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Environmental Awareness Education through Proverbs in Brunei Darussalam

ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to provide educators with a different perspective on the teaching and value of proverbs. In addition to the semantics and pragmatics of proverbs, the lateral words and phrases used are equally important and interesting for students living in a modern era and culture. Pupils, as early as the third grade in elementary school, can be introduced to proverbs with this method. So, this paper focuses on environmental education using Malay proverbs in schools. The local wisdom of proverbs reflects views from earlier times, defining the culture, and its values. I try to explore how traditional Malay people coexisted with nature. Using observations of their surroundings, they crafted proverbs using beautiful phrases and conveyed wise messages. The educators can use this wisdom in teaching about the relationship between plants, animals, and natural objects; and how to mitigate or prevent natural calamities. The paper describes proverbs with an environmental theme and introduces the concept of environmental awareness education integrated with teachings from the Malay language. Due to the time depth and language dynamic, the words or phrases used in proverbs might change over time, which poses challenge to learners. It is important for teachers to apply an integrated learning approach in the teaching of proverbs. Besides the meaning of the proverbs, students should first understand the words or the phrases that built the proverbs and appreciate our forefathers' ingenuity, especially its relations with the environment.

KEY WORD: Proverbs; Malay Language; Environment; Education; Integrated Learning.

RESUME: "Pendidikan Kesedaran Alam Sekitar melalui Peribahasa di Negara Brunei Darussalam". Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk memberi pendidik dengan perspektif yang berbeza mengenai pengajaran dan nilai peribahasa. Sebagai tambahan kepada semantik dan pragmatik peribahasa, perkataan dan frasa yang digunakan adalah sama penting dan menarik untuk pelajar yang tinggal di era dan budaya moden. Murid, seawal darjah ketiga di sekolah rendah, boleh diperkenalkan kepada peribahasa dengan kaedah ini. Oleh itu, makalah ini memberi tumpuan kepada pendidikan alam sekitar dengan menggunakan peribahasa Melayu di sekolah. Kebijaksanaan tempatan peribahasa mencerminkan pandangan dari zaman dahulu, menentukan budaya, dan nilai-nilainya. Saya cuba untuk meneroka bagaimana orang-orang Melayu tradisional bersubahat dengan alam semula jadi. Menggunakan pemerhatian persekitaran, mereka menghasilkan peribahasa dengan frasa yang indah dan menyampaikan mesej bijak. Para pendidik boleh menggunakan kebijaksanaan ini dalam mengajar tentang hubungan antara tumbuhan, haiwan, dan objek semula jadi; serta bagaimana untuk mengurangkan atau mencegah bencana alam. Makalah ini menerangkan peribahasa dengan tema alam sekitar dan memperkenalkan konsep pendidikan kesedaran alam sekitar yang bersepadu dengan pengajaran bahasa Melayu. Oleh kerana kedalaman waktu dan bahasa yang dinamik, perkataan atau frasa yang digunakan dalam peribahasa mungkin berubah dari semasa ke semasa, yang menimbulkan cabaran kepada pelajar. Adalah penting bagi guru untuk menggunakan pendekatan pembelajaran bersepadu dalam mengajar peribahasa. Selain makna peribahasa, pelajar harus terlebih dahulu memahami kata-kata atau frasa yang membina peribahasa dan menghargai kepintaran leluhur kita, terutama dalam hubungkaitnya dengan persekitaran.

KATA KUNCI: Peribahasa; Bahasa Melayu; Persekitaran; Pendidikan; Pembelajaran Bersepadu.

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INTRODUCTION

In August 2015, more than half of Southeast Asia was blanketed by a thick haze from forest fires in Sumatera and Kalimantan, Indonesia. Although natural phenomena may have contributed to the fire, it was largely attributed to human activities (Butler, 2015). The thick smog associated with the fire was not an isolated occurrence; in fact, such events occur on an almost yearly basis. They cost millions of dollars,¹ and thousands of human hours in lost productivity, tourism, and closure of businesses and institutions. Additionally, such events may create long-term health problems for thousands of people (Chan, 2015).

The lessons learned from these environmental issues have global implications; therefore, environmental issues should be addressed by all. In addition to integrated efforts to tackle the problem, a change of mind-set is necessary to address the root cause of the problems. Individual and organisational expertises are necessary to address the underlying issues. Development of sophisticated state of the art technology is not the only way to address these challenges. Previous generations lived alongside nature and used a more gentle and sustainable approach to tackle environmental issues. There are many ways to coexist with nature, and much of this information is already captured in various forms of human knowledge (Lemos, 2007).

The aim of this study is to provide educators with a different perspective on the teaching and value of proverbs (cf Ruffle, 1977; Ali, 2000; David & Noor, 2003; and Yellin, 2012). In addition to the semantics and pragmatics of proverbs, the lateral words and phrases used are equally important and interesting for students living in a modern era and culture. Pupils, as early as the third grade in elementary

school, can be introduced to proverbs with this method.

The semantic and pragmatic aspects of proverbs require a high level of cognition to understand the underlying philosophies (Meider, 2004; Stone, 2006; and Nabifar, 2013). Although it might be too early to emphasise the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the proverbs, the lateral words and phrases are straightforward and pupils can imaginatively consider them.

METHODS

This research focused on Malay proverbs using eight excerpts with an environmental theme from, firstly, *Kamus Perdana Peribahasa* (A Dictionary of Prime Proverbs) compiled by Aida & Siti Nursakinah (2002). The book includes 105 entries on the environment or nature-related themes. Secondly, from *Peribahasa* (Proverbs) compiled by K.St. Pamuntjak, N.St. Iskandar & Madjoindo (1983) listed 4,032 general Indonesian/Malay proverbs and was also used.

The first book was written by Malaysian researchers and reflects use of proverbs in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, where similar languages and cultures exist (Aida & Nursakinah, 2002). The latter book was compiled by three Indonesian researchers and demonstrates that Indonesian language and culture share a common origin with Malay language and culture (Pamuntjak, Iskandar & Madjoindo, 1983).

The eight samples were chosen, because they are among the most common proverbs used in the everyday lives of Malay people, or commonly taught in schools. From an environmental point of view, the words and phrases used are related to natural surroundings or the environment (cf Basgoz, 1993; David & Noor, 2003; Saglam, 2004; Smith & Pun, 2006; Sonmez & Alacapinar, 2011; and Yildirim & Simsek, 2011).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

About Proverbs. Proverbs were chosen for this research for several reasons. *First*, many cultures have proverbs, which makes it possible for us to compare proverbs

¹Joko Widodo's early estimation for the 2015 haze was that it will cost L Indonesia up to 475 trillion Rupiah (\$47 billion) with more than 136,000 people suffering from respiratory infections. Indonesia was not the only country involved: Malaysia, Singapore, parts of the Philippines, and Thailand were also affected. See, for further information, F. Chan (2015).

across cultures within the suggested theme (Barajas, 2010). *Second*, proverbs are normally taught as part of language lessons, including vernacular or standard languages, or in foreign language lessons (Breva-Claramonte, 2003). *Third*, as described in various definitions, the lessons underlying proverbs are always associated with morals, and can thereby have a long lasting impact on one's life (Mieder, 1994; and Mieder & Sobieski, 1999).

There are various definitions of "proverb", which typically centre on keywords, such as: *morals, wisdom, expressions, statements, experiences, lessons, and truth* (Basgoz, 1993; Mieder, 1994 and 2004; Stone, 2006; and Barajas, 2010). In this context, OUP (Oxford University Press) in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2012) defines a proverb as "a short saying stating a general truth or piece of advice" (OUP, 2012:579). HCP (Harper Collins Publishers) in *Collins English Dictionary* (2012) describes a proverb as a "short saying that expresses a truth or gives a warning" (HCP, 2012:463). While EBI (Encyclopaedia Britannica Incorporation) in an article entitled "The New Encyclopaedia Britannica" (1993) suggests proverbs are "succinct and pithy sayings in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs" (EBI, 1993:749).

F. Seiler (1922) and N.R. Norrick (1985) note that proverbs are generally described as self-contained, pithy, traditional expressions with didactic content and fixed, poetic form (Seiler, 1922:2; and Norrick, 1985). R.D. Abrahams (1972) considers a proverb to be a full statement (Abrahams, 1972). W. Mieder (1993) gave a comprehensive definition of a proverb as a short, generally known statement of folk wisdom that contains truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation (Mieder, 1993:24).

Proverbs differ from idioms as they show shared cultural wisdom and carry a message about people and their lives (Hatch & Brown, 1995). In this context, Mandana

Kolahdouz Mohamadi & Mina Kolahdouz Mohamadi (2015) described proverbs as spread knowledge, wisdom, and truths about life from ancient times up until now (Mohamadi & Mohamadi, 2015).

N.R. Norrick (1985) notes that the meaning of a proverb can be categorised as either literal or figurative. As an example, the proverb *Like father, like son* is regarded as literal, because is SPI (Standard Proverbial Interpretation) is straightforward, that is "father and son are alike". However, there are proverbs in which SPI differs from the literal meaning, such as *No rose without a thorn*. This form of proverb is categorized as figurative and means "there is no pleasant thing without some unpleasant aspects", which is not the literal meaning (Norrick, 1985).

Unlike proverbs in most languages, Malay proverbs can be categorised into four categories, as described by H. Abdullah & M. Ainon (2011). These are: *simpulan bahasa, perumpamaan, bidalan, and pepatah*. Firstly, *simpulan bahasa* (idioms) typically consist of two or three words. The literal meaning of the word combination is different to the actual meaning of the *simpulan bahasa*. For example, *langkah kanan* literally means "right footstep", yet the actual meaning is "lucky" (Abdullah & Ainon, 2011).

Secondly, *perumpamaan* (simile) comprises phrases starting with *seolah-olah, ibarat, bak, seperti, macam, bagai, or laksana*. Translated to English, these words are similar to "as" or "like", in other words "to resemble". For example, *bagaikan pinang dibelah dua* literally means "like betel nut split apart evenly", yet it is used to refer to a compatible, perhaps equally beautiful and handsome newlywed pair (Abdullah & Ainon, 2011).

Thirdly, *pepatah* (adage) refers to a proverb that contains advice or teachings. For example, *Adat berperang, yang kalah jadi abu, yang menang jadi arang* literally means "in war, the loser turns to ashes, and the winner becomes coal", yet the actual meaning is that, in war, both the defeated and the winner are losers (Abdullah & Ainon, 2011).

Fourthly, *bidalan* (imagery) refers to phrases starting with *jangan*, *biar*, or *ingat*. For example, *Kalau kail panjang sejengkal, lautan dalam jangan diduga* literally means “if you have a short hook, do not attempt to fish in the deep sea”, yet it actually means that “if you have little knowledge, you should not dare to be too ambitious” (Abdullah & Ainon, 2011). This research does not differentiate between these four categories.

In this paper, it is suggested that the teaching of proverbs requires a new approach and emphasis. Focusing on an environmental theme, I present examples of how this might be done. Proverbs, normally taught as part of language classes, can be structured as integrated learning² content in a language class. Through integrated learning, the message can reach students in more fun and effective ways, as well as saving resources (King *et al.*, 2007).

Malay language teaching should take place in a way that makes the subject relevant and enjoyable. Teaching of the Malay language should not only focus on writing and grammar, but should reflect and engage with relevant issues across the syllabus (Ali, 2000; and Ibrahim, 2008).

Education is generally held to be one effective way to create sustainable awareness. By focusing on environmental education, students will have the advantage of learning natural ways to manage and safeguard their surroundings. Effective environmental management includes understanding historical background (Hopkins & McKeown, 1999; and UNESCO, 2002).

Proverbs are history, fossilized stories, or knowledge that dictates happenings related to daily life and culture (Basgoz, 1993; Mieder, 1994 and 2004; Stone, 2006; and Barajas, 2010). When studies become fun

and interesting through proverbs’ intrinsic moral teaching and language aesthetics, a lasting impact may be made on students. Exposure to proverbs may in fact be the best and most cost-effective way to teach and promote environmental awareness. The often-used phrase “prevention is better than a cure” succinctly describes environmental education. Here, the term “prevention” refers to educating individuals, especially the future generation (Arendt, 2005; and Simons-Morton, Greene & Gottlieb, 2005).

The focus of this research is not on the semantics and pragmatics of proverbs, but rather on the explicit phrases used. It is very important for students to understand the language used as proverbial phrases normally carries a meaning different from the intrinsic or didactic meaning (Liontas, 2002; and Angel, 2016).

Teachers have typically focused on the intrinsic meaning of the proverbs, that is either literal or figurative, but with very little emphasis being given to explain the phrases. Most proverbs have survived for many generations or centuries, so that the words or phrases used might have changed or become obsolete, due to linguistic or cultural change. The study of the words or phrases used in proverbs is as important as the study of their meaning.

Attitude of Traditional Malay People towards the Environment. Since the early days of hunter-gather societies, humans have been highly dependent on nature. Hunter-gatherer societies obtained their food directly from natural ecosystems, by hunting wild animals and collecting wild plants (Richerson, Mulder & Vila, 1996).

In fact, animals were often regarded as human or spiritual beings, who could be appealed to for help and protection. Rituals were commonly performed to show respect, gratitude, and reverence for animal spirits, with the hope of promoting continued hunting success. Other rituals to influence natural events, such as the coming of rain, were also common in hunter-gatherer cultures. Beliefs in magic, ritual, and fusion of humans with the natural world are often termed animism (Richerson, Mulder & Vila,

²Integrated learning or learning across the curriculum is an integration of learning that demonstrates the ability to connect information from disparate contexts and perspectives. This includes the ability to connect the domain of ideas and philosophies to the real world, “from one field of study or discipline to another, from the past to the present, from one part to the whole, from the abstract to the concrete – and vice versa”. See, for further information, P.M. King *et al.* (2007).

1996; and Wilber, 2000).

For those humans, living with a respect for their surroundings was the only way to co-exist and ensure mutual benefit. For millennia, humans protected nature in ways that contrast sharply with modern times, in which many people are not concerned about what happens around them. Now, the impacts of climate change have confirmed that we cannot take environmental issues for granted, and all segments of society must be proactively involved in saving the planet. Nature is the source of sustenance for humankind on this earth. Historically, many beliefs have revolved around natural surroundings. Humans respected natural phenomena (Prpic, 2009).

Like most civilizations, traditionally, the Malays considered the environment very important. They believed everything surrounding them had a life and soul (Halimi, 2008). This belief persists today despite many Malays professing Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam (Bellwood, 1997). For example, when Malay people want to enter a forest, they will often seek permission from the "guardian" by offering greetings and other kind words. Once in a forest, rules must be observed, for example, trees should not be randomly chopped, because it is feared that the wood has a "guardian" or "spirit".

Indirectly, such customs reinforced respect for the forest. Malay people have long believed that if they observe the rules, such as only cutting down trees that are needed, ensuring they fell in the right location without destroying other young trees, the spirits would not disturb them. In other words, do not harm the forest and the forest will let you take what you need. These spirits make the forest alive, although people cannot see the spirits. They can see and interact with the forest and assume that the spirit can see and listen to them. This succeeded in creating a balance of power and a sense of respect between nature and humans (Koh & Ho, 2009).

Until recently, the great majority of Malays were rural people, and for the most part their proverbs reflect this country life.

Proverbs are concerned principally with the houses and boats, trees and fruits, birds and beasts, which go with life in a Malay hamlet (Brown, 1959).

From a linguistic point of view, human relationships with nature can be inferred from language. We can similarly visualize how the Malay people conceptualized their surroundings during a particular time from the language used. Various genres, such as songs, poems, and proverbs can be used to understand historical happenings or facts linked to a specific time (Tucker, 2000). For this research, proverbs with an environmental theme were chosen with a view to their role in environmental education and awareness through the various analogies used. Most of the analogies relate to natural surroundings.

Let us try to understand Malay thinking based on the meaning of the following proverbs:

Firstly, *Seperti aur dengan tebing / Bagai aur bergantung ke tebing, bagai tebing bergantung ke aur / Bagai aur di atas bukit*. Loose translation is: "Like the bamboo and the river bank / as bamboo depending on the river bank, river bank depending on the bamboo / as bamboo on the hill". Equivalent English proverb is: "If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours / one hand washes the other / a chain is no stronger than its weakest link".

The moral meaning of the proverbs is to encourage cooperation between groups of people to achieve a goal that benefits all parties. However, for the purpose of this discussion, the explicit phrase used is very interesting as the woven root system of bamboo acts as a cohesive for colloidal particles, making the plant a very important species as soil protector near rivers. The roots of bamboo are capable of strengthening the soil of the riverbank. Riverbanks are vulnerable to erosion and landslides, due to the strong current and constant flow of water from upstream. Bamboo growing along the riverbank will absorb the water, which naturally lessens the danger of flooding downstream.

Bamboo forests have many

environmental benefits, because they function as carbon sinks, produce oxygen, control soil erosion, provide organic matter, regulate water levels in watersheds, conserve biodiversity, beautify the landscape, and essentially contribute to the purification and regulation of the environment (Schröder, 2012).

Similarly, if bamboo grows on a hill, it is capable of preventing both erosion and landslides. Less water will reach the foothill as portions of the water are trapped and absorbed by the bamboo roots, which in turn supply the water to the bamboo. If bamboo is cut, a hollow internode can be observed. Bamboo absorbs water and stores it in the hollow internode.

Secondly, *Ada bukit, ada paya*. Loose translation is: "Where there are hills, there are swamps". Equivalent English proverb is: "No people is an island". The moral of the proverb is that social imbalance always exists and should be considered natural and common, that is if there are poor people then there are also rich people. The proverbial phrase itself implies that two natural elements should co-exist, because the swamp acts as the "catchment area" for water flowing from the hills before it reaches nearby rivers or streams.

This situation is different today. Development has meant that hills have been levelled and the excess soils used to level the swamps. Now, when it rains, the water cannot flow smoothly to the river. Worst still, there is no replacement for the swamps to act as an artificial water catchment and no monsoon drains. This has resulted in flooding as water flows rapidly downhill. In any development or construction site, developers should take into account the size and depth of the swamp and replace it with equivalent drainage that can accommodate the same amount of cubic water as previously (Chilibeck ed., 1993).

Thirdly, *Ada batang, cendawan tumbuh / Di mana batang terguling, di situ cendawan tumbuh*. Loose translation is: "Where there is a branch, mushrooms grow". Equivalent English proverb is: "Everything in the garden is rosy".

Moral meaning, we will get our fortune regardless of our whereabouts. The literal meaning of this phrase can easily be understood by envisaging situations at that time. If there is a trunk, mushrooms will grow on it, which implies that the air and rainwater were not contaminated. Mushrooms will grow readily on any fallen or milled trunk.

Nowadays, however, we cannot simply harvest mushrooms as these might be contaminated with toxic elements from the air or absorbed from the soil. In fact, due to climate change, mushrooms no longer grow well on logs anymore. In the past, many cases of mushroom poisoning were due to mistaken identity (Erni ed., 2015).

However, even edible mushrooms may be contaminated by toxic rains or polluted air. Wild mushrooms are exposed to unpredictable climates, where toxic rain can be easily absorbed. A once-edible mushroom may become fatally poisonous, due to environmental pollutants (cf Kļaviņš, Azizov & Zaļoksnis, 2014; and Erni ed., 2015).

Fourthly, *Ada hujan, ada panas*. Loose translation is: "If there is rain, there will be a sunny day". Equivalent English proverb is: "Every dog has its day". The moral meaning of this proverb is that you can always take revenge, when there is a chance. However, the proverbial phrase implies that the weather follows an orderly pattern: the rainy season is followed in turn by a hot season. However, due to current global warming, experts say it is almost impossible to predict climate changes.

In its report called "What We Know: The Reality, Risks, and Response to Climate Change", the world's largest scientific organization, the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science), in 2014, says as following here:

[...] the range of uncertainty for the warming along the current emissions path is wide enough to encompass massively disruptive consequences to societies and ecosystems: as global temperatures rise, there is a real risk, however small, that one or more critical parts of the Earth's climate system will experience abrupt, unpredictable and potentially irreversible changes (AAAS, 2014:1).

In "Turn Down the Heat", the World Bank says also that in a much warmer world, "*we can expect extremes in flooding and droughts, in heat waves and water scarcity, in increased intensity of storms and irreversible loss of biodiversity*" (cited in Smith, 2014:1). The tropical climate of the island of Borneo is quite uniform. However, from August 2015 to April 2016, western Borneo experienced a hot season; while the southern part experienced heavy rains, which caused flooding in cities like Kuching in Sarawak, Malaysia (Davies, 2016). The unpredictable weather caused great losses for farmers as well as fishermen. Crops were devastated by the extreme conditions, which in turn led to poverty and food shortages (Fischer, Shah & Velthuis, 2002).

Fifthly, *Air jernih, ikannya jinak*. Loose translation: "Clear water, tame fish". Equivalent English proverb: "The mark of a good leader is a loyal follower". The moral meaning of the proverb is "a safe and prosperous country has a civic-minded, moral, and polite society". The phrase implies that where water is crystal clear, it is full of fish. This situation will slowly but surely diminish both in urban settings as well as villages due to development, logging, and agriculture as well as other commercial and industrial activities (cf Ravanera & Gorra, 2011; and Chadha, 2013).

It is almost impossible now to find a real-life illustration of the proverb, especially in countries where development, industrialisation, and lack of regulations are rampant. Animal lovers will enjoy this proverb and the impact of understanding the previous context will surely make them recognise the importance of clean rivers and streams.

Sixthly, *Ada air ada ikan*. Loose translation: "Wherever there is water, there are fish". Equivalent English proverb: "Where there is a country, there are people". The moral meaning of this proverb is "Wherever we are, we can always find a source of livelihood". However, even though the phrase may be an overstatement in that it states that if there is water there are fish, this situation reflects an

observation of its time. If the scenario is incorrect, this proverb will disappear and will not continue to be used by the next generation. Although it seems too literal or exaggerated, in the past there was no pollution and there surely were a lot of fish everywhere.

The attitude of the Malay people towards getting fish was that it was easy, and food was abundant as long as there was water (Yoshino, 2014). Due to commercial and industrial activities, water is now polluted (cf Eng, Paw & Guarin, 1989; and Pitsuwan, 2009).

South Asia – particularly India – and Southeast Asia are facing severe water pollution problems. Rivers such as the Yellow (China), Ganges (India), and Amu and Syr Darya (Central Asia) are top the list of the world's most polluted rivers (Jha, 2005). In cities in the developing countries of the region, most water bodies are now heavily polluted with domestic sewage, industrial effluents, chemicals, and solid waste. Most rivers in Nepal's urban areas have been polluted and their waters are now unfit for human use, while drinking water in Kathmandu is contaminated with coliform bacteria, iron, ammonia, and other contaminants (UNEP, 2001).

It will take decades for the water to be fit for consumption again and much of the damage is irreversible. Endemic flora and fauna in and along the river will likely become extinct, which may cause a serious imbalance in biodiversity.

Seventhly, *Dari semak ke belukar/ Belukar sudah menjadi rimba*. Loose translation: "From bushes to forest". Equivalent English proverb: "Jump out of the frying pan and into the fire". The moral of the proverb is to leave one dangerous or bad situation for a situation that is worse. The phrase of this proverb envisaged how bushes could grow into a forest. When less destruction or damage was done to the bushes and forests, this progression would be a natural phenomenon in the foreseeable future (Alexander, 1997; and Chang & Chamberlin, 2004).

Traditionally, farming areas were only

used for a short period, after which farmers left their fields in search of new fertile land. These traditions continue from the era of hunter-gatherers until recently. The tradition would enable bushes to grow into forests and at the same time for soil to be normalised and become fertile again (Costantini *et al.*, 2016).

The scenario is less likely to happen now, due to an expansion of commercial agriculture such as the production of palm oil. Rainforest area the equivalent of 300 soccer fields is being destroyed every hour for palm oil plantation. This gives rise to numerous problems for the climate, environment, and people living in the forest (PO, n.y.).

Population expansion is another reason for deforestation. Houses, agriculture, firewood, and other factors contribute to the deforestation. Many young generations have never directly seen or visited woods, let alone forests. Many of them have only seen small wooded areas in a park or botanical garden. More and more young people only understand the concept of a “concrete forest”, which refers to buildings in the city (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2000; and Murray & Nelson, 2005).

Eighthly, *Laut mana yang tidak berombak, bumi mana yang tidak ditimpa hujan*. Loose translation: “All the seas will be rough, all places will have rain”. Equivalent English proverb: “To err is human, to forgive is divine/nobody is infallible”.

The moral meaning of the proverb is that everybody makes mistakes. We can refute the literal meaning of the phrase given that there are many places on earth that are dry. However, if we observe carefully, these dry places are, or were, inhabited by people, which suggest the possibility that they were once habitable and received rain. This proverb means that in the past, rains fell at almost every part of the globe. At present, the frequency of rain has resulted in devastation. This phenomenon is due to global warming (Jennings & Magrath, 2009; and Trenberth *et al.*, 2014).

From non-expert observation, nothing changes at sea. Every second, the waves

appear to move as usual. The movement of waves reminds us that the sea is vast and deep. The alarming report by a scientist who said that the impact of global warming is slowly melting the ice in the Antarctic will certainly affect all land on earth (Gillis, 2016). The rise of water will reduce the amount of liveable land. In short, we need the balanced presence of “mother nature” as described by our forefathers in their fossilised proverbs.

Teaching of Proverbs. Proverbs are taught in the Malay language curriculum from Year Three in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, and Indonesia (*cf* Lowenberg, 1985; Jones, 1996; Dardjowidjojo, 1998; David & Govindasamy, 2007; and Redmond *ed.*, 2009).³ This means that proverbs are considered important enough to be taught in schools. They have the ability to communicate moral teaching through beautiful language. The analogies used are valued highly and the metaphors are unique.

It is, however, very challenging to teach proverbs as many of them were created by ancestors and the words used are sometimes archaic. Teachers need to explain or show (picture or bring students to see it by themselves) the intended objects or items. For example, for the proverb “*seperti aur dan tebing*” (like thin bamboo and mountain-side), it is likely that at least half of the students, especially those from urban areas, will not know what “*aur*” is. Many will know the word bamboo, but “*aur*” is more specifically a small species of bamboo and is no longer a household word.

Many proverbs use irrelevant words or words that have unconvincing connotations for students, such as “*bagai hantu makan dedak*” (ghost eating bran or rice flour). Many modern families have taught their children that ghosts do not exist. Furthermore, not many students will know about “*dedak*”, homemade bran or riceflour. Teaching the proverb will create

³Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, and Indonesia share a common language of Malay origin. The lingua franca Malay was later uplifted into a standard language named as “Standard Malay” or just “Malay” in Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia. It is now being called an “Indonesian Language” in Indonesia.

more confusion for students if not handled correctly. However, pictures, storytelling, or even hands-on experience will help them to appreciate the ancient wisdom (Pedersen, 1995; and Dujmović, 2007).

The teaching of proverbs must not only emphasize moral meaning, but the words and phrases used. The teacher should relate the actual meaning of the proverbs (Basgoz, 1993; Mieder & Sobieski, 1999; Barajas, 2010; and Nabifar, 2013). Otherwise, the proverbs will only be memorised and repeated in the exam without knowing or understanding the underlying message. If this happens, the entire lesson becomes useless and the students will have obtained empty knowledge.

The way in which proverbs are taught lies in the hands of the curriculum planners and teachers, who choose the relevant proverbs for teaching. With more emphasis on integrated learning, it is very important to look beyond language and moral teaching. Thematic teaching should be considered as another option with an emphasis on various current affairs including environmental issues. Environmental issues are not only current, but also global issues. Relating these issues to various subjects is important in creating an urgent and lasting awareness.

Proverbs use actual analogies about the surroundings. These analogies usually refer to natural phenomena, such as nature, plants, and animals as well as the broader surroundings. In addition, the analogies used reflect the situations of a bygone era. So, through proverbs in education, students will not only learn languages and morals but lessons from a time machine that enables them to travel back to the time of their ancestors (Basgoz, 1993; Cohen & Shires, 1998; and Barajas, 2010). Students will, then, be able to compare positive and negative impacts of various current developments around them, and they can use this enhanced awareness to improve the future.

CONCLUSION

Due to the time depth and language dynamic, the words or phrases used in

proverbs might change over time which poses challenge to learners. It is important for teachers to apply an integrated learning approach in the teaching of proverbs.

Besides the meaning of the proverbs, students should first understand the words or the phrases that built the proverbs and appreciate our forefathers' ingenuity, especially its relations with their environment.⁴

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⁴**Statement:** Herewith, I affirm that this article is my original work and not a product of plagiarism, and that the article has not been submitted, reviewed, or published in another scholarly journal. Upon acceptance for publication, I will not withdraw my manuscript from the *SOSIOHUMANIKA: Jurnal Pendidikan Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan* (*Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Education*).

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