Developing Malay Children's Literary Resources

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Abstract

The materials and resources for Malay literature for early childhood in Malaysia are still in the infant stage and have not expanded to include main references or developed into big book form. The children literature in our market is not published based on education philosophy and research, but it is produced based on profit. The process of evaluating the quality of children's literature need to take into account the interest of the children, their visual ability, messages of the story, and the effect of the story towards the children. Hence a survey was carried out among 941 respondents including university students, preschool teachers and parents which were selected randomly in Malaysia. Learning outcomes identified the main features which attract the children to read. Malaysian children were found to be interested in stories with the themes of love, friendship and family, imaginative animals and funny characters, simple plots, colorful illustrations, big size story books with lot of dialog and video publications (DVD/VCD). The main factors that are considered by parents when buying children's literature materials are the moral values, quality and activities in the stories. They are also requiring CALL activities such as ICT games and exercises to make teaching and learning more effective.

Introduction

Early childhood literature is the building agent in forming human emotion, thought or language. According to Savage (2002) human development in early childhood literature can be divided into three forms namely, self development and social, cognitive development and language development. The development of brain has achieve up to 80% when the child reach the age of three years. Whereas Misran Rokimin (2001) has check the children literature as development agent towards self development of human includes its emotion, thought and language. Therefore, children's era are the golden era for the educators, parents and education agency to expand the cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspect to achieve its maximization.

Children literary material in Malaysia

Until to-date, early childhood literature still in its explorative stage in Malaysia. We are buying more, reading and import children story book from oversea especially Britain and America. Research on the role and influence of literature on children also not much done by local researchers.

Followed by this, reference books on curriculum and early childhood literature modules at the libraries were on Britain, America, and Australia etc. Those books were used by educators from all local education institutions from the lowest level to the highest level. Those childcare centers, pre-school operator have applied the theories and curriculum base on the oversea in local structure which is not suit to the local children.

Most of the literary materials for local children are based from traditional printed materials and it is totally not in-line with the present country's development. Besides we have move towards the paperless era and borderless world, teaching materials in literature must be in line with the development of globalization. In addition, Malaysian parents are becoming more education-conscious and are sending their children to kindergartens, thus creating a greater demand for pre-school literature.

The early childhood literature materials written in Malay language are limited and can't be use as references or to be called big book. Materials which have been introduced in the market are not base on the education philosophy and research. On the other hand, it is more profit taking in mind without looking at the development of child psychology.

When we evaluate the quality of a children literature, we need to take into consideration of children's interest, their visual ability and the storyline perspective as well as the children's respond towards it. Early children's visual which is very encouraging, therefore literature materials could motivate the children to read at the very tender age.

Not much research on children literature materials has been done in Malaysia. What's more on the development on early children literature in Malay language which is based on scientific research, Most of the children's literature in the Malaysian market now are not appealing, no quality, not systematic and not classified according to the children's age.

This situation is much differs to the children's literature in English which is established and developed. It came out with an appealing Outlook, various dimensions and style and in series. Followed that, literature materials in English were publish in the form of mini library which suits the children's taste in various field of literature materials in

English which is published follow according to researches on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of the children concern.

Therefore, this research is in pioneer stage towards the development of literature materials in Malay language. The development of literature materials will adapt the ways, approaches, methodology and the special aspect of it from the English literature to suit the culture and Malaysian perspectives. All the story, animation, characters and background in the children literature in Malay language will color with local Malaysian taste and we will propose that the materials publish in two forms namely book and CDs with both audio and visual aspects, we hope that the children will welcome and show interest in those literature materials. And this can be instilling the lifelong reading culture among the children.

With that, this research suits certain criteria in the Ninth Malaysian Plan (RM9) that is to inculcate Reading culture and lifelong learning. As the Malay proverb says 'to straighten the bamboo, start with its shoot'. With that this research is important in educate the society that to inculcate reading habits must start from young. This will also to upgrade human capital of Malaysian citizen as propose by Malaysian former Prime Minister, Tun Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi.

Present Status of Children Literary Book

Hadijah Rahmat (2006) has surveyed the development stage of children literture in Malaysia dan Singapore from the traditional period up till 1982. Her research finding shows literary work in Malay language took a longer period and late in its development. Eventhough the literary work evolve and develop shows its upgrading in quantity definately higher than its quality. Malay children literature has not show sign of its usage as motivation tool towards high achievement.

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remaining 20% are text book titles. In terms of language, in 1996, about 58% of children's books are in Malay, 42% are in other languages (Azizah & Md. Sidin, 2004).

Based from the research done by Mahzan Arshad (2006), literature materials published in Malaysia were categorized at minimal level for the purpose of child development. He has done the research base on 820 children story books published from 1996 to 2005. 50.2% of the book published in Kuala Lumpur and 35.9% in Selangor itself. Results from this research shows that the quality of children literature published in Kuala Lumpur was not good. Its main characteristics are the specific theme for children, simple and light language, interesting illustration, simple story line and its plot.

The evolvements of children story books has shown an increase in numbers, but the quality on story, paper, illustration, colors and others were not well taken care of. The study indicated that the local book industry is dominated primarily by books produced for the domestic market focusing on school text book, revision guides or model answer books. On the average, print runs for school text books may range between 7,000 to 100,000 copies and for non text books between 5,000 to 10,000 for children's books (Siti Zakiah Aman, 2004).

Children Preferences in Literature

Research studies on reading interest, reading preference, and reading choice provide useful information to those who purchase books for children and those who encourage them to read the books. Many studies of children's reading interests have been conducted during the past fifty years in western countries.

- Cover illustrations that suggest the topic of the story
- Episodic plots
- Progressive chronological plots that can be easily followed
- Quick start to the story with action beginning on the first or second page to hook the reader
- Rapid introduction to main characters and only a few main characters
- Characters the age of the reader or slightly older
- Books based on movies and television

In addition, trivia books such as the *Guinness Book of World Records*, sports statistics books, joke books, and game system guides for video and computer games are very appealing to some boys.

The topic of children's preference has been more fully researched for intermediate-grade than for primary and preschool children. In looking at what is available, though, several cautions should be kept in mind. First, these research results tell what children as a group appear to like. They do not indicate what an individual child will like. They provide a starting point as a suggestion, not an answer. Second, while a survey of preferences helps educators judge the content and type of literature children may enjoy, it is not a guide to literary quality. Teachers must work both with what they know of children and with what they know of literature as they select books.

In general, sex differences in reading interest do not appear strongly until children are around eight or nine years of age. Primary school children, both boys and girls, enjoy stories about personified animals, about nature, about children their age or slightly older, and about daily life and familiar experiences. They prefer illustrations that adults would

term *representational* as opposed to abstract when they are judging pictures apart from text. Although they generally prefer color illustrations over black and white, when a study was done with primary children choosing books in their own classroom, it was found that some books in back-and-white ha special meaning for certain children. Any book, due a certain combination of content and type of illustration, may become a favorite (Joan, 2000).

Thus, isolating a single factor has not proved to be a reliable method of predicting children's responses to a specific book. Some teachers conduct interest surveys within their own classes, determining what interests the children have in common and finding individual interests that can be matched with appropriate literature. Many teachers find that books about monsters and books that are humorous are currently very popular with their classes.

Primary grade children, in a pilot study conducted by Carol Fisher and Margaret Natarella (1978), showed a favorable attitude toward both rhyming and unrhyming poetry but preferred the rhyming. Often, if they liked the topic of the poem, they liked the poem too. If they disliked the subject, they disliked the poem about it. The children had difficulty in comprehending figurative language, tending to interpret it literally for some rather strange conceptions of what the poem was about. Their favorite poems have strong rhythm and rhyme and frequently were narrative in form. These results were confirmed by a later study of primary grade children's poetry preferences.

One of the most consistent findings of all the studies is that preschool a primary grade children enjoy literature, both prose and poetry. Teachers and day-care providers have the opportunity to extend this enjoyment, to broaden children's taste in literature, and

to plan literature experience in such a way that goals of early childhood education are supported.

Be aware also that there is a social dimension to children's literacy preferences. Children will respond to the attitudes of other children and of the adults who are presenting books. When a teacher shows that he or she enjoys a book and encourage children to look at or read it, the climate is set for a positive response. When a day-care provider makes the environment conducive to looking at and sharing books, children are more likely to do so; even the way in which the book is presented may become associated with the book itself. Thus care should be taken that books are shared in ways that are enjoyable for children.

The Study of Reading Habits in Malaysia 1966 conducted by Frank Small and Association for Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia revealed that among the childe of the 5-9 years age group, almost 79% acquired reading ability. However, only 56% of them practise reading covering newspapers (10%), magazines (6%), books (26%) and comics (41%). The finding also reveal that school-going children practise more reading than pre-schoolers and that the majority of the children perfer knowledge books (53%) to fiction (45%). Hobbies (15%) and other non-fiction (12%) occupy a much lower perference. The survey also looks into the criteria in choosing books for children by parents and the findings are as follow:

Books with picture (25%)

Story/Fiction/Fairy tales (15%)

Easy/Simple to understand (10%)

Arouse interest in reading (10%)

Suitable for the age (9%)

Comics/Cartoon books (8%)

Improve knowledge (7%)

Drawing/Painting/Colouring (6%)

Related to studies (5%)

Chosen by the children (3%)

Not too expensive (2%)

Azizah dan Md. Sidin (2004) did a survey to draw up a reading profile of students in Malaysia from the age of 7 to 12. The main findings are related to their reading habits, purchasing of books and their preferred reading materials. On the question of whether they read books other than school text books, 100 percent respondents give positive answer. References and activity books are always read. Other favourite categories are maganizes and illustrated books. Besides that, the respondents prefer to buy books rahter than borrow or rent; about 30 percent buy about 1 to 3 books per month while 22.2 percent claimed that they buy 10 books and above in a month. The respondents regard newspapers as the most read and preferred publication followed by comic books (56%), novels (51.3), activity books (45.2%), illustrated books (43.2%), magazines (44%) and reference books (40%).

Chew and Zahari (2008) discuss the stance taken by university undergraduates, teachers and parents in evaluating Malay Folk Literature in early childhood education to be used as big books. The survey were taken from 941 respondents, indicated that Malay Folk Literature can be absorbed into teaching and learning for early childhood with a mean of 4.12 while it can be big books with mean of 4.02. Meanwhile the highest mean value required for placing Malay Folk Literature genre as big books in early childhood education

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Respondents comprised three categories, namely: undergraduates from the Early Childhood Education or Malay Studies programs, teachers from childcare centres, and parents. These three categories were chosen because they are very involved in choosing suitable reading materials for children and because they are connected to and well versed in the field.

Before the fieldwork was undertaken, a pilot study was done to verify the instrument. Analysis showed the Cronbach Alpha of the instrument was 0.95, hence indicating its consistency and suitability for the study.

Profile of Respondents

A total of 941 respondents were involved in this study, comprising 347 undergraduates, 299 teachers and 295 parents. Their details are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Respondents' Profile by Location, Ethnicity, language Spoken at Home, Gender, Academic background, Age and Experience in Using Computers*

Social Background (N=941)	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1.Location of home	Urban	545	57.9
	Rural	396	42.1
2. Ethnicity	Malay	573	60.9
	Chinese	198	21.0
	Indian	87	9.2
	Other	83	8.8
3. Language spoken at home	Bahasa Malaysia	596	59.9
	English	169	18.0
	Chinese	126	13.4
	Tamil	36	3.8
	Other	46	4.9

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4. Gender	Male	255	27.1
	Female	686	72.9
5. Academic background	SPM/SPVM/MCE	120	12.8
	STPM/HSC/STP	365	38.8
	Certificate	53	5.6
	Diploma	150	15.9
	Bachelor degree	192	20.4
	Master	43	4.6
	Doctor of Philosophy	18	1.9
6. Age	21 – 30 years	600	63.8
	31 – 40 years	198	21.0
	41 – 50 years	132	14.0
	51 and above	11	1.2
7. Experience in using computers	Very frequent	453	48.1
	Frequent	212	22.5
	Rarely	234	24.9
	Never	42	4.5

Table 2 show that almost 2/3 of the respondents hail from urban areas. More than half or 60.9% of respondents are Malays compare to Chinese (21%), Indians (9.2%), and others (8.8%). Language spoken at home is closely related to ethnicity, with 59.9% of respondents speaking in Malay, 18% in English, 13.4% in Chinese, 3.8% in Tamil, and 4.9% in other languages. From the gender standpoint, there are more female respondents (72.7%) compared to males (27.3%). Most of the respondents have A level qualification (38.8%), compare to bachelor degree (20.4%), and diploma (15.9%). More than half or 63.8% of respondents are aged between 21-30 years, and nearly half (48.1%) of all respondents frequently use the computer in their daily lives.

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Findings of the Study

This study will use the mean and standard deviations to analyze the view of the literary community toward the favorable children's reading materials that is most suitable for use as big books for Malaysian children as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of Malay Children's Literary Materials Considered Interesting in Malaysia (N=941)

Characteristics	Respondents	Mean	SD	Average Mean	Average SD
1.Themes which children like					
a. Love	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.6196	0.5933		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.4916	0.7480		
	Parents (n=295)	4.3424	0.6660	4.4920	0.6773
b. Friendship	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.5072	0.7147		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.5017	0.6970		
	Parents (n=295)	4.3119	0.7589	4.4325	0.6972
c. Family tie	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.5130	0.6556		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.4214	0.7528		
	Parents (n=295)	4.3492	0.6777	4.4325	0.6972
2. Characters (icon) which children like					
a. Imaginative animal	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3055	0.7858		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2107	0.9443		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9797	0.9145	4.1732	0.8890
b. Funny character	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.4150	0.7258		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.0870	0.9584		
	Parents (n=295)	3.8508	0.8440	4.1339	0.8734
c. Superhuman	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.2939	0.8189		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1070	1.0969		
	Parents (n=295)	3.8102	1.0520	4.0829	1.0072
3. Plots suitable for children					
a. Simple plot	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.6052	0.6151		

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a. Rhyming language	Teachers (n=299)	4.3344	1.0241		
	Parents (n=295)	4.0949	0.8871	4.3592	0.8731
b. Plot of *poetic juctice*	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.4121	0.7604		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1204	1.0161		
	Parents (n=295)	3.7559	1.1072	4.1137	0.9983
c. Plot of sequential	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3602	0.7252		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1605	0.8942		
	Parents (n=295)	3.7695	0.8578	4.1116	0.8588

4. Ilustration that interest the children

a. Colourful	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.5677	0.6567		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.4147	0.7870		
	Parents (n=295)	4.1661	0.8224	4.3932	0.7708
b. Fantacy world	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3775	0.7556		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3512	0.8749		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9220	0.8982	4.2264	0.8647
c. Multi-dimension	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1499	0.8227		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.0134	0.9268		
	Parents (n=295)	3.7593	0.8205	3.9841	0.8708

5. Presentation in books that children like

a. Big book size	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1326	0.9122		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1806	1.1296	4.0584	1.0467
	Parents (n=295)	3.8475	1.0788		
b. Different shape of the book	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1066	0.8552		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.9866	0.9830		
	Parents (n=295)	3.7763	0.8476	3.9649	0.9050
c. Big font	Undergraduate (n=347)	3.7637	1.1026		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.9264	1.1027		
	Parents (n=295)	3.7797	0.9344	3.8204	1.0542

6. Language used in books that children like

a. A lot of dialogue	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1671	0.8264		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.0569	1.0460		
	Parents (n=295)	3.8475	0.9656	4.0319	0.9526
b. Repeat language	Undergraduate (n=347)	3.4755	0.9921		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.7492	1.0460		
	Parents (n=295)	3.5695	0.9656	3.5919	1.0280

c. Rhyming language

		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
c. Rhyming language	Undergraduate (n=347)	3.5187	1.0009		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.6288	0.9997		
	Parents (n=295)	3.5695	0.9560	3.5069	0.9910

7. Type of published materials

		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
a. Video(DVD/VCD)	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.5072	0.6556		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3880	0.7922		
	Parents (n=295)	4.1932	0.7514	4.3709	0.7420
b. Book	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.4294	0.6694		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2508	0.9627		
	Parents (n=295)	4.0136	0.7953	4.2423	0.8282
c. Audio (CD)	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3689	0.6859		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1438	0.9913		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9119	0.8605	4.1541	0.8670

8. ICT materials which are suitable

		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
a. ICT interactive	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1124	0.8511		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2809	0.7606		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9797	0.8726	4.1243	0.8382
b. Graphic in 3 dimension	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.2133	0.7756		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1538	0.8726		
	Parents (n=295)	3.8746	0.8697	4.0882	0.8491
c. Web page	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.0836	0.8510		
	Teachers (n=299)	3.9532	1.0513		
	Parents (n=295)	3.7831	1.0270	3.9479	0.9809

9. Contents of ICT materials

		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
a. Games	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3948	0.7733		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3679	0.9404		
	Parents (n=295)	4.0407	1.0490	4.2752	0.9327
b. Interactive	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.1816	0.8038		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3545	0.7867		
	Parents (n=295)	4.1186	0.7668	4.2168	0.7921
c. Exercises	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.2305	0.17819		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.1137	0.9088		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9458	0.8905	4.1041	0.8653

10. Weightage of buying

		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
a. Moral value	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3919	0.7346		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2709	0.8255		

	Parents (n=295)	4.0915	0.9450	4.2593	0.8422
b. Quality	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3545	0.7520		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.3278	0.8108		
	Parents (n=295)	4.0271	0.8284	4.2434	0.8011
c. Variety of activities	Undergraduate (n=347)	4.3487	0.6943		
	Teachers (n=299)	4.2876	0.8011		
	Parents (n=295)	3.9559	0.18460	4.2062	0.7963

Table 2 clearly shows the opinion of the literary community towards Malay literature in early childhood education is positive. There are ten characteristics of the children's story books were questioned. The most popular theme of the story books identified by all respondents was love (mean 4.4920, SD 0.0221), followed by friendship (mean 4.4442, SD 0.2374) and family tie (mean 4.4325, SD 0.2223). These themes were popular because they are close to the children and form their whole life.

Imaginative animal was the most acceptable character for integration into Malay early childhood story books (mean 4.4920, SD 0.0221) beside the funny character (mean 4.4442, SD 0.2374) and superhuman (mean 4.4325, SD 0.2273). In other word, the respondents found that imaginative and creative characters are the interesting icons that children prefer compare to the real characters.

Regarding the plot in the story books which is suitable for children, respondents chose the simple plot (mean 4.3592, SD 0.0285) as the top list. Simple plot consists of a few characters with one or two events, is found easy to be understood by the children. Plot of poetic justice (mean 4.1137, SD 0.0325) was suitable for children to inculcate the moral

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and parents. According to Maria Perers (2004), a story book becomes so personal for a child, that the story is perfectly memorised, makes them feel safe, embody eternal values and are windows to immortality.

In parallel with the ICT era, the respondents showed that the Malay stories that produce in ICT form should first comprises of ICT interactive (mean 4.1243, SD 0.0273), second was graphic in three dimension (mean 4.0882, SD 0.0277), and third web page (mean 3.9479, SD 0.0320). On the other hand, contents of the ICT materials need to be filled with games (mean 4.2593, SD 0.0274), interactive (mean 4.2434, SD 0.0261), and exercises (mean 4.2062, SD 0.0260) to be done by the children as an evaluation tools of the children's understanding of the story that they read.

Moral value (mean 4.2593, SD 0.0274) in the story books or CD always became the most important weightage of buying by the buyers because it influence the children values and personalities. This followed by the quality of the story books (mean 4.2434, SD 0.0261) include the paper, colours, illustrations, story etc; how a children's book is written and illustrated is, therefore a concern for each as for society as a whole. In addition, variety of activities (mean 4.2062, SD 0.0260) in the story books also another important factor that to be considered by the buyers. Activities here include exercises, games, and interactive activities.

Most of the items shown that undergraduate students scored the highest mean and the parents gained the lowest mean. In other word, undergraduate pursue most positive attitude toward all the characteristics compare to preschool teachers and parents, except six items that preschool teachers gain the highest mean. The items included big book size and big font under the title of "presentation in books"; repeat language and rhyming language
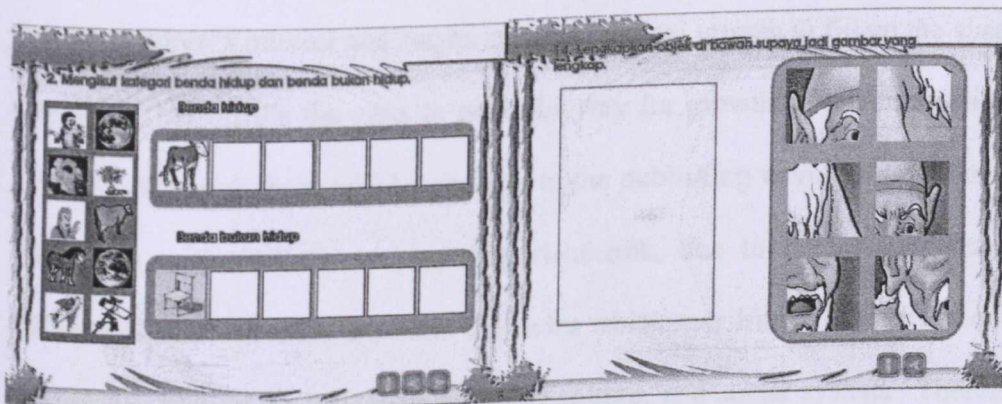
Figure 5: Match the objects according
To living and non-living
things

Figure 6: Match and arrange the above
object to form a perfect
picture

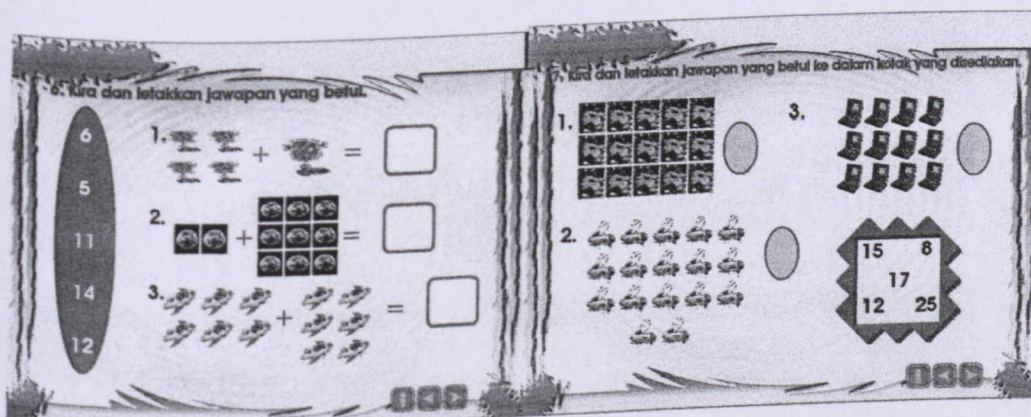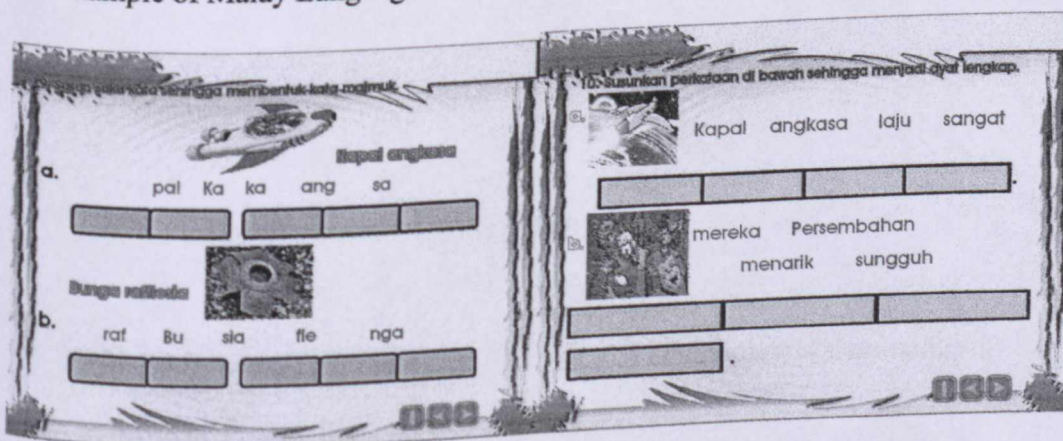An example of mathematic exercises is shown as in Figure 7 and 8.

Figure 7 & 8: Count and match the answers in the boxs provided.

An example of Malay Language exercises is shown below in Figure 9 and 10.

for the children's interest and stages in psychological growth to fill up the absence of local content. This fulfills the aims to pave the way for growth of this "book industry of the future". Although there will be changes in the publishing world in the future, but printed publishing will continue to play important role, due to the existing socio-economic imbalance. Besides, there are other obstacles which may hinder the growth of multimedia publishing, such as economy, technology, culture, and social system. Therefore, printed and multimedia publishing must co-exist to satisfy the needs of their audience.

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