

# TEACHERS' VOICES

stories from the classroom

**VOL. 5**  
**2025**



# TEACHERS' VOICES

STORIES FROM THE CLASSROOM

Volume 5

2025



**TEACHERS' VOICES:STORIES FROM THE CLASSROOM: VOL. 5**  
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First Published 2021

Cover & Layout Design: Duke Michael

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eISBN: 978-983-9411-10-2

Published by  
Malaysian English Language Teaching Association (MELTA)

G-11-2, Putra Walk, Jalan PP 25, Taman Pinggiran Putra,  
Bandar Putra Permai,  
43300 Seri Kembangan Malaysia.

[www.melta.org.my](http://www.melta.org.my)

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# Foreword

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Welcome to "Teachers' Voices 2025", an enlightening collection of narratives that seeks to illuminate the often unseen landscape of the modern classroom through the eyes and hearts of those who stand at its core: our teachers. In an era of rapid educational evolution, mounting expectations, and diverse student needs, the stories within these pages offer an invaluable window into the daily triumphs, profound challenges, and unwavering dedication that define this noble profession.



This book is a testament to the fact that teaching is far more than a curriculum delivered, or a lesson plan executed. It's an intricate dance of empathy and intellect, a continuous act of fostering growth, and a profound commitment to shaping the future, one student at a time. Each voice within this anthology, whether a seasoned veteran sharing decades of wisdom or a fresh new face in the staffroom brimming with innovative ideas, contributes a unique perspective. These teachers come from a myriad of background... from cikgus, teacher trainers to lecturers and university professors; each with a deep attachment to the profession and its varied dynamics. They reflect the rich tapestry of experiences that comprise the teaching journey, from the joyous breakthroughs of student understanding to the quiet struggles of navigating complex social dynamics and the ever-present demands of an evolving educational system.

I hope that these reflections will resonate deeply with fellow educators, offering solidarity, shared understanding, and a powerful sense of community. Let these authentic voices inspire meaningful dialogue, encourage empathy, and remind us of all the immeasurable and lasting impact a dedicated teacher can have on individual lives and on society.

Above all, this book is a tribute to the educators who have left indelible marks on their students' hearts and minds. It is a recognition of their unwavering commitment and a celebration of the profound difference they make every day. May these stories inspire, uplift, and remind us of the extraordinary power of teaching.

***Datin Dr. Thusha***

***Rani Rajendra***

Chief Editor

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**“Education is not  
the filling of a  
pail, but the  
lighting of a fire.”**

William Butler Yeats

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*Education is the most  
powerful weapon which  
you can use to change  
the world.*

Nelson Mandela

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# BRIDGING WORLDS:

## A Journey of Teaching English to International Students

by

MARIONE ANNE FOO

“Education is not just about imparting knowledge; it’s about connecting with people, understanding their struggles, and empowering them to overcome their fears.”

**I**t was a crisp Monday morning when I walked into the classroom, greeted by a sea of unfamiliar faces. The room was filled with students from China, Korea, and Kazakhstan, each carrying their own unique stories, cultures, and struggles. They were here to learn English, a language that would hopefully open doors for them in their academic and professional lives. Little did I know, this experience would not only challenge me as a teacher but also transform the way I viewed education and human connection.

The first few weeks were, to put it mildly, a struggle. The students’ proficiency in English was very low, and communication felt like navigating a maze with no clear exit. Simple instructions were met with blank stares, and group discussions were often met with silence. The language barrier was only part of the problem; the students seemed disconnected, not just from me but from each other. The initial excitement of being in a new environment had faded, replaced by a sense of demoti-

vation and frustration. I could see it in their eyes—they were losing hope.

I found myself lying awake at night, replaying the day’s lessons in my head. What was I doing wrong? Was it my teaching style? The materials? Or was it something deeper? One evening, as I sat at my desk preparing for the next day’s lesson, it hit me: I had been treating them as a group, a collective entity that needed to be taught. But they weren’t just a group; they were individuals, each with their own strengths, weaknesses, and fears. I realized that if I wanted to reach them, I needed to see them as individuals first and students second.

The next day, I decided to try something different. Instead of diving straight into the lesson, I spent the first 15 minutes of class asking each student about their day. It was slow and awkward at first, but I persisted. I learned that Zhang from China loved playing basketball, that Amina from Kazakhstan missed her family’s homemade bread, and that Ji-hoon from Korea dreamed of becoming a software engineer. These small snippets of their

lives became the foundation of our classroom dynamic.

I also introduced activities that encouraged communication and reduced shyness. One of the most successful was a “cultural exchange” exercise where students shared something unique about their home country. Zhang taught us how to say “hello” in Mandarin, Amina showed us a traditional Kazakh dance, and Ji-hoon shared a popular Korean proverb. The room, once filled with silence, was now alive with laughter and curiosity. It was a turning point.

As the weeks went by, I noticed subtle but significant changes. The students began to participate more actively in class discussions. They started asking questions, even if their sentences were grammatically incorrect. They laughed at my jokes (or at least tried to), and they began to support each other, offering help when someone struggled to find the right words. The classroom, once a place of tension, had become a safe space where they felt comfortable making mistakes and learning from them.

One of the most memorable moments came during a role-playing activity. The students were tasked with ordering food at a restaurant, a scenario that had initially seemed daunting to them. To my surprise they embraced the activity with enthusiasm. Zhang, who had been one of the quietest students, confidently played the role of a waiter, while Amina and Ji-hoon practiced their orders with exaggerated gestures and expressions. It was messy, it was imperfect, but it was real. For the first time, I saw them using English not as a barrier but as a bridge.

By the end of the course, the transformation was undeniable. The students who had once struggled to string together a sentence were now holding basic conversations. They were more con-

**“Teaching is not just about what you teach but how you teach. It’s about patience, empathy, and the willingness to adapt.”**

fident, more engaged, and more willing to take risks. But beyond their language skills, what struck me most was the sense of community they had built. They had started as strangers from different corners of the world, but they left as friends who had shared a journey of growth and discovery.

Looking back, this experience taught me more about teaching—and about life—than I could have imagined. It reminded me that education is not just about imparting knowledge; it’s about connecting with people, understanding their struggles, and empowering them to overcome their fears. It’s about seeing them as individuals, not just students, and creating an environment where they feel valued and supported.

To anyone embarking on a similar journey, I would say this: teaching is not just about what you teach but how you teach. It’s about patience, empathy, and the willingness to adapt. It’s about seeing the potential in every student, even when they can’t see it themselves. And most importantly, it’s about building bridges—between cultures, between languages, and between hearts.

This experience will forever remain etched in my memory, not just as a teaching assignment but as a profound lesson in humanity. It was a reminder that even in the face of challenges, hope and progress are always possible. And sometimes, all it takes is a little effort to see the world—and the people in it—in a different light.

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# UNBREAKABLE SPIRIT:

## Triumphs of the Classroom

by

THUSHA DEVI RAJENDRA

“It was resilience—not just words—that made them fluent in the language of perseverance.”

**T**he English language classroom had always been more than a place of teaching for me; it was a battlefield of words, emotions, and silent struggles. Within those four walls, I witnessed students wrestle not just with grammar and pronunciation but with self-doubt, fear, and the daunting challenge of expressing themselves in a foreign tongue. And yet, resilience—like an unshakable flame—burned brightly within them, lighting the way forward.

I remembered the first time I walked into 3 USM as an English language teacher, feeling a mix of excitement and trepidation. My hands trembled slightly as I placed my books on the table, scanning the faces before me—some eager, some anxious, some distant. I knew, at that moment, that my role was not just to teach English, but to foster courage, to nurture determination, and to remind my students that failure was not the opposite of success, but a crucial part of the journey towards it.

I saw resilience every day in my students. There was Shafiq, a new student from Kuala Terengganu and English was her adversary—an intimidating force that taunted her with its irregular verbs and strange idioms. The first time she stood to speak, her voice trembled. Words tangled

“Failure was not the opposite of success, but a crucial part of the journey towards it.”

in her throat like vines, and the silence that followed felt heavier than a thousand unread textbooks. The class watched, waiting. Some eyes held sympathy, others, impatience. Shafiq sat down quickly, her cheeks burning with humiliation.

For days, she barely spoke. But she listened. She watched how others formed words, how confidence carried even the most flawed sentences forward. Then, one day, she tried again. A single sentence—

For days, she barely spoke. But she listened. She watched how others formed words, how confidence carried even the most flawed sentences forward. Then, one day, she tried again. A single sentence—halting, uncertain, but spoken. It was as if she had chipped away a piece of the great wall before her. A week later, she added another sentence. A month later, she volunteered for a presentation. Her words were still imperfect, but they were hers, and she owned them. Shafiq had found her resilience, not in perfection, but in persistence.

Resilience in 3 USM was not always loud. Sometimes, it was found in the quiet determination of students who refused to surrender. I saw Theven, who sat in the back row, scribbling answers in his notebook while battling the voice in his head that told him he would never be good enough. I saw Farhan, practicing writing during his free time because he did not want to fail his English paper. I saw Aisha who once failed a test so badly that she wanted to quit, but instead, she focused on her weak areas and worked tirelessly to

improve.

But resilience was not just about individuals, it was a shared experience. It was in the collective energy of my classroom, 3 USM, where mistakes were not ridiculed but embraced as opportunities for growth. It was the quiet nod of encouragement from a peer, the teacher's patient smile, the shared laughter when someone mispronounced a word in a way that sounded hilariously wrong. These moments, these tiny, seemingly insignificant instances built something much greater than just language skills. They forged courage, determination, and an unbreakable spirit.

Language learning was, at its core, an exercise in resilience. It was about standing in the face of confusion and not running away. It was about making mistakes, again and again until those mistakes slowly turned into understanding. It was about the moments of frustration, the laughter at mispronunciations, the endless rewrites of an essay, the quiet pride of finally getting it right and the silent prayers before a presentation.

The classroom was a place of second chances. Every day, my students entered, carrying with them their worries, their past failures, their fears of speaking up. And yet, they returned. They raised their hands, even when they were unsure. They

pushed through the embarrassment of saying the wrong thing. They kept trying, because somewhere deep inside, they knew that the only way forward was through the struggle.

And when success finally came, it was not always loud. Sometimes, it was a tear of relief when a difficult test was finally over. Sometimes, it was simply the realization that fear no longer controlled them.

Resilience was not about never falling—it was about always getting back up. It was about Shafiq, Theven, Farhan, Aisha, and every student who had ever doubted themselves but chose to try anyway. And in the end, it was resilience—not just words—that made them fluent in the language of perseverance. It was resilience that transformed a classroom into a place of possibility, where every failure was just another step towards triumph.

**“Resilience was not about never falling—it was about always getting back up.”**

One of the greatest moments that proved the power of resilience came when 3 USM won the school-level choral speaking competition. It was not an easy road; weeks of preparation, countless rehearsals, and moments of doubt threatened to

break their spirit. But they persevered. Day after day, they practiced their lines, perfecting their articulation, synchronizing their voices, and embracing the rhythm of the words. Mistakes were

made, voices cracked, and frustration crept in. Yet, they pushed through. They learned to support one another, to blend their voices in unity, and to believe in their collective strength. And when they finally stood before the judges, their voices strong and unwavering, they delivered a performance that echoed with passion, determination, and triumph. When victory was announced, I saw in their eyes the undeniable truth: resilience had led them there. It had turned struggle into strength, fear into courage, and doubt into triumph.

Through it all, there was one song that kept them going - "Hall of Fame" by The Script. Whenever doubt crept in, they hummed its melody, drawing strength from its lyrics. "You can be the greatest, you can be the best, you can be the King Kong banging on your chest." It became their anthem, a reminder that their struggles were temporary, but their perseverance was permanent. That song, much like their journey, was a testament to the unyielding power of resilience.

*We cannot educate the citizens of tomorrow based on the requirements of yesterday.*  
— Abhijit Naskar



*Dr. Thusha Devi Rajendra has 30 years of experience teaching English at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Her research interests span children's and world literature, semiotics, multimodal analysis, and TESL. Passionate about creative teaching, she loves to explore drama and poetry in education. She enjoys travelling, creative writing, reading, and gardening.*

# WRITING COURSE IS BORING

- A Fact or A Myth?

by  
HOOI CHEE MEI

“A writing course is only boring if we let it be.”

**I**n the June 2024 semester, I was assigned to teach the Basic Professional Writing course. This has been my “baby” ever since I took over to teach this course in the May 2022 semester. This course was taught in a long semester, in which the lessons were conducted for 14 weeks. Surprisingly, there were only nine students who signed up for this course because it was an elective course. I was curious with the figure because normally, there would be around 30 to 40 plus students who would sign up for this elective course. After enquiring further, I realised that few students could not sign up for this course due to the clashes in schedule with major subjects. Hence, I took this up with an open heart to teach a small group of students in that semester.

Honestly, to teach a small group of students would be tricky for me. This is because I was used to plan lessons to teach a large group of students. To top it all off, I had one Chinese student who was

quite weak in English. Henceforth, I would not only need to pay extra attention to this Chinese student but also to ensure that I will not to be biased towards my eight Malaysian students.

Pertaining to their assessments, the students would need to do three assessment tasks: an individual task and two group tasks. For the first assessment which was an individual task, they were required to write a job application letter together with a resume or a Curriculum Vitae (CV) based on a real job advertisement. In order for me to know whether they wrote the job application letter together with a resume or a CV by themselves, I told them that I would conduct a mock job interview to ensure that they actually did their assessment and not use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to generate their assessment. They were supposed to know what they wrote for this assessment because they could not refer to it during the mock job interview. This would assist them to do their assessment properly and they would be taught on how to tackle the questions for the actual job

interview.

I recall when the students sent their first assessment for me to check, there were few errors, in which I provided some comments for improvement. In the mock job interview, they were asked questions from their job application letter and the resume or CV like:

“You scored so well in your studies. How do you feel?”

“What did you do in order to get this good result?”

“What determines you to qualify for the job?”

The questions asked were the exact questions asked to me during my job interview before becoming an Assistant Professor at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). Feedback was given to them after the mock job interview. Coincidentally, there was a career fair that was held at UTAR which was related to this assessment. I eventually planned my lesson to cater to it, and I informed my students to visit the career fair which happened during my lesson time. I gave

them a short task to visit the career fair and to provide me with a summary on what role or position that they found was related to their major course. This would make the students be aware of how to find a job and what to do to apply for a job after they graduate.

“I believe that we, as educators, could instil some laughter in our lessons to make the lessons fun and interesting.”

With regards to the second assessment, it was a group task that involved writing the minutes of the meeting. In this assessment, they would need to write the effective minutes of meetings. I instilled some humour when teaching them. I asked the students the first question which was: “What is the short form of minutes?” They answered: “MINS”. Thus, I told the students to spell “M.I.N.S.” individually by saying it out loudly, to which one of the students understood the joke when I informed them to spell it out faster. It turned

out to be pronounced as “Am I an ass?” when they spelled it out quickly. All of them laughed at this joke. I believe that we, as educators, could instil some laughter in our lessons to make the lessons fun and interesting.

Finally, they had to do their third assessment which was an informal proposal. This informal proposal would be the toughest assessment to be carried out because it was technical. Hence, I tried to make the students understand the concepts and elements of the informal proposal to make it better. Consultation and feedback were also provided to them for their second and third assessments to ensure that they were on the right track.

Usually, I would assign a different leader for each group for the weekly group tasks to instil confidence in them to lead the group. By doing that, they improved not only in their writing but also in guiding the group members. Amazingly, all nine students passed this course with flying colours in that semester. My advice to all educators would be that we could change our approach to be interesting by replacing a fact or a myth that a writing course is boring. Consequently, the students will try their best to do well if they notice that we give them extra attention.

**“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.”**

Albert Einstein

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# THE MAGIC OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN MY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by  
ADI IRMA SURYADI

“Teaching English is not just about teaching a language—it’s about empowering students to express themselves, think creatively, and connect with the world.”

**A**s an English teacher, I am always looking for ways to make language learning more engaging, meaningful, and memorable for my students. Teaching young learners, especially in a world dominated by technology, has its challenges and opportunities. Traditional teaching methods, while effective, often struggle to capture the imagination of students who are more accustomed to screens, interactivity, and multimedia. That is why I turned to digital storytelling, a method that blends creativity with technology, and what an adventure it has been!

## Discovering Digital Storytelling

The idea of using digital storytelling in my English lessons came to me while researching innovative ways to teach language skills. I came across stories of educators worldwide using digital platforms to help students narrate their experiences, create fictional tales, and even document historical events. The concept was simple: students would craft their own stories using digital tools such as

video, images, voice recordings, and animations. This approach would not only improve their language skills but also allow them to develop their creativity, confidence, and digital literacy.

With excitement, I decided to introduce this project to my students. Initially, I was unsure how they would respond. Would they find it too challenging? Would technology be a barrier rather than a tool? My doubts disappeared the moment I introduced the project in class. Their eyes lit up with curiosity, and I knew I was on the right path.

## The First Steps: Choosing a Story

To begin, I asked my students to brainstorm story ideas. Some chose personal narratives about a memorable trip or a funny experience, while others opted for fairy tales or futuristic adventures. This brainstorming session was one of the most exciting moments in my classroom. Students who were usually shy about speaking in English suddenly became animated, sharing ideas and helping each other refine their plots.

After selecting their stories, the next step was writing a draft. This was where English language skills came into play. They had to focus on grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. But unlike traditional writing exercises, this felt less like an assignment and more like an opportunity to bring their ideas to life.

## Bringing Stories to Life

Once the drafts were complete, we moved on to the digital aspect of storytelling. I introduced them to various free and user-friendly tools such as Canva, Storybird, and StoryJumper. All students used StoryJumper to create stories with illustrations and voiceovers. In addition, they used AI tools to create illustrations or images and sound effects.

One of the most memorable projects was by a student named Nathasya and her group members, who created a story about Discipline and Consequences: A lesson learned. She used her own digital drawings, inputted the drawings into StoryJumper, and then added a voiceover. Watching her transform her simple idea into a full digital story was inspiring. She

was learning English, yes, but she was also building her storytelling skills, artistic expression, and confidence.

### Overcoming Challenges

Like any project, this one came with its own set of challenges. Some students struggled with technology, while others were hesitant to record their voices, afraid of making mistakes in English. To address these issues, I created small peer-support groups where tech-savvy students helped those who were less familiar with digital tools. I also reassured them that making mistakes was part of the learning process

“This digital storytelling project was more than just an English lesson—it was a transformative experience for my students and me.

and that their stories didn’t have to be perfect, they just had to be theirs.

Another challenge was time management. Some students got so absorbed in perfecting their illustrations or voice overs that they lost track of deadlines. To keep them on track, I set clear milestones: first the script, then the storyboard, followed by the digital creation, and finally, a presentation day where everyone would showcase their work.

### The Big Reveal-Presentation Day

The day of presentations was nothing short of magical. Students proudly showcased their digital stories to their

classmates, who watched with enthusiasm. We had a diverse mix of stories, some funny, some touching, and some incredibly imaginative. One student narrated a story about a robot who wanted to learn how to dance, while another shared a heartfelt tale about missing her grandmother.

The best part? My students were communicating in English without fear. They were engaging with their audience, answering questions, and discussing their creative choices. It was a moment of triumph for all of us.

### Reflecting on the Impact

This digital storytelling project was more than just an English lesson—it was a transformative experience for my students and me. They didn’t just learn new vocabulary or practice grammar; they developed critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy skills. More importantly, they discovered their own voices and the power of storytelling.

For me, this project reaffirmed my belief that teaching should evolve with the times. By embracing technology, we can make learning more relevant and exciting for our students. The joy and confidence I saw in my students convinced me that digital storytelling is a tool I will continue to use in my classroom.

Teaching English is not just about teaching a language—it’s about empowering students to express themselves, think creatively, and connect with the world. And if a little digital magic can help achieve that, then I’m all for it.

*A student’s digital story about discipline and consequences, creatively brought to life through illustrations and narration—showcasing how digital storytelling empowers learners to express themselves in English with confidence.*



Adi Irma Suryadiis is an English educator with over five years of experience in TeachingEnglish to Young Learners (TEYL). He earned his Magister of Education degree in 2022. Passionate about innovative teaching methods, he integrates technology and storytelling to create engaging and effective learning experiences for students.

# TASTE & TELL

## 2024

### A FEAST OF CULTURES, A CELEBRATION OF LANGUAGE!

by

YUGESWARI ARUMUGAM

**T**he idea for TASTE & TELL: Batang Padang Food Fiesta (HIP) District Level 2024 was born from a simple yet powerful vision; celebrating cultural diversity through food while fostering language immersion. As the Head of the English Panel of SMK Air Kuning, Perak and the Chairperson for the district, I had the privilege of spearheading this initiative, a collaborative brainchild of fifteen dedicated secondary school English Panel Heads. Together, we meticulously crafted an event that would seamlessly blend language learning, cultural appreciation, and community engagement. Our efforts were guided by the invaluable wisdom of SISC+ Ms. Lim Lin Sun, whose unwavering support shaped our strategies. With the enthusiastic backing of our esteemed principal, Tuan Haji Mohd Khuzaimi bin Mohd Nordin, and the unwavering encouragement of the Senior Assistant of Student Affairs, Puan Suhaina Risal Binti Mohd Kahiri, we knew we were on the verge of something truly extraordinary.

The planning was intense. Every detail, from the rules and regulations to the logistics of the event, required careful deliberation. Our first challenge arose when we needed official approval from JPN Perak to collect registration fees—a necessary step to ensure smooth execution. Just when we thought everything was in place, an unexpected roadblock emerged. The original date, October 16, 2024, clashed with an important briefing on the safety and administration of the SPM 2024 English Speaking Test, rendering many English

teachers unavailable. I still remember the moment of disbelief upon discovering this conflict. With our documentation nearly completed, it seemed like an insurmountable setback.

But adversity fuels resilience. Alongside Ms. Umami Fadhilah and Ms. Sumithra, we painstakingly reworked the documentation. It was a process that demanded patience, efficiency, and an unshakable belief in our mission. Our beloved principal stood by us unwaveringly, and with his encouragement, we returned to JPN Perak with a revised proposal. The approval for a new date - October 15, 2024 - felt like a triumphant breakthrough, paving the way for an event that would soon become a district-wide spectacle.

Excitement buzzed through the participating schools. Fifteen secondary schools, each representing a different country, embraced the challenge with enthusiasm. From Malaysia's Semai cuisine to Italy's rich pasta dishes, students meticulously curated their booths, transforming them into vibrant representations of their assigned cultures. The sight of students donning traditional attire, immersing themselves in the language and history of their chosen countries, was nothing short of inspiring.

The participating schools and their designated countries were:

- SMK Sri Tapah - Malaysia (Semai cuisine)
- SMK Syekh Abdul Ghani - England
- SMJK Choong Hua - India
- SMK Buyong Adil - Thailand
- SMK Dato' Panglima Perang Kiri - Vietnam
- SMK (F) Besout - Arab region
- SMK Hamid Khan - Korea
- SABK Batang Padang - Malaysia (Malay cuisine)
- SM Sains Tapah - France
- SMK Bidor - East Malaysia
- SMK Sungai Keruit - China
- SMK Trolak - Mexico
- SMK Chenderiang - Japan
- SMK Sungkai - United States of America
- SMK Air Kuning - Italy

One of the most unforgettable moments of the day was the fashion runway—a stunning display of cultural attire orchestrated by AKSES students, who had previously showcased their talents on a national level. Under the expert guidance of Ustaz Mohamad Fahdin Bin Zakaria, they took to the stage, exuding confidence and elegance as they intertwined fashion with heritage. The crowd was captivated, their applause echoing through the venue. Just when the energy was at its peak, the AKSeS Band, led by the talented Nor Nasyitah Balqis Binti Darul Adnan, delivered a breathtaking performance, further elevating the atmosphere with their electrifying musical renditions.

The event's significance was amplified by the presence of Mr. Faisal Bin Md Yusuf, the Head Assistant Director of the Language Division, JPN Perak, who officiated the launch. His speech was a poignant reminder of the role language and cultural understanding play in shaping global citizens. Watching the students engage not only in English but also in the native languages of their assigned countries, I felt an overwhelming sense of fulfilment. Here, in this very moment, learning transcended the confines of a

classroom—it became lived, breathed, and experienced.

As the aroma of international cuisine filled the air, students eagerly showcased their culinary masterpieces. Each booth was an explosion of flavours, textures, and stories, from the delicate artistry of Japanese sushi to the bold spices of Indian delicacies. It was more than just a feast; it was an exchange of knowledge, history, and appreciation. Observing students from different schools engage in meaningful conversations, sharing insights about their assigned cultures, I knew we had achieved something profound.

Of course, no success story is without its challenges. The sheer number of attendees made crowd control a daunting task. The biggest disappointment was the inability to accommodate all students from SMK Air Kuning, a limitation dictated by logistical constraints. But despite these hurdles, the spirit of collaboration, the



dedication of teachers, and the boundless enthusiasm of students carried the event to unprecedented heights.

Of course, no success story is without its challenges. The sheer number of attendees made crowd control a daunting task. The biggest disappointment was the inability to accommodate all students from SMK Air Kuning, a limitation dictated by logistical constraints. But despite these hurdles, the spirit of collaboration, the dedication of teachers, and the boundless enthusiasm of students carried the event to unprecedented heights.

Reflecting on this journey, I am overwhelmed with gratitude. To our principal, Tuan Haji Mohd Khuzaimi Bin Mohd Nordin, your belief in us never wavered. To Ms. Umami Fadhillah and Ms. Sumithra, your resilience and meticulous attention to detail turned setbacks into stepping stones. To SISC+ Ms. Lim Lin Sun, your mentorship provided the foundation for our success. To every teacher and student who poured their heart into this festival—you are the reason this event was not just a success, but a milestone in our collective journey.

And above all, to the fifteen incredible schools that participated, your dedication and creativity made this event a reality. Without you, TASTE & TELL: Batang Padang Food Fiesta 2024 would not have



been possible. Your hard work, passion, and enthusiasm turned this into more than just an event—it became a celebration of diversity, education, and unity. Your efforts created a platform for students to explore, interact, and grow beyond their classrooms, leaving an indelible mark on all those who participated.

The TASTE & TELL: Batang Padang Food Fiesta 2024 was more than just a day of food and festivity. It was a movement—one that championed language learning, cultural appreciation, and the power of unity in diversity. As I look forward to future editions, I know that this is only the beginning. The fusion of education, culture, and community will continue to thrive, leaving a lasting impact on all who were part of this extraordinary experience. This event has set a new benchmark, proving that with passion and teamwork, we can create meaningful, unforgettable experiences for students and educators alike.



*Ms. Yugeswari Arumugam is an English teacher at SMK Air Kuning, Perak, with 10 years of experience. Holding a Master's in M.Ed TESL, she is a Ministry of Education Malaysia-recognized Edufluencer. As Head of the English Panel, she promotes innovative learning and HIP, now expanded to the district level.*



# FROM WASTE TO WONDER:

## Building a Sustainable Community

by

SHEE YUEN LING

“The project showcased how one man’s trash could truly become another man’s treasure, turning waste into wonder.”

In the heart of our community lies a story of transformation, innovation, and sustainability. It all began with a simple yet powerful idea: turning waste into wonder. This idea was the cornerstone of our project-based learning initiative, "From Waste to Wonder: Building a Sustainable Community," which not only garnered us multiple prestigious awards but also left a lasting impact on our students and the community.

The journey started with a focus on waste management, recycling, and sustainable practices, aiming to utilize fruit and vegetable waste for enzyme production. This project not only addressed critical environmental issues but also incorporated an entrepreneurial element, providing our students with a holistic learning experience that spanned various subjects and skill sets.

### The Genesis of the Project

The project was conceptualized to raise awareness about waste management and sustainable practices. By transforming waste materials into valuable enzymes, we highlighted the potential of upcycling and its positive impact on the environment. Enzymes derived from fruit and vegetable waste have numerous industrial applications, and this innovative approach opened a new realm of possibilities for our students.

Our pupils were actively involved in every step of the project, from collecting waste materials to producing enzymes and finally to marketing the enzyme-based products. This hands-on experience was designed to develop essential entrepreneurial skills, enhance their understanding of environmental issues, and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and Goal 13 (Climate Action).



*Students and teachers proudly display their MELTA certificates, celebrating achievements in project-based learning and sustainability*

### Achievements and Recognition

Our efforts were rewarded when we won the Gold Award in the MELTA GANAKUMARAN SUBRAMANIAM PBL GOLD AWARD. This was a monumental achievement, marking the beginning of a series of accolades. The project also clinched the Gold Award in the prestigious

EDU@INNOVATE competition organized by UPSI. These successes were a testament to the dedication and hard work of our students and the effectiveness of project-based learning.

Additionally, our poster for the 2nd International Action Research Competition 2023 (2nd i-ARC 2023) received the People's Choice Award, with an overwhelming 422 likes, reflecting the community's support and belief in our work. The action research on Waste2-Words, an integral part of our project, also won a silver medal, adding another feather to our cap.

## “Project-based learning turns ideas into impact.”

In addition to these achievements, our school was honoured with the AIA Healthiest School Award and the South-east Asia Waste Hero School Award. These accolades not only recognized our commitment to sustainability and health but also positioned our school as a leader in promoting environmental and health-conscious practices in the region.

## Educational Impact and Skill Development

Through this project, students not only learned about sustainability but also honed valuable soft skills. The project fostered creativity, innovation, and collaboration among students. They engaged in various activities that enhanced their language skills, such as:

- **Listening:** Students listened to audio resources and conducted interviews related to enzyme production.
- **Speaking:** They participated in group discussions, presentations, workshops, and demonstrations on enzyme-making processes.
- **Writing:** They wrote reports, recipes, and procedural documents for enzyme production.
- **Reading:** They read articles, recipes, and scientific literature on food enzymes.

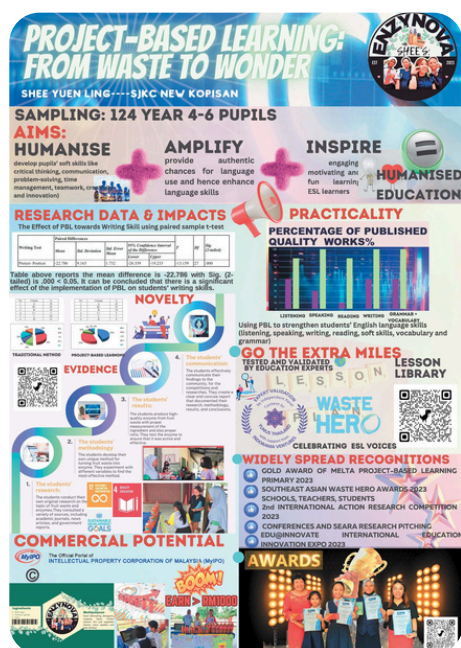
The integration of technology played a crucial role in this project. Students used multimedia tools to design posters, create listening and speaking exercises, and collaborate on digital platforms for writing tasks. This not only supported their ICT skills but also made the learning process more engaging and effective.

### Left

The award-winning “From Waste to Wonder” poster highlighting the project’s goals, impacts, and achievements in sustainability education.

### Right

The team representing SJKC New Kopisan at EDU@INNOVATE 2023, where their innovative sustainability project gained recognition.



## Entrepreneurial Initiatives

One of the most exciting aspects of the project was the entrepreneurial initiative. Students produced enzyme products and sold them to the community at reasonable prices (500ml for RM5 and 1 litre for RM10). The first cycle of sales generated RM1000, which was contributed to the school. The success of this initiative was recognized with the Gold Award from MELTA PBL Project and a cash prize of RM300.

## Community Engagement and Future Prospects

Our project emphasized community engagement through various initiatives. Students created social media posts, videos, and awareness materials highlighting sustainable practices and the benefits of enzyme-based products. They organized community events such as workshops and demonstrations to showcase the process of enzyme production. Collaboration with the school community and aspiring student entrepreneurs fostered long-term sustainability and entrepreneurship development.

Reflecting on this journey, it's evident that the project not only elevated students' skills but also instilled a lifelong love for learning. Their creativity flourished, and their confidence soared as they took charge of their education. The project showcased how one man's trash could tr-



*The Waste2Words action research abstract presented at i-ARC 2023, showcasing the positive impact of project-based learning on ESL writing skills.*

ly become another man's treasure, turning waste into wonder.

As we look to the future, continued efforts in sustainability and entrepreneurship will remain at the forefront of our initiatives. This project has laid a strong foundation for future endeavours, inspiring students to explore, innovate, and contribute to building a sustainable community.

In conclusion, "From Waste to Wonder: Building a Sustainable Community" exemplifies the power of project-based learning in nurturing young minds. It aligns perfectly with our belief in empowering students to explore, innovate, and collaborate, making a lasting impact on their education and the community. This journey of turning waste into wonder is a testament to the boundless potential within each of our pupils and the transformative power of education.



*Shee Yuen Ling is an Edufluencer 1.0 appointed by MOE and a dedicated English language teacher, demonstrating a profound commitment to lifelong learning as the cornerstone of her ethos. She firmly believes that teaching is a means of touching the very soul of a person. In 2022, she was honoured with the esteemed Pingat Penghormatan Guru (PPG) award. She also holds the distinction of being a proficient CEFR master trainer and has been appointed as an Edufluencer by the Ministry of Education. She is one of the visionary co-founders behind Media Education for All (ME4A). She is also an ambassador DKDP as well as a Digital expert in ICT field.*

# VOICES ACROSS the WAVES

by

DEEBAMALAR PANDI

**M**

y father used to take me to the Port Klang Jetty when I was six years old so I could see the sunset paint the sky in gold and orange hues. "Appa, what lies beyond the sea's edge?" I

would enquire as the boats bobbed gently down the shore.

"There is an island called Pulau Ketam—the island of crabs," he would respond with a sardonic smile. "I'll take you there one day."

Dreaming of the enigmatic island just out of my grasp, I held fast to that promise. But life took over as the years went by. Even my spouse talked about taking me there after we were married, but the fantasy was never realised.

Then, when I was 37, destiny made a decision for me.

Everything changed in 2019 after receiving a call from the district education office. I was told by the officer, "Come in to collect your promotion letter," I was both excited and nervous about my new posting. To the officer's surprise, I burst out laughing when I finally saw the letter.

He questioned inquisitively, "Why are you laughing?"

I grinned and said, "I've been wanting to go to Pulau Ketam all my life. I now could visit there daily.

I took a deep breath as I stepped off the boat onto Pulau Ketam's wooden dock, where I could smell the sea, hear the gulls, and see the vibrant stilt buildings

rising above the water. The clatter of everyday life, the hum of motorbikes, and the conversation of fishermen filled the island. I rode my bike to school every morning, navigating the winding wooden paths. Children raced past, laughing, and fishermen nodded hello. The school itself was a tribute to tenacity, standing on stilts with a worn wooden construction.

Mr. Ooi, the principal, gave me a warm welcome on my first day. "Madam Deeba, the children are excited to meet you."

Curious faces peered through classroom doors as we strolled along the unassuming hallways. When the bell rang, I entered my classroom and was met with hungry eyes and shy looks.

I smiled and said, "Hello, everyone," bridging the gap by combining Bahasa Malaysia and English. "Madam Deeba is my name. *Cikgu baru kamu, saya*. Your new English teacher is me."

With looks that ranged from apprehensive excitement to curiosity, the children listened intently. The majority of them had little exposure to English and spoke Hokkien or Teochew at home. I was aware that I needed to make language acquisition enjoyable and interesting for them.

The initial weeks were difficult. Basic English was difficult for many of my students, so I had to modify my teaching strategies frequently. To get their attention, I used games, songs, and visual aids. I also learnt some simple Hokkien phrases to better interact with kids, and every time I tried to use them, I got excited chuckles.

Overcoming the students' fear of speaking English was one of my toughest tasks. Many were insecure because they feared making mistakes. To address this, I established a "Mistake-Friendly Zone," where mistakes were welcomed as teaching moments rather than as failures. Students gradually started to take part more actively, conversing and using English to express themselves.

Koh Pei Yi was one pupil who stood out. Although she was a reserved child who didn't talk much, I could see that she was fascinated by online resources for education. She paused before raising her hand during a group activity one afternoon.

"Teacher, can I try?" Softly, she enquired.

I felt a surge of pride. "Obviously, Pei Yi. Show us your abilities.

She recited a simple sentence in English, her voice trembling but clear. Pei Yi's face brightened with a smile as the classroom erupted in cheers. For all of us, not just her, that was a turning point. She started using English more frequently after that day, becoming more comfortable with each lesson.

I used Book Creator, an online tool that allows students to design their own English-language illustrated stories, to introduce digital storytelling to make learning the language more interesting. This program changed everything by encouraging creativity and improving language skills.

Motivated by Pei Yi's bravery, I worked with SJKC schools on the island to plan an

English Language Carnival. Through English-language speeches, debates, storytelling, and skits, students demonstrated their growth. Although the planning was rigorous, the excitement was contagious.

The school became a thriving centre for learning English on the big day. Speaking in English, Pei Yi stood boldly in front of the audience. The crowd erupted in applause as she concluded, and I saw education officers dabbing at their eyes, deeply affected by what they had seen. They had never thought that pupils from a tiny island school could become so confident and fluent.

**“It was about using the power of the English language to change lives, especially mine.”**

An important turning point was the English Language Carnival's success. The importance of learning English as a means of gaining access to more opportunities became clear to the students. Their academic achievement improved along with their confidence. The SPM English pass rate increased gradually over time, more than doubling from its initial level.

I kept coming up with new ideas, teaching other educators on how to use digital resources and incorporating local tales into courses. I eventually rose to prominence in my school and district, mentoring teachers outside of Pulau Ketam and sharing excellent practices.

Pei Yi came up to me one evening as I was sitting on the jetty taking in the sunset.

“Thank you for everything, Teacher. One day, I hope to teach English like you do.”

With a full heart, I grinned. “Pei Yi, you are free to be anything you choose to be. Simply maintain your self-belief.”

I came to the realisation that my trip to Pulau Ketam had never been solely about realising a boyhood fantasy as the sun began to set. It was about using the power of the English language to change lives, especially mine.

*“Ajar dengan jiwa guru”* - Teach with the soul of a teacher is a common saying from my principal. And I have done precisely that.

*Deebamalar a/p Pandi is an English teacher at SMK Pulau Ketam with over 18 years of teaching experience. Promoted to Guru Kanan Mata Pelajaran in 2019, she champions digitalisation in education and has served as a Malaysia Book Creator ambassador since 2020. As an Action Research coach in Klang district for the past seven years, she has led numerous workshops on innovative teaching pedagogies, sharing best practices with educators across the district.*



# A SPARK OF LITERACY:

## Reforming Students' Reading Voyage

by

RAGANESWARI RAMASAMY

“Her students no longer saw reading as a difficult task but as an adventure—and in helping them discover that joy, Ms. Rose found a new home in the heart of a Malaysian village.”

**M**s. Rose's teaching venture began in 2015. She was over the moon once her friend said that she could check her posting information via the official website. She had always visualised making a difference in the lives of her students. Her thought of becoming a teacher bumped into her mind when she was five. When the chance to be posted as a teacher in Malaysia happened after she completed her degree, she couldn't comprehend her anticipation. Nevertheless, her gladness quickly turned into wonder when she found out that her first posting was in a remote area of Malaysia, which was far from the sparkling cities that she imagined. She told her parents about it, and they asked her to go.

After a week, Ms. Rose had prepared her belongings with excitement and desolation feelings. She boarded a bus ride to her new home, where the roads were unac-

customed and the countryside immensely different from what she knew. The journey was very long, and she was shimmering about her old life and the new one which she was about to begin. After a few hours of her journey, the bus toured further into the heart of Malaysia, a wisdom of willpower aroused to settle in. Although she felt isolated at times, she reminded herself of the purpose she was there for. The purposes were to teach, to inspire, and to make a difference. Her courage cultivated as she equipped herself to dive into her new character, knowing that the exploration ahead would be one of both personal and professional development.

After a nine-hour journey, she reached the rural village. After stepping on her feet for the first time into the village, she had taken a leap of faith and tried to come out from her comfort zone. She met her house owner to take the key to the rented house. After a short conversation, she brought all her belongings into her house. The follow-

ing morning, she woke up early and prepared all her stuff, which she had to bring along with her. After that, she walked to her school, as her school was a stone's throw away from her rented house. In a quiet village nestled between rolling hills, she saw a small school where students were lining up systematically before entering their classroom. Ms. Rose read the signboard to reach the school office.

The following day, her teaching journey began, and she entered the lower secondary class. As she entered her class, she noticed a few students who were fidgeting nervously, their eyes downcast, and their books unopened. She understood that these students were having a major issue with the English language. After introducing herself, she began to teach by using her prepared materials by following the themes from the textbook. When she started with her lesson, most of the students were struggling with their reading skills and

some were afraid to stand up and read. Ms. Rose distinguished that these students had potential, but they needed the right kind of support. Therefore, she set out to create a learning environment where reading was not a chore but an exciting challenge that they could face together.

“Her first goal: show them they were more capable than they believed.”

Each day during her lessons, she had to start with a motivational statement. She made it her first goal to implant in them the confidence that they were proficient in more than they realized. Her students may have rolled their eyes at the beginning phase, but Ms. Rose’s untiring confidence in them gradually began to make a transformation. After a few months, students who were very naive started to raise their hands more regularly to read a few lines even though their voices shivered. Although motivation was essential, Ms. Rose knew that her students needed more than inspiration; they required a variety of activities that would make reading pleasurable. Therefore, after school every day, she spent hours scheduling inspired lessons that would engross her students in different ways. She always started her les-

sons by writing a new word on the board. Nonetheless, she didn’t just want them to memorize the word. As an alternative, she wanted them to use it by constructing a simple sentence. At first, her students were reluctant to do it, but by providing some samples, slowly the students started to construct their simple sentences. Moreover, Ms. Rose had also added other reading activities to arouse her students’ engagement. She spoke to her school principal to get permission to spend about 30 minutes every Friday reading a passage in the school hall.

“She wanted them to use each new word, not just memorize it.”

Towards the end of the year, students began to blossom. Most of Ms. Rose’s students, who once feared reading aloud were now reading with confidence in front of the class; students who had resisted stringing together a sentence was now writing their own short stories, and some were able to read more unpretentious novels. They no longer saw reading as a difficult task but as an adventure. She felt very contented as her students were able to progress steadily. She had also become an adored character in the village as she managed to make a lot of changes in teaching the English language among her

“Students who once feared reading aloud were now reading with confidence.”

students. Even though, at the initial stage, she was very dissatisfied with her posting placement, the villagers had become her second family. Finally, she understood that, through her time in the village, she had not only changed her students’ lives but had also experienced a revolution of her own. She had learned the accurate denotation of resilience, community, and the supremacy of connection. Though her family was still miles away, she knew she would bring their love and support with her anywhere she went. She had found a new home in the heart of the Malaysian village, and she also learned that as a teacher, she should prepare herself to teach anywhere without being very fastidious.



*Dr. Raganeswari Ramasamy is a dedicated language teacher with a PhD in Education with Technology. She integrates innovative digital tools to enhance language learning and student engagement. An avid storyteller, she enjoys writing and exploring creative teaching methods to make learning more interactive and effective.*

# FROM THE FIELD TO THE CLASSROOM:

## A Teacher's Diary of Guiding Student-Athletes

by

IRENE WAN YOKE QUIN

“Teaching is as much about learning from my students as it is about guiding them.”

**T**eaching is a journey marked by unforgettable moments, unique challenges, and deep connections. As an educator of student-athletes, my classroom often extends beyond four walls, bridging the vibrant world of sports with the structured demands of academics. This essay is a glimpse into my teaching diary—a collection of stories, reflections, and lessons learned while supporting student-athletes as they navigate their dual roles. Through it all, I have discovered that teaching is as much about learning from my students as it is about guiding them.

“Even a simple exploration of surnames can transform into a powerful lesson on cultural diversity.”

### Embracing Identity and Diversity

Every journey into a classroom begins with introductions. When I first met the class of 2024, I shared only my surname with the

students. Their curiosity quickly sparked a lively discussion about my identity, as my surname carries roots in both Chinese and Malay traditions. This led to a deeper conversation about the history behind their own names. The students were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of their names and even ask their parents about the stories behind them. Such moments reflect the richness of Malaysia's multicultural classrooms, where even a simple exploration of surnames can transform into a powerful lesson on cultural diversity. They also serve as a reminder that teaching goes beyond textbooks—it is about celebrating diversity, sparking curiosity, and ensuring every student feels valued. In a classroom that mirrors Malaysia's vibrant cultural tapestry, creating inclusive spaces enables students to connect with one another while embracing both their shared and unique identities with pride.

### Balancing Academics and Athletics

For student-athletes, life is a delicate balancing act. Their schedules are packed with rigorous training, matches, and academic responsibilities. In May 2024, as

mid-term exams approached, the challenge games tested everyone's flexibility. Yet, the effort paid off, showing that adaptability can make even the toughest situations manageable. On July 24, 2024, I learned that students returned from an away football match at 4:00 a.m., only to attend class by 10:00 a.m. Their unwavering dedication was both inspiring and humbling. These young athletes remind us that perseverance can triumph over even the toughest challenges.

“We must advocate for a system where neither academics nor athletics are sacrificed.”

However, their journey is not without its struggles. Coaches occasionally prioritize games over lessons, leaving academics to take a backseat. This highlights the importance of collaboration between educators and sports departments. We must advocate for a system where neither academics nor athletics are sacrificed, ensuring these students thrive in both arenas.

### **Building Resilience through Understanding**

Teaching is not just about academic success; it is about helping students uncover their inner strength and guiding them through moments of doubt and fear. On June 4, 2024, a disheartened student confided in me about his fear of failing the SPM exams. He believed he would not succeed—despite no one ever telling him so. I asked him, “Who told you that you will not succeed? Was it me? Was it one of your teachers?” His realization that his doubts were self-imposed marked a turning point in his mindset.

A similar moment occurred on September 4, 2024, during a writing lesson. Some students admitted they struggled to write because they felt their understanding was inferior to the sample essays I provided. They even compared their abilities to mine, doubting their capacity to improve. I reminded them, “It’s my job as your teacher to teach you what you don’t know.” This reassurance helped them see their learning journey as an opportunity for growth, rather than a reflection of their inadequacies.

Another striking moment came on September 30, 2024, when a student approached me with a quiet confession: “If I could turn back time, I would focus on my studies instead of football.” As he nervously awaited his turn for the trial speaking test, I looked at him and said, “Don’t regret anything—just keep moving forward.” That simple exchange stayed with me, a poignant reminder of the heavy self-reflection students often carry as they navigate their choices and dreams.

**“Every setback is an opportunity for growth.”**

These moments underscore a fundamental truth: education is not confined to textbooks or exams—it is about fostering resilience, building confidence, and helping students see challenges as stepping stones rather than roadblocks. As educators, we hold the power to reframe their narratives, showing them that every setback is an opportunity for growth.

**“Effective learning does not rely on perfect conditions—it thrives on connection and flexibility.”**

### **Creative Solutions for Unique Challenges**

Every class comes with its own set of challenges, pushing teachers to think creatively and adapt quickly. On August 19, 2024, a broken power outlet at the front of the classroom disrupted my planned listening practice lesson. Instead, we turned it into an impromptu session on the floor at the back of the room. Sitting together on the floor created an unexpectedly relaxed and engaging atmosphere, and to my surprise, the students performed exceptionally well. This experience reminded me that effective learning does not rely on perfect conditions—it thrives on connection, flexibility, and the ability to adapt to the moment.

Creativity also plays a key role in making lessons relatable and engaging. For example, during speaking lesson on September 11, 2024, I incorporated scenarios drawn from my students’ everyday experiences, such as handling a tough football match or presenting a group project. When tasked with speaking about “My Ambition,” I aligned the lesson with their shared dreams of becoming professional footballers or coaches. By connecting lessons to their realities, I turned routine practice into meaningful and memorable learning experiences.

### **Lessons from a Hybrid World**

By December 2024, I was navigating the challenges of hybrid learning—teaching both online and in-person students simultaneously. This new normal demanded not only technical skills but also a deeper sense of patience and empathy to bridge the gap between physical and virtu-

**“Education is not just about mastering technology—it is about fostering connection, inclusivity, and resilience.”**

al classrooms.

The shift to hybrid and online education, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted significant gaps in access to the tools and facilities necessary for effective learning. Ensuring that every student felt included, regardless of their circumstances, became a critical aspect of teaching. These challenges underscored the evolving nature of education, where adaptability and innovation are as important as lesson plans.

Even today, hybrid and online learning remain spaces where teachers and students continue to grow, adapt, and thrive. The experience has taught me that education is not just about mastering technology—it is about fostering connection, inclusivity, and resilience in the face of change.

### **The Teacher’s Journey**

For teacher trainees and practitioners, the path of education is one of constant learning and growth. Teaching student-athletes, or any diverse group of learners, is a reminder that the essence of education lies in its humanity. It is about seeing students not just as learners but as individuals with dreams, struggles, and boundless potential.

**“These are the unseen challenges of teaching—the emotional labour, the fine line between encouragement and pressure.”**

There will be days of exhaustion, nights spent worrying about whether your lessons are effective, and moments of doubt. The weight of responsibility can feel even heavier during exam season. January 3, 2025—the last class with the Class of 2024 before they sat for their SPM English language papers. The day before, they had taken their Bahasa Melayu exams, and the anxiety was evident. Some students were worried about their performance, especially since

passing Bahasa Melayu and History is crucial for obtaining the SPM certificate.

One student expressed fear about his results, and I reassured him that his feelings were valid. I, too, have felt that uncertainty, yet things often turn out better than expected. Navigating lessons during exams is a delicate balance. Parents asked us to refrain from discussing answers to completed exam papers to avoid adding to the students' stress. That night, I laid awake, thinking about how to support my students without unintentionally lowering their morale. These are the unseen challenges of teaching—the emotional labour, the fine line between encouragement and pressure.

Yet, these challenges are outweighed by the triumphs—the small smiles of understanding, the proud glances of achievement, and the knowledge that you are shaping lives. Even in moments of doubt, we move forward, knowing that our role extends beyond the classroom. It is about guiding, reassuring, and standing beside our students as they navigate both their studies and their emotions.

### Concluding Thoughts

Teaching is a journey of connection, resilience, and growth. Whether you are just beginning your path or are a seasoned educator, remember that your role is invaluable. You are not just teaching subjects; you are shaping minds, nurturing hearts, and building futures.

**“You are not just teaching subjects; you are shaping minds, nurturing hearts, and building futures.”**

So, as you step into your classrooms, hold onto the hope and purpose that brought you here. Let every challenge be an opportunity, every moment of doubt a chance to reflect, and every student a reminder of why you chose this path. Together, we are bridging dreams and reality, one lesson at a time.

**“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”**

John Dewey

*Irene Wan holds a Ph.D. in Learning, Teaching and Curriculum from the University of Missouri, USA. With extensive experience teaching culturally diverse English language learners in both the USA and Malaysia, she has recently expanded her expertise by working with student-athletes. This journey enriches her dynamic career in English language education across varied contexts.*



# MY LITERATURE COMPONENT JOURNEY

by  
KANGGATHEREN MANOGARAN

“The memory of my students cheering for Dawan’s victory reminds me why literature matters—it opens minds, sparks empathy, and makes students feel something real.”

**W**hen I first held my Form 1 literature component book in 2003 as a student, I felt an incredible thrill. I love storytelling, and here was an entire component of the English subject dedicated to it! By the end of my first year of secondary school, I had not only read the texts assigned to me but also those given to students in other states. I devoured everything I could find. More than just words on a page, literature was a portal to different worlds, different lives, and emotions I had never encountered before.

Twelve years later in 2015, I started my journey as an English teacher. I was excited to introduce my students to the value of storytelling, as I was among the first group of teachers to teach the literature component in its third cycle. I envisioned passionate discussions, with students paying close attention to every word of a well-crafted sentence. I had be-

en that student, after all. But reality wasn’t quite so beautiful.

However, the students greeted my enthusiasm with blank stares. They couldn’t see what I saw. No matter how hard I worked on my lessons, the response was indifference. And these were my upper and intermediate level students. I cannot imagine what the teachers of the lower level classes were going through. I soon discovered that my love of books did not automatically translate into my students’ engagement. That was a hard pill to swallow.

Then *Sing to the Dawn* presented my greatest obstacle. Teaching a novel was a completely different challenge. Unlike short stories or poems, which were manageable in small chunks, novels required sustained effort. When I handed out the book, one student groaned, “Teacher, do we have to read all of this?” His tone was one of genuine concern.

By the way, *Sing to the Dawn* is a fantastic story. Dawan, the heroine, wins a scholarship to study in the city, but her father and village believe that the opportunity should go to her younger brother, Kwai, simply because he is a boy. It’s a powerful tale of resilience, equality, and breaking barriers. I wanted my students to experience this. But how?

I did my best to guide my students in navigating the material. For a start, I provided worksheets with leading questions that indicated the appropriate pages, paragraphs, and lines. I made the novel as digestible as possible by breaking it down into smaller parts. However, as I scanned the classroom, I saw vacant expressions. Their hearts weren’t in the lesson, even if they filled in the blanks. The story’s magic was lost.

And to be honest, I began to feel like I was losing something too. Literature is essentially storytelling and who doesn’t like stor-

ries? Whenever my more extroverted colleagues narrated stories from their past during assemblies, I could see my students listening attentively, which means they know how to appreciate a good story. Then why do they stare at the pages of the novel with dull, lifeless expressions. It made me wonder—was I failing them? Was I expecting too much?

I tried to imagine myself as a Form 5 student. Back then, I probably would've admired Dawan's determination, but I doubt if I ever would have questioned whether a girl should be allowed to pursue an education. It seemed obvious to me that she should. Yet, for many of my students, this was an entirely new concept. Maybe that was the real challenge—not just getting them to read but helping them see why this story mattered in the first place.

So, I decided to try something different. Instead of just teaching the novel, I wanted to make them feel it. One day, I wrote a question on the board: If you were Dawan, what would you do? Silence filled the room. I rephrased it: What if your sister, cousin, or best friend was told she couldn't continue studying just because she was a girl? Again - complete silence. So, I posed a completely different question: What if you came in first in class, but the person who came in second place received an award for best student in the class.

At first, there were the usual murmurs. A few shrugged, unsure of how to respond.

But then, something shifted. One student hesitantly said, "That's not fair." Another added, "If I got first place, I should win the award." And just like that, we had a discussion. I encouraged them to share their thoughts freely. A few girls spoke up about how they sometimes felt underestimated by their own families and were expected to help their mothers and grandmothers with house chores, but their brothers and male cousins did not necessarily have their expectations thrust upon them. As for many of the boys, this was a revelation. The idea that a girl could be denied education because of her gender had never even crossed their minds. The classroom, once silent and uninterested, was now buzzing with debate.

Slowly, I saw a change. Some students started reading the novel on their own during recess. Others whispered to me after class, asking what would happen next. One day, another teacher stormed into the staffroom, complaining that my students had been caught reading *Sing to the Dawn* during her lesson. I had to suppress a smile.

And then came the moment—the day we reached the scene where Dawan's father finally gave his reluctant approval. The class erupted. Cheering. Deep sighs of relief. I was stunned. At first, I told myself they were just happy to be done with the book. But then I saw their social media posts—students sharing their thoughts about how much they enjoyed the story.

That was when I knew: *they got it.*

Unfortunately, the English literature component has since faded into the background, a casualty of curriculum changes and time constraints. Even as an enthusiast, I struggle to cover all the required readings. But the memory of that day, when my students cheered for Dawan's victory as if it were their own, reminds me why literature matters. It has the power to open minds, to spark empathy, to make students feel something real. And that, to me, is the essence of teaching.



*Kangga Manogaran is an English language teacher with a passion for literature and storytelling. With almost 10 years of experience in the classroom, Kangga enjoys finding creative ways to engage students and make literature come alive. In addition to teaching, Kangga loves reading, writing, and researching reading materials used in the English language classroom.*

“The experience that makes possible the “breakthrough” is a “collective” experience. However, usually someone or another will, individually, put forward and explicate a new perception of this social reality. One of the fundamental tasks of the educator who is open-minded is to be attentive and sensitive to the way a given social group reads and re-reads its reality, so as to be able to stimulate progressively a generalized comprehension of this new reality.”

— Paulo Freire

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e ISBN 978-983-9411-10-2



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