EFL Textbook Analysis

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to determine how well a nationally mandated Malaysian EFL Upper Secondary textbook prepares upper secondary students for tertiary reading in English. The data were in the form of comprehension reading passages in the selected EFL textbook. In this study, reading instructional design in the EFL textbook was analyzed in terms of types and the grade-level length of passages. Using the data acquired from an analysis of this mandated textbook, the author argues that the ESL reading instructional design in the national Malaysian EFL Upper Secondary curriculum significantly under prepares students because of its overemphasis on narrative passages that are below grade-level texts.

Introduction

English has been widely acknowledged as an international language (Tsui & Tollefson, 2006). According to Bruthiaux (as cited in Ridge, 2004), "English has all the key characteristics that make it likely to remain the dominant worldwide language" (p. 415). The dominance of English also influences and cause changes in other languages, people's view of language, culture, race, ethnicity and identity (Kubota, 1998). The importance of the English language has been established universally as a tool for social, economic, and political success (Phillipson, 1992). As a result, many non-English speaking countries promote English proficiency as an effort toward modernization and internalization (Pennycook, 1994; Tollefson, 1995). For example, in Hong Kong, the shift from English to Chinese language instruction was rejected by many education stakeholders, such as parents, because English continued to be seen as the language of economic opportunity (Tsui, Shum, Wong, Tse, & Ki, 1999).

The importance of English is even more prominent at the university level in this era of globalization. Tsui and Tollefson (2006) label proficiency in the English language as the "global literacy skill" (p. 1), which has become a commodity for communication (Crystal, 2003; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999) and a vehicle for knowledge transfer (Welch & Welch, 2007). As such, reading skill has been argued to be the most critical skill for academic success (e.g., Weideman & Van, 2002) because it facilitates access to information, which enables learners to use and mediate the information that they have acquired (Pretorius, 2002). Considering the importance of literacy skills, students need to be prepared to handle reading tasks that they will face later in their educational careers (Grabe, 2001). First language (L1) reading studies have suggested that students may benefit from reading instruction that resembles the reading demand at

university level (e.g., Feathers & Smith, 1983; Nist & Kirby, 1986). For example, asking students to read expository texts might map with the type of texts they may frequently encounter in their content areas (e.g., Carrell, 1985; Pugh, Pawan & Antomarchi, 2000). In addition, exposing students to grade-level texts in reading instruction may help students read and comprehend grade-level texts in the content areas (e.g., Boling & Evans, 2008). Thus, reading instructional design should emphasize reading instruction that uses expository text type that maps onto the grade-level and the type of texts that students frequently encounter in their content areas especially at the university level. Understanding reading texts is paramount to academic success (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008). Considering students' ability to read grade-level expository texts well is imperative in order to perform in their academic areas at the university level, the current study chose to analyze whether the Malaysian Form 5 EFL national textbook prepares students in reading the expository type and grade-level text.

Text Types and Grade-Level Texts

In general, L1 and L2 reading researchers have come to a consensus that there are two major text types: narrative and exposition (e.g., Avaloz, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascon, 2007; Gaddy, Bakken, & Fulk, 2008; Grabe, 2008; Koda, 2007). The common features of narrative text include characters, settings, problems or conflicts encountered by main characters, plots, and affect patterns (Gurney, Gursten, Dimino, & Carnine, 1990; Zhang & Hoosain, 2001). In contrast to the narrative type, expository texts are often written for the purpose of knowledge sharing and thus the content is often informational (Koda, 2005). Narrative texts are more consistent in structure while the structure of expository texts is more varied (Bakken, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 1997). Expository texts often use text structures such as cause and effect, problem and solution or compare and contrast (e.g., Meyer & Freedle, 1984; Meyer & Rice, 1984; Taylor, 1980).

Past studies have shown that L2 readers' familiarity with text structure influences their level of text comprehension (e.g., Bakken, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2002; Cook, 1983; Pullido, 2007). Reading comprehension process requires an efficient integral coordination of underlying processes of reading including discourse processing (e.g., Cook & Gueraud, 2005; Cook & Myers, 2004). The exposure to a certain text type affects students' ability in the discourse processing of that particular text type (e.g., Armbruster, 1986; Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008; Koda, 2005). Hence, if narrative texts instead of expository texts are more frequently used in reading instruction, students might be able to process narrative texts in a more efficient way than processing expository texts due to structure familiarity and frequent processing practices of narrative texts. Bakken et al. (2002) contended that in order for students to be able to read and process the discourse of expository texts effectively in the content areas, explicit training on expository texts is crucial.

In terms of grade-level texts measured by the length of the texts, the findings of past studies indicate that shorter or simplified passages may better facilitate L2 reading comprehension (e.g., Leow, 1997; Shook, 1997; Young, 1999). Some studies examined the role of authentic and simplified texts in which authentic texts are commonly longer

than simplified ones (e.g., Crossley, Louwerse, McCarthy & McNamara, 2007; Tomlinson, Dat, Masuhara, & Ruby, 2001). Oh (2001) studied the effects of elaborated text that is commonly longer than the authentic and simplified texts and found that such modification may also assist text comprehension. Nonetheless, it is still inconclusive whether shorter or longer texts are best used in L2 reading comprehension instruction (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998). Within L2 reading context, the question is how the length of passages used in general L2 reading comprehension instruction would affect students' ability to read at grade-level in the content areas which texts are commonly long and complex in nature (e.g., Beck, McKeown, Sinatra, & Loxterman, 1991).

The importance of L2 readers reading the appropriate type of L2 texts at grade-level, particularly in relation to academic performance has not yet much examined in the field of L2 reading. More often than not, the focus of L2 reading research is concentrated on how L2 learners can comprehend L2 reading texts without much consideration of the type of text and the importance of comprehending grade-level texts. Past studies on L2 reading which examined text length hardly considered whether the texts used in the study were grade-level texts (e.g., Crossley & McNamara, 2008; Crossley, Louwerse, McCarthy & McNamara, 2007; Rott, 2007). Hence, the significance of exposing students to grade-level expository texts in EFL reading instruction at the secondary school level to prepare them for EFL reading in the content areas at the university level deserves further investigation.

EFL Reading within the Malaysian Context

The Malaysian public secondary and tertiary educational systems were the research contexts for the present study. The Malaysian public secondary school system comprises Grades 7 to 11 or Form 1 (seventh grade–13 years old) to Form 5 (eleventh grade–17 years old). Bahasa Malaysia, which uses Roman alphabet, is the medium of instruction in all Malaysian public schools. The English language is highly valued in Malaysia that the English language subject is made a required subject from pre-school to the tertiary level. Bahasa Malaysia is the medium of instruction in all public schools and the same national textbook issued by the Malaysian Ministry of Education are mandated to be used at all public schools. Currently, there are 22 public higher institutions and 49 private higher institutions in Malaysia (List of Universities in Malaysia, 2012). Seventy three percent of the total of private and public higher institutions in Malaysia use English as a medium of instruction. Thus, students' inability in the English language may adversely impact their performance in content areas. In addition, Malaysia is also the largest provider of international undergraduates for courses in the United Kingdom (HESA, 1995), a situation which makes secondary school English language literacy preparation more crucial among secondary school students because the lack of the required EFL skills especially literacy skills may affect students' academic performance at the university level.

Within the Malaysian setting, the number of students less proficient in the English language is becoming more prominent (Powell, 2002). In 2002, the change of paradigm concerning the importance of English for knowledge-based purposes has resulted in a new English language policy with the emergence of the Malaysian University English

Test (MUET) for pre-tertiary education students. The MUET sustains the importance of acquiring the English language up to the tertiary level by making the MUET a requirement for university entry or graduation (Heng & Tan, 2006). EFL reading proficiency is the major component of the MUET. The MUET is compulsory for public university entrance for all students in Malaysia regardless of whether the secondary school leavers are from public or private secondary schools.

The emphasis on reading on the MUET is in line with the substantial role of reading in English in meeting the academic demand at higher institution levels in Malaysia (Kaur & Thiyagarah, 1999). Many past studies on EFL (English as foreign language) reading within the Malaysian setting found that university students' academic performance correlates with their EFL reading ability in content areas (e.g., Faizah, Zalizan, & Norzaini, 2002; Kanagasabai, 1996; Nambiar, 2005, 2007; Ponniah, 1993). Academic literacy and achievements at the university level involving EFL reading could be directly affected by students' ability to read, process, and comprehend texts in English, which at the university level are primarily content area texts in the form of expository text. Hence, the persisting EFL reading issues within the Malaysian tertiary setting suggests that university students are lacking in the ability to process and comprehend expository texts. Students' lack in these reading skills may adversely affect their academic performance. Prevalent EFL reading issues at the university level raises concerns regarding the extent to which secondary school students are provided with sufficient exposure to grade-level expository texts in reading instruction as a preparation for EFL reading at the tertiary level.

Ting and Tee (2008) studied students' awareness and familiarity on the structure of academic text types among second to fourth year undergraduates at a Malaysian university. The findings indicate that the majority of the participants significantly lack familiarity with academic texts discourse due to insufficient direct exposure to the discourse structure of such text type. This suggests the importance of the use of expository type of texts in reading instruction and simultaneously taking into account the grade-level factor in order to provide secondary school students with ample exposure to and awareness of the discourse structure in expository texts as well as the ability to manage grade-level texts.

A study by Kaur and Thiyagarah (1999) among EFL students at a public higher institution indicated that almost 50% of the respondents rated their EFL reading comprehension ability as not being very efficient when reading materials in English. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that students enrolling at Malaysian universities merely have developing academic readiness due to lack EFL reading comprehension ability. It is questionable if such a phenomenon is partly related to lack of exposure to grade-level expository texts in EFL secondary reading preparation. Many EFL researchers within the Malaysian setting contend that the flaws in EFL reading preparation at the secondary school level could be one of the explanations why many university students in Malaysia have difficulties when reading in English (e,g., David & Govindasamy, 2006; Pandian, 2000; Seng, 2007; Seng & Hashim, 2006); a situation that is similar to other EFL countries (e.g., Chen, 1998; Day & Bamford, 2005; Vlack, 2009).

Due to this similarity between Malaysia and other EFL countries, the findings from the present study may have implications for other EFL settings.

Based on the researcher's personal experience for 13 years as an EFL teacher at Malaysian secondary schools, EFL teachers have the discretion to use any reading passage of any length provided in the textbook that they deem appropriate for their EFL reading instruction. The Malaysian Ministry of Education has made it mandatory for EFL teachers to use the passages in the national EFL textbook for reading instruction, although passages from other sources are allowed to be used as additional materials. Since the Malaysian educational system practices standardized testing, it is imperative that teachers use the passages in the textbook because the passages contain the target vocabulary words stipulated in the syllabus. However, when selecting passages, the importance of using grade-level texts in reading instruction within the Malaysian setting is a standard that is not highlighted. As a result of such practices, there is no specific emphasis on the text type that should be frequently used in EFL reading instruction as well as on the use of grade-level texts. Such instructional practice is not in alignment with the goal of the Malaysian EFL Secondary Curriculum to prepare students for EFL reading at the tertiary level. Hence, the EFL reading preparation that students receive at the secondary level is significantly important to study in relation to whether secondary school students within the Malaysian setting are prepared to effectively read and understand EFL grade-level expository texts at the university level.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:
1. What types of reading comprehension passages are used in the Malaysian Form 5 EFL secondary textbook?
2. To what extent are grade-level passages used in the Malaysian Form 5 EFL secondary textbook?

Research Approach and Design

A document analysis method was selected for this study because the current study only examined a textbook as one of the Malaysian EFL curriculum documents. In this study, the term *reading instruction* refers to classroom instructional implementation while the term *reading instructional design* refers to the suggested design of reading instruction in the textbook. *EFL textbook* refers to the nationally mandated Form 5 English language textbook.

As stated in the Form 5 English Language Curriculum Specifications document (Malaysian Ministry of Education [MOE], 2003), one of the main goals of the Malaysian English language secondary curriculum is to prepare students with EFL literacy skills that they may need at the tertiary level. The Form 5 English Language Curriculum Specifications document, which was developed by the Curriculum Planning and Development Division under the MOE, provides instructional guidelines for EFL instructional material development and classroom instruction. Hence, the purpose of this study was to offer suggestions on how the Malaysian Form 5 English language secondary curriculum may effectively prepare secondary school students for the EFL reading

demands they will encounter in institutions of higher education. In order to make such suggestions, EFL reading instructional design in the Malaysian Form 5 EFL secondary textbook was analyzed.

Richards and Rodgers' (2001) model provides a framework of how language teaching can be analyzed. Based on Richards and Rodgers' (2001) model, language teaching can be analyzed in terms of its approach, design, and procedure. Since this study only examined part of the design of L2 reading instruction, only Richards and Rodgers' (2001) conceptual framework of the design of language instruction is applicable, although with modifications. This study added to Richards and Rodgers' (2001) model the analyses of the types and length of reading passages found in the Malaysian Form 5 EFL secondary textbook. Richards and Rodger's (2001) revised model was used to analyze the reading instruction components because this model provides a clear conception of what reading comprehension instruction entails at the design level. Using the revised model, the components of reading instruction were identified comprising the types of reading passages and the grade-level of reading passages used in reading comprehension instruction. Based on the review of past studies, the sub-components of text-type and grade-level were analyzed.

Instrument

Past studies that examined EFL curriculum often used key curriculum documents to gather relevant data followed by document review (e.g., Alwan, 2006, Hung, 2006; Su, 2006). Thus, following previous EFL curriculum studies, EFL textbooks as one of the key curriculum documents was also reviewed and analyzed in this study in order to obtain data related to the reading instructional design in the Form 5 EFL secondary textbook.

The Form 5 EFL secondary textbook was selected as a sample of a standardized instructional material approved by the Textbook Division under the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Based on the description on the MOE Textbook Division (http://www.moe.gov.my/bbt/bukuteks_konsep_en.php) the textbook is organized by topical chapters based on the themes specified in the Form 5 English Language Curriculum Specifications document. The passages used in each chapter are related to the topic of the chapter under the selected theme. The EFL textbook must also conform to instructional guidelines stated in the Form 5 English Language Curriculum Specifications document. The MOE appointed independent authors whom are affiliated with a publishing company to develop the textbook for public schools in Malaysia. However, for reading comprehension passages, there are no specific guidelines on the selection in terms of types and lengths of passages that should be included in the textbook. Hence, it is entirely up to the authors' discretion in determining the types and lengths of passages as long as the passages conform to the themes specified in the Form 5 English Language Curriculum Specifications document. Each reading comprehension passage in the textbook is followed by comprehension questions divided into four sub-sections; supporting details, main ideas, inference, beyond the text and summary.

The national Form 5 EFL textbook was also selected for analysis because the Form 5 is the final year in secondary school and thus it represents the continuity in

education between secondary school level and the tertiary level. Therefore, students' ability to read in the English language at the Form 5 level reflects the information literacy skill in the English language that they have developed in secondary school EFL preparation to meet the academic English demands at the post-secondary level. Henceforth, the Form 5 EFL textbook will be referred to as the EFL textbook.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Richards and Rodgers' (2001) revised model was used in analyzing data in this study in finding out the instructional design of reading instruction reflected in the Malaysian Form 5 national textbook. In order to find out how EFL reading instruction at the secondary school level applies to tertiary academic contexts, qualitative analysis of the EFL textbook was conducted in terms of passage types and grade-level. Such analysis may provide insights into the EFL reading preparation process at the secondary school level. Within the context of the current study, reading passages in the EFL textbook that are not for the purpose of reading comprehension instruction such as reading passages for grammar, vocabulary, and writing practices were not included in the analysis of EFL reading passages.

To answer the first research question in this study, based on the review of past studies on major text types, reading comprehension passages in the EFL secondary textbook were categorized as either narrative texts or expository texts. Texts with the features such as characters, settings, problems or conflicts encountered by main characters, plots, and affect patterns (Gurney, Gursten, Dimino, & Carnine, 1990; Koda, 2005) were labeled as narrative texts. Passages with content information (Koda, 2005) which are normally read for efferent purposes and with text structures such as cause and effect, problem and solution or compare and contrast (e.g., Meyer & Freedle, 1984; Meyer & Rice, 1984; Taylor, 1980) were labeled as expository texts. The total frequency of each passage type was converted into percentages based on the total number of reading comprehension passages in the textbook.

To answer the second research question, grade-level texts in this study were examined in terms of text length using Leslie and Caldwell's (2004; 2006) Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI 3 & 4). These inventories were used as proxies because there is no published inventory for grade-level texts in terms of length for L2 reading. Based on these inventories, the grade-level length of reading texts for upper secondary should be between 470-550 words. The mean length of reading comprehension passages for expository and narrative text types were calculated and served as the indicator of the extent to which grade-level passages for upper secondary level are used in the EFL textbook for both text types. If the mean text length of both types of passages in the EFL textbook are less than 470 words, the texts are considered as not grade-level texts for the Form 5 level and vice versa.

Findings

Tables 1 and 2 present the analyses of types and length of reading comprehension passages in the EFL textbook.

Table 1

Analysis of Narrative Passages in the EFL Textbook

23 Narrative Passages (63.9%)
Mean of passages length = 312 words

Table 2

Analysis of Expository Passages in the EFL Textbook

13 Expository Passages (36.1%)
Mean of passages length = 540 words

In terms of types of passage in the EFL textbook, EFL reading instruction at the Form 5 level exposed students to both narrative and expository texts. There were altogether 36 passages for reading comprehension in the EFL textbook. 23 of the passages were narrative passages (63.9%) and 13 were expository passages (36.1%). This finding indicates that the EFL secondary reading curriculum exposes students to the narrative type of passages significantly more than to the expository passages. In relation to reading in EFL at the university level, such a finding seems to be in contrast to the aim of preparing students to read texts in content areas, which are primarily expository texts (e.g., Pugh, Pawan & Antomarchi, 2000). Past studies have shown that narrative and expository texts require different cognitive processing and cognitive demands (e.g., Baretta, Tomitch, McNair, Lim, & Waldie, 2009; Horiba, 2000; Trabasso & Magliano, 1996). As such, if EFL instruction at the secondary level focuses on training students more on reading narrative texts than reading expository texts, students might be faced with difficulty in processing expository texts, which they encounter the most at the university level. Therefore, to prepare students for reading in EFL at the university level, reading instruction that exposes students more to expository texts may assist them to efficiently process such texts in the content areas.

In terms of length, the mean passage length for the narrative type was approximately 312 words while the mean length for the expository passages was about 540 words. The narrative passages used in the textbook are primarily much shorter than the expository passages instead of approximately equal in length. The Textbook Division of the MOE stated in the textbook specifications section (http://www.moe.

gov.my/bbt/bukuteks_konsep_en.php) that the content of the textbook should be at the target students' grade level. Since the Form 5 is equivalent to eleventh grade in the Canadian high school system, the mean length of the expository passages conform to grade level, but not the length of narrative passages (e.g., Leslie & Caldwell, 2004; 2006). The EFL Curriculum Specifications, which document serves as instructional guidelines for the national EFL upper secondary textbook, indicates developmental instruction in which language activities are divided into different levels from elementary to a more sophisticated level.

If instruction is presented developmentally from a lower level to a higher level, the length of reading passages in the textbook should be in the graded pattern from shorter to longer passages. However, the length of passages in the textbook does not follow such a pattern; the bar graph in Figure 1 shows the irregular pattern of reading passage length in the textbook.
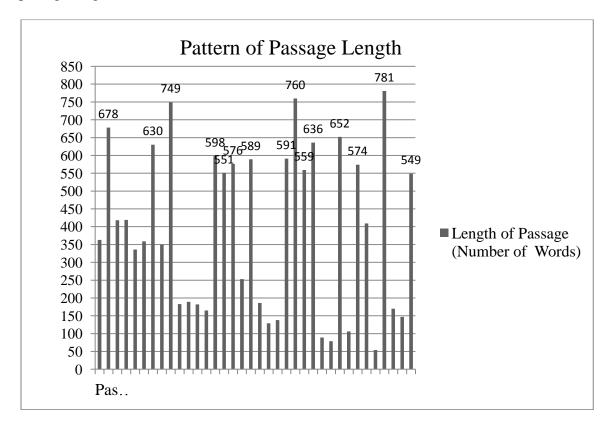

Figure 1. Pattern of Reading Passage Length in the EFL Textbook.

Considering the high irregularity of passage length in the selected EFL textbook, the importance of grade-level passage length seems not to have been given appropriate attention in the textbook planning and development. At the Form 5 level students should be trained to read and comprehend passages in the English language that is somewhat equivalent to the corresponding grade level for English as first language readers. The

range of words for upper secondary reading texts should be between 470-550 words (Leslie & Caldwell, 2004; 2006) in order for them to be able to read at grade-level when enrolling in tertiary education. However, there are only about 15 passages (41.7%) that meet the grade level word range while the other 21 passages (58.3%) are far below grade level. At the university level, students have to read materials in EFL in their content areas in a similar way as native speakers do in order for them to be academically successful. Such an approach to EFL reading instruction in terms of the appropriateness of teaching materials selection may not prepare students with the EFL reading skills that they need at the tertiary level.

With regards to the vocabulary presented in the reading passages, vocabulary learning is addressed as a component of reading comprehension in the form of finding the meanings of words in context. Because the majority of the passages are narrative texts, it seems that vocabulary related to narrative text is more emphasized than vocabulary that is related to expository text. Considering that students primarily have to read expository texts at the university level, they might be faced with difficulty understanding expository texts due to lack of emphasis and exposure to vocabulary that are used in content area texts, which are primarily expository texts (e.g., Pugh, Pawan & Antomarchi, 2000).

Implications and Recommendations

In order to prepare students for university reading in EFL, material selection in terms of reading passages should be given equal attention (e.g., Cheek, 1983). The type of passages used in reading instruction may influence learners' reading comprehension ability with such text type (e.g., Williams, 2005). However, the findings on the type of reading passages indicate that narrative passages are more emphasized than expository passages. Literary exercises on the selected novels designated by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), which conclude each chapter of the EFL textbook, result in more emphasis on narrative passages rather than expository passages. This is the most logical explanation of why narrative passages outnumber expository passages. Nonetheless, the inclusion of literary reading suggests that narrative passages are more emphasized than expository passages in the design of EFL instruction material within the Malaysian setting. Considering the findings on EFL reading passages in which students are primarily exposed to narrative passages and simultaneously not consistently trained to deal with grade-level passages, such L2 reading instructional practices may have academic implications especially at the university level. While the analyses of passages in this study covered the entire book, in actual classrooms, EFL teachers may not include all these passages in their instruction. Thus, not only do expository passages appear less frequently in the textbook, there are chances that students' exposure to the processing of informational texts might even be marginalized because of the pick and choose nature of teaching materials in the curriculum at the EFL teachers' discretion.

As found in the EFL textbook, longer expository passages, which are not meant for reading comprehension instruction but rather for other activities such as EFL writing, can be considered as merely providing students with exposure to expository passages but not training them for comprehension processing for such type of passage. In fact the

focus of reading such passages was steered towards other elements such as format or organization instead of making meaning from the texts.

Apart from the literary passages extracted from the mandated novels by the MOE to be included in the textbook, there were no specifications for the selection of reading passages provided in the Form 5 English Language Curriculum Specifications document, which the textbook should conform to in terms of passage types and grade-level. The pattern of passage selection for EFL reading comprehension in the EFL textbook emerged to be highly irregular from the first chapter to the final chapter in the textbook. Other than the requirement to base the textbook content on the Form 5 English Language Curriculum Specifications, there were no detailed guidelines or specifications from the Textbook Division at the MOE concerning the type and length of EFL reading passages that should be used in the textbook. Below are the data found at the MOE's Textbook Division website regarding the design of the textbook, which partially includes the general characteristics of passages in the textbook: The design of the primary school textbook packages must take into consideration the type of book and the age of the pupils. Usually, the design of primary school textbooks is simpler and the text is less dense. Whereas, the design of secondary school textbook packages is more complex with more texts and additional information (http://www.moe.gov.my/bbt/bukuteks_rekaben tuk_en.php). Nonetheless, there is no explanation or detailed descriptions of what entails "more complex with more texts and additional information." Nonetheless, these general specifications could be an explanation of the inclusion of many passages in the textbook although the other factors involved in the passages selection such as type and length were undetermined based on the data acquired from the EFL textbook and the MOE's Textbook Division website. Since there were no explicit guidelines for the type of passage selection, it seems likely that it was entirely up to the textbook writers' discretion in terms of types of passage selection as well as the frequency for each type of passage to appear in the chapters throughout the textbook. The five revolving themes for the chapters in the textbook allow the choice of reading passages to either be presented in the narrative or expository types of text. It seems that the themes were not directly a decisive factor for the selection of types of passage in the EFL textbook. The imbalance of the narrative and expository reading passages in the EFL textbook raises the question of how the selection of types of reading passage was decided at the textbook planning and development levels in relation to the curriculum goal that is to prepare students to read and understand texts well in their content areas at the higher education level.

Thus, a reading instructional approach that focuses on narrative EFL reading passages more than the expository passages may have implications on achieving such a curriculum goal because at the university level, content area texts are commonly in the form of expository rather than narrative (e.g., Pugh, Pawan & Antomarchi, 2000). In fact, in English as a first language (L1) settings, in order to prepare students for the next school level, it is considered as best practice to expose students to content area literacy by training them on expository texts beginning at the elementary school (e.g., Moss, 2005). If such training is advocated and practiced in the L1 setting at the elementary school level, the need to facilitate students with similar training especially at the upper secondary level in an L2 setting is even more crucial. In addition, using Leslie and

Caldwell's (2004; 2004) reading text length taxonomy according to grade level, the mean length calculation shows that the expository passages are more within the grade level for the Form 5 or eleventh grade, while the narrative types of passages are way below grade level. Therefore, within the Malaysian EFL secondary reading context, the gap between the types of materials used at the secondary school level and the type of reading materials that students most read at the university level should also be given appropriate attention.

Within the Malaysian setting, it is acknowledged that weak learners should be taken into account in material selection because the majority of the population of Malaysian secondary students comprises non-urban students who lack exposure to the English reading materials (e.g., David & Govindasamy, 2003; Rajaretnam & Nalliah, 1999). Instead of using random and irregular pattern of material selection, conforming to the graded curriculum, the text selection should be at least in the pattern that moves from shorter texts to longer ones as the chapters increase and as learners progress in the academic year.

In the EFL textbook, vocabulary is addressed as part of reading comprehension exercise in each chapter. Considering that the majority of the passages were narrative, the question is whether the passages contain appropriate vocabulary that students may need for content reading at the university level (e.g., Coxhead, 2000; Nation, 2001; Swales, 2009). At institutions of higher learning, it is imperative that students are prepared with the required vocabulary to function in the content areas, which commonly involve complex expository texts in terms of concept and language. Word lists such as the Academic Word List compiled by Coxhead (2000) comprises high frequency academic vocabulary that students may frequently encounter in a wide range of academic texts. Hence, spending the majority of EFL reading instructional time on narrative texts rather than expository texts reflects the deficiency of EFL academic word training at the secondary school level of which such training may help prepare students for information literacy in their academic fields at the university level. In order to comprehend an L2 text, readers have to understand 98% of the words in the text (e.g., Koda 2005). Thus, substantially exposing students to narrative vocabulary instead of academic vocabulary at the secondary school level may perhaps assist students to improve their EFL oral skills but not their academic reading skill in EFL at the university level, which involves substantial reading of printed academic sources that are primarily in English (Graddol, 1997).
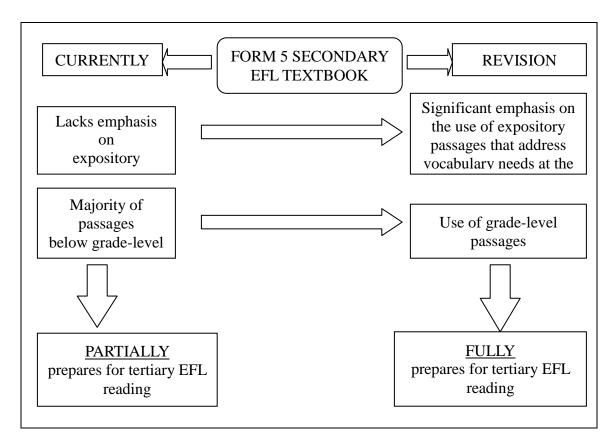
Figure 2. Recommended Revisions.

Figure 2 provides the recommendations for the revision in the reading instructional design in the EFL textbook. The findings of the study indicate that currently the EFL textbook was designed with the emphasis on narrative passages. The EFL textbook includes too few expository passages and the majority of the passages are below grade level. In synthesis, these findings suggest that currently, the reading instructional design in the EFL secondary textbook only partially prepares students for tertiary reading in the EFL. In order for the Malaysian EFL Secondary Curriculum to fully prepare students for tertiary EFL reading, a revision in the EFL textbook instructional design is called for. The textbook should place significant emphasis on the use of grade-level expository passages that address students' vocabulary needs at the university level. With such revision, the goal of the EFL Secondary Curriculum to prepare students for EFL reading at the university level could be met.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that the reading instructional design in terms of the selection of the type of passage and length in the Malaysian national EFL textbook seems to lack emphasis on training students to read grade-level expository texts, which texts students are expected to read most in the content areas at the university level.

The findings of the current study also provide insights into how passage-related variables in the EFL secondary reading instructional design in the EFL textbook might contribute to the persisting EFL reading flaws at the university level, particularly within the Malaysian setting. Thus, a revision of the reading instructional design in the Form 5 EFL secondary textbook in terms of the criteria of passage selection is called for as a step to improve the effectiveness of the EFL secondary reading instruction with the implications for academic preparation for EFL reading at the university level.

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