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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 6

Evaluating the Literature-Driven English Programme

Introduction

In this chapter, the Literature-Driven English Programme (LDEP) is evaluated to ascertain if it was successful, and if it was, to what extent it was successful. In evaluating the programme the conclusions reached from the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 are used. The quantitative data from Chapter 4 and the qualitative data from Chapter 5 are synthesised in order to develop a more holistic picture. The quantitative evidence from the pre-test and post-test writing and reading comprehension skills assessment and surveys are combined with the perceptions and opinions of the teachers and students to evaluate the LDEP.

There were three areas, namely writing skills, reading comprehension skills and the teaching of grammar that formed the core of the LDEP. Due to time constraints, the focus was largely on improving narrative writing and imparting knowledge of selected grammar concepts and to a lesser extent, on enhancing reading comprehension skills. These grammar concepts were chosen because it was felt that knowledge of these concepts would aid in writing narratives. In this chapter, the LDEP is evaluated from the perspective of whether there were improvements in writing and reading comprehension skills and increased understanding of the grammar concepts taught. Apart from improvements in each of the three areas, the limitations of the LDEP are also examined. Finally, in view of the shortcomings, recommendations on how the LDEP can be further improved are suggested.

The Literature-Driven English Programme

Writing Skills

Narrative writing skills were taught during the Literature-Driven English Programme (LDEP). The students were instructed in selected grammar concepts and narrative writing techniques that would aid in the writing of narratives.

The writing skills of the students in the experimental and control groups were assessed through pre-tests that were completed before the LDEP was implemented as well as through post-tests completed at the conclusion of the LDEP. Teachers and students were also asked to comment on the benefits and weaknesses of the LDEP in relation to the teaching of writing skills.

Benefits

According to the quantitative and qualitative findings, the students in the experimental group generally improved in their writing skills under the LDEP (c.f. Table 4.3, p.112, pp.184-185 & pp.204-205). On the other hand, the post-test mean score in the writing skills assessment of the students from the control group remained similar to their pre-test mean score (c.f. Table 4.3, p.112). The students in the experimental group improved across the various sub-groups based on gender, ability, class, school and stream. The improvement scores were all the more remarkable considering that the LDEP was a language programme that ran for a relatively short span of time.

An evaluation of the LDEP in the area of writing skills is not complete without reviewing the Effect Sizes of the writing skills improvement scores of the students as a whole as well as those within the sub-groups. These sub-groups were created based on gender, ability, stream, school, school type and class. Overall,

the ES of the improvement scores of the students in the experimental group in the writing skills test was a moderate 0.44 (c.f. Table 4.3, p.112). These boys and girls came from four different schools, streams and were of different abilities. An ES of 0.44 gained by such a diverse group of students during a short language programme is significant, more so since the control group of students from three of the same schools did not improve. In addition, among the sub-groups, there were substantial gains in the improvement scores as well.

Since the control group of students did not improve, only the experimental groups of students were categorised into sub-groups to study if there were improvements across the sub-groups as well. Among the sub-group based on gender, both boys and girls in the experimental group achieved moderate improvement score Effect Sizes, with the boys gaining a slightly larger ES of 0.50 compared to the ES of 0.39 of the girls (c.f. Table 4.10, p.124). As noted in the literature review, it is often reported that boys do not perform as well as girls in English (Cleary 1992; Hawkes 2001; Head 1999; Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools & Equal Opportunities Commission 1996; Wong, Lam & Ho 2002). However, in the LDEP, not only did the experimental group of boys improve but the mean improvement score ES of these boys was also slightly larger than the mean improvement score ES attained the experimental group of girls. The LDEP may aid in reducing the disparity that exists between the achievements of the boys and girls in English Language.

Among the students with the different PSLE English Grades, the improvement score Effect Sizes was moderate to strong, with students with Grades A* and C achieving Effect Sizes of 0.56 and 0.57 respectively and students with Grades A and B gaining Effect Sizes of 0.39 and 0.46 (c.f. Table 4.8, p.122). Based on gender and PSLE English grades, the boys achieved a moderate to large improvement score Effect Sizes of between 0.43 and 1.40 (c.f. Table 4.11, p.125). The girls with Grades A* to B gained improvement Effect Sizes of between 0.37 and 0.61 (c.f. Table 4.12, p.126). According to the findings, the

LDEP benefited the students regardless of gender and ability. This is an important finding since there is evidence to show that boys often do not perform well in English Language (Hawkes 2001; Head 1999; Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools & Equal Opportunities Commission 1996). The evidence indicates that the LDEP aids boys independent of varying abilities to improve their writing skills.

In the research, there were two streams, the Special/Express and the Normal (Academic). Most secondary students in Singapore are either in the Special/Express or Normal (Academic) streams. The Normal (Academic) students comprise a smaller group as the largest group of secondary students are in the Express/Special stream. While the Special/Express stream students improved, it is significant that the Normal (Academic) students also improved. The ES of the average improvement score in the writing skills test of the Normal (Academic) students was a large 0.88 (c.f. Table 4.16, p.134). The findings demonstrate that the LDEP benefited students across a wide spectrum of abilities.

With regard to the achievement displayed by the individual schools, students in the experimental group from all four schools improved while the control group in three of the schools did not improve (c.f. Table 4.3, p.112). One of the schools, School 1, did not have a control group of students. Schools 1, 2 and 4 registered similarly strong improvement score Effect Sizes of between 0.48 and 0.56 (c.f. Table 4.14, p.130). Though the improvement score ES of School 3 was smaller at 0.18 (c.f. Table 4.14, p.130), the control group in School 3 did not improve and possibly registered a decrease compared to the experimental classes (c.f. p.135). Most of the individual experimental classes also displayed improvements in the writing skills assessment with the improvement score Effect Sizes ranging from a respectable 0.29 to a large 0.88 (c.f. Table 4.16, p.134). Only two of the fourteen experimental classes registered slight improvement score Effect Sizes of 0.04 and 0.08. The evidence reveals that generally in the schools and most of

the classes, the LDEP had a positive influence on the writing skills of the experimental group of students.

In terms of the different teachers who taught the experimental curriculum, there is evidence to suggest that the curriculum had an impact irrespective of the different teaching styles and teacher personalities. Twelve teachers taught the fourteen experimental classes and in one school, School 4, three teachers taught the experimental as well as the control classes. In most of the classes in three of the schools, each of the classes was taught by separate English and Literature teachers during the LDEP. Despite being taught by different teachers most of the experimental classes achieved moderate to large Effect Sizes in the improvement scores. Even when most of the classes were instructed by different teachers in the English and Literature components of the LDEP which led to overlaps and inconsistencies due to miscommunication or lack of coordination these classes improved. In School 4 where the same teachers taught the experimental and control classes, the experimental classes achieved improvement score Effect Sizes of 0.41 and 0.68. On the other hand, the control classes taught by the same teachers did not improve in the writing skills test. The students, in fact, achieved negative mean improvement scores in the writing skills test (c.f. Table 4.17, p.135). The findings suggest that the curriculum was effective in imparting writing skills regardless of the different class dynamics, school cultures or teaching styles.

In the surveys many students gave feedback that there was improvement in their writing skills. In the surveys that the students in the experimental group completed, between 64% and close to 80% of the students reported using the different techniques and concepts taught to improve their narrative writing skills (c.f. p.160). A high percentage of over 75% of the students had at least used some of the techniques and concepts taught (c.f. p.159). According to the responses of the students in the survey, the LDEP was successful in stimulating students to apply what was taught during the lessons.

In examining the qualitative data that included interviews with students and teachers, there was also positive feedback. Many teachers in the experimental group commented that they observed an improvement in the writing of the students (c.f. pp.184-185). Some of the teachers observed the students acquiring knowledge of the concepts or techniques taught. They also mentioned that many of the students used more descriptive words and varied the sentence structures (c.f. p.185).

Many of the students interviewed also felt that they had improved in their writing (c.f. pp.204-205). Both the male and female students reported employing some of the techniques and concepts taught, thereby creating more interesting narratives (c.f. pp.204-205). The evidence from the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates that many of the students, male and female, improved in their writing skills and they were also applying the relevant techniques and concepts taught during the LDEP. The literal replication of positive outcomes in the writing skills assessment as substantiated by the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates that there are inherent merits in the LDEP that enhance the writing skills of the students.

Reading Comprehension Skills

The intent of the research was to discover if by analysing the content and language of the literature text, the reading comprehension skills of the experimental group of students would improve as well. There was no direct instruction of reading comprehension skills in the pilot version of the LDEP. The increase in reading comprehension was hypothesised to flow from the explicit teaching of narrative writing skills and literary analysis rather than from direct instruction. Therefore, there was a possibility that the reading comprehension skills of the students would improve when students were guided to analyse and study the literature text from the point of view of a writer.

The reading comprehension skills of the experimental and control group of students were assessed through a pre-test and a post-test to discover if there was an improvement in either or both groups of students. The experimental group of teachers and students were also interviewed and the students completed surveys at the end. Though the focus of the interviews and surveys was on the writing skills and literary analysis, some insights on whether the LDEP aided in improving comprehension skills were gained as well.

Benefits

The pre-test and post-test results of the students with PSLE English grades A, B and C in Schools 3 and 4 and those from the Normal (Academic) class in School 1 were analysed. The reasons for the exclusion of the results of the Express students in Schools 1 and 2, and those of students with Grade A* in Schools 3 and 4 are offered in pp.143-145.

The quantitative data pertaining to the reading comprehension skills of students from Schools 3 and 4 indicate that generally, the students in the experimental group improved more than the control group. The experimental group gained a strong improvement ES of 0.64 as opposed to the moderate ES of 0.43 of the control group (c.f. Table 4.25, p.146). The integration of reading and writing and the use of the literature text for analysis and as a tool to teach language skills appear to have better enhanced the reading comprehension skills of the experimental group of students compared to the control group. Here it is noted that the control group of students were explicitly taught comprehension skills and they also completed comprehension exercises as part of their ordinary class work. Though the pilot LDEP did not have explicit reading comprehension exercises the students increased in reading comprehension skills more than the control group which had explicit activities in reading comprehension. The greater improvement registered by the experimental group suggests that the LDEP may be more effective in enhancing comprehension skills than the conventional mode of teaching these skills.

In comparisons between the sub-groups within the experimental group and control group, most of the different sub-groups within the experimental group also improved more than the corresponding sub-groups within the control group. Across gender and PSLE English grades, generally the experimental group improved more than the control group of students (c.f. pp.150-152). The experimental group of girls achieved an ES of 0.60 whereas the improvement score ES of the control group of girls was 0.41 (c.f. Table 4.27, p.149). The evidence also indicates that the experimental group of boys gained much more from the LDEP than the control group of boys. The boys in the experimental group achieved a large improvement ES of 0.92 whereas the control group of boys achieved a moderate ES of 0.49 (c.f. Table 4.27, p.149). With regard to gender, both girls and boys in the experimental group improved more than the girls and boys in the control group. However, the achievement by the experimental group of boys was noteworthy in that the magnitude of the improvement was greater than that of the experimental group of girls or the control group of boys. Though the findings demonstrate that the LDEP had been successful in enhancing the comprehension skills of both boys and girls, the evidence reveals that the boys may have benefited more than the girls.

The girls with PSLE English Grade A achieved a moderate reading improvement score ES of 0.37 whereas the improvement score ES achieved by the control group of girls with Grade A was a small 0.19 (c.f. p.151). With regard to PSLE English Grades A and B, the boys in the experimental group gained much larger improvement Effect Sizes of 0.68 and 1.40 respectively in contrast to the control group of boys with Effect Sizes of 0.28 and 0.66 (c.f. p.150). The experimental group of girls with Grade A and the experimental group of boys with Grades A and B gained more in terms of enhanced reading comprehension skills than the girls and boys with the corresponding grades in the control group.

There were negligible differences in the achievement findings of Schools 3 and 4. In School 3, the experimental group achieved a large reading improvement score

ES of 0.63 as opposed to the moderate ES of 0.39 of the control group (c.f. Table 4.30, p.154). In School 4, the experimental group also achieved a large improvement score ES of 0.65 while the ES of the control group stood at 0.46 (c.f. Table 4.31, p.155). Again, despite the differences between the two schools, one being an all-girls' government-aided school and the other a government co-educational school, the improvements of the experimental groups were similarly greater than the improvements registered by the control groups in these schools. From the findings it can be ascertained that the LDEP may have been more effective than the usual curricula of these schools in improving reading comprehension skills.

The reading comprehension results of the Normal (Academic) class in School 1 were also analysed. Though there was no control group of Normal (Academic) class, the achievement registered by these students were in themselves notable. The Normal (Academic) class of students achieved a large ES of 1.10 in the reading comprehension improvement scores (c.f. Table 4.33, p.156). Boys and girls registered large Effect Sizes of 1.15 and 1.01 respectively (c.f. Table 4.33, p.156). The findings indicate that the LDEP was successful in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of the students in the Normal (Academic) stream.

Through the close reading of and interaction with the literature text during the LDEP, the reading comprehension skills of the students with PSLE English grades A and B in the experimental group in Schools 3 and 4 had improved substantially more than comparable students in the control group (c.f. Table 4.25, p.146). Likewise, the experimental group of students in the Normal (Academic) class in School 1 also registered large improvements (c.f. Table 4.33, p.156). The LDEP appears to have been effective in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of the students, irrespective of gender, ability, stream or school.

The surveys that the students completed and the interviews with the teachers focused on improvement in writing skills and literary analysis. In terms of literary analysis, around 70% of the students, both males and females, said the lessons during the LDEP were helpful in analysing the literature text (c.f. p.160). Many of the literature teachers felt that the LDEP was useful in teaching literary analysis (c.f. pp.187-188) though one teacher felt that during the LDEP there was insufficient literary analysis of the literature text (c.f. p.193). Though literary analysis is different from reading comprehension in some ways, it is also similar in that comprehension of the text is gained through analysis. Therefore, it is possible that the responses of the students in the survey, indicating that literary analysis was advanced during the programme, might imply a developing general reading comprehension skill as well. The literal replication of enhanced reading improvement scores of the experimental group of students with Grades A and B in Schools 3 and 4 suggests that the LDEP aided in enhancing the reading comprehension skill of these students regardless of gender or ability.

Understanding of Grammar Concepts Taught

Six grammar concepts were taught during the LDEP to enhance the writing skills of the students. There are some researchers who argue against the explicit teaching of grammar (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones & Schoer 1965; Cox 1995; Hartwell 1985; Hillocks & Smith 1991). It was the intent of this research to discover if using the literature text as a tool to explicitly teach grammar in context would aid in the students learning and applying the taught grammar concepts. In the surveys that the students completed, they were asked to respond to the number of concepts that they had learnt. In addition, in interviews with teachers and students, they were asked to give feedback on the teaching of grammar concepts.

Benefits

There is evidence to indicate that the teaching of the grammar concepts had increased the awareness of these concepts in many students. About 75% of the

students surveyed reported understanding three or more out of the six concepts taught (c.f. p.159).

There were five sub-categories under which the students were assessed in the writing skills assessment. One of the sub-categories was “convention”, under which students were assessed on grammatical correctness. Under this sub-category, the students in the control group did not show any improvement but the experimental group improved (c.f. pp.115-116). The quantitative data from the surveys and the writing skills assessment indicate that the explicit teaching of grammar concepts during the LDEP resulted in the students both learning some of the concepts and applying them in their written work as well.

From the qualitative data derived from the interviews with teachers and students, it also appears that the explicit teaching of these concepts has had an effect on the learning of the students. According to the teachers the students had become more aware of some of the concepts taught (c.f. pp.189-190).

They are a bit more aware, you know, because of all the drilling, you know, identify the adjectives, and identify this, you know, I think they are a bit more aware in, as opposed to if we didn't do this.

(Teacher L, School 4)

Students reported applying some of the taught concepts (c.f. pp.206-207). They also mentioned that arriving at an understanding of the utilitarian purpose of some of the concepts had changed the way they viewed writing.

As for the grammar, the one that shocked me the most is actually the activity where we had to change the grammar, the tenses of each word and how it changes the whole meaning of the sentence. So I do use it now because, just you can see how it changes, and how your writing, how someone can view your writing in the wrong way if you should use the wrong tense.

(Male student from Class 13, School 2)

On the other hand, a few teachers expressed misgivings about the teaching of grammar (c.f. pp.190-191). They reported that some students experienced difficulty in grasping a few of the concepts and some students become bored during the lessons. There was also some caution expressed against the amount of attention paid to the teaching of grammar concepts.

However, when the LDEP was designed, it was felt that there was a need to revisit and teach grammatical conventions since in Singapore and in the United States there were concerns in recent years about the declining standards in English (Davie 2003; Vavra 2003). During the interviews with teachers, they also mentioned the poor knowledge of grammatical rules evident in the writings of their students (c.f. p.189).

It appears that many students who enter secondary schools do not have a sound knowledge of the grammatical rules that would help them in writing as well as reading comprehension.

They don't seem to have firm knowledge of grammar and how to use it.

(Teacher A, School 1)

There are local students coming from non-English speaking backgrounds and they often converse in the local colloquial language, *Singlish*. In addition, teachers from Schools 2 and 4 also mentioned that in their schools there were students from other countries, especially China, who were very weak in English.

The weaker ones, they tend to translate their thoughts from Chinese to English and somehow there are expressions that become very awkward, these are of course exceptional students, very weak students, but generally, the basic level difficulties in grammar, difficulties in expressing themselves.

(Teacher G, from School 2)

Additionally, there were concerns that the bilingual policy and the communicative form of teaching English have led to deterioration in the standard of English (c.f. p.189). The use of modern communication technology, such as mobiles and the internet, has also led to a decline in the standard of English (c.f. p.189). There appears to be a real need to teach students grammar concepts. In Singapore as well as in the United States, the concerns about the declining standards in relation to English Language (c.f. p.19, p.39) have led to calls to return to the basics. In the United States, for instance, advocates for a return to the explicit teaching of grammar include Hagemann (2003) and Vavra (2003). It was partly in view of this expressed need to arrest declining standards that the teaching of grammar concepts was incorporated into the LDEP.

In designing the explicit teaching materials of the selected grammar concepts, a conscious effort was made to move away from the traditional mode of teaching formal grammar through the use of isolated examples and through completing exercises that were divorced from context. Some of the teachers were also wary of teaching grammar explicitly (c.f. p.191). One of the teachers mentioned that the teaching of formal grammar is not very useful in imparting the necessary grammar concepts to the students.

Grammar and usage – perhaps you have students who diligently learn new words but they use them wrongly because they learn them in isolation from the context, then we have another problem.

(Teacher A, School 1)

During the LDEP, the students were taught contextually through the use of examples from the literature text. In addition, the students were expected to complete grammar exercises extracted from the literature text. It was hoped that the contextual teaching of grammar concepts through the use of concrete examples from the literature text would help the students learn the concepts better. There are however, improvements that could be made to the implementation and teaching of these grammatical concepts. Recommended

improvements are suggested toward the end of this chapter under “Suggested Improvements” (c.f. pp.243-245).

In summary, it may be useful to examine the comments of the teacher from School 2 with regard to the explicit teaching of grammar. In School 2, the English programme for the lower secondary students was an integrated one, modelled after a Literature-Based English Curriculum (LBEC). In her first interview before the implementation of the LDEP, the teacher from School 2 commented:

Of course, there are weaknesses in it [LBEC] that there is less emphasis on grammar, so the students get less exposure to grammar. But then, we found that some of these, even if we teach grammar, transfer does not usually automatically take place, so perhaps, we hope that as we go along, as the students are exposed more and more to literature, they will get a sense of how language is being used.

(Teacher G, School 2)

In the interview after the implementation of the LDEP, on being asked whether the programme was useful, she said:

Certainly yes, also helps extremely with the narrative writing because... 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 quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that many students had improved in their understanding of the grammatical concepts and were applying what they had learnt in their writing as well. The evidence indicates that the explicit teaching of grammar concepts had aided in the improvement of the writing skills of these students.

In the LDEP the imbalance found in the LBEC caused by the absence of the explicit teaching of grammar is corrected by linking the explicit teaching of grammar to the study of the literature text. The literature text becomes the vehicle through which students are taught to become better writers and readers. While in a LBEC it is hoped that students will gain language skills through interaction with the literature text, in the LDEP the learning of identified skills and concepts are explicitly taught. In the course of the research, during the programme the students were guided in gaining an appreciation of the literature text as a model of well-crafted language. During the implementation of the programme it was hoped that, through the process of theory application, they would be able to transfer knowledge of the craft into their own compositions when creating their narratives. The outcomes imply that there was transference of concepts taught when the students composed their narratives.

Drawbacks of the LDEP

Generally, the students in the experimental group improved in their writing skills (c.f. Table 4.3, p.112) while the control group did not improve. In the reading comprehension assessment, the students with Grades A and B in the experimental group generally performed better than the students with similar grades in the control group (c.f. Table 4.25, p.146). However, due to the nature of the curriculum initiative project during which the variables were not manipulated and teachers retained full control over the teaching of the given materials (c.f. pp.66-67), there were limitations. A few teachers reported encountering difficulties during the implementation of the programme and some teachers expressed reservations over some parts of the programme.

A few of the teachers from Schools 1, 3 and 4 found that some of the lessons in the uniform curriculum implemented in four diverse schools were difficult for some of their students (c.f. p.191). In School 1, one of the teachers was of the opinion that the Secondary One students were too young for a programme like the LDEP (c.f. p.195). According to her, the older students, from Secondary Two

onward, would have benefited more from the lessons than the Secondary One students.

In another school, School 3, the teachers alluded to the difficulties they encountered in having access to the curriculum just before the implementation of the programme. The programme outline was sent to the school at least three months earlier and the researcher requested for a meeting with the English and Literature teachers during the June holidays. However, due to lack of adequate communication, the researcher met only the Literature teachers during the school holidays. As a result the English teachers in School 3 had a short period of time to acquaint themselves with the curriculum before teaching under the programme (c.f. pp.195-197).

Some teachers and a few of the students reported that there were inadequate reinforcements of the concepts taught (c.f. pp.192, 210). Due to the short period allowed for the programme in all the four schools, there was no time to include more exercises to reinforce the taught concepts. Thus, the aim of the current research was limited to studying the effect of the short-term learning of the concepts taught during the programme. However, the feedback on the relatively few reinforcements is viewed constructively as it leads to the useful suggestion to include more reinforcements of the learnt material in future implementations of the LDEP.

With regard to the reading comprehension skills, it could not be ascertained whether the LDEP had been successful with students who scored in the highest percentiles in the pre-test in the reading comprehension skills assessment. The reading comprehension test instrument was a uniform instrument designed to cater to students of different abilities. In attempting to make the test accessible to the low ability students the reading comprehension pre-test and post-test became less challenging for the students with PSLE English Grade A* or close to it. A more challenging instrument with more differentiated difficulty levels would

have been helpful in discovering if the programme was useful in improving the reading comprehension skills of the higher ability students as well. Further implementations of the LDEP should incorporate assessment instruments that address a wider range of abilities.

Some of the teachers expressed reservations over the explicit teaching of the grammar concepts. Additionally, some of the students were of the opinion that the teaching of these concepts was boring (c.f. p.208). Among the teachers who expressed reservations, there were a few who thought that they were losing the interest of their students when the grammar concepts were taught explicitly (c.f. p.191). The objective of the explicit teaching of grammar concepts was obvious to some students but to others they were just learning “grammar”. Students who understood the objective appeared to appreciate the need to learn grammar and were more amenable to the teaching of these grammar concepts (c.f. pp.203-204 & p.206). It may be difficult to make a lesson a hundred percent “fun”, and not all “fun” lessons may be educationally enriching. Therefore, it is important to inform the students of the objectives of the grammar lessons and link these lessons to their writing, reading comprehension or literary lessons. It is also important for the students to be aware that recall of concepts already taught could be just as important as learning new concepts.

The LDEP included many activities that involved students working in groups. While many of the students enjoyed the group work (c.f. pp.186-187 & pp.202-203), there were also problems with group work (c.f. p.211). The lesson plans did not specify any ground rules or expectations for group work. Since teachers would have different ground rules or expectations for their classes, the researcher was not in favour of imposing her own version of rules and expectations. Again, this is the nature of naturalistic research where the abilities and teaching styles of the teachers cover a spectrum and the teachers are volunteers of unknown ability before the LDEP was implemented.

Suggested Improvements

The following suggestions are offered as a means of improving on the LDEP should the LDEP be implemented in schools in the future.

1. *Teachers and Students Having Access to More Information on the LDEP*

There were students who complained that the explicit teaching of the grammar component of the LDEP was uninteresting (c.f. p.208) and some thought some parts of the grammar component were repetitive of lessons learnt in primary school (c.f. p.203). Thus, one of the suggestions pertains to ensuring that students are informed of the overall objectives of the programme as well as the sub-objectives of each of the lessons so that they can appreciate the links between the lessons. Understanding the objective of each of the lessons might help the students to better appreciate the LDEP.

In one of the schools, teachers encountered problems when teaching under the LDEP because they were not adequately briefed about the programme (c.f. pp.195-197). Additionally, a few teachers had misconceptions about the programme (c.f. pp.213-216) and some teachers felt uncomfortable teaching the programme because they were unfamiliar with the curriculum (c.f. p.198).

Teachers themselves should also have sufficient time to acquaint themselves with the theory behind the LDEP. They should be made aware of the reasons for grammar being taught explicitly and the ways in which the teaching of grammar under LDEP is different from the conventional mode of teaching grammar. With a greater understanding of the mode of teaching grammar and with relevant resources being made available to them, the teachers may feel more comfortable teaching the lessons. If the teachers assume greater ownership of the teaching materials, it may follow that there would be greater understanding and appreciation of the explicit teaching of the materials. For instance, PowerPoint presentations of the explicit teaching materials could be less frequently used. Instead, teachers could have interactive lessons with their students, acting as

instructors as well as facilitators, in the learning of the grammar concepts. In addition, other modes of presenting the explicit teaching materials could be utilised. For example, in one of the lessons the clauses were taught by getting volunteers to come up to the front of the class and demonstrate the different clauses.

Because of the way the lesson was taught they were more interested. We had nine people to the front of the class holding different types of clauses, so in a way it was some sort of a demonstration that they enjoyed. They don't like lessons where definitions are stated, whether on the whiteboard or PowerPoint slides and then asked to identify. They don't seem to like that. I think they like movements.

(Teacher A, School 1)

2. *Inclusion of More Reinforcements*

Some teachers and students were of the opinion that there were too few reinforcements of taught concepts (c.f. pp.192 & 210). To facilitate long-term learning, more reinforcements should be included in the curriculum. In addition, these reinforcements should be in the form of activities, and not more explicit teaching or lectures. More explicit teaching might have the reverse effect of causing students to lose interest in the lessons (c.f. pp.210-211).

3. *Setting Ground Rules for Group Work*

Many students claimed that they learnt better from their peers (c.f. pp.201-202) and because of that, group work should continue to play a big role in the LDEP. However, some students reported that there had been abuses during the group work (c.f. p.211). Teachers should set ground rules to ensure that students do not take advantage of hard work of other students which may demoralise the hardworking students.

I don't enjoy because the group work is not actually group work, only a few persons doing it.

(Student from Class 18, School 3)

The rules would also act as a safeguard to prevent excess socialising which would be detrimental to learning.

It's their comfort zone... they like to talk, then never, you know, remember about the work we are supposed to do, until the teacher scolding us.

(Female student from Class 9, School 1)

Group work can also take up a lot of valuable teaching and learning time and therefore, it is important to set a schedule and keep to it.

If the class ain't cooperative, right, then the teachers can't get the class to go into, how do you say, groups fast enough, then there might not be much time for presentation and stuff.

(Female Student from Class 24, School 4)

Group work can lead to good learning experiences but it can also lead to anger and frustration because children have a strong sense of fair play. Therefore, it is important to have rules in place and inform the students of the group expectations before they begin working in groups.

4. Develop the LDEP to Extend it over a School Year and Include More English Language Skills

Due to the short duration of the current research the focus was on writing skills. The LDEP should be further developed to include the teaching of more English Language skills and extended to include the curriculum for the entire school year.

5. Develop package of Resource Materials for the Teachers

Some teachers had reported that they did not feel confident teaching under the LDEP because they were not familiar with the materials used or the methods of teaching employed during the programme (c.f. p.198). Developing a package of resource materials and having resource teachers to aid in orienting and acquainting the teachers with the LDEP would enable the teachers to approach teaching under the LDEP with more confidence.

Conclusion

Under the three main areas of the LDEP that were measured, namely writing skills, reading comprehension skills and the teaching of grammar concepts, there were positive outcomes. The experimental group of students improved in the writing skills assessment whereas the control group of students did not improve. Across differences of gender, school, class, stream and abilities, in general, there was improvement in the performances of the experimental group of students. In the reading comprehension skills assessment, the results of students with Grades A and B from Schools 3 and 4, and those of the Normal (Academic) class in School 1 were analysed. Again, the experimental group of students displayed greater improvement than the control group of students. Even within the sub-groups of gender, school, stream and ability, the experimental group of students improved more than the control group of students. The students and teachers also mentioned observing improvements in writing skills and literary analytical skills. Additionally, most students in the experimental group appeared to have grasped and applied some of the taught grammar concepts in their narratives. On the other hand, the students from the control group did not display any improvement in the area of “convention” in their writing. The teachers and students in the experimental group also reported that the students were applying grammar concepts when composing their narratives.

The teachers and students mentioned some weaknesses in the programme. The difficulty level of some of the lessons and problems encountered during the implementation of the programme were mentioned along with the lack of adequate reinforcements of the concepts taught. Some students found the teaching of the grammar concepts uninteresting, and some teachers also had reservations about the teaching of the grammar concepts. A further group of students reported disliking group work because group work processes were sometimes abused by students not doing the assigned work.

In light of the weaknesses mentioned by the participants, some improvements to the programme are suggested. Students and teachers should have more information about the programme, especially with regard to the teaching of grammar concepts. Teachers should have ample opportunity to get well-acquainted with the programme, the materials and modes of teaching the materials. There should also be ground rules for the group work and more reinforcements of the concepts should be included in the programme.

In the next and concluding chapter, the research is evaluated through assessing whether the research questions were answered. In addition, the practical and theoretical implications and limitations are covered. Recommended improvements to the research are also offered should future research be undertaken in this area of curriculum development. Finally, the significance of the research is discussed.