LEARNER-CENTREDNESS IN MALAYSIAN YEAR FIVE PRIMARY
SCHOOL TEACHING: FOUR CASE STUDIES OF
TEACHERS’ PRACTICES, BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

LEARNER-CENTREDNESS IN MALAYSIAN YEAR FIVE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHING: FOUR CASE STUDIES OF TEACHERS’ PRACTICES, BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE

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This study was undertaken to explore and describe how English language is being taught and how the curriculum guidelines that emphasise learner-centredness are being interpreted by teachers in primary schools in Malaysia. Specifically, it focuses on whether teachers implement learner-centred classroom practices and describes teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about learner-centredness. Finally, the study focuses on teachers’ views on possible issues and challenges in implementing learner-centred approaches in Malaysian primary English classrooms. Four teachers from different school categories in a northern state in Malaysia participated in this research representing rural, town and two vernacular schools (Chinese and Tamil). Using ethnographic approach, the study involved qualitative/exploratory approaches by documenting, describing and analysing data gathered from semi-structured interviews, observation plus note-taking, video-recording of classroom and video-stimulated recalled interviews. Findings indicate that teachers did not fully embrace the principles of learner-centredness but minimally integrated some learner-centred practices at varying degrees particularly in allowing more learner participation, introducing varied materials and activities, introducing activities that involved some discussion and discovery and encouraging interactions between learners and teachers in the target language. The findings also found some efforts to encourage self and peer-evaluation. Two fundamental principles of learner-centredness i.e., collaboration and negotiation of learning objectives and identification of learner objective and subjective needs were not found in any of their practices regardless of the school categories. Teacher’s interpretations of learner-centredness revealed superficial understanding about learner-centred practices. Consequently, recommendations were proposed in terms of improved teacher training, an outline of an idealised working construct and definition of learner-centredness to use in ELT classroom, areas of change needed in the education system in Malaysia and future research areas to investigate learner-centredness.
I am grateful to my main supervisor Mr Wasyl Cajkler and my second supervisor, Dr Agneta Svalberg who offered insightful feedback and support throughout completing my doctorate study journey. I would like to thank my sponsors, the Ministry of Higher Education and Universiti Utara Malaysia, as without their support, this thesis would not have been possible. I am also indebted to the teachers who participated in this study and my colleagues at the School of Education. Finally, I owe my deepest gratitude to my husband, Fairul Nizam and children (Arrazi, Isyraf, Lukman and Aminah) whose patience and understanding enabled me to complete my study.

Thank you.
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## List of Abbreviations

1. CLT | Communicative Language Teaching
2. ELT | English language teaching
3. KBSR | Primary school integrated curriculum
4. LC | Learner-centred
5. MOE | Ministry of Education
6. MT | Mother tongue/ native language
7. SPM | Malaysian School Certificate (after 11 years schooling)
8. SR | Stimulated-recall
9. STPM | Malaysian High School Certificate (after 13 years schooling)
10. TC | Teacher-centred
11. VSRI | Video-stimulated recalled interview
CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of eight sections: Introduction, Context of study, Historical overview of ethno-linguistic context in Malaysia, KBSR and Malaysian ELT curriculum, economic and global communication’s influence to ELT in Malaysia, teacher education in Malaysia and statement of the research problem. The research aims to explain and describe teachers’ classroom practices, beliefs and understanding about learner-centred approaches in ELT.

1.1 Context of study

In Malaysia, curriculum and methods for English language teaching in public government schools are prescribed in two official documents referred to as the Primary School Integrated Curriculum (English translation) or Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (commonly referred to by the acronym KBSR) and The English Syllabus Specifications. The former outlines the overall expectations and the philosophy underpinning English language teaching in Malaysia, while the latter covers the specific aims and objectives and teaching and learning expectations for each year of primary school i.e. from year one until year six. These documents have been published by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia and distributed to all schools. The latest version of the curriculum specifications was
updated in 2003 and provides teachers with advice about the expectations for curriculum content for primary school (MOE, 2003, pp.3-5). The general aim of the primary curriculum in Malaysian is as indicated below:

The terminal goal of the English language curriculum for schools is to help learners acquire the language so that they can use it in their everyday life, to further their studies, and for work purposes. English is important, as with globalization, thus Malaysians will need to be proficient in the language and to communicate with people in other countries. The use of English in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has also been incorporated into the curriculum to enable learners to access knowledge on the internet and to network with people both locally and overseas.

(MOE, 2003, p.3)

In addition, it is very important to note that, the development of the education system in Malaysia is highly influenced not just by external and recent developments globally but also within the country itself. Nevertheless, to understand the historical background of the Malaysian education system, a section on Malaysian cultural and ethno-linguistic aspects is covered next. This section will explain how and why the system was influenced by western ideals after being colonized by many countries, the last being the British empire prior to Malaysian independence in 1957.
1.2 Historical overview of ethno linguistic context in Malaysia.

Malaysia, previously known as Malaya has had a history of being a famous Eastern sea base trading centre that in the 15th century, was referred to as ‘a region of prosperity and unity’ also known as the ‘Malay World’ (Rashid, 2002, p. 2). Western influence reached the region in the 16th century driven by a mixture of economic forces and religious missionaries. Malaya then had the history of being colonized for 446 years, first, by the Portuguese in 1511 followed by the Dutch, Japanese and finally the British before she gained her independence in 1957 (Andaya, 1882 cited in Rashid, 2002, p. 3). Prior to independence in 1957, education in Malaysia was primarily in the form of religious schools. However, when the British came, they established English medium primary and secondary schools for the rich and royal families. Following Malaya’s independence from the British government tremendous changes in education policy took place. Fear of losing Malay identity has resulted in serious efforts by the government to cultivate the Malay Language as its national language (Omar, 1987; Pandian, 2002). Until the year 1970, Malays mainly studied in Malay medium schools.

The British Malay-English medium school divide also impacted greatly on the other ethnic groups who emigrated from India and China. These workforces were brought in by the British government to work in plantations and the tin mining industry (Pandian, 2002). This has led to the emergence of Tamil and Mandarin as commonly used languages in Malaysia. In order to avoid racial tension, vernacular schools (mother tongue medium) were also opened in order to cater for other races like the Indian and Chinese. Thus, what prevails today is the constitutional status of the Malay language as the national language and English language is regarded as the second language (ESL).
English language has been accepted and widely used in business communication and private sector correspondence especially in major cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang (Omar, 1987; Azman, 2004). It was due to global economic pressures that the Malaysian government has put a strong emphasis on English language proficiency among its school leavers to prepare them for their future careers (Gill, 2002). In fact, the curriculum document envisages producing pupils who are able to communicate effectively both inside and outside school (MOE, 2003, p.5). This is in accordance with the National Education Policy that indicates that ‘English is taught as a second language in all-government-assisted schools in the country at both the primary and secondary school levels of schooling’ (MOE, 2003, p.1).

English language teaching (ELT) in Malaysia was first introduced in the early 19th century where the teaching of English was made compulsory but there was no common syllabus for all the schools until 1965. The implementation of the National Education Policy in 1967 resulted in the development of a common English language syllabus for primary school classrooms in West Malaysia. The syllabus was called the Structural Syllabus and the syllabus advocated the use of the Structural Situational Syllabus or the Oral Method (Foo & Richards, 2004). The structural approach to teaching English was very common at that time. The syllabus focused more on drilling and practice of correct forms of grammar and on the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

However, the Malaysian Third Plan for 1976-1980 for education aimed to have students who are able to communicate in English to compete with the global economic changes (MOE, 1979, cited in Rahman, 1987). Therefore, in 1974 the curriculum development
centre was given the responsibility to devise a new English language curriculum to suit these changing needs. As a result, in keeping with the current trend in ELT at that time, the new syllabus adopted the *communicative language teaching approach* (CLT). However, this new communicative curriculum was found to be overambitious and incoherent since it was designed by three Ad-Hoc groups at the Ministry of Education (Foo & Richards, 2004; Pandian, 2002). The syllabus also was found to be unsuitable by the committee’s preliminary evaluation based on reports collated from districts and state education levels. The committee concluded that this drastic shift to a communicative way of teaching failed to take into account the non-English speaking background of learners who have very little exposure to English language in rural areas in Malaysia. Thus, the committee reviewing this problem later proposed a new syllabus in 1989 called the Primary School Integrated Curriculum (KBSR) that embodied the notion of learner-centredness as its main thrust.

1.3 **Introduction of Learner-centredness in Malaysian ELT curriculum**

The new KBSR curriculum was wholly designed at Ministry of Education level and handed down to be implemented by teachers. It was introduced to promote pedagogies that emphasize learner-centred approaches in the new primary school curriculum. The move was based on the 1979 Cabinet Committee report (MOE, 1979, cited in Rahman, 1987) that among others proposed some changes to the existing system. The new curriculum was claimed to have more focus on the basic literacy skills (three R’s): reading, writing and arithmetic. More importantly, the new curriculum encompassed child-centred conceptual principles that were the trend at that time. For example the statements about the balanced need to focus on literacy skills as well as the importance
of learners’ needs were also in line with the Plowden report in the UK (DES, 1967) and will be discussed later in the coming chapter. Learner-centred conceptual principles as envisaged in the Malaysian curriculum through the KBSR curriculum consist of:

- acquisition of skills and knowledge through direct experiences
- suitable and relevant experiences to suit the child’s needs
- variety and interesting activities
- active involvement of the pupils
- flexibility in the teaching and learning process

In terms of the areas of study in KBSR curriculum, they are based on Recommendation 57(a) of the Cabinet Committee Report that the new primary curriculum be planned to enable pupils to acquire skills in three basic areas: Communication, Man (self) and His Environment and Individual Self- Development. These topics should be taught taking into account the learners’ needs, interests, potential and mental capacities as well as their readiness (Rahman, 1987). However, how learners’ readiness could be evaluated was not specified in the document.

In terms of English language teaching within KBSR, the Malaysian government puts great emphasis on the importance of preparing learners to be proficient in the English language to enable them to communicate effectively with people from other countries. Furthermore, the KBSR is also intended to enable learners to be knowledgeable in Information Communication Technology (ICT) in order to gather information from the internet and to establish networks with people both locally and internationally. The specific behavioral objectives are as listed below as a guideline.
By the end of primary school, learners should be able to:

1. listen to and understand simple spoken English to be able to function in common everyday situations;
2. speak and respond clearly and appropriately in common everyday situations using simple language;
3. read and understand different kinds of texts (from print and electronic sources) for enjoyment and information;
4. write (including e-mail) for different purposes using simple language; and
5. show an awareness and appreciation of moral values and love towards the nation.

(MOE, 2003, p.5)

The syllabus also specifies certain considerations for teachers to employ when teaching in the primary classroom. The first is that 'a learner is at the centre of the learning process' (MOE, 2003, p.3). Furthermore, the teaching approaches, activities and materials used must be tailored to suit the different needs and abilities of the pupils. The four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) should also be integrated naturally within the lessons. The pupils are also expected to participate actively in tasks and activities in the language classroom. In terms of the teaching content, selected themes have also been specified to assist teachers in their teaching, for example: World of Self, Stories, and Knowledge, (MOE, 2003, p.7). The language skills, grammar items, vocabulary and sound systems should be repeatedly enforced throughout the lessons with regular recycling. The teachers are encouraged to be creative in coming up with other activities felt suitable for their learners (ibid). In sum, the curriculum’s main thrusts are learner-centredness, balanced development of skills, pupil participation and creativity development.
1.4 The influence of economic and global communication to ELT in Malaysia.

It is evident that this shift in curriculum focus in ELT Malaysia from the traditional approach (focus on a grammatical and structural syllabus) (Gaudart, 1987; Foo & Richards, 2004) to a more learner-centred and communicative approaches began with the global ELT trends in the 1970’s. This change was considered necessary in Malaysia as English language has been accepted and widely used in business communication and private sector correspondence especially in major cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang (Azman, 2004). This global economic pressure also contributed to the strong emphasis brought by the Malaysian government to ensure a certain level of English language proficiency among its school leavers to prepare them for their future careers (Gill, 2004).

Malaysian curriculum planners therefore developed a curriculum that emphasized the communicative approach to language teaching in the hope of preparing learners to be able to communicate proficiently in English and to prepare students for both local and international networking (Ashraf, 1996; Pandian, 2002). In fact the most recent curriculum document updated in 2003 envisages producing pupils who are able to communicate effectively both inside and outside school (MOE, 2003, p. 5). This is in accordance with the National Education Policy that indicates that ‘English is taught as a second language in all-government-assisted schools in the country at both the primary and secondary school levels of schooling’ (ibid, p. 1). Inevitably, this new curriculum change in 1989 had great impact on the teachers as they needed to be trained to implement this change. In line with that, the coming section describes teacher training in Malaysia in brief to understand the nature of training received prior to being posted to teaching in schools.
1.5 **Initial Teacher Education in Malaysia.**

Currently, teacher training in Malaysia takes place at two levels. The first level is the training of non-graduate teachers in the 27 teacher training colleges and the second involves the training of graduate teachers in universities (Lee, 1999). Within these levels, there are two types of training involving pre-service and in-service teachers. Initially, the admission requirement for training at teacher training colleges was the Malaysian school certificate (SPM obtained after five years in secondary education) but was raised to Malaysian High School Certificate (STPM obtained after seven years of secondary education and equivalent to an A-Level). Prior to 1966, this teaching training program was known as the Certificate in Teaching but later upgraded to diploma level after the course duration was extended from two and a half years to three years. The curriculum used for all these colleges is standardized and comprises six components as summarized in Lee (1999) below:

(i) Teacher dynamics-language skills, thinking skills, Islamic education/Moral education, Islamic Civilization, and environmental education.

(ii) Knowledge and professional competence-Education in Malaysia, Psychology, Pedagogy and guidance and counseling.

(iii) Knowledge in Subject option and specialization- major subject, minor subjects and electives.

(iv) Self-enrichment-art education and physical and health education/games.

(v) Co-curricular activities-management of co-curricular activities, games, athletics, uniformed units and societies.

(vi) Practicum (teaching practice)
These are compulsory components for all teachers regardless of their linguistic and ethnic origins. From this description of the courses that teachers have to undertake, it is evident that the teacher training program is geared towards a holistic view of teaching incorporating many elements which have to be covered in the three-year course. This college diploma program will generally produce primary school teachers while secondary teachers usually are trained at public universities.

These secondary school graduate teachers in Malaysia are trained in public universities under two programs. The first is the one-year post graduate teaching diploma called Post Graduate Teaching Certificate (KPLI in Malay acronym) which resembles the UK Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) program. The other one is the concurrent academic and teaching programs leading towards a four-year bachelor degree such as BA of Arts (Education) or B.Sc of Science (Education). Another type of teacher training is the specialized degree in education leading towards a bachelor degree in education such as B. Ed (TESL) training opportunities.

Teacher training in Malaysia also emphasizes the continuity between initial teacher training above and in-service training to ensure quality education in schools (Hamdan, 2004). However, as curriculum development and teacher training programmes are highly centralized at the ministry level, the dissemination of latest curriculum updates and the implementation of the in-service training have been greatly decentralized with agencies at state and district levels (Lee, 1999). Teacher training for in-service teachers is divided into the following: (i) Special Degree Programme (for non-graduate teachers), (ii) Special Teaching Certificates and, Professional Development courses.
During the first two courses, teachers follow similar syllabus as the initial training while receiving some credit transfers for certain basic educational subjects. The professional development courses are gradually offered to selected teachers who will share the knowledge with their colleagues in the respective schools. Similarly, information on the latest updates in the curriculum would use this model of training. This cascading model has been practiced widely in Malaysia which involves direct training for a small number of trainers in the knowledge and skills necessary to enable the intended change in the instructional knowledge and behavior to other teachers at different levels of training (for example at the state and district levels). However, as highlighted by Wedell (2005), this model, while being cost-effective and able to reach maximum numbers of teachers, can have drawbacks in terms of the potential incomplete dissemination of relevant skills and latest development as these input probably diluted at various levels before reaching the lowest (for example in Malaysia, the district levels). Furthermore, not all teachers (particularly those in the rural areas) will be able to attend these professional development courses usually held at the state education department.

1.6 Statement of the problem

As highlighted in the context, language learning in primary school as envisaged in the Malaysian KBSR syllabus, should be learner-centred (LC) to suit the different pupils’ needs, integrating the four language skills and focusing on achieving communication for life inside and outside of the language classroom. The teaching approach and underlying theories behind the curriculum were not clearly specified; neither were the relevant literature for the teachers if they want to refer to the details of
the underlying concepts or approach being suggested. In the Malaysian curriculum document, for example, there is a whole section on the need for the learner-centred approach in implementing the teaching process and yet no pedagogic and theoretical explanations on how it should be implemented are supplied. The paragraph on learner-centredness below may appear intuitively appealing for language teachers, but it is not accompanied by advice on implementation.

Learner-centredness

“The learner is at the centre of the learning process. Teaching approaches, lessons and curriculum materials for learning must be adjusted to suit the differing needs and abilities of pupils. It is important that appropriate activities and materials are used with pupils of different learning profiles so that their full potential can be realized.”

(MOE, 2003, p.3)

Looking at the paragraph, it seems that it lacks explanation on a number of fundamental questions on the concept of a learner-centredness. Firstly, what is meant by ‘learner is at the centre of the learning process’? From this paragraph, it is stated that teachers are expected to take into account diverse students’ needs and abilities in all aspects of their language teaching (approaches; lessons content; activities; and materials). However, how and what skills are required (if any) by teachers to implement these are not explained. This concern about the implementation of learner-centred approaches has been highlighted by Tudor (1996) who acknowledged the complexity of defining what learner-centred means.
Although the notion of learner-centredness has been widely used in the ELT field, there are a lot of fundamental issues regarding the term that need to be explored (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1992). Tudor (1992) highlighted that there have been mixed reactions among teachers and researchers towards the notion of learner-centredness in language teaching and learning. The concerns are on (1) the uncertainties of what it actually means; (2) what it actually involves and (3) how it might be realized in classroom contexts. To address these issues, perhaps, there should be an explanation on how these needs and abilities can be identified (see Brindley, 1989 for an example of needs analysis) and how the teachers can be trained for the identification of skills and abilities (Tudor, 1996).

This lack of knowledge about the underlying concept behind a teaching approach may lead teachers to misinterpret or make their own assumptions on how best to implement the approach in their language classrooms (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1992). In fact research studies conducted in Thailand by Nonkhutheng et al (2006) and Prapaisit De Segovia & Hardison (2008) found that due to lack of knowledge of the learner-centred approach, teachers tended to implement it as they understood it within their contextual constraints such as large classrooms, teachers’ heavy load and insufficient materials. Such local application and interpretation are inevitable with any curriculum innovation but failure to explain the underlying principle to an approach could lead to greater fragmentation and variability.

However, in Malaysia, if teachers want to explore the justification for this approach, no further guidance is offered. This can be misleading as both learners and teachers have their own expectations and perceptions on how learning should happen in class (Benson, 2001; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 2002). Therefore both teachers and learners
should be aware of the kind of approach being used in a classroom. Thus, it is fundamental that the elements of learner-centred approach that have been explicitly stated in the Malaysia Curriculum Specification be further researched so that the teachers and learners are clear about what is expected of them in language classroom.

Interestingly, past experience suggests that curriculum specifications and what teachers claim take place in their classroom may be far from reality in actual classroom practices. This is evident in studies on language teaching practices (for example, Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Nunan, 1989). This could be due to various reasons such as teachers’ confusion of what is expected from the curriculum (Tudor, 1992; 1996), or contextually inappropriate approaches being imposed on the teachers (Holliday, 1994b; 2005). In the Malaysian teaching context, Ali (2003) found that overemphasis on examination results, minimum exposure to the target language and teachers’ lack of English language proficiency and training inevitably have led the teachers in his study to abandon altogether the learner-centred principles behind language teaching envisaged in the curriculum. This was made worse by practical problems such as large classroom size (35-45 pupils in a classroom) and teachers’ heavy workload.

Consequently, my research was driven by an interest to investigate language teaching approaches in Malaysian primary classrooms in relation to the general curriculum expectations, i.e. using learner-centred approaches (MOE, 2003, p.3).
1.7 Research aims

My research purpose and research questions are listed below.

The aims of the research are as follow.

1. To explore and describe the practices of English language teaching in Malaysian year five (aged 11-12) primary school teachers.
2. To explore teachers’ understanding and beliefs about learner-centredness in language teaching.
3. To explore the teachers’ views on the issues associated with the implementation of learner-centred approaches and provide possible suggestions.

1.8 Significance of study

The study has great significance both to ELT theory and to practice. Firstly, studies on the implementation of learner-centred approaches (Nunan, 1989; Tudor, 1996) have indicated that there seems to be ambiguous interpretation of what learner-centred approaches in language teaching really means to teachers. This study therefore, aimed to propose a construct of learner-centredness in ELT based on the review of literature on a general education learner-centred view of teaching.

Secondly, just as communicative language teaching has a weak and strong version (Howatt, 1984) to distinguish the fundamental and practical aspects of classroom teaching, I would argue that the learner-centred approaches to language teaching may have to be perceived in terms of the extent or degree of implementation considering the contextual ethno-linguistic and education system factors mentioned earlier. This also concerns the issue of applicability and adaptability (Hollliday, 1994b) of learner-centred principles to Malaysian teaching contexts. This is because opportunities for students to
be more involved in their learning, such as strategy training, and the chance to evaluate teachers’ practices and engage in self-assessment activities have traditionally been neglected to make way for teaching that focuses on examination demands. Thus, the study explored suggestions for implementation by the teachers involved.

In terms of practical implications, the implementation of learner-centred approaches in a primary context has not been extensively explored (Crick and Mc Combs, 2006; Ali, 2003). Burns & De Silva (2000) highlighted that the learner-centred approaches have mainly been explored in adult learner contexts or in Western contexts especially Australia (Burns, 1996; Nunan, 1989). This further justifies the need to explore the implementation of the learner-centred approach particularly in the primary school context in Malaysia.
1.9 **Organisation of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into seven chapters: chapter one is the introduction to the thesis. This chapter introduces the context of study, explaining the historical overview of the ethno-linguistic context in Malaysia and the influence of global economic and communication demands to the change of curriculum in Malaysia. Following this, a section on teacher education in Malaysia, statement of the problem, research aims, significance of the study and structure of the thesis.

Chapter two is the literature review and consists of three parts. Part one covers the definition of learner-centredness in education and in ELT, the historical background and development of the child-centred movement, the theories that underpin learner-centredness including Constructivist, Humanistic and Psychological theories, the implications for classroom practices, the characteristics of learner-centred practices in both the general education field and in ELT and the relationship of learner-centredness with learner-autonomy. Part two covers the literature on previous research on learner-centredness describing the main methods used (quantitative and qualitative) and aspects of learner-centred teaching and learning process previously explored (such as learners’ evaluation of tasks/activities and experiences, teachers’ views about their approaches, and teachers’ beliefs about learner-centredness). Part three synthesised principles of learner-centredness and offers an idealised ‘working construct and definition’ of learner-centredness. This construct of learner-centredness in ELT was mainly based on the review of the literature on learner-centred view in applied linguistics as well as from general education view of teaching. Chapter three describes the research paradigm within which the research is situated, and explains the research design, research method
and instruments used in the study. It discusses issues related to my research design, including the choice of schools and participants. It also describes the design, piloting and ultimate use of data collection instruments followed by data analysis methods, as well as issues of reliability, validity and ethics.

Chapter four, five and six cover the description and discussion of findings and are presented consecutively representing each of the key research areas: Chapter Four: Teachers’ Beliefs and Knowledge (explored using semi-structured interviews); Chapter Five: Teachers’ Classroom Practices (explored using video-recording, observation and field notes) and Chapter Six: Teachers’ Explanation for Practices and Beliefs about their recorded practices (beliefs in action) (explored using video-stimulated recalled interviews). Throughout these three chapters, the order of findings for each case study is presented beginning with Salim (Town school), Thika (rural school), Lee (vernacular Chinese) and Ramu (vernacular Tamil). This order does not indicate any order of significance in terms of the extent of the learner-centred beliefs, knowledge or practices explored in this study.

Chapter four is divided into two parts. Part one describes the teachers’ beliefs about ELT and learner-centredness in ELT and followed by the discussion for the chapter. Part two explains the findings about teachers’ knowledge and is divided into two sections, section one covering teachers’ definitions of learner-centredness in ELT while section two covers teachers’ understanding about the characteristics of learner-centred approaches in ELT. This chapter concludes with the discussion of findings on teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about learner-centredness.
Chapter five explains the research findings about teachers’ classroom practices explored using video-recording, observation and field notes. This chapter describes the lesson content of each teacher’s classroom practices at two levels; macro level and micro level to produce two types of description. One description illustrates teachers’ key lesson stages describing the overall teaching approaches used by each teachers while the other describes specific features of lessons in relation to the working document on seven ELT learner-centred principles explained in chapter two.

Chapter six presents the findings and discussion about teachers’ explanations for practices and beliefs. Each teacher’s beliefs system is described and then compared with the construct and working definition of learner-centredness in ELT.

Chapter seven consists of the implications and recommendations of the study. It summarizes the main findings and conclusions with regard to the research questions in chapter three. This chapter also describes the implications and suggests recommendations for improvement and further research areas to explore. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks based on the researcher’s reflections on the research process.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: LEARNER-CENTREDNESS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three parts. Part one reviews the definition of learner-centredness in education and in ELT, the historical background and development of the child-centred movement, the theories that underpin learner-centredness including Constructivist, Humanistic and Psychological theories, the implications for classroom practices, the characteristics of learner-centred practices in general education and in ELT and the relationship between learner-centredness and learner-autonomy. Part two covers the literature on previous research on learner-centredness describing the main methods used (quantitative and qualitative) and aspects of learner-centred teaching and the learning process previously explored (such as learners’ evaluation of tasks/activities and experiences, teachers’ views about their approaches, and teachers’ beliefs about learner-centredness). Part three synthesises principles of learner-centredness and offers a ‘working construct and definition’ of learner-centredness to be used as a conceptual framework to guide the research described in chapter 3.

2.1 Defining learner-centredness

In the field of education, learner-centredness has been broadly defined based on the American Psychological Association principles (APA, 1997) as,

‘The perspective that couples a focus on individual learners—(their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs)
with a focus on learning (the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners). This dual focus then informs and drives educational decision-making. The learner-centred perspective is a reflection of the twelve learner-centred psychological principles in the programs, practices, policies and people that support learning for all’

(Mc Combs & Whisler, 1997, p. 9)

This definition proposes that teachers need to consider the learners’ personal backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, interests, and needs in providing the most suitable learning conditions, in order to promote the motivation to learn and create a sense of achievement for all learners. These principles are discussed in great detail in the coming section on the underlying theories of learner-centredness after a review of the historical background of learner-centred education.

In ELT, efforts to arrive at a definition of learner-centred approaches seem to be problematic (Tudor, 1996) and the term ‘learner-centred’ has been said to be loosely used to distinguish it from the traditional approaches (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In fact Nunan and Lamb (1996) argue that learner-centredness can mean different things to different people.

Nunan sees learner-centredness as an approach that involves ‘active involvement of learners in communicating in the classroom; the use of authentic materials; and incorporating into the curriculum learning-how-to learn goals alongside language
goals’ (Nunan, 1993, p. 1). These learning-how-to learn goals consist of the development of efficient learning strategies including identifying preferred ways of learning, negotiation skills and encouragement to set personal objectives. In addition, learners will be trained to adopt realistic goals and time frames besides developing skills of self-evaluation (Nunan, 1988, p. 3). Learners are also expected to contribute input in planning the learning objectives and tasks besides being critical in evaluating their progress and the teachers’ practices in the classroom (Nunan, 1988).

Littlejohn (1985) also sees learner-centred approaches as ‘concerned with allowing learners with a greater role in management of their learning, by providing opportunities for learner choice in the method and the scope of study’ (p. 261). This highlights a significant change from objectivist teacher-centred approaches that view education as something that is handed down from teachers and schools. These roles are further emphasized by Tudor, who views the learner-centred approach in terms of the roles of learners: ‘students are seen as being able to assume a more active and participatory role compared to the recipient of knowledge in traditional approaches’ (Tudor, 1992, p. 22). These roles include planning and selecting the tasks in their language learning (Nunan, 1993, p. 6) and identifying their own learning styles and strategies (Nunan, 1988). Therefore, an observation of a learner-centred classroom should provide evidence of learners assuming the above roles of planning and identifying strategies. These qualities have been associated with autonomy in language learning (see for example, Holec, 1981; Benson, 2001; Little, 2002) and thus, the resemblance of learner-centredness and learner autonomy will be explored later in the coming section explaining the principles of learner-centredness.
Brindley (1984) views the learner ‘as being the centre of the educational process and for that, instructional programmes should be centred on learners’ needs and learners themselves should exercise their own responsibilities’ (p. 15). Brindley (1989) further elaborates that these learners’ needs, can be divided into subjective and objective needs. Subjective needs involve affective needs, wants, expectations, and learning style, while objective needs concern learners’ personal background data, patterns of language use, learners’ language proficiency levels and their problems (ibid pp. 70-72).

This emphasis on learners’ needs is in line with the expectations laid out in the Malaysian curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 3) suggesting that learner-centredness in teaching involves putting the focus on learners’ needs and considering all decisions about teaching practices in relation to the learners’ needs and differences. This could be achieved through a process of consultation and negotiation between the learners and teachers.

The above discussion highlights the way learner-centredness has been viewed by education and ELT practitioners. Unfortunately, none of these definitions and explanation were included in the Malaysian curriculum documents despite being accepted as the main thrust of the curriculum. Teaching recommendations on the curriculum document mostly refer to teachers’ roles and not the learners. In fact, one may argue that too much of teachers control appear to be paradoxical to the concept of learner-centred itself. The historical background of learner-centredness education is explored to understand the origins of this notion.
2.2 Historical background of Learner-Centred education

The concept of learner-centredness in education originates from the notion of ‘child-centred education’ that appears to be closely associated with ‘progressive education’ (Pine & Boy, 1977). This progressive education emerged as a response to the traditional, didactic schooling system in America. A significant early expression of concern for the child as a learner was found in the work of Rousseau and other nineteenth century educators such as Pestalozzi, Herbart and Froebel (Pine & Boy, 1977). However, the greatest and clearest statement of the concepts of child-centred education is said to be found in the writings of John Dewey who seems to place education in the context of a social philosophy expressly designed for the twentieth century (O’Hear, 1991) and it was claimed that many of the methods of social progress and reform were constructed based on Dewey’s ideas.

Dewey’s idea of education emphasises the equal importance of physical, emotional, intellectual and social development of the child and proposed that a teaching-learning process should engage the whole child. Dewey accepted that individuals have important developmental properties but he also stressed the value of experience. According to Dewey, education should be a systematic reconstruction of learners’ experience (Dewey, 1920, cited in Dworkin, 1959) where teachers are required to progressively guide learners in connecting learners’ experience with their learning as well as constructing new experiences. These requirements evidently put certain demands on the teachers’ roles as synthesised by Dewey below. According to Dewey, teachers’ roles in child-centred education can be categorized into four as listed below:
1. Finding ways of enriching, balancing and clarifying the children's experience.
2. Refining experience because children need to be guided into reflective channels to seek new meanings.
3. Simplifying experience because a child is uniquely different.
4. Finding ways of connecting the child's experience with the diverse ways of life of his culture.

The current understanding of learner-centredness can be traced to concurrent developments of the progressive movements in western countries namely the USA and the UK. In the USA, Dewey was one of the key figures in the development of the basic rationale for child-centred education (Dworkin, 1959). He was concerned with pedagogy seen in terms of children's growth and a process of discovery. Dewey theorizes that education was not a preparation for future living but a continuous reconstruction of experience within a social world and school was viewed as a community engaged in a social process of enriching the children's own activities (Dewey, 1920 cited in Dworkin, 1959).

While Dewey had provided the clearest statement of child-centred education during his era in the USA, similar emphasis on progressive education was also embraced by Britain. The Plowden Report (DES, 1967) was drawn from characteristics of progressive education that summarized child-centred education as:

- A school is not merely a teaching shop but must transmit values and attitudes.
- It is a community in which children learn to live first and foremost as children and not as future adults
- The school sets out deliberately to devise the right environment for children, to allow them to be themselves and to develop in the way and at the pace appropriate to them.
"The child', as cited in the Plowden Report, 'lies at the heart of the educational process' 

(DES, 1967, p.7)

The above statements suggest an emphasis on the individual differences and needs of each child. The use of the term *individual differences*, signifies that each child is unique and differs from one another in a variety of ways such as in their needs, interests, aptitudes, skills, intellectual ability and a host of other possibilities. Thus, the Report states, 'Individual differences between children of the same age are so great that any class, however homogeneous it seems, must always be treated as a body of children needing individual and different attention' (DES, 1967, p.25). The main thrust of the Report stressed that all educational strategies must be based on individualization that takes account of the characteristics that distinguish individual learners based on their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capabilities, and needs.

The above viewpoint has several practical implications for the classroom. First, the traditional class lesson is not appropriate, since it does not take into account the differences between children. The uniqueness of each child according to Dewey demands that the educational process be individualized. This suggests that the process of teaching and learning needs to be made suitable to each child’s needs, interests and abilities. As stated in the Plowden Report, children are unequal in their abilities and in their rates of development and their achievements are the result of the interaction of nature and nurture. Therefore during teaching, teachers will have to be flexible and adapt their methods to suit individuals within a class or school (DES, 1967, p.460).
However, the Report acknowledges that this brings challenges to teachers. Individual attention to children requires time and therefore, teachers are advised to carry out group teaching as well, in which children who are roughly at the same stage can be taught together (DES, 1967, p.274). Thus, group teaching is acceptable because total individualization explained earlier is impractical. Grouping also fulfils a socialization function where children can learn to get along together, help one another and realize their own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of others. In addition, grouping learners also fulfils a pedagogic function of promoting children to express themselves better and to do peer-teaching while learning. These new ideals about child-centred education have also been embraced by many countries including Malaysia as reflected in the previous context of study chapter. In order to further understand this shift towards more progressive, learner-centred education, it is essential that the underlying theories that influenced this move particularly in the area of language teaching be explored next.

2.3 Overview of the theories influencing learner-centred approaches

2.3.1 Positivist view of learning

In ELT, the notion of a ‘learner-centred approach’ has emerged as an alternative to the traditional teacher-centred approaches influenced by the Positivist view of learning (Hollday, 1994b, p. 7). According to the Positivist view, instructed learning is perceived in terms of formation of desired learning behaviour achieved through the process of teachers giving stimulus-response (SR) conditioning (Williams & Burden, 1997). In this approach, the aim of the language teaching process is to achieve accuracy of the language items taught. A typical teacher-centred learning process involves learners responding to the teacher’s stimulus for example by substituting and repeating the language patterns. Teachers reinforce learners’ display of the desired behaviour and
learners are rewarded, while negative behaviours are punished. This was the ideology behind a lot of teaching through stereotyped drills and practice in the 1960s.

Learner-centred approaches stemmed from the dissatisfactions with the teacher-led approaches that have been criticized for having several shortcomings. For example, in grammar-translation methods, teacher-centred approaches seemed to undermine the learners’ contribution to language learning by failing to acknowledge learners’ needs to participate actively rather than merely parroting and accepting teachers’ explanations. These approaches view learners’ roles as passive: they are essentially recipients who simply absorb and repeat the stimuli given by teachers (Brown, 2000). According to Williams & Burden, 1997), in teacher-directed approaches, there is very little communication and learner interaction thus neglecting learners’ needs to be exposed to opportunities for practice (Harmer, 2003). In fact, teacher-led approaches do not seem to provide avenues for strategy development to encourage effective learning (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Consequently, it has been claimed that there is little attention to learners’ cognitive processes during language learning in the audio-lingual drills that require learners to mechanically repeat in chorus the language items taught (Howatt, 2004). In addition, since grammatical accuracy is paramount in this view, the meaning and context of language items are not addressed. These weaknesses of the teacher-centred approaches have helped to bring the development of the learner-centred approach to language teaching (Cook, 2001).

Some of the teaching approaches associated with teacher-centred approaches among others are the audiolingual method and ‘Presentation-Practice-Production’ (Brown, 2000, p. 34). The audiolingual method was derived from the structural syllabus that
consisted of grammatical items listed in the order to be taught (Ellis, 1993). The structural-oral-situational method comprises a ‘structurally and lexically graded syllabus with situational presentation of the teaching content including the four language skills’ (Prabhu, 1987, p. 10).

In terms of activities, traditional teacher-centred language classrooms use activities such as substitution drills, memorization activities, choral reading, and teachers asking questions that require a display of knowledge (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 5). These teacher-led approaches were criticized for focusing more on the language than on learning to communicate (Howatt, 2004).

2.3.2 Constructivist and Humanistic view of learning

The learner-centred approach has also been associated with Constructivist theory (Tudor, 1996). The Constructivist learning theory views learning as an active process of reconstructing existing understandings based on current and past knowledge. This theory asserts that in teaching, teachers should encourage discovery, engage in active communication with learners and accommodate teaching and learning tasks to learners’ current level of understanding (Williams & Burden, 1997). However, this Constructivist view of learning has been heavily criticized due to its lack of clear indication of the roles of learners in the language classroom, direct instruction and of the teachers’ roles (other than providing suitable input and encouraging the learners) (Tudor, 1992).

In ELT, the origin of the concept of learner-centredness was partly influenced by influential humanistic education authors (like Maslow, 1970 and Rogers, 1961, cited in Tudor, 1996, p. 31). This humanistic psychology in education actually promotes the
notion of ‘the whole person’ (Tudor, 1996). Stevick (1990, p. 23-24) summarized the components under this humanistic view into five namely: *feelings of personal emotions, social relations, responsibilities, intellect, and self actualization*. These elements can be seen in humanistic approaches like Community Language Learning (CLL) proposed by Curran (1976, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

In essence, learner-centred approaches to language teaching and learning have been greatly influenced by among others, humanistic educational approaches, psychological theories and social constructivist theory (Pine & Boy, 1977; Stevick, 1990; Tudor, 1996).

### 2.4 The Learner-Centred Psychological Principles

In general education, learner-centred education has been greatly influenced by Learner-Centred Psychological (LCP) Principles. LCP principles are drawn based on a research-validated framework developed by the works of Mc Combs (2001), Mc Combs & Whisler (1997) and influenced by the American Psychological Association (APA). These principles have been used for school reform in the United States of America (Mc Combs, 2001; APA, 1997). The framework provides the basis to understand learning and motivation when the conditions and context of learning support individuals’ ‘needs, capacities, experiences, and interests’ (Mc Combs, 2001, p. 185).

The four domains of the APA principles are cognitive and metacognitive, motivational and affective, social and developmental, and individual differences (APA, 1997). The first domain, the cognitive and metacognitive, consists of the learners’ intellectual capacities and how these capacities are used to facilitate their learning, such as the
nature and goals of the learning process, construction of knowledge, strategic thinking and thinking about thinking (APA, 1997; Mc Combs & Miller, 2007).

The motivational and affective domains focus on the roles of motivation and curiosity in learners’ thinking. They cover the motivational and emotional influences on learning, intrinsic motivation to learn, and the effects of motivation on effort (Mc Combs & Miller, 2007, p. 46).

This third domain focuses on two principles, namely the developmental influences in learning (such as physical, intellectual, emotional and social aspects of learning) and the social influences on learning. Learning, according to this principle, is influenced by interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others (APA, 1997; Mc Combs & Miller, 2007, p. 49). The final domain of the APA principles focuses on individual differences in learning, diversity in learning preferences, and evaluation.

According to these APA principles, learner-centredness assumes that cognitive, affective, social and individual differences will be at the heart of classroom activity. Pupils will be expected to engage in discussions about the planning of learning objectives, classroom activities and their evaluation. In addition, the principles assume that motivational and affective aspects, such as learners’ curiosity and engagement in the learning process, should be prominent in a learner-centred classroom where learners can develop and exercise their abilities and skills in planning and evaluating their learning. It also involves identifying suitable learning strategies to enhance their learning processes (Nunan, 1988). According to Mc Combs & Whisler (1997), the principles are intended to deal holistically with learners in the context of real-world learning situations. Thus, they are best understood as an organized set of principles; no principle should be viewed in isolation.
Drawing from the above LCP principles, a set of guidelines called The Principles of Learner-centred Model was developed by Mc Combs and Whisler (1997) for classroom practitioners to consider when implementing learner-centred approaches in their classroom practices. Mc Combs and Whisler referred to them as the Premises of the Learner-Centered Model as listed below.

1. Learners are distinct and unique. Their distinctiveness and uniqueness must be attended to and taken into account if learners are to engage and take responsibility for their own learning.

2. Learners’ unique differences include emotional states of mind, learning rates, stages of development, talents, abilities, feelings of efficacy, and other academic as well non academic attributes and needs. These needs must be taken into account if all learners are to be provided with the necessary challenges and opportunities for learning and self-development.

3. Learning is a constructive process that occurs best when learning content is relevant and meaningful to them; and when learners are actively engaged in creating his/her own knowledge and understanding by connecting what is learnt with prior knowledge and experience.

4. Learning occurs best in a positive environment, one that contains interpersonal relationships and interactions where learners feel appreciated, acknowledged, respected and valued.

5. Learning is fundamentally a natural process; learners are perceived as naturally curious and basically interested in learning about and mastering their world. Although negative thoughts and feelings sometimes interfere with this natural inclination and must be dealt with, learners do not require ‘fixing’.

   (Mc Combs and Whisler, 1997, p.10)

In this view, the learner is a positive contributing entity, a person who can assume responsibility in learning. This contrasts with an objectivist view of the learner as someone to be instructed.
Drawing from the above principles, the main thrust of learner-centred approaches are that, firstly, learners should be included in educational decision making processes; secondly, learners’ diverse perspectives are encouraged and respected during learning experiences; thirdly, learners’ differences in culture, abilities, styles, developmental stages and needs are accounted for and respected; and finally, learners are treated as co-creators in the teaching & learning process (ibid p.11). The principle also suggests that learners have readiness to learn.

However, these principles could be interpreted in a variety of ways and acknowledging that, Mc Combs and Whisler describe how these principles can be translated into classroom actions that teachers can relate to. Therefore, these principles are synthesised to translate them into more applicable and meaningful classroom characteristics for teachers to comprehend. According to Mc Combs and Whisler (1997) the features to be expected in a learner-centred classroom can be described in terms of the aspects below.

2.5 The characteristics of learner-centred classrooms in education

2.5.1 The curriculum/ syllabus

The learner-centred curriculum contains tasks that stimulate learners’ various interests and includes activities that help learners understand and develop their own perspectives (Murdoch & Wilson, 2008). It is also organized around themes that are meaningful to learners and has explicit built-in opportunities for all learners to engage their higher-order thinking and self-regulating learning skills. The curriculum also allows learning activities that are global, interdisciplinary and integrated. The curriculum also features activities that encourage learners to work in collaboration with other learners. In contrast, teacher-centred classrooms mostly involve individual work
and desk work with learners seated in rows facing the front (Mc Combs and Whisler, 1997, pp. 89-96).

2.5.2 Characteristics and roles of learners and teachers

In a learner-centred classroom, learners adopt new roles where they may no longer be passive recipients of knowledge transmitted by the teacher. In fact, to ensure effective learning in a learner-centred classroom, they should actively contribute to the teaching and learning process. This means that they are able to choose their own projects, work at own individual pace and be able to show excitement about learning new things. Furthermore, they are able to work with learners of different cultures and abilities. They are also able to demonstrate knowledge in various ways and are actively engaged and participating in individual and group activities (Murdoch and Wilson, 2008, chapter 3).

The teacher, on the other hand, communicates high expectations for all learners and listens to and respects the learners’ point of view. The teacher also encourages and facilitates participation and shared decision making. The teacher also provides structure without being too directive, encourages learners to think for themselves while emphasising learner enjoyment of activities. Finally, the teacher also helps learners refine strategies for constructing meaning and organizing content as illustrated by Murdoch and Wilson (2008, pp 7-23) called *Constructing a learning community*. The teacher acts as facilitator and moves around the classroom. On the other hand, in a teacher-centred classroom, the teacher usually stands at the front of the classroom and directs the class. Most of the talking is also done by the teacher and they decide who
may speak. Students occasionally respond to a teacher’s questions or initiation (Mc

2.5.3 Teaching strategies and methods

In terms of teaching strategies, the methods need to be more flexible and involve
a variety of ways to match learners’ needs. This includes learning activities that are
personally relevant to learners and give learners increasing responsibilities for the
learning process. In addition, the teaching strategies also comprise questions and tasks
to stimulate learners thinking beyond memorizing and help learners refine
understanding by using effective learning strategies. Peer learning and peer teaching are
also included as part of instructional methods. This includes group and pair work,
assignments, projects, presentations, discussions, and sharing with the whole class
(Jones, 2007, pp. 50-63). Seats should be rearranged so that students can sit in pairs and
groups. Students are allowed to leave their seats and move around the class to
collaborate. In a traditional approach, homework is usually in the form of exercises
from textbooks assigned by teachers. In a learner-centred classroom, the homework
could be in the form of self-access work, diaries, pen pal correspondence, projects,
research, and activities using computers, the internet and explorations of authentic
materials. In fact, the amount and type of homework is negotiated with students (Jones,
2007, chapter six)

2.5.4 Assessment system

In a learner-centred classroom, teachers assess different learners differently and
learners’ input in the design and revision of assessment system is accepted. Teachers
monitor progress continually to provide ongoing feedback on individual progress. In
addition, the assessment system also promotes learners’ reflection on their growth as learners through opportunities for self-assessment. This means that it allows diversity of competencies to be demonstrated in a variety of ways (Mc Combs & Whisler, 1997, pp. 94-95). These self and peer evaluative techniques could be in the form of portfolios or diaries, which help pupils to reflect upon their work. Some of these principles could be seen in practical primary teaching suggestion books such as Murdoch and Wilson (2008) that used elements like pictures and simple words such as ‘my worries’ to reflect about their work (p 10).

Nevertheless, it is imperative to highlight that implementing learner-centredness in ELT according to the above description could be problematic as there can be a clash between theoretical recommendations and practical classroom practices. Critics on learner-centred approaches highlighted the issue of finding the balance between humanistic aspects of teaching and the aims and process of language learning as highlighted by Tudor (1996) and Stevick (1990). For example, the literature about learner-centredness in ELT seems to be preoccupied with acknowledging active learners’ roles and overlooking the roles of language instruction by the teacher. This may lead to variability of interpretation of the teachers’ instructional roles in a learner-centred classroom. Some may argue that only facilitates the learning process by giving learners more autonomy to discuss and present their ideas during group activities.

According to Holliday, In TESOL, learner-centredness should be perceived in terms of authenticity of interaction and how oral interaction and participation tasks among learners are distributed and managed in a classroom (Holliday, 2005, p. 65). This means that, in English language classrooms, the nature of teacher-learner oral interactions in the target language should be meaningful to the learners. In addition, Holliday asserted
that the complexities of classroom realities and the contexts of language teaching need to be considered when adopting learner-centred approaches in non-western teaching contexts.

2.6 Learner-centredness and learner autonomy in ELT

Learner-centredness and learner autonomy are two terms that have been used to represent the new shift in the education reform since the 1920’s. According to Benson (2001), the aim of education since then shifted beyond the mastery of subject matter to prepare learners for social and political life. Similarly with learner-centredness, learner autonomy was in line with Dewey’s view of education that founded the early Council of Europe work on development of autonomy in language learning (Benson, 2001, p. 25).

With regard to the teachers’ roles, both learner-centredness and learner autonomy acknowledge the complex roles of teachers. In learner-centred approaches, teachers’ roles need to be balanced between the instructional roles and facilitating roles (Tudor, 1996). Similarly, Voller (1997) suggests that to develop learner autonomy, teachers need to play both management and instructional roles. The management aspect deals with the social aspect of teaching to determine social distance and authority in the classroom while the instructional roles focus on the tasks needed to achieve learning objectives. Learner autonomy uses the term learner training to describe the process towards achieving learner autonomy. According to Holec (1981), learner training should be based on discovery where learners should explore and discover with and without the help of other learners. Holec argues that the discovery process to find answers or solve learning problems would develop knowledge and techniques needed to be autonomous learners. Elements of ‘trial and error’ are accepted in this process and learners train themselves progressively (ibid, p.42). Again, there are resemblances
between learner-centredness that also aims to develop learners’ learning skills and efficient learning strategies so that ultimately they can be autonomous learners. The skills emphasised in learner-centred approaches include assisting learners to identify their own preferred ways of learning; developing skills needed to negotiate the curriculum; encouraging learners to set their own objectives; encourage learners to adopt realistic goals and time frames; develop learners’ skills in self evaluation (Nunan, 1988, p.3).

It is evident that both learner-centred approaches and learner autonomy allow learners to participate actively and have more significant roles in their own language study. Looking at learner autonomy, it aims to allow learners to take responsibility and ownership of their learning process (Wenden, 1991; Benson, 2003). Learner-centred approaches allow learners to assume a greater role in management of their learning objectives, methods and scope of study (Littlejohn, 1985, p. 261). As described earlier, learner-centred approaches promote learners to be more involved in the learning process and regulate their learning more effectively using learning strategies (Nunan, 1988). In comparison, learner autonomy has been described as ‘the readiness of the learners to take charge of their own language learning, to hold responsibilities for the decisions concerning the aspects of language learning’ (Holec, 1981, p.3). These aspects of learning, according to Holec, include:

(i) determining the objectives
(ii) defining contents and progression of language learning
(iii) selecting methods and technologies to be used
(iv) monitoring the procedures of acquisition
(v) evaluating what has been acquired
Furthermore, in a learner-centred classroom the collaboration and negotiation process to suit learners’ needs and abilities appear to be the preconditions for learner-centred approaches to take place. In addition, learner-centredness specifies on the need to enhance interaction in the target language, the use of authentic and a variety of materials to suit learners’ specific needs.

The discussion about learner autonomy here clearly mirrors most features of learner-centredness in ELT explained earlier. However, despite having similar aims learner-centredness and learner autonomy differ in terms of their specific foci. Learner autonomy can be seen as the end product of a learner-centred classroom teaching and can only be achieved once learners have the *willingness* and *readiness* to assume those responsibilities. In addition, while learner-centred approaches aim to strike a balance in how teaching and learning processes are organised and managed in a classroom and outside classroom, learner autonomy is about the capacity of learners to take charge of their learning and not about how learning is organised (Benson, 2001, p.50). The emphasis in learner autonomy is to increase or achieve the learners’ capacity to take control of their own learning.

From the literature covered so far, the complexity of learner-centredness in ELT is evident and it is difficult to get a clear picture of just what constitutes learner-centredness despite it being at the heart of many theories and principles. In fact finding a concrete definition of what it means is also a challenge (Tudor, 1996). According to Tudor (1996), the difficulty to conceptualise learner-centred approaches in ELT seems to occur because the term ‘learner-centred’ has been loosely used to distinguish it from the traditional approaches (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and learner-centredness has been closely associated and easily confused with CLT (Savignon, 1991).
In fact, some ELT practitioners (for example, Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2006) see learner-centredness as an essential dimension of the CLT approach. This is because both aimed to achieve similar things. For example CLT according to Nunan and Lamb (1996) involves using language to express meaning; carrying out tasks and using language that is meaningful to the learner and the objectives reflect the needs of the learner. CLT activities also engage learners in negotiating meaning and interaction. In terms of the roles of the learner, they are seen as negotiators and interactors. The teachers’ roles on the other hand, are to facilitate the communication process, carry out needs analysis and manage the communication process. The CLT approach works on the assumption that communication and interaction with teachers and other learners in the target language are very important (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Howatt, 2004). This has led to the view that learner-centredness is an extension of CLT as it adds to the communicative view of teaching.

However, there are some distinctions between the two that need acknowledgement. While both CLT and learner-centredness promote active participation and opportunities for practice in classrooms, a learner-centred approach can be distinguished from the CLT approach in terms of the extent of learners’ involvement in their learning process. In learner-centred approaches, learners as well as teachers are actively involved in the teaching and learning process such as, doing needs analysis, selecting the methodology and making decisions about the content of learning. Nunan (1993) for instance, describes learner-centredness as an approach that involves ‘active involvement of learners in communicating in the classroom; the use of authentic materials; and incorporating into the curriculum learning-how-to learn goals alongside language goals’ (Nunan, 1993, p. 1). These goals include the development of efficient learning
strategies including identifying preferred ways of learning, negotiation skills and encouragement to set personal objectives and to adopt realistic goals and self-evaluation (Nunan, 1988, p. 3). In a learner-centred view, learners have a much fuller negotiative role than in the case of many second language teaching classrooms where goals are specified solely by the teacher or the sponsor. Nunan’s view is consistent with the views presented in some ELT methodology books (for example, Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Brown, 2001; Cook, 2001) that suggest that learner-centred has not been perceived exclusively as a type of approach but instead as a criterion for other teaching approaches like communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT).

It is therefore important to conclude here that learner centredness is not an ‘all-or-nothing’ concept (Nunan, 1993, p.136) but instead a very relative matter and should be perceived on a continuum (Mc Combs & Whisler, 1997). There are levels of implementation as proposed by Nunan (1993, p. 183) that can be adapted to suit learners’ abilities and readiness to embrace their new roles and responsibilities. The five levels involved in learner-centred approaches to language learning, namely awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and the transcendence level. The awareness level is when learners are being made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the programmes/ curriculum. The involvement level takes place when learners are involved in selecting their own goals and objectives from a range of alternatives offered. The intervention level increases learners’ involvement to modifying and adapting the goals and content of the language syllabus. The creation level further extends learners’ involvement to actually creating their own goals and objectives and finally the transcendence level extends learner involvement beyond the classroom where learners
make links between the content of lessons to the world outside the classroom. However, according to Nunan, learners’ involvement in these levels requires certain skills, abilities and readiness.

In short, the continuum of learner-centredness being implemented could and should be perceived in terms of the extent of; the presence on active rather than passive learning; an emphasis on deep learning and understanding rather than rote learning (drilling and repetitions); increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student; and eventually an increased sense of autonomy in the learner. Having explored the theoretical aspects of learner-centredness, the next part will explore how this area has been investigated in the area of ELT and educational studies.
2.7 Previous studies on the implementation of learner-centred approaches

Both positivist and interpretive/qualitative research methods have been used in research studies to explore learner-centredness in ELT. A survey method in investigating learner-centred approaches in teaching was chosen in studies by Garret and Shortall (2002) and Crick and Mc Combs (2006) as they wanted to cover a large number of respondents and to assess certain aspects of the approach. Garret and Shortall (2002) conducted a survey among 103 college students in Brazil on their evaluations of their experiences participating in learner-centred activities in comparison with teacher-centred activities. The survey method involved a questionnaire comprising questions on their affective reactions (enjoyment, anxiety) and perceived learning value (learning outcome) using a 5-point scale rating. In addition to their rating, learners were also expected to write their reasons for the ratings they had given. Their findings indicated that the learners perceived the learner-centred activities as more enjoyable, fun and relaxing. However, in terms of perceived learning value, the learners perceived teacher-centred activities as better for learning than learner-centred activities. In fact, the findings suggest that although learners enjoy the learner-centred activities more, they are unsure of their benefits for their language development.

Crick & Mc Combs (2006) adapted a study that had been carried out in the USA in order to investigate the assessment of learner-centred practices (ALCP) among fifteen teachers in the UK and 851 learners in five schools. The ALCP survey used in this research was adapted from the American Psychological Principles (APA, 1997) explained in an earlier section. This study also revealed that teachers found the practice of evaluating themselves and looking at learners’ evaluation about their practices had
improved aspects of their practices particularly on the needs and nature of feedback given. However, despite being able to cover a larger number of respondents these quantitative approaches are limited in their research coverage of issues. For instance, Garret and Shortall’s study explored learner-centredness in terms of learners’ perceived values of their experiences and activities that take place in the classroom. There was no observation of practice. As a result, using surveys is not adequate to my research interests to explore teachers’ current ELT practices and whether they implement learner-centred approaches as recommended by the ministry.

In other research projects that did not necessarily involve ELT classrooms, Mc Combs & Miller (2007) and Daniels & Perry (2003) found that the adapted learner-centred principles (LCP) used in the classroom significantly increased motivation. The studies found that learners had less anxiety about learning and were more willing to participate. Other data gathered by Crick through a survey method also found that teachers gained insightful feedback on their teaching from the learners’ evaluations, and that over time these helped the teachers to improve aspects of their teaching (Crick & Mc Combs, 2006). This is one example of a study of learners’ contributions in evaluating their learning process which is a feature of the learner-centred classroom mentioned earlier (Nunan, 1988; 1993; Tudor, 1996).

It is also important to note that studies on learner-centredness in ELT have been mainly focussing on adult learners and mostly in western contexts (Burns, 1999). In fact all the studies cited here were conducted with adult learners except for the study by Crick and Mc Combs that involved teachers and learners from both primary and secondary schools.
Learner-centredness has also been explored using interpretive/qualitative research orientations. Some of the studies (for example, Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Anton, 1999; Croft, 2002; Van Dang, 2006; Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf & Moni, 2006; Prapaisit de Segovia & Hardison, 2008) have used combinations of qualitative research methods to investigate the implementation of learner-centredness in language teaching.

Burns (1992) used situated ethnographic investigation to study the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and curriculum process in L2 classrooms. Using observation and semi-structured interview data, she found a complex, interrelated network of beliefs that guided teachers’ practices and approaches. The findings suggested that teachers’ beliefs were informed by their previous learning experiences as learners.

In another study, Burns, (1996) investigated the nature of teachers’ beliefs and its impact among Australian migrant adult learners using ethnographic and interpretative approaches. The study aimed to understand, interpret and explain the nature of teachers’ beliefs. The researchers used collaborative case study design involving six teachers.

Anton (1999), in her study on the discourse in a university classroom in the USA chose an observation method to investigate interactions in the so-called learner-centred and teacher-centred classrooms. She recorded the discourse in both classrooms and conducted a discourse analysis of the transcriptions. Anton found that learners in the LC classroom interacted in the target language and participated in learning activities more than in the teacher-centred Italian language classroom. In the learner-centred French classroom teachers used controlled practice of grammar structures and communicative-oriented paired or group activities. In contrast, the teacher-centred classroom discourse provided very rare opportunities for learners to interact and practice language
structures. This was because the class mostly involved the teacher talking from the front and the learners repeating certain expressions when asked to do so by the teachers.

In Vietnam, Van Dang (2006) used observation as the primary method and also conducted interviews to investigate how learner-centredness was employed in an EFL teacher’s training college. The study found that the learner-centred approach has significantly increased classroom interaction. Some of the activities observed were publishing bulletins and conducting mini conferences. The EFL teachers in the study were very proficient and highly motivated. Van Dang (2006), however, observed that the success of the approach relied heavily on class structure, physical environment and classroom culture, all of which may prove less easy to control in large classrooms. All the above studies were conducted either in secondary school settings or mostly in adult language teaching contexts. None were conducted in primary schools.

In Malaysia, although there have been studies to explore teachers’ practices, there is little evidence that any have specifically explored teachers’ English language practices and beliefs with regard to learner-centred approaches as proposed by the ministry of education. Rahman (1987) conducted a case study of the overall implementation of the learner-centred based KBSR curriculum to explore the extent of its principles being practiced by primary teachers in Malaysia. The study found that after four years of implementation many of the conceptual understanding of child/learner-centred education and their implementation for classrooms were far from happening in the four Malaysian schools explored. According to Rahman, the teachers observed still displayed the commonly used ELT formula of Present-Practice-Produce (PPP).

The teachers interviewed explained that they still used the teacher-centred approach to teaching but integrated some communicative activities that involve learners such as
group work, class discussions or pair work. Rahman, however, argued that these features may on the surface indicate learner participations but do not necessarily embrace the principles of learner-centred approaches as the teachers’ practices were still very much teacher-dominated with fewer opportunities for active learning by learners. She argued that, teachers were still struggling with the new change and proposed to address this by raising the level of training and professionalism of the teachers (ibid.). She found that there were clear tensions and confusions with the move from the traditional approaches to the then new learner-centred approaches. Rahman also concluded that, this was partly due to the lack of a clear definition of the nature of learner-centred approaches which has inevitably left room for wide variations in interpretation and practice.

A more recent finding by Ali (2003) in his case studies among three primary school teachers on the east coast of Malaysia also found that teachers interviewed explained their difficulties to implementing communicative, learner-centred approaches in their classroom. The findings revealed that teachers struggled to fulfil the curriculum needs to be more learner-centred in their teaching approaches with the need to teach for the examination in the examination-oriented culture in Malaysia. The study also found that these teachers displayed and admitted having a lack of confidence in teaching English due to limited qualifications and training.

The findings inevitably signified that teachers were not able to teach English communicatively with a focus on learners’ needs based on the curriculum documents (MOE, 2001; 2003). This study found that teachers focus more on drilling language patterns and preparing learners for the schools’ test and examination (Ali, 2003, p. 2). Ali concluded that because of the constraints explained above, the teachers concentrated
their teaching towards the technical domains of education such as delivering and finishing the syllabus content and evaluating learners’ understanding in order to answer the examination questions. The emphasis on technical domains comprised of ‘content, standard, methods for organization/delivering instruction, and strategies for assessing the attainment of knowledge, skills and understanding’ (Crick, Haddon, Broadfoot & Tew, 2007, p. 270) which were also predominant among teachers in their study in schools in the UK. They found that teachers tended to focus on these technical aspects rather than skills development in order to cover the syllabus before the tests.

It is also unfortunate that opportunities for students to be more involved in their learning, such as strategies training, and the chance to evaluate teachers’ practices and engage in considered self assessment are neglected to make way for examination demands. This is partly due to teachers’ lack of readiness to change the teacher-learner role, large class size, and teachers’ language proficiency and exam-oriented culture. The findings from both these studies clearly highlight the need to cautiously consider the adaptability and compatibility of elements of learner-centredness before prescribing them in the Malaysian curriculum. From the two research studies in Malaysia on the implementation of learner-centred approaches in primary schools, it was evident that the underlying principles of learner-centred approaches posed challenging implementation issues and require more explorations into teachers’ classroom practices and views about this curriculum shift from teacher to a learner-centred one.

Firstly, the current top-down approach to syllabus planning practiced in Malaysia clearly is not in accordance with what is expected in a learner-centered curriculum process. In fact as Nunan (1988) highlighted, a learner-centred curriculum development ideally should involve collaborative efforts thorough consultation with the learners and
teachers in the teaching and learning process. According to Nunan (1988), a learner-centred curriculum development model for language learning should comprise four steps:

(i) Initial planning procedures that involve collecting general information about learners to identify their objective needs - age, educational background, previous learning experiences, time in the target culture, previous and current occupation.

(ii) Selection and gradation of content that involves making explicit content objectives to help learners have realistic ideas of what can be achieved and be more aware of their roles as learners. In addition, learners are also exposed to activities that enable them to do self-evaluation, activities related to their real-life activities and that can develop their skills gradually.

(iii) Selection of methodology and materials where this process involves negotiation and consultation between teachers and learners, not just given by teachers.

(iv) Ongoing monitoring, assessment and evaluation. This evaluation stage is parallel with other curriculum activities and may occur at various times throughout the teaching and learning process.

Unlike the three traditional steps (planning, implementation and evaluation) to curriculum development by Taba (1962 cited in Nunan, 1988) a learner-centred curriculum development model differs in several ways. Firstly, the evaluation process involves informal monitoring simultaneously during teaching and learning process and not just at the end. Self-evaluation in a learner-centred curriculum is highly encouraged and will be conducted by both the teachers and learners. In addition, skills in evaluating materials, learning activities and objectives setting will be embedded within the teaching process.
Finally, teachers must do self-evaluation and reflection on their performance to improve on the curriculum and also for their professional development. According to Nunan, teachers must be ready and willing to participate in this process in order for the curriculum to be successfully implemented. However, the above curriculum development steps outlined by Nunan (1988) seem very idealistic in nature as they disregard the training or skills needed by both teachers and learners to participate in the activities suggested. For example, evidently, teachers and especially learners require some exposure or training to engage in discovery activities or self evaluation to monitor their achievements. Self and peer assessment are skills that require nurturing over time.

Furthermore, another major concern to be considered is whether the teachers in Malaysia are well prepared to fulfill such objectives. This has the implication that ELT teachers therefore should be well trained in order to be (1) proficient in English language in order to teach the four language skills (2) able to identify the needs of their learners (3) able to adapt teaching materials to suit learners’ needs (4) be equipped with management skills to design and control activities that brings out participation (5) creative to come up with relevant activities to cater to learners’ diverse needs (6) be trained in language awareness and study skills and (7) have the negotiating skills to promote learner-centred approaches in the classroom.

2.8 Teacher’s knowledge and Beliefs about language learning and teaching

The research studies reviewed on the implementation of learner-centred approaches above also integrated two vital aspects of teachers’ practices, i.e., teacher’s beliefs and knowledge about their practices. These elements are inter-related as they have intertwined relationship and have been explored extensively as reviewed by Borg
(2003; 2006). According to Borg (2006), teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, images, assumptions, metaphors, conceptions, perspectives about teachers, learning, students, subject matter, curricula, materials, instructional activities and (him/her) self can be termed as teacher cognition (p.41). Teacher cognition, according to Borg (2003) refers to the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching- what teachers know, believe and think (p.81). Borg (2006) reviewed studies exploring this aspect and concluded that the area of teacher cognition is ‘characterised by an overwhelming array of concepts’ (p.35). Borg (2006, pp.36-39) illustrated this point using a three-page table that list how teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, theories, cognition have been defined.

This implies that the investigation of teachers’ beliefs and knowledge can be as complicated. According to Pajares (1992), the difficulty in studying teachers’ beliefs has been caused by definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and beliefs structures. For example, teachers’ beliefs have been referred to, among others, as principles of practice (Elbaz, 1981; 1983); Cognition (Woods, 1996; Borg, 2003; 2006); practical knowledge (Calderhead, 1988; Elbaz, 1981) and pedagogical principles (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver & Thwaite, 2001).

Despite all these definitions, the underlying principles behind these terms are that they refer to teachers’ cognitive and behaviour which are guided by the personal system of beliefs, values and principles that teachers hold in their life.

Despite the complexity, teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about their practices have been perceived to be very important and have been extensively explored as indicated earlier. It has been argued that teachers’ classroom practices are influenced by the beliefs developed over time (For example, Elbaz, 1983; Burns, 1992; Borg, 2003). Burns (1992) claims that teachers’ verbalizations of their personalised beliefs can raise their
consciousness level of their own practices. In addition, teachers’ beliefs, formed from personal experience, education and values are important as they consciously and unconsciously shape how teachers see and relate to learners, teaching and learning (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p. 27). In fact, an understanding of the relationship between beliefs and their classroom practices could inform language teachers and teacher educators on future innovations to be implemented in classrooms (Lacorte, 2005).

Elbaz (1983) used teachers’ practical knowledge for the study that focussed on the nature of teachers’ actions and decision orientation. She uses five categories of teachers’ practical knowledge has been proposed; knowledge of; self, the milieu of teaching, the subject matter, curriculum development and instruction (ibid).

Beliefs, according to Pajares (1994) can be divided into two types namely the expounded beliefs (theory claimed) versus the theory in action (what is actually done). Woods (1996), in a study on teachers’ personal account of their teaching practices found that beliefs, knowledge and assumptions coexist in a complex system that guide teachers’ practices in teaching. This means that, researchers cannot deduce language pedagogies simply on the teachers’ accounts of their practices without seeing them in ‘actual instances of practices’ (Breen et al., 2001, p.498).

Burns, (1996) investigated the nature of teachers’ beliefs and its impact among Australian migrant adult learners under the AMEP programme. This study used ethnographic and interpretative approaches as aimed to understand, interpret and explain the nature of teachers’ beliefs. The study used collaborative case study design involving six teachers. The data collection methods involve classroom observation and semi-structured interview using stimulus recall procedures.
As indicated in Pajares (1992), it is unavoidable to infer teachers’ beliefs during research investigations. However, several aspects (citing Rokeach’s suggestion) can be considered to ensure beliefs can be inferred and validly represented as listed below.

- Inference must take into account on the ways teachers’ give evidence of belief and beliefs statements
- Participants’ intentionality to behave in a predisposed manner
- Behaviour related to the beliefs in question

(Pajares, 1992, p.315)

In my study, teachers’ beliefs refer to declared/expressed feelings and embedded beliefs from verbal/ non-verbal communication about certain issues (such as using metaphor) in language learning. Davis (2003) argues that teachers’ beliefs should also be inferred from the way they act rather than only from what they say they believe. These beliefs complement the coverage of teachers’ beliefs and knowledge aspects.

(1) Teachers’ declared beliefs based on their report during semi-structured interviews.
(2) Espoused beliefs: beliefs inferred from the way teachers act (Davies, 2003, p. 208).
(3) Teachers’ thinking in terms of their theory behind their actions (Calderhead, 1988; Breen et al, 2001)

Justifications for my methods to explore teachers’ beliefs are covered in detail in Methodology chapter later.
2.9 The construct and working definition of learner-centredness in ELT for the study.

Drawing from the review of literature of the ways learner-centredness has been explored and the issues concerning it, a detailed conceptual construct of learner-centredness has been synthesised to inform my research. Nunan (1989) proposed that learner-centredness in ELT classroom should comprise seven elements as illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Elements of a learner-centred system (Nunan, 1989, p. 77).

Nunan’s model while helpful in general terms, does not offer specific detail of each section that could be more informative for teachers’ needs. Therefore, further literature
search on the elements above was carried out. As a result, a theoretical construct of learner-centredness in ELT has been deduced from the review of literature on learner-centred principles (e.g. Dewey, Constructivist theory, Humanistic Theory, American Psychological Association Principles) and the works of learner-centred theorists and researchers as listed below. I have deduced that ideally, learner-centred principles in ELT comprise the attributes below:

2. Negotiation of objectives, activities and evaluation to suit learners’ different needs and levels (Brindley, 1984; Nunan, 1989).
3. Participation of learners (Anton, 1999), and their motivation (Daniels & Perry, 2003; Garret & Shortall, 2002).
4. Interaction in the target language (Mc Combs & Miller, 2007), such as pair work and group work (Anton, 1999).
6. Discovery/experiential learning activities for development and training of learners’ metacognitive strategies (APA, 1997; Mc Combs & Miller, 2007), such as to identify preferred ways of learning, negotiation skills, setting realistic goals and encouragement to set their own objectives (Nunan, 1988).
7. Varied learning activities: a variety of activities, preferably using authentic materials (Daniels & Perry, 2002) to suit different levels and needs (Brindley, 1989)

The contributions of these researchers and ELT theorists were highly beneficial to inform my research. However, as cautioned by Tudor (1996), these statements could mean different things to different people. Nunan and Lamb (1996) argue that learner-centredness needs to be explained in practical terms to teachers to avoid misinterpretation. Drawing from the arguments above, I constructed a ‘working document’ for learner-centredness a term borrowed from by Ushioda & Ridley (2000).
They used this term to refer to practical definitions and practical representation of ideas about their large-scale research project on the evaluation of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in Irish post-primary schools that was based on the key theoretical concepts of learner autonomy as their main thrust. They constructed a working definition for learner autonomy for teachers in the project to implement their teaching according to the working definition of learner autonomy by specifying the key aspects of learner autonomy and the pedagogical implications. In other words, they addressed the *what*, the *why* and the *how* that teachers may have when implementing this European Language Portfolio programme.

Similarly, I would argue that a working document on the construct and definition of learner-centredness in ELT is required in order to make learner-centredness more understandable to teachers. In addition, this idealized construct was used to frame my research comprising a working definition and classroom pedagogical suggestions for learner-centredness in ELT as indicated in table 2.1 below. This model is derived from the study of literature in this chapter.
### Table 2.1: An Idealised Construct Learner-centredness in ELT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultation with learners in setting learning objectives; activities and evaluation (Nunan, 1988; 1989; Tudor, 1996).</th>
<th>Teachers collaboratively negotiate learning objectives of lessons, types of activities, and assessment types with learners; Learners are trained and encouraged to participate in setting learning objectives, types of activities and types of assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification and acknowledgement of learners’ different needs and levels (Brindley, 1984; Nunan, 1989).</td>
<td>Teachers identify learners’ needs: (1) Objective needs: learners personal background data, patterns of language use, learners’ language proficiency levels and their problems. (2) Subjective needs: affective needs, wants, expectations, and learning styles. Learners communicate their needs and learning styles to teachers (e.g. in a learning diary, portfolio or journal). Learners identify their reasons for learning the target language (e.g. in a learning diary, portfolio or journal.) Learners communicate their preferred strategies for learning TL (e.g. in a learning diary, portfolio or journal).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for participation of learners (Anton, 1999)</td>
<td>Teachers create opportunities for participation acknowledging learners’ different needs. For example, table setting arranged for learners to face each other to encourage participation and interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions between learners and teachers in</td>
<td>Teacher interactions in target language that focus on communicating meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| the target language (Mc Combs & Miller, 2007) | Grammar teaching is integrated within lessons.  
Questioning that encourages explanation and interactions.  
Learners interact with learners and teachers freely. |
|---|---|
| Ongoing evaluation and feedback, consisting of self-evaluation and teacher-evaluation towards setting personal objectives (Nunan, 1988). | Teachers conduct continuous evaluation: formal and informal.  
Learners conduct self-evaluation and evaluation of lesson.  
Learners communicate personal learning targets. |
| Awareness activities for development and training of learners’ metacognitive strategies (Nunan, 1988). | Teachers create / integrate activities that develop and encourage:  
(1) Learning skills: discussion skills and presentation skills.  
(2) Meta-cognitive strategies: how to identify preferred ways of learning, negotiation skills, setting realistic goals and evaluating their own learning.  
(3) Encouragement to set their own objectives |
| Variety of learning activities to suit different levels and needs such as pair work and group work (Anton, 1999). | Teachers create/integrate activities to involve learners in group work, pair work, project/task-based activities, peer correcting, discovery-based activities.  
Learners contribute ideas on desired learning activities and how to conduct activities |
This working construct was used when triangulating my research data gathered by during my stage four research process as illustrated in chapter three, in which my research sought to describe (1) the teachers’ practices in Malaysian primary (English language teaching) ELT classrooms; (2) the teachers’ understanding of learner-centred classrooms (knowledge about definitions and features), (3) teachers’ beliefs about their practices and about learner-centred approaches; and (4) the challenges associated with the implementation of learner-centred approaches. The extent to which the vision of learner-centredness synthesised in the working construct was the focus of the research. How this was investigated is explained in the next chapter.

However, in using this idealised framework of LC principles in ELT to guide my research, I need to acknowledge several points: First, this framework while useful to frame my research does is deduced based on western definitions and contexts. Holliday (1994a, p. 174) argues, learner-centredness represents naïve ideas which belong essentially to western context (Britain, Australia and North America) that promotes technology transfer that may not necessarily appropriate with non-western countries. For example, interactive activities and collaborative involvement of learners may not be appropriate to all classrooms and learner culture. Therefore, this idealised learner-centred model could be seen as a head start towards proposing a more culture-sensitive approach to teaching English in Malaysian primary schools.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the research design, paradigm and research methodologies considered and used in this study. It first explains the exploration of issues related to researching language classrooms, the approaches used in investigating classroom-based study and the interpretive/qualitative paradigm that underpins the study. It also includes an explanation of the use of the multiple case study design and the justification and explanation for each method used in the study: semi-structured preliminary interview, classroom video-recording with observation and note-taking and video-stimulated recalled interviews. Finally, the validity and ethical issues are explained.

3.1 Researching language classrooms

How I decided on researching language classrooms is explained here. In order to answer my research questions set out earlier, I considered various approaches to classroom study. However, choosing the most suitable approach to classroom research can be as complicated as the classroom itself (Chaudron, 1988; Long, 1980; Van Lier, 1988; Tsui, 1995). In fact, the classroom has been described as 'a black box' (Long, 1980) and 'a world of its own' (Van Lier, 1988). Therefore, it is not surprising to find different authors have described classroom research in different ways. For example, Chaudron (1988) classifies approaches to classroom research into four: psychometric, discourse analysis, interaction analysis and ethnography (see Chaudron, 1988). Ellis (1990, pp.10-15) on the other hand, suggests that there are three categories of language classroom studies: research on classroom
processes; research on classroom interaction and second language (L2) acquisition; and, research on formal instruction and L2 acquisition.

Until recently, classroom-based studies seem to be more inclined towards those that specifically aim to find cause-effect relationship between certain actions and their outcomes as opposed to understanding the underlying events that happen in the classroom (Van Lier, 1988; Chaudron, 2001). This suggests that the classroom process can be very complicated to investigate as it involves areas ranging from lesson planning processes the teaching and learning process and post-lesson evaluation i.e. actual lessons and the outcome of lessons (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 25).

According to Chaudron’s (1988, 2001) classroom research classifications above, the first tradition is the *psychometric* which normally uses experimental methods with a pre- and post-test and with experimental and control groups. Secondly, there is *discourse analysis* which focuses on the analysis of classroom discourse in linguistic terms. This approach involves studying classroom transcripts or ‘chunks of language’ and assigning utterances to predetermined categories. Usually, this approach involves close examination of audiovisual records of interaction. Examples of classroom studies using this approach are analyses of utterance, repair strategies and conversational exchanges (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 61).

The third tradition is *interaction analysis* which normally examines the extent to which learner behaviour is a function of teacher-determined interaction and it involves coding classroom interactions (see examples in Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Van Lier, 1988; Tsui, 1995). This involves areas like the investigation of teacher talk, learning strategies and patterns of participation.
The fourth category is the ethnographic approach which aims to obtain insights into the classroom as a particular social phenomenon or cultural system. This normally involves the naturalistic 'uncontrolled' observation and description of the classroom. This method is arguably said to be the most qualitative in nature as it provides *thick* or detailed description of the topic studied. However, due to the in-depth detailed exploration of the topic, this type of classroom research approach mostly involves a small number of cases (Denscombe, 2003). In terms of analysis of data, this approach frequently involves explicit detailed interpretations of the functions and meanings of human behaviour (Silverman, 2006, p.56).

Considering the nature of classroom research as highlighted by previous language classroom based research studies above (for example, Cauldron, 1988; Van Lier, 1988; Tsui, 1995), I employed Chaudron’s fourth approach i.e. the ethnographic approach to explore teachers’ classroom practices, their understanding and beliefs about learner-centredness in their teaching. Further justification for my research approach is elaborated in the next section on research paradigm.

### 3.2 Research Paradigm

My research was approached from an interpretive research paradigm using an exploratory/ qualitative approach as it enabled me to understand, discover and explain what happened in language classrooms from the participants’ perspectives (Denscombe, 2003). Creswell (2007) suggests that an interpretive/ qualitative research paradigm may be useful to understand the behaviour and the realities of the classrooms and get as close as possible to the participants being studied. Creswell further argues that the philosophical assumptions on the nature of reality (ontology) for this orientation are based on their acknowledgement of the notion of multiple realities. These different realities may be interpreted and supported by the use of multiple quotes based on participants’ actual words which represent participants’
different perspectives (Descombe, 2003; Creswell, 2007). This means that the methods used in the inquiry processes are inductive in nature and shaped by the contexts of the study and the researcher’s experiences (Cohen et al, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

An interpretive research study thus allows for a holistic investigation of realities. The classroom realities concerned are how teachers conceptualise and explain their practices, how they perceive learner-centredness and how they explain the notion of learner-centredness. These participants’ perspectives also known as *emic* or *insider’s* perspectives (Merriam, 1997, p. 7) enable me as a researcher to understand the teachers’ interpretation of classroom realities and how they interact within the ‘social world’ within their teaching and learning contexts.

The ethnographic approach employed in a case study offers a holistic understanding of classroom reality instead of focussing on certain criteria already established. This is in line with Tsui (2008) who also argues that classroom research should be descriptive rather than prescriptive (p.262). For this reason, the approach for classroom observation chosen for this study is naturalistic, non-participant observation as opposed to systematic observation. Therefore, what learner-centredness means to teachers in the Malaysian context and how it is practised has to be clarified and established using an interpretive/qualitative research design.

This decision was made because I needed a research approach that was exploratory in nature involving the use of case study design incorporating different methods and with different participants that sought to produce ‘differing but mutually supporting ways of collecting data’ (Denscombe, 2003, p. 132). I believe that in order to understand classroom practices
and teachers’ understanding and beliefs about practices, an ethnographic approach using multiple cases is most relevant.

Arguably, systematic observation has been perceived as being more structured and thus provides a more objective account of events and behaviours compared to self-report data (Dornyei, 2007, p. 185). However, the idea to use systematic observation only was abandoned as it was limited in its coverage where it only looks at overt behaviour and not the intentions that motivate the behaviour observed (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 200) that I aim to explore. In addition, I dismissed systematic observation as it oversimplifies human behaviour as straightforward and unproblematic and views it in terms of categories usually measured in frequency of occurrence. This contradicts with the interpretive principle that views realities when individuals interact with their social world (Creswell, 2007) and acknowledges the roles of contextual information or factors surrounding the individuals that may have influential impacts on how individuals act. Considering all the above, I used semi-structured interviews to explore teachers’ beliefs and understanding about learner-centredness and classroom observation and recording to document and provide a description of their classroom practices.

In line with this interpretive explanation, the methods used in my study involved using semi-structured interviews and VSRIs that elicited teachers’ interpretation of their practices, as well as knowledge and beliefs about learner-centredness in teaching. As an interpretive researcher I qualitatively explored the reality by getting as close as possible to the participants being studied by conducting four case studies.

Data collected in this study involved detailed ‘thick’ description of the events that take place in the form of themes, categories, and anecdotes as described by Merriam (1997) and Silverman (2006). Equally important, by using the interpretive paradigm I was able to
describe how the teachers understand and interpret classroom realities and how they interact within their social context. The social contexts of teaching English in Malaysia are characterised by the following conditions: large classroom sizes, teachers’ heavy workload, unqualified or untrained English teachers, overemphasis on examinations and limited teaching resources (Ali, 2003; Azman, 2004). Observing how these teachers interacted within these teaching contexts enabled me to obtain a holistic picture of how ELT in Malaysian primary schools has been implemented.
3.3 The pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that my qualitative research approach enabled me to explore what I aimed to achieve in the study. The pilot study was conducted for four weeks in February 2009 in one school in a northern state in Malaysia. The school nominated all three English language teachers to participate in this study, two males and one female aged between 49-53 years old who taught Year Five learners (aged 10-11). Among the three, only two (both males) were willing to be video-recorded while teaching. Therefore, the data described later were gathered from the two willing teachers. All the research instruments (semi-structured interviews, classroom observation plus note taking and classroom recording as well as VSRIs were piloted in four stages namely pre-observation stage, observation and reflection stage, video-analysis stage and data verification stage and these stages were used during my main study.

The pilot study enabled me to address several implementation issues of the research instruments particularly the VSRIs. First, a decision had to be made about the strategy to adopt with the VSRIs: whether to let the teachers choose the stimulus from the video recordings or whether the researcher would select specific events of the recording to ask the teacher to discuss. The choice had serious implications in terms of research design, implementation and data analysis. While trying to be faithful to my interpretive paradigm that would prefer the participants’ to interact within the reality (by watching themselves teach and then deciding when to start talking about it), it may have impact on the implementation as discovered during the pilot study when one teacher did not want to select at all and wanted to watch the video until the end.
This dilemma was faced by Stough (2001) in her study where the viewing just went on until the end without any involvement by the participants. Thus, Stough asserted that a researcher needed to have a role in selecting the clips to view because participants can sometimes be unwilling to make the first move. This was done by the researcher viewing the recording prior to the interview and selecting where to pause. This, again, had implications on both research design and data analysis because data analysis actually begins during the data collection process (as reflected in Figure 3.2 later). Thus the field notes became very important data to help the researcher to select the events to prompt the teachers as explored during the pilot study.

In relation to this issue, Gass and Mackey (2000) suggested that the researcher could give the options to the participants on when to talk and what to talk about. A researcher may pick up ideas to ask from the participants’ discussions of the events. An example of these options can be seen in their suggested sample instruction as follows:

> What we are going to do now is watch the video. I am interested in what you were thinking at the time by looking and talking about the pictures. We can hear what you were saying by looking at and listening to the video, but we don’t know what you were thinking. So what I would like you to do is tell me what you were thinking during those events recorded in the video recording. You can pause the video any time you want. If I have questions about what were you thinking, then I will push pause and ask you to talk about the video

(Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 59)

Based on the pilot experience, I adapted and simplified Gass and Mackey’s instructions above by giving the teachers the instructions below instead to suit my situation. This adaptation involved adding another option of talking about what the teachers think of their overall teaching if they did not have anything specific to talk about from the video. This third option, in my situation, was decided on during the data collection process due to the
short lapse of time between the classroom recording and the VSRI sessions that took place shortly after the lesson. It is important to note that one of the lessons recorded during the pilot study was the last period before school ended for the day and the teacher requested to talk about his teaching after the viewing despite my suggestion to do it later.

During the pilot study I managed to trial the options of the initiation to speak, *i.e.* letting the teachers select where to talk or I as the researcher selected the stimulus. However, in the latter option, I actually waited until the end of the recording before asking anything as requested by the teacher. Teacher B selected the stimulus himself and asked me to stop the video during the viewing while Teacher C requested to watch the whole recording and the questions were asked afterwards. This prompted me to improvise my instructions into the one below to accommodate the teacher’s request.

*I will show you the video recording of your teaching. I’m interested to know what were you thinking when you were teaching. You can push pause whenever you want. If I have something to ask you about the video, I will push pause. If you don’t have anything specific to talk about, you can begin with what you think of the overall teaching.*

Another issue being explored during the pilot study was minimizing the delay between event and recall as highlighted by Gass & Mackey (2000) who suggested that the ideal time to have the stimulated-recalled session was on the same day or no later than two days after the video-recording.

The other issue in implementing this VSRI was the need to familiarize the participants with the researcher’s presence in order to reduce anxiety (Dornyei, 2007). This was achieved by actually meeting the teachers at least three times before recording the lessons and conducting the VSRIIs during the pilot study as well as the main study. In addition, the lesson recording and the VSRI sessions were only conducted when the teachers were ready.
In terms of findings, the pilot study revealed that teachers seemed to believe that learner-centredness was not suitable to be implemented in the Malaysian context. The teachers explained the challenges faced in their daily teaching experiences during semi-structured recall interviews (and the VSRIs after the lesson recording). In addition, my observation and field notes were also able to confirm some of their claims. The teachers suggested that the possibility of implementing LC practices was minimal within the contextual constraints they highlighted such as overemphasis on examinations, heavy non-teaching and teaching workloads, lack of support from the school administration, lack of proper training on specific skills regarding LC approaches and perceived resistance by both teachers and pupils.

The pilot study convinced me to adopt a multiple case study design and acknowledged the need to explore more cases to gather more evidence about teacher practices in different teaching contexts in Malaysia. Hence I decided to use a multiple case study design for reasons and justifications explained in detail next.
3.4 Multiple Case Studies

A case study is defined as ‘an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real–life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Case studies usually involve a combination of data-gathering methods to understand the reality being investigated (Denscombe, 2003). For example, interviewing teachers alone may be able to explore teachers’ reports on their understanding and beliefs about learner-centredness but it is not able to explore teachers’ ELT practices. This is where other research methods come into place to redress the limitations of semi-structured interviews. Therefore, I combined semi-structured interviews with other research methods. In order to contextualize teachers’ practices, knowledge and beliefs I needed to use an introspective method suggested by Gass (2001). This is because, as Breen et al. (2001, p. 498) argue, researchers need to see both the classroom pedagogical aspects in ‘actual instances of practices’ and to obtain teachers’ accounts of their practices via interviews. Teachers’ knowledge and beliefs are not straightforward areas to investigate and in fact are considered complicated (Pajares, 1992).

Stake (2005) sees a case study as the study of the particularity of a case, such as a student or a classroom, in order to understand its activity in context. Cohen et al. (2007) define a case study as an observation of characteristics of an individual unit, which can be a person, a class, or a community. While a single case study aims to investigate ‘a particularity and complexity of a single case’ (Stake, 1995, p.xi), evidence from multiple cases is often considered ‘more compelling’ and therefore the overall study is considered to be more robust (Yin, 2003, p. P. 46). However, multiple case studies are more challenging as every case serves a specific purpose within the overall scope of the research design and therefore
requires extensive resources and time compared to single case. The use of multiple case study design has increased particularly in the areas of school innovations such as new curricula or new educational technology (Yin, 2003, p. 46).

Yin (2009) recommends that in conducting multiple case studies each case must be carefully selected so that it either:

1. Predicts similar results (literal replication)
2. Predicts different results but for predictable reasons (theoretical replication)

Case studies usually involve using several research methods such as observation, interview, audiovisual materials, and analysing official documents and reports (Merriam, 1997; McKay, 2006; Creswell, 2007). The use of multiple methods is important in order to gather rich, in-depth and holistic data about the case being investigated (Stake, 2005). In addition, it enables me to explore in-depth insights (Denscombe, 2003) into the relationships and classroom processes involved in the teaching and learning contexts. This is because, as a researcher, I was able to get as close as possible to the participants being studied in a natural setting whereby the researcher can go and collect data in the participants’ environment (Danmoyer, 2000; Cohen et al, 2007).

The use of multiple case studies provides a ‘thick’ description of the events that take place drawing on participants’ interviews; classroom recordings and field notes, and the video stimulated recall interviews. In fact, according to Dornyei (2007), multiple case studies ‘display a high degree of completeness, depth of analysis and readability’ that cannot be adequately researched in other common research methods (2007, p. 154). I believe that understanding several case studies will lead to greater understanding, and better theorizing about a phenomenon or general condition of a larger collection of cases of ELT primary classrooms in Malaysia (Dornyei, 2007). For my research project, multiple case studies are
particularly appropriate because in Malaysia, different school categories and localities represent different kinds of teaching contexts and constraints. For example, rural primary schools may not have the same facilities and support to learn English as their urban counterparts.

Multiple case study design, however, does not aim to represent the world or general population but the cases that are relevant to the researchers (Stake, 2005, p.460). Despite being described as not being scientific (Yin, 1984), Stake (2005) argues that they can be seen as a small step towards grand generalization (p.448). Yin (2009) argues that in multiple case studies design ‘each individual case study consists of a ‘whole’ study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case: each case’s conclusion are then considered to be the information needing replication by other individual cases’ (p.50).

In addition, the cross-case analysis also explains why certain cases were predicted to have certain results while others may indicate contrasting results. According to Yin (2009), this is referred to as replication logic and could be compared to the logic used in multiple experiments (p.54) where steps and methods of investigation are used in different cases.

In terms of analyzing the cases, individual cases and the multiple-case results can possibly be the focus of a summary report. This means that in multiple case study research design, two levels of analysis are needed namely a within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis. For my study, the within-case analysis indicates how and why a particular practice was demonstrated (or not demonstrated) while cross cases describe the extent of similar practices in comparison with other cases. Thus, dual-level analysis from these multiple case study schools will inform me about the ELT practices in diverse teaching contexts in Malaysia that may reveal some of the similarities and differences in these cases. The design of my
multiple case studies was adopted from Yin (2009, p. 46) as illustrated in this diagram and explained further below.
Diagram 3.1: Multiple-case study design: Replication Logic (Yin, 2009, p.54)

3.4.1 Case study schools

Four national primary schools involved were selected from four school categories. These school categories were determined from a list obtained from the Ministry of Education website. They were one national school (SK-town); one national school in a rural area (SK-rural); a national vernacular Chinese school in a town (SJKC-Chinese) and a semi-rural national Vernacular Indian school (SJKT-Tamil). These different categories of schools were selected to represent the particularity (Yin, 2009) of different cases as in Malaysia, these categories reflected the multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic contexts in Malaysia. For example, the Town-Rural divide in Malaysia is significant as the geographical location of
the schools means that these schools are slightly disadvantaged in terms of ICT facilities and resources as the town schools counterparts (David, 2004). Similarly, the two vernacular schools have major differences from the national schools in terms of (1) the medium of instruction; (2) allocation of fewer English language periods. In National Type schools, the medium of instruction is the national language (Bahasa Melayu) while in the vernacular schools, mother tongue (MT) language is used as a medium of instruction and is taught formally as a curriculum subject. Tamil language is taught for the Tamil Vernacular type schools (SJKT) and Mandarin is taught at the Chinese Vernacular type school (SJKC). Secondly, the amount of time for English language teaching in the two SJKs is shared with the MT language. This means that for 240 minutes allocated (average of 6 periods of 40 minutes) for English lessons in national schools, vernacular schools only have 120 minutes (3 periods of 40 minutes). These teachers usually have to compensate for this less time of English with extra classes and extra workbooks for learners to do at home.
3.4.2 The teachers

One ELT teacher from each school was selected by the school authorities to participate in my research. Their selections were based on three major conditions that have been set out by the ministry and by my research objectives. The ministry had given the permission to conduct research with the conditions that none of the lessons recorded would involve participants who would be taking the national (UPSR) examination that year (year 6). Secondly, the EL teachers had to be willing to participate. My criteria of selection were that these teachers must have at least five years’ teaching experience and they must have ESL qualifications to teach English language and aware of the new curriculum update but not necessarily trained in instructional skills to implement learner-centred teaching approaches.

It is important to note that in Malaysia, it is common to have teachers teaching English language without proper qualifications as there is a shortage of English teachers. Sometimes, the class teachers have to teach the language especially in rural areas (Ali, 2003). Based on these criteria, I managed to get the cooperation of four schools after three other schools declined because their teachers did not fulfil some of the conditions already mentioned. For example, one rural SK school with only 230 students approached had only three EL teachers and only one had an ESL teaching qualification and she had to be discounted as she was teaching Year six students.

Another matter needs highlighting here is that, the seniority of the teachers (aged 46-53) who participated in my study may have some impact on the findings gathered as these teachers were trained in the 70’s and 80’s where learner-centredness was still a very new concept in the Malaysian education system. However, efforts to expose teachers to this change have been offered via in-service short course training although may not necessarily
effective as highlighted by Rahman (1987) and Ali (2003). Thus, it is fair to say that if the teachers who participated are younger, I may gather considerably different data as they may have been more exposed to recent training on latest curriculum updates.

3.4.3 Process of data collection

Throughout the twelve week data collection period from June to September 2009, I visited each school at least six times. The first two visits were introductory and courtesy visits to the school administration explaining my research project and to meet the English language Head of the school. I was also introduced to year five EL teachers. The English heads then selected a teacher based on the criteria set by the Ministry of Education and my criteria namely:

- ESL trained teacher (at certificate or diploma level)
- at least five years teaching English language
- not involved in teaching Year six (national level UPSR exam taken at the end of primary school)
- willingness and available to participate.

During this meeting I arranged for the next individual meeting with the participating teacher. One preliminary interview was conducted with each teacher. It took on average thirty minutes to an hour and was conducted at a quiet location in the school identified by the teachers. Three of the interviews were conducted in the resource room or IT room while one school (town school) provided a meeting room for my use during my visits to the school. During this data collection period, some of the teachers were actually busy preparing their learners for the national primary school leaving examination (UPSR) scheduled at the end of September 2009. Therefore, some of the classroom data may reflect some the teachers’ efforts towards preparing learners for examination.
## ABLE 3.1: Data collection details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>INTERVIEW 1</th>
<th>LESSON 1</th>
<th>VSRI 1</th>
<th>LESSON 2</th>
<th>VSRI 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SK Town</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>20 + 40 minutes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>20 + 40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Salim</td>
<td>(16/07/09)</td>
<td>(23/07/09)</td>
<td>viewing (26/07/09)</td>
<td>(10/08/09)</td>
<td>viewing (09/08/09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK Rural</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>20 + 30 minutes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>25 + 60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Thika</td>
<td>(18/08/09)</td>
<td>(02/09/09)</td>
<td>viewing</td>
<td>(06/09/09)</td>
<td>viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(03/09/09)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(08/09/09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJK (Tamil)</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>30 + 30 minutes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>15 + 60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Ramu</td>
<td>(05/08/09)</td>
<td>(12/08/09)</td>
<td>viewing</td>
<td>(19/08/09)</td>
<td>viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(13/08/08)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(19/08/09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJK (Chinese)</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>40 + 40 minutes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>40 + 40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Lee</td>
<td>(21/07/10)</td>
<td>(22/07/09)</td>
<td>viewing</td>
<td>(07/09/09)</td>
<td>viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(23/07/10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(07/09/09)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 Research objectives and questions

To explore the above key areas of teachers’ classroom practices, understanding and beliefs, I used three key research questions and further subdivided them into several specific research questions listed below.

Question one: How is English language being taught in Malaysian year 5 primary schools?
In helping to answer the first research questions, it was subdivided into three specific research questions:

(a) What are the approaches that year 5 teachers use in English language teaching in Malaysia?

(b) What are the features of ELT teachers’ practices in Year 5 classrooms in Malaysia?

(c) To what is are learner-centred practices adopted?

Question two: How has learner-centredness been understood and perceived by year 5 primary teachers in Malaysia?

In order to explore teachers’ understanding and beliefs about learner-centredness, three specific research questions were used:

- What is the teachers’ definition of the LC approach?
- What is the teachers’ knowledge about the features/characteristics of an LC approach?
- What are the teachers’ beliefs about practices associated with learner-centred approaches implemented in their classrooms?
The final research question summarised the teachers’ views about their experiences in implementing learner-centredness in their teaching.

Question three: What are the issues associated with the implementation of the learner-centred approach in Malaysian primary classrooms?

3.6 Key research areas.

3.6.1 Teachers’ classroom practices

Teachers’ classroom practices in focus for the research refer to the teaching behaviour in the forms of classroom interaction that can be observed in the classrooms. Classroom interaction is particularly important in a language classroom because language has a dual role of being the subject of study as well as the medium of learning (Tsui, 1995, p.12). This however does not undermine the role of classroom discourse. Classroom discourse, while able to contribute towards better understanding of the nature of classroom interactions as well, was not used as it emphasised more on particular linguistic or non-linguistics features of teacher - learner interactions and not particularly relevant for my research aims.

Classroom interaction can be defined as ‘the chain of events which occur one after the other, each occupying only a small segment of time’ (Flanders, 1970, p.4) and has been classified in various ways. According to Malamah-Thomas (1987), most classroom interaction analysis originates from Flanders (1970) who proposed Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) that comprises three main categories of interaction namely Teacher Talk; Learner Talk and other types of verbal behaviour or silence. Teacher talk comprises: accepting feelings; praising and encouraging; accepting or using ideas of pupils; asking questions; lecturing; giving directions; criticizing or justifying authority.
On the other hand, Pupil talk consists of responding and initiating. The final category refers to silence or non-verbal communication that represents silence or confusion.

Others (for example, Tsui (1995) adapted FIAC and further extends the categories into the following categories: (1) teacher questions; (2) teacher feedback and error treatment; (3) teacher explanation; (4) modified input and interaction; and (5) student talk.

A more recent adaptation is Alexander’s repertoire of classroom pedagogical interactions (Alexander, 2008, p. 105), categories developed based on his cross-cultural studies of primary school classroom pedagogy at five countries (India, Russia, France, UK, USA). These three repertoires of pedagogical interactions he proposes comprise: organizing interaction; teaching talk and learning talk. The first two aspects are teacher’s repertoire and the last aspect refers to the learners’ talk.

Drawing the review on classroom study above, for my study, I adapted Alexander’s categories to describe the overall lesson progressions (or lesson stages) I referred to as macro features as well as specific features of lessons associated with learner-centred practices. These stages were described to identify the overall approaches that teachers used in teaching English. For specific features of teachers’ ELT practices, I termed them as micro features of the lesson. These micro aspects, on the other hand represented specific aspects of the lesson as explained as the constructs of learner-centredness in ELT established earlier in chapter 2.
3.6.2 Teacher’s knowledge and beliefs about learner-centredness and about their practices.

As reviewed in chapter two, the concepts of teacher’s knowledge and beliefs used for the study were based on teachers’ declared beliefs drawn from their report during semi-structured interviews. Secondly, espoused beliefs are beliefs inferred from the way teachers act (Davies, 2003, p. 208). These were explored from the classroom recordings and observation plus note-taking. Finally, Teachers’ beliefs or thinking in terms of their theory behind their actions (Calderhead, 1988; Breen et al, 2001) were explored. These were revealed during the VSRIs as teachers explained certain practices selected during the reflection process. This set of beliefs may not necessarily be identical to the beliefs about learner-centredness explored during the preliminary interviews. The teacher’s beliefs were identified based on their knowledge and beliefs statements such as ‘I believe’, ‘in my view’, or ‘I think’. The detailed identification of teacher’s process will be explained in chapter four next.

3.6.3 Teacher’s explanation and justifications for their practices

In addition to semi-structured interviews, video recording plus field notes, the SR interview was used as it was crucial in strengthening my research design strategies. This process of triangulating both data and research instrument was employed in order to achieve trustworthiness and credibility (Dornyei, 2007).

In summary, the investigation of teacher’s beliefs in my study involved, first, describing their beliefs about ELT using semi-structured interviews, secondly describing their ‘theory in action’ from the video recording of their classroom practices and then their introspective reflections about their practices using video-stimulated recall interviews.
Teachers’ explanation about their practices is particularly relevant as it concerns the applicability of the LC principles in Malaysian primary classrooms where teachers are pressured into teaching or preparing their pupils towards answering examination questions (Ali, 2003, p. 270). How I triangulated these and my justifications for this triangulation process are explained next

### 3.7 Triangulation of research methods

Case studies generally involve gathering data from multiple sources in order to get a balanced view of an issue (Johnson, 1992; Denscombe, 2003; Van Lier, 2005) and are ‘concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question’ (Bryman, 2004: 48, citing Stake, 1995). For example, a case study may involve using observation, interview, audio-visual materials, and analysing official documents and reports (Merriam, 1997; McKay, 2006; Creswell, 2007). As mentioned earlier, using multiple methods is vital in order to gather rich, in-depth and holistic data about the case that is being investigated (Stake, 2005) and

According to Cohen et al, (2007), triangulation involves different research methods combined to produce ‘differing but mutually supporting ways of collecting data’ (Denscombe, 2003, p.132). I achieved this using a four-stage data collection process incorporating four research methods namely: Semi-structured preliminary interviews, video recordings and observation, field note taking (during video recording) and video stimulated recall interviews (VSRI).

The research used multi-method approaches to explore both participants’ self-report beliefs as well as observed and inferred ones. Davis (2003) argues that teachers’ beliefs should also be inferred from the way they act and not only from what they say they
believe. These, according to Davis are called ‘espoused beliefs’ (p. 208). Calderhead (1988) and Breen et al, (2001) also highlighted the same concern that it is not enough to infer teachers’ beliefs based on their actions. They suggest that this could be improved with the use of SR procedures as this will enable researchers to describe teachers’ thinking in terms of their theory behind their actions and should be used with other methodologies to triangulate data for accuracy and authenticity of teachers’ report of their practices (Stough, 2001).

However, having the teachers’ self-reported claim about their practices and beliefs explored using the semi-structured interviews and what can be described based on classroom observation did not provide me with a complete representation of teachers’ practices, knowledge and beliefs. This is because teacher’s knowledge and principles underlying their practices sometimes become embedded in their actions and can sometimes be very difficult to explain (Calderhead, 1988, p.3). Breen et al, (2001, p.476) suggest that interviewing teachers needs to be complemented with data collection involving observation and elicitation techniques. Following this, I added another elicitation technique using a video-based introspective method to triangulate my data in order to explore teachers’ thinking as well as their thoughts as they are teaching (Gass & Mackey, 2000). All of these data later were triangulated during the process of comparing and contrasting with the idealised LC principles summarized in earlier chapter.

Figure 3.2 below illustrates the triangulation of the multi-research methods used in this case study research design where each stage is explained in detail next.
Figure 3.2: Research Stages

**Pre-observation Stage**

Preliminary interviews (audio-recorded):

*To explore what teachers think about practice and challenges in using LC?*

**Observation & Reflection Stage**

- Classroom observation (video-recorded):
  *To explore what happens in classrooms*

- Video-stimulated Recall Interviews:
  *To explore what teachers think (about practice and challenges)*

**Video-analysis Stage**

Identification of macro and micro features of lesson:

*To describe classroom practices*

**Data triangulation & Verification Stage**

Comparison of findings with the principles of learner-centred practices

*To describe the extent of learner-centred practices in Malaysian classrooms*
3.7.1 Pre-observation stage (Semi-structured preliminary interview)

As illustrated in the table above, the first data collection stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview was conducted with the teachers to get information about their teaching background, teaching courses attended and overview of their teaching principles and approaches were conducted to establish familiarity and rapport with the participants (Lyle, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007). This is extremely important both in terms of reliability and ethically in order to make the teachers feel at ease with the researcher.

The foci of this interview were as indicated below;

1. Describe teacher’s teaching, academic background and courses/training attended related to learner-centred approaches.
2. Describe teacher’s beliefs about teaching English.
3. Describe teacher’s knowledge about learner-centred approaches in language teaching.
4. Describe teacher’s beliefs about learner-centred approaches in language teaching in Malaysia.
5. Describe the challenges that teachers face in teaching English in Malaysian classrooms.

The interview questions were divided into three categories to represent the research questions. To achieve the above aims, several categories of semi-structured questions were used as a guide (see Appendix 2). Semi-structured interviews (SSI) were used as opposed to structured or open interviews as it enabled me to have flexibility whilst having clear sets of questions. It also lets the interviewees develop more ideas and allow them to speak more widely on the issues raised (Denscombe, 2003, p.167). In
addition, since the answers are open-ended, there are opportunities for more in-depth clarification and elaborations of areas investigated.

**Analysing interview data**

In terms of analysing interview data, I considered the steps of Cohen *et al* (2007, p. 368) who suggested four general stages that involved:

- generating natural units of meanings
- classifying, categorizing and ordering these units of meaning
- structuring narratives to describe the interview contents
- Interpreting the interview data.

Miles & Huberman (1994) see data analysis as the process of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction refers to data selection and condensation where the data are summarized, coded and broken down into themes, clusters and categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1999, p. 7). The second process, data display, describes the way data are displayed either in diagrams, pictorial or visual forms in order to represent what the data mean. According to Miles & Huberman, data display should be in the form of ‘organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and/or action taking’ (1994, p.429). The next process involves drawing conclusion and verification of data where the data are displayed and interpreted. This could be in the forms of writing on post-it notes or writing down categories on white boards. Data transcriptions can be done at various levels depending on research purposes. According to Arksey & Knight (1999; Cohen et al, 2007), this is because some research studies may only be interested in meanings and not the linguistic features, discourse or nature of the speech (such as hesitations, false starts, grunts or pauses).
Content analysis is a systematic set of procedures that involve an analysis of the content rather than the structure of a communication and enables a researcher to summarize and report written data focussing on the contents of data and their messages (Cohen et al, 2007. This means that the written data need to be rigorously analysed, examined and verified for the meaning expressed by the interviewee (ibid, p. 475).

The process of content analysis begins with the sample of data texts which need to be broken down into units of analysis (words, phrases, sentences) and be placed categorically under certain themes. Next, coding takes place followed by categorizing the meaningful units identified earlier into categories or themes. This is followed by comparing the categories and making links between them. Finally the concluding process involves drawing theoretical or practical conclusions from the text (p.476).

Miles & Huberman (1994) highlighted that the categories identified during content analysis usually have a high degree of interconnectedness with other units and may have multi-layered relationships. For example, Cohen et al (2007, p. 484) used the relationships such as nature of issue, cause of issues, outcome of issue and handling nature (solution) in their coding to illustrate this point.

This means that there could be several sub-themes for each category depending on the data gathered. In sum, content analysis is a rigorous process that may involve revisiting the identified categories, comparing and testing the themes several times before being able to generate conclusions from theoretical readings from review of the literature.

Therefore, both my interview data (preliminary and VSRI) used similar analysis illustrated above as both interviews were interested with the content of the teachers’ interview and not to their linguistics aspects or other language aspects such as discourse or pronunciation. This was conducted to generate meanings and interpretations of the
participants in relation to classroom practice. For example, a particular unit of analysis can be classified according to its nature, its cause, its outcomes or the way it is handled. The interview data analysis has followed the steps mentioned in Miles and Huberman (1994), Arksey and Knight (1999) and Cohen et al, (2007) as illustrated in Figure 3.3 below and explained next.
Referring to Figure 3.3 above, the data analysis began by transcribing the interview in a two-column table, the first column was for the actual transcriptions where the units of
analysis were identified by highlighting using different coloured highlighters. The second column was allocated for labelling or classifying the units of analysis. An example of the process is as shown in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Sample of Semi-Structured Interview transcript extract (Lee, Vernacular Chinese School)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview transcriptions</th>
<th>themes emerging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong> So in terms of activities, do you group them or do you do direct teaching?</td>
<td>pressure to finish syllabus content in vernacular school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong> Hmm…but now to be honest with you <strong>with 120 minutes and we have to cover all, we also have other subjects; we cannot carry on with activities-so direct teaching.</strong> I believe all teachers are doing this. If you do <strong>group work or interactive learning, it takes a lot of time. But I believe it’s a much more effective way</strong> but we must have more time. We need additional time. Give us sufficient time, and we have to do literature some more. And we only see them three days-Monday, Wednesday and Thursday and sometime they have to go to computer room for computer lessons. And sometimes public holidays on the double periods so how?</td>
<td>pressure coping with other subjects Declared approach used-direct teaching due to time constraints Believe (underlined) group work and interactive teaching is more effective but time consuming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this interview transcript, the process of classifying the units of analysis was conducted for each teacher in table format. This stage also involved grouping the units
of analysis and finding relationships with other themes. A sample of data analysis process carried out to the interview data with Lee (Vernacular Chinese School) in order to identify the themes emerging from the interviews is as illustrated Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Sample of Identification of Themes Process for Interview Transcripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>EMERGING THEMES/ SUB THEMES/ additional</th>
<th>UNITS OF ANALYSIS/ ACTUAL QUOTATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ understanding/ knowledge about LC approaches</td>
<td>• associate LC with autonomy for learners</td>
<td>‘I think this LC, is more on we give more autonomy to the students’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involvement of learners in T &amp; L process</td>
<td>‘We will give them more chance to do things independently’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Role of teachers as facilitator/motivator</td>
<td>‘Probably we play the role of facilitator or motivator’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Variety of tasks/activities</td>
<td>‘We have to come up with the tasks to guide them so that they know what they have to do’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘...have to include a lot of activities (discussions, presentations and to report)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.2 Observation and Reflection stage

This stage involved conducting video recording and observation plus field note taking. These processes took place simultaneously during the lesson recording. While semi-structured interviews explored teachers’ declared practices (Calderhead, 1988)
explained earlier, this stage described teachers’ actual practices. This provided a balanced view about teachers’ practices from the teachers as well as from the researcher’s field notes and video data. During this observation and reflection stage, video-stimulated recalled interviews were conducted within 48 hours of the lesson recording. These processes are explained in detail below.

(a) **Video recording and observation with field note taking (simultaneous)**

The process of video recording above was carried out once the teachers indicated their consent and readiness to be videotaped and took place up to several weeks after the preliminary interview. Video recording was used to capture the classroom events as they happened as it provides richer contextual information. In addition, it enabled me to select the stimulus about the target event to ask about during video-stimulated recalled interviews later. Moreover, the visually rich stimulus of video recording can be superior compared to audio stimulus or looking at classroom transcripts. This, according to Dornyei (2007, p. 149) can improve the quality of the introspective video stimulated recalled interview procedures.

The classroom observation and field note taking while the lessons were recorded were vital as an initial analysis to select stimuli for VSRIs which took place at this stage. The focus of the field note taking is to describe the classroom processes as they happen and not to impose any checklist or criteria as proposed by the positivist/quantitative view by using systematic classroom observation discussed in chapter 2. These notes are in the form of specific key episodes that may reflect certain issues with LC practices such as the role of grammar teaching, the role of teachers, group work and translation methods used. This initial data was selected and asked about if the teachers did not mention them first during the VSRIs.
(b) **Video-stimulated recalled interviews**

The Observation and Reflection stage also involved conducting VSRIs. Stimulated recall (SR) procedure is ‘one type of introspective methods that represent a means of eliciting data about thought processes involved in carrying out a task or activity’ (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p.1). It has been used in studies concerning cognitive strategies, language learning processes and teacher behaviour (Lyle, 2003, p.861).

SR has been used with other methodologies to triangulate data for accuracy and authenticity of teachers’ report of their practices. More importantly, it complements the inadequacy of methods like direct observation by helping a researcher to explore cognitive processes (Gass & Mackey, 2000). The use of SR interview in this study enabled me to capture teachers’ thinking in terms of their theory of actions (Stough, 2001) or beliefs about their practices as they may find it difficult to articulate the principles behind their actions in isolation only via semi structured interview.

Therefore, my sequence of data collection was based on the sequence of strategies to cover avenues of a teacher’s beliefs system, comprising their declared beliefs or personal theories; their theories in action observed via their practices and their embedded beliefs via the VSRI sessions. The semi-structured interview gathered teacher’s declared beliefs. The VSRIs combined with the video recording and researcher’s notes thus, offered a better representation of participants’ embedded thoughts and beliefs compared to just looking at participants’ self-report accounts.

Davis (2003) argues that teachers’ beliefs should also be inferred from the way they act rather than only from what they say they believe. These, according to Davis are called
‘espoused beliefs’ and ‘beliefs in action’ (p. 208). Similarly, Calderhead (1988) and Breen et al. (2001) also suggest that the use of SR procedures will enable researchers to describe teachers’ thinking in terms of their theory behind their actions and should be used with other methodologies to triangulate data for accuracy and authenticity of teachers’ report of their practices (Stough, 2001). For that reason, the SR interview was a crucial strategy to strengthen my research design. This can be seen as another strategy to achieve trustworthiness and credibility in the research design i.e., by triangulating both data and research instrument (Dornyei, 2007).

Stimulated recall (SR) has also been known to have several shortcomings. The limitations associated with SR include incomplete memories (Calderhead, 1981), influence of anxiety (Dornyei, 2007) and the researcher’s influence in selecting stimulus and conscious censoring of the recall by the participants (Gass & Mackey, 2000). There is also the principal issue of the difference between recall and reflection (Gass, 2001). Gass & Mackey (2000) have suggested that validity issues associated with SR can be dealt with by minimizing the delay between event and recall. The VSRIs were conducted within the next two days after the video recording (see chapter four) in order to avoid memory lapse (Gass & Mackey, 2000). The ideal time suggested to have the SR session is the same day or no later than two days after the recording. For my study the video stimulated recall interviews were conducted with the teachers preferably the same day or the next day as suggested by Dornyei (2007).

The interviews were audio recorded using an Olympus digital voice recorder and transcribed using Word Scribe Express software and followed similar interview data analysis procedures mentioned.
The VSRI is a three-stage process that involved the steps as illustrated in diagram 3.4 below. The VSRIIs looked at similar aspects of research questions explored by the preliminary interviews i.e. the teachers’ practices and their explanation of teaching practices with reference to the video as stimuli. They also further complemented the findings from preliminary interviews that covered the teacher’s understanding and beliefs about learner-centred approaches. In fact, they enabled both the teachers and the researcher to elaborate more or illustrate the issues and challenges associated with the implementation of this approach covered during semi-structured interviews.
Figure 3.4: VSRI Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Video-record the classroom (for analysis of macro &amp; micro features of lesson later)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Take field notes for selection of stimuli to further explore teachers’ knowledge (see Appendix 3 for observation guidelines)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Explain the instructions (see Appendix 4) to the teachers prior to viewing the video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Play the video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Note down the stimulus that teachers selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Audio-tape the interview process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ask specific questions about the stimulus selected such as, ‘what were you thinking at this time? Or ‘what goes on in your mind here?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow-Up stage

(After video-viewing and asking specific questions about the lesson)

Ask general questions about overall teaching practices or the VSRI procedures such as:

‘in what ways do you think you have achieved being learner-centred in your teaching?’
The first stage of VSRI involved video-recording the lessons after getting an informed consent from the teachers. The teachers were told to teach as they would normally do according to their syllabus content. The lessons were recorded using Sony HD camcorder placed on a tripod at the corner of the classroom indicated by the teacher. The teacher’s voice was audio-recorded using Olympus digital voice recorder place in the teachers’ shirt pocket. Another handheld recorder was placed in the teacher’s desk to capture learners’ voice in the front of the class. This was to ensure the quality of teachers’ voice for transcription process later and to capture the learners’ response to the teachers.

Upon a cue given by the teacher, the whole lessons were recorded. I used the opportunity to widen discussion by having an optional follow up stage (after the video viewing) to ask general questions about the teacher’s opinion about their overall teaching in relation to the curriculum expectations. The complete procedures and questions used during the VSRIs are included in Appendix 4.

3.7.3 Video data analysis stage

Data from the video was analysed using interaction analysis to arrive at two types of classroom data. The first is called Macro features (description of key lesson stages/ episodes) to identify the overall approach used by each teacher and micro-features (specific aspects of the lessons that are associated with LC practices identified in chapter 2). Further explanation on the analysis is provided in chapter five.

3.7.4 Data triangulation and verification stage.

This stage involved comparison of findings from the semi-structured interviews, note-taking and observation, video data as well as VSRIs with the principles of learner-
centred practices to provide a holistic description of the extent of these four teachers’ implementation of learner-centred practices, nature of beliefs and knowledge about learner-centredness. At this stage, the findings were closely compared with the working construct of learner-centredness as well as the descriptions of learner-centred classrooms by Mc Combs & Whisler (1997) synthesised in chapter two.

3.8 Research reliability and validity

Qualitative studies in general and specifically case studies research have been criticized as having various limitations. The most frequently highlighted issue concerns the credibility of generalizations made from research findings, due to the limited coverage of participants. Moreover, it has been argued that case studies are very subjective and personal (Denscombe, 2003, p. 39) and suffer a ‘lack of rigor’ and ‘little basis for scientific generalization’ (Yin, 1994, p.10).

Discussions about these issues (for example, Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Bassey, 1999; Denscombe, 2003; Dornyei, 2007) have acknowledged this credibility issue and suggest some alternative measures to ensure case study research is in fact valid and reliable. Bassey (1999, p.75), argues that the notion of ‘trustworthiness’ introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1995) can be seen as an alternative to reliability and validity. Reliability in research refers to the consistency of the result obtained from a research study and possibility to replicate the same method while validity, on the other hand, deals with the extent to which the research actually investigates what the researcher aims to investigate. These two concepts are vital in positivist/quantitative research that aim for stable, objective and generalizable research findings (Cohen et al, 2007). Trustworthiness comprises the rigorous steps to be taken in conducting case study research in order to ensure the criteria of truthfulness and authenticity are fulfilled.
The criteria for truthfulness proposed by Denzin (1994; cited in Dornyei, 2007), namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, correspond to positivist/post positivist criteria. Lincoln and Guba (1995) explain that credibility corresponds to the positivist internal validity, transferability to external validity, dependability to reliability, and confirmability and objectivity to neutrality. This equation, according to Dornyei (2007, p.57), is referred to as ‘parallel criteria because of their corresponding quantitative counterparts’. In relation to the above arguments, efforts towards achieving trustworthiness are a major consideration in this research design, and will be covered next.

3.9 Trustworthiness and credibility of study

As suggested by Dornyei (2007) there are strategies to ensure validity in qualitative research, which I took on board in designing my research. Firstly, I needed to ensure what Dornyei referred to as ‘researcher integrity’ was achieved by making sure that all the steps taken and a reflective account of the process during the research were recorded in detail, so that it is accessible for other researchers to follow. A thoroughly contextualised and rich description of the research process can merit confidence in the researcher (Bryman, 2004).

Credibility in qualitative research can also be achieved as a researcher needs to acknowledge and identify potential researcher bias so that the descriptive narration of the process is more realistic and transparent. Similarly, in reporting the findings, a qualitative researcher must discuss and report possible alternative findings and explanations before drawing a conclusion based on these possible findings. In order to achieve credibility and trustworthiness of my study, I followed the steps to ensure what Dornyei (2007) refers to as ‘researcher integrity’. Firstly, I tried to achieve a ‘prolonged
engagement with data sources’ which involves spending enough time to build trust and avoiding misleading ideas (Bassey, 1999, p. 76). This was why my study involved four key stages (as explained earlier) that required me to visit and meet each participant at least six times during my study. This was a very time consuming process but was necessary.

Next, while quantitative studies aim to generalize their findings, qualitative studies aim for transferability of their methods instead (Bryman, 2004; Dornyei, 2007). This was achieved by having a thorough or thick description of the research process and making sure all the reflective accounts of the research process were systematic and recorded in detail. These in-depth descriptions can provide other researchers ‘a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux’ (Bryman, 2004, p.275).

This is important so that this research work can be accessible for other researchers to follow. While recording the lessons, I took notes of important details of the classroom such as the classroom layout, positions of students or any interruptions during the lessons (see Appendix 6).

Secondly, validity and reliability checks were carried out during the research. These involved first, obtaining respondents’ feedback and clarifications on emerging issues based on the data during my VSR meetings (conducted much later during the field work) so I could validate the data and minimise researcher bias.

In addition, in order to acknowledge and identify any potential researcher bias in the descriptive narration of the process to ensure realistic and a transparent account of events, I involved a colleague to do the process of describing the lesson progression for
the lesson macro features. Similarly, the identifications of specific lesson features associated with learner-centredness were also discussed with this colleague.

Involving a colleague in some parts of my research process had also provided another critical eye to the research project that I may have overlooked. This involvement was needed to compare my transcriptions and during data analysis process as an inter-rater to achieve reliability during the content analysis process. One colleague was willing to assist me in this process and did partial transcriptions for several of my classroom transcription data sets.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical conduct was carefully considered where all participants were given adequate information about the research project aims and expected outcomes. All participants were given a consent form to indicate their informed agreement to participate in the video recording of the classroom teaching and in the interview sessions. As children were involved in the video recording of the classrooms, parental consent forms were distributed prior to the data collection process through the school administrator. Access to the setting was negotiated through the gatekeeper i.e., the Education Planning Unit, Ministry of Education, Putrajaya Malaysia.

Permission to conduct research in schools was also obtained by the relevant government ministries (see Appendix 1). Copies of the video materials were made available to the participants involved as they requested and the participants were assured that clips from the video would only be used within the constraints of the research and not for other purposes. The children involved in the research were informed by the schools of the researcher’s visits and the use of the video camera. At least three visits to the
classrooms prior to the recordings took place to establish and familiarize teachers and pupils with the researcher’s presence and the use of the video camera. This was also to minimize the Hawthorne effect (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 187) where participants would behave unnaturally and according to what they are expected to do when being observed.

Most importantly, anonymity and confidentiality were assured at all times where the teachers were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time if they changed their mind. The use of the expected findings of the study i.e. a descriptive account of their classroom practices, a description of their knowledge of learner-centred approaches, a description of their teaching principles and beliefs about English language teaching and their descriptions of the challenges they face in their practices were explained to the teachers involved. Each of the findings is further explained in the next three chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR

TEACHERS’ KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNER-CENTREDNESS: FINDINGS FROM PRE-OBSERVATION STAGE

4.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the findings from the preliminary semi-structured interviews (SSIs) conducted during the pre-observation stage of my research and is divided into two parts. Part one includes descriptions of participants and the case study schools. This part focuses on the findings about the extent of teachers’ understanding and knowledge that comprised teachers’ definitions and descriptions of the characteristics of learner-centred approaches. Part two describes the teachers’ self-reported beliefs (declared beliefs) about learner-centredness in ELT and concludes with a discussion of findings on teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about learner-centredness.

4.1 Demographic information about participating schools and teachers.

The semi-structured interviews conducted with the four teachers gathered some demographic description of the four case study schools and the teachers involved. The teachers as well as the schools’ name were anonymised and replaced with pseudonyms for teachers and letters A, B, C and D for the schools. Information about the schools is presented in Table 4.1.
### TABLE 4.1: Demographic descriptions of the four case study schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School information</th>
<th>Medium of instruction during lessons and exam questions</th>
<th>Number of students boys</th>
<th>Number of students girls</th>
<th>Number of English Language teachers from overall teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SK A (National type Town school)</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15/ 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK B (National type Rural school)</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>13/ 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJK (C) C (National Chinese Vernacular type school)</td>
<td>Chinese (Mandarin)</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>19/ 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJK (T) D (National Indian Vernacular type school)</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15/ 51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The SSIs also gathered the teacher’s personal information, teaching and academic background. Four teachers participated in the study, three male and one female. Following the criteria explained in chapter three, teachers should have at least five years teaching experiences and they had to be ESL trained. The teachers who participated had at least twenty years of experience in teaching English at primary school level. All of them had a teaching certificate or diploma obtained from Malaysian teacher training colleges. Only one teacher had a Bachelor degree although not in his teaching subject but in Economics as that was the scholarship on offer at that time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Teaching Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Degree in Economics (4 years) ESL Teaching Certificate (2 1/2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National school (TOWN) A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thika</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>ESL Teaching Diploma (3 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National school (RURAL) B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>ESL Teaching Certificate (3 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernacular (TAMIL) school C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>ESL Teaching Certificate (2 1/2 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernacular (CHINESE) school D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Teachers’ knowledge about learner-centredness in ELT

Teacher’s knowledge in this study as elaborated in chapter three was based on the teacher’s explanation or declared knowledge about learner-centredness. The focus of this section is to describe each teacher’s definition and explanation of the characteristics of learner-centred approaches.

4.2.1 Teachers’ definition of LC approaches

Based on the findings, the teachers provided very vague definitions of learner-centredness. The definitions seemed to centralise around the roles of teachers and learners, the emphasis on learners’ needs and direct comparison with the traditional teacher-centred (TC) approaches.

Salim defined an LC approach as an approach where ‘it’s more on the learners doing the activities and the teachers are guiding them through the activities’. On the other hand, Lee from the Vernacular school C associated learner-centredness with learner-autonomy and defined it as ‘more on we (teachers) give more autonomy to the students’ and ‘we (teachers) will give them more chance to do things independently’. Both these definitions focused on the facilitative roles of teachers and active learners’ participations in learning activities.

However, Ramu (from SJKT) gave a rather vague explanation about learner-centredness by making the following comparison between the teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches.

it’s (LC) more concentrated on the learners. TC is more on the teachers and the teaching side...and...it should focus more on learners’ needs. Whatever that we plan should be a learner-centred.
Similarly, Thika from the rural school although she agreed that teaching should be learner-centred did not explicitly define learner-centred approaches. Instead, she highlighted the central concern of learner-centredness i.e, putting learners at the centre of the teaching and learning process and discussed the benefits of learner-centredness in teaching.

... because students won’t be interested if you are the most important person, they have to feel important as well. Make the lesson interesting. But the teaching pedagogy-if you ask me, for language-there are so many things different from maths and science.

When asked about the difference between TC and LC teaching, Thika also associated LC practices with the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT).

Nowadays students are very hyper active you know, so when I bring them to the IT Room they’ll be a bit alert. Normally when they see me in the classroom-they will find it very dull. When they come to this room, they’ll be alert-it’s like an induction already and (there’s) a liking there already. After that, I can switch them to a better mood. If I do the same thing...maybe once in a while I do chalk and talk but not all the time.

They showed awareness of the concept and it is clearly something that they have reflected on but not surprisingly they did not express a common definition. Their reflections on what learner-centredness means were consistent with the uncertainties found in the limited literature on this notion and imprecise recommendations in the Malaysia curriculum documents.
4.2.2 Teachers’ knowledge about characteristics of learner-centred practices

The SSI also revealed the extent of teacher’s knowledge about the characteristics of learner-centredness approaches in ELT. Salim admitted that he was unsure of the real definition of learner-centred teaching but managed to give some descriptions of the principles of learner-centred approaches using his own interpretations. These included the following claims: *focus of teaching should be on learners, active participation of learners in group work, activity-based lessons* and *more learner interactions*. Despite his confession of not knowing how to define LC, his explanation of LC indicated that he had some ideas of the principles. He explained that LC involved learners’ participation in learning activities and the teachers normally guided learners through the process instead of dominating the classroom process.

*I don’t think I really know what is... in detail what is this learner-centred...but roughly from my knowledge that I have now, I think it’s more on ... the learners doing the activities, all right, and teachers are guiding them through the activities.*

Salim was also able to identify that in an LC classroom there should be more focus on participative activities. Some of the activities he suggested could be expected in an LC classroom included getting learners to participate in group work and ‘coming back to present their findings’.

On the other hand, Thika, despite claiming that she was introduced to LC approaches during her teacher training, displayed vague understanding when asked of what she understood by learner-centredness. She claimed that she implemented her lessons according to what was taught during her teacher training but failed to provide
description of vital features of learner-centred approaches: ‘Yes, what they taught was what we are doing now. Of course, it has to be learner-centred not teacher centred’. She also seemed to be unsure about pedagogical aspects of LC teaching but acknowledged that learners need to put more individual efforts, be responsible and more autonomous in order to succeed in language learning. She argued that these efforts were necessary as learning language was very different from learning Maths and Science where, when ‘You (teachers) teach language, you can only teach the basics but the essence has to be done by own individually themselves’.

Lee repeated similar features of LC mentioned by Thika as he also argued that LC approaches should involve giving more autonomy to learners and allowing learners to be more actively involved by participating in learning tasks. In addition, Lee described learner-centred approaches as allowing learners to have more ‘chance to do things independently’. In terms of the teacher’s roles, Lee argued that in an LC classroom, teachers act as a ‘facilitator and motivator’. Lee also highlighted that in an LC classroom there would be a variety of tasks and activities such as group discussions, pupils’ presentations and writing reports and presenting them back to the class.

Similar to Thika, Ramu managed to identify some general principles of LC approaches such as ‘it’s more concentrated on the learners’ and he distinguished LC versus teacher-centred (TC) as being ‘more on the teachers and the teaching side’ while LC should be more on learners. Furthermore, he identified that LC approaches involve activities that focus more on learners’ needs. Unlike the others, he identified another feature of LC approaches i.e. taking into account learners’ background during the lesson planning process,
whatever that we plan should be a learner-centred...as a teacher, you know the child better through which we should be able to plan our lesson., the materials that we got to teach, of course we should know the background of the child, what is acceptable to the child. Only then, we can tailor the lesson to what they want.

His overall descriptions of LC approaches, however, were philosophical in nature and did not indicate any actual descriptions of classroom practices.

*LC...* Know the child better, so that what...you see sometimes we teach but are they learning? Have the child really received what we have taught? - learn something? Has the teaching and learning process take place? When you teach, the learning process should go on. Sometimes we teach but there’s no learning.

There seemed to be a lack of specificity characterising the discussion of both definition or features of learner-centredness. The respondents were aware of the concept and the recommendation to teach in a learner-centred way but in one case (Thika) had great difficulty articulating LC characteristics, focusing more on the importance of being learner-centred. There was general recognition of the importance of LC, but less ability to describe the components of LC approaches beyond mention of more involvement in tasks and more responsibility on the part of learners. In order to describe the extent of teachers’ understanding of learner-centredness, a cross analysis of the aspects they mentioned and the LC principles (Mc Combs and Whisler, 1997) clearly indicated limited understanding of learner-centredness as summarized in table 4.3 below.
From the table, it is evident that all teachers managed to identify at least two out of seven principles of learner-centredness (the roles of teachers and learners and the variety of materials and activities involved in an LC classroom). Only Salim and Lee were able to identify the discovery-based activities associated with LC practices while only Ramu was able to acknowledge the identification of learners’ needs emphasised in LC teaching. None of them mentioned the fundamental elements of the LC construct that distinguished it from other approaches: (1) collaborative negotiation of learning objectives activities and evaluation, (2) increased learner interactions in the target language and (3) ongoing evaluation and self-evaluation. Therefore, it can be deduced that there seemed to be a vast gap in these teachers’ understanding that needed to be addressed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and this will further elaborated in chapter seven.
Table 4.3: A cross-case analysis of teacher’s knowledge about learner-centredness expressed in preliminary interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LC principles in brief</th>
<th>Salim</th>
<th>Thika</th>
<th>Lee</th>
<th>Ramu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Collaborative planning teaching &amp; learning process</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Needs identification/ analysis process</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Increased learner’ interaction in TL</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learner active roles, teacher facilitative roles</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ongoing teacher evaluation plus learner self-evaluation</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Discovery/ experiential activities (such as group work)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Varied materials and activities to suit diverse needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Exploration of Teacher’s Beliefs

Beliefs about learner-centredness were extracted from the interview transcripts through identification of declared beliefs statements or self-reported claims about their beliefs (Calderhead, 1988). These belief statements reflected their cognitive, behavioural actions guided by their personal system of beliefs, values and principles developed over time (Borg, 2003). Teachers’ statements of beliefs about their practices were extracted from their views about the current primary ELT practices prefaced by phrases such as ‘I think’, ‘I believe’, ‘in my opinion’, ‘I’m sure’ as well as advice words like ‘should’ that were indicative of opinions, perspectives or beliefs. In addition, questions that required them to make assessment of their current and previous teaching experiences expressed with words such as ‘it’s better...compared to...’ or ‘during my time, things were better/different’ as evidenced in the findings also revealed their beliefs about suitable ELT practices, effective teaching and learning, and factors that contribute to pupils’ learning success (such as attributes of learners, lesson aims, content and assessment).

The interview data were summarized to generate units of meanings and later classified and arranged into the themes emerging throughout the interviews. This process (as described in detail in chapter 3) was conducted for each interview and later compared with the other teachers following the content analysis for interview data as explained in detail in chapter 3. According to Cohen et al, (2007, p. 368) and Miles and Huberman (1994), the themes emerging from the data need to undergo a classification process to explore the relationship of the themes. A detailed sample of questions used during the interview is included in Appendix 2.
Unlike presentation of findings in other sections that described each teacher individually, teachers’ beliefs will be described based on the most common to the least common beliefs held. These beliefs will be compared with the characteristics of LC classrooms in education described in chapter 2 to situate the nature of the teachers’ LC beliefs.

The analysis of the interview transcripts led to identification of two sets of beliefs. The first set comprised eleven themes that represented Teachers’ Beliefs about their current ELT Practices and the second set comprise themes representing Teachers’ beliefs about learner-centred approaches. The beliefs about ELT practices are listed in the coming section to facilitate reading.

The second set of beliefs about learner-centred practices categorised under three headings:

Category 1: common pre-occupations about learner-centred approaches such as,

(i) Focussing on the needs of learners
(ii) Involving more learners’ participation
(iii) Involving more activities such as group discussion and presentation of ideas to class
(iv) The roles of teachers as facilitators.

However, these teachers’ pre-occupations about learner-centredness were described under teachers’ knowledge earlier and therefore will not be repeated here. This section will describe the themes that encapsulated teachers’ beliefs about learner-centredness under Category 2 (teachers’ positive beliefs about learner-centredness) and Category 3
(teachers’ negative beliefs about learner-centredness). The last two sets of beliefs will be individually described below.

4.3.1 Beliefs about ELT practices

The themes that encapsulated teachers’ beliefs about English language teaching in general and about their practices are as listed below and described and discussed in relation to LC principles.

1. Home environment and exposure to English language is important for success
2. Parental support plays an important role in learning success.
3. Learner exposure to a variety of English language input will familiarize them with the language
4. Language learning should be a natural process and informal process
5. Learning should be developmental-learners learn things in a structured manner.
6. Modelling correct language use is important
7. The necessity to use a variety of approaches according to learners’ needs.
8. Repetition and reinforcement are vital to achieve mastery of language- ‘Practice makes perfect’
9. Translation to native language/ mother tongue is necessary in certain situations
10. Importance of learners’ awareness about reasons for learning
11. Teachers’ roles are changing from being the central figure to becoming facilitators.

All teachers interviewed seemed to share common beliefs that exposure to the target language, home environment and parental support as the most important factors to ensure success in language learning. For example, Salim argued that supportive parents who expose their children to English language in their home environment could provide...
an added advantage as learners may have picked up vocabulary and basic social interactions prior to being formally introduced to English at school.

*So, if, we want students to learn better, parents should create an environment first before coming to school. If a child is speaking English at home-with their neighbours like that-they are totally different when they come to school.*

This was echoed by Ramu who argued that parents could show their support by exposing them to more spoken English as most time is spent at home compared to the limited time learning English in schools. He also added that the exposure to target language from various sources such as ‘printed media and multimedia’ enabled learners to be comfortable in using the language. Thika expressed her belief that a positive learning environment at home can help in improving language ability by citing her own experience as a learner,

...*and another most important part is not the teacher teaching, is the environment. Like for me... I come from English speaking family, even though my parents don’t converse in English but my brothers and sisters talk in English. The teaching does not really play the role- it’s the communication in English.*

Similarly, Lee emphasised that exposure to English language when communicating with family members or neighbours can enhance learners’ language abilities. This belief that acknowledged the roles of exposure to the target language at home and exposure to other media of instruction in English was in line with learner-centred views about learning. LC principles emphasise the need for variety and preferably authentic sources and opportunities for language use for learners to interact comfortably (Nunan, 1988;
Tudor, 1996) and with less anxiety when using media like the audio and visual media and the internet. In addition, learner-centredness proposes that learners’ affective aspects such as preferences and interests be met in order to sustain their interest and motivation (Mc Combs & Whisler, 1997).

Nevertheless, the majority of the teachers (Salim, Thika and Lee) also seemed to have a belief that was not expressed in LC principles as they believed *modelling correct language use, repetition* and *grammatical accuracy* as very important to achieve correct language use. This belief appeared to be very much in line with the traditional teacher-directed view of learning. Salim believed that teachers should model appropriate language use for learners to follow as learners would naturally correct their mistakes based on the teacher’s language use. Salim also believed that learners who were already using English language in their daily life outside the classrooms were more likely to perform self-correction compared to those who only listen to English language in the classroom. He believed learners’ language awareness about grammatical structures can develop from daily use of the language:

*If a child listens to a language that is spoken correctly, they will follow that. So usually, I mean naturally they are able to change —they didn’t make so many grammatical mistakes but if they will follow that. So if, whatever they listen to is not correct, then we have to teach them the correct way.*

It would appear that teachers in this study valued repetition and practice particularly in rural settings where learners’ exposure to EL was limited. Lee for example, suggested that oral repetition of similar words or structures exposed learners to be aware of new EL words.
He seemed to believe that learners’ vocabulary development and understanding could be facilitated via exposure and repetition of words which may eventually lead to usage. In fact, Salim cited a success story in Singaporean schools that used similar approaches of speech repetition before introducing any text to learners.

...in rural school and I found that recently, I found ... the same concepts of repeating, repeating words throughout the lesson, and always going back to the words they’ve learn ...I found that one Singaporean speech book using the same method and - getting the students you know instead of recognizing & reading the words in written form all sorts & they repeat the same exercises. Repetitions will get the students to know more words... and after all that reading itself will progress into usage. That what I’ve covered in rural school.

This was echoed by Thika from the rural school who believed that in order for language learning to take place, learners should be exposed to syllabus content repeatedly and they should do several practice activities on similar structures until they are internalised. She argued that, if learners did not have enough practice, the structure would be forgotten and thus needed further reinforcement. Her belief about her learners resembled the Behaviourist transmission view of learning, seeing learners as vessels that need to be filled and to be re-programmed. Her choice of words such as ‘to reinstall’ knowledge in learners as an analogy for the process of re-teaching and reinforcing the content again was also more inclined towards a teacher-directed view. She also strongly believed in the need to practice in order to achieve success in language learning.

The students need to be exposed several times. It’s not good enough. For example, grammar topics- exposure is very important. Students need to be
recalled every now and then. Then it’ll be stuck in them. If not, gone with the wind... For example, if they go on holidays, when they come to the next lesson you have to ‘reinstall’ everything.

Unlike the most common held set of beliefs explained earlier, these three teachers (Salim, Thika and Lee) displayed non-learner centred beliefs as their beliefs described above were not in accordance with the characteristics of LC classroom in education explained in chapter two. In fact, these teachers’ beliefs were in contrast to what LC beliefs about learners and teaching approaches should be like. For example, the methods of LC teaching need to be varied and flexible to suit different learners’ needs and not simply asking them to repeat and drill content. In fact, LC activities should include learning activities that can increase their responsibility for learning. Most importantly, LC teaching strategies involved teachers’ asking stimulating questions and tasks that challenge learners’ thinking beyond memorizing and repeating. These could be achieved by peer learning using pair work, group assignments, projects, presentations, discussions, and sharing with the whole class. These stated beliefs seemed to be in contradiction with the features of learner-centred teaching (that involved group work, projects and other interactive activities) mentioned by these teachers as evidenced in the previous section on teacher’s knowledge.

Only two teachers (Salim and Lee) expressed their beliefs on the importance of learners’ awareness about reasons for learning. Salim believed that learners should be aware of why they learn the language. The awareness about the objectives of their language learning was perceived as a precondition that learners should have in order to be interested in learning the language.
...the students, they must use the language, and they...they should actually know why do they learn the language, the purpose of learning then only they'll be interested (Salim)

Lee also seemed to associate successful learners with their ability to understand their reasons for learning English. These two teachers’ beliefs were consistent with the principles of learner-centredness that emphasise learners’ ability to identify their own objective and subjective needs in order to develop learning skills and strategies to be more autonomous learners.

The findings also reveal some conflicting views about the roles of translation and code-switching to the native language. Thika, for example, believed in the necessity of translating or code-switching due to her learners’ background i.e, coming from rural areas and thus had little exposure and use of English language.

*I have to use. If I talk plainly in English, it’ll be as though I’m speaking to the walls- no reactions at all. I do that very often, so most of the times, if you go to my class, very passive class. When I talk in English they won’t give me any answer. Unless I talk in Bahasa, then they will reply- very passive class.*

On the other hand, Ramu seemed to embrace LC beliefs when he argued that translating to MT could be counter-productive as learners tend to rely on a teacher’s translation all the time knowing that the teacher would translate to them. Learners, according to him, should put in effort to discover the language and make sense of the language on their own. He strongly expressed his views against translating into the MT as this could give mixed messages to the learners as reflected in the extract below.
You teach a language you never translate. I hold to that! You should teach the language without any translation or any kinds of ways of giving the meaning in another language. It should be solely in the particular language then only the child will make the effort to learn the language. Once they know you are translating, definitely whatever you say the child will wait for you to translate. Language should be taught in a way where there should be any other language. So English in particular, talk in English, converse in English. Make it a point to make them understand in English... That’s what I feel should be the way to teach the language.

The teachers in the study appeared to acknowledge the shift of the perceived teacher-learner roles compared to the traditional method that viewed teachers as the transmitter of knowledge and learners as passive recipients. In fact, teaching and learning input could also be explored autonomously by learners using multimedia technology and internet. This was explained by Ramu who suggested that teacher’s roles have gradually changed with the advancement of technology.

When we use Multimedia, the role of teachers will become lesser and lesser. Actually what is the role of teachers? Teachers should be the facilitator. Gone were the days with teachers were solely teaching. Now we just facilitate. Let them get the information from wherever the source... Gone were the days...where ‘I talk, you listen’. Now, we have to listen to the children because the children are more exposed, nowadays with the internet and all, we are learning a lot from them.
There were also beliefs that revealed individual views about aspects of classroom teaching and learning process. For example, Lee appeared to be very inclined towards learner-centred approaches expressing the desire to develop lessons according to the interest of the pupils. This, according to him could be achieved by introducing topics closely relevant to them such as talking about personal experiences in order to get them to interact.

_You have to plan the lesson according to the interests of the pupils. The interest is very important. Our topic..., when we introduce the lessons, let say we talk about personal experiences, or maybe we can talk about their opinions about what they like or things like that. Get them to engage in healthy interactions._

Thika believed that language teaching and learning should focus on mastery of communication skills, and on meanings and not be overly concerned with the examination.

_We are learning the language to master and communicate in the language not to answer exam paper. The most important part in learning a language is to be able to understand-the comprehension must be there._

Thika also seemed to believe that language learning should be sequentially developmental. According to Thika, mastering one skill (listening, speaking, reading and writing) at a time is very important to learners can gradually improve themselves. She compared her own learning experience with current learners who were expected to acquire skills such as writing skills too soon without sufficient emphasis first on reading and speaking skills. She argued that, these over-ambitious expectations could result in
overloading learners with these skills all at once. As a result, teaching could backfire and learners would not gain much.

...what I mean is- don’t emphasise on written work. OK, let them master the aural-oral skills then you move to the next step, written work. I’m not saying that they should just stop here. Once you already master the Oral-Aural skills, you can go to other skills. To me, in primary (school) they focus on Oral-Aural, that would be good enough. Now we are doing four skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing we do... of course, we can do writing, but not too much...Here, whether they master or not, they go on and on- so finally, you are zero.

However, she seemed to believe that reading, particularly reading aloud, was a pre-requisite to be able to master the language in the future.

Reading is the most important part- if the students can read well, not just reading but read aloud well, students should be able to master the language in the long run.

Throughout the interview, she appeared to have some frustrations about the focus on writing and claimed that she would welcome a stronger steer to focus on listening and speaking. Similarly, Lee expressed dissatisfaction with the centrally produced teaching materials provided by the ministry. He seemed to believe that a standardised set of teaching materials could be overlooking the needs of some learners. Therefore, he suggested that the ministry should provide a selection of textbooks so teachers can select the materials according to their students’ levels. This highlighted the challenge of
adopting the implementation of a learner-centred curriculum and principles within a centrally-governed, top-down curriculum implementation in Malaysia.

*I think the government should consider introducing a few texts so that teachers can select texts that are suitable for them. If you come up with single text for the whole country... how can they learn?*

Teachers, according to Lee were not able to adapt teaching materials based on textbooks given, as adaptation is not an easy process and teachers may not welcome the ideas of adapting textbook materials to suit their learners’ needs. He believed that textbooks suitable for learners’ levels could contribute to learning success.

*Normally we will look at the difficulties first that they are likely to encounter, and then we can plan our lessons. We know what the problems that they are likely to face. So we try to assist and make it easier for them.*

Lee highlighted the situation where teachers were expected to adapt the resources (textbooks, courseware and work books) provided by the ministry to suit learners’ needs. He seemed to suggest that centrally produced differentiated materials would be a creative solution to the problems faced. However, he had limited expectations about the likelihood of them being developed and thus remained pessimistic about pupils’ chances of success in language learning. This also highlighted the challenges that teachers were likely to face in terms of skills (adaptation) needed to implement learner-centred approaches that required teacher’s to plan, develop, and design materials, activities and evaluation to suit different needs of learners in the classroom. In addition, Lee mentioned the issue of teacher’s willingness and readiness to embrace this extra responsibility.
How will the teachers do (adapt)? Adaptation is not easy. How many teachers are willing to do that? In theory yes but in reality, no. so the only to solve the problem is the ministry must come up with three sets of materials and then pupils can follow the lessons and can enjoy the lessons because it’s within their ability. Even with this text, we cannot do much; they are still going to fail the test.

Beliefs extracted from the preliminary interview comprise teachers’ beliefs about: learning, teaching, learners, the aims and content of lessons and about learner-centred practices. The findings from the preliminary interview data and the VSRI data reveal that teacher’s beliefs about ELT practices were guided by their beliefs about how they thought English language teaching should be implemented in the Malaysian context. These beliefs that guide teacher’s classroom ELT practices were based on their own personal experience as a learner; effective teaching practice experiences and based on their teaching circumstances. This is in line with Borg (2003) who argues that teachers’ classroom practices can be influenced by a beliefs system that has developed over time and consists of the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories and assumptions about teaching and learning.

A synthesis of the preliminary interview findings conducted with each teacher revealed the teacher’s personal beliefs system about ELT. There were several recurring references to teachers’ own personal reference as a learner themselves. For example, ‘…those days...teachers never translate’ or ‘When I was learning’ referring to the time she was a language learner’ (Thika , SSI). This also suggests that she valued the effectiveness of the focus-on-grammar based approach to language teaching saying that ‘when I was a student myself, the way I learn, it was something …, teachers those days they were very good- they taught us Grammar directly’ and that ‘Those days, I
remember, teachers ask us to read, read and read. We hardly have any homework’ (Thika, SSI). Thika also expressed many beliefs that did not conform to LC principles when she gave an analogy of her learners as being like a computer that needed to be reinstalled and reprogrammed. In fact, this was paradoxical with LC principles that believe learners learn through exploring and discovery.

Thika who taught at rural school portrayed many non-Learner centred beliefs as described by Mc Combs & Whisler (1997) as she appeared to have very low expectations of the learners and felt that her learners could not improve and could not understand anything if she taught in English without translating or code-switching. This belief that instruction needs to be translated to MT was strongly opposed by Ramu who taught in a vernacular Tamil school. Instead, he believed that learners need to be exposed to the target language as much as possible. This view seemed to suggest that these teachers embraced some of the LC principles that encourage interactions in the target language in order to achieve fluency.
4.3.2 Teachers’ Beliefs about learner-centred practices

During the semi-structured interviews, the teachers were asked specifically about their beliefs about learner-centred approaches in English language teaching. These belief statements were sometimes embedded within the teachers’ reflection about their current classroom practices or recollection of their experiences as learners being taught using teacher-directed approaches.

From the interview data, the teachers identified three positive properties of learner-centred practices. All four teachers in the study acknowledged the potential usefulness of LC practices in terms of allowing more opportunities and exposure for learners to be able to use the TL in their daily communications as well as in the classrooms. Furthermore, learner-centred approaches were described as able to make the learning experiences more meaningful to learners as they were able to interact among their classmates in TL more. In addition, learner-centred practices were believed to potentially improve the classroom atmosphere as learners would have fun learning the language. For example, Salim agreed that ‘LC approaches might be fun’ where the students were able to enjoy themselves in a fun-learning and non-threatening environment.

Similarly, Thika argued that learner-centred approaches were more interesting if integrated with the use of ICT to sustain learners’ motivation in learning English.

*Nowadays students are very hyper active you know, so when I bring them to the IT Room they’ll be a bit alert. Normally when they see me in the classroom—they will find it very dull. When they come to this room, they’ll be alert—it’s like*
an induction already and (there’s) a liking there already. After that, I can switch them to a better mood. If I do the same thing...maybe once in a while I do chalk and talk but not all the time.

Ramu also seemed to believe that proper consideration about learners’ needs and interests when planning lessons could contribute to the success of language teaching as learners would become more interested and therefore be engaged with the lessons.

You see, from my experience after 30 years of teaching. It shouldn’t be the question of students’ participation and all but the planning. The planning is very important. This is what I should plan for the child. If I do this, I’m sure I will get the interest of the child. It’s about getting the interest of the child. If you catch their interest in the first five minutes, I would say that they’ll be interested and the whole day I would say is a success.

However, despite the acknowledgement of the positive effects of learner-centred practices, all teachers were not very keen on implementing LC practices in their lessons. The teachers highlighted the demands that LC practices created on their workload such as extra time needed for planning, preparing and implementing the activities during lessons. Salim, for example stressed that,

You know planning itself - it takes a lot of time. You know, when you are teaching in schools, you are not just teaching. We are involved in a lot of other things. So you are involved in preparing for ...other things. So we really don’t have time to prepare for this LC approaches
All four teachers argued that besides teaching responsibilities, teachers were involved in other non-teaching roles and therefore had limited time to plan, prepare and integrate LC approaches that encourages a lot of activities among learners.

...for LC it’s more on activities and most of the times we do not have time for activities and LC approaches might be fun- the students are able...enjoy...you know-fun learning...but then...overall, It will take a longer time for them to...to...to get the gist of the lesson and we don’t have the privilege of having so much time with them.

Another drawback identified was the perceived limited success of learner-centred practices and coverage of lesson content. In fact some even argued over usefulness of group activities to achieve the learning objectives planned for the whole topic. For example, Salim, despite acknowledging the fun learner-centred activities bring to learners, argued that learners may require more time to understand the lesson content as the aims were embedded within the discovery and group discussion activities as opposed to direct teacher imparting the content. Furthermore, there seemed to be a sense of dilemma felt by these teachers who constantly had to decide whether to follow the LC approaches or to resort to the transmission one-way teaching.

It might not be correct for us to give to have a one-way traffic where it is more on teacher-centred but I think... we don’t have a choice.

Salim also highlighted the problem in classroom management aspect when implementing LC practices during lesson. He argued that ‘you (teachers) will have discipline problems and it’s quite difficult to get students to really participate’ due to classroom behavioural problems such as getting pupils sit down and to follow teachers’
instructions in order to complete the activities in time. Salim who taught in an all-boys school, stressed that this ‘dealing with the mischievous part of the students’ was another factor that discouraged many teachers including him to implement group activities.

This was strongly supported by Thika who asserted that grouping pupils into pairs or groups was not practical in her class as this could lead to loss of control. She claimed that group work would only result in chaos as learners would interact in the mother tongue instead of English language, and would not pay attention to her instruction.

> Group work, pair work... for me, I don’t think it’s feasible there because we don’t have enough time. Students are not so good in this school. Maybe, if they are very good, you can put in pairs and groups. Once you give them group work, they won’t be doing group work but talking. I need them to do their work also. If I let them do as they wish, they won’t finish even one exercise. So I supervise them. Mostly, I won’t let them sit in groups but they sit on their own in class but I let them participate. So I ask them questions and they have to answer.

Another constraint highlighted by the teachers in the study was the struggle to balance the perceived importance of classroom practices with fulfilling the pressure placed to ensure learners achieve the examination targets. The teachers argued that LC practices were impractical to be fully implemented within their teaching demands as teachers were required to complete the syllabus before the examinations. Throughout the interview, there was a lack of enthusiasm about the implementation of LC approaches in his teaching. For example, Salim argued, ‘...to certain extent you can do it but not all the time’ and have to resort to one way traffic teacher dominated teaching as he argued
that teachers who use LC tended to drag the lesson and would not be able to complete the syllabus content before examination.

This view was similar to Lee who strongly expressed his lack of faith in the prospect of LC being accepted. He believed that it was not feasible to be implement LC in his teaching context i.e, Chinese school. He argued that the target-orientated nature of the school system and the school’s expectations to measure achievement in terms of grades, too much syllabus content to cover and the unsuitability of teaching materials to learners’ levels have become significant impediments for him to teach using a LC approach that involves activities to suit the needs of children.

*It is rather impossible! (2X) because our school Heads, they always look for grades, and they go for passing marks-we have to achieve certain targets! We have to so we do a lot on examination questions. Give them more practices for examination purposes. So that takes a lot of our time. And we have to cover 12 units and some days we really have to rush.*

In addition, the teachers particularly Lee and Thika believed that LC practices may not be suitable with their learner’s ability and proficiency level. This was due to the fact that for most of the students, the only time they were exposed to English language is during English lessons. Lee who taught in a Chinese vernacular school, also argued that the vocabulary introduced in the textbooks supplied by the ministry was ‘much too high for these pupils’. Similarly, Thika claimed that in her rural teaching context, her pupils found the textbooks difficult and that had resulted in her identifying other teaching materials for her learners.
4.4 Chapter Conclusion

From the findings above, all four teachers displayed some basic understanding of the definition of learner-centredness and their attributes. However, their theoretical knowledge was limited to stating the superficial attributes of LC principles (such as emphasising learner’ needs; involving pupils in collaborative activities such as group work and then presenting their group finding; and teacher’s roles as facilitators). None of the teachers mentioned the more fundamental characteristics of learner-centred approaches in ELT such as involvement of learners in negotiation of learning objectives, activities, and assessments (peer or self) or ongoing teacher and learner self-assessment of their progress.

This finding was very significant as this indicated that not much had changed since Rahman’s (1987) study that explored the implementation of the KBSR curriculum. Her findings also indicated that teachers in 1984 struggled with the new curriculum as they were not clear of the ‘underlying apparatus’ of learner-centredness (p. 9). Therefore, she proposed immediate actions to raise the level of training and professionalism of the teachers (ibid). Rahman further cautioned that without proper interventions, particularly on arriving at a clear definition of the nature of learner-centred approaches expected to be implemented, there would be more room for variability of interpretation and practice.
This finding also revealed teachers in different schools integrated various elements of teacher-centred strategies such as modelling correct pronunciation approach to ELT and were very confident of the effectiveness in their teaching contexts. In rural school for example, it appeared that the teachers believe that the action of drilling for accuracy is very effective in order to allow learners to participate in language learning activities. Similarly, the role of practice is believed to be very prominent and widely accepted by all the four teachers. Therefore, taking into consideration the findings on the teacher’s beliefs about learner-centred practices in these schools, I will put forward some recommendations that will be further elaborated in chapter seven.
CHAPTER FIVE

TEACHERS’ CLASSROOM PRACTICES

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 explains the research findings about teachers’ classroom practices explored using video-recording, observation and field notes. This chapter describes the lesson content from each teacher’s classroom practices at two levels: general level and specific level to produce two types of descriptions. One description illustrates teachers’ macro features (lesson key stages) describing the overall teaching approaches used by each teacher and the other offers a view of micro features (specific features of lessons in relation to the working document on the seven ELT learner-centred principles explained in chapter 2). How the video data were analysed is also illustrated. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the extent of learner-centredness practiced by teachers.
5.1 Overall content of lessons

There were eight lessons recorded and the topics and content of lessons are as illustrated in table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Content of lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Lesson one</th>
<th>Lesson 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content/ focus</td>
<td>Content/ focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National school-Urban</td>
<td>Invention</td>
<td>Constructing sentences using pictures of a busy road during heavy rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Constructing sentences based on pictures and vocabulary; Tenses-Present continuous tense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National school-Rural</td>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>Adjectives of comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practicing test questions</td>
<td>Adjectives of comparison; Practicing test questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernacular school</td>
<td>Personal pronouns</td>
<td>Directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Chinese)</td>
<td>Pronouns</td>
<td>Substitution drills; Present tense; Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernacular school</td>
<td>Writing is easy and fun</td>
<td>Greed doesn’t pay (King Midas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Tamil)</td>
<td>Subject- verb agreement</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Present and past tense</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Macro features of lessons

Two lessons were recorded for each teacher totalling to eight lessons and were used to identify the lessons’ macro features. The selection of excerpts to use in this discussion is based on the recurring patterns throughout the two lessons of each teacher. The macro features were analysed using two analyses; one was based on the field notes taken during the lessons where I noted down the key episodes or stages of lessons, labelling and noting down the approximate time allocated for each step using a two-column table as shown below. Each key stage was identified, classified and described before comparing it with lesson stages proposed by Alexander’s repertoire of classroom pedagogical interactions (Alexander, 2008, p. 105) explained in chapter 3. Alexander’s three repertoires of pedagogical interactions comprise: organizing interaction; teaching talk and learning talk.

Table 5.2: LESSON KEY STAGES SHEET: Case 1: SJKC lesson 1

- Categorize the lesson based on the activities that take place.
- As you watch the lesson recording, you will also need to write down the duration of each categories of analysis. E.g event at 2.15- 3.05 = 50 seconds duration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time/ minute</th>
<th>Lesson stages/ activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-20 (20 secs)</td>
<td>Salutations and greetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1.38(1 min 38 secs)</td>
<td>Setting up the class (OHP, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.39-2.00(1 min)</td>
<td>Introduction-set induction (Pronoun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01-3.33(1 min 32 secs)</td>
<td>Teacher gives examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.34-5.48 (2mins 14 secs)</td>
<td>Teacher reads, students repeat after the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.49-7.49(3 mins)</td>
<td>Teacher gives exercise to do on pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Range</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7.50-15.12 | Teacher asks the student to answer the missing word from text  
Teacher explains  
Teacher chooses one student to answer  
Student answer  
Whole class reading aloud- the whole sentence  
Teacher asks  
Student answer – teacher corrects the student answer |
| 15.13-20.02 | Teacher gives another exercise  
Teacher asks student to do an exercise - underline the correct answer  
Student answer – teacher corrects the answer  
Teacher reads answers– students repeats |
| 20.03-20.36 | Teacher asks student to open the textbook  
(33 secs) |
| 20.37-24.38 | Teacher asks student to do a role play  
(4 mins 1 sec)  
Student perform a role play |
| 24.39-25 | Teacher explains next activity  
(19 secs)  
Whole class reading aloud- the whole sentence from text book |
| 25.00-26.00 | Teacher explains the sentence/ vocabulary  
(1 min) |
| 26.01-26.33 | Whole class reading aloud- the whole sentence from text book  
(32 secs) |
| 26.34-27.19 | Teacher explains next activity- pronoun in dialogue form (sentence level)  
(1 min) |
| 27.20-28.43 | 2 student read dialogue (role play)  
(1 min 23 secs) |
| 28.44-29.42 | Teacher asks student to go through the exercise in the textbook  
(pronoun used at sentence level)  
(58 secs) |
| 29.42-33.30 | Teacher shows the answers on OHT and ask student to compare their answers  
(3 mins 48 secs) |
| 33.31-36.00 | Teacher explains next step  
(2 1/2 mins) |
| 36.01-40.03 | Teacher go through the new vocabulary with students |
To represent a more detailed picture of the lessons’ key stages, I used the lesson transcripts to provide a documentation of the teacher’s approach. I tried to identify key features of the teacher’s approach and arrive at a summative view of the type of teaching taking place. I achieved this by giving each teacher a label to sum up their teaching and how this was conducted is further developed below. This analysis using the lesson transcripts was used to complement the potential shortcomings of field notes taken during observation. This step was taken to ensure credibility of my findings as proposed by Dornyei (2007). This dual-stage process was carried out consecutively to all eight lessons. All eight lessons were viewed and transcribed in a three-columned table as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(4 mins)</td>
<td>Teacher gives student handouts on new vocabulary with the meaning to keep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.04--43.59 (4 mins)</td>
<td>Teacher go through the handouts with students Teacher ask students to read out loud the text on the handout Teacher explains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.00-44.50(50secs)</td>
<td>Teacher concludes lesson and asks students to finish exercise as homework/ follow up for next lesson.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

END OF LESSON
### Table 5.3: Sample lesson transcript 1: LESSON 1(SK Vernacular Tamil)

**Class:** 5UPM  11.15-12.10 @ 19/09/09  
**Topic:** Writing is easy and fun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction transcription</th>
<th>Instructional purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong> Ok, good morning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SS</strong> Good morning sir.</td>
<td>GREETINGS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **T** Now we’ve seen recently hmm...after your exam, you did your *Percubaan* (trial exam) isn’t it. Then I found that... some of you still have problem writing. Writing complete sentences. **Still have problem what...?** | REMINDING ABOUT EXAM  
Question required one word answer/completion teacher utterance |
| **SS** Writing (students complete teacher’s utterances) |                       |
| **T** Writing complete sentences. Some of you are still very what you call confuse on how, you form your sentences. So after looking through your test papers, I find that you need to revise....**you need to what...?** | T-S interaction pattern 1; sts completing teacher’s utterance/words |
| **SS** Revise (students complete teacher’s utterances) |                       |
The lesson transcripts for all lessons were used to identify the micro/specific features of the teacher’s classroom practices to determine the extent of learner-centredness practiced (stage four analysis) by comparing them with the seven principles of learner-centredness in ELT reiterated below:

2. Negotiation of objectives, activities and evaluation to suit learners’ different needs and levels (Brindley, 1984; Nunan, 1989).
3. Participation of learners (Anton, 1999), and their motivation (Daniels & Perry, 2003; Garret & Shortall, 2002).
4. Interaction in the target language (Mc Combs & Miller, 2007), such as pair work and group work (Anton, 1999).
6. Discovery/experiential learning activities for development and training of learners’ metacognitive strategies (APA, 1997; Mc Combs & Miller, 2007), such as to identify preferred ways of learning, negotiation skills, setting realistic goals and encouragement to set their own objectives (Nunan, 1988).
7. Varied learning activities: a variety of activities, preferably using authentic materials (Daniels & Perry, 2002) to suit different levels and needs (Brindley, 1989).

Analysis of the macro features led to the labelling of each teacher to try capturing the key characteristics of their approaches. For example, the first teacher, Salim had clear teacher-directed stages to each lesson, ending in a conclusion drawn by summarizing the content and he then set a task for the next lesson. The order was clear and approach methodical, hence the label ‘Methodical and Classroom manager’. Using the same principles, I applied a summative label to each teacher according to their classroom orientations illustrated in detail next. These teaching approaches are discussed below.
5.2.1 Salim- Methodical Classroom Manager and Occasional Facilitator

Salim’s lessons could be described as very well-planned and controlled. His school is an all boys-school and there seemed to be a lot of classroom routine to maintain classroom discipline. It began with the teacher spending on average five minutes maintaining order and checking attendance. This involved instructing learners to tidy the classroom, collect rubbish and arrange the tables and chairs. Once this was done, the teacher checked the attendance and gave specific routine instructions to get pupils ready for the lesson. Both lessons recorded showed the teacher spent around five minutes to settle learners before beginning with the lesson.

\[ T \quad \text{All right, sit down. Now, first, please clear your place. Pick up all the rubbish on the floor.} \\
Rangga, don't sweep! Don't sweep! All right, clear all your desks and keep your books and take out your English books. \\
Hari, sit down!. Take the papers first. Take out your text books. Put your hands on your desks. Open your book. Is Ranjit here today? Whose place is this? \]

\[ SS \quad \text{Ranjit.} \]
\[ T \quad \text{Where is he?} \]
\[ SS \quad \text{Football.} \]

Then the lesson continued with the introduction where Salim recalled the previous lesson learnt and asked very controlled questions that required expected and predictable answers by the learners.

\[ T: \quad \text{Now the other day we have learned about Wilbur and Oliver Wright, they invented...what do they invent?} \]
\[ S: \quad \text{aeroplane} \]
\[ T: \quad \text{yes, they invented aeroplane. Now, if you want to invent-what would you invent? Yes...Rangga?} \]
Salim elicited eleven ideas from the learners such as: ‘play station 4 and 5, electric car, automatic pencil case and floating car’. The lesson then continued with reading aloud of a dialogue where three pairs of learners stood and read the dialogue of a boy and his grandfather.

T  Now we look at the textbook. Who wants to read, who wants to become Johan? Who wants to become the grandfather? Ok put your hands down! Your turn will come.

SI  (Student read his dialogue as Johan).
S2  (Student read his dialogue as grandfather).

This was followed by the teacher summarizing the content of this dialogue and continued with the next activity where the teacher read aloud the vocabulary list (improve, mangle, invention, squeeze, invent, motor, gears and inventor) followed by the learners.

T  Yes, they fixed the motor and they just switch it on. And they will slice the ice by themselves. So this is how they improve, Ok. How they improved-How they improve on the machine. OK. Now, so…what does Johan want to do?

SS  Johan also wants to become an inventor.

T  AR, he also wanted to become an inventor. Now let’s look at the words involved- the dark lettered words. Ok ready? Let’s read the words together and point to the words IMPROVE...

Then, Salim explained the next vocabulary matching activity from the textbook and shows an example. Learners were expected to do this individually. The words that they
were expected to match were; improve, mangle, invention, squeeze, invent, motor, gears and inventor.

T All right. Let’s look at page 102. AR, now look at the box (2X) in yellow here... (referring to the textbook). You look at the first word -GEARS. GEARS- got how many meanings?. <....> You look at (the word) GEARS-it can be a noun- a noun have three meanings; a tool; a wheel a particular setting of an informal apparatus and you have the verbs-they have another three meanings. What I want you to do is-look at all the meanings here, you are going to choose the best meaning, the meaning that is suitable with the words here.

Learners were engaged in this activity for ten minutes where they compared and discussed answers for a matching exercise in groups of five. They interacted mostly in English but occasionally resorted to Malay to explain their answers. This evidently reflected an LC principle where learners interacted in TL and engaged in group activity in discovering the answers to the questions asked. After another three minutes, the group leader presented their group’s decision at the front by reading out their group’s answers. At this stage, the teacher did not give correct answers but redirected the questions back to the class. This again, resembled an LC practice that challenges learners’ cognitive and thinking skills when explaining and justifying their answers.

T Now, I want you sit down in groups, then you can discuss among yourselves. Don’t look for your friends-I will give you the groups. Six of you-Nazim, Irwan, Adam, Nabil, Ranjit and ... The next group will be Gauntham, .....the six of you. This one- Niaz up until here. You just pull you table together. This one. Here, one group. Come. AR., come, shift this one. You just turn around. (T organizing the groups)

SS (do group activity in groups) within group interaction.
The leaders – come to the front. Who’s the leader here? AR, stand in front. Now, we are going to listen to Amol’s answers. Listen. Ok what is the first meaning? What have you got? What is Gear?

A particular setting of engaged gears

The lesson continued until all questions were answered and the teacher gave compliments on the leaders’ efforts. Finally, before the lesson ended, a follow-up activity for the next lesson was explained where learners were asked to correct answers discussed earlier and stick the handout in their exercise book.

Salim’s lessons could be described as very organised and principally resembled the teacher-centred approach as analysis of the classroom interaction showed that some phases of the lessons were dominated by teacher talk but still allowed ample opportunities for learners to interact, as evidenced by the exchanges presented above. At certain times, Salim devolved control to the learners. Salim’s lessons offered opportunities for pupils to interact in the target language during group and pair work although learners sometime code switched to Malay during their discussion to continue the flow of discussion. Furthermore, his lessons involved efforts to develop learners’ presentation skills and negotiation skills when deciding on the answers with their peers. In addition, the field notes and observation recorded that pupils remained engaged with the tasks given and seemed very interested with the topics on inventions and describing pictorial stimulus to generate ideas to write sentences (see Appendix 6). On the whole, Salim’s lessons were engaging and managed to invite participation among the pupils and these features were in line with the principles of learner-centredness that emphasised maximum interactions in the target language, encouraging active learner participation, development of study skills and the inclusion of discovery-based activity.
in the process of discussing and deciding which answer and when constructing sentences based on the picture.

### 5.2.2 Thika- The Transmitter and Programmer of Learners

Unlike the two lessons by Salim that did not use any other media, the two lessons recorded at this rural school with Thika used the laptop as the main instructional tool. The lessons were using the courseware either supplied by the ministry or the teacher’s own CDs. The lessons were conducted in the IT room that was equipped with 24 desktops, a teacher’s laptop, a white screen, a white board and a writing board. It is vital to highlight that although there were chairs in the room, the forty learners were all sitting on the floor around the teacher’s table and in front of the white screen. The lessons both began with Thika setting the laptop ready and play the courseware entitled Adjectives of Comparison (lesson 1) and Revision exercises on adjectives (lesson 2) in preparation for the examination. The teacher instructed learners to watch and listen to the courseware CD about a conversation among three students arriving at their tuition teacher’s house:

\[ T: \quad \text{Ok listen today we are going to do adjectives of comparison.} \]
\[ \text{We look at the video first and I will explain to you} \]
\[ CD: \quad \text{Grammar Year five- Adjectives of comparison (AOC).} \]

The video included instruction from a teacher called Puan Sofiah:

**Part 1: conversation**

- **Suraya**: Wai Yee, come on in, you are really wet...
- **Wai Yee**: yes, it is raining so heavily...
- **Suraya**: Dinesh you are wet too.
- **Wai Yee**: Yes, you are wetter than I am...but...
- **Dinesh**: Yes...of course I ran faster....I am better than her
- **Wai Yee**: ....your house is the furthest....
Suraya: Here are some towels for you

Puan Sofiah: Hello....did the two of you notice that you used a lot of adjectives of comparison.

The lesson explanation was done by the video CD (Puan Sofiah as the teacher) where ‘Puan Sofiah’ explained what adjectives of comparison are to her students and gave some examples.

Puan Sofiah: AOC is used to describe the difference between two or more things. Here are some examples of AOC according to number of syllables. For 1 or 2 syllables we use er and est. For more syllables, we use more and most.

Thika repeated the key points afterwards and gave examples.

T: Ok now, before I continue, now we stop for a while and I will rewind a bit...OK (rewinding and reading from the screen). Ok look, AOC is used to describe the difference between two or more things. Ok for example if you want to compare like these pen and pencils (showing the pen and pencil). Which is longer?’

SS: pencil

She stopped the CD and repeated the explanation. This explanation was also translated into Malay language and later continued by the teacher character (Puan Sofiah) from the CD.

T: Ok for adjectives with one or two syllable, you know syllables?

SS: No

T: Syllables...suku kata (MT translation) For adjectives with one or two syllables, like this ...for example, you look at this...(referring to PP slide screen) FAT-only one syllable, next one, THIN, how many syllable?

SS: one

This activity of teacher playing the CD and highlighting some key points resembled a teacher-directed approach despite using another voice to do the explaining. Throughout
this period, the students in the room sat quietly and responded if prompted with questions like ‘Ok for adjectives with one or two syllable, you know syllables?’ and students answered ‘No’. The teacher showed more examples with the laptop and instructed learners to repeat reading aloud examples from screen.

After this presentation of content was over, Thika showed a completion exercise on the laptop and instructed learners to answer aloud in groups. This activity where learners practiced answering the questions on the screen continued until the teacher was satisfied that she had covered the different type of potential questions asked about AOC. She continued talking about the coming end of year examination and gave tips on answering the questions.

\[ T \quad \text{when you see the word the, the next word must have est or when you see the word than there, you must use the word more, please remember that in your exam ok.} \]

The lesson moved from practice stage to the production stage after the teacher checked for comprehension and instructed learners to do a follow up activity. Learners were instructed to copy and answer further exercises from the screen into exercise books and to be discussed in the next lesson.

Thika’s classroom practices indicated a clear dependence on the traditional model of ELT involving presentation, practice and production (PPP) with the use of ICT in the lesson. Superficially the lessons appeared very modern but in essence it was teacher-directed using modern ICT to support. ICT was a straight replacement for the blackboard. Instead of chalk and talk, her lessons were mostly a ‘mouse and talk’ approach. Thika also used pupils’ mother tongue a lot through the lessons and seemed to neglect the learners’ need to interact and learn comfortably as she let the pupils sit
around her on the floor. Her interactions mostly required confirmation by the pupils and required one word answers. Fundamentally, the lessons were very much teacher-directed and dominated by the teacher and did not explicitly display any of the seven principles of learner-centredness. However, there were some efforts to integrate two of the principles, i.e, acknowledging learners’ needs of having diverse language abilities when Thika code-switched explanation of the grammar rules that her learners found difficult to comprehend. In addition, she used the ICT as her teaching aid rather than just simply explaining the rules to them. The use of variety of materials including ICT to expose learners to target language use is encouraged by LC principles.

5.2.3 Lee- More is Better

Lee’s lessons could be described as very compact with several activities to cover the topic of the day. Both lessons were conducted in the classroom and he used the laptop and overhead projector (OHT) to teach in addition to the blackboard. He spent several minutes getting the equipment ready as they were not installed in the classrooms. The lesson began with the lesson introduction or Set Induction stage where he recalled past lessons on pronouns. Lee reminded the learners of what pronouns are before showing them the OHT on explanations of pronouns.

T You are ready...Ok. Well... today we are going to learn about what we call Pronouns. In fact, I think all of you have learned of pronouns in year 1, year 2, year3 and year 4. I, YOU, WE, THEY! Have you heard of that? Yes or No?

SS Yes

Explanation of pronouns (displayed on OHT)

T That is called pronouns. Those words are called pronouns OK. They are words that we use to replace or take the place of the nouns. For eg. You
say, I HAVE A SISTER. Then, you say... you don’t keep repeating MY SISTER, MY SISTER... again and again. You use what? What is the pronoun used for sister?’

SS she

T She-you use she. You say...MY SISTER IS TAN MEI LING. Then the nest sentence you don’t say MY SISTER IS TWELVE YEARS OLD. You write what?...We use SHE. You don’t keep on repeating. And then for objects, SHE becomes HER. For eg. I GAVE A PRESENT YESTERDAY. He becomes what? HE becomes HIM. That is what we call Object Pronouns. Ok? I become ME; THEY-THEM; WE-US. OK, I have some notes here on Pronouns. Perhaps you can understand about pronouns. Can you see? (referring the OHP) The meaning is also in Chinese there...

Lee read aloud the definition of pronouns displayed on OHT and learners repeated reading aloud definition of pronouns after him.

T OK Let’s read what pronouns are. Is the print big enough for you? From the back there?...OK Let’s read...PERSONAL PRONOUNS

SS PERSONAL PRONOUNS

T PRONOUNS ARE WORDS-THAT ARE USED-TO TAKE THE PLACE OF NOUNS.

SS PRONOUNS ARE WORDS-THAT ARE USED-TO TAKE THE PLACE OF NOUNS

T you know noun right?

His lesson progressed into Practice activity 1 individual-picture level practice activity 1- change the noun in the picture to a pronoun; e.g. girl-she; boy-he; dog-it.

T So have you got a rough idea on how to use pronouns now?

SS yes

T Now before that, I just have to make sure that you have understood what pronouns are. So we have to do some exercises here. Let us go through
some exercises. Ok, now..., first you look at this picture first. First picture-What do you see? Come on what do you see?

SS  a girl

T  A girl-what is she doing?

SS  Dancing

Throughout this activity, the learners were reading aloud answers when prompted as shown in the transcript below.

T  Ok number one, can you read the answer please.

SS  (sts read the sentence aloud in chorus) SHE WANTS TO BE A BALLERINA

T  Ok ballerina-very graceful. Number 2, this boy-one boy-what’s the pronoun we use? See, be careful you see even though a boy but there’s AM there. Ok when we see AM, what do we use?...Can we say He AM?.

SS  No

The lesson moved to Practice activity 2- Sentence level practice activity 2 involving the completion of missing pronouns in sentences.

T  Ok another exercise before we go to the book. Ok now, this one also...I want you to take a look at this exercise now<...> Number 1- can anybody give me the answer for number 1- I want to see some new hands now. Ok, Siew Boon...

SB  I AM

T  I AM- it’s easy because you have the word AM there- it’s easy. The word AM tells you the answer. Ok read...

Lee explained the dialogue after learners finished reading aloud the dialogue. The teacher tried to make the learners feel motivated and good about themselves by highlighting that they may know more about the IT compared to him. In doing this he
compared and tried to relate learners’ IT knowledge with the importance of practicing reading in English as a result of being exposed to it in their daily life.

\[ T \]  Mum, is there any letter for me?. Ok, sometimes you receive letters, but do you still receive letters, now we have emails and all. My time when we receive letter we were happy. But today we have sms, some more? How do you communicate?

\[ SS \]  MMS

\[ T \]  MMS, I don’t know, I only know msn. Mr Lim is not very familiar with all these new gadgets. YS, you know better than me. You see there are many things that pupils are better than teachers. Why do you think you are better than me?...because you do that every day- just like learning English, if you want to be good you need to read every day and all. I’m not very good in computers, YS. What else?...

\[ SS \]  (Some students muttered) SMS, MMS, emails

Lee introduced the third practice activity; **Practice activity 3- Completion of missing pronouns in paragraphs.** The exercise was from the textbook and some of the books had answers from previous borrowers and the teacher reminded them not to just accept those answers. The next activity was the vocabulary section where Lee explained the difficult vocabulary from the dialogue text read earlier. This vocabulary section involved the teacher pronouncing each word and asking the learners to repeat aloud after him. This pronunciation repetition was followed by the teacher explaining the words. He used an overhead projector to show a photocopied page from an English-Chinese dictionary.

\[ T \]  Look carefully (reads out the words) can you see the words. **Camp-Culture-Cooperation-Importance-Commandant-Sirens-March-Trainer-Service-Unity**-I will explain these to you.
I will explain to you the meaning. I have photostated this from the dictionary. Let’s go through the meaning. Can you see the words? (on OHP)

This explanation continued until all the nine words were explained by the teacher. Learners at this stage only repeated, pronouncing or spelling the words as prompted to do so. The lesson ended with the instruction for a follow up activity of completing the exercise at home and to be discussed in the next lesson.

In summary, both Lee’s lessons could be described as very compact with practice activities and seemed to be focusing significantly on accuracy in terms of grammatical accuracy as well as in pronouncing words. There were various examples as shown above when Lee modelled pronunciation of words or reading aloud to the pupils. The interactions as evidenced above clearly showed that the lessons were teacher-led where learners had minimal creative opportunities for practice in using the target language, interacting among their friends or participating in discovery activities.. The lesson contained repetition of practices on pronouns from picture level to sentence and paragraph level. The only opportunity to interact available to them was when they were asked to answer questions individually.

5.2.4 Ramu - The Philosopher and Motivator

Unlike Lee’s lesson, both Ramu’s lessons were conducted in the ICT room as Ramu used powerpoint presentation to teach. The situation in the ICT room was very
compact as there were computers on the tables. The lesson topic was subject-verb-agreement (SVA) and was appeared to be a revision of the topic. The lesson began with greetings and was followed immediately by ‘small talk’ about the examination. The teacher elicited answers from learners about the previous lesson and later spent around seven minutes reminding them to be careful when writing sentences during their examination. He also highlighted the mistakes they had made during the recent mid-term examination.

_T_  Now we’ve seen recently hmm...after your exam, you did your Percubaan (trial exam) isn’t it. Then I found that... some of you still have problem writing. Writing complete sentences. Still have problem what...?

_SS_  Writing (students complete teacher’s utterances)

_T_  Writing complete sentences. Some of you are still very what you call confuse on how, you form your sentences. So after looking through your test papers, I find that you need to revise....you need to what...?

_SS_  Revise (students complete teacher’s utterances)

_T_  Revise...further, on how to make complete sentences. Some of you are still confuse with grammar.....your what?

_SS_  Grammar (students complete teacher’s utterances)

_T_  Some of you are still confuse with your use of grammar. You Remember the other day, I told you, you were supposed to use the formula I showed you. What’s the formula?

_SS_  SVOPT

_T_  What do we mean by SVOPT?

_SS_  SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT-PLACE-TIME

Ramu continued the explanation by showing Power point (PP) slides on sample 1: Subject and Verb (SV) and explained some examples. This was followed by learners constructing two sentences and reading them out to the teacher later.
That's right! The subject must be there and the verb must be there for the simplest sentence. The most the simplest sentence we can write make sure we have a subject and a verb. Very important! Look at the example here (referring to power point slide). Suzy here is the what?

Suzy subject

Suzy- subject, what’s the verb here?

Suzy cried

The first is Subject and Verb as a complete sentence. Now, take out a piece of paper. Can you write an example of a singular subject and one example of plural subject? Can you do that now? Like in sample one. That’s all. It can be past tense, present tense of continuous tense. I want to listen to you sentences afterwards to see if you have done well.

Ramu’s lessons, like Thika’s from Rural school, could be described as totally teacher-dominated despite the full use of the laptop as instructional tool. However, the way the power point presentations were used was different in the sense that Ramu only used the PP to show long explanations and definitions of certain terms, to illustrate the different types of sentence patterns and examples for each sentence pattern while Thika used the laptop as an instructional tool to replace her teaching role. For example, in lesson 1, Ramu’s lesson was structured in a manner that he repeated similar activities several times throughout the whole lesson.

(1) Ramu explaining sample structures 1-4 using PP slides [sample 1(SV); sample 2 (SV + Object); sample 3 (SV+ Adjective); sample 4 (SV + place)] throughout the lesson.

(2) Pupils writing two sentences based on the sample as practice while the teacher walked around class.
(3) Several selected/volunteered students reading out sentences and the teacher confirming/accepting answers

(4) Follow-up activity where learners writing two sentences for each sample learned in their exercise book.

Ramu’s lessons as evidenced above were both teacher-directed with very minimal opportunities for learners to actively engage in types of learning activities recommended in learner-centred classroom practices. Ramu, however, did not resort to code-switching or translating to the learners’ MT (Tamil) as Lee from the Chinese school did and Thika from the rural school but tried explaining everything in English. Lee used MT occasionally when explaining words like ‘sailor’ and used Bilingual dictionary explanation (English-Chinese) to illustrate the different meanings of certain words like ‘camp’ while Thika used translation to MT almost 50 percent during her teaching.

In essence, at the macro level, the teachers at the four schools conducted their lessons mainly in steps that resemble the transmission model involving the three-step classic lesson structure of Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) with some efforts to integrate some features of LC practices at varying levels especially incorporating group activities. All lessons portrayed clear progression from the Presentation Stage (that involved teacher drawing learners’ attention to a specific form or structure and learners asked to answer simple questions and give a response or answer teacher’s questions in very controlled activities). At this stage, teachers used questioning, repetition and explanation of several examples as illustrated by the lesson transcripts.
All the lessons progressed from teacher presenting the lesson contents to the *Practice Stage* where pupils were expected to do specific tasks that focused on certain form of the content presented earlier. This was usually in the forms of controlled activities (such as substitution tables, gap-filling tasks, simple question-answer tasks or mini dialogues with partners) as illustrated in the findings particularly in Thika, Ramu and Lee’s lessons.

The lessons ended with the *Production Stage* when the learners engaged in activities, in which the target structures for the day’s lesson were reinforced and learners had to complete the task. The aim of this production stage was to consolidate what has been learned during the preceding stages. This production stage also aims to extend learners’ ability to apply the item in other contexts. In many cases, this stage is also seen as a follow-up activity at the end of each lesson. All the above seemed the typical traditional approaches to language teaching (see for example, Harmer, 2007; Cook, 2001, 224-8; Richards & Rogers, 2001).

Having discussed the macro analysis of the lessons, the next section will extend the description and discussion to focus more on the specific features or micro level analysis of the lessons. Specific references will be made to the features of learner-centred classroom practices.
5.3 Micro Features of Lesson

For lesson micro features, I transcribed the classroom interaction between the teacher and learners and arranged into certain emerging patterns or themes. The interaction analysis therefore was used to describe the patterns of pedagogical interactions that resemble the features of the lesson that are associated with learner-centred practices.

The interaction analysis process (described in greater details in methodology chapter) conducted here involves three key steps; (1) identifying themes/coding of verbal communication (2) arranging the data into useful display and (3) analyzing the results in order to study patterns of teaching and learning. The patterns identified as explained in detail in literature review and methodology chapter. A summary of the nature of teacher-learner interaction is as illustrated in table 5.3 below.
Table 5: Patterns of pedagogical interactions (Alexander, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature/ patterns of pedagogical interactions</th>
<th>Teaching talk</th>
<th>Learning talk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom organization talk</td>
<td>Rote –drilling of facts, ideas and routines through repetition, recitations through questions, Instruction: imparting information, explaining facts etc.</td>
<td>How the learners talk such as: Narrate, Explain, Ask questions, Negotiate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole-class teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair-work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During this observation, recording and note-taking stage, the researcher was the sole analyst. Once the data were obtained, recorded, transcribed, analysed and compared with the seven principles of learner-centred practices that will be described individually. The micro features of lessons will be discussed based on table 5.3 and table 5.4 below and will be discussed and compared with the LC principles to determine the extent of learner-centredness practiced by these teachers.

5.3.1 Negotiation of objectives, content, activities and assessment of lessons

In terms of negotiation of objectives, content, activities and assessment of lessons, there was no negotiation or collaborative efforts between all four teachers and learners at any stage of the lessons. However, I have to indicate here that this LC feature may not be observable due to a more complex reason. This is due to the centralised nature of syllabus planning at the ministry of education level. This means that like most schools in Malaysia, the curriculum content is top-down where the
syllabus and textbooks were all decided and provided by the ministry. The teachers were expected to implement the syllabus and used the materials supplied by the Ministry but with some degree of flexibility (MOE, 2003).
5.3.2 Learner’s participation/ involvement in classroom activities

Based on table 5.3 above, in terms of learner’s participation/ involvement in classroom activities, the video data revealed very minimal active participations. The nature of participation that happened mainly involved learners reading aloud instruction, answers or responding to teacher’s instructions. This was because the practices were mainly teacher-dominated with teacher-led activities and interactions. The activities were mainly whole-class directions by teachers involving explaining content; giving examples; questioning that only requires minimal answers; encouraging and controlling the lessons as evidenced by the lesson descriptions presented earlier.

The learners observed in all lessons except Salim’s lessons were not involved in any group work activities and mostly work individually either filling in answers or writing sentences. This scenario was the direct opposite of what should happen in a LC classroom. In fact, according to Mc Combs and Whisler (1997) in LC classrooms learners among others, should be able choose their own project, work at their own individual pace, demonstrate knowledge in various ways and actively engage and participate in individual and group activities.

5.3.3 Identification of learners’ needs to be considered during planning and implementing learner-centred approaches

Another vital characteristic of the learner-centred classroom involves the identification and acknowledgement of learners’ different needs and levels (Brindley, 1984; Nunan, 1988). However, as there is little evidence from the previous literature review about the structure of a learner-centred lesson, one can only assume that the lessons should ideally begin a needs analysis process involving the teacher identifying
learners’ objective and subjective needs as proposed by Brindley (1984). Nunan and Lamb (1996) suggested samples of a needs analysis instrument that can be adapted to suit teachers’ needs. The samples that involve identifying learners’ general needs a survey to obtain personal information (e.g., name, age, ambition, language learning history) and perceived language needs (pp.34-42).

5.3.4 Integration of experiential/ discovery learning activities that include learning strategies

From the table above, the types of activities used by the teachers were mostly teacher instruction activities except for Salim who used group work, pair work and presentation of learners’ work in front of the class. Thika allowed individual work only with minimal or no opportunities for learners to interact with each other. There were several practice activities where learners shouted out answers to the class and teachers confirmed the correct answers.

5.3.5 Nature of assessment (including self-assessment) and ongoing teacher feedback

It was also found besides pressure from the school authorities, teachers were also pressured to finish the syllabus content by the parents’ expectations.

...parents expect us to cover everything in the book because that’s the only thing they know how to ask. Whether we like it or not, we have to touch on it here and there. Even though we have been told during courses and all that, we can go according to our students’ pace but when it comes to exam, we have standard exam. They tell us questions are set up until topic 10-so if you don’t cover, how are they going to answer? I would like to suggest the government that they come up with three sets of books for example, to cater to the learners-fast learners,
mediocre one and weak one so that at least they can learn something. We must not occupy with the exam! Lee-SSI (1).

5.3.6  Nature of language activities

The activities that take place were mostly teacher instructions. From the eight lessons recorded, only one teacher (Salim-Town) attempted group work where learners discuss and compare answers after doing the task individually. The group findings were then presented by a group representative in front of class. Most teachers observed planned their lessons in such a way that mainly requires learners to answer practice exercises. This may be due to the large class size that and pressure to complete the syllabus before the examination. This significant finding was found to be dominating the learner interaction in three out of the four schools. In these three teachers’ lessons’ activities, learners were asked to do several practice exercises (where they will answer questions in silence or shout out the answers to the class) were prioritised over having communicative group work/ pair work activities. It seemed that the quantity of practices matters to these teachers. This, according to the teachers was due to the large content coverage that teachers have to complete before the examination and the focus of the assessment were more grammar-based and literacy-based (reading and writing) and not on oral-aural skills. For example, Lee from the Chinese school asserted,

...but now to be honest with you with 120 minutes and we have to cover all, we also have other subjects; we cannot carry on with activities-so direct teaching. I believe all teachers are doing this. If you do group work or interactive learning, it takes a lot of time.’ And that ‘we (teachers) have to cover 12 units and some days we really have to rush; and the vocabulary introduced in the books is much too high for these pupils.
5.3.7 Nature of learners’ interactions in target language

As illustrated clearly in table 5.4 on cross-case analysis of teacher-learner interactions below, it was clear that in all eight lessons, there were very minimal learner interactions depicted from the classroom transcripts except Salim’s lessons. Only in Salim’s lesson we could see more learner interactions in terms of giving ideas on invention, discussing during pair work and group work. Learner interaction in Salim’s lessons included learners giving ideas on invention, reading out a sentence they had constructed, explaining/justifying choice of meaning of vocabulary selected and commenting/correcting peer sentences written on the board as gathered from the evidence here. Learners in this instance were able to contribute their sentence ideas as well as

\[ T \] (T writes on the blackboard)- THERE WAS A TRAFFIC JAM BECAUSE ACCIDENT. All right, can we have one from Haziq?. Just any sentence.

\[ S1 \] THE PEOPLE ARE WALKING CAREFULLY.

\[ T \] (writes on the blackboard)-THE PEOPLE ARE WALKING CAREFULLY-One more (2X). All right, Arvin?.

\[ S2 \] THE DRIVERS ARE WALKING CAREFULLY TO AVOID ANY ACCIDENTS

\[ T \] OK, now we have got five sentences- Ok Rangga, give me one!

\[ S3 \] EVERYONE ARE RUNNING QUICKLY TO THE SHADE PLACE

\[ T \] (T writes on the blackboard)- EVERYONE WAS RUNNING QUICKLY TO THE SHADE PLACE. Ok, Let’s look at number one (2X). THERE WAS RAINING IN THE CITY. Is that correct?

\[ SS \] (some raised hands and respond) some Yes,, some No

\[ T \] Who says it’s wrong? Ok hands down.

AR Ikhwan, how do you correct it?<...> How do you correct it?
S4 THERE ARE RAINING HEAVILY IN THE CITY

T THERE ARE RAINING HEAVILY IN THE CITY?

SS (some shouted) No!!! (and mumbled their versions of sentences)

The lesson transcripts above depicted some peer correcting activity and discovering their own correct versions of sentences without the teacher telling them. These kinds of interactions were more interactive and allowing learners to explain their answers and negotiate their answers. Therefore, Salim’s classrooms, where learners could explore possible answers, experiencing trial and error (Mc Combs & Whisler, 1997) could potentially develop their skills to assess their own understanding (Nunan, 1988) of the topic being discussed.

In contrast, in the other lessons by Lee, Thika and Ramu, learners’ interactions were limited to Yes/No answer to confirm understanding or reading out one word answers individually or repeating after teacher. Learners’ interactions in Lee’s lessons were limited to utter mostly one word answer when cued by the teacher or reading aloud from the screen and OHT. This patterns of interaction clearly illustrated that learners’ responses were very limited to respond one word answer without requiring them to stimulate their minds as evidenced in Salim’s lessons. The patterns sampled below were also very dominant in Lee’s other lesson.

T (Teacher set up the laptop, OHP and lcd screen) Is it clear? Can you see? (referring to the LCD display)

SS Yes

T Can you please turn to page erm..page 86.<...> (looking at the book)

Now, are you ready?

SS Yes

T You are ready...Ok. Well... today we are going to learn about what we call Pronouns. In fact, I think all of you have learned of pronouns in
year 1, year 2, year 3 and year 4. I, YOU, WE, THEY! Have you heard of that? Yes or No?.

SS    Yes

T    That is called ‘pronoun’. Those words are called pronouns OK. They are words that we use to replace or take the place of the nouns. For eg. You say, I HAVE A SISTER. Then, you say... you don’t keep repeating MY SISTER, MY SISTER... again and again. You use what?... what is the pronoun used for sister?

SS    She

T    She—you use she. You say... MY SISTER IS TAN MEI LING. Then the next sentence you don’t say MY SISTER IS TWELVE YEARS OLD. You write what?... We use SHE. You don’t keep on repeating. And then for objects, SHE becomes HER. For eg. I GAVE HER A PRESENT YESTERDAY. He becomes what? HE becomes HIM. That is what we call Object Pronouns. Ok? I becomes ME; THEY-THEM; WE-US.OK, I have some notes here on Pronouns... Can you see? (referring the OHP) The meaning is also in Chinese there...

OK Let’s read what pronouns are. Is the print big enough for you? From the back there?... OK Let’s read... PERSONAL PRONOUNS

SS    (sts repeat after teacher) PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Thika’s lessons were also dominated with her instructions in terms of explaining. There were very minimal interactions among the pupils in her class except when responding Yes/No. In comparison to all other three teachers, her lessons were (most of the times) could be described as monologue as she used the power point slides or VCD to present her lesson content where pupils sat quietly and watch the screen as evidenced below.

T    (T gets the laptop ready and play the courseware on adjectives of comparison-introduction music was in the background) Ok listen today we are going to do adjectives of comparison. We look at the video first and I will explain to you.
Pencil is longer. So this is what we call comparison. AOC is used to compare two things or more OK, 'perbandingan lebih dari satu atau lebih' (explanation translated to MT).

And how you used it? It is like this... (plays the CD again and lets the sts listen)

**Dinesh:** Puan Sofiah, how do we identify adjectives of comparison?

**Puan Sofiah:** For adjectives with one or two syllables. (stops the CD).

(Teacher repeats) Ok, for adjectives with one or two syllables, you know syllables?

- SS No
- T Syllables...suku kata (MT translation)

For adjectives with one or two syllables, like this ...for example, you look at this...(referring to PP slide) look at this, fat-only one syllables, no joining sounds right?, next one, THIN... how many syllables?

- SS one

Thika’s lessons could have allowed more interactions by learners for example, by asking them to explain syllables by showing the breakdown of a word into syllables. In this way learners can be engaged in discovery and actively discussing ideas with their friends. Instead their interactions were minimal and this was predominant throughout both Thika’s lessons.

Similar patterns of interactions could be observed in Ramu’s lessons where learners’ talk involved responding Yes/No to teacher’s prompts, repeating after teacher’s pronunciation, reading their sentences aloud and completing teacher’s utterances as shown in the extract from lesson transcripts below.

- T OK the one with En. Amin & PN .Rokiah...we use ‘are’- we don’t use ‘is’. I see a lot of mistake s when you put En. Amin & Pn. Rokiah ‘is’. So
be careful. UPSR is once in your lifetime, right! It’s once in your lifetime. The one mark will tell whether you get an A or B. So be careful

SS  Yes

T  So can you give me an example of SVO(subject-Verb-Object). Yes?

S  She designs a card

T  Yes, very good!, She is a what?

SS  Subject

T  Object?

SS  Card

T  Now we look at sample 3, we do a few samples and I expect you to write some sentences using these samples. Now SV adjective. Can anyone tell me what is an adjective? What does an adjective do? Anyone?

Ramu’s lessons in particular, displayed instances of learners completing teacher’s utterances as noted in the extract above. In comparison with Thika’s lessons, Ramu allowed more interactions from learners as evidenced in the extract where he invited his pupils to read out their sentences to the class. This created a sense of achievement among the pupils.

T  Ok, there we have some examples of place. Sungai Petani. it’s a place. (give some more examples of place from the examples read by the students). Ok can you do these sentences now?

S  Ramu went to their village last week

T  Ramu went to their village last week. Ok good. Ok we give chance those who have not done yet ok.

SS  (seven students read out sentences)

S  Can we have another example?

T  (Sts read out sentences)
S  Ok that’s enough. Please look at the time. Ok! look at the example here. there’s another option where you can put the time, for example, EVERYDAY, I COME...; or I COME EVERY DAY (give four more examples).

T  Ok...are you clear with all the samples that i gave you.

SS  Yes.
5.4 Discussion: Extent of learner-centredness practiced in Malaysian primary classrooms

Table 5.5: A cross-case analysis of the extent of learner-centred principles/practices observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LC principles in evidence</th>
<th>Salim</th>
<th>Thika</th>
<th>Lee</th>
<th>Ramu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Collaborative planning teaching &amp; learning process</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Needs identification/ analysis process</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>minimal</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Increased learner’ interaction in TL</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>minimal</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. providing opportunities for active participation of learners / teacher facilitative roles</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>minimal</td>
<td>partial</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ongoing teacher evaluation plus learner peer/self-evaluation</td>
<td>partial</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>minimal</td>
<td>partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Discovery/ experiential activities (such as group work)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Varied materials and activities to suit diverse needs</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>minimal</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>partial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:

√ - frequently happening
X - not happening at all
Minimal - hardly happening
Partial - sometimes happening

The extent of learner-centredness practised in this study was established by drawing evidence from both the macro and micro features analysis of the lesson transcripts as summarized in table 5.4 above. As cautioned by Tudor (1996) and McCombs & Whisler (1997), learner-centredness in a classroom setting should not be
viewed as all or nothing scenario. Instead, they stressed that learner-centredness should be perceived on a continuum. This means the principles of learner-centredness could be implemented at varying degrees as explained in detail in chapter two (Nunan, 1993, p.183).

The findings from the classroom video recordings and field notes suggest that all the lessons recorded could not be described as implementing all the LC principles (see chapter two). Instead, these lessons could be described as using an eclectic approach integrating some of features the traditional teacher-centred approaches to ELT from the use of the PPP Model, grammar teaching and direct translation and the learner-centred characteristics such as participation and interaction, group and pair work and the variety of activities used. Therefore, learner-centredness in language teaching theoretically as depicted by the characteristics outlined in chapter two essentially involve collaborative, consultative efforts between the teachers and learners in the process of setting learning objectives, activities and evaluation. The findings from the overall data however, clearly indicated the opposite of this scenario as the whole process were all conducted by the teachers following specified syllabus contents.

Nevertheless, it is important to note here that the lack of consultative process during curriculum planning process does not necessarily indicate teachers intentionally avoid this process. This is because as explained in chapter two, Malaysia’s curriculum development was centrally planned and took place at the curriculum development centre (CDC), Ministry of Education in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, the lack of consultation process could be because teachers may not see this as part of their responsibilities. This also suggests that this first principle of learner-centred approaches in ELT was not realistically implemented in the Malaysian curriculum system due to its context.
Another significant finding is the lack of readiness on the part of these young learners to embrace learner-centred skills such as identifying learning styles, setting learning objectives and evaluating their own learning as proposed by Nunan (1988). In fact, there is a lot of indication learners in the study were not ready to adopt more active roles rather than listening to the teacher.

In summary, it can be deduced that the four teachers had implemented some of the LC principles but at varying degrees in terms of:

(i) providing opportunities for participation of learners;
(ii) activities that involved discussion and discovery;
(iii) interactions between learners and teachers in the target language;
(iv) ongoing evaluation and feedback, consisting of self-evaluation;
(v) variety of materials and activities used to suit learners’ needs.

The above could clearly be observed in the lessons of three of the teachers (Salim, Ramu and Lee) but almost none in Thika’s lessons. The evidence from the study also found that there was no visible effort to integrate or to engage learners in these two principles:

(i) Negotiation of objectives, activities and evaluation;
(ii) Identification of learners’ objective and subjective needs.

All teachers claimed during the semi-structured interviews and the VSRIs that they identified the learners’ needs based on observation and daily experiences dealing with their work. This informal and very subjective process of understanding learners’ needs however, was not in accordance with the learner-centred idea of needs analysis (see Brindley, 1989 and Nunan & Lamb, 1996) and was discounted as an evidence of
teachers identifying the needs of learners as they failed to show any form of needs analysis when requested during the interviews.

In sum, the above discussion of the four teachers practices investigated suggests that what was being practiced in Malaysian primary classrooms investigated displayed the lower end of the LC practices continuum. However, this may not be necessarily a bad thing in Malaysia considering the lack of readiness of both teachers and learners to embrace the flexible responsibilities. In comparison with the idealised model of learner-centred practices in chapter 2, although there was little resemblance with what should happen in an ideal learner-centred classroom, the teachers have realistically implemented some elements of learner-centred practices that they viewed practical and effective. This is because, considering the constrains these teachers have to work with, for example, exam-centred culture, pressure from school administration to achieve national target and lack of training, these teachers were positive about the approach. These issues will be further discussed in chapter seven that focuses on the implications of the research and future recommendations will be put forward based on the implications deduced.
CHAPTER SIX:

FINDINGS VIDEO-STIMULATED RECALLED INTERVIEWS (VSRI) -
TEACHER’S EXPLANATION FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICES

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of findings explored using video-stimulated recalled interviews. This interview process uncovered themes that can be categorised into three broad categories: teachers’ explanation about their practices, their embedded beliefs revealed when reflecting on their classroom practices and the challenges faced by teachers to teach English using learner-centred approaches. In total there were 78 stimuli selected by the four teachers and, thirteen specific themes were extracted from these stimuli. The themes were then compared with the seven aspects of the learner-centred construct (chapter 2) to deduce whether teachers’ orientations in their classroom practices and beliefs revealed from the interviews were consistent with a learner-centred view of teaching and learning.

6.1 The Findings from the video-stimulated recalled interviews

The process of conducting VSRI involved (1) viewing the previously recorded lessons with each teacher and (2) during this viewing, both the teacher and researcher would select any stimulus or lesson episodes to reflect on. It is important to note here that the lessons had been viewed by the researcher prior to the interviews because this initial viewing served as a preliminary analysis process. During this first viewing, the
researcher would select the stimulus based on the video data as well as the field notes taken during classroom observation. This selection process was necessary to assist the researcher to focus on what episode and aspects to ask about during VSRIs. The lesson episodes were selected based on classroom practices that were emphasised in learner-centred principles such as types of activities (discovery/exploratory), nature of participation (cognitive, social involvement), assessment (ongoing, self and peer) or the roles of teachers (facilitative) and learners (more autonomous).

On average, the VSRIIs took one hour to one and a half hours each time as they involved viewing the lesson on a laptop and recalling specific lesson episodes. It was done by pausing the recording anytime when either the teacher or the researcher had something to say or ask about specific lesson episodes. These lesson episodes will be referred to as stimulated-recall(s) (SR) in this chapter. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. A content analysis of the 78 SR lesson episodes from the eight interviews led to the identification of the themes that were predominant during these recalled interviews shown in table 6.1 below.
Table 6.1: Number of stimulated-recalled (SR) episodes explained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Number of SRs selected</th>
<th>Total SRs selected/ commented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher selection</td>
<td>Researcher selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salim</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thika</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramu</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SRs selected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To illustrate how the themes were identified, I have used two sample interview transcripts with Lee who taught in a Vernacular Chinese school. Sample A below was used to show the researcher-selected SR during a lesson episode when Lee translated some words into Mandarin during his lesson. This episode was chosen because in a learner-centred language teaching classroom, one might expect that interactions in the target language would be predominant to improve communicative skills and that L1 use might be avoided. Therefore, Lee’s explanation about this practice could assist me in further understanding his views about translating to MT as well as about his justifications for doing so. Another sample of an SR initiated by the teacher is also shown below to illustrate how Lee’s orientation in classroom practices was extracted from the data. From Sample 2, Lee explained his actions of using humour to ensure his learners would still be alert and not lose focus. During this explanation, Lee also revealed his belief that learners have different abilities and thus learn at different rates.
This acknowledgement was important as it was in line with LC principles, that learners have individual and differing needs to which teachers should give attention.

(Note: bold phrases refer to themes identified about practices and underlined words indicate beliefs)

**SR 1 (Researcher Initiation)**

Lesson episode when teacher translated some words in mother tongue (MT- Chinese) and used MT dictionary to assist learners

T ...A person who works in the ship? 'shuei.sor (sounds like)' *(Chinese translation)*, you know ‘Popeye’ the sailor man-he’s a sailor. Sailors- they work in ships in the middle of the sea. So in the sea, they have water around them, so how do they know where to go? So the sailor they need what? they need in Chinese we call it *(Chinese translation)* but in English we call it compass. In fact I got one here (show the compass)...

**Table 6.2: Sample VSRI Transcript (Researcher initiation)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of VSRI with Lee</th>
<th>Themes/practices explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R Right, I noticed just now you translated some of the words like ‘sailor’ and all that in their MT (Chinese) - so what is your view about this?</td>
<td>The use of translation to MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Usually I do this as a last resort because <strong>I don’t believe in translation because I don’t think the MT has impact on the child’s command of the language</strong>. But in certain cases like that, if I were to explain these words, <strong>it will take a lot of time</strong>. That’s why I resort to translation method - just for them to understand. YS, if I take them from year 1, things would have been different. Probably I don’t have to translate because <strong>I just took over the class</strong>. I believe the previous teacher resorts to translation when necessary only reason: To save time To accommodate learners’ familiarity with translation method (learners were used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SR 3 (Teacher initiation)

Lesson episode when the teacher tried to sustain the learners’ attention with a picture showing various activities where learners needed to give the personal pronoun for the people, animals or objects in the picture.

\[ T \quad \text{It looks like they are sisters. They look almost alike-yes?, maybe twins. Ok last picture, what do you see? Do you see some monkeys playing?...} \]

\[ SS \quad \text{No...children} \]

\[ T \quad \text{children playing what?} \]

\[ SS \quad \text{basketball} \]

Table 6.3: Sample VSRI transcript (Teacher Initiation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of VSRI</th>
<th>Themes/ practices explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...they learn at different rate and some of them need these kinds of humour. Like when I say something nonsense, ‘do you see some monkeys playing?’ (Referring to lesson), they’ll try to correct you. <strong>Otherwise they’ll be passive.</strong></td>
<td>role of humour to sustain interest acknowledge/belief in learner differences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar process as illustrated above was carried out for all 78 SRs reflected on by the four teachers during the eight VSRI. Once all the themes reflected from the 78 SRs in the second column were extracted, a classification/ categorization process was carried out as some of the SRs were found to be a repetition of teachers’ concerns about their practices. Therefore, although there were 78 lesson episodes paused and reflected upon during the VSRI, the classification and categorization process carried out led to
thirteen themes that were predominantly explained by the teachers as summarized in table 6.4 below. It is important to highlight that, during these reflections and explanation about their recorded practices, teachers’ beliefs about their practices were also uncovered indicated by the underlined phrases as illustrated in sample 1 and 2 above. These embedded beliefs may not necessarily resemble the teachers’ general beliefs (about ELT and learner-centred practices expressed during pre-observation stage interviews) as the beliefs extracted from those semi-structured interviews were expressed without reference to any specific stimuli/ lesson episodes from the video recording.
### Table 6.4: Themes reflected during VSRIs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes reflected</th>
<th>SR/ Number of times being asked about/ reflected upon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Classroom management aspects to control lessons</td>
<td>/\\ SR 5, 8, 11, 15, 17 \ SR 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teaching of reading skills</td>
<td>- /\\ SR 8, 22, 23 \ SR 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Emphasis on correct pronunciation</td>
<td>/\\ SR 4 \ SR 19 \ SR 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The role of explicit grammar teaching &amp; language awareness</td>
<td>//\\ SR 19, 20 \ SR 5, 6, 7 \ SR 1 \ SR 4, 5, 14, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The roles of teacher and learners</td>
<td>///\\ SR 12, 13, 18 \ SR 1 \ SR 18 \ SR 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The issues arising when implementing LC approaches (activities)</td>
<td>//\\ SR 9, 21 \ SR 4 \ SR 23 \ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Acknowledgement of learners’ needs &amp; background</td>
<td>//\\ SR 6, 7 \ SR 6, 14, 21, 24, 27 \ SR 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The use of MT in teaching</td>
<td>- /\\ SR 8, 11 \ SR 12, 13 \ -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

181
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diverse strategies to increase participation (opportunities to try, jokes, games)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR 3, 14, 16</td>
<td></td>
<td>SR 2, 3, 4, 15, 20</td>
<td>SR 1, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The use of ICT or other teaching aids</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR 3, 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Assessment of learners</td>
<td>SR 2</td>
<td>SR 2</td>
<td>SR 7, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The role of repetition of different practice activities to achieve accuracy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>SR 10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Explanation/evaluation of own teaching approaches</td>
<td>SR 1, 10</td>
<td>SR 10</td>
<td>SR 14, 16, 17, 26, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (78)</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To be practical, however, I have decided to select only three themes for each teacher to describe and discuss in this thesis as illustrative of the teachers’ classroom practice. These themes were selected based on three criteria. Firstly, the themes were relevant to the seven constructs of learner-centredness synthesised in chapter 2. Secondly, these themes were predominantly mentioned by the teacher as they indicated their concerns about these specific practices, and thirdly, themes that specifically answer my research question to uncover teacher’s beliefs and challenges faced in implementing learner-centred practices.
6.1.1 Salim

From the summary of VSRI data above, Salim’s seemed to be very preoccupied with themes 1, 5 and 9 that represented classroom management aspect of his practices, the teacher’s and learner’s roles, and strategies used to increase participation.

Theme one, classroom management strategies seemed to be dominant in both of Salim’s VSRI s and was reflected upon five times (SR 5, 8, 11, 15, 17).

SR 8 was selected by Salim when the video showed the lesson episode where he chose the group members instead of allowing the pupils to nominate themselves. Salim was very concerned about the power and prevalence of friendship groups.

\[ T \quad \text{Today, you will work with your friend. Don’t look for your friends. I will give you your friend. I will give you a picture, you will write some sentences about the picture (using some of the words below the picture).} \]
\[ \quad \text{Ok write five sentences... (lesson, 1)} \]

Table 6.5: VSRI Transcript (Salim: SR 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SR 8</th>
<th>Transcription of VSRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Here...look, look...they will look for their friends- whatever they are doing, all right. When they are asked to pair up or sit in groups. If you ask them to do they will start to look for their friends. You look the reaction is very fast for one of the students here (pointing to the screen on pause). <strong>Instantly he is looking at his left for his clique here. That is why I gave them the instructions.</strong> That is why I put them- I arranged them where they are supposed to sit. So that in every group there will somebody who is very good, there will be some good students and weak students in every group...You know, <strong>when they are learning from their friends – it is more informal.</strong> In fact you must select a leader for each group who is able to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
control the group. In fact you can find from the activity (pointing to the screen), so I selected some weaker students if you remember (pupil’s name) to be leader so that hopefully he can, **he will get more chance**. Rather than, you know, he will be a quiet follower sitting at the corner.

From the SR 8 above, Salim seemed to be thinking very carefully when planning his group activity to maximise the benefits for the majority of his 39-pupil classroom. He also seemed to believe that by putting mixed ability learners in a group they could learn from their friends in an informal and less anxious situation. This reduced dependence on friendship groups and in his view led to more formative classroom practice. During this explanation, his belief that learning language should be an informal process was revealed as underlined above. Despite implementing group activities, Salim was also very concerned with the prospect of losing classroom control when allowing group work activities. This was due to the problem of excessive noise and potential disturbance to the neighbouring classes that are mostly separated by thin wooded partition walls. He also explained that he only occasionally did group work with his learners because of the time constraint to finish the syllabus content within the term.

However, Salim offered both merits and drawbacks for implementing group work as revealed by SR 9. It is important to note that, unlike the other three teachers who also talked about group work, Salim was the only teacher found to use group work and pair work quite frequently in the observed lessons. He offered both sides of the issues for using group work during English lessons. While acknowledging that group work may have the benefits of allowing learners to discuss with friends to get the answers and enable them to learn from each other while correcting one another, he was more wary of the negative properties of having group work during his lessons. For example, during
VSRI (1), he asserted that group work can be counter-productive in terms of time consumption and task coverage compared to teacher-led lessons. He gave a scenario when he could include several activities compared to only one during a learner-centred lesson. This, according to him discouraged teachers to include group work activities during English lessons as highlighted in bold in the transcript below.

_Erm...okay...doing group work aaa...if, if, maybe...the end results all right...maybe by doing group work they are able to discuss and they might get the answers, the ...the answers to whatever we are teaching them. But you find that by doing group work, you know..., we are actually you know, time consumption. If we a have a certain....let say, if we have a 30-minute lesson, the group work will take around 15 minutes, all right. Or if you have a one-hour lesson, the group work will take up around let say....half an hour, 30 minutes. We found that if we were to do it teacher-centred, all right, erm...we are able to do two or three activities at that particular time. But if you were to put it into a group work, we were able to accomplish only one. That is the reason why teachers usually we do not want to do group work (Salim, VSRI, 1)_

Salim also offered explanations for his selection of mixed-ability learners for group and pair activities. He seemed to believe that learners learned better and felt more comfortable among their peers in an informal setting with friends who can correct them.

_Hmm....Ok this is... in fact for them to recognize the grammatical mistakes that their friend make and...It is also for them to recognize the mistakes and not to repeat the same mistakes in the future ..., so if I were to correct the sentences individually, only the particular students will know the mistakes. Whereas in this situation they are able to correct by correcting the mistakes that they see in the sentences, so in the future they shouldn’t be committing the same mistakes._

This was why he ensured that his learners’ group comprised learners with different language abilities and gave them suitable roles in the group to maximise participation.
This secured greater supportive interaction than in allowing friendship groups alone in
the classroom. For example, sometimes, he selected a leader for each group who is
able to control or simply to give more chance to boost self-confidence.

Salim was also found to be the most methodical in terms of explaining his classroom
management routine reinforced over time. He argued that his managerial style was
necessary for his situation teaching in an all-boys school to ensure his learners pay
attention to lessons. He believed in using consistent routine instructions to train his
learners to pay attention and these assisted him to manage disruptive behaviour as
shown in the interview extract below.

*Yes, yes, another thing is getting students’ to pay attention. You know, they are
required to...if you asked them to look at the front but they are still writing...so
one way to get them to really listen to you is... to stop them from writing. And
ask them to put their pencil down. A more rigid instruction is they have to
keep away their pencils, their erasers and even keeping their pencil box. One
more instruction is to put their hands on the desks. These are the instructions
that they hear throughout the year, all right, every lesson, every time I see
them.* (VSRI, 1)

VSRI data also revealed Salim’s belief that knowing learners’ personalities and
behaviour patterns is important in planning and implementing activities particularly in
an all-boys’ school. He argued that in order to be able to conduct the lesson well, he
needed to know the students well and this knowledge can also help in deciding the
‘input that we (teachers) put into the lesson’. This included the knowledge of learners’
abilities or ‘knowing how much they (learners) can take’ (VSRI, 2). This is in line with
LC principles that emphasises knowing learners’ abilities and learning styles. Salim
further explained that by identifying these learners’ personalities and behaviour, he
could predict their reactions or future actions.
... These students, I’ve already identified them, and I know their reactions and I know whatever they are will do after certain time. In that way before they start doing anything mischievous I’ve ‘already nipped them on the butt’. That means that I’ve already stopped and control that before they can do that (laughing) (Salim, VSRI, 1)

Salim’s explanations about his classroom practices revealed many concerns and beliefs that were in line with learner-centred practices compared to the other teachers. The VSRIIs were able to provide avenues for Salim to explain reasons for his practices despite having different views from the other teachers about how English should be taught. This was encapsulated in the extract below. He seemed to have a very pragmatic view about his classroom approaches he considered suitable with his teaching situations. In doing this, he provided an explanation that highlighted and explained the challenges teachers faced in implementing learner-centred approaches such as the struggle to finish the syllabus. That deterred him from following what the curriculum expected.

I don’t consider myself purely a learner-centred teacher all right. Hmm I use approaches whatever or whenever I need, I make ...according to the syllabus all right. Of course I do not discount that learner-centred approaches, they are quite effective but as I mentioned earlier, it takes up a lot of time, at times we need to rush through in order for us to finish before the examinations. In that case I would have to abandon learner-centred approaches so it will be one-way traffic. (VSRI, 2)
6.1.2 Thika

Referring to table 6.2 above, it is evident that Thika was preoccupied with themes 4 (The role of explicit grammar teaching & language awareness), 8 (The use of MT in teaching) and 10 (the use of ICT or other teaching aids). It is important to note that both Thika’s recorded lessons were actually on related topics: Adjectives and Adjectives of comparison. Both lessons were very similar in their stages and approach using a laptop and conducted in a computer laboratory. Hence, her explanation of practices during VSRI was mainly preoccupied with issues related to the use of ICT. When asked about the merits of ICT during VSRI (1), Thika explained that ICT could be more interesting than listening to teachers.

*OK, This ICT, the pupils will not be bored when they see something colourful with the cartoons and music. They’ll be more keen (keener) to learn rather than a teacher coming and sitting in front and teaching.*

Both VSRI also revealed that she perceived the ICT as a direct replacement for teachers’ roles in classroom instruction (as already evidenced in the previous chapter). This suggests that Thika may have misunderstood the principal need to use ICT to allow more learner participation rather than as a replacement of a teacher’s voice. This misguided belief was evident when she explained that teachers’ roles were to do reinforcement activities.

*We just do the reinforcement and everything is there (on CD) just give further explanation to make better foundation for them.*

Her lessons were found to be the least interactive where the 45 pupils were found to be sitting on the floor in the IT room while listening and writing in their books. When
asked why pupils were not given opportunities to use the 24 computers available in the IT room, she gave the explanation below:

*I don’t use the PC individually and the students who don’t get the chance will be crying for attention to try out...Yes, yes, some of them are even better than the teachers. The thing is they are not given the chance, you know... if they are given the chance, they might not be able to learn too* (Thika, VSRI, 1).

Thika explained that she did not let her learners share the computers for fear that those not getting a chance to use them would distract her lesson and lead to a loss of class control. It is important to note that, among all teachers, Thika seemed to be very distant from her learners and displayed low expectations of her pupils as evidenced above when commenting on their likely behaviour.

Thika’s overall views expressed during VSRI’s were not in accordance with learner-centred practices that believed learners have the ability to learn and engage in activities and therefore should be given the opportunities to explore (Mc Combs & Whisler, 1997). In fact, unlike other teachers who were very diplomatic in describing their approaches, Thika admitted that she was an ‘exam-centred teacher’ (VSRI, 1). She explained that her motive for being an exam-centred teacher as opposed to learner-centred was because of the need to focus on preparing learners for examination as their abilities were measured in terms of their examinations grade. In fact she argued in favour of direct grammar teaching approaches as reflected in SR 8 shown below.
**Stimulus 8 (Teacher initiation)**

Lesson episode when she used drilling to teach grammar items (Adjectives of comparison)

\[ T \quad \text{Ok listen today we are going to do adjectives of comparison. We look at the video first and I will explain to you.} \]

\[ CD \quad \text{(playing a conversation among three friends using adjectives of comparisons)} \]

**Table 6.6: Sample VSRI transcript (Thika: SR 8)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of VSRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thika also strongly expressed her dissatisfaction with the current LC approaches that proposed that grammar teaching should be done implicitly rather than through explicit/direct teaching.
Thika’s apparent lack of regard for learners’ needs (for example, expressed while exploring the use of PCs, or discussing how pupils engage in interactive activities as evidenced above) revealed her indifferent attitudes to her learners’ needs. This could be deduced from the way she understated her learners’ potential as evidenced above. However, this negative finding contradicts her claim made during SSI that she embraces learner-centred practices via the use of ICT. In essence, some of her declared beliefs about learner-centred teaching were at odds with the beliefs expressed during VSRIs.

6.1.3 Lee

The summary of VSR interview data in table 6.2 above showed that Lee seemed to be very preoccupied with themes concerning learners’ needs, strategies to increase participation and on the teaching of reading skills. The first two themes were mentioned four times during VSRIs while the teaching of reading was reflected on three times out of the 28 SRs. On the whole, Lee seemed to be very concerned with the learners’ needs to be relaxed in order to enjoy the lesson. He believed that the level of learners’ motivation and interest could be sustained if he created a relaxed environment by making jokes and making small talk. Lee explained that jokes were important as according to him, pupils would remember better if the lessons were memorable and filled with humour.

SR 2 (Teacher Initiation)

Lesson episode when teacher make some jokes during his teaching to interest his pupils

\[ T \text{  My pencil is very short, I need to sharpen me? Do you sharpen the pencil or you sharpen yourself...Ok Intan, what's the answer...} \]

\[ SI \text{ It} \]
Yes, IT, you must think carefully before you answer. How can you sharpen yourself?. We have to take you to hospital (laughing with the class)

Table 6.7: VSRI Transcript (Lee: SR 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>VSRI Transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Jokes here- I feel that...hmm I remember during my schools days, I noticed that some teachers, their lessons were very dull and unexciting and so you become bored easily. So I think you need some sense of humour so that the pupils can sustain their interest. We have to bring in something funny so they’ll be interested. I believe pupils will learn better that way. If something is exciting, if something is funny their mind will catch it. If the lesson is monotonous, the mind cannot absorb much. Even though, they might absorb, but they won’t retain long. I believe that the impact must be there. I always believe that if something is funny, you’ll remember next time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From his explanation, it was revealed that he believed that interesting and relaxed lessons would result in better learning. He also expressed his belief that teachers need to pitch the lessons according to learners’ level so they would relate to the lesson and therefore result in the success of the teaching process. Such views are not at odds with learner-centred principles. This was reflected in SR 14 (Teacher initiation) during the lesson episode when he used the school surrounding to teach about directions and the influence of his learning experience to the way he teaches English now)

East is where the sun rises ok, it always come up from this side (east) and sets here. So, according to my compass, here is north. So if you don’t have a compass-how do you know your direction? You can use look at the sun, where it comes up, that’s east. So you have a sense of direction now?-so now, where’s the toilet?-there (pointing to the
direction) right? So which direction-is it East, West, North Or South. So it’s like that. So now, from this school, this side is the east, so what do we have there? Central square. Ok from here, what do we have that side (West)?.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Taman XXX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>This side (North)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Taman YYY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>South...What do we have?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8: VSRI Transcript (Lee: SR 14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>Transcription of VSRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Regarding this (referring to the lesson intro-asking students about directions to the school office) Normally, when I reflect how I learned things in the past, there are certain teachers who can make lesson simple and easy to understand, whereas there are certain teachers, they might be very committed but then their lesson are very boring and difficult to understand. I still remember this, although just a temporary teacher, but his lesson was very interesting in the sense that he was able to associate Physics with everyday life; I enjoyed this very much and understand better. So, he was far better than some of the trained teachers, YK. <strong>What I believe is that, like in this case, you are talking about ‘directions’, you have to start off with something that students are familiar with;</strong> their surrounding- maybe their neighbourhood, their school so they know what directions means and what North, South, East, West really. It will be more meaningful to them. It makes more meaning to them before we move on to outside world (directions) right?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This belief above, it could be argued, clearly encapsulated what learner-centred teaching is all about i.e. considering the needs and interests of learners in planning, preparing and implementing his lessons.
Lee also shared the strategies he believed could encourage learners to participate in his lesson. For example, SR 3 was selected when the learners read the answer on being happy with the way they look and Lee related the issue of being happy with the way one looked with cosmetic surgery. Bringing in current news like this, he believed, enabled learners to relate to the lesson better.

**Table 6.9: VSRI Transcript (Lee: SR 22)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of VSRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R Right, here...you were teaching reading-how do you usually teach reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Erm, normally the procedure is for reading comprehension, I think you have you have to read silently and answer some questions about it; and later followed by reading aloud so we can listen to the words and all that. But in this context, I was rushing a bit so I don’t follow the procedures. I just make sure they read aloud and all that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Is it important that the students to pronounce very accurately?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T I try to make them pronounce the words as closely as possible but OC even myself cannot pronounce as the native speakers. But the thing is, at least let them get the sounds correct so if they hear the word today. I they hear today and probably hear them again later. If you don’t make them pronounce the words how it may help them to pick up the word later. OC, I don’t expect them to immediately acquire these words today. It’s a long process- needs a lot of repetition YK.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VSR interview data also revealed Lee’s belief about learning consistent with his belief expressed in SSI that emphasised fluency and accuracy in pronunciation. He appeared to be very adamant in his efforts to produce learners who could pronounce correctly in order to prepare them to read.

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Err, yes, vocabulary in a way and introducing the meaning of the vocabulary; but at the same time, I want to get them to pronounce the words correctly so that they are able to utter and pronounce properly. After that they will read the text so they can read it.

From the descriptions of practices explained and beliefs, Lee appeared to be embracing many learner-centred practices and beliefs as he tried to motivate and create a positive environment for learners. However, his explanation about his use of translation indicated the constraints that he faced in implementing practices that he may not fully believe in. He revealed that, despite believing that learners need to be exposed to the TL, some situations demand the use of translation in order to save time. However, like the other three teachers in this study, he strongly believed in modelling correct language use to his pupils in order to produce pupils who would pronounce and read ‘properly’. This reference to the notion of accuracy contradicts learner-centred practices that focused more on the learner’s learning process (Jones, 2007) rather than the targets to achieve accuracy and fluency. His approach seemed very concerned with linguistic product, getting the form right.

6.1.4 Ramu

Data from the VSRIs revealed that Ramu’s approach seemed to be very concerned with his learners’ affective aspects when he acknowledged the diverse learners’ abilities and needs. The extract from the VSRI (1) below showed that he introduced the lesson content according to learners’ abilities and gradually introduced them to more challenging content once they showed progress as shown in SR 2 below.

SR 2 (teacher intiation): Lesson episode when Ramu gradually shifted from one sentence structure to another after pupils were able to construct sentences.
Suzy was crying, good. Suzy is a singular subject, so Suzy was...OK anyone can make a sentence using a singular subject using a present continuous tense. Just now we do singular, now we do the plural. Anybody? You can use the word cry as the root word. Anyone?

The children are crying

Table 6.10: VSRI Transcript (Ramu: SR 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of VSRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T Hmm, I would say that the students are confused YS on how to make proper sentences- so ...I think why not I introduced to them the simple, basic pattern of writing a sentence. That’s why I started with simple sentences where they use a subject and verb. From there I keep on extending the sentences where they are capable of using subject – verb; subject and object and subject-verb, adjective and objective. So I was just trying them, go gradually… extending the sentences (Ramu, SR 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ramu also explained his emphasis on integrating learning and thinking strategies by making his learners aware of their mistakes as shown in the extract below. In fact, there were more episodes from the lessons recorded where he directed them to their mistakes and conducted some kind of error analysis activities. From this, it can be deduced that Ramu believed that learners needed to have some awareness of their abilities and performance and abilities to evaluate their own learning, self-assessment skills (again, in line with LC principles). These principles closely resembled the notions of learner training in learner autonomy.

It seems in this part of the lesson- you find that I’m trying to introduce the plural subjects whereby I wanted them to be able to recognize the plural verb. So there’s a tendency for some of them with the verbs – single verbs where the subjects are plural; where they carelessly put single subject with plural verbs.
That’s why I make them write and to read the sentences so that I would know a number of them might be confused with subject verb agreement…. I want them to think before simply answer the questions.

Ramu was also found to be very concerned with other affective aspects of learning such as the importance of motivation and acknowledging learners’ interests. This preoccupation was consistent with his classroom practices where he spent significant time giving them encouragement and praise as shown in the extract below. He seemed to believe that praise and encouragement could have a snowball effect where others will feel motivated to take risks and try to work with the language as shown from the VSR evidenced below.

SR 7 (Teacher initiation) - Lesson episode when he praised his pupils as a technique to motivate learning.

\[\begin{array}{ll}
S1 & \text{(answers) soundly} \\
T & \text{OK very good. Now let’s come back to the sentences- the subject ends with the word ‘happy’-Are you happy? If you are happy, say Yeah!!!} \\
SS & \text{Yeah!!!}
\end{array}\]

Table 6.11: VSRI Transcript (Ramu: SR 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SR 7</th>
<th>Transcription of VSRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>You see, that I praise them--..This is one of the techniques that... the other students might be encouraged to talk. There are a few who might be hesitating to talk. So when you give them some encouragement, praising them...that will sort of will encourage the others to come up with their sentences...that was my aim to make the others feel good-'your sentence is very good’ and all that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Hmm...It makes others want to try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>It gives them the motivation to try. You see, it doesn't matter any subjects-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for that matter. It could be English, science or maths. **Motivation is very important**—children love being motivated, being praised. They need some kind of praising...so that language teaching is less dull, if you are not making it very motivational. **So if you do not make it very interesting—definitely you will be failing in teaching the language...**, we need extra. People should put extra effort to **make them feel that they are in the picture**. So that’s **why I feel motivation is very important in teaching** English... extra motivation, extra encouragement is very important

In fact, to a certain extent, he regarded motivation and encouragement as pre-requisites to language learning success. He seemed to embrace the principle of learner-centredness that acknowledged learners’ emotional and psychological needs to feel important and comfortable in order to learn as outlined by Mc Combs & Miller, (2007, pp.52-54) as evidenced in further reflections on motivation as illustrated in table 6.11 above.

Ramu, like Salim, took a more pragmatic approach in explaining his overall language teaching approach when he considered himself implementing a combination of both teacher-centred and learner-centred principles. In fact, he evaluated the extent of his practices as 70 percent learner-centred and 30 percent teacher-centred as evidenced in the extract below.

*I think I’m more on child-centred or student-centred teacher because—we should extract more from the child than we putting in all the data, all the material and*
all we should encourage the child to talk more than we talking. I think I’m more
70% child centred and 30% teacher-centred (Ramu, VSRI, 1)

His claim here, however, was inconsistent with the classroom data that found he was observed to implement practices that were in line with four of the seven learner-centred principles but on a very minimal scale. This significant finding was consistent with the finding on teacher’s beliefs in chapter four that concluded that teachers investigated in this study had very limited and superficial ability to articulate learner-centred principles and describe LC practices. It also indicated that teachers had varied interpretations and this variability led to them implementing learner-centred practices according to their own interpretations.

The overall findings from the VSRIIs complemented the description of teachers’ practices by giving an explanation, justifications and embedded beliefs about learner-centred practices. From the data, it can be deduced that teachers understood some principles of learner-centredness that they need to implement in their lessons such as grouping learners to encourage interactions, the roles of motivation, the use of a variety of teaching materials and media to sustain learners’ interests and the need to identify learners’ needs as reflected by Salim, Ramu and Lee.

However, there were some reflections particularly in Lee and Thika’s SRs that reflected beliefs in paradox with what learner-centred approaches where they were persistent in their beliefs that ‘correct’ language forms need to be modelled and drilled to pupils in order to achieve accuracy in grammar and pronunciation.

Equally important, VSR interview data provided an insight into why these teachers taught the way they did. The findings revealed that there were many contextual
constraints that teachers had to face in order to implement learner-centred approaches. The contextual constraints highlighted during the VSRIs strengthened the arguments by Rahman (1984) and Ali (2003) who proposed a better supportive environment and better training for teachers. These challenges will be further explained next.
6.2 Explanation of challenges faced by teachers in relation to learner-centred approaches.

Interview data analysis led to the identification of three main themes associated with the challenges faced when implementing learner-centred practices. These challenges can be categorized as curriculum constraints and a target-oriented culture, a non-conducive teaching environment, and teacher workload. These contextual circumstances, according to the teachers, hindered them from implementing learner-centred approaches.

6.2.1 Curriculum constraints and target-oriented culture

The most frequently highlighted issue was the target orientation culture in the Malaysian education system that put overemphasis on examinations and the teachers’ teaching and non-teaching burden. This means that, teachers tend to teach learners topics or grammatical content that will be covered in the examination. Many references were made to this matter in the previous section on teacher’s explanations and beliefs about their practices. For example, Salim mentioned about having to resort to a teacher-directed ‘one-way traffic’ approach to teaching because ‘at times we (teachers) need to rush through in order for us to finish before the examinations’ (Salim, VSRI, 1). It is no surprise when Tomlinson (2005) argued that ELT materials in Asia (including Malaysia) are still centralised around grammar even when claiming to be following a communicative approach.
6.2.2 Non-conducive and non-supportive teaching environment

There were many claims about the non supportive environment that hindered them from practicing what the curriculum expected them to do. Town schools, according to Salim have enough resources in terms of both technical hardware and materials ‘Now, the government provided us with a lot of laptops, LCD projectors even screens and all and most of the classrooms are supposed to be fixed with these’. However, the technical support to install and maintain the equipment was not provided that results in the equipment being abandoned.

Triangulation of data from classroom observations plus field notes taken by the researcher as well as data from video recording could confirm some of these teachers’ claims about these constraints. Field notes indicated that the equipment in the schools investigated was not properly maintained. In fact in Thika’s cases, out of 24 PCs available, only 19 could be used. This could be very frustrating to the teachers as well as the learners.

In addition, Thika’s school like other rural schools in Malaysia is situated in less populated and where residents relied entirely on government funding. The above scenario could contribute to the existing lack of interest and motivation of the learners to learn the English language.
6.2.3 Teacher workload

The most highlighted issue among all teachers was the non-teaching burden teachers faced such as administrative responsibilities and writing diagnostic reports after each tests and examinations. The pressure to train learners towards the exam was also mentioned by three teachers.

Town school teacher Salim highlighted the common issue of teachers being burdened with non-teaching administrative duties in addition to their teaching load. Furthermore, he argued that there was no specialisation where English teachers would also have to teach other subjects such as physical education (PE) or Moral education. As a result, he claimed teachers resorted to teach as they normally have or just use the materials supplied by the ministry. However, despite having the courseware, he argued, teachers still did not fully utilise such resources as they are unsuitable for his learners.

*But most of the times, getting the things ready itself... takes a lot of time and the courseware that we get... They are not suitable. They are not suitable for the lesson that we are going to teach. They are either too easy...and most of the time it is just used to just fulfil the requirements* (Salim, VSRI, 1)

In conclusion, the overall findings from the VSRI data suggest that some of the predominant issues highlighted here were consistent with the negative properties of learner-centred practices that discouraged them from implementing them reported in section 4.3.2. In chapter 4, the teachers reported learner-centred practices as not having perceived importance in learning success, causing classroom management problems and being time consuming. If the preliminary interviews uncovered teachers perceived issues about learner-centred practices, the VSRI s highlighted practical issues related to
the equipment, materials and support needed to implement learner-centred approaches. These issues will be further explored in chapter 7 where the implications of the findings are presented and recommendations are put forward taking into consideration evidence above and from chapter 4.
CHAPTER SEVEN

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the whole study; it presents the overview of research summarizing the methodology used, main findings and conclusion with regard to the research questions in chapter three. It also discusses the implications and suggests recommendations for improvement and further research areas to explore.

7.1 Overview of research

My research questions which set out to explore teachers’ current ELT practices have managed to offer a descriptive documentation of teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and current classroom practices in relation to learner-centredness in language teaching in the four case study schools investigated. My research questions were answered by using multiple case study research design involving a combination of semi-structured preliminary interviews, lesson recordings and VSRIs about their practices in a four-stage data collection and analysis project. These four stages of research involved conducting preliminary interviews to describe teachers’ declared ELT practices, knowledge and understanding and beliefs about learner-centredness in language teaching.
This was followed by observation and an initial reflection stage that involved two steps namely (1) classroom observation of the lessons (lessons also being video-recorded) in order to explore what happens in the classroom and (2) conducting VSRIs to explore what teachers think about their practices and the challenges they faced. The field notes were used to assist in selecting the stimulus or lesson episodes to be explored during VSRIs. The third stage took place after the field work was completed and involved video data analysis to describe the macro features of the lessons recorded as well as identifying micro (specific) features of the lessons in relation to learner-centred practices. The final stage of my research was to do a cross case analysis of the findings in order to relate and compare my findings with the theoretical principles of learner-centredness in ELT. This was conducted in order to describe the extent of teachers’ practices and understanding about LC approaches that guided me to investigate this matter.
7.2 Main Findings

My second research question that aimed to explore teachers’ understanding and beliefs about learner-centredness revealed that despite being the main thrust of the Malaysian curriculum, it evidently appeared to be a complex idea for teachers to understand. Interview data to explore teacher’s beliefs revealed that their definitions and descriptions of learner-centred practices were limited to superficial features that could be deduced from the term learner-centred itself. These included references such as:

(a) Learners being the main focus of lesson,

(b) Teachers having less teaching but more facilitating roles

(c) The use of activities in groups to enhance participation and interactions.

However, more fundamental attributes of LC practices below were missing from the teachers’ descriptions:

(d) Negotiation process when planning, implementing and evaluating learners

(e) Identification of learners’ objective and subjective needs in order to plan lessons according to learners’ diverse needs,

(f) The use of a variety of materials

(g) Ongoing evaluation process involving both learners and teachers.

It was not surprising that in my exploration of teacher’s beliefs, the teachers had mixed feelings about this learner-centred notion and questioned the perceived benefits of learner-centred practices. While acknowledging the fun that enjoyable group-based and discovery activities could bring, some teachers were sceptical about the contributions to
their lesson aims. This was due to associations of LC activities with problems such as they are time consuming, and contribute to classroom disruption in terms of noise and discipline problems. In fact, LC activities were said to be distracting learners from lesson aims as they were more likely to lose the focus of the lesson content.

The teachers’ overall beliefs about language teaching were also more dominated by the traditional teacher-centred views about learning where three in particular (Salim, Lee and Thika) strongly believed in the Transmission Model via a PPP lesson structure, the role of repetition and modelling to achieve accuracy in grammar and pronunciation (Williams & Burden, 1997). However, there were some references from the data that indicated that four teachers believed that learners should be exposed to a variety of language sources such as the media and ICT and that is in line with LC principles. Two teachers also highlighted that learners needed to be aware of their responsibilities in learning that was also consistent with LC view that emphasised skills development towards achieving learners who are more autonomous and involved in achieving their learning objectives.

In terms of teachers’ understanding of the principles of learner-centredness, it could be deduced that teachers in this study still lacked in understanding of the fundamental principles of learner-centredness as observed in the teachers’ practices during classroom observation as well as from the video data. The teachers’ classroom practices could be described as more inclined to teacher-centredness instead of displaying more learner-centred attributes. All lessons observed had clear stages that resembled the three-stage lesson progression comprising Presentation of language content, Practice of intended structures and Production of learner content (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These were depicted in both macro and micro analysis of the eight lessons recorded.
Exploration of the micro features of lessons associated with LC practices revealed strong dominance of teacher-dominated practices in terms of lessons monopolised by direct teacher instruction, minimal learner interactions and limited interactive activities such as group discussion. Only one teacher from the four studied could be said to allow more interactions, group activities and learner active involvement in learning processes. In the others, lessons could be described as very transmissive with one way instruction most of the time. There was however an attempt to integrate ICT within lessons by two teachers (Thika and Ramu) but the use of the laptop was more as a replacement for the teacher’s instructional roles rather than a means to secure active participation. This use of laptop may superficially resemble LC practices but what was observed was not the use of a variety of media in LC classrooms intended to allow learners either to be engaged in discovery/exploratory activities or to expose learners to a variety of language input as recommended by Mc Combs & Whisler (1997).

My research also complemented the classroom data with VSRI data to explore teachers’ explanation and justifications for their practices as this offered me a more holistic and balanced view of these teachers’ classroom practice realities. During VSRIIs, teachers were able to explain why they had to teach the way they did despite having their own idea about how language should be taught. Findings from VSRIIs seemed to suggest that teachers were faced with the dilemma as whether to teach according to syllabus specifications (that required them to implement more communicative, learner-centred approaches) or to teach content in order to prepare learners for the examinations. During the interview, three out of four teachers expressed their sense of helplessness of having to succumb to the target/exam oriented culture in
the Malaysian education system. Teachers argued that despite realising that their practices should be more learner-centred, their teaching still resembled the traditional approach that emphasised accuracy. This was because learners’ achievements were measured based on their grade and not their abilities to communicate effectively. Therefore the overall finding from this study seemed to suggest that the extent of learner-centredness being practiced in Malaysian primary classrooms investigated was still limited. Similarly, the teachers’ knowledge about learner-centredness was also limited and the teachers’ beliefs about their classroom practices resembled more of the traditional approaches instead of learner-centred approaches. The significance and implications of these findings will be elaborated next.
7.3 Implications and Recommendations

The data discovered from this study seemed to suggest that the implementation of learner-centred approaches in Malaysian primary schools is at the lower end of the continuum proposed by Nunan (1993) and Mc Combs and Whisler (1997). This is because some of the construct of learner-centred principles may seem to be unsuitable or paradoxical for the current primary school education system in Malaysia. Firstly, LC works on the assumption that there should be a collaborative effort between teachers and learners in the process of planning of the objectives, activities and evaluation. However, due to the Top (ministry level)-Down (teachers) nature of curriculum development in Malaysia, this model of learner-centred curriculum development proposed by Nunan (1988) would be very unlikely to be implemented in countries like Malaysia. Secondly, the complexity of the role of the school curriculum in Malaysia that serves more than just to improve learners’ language proficiency but as a tool for national unity made it difficult to allow flexibility and has been centralised to ensure that all schools whose learners are from multi-ethnic backgrounds enjoy similar provision (David, 2004). Furthermore, teachers in the study seemed to be apprehensive to the idea of shared responsibilities between the teachers and learners.

Therefore, it is fair to suggest that learner-centred approaches to language teaching in Malaysia could only be implemented under certain conditions and only to a certain degree. Taking into account the unique Malaysian background, learner-centred approaches in Malaysian primary schools could realistically be implemented according to the perspectives of Malaysian teachers as gathered in this research. Based on the findings of this study, some initial ideas towards a teaching model suitable for Malaysian primary classrooms are put forward.
The idea of proposed by LC teaching model of having teacher-learner negotiation of learning objectives, activities and materials is essentially ideological in nature. In fact, according to Waters (2007), as there has been no empirical data has supported that this is achievable at primary school level particularly in an Asian country like Malaysia. Therefore, as suggested by Wedell (2009), rather than importing alien idea, curriculum planners need to acknowledge the importance of ‘local realities’. These realities, according to Wedell (2009, pp. 32-33) include aspects such as:

1. the teacher’s current practices i.e, which practices found to be effective in their context and vice versa
2. class sizes
3. resources and teaching materials
4. demands of high-stakes assessment
5. provision of teacher development training program to expose teachers to new practices
6. awareness and attitudes of other major stake holders such as parents
7. funding available to support the implementation of any new practices

Another vital issue is the readiness of the teachers to fully accept this innovation in their teaching practices and the readiness of the learners at primary school level aged 7-12 years to take more responsibility in LC classrooms. Therefore, in line with the considerations proposed by Wedell above, A systematic and continuous support for teachers for example, by reducing workload, providing assistance in managing administrative responsibilities and technical help in using ICT could reduce teacher’s apprehension towards curriculum change. In addition, efforts to improve teacher education programs and in-service training to integrate training for teachers to address
the issues of skills required to implement learner-centredness (such as needs analysis, objective negotiation, materials adaptation) should be increased.

Jones (2007) also argues that providing conducive physical classroom setting and atmosphere can encourage more discussion and activity-based lessons. This can be achieved by planning for smaller class sizes of not more than 25 per classroom, changing classroom seating arrangements to encourage face to face communication and providing more self-access learning materials readily available in the classroom and resource room so learners can take ownership of their own learning.

However, a more fundamental matter to be addressed by the stakeholders of educational change in Malaysia i.e, the ministry, the teachers, the parents and the society in general, is not to underestimate the complexity of educational change. There is a need to understand the importance of acknowledging the existing Malaysian educational culture and teaching learning conditions before adopting any new approaches such as the LC approaches. More research needs to be conducted before adopting any externally conceptualised idea about education that may be unsuitable to the culture and teaching situations in Malaysia. For example, progressive pedagogies such as learner-centred approaches characterised by their emphasis on the learning process (that actively involve learners and promote autonomy) have been criticized for their lack of explicit classroom teaching recommendations (Nunan, 1989). Therefore, because of this lack of clarity in teaching recommendations, teachers who are less familiar with the language or those from different cultural backgrounds would face difficulties. In fact some may even face cultural conflicts with Eastern ideals about education (Holliday, 2005). As highlighted by Mercer (1995), both teachers and learners contribute to teaching and
learning, and therefore their social and cultural relationship need to be carefully considered in order to facilitate learning.

...teachers and students do not leave their personal and social identities outside the classroom door, and classroom talk is one means for expressing and maintaining such identities as well as redefining them.

Mercer (1995, p. 47)

Equally important, a review on the imposition of externally-designed curriculum development and implementation currently practiced should be considered. The government could gather input from the teachers (bottom up approach) rather than top-down approach. As Nunan (1988, p. 2) asserted, in a learner-centered approach, ‘the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision making process’. However, how this collaborative effort could be materialised especially at primary school level in Malaysian context remains a question. There have been some suggestions but not necessarily in ELT on how this planning aspect could be done. For example, Murdoch & Wilson (2008) suggested involving learners in automatic assessment by designing a rubric for a science project. However, this is far from adequate as teachers need to know how they can involve learners more in other aspects of teaching and particularly if they have a top-down curriculum imposed by the Ministry of Education.

Therefore, I would argue that in order to improve teachers’ well being as important stakeholders, their voices need to be taken into account. As discovered from the data, the teachers argue (Salim, Ramu and Lee) that in order to implement effective teaching strategies, teachers require specialised skills and assistance in several areas. These
include, developing and communicating objectives, providing appropriate materials and
discovery based activities for learners and providing adequate support for classroom
activities (perhaps in the form of the extra hands of a teaching assistant as practiced in
the UK).

Another significant finding in this study showed that teachers did not necessarily use
any particular approach in their practice. Instead, they were pragmatic in their teaching
approaches i.e, teaching according to their teaching situations and conditions. This
means that rather than focussing on the particular nature of approaches, the focus
should be more on a repertoire of approaches felt suitable by the teachers to suit their
learners’ needs rather than advocating to a certain type of approach. Therefore, as
observed in many cultures as suggested by Holliday (2005), TC as opposed to LC could
be seen as more culturally appropriate. In teacher-centred teaching, as my study
revealed, teachers’ authority and power are potentially more beneficial and may not be
a negative feature at all as evidenced in Salim’s lessons. While maintaining control of
the lessons, Salim managed to integrate activities that allowed interactions and
participation. Nevertheless, this requires further investigation along with study of the
impact of current approaches.

The significance of teachers’ knowledge and understanding about the theories and
principles of teaching and learning (or the lack of it) within their contexts should also
receive greater emphasis in teacher education programmes. This is vital as unclear
principles underpinning certain teaching approaches can be a major setback to
curriculum implementation as found in this study. Therefore, I propose that there should
be clear guidelines where the LC principles are explained in terms of classroom
behaviours expected by teachers and learners, the classroom activities, and the kinds of
assessments required to evaluate learners. In addition, systematic and continuous training to communicate principles and developments in language teaching should also be monitored so teachers, regardless of their locations are well-informed. In relation to the findings in this study, evidently teachers need to be more aware of the underlining principles behind the notion of learner-centredness in the curriculum.

From the findings, I would argue that regardless of what teaching approaches are recommended, there should be clear guidelines on both theoretical and practical classroom suggestions to strengthen the teachers’ understanding of the teaching approaches and learning theories. This should include elements synthesised from the works of Mc Combs & Whisler (1997). However, it is equally important to allow teachers to adopt and implement their classroom according to their students’ needs.

1. Acknowledge the ideologies that underlie both pedagogical strategies and theories about learning
2. Ensure that the materials, activities, and assessments used are compatible with the theoretical approaches that inform teachers’ expectations for writing
3. Discuss the connection between teachers’ theories and practices with students
4. Evaluate student attitudes and readiness for particular approaches and issues
5. Prepare students sufficiently for activities and topics
6. Assess activities during and after student participation and include students in the assessment process
7. Plan alternative strategies to meet the needs of a variety of students.

These elements could gradually develop learners to be more involved and responsible in their learning process as well as inform teachers about the needs and interests of their
learners. The recommendations above should be followed by a systematic training system for teachers to develop skills necessary to implement learner-centred approaches that are exploratory, discovery and communicative in nature. Some practical ideas for LC books for primary school teachers such as from Murdoch & Wilson (2008) and Jones (2007) could also prove helpful.

7.4 Limitations of the study and future research areas

From the findings, how learner-centredness were perceived and implemented in Malaysia still need further investigations as this study involved in-depth explorations of four cases. The ministry of education could gather more comprehensive large scale research-based evidence of the benefits of LC approaches. Similarly, there should be investigations on the implications of the current curriculum development practices at the ministry level (planning, implementation and evaluation) without consultation with the teachers as the main stake holders in language teaching.

Therefore, I propose that more research in these specific areas of learner-centred teachers’ practices be pursued in Malaysian primary schools to obtain a comprehensive picture both from teachers and learners as those directly affected by this recommended shift of teaching approaches. Such projects should concentrate on:

(a) Investigating the process for the identification of learners’ needs (formal needs analysis instruments and informal-everyday observation).

(b) Exploring classroom pedagogical interactions (classroom talk) in terms of the patterns of interactions (teacher-learner; learner-teacher; learner-learner; learner-whole class).
(c) Capturing the nature of questioning (questions to recall knowledge versus questions to stimulate discussion) that encourage or limit learners’ interactions.

(d) Learners’ perceptions about the activities associated with LC approaches such as group work, project work and discussion of findings and presenting in front of class.

(e) The use of recording by the teachers themselves as a self evaluation tool to improve their teaching practices as suggested by Mc Combs & Whisler (1997).

(f) The effects of new curriculum ideas to teachers and learners.
Conclusion

Learner-centred approaches in ELT have been ambiguously described by teachers and ELT practitioners underlining particularly teachers’ lack of understanding of the underlying principles of learner-centredness (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996). The review of literature on learner-centredness in ELT identified seven fundamental principles of learner-centred approaches. These principles however, were selectively implemented by the teachers in the study. For future development, these principles might be used to guide curriculum planning and teacher development projects.

My study has established that in these four case study schools involving National type (SK) town school, rural school, Vernacular SJK (Chinese and Tamil) learner-centred practices were practiced at varied level particularly among the four teachers but were almost non-existent in Thika’s practices. The LC principles that were observed during observation and video-recording and were mentioned in their explanations of learner-centredness indicated some levels of principles below:

i. Opportunities for participation of learners

ii. Inclusion of activities that involved discussion and discovery

iii. Efforts to encourage interactions between learners and teachers in the target language

iv. Ongoing evaluation and feedback, consisting of peer-evaluation

v. Variety of materials and activities used to suit learners’ needs.

The four principles above could clearly be observed in the lessons of Salim, Ramu and Lee but almost none in Thika’s lessons despite her use of ICT. There was no evidence
of negotiation of objectives, activities and evaluation or identification of learners’ objective and subjective needs. None of the teachers were able to identify these principles. In sum, it can be deduced that the four teachers investigated neither fully implemented the principles of LC in their teaching nor believe that these principles were suitable in their teaching contexts and explanations were provided during the VSRIs. Therefore, several issues and recommendations highlighted in this chapter could inform curriculum planners and teachers on conditions should be considered if learner-centredness to be significantly practiced and accepted by teachers in Malaysia.
References


Appendix 2: Categories of semi-structured interview questions

Instruction:
Distribute informed consent form/profile form (attached)

Phase 1: Semi-structured interview (SSI)

Aims of the interview instrument:

1. Describe teacher’s teaching, academic background and courses/training attended related to learner-centred approaches.
2. Describe teacher’s philosophy in teaching English.
3. Describe teacher’s knowledge about the learner-centred approaches in language teaching.

PHASE 1 Preliminary interview questions

A1 Teacher’s teaching, academic background
   1. can you tell me about your teaching background/experiences?
   2. what kind of teacher training courses have you attended?

A2 Courses related to learner-centred approaches attended
   1. have you attended any courses about teaching approaches/learner-centred approaches?
   2. what is your opinion about the courses?

A3 General philosophy about how they taught English language
   1. How do you describe your teaching approach?
   2. What are the features or characteristics of the approach that you use?
A4 Beliefs about how English should be taught and about LC practices

1. How do you think English should best be taught in Malaysian classroom?
2. What is your opinion about learner-centred approaches that are proposed in the syllabus documents?

B1 Teacher’s definition of learner-centred approaches

1. How do you define the learner-centred approach?

B2 Teacher’s knowledge about learner-centred approaches

1. What normally happens in a learner-centred classroom?
2. What kinds of tasks/activities normally take place in a learner-centred classroom?
3. What are the roles of teachers and pupils in a learner-centred classroom?
4. What do you think are the needs of your learners in language learning?
5. What are the skills that you think learners need in learning language?
6. How do you identify the needs of your learners?
7. How do you develop their learning skills?
8. How do you develop their motivation to learn?
9. Would you describe your classes as learner-centred? If so, in what ways?
Appendix 3: Guidelines for researcher during classroom observation

Videotaping classroom and field note taking) followed with video stimulated recall interview within 24 hours of the recording

Objectives of classroom observation are to;

1. Describe teachers’ practices in teaching English in Year 5 Malaysian Primary classrooms.
2. [Based on the recorded video] investigate teacher’s thinking when teaching English based on the curriculum documents?
3. [Based on their action/practices in classroom] explore their beliefs about classroom practices recorded in their classrooms?
4. Explore and describe the challenges of teaching English (maybe using learner-centred approach) in Malaysian classrooms contexts?

Notes for researcher:

When analyzing the classroom recording, specifically observe for specific events as suggested in the learner-centred elements below: whether and to what extent are learners involved in their language learning processes. These specific events will be tagged and will be asked during the VSRI:

2. Negotiation of objectives, activities and evaluation to suit learners’ different needs and levels (Brindley, 1984; Nunan, 1989).
3. Discussion to increase participation of learners (Anton, 1999), and their motivation (Daniels & Perry, 2003; Garret & Shortall, 2002).
4. Information exchange between learners and teachers to increase interaction in the target language (Mc Combs & Miller, 2007), such as pair work and group work (Anton, 1999).
6. Awareness activities for development and training of learners’ metacognitive strategies (APA, 1997; Mc Combs & Miller, 2007), such as to identify preferred ways of learning, negotiation skills, setting realistic goals and encouragement to set their own objectives (Nunan, 1988).
7. Learning activities: a variety of activities, preferably using authentic materials (Daniels & Perry, 2002) to suit different levels and needs (Brindley, 1984).
Appendix 4: Questions asked during video-stimulated recall interview

Beliefs about their practices: key words to represent reflections/ explanation of practices/ beliefs are being highlighted in BOLD

BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNER-CENTRED PRACTICES

Possible Interview Question

1. **What is your view** about learner-centred approaches that are proposed in the syllabus documents?
2. What **do you see** as the most important aspects of your role as the teacher in your classes?
3. Do **you feel** that group work is beneficial? Why or why not?
4. Are you primarily responsible for evaluating students’ work? Do **you feel** that this is the **best way** to handle evaluation?
5. **How do** students learn vocabulary/ reading/ speaking/etc in your class? **Why do** you use this approach?
6. **Do you believe** that students are capable of making decisions about what to do with their class time?
7. **Do you believe** that students are capable of evaluating their own work?
8. **Do you see** any advantages to learner-centred learning over approaches with more teacher direction?

Challenges /constraints associated with LC approaches

1. Do you see any drawbacks to learner-centred learning?

2. What are the challenges that come with the implementation of the learner-centred approach in the Malaysian classrooms?
### Appendix 5: Sample interview transcript (Thika)

Preliminary Interview Rural school 18/08/09 (8.15-9.05@50mins)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong> Good morning Cikgu Tamil Selvi. Thank you for having me. As you know, I’m here to conduct a study on teaching approaches in year 5 classrooms. My focus is on teachers’ practices in language teaching in Malaysia. Right, before we go on to more details, can you tell about your teaching background, qualifications, teaching experiences and things like that.</td>
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<td><strong>T</strong> Good morning Lila, now it’s a pleasure having acquainted with you. Now, my experience, I finished my college in (19)88 and I did...my option was English option and my first posting was to Kedah- to a remote school in Labu Besar in Kulim. Not quite remote but very remote for those days-I had to travel around one hour to go there. The students there were really backward. So, it was a new challenge for me as a new teacher so I did not know how to overcome their problems and I had to get to know the students and establish myself as well to convey my teaching to the pupils. But, over the years, I think I’ve improved myself-because experience makes it perfect-because when I was a newly appointed teacher- I think to me, even though I had the training-I received all the knowledge but to me I think I was still a Zero there then. That was the starting point for me. Now, after so many years of experience, I think I’ve learnt a lot throughout the years. OC not only the teaching will make you experienced but we have to do learning, the learning process of new things as well- so new things coming. Teaching, initially it was not for me but later on I feel to like it already. It’s already a profession that I like; hmm...I love not like lah teaching now (Laughing)//. So it has been almost 20 years is it, in fact 21(years).I have another 11 years if I’m opting (retire) at 58.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong> Right, so throughout your teaching experience-you mentioned just now, you consider yourself as a Zero-perhaps in experience but not in knowledge right, so how has your view about language teaching developed from that time until now?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong> Ok, to me, when I was a student myself, the way I learn, it was something hmm- teachers those days they were very good- they taught us Grammar directly. And another most important part is not the teacher teaching, is the environment. Like for me... I come from English speaking family, even though my parents don’t converse in English but my brothers and sisters talk in English. The teaching does not really play the role- it’s the communication in English. To me that is the main problem now. Students do not speak in English. The most important factor is to improve your language; teaching does not really play the important role. You must really use the language-whatever the language. Use the language; if you use the language you will be proficient in the language. That is the most important thing- it’s a stepping stone for all students. For me that the main problem now-students don’t talk in English. I’m not talking about at home but in school environment- during the lesson itself they hardly talk in English.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>R</strong> Do you think this is because of lack of exposure or opportunities for them to the</td>
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YK, that we are expected to complete, we have to finish according to the ministry’s requirement not the pupils’ requirement. We know what the students need but we cannot do according to what we wish or what the pupils require. Every day, we do what the textbook require, that’s all!

R You mentioned something about the need to master the knowledge of the language and communicate, so what have you done to achieve this in your lessons. Do you teach grammar knowledge to them?

T Yes, I don’t agree with what they are asking us to now-grammar should be taught directly (2X) <...>. But it you see, it should be taught directly but at the same time, it should be instilled also. YK Sometimes you can teach directly, sometimes we need not do like that (teach directly). Like for example, during my days, my teacher did not tell me what you call…of course she introduced basics of grammar but when it comes to parts of speech, she will not tell me. But nowadays, I tell you how we have taught, like for example, Superlatives, big-bigger-biggest. To me, how I teach—if you see, ‘than’, definitely the following word must have ‘–er’, ok, after the word ‘than’, like bigger ‘than’ Ok. Smaller than, YS, we are giving them tips, grammar tips. Another thing, when you see, the word with ‘–est’ like ‘biggest’, it must have ‘the’ before. These kinds of things, my teachers never taught but we know how to use superlatives. Sometimes OC something might be misleading them. But nowadays, if you teach the students like the way we were taught, they wouldn’t be able to understand. Because they don’t read. YS, when we read, we know when to use ‘er’, ‘est’. The thing that we have to practice. Practice makes you perfect. So when you read a lot, you don’t need somebody to tell you how to construct a sentence. I don’t remember being taught, how to construct sentences and all. Even during the penilaian exam (standard exam prior KBSR introduction). My teacher never gave me any tips, but I was able to go through the exam, to pass the exam—because of exposure. I read a lot, not just me, but those days, many of us read a lot. Maybe our background. Nowadays, I don’t know—maybe the students already made up their mind, never read anything other than textbooks (laughing).

R It’s interesting that you mentioned the need to read so that they will be proficient in the language, so how is it here? Do they have resources to read like that?

T YK the library, we used to race among our friends to go and get the latest books that kind of thing. Nowadays, we can see hmm….only a handful of them in my school—hardly… nobody knows stories (story books). It may be lack of exposure, but it’s more because exam orientated. Parents send them from year one to tuition. They don’t teach them reading but how to answer exam. They are focusing on exam, so they never read. If you ask me, better scrap off exam, that’s the best way.

R No exam? What about other assessment?

T You don’t need assessment for English. No need assessment for language, maybe for maths and science. No need for English. If you are able to speak fluently in the language—it’s good enough already. Only a proficient person can speak very well, Yes or not?

R Hmm, but some would argue that, there are people who can speak but not
necessarily write grammatical sentences or don’t understand the grammatical aspect of the language. So how do we know?

T Now, when you speak, a good teacher will know, she will be able to identify whether you are good in English or not. Everybody can speak....but how many can speak without grammatical mistakes-OC in Malaysia, many can speak in English but they make mistakes here and they. Of course when we listen to them, we think- 'he’s proficient in English' but if we really listened carefully, when will know whether they are really proficient-the way the talk. Only a person who has a lot of grammatical knowledge will be able to identify the mistakes.

R So, just know you mentioned about the exam orientation imposed by the government and all that. So when you were trained during your TESL teaching diploma course, was there any particular course that mentioned anything about the approaches that you need to use when teaching?

T Yes, what they taught was what we are doing now. OC It has to be learner-centred not teacher centred. That, I agree because students won’t be interested if you are the most important person, they have to feel important as well. Make the lesson interesting. But the teaching pedagogy-if you ask me, for language-there are so many things different from maths and science. You teach language, you can only teach the basics but the essence has to be done by own individually themselves. OK Reading-to me, reading is the most important part- if the students can read well, not just reading but read aloud well, students should be able to master the language in the long run. Nowadays, if you want to test-you call one of my students –how many of them can read the passage fluently without any mistakes- not even the first class. They make a lot of mistakes, they are not confident. If you ask them to read-nobody will want to read because they are not confident with themselves.

R So I supposed you agree with the idea to reintroduce more literary texts in schools

T Less written work and more literature, I mean more reading; oral-aural skills. Don’t emphasise on written work but master the spoken work. If this thing goes to the ministry, I will be very happy. What I mean is- don’t emphasise on written work. OK, let them master the aural-oral skills then you move to the next step, written work. I’m not saying that they should just stop here. Once you already master the OA skills, you can go to other skills. To me, in primary they focus on Oral-aural, that would be good enough. Now we are doing four skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing we do of course, we can do writing, but not too much. What I’m saying is those days, you master one skill and then we go to the next skills. That’s what I think. They just master one skill then we go the next one. Here, whether they master or not, they go on and on- so finally, you are zero.

R Just now, you mentioned learner-centred and all. So what do you understand LC as opposed to TC or other approaches that you have been using so far?

T OK, like for example, when I’m teaching in Chalk and Talk method- nowadays students are very hyper active YK, so when I bring them to the IT Room they’ll be a bit alert. Normally when they see me in the classroom-they will find it very dull. When they come to this room, they’ll be alert-it’s like an induction already and
(there’s) a liking there already. After that, I can switch them to a better mood. If I do the same thing...maybe once in a while I do chalk and talk but not all the time.

R: So you bring them here most of the times rather than teaching in class?

T: Yes, most of the time...because we have this IT facility, the cds, everything is there. You just (switch) ‘on’ it and let them see and after that we can do the emphasis.

R: So what kind of activities that you do here

T: Usually I fixed the audio, this none and the LCD and there are so many softwares given by the ministry, so for every topic just put the CD topic after topic. So let them see first and later on, I question them regarding whatever they saw and I also, if there is any grammar points there, I emphasise on the grammar points after that.

R: So in terms of students' activity like group work or pair work like that?

T: OK, Group work, pair work for me; i don’t think it’s feasible there because we don’t have enough time. Students are not so good in this school. Maybe, if they are very good, you can put in pairs and groups. Once you give them group work, they won’t be doing group work but talking. I need them to do their work also. If I let them do as they wish, they won’t finish even one exercise. So I supervise them. Mostly, I won’t let them sit in groups but they sit on their own in class but I let them participate. So I ask them questions and they have to answer. Participation is there OK.

R: You mentioned just now, they will be talking among themselves, is it in their mother tongue?

T: Yes, They won’t talk in English- definitely not. They’ll talk in Malay. Almost 99% are Malay. They won’t be talking in English, No.

R: Do you use translation method in your class?

T: Yes, yes, I have to use. If at all, I talk plainly in English, it’ll be as though I’m speaking to the walls- no reactions at all. I do that very often, so most of the times, if you go to my class, very passive class. When I talk in English they won’t give me any answer. Unless I talk in Bahasa, then they will reply. Very passive class. To me, it’s very boring also.

R: So that’s why you need to bring in more fun with IT right. So, you mentioned, that the ministry supply the software, textbooks (TB) and all that. So, do you use textbooks often in your lesson?.

T: No the textbooks’ contents are all in the CD so I hardly use the TB. To me, when I go to year six, I never touch the TB, I’m strictly exam-orientated. So I will start out with my exam papers, sample papers, grammar topics. So year six-outlah. I won’t be following the syllabus.

R: So, in terms of skills to use all these equipment. Do you teach yourself or do you go for training?

T: So I learn myself-trial and error method.

R: Some teachers would argue that they don’t use all these ICT facilities because it takes more time to learn and all that. What is your opinion about that?

T: To me, that’s another XX (swear word)! That is a very good question. To me, I never go for training. My school, to me my school is equipped with everything but
the teachers never utilise these. They say, they don’t have time to fix, they don’t know. The thing is whatever, even language. When we do things very often we will be better. If we don’t do it, we’ll never learn. For me, although very slow, I really put my initiative and learn how to do these things and now I’m OK, I’m good enough to fix all these things.

R Do you find the use of ICT in your teaching very beneficial compared to other old methods.

T OC, it is very beneficial. In fact, I would suggest that they have this in the classroom itself. This one, we have to bring the students here- which is also time consuming. If we have this fixed in the classroom it’s better.

R You don’t have these fixed in the classroom yet?.

T We have the LCD there but we have to bring in our laptop. We have to do the fixing. Here, everything is ready.I don’t need to bring anything.

R So it’s more on the technical part. So getting back to this LC, some teachers would argue that it cannot be implemented because of time consuming and the learners are not able to handle this discovery learning by themselves; do things on their own and all that. So what is your opinion about this? In your classroom, do you think your learners are able to do this?

T I don’t think so!- because to learn a language, you must think in that language. They are not thinking in the language. They are thinking in Bahasa Malaysia, yes or not? When they are proficient in the language, they might think in the language. So they are not proficient. So where is the discovery going to come there. There’s no discovery there. But to me if the teachers’ explanation is clear-and a lot of repetitions. Once or twice is not enough. The students need to be exposed several times. It’s not good enough. For example, grammar topics- exposure is very important. Students need to be recalled every now and then. Then it’ll be stuck in them. If not, gone with the wind. For example, if they go on holidays, when they come to the next lesson you have to ‘reinstall’ everything.

R I can sense that a lot issues of lack of exposure here. Is it because you don’t have support from school administrative to provide English environment.

T My GB is very supportive but it’s not just her responsibilities. Teachers who are doing the PPSMI were really learning the language but they are more worried about their area and they are not really concerned with this English issues. To me, Maths and Science should be taught in their mother tongue. Can I share with you? I have this Korean visiting student. She’s just around ten years old. She doesn’t know English. She knows but very basic, I go and give her tuition at home for English. This girl was able to do high standard maths level like in Form four (secondary school level). She understands the concepts well but they don’t know English. I’m not condemning English, if you want to travel to English countries, they you need English. But just for communication. Parents should not see it as an exam subject but a leisure.

R So is there anything else that you would like to add?. Maybe what would you like to see improved in our curriculum and things like that.
| T | Giving importance to Oral-Aural skills at primary level. Able to converse and able to comprehend when people talk in English. But now, when they go to secondary school, are zero. |
| R | So thank you very much Cikgu Tamil Selvi. |
| T | You are most welcome. |

[END of Transcription]

Transcription explanation:

Cikgu  Means ‘Teacher’- a formal salutation for teacher to show respect
...
Pause
//  overlapping remarks with researcher (Aha/ Hmm/)
\  unclear
AR  abbreviation for All right
OC  abbreviation for Of course
(Word)  ellipsis/missing word
(2X)  repeated twice
(Laughing)  speaker laughing
Appendix 6  Sample of field notes (classroom layout and lesson episodes)