

**CONGRUENCY ANALYSIS OF TASK-BASED  
LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) AND PRIMARY  
SCHOOL STANDARD CURRICULUM: FROM  
POLICY TO TEXTBOOK TO CLASSROOM  
PRACTICE**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA  
2017**

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by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**December 2017**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful.

All praises to Allah for giving me the strength and preserverance in undertaking and completing this journey.

Firstly, I would like to express my utmost sincere gratitude to my supervisors Prof. Madya Dr. Shuki bin Osman and Associate Professor Dr. Jonathan Newton from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, for their continuous support, for their patience, for giving me motivation, and for sharing their immense knowledge. Their guidance helped me in completing this research and in the writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having better supervisors, advisors and mentors for my Ph.D study. I would also like to thank Dr. Zarina Mustafa for her insightful comments and for the hard questions asked that drives me to scrutinise this research from various aspects.

I would also like to express my greatest sincere appreciation to my beloved late father, Norany Haji Mohd Shariff for always giving me motivation and encouragement to push to the limit; my dearest mother, Asmah Hassan for always believing in me and my dearest husband, Mohd Shah Mohd Noor for always being there for me; to family and friends for giving me their support especially Noor Hashimah Hashim, for being understanding and for being there for me through hardships and life tribulations during the course of this study. May Allah bless us all.

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**ANALISA KONGRUENSI ANTARA *TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING*  
(*TBLT*) DAN KURIKULUM STANDARD SEKOLAH RENDAH (KSSR):  
DARI POLISI KE BUKU TEKS KE AMALAN PENGAJARAN DI BILIK  
DARJAH**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian analisa kongruensi ini bertujuan untuk menyelidik keselarasan antara polisi kurikulum (kurikulum yang dirancang), buku teks (bahan sumber kurikulum) dan amalan pengajaran bilik darjah (kurikulum yang dilaksanakan) dengan prinsip-prinsip *TBLT* (*Task-Based Language Teaching*) dalam pengajaran *ESL* (*English as a Second Language*) sekolah rendah. Di Malaysia, *TBLT* merupakan kaedah pengajaran yang berbeza dengan kaedah pengajaran berpusatkan guru dan sukatan pelajaran tradisional berasaskan aturan tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris. Malaysia merupakan antara negara yang terawal melaksanakan pendekatan *TBLT*. Walaubagaimanapun, realitinya, pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sekolah rendah lebih tertumpu kepada kaedah tradisional berpusatkan guru. Fasa pertama kajian ini melibatkan analisa dokumen bagi mengkaji sejauhmana rekabentuk dan tahap aktiviti dua buah buku teks Bahasa Inggeris Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) menepati prinsip-prinsip *TBLT* dan ciri rekabentuk *task*. Fasa kedua kajian ini melibatkan kajian kes pelbagai bagi mengkaji bagaimana guru-guru melaksanakan *task* dalam bahan buku teks dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi keputusan pedagogi dalam pengajaran mereka. Dapatan daripada kajian ini menunjukkan terdapat keselarasan antara polisi iaitu kurikulum yang dirancang dan bahan sumber kurikulum iaitu buku teks dengan prinsip-prinsip *TBLT*. Walaubagaimanapun, daripada hasil pemerhatian amalan pengajaran guru dalam

bilik darjah menunjukkan wujud ketidakselarasan antara keputusan pedagogi guru dalam pelaksanaan pengajaran dengan prinsip-prinsip *TBLT*. Terdapat corak yang konsisten menunjukkan kecenderungan guru-guru dalam kajian ini mengamalkan pengajaran berpusatkan guru. Ini berlawanan dengan pengajaran berpusatkan murid yang menjadi salah satu tunggak utama *TBLT*. Ini mengakibatkan kesan positif *TBLT* terhadap pembelajaran yang terkandung dalam bahan buku teks tidak tercapai (*de-tasking*). Amalan pengajaran guru-guru dalam kajian ini tidak memberi kesan positif terhadap pelaksanaan *TBLT*. Corak sebegini menampakkan guru-guru ini tidak memahami ciri-ciri *task* yang memerlukan peluang-peluang pembelajaran berkesan menggunakan bahan sumber *TBLT* tidak terlaksana. Dengan itu, perlu ada penyelidikan seterusnya yang memfokuskan kepada impak latihan perkembangan guru berkaitan *TBLT* terhadap pengajaran berasaskan bahan buku teks yang boleh meningkatkan penglibatan dan pembelajaran murid-murid sekolah rendah di Malaysia.

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(TBLT) AND PRIMARY SCHOOL STANDARD CURRICULUM: FROM  
POLICY TO TEXTBOOK TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE**

**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the fidelity of the curriculum policy (the planned curriculum), textbooks (the resourced curriculum) and classroom practices (the enacted curriculum) to the principles of TBLT in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms. In Malaysia, TBLT reflects a departure from established teacher-centric approaches and traditional lexico-grammatically sequenced syllabi. Malaysia was among the early adopters of a task-based approach as seen in the *Malaysian Communicational Syllabus* of 1975. However, in reality, English language teaching in the public school system has remained resolutely wedded to more traditional ‘chalk-and-talk drill methods’. The first phase of the research involved document analyses with the aim to investigate the extent to which the design of activities and activity cycles in recently published and officially mandated ESL Standard English Language Curriculum (SELC) textbooks for Malaysian primary schools reflect the principles of TBLT and key features of task design. The second phase of the research involves multiple case design to investigate how teachers implemented tasks from these textbooks, and the factors that influenced their pedagogic decision making. Findings from the research show that there is an alignment between policy and textbooks to TBLT principles. However, evidence from observation data suggests there is an infidelity between teachers’ pedagogical decisions to TBLT principles. Teachers tended to show consistent patterns of teacher-centeredness which resulted in the weakening of the task features embedded in the lessons (de-

tasking). Hence, “what teachers did” was not entirely positive for task-based learning. The pattern of de-tasking by these teachers suggests that in the absence of awareness and understanding of principles of teaching with tasks, teachers can all too easily and unwittingly undermine the affordances available in task-based resources. Therefore, there is a need for more research focused on the impact that task-based teacher professional learning might have on textbook-based teaching practices and ultimately on student engagement and learning in Malaysian primary schools.

# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Many revisions of the English language curriculum have been taken place in the last four decades and yet the same issue of Malaysian school leavers and graduates lack of English competency is recurring (Hazita Azman, 2016). In a 2011 survey by the Malaysian Employers Federation involving over 800 companies, it was reported that more than 60% of the respondents said that graduates interviewed for jobs were not suitable because of their weak communication skills in English. In his Oct. 10 2014 budget speech, Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak blamed weak English as one of the factors for 50,000 graduates remaining unemployed six months after leaving college (Fernandez, 2014).

Where did it go wrong? The policies or the translation and the implementation of the policies at classroom level? Past studies had shown that there was a mismatch between the policy and practice at primary level during the implementation of the previous curriculum that generated these undesirable outcomes (Hardman & Norhaslynda A-Rahman, 2014; Mohd Sofi Ali, 2003; Normaziah Che Musa, Koo & Hazita Azman 2012; Pandian, 2004). Any discrepancy between policies and practice if not addressed at the early foundation stage of the curriculum implementation would result in negative impact to the education process at a higher level as indicated by the status quo i.e. lack of English competency among Malaysian school leavers and graduates (Nor Liza Ali, M. Obaidul Hamid & Karen Moni, 2011).



Standard English Language Curriculum (SELC) is the latest curriculum revamp introduced gradually starting from 2011 for Year One pupils and has reached its completion in 2016 covering all the six primary schooling years. This study in its limited context and capacity aims to find elements of TBLT in the curriculum as a small step to pave way to the promotion of an explicit implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the curriculum. TBLT adoption may help to rectify the status quo of Malaysian learners lack of English competency since it promotes communicative competence (Ellis, 2003) which is in line with the aim of SELC (Ministry of Education, 2011). This is done by examining the level of congruence between the planned curriculum (Primary SELC), the resourced curriculum that is the mandated textbook lessons and the actual practice in the classroom referred henceforth an enacted curriculum in regards to TBLT principles. If TBLT principles are found embedded implicitly in the curriculum, the adoption would prove to be feasible and beneficial.

The findings of this study, in its limited context and capacity, would provide insights on teachers' pedagogical decisions and actions in implementing the curriculum and the contextual constraints they faced. The findings may shed light to the policy makers in addressing any mismatch between policies and practice that may cause the problem of English incompetency among Malaysian learners. The findings could also inform textbook developers of how textbook lessons are translated and implemented in the classrooms by teachers and how to make the lessons doable in different contexts. This can be utilised to create awareness among teachers of their own practice and inform them the ways to improve it. This study in its limited context and capacity could also provide crucial information on

professional development needs of teachers in teaching communicatively and to move away from drilling, ‘spoon feeding’ and rote learning. At the end of the tunnel, it is hoped that the explicit implementation of TBLT in the curriculum can be realised in our quest to achieve the required level of communicative competence among Malaysian learners as aspired by the national curriculum.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

In Malaysia, English is taught formally as a second language since primary year one until form five of the secondary school. Despite being exposed to the language for eleven years, potential employers claim that school leavers have problem communicating and writing in English (Nor Hashimah Jalaludin, 2008; Nambiar, 2008; Saadiyah Darus & Kaladevi Subramaniam, 2009). There are also complaints published in the media over the last few decades of youth including university graduates having difficulty expressing themselves in English during job interviews (Chan & Tan, 2006; Normala Othman & Mohamed Ismail Ahamad Shah, 2013; Rebecca Rajaendran, 2016; Syed Jaymal Zahiid, 2015; Yuen Mei Keng, 2015). In the private sector, these graduates when employed face problem corresponding with foreign counterparts due to low level of English proficiency. For these reasons, there is a critical need to try new approaches to teaching language in Malaysia (Normala Othman & Mohamed Ismail Ahamad Shah, 2013).

## **1.3 Problem Statement**

Mohd Sofi Ali (2003) found that Year Six pupils have not improved much despite learning English for six years. This is based on a public examination results

at the end of the primary schooling that is Primary School Assessment Test. It will be referred as *UPSR* henceforth. He also discovered that the pupils can read and write since they are drilled with the *UPSR* exam format which involves reading and writing. Listening and speaking take a back seat. As a result, they are not able to speak English well and have problem listening to English. In short, great emphasis is placed on accuracy and not fluency i.e. grammatical competence versus communicative competence.

There seems to be a mismatch between the planned curriculum, the enacted curriculum and the assessment. The planned curriculum stated the explicit adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) but the teachers are found not teaching the language communicatively (the enacted curriculum) as prescribed in the planned curriculum (Mohd Sofi Ali, 2003). *UPSR* is the most important examination at primary level in the eyes of the stakeholders namely parents and educational authorities. School leaders and teachers are pressured to produce good results or else they are held accountable. This explained the manner in which the language is taught i.e. teaching towards the exam (Mohd Sofi Ali, 2003).

The introduction of SELC aims to rectify this situation by enhancing the pupils' communicative competency (Ministry of Education, 2011). The Malaysian education system failed to get more than 60% students to attain the minimum proficiency levels in mathematics and science compared to the international standards in the TIMSS and PISA, when Malaysia first participated in the international assessments in 1999 and 2009 respectively. Furthermore, it was discovered that from 2010-2012, more than 35% of the primary school children,

exiting after year Six scored below the minimum competency level (Hazita Azman, 2016). The pertinent question arises; how this newly developed curriculum, SELC can rectify the grave situation of Malaysian students' communicative incompetency that the previous curriculum (*KBSR, Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah*) failed to do? Regarding the previous curriculum, *KBSR*, Pandian (2004) provides one possible answer to its unsuccessful implementation. He states that in Malaysia,

*When the initial euphoria of implementing the concepts laid down by the KBSR [Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah] (New Primary School Curriculum) and KBSM [Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah] (Integrated Secondary School Curriculum) under the notion of communicative competence had died down, classroom teaching seems to have returned to chalk-and-talk drill method (Pandian, 2004, p. 280)*

To ensure that this issue will not recur in the implementation of SELC, analyses of various curriculum stages are called for.

The justifications in using TBLT principles as the benchmark is firstly, it is based on the fact that TBLT is generated from the development of CLT (Richards, 2006) and SELC is a communicative curriculum that embeds Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles. The aim of SELC is to promote communicative competence among Malaysian young learners (Ministry of Education, 2011). Hence, TBLT principles should be in tandem with the principles of SELC. Secondly, TBLT has gained popularity in the curricula of many Asian countries such as Taiwan, China, Vietnam and Hong Kong (Newton & Adams,

2009) mainly because TBLT promotes communicative competence (Ellis, 2003; Van Den Branden, 2006; Willis & Willis, 2007) as desired in many ESL and EFL contexts. The core component of TBLT is a task that engages learners in real world language use involving meaningful cognitive operations with primary focus on meaning to achieve a non-linguistic outcome (Ellis, 2003). This would shift the conventional teaching of 'chalk and talk' and rote-learning to a communicatively meaningful learning experience.

Thirdly, Malaysia was among the early adopters of task-based approach in its Malaysian Communicational Syllabus in 1975. Then, the Bangalore Project initiated by Prabhu in India followed suit in 1987. Both were relatively short-lived (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The findings of this study, in its limited context and capacity, can help to promote the revival of TBLT in Malaysian primary English curriculum. This lead to a pertinent question as to why TBLT principles and not CLT principles are used as the guiding principles in gauging the level of congruence and the level of communicativeness between the three curriculum stages since CLT is the pillar of SELC?

The fourth justification answers the question of why TBLT and not CLT? Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been embedded in Malaysian curriculum for more than two decades (Pandian, 2004). In fact, since 1975, Malaysia has started to adopt CLT to replace the structural-situational syllabus of English (Chan & Tan, 2006) and it still persists until today in the Malaysian curriculum. The latest curriculum development, Standard English Language Curriculum (SELC) or *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR)* is a communicative syllabus as

reflected in its aim “to equip pupils with basic language skills to enable them to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts that is appropriate to the pupils’ level of development” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p.1) . So, all in all, CLT has been adopted in Malaysian curriculum for more than four decades. Unfortunately, many Malaysian school leavers and graduates have yet to attain the required level of English language communicative competency (Fernandez, 2014; Rebecca Rajaendran, 2016; Syed Jaymal Zahiid, 2015; Yuen Mei Keng, 2015). This called for a different approach in teaching English to Malaysian young learners.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to examine the level of congruence between the underlying principles of the planned curriculum (SELC), the principles that underpin the design of the skill-based lessons in the mandated textbook (the resourced curriculum) and the actual classroom practice that involves teachers’ pedagogical decisions and actions (the enacted curriculum) in regards to TBLT principles. In other words, the level of congruence between the principles of these different stages of the curriculum to the principles of TBLT is investigated. This is so since TBLT emphasizes communicative competence that is in line with the intended direction of the communicative primary standard curriculum in Malaysia.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study may not be able to resolve this national issue but it can inform our current practice and give voice to people silenced or not heard, in this case, the teachers who are the executive decision makers in the actual implementation of the

curriculum (Barnard & Nguyen, 2010). This study, in its limited context and capacity, may provide some understanding to policy makers, curriculum developers, textbook writers and teachers themselves on what guides the teachers' pedagogical decisions and actions in teaching SELC to Malaysian young learners. The findings of this study may offer the answers to whether the aspirations of the policy makers are taking shape in SELC classrooms and if not, what are the constraints and obstacles. The findings also may shed light on whether the underlying principles of SELC are reflected in the teachers' pedagogical decisions and actions in teaching English and how the textbook materials are utilised in the classrooms. The findings of this study would inform teachers' professional development needs that include equipping them with the knowledge of CLT, TBLT and implementation strategy of these approaches in their teaching contexts. This is also to ensure that the teachers' practice is in accordance with the policies.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

The research questions of this study are as the following:

1. To what extent are the underlying principles of the planned curriculum (SELC) aligned with the principles of TBLT?
2. Do the resourced curriculum i.e. the mandated textbooks lessons, provide affordances for learners to be engaged in communicative lessons?

### Sub-questions

- i. To what extent are the skill-based lessons in the officially mandated primary school ESL textbooks (the resourced curriculum) in Malaysia aligned with the principles of TBLT?

- ii. If TBLT principles are present, to what extent are they reflected across the four-skill areas (Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading)?
  - iii. Which features of task are most represented and which are less represented in the textbook lessons?
3. When teaching these lessons, are the pedagogical decisions & actions taken by teachers (the enacted curriculum) aligned with the principles of TBLT?

#### Sub-questions

- i. What kinds of modifications (if any) made on the textbook lessons by teachers when teaching?
- ii. When modifying textbook lessons, do teachers re-task or de-task?
- iii. What are the rationales of the teachers when modifying the textbook lessons?

### **1.7 The Operational Definitions of Terms**

The terms use in this study are operationally and conceptually defined as the following:

#### **1.7.1 Congruency Analysis**

A congruency analysis is a small-N research design in which the researcher uses case studies to provide empirical evidence for the explanatory relevance or relative strength of one theoretical approach in comparison to other theoretical approaches (Blatter, 2012). The approaches derived from ESL theories that are involved in this study are Task-Based Approach, Communicative Approach and



other related approaches that emerged in the classroom observations such as Grammar Translation Method.

### **1.7.2 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

Task-based language teaching is defined as “teaching that is based entirely on tasks. Such teaching makes use of a procedural syllabus” (Ellis, 2003, p.351). Procedural syllabus refers to a syllabus consisting of a graded set of tasks to be performed by the learners (Prabhu, 1987). In TBLT, “task is the basis of language curriculum and it constitutes a strong version of CLT” (Ellis, 2003, p.30). In this study, the textbook lessons and the classroom lessons were analysed whether they fulfilled the criteria of task as proposed by Ellis and Shintani (2014).

### **1.7.3 Standard English Language Curriculum (SELC)**

SELC is a standard-based curriculum with modular approach that consists of five modules covering all the language skills namely, listening and speaking, reading, writing, grammar and language arts. The initial stages of the lessons under this modular approach emphasise on vocabulary acquisition. This is followed by the teaching of the receptive skills before pupils are asked to produce language. The pupils are asked to listen first before doing the speaking activity and read before they are asked to write (Ministry of Education, 2011). This allows pupils a ‘silent period’ that is beneficial linguistically and affectively. The young learners can use this period to acquire useful vocabulary for later production and as a means to build their self-confidence in using the target language. This can be done by just eliciting non-verbal involvement using tasks (Duran & Ramaut, 2006). One example of task that

requires non-linguistic responses is input-based task such as ‘listen and do’ (Ellis, 2003; Shintani, 2012).

#### **1.7.4 The Policy**

The policy that is the planned curriculum in this study is “all about what knowledge is of most worth – the important goals and objectives” ((Marsh & Collin, 2009, p. 3). Campbell (2006) refers to the planned curriculum as ‘curricular authority’ – the legitimacy of standardized curricular guidelines. The planned curriculum translates the aim of the curriculum into “subjects that students are expected to learn, the measured objectives of the courses and the lessons, and the subject’s assigned reading” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009, p.17). It is the intended curriculum as manifested in policy documents (Davison, 2003). Primary Standard Curriculum or *Standard English Language Curriculum (SELC)* is the planned curriculum in this study.

#### **1.7.5 The Textbook**

The textbook that is the resourced curriculum is exemplified in commercially published textbook resources (Davison, 2003). The resourced curriculum in this study is the skill-based lessons in Year 2 and Year 4 textbooks. These are mandated textbooks and are not published for commercial purposes.

#### **1.7.6 The Classroom Practice**

The classroom practice is the enacted curriculum that “deals with professional judgements about the type of curriculum to be implemented and evaluated” (Marsh

& Collin, 2009, p.17). It emerges in the classroom as a result of the actual context that requires teachers making necessary adjustments (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009). In the context of this study, the enacted curriculum refers to the teachers' pedagogical decisions and actions in teaching English in the classrooms.

#### **1.7.7 Urban Premier School**

There are two urban schools involved in this study. One is a premier school for boys and the other one is a premier school for girls. The two schools are situated in an elite part of the town in a district in a northern state in Malaysia.

#### **1.7.8 Rural School**

There are two rural schools involved in this study. One is located near what used to be an estate of the palm plantations. These plantations are now replaced by new low cost housing areas. This is a normal day school. The other school is located in a village of farmers and fishermen. This school had won an excellence award for maintaining the attainment of good results for the past three consecutive years (2011, 2012 and 2013).

#### **1.7.9 Task**

Ellis (2003, p.16) delineates task as “a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources,

although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, directly or indirectly, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes.”

#### **1.7.10 An Activity**

An activity refers to a language activity or an exercise that does not fulfil the four task features. It mainly focuses on form instead of meaning and involves grammar practice or drilling.

#### **1.7.11 Focus on Meaning**

The primary focus on meaning involves both semantic and pragmatic meaning. Semantic meaning refers to “the specific lexical and grammatical meanings encoded by words and grammatical structures. Pragmatic meaning refers to functional meanings that arise when language is used to describe, request, apologize and so on.” (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p.136). Ellis (2003, p. 342) defines focus on meaning as “the cognitive processes involved in comprehending and producing messages for the purpose of communication.”

#### **1.7.12 Focus on Form**

Long (1991) as cited in Ellis (2003, p.342) “uses this term to refer to instruction directed at teaching pre-selected linguistic items in activities where the students’ primary focus is on form rather than meaning.”

### **1.7.13 A Gap**

A gap exists when the pupils need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). There are three types of gaps namely an information gap, an opinion gap and a reasoning gap (Prabhu, 1987). Information gap can be one way or two ways. The former entails learners to share information that only one learner has. The learner who is in possession of all the information needs to communicate this information to the others. On the other hand, in the two-way information gap task, the information is divided among the learners and needs to be shared in order to accomplish the task outcome. An opinion-gap task requires learners to exchange opinions on an issue that will result in differing views. A reasoning-gap task entails learners to synthesize the information given to them and deduce new facts from it (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). These three types of gaps are identified when analysing the textbook lessons and the classroom lessons in this study.

### **1.7.14 Non-Linguistic Outcome**

A non-linguistic outcome is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). A learner acts as a language user and not as a language learner (Erlam, 2015) i.e. the outcome does not entail pupils to attend to language per se but to complete tasks by using language. The examples of a non-linguistic outcomes are “a completed table, a route drawn in on a map or a list of differences between two pictures” (Ellis, 2003, p.21). A set of correctly arranged jumbled sentences of a story is also an example of a non-linguistic outcome (Willis & Willis, 2007).

### **1.7.15 Skill-Based Textbook Lesson**

Skill-based textbook lesson is a discrete section in the textbook allocated for different skills. The skill involved is indicated on top of each textbook page (left-hand top corner in Year Two textbook and right hand top corner for Year Four textbook). Each discrete section represents a module as *SELC* adopts a modular approach. For Year Two textbook each unit consists of four discrete sections representing four modules namely Listening and Speaking, Reading, Writing and Language Arts (Suria binti Mohd Yasin, Selajothi a/p M. Selladurai & Norehan binti Mohd Nooh, 2011). The reading section is further divided into two subsections that are Phonemic Awareness and Reading Text. These two subsections are treated as separate lessons in this study since phonemic awareness lessons are non-task lessons. In a phonemic awareness lessons only phonemes are involved and phoneme is one of the linguistic components of the English language. Phonemic awareness does not involve pragmatic meaning of the language. It focuses on form and does not fulfil any of the task criteria. In contrast, in Year Four textbook, each unit comprises five to six skill-based sections that are treated as lessons. They are Listening and Speaking, Reading, Writing, Grammar, Language Arts and Contemporary Literature (Lim Eng Seong, Lee Poh Hin & Khor Hui Min, 2013).

### **1.7.16 Task-Based Lesson**

A task-based lesson is a lesson that fulfils all the four task features as presented by (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Most importantly, it is meaning-focused with a clearly defined non-linguistic outcome (Ellis, 2009). These are the key features of a task-based lesson. The pragmatic meaning of the language is involved in completing the task.

### **1.7.17 Task-Like Lesson**

A task-like lesson is a lesson that fulfils some but not all the four task features. The key features of a task-like lesson are firstly, there is a focus on meaning and secondly, it is communicative in nature. However, the non-linguistic outcome may be absent from a task-like lesson and hence, does not meet all the requirements of a task.

### **1.7.18 Non-Task Lesson**

A non-task lesson is a lesson that does not satisfy any of the four task features as proposed by (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). A non-task lesson is form-focused and has no meaningful gap i.e. there is no information, opinion or reasoning gap. There is a presence of a linguistic outcome instead of a non-linguistic one. Learners are taught the language that they need to use in completing the language activity given and they are not required to use their own resources.

### **1.7.19 ‘Re-Tasking’**

‘Re-tasking’ is defined as when a teacher either adds a task feature to a non-task lesson or enriches an existing task feature when the teacher modifies textbook lessons to suit the teaching context.

### **1.7.20 ‘De-Tasking’**

‘De-tasking’ is defined as any teaching decision which de-emphasizes or removes any of the four task features from a task-based lesson.

## 1.8 The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is depicted in Figure 1.1 below. The underlying principles of SELC, the two textbooks and the classroom practices of eight participating teachers are analysed based on the four task features proposed by (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). These four features are:

1. The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (i.e., learners should be mainly concerned with encoding and decoding messages, not with focusing on linguistic form).
2. There should be some kind of 'gap' (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).
3. Learners should largely rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity. That is, learners are not 'taught' the language they will need to perform the task.
4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).

The presence of the task features in the resourced and the enacted curriculum points to the feasibility of TBLT adoption in the curriculum. On the contrary, if the task features are found to be absent in the resourced and the enacted curriculum, suitable modifications are needed if TBLT is to be explicitly implemented in the curriculum. The modifications involve developing task from the resources in the mandated textbook and re-tasking non-task lessons. Therefore, teachers need to be developed professionally to do the necessary modifications. They need to understand TBLT principles and the application of the principles in their teaching contexts.



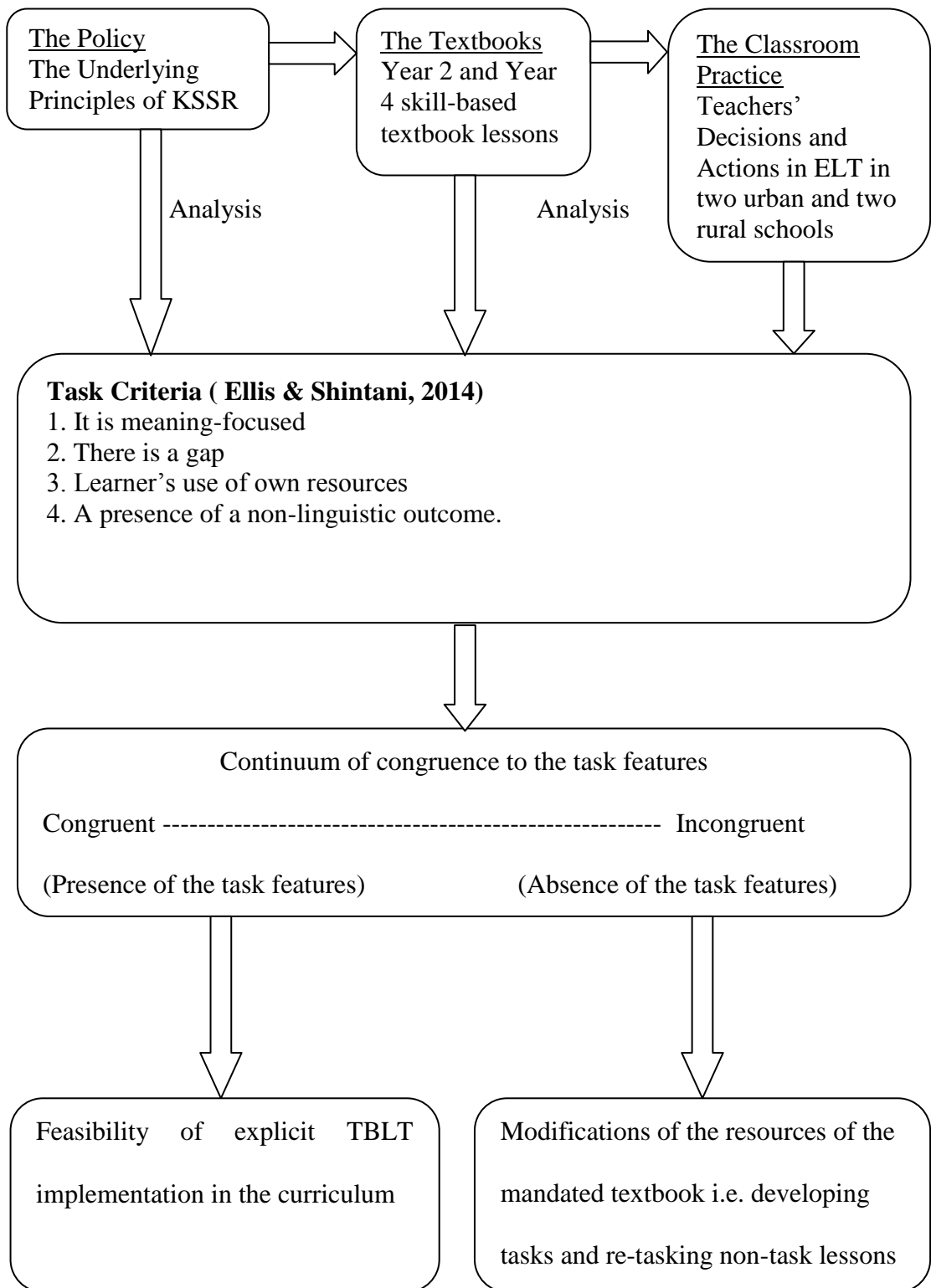


Figure 1.1 The Conceptual Framework

## **1.9 Limitation of the Study**

This study only involves eight primary school English teachers. Four of them are Year Two teachers and another four are Year Four teachers from four schools in a district in a northern state of Malaysia. Hence, the data is limited by what the participants experienced and felt. Eight teachers interviewed are dedicated teachers with good pedagogical practices based on the observations conducted but some of them could not articulate well their good classroom practices especially in justifying their pedagogical decisions. To overcome this, the teachers were asked to give examples of the most satisfying and the most effective lesson that they had taught. Insights on the teachers' pedagogical actions and decisions were gained from the examples given.

## **1.10 Summary**

The problem of Malaysian learners and graduates lack of English competency still persists despite the introduction of many educational reforms to overcome the problem. After many decades of adopting communicative curriculum, the desired result has yet to be achieved. Therefore, there is a pressing need to re-examine the curriculum and its implementation, and to try new approach as an effort to improve the status-quo. Soft-skills such as communication skills are becoming increasingly important in the survival of our nation in today's world without borders.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with a discussion on education reforms and the mismatch between policy and practice in the Malaysian primary education. A brief discussion on textbook use ensues since the mandated textbooks are the main resources in Malaysian primary contexts. The discussion on textbook is imperative since this study involves analysing textbook lessons and how some of the lessons are implemented in the classroom. The discussion continues about teacher cognition. This aspect is important since teachers are curriculum implementers. So, what teachers believe, think and know will shape the learning experiences in the classroom. The brief discussion on teacher cognition provides insight on the pedagogical decisions and actions of the teachers involve in this study. Then, following this, is the discussion on second language acquisition that includes the theories of second language acquisition. The more important part that is the approaches to language teaching is discussed next. Since CLT has been adopted in Malaysia for more than four decades and TBLT is a development of CLT, the principles of CLT and CLT paradigm that leads to eight major changes in the teaching of English as a second language (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003) are also included. This chapter also includes an account of the features of PPP (Presentation, Practice and Production) model of teaching which is commonly practised in Malaysian classrooms. Then, the discussion on TBLT ensues. This is followed by the distinctions between a task and an exercise, tasks classifications, the benefit of teaching with tasks, task engagement and the contextual constraints in TBLT

classroom. Studies on implementing TBLT involving young learners are included as these are highly relevant to the context of this study. A review on TBLT in Asia and TBLT in Malaysia concludes this section.

## **2.2 Education Reforms and the Mismatch between Policy and Practice of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Malaysia**

Normazidah Che Musa, Koo Yew Li and Hazita (2012) found that there is a mismatch between policies and practices regarding the teaching of English in the Malaysian context. Due to that, the researchers recommend educators and policy makers to re-examine their theories and strategise suitable interventions to improve the teaching and learning of English in Malaysia.

There were four major education reforms spanning in the last four decades in Malaysia involving the teaching and learning of English. In 1982, the Integrated Curriculum for Primary schools or *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR)* was introduced. The emphasis of the English curriculum was on language use for communication purposes rather than focusing primarily on the acquisition of grammatical knowledge as in the previous curriculum. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was the pillar of the teaching of English under *KBSR*. The primary principles of CLT is learner centeredness and contextualized language use (Nunan, 2004). This is reflected in the learning outcomes of *KBSR* as they are locally contextualised to make learning purposeful and meaningful to Malaysian pupils' everyday lives. *KBSR* is designed based on 'situated task-based approaches'(Hazita Azman, 2016). However, ten years into its implementation, mismatch was reported between the curriculum objectives and CLT principles with

the actual classroom practices and language assessment (Normazidah Che Musa, Koo Yew Lie & Hazita Azman 2012). Mohd Sofi Ali (2003) also reveals that there is no connection between how English is supposed to be taught as stated in the curriculum, how it is actually taught in classrooms and how performance in the language is assessed. He points out that while the policy gives great emphasis on real daily communication, the classroom practice focuses on examination. This is a clear case of fluency (communicative competence) versus accuracy (grammatical competence).

The second curriculum reform was introduced at the onset of the millennium, with emphasis given to the use of technology in education. Smart schools were initiated throughout the nation with the purpose to narrow the gap between urban and rural pupils in terms of educational opportunities. Azizah et al. (2005) as cited in (Hazita Azman, 2016) reveals that, on top of the hardware issues, English teachers found the subject courseware were inappropriate for their students in terms of level of proficiency as well as content. They also found that the majority of the students still preferred face to face interaction with their teachers. Pupils had difficulties understanding the instructions and content delivered in English through the computer based lessons. Additionally, teachers and pupils focused more on preparing for the exam.

Faced with English communicative incompetency issues among Malaysian school leavers and graduates (Normala Othman & Mohamed Ismail Ahamad Shah, 2013), Malaysian government introduced a bilingual education programme called ETeMS (Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English ) in 2003 (Ministry of

Education Malaysia, 2002). This programme did not achieve the desired outcomes due to several factors as reported in the following studies. A survey conducted by Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi and Mahendren Maniam (2013) involving 50 teachers and 13 state and district education officers in Terengganu indicated that the failure of ETeMS was mainly due to teachers factors. The first factor is the English proficiency level of the Science and Mathematics teachers that did not meet the required standard to teach Mathematics and Science in English. In addition, their reluctance to participate in the Buddy Support System, a peer mentoring programme to enhance English proficiency, is also cited as one of the factors that contributed to the failure of ETeMs. To support teachers' low proficiency level, they were provided with courseware. The failure however, was not attributed to the expensive courseware developed specifically for ETeMS since majority of teachers in the survey did not attempt to use them in their classroom. (Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi & Mahendren Maniam, 2013).

Ong Saw Lan and May Tan (2008) state that the lack of English competency among Science teachers as one of the most problematic issues in the teaching of Science in English. So it was not surprising when parents and educators expressed grave concern on the quality of the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics in English when both teachers and students were not proficient in English (The Star, 2006 as cited in Ong Saw Lan & May Tan, 2008). This concern was legitimate by looking at the students' language preferences in answering questions set in public examinations. After learning the Mathematics and Science in English for three years, only 33 % of Science candidates and 27% of the Mathematics candidates chose to answer the papers in English. The rest chose to

answer the exam questions either in *Bahasa Melayu* or a mixture of both languages. (The Star, 2005 as cited in Ong Saw Lan & May Tan, 2008).

Thus, the major contributing factor of ETeMS failure seems to rest on the shoulders of the teachers for their lack of English proficiency in undertaking this challenging task. One has to remember that the teachers had been teaching both subjects in *Bahasa Melayu (BM)* for three decades prior to the implementation of ETeMS in 2003 (Ong Saw Lan & May Tan, 2008). So, it is understandable why the teachers had great difficulty with the terminologies of both subjects in English. Switching from *BM* to English in teaching Mathematics and Science after a few series of short courses did not help to ease the problem.

Other than the reason of ETeMS failure found by Ong Saw Lan & May Tan, (2008), another possible reason is our failure to understand the reality in multilingual classrooms. It is important to recognize that bi/multilinguals use the different languages in their repertoire fluidly and dynamically to make sense of what they come into contact with in the real world. In the case of emergent bilinguals, the dominant language will guide their cognitive processes and inner speech. So, there is a tendency to code-switch and translanguage. (Martin, 2005) captures the essence of this problem by describing about code switching in Malaysia as the following:

*The use of local language alongside the “official” language of the lesson is a well-known phenomenon and yet, for variety of reasons, it is often lambasted as ‘bad practice’, blamed on teachers’ lack of English language*