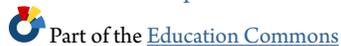

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The Effectiveness of a Literature-Driven English Programme in Improving the English Language Skills of Secondary One Students in Singapore

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

From the middle of 1999 onwards, policy-makers and the media in Singapore began to discuss the issue of the standard of English in Singapore. There were suggestions to improve the standard by placing a greater emphasis on the teaching of grammar (Kramer-Dahl 2003; Nirmala 1999). The English Language syllabus was revised and English Language teachers were required to attend a 60-hour course to familiarise themselves with the new syllabus (Nirmala 1999). When the researcher attended the course in 2001, teachers with a degree in English were permitted to attend a shorter 24-hour course while others, including those with a degree in Literature, had to fulfil the 60-hour requirement. Though the aim of the new syllabus was to equip 'students with a conscious understanding of how patterns of language are used systematically and variably in different contexts', it wound up 'teaching prescriptive grammar' (Kramer-Dahl 2004, p.80).

Kramer-Dahl considers the media allusions to declining standards 'manufactured' (2003, p.80) and questions the assumptions underlying the concept of standards. Indeed, the publicity has led to the rich Colloquial Singapore English (CSE), *Singlish*, being demeaned in the media and by policy-makers (Kramer-Dahl 2003). The negative publicity appeared to have even influenced a young student to question the validity of communicating in CSE in the classroom. In 2002, the researcher divided her Secondary One class into groups and asked them to translate a scene from a Shakespearean play into CSE and act out the scene. One of the students promptly stood up and questioned, "But, ma'am, we are supposed to learn proper English." In reply, the class was told that it would aid in the literary understanding of the play and that since they had already shown their capability in being able to translate Shakespearean English into Modern Standard English in an earlier activity, their knowledge of Standard English was in no danger of being

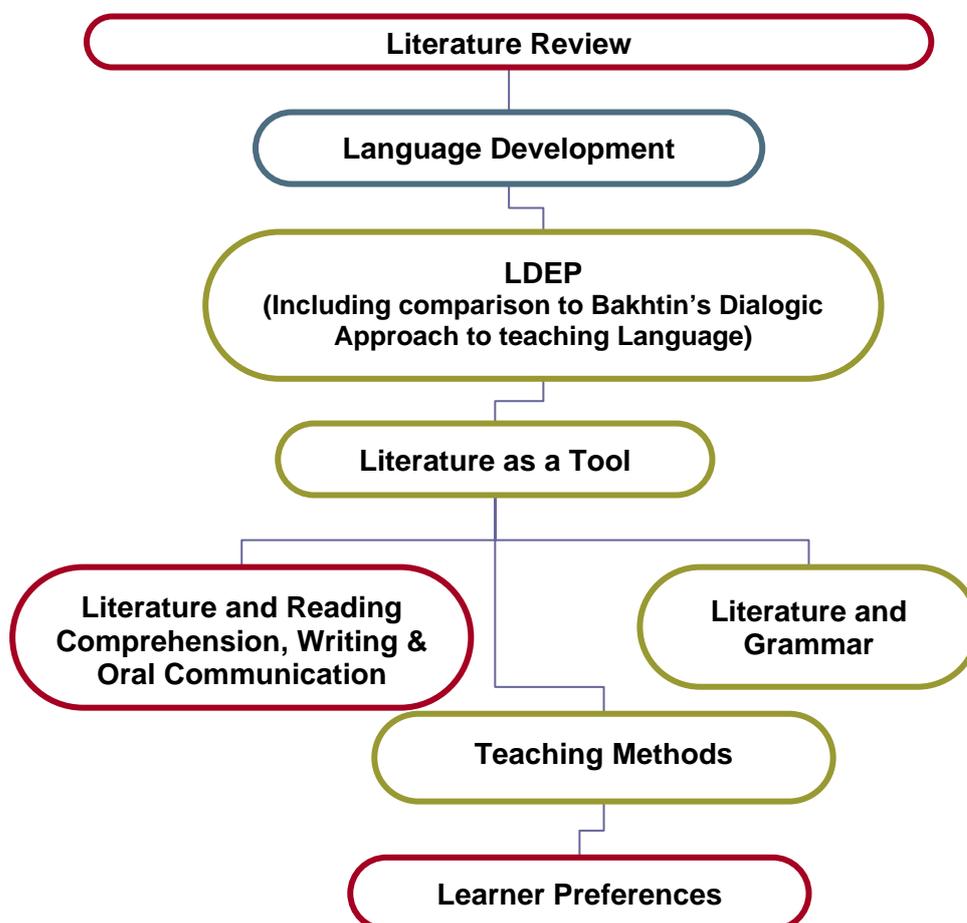
contaminated. In addition to being entertaining, the translation and the subsequent role-playing had the effect of making Shakespeare relevant and accessible to a group of Singapore students far removed from the cultural, social and historical realities of Shakespearean England.

While CSE has its uses and there may not be a crisis in the declining standards, the importance of teaching a Standardised English Language cannot be trivialised. According to Pakir (1991) highly-educated users of English in Singapore are able to easily navigate between Standard Singapore English (SSE) and CSE depending on the social occasion. They also occupy the upper stratum of the Singapore society. In Singapore, the ability to code-switch between SSE and CSE or even between English and other languages is socially and economically empowering (Foley 1998). CSE is learnt from the environment but SSE should be learnt in schools to enable all students to capitalise on the economic and social advantage that SSE affords.

As a former teacher interested in discovering new ways and means of improving the knowledge of SSE in students, the researcher decided to design and implement a new curriculum. This project is the formal evaluation of the effectiveness of this curriculum in improving the English Language skills of the students. This new curriculum was implemented in four secondary schools through the Literature-Driven English Programme (LDEP) in 2004. In three of the schools the LDEP was tested against the pre-existing curricula in those schools through the use of control groups to discover if it would be more effective in enhancing writing and reading comprehension skills of Secondary One students. In the fourth school, there was no control group since the school requested that all the Secondary One Express and Normal (Academic) students be taught under the experimental LDEP. Chapter 3 offers a detailed description of the methods and samples of participants of this research project. Before the LDEP was designed, works by other educators and researchers in the field were examined. In researching a curriculum initiative project that includes the design of a programme, it is important to study available literature on the factors that would have an impact on the initiative.

The outline of this literature review is shown in Figure 2.1. Figure 2.1 demonstrates that, firstly literature on how language develops and is acquired was explored. The implications of language development on the design of a language curriculum were also studied. Then, literature pertaining to the different components to be included in the LDEP was explored before creating the outline of the LDEP. Comparison was also made to some aspects of the Dialogic Approach (Bakhtin 1981) so as to gain a better insight into the rationale for implementing the LDEP. Next, the use of Literature as a tool in the LDEP was examined before considering Literature as an aid in achieving each of the separate objectives of the programme, namely the teaching of: writing; reading comprehension; oral communication; and grammar. Finally, literature on the teaching methods that were employed in order to realise the objectives as well as learner preferences was reviewed. Background knowledge of these factors is essential as they might play an influential role in the success or failure of the programme.

Figure 2.1: Outline of the Literature Review



Language Development: Linguistics, Children and Education

Before exploring the curriculum itself, the theories of language acquisition and development were examined. It is important to ascertain if any theory would enhance the understanding of the learning of a language, and especially the way secondary school-aged children learn language.

After reviewing the literature pertaining to the different theories on the development and acquisition of language, an adapted version of modern socio-cognitive theory of language acquisition (Atkinson 2002) was accepted as the most helpful in guiding the designing of the LDEP. Socio-cognitive theory contains elements of an early hypothesis of the environment influencing language acquisition (Bloomfield 1933) and a later premise that language is inborn (Chomsky 1965). Before exploring socio-cognitive theory, it might be pertinent to examine the theories formulated by Bloomfield and Chomsky as these theories may be viewed as part of the evolutionary process of the linguistic study that led to the socio-cognitive theory.

Bloomfield (1933) tells us that we are stimulated by our environment to learn language. In other words, a child makes sense of language and imitates it through interaction with other humans 'by connecting the learned situation of its fuse (the stimulus) with its form (the response)' (Wanner & Gleitman 1983, p.4). Without an environment to teach and sustain the language acquisition of the child, the child may have difficulty acquiring language capabilities. On the other hand, the creation of a conducive environment for learning in an educational setting would lead to the acquisition of language. From this theory, it may be surmised that any person, whether child or adult, when situated in an appropriate learning environment would be able to acquire a language, for language acquisition is solely dependent on external social forces.

However, adults converse with other adults and with children in different ways. When adults converse with children adults simplify what they say or repeat phrases and words and in addition, these 'utterances... are not

perfectly grammatical' (Dale 1976, p.63). Therefore, it would be difficult for children to make sense of the rules inherent in the language and subsequently, go on to replicate them in their own spoken language. Given the limitations of the behaviourist viewpoint in explaining language development, linguists began to look for other explanations. In 1965, Chomsky popularised the notion that language learning is aided by the innate capabilities in all human babies to process and make sense of the sounds that humans vocalise into words. Chomsky and others like Lenneberg (1967) believe that all humans share this natural common capacity which allows a child, who is not taught explicitly, to gain 'a complex internal rule system' (Slobin 1974, p.56).

There is biological evidence to support the theory of an innate ability in humans to acquire language (McNeill 1970). It was found that, among the primates, humans have a shorter gestation period which means that human babies emerge into the world completely reliant upon their caregivers, who are usually their mothers. This helplessness gave rise to an evolutionary need in babies to articulate their wants and needs just to ensure their survival (McNeill 1970) which, it is argued, leads to the development of a unique biological means of acquiring language. An example of this unique biological means can be found in the larynx which in humans evolved to be situated lower than in the other primates, thus increasing the variety of sounds that humans can vocalise (Holden 2004).

The hypothesis that humans have a natural capacity to acquire language is supported by the fact that, in a short span of time, young children are able to acquire a complex language. The theory of operant reinforcement (Skinner 1957), whereby the child is reinforced to repeat a certain word when by chance the child is rewarded on vocalising that word, cannot explain how a child is able to learn a wide array of words and word combinations (Wilkinson 1975). Halliday, has written of 'filters [that help] learners decide what is and what is not on their agenda, identifying what aspects of ongoing behaviour may be appropriately tackled for learning' (1993, p.105). In other words, cognitive processes determine the form and mode of learning a language.

Indeed, some psycholinguists have supported the link Chomsky draws between language acquisition and an innate capability in humans based on the intricate correspondence between the cognitive processing that occurs during language acquisition and the practical nature of that acquisition (Bever & Montalbetti 2002).

In 1967, Lenneberg went a step further and expounded the theory that after puberty, children reach a critical stage, after which they will not have the capacity to acquire fluency in a language even if instructed or exposed to the language (Lenneberg 1967). The case of Genie who was found and rescued at age thirteen in 1970 appears to support the critical stage theory. When rescued Genie could not speak a word since she was kept in a locked room, deprived of any human interaction (Curtiss 1977). During the seven years that she was reintroduced into society, the progress of her language acquisition followed that of a normal child, though at a slower rate (Villiers & Villiers 1979). However, according to Curtiss, Fromkin, Rigler, Rigler, and Krashen (1975) Genie continued to have problems with articulation and in attaining greater syntactical competence. Since, according to Clahsen and Muysken (1989) and Dopke (1998), the degree of language competency is to be measured by the number of dependent clauses used as well as by the 'Chomskyan definition of linguistic competence as essentially syntactical competence' (Bongartz & Schneider 2003, p.28), it may be suggested that Genie had difficulty attaining fluency in the language. Though Genie progressed in acquiring language, her inability to attain fluency appears to confirm the critical stage theory that fluency in a language cannot be achieved if the language is learnt after puberty.

Advancing a theory pertaining to normal language development based on an atypical instance of the outcome of language deprivation on one child is, however, problematic. Not only is the sample size too small to make a generalisation, but the case of Genie is an extreme case. Genie was kept isolated in a room with little human interaction for thirteen years and there is a possibility that this might have caused severe emotional and mental damage so that her capacity to learn was impaired (Curtiss 1989). It was also found

that the left and right hemispheres of her brain worked in reverse of the norm; the left side of her brain processed spatial information rather than language and the right side dealt with language (Stromswold 2000). In addition, during the seven years of study, Genie received no formal instruction (Villiers & Villiers 1979) and that leads to the question of whether the lack of instruction had an impact on the learning of more complex forms such as syntax.

In another study of a group of Korean and Chinese native speakers, aged three to thirty-nine, it was found that in learning English after puberty the students experienced greater difficulty in acquiring syntax (Johnson & Newport 1989). This study, however, relates to second language learners with no exposure to the language before they started learning it formally at a later age. Indeed, most researchers subscribing to the critical stage theory have explored the neurological processing during language acquisition in participants with language impairments or brain damage and second language learners (Stromswold 2000). In the case of Singapore, students are taught English from kindergarten onwards (Census of Population Office 2000). Therefore, though the research participants were in Secondary One during which most of the students turned thirteen years of age, these students were exposed to the English Language from a young age. Learning language skills during the LDEP for these students was thus related to enhancement of the skills rather than the learning of a new language.

While biological theorists of language acquisition (Chomsky 1965; Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch 2002; Holden 2004; Stromswold 2000) may find credence in their theory by pointing out that very young children acquire language at an amazing speed, children also do not come into the world equipped with ready-made adult-like grammatical rules. Infants can make sense of some of the words used in their surroundings and can answer aptly even before they can articulate any words (Villiers & Villiers 1979). They progress to apply 'grammatical principles... [and] operate on these basic and universal principles even when composing short, idiosyncratic, childish utterances' (Slobin 1974, p.48). On the other hand, children are unable to comprehend passive sentences or differentiate between syllables until much later (Villiers

& Villiers 1979). It has also been found that unstressed parts of speech are absent from the speeches of children (Brown & Fraser 1964). It appears that children are attuned to the sounds found in their environment and they seem to take cues from it to articulate their own developing versions of the language. Certainly, children may have some innate ability to comprehend language but there has to be some 'social input... to support [their] language development at every turn' (Atkinson 2002, p.528). Nurture appears to have an impact on the learning of a language. If that is the case, then formal instruction in the form of a new curriculum, such as the LDEP, could aid in enhancing language learning.

The socio-cognitive theory that Atkinson (2002) propounds was inspired by the socio-cognitive approach originated by Temmerman (2000). According to the socio-cognitive theory, there is an internal biological wiring in humans that needs to be stimulated by the environment. Since language is the means through which social interaction and accomplishment occur (Atkinson 2002), it is logical to consider language acquisition from a social perspective.

'Language never occurs apart from a rich set of situational/sociocultural/historical/existential correlates, and to separate it out artificially is to denature it' (Atkinson 2002, p.527). Separate language from its social context, which makes it meaningful, and the result is ineffective or incomplete learning.

Even from a very young age, in the early language acquisition stage, parents and siblings interact closely with the child and 'language acquisition... takes place in the context of a rich interaction' (Villiers & Villiers 1979, p.98). The case of Genie demonstrates the importance of the need for social support in the acquisition of language. During the thirteen years Genie was deprived of cues from the environment she had no knowledge of language though biologically she had the apparatus to produce speech. Indeed, the environment appears to stimulate infants to acquire language. Locke (1993) found infants to be drawn to recurring interactive actions. Atkinson (2002) also points out that according to a discovery made by Barrett (1995) there is a tendency for infants to connect specific vocabulary with what exists or has occurred in their physical surrounding. A social context is needed to make

language meaningful to the one acquiring it (Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1991) and this is especially true of the acquisition of higher order language skills (Atkinson 2002; Villiers & Villiers 1979). What is true for infants may well be true for older children as well since even in the study of adult learners, it was found that social and cultural contexts play a key role in enhancing the learning of a language (Alfred 2003; Caffarella & Merriam 2000).

Firth and Wagner (1997) argue that any theory that focuses on only the natural intellect of an individual without also taking into account the social effects on the learning of language makes that theory lopsided. Infants learn from their caregivers and when they reach school-going age, the teaching role is taken over by teachers and peers in a school setting.

In research conducted by Bardovi-Harlig (2000) it was found that formal instruction along with social interaction in a school setting have an impact on the learning of a language. The social interaction can be between a competent user of the language and a beginner, whether it is between a student and a teacher or a second language learner and a native speaker. When comparing uninstructed and instructed learners, it was found that 'all the tutored learners in the European study entered the morphological stage of development, whereas only some of the untutored learners did' (Bardovi-Harlig 2000, p.404). Moreover, differences in the rate and degree of acquisition of the language among the learners, whether tutored or untutored, indicate that there are multiple factors involved in the successful acquisition of the language. Apart from the variability in the mode of instruction, the following factors also played an important role in the progress of the learners: motivation to learn and the frequency of interaction with competent speakers (Bardovi-Harlig 2000).

Through intermingling with parents and other adults and through interacting in classrooms and playgrounds with teachers, peers and other humans, children are learning how to communicate in their everyday interaction. Language acquisition goes on through life and, much, including syntax, can be learnt through social interaction. Indeed, it seems the critical stage when learning of

a language is thought to be difficult relates to the articulation of words rather than to grammar or vocabulary (Villiers & Villiers 1979). Instruction and immersion into the company of competent speakers seem to aid all language learners to achieve competence in the acquisition of higher-order language skills.

If direct instruction and interaction are needed for students to achieve language competence, then an English curriculum that includes explicit teaching of skills and the application of these skills through interaction may enable students to better internalise the learning. It is the contention of this research that the proposed Literature-Driven English Programme (LDEP) would be effective in this respect. The LDEP encouraged the use of explicit and implicit teaching of writing and reading comprehension skills and grammar through active interactions and through the contextual discussions on the literature text. Thus, the purpose of this thesis was to discover the answer to the main research question, namely, would an integrated English language and literature curriculum enhance the English Language skills of the students?

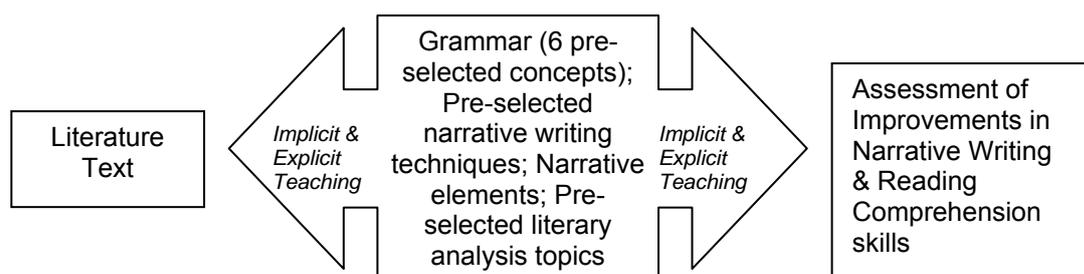
The Structure of the Literature-Driven English Programme

In this and subsequent sections, the Literature-Driven English Programme (LDEP) is discussed from two perspectives, namely the LDEP as a concept and the LDEP as the implemented programme. The LDEP as a concept is treated in the present tense whereas the LDEP as the implemented programme is discussed in the past tense.

The LDEP involves using a literature text as a tool to teach skills and concepts. Additionally, the LDEP includes linking the analysis of a literature text with the teaching of skills and concepts. For the research, a literature text was utilised to instruct the students on narrative writing techniques and selected grammar concepts that aided in the teaching of these techniques. In the LDEP, a literature text thus becomes the model through which the effective use of language, writing techniques and the elements of specific writing genres are highlighted to the students. Through highlighting instances

of effective narrative writing skills, students may emulate the author of the literature text when they produce their narratives. Moreover, through the analysis of the text and teaching of specific writing techniques, the students may also display improvement in reading comprehension. In teaching these skills and techniques, explicit and implicit forms of instruction are employed.

Figure 2.2: Brief Outline of the LDEP and the Assessed Outcomes



With regard to the research, the literature texts were selected by the schools and selected grammar concepts and narrative writing techniques were taught using these literature texts. As Figure 2.2 illustrates, the literature texts were utilised to explicitly and implicitly instruct the Secondary One students of different abilities, from the four secondary schools, on pre-selected topics and techniques. The anticipated outcomes at the end of the programme were improved narrative writing and reading comprehension skills which were assessed through test instruments with the aid of standardised rubrics and answers. The Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) English grades of the students were used as indicators of their abilities and there were students with Grade A* (the highest grade) to the lowest Grade C. These particular outcomes were chosen because students in most secondary schools in Singapore are taught writing and reading comprehension skills. These skills would ultimately be tested four or five years later in the Cambridge General Certificate of Examination at Ordinary Level (G.C.E 'O' Level). Some time is also devoted to oral communication skills since the English examination in the G.C.E 'O' Level includes an oral component. A more detailed discussion of the methods and instruments employed for the research and the types and sources of data collected is included in Chapter 3.

The goal of the LDEP was to enhance narrative writing, reading comprehension and oral communication skills. Grammar was also taught as it was felt that knowledge of grammatical rules would aid in the improvement of writing and reading comprehension skills. In Secondary One, students are usually taught narrative writing skills. As such, improving narrative writing skills was one of the targeted outcomes of the programme. Literature is also taught for the first time in Secondary One. Therefore, basic appreciation of literary analysis was also introduced, in addition to selecting topics for analysis that would enhance narrative writing and reading comprehension skills. Narrative writing and reading comprehension skills of the Secondary One students in the experimental group which underwent the programme and the control group which followed the usual English and Literature curricula of their respective schools were assessed through test instruments. However, due to the short span of the research, the oral communication skill of the students was not assessed while their literary analytical skill was evaluated through the feedback received from teachers and students.

What is relevant for Singapore could be relevant for other countries. There are many countries like Singapore with populations of diverse linguistic backgrounds attempting to learn the English Language. Thus, Singapore presents a fertile testing ground for the LDEP in terms of the impact of language ability on the success or failure of the programme. The educational system in Singapore includes students from different linguistic backgrounds. Though the ethnic diversity of Singapore is categorised into three main ethnic groups and “Others”, the diversity within each ethnic group, particularly among the Chinese and the Indians, is wide. The Chinese form 76.8%, the Malays 13.9%, the Indians 7.9% and Others, comprising the remaining ethnic groups, 1.4% of the total population (Census of Population Office 2000). However, this classification into four main categories masks ‘the highly complex and heterogeneous linguistic heterogeneity within each ethnic group’ (Kramer-Dahl 2003, p.162). Among this diverse population, some students come from an English-speaking background and their English language ability is more advanced than those who come from homes where the main language spoken is a language other than English (c.f. pp.4–5). Additionally,

the school system of Singapore includes new migrants from countries such as China, where exposure to the English language is minimal for many of these immigrants. The impact of the LDEP on students of different abilities could have implications for the teaching of English language skills to students who include those who are fluent or weak in the English Language.

Before going into the different elements of the LDEP, it might be pertinent to consider the work on *Dialogic Imagination* by Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1981). There are some parallels between the philosophy of literacy formation espoused by Bakhtin and the LDEP. 'Bakhtin presents grammar and language as a lesson in the *construction* of language [italicised by Godley] and meaning rather than avoidance of error by asking his students to apply the grammatical concepts they are learning through literature to their own writing' (Godley 2004, p.55). Godley (2004) states that in the domain of English language teaching, many have called for the implementation of the approach formulated by Bakhtin to the teaching of grammar in English language classrooms. Green (2002) has also suggested that such language instruction be attempted in Australia.

One of the aims of the research on the LDEP was to discover if a dialogic mode of teaching grammar would be successful in improving the language skills of students. In the programme, grammar was taught in context through the literature text. Additionally, during the LDEP, the literature text was used as a model to demonstrate how words, grammar, narrative writing techniques influence meaning and stimulate responses in the reader. The students, through understanding the meaning-making conventions in a narrative, were then asked to create narratives by utilising what they had learnt.

In designing the LDEP, a number of factors are considered. The first factor is the use of literature as a tool to teach writing and reading comprehension skills as well as grammatical concepts. The second factor relates to using the contextual cues found in the literature text to make the learning more relevant and authentic. The third factor pertains to the methods used to teach the skills and concepts; these methods include explicit and implicit forms of instruction. The explicit teaching ensures that the students are presented with

the necessary information from which they could draw when applying the skills and concepts learnt. The implicit teaching method may stimulate intrinsic interest in the learner to achieve. The intrinsic interest could be aroused by not only making the learning relevant to the learner but also by ensuring that the learning is an active one (Daiker, Kerek & Morenberg 1990; Patterson 1977; Shafer 2001). By being an active learner, the student might better internalise the learning which could leave a lasting impression on the learner. As such, the students are expected to actively participate in the lessons through the inclusion of activities that require them to apply the skills and concepts learnt. The fourth factor includes learner preferences, with particular reference to gender preferences. Diverse kinds of activities are included to cater to the diverse needs of students with different learner preferences. The fifth factor considers the value of social interaction by including group work.

Literature as a Tool for Cognitive and Language Development

In the Singapore *Straits Times*, Davie (2003) reported that with the decline in the standard of English there was also a drop in the number of students sitting for the literature paper for the G.C.E 'O' Level. Within eight years, the percentage of students sitting for the paper fell from fifty to a mere twenty-five and in 2001, only four percent of the students took the literature paper for the G.C.E at Normal Level (Davie 2003). In the same report, many teachers commented that 'English literature students had a sound command of the language and expressed themselves well' (Davie 2003). It would be simplistic to say that the drop in the number of students taking Literature can be attributed to the decline in the standard of English. There are other variables (such as different modes of teaching the language) to consider but one may well ask why Literature students are perceived to display a better command of the language (Davie 2003). Is there a link between the interest in reading and literary analysis displayed by the Literature students and better command of the language? It is probable that the text may demonstrate to students the practical manner in which effective communicative devices could be employed; the text thus becomes a model which the students could emulate.

Indeed, if there is a link between learning Literature and improved English Language skills, the LDEP might be one strategic approach to arrest the perceived decline in the standard of English in Singapore (c.f. p.19).

The LDEP incorporates some aspects of the dialogic approach of Bakhtin, a Russian researcher, in teaching language skills (c.f. p.31). According to Godley, in the research conducted by Bakhtin the 'curricular materials came from Russian Literature rather than grammar or language textbooks' (Godley 2004, p.55). Bakhtin (1986) discovered that the language skills of his students improved when Russian literature texts were utilised to teach Russian grammar. What may work for the teaching of Russian Language through the use of Russian literature texts could well work in the teaching of the English Language using English literature texts. In the LDEP, the curricular materials also came from the literature texts selected by the schools. The students were taught language skills and grammatical concepts solely through the use of literature texts.

In utilising the literature text as a tool to teach language skills it is important to consider the inherent merits of the text in imparting the skills. The text has to be a good model of language usage and the genre being taught. Additionally, the text should be appropriate for the age of the students and be of interest to these students (Raphael, Florio-Ruane & George 2004). In the current research the schools selected the literature texts and due to time constraints there was no discussion between the researcher and the schools on what type of books to select for the programme. Therefore, when the research findings are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, references are made to the possible limitations of the texts selected.

Though not assessed during the research due to limitations of time offered by the schools, another potential advantage of the LDEP is that it could allow for multi-dimensional learning to occur. The LDEP, through involving students in the analysis of the literature text, may inspire creativity through lateral thinking whereby a person looks at problem as a conflict, and searches for several alternative solutions. Even the least likely alternative is carefully considered

for there may lie the best solution to the problem (De Bono 1995). Literary analysis involves the study of conflicts to arrive at an understanding of several possible alternative interpretations. The activities during the LDEP involved exploring the themes, conflicts and character traits, among others, in the literature text. Students were encouraged to explore the issues and arrive at conclusions and judgements as a class, in smaller groups and individually.

Through the analysis of the literature text, students may be guided to return to what Samples refers to as the 'metaphoric mind' (1976, p.19) after centuries of its subjugation by our infatuation with the rational mind. According to Samples, the brain houses two different functions, the left side of the brain accommodating 'the organizing, logical, "conforming" qualities... [while] the right... is the residence of the metaphoric mind' (1976, pp.18-19). Aside from being in touch with the senses, the metaphoric mind is the inventive side of the brain that confronts existing knowledge so that new knowledge can be created. Additionally, the metaphoric mind does not see parts in isolation, but rather searches for their connection with the greater whole (Samples 1976). Likewise, during the LDEP, the students not only dealt with what they found in the literature text, but they used the knowledge they had gained from the text to create their own narrative pieces.

An additional benefit could be that stereotypes which arise in young minds may be reduced in secondary school when they start to learn Literature. According to Gardner, there is a need to 'revise the misconceptions and stereotypes that reliably arise all around the world in the first half decade of life' (Gardner 1993, p.111). Through a literature text, the secondary school students could be taught to experiment with different perceptions, come up with various ideas and at the same time, tackle their own biases.

When students confront their prejudices, their own characters might mature as well. According to Walsh (1966), the development of cognition that does not take into account morality is inadequate. A lack of a sense of morality leads to an impoverished mind that leaves the emotional side underdeveloped. A holistic view of education is needed and the 'American or

Pragmatic view of life and education' does not meet the demands of society for though it 'has greatly enlivened the method of education, making it active and exciting, [it] has in turn vulgarized the notion of character' (Walsh 1966, p.189). Literature texts, which study the human condition, may trigger debates that could set students thinking about various societal issues, and how the actions of an individual could affect the lives of others.

The fictional works may also stimulate the students to think about their obligations and responsibilities as citizens of their country and the world.

Walsh commented that

literature embodies in itself and provokes in us a free and open consciousness. It is the full, articulate intelligence, the impassioned mind, neither driven by the force of unenlightened emotion, nor dry and abstract and subject to the tyranny of syllogism (1966, p.213).

Indeed, if such learning takes place, then society and individuals will benefit from the fact that students are able to interact with others in a more responsible and sensitive manner. It must be noted that the multi-dimensional learning objective is outside the purview of the research objectives. However, reference is made here to multi-dimensional learning because there is a likelihood of such learning taking place through the use of the literature text to teach analytical and language skills during the LDEP.

It is contended that the teaching of English and Literature as two separate components could be regarded as an artificial distinction. A synthesis between English and Literature may result in a natural reunion that could produce a vital balance between the rational and metaphoric functions of the brain. Thus, the integration of English and Literature may lead to a holistic intellectual development in students that would enable the students to understand themselves, the world and their relationships with the world. Additionally, Literature may also aid in improving the language skills of students. In summary, this research is conducted in the context of the teaching of English and Literature in the Singapore school system to discover if the integrated teaching of English and Literature would enable students to develop their cognitive and language faculties.

Literature and Reading Comprehension, Writing and Oral Communication

In the LDEP the literature text is utilised to teach reading comprehension and writing skills. There are also opportunities for students to develop their oral communication skills during group and individual presentations.

Through analysis of the literature text, it is hoped that the students would develop their reading comprehension skills. By examining the language and content in the literature text, the students may arrive at a greater insight into the text than if they were to only study the content of the text. During the LDEP, the students are guided in 'understanding authorship, [thereby]... sort[ing] out what reading is all about through writing' (De Ford 1981, p.657). Langer and Flihan (2000) argue for enhancing language development through the learning of Literature and classroom interactions. Langer goes so far as to state that literature classes may lead the students into constructing 'more individually rich, but never singular interpretations' (1999, p.10).

In the very act of textual interpretation there are occasions for critical thinking or 'reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do' (Ennis 1987, p.10). For instance, when one reads a literature text, one is struck by multiple conflicts that might elicit varying responses from different readers. Thus, a class discussion could lead to 'the formation of responses [in individual students] and the selection among possible responses' (Solso 1991, p.440). During the LDEP, the literature text is used to stimulate the creation of meaning through communal inquiry (Lipman 1991) when the students participate in small group and class discussions. Indeed, through communal inquiry, students may be guided to better comprehend a piece of writing, thereby becoming good readers who can understand and interpret a text well.

The LDEP provides students with opportunities to interact with the literature text in meaningful ways and to discover different ways of looking at a problem. These opportunities may provoke new ideas so that the cognitive activities

that take place when one is reading would lead to the mind engaging in pleasurable resourceful endeavours (Gold 1988). A possible outcome of these endeavours could be better reading comprehension skills resulting from interacting with literature texts that are relevant to the age and stimulating (Raphael et al 2004).

Effective users of language skills are those who can competently read as well as effectively communicate their ideas or perceptions in written form to others. The LDEP facilitates the use of the literature text as a tool to teach students writing techniques. Some researchers argue that there is a strong correlation between reading and writing. In studies carried out on the reading and writing habits of students, the findings point to a strong correlation between reading and writing (De Ford 1981; Wittrock 1983) and it has been found that one who reads well also writes well (Chall & Jacobs 1983; Stotsky 1983).

One of the reasons good readers may also be good writers could be due to the readers implicitly learning writing techniques from the author of the text while reading. It is argued that there is an interconnectedness as well as interaction between reading and writing. Often, reading and writing, which are so inter-linked that they are really 'one kind of literate skill..., [are taught] as if they are exclusively individual cognitive skills' (Yagelski 1994, p.31). The LDEP aims to correct the artificial split between reading and writing and merge these two inter-related disciplines. During the LDEP the students are guided through their own writing process as they read the literature text. The students are directed to read from the perspective of an author as recommended by Langer and Flihan (2000) and Smith (1983) so as to analyse the thinking and writing processes of the author who is trying to express an idea or narrative. The students then become apprentices to the writer of the literature text who is after all a skilful practitioner of the language.

In teaching students how to write effectively, reading published works or the works of other students could greatly aid the students to internalise the mechanics of the language better. Knoeller has published poems for over two decades and through practice he has discovered that as a writer he finds

inspiration in reading. It is a practice that he calls 'reading as a writer' (Knoeller 2003, p.42). From the experience of Knoeller as a poet, it becomes apparent that works by other writers have aided in his development as a writer. Just as a professional writer draws on the expertise of other expert writers, so too can young learners learn from the techniques employed by authors of literature texts. Teachers can facilitate the conversion of students into apprentices to the authors of the literature texts.

Apprenticeship is an old concept, one that has been in use since ancient times in many cultures. Apprenticeship offers the learner the opportunity to learn through observation from an expert in the field of study. Thus, 'imaginative writing, such as poetry and fiction, can serve an important role in helping students understand literary forms and styles' (Marcus 1977, p.373). Through understanding different forms, the students could then attempt to imitate the various forms, before discovering their individual styles to create their own compositions. This form of apprenticeship learning during the LDEP also includes explicit instruction on techniques that cannot be observed or are trade secrets (Gardner 1993). Since it is neither commonplace nor practical for most schools to employ an author to teach writing, the literature text could take on the role of the expert and the explicit instruction could be provided by a teacher who is schooled in the genres and techniques of writing.

Oral expression is as important as written language for, as social beings, humans spend much time interacting and communicating orally. Oral competency is, therefore, an essential life-skill. As Fox (1998) argues, one who routinely applies oral language may be able to respond rationally rather than resort to a sentimental reaction.

One way in which oral expression could be stimulated is through the reading of a literature text. Literature of different genres exposes the students to a world of novel ideas revealed in a language and manner that are effective forms of communication. The literature might then influence 'the child's own internal thought and oral communication' (Fox 1998, p.146). Walsh concurs by stating that these lasting works of Literature are a legacy left behind by the

'most gifted minds [which]... offer us standards by which we may judge the incompleteness and the poverty of our own knowledge... [and] the means to emulate them' (1966, p.133). These standards afford students the opportunity to add to or refine their store of ideas before expressing themselves through oral communication. Though oral expression was not evaluated during the programme due to lack of human resource and time constraints, during the LDEP students were required to present their work orally as well as in written form.

Literature was utilised in the LDEP to enhance writing, oral communication and reading comprehension skills. The Literature text as a model of effective communication of ideas became a tool to enhance comprehension skills and teach students to express themselves in written and oral forms.

Literature and Grammar

The teaching of grammar has, in recent years, fallen into disfavour, especially in the United States (Mulroy 2004; Vavra 2003). Mulroy (2004) rather humorously writes of the consequences of the war waged against the teaching of grammar by the American National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). In his opinion the campaign by NCTE against the teaching of grammar has led to what he refers to as a 'higher illiteracy' (Mulroy 2004, p.54). According to him, '[h]ere then is a second element in higher illiteracy. Its victims are not only ignorant of how to analyse complex meanings; they are ignorant of their ignorance' (Mulroy 2004, p.54). He goes on to write about the inadequate reading comprehension skills of his university students due to their lack of knowledge of the grammatical structures.

Researchers have argued against the traditional mode of teaching prescriptive grammar, writing that it simply does not have any value in advancing the language skills of the students (Bailey 1997; Braddock, Lloyd-Jones & Schoer 1965; Cox 1995; Hartwell 1985; Hillocks & Smith 1991; Shuster 1999). However, the question may not lie in whether grammar should be taught at all but in how it should be taught. While there is much literature

on what might not work in the teaching of grammar, little attention has been given to the issue of what form of instruction might work (Kolln 1991; Weaver 1996). In attempting to determine the form of instruction the teaching of grammar should assume, it might be relevant to explore the discovery made by Harris (1962). When just one component of the language, grammar, was examined, Harris (1962) found that studying grammatical conventions contextually was more useful than studying formal grammar.

Bakhtin (1986) approached grammar instruction by accepting that 'language is not artificially separated from its communicative purposes, as it is in many grammar textbooks, but is instead presented as inherently dialogic' (Godley 2004, p.55). The LDEP utilises the same approach in that the students study the grammatical conventions used in the text and engage communally in their growing understanding of these conventions and through the creation of their own compositions. The LDEP, through equipping students with knowledge of language conventions, aims to enhance the language skills of the students. According to the Qualification and Curriculum Authority in London students by comprehending 'how language use and choice contribute to meaning and effect... [might become] more responsive and critical as listeners and readers' (Qualification and Curriculum Authority 1998, p.21).

When Smoot conducted an experiment in his grammar class to test the effectiveness of teaching a grammatical concept and its application through a history text, he found that they were becoming 'more discerning writers and critics' (2001, p.41). His students realised that studying the phraseology of the argument aided in the understanding of the argument itself. There appears to be complementary results from learning grammar contextually; a practical skill is learnt and the content of the piece of writing is also better understood. During the LDEP, however, the students learn more than grammar in line with the recommendations of some researchers which are incorporated into the LDEP. The LDEP is designed to make the learning goal-oriented (Barton 1998; Hagemann & Wininger 1999) with a connection being made between grammar and Literature (Marshall 2001) and linking the

learnt grammar concepts to the actual writing process (Keen 1997; Richmond 1990).

Through the LDEP, students are taught pre-selected grammatical concepts which are necessary to attain a particular outcome which in the case of the research was narrative writing skills. It is hoped that this goal-oriented contextual form of teaching grammar with an emphasis on its practical use would lead to the enhancement of language skills in the students.

Teaching Methods

Two modes of teaching, namely explicit and implicit forms of instruction, are employed in the LDEP to achieve the learning outcomes of enhancing language skills in reading comprehension and writing. The explicit mode is first used to impart pre-existing knowledge, or content, so that students could develop their language skills from an existing base or foundation. When students apply the knowledge gained through the explicit teaching, they may also learn implicitly through contextual and process-oriented approaches.

Implicit Instruction through Contextual and Process-oriented Approaches

Harp proposes that 'language is learned through use in meaningful contexts, not through talking about it or analysing it' (1991, p.4). If the different components of the language were examined, one could see that language is not made up of unrelated parts of speech or unconnected sentences.

Language consists of parts that could be constructed in meaningful ways if they are linked or brought together into a holistic unit; the parts make up the whole, and they make little sense without the whole. The literature text is the whole, and when studying it, students are actually 'examining the language of a work more closely and in greater depth' (Knoeller 2003, p.44).

According to the cognitive psychologist Tulving (1972), context plays an important role in the teaching of vocabulary since semantic memory only remembers meanings of words in terms of referents and not single episodes.

Tulving (1972) argues that when one hears a word, semantic memory does not hone in on a specific period of time when the word was used, but rather offers a general idea of it which is derived from several occasions when the word was used.

The study of semantic memory by Tulving (1972) demonstrates that the mind does not work on isolated pieces of information, but rather, like the metaphoric mind, searches the landscape of the mind for whole pieces of information and connections. However, as Solso states 'if information is not used or rehearsed, with time forgetting may occur' (1991, p.196). Students need to apply the concepts learnt so as to internalise these concepts, thereby ensuring that these concepts are not soon forgotten.

Application appears to be important. Students do not learn if they are turned into passive learners; they cannot be converted into mere receptacles into which knowledge can be poured (Daiker, Kerek & Morenberg 1990; Killgallon 1987; Shafer 2001). Students learn best or naturally if they are involved in their own learning (Shafer 2001). Killgallon (1987) and Daiker, Kerek and Morenberg (1990) have recommended that students should be allowed to test different modes of sentence constructions through hands-on activities. Only through the process of actually applying what they had learnt will the students be better able to understand the concepts learnt.

The LDEP includes activities in which the students participate so that the concepts that they are taught could be reinforced. For example, in the research, the students learnt about characters and how they influenced a narrative. A follow-up lesson required them to change the character traits of the characters in the narrative so that they could discover for themselves the effect that the change would have on the events and resolution of the narrative. The students also applied the concepts and techniques taught by creating new stories with the altered characters.

The implicit form of instruction is a fundamental aspect of the Literature-based English Curriculum. According to some researchers, a literature-based

curriculum aids in improving language skills because it is process-oriented and makes use of actual literature texts (Feeley, Strickland & Wepner 1992; Giddings 1992; Sorenson & Lehman 1995). The LDEP also incorporates this aspect of the process-oriented approach and the use of literature text into its lessons. The belief that through the application of taught concepts and skills the students would better internalise the lessons forms part of the premise on which the LDEP is based. However, the LDEP differs from the Literature-based approach in that the LDEP works on the premise that students need explicit instruction to gradually expand on their knowledge.

In supporting the implicit mode of instruction, Shafer goes so far as to state:

written language does not require explicit teaching [and this perception] is further supported by the ethnographic research of Denny Taylor in her three year study of six families. At the time of the study, each of the families Taylor observed had children who were at various stages in literacy development. Some were not yet literate in the academic sense, while the others were adults and literate professionals. For each Taylor found the acquisition and development of language to be a rather organic outgrowth of daily life (2000, p.32)

It is likely that the participants in the study conducted by Taylor came from a cultural and economic background that placed much value on the acquisition of literacy in Standard English. From a very young age, they would have received the appropriate home and environmental support to aid them in their acquisition of the language. With this support these students were probably able to make the appropriate links between the implicit teaching and the sound knowledge of the basic principles of Standard English they already possessed to advance in their acquisition of Standard English. Many students in the United States and Singapore, on the other hand, are not viewed as competent users of Standard English (Davie 2003; Frater 2004; Mulroy 2004; Vavra 2003). They may not have the necessary learning environment outside of school to acquire a strong foundation in Standard English to aid in the acquisition of Standard English through implicit teaching. For these students, an implicit mode of instruction might not be sufficient.

Explicit Instruction through Literature Texts

It is the contention of some writers that the process approach is insufficient in equipping students with the necessary language skills (Mulroy 2004; Vavra 2003). In fact, these authors believe the process approach of teaching has led to a decline in the standard of the English Language. According to Vavra (2003), the decline in the standard of English Language in the United States is evidenced by a decline in test scores in the last forty years, and the decline could be due to the focus on the teaching of English through a process-oriented approach. The process approach to learning does not take into account the fact that 'process and content, thinking and knowledge, must be brought into a worthwhile balance' (Fox 1998, p.135). In Singapore, there have been similar experiences. In a report in the *Straits Times* of Singapore, the English language educators who were interviewed felt that the standard of English had declined (Davie 2003). They attributed the decline to the fact that 'in the 1980s and 1990s... [students were] taught through activities such as discussions, language games and role play' (Davie 2003). The similar experiences of educators in the United States and Singapore suggest that learning implicitly through process alone may not be enough. In order for students to acquire a sound foundation so as to produce quality written and oral work, Fox (1998) states that content is needed before the process can guide or lead students to new discoveries.

In searching for content to teach the English Language, age-appropriate literature texts, namely the plays, novels, short stories and poems could be utilised. Literature texts could act as models, the tool through which the mechanics of the language and different writing styles could be taught. Indeed, 'imaginative writing, such as poetry and fiction... [could be used to enable students to] understand literary forms and styles' (Marcus 1977, p.373). Students could try out the different styles found in the literature texts, using them as models, before producing their own creative works.

Apart from the explicit teaching of the form, there should also be a focus on the language of the text. As Hagemann states, '[w]riters who are better able

to address the needs and expectations of their readers, in part by drawing on formal or grammatical conventions become more successful communicators' (2003, p.76). Hagemann recommends that while activities can be contextual in nature, time should also be spent to explain grammatical rules and the mechanics of language so that students are able to understand how these help in expanding their understanding of the written language. The recommendation by Hagemann appears to support the advice advanced by Braddock (1969) that students be instructed in the art of composing instead of merely being given writing exercises in the hope that they would learn from them. Besides, even in allowing students to become more reflective, they need to be given 'substantive information and sound logic' in which to develop their viewpoints (Ivie 2001, p.18).

The LDEP is designed on the premise that features of good writing, including the mechanics as well as the writing techniques of a particular genre, need to be highlighted to the students so as to enhance the learning of writing skills. This premise is in line with the recommendations offered by Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl and Linn (1994), Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas and Daley (1998) and other researchers (Derewianka 1990; Hasan 1989; Martin 1989; Rutherford & Sharwood-Smith 1985). However, the explicit teaching of the mechanics and techniques is to be conducted for no more than twenty minutes. Some researchers indicate that only a very small percentage of students would be able to listen to and absorb much from long lectures on new and difficult concepts (DePaula 2002; Honigsfeld 2000). In the LDEP, there is an expectation that the teachers would interact with the students during the lecture-style instruction so that students could be active participants. The lecture-style teaching of skills is also complemented with other modes of explicit teaching. During the research, for example, student volunteers were asked to demonstrate the different sentence types. Students with different clauses on strips of vanguard sheets (large-sized thick sheets of paper) took centre-stage while other students shifted these students around to create different types of sentences.

The LDEP works on the premise that there are merits in the arguments advanced by those who believe in the contextual process-oriented approach and those who value teaching concepts and techniques explicitly. Explicit instruction is included to present students with the necessary knowledge base. The students then apply the concepts learnt through a process approach. In conclusion, a combination of the two teaching modes is employed in the LDEP to capitalise on the advantages of both approaches so as to enhance the language skills of the students.

Another aspect of the research on the LDEP included examining learner preferences, especially different gender preferences. After examining how students may prefer to learn, a variety of activities is included in the LDEP to accommodate these different preferences. It is hoped that the different activities would stimulate a greater interest in the students to learn the language skills.

Learner Preferences, with Particular Reference to Gender Preferences to Learning

In secondary schools in Singapore class sizes are large, ranging from thirty-five to forty students in each class. Since it was not possible to measure the learning preferences of the students involved in the research it was presumed that in each of the classes with close to forty students, different kinds of learning preferences would exist. There would be some students who would prefer to work in groups while others would rather work individually. There would be those who would like to take centre-stage and present in front of the class, and yet others who would rather be left alone to sit and learn at their desks. These variations in learner preferences have to be considered to ensure that the LDEP would interest and motivate many of the students in the diverse classrooms to learn under the programme.

Researchers reveal that children in general approach learning in varied ways and gendered differences in these approaches are more noticeable than other group differences (Head 1999; Honigfeld & Dunn 2003; Jorge 1990; Marcus

1979; Yong & McIntyre 1992). According to Honigsfeld and Dunn (2003), boys tend to be more kinaesthetically-oriented but are not as self-motivated as girls. Some girls are also more diligent and are open to seeking help from peers as well as teachers (Clark & Trafford 1996; Cole 1997). The Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools & Equal Opportunities Commission (1996) claims that boys need to be involved in the process of learning and see the practical benefits before they apply themselves in any lesson. Most girls, on the other hand, are more conforming and persistent. In addition, some researchers have noted that generally boys have poor auditory skills while girls are better at listening (Head 1999; Honigsfeld & Dunn 2003). Willingham, Cole, Lewis and Leung (1997) discovered that in the performance of different tasks, boys are better at multiple-choice questions whereas girls are better at written responses.

It must be noted that the purpose of this project does not include investigating the validity of different learning preference claims. Rather, the different learning preference claims advanced by various researchers were considered with the intent to accommodate the range of learning preferences identified in these prior research undertakings. To cater to various learner preferences, the LDEP includes a variety of activities, different modes of teaching explicitly and diverse kinds of output that students are expected to produce. Students are expected to produce short written pieces in addition to extended compositions. Oral presentations, role-playing and alternative modes of expressions such as illustrations are also included in the LDEP. The LDEP includes opportunities for students to participate in group work as well as work individually. Moreover, no more than twenty minutes are to be spent on the explicit teaching of the concepts. The short duration of the explicit teaching might aid students with less well practised listening skills. These students might learn better during group work when together with their peers they apply the concepts taught explicitly. Students are also expected to produce different forms of work. For example, during the research in addition to the final narrative piece, they were given short response assignments as well as exercises that included symbolic representations instead of written work.

It is important to vary the exercises and activities because there is research to reveal that boys do not perform as well as girls in English. Since the LDEP is an English Language programme, it is essential to include different activities and exercises so as accommodate the various learning preferences of the boys and girls. The absence of differentiated teaching to cater to the differing interests and modes of learning might account for the boys lagging behind the girls in literacy or English (Hawkes 2001; Head 1999; Noble, Brown & Murphy 2001; Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools & Equal Opportunities Commission 1996). The lower achievement of boys in English may be one of the reasons why 'secondary age boys tend to have more negative attitudes towards reading and writing than girls' (Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools & Equal Opportunities Commission 1996, p.16).

In England, Australia and Hong Kong, the test scores of boys lag far behind girls in English. According to an English report published by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in 1996, 'girls out-perform boys at ages 7, 11, and 14 in the National Curriculum assessments in England' (Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools & Equal Opportunities Commission 1996, p.6). In Australia, 'twice as many boys as girls were represented in the lowest ability groups in literacy across all socio-economic groups' (Hawkes 2001, p.105). In the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, completed by students at the end of secondary school, girls outperformed boys in English as well as other subjects except Mathematics (Wong, Lam & Ho 2002).

One of the reasons cited by Head (1999) for the general lack of achievement in English displayed by the boys is the change in the cultural and educational climate. Feminism created a vacuum for the boys when women became the focus of study. Additionally, since boys experience 'difficulty with the affective aspects of English' (Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools & Equal Opportunities Commission 1996, p.16) when these affective aspects become topics of discussion during English lessons these lessons became difficult for the boys (Head 1999).

There is also research to implicate factors other than gender differences for differing learning styles of students. Researchers have claimed that changing social climate could account for a change in preferences as well. According to Honigsfeld and Dunn (2003), boys today are less compliant to authority figure and prefer working in groups. However, about twenty years ago, in the United States male students were more teacher-motivated and would rather work individually than in groups (Marcus 1979), indicating that there is a likelihood that 'learning-style preferences change over time' (Dunn & Griggs 1995, p.197).

Cultural differences may also play a role in the learning preferences of boys and girls. 'Discrepancies between (a) overall and country-specific findings and (b) results of previous and current research may suggest that cultural differences affected the learning-style preferences of the two genders or that individual differences within each group weighted the results' (Honigsfeld & Dunn 2003, p.204).

There are contradictions between the findings of some researchers. These contradictions may arise from differences in context, ability and approach of the researchers and their samples. According to Yong and McIntyre (1992), males were found to be more attracted to learning approaches that encouraged movement and active learning than females. Honigsfeld and Dunn (2003) go so far as to claim that girls prefer working alone whereas boys like interacting and learning from their peers. However, Holden (2002) discovered that active learning was enjoyed by both boys and girls.

According to some researchers where there are variations in learning preferences, differences in achievement may have an impact. Among high-achievers, both boys and girls enjoy reading and writing. Low-achieving boys and girls do not view reading and writing as pleasurable activities. However, boys display a less positive attitude towards reading because unlike underachieving girls, underachieving boys are less 'compliant and do not concentrate if the subject does not engage their interest' (Holden 2002, p.107). It is probable that more boys than girls are represented among the

low achievers (Hawkes 2001) because low achieving girls are more compliant and attentive than boys even when the subject is not interesting. Another research that mentions similarities between the reading preferences of boys and girls claims that there is a convergence of reading preferences with many boys and girls preferring to read horror and fantasy stories. While more boys than girls like reading non-fiction, too few of the boys enjoy non-fiction to suggest 'a strong fact/fiction divide on gender grounds' (Holden 2002, p.105). Indeed, in the area of English learning, Myhill (1999) found more similarities than differences between the genders.

There may be divergent views and findings about learning preferences and gender, but evidence reveals that there are various ways in which different students are stimulated and motivated to learn. There could even be more than one way in which a particular child learns. In research conducted on older students in a community college in the United States, it was discovered that students adapted their learning styles to the subject being taught (Jones, Reichard & Mokhtari 2003). It has been claimed that students employ different learning modes according to the demands of a particular subject or task (Cornett 1983; Entwistle 1981; Kolb 1984; Sims & Sims 1995). Students are 'most likely to prefer learning through active experimentation when learning science... [and] concrete experience mode' when learning English and Social Studies' (Jones, Reichard & Mokhtari 2003, p.369).

There are different learning preferences and whether these preferences are based on gender or not, a teaching approach that offers a combination of methods is needed to cater to a diverse student population. By adapting the teaching approach to suit the learning preferences of different students, most children, boys and girls, may be motivated to learn in an English Language classroom. According to Darling-Hammond (2000), successful teachers are those who make use of a wide repertoire of teaching strategies. When designing the LDEP, the need for active participation and a variety of activities and assignments was recognised. The assignments include tasks requiring short responses as well as extended written pieces from the students. For the final assignment, an extended piece of writing, the students are also given the

option to make use of computer technology to aid students who may prefer typing on a computer rather than writing a lengthy composition. In addition, activities included in the lessons for discussion give students the option to express themselves from a personal or broad perspective. Though it was felt that the literature text should be appealing to the children as well as 'thought-provoking and age-appropriate' (Raphael, Florio-Ruane & George 2004, p.199), due to time constraints, the researcher could not discuss the choice of books with the schools. As such, the researcher designed the curriculum based on the texts that the schools had already chosen for the 2004 academic year.

To meet its desired outcomes, the design of any curriculum must accommodate anticipated differences in the learning preferences of the students. Therefore, a curriculum that is broad enough to give students options when completing assignments or include various teaching methods may reach a wider student population. By catering to the different learning preferences of a diverse student population, it is hoped that the students would be encouraged and motivated to learn.

Conclusion

Children acquire language in many ways. The intent of the research on the LDEP was to discover if the LDEP would prove to be an effective mode through which the writing and reading comprehension skills of early adolescents are enhanced. In designing the curriculum for the LDEP various factors were considered. These factors included the manner in which the learning of language is transmitted, environmental influences, and the active and practical use of communicative language with the literature text as a model of that communicative language. Additionally, the use of explicit forms of instruction and the process of applying the concepts taught explicitly in purposeful endeavours were also considered. Research into different learner preferences, with particular reference to variations due to gender, was also examined.

In considering the various theories on language acquisition, socio-cognitive theory proposed by Atkinson (2002) was adopted in preference to the theories advanced by Bloomfield (1933) and Chomsky (1965). In designing the LDEP it was accepted that the innate capacity of the students to learn language has to be supported in a number of ways. There has to be classroom interaction with the teacher and other students and students should have the opportunity to participate orally, in written form and through reading in the communicative process of acquiring and utilising language.

Another factor considered was the utility of the literature text in transmitting language skills. The benefit of having the literature text studied as a model of communicative language in advancing writing, reading comprehension and oral communication skills and in teaching grammar was studied. In reviewing the structure that the LDEP should adopt, the research that Bakhtin (1986) conducted on a curriculum he implemented through which he taught students Russian language skills through the use of Russian Literature texts was reviewed. According to Green (2002) 'for Bakhtin, the novel (or "novelness", as he put it) represented a particularly rich "language laboratory" '. Green continues by advocating the use of the idea of a language laboratory in English Language classrooms. In the English-speaking world, 'despite the fact that the field has seen many calls for grammar instruction that is dialogic in nature, such instruction has not yet been studied systematically in classroom contexts' (Godley 2004, p.56). The research on the LDEP included such a study on the use of the literature text as a "language laboratory". During the LDEP, the literature text became the specimen that was dissected and examined by the teacher and students in each of the experimental classes so as to enhance the learning of selected English Language skills. The close study was performed not so as to deconstruct the text, rather, the features of the text were studied in parts and then, as part of a holistic narrative unit.

There are researchers advocating the advantages in teaching explicitly (Daiker et al 1990; Killgallon 1987; Shafer 2001) and through a process-oriented approach during which students learn through application of skills

(Fox 1998; Ivie 2001; Marcus 1977). Since there are benefits in instructing students explicitly and implicitly, these two approaches to teaching were adopted for the LDEP. During the review of the research on the learning preferences of the students it became apparent that there are individual and gender differences (Head 1999; Hawkes 2001; Holden 2003; Honigsfeld & Dunn 2003; Jorge 1990; Marcus 1979; Yong & McIntyre 1992). To accommodate the differences in learning preferences, different kinds of activities and explicit teaching approaches were included in the LDEP.

The possible benefits of integrating two subjects, English and Literature, which are taught separately in most schools in Singapore, were also explored. Walsh states that 'intelligence... is intimate with feeling, feeling with sensibility, and sensibility with language' (1966, p.49). There is a direct link between our cognitive faculty and our senses, and both merge and find an outlet in language. However, the current mode of teaching English and Literature as separate, non-integrated units in most schools in Singapore does not allow for a holistic expression that combines the metaphoric and rational parts of the mind. Through bridging the artificial divide that currently exists between English and Literature the LDEP may lead to a natural merging of the two inter-connected disciplines.

By testing the LDEP in classrooms in Singapore this research hopes to discover the effectiveness of the LDEP in improving writing and reading comprehension skills through utilising literature texts as tools. The LDEP also employs explicit and implicit modes of instruction and incorporates different kinds of activities and instructional methods to cater to the differing learning preferences of students of varying abilities.

In the next chapter, the methodology and methods employed during the research are explained. The different kinds and sources of data and the triangulation of methods and measures used during the research are also stated. Additionally, the ethical considerations that were utilised during the course of the research are described in detail.