Review

Developing children's literary resources

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The Malay literary materials and resources for early childhood in Malaysia are still in the infant stage and have not been expanded to include the main references or developed into big book form. The children literature in our market is not published based on educational philosophy and research, but it is produced based on profit. The process of evaluating the quality of children's literature needs to take into account the interest of the children, their visual ability, messages of the story, and the effect of the story on the children. Hence, a survey was carried out among 941 respondents including university students, preschool teachers and parents which were selected randomly in Malaysia. Learning outcomes identified were the main features which attracted the children to read. Malaysian children were found to be interested in stories with the themes on love, friendship and family, imaginative animals and funny characters, simple plots, colorful illustrations, big size story books with lots of dialog and video presentations (DVD/VCD). The main factors that are considered by parents when buying children's literature materials are moral values, quality and activities in the stories. They expected CALL activities such as ICT games and exercises to be included to make teaching and learning more effective. Qualitative studies have shown that children were attracted by the stories developed that incorporate the above elements. Teachers also gave positive feedback on the application of the stories as teaching aid in kindergarten.

Key words: Children literary, Malay literature, Malaysia, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), information and communications technology (ICT).

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is the building agent in the formation of human emotion, thoughts and languages. According to Savage (2002), human development in early childhood literature can be divided into three forms namely, self and social development, cognitive development and language development. The brain of a child is 80% developed when the child is three years old. According to Misran Rokimin (2001), children literature is a development agent in the development of human emotion, thoughts and languages. Therefore, children below six years of age provide educators, parents and educational agency with the golden opportunity to maximize the cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects of the children.

In terms of genre, children's literature is divided into poetry and prose; prose may be divided into fiction and nonfiction. Nonfiction is the work of facts and fiction is the work that is designed to be informal and biographical. Fiction includes stories that are created based on the imagination of the authors whether real experiences and history, or fantasies. In addition, traditional literary prose includes folklore, epics, myths and legends. These are conveyed in the form of prose picture books, as well as in collections (Carol and Carl, 2008).

The children are divided into specific age groups. According to Piaget (1959), children are those between the ages of 1 to 12 years old. Children aged 13 to 15 years are referred to as pre-teenagers. According to this division, children aged below12 years are at a very important stage and books given to them must be compatible with their mental growth and basic needs. The world and the needs of these children are the key factors which become the fundamentals to the development of children's literature.

Children literary material in Malaysia

To date, children's literature is still in its explorative stage,

at least in Malaysia. Malaysian children are buying more imported children story books from overseas especially Britain and America. There is a need for more research to be done on the role and influence of literature on Malaysian children to contribute to the body of knowledge on early childhood literature and teaching modules as well as the formulation of early childhood curriculum for Malaysian children. To date, there is an over reliance on referential materials sourced from the West such as England and United States, as well as from Australia.

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Most of the literary materials for local Malaysian children are traditional printed materials and they are not in-line with the current socio-economic and technological environments. Besides in a paperless era and borderless world, be it literature or otherwise, should be in tune with a globalized environment. In addition, Malaysian parents are becoming more education-conscious and are sending their children to kindergartens, thus creating a greater demand for pre-school literature (Azizah and Md Sidin, 2004).

The children's literature materials in the Malay language are limited and cannot be used as references or be called big book. Materials which have been introduced in the market are not based on education philosophy and research. On the other hand, the publishers and producers of such materials are more profit-oriented, at the neglect of the materials' suitability to the psychological development of the children (Hamdan et al., 2004).

To evaluate the quality of children literature, one needs to take into consideration children's interest, their visual ability, the storyline as well as the children's respond towards it. The motivation to read literature materials is dependent on the visual effects of the materials on the children's visual perception. Thus, materials that are visually attractive could motivate the children to read at a very tender age.

Study of Children Literature in Malaysia

To date, studies on the feedback of the Malaysian community towards children's story books are scarce. Most of the children's reading books centre on literature in general and stories in particular. The views and opinions of the Malaysian public regarding children story books in the Malay language have yet to be explored in depth; in fact, the publication of children's story books in the Malay language has never been comprehensively researched. Most of the children's story books in the Malay language are published from the adults' and publishers' viewpoint and very rarely based on the research on suitability to a child's development, and may not have the desired effect on children's creativity and psychological as well as social development.

Study by Mohd Sidin (2005) has found that children's books in Malaysia in the 1990's were lacking in terms of content and presentation, such as physical appearance, design, volumes, illustrations and the print quality. Stiff and prosaic language could be the reason why Malaysian children were not happy with children's books published in Malaysia.

This situation still persists and according to a study by Mahzan (2006), of the 615 children's books published in Malaysia sampled in the study, many were found to be moderately fit or suitable for children aged 0-8 years, in terms of content, narrative style, illustrations, use of language and format of the book.

On the publication of children's books in Malaysia, Azizah and Mohd Sidin (2004) found that 80% of the books were published by the Malaysian Book Publishers Association (MABOPA) and children's books publishing was dominated by children's titles. However, 60% of the titles were textbooks and school exercise books.

In a separate study, Chew and Zahari (2009) found that Malay Folk Literature could be incorporated in early childhood curriculum. Meanwhile, to be positioned as big books in early childhood education, Malay Folk Literature needs exemplary stories and animal fables with means 4.22 and 4.19, respectively. The least popular is the *lipurlara* stories. The one-way ANOVA revealed a significant relationship between graduates, teachers and parents and all the items for the teaching and learning of Malay Folk Literature or the items for the content of the big book in early childhood education.

In the Panel Report of the 2010 National Book Award, it was shown that the number of children's books is still small in number. In addition to the poor language content and poor grammar, reading the books did not enhance children's ability to imagine a world filled with excitement, and a world full of anxiety, fear, frustration and grief. This situation is very different in children's literature in English which is well-established and developed. Children's literature in English is published in series with a strong appeal in terms of presentation and style. It follows that literature materials in English are published in the form of

mini library in various fields having a strong appeal to the children as the materials published are organized based on research conducted on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of the children concern (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008).

Therefore, this is a pioneer research on the development of children's literature materials in the Malay language. The development of literature materials for Malaysian children needs to adopt the approaches, methodology and incorporate the various aspects of children's literature published and produced in the West, in harmony with Malaysian culture, tradition, society and values. All the stories, animations, characters and backgrounds in the children's literature in Malay language will have local Malaysian flavor and it is proposed that the materials be published in two forms namely books and CDs, audio and visual ; with the hope that Malaysian children will accept and show an interest in these literature materials. And this could help in instilling a culture of lifelong reading among Malaysian children.

This study is in line with the emphasis of the Ninth Malaysian Plan (*RM Ke-9*), that is, to inculcate a reading culture and lifelong learning among the children, and as the Malay proverb says 'to straighten the bamboo, one has to start with its shoot'. This research is aimed at educating the society on ways to inculcate reading habits among children. This effort will also contribute towards the development of human capital as proposed by former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi.

There are many types of children's literature, namely book chosen for children, book chosen by children, book written for children. However, this article focuses only on the book chosen and written for children and evaluates its suitability for the children. Besides that, this study focuses on developing the literature for children aged 6-7 years as these are the formative years, and the literature will affect the patterns of behavior of children that will have an effect on their life later.

Quantitative method was used to ascertain public opinion on early children's story books in Malay. In the genre of Malay story books, several items in the instrument were formulated to gauge public opinion regarding the favorable children's reading materials most suitable for use as big books for Malaysian children, the most popular themes, characters, plot, illustration and demonstration of Malay children's story books, and opinion of the literary community on the suitability of the language, types of publication, purchase consideration, ICT materials and their functions.

To further enhance the reliability of the study, interesting stories for six to seven year-old children were developed and the children's acceptance of the stories was   evaluated in terms of the following qualitative aspects: songs, themes, characters, colours, and reinforcement exercises that cover the following areas: cognition, language, numeric, and games. Teachers'

feedback will be obtained to get a more holistic picture of the effectiveness of using these stories in teaching and learning in early childhood classes.

Theoretical framework

Jean Piaget (1896-1990) devised a model that depicts humans making sense of their world by gathering and organizing information, and this model has had a great impact on views on the distinct stages through which a person must go through in the development of an adult intellectual thinking process. According to Piaget (1959), certain ways of thinking that are quite simple for an adult are not so simple for a child. There are specific limitations on the kinds of material that can be used to teach a child at a given time in a child's life. Teaching a new concept to children may work for certain children but on the other hand, however, all the new concepts or background facts in the world are useless. The children simply are not ready to learn the new concept.

According to Piaget (1959), maturation is one of the most important elements that have influence on the changes in our thinking processes. Maturation is the unfolding of biological changes that are genetically programmed in each human being at conception and the least modifiable of cognitive development. Maturation is the biological basis for all other changes. Another factor that has an influence on change in thinking process is activity. With physical maturation comes the increasing ability to react to the environment and learn from it. The young child will explore, test, observe and eventually consolidate and organize the information obtained.

The most important elements of Piaget's theory are his description of the stages of development. Piaget's four stages of development are sensorimotor (0 to 2 years), preoperational (2 to 7 years), concrete operational (7 to 11 years) and formal operational (11 – adults). Piaget believed that all humans pass through the same four stages in exactly the same order. By knowing a child age is never a guarantee that we will know how the child thinks in every situation and even being 15 years old does not guarantee that someone has reached the formal operational stage. Piaget's theory described general patterns of thinking for children at different ages and with different amounts of experience. Progress from one to stage to another represents qualitative changes in children's thinking, that is changes in the kind of thinking rather than the amount (Singler, 1991).

The preoperational stage, which spans from ages 2 to7, sees the most obvious change, is an extraordinary increase in mental representation. Perception dominates children thinking. The name for this stage comes from the idea of "operational or mental activities." A child is performing a mental operation if they can easily classify different animals such as a cat, a lion and a rabbit. At this stage, the child reveals signs of mental representation

everywhere – in children's re-creations of experiences in make-believe play, in drawings and painting that cover the walls, and in their delight at story time. Especially impressive are strides in language (Berk, 2006). Children at this stage have limited notions of abstract ideas such as fairness or heat.

A central component of Piaget's theory of learning and thinking involves the participation of the children and the knowledge is not merely transmitted verbally but must be constructed and reconstructed by the children. Piaget emphasized that for a child to know and construct knowledge of the world, the child must act on the objects and it is this action that provides the knowledge and the process of learning (Sigel & Cocking, 1997).

The children must be active; and the child is not a vessel to be filled with facts. One important aspect of Piaget's approaches is that the child's readiness and the child cannot learn something until the maturation gives him certain prerequisites (Brainerd, 1978). The ability to learn for a child is always related to the stage of intellectual development. Children who are at a certain stage should not be thought the concept of a higher development level.

As the child acquires experiences, the child's existing schemes often become inadequate, and the child is forced to adapt to function effectively. Adaptation is the process of adjusting schemes and experiences to each other to maintain equilibrium. Adaptation consists of two reciprocal processes: accommodation and assimilation (Byrnes, 2001). Assimilation is fitting information or experience into a schema or a new schema is created for it. The process of assimilation involves the incorporation of new event into preexisting cognitive structures while accommodation means existing structures change to accommodate the new information. In other words, accommodation is the processes of dealing with new event by either modifying an exciting scheme or create a new one. Through the process of repeating assimilation and accommodation, the child eventually creates a mental structure and also formed new schemes.

Equilibrium is the balance achieved whenever the child's experience is fitted into the existing schema or a new schema. This balance is very short lived, as new experiences are constantly being encountered by the child. During the process of achieving equilibrium, it involves the child striking a balance between the child and the environment. Disequilibrium describes the mental state in which imbalance between the assimilation and accommodation. Disequilibrium is motivating in that it drives the child to achieve equilibrium. Equilibrium is the process of moving from disequilibrium to equilibrium. Equilibrium allows the child to employ assimilation and accommodation as tools for achieving equilibrium (Piaget, 1985). There are many types of equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation that vary with the stage of the development and the problem that needs to be solved. As for Piaget, the process of achieving

equilibrium is the major factor in explaining why some children are advancing more quickly in the development of logical intelligence than the others (Lavatelli, 1973).

According to Piaget (1959), in the second stage of cognitive development, the child is lacking in logical operation and the decisions made by them are based on their perception. The child now knows how to employ mental symbol to re-create or represent previous experiences. During this stage, the child has not yet mastered the ability to complete mentally or manipulate these symbols.

Among the major developments during theses stage are the ability to represent objects or events or to use symbolic functions. Between the ages 2 – 7, the child's mental abilities come to unfold fully as the child advances in language development and imagination. The child is now able to think and play in new ways. For example, the four years old child may turn the cup and saucer into a spaceship and starts talking happily about what he is doing even though no one is listening. This can happen when the child is alone or, even in a group. The child will talk without any real interactions or conversations and to Piaget this is known as collective monologue.

The child at preoperational stage has its problems and rewards. They do not think of the world in the same way as the adults. Their thinking is more on perception and their mental representations are limited to concrete objects. The child makes huge change from the sensori motor stage; however, they use more symbols and words to think about their own world (Piaget, 1985).

Research Methodology

Respondents in this study were divided into three groups, namely: undergraduates from the Early Childhood Education or Malay Studies programs, teachers from childcare centres or kindergartens, and parents. These three groups were chosen because they were involved in choosing the suitable reading materials for children and because they were involved in and well versed in the field.

The respondents were selected from six local public universities, they were the University of Malaya, National University of Malaysia, Putra University of Malaysia, Science University of Malaysia, Sultan Idris University of Education, and the University of Sabah. They were third year students. These respondents were early childhood education majors, and were undergoing teaching practicum in kindergartens or childcare centres; or major in Malay literature who took a children literature course as an elective in their program. Theoretically, they were knowledgeable and related closely to the children's world and thinking.

Teachers and parents were selected randomly from several childcare centres in the state of at Selangor and the Federal District of Kuala Lumpur. They were the front

Table 1. Respondents' profile by location, ethnicity, language spoken at home, gender, academic background, age and experience in using computers.

Social background (N=941)	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1.Location of home	Urban	545	57.9
	Rural	396	42.1
2. Ethnicity	Malay	573	60.9
	Chinese	198	21.0
	Indian	87	9.2
	Other	83	8.8
3. Language spoken at home	Malay	596	59.9
	English	169	18.0
	Chinese	126	13.4
	Tamil	36	3.8
	Other	46	4.9
4. Gender	Male	255	27.1
	Female	686	72.9
5. Academic background	SPM/SPVM/MCE	120	12.8
	STPM/HSC/STP	365	38.8
	Certificate	53	5.6
	Diploma	150	15.9
	Bachelor degree	192	20.4
	Master	43	4.6
	Doctor of philosophy	18	1.9
6. Age	21 – 30 years	600	63.8
	31 – 40 years	198	21.0
	41 – 50 years	132	14.0
	51 and above	11	1.2
7. Experience in using computers	Very frequent	453	48.1
	Frequent	212	22.5
	Rarely	234	24.9
	Never	42	4.5

lines who were dealing with the children daily and were familiar with the children's reading habits. This study gave due priority to the state of Selangor and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur because of their prominence in terms of population density and socio-economic development. A random sample of 20 kindergartens were selected in the state of Selangor and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and survey questionnaire were administered to parents and teachers to collect data pertinent to this study.

A pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the survey instrument. The Cronbach Alpha value of the survey instrument was 0.95, hence indicating the degree of reliability of the instrument.

Profile of respondents

A total of 941 respondents were involved in this study, comprising 347 undergraduates, 299 teachers and 295 parents. The details are shown in Table 1. Table 1 shows that almost 2/3 of the respondents were urban residents. More than half or 60.9% of respondents were Malays, 21% Chinese, 9.2% Indians, and 8.8% others. Language spoken at home wasclosely related to ethnicity, with 59.9% of respondents speaking Malay, 18% English, 13.4% Mandarin/Chinese, 3.8% Tamil, and 4.9% other languages. In terms of gender, there were more female respondents (72.7%) than males (27.3%). Most of the respondents have A- level qualification (38.8%), bachelor

Table 2. Characteristics of Malay children's literary materials considered interesting in Malaysia (N=941).

Characteristics	Respondent	Mean	SD	Average mean	Average SD
1.Themes which children like					
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.6196	0.5933		
a. Love	Teachers (n=299)	4.4916	0.7480	4.4920	0.6773
	Parents (n=295)	4.3424	0.6660		
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.5072	0.7147		
b. Friendship	Teachers (n=299)	4.5017	0.6970	4.4325	0.6972
	Parents (n=295)	4.3119	0.7589		
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.5130	0.6556		
c. Family tie	Teachers (n=299)	4.4214	0.7528	4.4325	0.6972
	Parents (n=295)	4.3492	0.6777		
2. Characters (icon) which children like					
a. Imaginative animal	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3055	0.7858		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2107	0.9443	4.1732	0.8890
	Parents (n=295)	3.9797	0.9145		
	Undergraduate (n=347	4.4150	0.7258		
b. Funny character	Teachers (n=299)	4.0870	0.9584	4.1339	0.8734
	Parents (n=295)	3.8508	0.8440		
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.2939	0.8189		
c. Superhuman	Teachers (n=299)	4.1070	1.0969	4.0829	1.0072
	Parents (n=295)	3.8102	1.0520		
3. Plots suitable for children					
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.6052	0.6151		0.8731
a. Simple plot	Teachers (n=299)	4.3344	1.0241	4.3592	
	Parents (n=295)	4.0949	0.8871		
Table 2. Continues					
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.4121	0.7604		
b. Plot of poetic juctice	Teachers (n=299)	4.1204	1.0161	4.1137	0.9983
	Parents (n=295)	3.7559	1.1072		
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3602	0.7252		
c. Plot of sequential	Teachers (n=299)	4.1605	0.8942	4.1116	0.8588
	Parents (n=295)	3.7695	0.8578		
4. Ilustration that interest the children					
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.5677	0.6567		
a. Colourful	Teachers (n=299)	4.4147	0.7870	4.3932	0.7708
	Parents (n=295)	4.1661	0.8224		
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3775	0.7556		
b. Fantacy world	Teachers (n=299)	4.3512	0.8749	4.2264	0.8647
	Parents (n=295)	3.9220	0.8982		
	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1499	0.8227		
c. Multi-dimension	Teachers (n=299)	4.0134	0.9268	3.9841	0.8708
	Parents (n=295)	3.7593	0.8205		

Table 2. Continues

5. Presentation in books that children like					
a. Big book size	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1326	0.9122		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1806	1.1296	4.0584	1.0467
	Parents (n=295)	3.8475	1.0788		
b. Different shape of the book	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1066	0.8552		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.9866	0.9830	3.9649	0.9050
	Parents (n=295)	3.7763	0.8476		
c. Big font	Undergraduate (n=347)	3.7637	1.1026		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.9264	1.1027	3.8204	1.0542
	Parents (n=295)	3.7797	0.9344		
6. Language used in books that children like					
a. A lot of dialogue	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1671	0.8264		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.0569	1.0460	4.0319	0.9526
	Parents (n=295)	3.8475	0.9656		
b. Repeat language	Undergraduate (n=347)	3.4755	0.9921		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.7492	1.0460	3.5919	1.0280
	Parents (n=295)	3.5695	0.9656		
c. Rhyming language	Undergraduate (n=347)	3.5187	1.0009		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.6288	0.9997	3.5069	0.9910
	Parents (n=295)	3.5695	0.9560		
7. Type of published materials					
a. Video (DVD/VCD)	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.5072	0.6556		0.7420
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3880	0.7922	4.3709	
	Parents (n=295)	4.1932	0.7514		
b. Book	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.4294	0.6694		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2508	0.9627	4.2423	0.8282
	Parents (n=295)	4.0136	0.7953		

Table 2. Continues

c. Audio (CD)	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3689	0.6859	4.1541	0.8670
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1438	0.9913		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9119	0.8605		
8. ICT materials which are suitable					
a. ICT interactive	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1124	0.8511		0.8382
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2809	0.7606	4.1243	
	Parents (n=295)	3.9797	0.8726		
b. Graphic in 3 dimension	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.2133	0.7756		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1538	0.8726	4.0882	0.8491
	Parents (n=295)	3.8746	0.8697		
c. Web page	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.0836	0.8510		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.9532	1.0513	3.9479	0.9809
	Parents (n=295)	3.7831	1.0270		

Table 2. Continues

9. Contents of ICT materials					
a. Games	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3948	0.7733	4.2752	0.9327
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3679	0.9404		
	Parents (n=295)	4.0407	1.0490		
b. Interactive	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.l816	0.8038	4.2168	0.7921
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3545	0.7867		
	Parents (n=295)	4.1186	0.7668		
c. Exercises	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.2305	0.l7819		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1137	0.9088		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9458	0.8905	4.1041	0.8653
10. Weitghtage of buying					
a. Moral value	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3919	0.7346	4.2593	0.8422
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2709	0.8255		
	Parents (n=295)	4.0915	0.9450		
b. Quality	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3545	0.7520	4.2434	0.8011
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3278	0.8108		
	Parents (n=295)	4.0271	0.8284		
c. Variety of activities	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3487	0.6943	4.2062	0.7963
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2876	0.8011		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9559	0.l8460		

degree (20.4%), and diploma (15.9%). More than half or 63.8% of the respondents were between 21 and 30 years, and nearly half (48.1%) of all the respondents frequently use the computer in their daily lives to do their work.

Findings of the study

This study used the mean and standard deviations to analyze the views of the literary community on preferred children's reading materials that were most suitable for use as big books for Malaysian children as shown in table 2.Table 2 shows that the opinion of the literary community on Malay literature in early childhood education was positive. The respondents responded to questions about the ten characteristics of the children's story books. The most popular story book themes identified by all respondents were love (mean 4.4920, SD 0.0221), followed by friendship (mean 4.4442, SD 0.2374) and family tie (mean 4.4325, SD 0.2223). These themes were popular because they were closest to the children and were important parts of their life. Imaginative animal was the most acceptable character for integration into Malay early childhood story books (mean 4.4920, SD 0.0221) besides funny characters (mean 4.4442, SD 0.2374), and superhuman (mean 4.4325, SD

0.2273). In other words, the respondents found that imaginative and creative characters are the interesting icons that children prefer compared to the real characters.

Regarding the the suitability of the plot in the story books for children, respondents have chosen the simple plot top in their list (mean 4.3592, SD 0.0285). Simple plot consists of a few characters with one or two events, and is found easilyunderstood by the children. Plot of poetic justice (mean 4.1137, SD 0.0325) was suitable for children to inculcate moral values among them; meanwhile sequential plot (mean 4.1112, SD 0.0280) was found easy to be followed by the children too.

Ilustration is another important component in developing the story books. Due to the sensitivity of children to colors, the colourful illustraton (mean 4.3932, SD 0.7708) was the most important part that interests the children. Besides that, respondents found that fantasy world (mean 4.2264, SD 0.0282) and multi-dimension (mean 3.9841, SD 0.0284) were two interesting illustrations in the children story books.

The study found that university students, preschool teachers and parents agreed that children liked the story books presented in big book size (mean 4.0584, SD 0.0341), different shapes (mean 3.9649, SD 0.0295) with big fonts (mean 3.8204, SD 0.0344). All these criteria are the important presentation in the story books that could

attract the attention of the children. The study found that children did not like long descriptive and narrative sentences, but preferred story books with a lot of dialogue (mean 4.0319, SD 0.0310) and repeat language (mean 3.5919, SD 0.0335) for prose or rhyming language (mean 3.5069, SD 0.0323) for poems. This finding is similar to the the finding by Carol Fisher and Margaret Natarella (1978) that children showed a favorable attitude towards both rhyming and unrhyming poetry, but preferred the rhyming more.

The type of published materials recognised as interesting by the respondents was the story publised in video format (mean 4.3709, SD 0.0242), book (mean 4.2423, SD 0.0242), and audio in CD form (mean 4.1541, SD 0.0283); video has audio and visual effects on children, and it is the most popular, but no CD-ROM in the world can replace the sense of well-being and togetherness of reading to children by teachers and parents. According to Maria Perers (2004), a story book becomes so personal for a child, that the story is perfectly memorised, makes them feel safe, embody eternal values and are windows to immortality.

In the ICT era, the respondents indicated that Malay stories produced in ICT form should firstly be interactive (mean 4.1243, SD 0.0273), second was graphics in three dimensions (mean 4.0882, SD 0.0277), and third web page (mean 3.9479, SD 0.0320). On the other hand, contents of the ICT materials need to be filled with games (mean 4.2593, SD 0.0274), be interactive (mean 4.2434, SD 0.0261), and have exercises (mean 4.2062, SD 0.0260) to be done by the children to evaluate the children's understanding of the story they have read.

Moral value (mean 4.2593, SD 0.0274) in the story books or CDs often became the most important point to consider when because of its influence on the children's values and personalities. This was followed by the quality of the story books (mean 4.2434, SD 0.0261) such as paper, colours, illustrations, story etc; how a children's book is written and illustrated is, therefore of concern to everyone in general. In addition, the variety of activities (mean 4.2062, SD 0.0260) in the story books was also another important factor to be considered by the buyers. Activities here include exercises, games, and interactive activities.

The results shown that undergraduate students scored the highest mean and the parents has the lowest mean for most of the items in the survey questionnaire. In other words, undergraduates have the most positive attitude towards all the characteristics compared to preschool teachers and parents, except six items whereby preschool teachers have the highest mean. The items included big book size and big font under the title "presentation in books"; repeat language and rhyming language under "language used in books that children like"; ICT interactive under "ICT materials which are suitable", and interactive under "contents of ICT materials". However, the differences of the mean score between preschool teachers and undergraduate students were not big (<.27).

Developing Malay children story book

Story

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey, Malay children story books were created containing themes of love and friendship, with imaginative animals, sequential plot, a lot of dialogs, and exercises and games. *The Adventure to Space* is a story about Anita and her four friends, Sang Sancil, sang kuda, Orang Utan and Sang Kambing in the space program. They were given the task of travelling to Venus to find the Rafflesia flower which could be used as an anti-bird influenza medicine to cure animals infected with the disease in Malaysia.

In their voyage, they faced many difficulties. Anita and the other animals lost their way and stop at planet Moon and Mercury. With the help of the members, they eventually succeeded in reaching Venus and found the Rafflesia flower and returned to Earth. The above story book was specially written for children aged between 6 to 7 years old. A traditional Malay poem the *gurindam* was played before the start of the story. Some of screen shots of story are shown as in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

b. Exercises

Exercises are in three parts, namely cognitive, numeric and Malay language. There are 15 items or questions in the exercises. Those who scored 10 or more items correctly are considered to have achieved the level of development in the development stage as proposed by Piaget (1959). An example of cognitive exercise is shown as in Figures 5 and 6. An example of numeric exercises is shown as in Figures 7a and 7b. An example of Malay Language exercises is shown below in Figures 9 and 10.

Game

In this section, there are four levels of the games and the children are required to click on the sparkling objects. This game aims to measure the coordination between children's sight and ability, as shown in Figures 11a and 11b below.

The higher the level of the game shown in Figures 11a and b, the faster the shining objects will move. Children who are successful in getting the full score will only allow moving on to a higher level.

Observations

Several researchers have suggested that literary understanding encompasses a rich variety of responses, as children bring together personal, social, and cultural responses to classroom discussions (Sipe, 2008) and express meaning in multimodal ways (Adomat, 2010). In

Figure 1. Dr. Teh introduced four friends to to Anita for the space.

Figure 2. They has lost their way in the Moon planet and require the way to Venus planet.

Figure 3. The five were to ask to amuse the princess of Mercury Planet.

Figure 4. The caretaker of Rafflesia agreed to give them the flower.
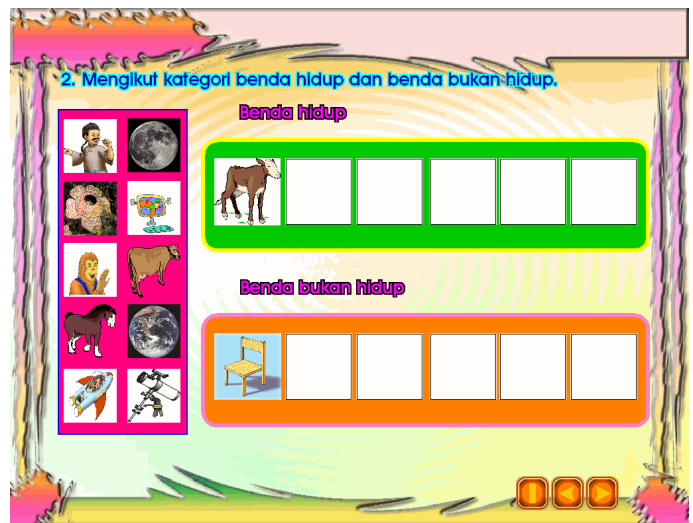
Figure 5. Match the objects according to living and non-living things
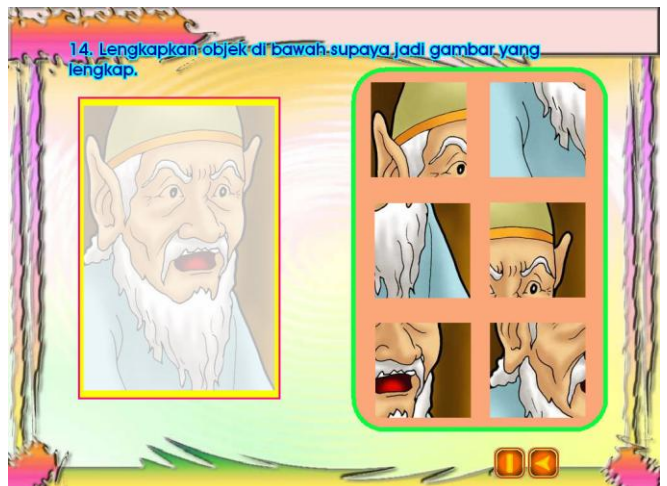
Figure 6. Match and arrange the above object to form a perfect picture.

(a)

(b)

Figure 7a and b. Count and match the answers in the boxes provided.

Figure 9. Match and arrange the syllable to form a word.

Figure 10. Match and arrange the words above to form a complete sentence.

(a)

(b)

Figure 11a and b. Click on the sparkling object.

this study, the teacher encouraged a broader range of responses from children during literature discussions.

This study only emphasizes on developing the favorable children literary resources based on the data collected. Demonstrations have been conducted in kindergartens randomly selected to determine the reception level of the children towards the developed stories. The study involved 15 children, nine boys and six girls between the ages of 4 – 6 years old. The children are representative as far as ethnic and socioeconomic diversity are concerned. There were nine Chinese, four Indian and two Malay children. The kindergarten is located in a rural area outside metropolitan Kuala Lumpur.

Teacher Madam Koh encouraged the children to draw upon a variety of modalities in responding to the story, such as the the songs, themes, characters, plot, and the morale in the story, and she assessed the children's responses to and efforts to build on the responses of others. She allowed the children to ask questions in between in order to express meaning and encouraged creative responses. The teacher thought they would appeal to the children's interests or would tie in with topics across the curriculum. The story presented a variety of themes, and one complete session lasted approximately 20–30 minutes.

Generally, the children enjoyed watching the story created because of its local flavors, local characters, colourful illustrations and the morale of the story. They were also interested in engaging with the games and the reinforcement activities. Six children loved the *gurindam*, the Malay traditional songs sang before the story starts, but a Chinese boy disliked it because he ddid not appreciate the Malay song. Ten of the children loved the themes of the story about adventures in space, especially the boys.

In terms of characters, it was a surprise that five children preferred the horse, three children preferred the Anita, two chose orang utan, and one child liked the robot. No one chose the deer (Sang Kancil) which is a popular animal and icon for wise and smart character in Malay folklores. According to Piaget (1985), children's thinking in the preoperational stage is more on perception. The children use more symbols and words to think about their own world. As a result, they chose horse as their most favorite character because they are more familiar with the animal watching it in the zoos, movies, cartoons or television programs.

On the other hand, the children were found to be bored with the dialogue, probably the dialogue is too long and they were not familiar with the Malay language used. The mother tongue for the Chinese children is Chinese, for the Indian children is English, and the mother tongue of the Malay children is the Malay language. Hence, the language used in the story could be a barrier and they were not able to comprehend the story well. However,

teacher F helped them to understand the story by explaining to them the story briefly before they were to engage with the reinforcement exercises and games. Ten children drew attention during the reinforcement exercise session and all were interested with the games. Due to the differences in age and background, the six year-old children answered the questions and played the game better than the younger ones.

This is one of the comments of the six year old boy:

> "I liked to watch the story, it was interesting and close to us; I saw orang utan, horse, deer, and goat in zoo, these are the animals in Malaysia; I also know the Rafflesia is the biggest flower in the world that only can be found in Sarawak. I have never seen this story before, this is new to me, but I am interested with its reinforcement activities and games related to its story, it was so easy."

Some children — Tan, Kerk, and Raben — showed a "signature style" in their responses to the storyboard in the categories of language literacy, numeric, cognitive, reinforcement exercises and games respectively. Tan Yu Wei accounted for 54% of the performative responses, although five other children showed performative responses throughout the data. Fifty-five percent of Kerk Zi Hau's responses were in the category of language literacy, and fifty-one percent of Robert Raj's responses were in the cognitive category. The other five children in the group showed a more balanced blend of responses across all categories; therefore, it was not evident that they had a particular signature style in their responses.

The results of this study show that this group of pupils have achieved variously as assessed in terms of their responses to developed storyboard: language literacy (33%); cognitive (30%); numeric (56%); enforcement exercise (48) and games (72%). All the children showed a blend of categories in building literary understanding of children's literature.

Compared to the participation of these children in whole-class perception, during which most of the children were quiet, ten out of fifteen children were active participants in the discussions. This developed story is found suitable for the six year-old children due to thier active participation in the discussion and engagement with the exercises and games involved.

The respondent children underwent the process of achieving equilibrium as stated by Piaget that involved the children in striking a balance between the child and the environment. They also showed some cognitive development after the activities. Besides that, they were also influence by social transmission or social experience, the process of interacting with others (Becker & Varelas, 2001). In other words, the children learn from

others and allow them to test their schemes against those of others. When the schemes are comparable, the children remain at equilibrium; when they are not, equilibrium is disrupted, the child will be motivated to adapt their schemes, and the process of development occurs. Without the social experience, the children would need to reinvent all the existing information and knowledge offered culturally. The amount children can learn from social experience varies according to their stage of cognitive development.

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Besides that, three teachers were interviewed to fulfill the triangulation requirement in qualitative research regarding the suitability of the developed storyboard to the children. In terms of the *gurindam* that was played before the start of the story, Yoga and Kerk felt that it was suitable and meaningful for children to get to know the local culture, especially Malay traditional trait, but Usha has a different view that nursery song is found more suitable.

Yoga and Kerk felt that the storyboard was suitable for the children between 6 till 7 years, Usha extended the age to 9 years old due to the setting of the story that takes place in space which could be quite strange to the children. The story plot was found to be simple and could be easily followed by the children.

All the teachers felt that the characters comprising four local animals were suitable and the number was just nice; the children were quite familiar with the animals, thus making them attentive and interested in following the story. The full agreement achieved by all the teachers regarding the graphic design and colours; this could be proven by the action of the children who went close the computer and tried to touch the screen.

However, with reference to Yoga, Kerk and Usha comment on the language aspect; they thought that the Malay language in the story was difficult and could hardly be understood by the 6 year-old children In addition, the long dialogue has distracted the the children's attention and bored them along the way. On the other hand, all the teachers supported the fact that the morals of the story

about friendship, cooperation and to save mother nature should be able strike the imagination of the children and might have a long lasting effect on them.

Question about the reinforcement exercises and games, all the teachers felt that the children needed such activities so that they could learn happily and concretely because it was interesting. Yoga said the exercises were needed to evaluate the understanding of the children about the story, and the games to assess the ways the children react. Kerk added that interesting games might be able to attract three years old children to play. Hence forth, they all suggested that this kind of teaching aids should be used continuously in the teaching and learning process especially in making the teaching and learning of the Malay language more interesting.

Implication of the Study and Recommendations

When one talks about children's literature, one would invariably associate it with fun and something than can serve as a lesson. The concept of 'it teaches and it pleases' (Nodelman, 2003) becomes a benchmark for measuring the result of the child's reading activities, that is reading literary works, and the feeling of excitement and entertainment, through the characters and plot in the developed story.

This study discussed and developed the story by identifying some important characteristics in a developed story. The story was assessed in a kinder garten and found to be suitable for six years old children. This has helped to provide another alternative teaching aid for the kindergartens to teach the children in a more interesting and creative way. This kind of teaching aids are rarely found in Malaysia but meaningful for the cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of children, besides fulfilling their language literacy, numeric and cognition requirements.

The developed story incorporated the elements of education, teaching and scholarship. At the end of the story, the children may have acquired the sense of characters, learned the lesson besides generating new knowledge or add-on knowledge. The children literature has expanded the lives of children by using anecdotes to educate the children, found that anecdotes cover a rich diversity of topics with both positive and negative examples of behaviour; and they may also provoke positive effects in the personality development of children (Asilioglu, 2008).

Based on the story, teachers can focus on the dramatic propensities that some children in their classes may exhibit by creating opportunities for dramatic interactions with the story. In order to have a better understand these stories, a teacher can plan a more structured drama activities before, during, and after reading of a text (Adomat, 2010), such as drama in education, process drama, and story drama techniques, which can enhance children's engagement and deepen their understanding

of literature. Opening up the contexts of our classroom and ways of learning can provide powerful opportunities for all learners.

On the other hand, the language of the story should be made easy and the dialogue should be short and concise to make the story more interesting and easier to follow. The story's conclusion should raise the possibility of further adventures. The relationship between the readers and this story is yet to be determined. In weighing the potential "good" of fictions both culturally and individual lives, Heinecken (2010) suggested that readers are thus not only asked to be self-reflexive about the processes by which they read, use, interpret and evaluate the fictions they encounter, but also the ways they participate in the continuing construction of a larger collective story.

However, this story was drafted and created by adults for children, not created by the children themselves, so in future, the study may focus on developing the story by the children themselves because they know better what kind of story they like and are interested in.

Furthermore, these teaching aids should be produced based on research and educational philosophy, supplemented by exercises and games, not exercises or games stand alone or separately. The integration between the story, exercises and games is a way to make learning more enjoyabloe and meaningful for the children. This is part and partial of the children's life they can enjoy and learn through playing; whereas the uniqueness of the teaching aid is fill the gap between the dull and meaningless teaching materials either in books or online form in the market and teaching and learning in the classroom.

Conclusion

This study shows ten main characteristics in the development of Malay literary for children. This is to provide guide lines for the publishers to publish children's literature that suit the children's interest and stages in psychological growth and to address the problem of the lack in local content. This fulfills the aims to pave the way for a chartered path in the growth of this "book industry of the future". Although there will be changes in the children literature publishing industry in the future, but it is believed that print publishing will still have an important role to play in early childhood education in view of the current trends in the evolution of early childhood education in the country and existing socio-economic imbalances. Besides that, there are other obstacles which may hinder the growth of multimedia publishing, such as economy, technology, culture, and social system. Therefore, printed material and multimedia publishing must co-exist to satisfy the needs of their audience.

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