assessments, teachers still need to prepare lessons, teach, and carry out other administrative work. There is high pressure for the teachers and pupils to do well in this assessment as the results from the assessment will be compared between schools at the district level, and then between education district offices at the national level. If the school records a low achievement for the assessment, the teacher needs to provide reasons and justification for what happened. This will eventually lead to the district office coming to visit the school and putting a lot more pressure on teachers. To avoid more undesirable consequences like this, the teachers have no choice but to amend the assessment results, although the pupils have not reached the standard. So, 'on paper', all pupils have passed the assessment at the end of the year.

*We actually have no choice but to amend the result. The pupils can pass the assessment as long as they can recognise and say the words, then they can pass. For the top classes, they have no problem, but for lower classes, this is a challenging situation and has thus resulted in teachers amending results.*

#### **d) Too many textbooks to follow**

There are three different textbooks provided for teachers to use. Hannah explains that one textbook is based on the curriculum specification topics, the second textbook is intended for LINUS assessment, and the third textbook is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) language framework, which has different content from the syllabus and curriculum specifications.

*We have the main textbook and another reference textbook (referring to CEFR textbook). How do we integrate both into the English lesson? I really don't have time to integrate both resources into my lesson plan as both contents of the books are not similar at all. On top of that, I have a LINUS assessment as well. We've become confused with which books we should use and don't have much time either to use both in the classroom.*

Hannah asked her subject coordinator, Madam J, about how to use all the textbooks but received feedback from her saying the district office has not provided guidance about this.

### **7.3.4 Hannah's beliefs about the teaching of reading**

In terms of teaching practices, Hannah believed reading was one of the essential skills for early literacy. She explained that the fluency level of the pupils was still low, even for an advanced class. Thus, she considered shared reading, drilling and reading aloud as potential techniques to help the pupils with their reading.

#### **7.3.4.1 Shared reading**

Shared reading is not a skill but a classroom activity where the teacher introduces a text to the children and helps them to engage with the text. Hannah emphasised several times the advantages of shared reading in her interviews. Her enthusiasm for this activity was possibly influenced by her experience of being a language learner where her teacher used this activity during the English lesson. This activity was also embedded in the previous English syllabus (KBSR). Hannah shared that she really enjoyed teaching reading by taking 5–10 minutes a day to conduct a shared reading activity in the classroom based on the previous syllabus. Currently, the teaching of reading has been treated as a skill rather than an activity, and she believes that is why pupils are having difficulty enjoying it.

*Previously, KBSR used shared reading, for 5-10 minutes a day. The pupils can still pronounce the English words even when we did not use phonics for reading before. I still believe that shared reading should be done every day by including it together with the reading and not only focus on individual skills, like writing and speaking.*

#### **7.3.4.2 Drilling and reading aloud**

Drilling, according to Hannah's interpretation, is used to make the pupils memorise words that they have learned. The level of proficiency of the class does not matter; it always seems to work well with pupils.

*I think drilling is important. It doesn't matter if it's a top class or bottom class; the pupils need drilling sessions so that they can remember what they learned. Just a short five minutes a day. It has to be every day. If not, they can't remember what they have learned.*

On top of drilling, reading aloud is used by teachers to assess and correct pupils' pronunciation. Hannah thinks that this is a good technique to use since she can assess pupils' pronunciation, and at the same time, she believes it will boost pupils' confidence in using the English during the lesson. Somehow, this practice is not listed as one of the activities that teachers should carry out in a language classroom anymore.

*So, during class, I will ask them to read aloud for around five minutes. However, if we are to follow the syllabus, it's considered wrong.*

This is one of the tensions that the teachers had to face when their beliefs and practices do not align with the new curriculum implementation.

### **7.3.5 Summary of Hannah's case**

The case of Hannah has thrown light on the struggles that she faced while teaching reading English. There are discrepancies, in terms of Hannah's beliefs, knowledge and practices that arise from using the phonics approach as part of her classroom teaching. From the interview data, her practice seems to be guided by her previous experience of how reading was taught in a language classroom. Although there seems to be some attention to phonics in her practice, it can be deduced that the reason for relatively little of this is due to the LINUS assessment. Hannah also shared the challenges she faced while teaching English. She seemed very concerned with other aspects of English language pedagogy, classroom management, and contextual factors that interfered with her teaching. From her interview, it can be deduced that she is putting more effort into addressing these issues rather than focussing solely on the phonics approach. This could suggest that she might have abandoned the phonics approach if it were not a compulsory part of the English lesson.

## **7.4 Naima's Case Study**

Naima was the most experienced English teacher out of all the participants. She had been teaching for about 29 years and had experienced teaching English using the previous and current syllabi for Year 1. It is necessary to consider this valuable experience, given that she has spent a great deal of her professional life in the education system.

### **7.4.1 Influences from life experiences**

Naima's schooling years were somewhat 'blurry' since it was some time ago when she finished school. She remembered how the teacher asked the pupils to repeat new English words after the teacher, and this seemed to be regular practice during that time. She could not remember much about the reading skills she learned. Usually, the teacher would associate reading with pronunciation by doing a read-aloud activity. Sometimes, they took turns to read sentences from the textbook. She did not think that these experiences influenced who she is today as a teacher.

### **7.4.2 Influences from professional coursework**

#### **7.4.2.1 Teacher training college**

Naima graduated from a teacher training college in 1988. She explained that she chose to enter the college due to the then lack of English teachers, and the college was looking for potential candidates to enrol. Back in 1988, being a teacher was considered a stable profession within the community. Reminiscing about her experience in the college, she did not think it helped a lot during her in-service teaching. Her teaching was more influenced by everyday encounters and experiences in the classroom.

#### **7.4.2.2 Phonics training**

Naima confessed that she had not attended any phonics training during her career. She used to teach Year 1 English, but it was when the KBSR syllabus was in operation. When she moved school, following her husband to live in another state, she was assigned to teach Year 6, which is a crucial assessment year in primary school. For 10 years, her teaching career mostly revolved around the upper primary levels in Years 4, 5 and 6. When she was

supposed to attend the phonics training, it clashed with another Year 6 programme. She realised that she never had any exposure to formal training about phonics teaching. However, things changed when she was transferred to her current school four years ago. The head teacher asked her to teach the Year 1 class because he knew she was once a Year 1 English teacher. She revealed that she was devastated by this role change since she knew nothing about the recent Year 1 syllabus.

*I still remember what the head teacher told me in a staff meeting. He said I should not have any excuses for not attending any phonics training before as all Year 1 English teachers have gone through the training after the commencement of the new syllabus in 2011. I told him that I had never participated in any training for this new syllabus. Come to think about it; it is true because when my school did the training for the English Year 1 teachers, it clashed with my other training for the Year 6 programme. Therefore, that is why I did not attend the training.*

#### **7.4.2.3 Professional learning community (PLC)**

Another aspect of training is through the professional learning community (PLC) sessions with colleagues at the school. PLC sessions provide a way for teachers to get together and discuss their teaching problems in school. These can be formal or informal depending on the teacher who organised and delivered the sessions. As was the case for Hanna, the PLC also served as a formal learning platform where teachers who attended a district training course came back to school and communicated what they had learned to others. This practice is commonly known as cascade training. Since Naima was having difficulty with the new syllabus, she willingly approached other English teachers in her school for help. However, she still found it challenging to work with the phonics approach in the beginning.

*Occasionally, Iman [the second participant] did teach us how to use the phonics in the classroom when she attended a training course held by the district education office. She is the coordinator for Year 1, so she is responsible for briefing us about the changes. I tried to follow the modules and guidelines, but it is hard to decipher everything. I do not know phonics, and I did not feel confident at all.*

She admits that she is more pragmatic when it comes to learning. She is comfortable with hands-on learning, which she can follow step by step rather than listening to somebody talk about it. As a result, she did not feel modules and workbooks were helping her to improve her pedagogical skills. She needed to learn things more experientially.

*Iman advised me to use the guidelines and procedures on how to use phonics approach through the module that she gave us, but I cannot work through the book, I need to look at the practical steps on how to use it. I need real mock teaching in implementing those techniques in the classroom.*

### **7.4.3 Influence of contextual factors**

#### **7.4.3.1 Classroom factors**

After a while, Naima was confident with the approach and started to improvise her teaching techniques. Most of the improvement came from her own experience as a teacher. She incorporated exciting teaching methods together with the phonics to get her pupils to pay attention to the lesson. Initially, Naima presented the sound of the letters without any actions but realised the pupils tended to forget them quickly. Since she seems to favour doing actions in the classroom, Naima integrated the action movements and sounds to make it more impactful. She observed that pupils could identify the phonemes and remember the sounds well.

*I realised that pupils pay more attention when I combine the actions and the letter sounds together. If I only introduce the sound, the pupils will not remember the action that comes with the sound. Hence, they tend to forget. So, I tried to make it the other way around. I show them the action first, and they need to guess the sound. For example, I pointed to the nose; they can guess it is /n/, so I applied both sound and action together. It improves a lot. Sometimes I show the action; they can guess the initial sounds from the action.*

#### **7.4.3.2 School- and district-level factors**

##### **a) Syllabus change**

Like Hannah, Naima also criticised the revised syllabus that she has had to implement this year. The revised curriculum of KSSR was circulated earlier in January (2017), which included new content for the syllabus and textbook. Within the new material, phonics is placed under listening and speaking skills despite being previously attached to reading. Naima was having a hard time adjusting her lessons to meet this requirement.

*I am an experienced teacher and have been in the field for almost 30 years. Preparing the lesson plans is not a problem for me. I have been doing it for my entire career. Because I am so used to it, and I know what to achieve in each lesson from the top of my head. This year I felt so worthless when I was not able to incorporate phonics in my lesson plan. Even worse, they [the ministry] consider phonics skills as part of listening and speaking skills instead of reading. For me, the purpose of phonics is not for reading anymore.*

Another point she raised was the pace of implementing the revised syllabus, which she felt was too fast; she believed there was too much content to cover from the syllabus and textbook. Therefore, she felt that she was rushing to finish the syllabus instead of following the pupils' learning pace. Emphasising quantity instead of quality seems to be the focal point of the new syllabus, in her opinion. Naima thought that there was no need for more topics in the textbook.

*The pace of the revised syllabus is too fast. I am struggling with the topics, and I feel that I have a lack of time to introduce each topic to the pupils. The objectives of each lesson are not clear, either. I do not know what I should focus on in each topic in the syllabus and textbook. Supposedly, they should allocate more time for specific topics.*

Naima enjoyed teaching very much. However, this syllabus reform was affecting her emotionally. It had demotivated her as she needed to change her usual teaching style and felt lost in trying to adapt to it.

*I enjoy teaching, it is enjoyable, and when we see the pupils enjoy the lesson, I become pleased with it. However, when it comes to things like this, it makes me sad. I hope that there will be no more changes before I retire. I cannot deal with it anymore.*

## **b) LINUS assessment**

Naima explained that the main reason for adopting the phonics approach is the LINUS assessment. She realised that her pupils were unable to pass the assessment. This put her in a difficult situation; thus, she had to change the practice that she was comfortable with. In her second year, she realised that phonics is a must for the LINUS assessment. Thus, she started to look for resources to help her with the approach. Once she implemented the phonics in her practice, she realised that there was an improvement in the pupils; when they needed to identify the sounds of the letters, the pupils sounded them out correctly.

*Previously during the first year, I realised that my pupils were having trouble when it came to phonics. So, during the second year, I stressed the phonics lesson more. Then, I slowly saw improvement with the pupils as well. When I show this gesture (mmm...), they can identify it is the /m/ sound for the letter m. I'm quite happy with the result now.*

This data would seem to suggest the LINUS assessment has brought some benefits for phonics teaching. Although it requires a lot of clerical work and is time consuming for teachers to conduct, it seems that it can help the teachers to track the pupils' progress in their English reading proficiency.

#### **7.4.4 Naima's beliefs about the teaching of reading English**

##### **7.4.4.1 Years of teaching experience**

As an experienced teacher, Naima believed that both pedagogical approaches to teaching reading (phonics and whole language) help pupils to learn to read and to be competent readers. Since she was so familiar with the whole-language approach, she was sceptical about using phonics in the English syllabus.

*We have enough evidence through the years that the whole-language approach works well. I am from the previous system, and I can see we are doing fine. Even I am a successful product of the past syllabus. My former pupils could read and speak English before we had phonics. I do not know what they are going to prove by implementing phonics in the syllabus.*

However, she did not reject the idea that maybe research has shown different results when it comes to the phonics approach, and she thought that this might be one of the appropriate methods to be used for future teaching. She felt obliged to follow directions from the ministry and comply with the changes, although it was hard to deal with in the beginning.

*I do not see any advantages when applying this approach in the classroom. However, in this case, I cannot blame phonics since I also believe that those who proposed the changes might have seen this as a new approach to adapt to future English teaching. So, I will try to adapt to it within my capabilities as that is what I need to do right now.*

#### 7.4.4.2 Reluctance to change

During the years of implementation, Naima was slightly sceptical about the phonics approach, although she shared that her youngest child who hated English at the age of four improved tremendously in her reading, fluency, and pronunciation when she was five after using phonics in her kindergarten. It occurred to Naima that she had sent her to a kindergarten which used the phonics approach as part of their reading programme.

*My daughter was quite slow in reading when she was four years old as compared to other siblings. When she was in kindergarten at the age of five, she was able to read English well, and her pronunciation was so good with the slang and accent. I was so surprised and didn't believe it was because of the phonics approach.*

Although Naima had evidence around her of the positive effectiveness of the phonics approach, the thought of changing her well-embedded practices made her felt restless; thus, she chose initially to ignore the implementation. According to Naima, the lack of pedagogical content knowledge was the main reason why she refused to adopt the phonics approach in the first place. She was not confident about performing all the phonics activities, let alone teaching the pupils blending and segmenting skills. She admitted that she stuck to the whole-language approach by sounding all the targeted words together, like how she was used to doing it before rather than doing the segmenting and blending activities.

*For the first year, I did not have phonics knowledge to teach the children, so I was more inclined towards the look and says approach. Which means, I introduced the words, I pronounced them, and pupils would read aloud and follow me.*

Moreover, she faced difficulty in adapting to the new syllabus when she had to teach Year 1 classes during her first year in the current school. She described it as a painful experience, and she did not want to go over the same hurdle ever again. The feeling was even worse than her first-year experience of being a teacher. She was reluctant to change her teaching method, and it took her nearly three years to implement phonics in her teaching.

*It was hard at first. I did not even know how to write a lesson plan with the new syllabus where I needed to include phonics in the teaching. I felt that I was doing everything wrong, from planning the lesson to choosing the material to use during the reading session. I felt unmotivated and started to question my ability as a teacher.*

#### **7.4.4.3 A sense of responsibility**

Although she agreed that phonics is helpful for LINUS, it does not mean that she had a smooth journey in adapting to phonics as part of her instruction. She considered it as her responsibility as a teacher to provide her pupils with what they need. Thus, it became one of the reasons why she chose to use the phonics approach as part of teaching reading.

*So, I followed what I had been told and was supposed to do as a teacher, and hopefully, there might be a positive side of it. I felt so uncomfortable at the time when I was not able to do the phonics approach in the classroom. Even more, it's not because I didn't want to do it, but I was not capable of doing it with my current knowledge at that time.*

She developed a lack of confidence in her teaching despite her years of experience in teaching the English language. She continually pondered whether she was doing the right thing with the phonics approach. However, as time went by, she accepted the new syllabus and realised that she must do the best she can to follow the new approach

*If you observed my teaching just now, there might be something wrong with it, and I am also afraid that I make mistakes, but then I realised that is how I teach. If it is based on the video that I watch on YouTube for phonics, it is the same way I do it. That is how you pronounce the words, so I only apply what I know.*

#### **7.4.5 Summary of Naima's case**

Naima was exposed to phonics teaching from her experience as a parent when her children were learning to read English using the phonics approach in their kindergarten. However, although she knew that phonics can work in term of improving reading proficiency, she was not confident in using the approach when it was officially implemented in the national syllabus. Nonetheless, she complied with the change due to the sense of responsibility she felt as a teacher to fully follow the instructions received from the ministry. Since LINUS assessment has become a vital part in determining pupils' English literacy, Naima has no

choice but to prepare her pupils to pass the assessment. In comparison to the earlier years of phonics implementation, Naima is now confident in using the phonics approach as part of her reading lessons. However, she admitted that adapting the approach does not mean that she is entirely comfortable using it in her lessons due to the confident and knowledge level she possesses so far. In this case, it can be seen that her decision to change is mainly influenced by contextual factors, although this often goes against her beliefs about the most effective ways to teach reading English.

## **7.5 Iman's Case Study**

### **7.5.1 Influence from life experiences**

Iman cannot remember much about how she was taught to read English during her school years. She shared that the core skill that was emphasised back then was rote learning; pupils needed to remember words, grammar rules, and even the spelling.

*Honestly, English lessons during my school days were not fun. I can't recall anything related to my English classes. Back in the 80s, everything was about memorising, lots of spelling tests and grammar rules.*

### **7.5.2 Influence from professional coursework**

#### **7.5.2.1 Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)**

Iman has a bachelor's degree in accounting. Following graduation in 1999, she worked in accountancy for a few years before she applied to be a teacher through the same alternative pathway offered by the Malaysian government to Hannah. In 2004, she was accepted for the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) programme and had to undergo the teacher training course (KPLI) for a year. She opted for a career in teaching due to the personal satisfaction dealing with children would bring her, and she believed that teaching English would polish her second-language learning too. The course included English as her major, physical education for her minor and completing other co-curriculum activities for the college. She could not remember much about what she learned during the training that was specifically about the teaching of reading English. During her training (in 2004), the English syllabus was still using the KBSR syllabus, which emphasised the whole-language approach.

#### **7.5.2.2 Continuing professional development courses (CPD)**

In 2010, when phonics was about to be implemented, Iman was one of the pioneer teachers selected to attend the first round of training courses. Throughout the courses attended, she got the most exposure to phonics teaching techniques, and it was then her responsibility to use that knowledge and train other English teachers in the school in preparation for the

implementation. Iman felt that the opportunity to experience the course first-hand had a positive influence on her attitude towards the approach; hence, she feels very confident in dealing with the syllabus changes.

### 7.5.3 Influence from contextual factors

#### 7.5.3.1 Classroom practices

##### a) Problem with the phonics approach

When the phonics approach was moved in the syllabus under the listening and speaking section from the reading section, Iman felt that this was a contradiction since the core purpose of phonics was to improve pupils' reading.

*If you want to focus only on phonics, it will not be easy. For the revised syllabus, the phonics approach is under listening and speaking. For the listening and speaking skills, it will be at the beginning of the lesson. Phonics is done for only 10 minutes in the lesson. Only 10 minutes. Sometimes, the pupils are still unable to remember the previous sounds and letters associated with one another; we have to move onto the next skills already. However, for me, if I'm going to do segmenting and blending practice like last year, I don't have enough time.*

Iman explained that the syllabus had a list of focus words that Year 1 pupils need to learn and remember, but most of the words listed are not included in the textbook. She struggled to find time to introduce all the words.

*For the focus words, I didn't expect to include all of them. I have to make sure the pupils know the words. It's compulsory for pupils to know all the words. That is why I said, it's difficult for me to teach phonics because of the words that they give. For example, bell: they want to focus on the /l/ sound, but the /l/ sound is at the back. Previously when we taught phonics, we only focussed on the initial sounds. It's easier for them to recognise the sounds with the words. If we go back to the word 'clamp' just now, the focus sound is actually /p/, but the word provided has /p/ the end of the word.*

### **b) Interference of mother tongue**

It is also important to note that there is an influence from the mother tongue when pupils learn English as a second language. In this case, the pupils usually become confused about the sounds in Malay words compared with English. Iman shared that she never mixed Malay and English when she taught the sounds, because the probability of pupils messing up the pronunciation is high.

*If I teach them the sound, I don't dare to 'localise' the example as it will make the pupils confused. For example, what are the differences between the sound /e/ and /a/? It's hard to compare it with Malay sounds since they learn differently in the Malay language.*

### **c) The mixed ability of pupils**

This year, Iman has to teach two Year 1 classes, which are the 'top' class (1 UM) and the 'bottom' class (1 UUM) in the school, i.e. for children of different abilities. In the 1 UM class, most children are exposed to the English language outside school and have families that support the second-language learning environment due to the difference in the social economic status (SES) of the pupils' families. However, most of the children in the 1 UUM class come from lower SES families, and some of the pupils are having difficulty in learning, such as dyslexia. A lot of adjustment must be made to the lesson plans, activities and also teaching approaches.

*Both classes need more physical activities in the classroom rather than sitting and listening to teachers. Each activity is around five minutes. So, I need to change the objective according to the pupils, usually, around three to five objectives per lesson. However, it depends on the topic as well. If the topic is a bit hard, then it will take more time, and there will be fewer objectives. It goes back to what you want to achieve in the lesson.*

Due to the difference in pupils' learning abilities, Iman also felt that sometimes she could not force pupils to memorise or learn new words too often. In her experience, although they did drill countless times, there was still a tendency for the pupils not to be able to remember the spelling. When that was the case, she would revise the listed words every day before they started a new topic.

*Although you keep repeating the spelling, one by one, by the end of the lesson when you ask them to spell back, they can't get it right. Usually, for this class, I will spend 5-10 minutes repeating the same words that they have learned the day before, especially for the focus words of the week.*

### **7.5.3.2 School- and district-level factors**

#### **a) Lack of support from colleagues**

Iman acknowledged that all Year 1 English teachers are committed to using the phonics approach as part of their pedagogy for teaching reading. However, what made her frustrated is that when the pupils got into Year 2, the Year 2 English teachers were not serious about using the approach. She felt that all the efforts that the English teachers in Year 1 made were wasted because the pupils were not able to continue to learn using the approach anymore.

*I realised that when the pupils were in Year 2, some of the English teachers are not using phonics anymore in their lessons. Although we really prepped the pupils well in Year 1, they can't continue to use it in Year 2 because of the different approach used by the teachers. I can't say much about it because I'm not their subject leader for Year 2. So, I can only focus on Year 1 teachers, if they have any problems using the approach.*

### **7.5.3.3 National and state-level factors**

#### **a) Inconsistency of learning objectives and content between English syllabus, textbook and LINUS assessment**

Iman commented that problems started to arise when they received a revised English syllabus in 2017, where the content of the English syllabus and textbook were changed and different. These changes have prevented her from practising and implementing what she has learned before, and there still have not been any briefings by the ministry for teachers about how to implement the revised syllabus.

*We already use the revised syllabus this year, but we haven't been called by the district office to review the syllabus. Are we doing it correctly? Is it according to what they want? I'm afraid that what we are teaching the pupils is different from what they [the ministry] want. Even though English is one*

*of the core subjects in school, the ministry and the district office are still unable to prioritise this issue. Even other minor subjects, such as moral and religious studies, received briefings from the district office earlier this year.*

Usually, teachers are given a teacher's guidebook for them to refer to regarding the syllabus, topics and examples of lesson plans. This year, they did not get any of this with the revised syllabus.

### **b) The incongruity of the Year 1 English syllabus**

Based on her experience over eight years as a teacher of Year 1, she feels that the current English syllabus is unsuitable. In fact, the level of what the pupils are expected to learn is not relevant for early years. Iman believes that early years learning is all about exposure and introducing the pupils to exciting concepts rather than focusing on the technicalities of the language.

*For Year 6, the main focus is the grammar structure, and it is suitable for their level. For Year 1, we're not allowed to teach grammar yet. We are supposed to introduce it into the lesson indirectly. However, that is not happening. I'll give you one example:*

*During our first-year teaching of phonics, one of the words is 'sat', /s/a/t/.*

*Pupils: What is sat, madam?*

*Me: It's the same as sit.*

*Pupils: Why don't we use 'sit'?*

*Me: Because it's past tense.*

*Pupils: What is past tense?*

*So, it will be like that. You don't want to teach grammar, but the word introduced in the textbook is already in the past tense.*

This is the only example that Iman provided in order to explain the situation. She also felt that the huge number of elements within the syllabus was distracting.

### c) The English textbook

Iman also expressed the view that the revised syllabus did not introduce phonics appropriately. She explained that for Year 1, the focus should be on the single sounds and letters. The targeted words listed in the textbook should have also complied with this rule. In this way, pupils would not have problems identifying the correct sounds and letters when they do segmenting and blending activities. However, the new syllabus and textbook did not align with this basic rule of phonics teaching and learning and included double letter sounds, which the pupils are expected to learn when they are in Year 2. Iman was concerned that this would make the pupils more confused about the sounds and thus unable to differentiate between the single- and double-letter sounds.

*The first sounds that they need to learn are /s/ /a/ /t/ /p/, and it should blend and segment as consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC), but it's been clouded by a lot of unnecessary words and textbook content that will confuse the pupils.*

She also gave an example of how the words chosen in the textbook seem too challenging for working at a Year 1 level. Even she is not able to offer a blending or segmenting of those words — for example, the word ‘clamp’.

*Like ‘CLAMP’: I am not sure how to segment the sound – /cl/? /c//l/? Last year, I taught Year 2 pupils, so I know how to use the /cl/ sound, but this year, to show the action, I already can't remember it. I could not separate /k/ and /l/; it's wrong. /cl/ is already one sound. The real focus is actually on the /p/ sound, but the /p/ is at the back of the word. They should start with a basic approach, and this is not basic at all.*

Iman further commented that some of the words are not appropriate for the actual phonics practice. The textbook writers are not even sure whether to introduce a letter's name or focus on the letter's sound.

*It's hard to practise phonics sometimes because of the choice of words that the writers use in the textbook: for example, orange. How are you going to segment it? While, in fact, they want to introduce the /o/ sound. If it's three letter words, then we will be able to do it. Even the pupils asked us, "Teacher, why we're not doing the action for orange?" [the blending arms]. We don't have enough hands to do it, I said.*

In addition to having a problem with the textbook content, Iman also explained that this year, English teachers have three textbooks provided by the ministry. The primary reference is the official textbook that is aligned with the syllabus, the second one is a textbook published by Cambridge, and they have the last textbook for LINUS pupils (pupils who are not able to pass the assessment in the pre-test). Having all these materials is making Iman more confused about which textbook she should follow, and she is also unsure what the purpose of each textbook is. Furthermore, she does not have enough time to work out how to use these new materials that she is not familiar with. She did admit that although the Cambridge textbook provides exciting materials and activities, she is afraid that her pupils were not learning according to the syllabus because the textbook used more activities and does not follow the official syllabus of Year 1. Added to these issues, the teachers are struggling to finish off the syllabus before the final year exam, which usually takes place in November.

#### **d) LINUS Assessment**

Iman explained that there are twelve constructs in the LINUS assessment to be tested. The lower levels involve blending and segmenting tests. The pupils need to blend and segment different given words, and the teacher will record whether the pupils can carry out the activity or not.

*When it comes to LINUS questions, especially the sounds section, we need them to sound for each letter. Previously, the words tested are simple c-v-c words such as 'sat', 'mat'. This year, it's not like that. There are lots of words tested that are not even on the syllabus, and it's not a part of focus words that Year 1 pupils need to know.*

Iman raised her concerns as she thinks the pupils might not achieve the target set for English literacy this year due to the change in practice for the revised syllabus. Besides that, the inconsistencies between syllabus and textbook create problems.

*I'm really worried about this year's pupils. I feel that they might not achieve the target. When we did the pre-assessment last April, the result was different than expected. Pupils' recognition and fluency in reading were low. Previously, we kept on drilling segmenting and blending every day without fail so the pupils could memorise the phonics sounds.*

The LINUS assessment can also be a burden to teachers, especially when they need to allocate time to test each of the pupils for the assessment. Since testing time is around April–May and August–September, teachers are always rushing to conduct the tests as well as having to focus on the teaching.

*I was so frustrated when it came to LINUS assessment sometimes. Not only do we need to use our teaching time allocation to carry out the assessment, but it also involves other spare time that we have. Rather than using the spare time to plan for the teaching, we ended up struggling with the system, keying in the pupils' results one by one. Imagine: inputting one student's details can take up to 20 minutes, and I have almost 60 pupils in two classes. What about teachers who teach three classes? We spend our time doing nothing that is useful for teaching and learning.*

#### **e) Focus on exams**

Other than the LINUS assessment, Iman also reported how parents were very worried about their children's results and had high expectations about them. She encountered a case where one of the parents was frustrated with her child's English result as the student only managed to get a B. The parent thought that her child had some problem with learning and asked Iman to pay extra attention to her child in the class.

*Parents have high expectations when it comes to the exam. So, I said to her: I don't think that your son has any problems in class. If I ask him to do work, he listens well. He can do the spelling very well. I was so sad when I got the message from the mother. I'm not able to console her more than that.*

Iman agreed that the exam could help her to identify pupils' levels of understanding. This is because during the exam, pupils are on their own and whatever happens they need to rely on their knowledge without having any chance to refer to others.

*If you want to know if the pupils understand the lesson taught, just look at their exam paper. During the exam, they can't look at their friend's answer; they do not have a textbook and have to do it on their own. If during the lesson they want to look at the textbook, I just let them because that is the learning time. It's okay for them to have a peek at the book. But during the exam, it will be a different story.*

The contextual constraints presented in Iman's case seem to reflect how difficult it may be for teachers to translate their beliefs into practice, even if they are strongly in favour of the

changes. It demonstrates that even if teachers' beliefs do change, these contextual constraints still hinder a full implementation in classroom practice.

#### **7.5.4 Iman's beliefs about the teaching of reading English**

##### **7.5.4.1 Becoming a phonics advocate**

Iman admitted that she knew about phonics sometime before the syllabus changed. At the start of her time as an English teacher in her current school, she noticed a gap in pupils' reading proficiency levels, especially from those who were coming from private kindergartens.

*When I started teaching here, I noticed that the pupils who previously attended private kindergartens showed different ability when it came to their English proficiency and reading. The way they sounded each of the words and read the sentences with proper pronunciation and intonation left me mesmerised as a teacher. It turned out their kindergarten used a phonics approach as part of the reading programme.*

Later, her own exposure to the 'the wonders of phonics' occurred when her daughter registered in one of the kindergartens that used phonics as part of the reading programme too. She was so impressed, as her daughter would come back home and practise the phonics song. Since then, she started searching the web about the phonics approach to help with her children's learning.

*Ever since my daughter came back and sang the phonics song eight years ago, I'm hooked, and I have tried to explore the approach myself for her siblings.*

With her eight years of experience in teaching Year 1 classes, Iman saw the differences that occurred when phonics became a part of the English reading syllabus. She claimed this was based on her experience of spending significant time using both approaches.

*The differences that I observed when phonics is used in the classroom is that the pupils manage to read faster. When we started the sentences with the same sounds of the words, introducing phrases is not as hard as before. If the pupils can apply the approach, the reading process can get easier. Most importantly, phonics is fun. You can see the way I use the phonics approach in the classroom and how much the pupils love it.*

The pupils enjoyed singing the phonics song at the beginning of the lesson. Iman used to encourage the pupils with specific sounds, and the pupils showed their eagerness in guessing the correct letters associated with the sound.

### **7.5.5 Summary of Iman's case**

As for Iman's case, we can conclude that she is one of the phonics advocates who view the phonics approach as an effective way to teach reading English. Her cognition seems to be influenced by her experiences of her daughter's learning, and later it was strengthened through a CPD course where she was one of the 'pioneer teachers', later becoming a district facilitator training other English teacher. The way she explained the discrepancy between the learning objectives and contents of the syllabus, textbook and current classroom practice shows that she knows what is going on and what is lacking with the current implementation. She seems to feel apprehensive about the revised syllabus, which is neither entirely supportive of the phonics approach nor of English as a subject. In her view, the inconsistency between learning objectives and contents in the syllabus, textbook and assessments might put pressure on teachers as it has failed to guide the teachers through the current implementation, thus affecting the outcomes of the learning.

## 7.6 Farah's Case Study

### 7.6.1 Influence from life experiences

Farah could not remember much from her school years about learning to read. What she can remember was that her teacher used drilling and memorisation techniques to make them read the text, and that they practised pronunciation by reading aloud. Then the teacher would directly correct them if they mispronounced any words. The focus in her English class was on vocabulary and grammar. Her teacher's philosophy was that pupils need to memorise as much vocabulary as possible in order to master English.

Interestingly, Farah's bachelor's degree had nothing to do with English or education. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Information Technology (IT). While waiting to get a job after graduation, she worked as a temporary teacher in a school. When the contract as a teacher ended, she worked as an English-language teacher in an English-language centre. During her part-time job at the language centre, she used the phonics approach as part of the reading programme endorsed by the centre. She was aware of the positive changes that occurred in the pupils' reading proficiency, which she described as excellent even though the youngest pupils were around four years old. In her view, through using the phonics approach, the pupils were able to read independently, and they also managed to read the English words by sounding the letters that appeared in them.

*The reading centre that I worked in only focussed on developing English reading proficiency. We didn't teach anything else or prep the pupils for an exam. So, we could only focus in developing their reading skills using the provided reading programme. I was surprised by the children's ability to read those English words when they started to recognise the letters' sounds. It was so different to when we taught English using the look-and-say approach. The pupils also seemed to have a good English accent as well, because they know the letters' sounds.*

### 7.6.2 Influence from professional coursework

#### 7.6.2.1 Diploma in Education

Farah took part in the one-year programme of a teaching course under the same government's employability scheme as Iman. She enrolled in a Diploma in Teaching

English as a Second Language (TESL) course, which specifically focused on teaching English. It took her one-and-a-half years (three semesters) to complete all the modules. She explained that most of her course modules emphasised the teaching methodology, especially how to teach reading, speaking, writing and listening skills on top of other relevant subjects. Her lectures were conducted using a textbook on language teaching methodology. However, her next comments made me curious about her teaching experience so far:

*I think I just used knowledge from the methodology textbook for 20 percent of my teaching. The other 80 percent of my knowledge is based on my informal experience in teaching from my part-time job before.*

She explained how her life experience through her previous part-time jobs had influenced her practice choices in the classroom.

#### **7.6.2.2 Professional development community (PLC)**

Farah believes in the importance of the PLC at the school level. She said that by having PLC sessions with other English teachers, they could learn new pedagogy from the teachers who went to the courses organised by the district education office. For example, she voiced her gratitude for having Iman as a Year 1 coordinator because Iman has always shared her experience and knowledge from the courses, especially on how to run the new syllabus, and how to approach phonics in teaching reading.

*Some teachers did not even hold the PLC session after they came back from these courses. Sometimes they also compressed and filtered the information that they received so that it could be delivered within a one-hour session, which I think it is not how it is supposed to be done if you want to make sure the implementation in school is done correctly. But this is the negative side of having cascade training for any new implementation, especially for school contexts.*

She followed the guidance from Iman throughout her first year in school. However, during her second year, she thought about how the phonics approach could be improved and suggested to Iman some revisions and other approaches that could better help the pupils to learn to read. According to Farah, Iman acknowledged her idea but was not sure if they could implement it because Iman was trained differently than on the course that Farah

attended. She left the decision to Farah to decide by herself. This led to Farah's questioning why teachers should be obliged to adopt a particular approach just because it has been endorsed by the education office when the teacher can opt for a different approach as long as it is working well for the pupils.

### 7.6.3 Influence from contextual factors

#### 7.6.3.1 Classroom practices

##### a) Experimenting with teaching methods

Farah admitted that she was always experimenting with her teaching methods, depending on the abilities of the pupils in the classroom, especially for teaching reading. She even tried a balanced approach to teaching reading when she once read aloud from the 'Peter and Jane' storybook in the classroom last year.

*I used the book to read aloud in my classroom. It has a repetitive sentence-pattern, so the pupils were able to guess the word that they do not know. For the weakest class, I read aloud, and they followed me. I think by using this technique, pupils will remember the words for their vocabulary and indirectly learn about sentence construction.*

Besides using the whole-language approach, she also used the phonics technique that she had proposed to Iman. According to her, the technique enabled the pupils to recognise and remember the sounds more efficiently and coherently.

*I was wondering why we teach the student to read as in /k/ /a/ /t/, then pronounce it as cat. I don't think pupils know how to blend like that if they are not familiar with the sound. You need to pronounce /a/ /t/ = at, then combine the /k/ sound to /at/ sound, and you get /k/ /at/. So, we can drill the pupils, for example:*

*/s/-/at/= sat*

*/p/-/at/= pat*

*/m/-/at/=mat*

In fact, Farah's suggested approach is another type of phonics approach, which is called analytic phonics. Since the current syllabus is using the systematic synthetic phonics, different procedures are applied when using each of the phonics approaches. It is understandable why Iman did not comment much on this proposal from Farah as this is something different to what she had been exposed to her during her district training. As for Farah, she learned this during her previous part-time employment at the English language centre

### **b) Time constraints**

Although all of Farah's suggestions came from her experiences in teaching, she was unable to put them all into practice because of the time constraints the teachers faced when planning and conducting lessons. They had to juggle everything within a one-hour session: classroom management, syllabus progression, exam preparation, and other related programmes in schools. Either the teachers are allocated a specific time to do each of those, or they prioritise what they think it is important to focus on in the lesson. Farah admitted that they were rushing to do each of the tasks, which resulted in a 'superficial practice' among teachers. 'Superficial' means that teachers did it half-heartedly, even though they 'ticked the box' for carrying out the activity or teaching a bit of content. For example, she said it was hard to focus on teaching and, at the same time, assess the pupils' literacy through the LINUS assessment. It is also hard to focus on the phonics approach itself, when at the same time, you need to make sure you covered all the English syllabus and focus on other language skills simultaneously in the classroom.

Farah used this phonics technique to help her teaching, and it worked with the pupils. Her primary focus in the classroom was the vocabulary and sentences because she thinks this will help the pupils not only to read but also help them in their writing.

*By introducing the vocabulary in a sentence structure, it will help the pupils to learn how to construct sentences as well. If they do not have enough vocabulary, how they can even speak or write in English?*

She believed that teachers who value the profession will try different teaching techniques and methods to make sure the pupils learn and progress. She also believed that each student

has their own learning pace, and it is the teacher's responsibility to identify how their pupils learn in the classroom.

*Sometimes it took me six months to realise that this specific student should be approached differently so they can understand the lesson. It is all about trial and error in terms of what fits the pupils' learning styles and what works in the classroom.*

### 7.6.3.2 School- and district-level factors

#### a) Lack of support from school administrators

Farah recalled an initiative proposed by the English teachers to have an extra session for the weaker pupils for helping them to read in English. The session was done an hour before the start of the school day, so pupils needed to come to school earlier to participate. She said it was a successful programme since it helped the teachers pay more attention to the pupils, and the pupils also received personal attention from the teachers. However, it did not last long because the school had cancelled the programme without giving any substantial reason.

*When we spent extra personal time with the pupils, we could see the progress that they were making in reading. But having the programme cancelled with no solid reason was quite a surprise for us, the teachers. We are trying to help by putting in extra effort, sacrificing our time to be early in school, but the effort just got shut down. It was so disheartening. It seems the administrators never considered the positive results of the pupils.*

Farah also believed that the school should adopt a reading programme that the teachers could use to teach reading English throughout the school levels. In this case, she mentioned a successful reading programme by a local publisher. This is because it is easy to follow the lesson sequences provided by the programme rather than to have teachers figure it for themselves.

*I believe that when the school administrator implements something good, it will end up with a positive result. If the school administrators authorised this reading programme, all the teachers would at least have the same levels of commitment and reference to do the reading session. But sadly, it is not happening right now since we didn't get enough support from them.*

### **b) Lack of support from colleagues**

Farah felt that it was sometimes hard to ask for colleagues' cooperation in sustaining phonics teaching practices although they had been reminded about them by Iman numerous times. She felt very thankful to Iman, as she could see how committed Iman had been to equip the teachers with the new knowledge for phonics teaching, but somehow not everybody could cope with the changes.

*Teaching phonics requires you to be lively and full of action when you're introducing the letters. Iman specifically taught us how to do the appropriate actions that are associated with the letters and letters' sounds so the pupils can relate well to both. But of course, there are teachers who refused to follow the actions as they feel shy in doing all those actions; maybe they think it's a childish thing to do. But then again, you should expect all of these when you're teaching lower primary level.*

She gave an example how other teachers might have neglected the phonics approach despite the constant support provided by Iman. Although she realised the current situation, she was not in a position to point out the faults of other people, but to reflect herself on her own responsibility to carry out the approach.

*I had to step in for another Year 1 class because their English teacher was absent due to personal reasons. I tried to teach them the phonics song and asked them to do the actions based on the song and they were not able to do it. I realised that the teacher was not using phonics during her lessons. It's quite sad when I encounter something like this because I feel that in the end the pupils are at a loss if they do not learn what they are supposed to.*

*Their English teacher is new to the school, so I guess she also hasn't been using phonics in the previous school either. I'm not finding fault in people; it's just that it's hard to get everybody on board doing the same thing that you want.*

### **7.6.3.3 National and state-level factors**

#### **a) LINUS Assessment**

Farah also thought that LINUS assessment is the main reason why she uses the phonics approach in her classroom. This assessment requires the pupils to pass each construct level from blending and segmenting skills to reading a short passage fluently. She admitted that

if she did not train her pupils how to segment and blend the sounds, it would be impossible for the pupils to acquire the skill to be able to perform in the test. Although the test is conducted in the classroom by the English teacher, the progress report of the pupils will be sent to the district education office for further evaluation of the pupils' proficiency level.

*If there was no LINUS assessment, I do not think I would be doing phonics in my classroom because it is so time-consuming, and I am more comfortable in something else, like introducing words and vocabulary. Because of my sense of responsibility, I need to use the approach, no matter what.*

#### **7.6.4 Farah's beliefs about the teaching of reading**

Based on the interviews with Farah, she is the type of teacher who enjoys experimenting with different teaching pedagogies as long as they suit the current pupils she has in the classroom. She seems quite aware of the current phonics approach and did not hesitate to try something else if it turned out to be beneficial for the teaching and learning process. Farah agreed that it is essential for the teacher to be responsible for their teaching, as it will affect the outcome of the pupils.

*I was wondering why we can't use both phonics and whole language during the classroom session. I don't think we should drill the pupils only to remember the sounds but lose the essence of reading itself, which is to be enjoyable and lively.*

*For example, I don't care much about the individual sounds in the blending activity. I believe it is just a technique in sounding individual sounds and combining it. If the pupils manage to say /kat/ directly, for me, it is already an achievement, instead train them to say /k/ /a/ /t/.*

She is more of an improviser than someone blindly following whatever is set out in the syllabus. She believes that if the pupils are exposed to the right techniques within their capabilities, they can perform well in reading. She gave an example with the previous techniques using the 'Peter and Jane' book for reading. 'Peter and Jane' is a series of storybooks which promotes repetitive sentence structure. According to Farah, when she used this in her previous class through a reading aloud activity, pupils were able to memorise the sentence structure very well. Not only that, the storybook promoted new vocabulary.

Farah also believes that by experimenting a lot in the classroom, the teachers can reflect on their practices, on what works and does not work with the children. She believes it is the teacher's responsibility to understand the learners and try to accommodate their learning styles.

*The teachers who care about their students will try all sort of methods, techniques, and approaches just to make sure the pupils understand what they teach and make progress throughout the learning.*

Farah is also the type of teacher who tries to accommodate changes. She welcomes the new ideas and implementation by trying to understand the rationale behind them before directly refuting them. She gives herself a chance to explore the techniques first before judging them.

*I agree that I felt uncomfortable changing my practice at the beginning, but I challenged myself to learn the phonics approach and give it a chance in order to see if there is any positive impact on the pupils' learning. So, I tried to learn from different sources online, through Facebook sharing with other teachers and also other experts in the field. I think that is how I show my participation and dedication to how to apply the phonics approach in my lessons.*

Despite all the efforts she has made to change her practice, she is still wondering about the extent to which the programme has changed teaching and learning in order to improve English reading proficiency, not only in the school but throughout the country.

### **7.6.5 Summary of Farah's case study**

Throughout Farah's case, we can observe an inconsistency between her beliefs and practices. Although she had been exposed to the phonics approach during her part-time job and acknowledged its advantages, Farah seems to have mixed feelings. She is the type of teacher who does not stick to one approach but somehow improvises as long as it is helping her pupils to learn. As she explained, she does apply phonics as part of her reading approach but does enough to satisfy the requirements of the LINUS assessment. This inconsistency in beliefs is also probably due to the contextual constraints that she has to deal with as a teacher compared to her role in her previous part-time job, where she only needed to focus on the teaching of reading. All in all, Farah's case demonstrates how core

and peripheral beliefs can contradict one another (Phipps & Borg, 2009) in order to sustain the targeted practices of the new changes of the syllabus.

## 7.7 Cross-Case Analysis of Language Teacher Cognition

### 7.7.1 Teachers' life experiences

Teachers' life experiences cover several aspects of teachers' experiences such as their schooling (where they themselves were ESL learners), their university study, their previous employment and their experiences as parents with their own children. All these aspects might or might not influence teachers' cognition and their practices, but somehow it would appear to serve as a common ground of why teachers have accepted and rejected certain practices while implementing the phonics approach in the teaching of reading English. Individual teachers have individual life experiences, which means there is variability in their cognition. This variability is in contrast to contextual influences at district and national level which seem to impact on teacher cognition in similar ways.

All teacher interviewees can be considered as experienced English teachers with between five and 29 years of teaching experience. Years of experience do play an important role in teachers' pedagogical practices (Borg, 2012). This is because experienced teachers have already developed their own ideas and preferences in conducting their teaching (Basturkmen, 2012). Kelchtermans (2009) refers to professional experience in his notion of subjective education theory, explaining that, according to their subjective educational theory, teachers make classroom decisions based on their personal knowledge and experience of 'what works' and beliefs about certain aspects of pedagogy and teaching. However, this subjective educational theory seems less influential when it comes to the recent syllabus implementation in this study. This can be seen with Naima, who complied with the new changes of syllabus and tried to adjust her teaching in order to meet the syllabus objectives despite her teaching experiences.

Although none of the teachers had much experience with the phonics approach as learners or as practising teachers, three of them had encountered the phonics approach in different contexts. Iman and Naima were exposed to the approach from their children's learning in kindergarten. According to them, their children had become fluent readers in English and had developed correct pronunciation and intonation when they pronounced the English words. Not only that, Iman also noticed her pupils who were enrolled in a kindergarten

which had adopted the phonics approach as part of their reading programme were more proficient readers than their peers. They acknowledged that the phonics approach worked wonders in English reading development as well as with the pupils' general proficiency in the English language. A different story emerged relating to Farah's exposure to phonics. She experienced teaching phonics for reading during her part-time job as a language instructor in an English-language centre. She was impressed by how the children from a young age were able to read using a specific reading programme adopted by the centre which incorporated the phonics approach. Hannah had not encountered any phonics approaches or programmes before becoming a teacher.

Despite being unfamiliar with the phonics approach as an English learner, the participants were exposed to the benefits of the phonics approach through different sources, but still those influences were not enough to result in permanent changes in their practices.

### **7.7.2 Teachers' professional coursework**

Apart from Naima, the other three teachers entered the teaching profession through an alternative pathway which required them to take up an additional Diploma in Education. Only Naima was fully trained as an English teacher from a teacher training college and graduated with teaching English as a second language (TESL) degree. According to Iman and Farah, one year to learn everything about teaching English was not enough, and it is difficult to cover everything within a year. Most of the courses that they learned on were only focused on how to teach the four English skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and grammar in general. None of the courses explicitly taught how to teach early reading in primary school. Furthermore, at the time they did their diplomas, the English syllabus had not yet been revised, so they did not receive any specific training on the phonics approach.

As in-service teachers, however, they were required to attend professional development courses, usually conducted by the education district office. Sometimes, these were attended by English subject co-ordinators who were required to cascade this training in PLC sessions at the school level for other teachers. In Iman's case, she attended the course as a literacy coach for the school; thus, she was confident in delivering the knowledge that she acquired. Hannah and Naima mentioned about how they were inadequately trained for the

phonics implementation, whereas Farah has different views on how phonics should be conducted based on her past experiences, but still followed the strategies advocated by Iman. It can be seen that the effectiveness of teacher preparation courses also contributed to the differences in the teachers' cognition as it reflected not only the teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, but also their confidence in practising the targeted approach due to the lack of proper training conducted for them.

It is important to acknowledge the influence of CPD on teachers' cognition especially in relation to a large-scale reform of the curriculum. Since education policy is always evolving and progressing, the role of professional coursework is very important in helping the in-service teachers to cope with educational changes and directly influence teachers' cognition. In this case, a well-executed development course with proper guidance for the teachers would help them to manage and implement the changes. These comments reflect the literature that refers to the need for continual CPD courses if sustainable changes are to be made in teachers' instructional practices when teaching reading (Buehl & Beck, 2015; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Putman et al., 2009). Giving one-off course to the teachers without consistently monitored their progress, development and challenges might hinder the process sustaining the new practices for the syllabus implementation.

### **7.7.3 The influence of contextual factors**

Most of the similarities between the four teacher interviews appear to be closely related to the influence of contextual factors. The contextual factors can be categorised into three significant domains: i) classroom factors, (ii) school- and district-level influences, and (iii) national policy context influences.

#### **7.7.3.1 Classroom factors**

In terms of classroom factors, time constraints, mixed abilities of the pupils, and the interference of the mother tongue seemed to be the major factors that influenced teachers' practices in the classroom. It can be concluded that these classroom factors have impacted on how teachers were making pedagogical decisions when selecting the content and language activities, teaching materials, and how to manage the classroom. No matter how much teachers prepared for the class, they seemed to always end up diverting from the

original lesson plan. They admitted that they did not have enough time to spend longer on certain phonics sounds, although they knew that some of the pupils were still not able to grasp the sounds, let alone blend and segment them. One hour a day for English is such a short time considering the number of things that they need to focus on within the whole English subject.

Apart from time constraints, having mixed-ability pupils and the interference of the mother tongue in a class can also be a challenge to the teachers. These influence each other and shape individual teachers' decisions in planning and conducting the lesson. Thus, teachers also make some pedagogical decisions by neglecting the phonics teaching in order to cope with these aspects (Roofhooft, 2014; Graham et al., 2014). This can be seen in Hannah's case where she did not hesitate to code-switch from English to using the Malay language for the weaker pupils as she thought it would help them to understand faster. This situation also occurred in Farah's class, where she became more flexible in her teaching by providing additional language activities whenever the pupils were distracted from the lesson. Although Hannah did code switch in her class, Iman was being careful in using the Malay language in the classroom because she did not want the pupils to be confused with both languages. This confusion is because the Malay language shares the same typography as English typesets. It was a challenge to make sure the pupils did not get confused with Malay and English letter sounds. As highlighted by Schweisfurth (2013), in this kind of situation it seems unfeasible for the teachers to properly pay attention to several groups of pupils at a time, which means, unintentionally, having some of the pupils left out from the lesson.

Due to these classroom constraints, teachers were experimenting with different teaching pedagogies as personal initiatives to find solutions to classroom learning and management (Putman et al., 2009). Based on the interview, Farah explained how she used different approaches depending on the pupils as the context, and she acknowledged that sometimes it took a while to realise the approach used was not suitable for those pupils. She felt comfortable in using both reading approaches (phonics and whole language) whenever she felt necessary in her classroom. Naima and Hannah each took the initiative to look for additional information online to support their pedagogical knowledge on how to use the phonics approach. They felt the online resources shared by the teachers' online community

on Facebook and websites were much better than the ones they received from the district office.

### **7.7.3.2 School- and district-level contexts**

It is also crucial to have full support from school administrators and colleagues for a successful implementation of curriculum reform (Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Mansour, 2013; Tsui, 2007). The teachers mentioned that the lack of support that they got from the school administrators hindered their progress in fully utilising the phonics approach. For example, the cancellation of an additional reading session and no continuation of phonics teaching in Year 2 can also hinder the pupils' progress in reading. School management had also not informed the education district office about the lack of English teachers in schools. This has resulted in not having English teachers with appropriate subject knowledge; therefore, effective teaching of English is not properly supported. This point was raised by Hannah when she mentioned the lack of English teachers in her school; thus, the phonics implementation there seemed somewhat rough. Though in this case only Hannah raised the issue, the lack of English teachers nationally is still a concern and a well-known issue within the Malaysia education system.

The next contextual constraint was about the exam-oriented culture where teachers often felt under pressure to prepare and rush to finish the syllabus for the examination (Mansour, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2009). This examination was perceived as contradictory to the aims of school-based assessment (SBA) in the KSSR curriculum. However, this pressure came from parents, especially those unsatisfied with a formative assessment of their children despite being provided with explanations by the teachers. As a result of the demand, schools and district education offices made it mandatory to have an exam per school term. Due to that decision, the teachers have no choice but to teach for the test and rush to finish the overloaded syllabus as soon as possible.

### **7.7.3.3 National and state-level contexts**

The national and state-level issues seem to have a profound influence on the implementation of the phonics approach due to the inconsistencies between the English syllabus, the English Year 1 textbook, and also the LINUS assessment.

The Year 1 English syllabus has been revised twice within six years of the new curriculum implementation. Each revision would result in a new textbook to be used by the teachers and the pupils. Due to that, teachers did not receive sufficient training in the syllabus, and there was no teacher guidance book provided in order to help them navigate the syllabus and the textbook too. In this case, the teachers were fully dependent on their previous teaching experiences and on the professional learning community (PLC) among the teacher community in the schools themselves. These situations were also one of the reasons why there were different interpretations of the curriculum implementation, thus leading to contrasting teacher practices observed in the classroom (Mansour, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

Apart from the syllabus itself, the content of the English textbook did not complement the Year 1 English syllabus. This can be seen through the use of vocabularies, the given examples, and the texts used in the textbook, which are too complicated for a Year 1 syllabus. The phonics contents in the textbook did not reflect the sequence of how phonics pedagogy should be introduced either. The contents were out of focus and loaded with unnecessary vocabulary, which would divert pupils' attention to the actual sounds that they need to learn. There was also too much content listed in the textbook, which made it difficult for the teachers to juggle in between each of the topics. More analysis and description of the textbook will be presented in the textbook analysis section.

LINUS assessment has become a central part of teaching phonics. This is because this assessment serves as a benchmarking assessment of pupils' development in English literacy. Since the assessment was carried out twice a year (in April and August), teachers need to prepare the pupils for the assessment. The pupils need to show an improvement for all 12 LINUS constructs tested. Among these constructs, constructs 1 to 4 are related specifically to phonics teaching where the objectives are to assess pupils' ability to identify, associate, segment and blend the sounds to letters and vice versa. Due to the assessment, it has influenced most of the teachers' cognition and made pedagogical decisions to change their practices and use phonics as part of their teaching of reading approaches.

It can be concluded that these inconsistencies of the English syllabus, textbook and the LINUS assessment have resulted in difficulties for teachers in comprehending, adopting,

and executing the current curriculum. On top of that, it can also be suggested that teachers were having difficulty in putting their beliefs into practice, even though they tried to change in the first place. There should be a way of reducing these contextual constraints so that the likelihood of the positive result in education transformation can be made (Schweidfurth, 2013; Wedell, 2013).

#### **7.7.4 The reality of teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading**

Based on the teachers' interview analysis, it can be presumed that teachers are juggling between their core and peripheral beliefs about the teaching of reading instruction. The presence of the teachers' core beliefs can be observed when teachers voiced their concerns about the new implementation while they argued that the previous syllabus and teaching of reading pedagogy were still able to produce pupils who have excellent English skills. However, the tension between beliefs and practices not only focuses on the relationship between these beliefs and practices but has impacted their cognition as well. For instance, Hannah and Naima were discussing the previous teaching practices that they used during the teaching of reading and acknowledged the effectiveness of those practices. As for Farah, she was not leaning towards a sole pedagogy nor had she stated her common practices. Rather, she felt more comfortable to test any pedagogy that will suit her students. Iman's situation is the example of how beliefs change resulting from training courses attended.

In addition, findings from the teachers' case studies seem to mirror criticism about phonics approach in the literature, although the context of the research is different. Teachers commented that the pupils were easily distracted if they were to focus on drilling the letter sounds for longer periods. This situation resulted in teachers shifting the focus of their lessons to something else. They abandoned the phonics practice in order to respond to the classroom situation. As critics have commented, phonics lessons are bound to be boring due to countless repetition of the blending and segmenting activities thus killing the joy of the reading activity itself (Krashen, 2002; Meyer, 2001; Wyse & Style, 2007; Wyse & Goswami, 2008). Furthermore, teachers admitted that they were using the phonics approach in their reading lessons due to the compulsory assessment (LINUS) that the pupils needed to pass before they finished Year 1. Thus, teachers' classroom pedagogy has become restricted and had a tendency to ignore other necessary reading skills in order to

cope with the assessment demands, a critique raised by the NRP (2000), i.e. teachers were focusing too heavily on ‘teaching to the test’. Whole language advocates have been supporting this saying that literacy is not about drilling and repeated practice but involves imagination, meaningful context, and authentic texts from the reading as a social interaction in the classroom (Krashen, 2001; Moustafa, 1993; Jeynes & Littell, 2000; Shaw, 1991; Stahl & Miller, 1989).

Despite having encountered the phonics approach indirectly in their previous life experiences through their children and previous job employment, part of their beliefs remains unchanged. What makes the teachers use the phonics approach, though they would seem to resent the implementation, are the statutory changes to practices. In this case, the presence of LINUS assessment as part of the curriculum change plays a vital role to make sure the teachers have no option but to try and adapt the phonics approach as part of their practices. As much as they tried to be positive with the new changes and tried to implement them, they were still struggling to fully incorporate the changes due to the contextual constraints that they experienced so far.

This is an example of how a top-down education reform took place within an educational organisation. The teachers who are at the bottom of the organisation have no voice in discussing if the implementation is worth changing for. Although they seem to depend on their intuition in teaching and comply with the changes, their core beliefs remain, shadowed by their peripheral beliefs and influenced by the contextual constraints around them.

### **7.7.5 Summary of the cross-case analysis**

The previous section has organised and analysed the data from the teacher interviews using Borg’s language teacher cognition framework (2006) as an analytical tool for the four teacher participants. As such, three main themes were presented: teachers’ life experiences, professional courses, and contextual factors that may have influenced their cognition and beliefs about the teaching of reading English. Based on these interviews, the contextual demands on teachers seemed to be the primary factor that made them comply with the current syllabus implementation although their beliefs remained stable and unchanged. In the discussion chapter, I will further discuss these factors together with the triangulation

of other findings from classroom observation and textbook analysis in order to present a whole interpretation for the study.

# CHAPTER 8

## THE OBSERVATION OF TEACHERS' PRACTICES IN USING THE PHONICS APPROACH IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

### 8.1 Introduction

To gain a better understanding of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge of phonics instruction and relationships between their reported beliefs, reported practices and actual practices, and to gain a more holistic picture of this using triangulation of different types of data collection, I conducted classroom observations. The principal of good phonics teaching as outlined in the Rose Report (2006, pg. 20) suggests that 'the key features of which are to teach beginner readers are; (a) grapheme/phoneme (letter/sound) correspondences (the alphabetic principle) in a clearly defined, incremental sequence; (b) to apply the highly important skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes in order, all through a word to read it; (c) to apply the skills of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell; and (d) that blending and segmenting are reversible processes'. Although these steps are not considered compulsory, they serve as a basis to guide the teachers in planning the lesson. In order to explore teachers' pedagogical content knowledge of phonics instruction and relationships between their reported beliefs, reported practices and actual practices, the data presented in this chapter were organised using thematic analysis of four teachers together according to these categories: 1) the general routines in the English classroom, 2) additional strategies for phonics teaching and learning, and 3) the apparent challenges teachers faced in the teaching of English reading

through the phonics approach. The reason for this arrangement is to have a clear description of comparison of how each teacher taught and approached phonics pedagogy in the English classroom. Thus, a clear comparison of teachers' practices can be made. This observation is not an evaluation of teaching practices but provides an understanding of what was happening in the classroom.

## 8.2 The general routine in the English classroom

Before starting a new lesson, all teachers would ask pupils to sing the phonics song as a warm-up activity. They had to do it in chorus with the actions that relate to the sounds. It seems that the phonics song has become standard practice at the beginning of every English lesson.

Across all the classrooms observed, I noticed that pupils do not have any problems in singing the phonics song even although they are of different learning abilities. They were able to memorise it as a nursery rhyme, which made them familiar with the letters and their sounds. Even pupils in Hannah's class, who were considered as 'weaker', were effortlessly able to sing the phonics song.

Hannah: Alright, now please sing the phonics song and do the actions. 1, 2, 3!  
 Class :.....  
 Gorilla, gorilla /g/ /g/ /g/, (action how a gorilla gets angry)  
 Pingu, pingu /p/ /p/ /p/,  
 Lollipop, lollipop, /l/ /l/ /l/, (action how to lick the lollipop)  
 Octopus, octopus, /o/ /o/ /o/, (action with rounded mouth)  
 (and they continued until z)

Example of English class activity in the introduction phase

Through the current revised syllabus, phonics instruction is positioned under listening and speaking skills. Thus, a formal phonics lesson is conducted in the classroom with the objective of introducing new phonemes integrated into listening and speaking activities. This was when the phonics 'teaching' phase took part in the lesson, where the teachers introduced targeted individual sounds and then proceeded with the segmenting and blending stages. From all of the lessons observed, all four teachers adopted a similar approach when they wanted to introduce the new phoneme sounds. They started with nursery rhymes, songs, or poems, which are found in the textbook and contain the targeted

phonemes that they were going to learn. Then, they proceeded with question-and-answer sessions in order to stimulate and arouse pupils' interest in the lesson.

The pupils did not have any problems with 'reciting' the letters' sounds as this was their daily 'drilling' through the phonics song. They could say the sounds when they were drilling, but it was observed that the pupils struggled somewhat when they had to read English words independently which contain phonemes that had been taught in the previous lesson. Through the observation, all the teachers were seen trying their best to cater to their pupils' needs. However, the data that illustrated difficulties with some independent reading would suggest that the drilling of the sounds through songs or other activities (see below) is not enough to prepare the pupils to be independent readers. The following section demonstrates in more detail how phonics was taught in different parts of the English lesson.

### **8.3 Additional strategies for phonics teaching and learning**

The objective of the phonics instruction is to develop the phonemic awareness of the early readers (Stahl, et al., 1998). Although phonemic awareness can be activated through these means, this is not the only way. For example, phonemic awareness activities may or may not involve reference to graphemes. Segmenting and blending may also be done orally with no reference to letters. In doing so, introducing individual sounds and the use of blending and segmenting activities are considered as common practices in teaching the pupils the sounds of the letters. Both tasks were the primary focus in the phonics lessons of the observed teachers, but there were differences in how the teachers went about this to encourage the pupils' learning.

#### **8.3.1 The teaching of individual sounds**

All teachers taught phonics by introducing the individual sounds before proceeding with the blending and segmenting activities.

In Naima's class, she introduced the /w/ sound in the listening and speaking session. She started the lesson by asking the pupils for context clues of the list of words that start with the letter W. Then, she presented a list of words that represent the letter W and the /w/ sound. Naima provided the words in a logical sequence, so the pupils were able to grasp

the idea of the representation of the /w/ sound through these words. The example of the logical sequence of phonics teaching is illustrated below:

Naima : What words start with W?  
 Class : Water, word, white, wet, window, watermelon, wall, when, weather, whisper. (Pupils list several words they can think of)  
 Naima : Good. Okay, now you repeat after me.  
           /w/ /w/ - win  
           /w/ /w/ - won  
           /w/ /w/ - wet  
           /w/ /w/ - wow  
 Class : (Pupils repeated after the teacher)  
 Naima : /w/ /e/ /t/ what is that? (Teacher blends the word and pupils guessed)  
 Class : wet!

#### Example of phonics teaching in Naima's class

Stahl (1992) emphasises that introducing a logical sequence of the targeted sound will help the pupils to recognise the sound pattern appearing in each word. Simultaneously, the pupils are also able to relate the relationship between the consonant and vowel, and how each makes up a different sound in order to represent a complete word.

Naima had reported in her interview that she also assessed pupils' current vocabulary through this activity by asking the pupils to list words that they know beginning with the letter W without reference to any pictures. When she was satisfied with the answers given, she then focussed on the /w/ sound and put up a list of CVC words. She emphasised the /w/ sound, asked the pupils to repeat after her a few times, and gave examples of words associated with the initial sound of /w/. Then, she moved to the segmenting activity wherein the teacher sounds the letters and pupils follow. While segmenting the sounds, Naima also performed actions to accompany the sounds, presumably to make the lesson more memorable. She moved to the activity section by playing a miming game where the teacher did the action first, and the pupils had to guess the targeted words.

After they tried a few times, the pupils took on the role of the teacher and their friends had to guess the words. This guessing game seemed to work very well with the pupils as they were able to perform the actions and their friends were able to guess the learned words correctly. Naima's initiative to use the CVC word lists indicates that she is familiar with

some of the recommended phonics pedagogy of teaching phonics in an explicit and systematic sequence (Glazzard & Stokoe, 2017). According to Naima's interview, she researched teaching strategies independently and referred to many online materials (e.g. YouTube) as she was not able to attend any training provided by the education district office. Training sessions were limited, and teachers were offered only one opportunity to attend a session. Based on this, it can be seen that Naima has put a lot of effort into trying to navigate through the phonics approach. She also seems to have gained confidence in using the approach, and managed to apply her pedagogical content knowledge, which was developed independently, in her classroom instruction.

In another class, Iman addressed the lesson differently. She taught phonics through spelling where the pupils needed to spell the words that have the /l/ sound in it. The excerpt of the observation that demonstrates this is below:

Iman	: This week we're going to learn a new sound. What letter is this?
Class	: L
Iman	: Is it capital or small letter?
Class	: Capital letter!
Iman	: Are you sure? We're going to learn the L sound. What is the sound for letter l?
Class	: /l/ (pupils sound the letter with the action.)
Iman	: We're going to play a pop quiz where you need to spell a word that has the /l/ sound. Ikhwan, please spell the word lion. (Teacher called the pupils' names one by one and they come to the front to spell the word.)

Example of phonics teaching in Iman's class

The activity continued with other suggested words from the pupils, such as log, lollipop, lamp, and lamb. Since this is the top class in the Year 1 group with eight other classes, the pupils had no problem in generating their vocabulary for the /l/ sound. One boy even came out with the word 'legendary', which was surprising since the word does not appear in the syllabus or textbook. In the session, Iman taught phonics implicitly, whereby the whole words were introduced. Iman focussed more on the beginning and ending sounds of the phonemes, and the contextual cues of the text. Through this session, the students orally spelt the words using the letter names instead of using the letter sounds.

Although Iman did draw out the phonemic awareness of the sound /l/, she only emphasised the /l/ sound instead of showing how the sound of /l/ related to other sounds to make a word. This is arguably a drawback of teaching phonics implicitly as the pupils were not able to build the concept of how each of the phonemes related to creating a word (Glazzard & Stokoe, 2017). It seems like the pupils learned that the letter L gives the /l/ sound, and those listed words/vocabulary started with the letter L and represented the /l/ sound. Based on the observation, Iman would seem to possess content knowledge of phonics by the way she explained about the sounds of phonics to the pupils in the classroom. However, it may be that her pedagogical knowledge in phonics teaching may be a little lacking in promoting phonemic awareness for the pupils due to the absence of a more systematic and structured phonics lesson. This observation was surprising given the interviews that I had with Iman regarding her professional development. She was the first to be selected to attend the phonics training and was selected to be one of the trainers for her school. She acted as a facilitator at school level to offer in-house training, opinions and insights to other teachers if they encountered any problems with the syllabus implementation in school. Yet, this data suggests that she has not been trained according to the way promoted in the phonics pedagogy literature or possibly suggests that Iman has not understood the intentions of her own trainers.

Farah started her lesson with a nursery rhyme, 'Hickory Dickory Dock', which complemented the week's lesson. She played it a few times for the pupils to sing along and enjoy the lesson. Then, she continued asking contextual questions about the rhyme. For example, "What is the time now?", "What time did the elephant appear?" The pupils were excited about the song, and they responded well by singing and answering the questions well. Moving on from this, Farah revised the previous phoneme sounds learned by using the lyrics of the rhyme. She asked the pupils to identify any individual phonemes that they recognised in the lyrics and underline them on the whiteboard. This activity seemed useful in assessing pupils' prior knowledge of the phonemes and most of them were able to do so. Satisfied with the pupils' progress, she introduced two new sounds which were /w/ and /ks/. The following extract is an excerpt from the field notes made during Farah's observation:

Farah : We'll start the class by singing this nursery rhyme.  
(teacher played the 'Hickory Dickory Dock' rhyme)

Class : Yay!

Iman : Look at the lyrics on the screen. Anyone can tell me what sounds you found in the lyrics?

Class : /k/

Farah : Okay come here and underline the sound that you said.  
(pupils came to the front when they are called out)

Class : /s/ /h/ /d/ /m/ /o/  
(Pupils got a few of the sounds correct, and they were able to underline the associated words in the lyrics)

Farah : This is the new sound that we will learn today. What is it?  
The new sound is /w/  
(Teacher sounds the letter and the pupils repeated after the teacher)

Farah : How about this? X, X  
(Pupils repeated after the teacher, instead of presenting it as /ks/, the teacher introduced it as X as in the letter X)

Farah : Let's look at the words that represent the sound. Follow me /w/. Web, wax, kiwi. Can you segment the word web for me?

Class : W e b (instead of segmenting, the pupils spelt the word)

Farah : No, it should start with /w/

Class : /w/ /e/ /b/

#### Example of phonics teaching in Farah's class

Farah made sure the pupils were aware of the sounds that they had recently learnt before introducing the individual phonemes /w/ and /ks/. Then she started to introduce words that represent other phonemes, such as '/w/eb', '/w/ax' and 'ki/w/i', taking from the textbook's examples. It is a good practice to revise the previous sounds. Farah failed to do so, which meant the class became confused. This is one of Stahl (1992)'s examples of a confusing lesson made by teacher.

Hannah started her lesson by engaging the pupils in identifying the letter names and sounds. She put up some pictures on the whiteboard that represented the sound she was going to introduce. She also provided opportunities for the pupils to build their letter-sound identification as she pointed to the appropriate letter on the pictures. Next, Hannah explained how the sound of the letter should be made by using appropriate gestures that were linked to the phonemes they had learned. She also focused on another aspect of learning such as the recognition of upper- and lower-case letters, possibly because this class consisted of low-ability pupils, as some of the students were still having problems in

identifying the alphabet and the letter case. Hannah was also explaining to the pupils how the /f/ sound should be made, which is by breathing out air from the mouth. The following extract is an example from the observation:

Hannah	: What letter with the sound /f/?
Class	: F!
Hannah	: Good! How to sound f?
Class	: /ffffff/
Hannah	: You put the teeth like this and sound the /f/. Say it together F, /f/! (Pupils repeated after the teacher)
Hannah language)	: Okay, F for what? (Teacher asked again in the Malay language)
Class	: Ular! (snake!)
Hannah	: Are you sure snake for F? What do we call fish in English? (Teacher used the Malay language to asked question)
Class	: Fish!
Hannah	: Yes, fish! What is this?
Class	: F!
Hannah	: What sound is F?
Class	: /f/!
Hannah	: Breathe out the air from your mouth (Teacher used Malay to explain)
Hannah	: Is this a small letter or capital letter?
Class	: Small letter!
Hannah	: What is this? We call this fire in English. Fire! Fire! (Teacher pointed out another picture. Without waiting for the pupils' response, she explained in Malay.)
Class	: Fire! Fire!

Example of phonics teaching in Hannah's class

### 8.3.2 Attempting to teach blending and segmenting

Once the pupils can identify and recognise the individual sounds, the blending and segmenting activities should be introduced. Blending is the ability to identify the sounds through a word in order to read the target words, while segmenting is the opposite, the ability to split up the word and to promote spelling skills among the pupils (Glazzard & Stokoe, 2017). Different teachers seemed to approach blending and segmenting differently, which resulted in different outcomes from the pupils.

Farah and Iman were both seen applying similar approaches while carrying out blending and segmenting activities. As for blending, Farah trained the pupils to read aloud the sounds and words, then to repeat after her. The words were displayed on the whiteboard since all of these are part of the English textbook content.

Farah	: When I said blend, you must say the sound first and then blend all the sounds. /b//e//ll/
Class	: /b//e//ll/
Farah	: Next, /l//o//g/-log
Class	: /l/ /o/ /g/-log
Farah	: /l/ /e/ /g/- leg
Class	: /l/ /e/ /g/ - leg
Farah	: Okay, next one is /d//o//ll/ - doll
Class	: /d//o//ll/ - doll

#### Example of blending activity in Farah's class

For the segmenting activities, the teachers pronounced the targeted words and asked the pupils to separate the individual sounds within the words. Pupils seemed confused by the teachers' instructions here, mixing up segmenting and spelling skills. Segmenting involves splitting up the words to individual sounds; for example, the word 'web', should be split into /w/ /e/ /b/. Iman seemed to be fonder of doing segmenting activities than blending, especially for the CVC words. She explained that this is due to her pupils' English proficiency. They already recognised and were able to read those words very well. So, she decided to focus more on segmenting, and teach the blending skill less frequently.

Iman	: Please help me segment the word ANT
Class	: A, N (pupils spelled the word instead of segmented the word)
Iman	: Segment! /a/?
Class	: /a/ /n/ /t/
Iman	: Picture no 2, what is it?
Class	: Sun!
Iman	: Okay, segment the word sun for me.
Class	: /s/ /u/ /n/ - sun!
Iman	: Picture no 3, what is that?
Class	: tap!
Iman	: Okay segment tap
Class	: /t/ /a/ /p/

#### Example of segmenting activity in Iman's class

As for Hannah, it was noticed that the main focus of her lessons mostly revolved around the individual phoneme sounds. Initially, the lesson started by introducing the letter's sound. She made it enjoyable by pasting detailed pictures with labels on the whiteboard. They were going to learn the /f/ sound. However, throughout the lesson, the focus shifted to only presenting the letter f within the selected words instead of the /f/ sound. A few other examples of words introduced were mu[ff]in, [f]lag and co[ff]ee. There were limited blending and segmenting activities with the words on the whiteboard. Hannah only emphasised the /f/ and /ff/ sounds instead of making the connection between the other letters and sounds within the words.

Hannah	: What letter with the red colour?
Class	: F!
Hannah	: What is this?
Class	: Cupcakes.
Hannah	: Yes, cupcakes. We also can call it muffin. Muffin!
Class	: Muffin! Muffin! (Pupils repeated after the teacher)
Hannah	: Okay, how many Fs here?
Class	: Two Fs!
Hannah	: What is this?
Class	: Bendera! (pupils replied in the Malay language)
Hannah	: This is flag! Flag! (teacher corrected the pupils)
Class	: Flag! Flag!
Hannah	: How many F here?
Class	: One!

Example of phonics activity in Hannah's class

There was an occurrence when she used an 'arm-tapping' technique to help the pupils to blend the sounds. This involved saying the target word first. Then by using two fingers (index and middle finger), the teacher tapped the other arm gradually progressing down the arm from shoulder to wrist. Then the teacher repeated the word while sweeping the two fingers along the left arm, from shoulder to wrist. The pupils copied the motions while following the teacher. This technique is believed to stimulate the kinaesthetic sense and provide tactile feedback (Woore et al., 2018). Hannah shared in her interview that she learned this from a professional development course held by the education district office.

Hannah	: Okay, now take out your left arm to do the blending and follow me. (teacher gave instruction while doing the gesture)
Hannah	: /d/ (while patting her left shoulder)
Class	: /d/ (pupils followed)
Hannah	: /u/ (while patting the elbow area)
Class	: /u/
Hannah	: /ck/ (while patting the wrist area)
Class	: /ck/
Hannah	: So, when you combine, it will become?
Class	: /d/ /u/.....
Hannah	: /d/ /u/ /ck/ (Hannah repeated a few times for the pupils and they followed)
Class	: /d/ /u/ /ck/
Hannah	: Duck!
Class	: Duck!

Example of arm-tapping motion in Hannah's class

A different situation occurred in Naima's classroom. She started the class by asking the pupils to brainstorm a list of words that start with the letter W. Pupils were able to share words such as water, word, white, window and wall. Then, Naima replaced the list by introducing her list of CVC words that represent the /w/ sound and asked the pupils to follow after her. After a few examples, she randomly blended the sounds in words and asked the pupils to guess the correct words according to the gestures she made. For example, /g/ is for /g/orilla, so she pounded hands on her chest like a gorilla, and /f/ is for /f/ish, she pulled both hands together and made them move like a fish. Pupils were able to guess the sounds and the words very well. Naima explained in her informal interview that by using appropriate gestures to link the sounds to the words, it helped the pupils remember the particular sounds. Rupley et al. (2009) propose this as a way to model and guide practice for effective reading instruction.

Later in the lesson, Naima only used the listed words that she introduced earlier for blending and segmenting activities. She structured her lesson by grouping a list of targeted CVC words with similar sounds so that the pupils were able to see the pattern of blending and segmenting in the targeted sound (Grossen & Carnine, 1993; Stahl, 1992) Furthermore, she called upon each of the pupils to come to the front for a blending activity. They made the phonics gestures to test their friends. It was observed that the pupils managed to perform the gestures very well, and their friends were able to guess the sounds and words

correctly, even though this was the first lesson they had been introduced to the /w/ and /ks/ sounds. To test the pupils further, Naima prepared a few new words that were not mentioned in the lesson to evaluate the pupils' understanding of the lesson. Pupils were able to pronounce these words correctly too.

Naima	: I will do the action and you guys need to guess the words, okay?
Class	: Okay!
Naima	: Good.
	(She made the gestures while the pupils sound the letters)
	/w/ /i/ /n/ - ?
Class	: /w/ /i/ /n/ = win!
Naima	: /w/ /o/ /w/?
Class	: Wow!
Naima	: /w/ /e/ /t/?
Class	: Wet
Naima	: /w/ /a/ /x/?
Class	: Wax

Example of how Naima tests her pupils in the lesson

Although segmenting activity is believed to prepare the students for spelling, at one point there was confusion with a traditional spelling activity. It was noticed that students spelled 'web' loudly with w-e-b instead of segmenting it as in /w/ /e/ /b/. This confusion occurred not only in Farah and Iman's classes, but also in Hannah's class. The teachers immediately corrected their pupils. This example shows that pupils sometimes cannot differentiate the teacher's instructions in relation to spelling and segmenting activities.

Farah	: Can you segment the word web for me?
Class	: w e b (instead of segmenting, pupils spelt the word)
Farah	: No, it should be /w/
	(The teacher corrects the mistake, then pupils realised the mistake and change to sound the word.)
Class	: /w//e//b/
Farah	: Okay, next kiwi. How to sound it?
Class	: /k/i//w//i/ (some pupils said i instead of /i/)

Example of pupils' confusion in Farah's class

#### **8.4 Summary of the chapter**

Reviewing the teachers' practices in teaching phonics, it is apparent that the way in which they were carried out in the classroom seemed to promote memorisation of the letter sounds rather than helping the pupils to improve independently their phonemic awareness in a natural fashion. From the practices above, it would also appear that teachers' approaches to blending and segmenting differed based on their understanding of how they are performed, which is also probably linked to the training that they received. Their focus on those activities was related more to the mechanics of the teaching process than incorporating the activities into an authentic reading session as part of giving exposure and experience to the students dealing with the targeted words in a reading context. With the exception of Naima, most teachers do not seem to provide enough examples of simple CVC words. They introduced other irrelevant words, focussing more on vocabulary, which made it hard for the pupils to retain the phonemic awareness of these particular sounds in the future. It is possible that the absence of a structured phonics lesson might be the reason why students were having difficulties in adapting to the approach. A positive impact was observed when the pupils were able to segment and blend the sounds individually, but when it came to words that have more than three sounds, they were not able to make sense of the relationships with other sounds in the same word.

# CHAPTER 9

## OBSERVED CHALLENGES AND INTERFERENCE OF OTHER PRACTICES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

### 9.1 Introduction

Apart from the observed teachers' classroom practices, there were also observed challenges and interferences that occurred during the classroom observation. However, as it may have become apparent, there was a certain degree of overlap between the themes presented in the case studies section and this section. The listed challenges and interferences below can be used as supporting evidences to further confirm what the teachers shared during their interviews.

### 9.2 Discrepancy of the English syllabus, LINUS assessment, and the English textbook

All teachers in the interviews presented in the earlier chapter raised the issues of the discrepancy between the English syllabus, LINUS assessment, and the English textbook. As much as they wanted to comply with some of the changes, the discrepancy between the learning objectives and the contents of the English syllabus, LINUS assessment and English textbook presented challenges. Further exploration of this issue from the observational data is presented below.

### 9.2.1 Revised syllabus and the structure of the weekly English learning

It is essential to have a general idea of the English lesson structure as timetabled in Malaysian primary schools in order to begin to understand some of the difficulties. The English subject is taught for 300 minutes per week. In the revised syllabus, English is organised according to a modular configuration where the language skills are organised according to the lesson. This is only a recommendation and schools are given the authority and the flexibility to arrange the lessons as they see fit.

**Table 9-1 Suggested time allocation for English skills from Year 1 English Syllabus**

Lesson 1 (1 hour)	Lesson 2 (1 hour)	Lesson 3 (1 hour)	Lesson 4 (1 hour)	Lesson 1 (1 hour)
Listening & Speaking	Reading	Writing	Language arts	Listening & Speaking

As mentioned earlier, for the revised English syllabus, phonics is a part of the listening and speaking skills section. Teachers usually structure their lessons according to the English syllabus. The example for a lesson is summarised below:

Table 9-2: Example of an English lesson sequence from the textbook

<b>Unit 13: Fun in the park</b>	
<b>Listening &amp; speaking section (Monday)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a picture of children playing in the park.</li> <li>2. There are five words, which focus on the /l/ sound. The teacher needs to say the words and pupils repeat after the teacher. The words are doll, bell, log, leg, and ball.</li> <li>3. The teacher needs to elicit pupils' responses by using WH-questions.</li> <li>4. Then, they will do the reading and blending activity. In this case, the teacher needs to guide the pupils that the phoneme /l/ is also represented by the grapheme /ll/.</li> </ol>
<b>Reading section (Tuesday)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A short text is provided and there are comprehension questions that pupils need to answer.</li> </ol>
<b>Writing section (Wednesday)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Rearrange the letters to form words. The words given here are skip, jump, run and kick.</li> </ol>
<b>Language Arts (Thurs)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Singing a rhyme with actions.</li> </ol>

For the listening and speaking activities, teachers were mostly trying to link pupils' prior knowledge of the topic they were about to learn. This strategy is useful to arouse pupils'

interest in the subject and to prepare them for what to expect further on. Below is an example of observation from Iman's classroom:

Iman	: So, where are the children now?
Class	: In the park!
Iman	: Can anyone tell me what is park?
Class	: Taman (pupils replied in Malay language)
Iman	: In English?
Student	: A field?
Iman	: Yes, I can accept that. What is the girl doing?
Class	: Playing the doll
Iman	: She is playing with her?
Class	: Doll!

The question and answer continued until the teacher was satisfied with the pupils' responses to the questions and their understanding of the current topic. This practice may be considered as standard practice since the other three teachers also used this exercise at the beginning of their lessons. Therefore, although phonics should be introduced in the listening and speaking session, teachers were seen struggling to maintain this focus, as they moved onto the reading lesson, thus leaving phonics instruction unattended until they were required to introduce new sounds to the pupils in the next chapter of the book the following week based on the syllabus.

### 9.2.2 LINUS Assessment

During the observation, it was observed that teachers focussed on the phonics approach when it came to introduce individual sounds, practising segmenting, and blending. It may be, however, that these practices are influenced by the LINUS assessment that they need to carry out twice a year in order to record pupils' English reading proficiency. The first phase of the assessment is conducted in April as a pre-test assessment and the second phase is in August as a post-test assessment. The test is a standardised assessment throughout the country, and teachers need to use the same assessment materials in order to test the pupils (refer to Appendix D). There are twelve constructs for English literacy in the LINUS assessment. Constructs 1–4 are related to the phonics approach and teachers were determined to improve the pupils' pass rates by making sure all of them got through these stages.

**Table 9-3: A list of LINUS constructs related to the phonics approach**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Aims</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Construct 1</b>	Able to identify and distinguish letters of the alphabet	The ability to identify and distinguish the shape of letters
<b>Construct 2</b>	Able to associate sounds with the letters of the alphabets	The ability to say the phonemes aloud
<b>Construct 3</b>	Able to blend sounds into recognisable words	The ability to blend phonemes into recognisable words
<b>Construct 4</b>	Able to segment words into phonemes	The ability to segment words into phonemes

However, these aims hinder the authenticity of phonics teaching in the classroom as teachers were seen to put more focus on the technicality of the approach rather than trying to incorporate it as part of the reading approach. It was treated as an individual practice in the English lesson without a systematic structure that helped to develop reading skills more holistically. Based on the observed practices, teachers did not have any other additional reading materials that can complement the phonics pedagogy, such as decodable stories, to vary the reading materials used. In fact, the phonics pedagogy only involved blending and segmenting activities, which made the classroom instruction repetitive and mundane.

### **9.2.3 The structure of the Year 1 English textbook**

Another factor that hinders effective phonics teaching is the structure of the English textbook and teachers' over-reliance on the materials inside it. The English Year 1 textbook is organised by themes and topics. It covers four modules: listening and speaking, reading, writing, and language arts. It also outlines a specific objective of improving pupils' phonemic awareness by introducing related graphemes and phonemes. From the observations, it was apparent that all teachers referred to the textbook as syllabus guidelines. They also depended on the texts and activities suggested by the textbook.

However, there were issues with how the materials were laid out within each topic. The book introduced the targeted sounds in the listening and speaking section. It also contained related activities to make the pupils familiar with the sounds. However, the textbook did not offer any revisit and recall practices from the previous lessons. Thus, the pupils were unable to revise the sounds that they had learned previously as proposed by phonics

advocates in the literature, who advise that daily phonics lesson should involve revisit and review, teach, practice and apply (Glazzard & Stokoe, 2017). For example, the /s/ and /t/ sounds were introduced in the listening and speaking section, yet the same sounds were not highlighted in the reading text and writing sections within the same topic. Another critical aspect to notice is that the textbook treats the letters' sounds in isolation rather than promoting the sounds through a CVC words list. This could impede pupils' and even teachers' ability to blend and segment the sounds through the examples of words listed in the textbook.

### **9.3 The interference of other second language teaching skills**

Other than the reading skill, there are other skills that need to be acquired by the Year 1 students. According to the current English Year 1 students, lower primary level should learn listening and speaking, writing, language arts and grammar. Under each of these skills, there are other sub-skills that students need to master, such as cursive writing, punctuation, and spelling to name a few. With so many objectives to be achieved within a year, it can be understood how teachers are overwhelmed in preparing their everyday lessons. There were three distinct practices observed from all the teachers who were trying to integrate phonics teaching with other language skills. This sometimes resulted in creating more confusion, but in some cases, it helped the students to learn something else from the teaching. Observational data presented below illustrate this point.

#### **9.3.1 Combining the teaching of spelling with phonics**

Teachers were observed consistently asking the pupils to spell, segment and blend the words that they intended to introduce to them. However, it was observed that pupils were sometimes confused by the teacher's instruction of what spelling, blending and segmenting were. Generally, teachers presented the targeted words to the pupils and they would spell the words that they had learned. Repetition also occurred during the lesson, as teachers kept asking the pupils to read aloud and spell the targeted words a few times until they were confident and showed consistency with the spelling. A few examples from the classroom observation of the teachers and pupils are below.

In Farah's class, they were discussing the answers for an exercise in the activity book. During the activity, Farah included spelling as part of the reinforcement to the pupils.

Farah	: Okay, let's read together. Pupils line up to buy...?
Class	: Food!
Farah	: How do you spell food?
Class	: F o o d.
Farah	: The school...?
Class	: Bell!
Farah	: How do you spell bell?
Class	: B e l l
Farah	: How to segment bell? /b/ /e/ /ll/
Class	: (followed the teacher)
Farah	: How to spell ten?
Class	: T e n
Farah	: Can you segment the word ten?
Class	: T e n
Farah	: That's spelling, now segmenting
Class	: /t/ /e/ /n/

Iman did the actions so the pupils could guess the verbs and spelled them out afterwards. This occurred in the presentation stage when Iman tried to introduce the actions for the material that she was using in the lesson. In this session, the words are spelt by using the letter names instead of sounds.

Iman	: Okay, what am I doing now?
Class	: Walk!
Iman	: How to spell walk?
Class	: W a l k
Iman	: How about this?
Class	: Jump!
Iman	: Okay, now jump with me! (pupils followed Iman to jump) How to spell jump?
Class	: J u m p
Iman	: How about this?
Class	: Run!
Iman	: How to spell run?
Class	: R u n

As for Naima, she alternated spelling, blending, and segmenting activities one after the other. It is possible that Naima combined these activities due to the demands of the LINUS

assessment, which requires pupils to blend and segment sounds, rather than a way of teaching whole-heartedly embraced by Naima.

Naima	: Okay, all of you say fox! Fox!
Class	: Fox!
Naima	: /f/ /o/ /ks/ - fox
Class	: /f/ /o/ /ks/ - fox (pupils repeated after the teacher)
Naima	: Ox! Ox!
Class	: Ox!
Naima	: How to spell ox?
Class	: O x
Naima	: How to segment ox?
Class	: /o/ /ks/ - ox
Naima	: Very good!

Out of the four teachers observed, only Iman had a designated time allocated for spelling exercises and tests with the pupils. Words used were the previous words they had learned in the classroom. Usually, Iman would randomly refer to the textbook and made the pupils spell the words. However, during the spelling exercise, Iman was not emphasising the phoneme sounds at all when she pronounced the words for the pupils. She did not emphasise any diction of the phoneme but focused on the word as a whole. The pupils seemed to enjoy the activity very much and requested to do it more frequently during the English class.

These practices show that the teachers mixed their practices, using the whole language techniques of the look-and-say approach and at the same time implementing the phonics approach through the blending and segmenting strategy. Whilst the researcher observed some confusion amongst the students when they heard the instruction from the teachers, the teachers seemed to consider their practice successful, as long as the pupils could understand their instructions, and followed them according to what they understood.

#### **9.4 The teaching of vocabulary through phonics instruction**

This is the interferences of how the teaching of vocabulary comes across the teaching of phonics. There are several ways teachers taught vocabulary in the classroom which were through repetition, reading aloud and drilling. The most common way observed in order to develop pupils' vocabulary was through the introduction stage of the lesson where teachers

initially asked the pupils about the words that started with the letter that they were going to learn that day. The pupils suggested any words that they could think of that started with the letter 'L', for example. Below are the example of letters and words listed by the pupils as part of their learning interactions in the classroom.

In Iman's and Naima's classes, their pupils, both from the top classes, seemed to be able to cope well with the tasks:

Naima : What words start with letter W?  
 Class : Water, word, white, wet, window, whiteboard, watermelon, wall,  
 when, weather, wear, whisper.  
 (While the pupils said the words, the teacher wrote them on the whiteboard)

Iman : What words start with letter L?  
 Class : Lollipop, legendary, lamb, lock, lion.  
 (While the pupils said the words, the teacher wrote it on the whiteboard)

A different experience occurred in Hannah's class. In spite of the pupils suggesting the words, she actually presented a list of vocabulary to her pupils. Hannah introduced the vocabulary in their mother tongue (Malay language), then translated it into English for the pupils. She also used contextual clues for the pupils if they were not able to identify the meaning of the words. The situation presented below demonstrates how Hannah handled her classroom when teaching new vocabulary to the pupils.

Hannah	: What is this?
Class	: .....
Hannah	: This is fire in English. Fire! Fire! Repeat after me.
Class	: Fire!
Hannah	: What is this?
Class	: Cat!
Hannah	: Are you sure it's a cat?
Class	: Cat!
Hannah	: No, this is not a cat. This is a fox. Fox! Fox!
Class	: Fox!
Hannah	: Very good!

It can be concluded that although they were going to learn the /l/, /w/, /k/ and /f/ sounds, the examples of the words provided did not represent the sounds that they were going to learn but put more emphasis on the letter names. This is one of the reasons why in the latter part of the lesson, teachers were facing a hard time in trying to blend those suggested words because they are not considered CVC words and therefore are not suitable for their level to learn using the phonics approach.

### 9.5 The interference of the whole language approach in assessing pupils' comprehension

Teachers also seemed to focus on pupils' comprehension, especially when new language was presented in a literary context, e.g. when a rhyme was played, a poem was recited, and a short story was read. Question-and-answer sessions occurred throughout the lesson whenever possible. Teachers admitted that it was one of the ways for them to make a swift assessment of pupils' understanding of what they have learned in their daily lessons. Below are the examples of how the teachers assessed the pupils' comprehension:

Hannah	: What is this?
Class	: Cup
Hannah	: No, it's in the cup.
Class	: Coffee!
Hannah	: What colour is the coffee?
Class	: Hitam! (replied in Malay language)
Hannah	: It's Black. Black! Black!
Class	: Black! Black! (pupils repeat after the teacher)

During the English lesson, Iman was introducing the pupils to their current topic, 'Fun in the Park'. Before they proceeded with another activity, Iman briefly tried to gauge the pupils' interest in the learning material that she was using. They were reading a short story from the textbook. Iman read the story and at the same time continuously asked comprehension questions.

Iman	: Where are they now? Are they at the zoo? Are they at the supermarket?
Class	: No, they are at the park!
Iman	: Can anyone tell me what a park is?
Class	: Taman (a student replied in their native language)
Iman	: In English?
Class	: Field!
Iman	: Okay, I can accept that. What is the girl doing?
Class	: Playing with the doll
Iman	: She is playing with her?
Class	: Doll!
Iman	: Yes, she is playing with her doll. Is she playing with the doll alone or with a friend?
Class	: With a friend!

The ability of the pupils to answer Iman's questions shows that they understood the questions and were aware of what they were currently learning. However, there were also times when pupils misunderstood the questions and gave wrong answers to the teachers. One of the examples occurred in Hannah's class as below:

Hannah	: Today is Thursday.
Class	: Today is Thursday! (Pupils repeat enthusiastically)
Hannah	: Today is.....?
Class	: Thursday!
Hannah	: What date is today?
Class	: Thursday!
Hannah	: Date, not day! What date is today?
Class	: (silence)
Hannah	: 20 <sup>th</sup> of July
Class	: 20 <sup>th</sup> of July

They had misheard the word 'date', thinking instead that the teacher was asking for the 'day', and, therefore, the answer given was wrong. In this situation, Hannah did not pronounce the word 'date' accurately, so the pupils might have inferred it was the same as the previous question relating to the 'day'. Exercising correct pronunciation throughout

the lesson can help teachers and pupils to become more conscious of specific sounds in words. This indirectly helps the pupils to develop their listening skills. Although phonics supported pupils in decoding the text, they were unable to engage meaningfully with the reading without comprehension. This also proved that acquiring enough vocabulary helps pupils' reading comprehension.

## 9.6 Summary of teachers' classroom observations

Based on the above observations, it is undeniable that all the teachers put effort into integrating the phonics approach throughout the English lesson rather than explicitly using it only for reading English. Whenever the teachers found words that could be blended or segmented or had been taught before, they asked the students to do the blending and segmenting regardless of when this was or in which section of the lesson. They were able to identify and point out mistakes that the pupils made and were even able to explain how to properly sound the related phonemes, as in the cases of Hannah and Farah. Neither did they have any difficulties in teaching the sounds of the letters except for Farah, who mistook the letter X's sound as an X instead of /ks/. Through these observations, it can be seen that they have adequate content knowledge (explicit knowledge) of using the phonics approach as part of the teaching process.

They also displayed pedagogical expertise in teaching English as a second language to primary school children as they were also able to make the lesson enjoyable and engaging through student-centred activities, including spelling games and singing. However, although this looked fun, it was essential to make sure the promoted phonics activities would achieve the objective of why phonics was introduced in the first place. There is the possibility that 'teachers who do not understand the content or have a limited view of subject content may use the activity just for the sake of having something "fun" in the class' (Holmes & Dougherty, 2006, p.12). In this case, it is not clear whether Hannah, Iman and Farah had sufficient pedagogical knowledge in the domain of phonics. The observations suggested that there was an absence of a systematic structure of phonics teaching when these teachers introduced the targeted phoneme sounds. They mostly structured the phonics teaching in their presentation stage, by introducing the sounds through context (i.e. rhyme, poem). Then, teachers introduced words that related to the sounds (/f/ - fish, muffin), but in this case, the chosen words did not systematically train pupils to decode by

teaching them using blending and segmenting skills. The teachers did sound the targeted phonemes that they taught, but they did not blend these properly with the sounds of other phonemes in words.

Stahl (1998) emphasises the importance of having a clear and consistent pattern of teaching phonics as it helps to improve pupils' decoding skill. Except for Naima, none of the teachers seemed to be selective with the choice of words that they introduced to the pupils. In her lesson, Naima introduced a list of the consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words: for example, by repeatedly introducing the /w/ sound in the web, wet and win which made the learning of reading through a phonics approach more explicit compared to other teachers. Naima's pupils were able to blend and segment the sounds effectively through the examples provided. This was demonstrated in the phonics game she conducted in the classroom where the pupils were able to carry out the activity well by themselves.

Stahl (1998) also highlights the importance of learning the word pattern by having relevant examples without any distraction of context, so pupils would not be confused about what they are learning in the lesson and this seemed to be the approach taken by Naima. However, the observations from all teachers revealed that phonics was most frequently taught in isolation, albeit sometimes embedded in other aspects of language teaching, e.g. by revising the sounds in the listed words in the textbook as part of pupils' vocabulary. The observations also revealed that the teachers did not only focus on phonics, but slightly varied their instructions to also include spelling, letter case identification, comprehension, and even vocabulary. It was observed that the teachers also focused more on the spelling of the word and sometimes lost the sense of what the whole phonics instruction is about. This is probably due to the content of the textbook, which neglected the introduction of CVC words for the beginner reader, but instead 'cherry picked' the words as long as they have targeted letters and sounds for the topics.

Inconsistency in training experiences can also be one of the factors why teachers dealt differently with phonics. Similar practices were observed in Iman and Farah's lesson since they were both partners in disseminating the implementation in the school. Although Naima is also from the same school, she admitted from her interview that she was more dependent on other sources such as online materials and her children's experiences with phonics learning. Naima also admitted that she was not able to follow the guidelines given

by the training as she felt the gap of knowledge was too big for her to comprehend everything from a one-off training session. Thus, she opted to find her own pace and solution to her teaching. At times, she also admitted that she still needs peer support if she encounters any problems.

From the data, it could therefore be concluded that the teaching of phonics was unsystematic and somewhat sporadic, rather than a focused approach to teaching English reading. This indicates that teacher preparation and development in this area have looked at phonics as one strategy amongst many others for language teaching, rather than an all-encompassing approach for teaching reading.

# CHAPTER 10

## ENGLISH YEAR 1 TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

### 10.1 Introduction

In Malaysia, English language textbooks are prepared by the Ministry of Education. They contain standardised content to be used by all schools in Malaysia based on the national curriculum and syllabus for the English language. Although teachers are allowed to use other teaching materials to support their classroom teaching, the textbook is still considered the primary reference when preparing teachers' lesson plans as they include specific language items that need to be covered in the teaching and learning.

### 10.2 The rationale for textbook analysis and evaluation

The decision to analyse and evaluate the English textbook is based on the findings from teachers' interviews and classroom observations. In the interviews, teachers expressed their frustration about the textbook given to them this year to teach the revised Year 1 English syllabus.

Iman explained that there were inconsistencies between the textbook content and the content of the workbook as part of the additional material for pupils concerning the Year 1 English syllabus. She claimed that the syllabus and the textbook presented different curriculum content, and the teachers were therefore confused about which one to follow. There was also an absence within the chapters of a clear progression that built on the children's prior knowledge. As for the workbook, it did not offer exercises that reflected what they had learnt in the classroom. No training was conducted on how to use the textbook and the workbook, and teachers were expected to work it out by themselves. This then led to different interpretations by teachers.

Farah mostly talked about the content on the subject of technology in the textbook. According to her, although the book tries to integrate technology into teaching through the presence of QR codes, the content and materials available are problematic. Some of the QR codes did not work when she tried to use them. Meanwhile, Naima felt that the textbook had too many topics and too much content to cover. Everything was done in a rush in order to finish all the topics in the textbook and syllabus. Each of the units consisted of different language items, and it was hard to make sure the pupils managed to grasp and master these. Hannah felt that the textbook did not offer proper content to develop reading skills nor to be used for teaching phonics. She struggled to find appropriate materials for her pupils within the textbook but managed to make personal adaptations as time passed. She felt that some of the language content was unsuitable for introducing to the Year 1 pupils, as some of them were still grappling with learning the alphabet, yet they were required to learn complicated and wide-ranging vocabulary.

Although teachers reported their strategies for dealing with the textbook, the classroom observation of these teachers did not suggest that all of them were applying them. From the observations, teachers were seen to be heavily dependent on the textbook. In Iman's and Farah's classes, they frequently used the textbook, especially when introducing a new topic and vocabulary. However, Naima and Hannah were more flexible, using the textbook when they thought it was necessary. They preferred to use their own materials, as long as it accommodated and covered the current themes and topics in the syllabus and the textbook.

### **10.3 An overview of the Year 1 English textbook**

The textbook has 141 pages with 24 units. It covers four modules within each unit: listening and speaking, reading, writing, and language arts. There are three main themes covered by the units: The World of Self, Family, and Friends; the World of Stories; and the World of Knowledge. The book is complemented by two activity books in order to provide opportunities for the pupils to acquire penmanship and to write at word, phrase and sentence level. Although many things can be evaluated from the textbook, the focus of this evaluation is on the phonics approach and reading skills and how these are integrated and presented within the overall textbook.

### 10.3.1 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the English textbook for Year 1 pupils are based on the general aims and objectives of the English syllabus/curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education (MoE). English for Year 1 aims to ‘equip pupils with basic language skills to enable them to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts that are appropriate to the pupils’ level of development’ (Year 1 English syllabus, 2015, p. 1). Specifically, by the end of Year 6 (on finishing primary school) pupils should be able to

- i) communicate with peers and adults confidently and appropriately in formal and informal situations
- ii) read and comprehend a range of English texts for information and enjoyment
- iii) write a range of texts using appropriate language, style and form using a variety of media
- iv) appreciate and demonstrate an understanding of English language literary or creative works for enjoyment
- v) use correct and appropriate rules of grammar in speech and writing

There is no indication of milestones for the end of each school year.

As for early reading and phonics, the syllabus introduces the ‘back to basics’ strategies with the intention of building a strong foundation in language skills, and the phonics approach is part of this through helping pupils to learn to read at an early age. The syllabus acknowledged the importance of phonemic awareness as a starting point for learning to read, and it should be initially developed using the phonics approach (English Year 1 Syllabus, 2017). It further asserts the significance of blending and segmenting activities as part of learning to build words and learning to spell (English Year 1 textbook). However, these explanations seem a bit vague concerning the reason for using the phonics approach as a strategy to enable pupils to become independent readers. In order to prepare the pupils to become independent readers, other components are also required, such as phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2006). It is also important to note that phonemic awareness is not phonics and vice versa; thus, these two components should be approached differently.

### **10.3.2 Design and organisation**

The time allocated for each unit is flexible. Usually, teachers are expected to finish half of the units (12 units) in the first half of the semester (January to June), and the remainder will continue in the second half of the semester (July to November) each year. In terms of developing phonemic awareness, there are 42 graphemes/sounds which are introduced in the textbook. The textbook starts with a fundamental topic in Unit 1, such as ‘Sounds Everywhere’, which highlights the recognition of the alphabet and the sounds that are produced by it. Then the units progress with different topics, such as ‘Greetings’, ‘My Day in School’ and so on. However, it is noted that the topics within the units are not arranged according to themes but randomly arranged throughout the textbook.

### **10.3.3 English language skills**

In the textbook, there are five English skills that the pupils must learn: phonemic awareness; listening and speaking; reading; writing; and language arts. Each of the units is arranged according to these skills. Phonemic awareness is introduced in Unit 3. Each unit has a starter activity, ‘Let’s talk’, where the teacher is expected to introduce the focus of the unit and to encourage pupils to talk to the teacher about the topic. How they want to carry out the section depends on the teacher, either using a song, story or interesting video. Then, it continues with the listening and speaking activity, in which the teacher needs to guide the pupils in saying what is presented in the section. In this section, the targeted phonemes are introduced. For the reading section, there are mostly short passages, dialogues and sentences for the pupils to practice as the reading comprehension exercise in the workbook provided. Then, there is a writing section where the pupils need to fill in the blanks or name the pictures in the workbook. Each of the units ends with a language arts section where either they are doing crafts, singing songs, or reciting a poem.

**Table 10-1: Language skills with examples of activities in the units**

Language skills	Categories	Types of activities
<b>Listening &amp; speaking</b>	Let's talk	Brainstorming activity, teachers ask WH-questions regarding the topic
	Let's say and do	Introduce new phonemes
	Let's listen	Point and say, a story and comprehension question, read aloud
<b>Reading</b>	Let's read	Conversation, read direction, blending activity, segmenting activity, short sentences with comprehension questions
<b>Writing</b>	Let's write	Rewrite sentences, fill in the blanks, punctuation exercise
<b>Language Arts</b>	Let's sing/chant/recite	Songs, rhymes, jazz chant
	Art activity	Doing a headband, a mask

### 10.3.4 The phonics approach and reading skills

Throughout the units, new phonemes are introduced within the listening and speaking sections. There are one or two phonemes per unit. This is then followed by blending and/or segmenting activities. After that, the reading text activity comes along.

Below is a list of phonemes and graphemes presented across the units in the textbook. The sequence of the graphemes was organised according to the phonics pedagogy materials in the teachers' book. Teachers are expected to teach these phonemes according to the contents.

**Table 10-2: A list of phonemes and graphemes presented across the units in the textbook**

Unit	Graphemes	Phonemes	Unit	Graphemes	Phonemes
1	-	-	13	l, ll	/l/
2	-	-	14	j, v	/dʒ/ /v/
3	s, a	/s/, /æ/	15	w, x	/w/ /ks/
4	t, p	/t/ /p/	16	y, z	/j/ /z/
5	n, i	/n/ /i/	17	qu	/kw/
6	d, m	/d/ /m/	18	sh, ch	/ʃ/ /tʃ/
7	g, o	/g/ /o/	19	th, ng	/θ/ /ð/ /ŋ/
8	c, k	/k/	20	ai, ee	/eɪ/ /i:/
9	ck, e	/k/ /e/	21	igh, oa	/aɪ/ /aʊ/
10	u, r	/u/ /r/	22	oo, ar	/u/ /u:/ /ɑ:/
11	h, b	/h/ /b/	23	or, ur	/ɔ:/ /ɜ:/
12	f, ff	/f/	24	ow, oi	/əʊ/ /ɔɪ/

#### 10.4 The evaluation of the Year 1 English textbook

The unit below is taken as an example from the textbook for a detailed description before I present a critical evaluation of it. As already explained, the organisation and the structure of each unit is similar to the others.

**Textbook Unit 4: Around the School**  
**Targeted Phonemes are /t/ and /p/ sounds**

**Unit 4 Around the School**

**Let's talk.**  
 That is the school canteen.  
 What can we buy there?  
 We can buy puffs and pies. We can also buy pasta and tarts.  
 What did you buy, Kiran?  
 I bought ten tarts for my friends.

**Let's say and do.**  
 't' Show all ten fingers and say the 't' sound ten times.  
 'p' Imagine you are pulling a rope. Say the 'p' sound ten times.

**Let's listen.**  
**At the Canteen**  
 1 Vinod is at the canteen. He buys a pie and a puff.  
 2 He turns on the tap. He washes his hands.  
 3 He sits at the table. He eats his pie and puff.  
 4 The bell rings at ten o'clock. Vinod walks to his classroom.

**Let's read.**  
**School Tour**  
 Directions: Turn left | Go straight on | Turn right  
 How do you go to the bookshop from the school gate?  
 From the school gate, go straight on. Then, turn left.  
 How do you go...  
 1. to the school canteen from the school gate?  
 2. to the classroom from the school gate?  
 3. to the field from the school gate?

**Let's write.**  
**Show Me the Way**  
 Map 1 How do you go to the bookshop from the school gate?  
 From the school gate, ...  
 Then, ...  
 Map 2 How do you go to the canteen from the school gate?  
 From the ... go straight on.  
 Then, turn ...

**Let's chant.**  
**Let's Go**  
 Pasta, curry puffs, pies,  
 Pasta, curry puffs, pies,  
 Pasta, curry puffs,  
 Pasta, curry puffs,  
 Pasta, curry puffs, pies,  
 He wants ten plates of pasta,  
 She wants some curry puffs,  
 They want pies,  
 They want pies.

This unit intentionally introduces places around the school. There are multiple learning objectives, and this itself is problematic because nothing is dealt with in depth. It is also not clear what the primary objective of the unit is when there are lots of different things to focus on. It is more complicated when multiple language learning categories are introduced within one unit, such as places, food and directions. The listening and speaking sections and the reading sections do not complement one another. The content for the current material in the reading section does not represent a reading activity. This unit is only the fourth unit of the textbook, and in the reading section, pupils are already expected to learn about directions, which is unrelated to the initial focus of the unit.

In the beginning, the characters discuss what they can buy in the canteen. We can see that the emphasis is on the letters ‘p’ and ‘t’ to represent the phonemes /p/ and /t/ such as /p/uffs, /p/as/t/a, /p/ies and /t/ar/t/s. In the next section, which is for listening and speaking, the teacher needs to draw the pupils’ attention to the phonemes /t/ and /p/, and two words are introduced, ‘sit’ and ‘tap’. Then, a sequence of pictures with a description of typical scenarios in the canteen is presented. The teacher is expected to read aloud the description, followed by the pupils, and in addition to ask comprehension questions about it. The next section for reading relates to directions (left, right, straight on) and a few other new places around the school (classroom, field, bookshop, canteen, school hall) are introduced. For the writing section, pupils are expected fill in the answers to the questions based on the textbook in their workbook. Finally, they perform the language arts activity by doing a chant about the food they can buy in the canteen with the emphasis on the letters ‘p’ and ‘t’ (pasta, curry puffs, pies, ten).

Although the initial phonics content in this unit is meant to introduce the sounds of /t/ and /p/, the sequence of the content in this unit ended up emphasising the letters ‘t’ and ‘p’. This can be seen through an abundance of words introduced in other sections, such as /p/uffs, /p/as/t/a, /p/ies and /t/ar/t/s. Most of the words provided are non-decodable words and the absence of the CVC words make it harder for teachers to teach blending and segmenting using the provided input in the text. Supposedly, the words given should follow the c-v-c chronology, so the pupils understand the sequence of the blending and segmenting activity. Reflecting on what Stahl (1998) mentioned, it is important to learn the word pattern by having relevant examples without any distraction of context so that pupils are not confused about what they are learning in the lesson. There is also an absence of follow-up exercises focussing on the phonemes /t/ and /p/ in the reading in the next section; instead, more new vocabulary is introduced. The pupils are not able to remember many new words introduced at the same time and within a short duration.

A successful phonics lesson should also consider conducting the following four steps: revisit and review; teach; practice; and apply (Glazzard & Stokoe, 2017; Johnston & Watson, 2014; Jolliffe et al., 2015). From the description above, it is evident that no systematic phonics instruction has been discussed or implemented in the syllabus or textbook, although previous evidence has shown that a systematic phonics programme is the key to successful phonics teaching and learning (Ehri et al., 2001; Torgerson et al.,

2006). In second-language learning, explicit phonics teaching will also improve decoding skills and help pupils to improve language learning autonomously and accurately (Hawkes et al., 2019).

If teachers were provided a thorough pedagogical aspect of phonics teaching, they might consider preparing a different set of decodable words that contain the phonemes /t/ and /p/ and practise the relevant blending and segmenting activities with the pupils. It is essential to introduce decodable words during this stage because it will help the pupils to enhance their knowledge of the phonics learned through practice and also to reduce pupils' memory load from a broad range of words at the same time (Castle, Rastle & Nation, 2018).

Since teachers are highly dependent on the textbook as their primary reference, it is understandable how teachers might misinterpret the way to teach phonics. It can be concluded that the present English Year 1 textbook lacks the appropriate phonics content required to support teachers' teaching or the pupils' learning. The existing information concerning systematic phonics teaching in the pupils' textbook is insufficient, sometimes confusing and most importantly, the selection process in the phonics teaching methodology has been conducted without a proper reference to the pedagogy literature. Besides, the absence of a specific teacher's guidebook for teaching phonics according to the syllabus and using proper techniques might also have affected the teachers' understanding and practices of how to follow the phonics approach in the classroom.

# CHAPTER 11

## DISCUSSION

### 11.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this study was to explore the beliefs and practices of English teachers with regards to the use of the phonics approach in the teaching of reading in English as a second language for young learners in Malaysia. The findings of the study in relation to the following research questions were presented in Chapters 4 to 7 as simplified in *Table 11-1*:

- i) What are the beliefs and knowledge of the English teachers in Malaysia concerning the teaching of reading English through the phonics approach?
- ii) How and to what extent do English teachers implement the phonics approach in their classrooms?
- iii) What are, according to the teachers, the contextual factors that influence their practices in implementing the phonics approach during English language teaching?
- iv) To what extent are the teachers' actual practices congruent with their stated beliefs about the phonics approach and the teaching of reading English?

**Table 11-1: The summary of the finding chapters**

Chapter	Data & Findings
Chapter 6	Survey results
Chapter 7	Four individual case studies of teacher participants
Chapter 8	The observation of teachers' practices in using the phonics approach in the English classroom
Chapter 9	The observed classroom and challenges of the teachers' practices in using phonics approach in the classroom.
Chapter 10	English textbook analysis

In order to answer these questions, the study firstly implemented a survey to elicit beliefs, knowledge and practices from a larger number of English teachers. Then, the trends emerging from the questionnaire were further clarified in follow-up interviews. The interviews were also complemented by classroom observation, and also through the document analysis of the Year 1 English textbook. This process helped to investigate teachers' reported beliefs and practices and their actual practices, also enabling the examination of internal and external factors, which shaped the relationship between the beliefs and practices in implementing the syllabus reform. This chapter will start by answering the research questions which guided this research, and then will revisit the conceptual framework presented in the literature review in order to explain the research findings. Lastly, it will consider the implications of the research.

## **11.2 Answering the research questions**

### **11.2.1 Research Question 1: What are the beliefs and knowledge of the English teachers in Malaysia concerning the teaching of reading English reading the phonics approach?**

*Teacher educators have come to recognize that teachers are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with theoretical and pedagogical skills; they are individuals who enter teacher education programs with prior experiences, [.....], and beliefs that inform their knowledge about teaching and shape what they do in their classrooms.*

*(Freeman and Johnson, 1998, p. 401)*

Based on the quote above, it was necessary to generally explore the beliefs and knowledge of teachers about the teaching of reading English through the phonics approach. A survey was used initially, before the data collected were examined further through case-studies and observations, which revealed more in-depth insights into teachers' cognition.

#### **11.2.1.1 The teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading English**

The first main finding is that the majority of the teachers who participated in the survey reported a mixed orientation of beliefs towards English reading pedagogy. The results show that teachers' beliefs seem a bit negative in relation to the phonics approach

statements with only one positive agreement (mean = 4.32) shown, which was for the statement, 'Beginner readers should be taught phonics skills'. During the interviews with the four teachers, they also shared their concerns about phonics. Although most of them acknowledged that phonics must have its advantages for it to be included in the syllabus, they seemed unable to understand the real reason why it should be applied in the teaching of reading. One of the participants (Iman) who was a phonics 'advocate', highly praised the approach, stating that it helps the pupils to recognise the words and sounds better. Another participant (Naima) who has been teaching for more than 25 years felt that the previous whole language approach had always produced. Nevertheless, she did not deny that there might be a good reason why the ministry has introduced phonics as part of teaching reading, which she was not aware of as a teacher. This view was also shared by another two participants (Hannah and Farah), who thought that phonics was just a part of the syllabus that they needed to implement but would not carry out if it were not for the statutory LINUS assessment.

This suggests that teachers' core beliefs of how reading should be taught, and their classroom practices remained unchanged. They were influenced more by their peripheral beliefs, focussing on phonics only because of the need to comply with curriculum reform, especially when they needed to comply with contextual pressures (Fives & Buehl, 2012), which in this case, was the LINUS assessment. Nonetheless, there were some changes to the participants' beliefs about reading instruction. For example, they acknowledged the advantages of phonics lessons and were able to recognise the positive outcomes for the pupils. However, these beliefs seemed rather peripheral as the teachers were unable to share a common understanding of phonics teaching principles or relate these principles to their own beliefs.

The differences in beliefs between the different teachers may have been related to differences in life and language-learning experiences. One difference is that Iman had undertaken extensive phonics courses due to her appointed role as a literacy facilitator while the others hardly had any opportunity to attend such courses. It was clear that this had an impact on her pedagogical confidence and enthusiasm for phonics. As the literature indicates, professional development courses have the potential to not only change teacher beliefs but also boost the teachers' confidence in carrying out the new practices in the classroom (Borg, 2006; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Smith, 2011).

### 11.2.1.2 Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of the phonics approach

This also leads to the next finding. It would appear that the teachers had an inadequate level of pedagogical content knowledge in teaching and using the phonics approach as part of their instructional practices. Based on the survey results, the teachers had both problems in content and pedagogical knowledge questions. The respondents scored highly for theoretical questions but were unable to transfer the content knowledge to pedagogical aspects of phonics pedagogy.

There are substantial findings in the literature indicating gaps in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge when teaching phonics concepts and skills effectively to beginning readers. These findings not only come from the ESL/EFL context (Bae et al., 2019; Lee, 2014; Vaisman & Kahn-Horowitz, 2019; Zhao et al., 2016) but also pertain to teachers whose first language is English (Bos et al., 2001; Carlisle et al., 2011; Cunningham et al., 2004; Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2005; Moats, 2009a, 2009b; Moats & Foorman, 2003; NRP, 2000). It can be deduced that this is a distinctive problem for teachers who need to teach reading English because they 'must have a solid grasp of both the complexities of English orthography and the language systems that print represents in order to teach pupils recognition of written words' (Moats, 2009b, p. 77). Moats further argued that teachers who lack such knowledge are 'likely to promote guessing strategies ("What might make sense here?"), bypass strategies ("Skip that and go on."), the belief that accuracy does not matter ("Nice try."), or rote memorization of higher frequency words' (p. 77). Such practices mentioned by Moats were apparent in the observed classes of my participants.

Nevertheless, the teachers used some of their own initiative to equip themselves with pedagogical content knowledge by further researching about the phonics pedagogy through online websites – e.g. YouTube, social media – and also by using other teaching materials available on the market. The result of these efforts is that teachers had different interpretations of how phonics should be taught in the classroom, which leads to the different practices observed. This can be observed from Iman's, Naima's and Farah's divergent classroom instructions, even though they were teaching at the same school and all received training from Iman in her role as literacy co-ordinator. As for Hannah, no

comparison can be made of her classroom teaching with other colleagues since she was the only teacher in her school who volunteered to participate in the study.

### **11.2.2 Research Question 2: How and to what extent do English teachers implement the phonics approach in their classroom?**

*What teachers do matters more than what they say they do.*

*(Borg, 2006)*

As the questionnaire and interviews refer to reported practices rather than actual practices, it is important to compare what teachers said they did to what they really did in the observed classroom. The results from the survey indicated that the teachers incorporated the whole language and phonics approach in their reading pedagogy without a particular preference for either as part of their practices in teaching reading. They rated their practice items in the survey from 1 (never) to 10 (always). Reported practice items for both the whole language and phonics approach scored 7.0 and above. It can therefore be concluded that teachers favour those practices equally in the classroom. If so, it seems that they were practising ‘balanced literacy’ instruction for the teaching reading as described by Wren (2001, p. 4): ‘a balanced literacy approach could be generically described as mixing some phonics with whole language’.

However, the classroom observation shows that neither were carried out according to recommendations in the respective literature. Castle et al. (2018, p. 38) referred to this situation as ‘a bit of everything and typically involving limited non-systematic phonics instruction’. From the observation of the four teachers, there was no doubt that they were applying phonics in their language classrooms. The teachers’ awareness of phonics teaching was obvious, and it was practised continuously throughout the English lesson. The teachers conducted blending and segmenting activities whenever they found words that lent themselves to this, even if sometimes it was not necessarily appropriate. The observations seemed to suggest that the process of blending and segmenting was synonymous with taking a phonics approach. On a positive note, teachers did display a certain level of pedagogical content knowledge of phonics skills and pedagogy. They managed to properly introduce certain letters with the correct sounds, although there were also some mistakes in identifying those sounds and the teachers seemed unaware of them.

The teachers were able to correct and point out the pupils' mistakes when the pupils mistakenly blended or segmented the targeted sounds in between the words. The same pattern also appeared in the survey section as most respondents were able to answer the content knowledge questions as compared to pedagogical knowledge questions.

However, phonics teaching is much more than blending and segmenting. Although both practices are crucial, the way they were carried out did not comply with the phonics instructional framework as proposed by Carnine et al. (2004).

Carnine et al. (2004) propose six aspects of explicit instruction that should be adopted in a reading programme:

- i) Specifying objectives
- ii) Devising strategies
- iii) Developing teaching procedures
- iv) Selecting examples
- v) Sequencing skills
- vi) Providing practice and review

Based on the observed teachers and classrooms practices, teachers were having problems with developing teaching procedure explicitly for phonics pedagogy. They also were not able to sufficiently select appropriate teaching materials and examples for the lesson. When teachers are provided with explicit teaching procedures, they are less likely to teach phonics in an abstract way.

According to Canine et al. (2004, p. 12),

*When teaching pupils to decode regular words, the examples would be limited to words that contain only the letters for which pupils have been taught the letter-sound correspondences. If the pupils know only the letters m, s, a, d and f, the teacher should not present the word 'met' since it contains an unknown letter (e).*

However, teachers ignored these rules and the compatibility of the targeted sounds to be blended and segmented in a word and how it applies in a text. This can be seen in Hannah's, Farah's and Iman's classroom practices. Hence, the lesson's objective was achieved by

introducing the targeted phonemes and making the pupils aware of their positions in words, but these could not be appropriately blended with the other sounds in the words. This is arguably a drawback of teaching phonics implicitly as the pupils were not able to build the concept of how each of the phonemes was related to creating a word (Glazzard & Stokoe, 2017).

The pupils who have little phonemic awareness are likely to find this instruction very confusing and find it difficult to make sense of the relationship of the letters and sounds within a word. At the end of the lesson, it turned out to be a basal reading exercise, where pupils would simply read those words aloud, repeating after their teachers. This is how a whole-language approach is conducted in the classroom, where pupils learn the word and then memorise it. This is evidenced by the absence of explicit systematic teaching using the phonics approach as the main component of what is required for a successful early reading classroom (Buckingham, 2016; Castle et al., 2018; Moats, 2014; NRP, 2000; Stahl, 1992, 1998).

Another point worth mentioning is the inconsistency of what teachers said they do as compare to what they really did. Iman, the ‘phonics advocate’, who attended extensive courses in order to equip her to be a literacy coach in the school, actually used a whole-language approach in how she structured her lesson and how she introduced the phonics to pupils. It is important to highlight this because her classroom instruction was supposed to be a benchmark for other teachers to follow. Farah also mentioned how she was experimenting with various strategies in order to teach reading in the classroom. This included incorporating both phonics and whole language approaches according to the suitability for her students. The observation of her practice revealed that her lessons were similarly structured to Iman’s lessons. Whilst Hannah felt that she lacked pedagogical knowledge in teaching phonics, she combined phonics and whole language approaches.

As for Naima, she was the one who was reluctant to change her practices due to years of teaching experience with the whole language approach. She also struggled to use the phonics approach due to lack of knowledge and having no confidence with this from the beginning. Although she lacked confidence in teaching phonics, observations of her practice showed that she was in fact using a clear and consistent pattern of teaching phonics. This is compliant with what Stahl (1998) proposed, i.e. having a clear and consistent

pattern of teaching phonics and the importance of learning the pattern of the words by having relevant examples without any distraction of context, so pupils would not be confused about what they were learning in the lesson. Further changes in her cognition will be discussed in the next section, section 11.2.4.

In summary, the teachers' use of the phonics approach for the teaching of English reading could be considered as superficial without involving much thought about how the theoretical aspects of phonics pedagogy can be transferred to practical instruction in the classroom lesson. On another note, it is also important to mention again that this section is not an evaluation of the teachers' instructional practices but serves as a comparison with the discrepancy between theoretical perspectives of teaching reading and classroom practices. It also serves as an indicator of the extent of the implementation of the phonics approach and how this materialised in the classroom.

### **11.2.3 Research Question 3: What are the contextual factors that influence teachers' practices in implementing the phonics approach ?**

*Teachers' stated beliefs are not reflected in their classroom practices, that exceptions to this trend can be identified, and that variations in the relationship between beliefs and practices can be explained with reference to both internal factors of the teachers themselves (e.g. biography, awareness, motivation, experience) and external factors (e.g. curricula, time, institutional policy), which may constrain what teachers do.*

*(Borg, 2018, p.85)*

In the previous section, we became aware that internal factors such as previous teaching experiences, demographic background, and teachers' professional coursework in the form of CPD influenced teachers' practices. When these are negatively affected (in this case, hindering the implementation of curriculum reform), practices nonetheless have the potential to get better and improve once teachers gain more practical experience in the classroom (Borg, 2006; Basturkmen, 2012). Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the impact of contextual constraints which may prevent teachers from exercising their beliefs or influence how they react to change. There were numerous examples of contextual constraints provided by the teachers and documented in the case studies. Some overlapped

with one another (i.e. more than one teacher faced the same constraint), while some were specific to individuals.

As far as classroom factors were concerned, the main findings from the case studies (interviews) were also observable during classroom teaching. The teachers mentioned (i) the time constraints that they had in delivering the lesson, (ii) the need to attend to different levels of pupils' language proficiency, and (iii) experimenting with different teaching approaches that suit their pupils' needs. From the classroom observations, teachers were seen to struggle to finish most of the lessons due to classroom management issues, which sometimes made the lesson divert from the original lesson plan. Sometimes, this situation made the teachers shift the lesson to something more fun by showing a video from YouTube. Occasionally, due to differences in language proficiency level, teachers were seen to pay more attention to the weaker pupils, which meant that they ignored other pupils. This situation resulted in them disturbing their classmates, which led to some disruption. Teachers had no option but to be strict and this situation affected the lesson flow. Other than that, although the teachers claimed that they were experimenting with different pedagogies, the observations showed that when faced with challenges like these, teachers seemed to frequently use the approach with which they were most familiar; in this case, they went back to the whole-language pedagogy. Often the pupils seemed to find the phonics part of the lesson too lengthy, rather repetitive, and they therefore lost concentration. Teachers shifted their pedagogy when they felt that the instructional practices were not working in getting the pupils' attention. They seemed to teach according to the pupils' learning readiness. The fact that the teachers experienced an absence of successful lessons in implementing the targeted approach may have been the reason why they had ambivalent attitudes and beliefs (Guskey, 2002).

On the meso level, lack of support from school administrators and colleagues, as well as lack of CPD training, also hindered teachers in properly implementing the new changes in the curriculum. Although there was an attempt to show that they were supporting the phonics approach, they were still struggling in sustaining the incorporation of phonics in the reading lesson. Having good support from the administrators and colleagues can help the teachers with emotional reinforcement (Hargreaves, 2004; Mansour, 2013; Zepeda, 2013) when they experience lack of confidence in trying out new practices (Fullan & Ballew, 2004). This factor seems to have been ignored by the school community as they

might think teachers were doing fine as long as they could deliver results. In Naima and Farah's cases, they acknowledged Iman's role was very helpful in helping them to navigate the new curriculum. This situation did not occur much in Hannah's case, as she was the one who needed to step up and take care of the Year 1 English teachers under her. However, due to the lack of English teachers in the school, some of the teachers were not trained to teach English. She could not advise on everything or intervene in any way unless they referred their problems to her. If the teachers were supported during this transition, it may have helped to provide social resilience and create new social norms (Cialdini, 2009) and eventually prepare the teachers to share and discuss their concerns, problems and also successful practices without feeling that they were being evaluated by other peers (Cialdini, 2009; Heck, 2009). By establishing this trust among teachers, they can work collaboratively without being dependent on the CPD training that they received through the cascade training.

However, the lack of CPD training given to the teachers cannot be ignored because it is how new curricula should be disseminated (Timperley, et al., 2008). Due to the lack of the CPD courses given, the teachers were receiving different interpretations of how phonics should be conducted in the classroom. The absence of a structured phonics pedagogy is one of the reasons why the practice was less effective in the first place and practices were not consistently applied by the teachers. Furthermore, one-day professional development courses are unlikely to make lasting changes to teachers' pedagogy, knowledge, or instruction (Ball & Cohen, 1999; McCutchen et al., 2002).

In addition, teachers experienced inconsistency between the English syllabus, the contents of the textbook, and the objectives of the LINUS assessment. These three elements were not aligned with a phonics pedagogy framework and this contributed in hindering the changes as expected. The discrepancy between the curriculum documents and the textbook have been mentioned in the literature as one of the factors that hindered the development of teachers' beliefs and practices (Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Mansour, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2009). Due to the exam-oriented syllabus, teachers were more focussed on finishing the syllabus and therefore covered a lot of content in their lessons. In addition, teachers were also seen to heavily rely on the textbook, as it was the official and easiest reference that they could obtain. The textbook analysis shows that the contents were presented according to the whole language framework where all the language skills (listening,

speaking, reading and writing) were included without paying much detailed attention to early reading skills. There was also a lack of coherence between the sections in the book. The phonics content was included as part of the introduction section to every topic in the textbook, thus minimising the main purpose of using phonics in the teaching of reading in the first place. With the absence of explicit systematic direct instruction for phonics pedagogy, the desired outcomes and objectives are difficult to fulfil (Carnine et al., 2004; Stahl et al., 1998).

Finally, yet importantly, the teachers' response to the LINUS assessment influenced how they implemented the changes in the curriculum. It seems that the assessment was the determining factor that forced teachers to use the phonics approach, thus changing their practices. Since the assessment is compulsory, teachers needed to make sure the students were able to show an improvement from the pre-test in April in the post-test in August every year. However, the assessment took up much of the teachers' instructional time since they needed to deal with the pupils individually in order to test them on 12 literacy constructs. The interviews indicated that none of the teachers had a positive view of the assessment, except for Naima. Previously, Naima was aware that her students were failing the assessment due to her inability to use the phonics approach as part of the reading lesson. Then, she decided to adopt the approach as part of her reading pedagogy.

These contextual constraints may act as a filter for beliefs and practices, but it also acted as a mediator for teachers to change their practices while holding on to the core beliefs that they believe in about the teaching of reading. Obviously, it was hard to develop a new pedagogical practice, but as shown by Naima, it was not impossible with 'just-in-time, job-embedded assistance as they struggle to adapt new curricula and new instructional practices' (Guskey & Yoon, 2009, p. 497). Below in *Table 11-2* is a summary of contextual constraints as reported in case studies and observed by the teachers' responses to classroom observation, which influenced teachers' practices of curricular reforms in the classroom.

**Table 11-2: A summary of contextual constraints as reported in case studies and observed by the teachers' responses to classroom observation**

Context	Categories	From Case Studies	As observed in the classroom
Classroom factors	Teacher-related	Time constraint	Teachers struggled to finish most of the lesson due to classroom management issues.
		Mixed beliefs of how to teach English reading	Teachers were still experimenting with which pedagogy to use and were still influenced by the whole language approach.
	Student-related	Mixed ability of pupils	Teachers needed to attend to different levels of pupils' language proficiency.
School and district level factors		Lack of support from school administrators and other colleagues	Teachers with no English teaching background were assigned to teach English. No continuation of practice from Year 1 to Year 2
		Lack of CPD training	Led to a different interpretation of how phonics pedagogy should be conducted
			The absence of a structured phonics pedagogy
National and state level factors	Educational policies	Exam oriented syllabus	Syllabus is not coherent with curriculum expectation.
		English textbook	Too many topics to cover, and lack of coherence between topics Heavy influenced by the whole language approach which made it difficult for the teachers to follow
		LINUS assessment	Teachers viewed the assessment as the main reason to use phonics as part of the reading pedagogy.

#### **11.2.4 Research Question 4: To what extent are the teachers' actual practices congruent with their stated beliefs about the phonics approach and the teaching of English reading?**

From the findings, several patterns occurred when it comes to describing the relationship between the teachers' stated beliefs and their practices, which can be seen as complex and varied according to context (Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2006; Buehl & Beck, 2014; Ng & Farrell, 2003; Peacock, 2001).

##### **11.2.4.1 Beliefs influence practice**

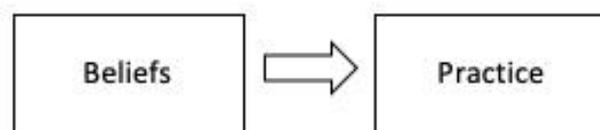


Figure 11-1: Beliefs influence practice relationship

One of the findings of the study supports the idea that beliefs provide a basis for practice and affect behaviour (Borg, 2011). Iman was always supporting the phonics approach due to her personal life experiences of how her children learned to read in their kindergarten. The additional pedagogical content knowledge that she received by attending courses as part of becoming a district coach also strengthened her beliefs that phonics helps the pupils to learn reading English well. Despite facing difficulty in exercising her beliefs due to contextual constraints, she was still able to sustain her practices by focussing on phonics whenever possible.

### 11.2.4.2 Practice influences beliefs

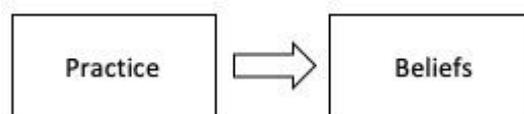


Figure 11-2: Practice influences beliefs relationship

This relationship can be observed through Naima's cognition, whereby classroom events in turn influence the subsequent decisions a teacher may make. Naima was a teacher who was reluctant to change her reading practice because of the years of teaching experience she had. However, she had to change her practice to accommodate the LINUS assessment. She viewed the phonics approach differently after being confident in using the approach as part of her teaching. In this case, although LINUS assessment is the mediating factor that influenced the change, it shows that when Naima put more effort into equipping herself with the pedagogical content knowledge, she gained the confidence to use the approach, despite an initial lack of training. This finding also suggests that a teacher's beliefs do change over time despite years of experiences that the teacher has had (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

### 11.2.4.3 Beliefs are disconnected/not related from practices

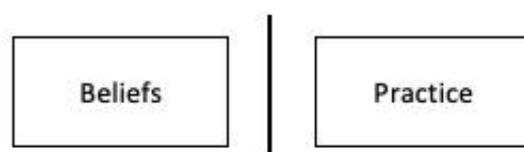


Figure 11-3: Beliefs and practice did not influence one another

This relationship appeared in Farah's situation where her beliefs and practices were disconnected and inconsistent. She had experience of using phonics from her previous part-time job as a language tutor and she acknowledged the benefit of the approach for young children. However, she felt that phonics was wasting the lesson time since the activities of blending and segmenting individual letter sounds were repetitive. She believed in a balanced literacy approach and that teachers should be given authority to use any pedagogy in the classroom as long as it will help the pupils learn to read. Based on her

observed practices, Farah was seen to be complying with the phonics pedagogy despite her beliefs that teaching and learning strategies should be fit for purpose, rather than depending on one particular approach. She was observed teaching phonics in a way that was presented to her through the PLC sessions.

#### 11.2.4.4 Beliefs and practices influence one another reciprocally

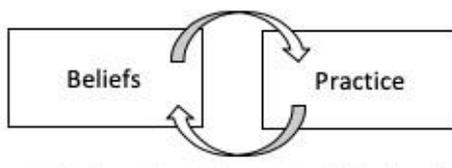


Figure 11-4: Beliefs and practices influence one another reciprocally

Although this relationship seems reasonable where beliefs and practices influence one another, it is actually complex in nature (Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2015; Mansour, 2009). This is because ‘the strength of relationship may vary across individuals and context as well as the type of beliefs and practices being assessed’ (Buehl & Beck, 2015). Borg (2015) further asserts that this relationship occurs ‘over the course of a teacher’s professional life’ (p. 83). This relationship can be observed in Hannah’s case study since her beliefs about the teaching of reading were developed through her years of practices as an English teacher since she was not exposed to English language teaching during her teacher training. Throughout the years, the practices became embedded as part of her beliefs, thus shaping the way she conducted her lessons. As observed, she managed to incorporate phonics alongside the multisensory activities such as games, as part of the learning experience. As much as beliefs drive the practices, however, ‘experiences and reflection on practices may lead to changes in and/or additions to beliefs’ (Richardson, 1992). In this case, Hannah did not show any resistance to the changes of the reading pedagogy, as she did not have strong beliefs of how it should be conducted in the first place. Other than Hannah, this relationship can also relate to another teacher, for example Naima. She was reluctant to use the phonics approach, but eventually changed her practices due to a contextual factor. As she is now familiar with the approach through constant practices, her core beliefs have slowly altered, and it seems that she thinks that phonics might work for her pupils.

### 11.3 Revisiting the conceptual framework of the study

In answering the research questions holistically, a conceptual framework (*Figure 11-5*) below was developed to explain the findings of my research. This conceptual framework is a combination of an adapted version of Borg's (2006) language teacher cognition framework, Pajares's research on teacher beliefs with particular reference to beliefs about subject-matter, and Shulman's (1978) concept of pedagogical content knowledge and theoretical perspectives on the pedagogy of reading. The dotted boxes represent the emerging aspects from the findings of this study, whereas the boxed with the solid lines are in the Borg's language teacher cognition framework and points discussed in the Pajares's beliefs about subject-matter and Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge of the literatures.

According to Borg's (2006) language teacher cognition framework, there are different aspects of cognition that can influence teachers' practices such as beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, assumption, conceptions, principles, thinking, and decision-making. However, in this study, teachers' beliefs about the teaching of English reading and pedagogical content knowledge of the subject seemed to be the most influential factors and are therefore given more attention (hence, the two additional boxes with reference to Pajares, 1992, and Shulman, 1978). Based on the findings of this study, both aspects seemed to be the principal influence on teachers' practices in the classroom. Other aspects of cognition were excluded since they did not emerge as main elements in the development of beliefs.

Whilst all four domains (schooling, professional coursework, contextual factors, and classroom practices) of Borg's 2006 framework also relate to the findings of the study, the schooling domain was extended by also including teachers' life experiences to explore the impact of their education and socialisation in broader terms. It was apparent that the teachers had diverse biographies that they brought with them into their professional work. Some of the life experiences related to their roles as parents, previous part-time jobs, and also their various pathways into the teaching profession. All of these experiences seemed to contribute to teacher beliefs about the teaching of reading English.

The findings from this study also confirmed that effective professional coursework can also be one of the interventions that can change not only teachers' beliefs but can also enhance their knowledge and practices (Borg, 2015; Fives & Buehl, 2015; Moats, 2014). However, it has been reported by Guskey (2002), that professional coursework is often ineffective as it does not promote a sustainable change to teachers' practices. From the case studies of this research, extensive professional coursework undertaken by a participant strengthened her beliefs about the enactment of the targeted practices, whereas teachers who did not receive enough training were seen struggling to adapt their practices. Another approach to professional development is the professional learning community (PLC), which had a positive impact in the urban school. The professional coursework domain has thus been extended to place particular emphasis on the PLC. By having this 'inclusive and mutually supportive group of people with a collaborative, reflective and growth-oriented approach' (Stoll, 2011, p. 104), it can help to disseminate and make sense of curriculum reform within a school community. It can also support the teachers by providing the opportunity to share their successful experiences and also discuss any difficulties they face while teaching. In the school with a PLC, the teachers' beliefs about phonics were still mixed, but a change of practice was observed. The question, for now, is how long they will sustain the practice to become an embedded part of the classroom instruction.

Another domain that appeared to influence teacher cognition is the contextual factors that the teachers experience in their everyday life. The findings from this study suggest that there are an additional two levels of context, which are at the school and district levels, and state and national levels that teachers need to deal with, and each level has its own distinct challenges. If life experiences and professional development are more on a personal level, contextual factors deal with the teachers' surroundings that might hinder the translation of beliefs into classroom instruction. However, these factors might have different intensity of impact depending on the research context (Borg, 2003). Teachers seem to experience similar issues, which were identified at different levels starting from the classroom context, to the school, and then national levels. Factors such as the pupils' ability (Savasci & Berlin, 2012), classroom management (Phipps & Borg, 2009), lack of support from school administrators and colleagues (Cialdini, 2009; Hargreaves, 2004; Mansour, 2013; Zepeda, 2013), lack of organised CPD training (Ball & Cohen, 1999; McCutchen et al., 2002), an exam-oriented syllabus, inconsistency of syllabus and

textbook (Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Mansour, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2009), and also the need to do the assessment presented challenges to teachers in carrying out the phonics approach.

These factors can serve as obstacles, but at the same time, can force the teacher to carry out particular practices despite the challenges. For example, the LINUS assessment is one of the main factors why the teachers adopted the phonics approach as part of their reading pedagogy. Thus, Borg's original framework (figure 3.4) was extended to include another two contextual levels in order to be more specific regarding what teachers had to deal with in regard to curriculum reform. Therefore, from the first section on the left, it can be concluded that teachers' beliefs and knowledge in this study which are represented by cognition were influenced by the teachers' life experiences, professional coursework that they attended, influence from contextual factors from classroom practices, school and district levels, and state and national levels. On another note, the accumulation of these experiences (on the left side of the framework) have influenced their beliefs about how the teaching of reading should be done.

However, the research findings also suggested that teachers' beliefs and knowledge might have directly influenced the teachers in using the phonics approach. Pajeras (1992) indicates that teachers' beliefs can represent any domain in the field of education including beliefs about specific subjects. In this study, it is specifically exploring the teacher's beliefs about the teaching of early English reading since the new implementation of phonics approach took place as part of reading pedagogy. The results from the survey show that the teacher respondents had a mixed orientation of how reading should be taught in the English classroom. Through the case studies which took place in the second phase of the research, the teacher participants agreed that phonics might have been effective in the teaching of early reading, but they were doing what they had been told to do and only followed the syllabus. The teachers did not appear not fully dedicated to implementing the practices, except for Iman. They seem to have developed peripheral beliefs about some benefits of the phonics approach, but these did not seem to be particularly stable due to the lack of awareness of why phonics should be part of the reading pedagogy. This also suggested that,

*[.... ]with the absent knowledge about why they are doing what they are doing, implementation will be superficial, and teachers will lack the understanding they will need to deepen their current practice or to sustain new practices in the face of changing contexts.*

*(McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001: 307)*

The knowledge domain also seemed essential in influencing teachers' beliefs and practices. In fact, it can be a strong mediator in changing the beliefs-practices relationship. Since phonics pedagogy can be considered as new knowledge to the teachers, it is important to know the current representation of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge when they were using the approach in the classroom. The findings in this study found that the teachers have no problem in showcasing their content knowledge while teaching the students. Although there were a few mistakes observed during the teaching, they were able to deliver most of the content knowledge of phonics especially in introducing individual sounds of the letters. However, their pedagogical knowledge of how to use and teach phonics was not an entirely dedicated phonics pedagogy but a mix of both pedagogies, which confirmed the findings of the survey earlier.

Generally, the evidence showed that teachers lack the necessary linguistic pedagogical content knowledge to use phonics as part of teaching early reading (Carlisle et al., 2011; Cheesman et al., 2009; Moats, 2014).

A phonics pedagogy requires an explicit systematic approach where the lesson should 'be constructed in a logical sequence that proceeds in a hierarchy from simple to complex objectives' (Hempenstall, 2016, p. 31) and this is the missing piece in the classroom practices, as the lessons provided suffered from a 'lack of scope and sequence that covers the full range of patterns in English orthography' (Moat, 2014, p. 79). This explicit systematic instruction is believed 'to help to reduce working memory load and enable the transfer of information to long-term memory so it can be assessed automatically by the students' (Hammond & Moore, 2018). By reducing the cognitive load, it can help the students to transfer skills and knowledge from short and long-term memory, and the new and difficult concepts. Teachers will help the pupils to break down the words into chunks and differentiate the lesson content with examples from easy to difficult (Hempenstall, 2016). This is, of course, not entirely the teachers' mistake since the shift of curriculum objective from improving second-language communication to second-language literacy

deal with contradictory aspects of pedagogy itself, especially in the early years teaching and learning. In addition, this transition was not fully explained to the teachers in order for them to understand the differences and how to incorporate both curriculum objectives at the classroom level.

All in all, this conceptual framework (*Figure 11-5*) can be a guidance and a contribution to language teacher cognition research and also to the teaching of early reading pedagogy. It can be the starting point to understand how each relationship has developed within the teachers' cognition when a new implementation was imposed on them especially since they had been using the previous pedagogy for a long time. It also shows how experienced teachers may change their practices when explicit knowledge of the subject and guidance are provided.

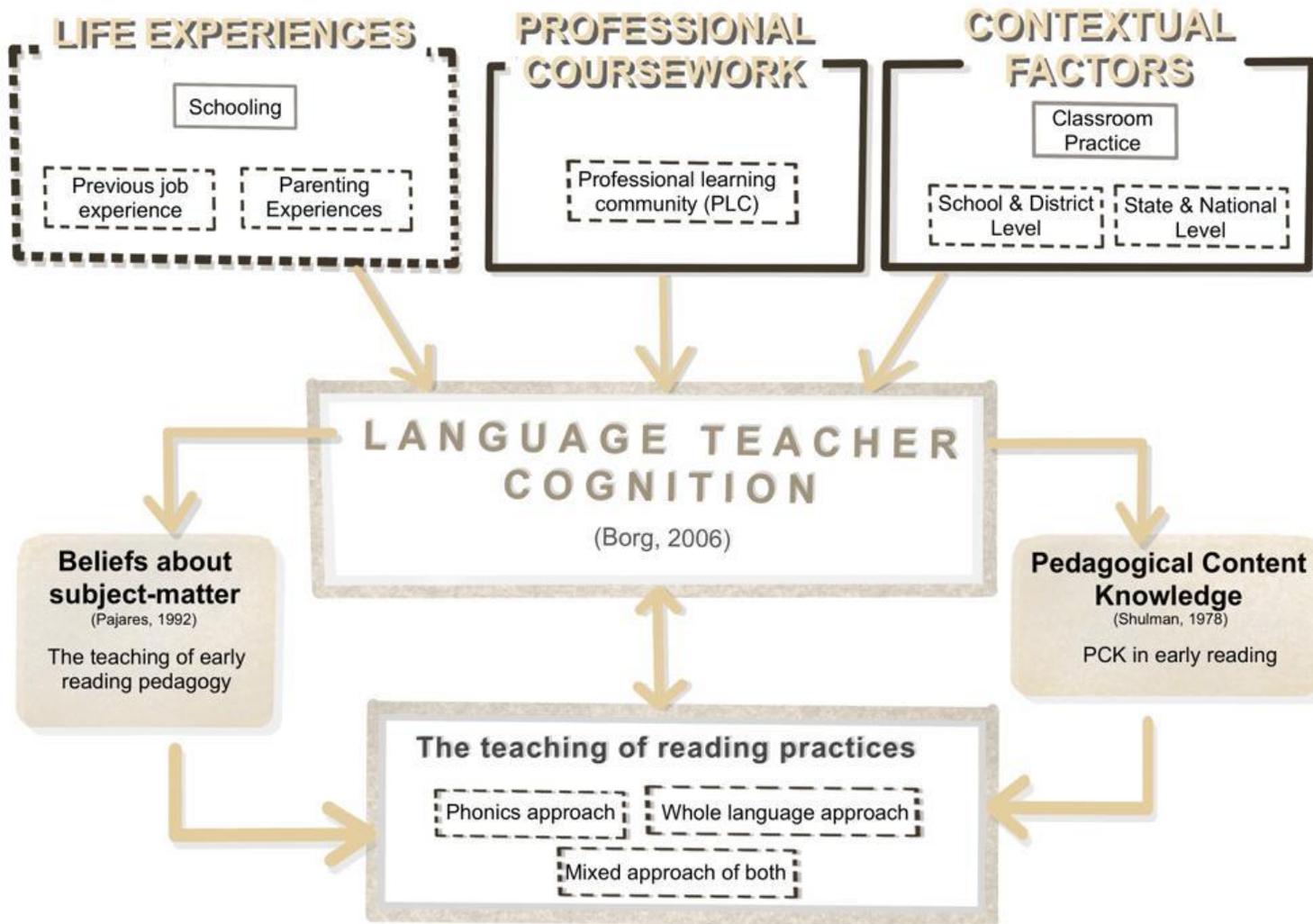


Figure 11-5: The conceptual framework of the study

#### 11.4 Implications of the study

**The first implication** to consider arises from the finding that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices are individual. This has been demonstrated by the four presented relationships (in response to RQ4), indicating how diverse beliefs-practices relationships can be. It is important to acknowledge that these types of beliefs and practice relationships do exist in the teaching community and are therefore crucial to consider when carrying out curriculum reform. So, no matter how much money and time have been invested for new curriculum reform, the result may be negligible if it focuses only on teacher behaviours without considering their beliefs (Borg, 2012), especially if they have been using certain approaches for a long time.

To target the beliefs, teachers need to be convinced by a practice that shows a positive result, in this case by teaching reading English using the phonics approach. Although they might be sceptical at the beginning of the implementation, continuous support through professional coursework provided for the teachers might have a positive influence on teachers trying the new pedagogy despite limited knowledge from their past life experiences. This will eventually lead to professional development (PD) courses for teachers to improve the level of their pedagogical content knowledge to comply with the changes (Moat, 2014).

However, it is also important to have a PD that is cognisant of the teachers' current beliefs and at the same time have an appropriate link between the theory and practice (Piasta et al., 2009). Coaching and mentoring teachers might have improved the quality of implementation (Carslie & Berebitsky, 2011). Moats (2014, p. 86) further argues that 'although teachers know what ought to be done, actually doing it (managing groups, using materials, and pacing the lesson) can still be daunting for teachers. Since CPD can be the main mediator to change teachers' beliefs and practices, it is important to have every teacher attend the development courses, so no cascade training is required, as it has the potential to miscommunicate the information given. According to Storey (2009), successful dissemination of a course at the school level is dependent on the motivation, ability, and skills of those who attended the training. Throughout the case studies presented in this thesis, it can be observed how dedicated Iman had been in helping her fellow teachers with the new changes in the syllabus. Her efforts had been acknowledged by

Farah, who was thankful to have Iman as part of the school community in order to support the changes. Besides, the time spent to run and attend the courses was also limited and insufficient to cover the content and design of the subject matter (Wedell, 2005).

**The second implication** is the absence of a detailed written curriculum, in particular with regard to the teacher's book and English textbook, which can also contribute to problems in bringing about curriculum reform. The findings of the thesis show that teachers were heavily dependent on the English textbook and workbook. For this reason, the textbook/teacher's book and workbook need to deal with the complexities of phonics pedagogy as part of the whole content. As suggested by the literature, phonics should be taught explicitly in sequence (Carnine et al, 2004; Moat, 2014; Stahl, 1998; Torgeson et al., 2006, 2018), so that the textbook should at least comply to the organisation of content suggested for phonics pedagogy. Also, having a teacher's guidebook on how to use phonics pedagogy as part of teaching reading will help the teachers tremendously throughout the lessons. According to Carnine et al. (2004, p. 11), the format should include 'what to say, what words to emphasize, what to ask, how to signal, how to correct appropriately'. By having this detailed guidance, teachers would be less likely to interpret the syllabus differently as they would have clear strategies to follow. This format should also reflect the pupils' varying abilities and also contain only one new skill per session to avoid inappropriate cognitive load on the pupils (Carnine et al., 2004; Stahl, 1998).

Critics might argue that by having this explicit instruction as guidance, it will limit the teachers' autonomy. However, this is the knowledge of how to teach reading in using the phonics approach. To quote Moat (2014, p. 87) regarding this,

*We continually underestimate the elusiveness of the foundation content (phoneme awareness, phonics, [.....] and so forth for in-service teachers. None of us born with these insights; we must learn a substantial amount of disciplinary content in order to help students understand what they are learning so that they can process text automatically.*

Due to the absence of this knowledge, the practices of using phonics have been interpreted differently by teachers, which leads to unsuccessful curriculum reform. However, policymakers should ensure that reform and the related guidance are evidence-based, paying attention, also, to the need for a 'balanced approach'. From this study, it can be

concluded that teachers were confused about how to use the phonics approach with a strong presence of whole language pedagogy in the syllabus and textbook. Although a balanced literacy approach seems like a potential ‘middle-ground’, there is a need to get the balance right. Castle et al. (2018, p. 38) argues that the term ‘balanced literacy’ is ‘always associated with a bit of everything and typically involved limited and non-systematic phonics instruction’. They further explained that there are other factors involved in helping children to read fluently and it does not mean everything needs to be crammed together in one lesson.

*Instructional regimens (decoding, fluency, comprehension) to support reading acquisition are likely to be most effective at particular points in development and limited teaching time should be structured to reflect this.*

*(Castle et al., 2018)*

These important points should be regarded in the textbook itself, the guidance provided for teachers and all professional development.

**The third implication** is related to school administrators as they were seen as a separate entity when it comes to classroom teaching and learning (Mooney & Mausbach, 2008). However, when it comes to implementing a new syllabus reform, this study would imply that effective instructional leadership is also important in making sure the education policy is adopted well at the school level. Not only that, school administrators should also try to create and impart, for example, a reading culture to make sure the school vision is aligned with the successful implementation of the curriculum (Boyd & Higgins, 2018), which is to improve second-language literacy in the primary schools.

This has potential to not only benefit the targeted teachers and pupils but also to transform the professional learning community (PLC) who would engage more with one another and would take an inclusive approach in terms of dealing with emerging problems. This would also give teachers more autonomy concerning curriculum development. Working in this way may transform the school leadership into becoming more active and engaged in the teaching and learning development of the teachers and students rather than focussing on test results on paper. It also makes ‘hard work become smart, and efficient work’ (Mooney & Mausbach, 2008, p. 28).

**The fourth implication** is the contextual constraint of the LINUS assessment. Understandably, the assessment was purposely introduced to measure the pupils' reading development from point A to B. However, the way it is conducted does not seem to have measured this progression. Teachers were having a difficult time because of it and pupils were learning that it is a test rather than a formative assessment of their reading proficiency, which had potential to have a positive impact on learning. Noticeably, pupils might develop test anxiety by knowing that they are not able to read English. Pupils also progress differently depending on their circumstances. Generally, assessment is still essential in any classroom instruction because it provides feedback on the children's progress. It also can guide the teachers about the effectiveness of their teaching and inform the teachers and parents what can be done to help the students with their learning (Barnes & Hunt, 2003). Needless to say, the assessment can be the early precursor to identify if there are any reading problems developed by the pupils at an early stage (National Reading Panel, 2008).

What should change here is the teacher perception that the result from the assessment is not to jeopardise them, but eventually to help them with their teaching. Thus, this is why school leaders should be aware of the process of teaching and learning so they can understand the result of the assessment itself. Trust between teachers and school leaders could be established in a way that teachers would not be afraid to report the truth about the pupils' attainment and how to improve the results of the assessment should be discussed within the teacher's community. This also would be a platform for the teachers to identify what is missing in their pedagogy or how they might teach differently. Any issues could also be further escalated to the district and state levels.

## 11.5 Summary

This study makes a contribution to knowledge in the field since it combines three main theoretical perspectives of teachers in adapting to the new curriculum implementation: (i) language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006); (ii) teachers' beliefs (Pajeras, 1992); and (iii) pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1978). The language teacher cognition framework was extended by proposing new themes which emerged from the research findings through life experiences, professional coursework and contextual factors. Other than that, to my knowledge, this research is also one of the pioneer studies of language

teacher cognition and the teaching of reading English through the phonics approach in a Malaysia context.

# CHAPTER 12

## CONCLUSION

### 12.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the aims, research objectives and findings from the study as a whole. A summary of the findings will be presented by revisiting the aims of the study before offering a final conclusion in relation to the research objective. A critical exploration of the limitations of the study will also be discussed along with the implications and recommendations for policymakers resulting from the study's findings.

### 12.2 Revisiting the aims of the study

The aim of the study was to explore language teacher cognition, specifically, English teachers' beliefs and knowledge related to teaching reading English through the phonics approach. The rationale for the investigation was related to the recent curriculum implementation which included the phonics approach as part of the teaching of reading in order to improve second-language literacy for primary pupils in Malaysia. This approach was to be applied in primary schools from Year 1 until Year 3, and their level of reading proficiency was assessed through the LINUS assessment, which is conducted twice a year (pre- and post-test).

The reasons why teacher cognition research is important against the backdrop of policy reform is because teachers' beliefs heavily influence classroom practices, including organising the lesson plan, instructional choice and even the pedagogy that they use during the lesson (Hoffman & Seidel, 2015). Thus, if the proposed reforms fail to complement teachers' attitudes and beliefs, the result of the implementation could be superficial (Sikes, 2013). Teachers will do whatever they feel is right because they have their own ideas, their own ways of doing things and their own preferences (Borg, 2012).

Prior to this reform in Malaysia, teachers adopted the whole-language approach. The study was concerned with how teachers adapted to these changes and if there were any changes to their beliefs about the teaching of reading. This is because syllabus reforms can be very demanding on teachers, and it requires the teachers to make big changes in their knowledge and teaching practices in order to implement them well (Panuel et al., 2007). The study also explored whether they had adequate pedagogical content knowledge to adopt the approach in their classroom instruction.

From the survey, it was found that teachers' beliefs of how reading English should be taught were mixed. They continued to favour the whole-language approach as part of their pedagogy and at the same time acknowledged the phonics approach contributed to early reading proficiency. In terms of their pedagogical content knowledge of the phonics approach, the results showed that this was somewhat lacking. The results also indicated that the teachers' demographic backgrounds (age, years of teaching experience, education level, gender and types of schools in which they taught) did not influence their beliefs or knowledge.

The ethnographic study was conducted in two different schools (urban and rural) with four teacher participants. The collected data were presented and analysed in a case study format since individual teachers have different stories to tell. Using Borg's (2006) framework as an analytical tool, the analysis indicated that different teachers reacted to the curriculum changes differently, based on their life experiences, their professional coursework experiences, and contextual factors. Although teachers were positive about the use of phonics approach and did include it in their teaching of reading, there were misconceptions about how phonics pedagogy should be done, and the principles of the approach were missing in the observed classrooms. Phonics seemed to be an 'add-on' strategy to a whole language approach rather than being explicitly taught with appropriate content, examples and materials. This is not surprising given the teachers lacked the pedagogical knowledge of the approach and received limited guidance to navigate the new syllabus. The analysis of the Year 1 English textbook suggested that it was also another cause of inconsistent phonics practice as its phonics content lacks enough appropriate content to support teachers' teaching and pupils' learning for reading English.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices are complex and because of that, it should not be ignored. This is because the discrepancy of what teachers believe and how they enact their beliefs can affect the degree of curriculum success.

### **12.3 Recommendations for policymakers**

The implementation of the phonics approach in the teaching of English reading in Malaysia has gone into the second phase of implementation, which runs from 2016 until 2020. The second phase of the implementation aims to accelerate and improve the system since the first phase built the momentum and laid its foundations in 2013. There are a few recommendations for the policymakers to consider improving the implementation of the phonics initiative.

The findings show that the lack of training and the inconsistency of training provision and discrepancy of curriculum materials has affected the phonics implementation, as the teachers were not getting enough guidance on how to implement the approach. Therefore, it seems logical for the Ministry of Education to suggest improving the current professional development courses, especially in training the teachers with a solid pedagogical knowledge of how to include the phonics approach as part of the teaching of reading in the lower level of primary school education. It is also recommended that the teacher education syllabus for pre-service teachers should be more explicit about how to implement the phonics pedagogy as part of English language teaching as teachers from the case studies shared that they were not exposed to the phonics pedagogy during their pre-service training years. In addition, there should be examples of early reading materials to illustrate the theory. This can serve as a foundation for teachers to understand not only the practical applications but also the reasons as to why a phonics approach is important in teaching early reading.

Moreover, a revision of the written curriculum, especially the syllabus, textbook, and teacher guidebook for teaching phonics, would help teachers to navigate the curriculum reform. Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that the teachers were relying on the textbook for teaching content and materials. Thus, it is equally important that this written curriculum deal with the complexity of the initial syllabus objective, which is to produce proficient second-language readers at the end of the primary school years, and with how

much of the targeted contents teachers should teach, along with how to teach it. It is beyond the scope of this study to suggest how such revision should take place; however, it is worth noting the fundamental aspects of phonics teaching as outlined by Carnine et al. (2010), Stahl (1997), and Killpatrick (2015), just to name a few (further reading in the literature review, chapter 3), in order to bridge the gap between the theoretical and practical aspects of the reading pedagogy.

#### **12.4 Limitations of the research**

While this research provides some important findings, it also has some limitations, which must be acknowledged and can be noted for improvement. First, the research was conducted with a limited number of participants. For phase one, only 123 participants took part in the survey, and for Phase two, two schools with four teachers took part in the longitudinal research design. This resulted in an inability to generalise the findings across all English teachers in Malaysia. Malaysia has 13 states and three federal constitutions; thus, the individual contexts of the states might be different, and there might have been different problems occurring within those contexts.

My lack of experience in survey design negatively impacted on the quality of the survey. Dornyei (2011) notes that in applied linguistic research the complications resulting from insufficient awareness of the theory of questionnaire design and processing. While preparing and administering the survey, I thought my pilot study stage was enough to identify the loopholes of the survey items. However, during my analysis, I faced challenges as to analyze and make sense of the data that were generated through SPSS. Also, the items selected for the survey were in some instances not easy to determine whether they related to a phonics versus a whole language approach pedagogy. I also should have included more variables for beliefs, knowledge and practices items in the survey so that relationships that are more diverse could be detected within each of these areas.

In addition, the return rate for the survey was not equal in urban and rural schools. This might also have influenced the survey analysis and results. However, since the initial objective of the survey was to provide a general understanding of the research problem and the research is exploratory in nature (Ivankova, et al., 2006), it is hoped that the findings

can provide indicative answers to the research question. However, the results of the survey cannot be generalised for the whole population of English teachers in Malaysia.

Second, throughout the data collection phase, I was unable to observe how the actual training courses prepared the teachers with the phonics pedagogy. Most of the findings about the courses were from descriptions by the teacher participants as part of the formal and informal interviews. Due to time constraints, I was also unable to interview the curriculum officers and the education trainers in order to probe their opinions on the shift in curriculum implementation. Their insights might be helpful in order to plan the training courses, the problems that they faced while conducting the training, and also the challenges that they faced in adapting to the new syllabus implementation.

Third, I was also unable to observe how the pupils respond to the phonics pedagogy in a second-language classroom and whether there is any improvement in terms of their reading proficiency level after being taught the phonics pedagogy. This can contribute to important findings on the effectiveness of the pedagogy in a second-language context.

Despite these limitations, in my view, this study provides a significant contribution to the field of knowledge, especially in understanding the reaction of how teachers professed their beliefs, which are reflected in their classroom practices. The study also proposed a conceptual framework of language teacher cognition in the teaching of reading English through the phonics approach, which may provide effective support for upcoming future research.

### **12.5 Recommendations for future research**

In light of the findings, which provide a strong rationale for intensive professional development, it would seem logical to investigate the effectiveness of such a programme in the future. This could involve action research, which could be undertaken in every district education office following the design suggested by McCutcheon et al. (2002):

- i) Conduct a pre- and post-test of teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practice relationships related to the intended new curriculum and syllabus

- ii) Conduct intensive training courses which spell out more of the explicit pedagogical knowledge of phonics pedagogy for the teachers to equip them with the appropriate knowledge of the targeted curriculum
- iii) Observe the teachers longitudinally and document their practices regarding early reading literacy practices
- iv) Measure students' reading achievements who were taught by the teacher participating in the professional development course at various points during the year

## 12.6 Recommendations for ITE/CPD

Based on the interview data of this study, the CPD in Malaysia is disseminated through cascade training which requires a teacher representative to attend courses and later share the course input with their colleagues in school (Storey, 2009). Although cascade training seems reliable for the dissemination of information and is easy to administer (Kennedy, 2014), the way it is constructed at school level is based on teacher representatives' skills and ability to deliver back the information and their motivation in order for the training to be effective (Storey, 2009). The data from this study suggested that those on the receiving end of the cascade training at school level had some negative experiences due to such issues. Although the current Malaysia Education Reform has revised this cascade practice (see figure 2.6), it seems like this delivery pattern is still present at district and school levels. Cascade training is still relevant for a curriculum dissemination; however, the findings of this study would suggest that the delivery method of the training should be changed. It should provide a suitable balance of theoretical and practical knowledge of how the new curriculum implementation should take place in school at the classroom level. Participation should not only be compulsory for all teachers with responsibility for teaching English, but also for school managers so that both groups can work collaboratively in co-ordinating and improving second language literacy in their school communities.

Currently, the delivery of the course remains in lecture format rather than active and engaging CPD. In order to improve this situation, attention should be given to successful case studies and pragmatic approaches of high-quality phonics teaching to inform the teachers of successful stories in adapting to the approach (Castle, et al, 2018; Rose, 2006).

By providing this information, they can compare and contrast the new insights with the existing experience and knowledge that they already have. Guskey (2002) proposes that in order to change teachers' practices, they should be provided with information and skills for them to evaluate the pro and cons of their actions. He argued that teachers' success in delivery the lesson is also based on teachers' perceptions of whether it influences students' achievement too. The provision of interactive teaching and real-life examples are more likely to influence teachers' beliefs and equip them with the appropriate tools for adopting new approaches (Guskey, 2002; Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

Other than that, it would be helpful to have a separate module in initial teacher education for early reading and literacy so sufficient time is available for the pre-service teachers to learn about early reading theory, related pedagogical practices and how to achieve the literacy objectives as outlined in the curriculum. Winch, Oancea & Orchard (2015) mention that teachers' ability to engage with educational research will tremendously help them to make their own pedagogical decisions. Theoretical knowledge helps teachers to understand why they are doing something rather than just what to do. Nonetheless, teachers will need to adapt this theoretical knowledge to their own situations in order to improve their technical knowledge.

Currently, minimal attention is given to early literacy curriculum because the ESL curriculum in Malaysia is still focussing on language proficiency rather than language literacy. In order to achieve the literacy objectives, the written curriculum should also be complemented with a 'supported curriculum' (Glatthorn, 2000). The supported curriculum refers to educational resources available that are provided along the written curriculum (*ibid*, 2000). In this case, it can be the instructional materials such as the quality of textbooks and teachers' books (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2012), but it will also involve teacher development discussed above. It is obvious from the teachers' interviews, classroom observation and the textbook analysis that the supported curriculum for the new phonics curriculum was not properly developed to support teachers in carrying out the intended written curriculum at the school level. Ultimately, the quality of the implementation determines the impact of the curriculum on young people and the implementation requires significant support in order for it to be done well (Snow & Juel, 2013).

Continuous mentoring, coaching and CPD are also needed in schools by literacy coaches (Flemming & Kleinhenz, 2007; Hammond & Moore, 2018; Louden, 2015). Indeed, this may be considered as another arm of the supported curriculum. Rather than making an evaluation of teachers' practices, this might be more discursive as to allow teachers to voice their concerns and anxieties, to be more practical in terms of allowing teachers an element of reassurance associated with putting into place different activities with their students, and to share their experiences of teaching and learning by identifying their strengths, teaching problems and to develop solutions by sharing ideas with others (Hammond & Moore, 2018; Knight & van Nieuwerburgh, 2012).

This reflects what Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualise as a 'community of practice', whereby people who share the same interest within the same community learn together through social interaction in order to improve their practices. In a community of practice, there are three components: a domain, community and practice. In this case, the *domain* of the English teachers could be the school or district meetings with teachers from other schools. The *community* is enacted through the sharing of ideas and experiences. Through collaborative learning, the teachers can enhance the *practice* of phonics teaching and learning and develop a bank of teaching materials. This should help the teachers to gain confidence needed to enact the approach and an appropriate professional response to the needs of their students.

## **12.7 My learning journey through this study and PhD**

As a novice researcher, it has been a rollercoaster ride of experiences, from preparing the proposal, collecting and analysing the data, disseminating the data at conferences and writing up the thesis. I have learnt the importance of justifying all steps and arguments in my study in order for it to be considered worthy of doctoral standard. As a PhD researcher, I have also benefitted from valuable information and advice from my supervisors, critical friends, subject experts, conferences that I attended, and research group discussions, which directly and indirectly have influenced the direction of this research study. However, at the end of the day, I have to be responsible for the decisions that I have made and have to defend them well during my viva. Throughout this learning process, I feel that I have learnt a great deal about research methodology, and I have continued to shape my ontological

and epistemological position, which has become more pragmatic in accordance with the research design.

Reflecting on my research context, this study has taught me a great deal about what teachers do, and why they do it, especially after spending a considerable amount of time in schools observing the teachers and lessons. As much as teachers are the mediators of curriculum implementation, it is frustrating to learn that nobody has considered their voices and teaching experiences to be part of the curriculum reform. This study has confirmed my initial hypothesis of how complex the relationship is between beliefs, knowledge, and practices in influencing the intended curriculum. This will affect the choices I will make in my future career as a teacher and researcher.

While collecting the data during the ethnographic study, I was approached by one of the Year 1 pupils in a low ability class who asked, “Teacher, are you mad at me if I’m stupid?” He looked so innocent. My heart sank because I realised that in the process of fulfilling the expectations of the curriculum, individuals in high-up positions and the school administrators, the emotions and the needs of some pupils were being neglected. In this case, of course, it is not entirely the teachers’ fault, but due to circumstances, the main stakeholders i.e. some of the pupils, suffered in the process. Since education nowadays is more focussed on the end-result through exam and assessment, we have forgotten the vulnerable stakeholders in the process: “If I’m not able to read and count 1, 2, 3, then I am stupid”. Little do they know that they are trapped in the never-ending battle between politicians, capitalists and educationalists in the education system, which treats them, teachers and pupils as lab rats to serve the purpose of their egotistical reforms of the education system. Thus, by presenting my participants’ stories, I hope this study could provide and act as a platform in giving voices to my participants. Therefore, they will be given the opportunity to receive the support from respective and relevant stakeholders.

## **12.8 Concluding remarks**

This research study brings an understanding of what teachers do and why they do what they do in their practice especially in a Malaysian context. The study also revealed that teachers require continuous support if curriculum reform requires them to widen their pedagogical knowledge and adjust their practices. This will help them to understand the

purpose of the reform more clearly and make the adjustment process less challenging. The teachers' development needs to be cognisant of their existing beliefs and contextual factors in order to be successful. The results of this study also highlighted a gap between the theoretical and practical issues of phonics pedagogy in a second-language classroom. It seems that theory has not yet been successfully translated into practice. It is important to acknowledge this issue as more developing countries teach English as a second language. It is imperative to find better ways to improve second-language early literacy in this global world.

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# APPENDICES

## **A - LETTERS OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORMS: GATEKEEPERS AND TEACHER PARTICIPANTS**



## LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY GATEKEEPER INFORMATION SHEET

**Title of Project:** The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school

**Name of Researcher:** Azyan Shafee (School of Education, LJMU)

I'm inviting the school to participate in the study entitled "**The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school**". The purpose of my study is to critically examine the effectiveness of the phonics approach implementation in the teaching of English reading in early reading. This study will take place in primary schools in Dungun, Terengganu beginning in 2016.

Due to this, I'm writing to ask permission and if it is possible to recruit participants (i.e English teachers and Year 1 pupils) to be part of the research study. I have prepared a description of the study and what is involved in it for potential participants, and I have attached a copy for you to read. It would be very helpful if you could recommend the participants according to the characteristics that I have included in the description of the study. Participation information sheet and consent form are also attached together with the description of study for potential participants references.

Ideally, I would like to begin data collection on June 2016 but I am very happy to be guided by you on this. I would anticipate that participants would contact me to complete the study within 1-week time frame after you have received this letter. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of all or part of your organization data.

A pseudonym will replace your organization's name on all data that you provide to protect organization identity. No identifying information will be included in the document and the confidentiality is absolutely guaranteed. Access to the data is strictly restricted to the researcher. I will report the result of my study in my Ph.D thesis and may also report in publications of various types, conference presentations, journal articles, professional publications and books. However, under no circumstances, will your name be released to anyone or appear in any publication created as a result of the study.

I hope that you will be interested in working with me on it. If you do, you may sign the 'Gatekeeper Consent Form' and inform me on the availability that I could come for a social visit before I proceed with the initial study. Should you have any comments or questions regarding this research, you may contact the researcher as below.

**This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee**

**Contact Details of Researcher:** Azyan Shafee (n.a.mohdshafee@2015.ljmu.ac.uk)

**Contact Details of Academic Supervisor:** Dr. Gillian Peiser (G.Peiser@ljmu.ac.uk)

**If you have any concerns regarding your involvement in this research, please discuss these with the researcher in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.**



## LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY GATEKEEPER CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school

**Name of Researcher:** Azyan Shafee (School of Education, LJMU)

Please tick to confirm your understanding of the study and that you are happy for your organisation to take part and your facilities to be used to host parts of the project.

- i) To ask permission and to recruit participants from the school (i.e English teachers and Year 1 pupils) to be part of the research study.
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
  2. I understand that participation of our organisation and students/members in the research is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect legal rights.
  3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential.
  4. I agree for our organisation and students/members to take part in the above study.
  5. I agree to conform to the data protection act

Name of Gatekeeper:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Researcher:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Person taking consent:  
(if different from researcher)

Date:

Signature:



## LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (SURVEY)

**Title of Project:** The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school

**Name of Researcher:** Azyan Shafee (School of Education, LJMU)

I'm inviting you to participate in the study entitled "**The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school**". The purpose of my study is to critically examine the effectiveness of the phonics approach implementation in the teaching of English reading in early reading. This study will take place in primary schools in Dungun, Terengganu beginning in 2016.

You will be needed to answer a questionnaire which may last for about 15 – 20 minutes. The questionnaire is looking into your beliefs, perception and knowledge of the teachers in phonics approach implementation in the teaching of English reading. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. No identifying information will be included in the document and the confidentiality is absolutely guaranteed. Access to the data is strictly restricted to the researcher. I will report the result of my study in my Ph.D thesis and may also report in publications of various types, conference presentations, journal articles, professional publications and books. However, under no circumstances, will your name be released to anyone or appear in any publication created as a result of the study.

**This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee**

**Contact Details of Researcher:** Azyan Shafee (n.a.mohdshafee@2015.ljmu.ac.uk)

**Contact Details of Academic Supervisor:** Dr. Gillian Peiser (G.Peiser@ljmu.ac.uk)

Dear Researcher,

I have read the information sheet provided and I am happy to participate. I understand that by completing and returning this questionnaire I am consenting to be part of the research study and for my data to be used as described.

Date:



## **LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PHASE 2- INTERVIEW)**

**Title of Project:** The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school

**Name of Researcher:** Azyan Shafee (School of Education, LJMU)

I'm inviting you to participate in the study entitled "**The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school**". The purpose of my study is to critically examine the effectiveness of the phonics approach implementation in the teaching of English reading in early reading. This study will take place in primary schools in Dungun, Terengganu beginning in 2016.

I will conduct classroom observation, each lasting 30-60 minutes depending on the lesson period teachers are teaching. With your permission, I will tape-record your instruction and may take field notes when necessary to document what and how you conduct your teaching. The interviews will be arranged at a time and a location that is convenient and acceptable to you. The interview will be audio taped with your permission, and the taped interview will be transcribed verbatim afterwards. I will send the transcriptions to you for verification later and then the tape will be erased after the thesis is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of all or part of your data. You are not obliged to answer any question that you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. No identifying information will be included in the document and the confidentiality is absolutely guaranteed. Access to the data is strictly restricted to the researcher. I will report the result of my study in my Ph.D thesis and may also report in publications of various types, conference presentations, journal articles, professional publications and books. However, under no circumstances, will your name be released to anyone or appear in any publication created as a result of the study.

**This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee**

**Contact Details of Researcher:** Azyan Shafee (n.a.mohdshafee@2015.ljmu.ac.uk)

**Contact Details of Academic Supervisor:** Dr. Gillian Peiser (G.Peiser@ljmu.ac.uk)

**If you any concerns regarding your involvement in this research, please discuss these with the researcher in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.**



## LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school

**Name of Researcher:** Azyan Shafee (School of Education, LJMU)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily | <input style="width: 50px; height: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights.                                       | <input style="width: 50px; height: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential   | <input style="width: 50px; height: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to take part in the above study by having interview and classroom observation by the researcher.   | <input style="width: 50px; height: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I understand that the interview/focus group will be audio / video recorded and I am happy to proceed   | <input style="width: 50px; height: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I understand that parts of our conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised.  | <input style="width: 50px; height: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
---------------------	------	-----------

Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
--------------------	------	-----------

Name of Person taking consent <i>(if different from researcher)</i>	Date	Signature
--	------	-----------

*When completed 1 copy for participant and 1 copy for researcher*

**B - RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**  
**PHASE 1- SURVEY FOR TEACHERS**  
**PHASE 2 – SEMI-STRUCTURED**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**



AZYAN SHAFEE  
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PHD STUDENT RESEARCHER



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LIVERPOOL L17 6BD.

PT3357 JALAN TAMAN SRI  
RUMBIA, 23000 DUNGUN,  
TERENGGANU.

## RESEARCHER PROFILE

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Teachers,

I am inviting you to participate in the study entitled '**Teaching of Early Reading in English Using the Phonics Approach in Malaysian Primary School**'. The purpose of my study is to critically explore teachers' belief, knowledge and practice in using phonics approach as part of the implementation in the teaching of English reading.

If you agree to take part, you will need to answer a survey which may last for 15 – 20 minutes. I am also looking for volunteers for informal interviews in the next stage. Your participation is entirely voluntary and there are no right and wrong answers.

No identifying information will be included in the document although confidentiality is NEVER unconditional. Access to the data is strictly restricted to the researcher. I will report the results of my study in my PhD thesis and may also report in publications of various types including conference presentations, journal articles, professional publications and books. None of your name, your school's name or any related information will be released to anyone or appear in any publication created as a result of the study.

This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee.

Please tick (✓) in the box below if you agree to answer the survey.

Dear Researcher,

<input type="checkbox"/>	I am willing to answer the questionnaire and understand the information stated above. I/C: School:
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am also willing to participate for the informal interview. Name: Contact No:

Sincerely,  
Azyan Shafee

There are **4 sections** to be completed; **A – Knowledge, B – Beliefs, C– Practice** and **D – Background Information**

**Section A: Knowledge (J. F. Carlisle et al., 2011)**

1. Mr. Shafee noticed that some of his second graders are having difficulty reading common irregular words. To address this problem, Mr. Shafee created sets of words for students to practice.

Which set is most suitable for this purpose?

- a. when, until, which, after
- b. sweet, sugar, milk, banana
- c. because, does, again, their
- d. light, house, my, they

2. Mrs. Zaini uses several different tasks to help her students identify sounds in words. Which directions indicate the use of a blending task?

- a. “Put the sounds together to say the word. /t /a//p/.”
- b. “Tell me the first sound of ‘tap’.”
- c. “Say tap’. Now say it again but don’t say /t/.”
- d. “Say each sound in ‘tap’.”

3. Mr. Khan present each of the following words orally to a group of children and to have the children tell him how many phonemes (speech sounds) are in each word. Help create an answer key that Mr. Khan could use by the number of phonemes contained in each word.

- a. freight \_ \_ \_ \_ \_
- b. ship \_ \_ \_ \_ \_
- c. nation \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

4. A parent asks you what to do to help Azeem, her Year 2 son, become a more fluent reader. Which of the following the recommendation is most likely to help Azeem develop reading fluency?

- a. Have Azeem read each book several times.
- b. Have him listen to books on tape.
- c. Have him read on his own for 20 minutes every evening.
- d. Read books to him every day.

5. A new third-grade teacher is having trouble picking books that are at the right reading level for his students. He asks you how he can help a student figure out whether a book is too hard.

You suggest that he tell the student.....

- a. to pick books on topics he/she knows something about.
- b. to avoid books with small print and few pictures or illustrations.
- c. not to pick books with more than five hard words on a page.
- d. not to select books written by unfamiliar authors.

6. A phoneme is...  
 \_a. the smallest part of written language  
 \_b. the smallest part of spoken language  
 \_c. a word that contains a vowel sound  
 \_d. I'm not sure

7. An example of matching words with the same final sound is:  
 \_a. please – buzz  
 \_b. house – hose  
 \_c. of – off  
 \_d. I'm not sure

8. An example of grouping words with a common vowel sound is:  
 \_a. kin, fist, kind  
 \_b. paid, said, main  
 \_c. son, blood, touch  
 \_d. I'm not sure

9. How many sounds are in the word 'grape'?  
 \_a. three  
 \_b. four  
 \_c. five

10. Which word contains a short vowel sound?  
 \_a. treat  
 \_b. start  
 \_c. slip  
 \_d. paw  
 \_e. father

**Section B: Beliefs** (Bruce Allen Knight and Peter Westwood, 1997)

**INSTRUCTION:** For each of the questions below, circle the response that best reflects your viewpoint.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
11. There is very little difference between the skills needed by the beginning reader and those used by proficient readers.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
12. Children learn to read in the same natural way that they acquire oral and aural language skills.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
13. Devoting specific time to word study in isolation is undesirable since this practice decontextualizes a component skill of language.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
14. Learning to read should involve attending closely to the print on the page.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
15. Sight vocabulary learnt in isolation does transfer to text reading	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
16. Beginning reader should be taught phonic skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	

17. For effective learning, literacy programmes should be organized to allow for the specific study of separate skills such as comprehension, word recognition and phonics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18. Proficient readers pay very little attention to the details of print when reading.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19. It is important to separate words into sounds	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20. It is important to decode words in a lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Section C: Practices** (Sandvik et al , 2014)

**INSTRUCTION:** For each of the questions below, circle the response that best reflects your practice.

Items	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Always
21. I use pictures alongside written text in books	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
22. I talk about how the pictures in relation to the text.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
23. I ask children to relate their own experiences to the story I read.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
24. I demonstrate how print works (e.g. words are read left to right)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
25. I demonstrate the sounds letters make.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
26. I help children sound out words. (i.e /buh/ + /oy/ = boy)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
27. I read aloud to children in the class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
28. I point out rhyming patterns when I read stories.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
29. I provide additional opportunities for pupils to practise pronunciation (e.g. pairwork) without explicitly teaching phonics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
30. I teach children the letters in their names.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
31. I help children write the letters of the alphabet.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
32. I use cue cards and visual aids to teach blending sound.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
33. I notice children enjoy the lesson with sound activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

**Section D: Personal Background Information**

Gander:	Male/Female
Age:	
School:	
Education level:	Dip in Education/Bachelor in Education/Bachelor (Non-B-Ed)/ Master (M.Ed)
Graduated From	Institute of Teacher Education (ITE)/University Education Course/Others: _____
Is English your core option?	Yes/ No If No, please state your core option:
English teaching experience:	More than 5-10 years/5-10 years/3-5 years/ 1-2 years/ less a year.

Type of School currently teaching:	1. Rural (Area: _____) 2. Urban (Area: _____)
Have you attended any training on teaching of phonics?	Yes/No If Yes, how many times per year: Organised by whom?:
Would you like to participate in the interview session?	If YES, please leave your contact information and I will contact you back. =)  Email: Phone No:

## **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR THE TEACHERS**

**Title of Project: The teaching of early reading in English using the phonics approach in Malaysian primary school**

### **A. Demographic information about teachers' language learning experience, educational background and teaching experience.**

1. Would you tell me something about your language learning experience?
2. Would you say something about yourself, such as your educational background and teaching experience?
3. How long have you taught English to Year 1 pupils?

### **B. Experience in Teaching Phonics Approach**

1. Are you familiar with the phonics approach in teaching reading?
2. Have you ever taught your students reading through phonic approach? If yes, when please explain your experience. (If no, proceed to No. 4)
3. In your opinion, what difficulty did you face in teaching phonics in your English lesson?

### **C. Teacher's training experiences and views of their training**

1. In your view, have the training successfully provided you with the necessary information on the underlying concept of phonics approach in the teaching of English reading?
2. What is your attitude to the training?
  - Feeling about the training? (suitability? meets expectations?)
  - Expectations on the training?
  - Recommendation?
  - Implementation time?
3. Do you think that the way the training was conducted is effective?
  - Method employed?
  - Strategies used- interactive?
  - Theories only or practical implementation/teaching model?
4. Do you seek any personal development attempts to complement training?

### **D. Teacher's opinions of the resources and modules provided**

1. How do you find the curriculum materials and the modules provided?
  - Suitable?
  - Effective in teaching, students learning, achieving the curriculum goals?
  - Fulfil the English language needs of the Malaysian primary school students?
2. What resources and modules have been provided to help the teaching and learning on the teaching of English reading through phonics approach?
3. Do you think that the modules help to enhance your understanding and practice of teaching English reading through phonics approach?
  - How?

- Example?
- 4. How do you use the resources and modules?
  - Follow the modules strictly?
  - Make changes to the modules?
  - Supplements the modules with your own activities and materials?
- 5. How the students responded to the modules?
  - Do they enjoy them?

**E. Suggestion to overcome the problem**

1. Do you think more exposure should be done in phonics as a subject knowledge?
2. Should training in phonics-based program be provided to teachers? Who should provide the training, Ministry of Education or State Education Department?
3. What are your suggestions to make sure this approach can be applied by English teachers in their classroom?

# **C - EXAMPLE OF TEACHERS' LESSON PLANS**

Minggu yang ke <input type="text"/>		Hari.....		Tarikh.....
DATE / DAY	July 31, 2017			Monday
TIME /CLASS	1.30 pm -	2.00 pm		1 UUM
	4.20 pm -	5.20 pm		1 UUM
	5.20 pm -	6.20 pm		1 UM
SUBJECT	English Language			
FOCUS	Listening and Speaking			
THEME	World of Knowledge			
TOPIC	UNIT 18 - Spend Smartly			
CONTENT STANDARDS	1.1	1.3	2.1	
LEARNING STANDARD	1.1.3 Able to listen, articulate and identify the phonemes			
	1.3.2 Able to talk about a stimulus by : (i) responding to Wh-Questions			
	2.1.2 Able to recognise and articulate initial, medial and the final sounds in single syllable words			
LEARNING OBJECTIVES	By the end of the lesson, pupils should be able to :- 1. <u>answer 5 WH questions correctly</u> 2. <u>articulate 6 words from /t/ and /l/ group</u> 4. <u>Pupils complete spelling</u>			
ACTIVITIES	 1. <u>Pupils discuss picture / with guidance.</u> 2. <u>Pupils answer WH questions</u> 3. <u>Teacher introduces /t/ and /l/</u> 4. <u>Pupils articulate the list words of /t/ and /l/</u> 5. <u>Pupils complete spelling of focus words.</u>			
	<b>Assessment</b> Pupils are able to write the words correctly in activity book page  <b>Reinforcement</b> Pupils articulate the letters sounds correctly.  <b>Remedial</b> Focus drills sound on /t/ and /l/			
TEACHING AIDS	LCD / laptop / textbook / activity books			
REFERENCE / SOURCE	Textbook and Activity Book			
<b>IMPACT</b>				
1 UUM	Class conducted by trainee teacher.			
1 UUM	Ppls (19) completed activity book (Unit 17)			

TEACHING & STRATEGIES  
(based on Bloom Taxonomy)

CROSS-CURRICULAR ELEMENTS  
Thinking Skills Learning Skills

21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS  
Critical Thinking Collaborative

SUCCESS CRITERIA  
Pupils can...  
Pupils can... sound  
Pupils can... blend.

DATE / DAY	July 25, 2017	Tuesday
TIME / CLASS	2 - 3 pm 4 - 20 - 5.30 5.30 - 5.50	1 UM 1 UUM 1 UN
SUBJECT	English Language	
FOCUS	Writing	
THEME	World of Self, Family and Friends	
TOPIC	UNIT 16 - Days of the Week	
CONTENT STANDARDS	2.2	Choose an item. Choose an item.
LEARNING STANDARD	2.2.6 Able to read and demonstrate understanding of : (i) linear texts - descriptions and rhymes Choose an item. Choose an item.	
LEARNING OBJECTIVES	By the end of the lesson, pupils should be able to :- 1. read and understand a short story in a paragraphs. 2. Answer 5 WH-questions (as in TB page 102)	
ACTIVITIES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils read aloud story on page 102 in the textbook.</li> <li>Pupils answer WH-questions.</li> <li>Pupils complete the table in TB page 101.</li> <li>Teacher guides the pupils to answer the questions.</li> <li>Pupils write and complete the tasks in the AB page .</li> </ol>   <p><b>Assessment</b> Pupils are able to answer WH-Questions.</p> <p><b>Reinforcement</b> Pupils recognize the sounds and words learnt.</p> <p><b>Remedial</b> Focus drills sound on /kw/.</p>	
TEACHING AIDS	LCD / laptop / textbook / activity books	
REFERENCE / SOURCE	Textbook and Activity Book	
<b>REFLECTIONS</b>		
1 um	Class conducted by trainee teacher.	
1 uum	23/23 ppl: needs guidance with reading. Pp.ls answer True/False correctly.	
.		

## DAILY LESSON PLAN YEAR 1



<b>DATE / DAY</b>	August 11, 2017	Friday
<b>TIME / CLASS</b>	2.00 pm - 3.00 pm	1 UKM
	3.20 pm - 3.50 pm	1 UKM
	4.50 pm - 5.50 pm	1 UTM
<b>SUBJECT</b>	English Language	
<b>FOCUS</b>	Language Arts	
<b>THEME</b>	World of Self, Family and Friends	
<b>TOPIC</b>	UNIT 19 - Let Us Do This Together	
<b>CONTENT STANDARDS</b>	4.1	Choose an item.
<b>LEARNING STANDARD</b>	4.1.2 Able to recite rhymes or poems, and sing with correct pronunciation, rhymes and intonations: (ii) rhymes	
	Choose an item.	
	Choose an item.	
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</b>	By the end of the lesson, pupils should be able to :- 1. Recite a chant : 'Recycle' 2. Colour the 'Let's Save the Earth' poster	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pupils recite a rhymes.</li> <li>2. Pupils listen to the instructions.</li> <li>3. Pupils colour the poster.</li> <li>4. LINUS Screening.</li> </ol> <p><b>Assessment</b> Pupils are able to colour the Save the Earth Poster.</p> <p><b>Reinforcement</b> Pupils recognize the sounds and words learnt.</p> <p><b>Remedial</b> Focus drills sound on phonemes /ɔ/, /θ/ and /ʒ/.</p>	
<b>TEACHING AIDS</b>	LCD / laptop / textbook / activity books	
<b>REFERENCE / SOURCE</b>	Textbook and Activity Book	
<b>REFLECTIONS</b>		
1 UKM		
1 UTM		

<b>TEACHING &amp; LEARNING STRATEGIES</b>
(based on Bloom's <del>Taxonomy</del> )
<b>CROSS-CURRICULAR ELEMENTS</b>
Thinking Skills Learning Skills
<b>21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY ACTIVITIES</b>
Critical Thinking Choose an item. Choose an item. Choose an item.
<b>SUCCESS CRITERIA</b>
Pupils can chant correctly. Pupils can colour the poster. Pupils can spell the words learnt correctly.



## DAILY LESSON PLAN YEAR 1

<b>DATE / DAY</b>	August 7, 2017	<b>Monday</b>
<b>TIME /CLASS</b>	2.00 pm - 3.00 pm	<b>1 UPSI</b>
	3.20 pm - 4.20 pm	<b>1 UKM</b>
	5.20 pm - 6.20 pm	<b>1 UTM</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	English Language	
<b>FOCUS</b>	Listening and Speaking	
<b>THEME</b>	World of Self, Family and Friends	
<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>UNIT 18 - Spend Smartly</b>	
<b>CONTENT STANDARDS</b>	1.1	1.3
<b>LEARNING STANDARD</b>	1.1.3 Able to listen, articulate and identify the phonemes	
	1.3.2 Able to talk about a stimulus by : (j) responding to <b>Wh</b> -Questions	
	Choose an item.	
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</b>	By the end of the lesson, pupils should be able to :- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Articulate 6 words from phonemes /ð/, /θ/ and /tʃ/.</li> <li>2. Distinguish the voiced /ð/ and voiceless /θ/ .</li> <li>3. Give a response why we should save the earth with 3R approaches-Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.</li> </ol>	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher talks about the pictures.</li> <li>2. Pupils tells other ways to reduce the usage of water, electricity and plastic bags and response on the importance of reducing the usage of those.</li> <li>3. Teacher introduces phonemes /ð/, /θ/ and /tʃ/ in words given.</li> <li>4. Pupils articulate the list words with phonemes /ð/, /θ/ and /tʃ/.</li> <li>5. Pupils tell the difference between voice and voiceless <b>th</b>.</li> <li>6. <b>LINUS</b> Screening.</li> </ol>	
	  	<p><b>Assessment</b> Pupils are able to write the words correctly in activity book Part 2 page 35 and 36.</p> <p><b>Reinforcement</b> Pupils articulate the letters sounds correctly.</p> <p><b>Remedial</b> Focus drills sound on phonemes /ð/, /θ/ and /tʃ/</p>
<b>TEACHING AIDS</b>	LCD / laptop / textbook / activity books	
<b>REFERENCE / SOURCE</b>	Textbook and Activity Book	
<b>REFLECTIONS</b>		
1 UPSI		
1 UKM		
1 UTM		

<b>TEACHING &amp; LEARNING STRATEGIES</b>
(based on Bloom's <del>Taxonomy</del> )
<b>CROSS-CURRICULAR ELEMENTS</b>
Thinking Skills Learning Skills
<b>21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS</b>
Critical Thinking Collaboration
<b>SUCCESS CRITERIA</b>
Pupils can recognize phonemes /ð/, /θ/ and /tʃ/. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. That</li> <li>ii. Mother</li> <li>iii. Three</li> <li>iv. Cloth</li> <li>v. King</li> <li>vi. ring</li> </ol>
Pupils can articulate the sound
Pupils can segment and blend.
Pupils can differentiate between voice and voiceless <b>th</b> .

# **D - EXAMPLE OF LINUS ASSESSMENT MATERIALS**



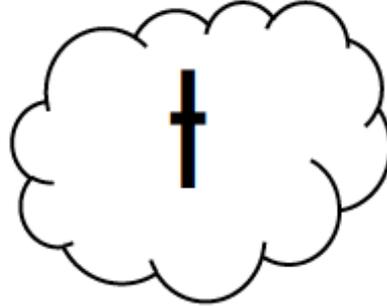
**KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA  
NKRA - PENDIDIKAN**

**INSTRUMEN LITERASI BAHASA INGGERIS  
MEMBACA  
SARINGAN 2  
TAHUN 1  
2017**

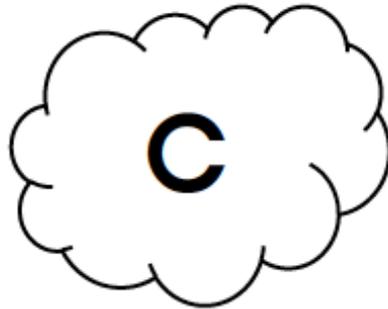
Instrumen Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca  
Saringan 2  
Tahun 1 (2017)  
LINUS2.0 © Hak Cipta Kerajaan Malaysia 2017

Say the letters aloud.

Example:



1.



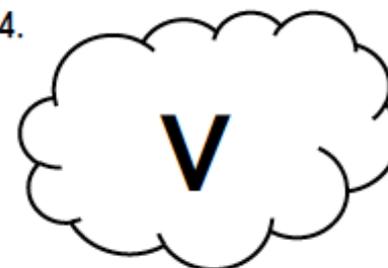
2.



3.



4.



Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arah Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017

Construct 1: Able to identify and distinguish letters of the alphabet.

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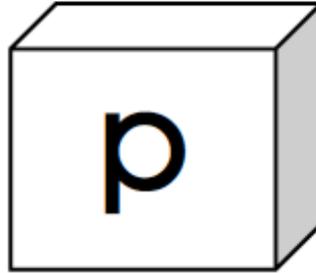
Saringan 2

Tahun 1 (2017)

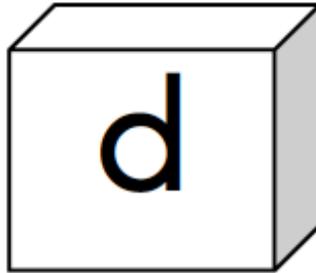
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Say the sound of the letters.

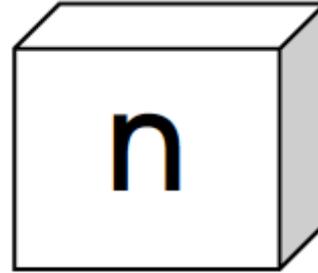
Example:



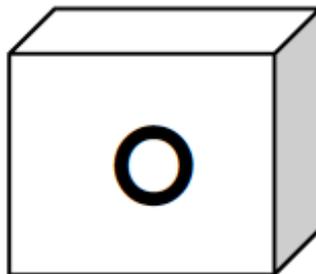
1.



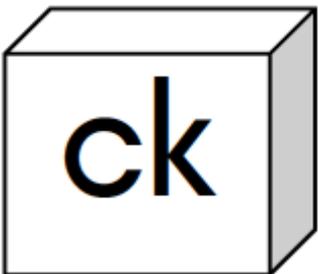
2.



3.



4.



Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arah Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017

Construct 2: Able to associate sounds with the letters of the alphabet.

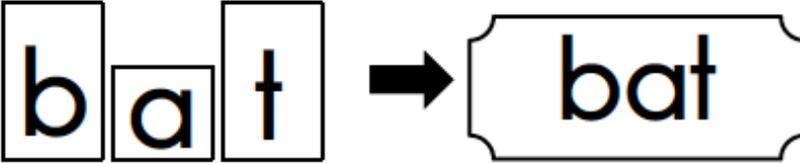
Instrumen Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca

Saringan 2

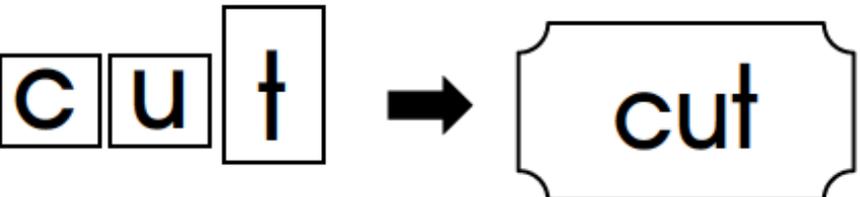
Tahun 1 (2017)

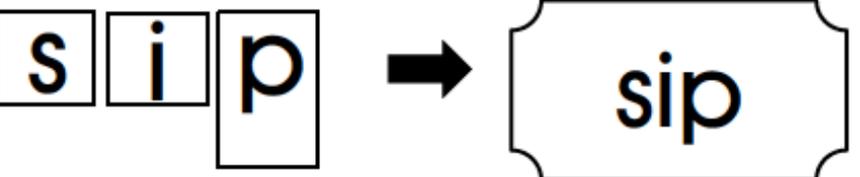
LINUS2.0 © Hak Cipta Kerajaan Malaysia 2017

Read the word aloud.

Example: 

1. 

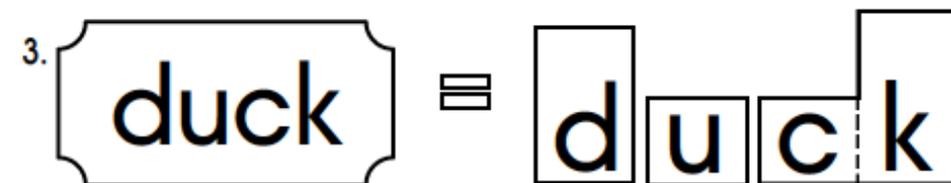
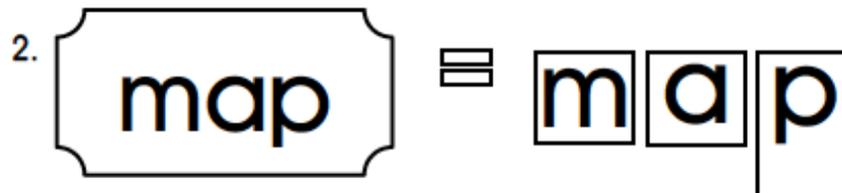
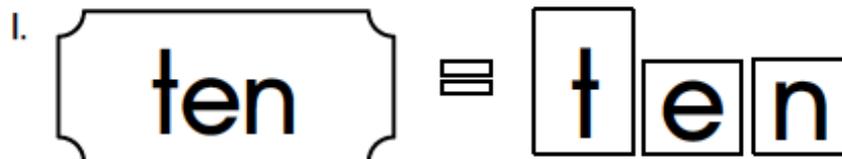
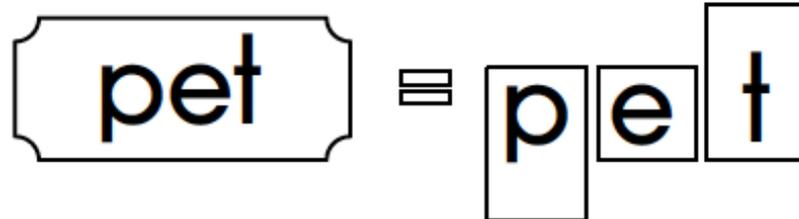
2. 

3. 

Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arah Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris  
Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017  
Construct 3: Able to blend phonemes into recognisable words.  
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Saringan 2  
Tahun 1 (2017)  
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Read the word aloud. Then, say the sounds.

Example:



Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arahan Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris  
Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017

Construct 4: Able to segment words into phonemes.

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Saringan 2

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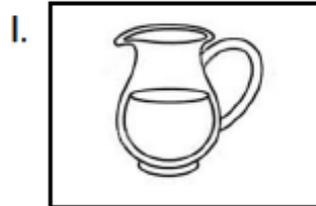
Point to the correct word.

Example:

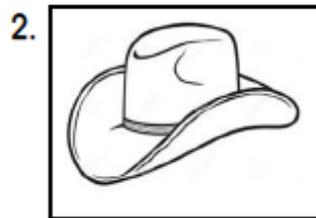


pan      ran      can

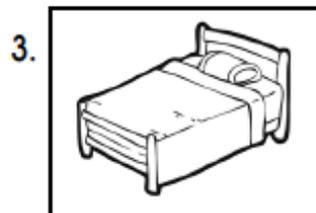
↑



jug      mug      cup



bat      hat      mat



net      pen      bed

Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arahkan Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris  
Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017

Construct 5: Able to understand and use the language at word level.

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Saringan 2

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Read and point to the correct answer.



Its name is

I do

a cat

Noni : Do you have a pet?

Fina : (1) Yes, \_\_\_\_\_.

Noni : Is it (2) \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Fina : No, it is a rabbit.

Noni : What is its name?

Fina : (3) \_\_\_\_\_ Kiki.

Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arahkan Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017

Construct 6: Able to participate in daily conversations using appropriate phrases.

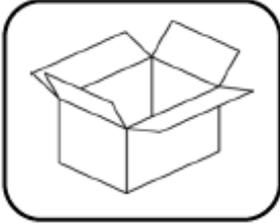
Instrumen Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca

Saringan 2

Tahun 1 (2017)

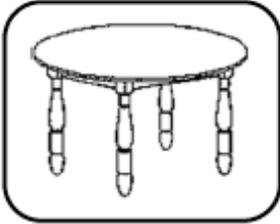
LINUS2.0 © Hak Cipta Kerajaan Malaysia 2017

Look at the picture. Point to the correct phrase.

1. 

small box
big bottle
  
2. 

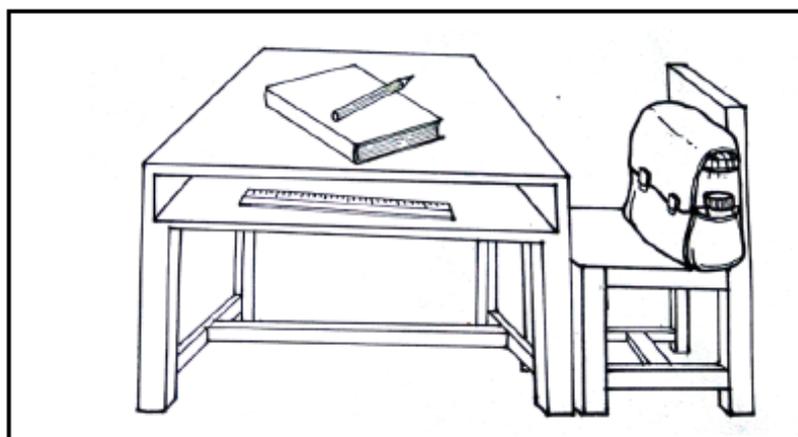
dirty socks
clean shirt
  
3. 

old woman
young girl
  
4. 

round table
square desk

Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arah Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017  
 Construct 7: Able to understand and use the language at phrase level in linear texts.  
 Instrumen Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca  
 Saringan 2  
 Tahun 1 (2017)  
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Look at the picture. Answer the questions given by the teacher.



1. 

on the book
-------------

under the chair
-----------------
  
2. 

on the table
--------------

in the desk
-------------
  
3. 

on the chair
--------------

under the table
-----------------

Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arahan Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017  
Construct 8: Able to understand and use the language at phrase level in non-linear texts.

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Saringan 2  
Tahun 1 (2017)  
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Read the sentences.



Mary loves music.

She likes to sing.

She can play the piano.

**Teacher's note:** Refer to Panduan Arahan Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017

**Construct 9:** Able to read and understand sentences with guidance.

**Instrumen Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca**

Saringan 2

Tahun 1 (2017)

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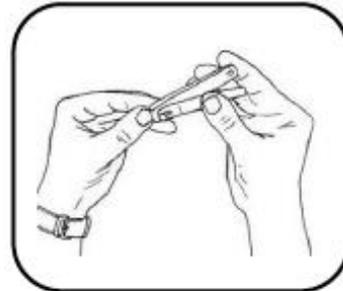
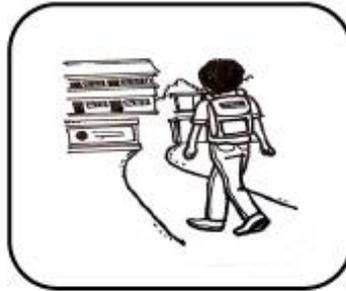
Read each sentence and point to the correct picture.

1. Amin cuts his nails.

2. The boys pull the rope.

3. Zaki walks to school.

4. The girls hold hands.



Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arahan Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017

Construct 10: Able to understand and use the language at sentence level in non-linear texts.

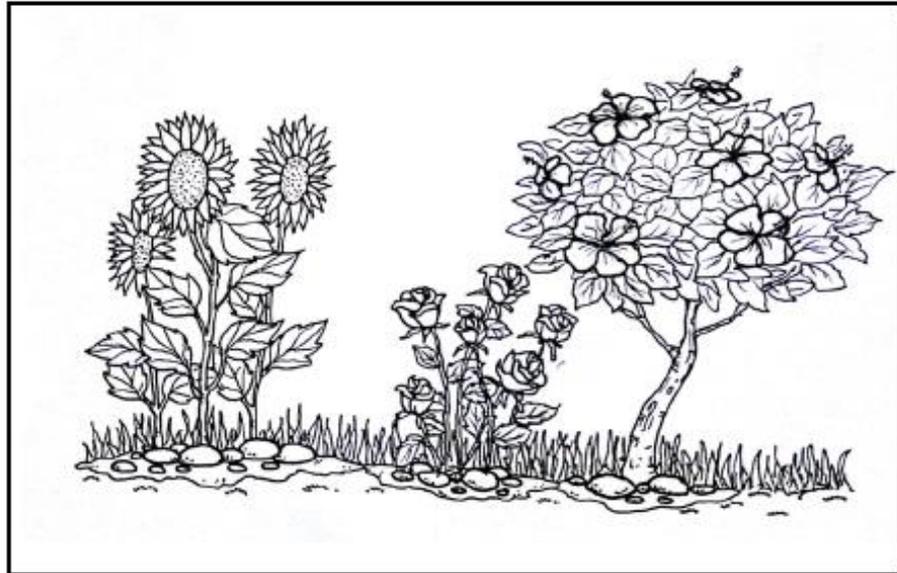
Instrumen Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca

Saringan 2

Tahun 1 (2017)

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Look at the picture. Read the sentences and answer the questions given.



This is a garden. It has many flowers. The flowers are beautiful.

Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arahan Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017

Construct 11: Able to understand and use the language at paragraph level in linear texts.

Instrumen Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca

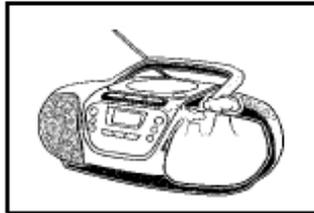
Saringan 2

Tahun 1 (2017)

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Match the sentence parts to make correct sentence.

Example:



It is a radio.



<del>It</del>	is	cycling.
This		drawing.
The boy		Johan's house.
The girl		<del>a radio.</del>

Teacher's note: Refer to Panduan Arahkan Guru dan Penguasaan Murid Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Tahun 1 Saringan 2 2017  
 Construct 12: Able to construct sentences with guidance.  
 Instrumen Literasi Bahasa Inggeris Membaca Saringan 2 Tahun 1 (2017)  
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