

## Character Building in ESL Materials: Values and Malaysian English Curriculum

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### Abstract

This paper conceptualizes values within character building, a desirable element which is integrated into Malaysian ESL curriculum. It examines Malaysian upper secondary school textbooks and found the prominence of the portrayal of such materials. Interview data suggest the need for character building among ESL learners and the positive role of such materials. Findings also suggest that the integration of values in ESL curriculum, when translated into ESL materials, problematizes further the notions of value-laden curriculum and values education.

*Keywords:* ESL; curriculum; materials; values; Malaysia

### Abstrak

Artikel ini meneliti semula konsep nilai dalam pembentukan peribadi, satu elemen yang wajar disepadukan dalam kurikulum ESL di Malaysia. Ia mengkaji buku-buku teks sekolah menengah di Malaysia dan mendapati terdapat pemaparan ketara nilai melalui bahan-bahan tersebut. Data temubual menunjukkan keperluan untuk membina sahsiah di kalangan pelajar ESL dan peranan positif bahan tersebut. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa integrasi nilai dalam ESL kurikulum, apabila diterjemahkan ke dalam bahan-bahan ESL, menambahkan lagi persoalan dan tanggapan tentang kurikulum dan pendidikan yang berasaskan nilai.

*Kata kunci:* ESL; kurikulum; bahan; nilai, Malaysia

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Values in ESL Curriculum and Materials

Values education plays a central role in many nations and their curriculums. Value-laden national curriculum is normally part of the bigger social planning that promotes positive values among citizens. ESL curriculum has the best ingredients for the integration of values through topics, tasks, and skills. Character building can be portrayed in ESL materials that benefit not only learning but also the inculcation of such desirable values.

English language textbooks in Malaysia are designed by experienced ESL teachers and the designing team may include lecturers from the universities or teacher training institutes, who may be previously school teachers. Technically, a textbook is designed as the main guide for the ESL classroom in Malaysia. The Ministry of Education, Malaysia stresses that textbook usage is compulsory while teachers are encouraged to design additional materials. This ministry's recommendation reflects the central role

of the English language textbook in the classroom setting. The ESL textbooks in Malaysia are designed to provide learners with vocabulary and content (themes/topics) that meet the requirements of the National Curriculum Specification (NCS). As such, they are said to be sufficient for preparing students for public examinations.

Due to the textbook writer's strict adherence to the syllabus specifications and guidelines for textbook writing, Malaysian school ESL textbook is a close approximation of the national syllabus [see Mustapha (2008) on how the national syllabus was translated well in the textbook]. This is crucial for researchers who evaluate materials and intend to link their microlevel analysis of materials to macroanalysis of the national syllabus. If the syllabus is well realized through the materials, then only the analysis can be validly discussed within the syllabus.

Character building is one of the most prominent values explicitly stated in Malaysian education. One of the “shifts” to transform Malaysian education as stated in *The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025* is to “develop values-driven Malaysians” (Ministry of Education, 2012):

Today’s students will inherit a world fraught with challenges, from environmental degradation to armed conflict, on a scale that has never been seen before. Successfully navigating these issues will not only require students to have leadership skills, but strong universal values such as integrity, compassion, justice, and altruism, to guide them in making ethical decisions. At the same time, it is important to balance the development of global citizenship with a strong national identity (p. 34).

The shift is expected to lead to “game-changing initiatives” that would “strengthen civics elements, focus on core values and underlying philosophies of major religions, develop students holistically, and facilitate interaction across school types, ethnicities and socio-economic group” (p. 36).

Such renewed “education transformation” complements the existing aspiration of the National Philosophy of Malaysian Education which is to produce individuals who are balanced and harmonic intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003). Based on the education philosophy, the NCS determines the scope and the requirements of the syllabus such as areas of language use, language content, context for language, and educational emphases. Educational emphasis includes aspects such as moral education, citizenship education and thinking skills:

Educational emphases...outline current developments in education that will help learners prepare for the world of work and social life. In this respect, the incorporation of moral education, citizenship education, patriotism and thinking skills in the specifications will contribute towards the building of a modern and progressive Malaysian society (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003, p. 3)

Ideally, the textbook should meet the requirements of the NCS. However, the aspects of educational emphasis, particularly character building elements need attention. This study investigates the extent of character building elements which are present in the Form 4 and Form 5 ESL textbooks.

How would content for character building materials be conceptualized? Effective character building ESL materials are surrounded by rich sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts that can be tapped by the materials developers. Graves (2000), in describing course design process of conceptualizing the content, identifies the focus on social contexts (sociolinguistics, sociocultural, and sociopolitical) as an important element in the second language course design.

Nunan (1988) in his advocacy for the second language learner-centred curriculum, considers the crucial role of confidence and motivation as the learner factor, the complexity of task factor, and the contextual cues of the text factor. The three interacting factors (learner, task, and text) can be the major considerations for the development of character building materials.

Shahini and Riazi (2010) capitalize on thinking skills in ELT through Philosophy-based Language Teaching (PBLT) as a new approach to developing productive language and thinking skills in student which emphasizes on three objectives:

...first of all to indirectly foster students’ communication skills of speaking and writing, secondly to make students reconsider their perceptions of different issues through raising logical reasons for their opinions, deconstructing their

assumed beliefs, prejudice, and concepts, and finally not to accept things blindly by just imitation and memorization (Shahini & Riazi, 2010, p. 8).

Emphasis on thinking skills is placed in Malaysian ESL syllabus:

Critical and creative thinking skills are incorporated in the learning outcomes to enable learners to analyse information, make decisions, solve problems, and express themselves accurately and creatively in the target language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003, p. 3).

The authors in this paper are making a modest attempt at conceptualizing the various ESL concepts that can be linked to the notion of character building materials.

### Character Building in ESL Materials

In the context of this research, building materials elements refer to those that promote character building and lifelong learning, and those that attempt to engage learners in such themes. The two elements are considered important and relevant to Malaysian syllabus and are reflected to an extent in the textbook investigated. Some of the character building related values mentioned in *The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025* are leadership skills, integrity, compassion, justice, and altruism (Ministry of Education, 2012).

The attempt to engage learners is limited to having the potential to motivate learners towards self-improvement. Self-improvement in this study includes the area of character building and lifelong learning. In other words, an ESL textbook refers to an ESL textbook which has the potential to motivate and compel learners towards character building and lifelong learning. This motivation is beyond the motivation to learn a target language. It is a broader sense of motivation, one that inspires a learner towards self-improvement in various aspects of life as a lifelong process. It presents the idea that language learning and improvement is one of the many aspects of improving oneself, an ideology deep-rooted in reconstructionism and progressivism which Kelly (1989) describes as Curriculum as Process and Education as Development.

This study views character building as a deeper sense of motivation which may imply a higher level of engagement in the language learning process. The main idea of character building materials in this study is to encourage and promote the necessity of character building and lifelong learning. The former has the potential to engage the learner as the theme of character building deals directly with the learner himself/herself while the latter creates an intrinsic motivation to improve oneself as a holistic individual, which includes equipping oneself in terms of language and communication (Tomlinson, 2006). Inspiring learners towards lifelong learning also implies the need to be a lifelong reader. Instead of instructing and motivating learners to read extensively or intensively, learners are indirectly intrinsically motivated to read as a result of being inspired to be a lifelong learner. Here, the textbook plays the role of an agent of character building.

Character building shares common underlying principles as communicative approach to language teaching (Alptekin, 2002; Savignon, 1987). Communicative materials should inculcate confidence and should prepare learners to use language effectively in the real world. This defines communicative competence, a dimension that can be as equally important as linguistic competence. In sociolinguistics, the notion of the speakers being able to fulfill the social function of the language (see Hymes, 1972; Pride & Holmes, 1972) requires the material writers to design materials which aim to equip the learners with higher level social skills in order to allow them to function in the society.

Character building materials can be described within the concept of multiliteracies (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Unsworth, 2001) which advocates a closer link between language and culture (in addition to the digital literacy) and calls for culturally relevant pedagogy. Brooks and Normore (2010), in discussing leadership and the role of the 21<sup>st</sup> century schools, suggest the development of global literacy in nine specific knowledge domains (political literacy, economic literacy, cultural literacy, moral literacy, pedagogical literacy, information literacy, organizational literacy, spiritual and religious literacy, and temporal literacy).

According to Lee (2001) character education is about the development of a positive and strong moral character. Lee regards this aspect of education as central to personality education, mind (heart) education, moral (ethics) education, and socialization. The author further explained that teachers themselves can play a vital role by being examples or role models themselves, helping students to meet community leaders and exposing students to the lives of great men in history and stories. Lee (2001) further claimed that students are willing to decide their behavior by the *behavior* of the teacher and the school atmosphere rather than by the *lecture* of a teacher or a textbook. No doubt, the teacher's behavior and the school atmosphere may have a significant influence on the students' behavior decisions; we should not underestimate or neglect the message delivered by the teacher and the content of the textbook. Being aware of the various variables that could contribute to a more positive effect on students' willingness to decide on their behavior, the focus of this study, however, is to critically evaluate the ESL textbooks from character building perspective and to recommend the possibilities of how ESL teachers play a part in enhancing character building.

A textbook may have texts which contain elements of positive values but it may not always appear to be highly engaging to learners. Pryor (2011) suggests that engagement can be fostered through personalized activities. Hence, tasks which precede the text and follow-up activities demand careful planning to enhance learner-text engagement. Paran (2003) proposes that critical thinking with regards to social norms and acceptable values should be common characteristics of a task. Paran further suggests that engaging activities could typically include having learners differentiate facts from opinions. Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggest that learners need to focus on issues, ideas and opinions instead of the language itself in order to enjoy a motivating language learning experience. Having these in mind, texts related to character building can be used as a content for discussion and debate which may further lead to learners' ownership of the need for character building.

Lifelong learning, another value associated with character building, is purposeful learning that people engage in throughout their lives for personal and professional fulfillment with the intention of improving the quality of their lives (Dunlap & Grabinger, 2003). The success of most classroom teaching and learning is determined by the responsibility of teachers, learners, parents, and policy makers. However, in light of lifelong learning, learners are responsible for their learning. In other words, learners take the lead while teachers facilitate them towards their destinations. By promoting reflection, learners are compelled to think and ponder critically upon their achievements and shortcomings. Here, learners come to realize their strengths and weaknesses through reflection without being told by another person. This may create a form of intrinsic motivation for self-improvement. Knowing the importance of promoting responsibility and reflection among learners, besides teachers and parents, textbooks may have a role in supporting the effort of promoting lifelong learners. In the era of globalization, tasks contained in ESL textbooks should prepare learners for the ever changing world (Meurant, 2010).

Lifelong learning has the ability to empower a learner through the duration of a lifetime (Ecclestone, 1999; Hinchliffe, 2006). It enables a learner, regardless of age and gender, to make sound decisions, having critical thinking and other living skills as a tool. These attributes are enhanced by a distinctive feature of lifelong learning and reflection (Dunlap & Grabinger, 2003). Reflection encourages a person to think and ponder over an event that has taken place, both in a formal setting and informal setting. This leads to the awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, viewing a problem from a spectrum of multiple perspectives and considerations. Lifelong learning is not restricted to the four walls of a classroom. It is extended to literally anywhere and anytime. Uggla (2008) nicely compared the two learning types: traditional learning views a school as society while lifelong learning views the society as a school.

## ■ 2.0 THE STUDY

The study aims to evaluate the upper secondary levels (Form 4 and Form 5) Malaysian ESL textbooks from a character building perspective. The research questions for the study are:

1. To what extent do the upper secondary level Malaysian ESL textbooks integrate the character building elements?
2. How do the ESL teachers perceive the role of character building elements in the textbooks?

A checklist of evaluation criteria was adopted based on the *VIA (Values in Action) Classification of Strengths* (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). The writers examined the relative prevalence of 24 different strengths of character of adults from 54 nations and all 50 US states which the study found as universal human nature. The list of values (refer Table 1) was adopted in this study to identify character building elements in the upper secondary levels (form four and form five) Malaysian ESL textbooks.

An inter-rater was recruited in the study to increase the reliability of the evaluation. The inter-rater was selected among experienced upper secondary ESL teachers from a public secondary school. A discussion was conducted between the evaluators after the evaluation was completed. Both evaluations are compared and finalized into a final version of the evaluation after a discussion.

Three in-service upper secondary ESL teachers were interviewed. These semi-structured interviews were conducted separately to avoid bias and influence of opinions, besides increasing the comfort level of the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in an informal and conversational manner. The teachers were required to express their personal opinion regarding the character building content of the textbooks and how teachers can enhance the content in the textbooks or how it can be supplemented if there is a lacking.

**Table 1** Values in action (Park *et al.*, 2006, p.119)

Wisdom and knowledge: cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.	Creativity: thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
	Curiosity: taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
	Judgment: thinking things through and examining them from all sides
	Love of learning: mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
	Perspective: being able to provide wise counsel to others
Courage: emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.	Honesty: speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
	Bravery: not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
	Persistence: finishing what one starts
	Zest: approaching life with excitement and energy
Humanity: interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others.	Kindness: doing favors and good deeds for others
	Love: valuing close relations with others
	Social intelligence: being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others
Justice: civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.	Fairness: treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
	Leadership: organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
	Teamwork: working well as member of a group or team
Temperance: strengths that protect against excess.	Forgiveness: forgiving those who have done wrong
	Modesty: letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves
	Prudence: being careful about one’s choices; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
	Self-regulation: regulating what one feels and does
Transcendence: strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning.	Appreciation of beauty and excellence: noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
	Gratitude: being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
	Hope: expecting the best and working to achieve it
	Humor: liking to laugh and joke; bringing smiles to other people
	Religiousness: having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

### 3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Using the adapted checklist adapted Values in Action (Park *et al.*, 2006, p. 119), a microscopic evaluation of the upper secondary ESL textbooks reveals the frequency of character building elements (Table 2, Table 3).

**Table 2** The most recurring and least recurring character building elements in the Form Four ESL textbook

	Character building elements	Num of Pages	Examples
1	Do the tasks require learners to be analytical and critical?	22	Speaking activities requesting students to agree or disagree on given topics by providing justifications.
2	Do selected texts promote a love of learning/lifelong learning?	15	Students read in groups a conversation about how success is defined; Students discuss and brainstorm in groups the definition of success. Such activities promote the idea that lifelong learning is a crucial quality for success.
3	Do the texts promote social intelligence?	12	Students read a passage on self-image. Then students discuss how self-image affects human interaction.
6	Do the texts inspire learners to take up leadership?	3	Students discuss a topic on how good leaders are crucial in a nation
4	Do the texts promote honesty and integrity?	1	Students discuss whether cheating during exam is justifiable.
5	Do the texts and tasks promote loyalty?	1	Students discuss a topic on promoting local tourism.

**Table 3** The most recurring and least recurring character building elements in Form Five ESL textbook

	Character building elements	Num of Pages	Examples
1	Do selected texts promote curiosity?	24	Students read a sample essay on space exploration.
2	Do selected texts promote a love of learning/lifelong learning?	15	Students discuss problems related to dyslexic children.
3	Do the tasks require learners to be analytical and critical?	14	In a writing activity, students are reminded that when writing an essay expressing viewpoints, both sides of a topic should be presented before taking a final stand.
4	Do the tasks promote open mindedness?	2	Students read a passage on how pros and cons of the Internet. This passage discusses how the Internet has changed our lifestyle.
5	Do the texts promote spirituality?	1	Students read a passage about Telemachus, a Roman hero and the passage merely mentions that he is a religious man.
6	Do the texts and tasks promote loyalty?	0	



The following are the most recurring character building elements of the Form 4 and Form 5 ESL textbook:

- Judgment: thinking things through and examining them from all sides
- Learning/lifelong: mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
- Social intelligence: being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others
- Curiosity: taking an interest in all of ongoing experience

The least recurring character building elements are:

- Open mindedness
- Spirituality
- Honesty and integrity
- Loyalty
- leadership

Tables 2 and Table 3 show that character building elements which are present in the Malaysian Form Four 4 and Form 5 ESL textbooks. Due to the potential redundancy and space limitation, the tables showing the specific pages on which the selected elements occurred are not included here. In general there seems to be concentrations of particular groups of values which can be due to their overlapping and universal nature. In addition, there is a big difference in terms of number of pages between the most occurring and the less occurring portrayals of the values. Such unfair distribution of values occurrences is worthy of interpretation. Although careful categorization was made with the help of an inter-rater, subjectivity may have crept into the data analysis.

Consider, for example, the least recurring elements which identify open mindedness, spirituality, honesty and integrity, loyalty, and leadership. These seemingly important values may not have translated well as materials. Translating values, which are specified in the curriculum specifications, into ESL materials is difficult due to the profound concepts of values. Matching such profound concepts of values with learning and learner factors, requires hard work on the part of the curriculum developers. Even pluralism, a universal value to many scholars, has been defined with Malaysian specific criteria (Abdul Rahman, 2001; Goh, 2008; Shamsul, 2001). Recent discussion on pluralism, however, has shifted to more engaged and inclusive views of diversity (Banks 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2011).

The same complexity in translating values into the ESL materials can be extended to those most recurring elements. Take for example the following element and its example from the data:

Character building elements	Example
Do the tasks require learners to be analytical and critical?	In a writing activity, students are reminded that when writing an essay expressing viewpoints, both sides of a topic should be presented before taking a final stand.

The above finding suggests frequent recurrences of ESL task of “being analytical and critical”. However, it may not capture the “real” character building elements in its truest sense. Effective character building ESL materials need to capture Banks’ (2008) multicultural curriculum which allows learners to approach the values of diversity in holistic, balanced and realistic manner. A closer examination of the materials may show that “critical” element is present but within a “neutral” and culturally unauthentic topic.

The unfairly distributed occurrences of different values as well as the big gap between the most and least occurrences indicate the complexity of values-embedded ESL materials. It may also explain the problems with dichotomizing values as well as the controversies surrounding values education. Ibrahim (2001) highlights how Malaysian education’s “dual system of morality” (Islamic education and Moral education) has complicated the notion of values education and its intended national goal towards national unity.

Typologizing the portrayal of character building is a complex task for the material developers. First the selection of portrayal may not match the intended objective attached to the value. Second, the selection may be a result of some sort of censorship due to taboo and sensitivity. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) caution about the role of censorship and its effects on the authenticity of ESL materials. Banks (2001) in describing pluralism within the broader framework of multicultural curriculum, asserts that culture needs to be portrayed in holistic, balanced, and realistic manner.

From the interview data, the 3 in-service teachers agree that these are some of the topics that are new to the learners. The interviewees point out that topics such as, ‘how parents can help their children to avoid drug abuse’ and ‘balancing work and play’ are examples of discussions that promote character building elements such as judgment. Given ample time, these topics may lead the learners to reflect on their individual roles in such issues. These may inspire learners to evaluate an issue critically and avoid superficiality. One of the best lessons that education can offer a child is to equip him/her with critical thinking skills and empower him/her with decision making ability which are necessary for students to function effectively in society (Meurant, 2010). From the interview data, both parents and employers, to a certain extent, do expect the school to contribute to their children’s character development:

Besides teaching English, I’m also involved in handling disciplinary issues. I have parents complaining to me that their children’s behavior is out of control at home and they would like the teachers to be involved. (Teacher A)  
I have friends who work in the industry and they complain that these school leavers can’t reason. It’s like where is their common sense? Everything needs to be explained. And what is happening in the school? (Teacher B)

Even though the interviewees agree that these skills are necessary to function effectively in society and that character building elements should be inculcated in English language classrooms, all the interviewees express that, in general, it seems that there are quite a number of learners who are not well-prepared for tasks that require reflection and reasoning. In the interview, the teachers reason that most students are not ready for such activities because activities such as reading comprehension at a literal stage (which require minimal inferential skill) and summary writing (identifying main ideas) are still central in most ESL classrooms in most public schools in Malaysia:

If classroom activities don’t encourage students to reflect, how can we expect them to be reflective? (Teacher A)

I think some of the activities in the textbook can be quite dull. I think there are interesting topics, at least, to me but I have to come up with my own worksheets. The activities in the textbooks don’t seem to connect it to the students’ life. (Teacher C)

The interview data also show that there is a sense that some teachers notice character issues are present among some academically achieving students. Interview data indicate that

educational institutions should strive to strike a balance between character building and intellectual achievement:

What's the point of having A (academically achieving) students with no character? Some of my weaker students are more respectful towards their teachers compared to the better (academically inclined) ones. (Teacher B)

These days, everybody (school management, education department and parents) talks about the number of A's and in our staff meetings, the principal implies that the teachers are solely responsible for that. I don't like the idea of academic achievement as the only reason we are in school. (Teacher C)

In the process of designing a task, teachers should take into consideration the learners' language learning development. Richards and Rodgers (2001) remind teachers that there are situations where students potentially have the ideas and arguments but they are not equipped with the language to convey their thoughts. A similar situation is noticeable in Malaysia. Collentine and Freed (2004) propose that issues and ideas serve as context for language practice and language acquisition.

An interviewee points out that the topic on 'planning for success' from the textbook allows her to incorporate authentic tasks in her lessons. The task requires students to interview at least three people (e.g. parents, teachers, neighbors) about the definition of success. Koay (2009) proposes that non-technical topics such as cultural heritage promote parent-involvement in a child's learning process. The authors propose that tasks such as having conversations about being successful in life (regardless of how success is being defined) promote parent-involvement. The non-technical characteristic of such topics allows parents to be part of students' learning experience in a practical, non-academic manner. The interviews can be conducted in any language because the main purpose is information gathering. Later, learners are assigned to report their findings in English which results as a writing activity. This is a pre-lesson activity which serves to provide background information to the planned lesson. Rather than focusing solely on language, this task allows learners to engage with members of society where learners participate in authentic discussions such as becoming successful in life and pursuing a career. A post-lesson activity could potentially be encouraging learners to find out more about becoming successful and finding fulfillment in life. This can be done by suggesting learners to read self-improvement books which are a form of authentic materials where McLean (2013) reports that such books are relatively accessible in terms of readability. To further exploit the potential of such topic, tasks can involve students to reflect on long term goals and short term goals. Having a broader perspective, such goals could involve having learners describe how and what aspects of their academic performance (e.g. geography, mathematics, science) they wish to improve.

Subscribing to a Vygotskian approach, teachers are far from merely transferring information to learners' mind. Meaning is co-constructed by both learners and teachers. In other words, teachers and learners bring along their past memories and emotions into the classroom. Based on what Vygotsky calls "Perezhivanie" (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011, p. 82) both teachers and learners utilize their emotional experience in order to make sense of the contents and tasks and in the process of making sense of the contents and tasks, both the teachers and the learners' emotional experience is lived through or "updated". The empowered role of teachers, achieved through a strong community of practice and reflected in their discourse community, shows the need for teachers to assume multiple identities when they are in the classroom as well as in the community (Zakaria, 2013, p. 7). Working within this approach, the authors propose that it is appropriate for teachers to

share their experience and history related to the themes/topics in the ESL textbook. Interview data show that teachers perceived students seem to be inspired by teachers' narratives:

There is something magical about stories. I think it helps my students to relate to me as a person. It sort of makes us more human and I think it's a good way of building a healthy relationship. I don't want to be remembered as a walking textbook. I want to inspire my students. If I want my students to never stop learning, I, myself should never stop learning. (Teacher A)

I enjoy sharing my stories with my students whenever possible because stories make the lesson more real. I guess they help students to bridge the gap between what is in the book and real life experience. Well, everybody loves stories. (Teacher B)  
I have a student who is now doing her teacher training and she said my stories inspired her to be a teacher. I have another student who is presently in medical school and she said one thing that she values most in my class is critical thinking - never accept something blindly but always ask why. (Teacher C)

From the interview data, English language teachers are potentially agents (in a Vygotskian sense) of character building. Teachers seem to find satisfaction in inspiring learners and a healthy teacher-learner relationship appears to be a crucial pillar of teaching and learning. The interview data also show that there is also a sense in which teachers bring in their past memories and emotional experience into the classroom. Without their positive attitudes, character building materials cannot be optimized in the classroom.

#### ■4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Viewing society as a general reflection of a country's education system and values is almost parallel to viewing the content of a national textbook as a general reflection of its national educational emphasis. The content of the Malaysian English language textbooks is an expression of the requirement of the national English language syllabus. In line with the National Education Philosophy, an ideal textbook should place equal emphasis on both values and intellectual aspects. The inclusion of values on ESL curriculum and materials is, thus, both socio-politically and pedagogically appropriate.

However, values education can also be put under critical scrutiny. How universal are the selected values? Park *et al.* (2006) found the shared universal values of kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, and judgment, prudence, modesty, and self-regulation. The subsequent questions are:

- How can the values be translated into the national curriculum and its content in order to benefit learners of various backgrounds?
- To what degree can all educators and other stakeholders agree "without fear or favor" on the selection of a particular value to be integrated into the national curriculum and on its specific portrayal in the materials?

With globalization and ICT, for instance, values are no longer portrayed in the usual traditional ways, even when the essence of the values still remains the same. Young ICT literate people, for example, may disagree with the value-loaded examples given by their parents, questioning the didactic manner values are inculcated by them. It is thus the role of curriculum and materials developers to identify the desired values, formulate appropriate goals, and translate the values into ESL materials. The development of value-

embedded ESL curriculum, like the general values education, is, thus, a complex endeavor.

The authors believe that the interest on language learning can be enhanced by placing the purpose of language learning within a broader perspective of character building. While language acquisition is generally the main objective of any language learning contexts, it is necessary to consider the broader objectives of education: to nurture individual growth and equip students to be effective members of the society by upholding the principles of progressivism and reconstructionism through the curriculum.

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