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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 5

The Qualitative Findings and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter the qualitative findings are reported and discussed. The quantitative data of the mixed methodology were presented and discussed in Chapter 4. The next Chapter 6 integrates the findings and discussions from Chapters 4 and 5 so as to develop in a substantial manner the outcome of the LDEP as a whole.

The qualitative data presented in this chapter consist of feedback from:

- Interviews with teachers who taught under the Literature Driven English Programme (LDEP) before the implementation of the LDEP and at the conclusion of the programme,
- Small group interviews with students from the experimental classes,
- Log book entries completed by teachers who taught under the LDEP, and
- Field and observational notes of the researcher.

During the course of the field research, teachers who taught under the experimental programme were interviewed in order to obtain their professional responses to the experimental programme. These professional responses included the perceptions of the teachers about the programme based on: their pedagogical knowledge; observations of their classes; evaluation of the performances in writing, reading and literary analysis of their students through class work and assessments, and through their interactions with their students. Teachers, in each of the four schools, were interviewed as a small group before the implementation of the LDEP. At the end of the LDEP, most of the teachers were interviewed individually. In two schools, due to time constraints, four teachers were interviewed in pairs at the conclusion of the programme.

Teachers were also supplied with log books. The teachers were encouraged to enter in these log books their reflections on the lessons and the reactions of the students to these lessons during the programme. At the end of the programme, six teachers returned these log books to the researcher. The students were also interviewed at the conclusion of the programme. On average, seven students from each of the seventeen experimental classes were interviewed as a small group. Each of the seventeen experimental classes was also observed twice over the course of the field research. In addition, field notes were taken during the course of, and after, the programme during informal sessions with the teachers. Table 5.1 displays the qualitative data collected for analysis.

Table 5.1: Qualitative Data Collected from the Experimental Group

	Qualitative Data	No. of Teachers/Students	No. of Classes
Interviews	Teachers – Pre-LDEP	12	17
	Teachers – Post-LDEP	11	
	Students – Small Groups	119	
Log Books	Teachers	6	—
Observations	Classes		17x2*

*Each class was observed twice.

The qualitative data were collected from the students from the experimental classes and teachers who taught under the LDEP. Qualitative data were not collected from the control group of classes or teachers since the intent in collecting the qualitative data was to gain an enhanced understanding of the LDEP from the teachers and students who had undergone the programme. Although thirteen teachers taught the experimental curriculum, twelve and eleven teachers were interviewed before and after the programme respectively (Table 5.1). In School 1, the Literature teacher who taught during the second phase of the implementation declined to be interviewed, provide any feedback or have her classes observed during her teaching. The classes were, however, observed during the English lessons. In addition, due to time constraints, another teacher in School 1 could not be interviewed after the programme ended. She, however, was interviewed before the implementation of the programme. She also gave feedback on the LDEP during informal meetings. In addition, though few log

books were returned (Table 5.1), during informal sessions feedback about the programme was solicited and received from most of the teachers. The feedback was included in the field notes which informed the findings presented in this chapter.

The transcriptions of the interviews were coded with the aid of QSR Nud*ist™ Version 6 (N6) (Richards 2002). The data from the log book entries and field notes were coded through conceptual analysis. The codes were derived by establishing categories from the feedback given by the teachers on the LDEP (c.f. pp.82-83). These categories were established so as to answer the research questions pertaining to the effectiveness of an integrated English and Literature programme in enhancing the language skills of the students. The transcripts of the interviews were transferred into N6 and relevant selections coded (Richards 2002) according to the established categories. From the codes, data were retrieved for the presentation and discussion of the findings in this chapter.

In this chapter, the findings and discussion of these findings from the interviews with teachers and their log book entries are presented so as to gain insights into the LDEP. First, their opinions regarding the teaching of the LDEP are valuable in discovering the benefits and difficulties of teaching under the programme. It is also important to assess the value of the programme by asking the teachers whether they felt learning had taken place. Finally, they were asked to offer recommendations on how the LDEP could be enhanced.

Seventeen experimental classes experienced the LDEP. However, three classes from School 1 were excluded from the quantitative analysis for a number of reasons. The pre-test and post-test scores of writing and reading comprehension assessments of two of the classes, Classes 3 and 8, and all quantitative data from Class 9 were excluded from the analysis. With regard to the writing assessment there was a discrepancy between the scores of the students from Classes 3 and 8 and other students whose scripts were marked

again (c.f. p.106-107). The writing skills pre-test and post-test scripts of Classes 3 and 8 were not returned to the researcher for the scripts to be marked again. The reading comprehension pre-test and post-test scores of all Express students from School 1, including those of Classes 3 and 8 were excluded (c.f. pp.143-145). These data were excluded because there may be possible inconsistencies in the marking and defect in the test instrumentation and not due to a lack of reliability of feedback supplied by the students. Thus, the survey responses and the qualitative data of Classes 3 and 8 were included in the analysis as there were no valid reasons to exclude the data. The feedback from the students, English teachers and the data from the observation of their classes offered a greater diversity to the insights gained about the programme, thereby enhancing the findings from the other classes.

With regard to Class 9 all quantitative data, including data from the surveys, were excluded due to the data being deemed unreliable because of discrepancies in the information provided by the school and by the students in the survey (c.f. p.101). However, the qualitative data were examined because qualitative data presents a number of advantages not found in quantitative data. The personal interaction of the researcher with the participants and stakeholders during the collection of the qualitative data affords the researcher with the opportunity to ascertain the value of the data. On the other hand, even a slight suspicion of the quantitative data being unreliable would be adequate reason to exclude them since there are no other avenues of checking the veracity of the data. Through obtaining data from the interview with the teacher and the observations of the class it would be possible to obtain valuable information about the students in the class. In a face-to-face small group interview the students might contribute frank and honest feedback. While the opposite could also be true in that the students may not be forthcoming with their feedback in front of their peers, the possibility of obtaining accurate information that might be helpful in understanding the class was a strong consideration that led to the inclusion of the interview data from the small group.

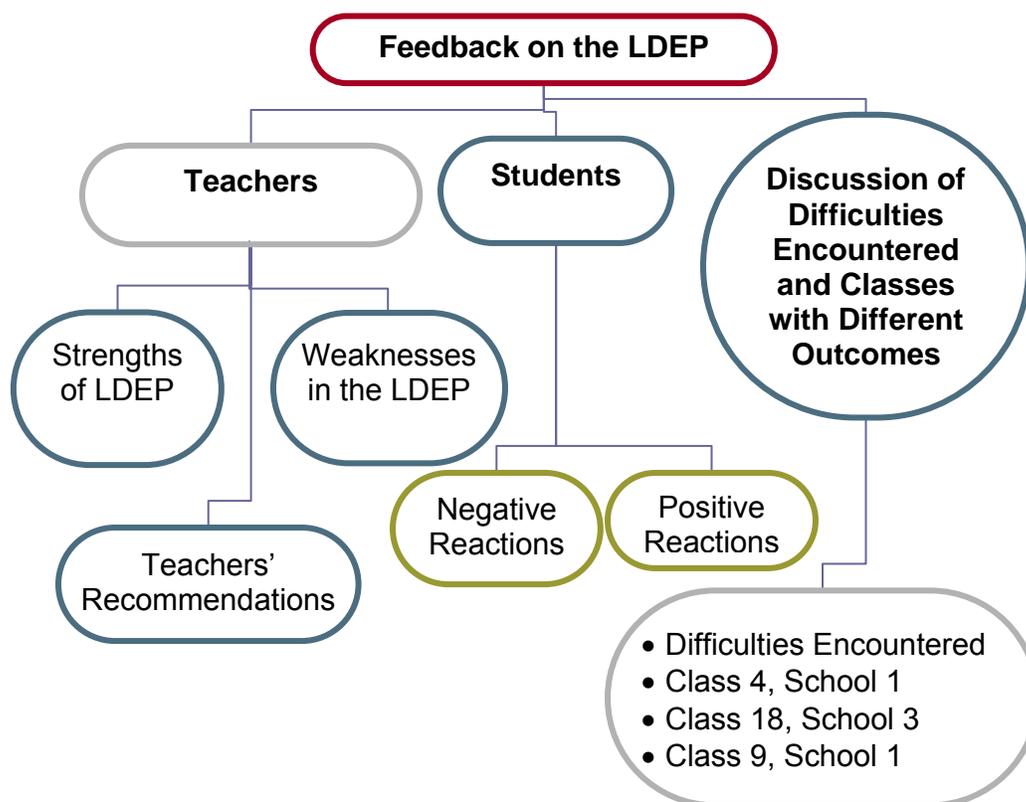
Moreover, qualitative data can be studied closely to discover the reasons for the quantitative data from Class 9 being unreliable. The feedback from the teacher, some of the students from Class 9 and the observation could reveal some factors that had a negative influence on the research on the curriculum initiative. Knowledge of these factors may aid future researches into a curriculum initiative as steps may be taken to reduce the adverse effects of these factors.

Findings from the interviews with the students and discussion of these findings are detailed in this chapter so as to enunciate the reactions of the students to the programme. The perceptions of the students in relation to whether their language skills were enhanced during the LDEP are also included. The data from the interviews of the students were coded with the aid of N6 (c.f. pp.82-83). The transcripts from the interviews were transferred into N6 and codes created (Richards 2002) through establishing categories to discover the extent of the appreciation of the students for the content and utility of the LDEP. From these codes, the reactions of the students to the LDEP and their perceptions of the utility of the programme were retrieved and included in the presentation and discussion of the findings offered in this chapter.

Finally, the observations of the classes, aided through the use of a semi-structured observation schedule (c.f. Appendix 9), were utilised to evaluate the teaching and learning under the LDEP. The manner in which the experimental curriculum was taught and the difficulties the teachers encountered in teaching the curriculum were observed. The reactions of the students during the lessons were also observed. The semi-structured observation schedule was based on 'categories of behaviour... [and] activities' (Wilkinson & Birmingham 2003, p.129) which were related to the research objective of discovering the effectiveness of the LDEP in enhancing language skills.

Figure 5.1 presents an outline and sequence of the topics included in this chapter.

Figure 5.1: Outline of Chapter 5



As Figure 5.1 indicates, feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of the programme was solicited from the teachers. In relation to the strengths, the teachers were asked to comment on the benefits of integrating Literature and English as well on the constructive outcomes of the LDEP. They were also asked about the drawbacks of the LDEP and the difficulties they encountered during the implementation of the programme (c.f. Appendix 6). Figure 5.1 demonstrates the type of feedback obtained from the students which focused on their positive and negative reactions to the LDEP (c.f. Appendix 7). Through the aid of the observation and field notes it was possible to understand the difficulties encountered during the LDEP (Figure 5.1). These notes were used to arrive at possible explanations as to why the findings from Classes 4 and 18 did not match those of the other experimental classes. Data from the observation and field notes relating to Class 9 were also examined in an attempt to further explain why the quantitative data might have been unreliable and to obtain feedback

about the programme from at least some of the students in the class (Figure 5.1). Data from the interviews with the teachers and students were also used to enhance the data from the observation and field notes. Their comments were used to verify the findings from the observation and field notes.

FEEDBACK FROM THE TEACHERS

Thirteen teachers taught the experimental classes. Table 5.2 presents the classes and the teachers who taught these classes in the four schools. To ensure confidentiality the teachers and classes are identified through the use of alphabet letters and numbers respectively. Feminine pronouns are also employed when references are made to the teachers to further ensure confidentiality.

Table 5.2: Teachers and the Classes they taught

School	Teachers	Subject/s Taught	Classes
1	A	English & Literature (Literature Only)	1, 5, (2, 3, 4)
	B	English	2, 4
	C	English	3, 8
	D*	Literature	6, 7, 8, 9
	E**	English	7, 9
	F	English	6
2	G	Integrated Literature-based English Programme	11, 13, 15
3	H	English	16
	I	English	18, 20
	J	Literature	16, 18, 20
4	K	English & Literature	23
	L	English	24
	M	Literature	24

* Declined to provide feedback, be interviewed, or have her classes observed.

** Was unavailable for second interview at the conclusion of the LDEP.

While all the three other schools had separate English and Literature programmes, School 2 had an integrated Literature-based English Programme with a greater focus on the teaching of Literature than on English Language skills. Since the LDEP is different from a Literature-based English Curriculum (c.f. pp.8-10) the English programme in School 2 was accepted as another type of curriculum like the non-integrated curricula of Schools 1, 3 and 4. Moreover,

the use of a control group in School 2 allowed for a comparison to be made between the performances of the experimental and control groups in the school in the writing skills assessment. The ES of the mean improvement score of the experimental group was more than twice that of the control group of students with the experimental group achieving an improvement ES of 0.56 as opposed to the improvement ES of 0.23 of the control group (c.f. p.133).

As Table 5.2 illustrates, in School 4, one class was taught English and Literature by the same teacher (K) whereas the other class (24) was taught the subjects by different teachers, L and M (Table 5.2). In School 1, two of the nine classes (1, 5) were taught English and Literature by the same teacher (A). The remaining classes were taught English and Literature by different teachers (Table 5.2). One teacher (G) taught the three classes in School 2 (Table 5.2). Since the LDEP was an integrated programme, having different teachers teach the two subjects, English and Literature, was not an ideal situation. However, in Singapore the current reality in most schools is that teachers teaching other subjects, such as the Humanities or Mathematics, also teach English. This reality was taken into account when the outlines and lesson plans were designed. In the three schools without an integrated English and Literature programme, the outlines and accompanying lesson plans differentiated the English lessons from the Literature lessons. However, it must be noted that in each school the teachers were encouraged to look through the outline and all lesson plans so as to obtain a complete picture of the LDEP. They were also informed that as an integrated programme, concepts taught in English classes would have to be completed before proceeding on to the Literature lessons, or vice versa. In short, coordination between the English and Literature teachers would be helpful in overcoming the disadvantage of having different instructors to teach English and Literature.

The semi-structured interview schedules that were used before the implementation of the LDEP and at the end of the LDEP are reproduced in

Appendices 6a and 6b. During the semi-structured interview before the implementation of the LDEP (Appendix 6a) the teachers were asked to comment on:

- the curriculum normally adopted by their schools, and
- their opinions with regard to having an integrated programme.

At the conclusion of the LDEP, during the semi-structured interview (Appendix 6b), the teachers offered feedback on:

- problems they faced during the implementation of the LDEP,
- benefits of the experimental curriculum,
- drawbacks of the experimental curriculum, and
- possible recommendations on how it could be modified to be of greater benefit to their students.

The feedback of the teachers regarding the programme and their students was also solicited through the logbook entries and during informal meetings.

The intent of the interviews was to gain an insight into the views of the teachers regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the LDEP. In addition, it was hoped that the teachers would also recommend modifications that they might find useful in teaching language skills to their students.

All interviews took place in the respective schools in the afternoons after lessons had ended. They were conducted by the researcher and audio-recorded with the explicit consent of the participants. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and then reviewed for accuracy before being transferred as electronic files into N6 by the researcher (c.f. p.81 & p.83).

Feedback of the Teachers on the Strengths of the LDEP

In the interviews, the teachers were asked to comment on the positive aspects of an integrated programme, in general, and on the LDEP in particular. To highlight the quotations from the teachers, these quotations appear as indented texts in a different font with ellipsis to indicate omission and elaboration or explanations

within brackets. Additionally, feminine pronouns are used for all the interviewees so as to preserve the confidentiality of the interviewees since all except one of the teachers in this sample were females.

A. *Benefits of Integrating English and Literature*

During the interview before the implementation of the programme, many of the teachers were of the opinion that combining English and Literature was a logical step since the two subjects were inter-related. There were practical advantages to be gained from the integration. Some teachers mentioned that it would be beneficial to nurture an interest in Literature since it would enhance the learning of language skills.

1. The Inter-relatedness of Literature and English Language

Many of the teachers in the four schools were of the opinion that Literature and English were inter-related with many similarities. They mentioned that similar skills are taught during the teaching of the two subjects. In the three schools that do not have an integrated English and Literature programme, the teachers spoke of consciously and unconsciously integrating the two subjects.

It is very easy to appreciate that the two are very complementary indeed. Lots of writing tasks for English can easily spin out of Lit. It's just simple playing around with the characters. Even though Lit is mainly narrative in structure, English can easily come in to complement it.

(Teacher M, School 4)

At times the integration of the two subjects may lead to duplication of skills taught in schools where Literature and English are taught as separate subjects. Two of the twelve teachers in the three schools that do not have an integrated Literature and English programme taught English and Literature to some classes. One of the teachers mentioned that because there were duplications when she taught both subjects, the two subjects should perhaps be integrated.

For Literature teaching I find myself reinforcing certain skills that I teach in English Language, so maybe, Literature should be integrated with Language teaching.

(Teacher A, School 1)

2. *Practical Advantages in Integrating Literature and English Language*

Many of the teachers in the four schools were of the opinion that there were practical benefits in combining the two subjects. In utilising Literature as a tool to teach language skills, students would be better able to comprehend and apply the concepts taught. One of the teachers elaborated that comprehension was advanced when the Literature text translates abstract concepts into more concrete terms.

Last term, I was teaching English, and I was not teaching that class Literature but when I was talking about something and I felt that it, they would understand better if I use the example in Literature. I just drew the character and I explained to them... they seemed to understand it very well.

(Teacher L, School 4)

Some teachers expressed the opinion that students might be able to better understand the concepts as well as apply the skills learnt because these skills are being taught in context. They viewed the Literature text as a model from which the students can appreciate the use of language and learn from it.

There is so much application in terms of modelling, in terms of using content because they are both skills-based subject. If they have a similar platform to base their skills on, it would make the learning more complete for students.

(Teacher M, School 4)

A few teachers mentioned that the literature text can expose the students to many diverse ideas and aid in the growth of the students as writers. A better appreciation for language may result in greater creativity in writing.

Maybe a greater interest in literature... awareness in the students to see the language in play, and maybe in the texts that are chosen, to see how good writing, and to recognise it, and perhaps to actually try to emulate, or try to create, or try to at least follow those writings and maybe, come up with their own creative pieces... to sort of put into writing their views of life or their emotions, and through that a greater awareness of how language is a conveyor of the thoughts.

(Teacher G, School 2)

LDEP as an Integrated Programme

The LDEP was an integrated Literature and English programme. Many of the practical benefits that the teachers mentioned with regard to an integrated English and Literature programme were reported as advantages of the LDEP. These advantages are described in the next section.

B. Constructive Outcomes of the LDEP

Every one of the eleven teachers interviewed at the end of the programme said that the students gained in some way or another. Some mentioned improvements they saw in the language skills of the students. Some of the Literature teachers saw amelioration in the way students analysed the literature text. Yet others thought that the thinning of the distinction between English and Literature was a desirable outcome.

1. Improvement in Language Skills

In terms of language ability, all the teachers reported that learning had taken place in varying degrees in the students. For instance, Class 16, termed as very weak by its English teacher displayed some form of learning taking place during the LDEP.

Firstly, my students are a weaker lot. They are actually quite weak... they could tell me that this is, ah there you are [shows the pieces of work completed by the

students] that they have simple, that they have compound. When they can recognise the sentences, that is good, right? ... It's coming along. Yeah, I think they have learnt something.

(Teacher H, School 3)

Teacher G was of the opinion that the programme was structured in such a way that it proved very helpful in imparting writing skills. She went on to elaborate that its usefulness lay in the fact that

it managed to convey to the students how the changes in the structures will change the focus or emphasis of the narrative writing, so they were aware of it.

(Teacher G, School 2)

The main aim of the LDEP was to impart knowledge of grammatical rules and writing techniques so that the students would have the necessary skills to write better narratives. There might have been varying degrees of success in terms of transference of these skills into the writings of the students. However, the teachers reported that many of the students gained knowledge of some of the narrative writing skills. In addition, the teachers found the students applying the concepts learnt in their writing.

I see a lot of adjectives used, and a lot more, a lot of variation in sentences, in sentence structure.

(Teacher J, School 3)

2. *Better Acquisition of Language Skills through Contextual Learning*

Another aim of the research was to discover whether students would be better able to acquire language skills if they were taught through the contextual cues found in the literature text. The answer from the research seems to be in the affirmative. According to some teachers, the students appeared to learn better because contextual examples from the literature text were used to convey concepts.

In this programme, we actually had some exercise on adjectives and there was a model for them to see the

passage, that actually was a model to them, to show them that they should use adjectives in certain ways, and so then they began to realise that sentences are formed from words and certain words pieced together make sentences and it's how you piece these words together that make good sentences and it was through this that I was able to show to them how to write a complete sentence and a proper sentence and a lot of them learnt.

(Teacher J, School 3)

The same teacher had also mentioned that such examples were often missing in the conventional English textbooks used in many schools.

3. *Learning through Group Work and Different Modes*

The programme was also designed on the premise that the students had different learning styles and preferences. Within the lessons there was group work as well as individual work. There were varying activities, from drawing to dramatization to presentations. The different approaches used in teaching the lessons appeared to have succeeded in getting students to enjoy the learning process as well as gain in knowledge and skills.

One useful exercise according to some of the teachers was the peer-editing that the students were required to complete before handing in the final drafts of their narratives.

They learnt from each other because they would point out the mistakes and I think it is very good, because some of the feedback they gave to their classmates are quite positive.

(Teacher E, School 1)

In addition to learning from each other, some of the teachers also mentioned that the students appeared to enjoy working in groups.

A lot of the entire programme was done based on group work, and interactive activities so, and they really enjoyed that. I think that helped a great deal to make the programme more lively and enjoyable for

them, so even when they wouldn't really understand the concepts, they had fun working with each other. That helped, I would say significantly, the group work, yes.

(Teacher M, School 4)

The diverse activities appear to have interested the students as well. Teacher M from School 4 elaborated on one activity that the students enjoyed particularly.

The one I remember most clearly is the activity where they had to change Lenny's character and situation based on the story, so he is no longer, you know, the way he is. They had to change him completely and see how it affected the rest of the story and it was fantastic, they enjoyed it completely and they did a really good job of twisting him around, so that was fun.

(Teacher M, School 4)

Another activity teachers mentioned was one in which groups of students were required to draw one of the characters from the story and include in the picture symbols of the character traits of that character. The students appeared to have enjoyed doing creative work in groups. By including different kinds of activities in the LDEP to cater to different students with diverse learning preferences, the LDEP was able to generate interest in the learning process among many of the students. It is important that students enjoy the learning process so that they may be motivated to learn.

4. *Enhanced Analysis of a Literature Text*

No test instruments were designed to evaluate whether learning of literary analysis occurred. However, it would be valuable to attempt to discover if the programme improved the skills of the students in literary analysis as well. Since it was an integrated programme, it was important to discover if the programme succeeded in imparting language and literary analytical skills. If the programme

aided in the teaching of one subject but failed in the other, its usefulness in imparting skills in both areas as an integrated programme would become questionable. Therefore, during the interviews with the Literature teachers, they were asked about the progress of the students in literary analysis and the Literature teachers reported that generally the students showed an improvement when analysing a literature text. The Literature teacher from School 3 spoke of how the lessons on literary analysis even elicited some good work from the weak class, Class 16.

I have spoken to the English teacher and she is thinking that they are a bit slow, you know, but in the Literature class I think they have performed marvellously.

(Teacher I, School 3)

Teacher I went on to state that the LDEP had enabled the students 'to speak up among their peers'. Another teacher in School 4 commented that the students during the LDEP

really re-look at their text and I feel that sometimes they ask more intelligent questions.

(Teacher K, School 4)

Teacher K was of the opinion that the lively group discussions had helped the students to analyse the stories better. Before the LDEP, during English classes, the students would work on short comprehension passages, and these did not give students any opportunity to participate in peer discussions.

5. *Reduction in Duplication of Concepts Taught*

There were two teachers who taught both English and Literature in two of the schools that do not have an integrated English and Literature programme. One of these teachers had spoken of the overlap that existed when she taught English and Literature as two separate subjects (c.f. pp.182-183). However, through the LDEP, she was able to reduce the duplication.

I cut down on repetition. I just teach them the structure as I would in an English lesson or even in a

Literature lesson; I just move on to identifying the different elements and tie it back to writing. So, I think right now they see, I think the students actually see how closely related English Language and Literature analysis can be.

(Teacher A, School 1)

Teacher A also stated that sometimes her students were unable to make a clear distinction between English and Literature, which she considered 'healthy'.

Some of her students had actually noted down, as Teacher A reports:

Oh, I am not sure what Literature is about still but I definitely know that it helps me in my writing. I write better now. I at least know how to write an essay, and structure it.

(Teacher A, School 1)

6. *Improving Students' Knowledge of Grammar Usage*

In interviews before the implementation of the LDEP, a few of the teachers spoke of some students having a poor knowledge of grammatical rules. Various factors were attributed the poor knowledge of grammatical rules. For some teachers the contributing factors included the non-English speaking home backgrounds of the students and the communicative form of teaching language in recent times with no explicit teaching of grammar concepts. Modern technology was also mentioned as playing a contributory role in the deterioration of the English language.

The use of MSN [Microsoft Network] is a big hit. They write to each other in sms [short message service] language which is very, very bad for students. They end up writing essays for us in sms language.

(Teacher J, School 3)

With the explicit teaching of grammar, the students were made aware of what constituted accurate grammatical construction of sentences. As one teacher expressed it, the advantages of the LDEP might be that

the kids will familiarise themselves with the grammatical aspect, which is what they are lacking of,

because for most of the kids, they don't really know the technical aspect and as well as using the text by itself it serves as a double-edged sword in the sense that they are revising for their Literature, at the same time they are doing their English; it is actually quite as good as well as a comprehensive.

(Teacher C, School 1)

The LDEP appears to have achieved its main aim of imparting narrative writing techniques to many of the students through the contextual use of the literature text. In addition, it appears to have improved the literary analytical skills of the students, and for one English and Literature teacher reduced the overlaps that exist in the teaching of Literature and English as separate subjects. Additionally, the inclusion of activity-based lessons, peer learning and the contextual teaching of concepts enabled the teachers to facilitate the learning process.

Feedback of the Teachers on the Weaknesses in the LDEP

Some drawbacks mentioned by the teachers related to the curriculum directly while other weaknesses pertained to the implementation of the programme. There were also some comments that were related to the lack of preparedness of some teachers in teaching the curriculum.

A. *Limitations in the Curriculum*

Among the drawbacks, the teachers cited the technical nature of the lessons during which grammatical concepts were taught and the lack of reinforcements of the taught concepts. A few teachers also mentioned the discrepancy that existed between what the students were expected to produce in examinations and what was taught during the LDEP. One of the teachers was of the opinion that the LDEP would work better with older students.

1. *The Technical Nature of the Grammar Components of the Lessons*

At the beginning of each language lesson, the students were taught explicitly selected grammatical rules that would be useful when the students wrote the narratives. However, some of the teachers found that the students became bored during the explicit teaching of these skills.

They liked all the fun activities but they didn't like the technical part of the language, nobody did.

(Teacher A, School 1)

In addition, some of the students also found the concepts rather difficult to comprehend. Some teachers felt that some of the students needed to be more proficient in the language to understand the concepts. One of the teachers gave an example of a lesson that her students had difficulty grasping because of the technical nature of the lessons.

The idea of clauses they managed to get after a while, but the effects was hard, like the effect of the different tenses. They caught only the simpler ones, like past and present, I mean we have been drilling that for a very long time, but when it came slightly further down, how it can change the text, they can point out for the obvious ones, but it takes them a lot longer time and I feel that they are still pretty weak in identifying what tense will do to their piece of work.

(Teacher K, School 4)

Even though another teacher from the same school thought most of the concepts were within the grasp of the students in her class, the teaching of the concepts went into what she termed as the 'nitty-gritties of grammar, and technicality'. It was a kind of integration that she did not envision at the beginning of the programme. She thought that she herself would go for a literature-based curriculum. The type of integration that she would select would be one in which

the level of integration might be slightly different. We wouldn't really focus as much on the grammatical side

of things, so the miniscule details, focusing on a few devices, the main ones in depth.

(Teacher M, School 4)

Though some teachers may have reservations about the teaching of grammar concepts, there appears to be a real need to teach these concepts (c.f. p.39). Since grammar is an integral aspect of language acquisition, a more detailed discussion and recommendations on ways to improve the teaching of the concepts are found in Chapter 6, 'Evaluation of the LDEP' (pp.243-244).

2. *Lack of Reinforcements of Taught Concepts*

A few of the teachers were of the opinion that there was a lack of reinforcement of the taught concepts. The lack of reinforcement meant that there might not have been transference of the concepts learnt to the end-product, namely the narratives that the students produced.

There was not enough reinforcement on quite a lot of areas and they did not have time to assimilate even though we lengthened the time of the programme. They were not able to assimilate, especially things, abstract things like the effects of clauses.

(Teacher K, School 4)

Teacher H felt that weaker students especially needed the reinforcements. She felt that more time should have been devoted to the teaching of each concept.

For the weaker girls what was spent for one period can be the teaching for one period but a lot of follow up is needed for that lesson to work, so that might take on another week of work.

(Teacher H, School 3)

From some of the feedback of the teachers, it appears that in attempting to implement a comprehensive programme within a short span of time to teach narrative writing skills, more topics than some of the classes could master were

included. Additionally, there were too few reinforcements of concepts in the LDEP. Ideally, the topics should be covered over at least a semester (half a year) with more stories or literature texts used to teach the relevant skills. The use of more short stories may counter the complaint by some of the students that using the same story during English and Literature was boring.

They grew very quickly tired of using the same story,
they are complaining, oh, no not the same story again.

(Teacher A, School 1)

3. *Discrepancy in the Learning Outcomes of the LDEP and the Schools*

A number of teachers mentioned that the objective of the experimental curriculum did not match the output that the students were expected to generate in school. Teacher G spoke of the impracticalities of incorporating the skills learnt within the one hour students are usually given to complete a composition.

They are more sensitive to these changes and they will be more careful but they also mentioned that these skills that they acquired or become more aware of are not possible to transfer in their day to day lessons.

(Teacher G, School 2)

In addition, one of the Literature teachers was apprehensive that in the final examination, the students in her experimental class will not perform as well as the control classes.

You are covering so many things at a touch-and-go sort of pace so that they didn't help because now they lack that ability to interpret something at a deeper level, at a more critical level, and they don't have the writing stylistics to back up their points of view. So they don't know how to elaborate on a point, so these are things that they have yet to learn.

(Teacher M, School 4)

Another teacher from the same school taught the LDEP to the experimental class and English and Literature to control classes. From a class test assessing the

students on their writing skills that both classes completed she observed that there were differences in the way they approached the test question.

Two weeks after the programme ended, I felt that some of them [in the experimental class] are still unable to understand the question because you see in your programme you asked them to write on anything, anything that they wanted but without that focus, I realised that they seemed to have forgotten how to read the question requirements carefully.... This class, compared to my other [control] classes... I felt that more of them did not understand the requirement [of the test question].

(Teacher K, School 4)

The concern that the programme would adversely affect the performances of the students in the experimental group in the examinations came mainly from School 4. When learning is exam-oriented and exams are set with the intent that certain prerequisites be fulfilled, students who are taught skills and not those prerequisites might not do well. The aim of the LDEP was not to teach how to score in an exam, but to make sure certain narrative-writing skills were learnt. In the teaching of Literature the intent was to guide students to appreciate literary analysis. The researcher was aware that Secondary One students would be learning Literature for the first time. Therefore, the literature component of the LDEP was designed as an initiation into literary analysis. It was felt that the form of a literary essay could be learnt at a later stage when the students would be better able to appreciate literary analysis. At this point it might be pertinent to consider the comments made by the teachers from School 4 during the small group interview before the implementation of the programme.

Teacher M: With literature, it is always a challenge because a lot of our students come in, hearing from

Teacher K: Horror stories about literature.

Teacher M: That Lit is a very, very difficult subject, that it is enormously impossible to score, to do well, and this

Teacher K: They have these preconceptions that actually block them in the first place.

(Teachers K and M from School 4)

4. *Age-appropriateness of the LDEP*

Though most of the teachers who commented on the difficulty level and technical nature of some of the lessons did not link these limitations to age, a teacher from School 1 thought the students in Secondary One were too young to appreciate the usefulness of the programme.

Yeah, I think age-related, because if you, we conduct such a lesson in the upper sec[ondary] they would gain a lot from the lesson and they would give a lot of positive feedback... because they are more mature in comparison to the sec[ondary] 1.

(Teacher B, School 1)

Due to time constraints and the requirements of the individual schools, there were some limitations to the programme. There could have been more reinforcements of some of the concepts taught. Additionally, the difficulty level or the repetitive nature of the grammatical concepts taught may be resolved through individual class teachers providing greater input. Likewise, the input of the schools on examination or test requirements would ensure that the students are not disadvantaged for the examinations or tests. In relation of the age-appropriateness of the programme materials, there is evidence from the quantitative and qualitative data to indicate that the Secondary One students improved in their writing skills and understood at least some of the grammatical concepts taught (c.f. p.112, p.159 and pp.184-185 & pp.189-190).

Limitations in the Implementation of the LDEP

In School 3 in particular there were problems from the outset when the programme was implemented. There was a series of miscommunications and by the time the programme was ready to be implemented, there were tight time

constraints as well. These time constraints led to the English teachers from School 3 not being well-briefed about the programme since the briefing held by the researcher during the June holidays was attended by only the Literature teachers. The English teachers were then given a quick overview just before the implementation once school reopened for Term 3.

The English teachers in School 3 felt that there was a need for a briefing especially since they did not have enough time to acquaint themselves with the teaching materials or the Literature text before they taught.

The materials that came to me was kind of last-minute and I didn't look ahead to see what was at the end of it. I was caught up more with preparing for what is to happen tomorrow and next week. I wasn't thinking of the whole programme as a whole.... But when we had that National Day break, I took the time to sit down and read from the first plan all the way to the end, then I realised exactly what it was and I was better able to then carry out the lessons.

(Teacher J, School 3)

Teacher H from the same school also mentioned that being better prepared would have helped her to implement the lessons more effectively.

I would have been a little bit more effective if I know more of what programme is all about, like I would like to know what actually is wanted taught, right, maybe a thorough briefing would have helped.

(Teacher H, School 3)

The inadequate briefing also meant that there were some misconceptions about the programme in School 3. The Literature teachers from School 1, Phase 1 and School 4 worked closely with the English teachers to ensure that the programme flowed smoothly. In School 2, the same teacher taught both components to all her three classes. In line with the objective of the programme, it was important to see English and Literature as an integrated whole. The Literature lessons were designed to guide the students to better appreciate the art of narration which, in

turn, would aid them in the creation of their own pieces of narratives. In School 3 and School 1, Phase 2, there was little or no liaising between the English and Literature teachers. Therefore, there was a repetition of activities in School 1, Phase 2 and an improper sequencing of lessons in School 3.

I sort of modified but basically I think the activities that you had recommended though I have carried out at different parts, you know as different from that was recommended by you at the juncture.

(Teacher I, School 3)

It is interesting to note that among the four schools the students from School 3 attained the lowest improvement score ES of 0.18 in the writing skills assessment (c.f. Table 4.14, p.130). It is possible that the lack of a thorough briefing, inadequate coordination between the English and Literature teachers and an improper sequencing of lessons might have contributed to lower ES of the improvement score in the writing skills assessment in School 3. On the other hand, the repetition of activities appeared not to have been detrimental since the ES of the improvement score in the writing skills assessment achieved by the students in School 1, Phase 2 was 0.42 ($t = 3.701$, $df = 75$). However, it must also be noted that the ES of the improvement score in the writing skills assessment attained by the students in School 1, Phase 1 was higher at 0.51 ($t = 5.854$, $df = 133$).

The problems that the teachers in School 3 encountered indicate that a thorough briefing is essential. It is also important that the teachers acquaint themselves fully with the programme and its aims before teaching. Due to time constraints and a series of miscommunications, in School 3 a thorough briefing or a meeting with the English teachers in June before the implementation of the programme could not be held. Recommendations on how the programme might be better implemented are given in Chapter 6, 'Evaluation of the LDEP' (pp.243-245).

Unfamiliarity of the Teachers in Teaching LDEP-based Grammar

Some of the teachers were of the opinion that they did not have the experience or knowledge to teach the grammar components in the way it was expected of them. Not only were they expected to teach certain grammar concepts but the teaching of those concepts was designed to illuminate their usefulness when writing narratives. For example, the types of sentences were not merely defined but the different effects of these types of sentences on the reader were also meant to be conveyed to the students. It involved a utilitarian approach to learning grammar. Knowledge of grammatical rules had to be interlinked with an understanding of their practicalities. The approach was new to many of the teachers and the teachers had limited time to acquaint themselves with this approach.

On the day before the lesson itself I would go to do my own research on the technical aspect... I find it really uphill task to learn some of the lessons; they were very good by itself... but I was not able to deliver whatever is in the lesson plans to the kids, and at the end of it maybe I would think that I am in fact short-changing my kids in a way because I am not able to give them all the things that they should know, you know.

(Teacher E, School 1)

Running a workshop on the programme before the implementation would have been helpful in reassuring the teachers and in allowing them to approach the LDEP with greater confidence.

Modifications to the LDEP as Suggested by the Teachers

The teachers were asked to offer suggestions on modifications that they felt should be made to the LDEP. One of the suggestions offered was that the teachers should be well-briefed and perhaps, even involved in the planning process of the curriculum.

Teachers have got to know exactly what they are supposed to do with it because if we go in and teach

what we think is necessary but may not be the right thing, the focus is all wrong, then I think it's going to defeat the purpose.

(Teacher H, School 3)

She went on to say that the curriculum should also be appropriate to the ability level of the students. Her class was made of students who had a weaker command of the language than the other classes in the school. She felt that some of her students had problems grasping a few of the concepts.

A couple of teachers in School 1 that made use of two short stories to teach the grammatical concepts felt that the lessons could be spread over more stories. Teacher M from another school in which two short stories were also utilised felt that the stories should be more carefully chosen so that the students would find them interesting.

For me I suppose the stories chosen because of the restriction of the school to the stories that were chosen, perhaps, if we used slightly different stories it would help to make it slightly more interesting.

(Teacher M, School 4)

Additionally, some teachers felt that there should be more reinforcement of the taught concepts. A few also felt that there were too many concepts taught during a short period of time.

I do not know about the level, you know, about the amount of grammar, that I would teach, you know... maybe it would be less at each time... yeah, more spaced out.

(Teacher L, School 4)

A problem that schools with different teachers teaching English and Literature encountered was the difficulty in coordinating the English and Literature components of the integrated programme. One teacher had the following useful suggestion to offer:

If there is a chart actually done up you know that we can go and just make a mark that this lesson has been done. If she has already completed say, Lesson 9, Period 9, it would good for her to make a mark there, then, I would know then I can proceed with my lessons.

(Teacher J, School 3)

The Literature teacher from School 1 mentioned that quick meetings snatched on the way out of school or during recess breaks made it possible for her to coordinate the lessons with the English teachers.

It's feasible. Sometimes, when they are not even physically at their desk, I would just leave a note to say where I am and I would offer suggestions as to what they should teach next so that I can easily catch up and we can move on from where I left off.

(Teacher A, School 1)

This teacher also mentioned that there would be logistics to be taken care of if the school decided to implement the programme. For example, there may be difficulties arising from the timetabling of different number of periods for English and Literature teachers in a week.

The teachers reported that generally there was evidence to demonstrate that learning did occur. Many of the students also found some of the approaches used during the LDEP and the group activities interesting. However, some of them also found the pace of the learning too fast. They reported that there were few reinforcements and some students experienced difficulty in grasping some of the grammatical concepts taught. Nevertheless, almost all the teachers would teach under the LDEP if they could modify the programme to suit the abilities of the students in their classes and were given more time to get better acquainted with the programme.

FEEDBACK FROM THE STUDENTS

There were 119 students from the seventeen experimental classes in the four schools interviewed at the end of the LDEP. Teachers either selected the students or asked for volunteers to participate in the interview. About seven students from each class comprised each small group. (For the semi-structured small group interview schedule, please refer to Appendix 7). During the small group interviews, the students were asked:

- if there were any differences between the LDEP and the usual English and Literature (or English in the case of School 2) lessons that they had before the programme,
- to describe lessons during the LDEP that were enjoyable or not enjoyable,
- whether they felt the LDEP had helped them to improve in their narrative writing skills,
- whether they would recommend the LDEP to their peers, and
- the reasons for recommending or not recommending the programme.

All the small group interviews were conducted in the respective schools after the lessons had ended for the day. The interviews were facilitated by the researcher and audio-recorded with the explicit consent of the participants. The interviews were transcribed from the audio-recordings and reviewed to ensure accuracy before the transcriptions were transferred to N6 (c.f. pp.82-83). In the following description and discussion of the findings, the quotations from the students are highlighted through the use of indented text and a different font. Additionally, omissions are indicated through the use of ellipsis and elaborations or clarifications are included within brackets.

Positive Reactions

Most of the students interviewed in the four schools reacted positively towards the programme. The positive reactions related to the different kinds of activities

that were part of the programme, group work and the learning of the grammar concepts. Many students also thought that their writing skills had improved.

1. *Interesting Activities*

Many of the students interviewed mentioned a number of activities that they enjoyed. One such activity involved the changing of the character traits of the characters in the story, thereby altering the storyline. Another was to draw a character and include symbols of his/her character traits.

The fun of it, we made a totally new story which was so interesting [laughter from the students].

(Female student from Class 20, School 3)

Female student: We were supposed to draw a portrait of the character based on their character traits, yeah.

Male student: Love drawing.

(Students from Class 6, School 1)

The hands-on nature of the activities generated a greater interest in the learning. It also helped them to better visualise abstract ideas such as characterisation.

[Teacher D] lets us have more hands-on on the work, like getting together and draw the picture instead of reading the book and think how she looks like and all this.

(Male student from Class 8, School 1)

The LDEP included the different approaches to interest the students in the learning process and the programme appears to have achieved its aim. The different approaches used in teaching the writing skills and literary analysis generated interest in many of the students.

2. *Benefits of Group Work*

Many of the students, both females and males, commented on the benefits of working in groups. They felt that they learnt more from the group interaction than from only the teacher or through working individually.

Student 1: Understanding was strengthened because of this discussion we did.

Student 2: Also the presentation and group work, it somehow makes us improve in our oral presentation skills when we present our work in front of the class.

Student 3: At the same time also, it lets us share our views so we understand better.

(Male students from Class 11, School 2)

According to a female student from Class 1, School 1 working as a team led to her group coming up with many different answers. If she were to work on her own, the answers that she could generate would be limited. In pooling their ideas, they were able to learn more from each other. Another way in which they learnt from each other was through peer-editing which many of them found useful.

3. *Better Understanding of Grammar*

The combination of theory with application in the LDEP appears to have led to greater learning. Grammar concepts and writing skills were first explicitly taught before the students practised on the application of the theory either in groups or individually.

In School 2, there was a debate among some of the students as to whether the grammar taught was repetitious. Two of the students thought that the grammatical rules were too basic and they had learnt them in primary school. The other five students disagreed, saying that they had acquired new knowledge from the explicit teaching of grammar. According to one of the students,

You are going into a more detailed understanding of this phrases, clauses, and basically English grammar.

(Male student from Class 11, School 2)

Even though the grammatical concepts the students had to learn appeared rudimentary, the students were expected to attain a deeper understanding of the concepts. For instance, it was not enough that the students learnt what was an independent clause or dependent clause. They were expected to know that an independent clause can stand on its own as a sentence whereas the dependent clause cannot be a complete sentence. In doing so, it was hoped that they would construct fewer sentence fragments. Another example could be found in the demonstration of how to achieve an intended effect on the reader by varying the types of sentences used. Many students realised there was a difference in the way grammar concepts were taught during the LDEP while there were others who could not differentiate between what they had learnt in primary school and what they learnt under the programme. It may be useful to articulate lesson objectives to the students beforehand so that they could appreciate the reason and the purpose for learning the grammar concepts.

4. *Improved Writing Skills*

In answer to the question on whether they felt that their writing skills had improved, the majority of the students interviewed thought that they were writing better. Some mentioned varying the sentence structures more so as to create an intended effect on the reader.

I learnt that it was not just quantity but quality of the work... even though the sentences are shorter but they have a greater impact on the person that's reading it.

(Male student from Class 8, School 1)

Others mentioned being more aware of grammatical errors, and making a conscious effort not to commit them. Yet others spoke of adding descriptive words to make the story more interesting. Many of them also thought of the elements of a narrative, such as conflict, rising action, climax and resolution, when writing their narratives.

[Teacher E] say after the programme, we write better. Because last time when we write essays, it used to be

very simple, a lot of grammar mistakes, the plot is [unclear, interrupted], and all those tense mistakes and grammar mistakes, yeah but then after the programme, now we know how to make this interesting, make it truly exciting.

(Female student from Class 7, School 1)

The main purpose of the LDEP was to improve the writing skills of the students and it appears to have been achieved. Even though the programme ran for a short period of time, many of the students thought that they had improved. According to them, they were making use of the devices taught during the lessons to write better narratives.

5. *Enhanced Learning through the use of the Literature text*

Since the Literature text was the vehicle through which the students learnt grammar and writing skills, it was also important to discover if the students found the use of the text a useful medium. According to some students, there were benefits to learning from a literature text.

Furthermore, the grammar inside the book is better, and the vocab is better, and it's like, there are more, like, descriptive words and better adjectives, compared to the [English] textbook.

(Female student from Class 20, School 3)

Other students in Schools 1 and 3, which did not have an integrated English and Literature programme, also mentioned preferring the literature text to the English textbook to learn English. Some were of the opinion that they were better able to understand the elements of a narrative such as conflict and resolution from the literature text.

It is more detailed, we learn more.... the underlying message, the theme, the plot.

(Female student from Class 23, School 4)

Students from School 2 which has an integrated literature-based English programme also mentioned learning more from the LDEP. They felt that the combined teaching of grammar and writing techniques through using the literature text helped them to better understand narrative writing techniques.

There are such details when reading the whole story and how changing them can actually affect the whole book, you know.

(Male student from Class 13, School 2)

The change from a literature-based English programme to the LDEP appears to have also induced some students to pay greater attention in class.

In Terms 1 and 2 we were working purely on Literature, maybe some of us did not really appreciate it, but then, somehow in Term 3, with the introduction of teaching grammar within these books, then a lot of people actually woke up.

(Male student from Class 11, School 2)

From the point of view of the students, the combination of Literature with learning language skills had resulted in improvement in their language skills as well as literary analysis of the literature text.

6. *Learning More through the LDEP*

Some of the students mentioned that they learnt more from the programme than during the usual English classes. They were of the opinion that they had gained in language skills during the programme. Some students also mentioned that they preferred the lessons conducted during the LDEP to their usual English lessons.

Yes, it makes more interesting, we have more things to learn, not just sit there, bored to death, yeah [laughs].

(Female student from Class 7, School 1)

A few students reported being able to internalise the taught concepts as the LDEP enabled them to acquire and remember these concepts.

I think like we learn better, as in, the things get screwed, stick in your brain longer.

(Female student from Class 20, School 3)

In acquiring knowledge, a few students were also of the opinion that the learning had practical utility that differed from an exam-oriented approach to education.

We can see in this programme that, yeah, we are actually learning for the sake of learning, not learning for the sake of exams and such things.

(Male student from Class 15, School 2)

Toward the conclusion of the interview, the students were asked if they would recommend the programme to other students. Many of the students reported that they would recommend the programme because it helped them in their writing.

Of course, I will recommend to my friends, even to a friend who is good in English because it will be a revision and he would perform better in the examinations. However it depends on the person; if the person is only interested in fooling around, he will not learn.

(Male Student from Class 5, School 1)

A few students mentioned that the programme allowed them to become independent learners rather than depending on the teachers and the textbook for the answers all the time. Additionally, some expressed the opinion that they gained new knowledge as well.

Yeah, I will recommend the programme to our peers because I found that the programme taught me several new writing styles.

(Male student from Class 13, School 2)

Not only did they gain in knowledge, but according to some students they also enjoyed themselves while learning under the programme.

I think I will recommend this programme because... it makes the lesson more interesting, it's also, and ah, not only is it interesting, it is also more informative.

(Female student from Class 20, School 3)

Negative Reactions

Students reported some negative evaluations of the LDEP. Most of the negative reactions towards the programme related to the explicit teaching of the grammar concepts and the mode of teaching these concepts. Other negative reactions pertained to group work and a lack of reinforcements of taught concepts.

1. Explicit Teaching of Grammar Uninteresting

Some of the students were of the opinion that there should be more activities and that the explicit teaching of the concepts was tiresome. According to these students at times too much time was spent in going over the PowerPoint slides which were used to teach the concepts.

Since the theory is so long, we never paid enough attention so it's like quite tough for us to answer the questions in the exercises.

(Male Student from Class 6, School 1)

A couple of students also made reference to the mode in which they were taught through the PowerPoint slides.

It is like she will just go through the PowerPoint slides instead of like interacting with us more.

(Female student from Class 6, School 1)

The lesson plans were designed in such a way that the explicit teaching of the lessons were to take no more than fifteen minutes. In some cases, it appears that whole periods, of up to thirty-five minutes or even more, were spent on teaching these concepts. The LDEP was designed to be interactive to stimulate the interest of the students and a whole period spent by students listening to a lecture would be counterproductive. It must, however, be noted that it was the

first time the programme was being implemented. It would take teachers time to get acquainted with the materials and mode of teaching. Once that occurs, there will be no need to read off the PowerPoint slides. Then, there can be face-to-face teaching and interaction with the students. Another problem might lie in the fact that the PowerPoint slides were standard ones that were given to all schools, irrespective of the ability levels of the students. In classes where the students are weaker, fewer concepts than the ones originally planned would have to be taught. Teachers would have to decide on the pace and number of concepts to be taught during each lesson. In that way, perhaps, the explicit teaching of the concepts could be made more accessible to the students.

Some students also mentioned disliking the taking down of the notes found on the PowerPoint slides. In addition, a couple of students from School 4 spoke of being told to memorise the notes. These statements came as a surprise to the researcher since the lesson plans did not require the students to memorise the notes.

Because of Literature-Driven English Programme...
because we have to memorise all the clauses, phrases
and tenses, so and when we have to identify the themes
and all that, so it is hard to memorise all these things
when we have a test, so we get confused.

(Male student from Class 23, School 4)

If the students had been expected to memorise the notes on the PowerPoint slides, it would actually go against the intent of the LDEP. The definitions and explanations of the concepts on the PowerPoint slides were meant to provide background information to aid the students in completing the follow-up activities.

2. *Perceived Weaker Performance in School Tests due to the LDEP*

The group of students from Class 23 was particularly hostile during the small group interview. According to them they had performed badly in their English and Literature tests because of the programme.

Female student: Maybe when this programme started, my English dropped.

Male student: It tested us on the normal Common Test. I failed very badly.

(Students from Class 23, School 4)

There are a number of possible reasons why the students might not have done as well in their school tests as they did in the mid-year examinations. The comprehension test given after the programme, as Teachers K and L from School 4 admitted, was comparatively more difficult than the one given during the mid-year examinations. They were also sitting for a Literature test for the first time so there was no preceding test to which they could compare it. Moreover, the Literature test also required them to have knowledge of the form and style of a formal literature essay. The students were not taught to write formal Literature essays during the programme. However, in the writing and reading comprehension post-tests that they completed at the end of the programme, they had performed better than the control group of students in their school (p.135 & p.155).

3. *Too few reinforcements*

A few students from School 2 and School 1 mentioned that the lack of reinforcements of the concepts taught would result in them forgetting what they had learnt. They could easily return to their old writing habits. For long-term retention of skills taught it is necessary to have these skills reinforced more often.

However, the way these concepts are reinforced is also important. The English teacher considered her students in Class 16 weak and so, she gave them additional exercises on some of the taught concepts. She also went over some of the concepts several times. The students from the class expressed their dislike for the English class.

She is actually trying to get it in our head, like but we can't get it in our head because she is doing it over and over again so we are like so bored that we don't want to listen anymore.

(Female student from Class 16, School 3)

It is important that the concepts once explicitly taught are reinforced through activities or exercises rather than more explicit teaching of the concepts.

4. *Disadvantages of Group Work*

Though students generally liked working in groups, some students reported on how group work could be abused. They mentioned students who were uncooperative or even took advantage of the hardworking students.

Some are uncooperative, and do not do the work.

(Female student from Class 8, School 1)

When there is group work or peer-editing, guidelines and rules must be set in place to minimise abuse taking place. Further recommendations to better implement the LDEP in this respect can be found in the next chapter, 'Evaluating the LDEP' (c.f. pp.244-245).

Many of the students interviewed were of the opinion that they had learnt more during the LDEP than during their usual English lessons and that their writing skills had improved through the use of the Literature text to teach language skills. They also mentioned enjoying the group work and some of the activities. However, some of the students reported disliking the explicit teaching of grammar concepts as it made the lessons uninteresting. A few of the students also mentioned that there were too few reinforcements of concepts taught while others observed students taking advantage of group work by not contributing during the group work.

DISCUSSION OF DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED AND CLASSES WITH DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

In this section, data from the observations, field notes, log book entries as well as data from the interviews conducted with the teachers and students are used to assess the difficulties that were encountered during the course of the research. Possible reasons for the differences between the outcomes of most of the experimental classes and Class 4, School 1 and Class 18, School 3 are also offered. In addition, the qualitative data collected from Class 9, School 1 are also presented to further ascertain the reasons for the quantitative data from Class 9 being unreliable. The quantitative data were excluded from the analysis due to the possibility that they were unreliable. However, the qualitative data are included because the observation and field notes may aid in discovering additional reasons for the quantitative data being unreliable. Moreover, in a face-to-face interview with the researcher, the comments of the students might be more genuine and it would be possible to gain some insights into the opinions of some of the students in Class 9 about the LDEP.

Difficulties Encountered During the LDEP

Difficulties were encountered during the conduct of the research project due to the characteristics inherent in this research project. In classical experimental methodology, replications are designed to be consistent across the variables through controlling most of the variables so that these replications can be attributable to the influence of one or more specific variables (Collins, Joseph & Bielaczyc 2004; Thomas 2005). However, such replications would not reflect the naturalistic situations in schools which cannot be experimentally controlled (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer & Schauble 2003). There is appreciable variability across and within schools with many factors playing a role. Curriculum initiative project is useful when it takes into account this variability that is common in schools (Murray & Lawrence 2000). Therefore, in a curriculum initiative project it is important to discover if the curriculum would be effective in spite of the

variables in the different kinds of schools in which it is implemented. In this project, a number of difficulties were encountered precisely because the intent was not to interfere with pre-existing conditions or characters of the participating schools. It made the findings from the project all the more robust because the effectiveness of the curriculum was tested in natural conditions.

Difficulties were encountered particularly in two schools, School 3 and School 1 (Phase 2). In School 3, there was miscommunication from the beginning of the programme. Three Literature teachers were informed of the meeting with the researcher during the June holidays in 2004 before the implementation of the programme but the English teachers were not informed. Among the Literature teachers, only one of them went on to teach the experimental classes. Another taught the control classes and the third teacher did not teach the level but was the Literature coordinator. When the researcher met the English teachers, there was no time to fully acquaint them with the programme. The lesson outline and lesson plans were provided and a general overview was furnished. However, the teachers were not provided with an in-depth summary of the lessons and the ways in which they could fulfil the objectives of the research. The English teachers were also given the Literature textbook on which the English lessons were to be based a few days before they were expected to teach. It left them with little opportunity to read the book as well as the set of lesson plans. The inadequate understanding of the objectives of the LDEP led to a lack of coordination between the English and Literature teachers in this school and an improper sequencing of the Literature component of the lessons.

In School 1 during Phase 2, the Literature teacher who taught all the classes declined to meet with the researcher or provide feedback. During the small group interview, a couple of students mentioned that there was repetition of activities during the Literature and English classes. One of the English teachers also mentioned that due to time constraints, the English teachers did not meet up with the Literature teacher to coordinate lessons. However, there was an overall

coordinator for the programme in School 1 and she kept in touch with the teachers though she taught during Phase 1 but not during Phase 2.

In addition, in a few classes in School 1, Phase 2, the periods were also long. In one class, the students had one period of Literature in the morning, followed by triple periods of English. When the period for explicit teaching of concepts was extended much beyond ten or fifteen minutes with little movement for the students during the approximately two hours of Literature and English lessons, these students had difficulty focusing or becoming involved in the lessons. The researcher had neglected to ask for the timetabling of the English and Literature classes in the schools. It was only during the observation of the classes that she realised the long hours the students had to spend on the two subjects. In such circumstances, it is imperative that students move around and are involved in active, preferably interactive, work rather than spend the time passively listening to the teachers. In addition, there was no coordination between the English and Literature teachers in this one school. Since there were repetitions of activities, as reported by the students, it is not surprising that the students became bored during some of the lessons.

Then sometimes, immediately after Literature there is English, four straight periods of Literature and English. Yeah, four straight periods, so that was, and that was the lesson when we had that duplicate thing, it's always in that four periods the duplicate thing [repetition of activities].

[Researcher: And in the four periods, sometimes you just sit and watch slides, no activities?]

Ah yeah, not really, sometimes, not a lot, maybe in [the English] lessons, ah, then we have activities, if in our Literature teacher's, we usually just listen.

(Student from Class 7, School 1)

Another difficulty arose because there was no workshop on the LDEP before the implementation of the programme. Initially, the researcher intended to hold a

workshop before the programme was implemented in each of the four schools. However, due to time constraints arising from the teachers not having the time to attend these workshops no workshops were held at the beginning. Instead, an overview of the programme as well as outlines and lesson plans were presented and teachers were advised to refer to the researcher should they encounter any difficulty in the course of their teaching. However, while teaching, teachers in Schools 1, 3 and 4 experienced difficulties. When the researcher was informed of these difficulties, she went over some of the lessons with the teachers. The researcher also modelled the teaching of a lesson in School 1 during Phase 1 and in School 3 toward the middle of the programme. More detailed overview of the lessons was also conducted with the teachers from School 1, Phase 2. In School 4, some time was spent with Teacher K who voiced her reservations with some of the lessons. She mentioned having difficulty finding resources on the Internet on how to teach sentence types and the effects of each on the reader. She was informed that the lessons did not originate from the Internet but was designed by the researcher. Suggestions on how to conduct the lesson were offered. The researcher advised the teachers to notify her should they experience further difficulties. However, few teachers did and it was toward the end that some teachers reported the students having difficulty with understanding some of the concepts taught. The teachers might have had difficulty consulting the researcher during the course of the teaching of the programme. They might have encountered the problems while teaching and it would be too late to consult the researcher at that point. They might have also been trying to cope with teaching unfamiliar materials and dealing with the usual administrative and other duties. During the school term, they simply may not have had the time to consult the researcher.

Most of the schools and teachers were cooperative and followed the lesson plans as much as possible. Minor modifications made to the lesson plans included using transparencies instead of vanguard sheets or PowerPoint. In one or two cases, the modifications were somewhat significant. From the log book entries

and during lesson observations of Class 23, it was noted that Teacher K either did not follow through with all the lessons or modified the lessons. In a log book entry of Teacher K, she mentioned not assigning her students the narrative writing and the peer-editing exercises 'due to time constraints'. The exercise on creating their own narratives was a culmination of all the activities in the programme leading to the students creating the end-product, their own narratives. In essence, that was the summative activity of the programme. In addition, during one of the observations, for one particular lesson instead of having a whole class discussion the class was divided into smaller groups. Many of the students appeared confused about what was expected of them. The purpose of having a whole class discussion was to aid the students in carrying out the activity. The researcher had felt when designing the lesson that the activity was not an easy one and the students would not be able to complete it without guidance. In a whole class discussion, the input from the teacher and a wider group of students might have helped the students to better understand what was expected of them and to actively participate in the activity. That could be one of the reasons why Teacher K and the students from Class 23 during the small group interview mentioned the lessons being difficult for the students. A more detailed briefing of the lessons and objectives of the lessons as well as a workshop might have better prepared the teacher and others to teach the lessons.

The difficulties that arose during the implementation and the teaching of the LDEP added to the variability in the project. The presence of this variability was important in a curriculum initiative project of this sort. The curriculum, tested in such diverse circumstances, led to significant improvements in the writing and reading comprehension skills of the experimental group of students in the schools (c.f. Chapter 4). Admittedly, the Effect Sizes of the improvement scores in the writing skills assessment were not uniformly large, particularly in the case of School 3 (c.f. Table 4.14, p.130). However, it is argued that this increases the validity claim. In the face of these large variations, including those that were

encountered unexpectedly in schools, the experimental group of students improved over the control group of students in all the schools. The LDEP appears to have inherent merits that aid in improving the writing and reading comprehension skills of the students.

Two classes that showed little quantitative improvement in the writing assessments were Class 4, School 1 and Class 18, School 3. Class 4 attained an improvement score ES of 0.08 and Class 18 an improvement score ES of 0.04 in the writing skills assessment (c.f. Table 4.16, p.134). Possible reasons as to why they might not have performed as well as the other classes are offered in the next section.

Class 4, School 1

According to the English teacher, when comparing Class 4 with another experimental class, Class 2 that she taught, there were differences in the attitude of the students.

For [Class 4], it's a very restless bunch. I think, actually I should say that half of them benefited, the other half I am not very sure whether they have benefited.... But for [Class 2] they are quite responsive and quite, they are able to sit still. I think yeah, most of them benefited.

(Teacher B, School 1)

Class 2 gained an improvement ES of 0.64 in the writing assessment (c.f. Table 4.16, p.134). During the first observation of Class 2, the teacher had to leave the class because one of her students was taken ill suddenly. She was out of the class for a long time, and yet, most of the students remained on-task, completing the group assignment given before the teacher left the room. In observing Class 4 the first time, they were working on the drawing of the characters and most appeared to be engrossed in it. However, during the second observation, many students were off-task. The teacher spent quite a bit of time dealing with

misbehaving students. The activity involved getting them to change the storyline after altering the characters. The students were observed during the second part of the double period and they were already working on their assignment. The students were given additional time to finish their group assignment, and in the end, only one group managed to present their group work. In comparison to Class 2, many of the students in Class 4 appear not to be self-motivated. When the students in Class 4 were engaged in a task that they enjoyed, the drawing of the characters, they were engrossed. However, for the second activity few were engaged in the activity. In addition, when the researcher went in to observe the second time, during the second of double periods, the students were asked to take out their thermometers to check their temperatures. While the teacher went round checking the palms of the students, a group of boys started playing with their thermometers. Such a distraction could easily divert the attention of restless students from the assigned activity.

In the teaching of any curriculum, the cooperation of the students in the classes would also be needed to make the curriculum a success. If the students do not listen, it is hardly likely that any learning can take place. To further illustrate this point, the performance of another group of classes taught by the same teacher might be examined. In School 2, the same teacher taught all the three experimental classes. The Effect Sizes in the improvement scores of two of the classes, Classes 13 and 15, were similar, being 0.71 and 0.67 respectively (c.f. Table 4.16, p.134). The ES of the improvement score of the third Class 11 was much lower at 0.29 (c.f. Table 4.16, p.134). During the observations of these three classes, it was found that the students from Class 15 were generally quieter than those from Classes 11 and 13. Though Class 13 can be noisy during group work, most of the students did their assigned class work. In addition, when the teacher questioned them, they offered appropriate answers, indicating that they were listening during the explicit teaching of the grammar concepts and writing techniques. On the other hand, the students from Class 11 were more boisterous. During the second lesson that was observed by the

researcher, when the teacher realised that most of the students were not listening during the explicit teaching of certain grammatical concepts, she began quizzing them. Most of them could not answer her.

Class 18, School 3

Class 18 was another experimental class that showed little improvement in the writing skills post-test. According to the English teacher who also taught another experimental class, Class 20 (with an improvement ES of 0.30 in the writing skills assessment, c.f. Table 4.16, p.134), the students from Class 18 were generally weaker in English. More girls in Class 18 came from a Mandarin-speaking background whereas more girls in Class 20 came from an English-speaking background. The girls from Class 18 were also less 'motivated to do well academically' (Teacher J, School 3) than the girls from Class 20. The English teacher who taught Classes 2 and 4 in School 1 also said that more students in Class 4 came from a Mandarin-speaking background and that Class 4 was less motivated than Class 2. Further research needs to be conducted to ascertain if there is a correlation between the Mandarin-speaking background of students and the lack of motivation to learn in an English language classroom.

During the second observation of Class 18, it was noticed that the teacher was having difficulty holding the attention of the students in Class 18 because at least a third of them were off-task. During the group activity, instead of focusing on the activity the students were talking about unrelated matters, or revising for their upcoming Common Test. Common Tests are scheduled tests that all the classes in the level complete toward the end of a term.

Further pertinent evidence comes from the writing skills post-test. Class 18 was the experimental class with the highest number of students with incomplete scripts that could not be analysed. In the writing skills assessment eight (of the thirty-eight) post-test scripts of the students were excluded from the analysis. Their English teacher reported the students spending too much time working on

their outlines, and she had to prompt them many times to hurry up to finish within the time limit of thirty minutes. The Common tests and revision for these tests may have worn-out the students or the half-hour given to complete the writing test may have been insufficient. For practical reasons, the students were only given half an hour to complete the writing tests. The short time was a drawback as some students alluded to hurrying to finish their narratives within the short time given. Students in Singapore are normally given an hour in which to complete their compositions.

Class 9, School 1

The qualitative data of Class 9, School 1 were included for two reasons. The qualitative data might further explain why the quantitative data could be deemed unreliable. Additionally, the students in the small group could provide useful information to how at least some of the students in the class felt about the programme. Unlike the quantitative data, feedback from the observation and the English teacher could be more reliable. The feedback from the small group of students about the programme might also be reliable since the mechanics of a small group interview, which involves face-to-face interview with the researcher, may influence the group members to offer genuine feedback.

In general, the comments from the small group of students from Class 9 about the LDEP were positive. Some found the PowerPoint presentation, through which the grammar concepts were explicitly taught, uninteresting but useful. All the students also mentioned that they felt they were writing better narratives. According to one student, when her Literature teacher gave

tips on how to elaborate each paragraph, such as the introduction, climax, um, ideas keep flowing out of my head, and I can read, I can write so many things in just one paragraph and my grades has improved, since I failed for my, I think, mid-year, till now, then I pass.

(Female Student, Class 9, School 1)

All the students also said that they would recommend the programme to their peers.

Student 1 [female]: [The programme is] exciting, fun and excellent [laughter from the other students].
Adjective, what!

Student 2 [male]: Yes, because we know how to write an essay.

(Students from Class 9, School 1)

Some of the students commented that half the class were not attentive during lessons and that the teacher had difficulty getting the class to pay attention in class. From the class observation too, it was clear that few students were listening to the English teacher. She had to raise her voice on several occasions. Many of the students did not appear motivated to learn. The English teacher also reported that she had difficulty motivating the class to learn. According to her these students being from a Normal (Academic) class were not as academically motivated as the students from the Express stream.

In general, Class 9 was boisterous and seemed uninterested in learning. Though many appeared not to have paid attention, the students in the small group said that they had gained from the programme. From the terms that the students used during the interview in relation to the concepts they had learnt it was clear that these students in the small group had learnt some of the concepts. However, in general the class might not have gained much from the LDEP.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative data from the interviews with the teachers and students, observations of the experimental classes, field notes and log books of the teachers reveal that generally the students had benefited from the programme though there were some limitations expressed.

Positive feedback from the teachers and students include:

1. The advantages of an integrated Literature and English Language programme that some teachers alluded to before the implementation of the LDEP were realised during the LDEP. These advantages comprise reducing the duplication that arise from teaching two inter-related subjects separately and enhancing language skills through teaching contextually by utilising the literature text (c.f. pp.183-186). The teachers were of the opinion that the students achieved better reading comprehension skills during the LDEP because the students were taught in context (c.f. pp.187-188) and one of the two teachers who taught English and Literature remarked that there was no repetition in the teaching of similar skills under the LDEP (c.f. pp.188-189).
2. Many teachers and students reported that language skills and knowledge of grammar were enhanced during the LDEP (c.f. pp.184-185, pp.189-190 & pp.203-205).
3. Teachers mentioned that the group work and diverse activities included in the LDEP had stimulated interest of the students in the lessons (c.f. pp.186-187).
4. Many students commented that they enjoyed many of the activities and the group work (c.f. pp.202-203).

5. Some teachers also reported that the literary analytical skills of the students were enhanced through the LDEP (c.f. pp.187-188) while some students were of the opinion that not only had they learnt better with the help of the literature text but that they had also learnt more under the LDEP (c.f. 205-207).

There were also limitations and these limitations are described below:

1. Some teachers observed that the technical nature of the explicit teaching of grammar was boring for the students and that some students found it difficult to grasp some of the lessons (c.f. p.191). Students also mentioned that they found the explicit teaching of grammar boring (c.f. p.208).
2. Teachers and students commented on the lack of reinforcements of the taught grammar concepts (c.f. p.192 & p.210).
3. A few teachers from two schools were of the opinion that the objectives of the LDEP would not adequately prepare their students to meet the demands of the examinations set by their schools (c.f. pp.193-194). Some students from one school also perceived that their performances in tests had deteriorated after the LDEP (c.f. pp.209-210).
4. Some students also commented on the disadvantages of group work during which some students took advantage of the hardworking students (c.f. p.211).
5. Some problems were encountered during the implementation of the programme in Schools 3 and 1 (Phase 2). The English teachers in School 3 were inadequately briefed about the programme and there was also improper sequencing of the Literature component of the lessons (c.f. p.213). The difficulties encountered by the teachers in School 3 may have

contributed to the much lower improvement score ES of the students in the writing skills assessment in comparison to the improvement score ES of the students in the other three schools (c.f. p.197). In School 1 (Phase 2) there was inadequate liaising between the English and Literature teachers which led to a repetition of activities (c.f. pp.213-214). Some teachers reported experiencing difficulty in teaching the unfamiliar materials under the LDEP (c.f. p.198).

Students from two experimental classes with negligible positive improvement score ES in the writing skills were observed to be unmotivated and inattentive in class during the explicit teaching and group activities (c.f. pp.217-219). The feedback from the small group of students from Class 9 indicates that many students in Class 9 of School 1 were also unmotivated and inattentive though some of the students claimed that they had gained from the LDEP (c.f. pp.220-221).

The teachers also suggested some ways in which the curriculum could be modified so as to improve its effectiveness (c.f. pp.198-200). Some teachers suggested that there should be more reinforcement of the taught concepts and that more short stories should be utilised for the programme. The English teachers in School 3 mentioned that there should be a more thorough briefing. Some teachers also offered ways in which there could be better coordination between the English and Literature teachers when teaching under an integrated programme such as the LDEP.

There were teething problems with the implementation and execution of some of the lessons. There were also concerns about the difficulty level of certain grammatical concepts that were taught and lack of reinforcements of the taught concepts. In a couple of classes the lack of motivation in many of the students may have contributed to a lower achievement than the other classes in the post-test. However, from the point of view of many of the teachers and students, the

LDEP was effective in improving the writing skills and literary comprehension of many of the students. Many students also found some of the activities and group work enjoyable. The overall consensus of most teachers and students was that the LDEP achieved real improvements. Additionally, according to many of the students, they would recommend it to their peers.

The next Chapter combines the quantitative and qualitative findings in Chapters 4 and 5 to evaluate the programme. In synthesising the evidence from the mixed methods findings, Chapter 6 attempts to draw conclusions about the effectiveness and utility of the LDEP. Recommendations on how the programme could be further improved are also offered in Chapter 6.