Artikel Asli

Comics in Reading Comprehension Enhancement to Disseminate Nationhood and Patriotism

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Abstract: Instilling the knowledge and value of nationhood has been conducted most of the time using linear form of writing in the National Language. The National Language is utilized because it is a language to be mastered by all the citizens of Malaysia. However there should be a diversity in the types of materials in dispersing nationhood and patriotism among the young generation. Nationhood and patriotism values should also be imparted through materials such as the comics. Materials regarding nationhood of Malaysia are also present in abundance in English. Hence the second language should also be used to inculcate nationhood and patriotism. It would contribute greater to the knowledge in history of Malaysia. The incapability in comprehending the materials read on nationhood and patriotism would hinder the students from obtaining knowledge and values of nationhood. The study focused on enhancing reading comprehension among the secondary school students in the notion of enabling them to read and understand nationhood reading materials regardless of types of text and language used.

Keywords: Comics, reading comprehension, nationhood, patriotism

Introduction

The fundamental element of nation building and its progress is the young generations' self-development. Patriotism is a prime and dominance element which is significant in the construction and development of the young generations' identity specifically the adolescents in the schools. Nevertheless, the reality of the fortitude in patriotism is still debatable. Although the government has made the nationhood based subject, a compulsory subject to instill patriotism and nation hood values, the interest and attentiveness towards this subject is deteriorating.

The impact is evident through a study conducted among the university students, which revealed that majority of the students; perceive that the current education system has failed to impart the understanding of the social contract (Nazri Muslim 2014) which is the fundamental constituent in the formation of this nation. This scenario should have instigated the concern of the society since education is presumed to be a dominant instigator to patriotism (Pronina 2012). Hence, this paper, focuses on the transformation of reading materials used in imparting nationhood and patriotism among the young generation utilizing not only Bahasa Malaysia but the second language too which is English. The reason is to enable the students to extract knowledge and information present in abundance in English reading materials. This two-pronged strategy, which is to enhance reading comprehension of English materials using the comics in order to enable the students to read English comics on nationhood, would add fortune to the national education policy.

English has been widely accepted as the language for progress of a nation, especially in the field of science and technology, in the spread and acquisition of knowledge itself and in the boost of economy of a nation apart from being one of the languages spoken widely in the world. It was perceived as having great influence in the world through the "relentless hold the language has in the running of the world today"

(Doshi, 2012). However the issue regarding language specifically the national language still persisted being an issue of contention with non-Malay elites predominantly favouring English or English and Malay Language to be the National Language and the Malay nationalist of UMNO favouring Malay Language only (Graham. B, 2005).

Therefore, the aims of the government are to elevate the English language to be the "international communication" and the Bahasa Malaysia as the official language of the country internally (Loga Mahesan, 2005). However, English is still perceived as an important language and as the second most important language after the National Language. The importance of being proficient in English to acquire knowledge in the field of Science and Technology (Bernadette Foo & Cynthia Richards, 2004) could not be revoked too. Henceforth, English language has been accepted as the second language in Malaysia and undoubtedly been given a lot of emphasize.

The teaching of English Language and the materials used in the classroom by the teachers, has transformed parallel to the latest method of teaching which is the communicative method. The advent in the technology has contributed to the transformation of teaching aids utilizing the latest technology such as the Internet, website, software and others pertaining to the digital world. The aim of this transformation is to enhance the mastery of the language including comprehension of the gist of the lesson taught in the English classroom. One of the important elements in learning any language including English is the comprehension of text or materials used. The materials or the reading instruction specifically, should enhance students' comprehension, and suitable for the students. This is due to the fact that the content of the reading instruction, its quality and its difficulty would contribute to the meaning making process (Pardo, 2004), which contributes to understanding of any reading materials read.

Issues in comprehending reading materials

It is a fact that the learners in school especially, fail to master English language even though they have learned the language throughout their schooling years. It was found that the 'main problem' (Maryam Sabbah, 2013) of year 5 students who participated in a research administered in the northern part of Malaysia is comprehending the English text read, apart from other problems such as lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Lack of vocabulary will hinder comprehension because the reader would not be able to understand the text itself. Problems in comprehending a text read is often encountered by the readers (Jahromi, 2014). This leads to students not 'understanding the overall meaning of a text'. (Maryam Sabbah, 2013). This includes reading of nationhood materials, which normally convey hefty issues of nation and nation building values. Without understanding what is being read, reading becomes meaningless.

Similarly, the problem exist among tertiary level students in Malaysia who also face problems such as unable to comprehend long sentences or sentences containing difficult words in English. (Ahmad Mazli Muhammad, 2007; Nambiar, 2007; Zaira Abu Hassan, 2008; Normazidah Che Musa, Koo Yiew Lee & Hazita Azman, 2012).

Rigorous steps need to be taken to overcome the problem of comprehending what is read especially in the secondary level in order to eliminate the problem in the future. At present, with the Internet, we have students or teenagers who are 'digital natives (Prensky, 2001 in Yuan 2011). They grew in the era of cell phones, digital camera, digital technologies and fast spreading technology of information spreading platform. They spend most of their time in front of the Internet. Teachers should take advantage of this scenario to provide materials that would attract students to read and the focus should be on enhancing language learners' comprehension. Types of materials used in the classroom has a great impact as stressed by Fletcher (2006) that the quality of comprehension is determined by the material given to be read while Pearson and Hamm (2005) in Fletcher (2006) indicated that format of reading materials has influence in reading comprehension of a text.

It was found in the west, especially the United States that comics is effective in enhancing students' comprehension in the English Language and is utilized widely by the educators there regardless of the levels of their students. Lehman and Witty's large scaled study as early as 1927 revealed that students aged 8-15 years old of both gender were interested in reading comics. (Maryam Sabbah, 2013). Thus, it is only proper for teachers to utilize this interest in comics to enhance students' understanding in reading a text especially in English as a second language since input that is understood will increase the mastery of a language.

However, teachers in Malaysia rarely use comics in the classroom since there is a perception that comics are just used to create fun and humor for leisure. It is not regarded as a teaching material that can be improvised to be used in the classrooms of English Language. Based on these factors, the researcher utilized the comics as materials in the English reading comprehension classroom. Through the methods suggested, the researcher anticipate that students' interest could be engaged and their comprehension of what is read would

be enhanced since adolescents spend most of their time in front of the internet even to read. As accentuated by Serafini (2011) that at present, adolescents interact very highly with texts containing elaborated visual images apart from websites, expository texts, picture books and graphic novels.

Comics are categorized as a multimedia material. The term 'multimedia' invokes variety of definitions. However, Mayer (2009), defines multimedia as presentation of materials utilizing both words (such as spoken text or printed text) and pictures (such as illustrations, photos, animation, or video). The comics utilized in this study consist of picture and words displayed on screen of the computer. Being able to create mental image of what is read or visualize, enhances comprehension (Pressley, 2002) as cited by Dymock and Nicholson (2010). Hence, diagram or visuals help students to visualize the text in their minds when reading (Dorn and Soffos, 2005).

Furthermore, pictures and words, which are present in the comics utilized, contain unique and individual attributes as methods of delivering information since pictures are representations of things which are concrete (Paige Free, 2004). Words and images aid maximization of meaning and therefore using teaching materials that include pictures can assist meaning making Gambrell and Jawitz (1993) as cited in Paige Free (2004). Therefore, the use of pictures and words in the form of comics would enhance students' comprehension of the reading materials read including materials or comics in nationhood.

Issues Regarding Nationhood

The next focus is the issues on nationhood subjects. The prime aim of the nationhood education is to inculcate the sense of loyalty and love for the nation. Malaysia has implemented the teaching of several subjects at the higher level of education such as Malaysian Studies and Ethnic Relations and History as a subject in the secondary and lower level to educate students with national values, patriotism and belongingness to the country. However, past empirical evidence show that many students lack interest to learn such subject. Four main factors have been identified. The factors include the suitability and interest in syllabus, types of enjoyable activities and interest in teaching aids (Awang et al., 2013). Therefore, it is apparent that teaching aids or the reading materials regarding this subject would influence the interest of the students to learn the subject and absorb the nationhood values.

Malaysia is one of the nation that contains deep vertical cleavages due to differences in race, religion, culture, language and in order to integrate these diverse groups to build and sustain unity is still a continuous effort (Saad & Jacob, 2012). The young generations' knowledge and passion towards the country is vital to ensure the sustainability of peace and prosperous of the country which could only be achieved through the instilling of nationhood values among the young generation.

Literature Review

Multimedia and comprehension

A number of concurrent studies have been administered to investigate the effects of multimedia on comprehension. Studies were conducted to investigate the use of pictures to foster comprehension and answering of comprehension questions of expository texts as explained by Baggett and Graesser (1995) and Larkin and Simon (1987) as cited in Otero et al. (2002). Studies also supported the notion that the use of multimedia such as the graphic novels, which are also comics, in secondary classrooms, improved readers' comprehension skills such as making inference (Brenna, 2013).

Relatively, in a previous study conducted by Plass, Chun, Mayer, and Leutner (1998) students understood the story better when they looked up both visual and verbal annotations compared to those who only referred to visual or verbal explanations. Similarly, Yoshii and Flaitz (2002) found that learners using a combination of text and pictures performed significantly better compared to groups using pictorial annotations or only text annotations. Both the studies were cited in Abraham (2007). The use of sound, pictures, video and animated pictures have shown that they facilitate second language reading comprehension (Chun and Plass, 2005).

Research conducted by Whiting and Granoff (2010) as cited in Wheeler (2014) to examine the effects of multimedia input on the comprehension of a short story concluded that aural and visual components assist in comprehension. Formerly, Son (2003) as cited in Alkhasawneh, Rahman, Ayub, and Daud (2012), investigated the effect of multimedia and non-multimedia text on comprehension of a text and the result showed that multimedia text contributed to higher comprehension. In a research conducted by Kuo, Yang and Kuo (2010) as cited in Alkhasawneh et al. (2012) who investigated the effect of multimedia on elementary students' reading comprehension,

concluded that students' reading comprehension is enhanced by multimedia integrated text. This is due to the combination of textual and visual images, which assisted students to achieve better comprehension through greater understanding of keywords in the reading material (Sabbah, Masood, & Iranmanesh, 2013).

Comics in Education

Comics evoke meanings and exist in a unique medium since it is viable. It allows innovations on presentation of dry materials in variety fields and is categorized as a form of art (Al-Tabaa, 2014). Comics is also defined as comprising of a distinctive art form and do not belong to the print form (R. T. Cook and Meskin, 2015). Comics are referred to as a sequential art Eisner (1995) while Scott Mc Cloud (1994) refers to comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.as as cited in Vassilikopoulou et al. (2011). The fame of comics can be traced back to year 1930s. Sones (1944) reports that between 1935 and 1944, more than a hundred critical articles were published in educational and nonprofessional publications (Hammond, 2009) as cited by Sabbah et al. (2013). The 1930s and 1940s were seen as the "Golden Age" for the comics' book publication and their use as educational material (Rifas, 1988) as cited by Kneller (2009). It was reported that in 1943 six thousand schools were utilizing comics in the classroom as supplementary texts and Sones (1944) stated that over 100 articles were published in academic journals between 1935-1944 (Kneller, 2009). For the past ten years, it has been observed that comics' books in the form of digital or digital comics have earned high demands and their use have increased tremendously. (Lombard-Cook, 2015).

Apart from that, the comics industry flourished through as valuable teaching tools to illustrate potential new pedagogical avenues for the history classroom (Decker & Castro, 2012). The comics later delved into more important topics such as stories on war, economic and crime and ventured into the readers mind transporting them into visual and textual settings of the text and became the entrée of the adolescents into the adults' world (Tilley, 2013). Furthermore, the rise of formal comics' studies in visual arts- related and literary fields resulted in increase of comics use in the post-secondary

classrooms due to their interdisciplinary nature of merging of text and images which also enhances the meaning making process in the text (Al-Tabaa, 2014). This includes text in nationhood and patriotism.

The educational potential of comics is described as assisting students in retaining information, incorporating the content into the body of knowledge held by the students including the facts and elements of evidence and events. Illustration in the comics assist them to understand easier and clearer because comics are pictures or images and words that have been arranged in such a way so that it would be able to convey a story. It can also be perceived as an idea being dramatized Eisner (1985) as cited in Maldonado Editor and Yuan, (2011). Some large-scaled studies using comics in the traditional classroom were conducted. One study was by Hutchinson (1949) who conducted a survey among over two thousand teachers on the use of comics in the classroom. The result indicated that comics could foster reading skills among the students (Kneller, 2009). In a study conducted among 45 students chosen randomly and given comics to read and answer a quiz, the students concluded that the comics assisted them in clearly and accurately summarizing the main points found in the text read (Engler, Hoskins, & Sylvan, 2008). Besides that, the pictorial images in the comics are found to assist students in attaining meanings of expository texts (Evans, 2003) as cited in Engler et al., (2008) and guide students in making connections of the information between the verbal and the visual representation found in the text (Engler et al., 2008). Therefore, when images and words are combined, comprehension is increased (Chute,2008) as cited in Ching and Fook (2013). Henceforth, using of comics will also help teachers to increase students' interest by varying the strategies and techniques in teaching comprehension (Nesamalar, Saratha, & Teh, 2005). It would also assist students in reading other materials in English including materials on nationhood and patriotism.

In Malaysia, comics has paved its way from the historical path initiated through the use of comics by cartoonist Lat to promote unity, diversity and uniqueness need to be preserved by all Malaysians. Lat's cartoon books in the 1950's and 1960's have been translated into many languages and made him popular with fans around the world (Tju, 2009). His comic has disseminated and spread the nationhood values and patriotism by preserving the culture and the recognition towards the national or local values in

instilling love for the country. Hence, comics has contributed on the revolution of the education itself and therefore it is not impossible to utilize comics as maximum as possible in Malaysia.

The components of the comics are panels, gutters, balloons and captions Saraceni (2003) as cited in Tiemensma (2009). Based on the positive effect of comics in education, it is anticipated that the comics would evoke all the positive elements in assisting students to comprehend reading materials specifically reading materials on nationhood and patriotism found in English.

Comics in Nationhood Reading Materials

In accordance with that, comics have also established its position as a tool possessing the ability to instill patriotism values among the students. The dynamics in comics in the form of illustration enhances the readers' understanding of the text specifically the materials on nationhood and patriotism.

Among the comics found in the Malaysian context is the comic on the history of Malaysia as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 displays the content found in the comics' titled 1Malaysia. The comics explain the events and illustrate the scenes during the Malay States including the Malacca Sultanate and the narration is continued towards the struggle during the British occupation. The comics consist of fifteen chapters.

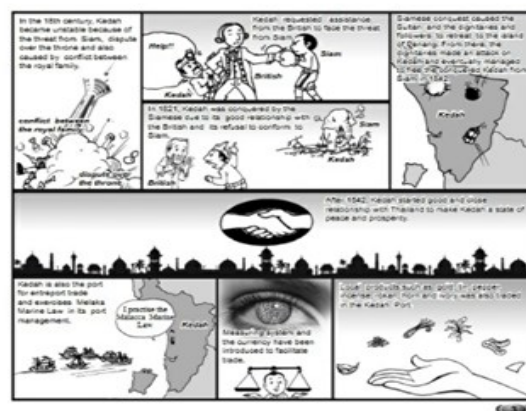Fig. 1. Content of the comics during the Malay States and British Occupation

Fig. 2. Comics containing events during the Malay States and British Occupation

Conclusion

Hence, it is proposed that the relevant authorities adopt initiatives to provide opportunities to access reading materials in the form of comics for nationhood in English too, with the prime notion of inculcating the interest towards nationhood and patriotism among young generations. In the discussed scope, the secondary students learn history as a subject and therefore, the utilization of comics as one of the materials that could be accessed in the classrooms and their homes would be an opportunity to enhance their knowledge in nationhood. Despite being a 'light' type of reading, comics bear a vintage role in disseminating the values of nationhood, patriotism and sense of belonging in the form of illustrations, which is close to the students' heart.

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