

**MAKE IT MEAN!  
USING A ‘COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY’  
TO IMPROVE LANGUAGE SKILLS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to explore ways of making ESL classes more engaging for language learners at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). To this end, an instructional method known as ‘Community of Inquiry’ (CI) where students sit in a circle and explain, challenge and justify one another’s opinions, arguments and assertions was combined with specially written ‘thinking stories’ containing philosophical issues and elements of relevance to learners’ culture. Two such stories were written and taught to a class of intermediate level, ESL learners at IIUM, over a five-week period, using CI method. Qualitative research methodology was utilized to evaluate learners’ responses to the method and materials. Data collection instruments included: in-depth interviews, student-diaries, focused-group observation and teacher’s diary entries. The data was subsequently transcribed, analysed and arranged into themes and sub-themes using Nvivo - a qualitative research software. The results of the research showed that CI method, combined with thinking stories, holds great potential for improving all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in a holistic way. For example, speaking and listening were practiced through CI discussions; grammar and vocabulary were learnt in-context using the thinking stories; pronunciation was practiced during read-aloud sessions of the stories and the philosophical issues and questions discussed provided an excellent stimulus for written work. In addition, students’ confidence to speak-up in class grew, as did their ability to use critical thinking skills. It appears that combining CI method with thinking stories satisfied learners’ cognitive, affective and cultural needs, and this, in turn, helped to increase their intrinsic motivation to study English - an important factor for effective language learning. The paper ends by suggesting ways to improve CI method for future implementations of this new approach to second language learning.

**Introduction**

Having worked as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher for several years in Asia, it became apparent that many of the ELT materials and textbooks available on the market were inappropriate for Asian learners. The main reason for this is that mainstream ESL textbooks tend to focus on popular culture, which is sometimes inappropriate for Asian learners’ values, worldview and culture. Tomlinson (2003), an ELT materials design expert, explains how ELT materials need to connect with

learners' cultural background, if effective language learning is to take place: "In order for learning to be successful, connections need to be made between the new and the familiar, between what is being learned and the learner's life and between the learning experience and its potential value in the future" (p. 19). The second reason is that many ELT textbooks appear to lack higher-order thinking skills. The reason for this could be that publishers tend to pander to the exam-oriented nature of their target market. Consequently, there is an emphasis on language learning rather than language acquisition, in contrast to SLA theory. The researcher therefore sought to find ways of making ELT materials more culturally appropriate for Asian learners and more cognitively engaging. This was done by producing materials consisting of 'thinking stories' containing philosophical elements and issues of relevance to Asian learners. In addition, a new instructional method was adopted for ESL known as 'Community of Inquiry'.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many of the ELT materials on the market fail to match the values, culture or worldview of Asian learners. There is also a tendency for published materials to negate higher-order thinking skills with the result of that commercial ELT materials are generally not very motivating or cognitively engaging for Asian learners.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The researcher designed a sample of ELT materials comprising of 'thinking stories' incorporating philosophical issues and elements of relevance to Asian learners' values, culture and worldview. The materials were then taught to a class of ESL learners using an instructional method known as 'Community of Inquiry' (CI). CI

requires students to read the thinking stories and formulate philosophical questions, then discuss these questions in a group. Next, the programme was evaluated using qualitative research methodology to gauge learners' reactions and responses to the CI method and materials (CIMM) in terms of motivation and benefit for learners' English language skills.

### **Research questions**

The study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do learners respond to CIMM in terms of their motivation to study English?
2. How do CIMM benefit learners' English language skills?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Motivation**

In the field of education, motivation is categorized under two main headings - intrinsic and extrinsic. According to Sadiq Midraj et al (2008), motivation is: "...a continuum from intrinsic (IM), which is 'motivation to engage in an activity because that activity is enjoyable and satisfying to do', to extrinsic (EM), which is behavior 'carried out to achieve some instrumental end, such as earning a reward or avoiding a punishment' ” (Previous Research section, para. 6). A study involving Emirati students revealed that intrinsically motivated students had higher attainment in English language than extrinsically motivated students. The former also showed significant differences in their language proficiency test scores. Moreover, these positive effects were longer lasting for intrinsically motivated students than extrinsically motivated ones (Sadiq Midraj et al, 2008). The researcher therefore anticipated that introducing higher-order

thinking skills into ELT materials by means of CI method and thinking stories, as well as making the content relevant to learners' values, culture and world view, it would enhance their intrinsic motivation to study English.

### **Content Based Language Teaching (CBLT)**

In the past, ELT methods such as the 'Grammar Translation Method (GTM) focused more on rote learning of grammar and vocabulary lists, often out of context, and were more teacher-centered. Students' input was very limited and opportunities for realistic communication in the classroom using the target language were very few. More recently, contemporary teaching methods such as: 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT), Content Based Language Teaching and Task-Based-Learning (TBL) have become more constructivist and student-centred in nature, with an emphasis on realistic communication and meaningful tasks. This is more in-line with SLA theory about how second language is acquired (Krashen, 2003).

Of particular interest to us here is an ELT approach called 'Content-Based Language Teaching' (CBLT). Brown (2007) defines CBLT as: "When language becomes the medium to convey informational content of interest and relevance to the learner" (p. 49). Hence, in CBLT language is not the sole focus of the learning, but rather the content dictates the form and sequence of the language to be learnt. An example would be a second language learner who studies motor mechanics in an English speaking environment. He or she not only learns about motor mechanics while at the same time picking up English as a means to an end. Research into CBLT has shown that it increases students' intrinsic motivation and empowerment, because the content is of interest to learners (Brown, 2007). If ELT materials can be designed with content

that is relevant to learners' culture, worldview and the problems facing them in their daily lives, as well as promoting higher-order thinking skills, they are more likely to be motivating and effective for them.

### **'Community of Inquiry'**

An educational movement known as 'Philosophy for Children' (P4C) advocates a teaching method known as 'Community of Inquiry' (CI). The founder, Mathew Lipman (1988), saw philosophy as a crucial part of education: "...philosophy is the discipline that best prepares us to think in terms of the other disciplines, it must be assigned a central role in the early (as well as in the late) stages of the educational process" (p. 18). For him, CI meant genuine discovery learning for both students and the teacher, who are encouraged to raise questions and share their opinions about the elusive problems and issues facing them in their daily lives:

Converting the classroom into a "community of inquiry" in which students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seeking to identify one another's assumptions (Lipman, 2003, p. 20).

To practise CI, students sit in a circle and work together with the teacher, using dialogue to find solutions to logical, metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, social or political problems. Sharp (1993) lists the cognitive behaviours gained by students in CI as: "giving and asking for good reasons, seeking clarification, defining concepts, making valid inferences, hypothesizing, generalizing, giving counter-examples, discovering assumptions, using and recognizing criteria, recognizing logical fallacies, and inferring consequences" (p. 337).

Another name given to CI is ‘Doing Philosophy’. According to Golding (2006) doing philosophy differs from conventional Western academic philosophy, where students learn the History of ideas and opinions of eminent philosophers on key philosophical issues. In contrast, doing philosophy encourages students to think about issues that are of importance to them i.e. the ‘big ideas’ and ‘rich concepts that are of interest to them. For example: “Culture, violence, number, art, mind, responsibility, justice, harmony, knowledge, racism, rules, reality, intelligence, science, faith, evidence, proof, beauty, love...” (Golding, 2006, p.67).

### **Previous research**

Several studies have been conducted demonstrating the potential of CI to enhance learners’ critical thinking skills, English language skills and soft skills, as well as building learners’ confidence to speak. An experiment with forty eight, form four students was conducted in a Malaysian secondary school (Moomala Othman & Rosnani Hashim, 2006). In this study, students’ critical thinking and English reading skills were compared for two programmes – the ‘Philosophy for Children Programme’ (P4CP) and the ‘Reader Response’ (RR) approach. The findings revealed that P4CP enhanced students’ critical thinking significantly unlike the RR approach. The P4CP also improved students’ reading skills due to a positive linear relationship between thinking ability and reading ability. In addition, students in the P4CP group showed differences in the quantity and quality of their questions, discussion and diary entries. One more benefit was that the diary entries of P4CP were lengthier and more philosophical in nature than the RR group. CI also helped students make judgments by drawing on personal experience; provide counter-arguments; evaluate peers’ contributions; justify judgments and use reasoning and critical thinking skills

collaboratively. All these advantages show that P4CP was more effective than RR in enhancing students' critical thinking and reading skills.

A similar experimental study was conducted by Rosnani Hashim (2003) in a primary school in Gombak, Selangor, Malaysia, comprising of thirty, eleven year old students of average ability. The aim of the study was to determine whether doing philosophy affected students' critical thinking skills. One hour sessions were conducted in Malay language over a period of twelve weeks. The *New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills (NJTRS)* was used to measure the effectiveness of the program. The results showed that doing philosophy improved students' critical thinking skills significantly. A similar experiment was conducted by Rosnani Hashim (2005b) in Tampin, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, but this time, English was the medium of instruction. The sample comprised of high and average ability students. Students practiced doing philosophy, in English as a second language, for one hour a day over a period of three weeks. Similar improvements in students' critical thinking skills were found for the high ability group.

A third experiment conducted by Trickey (2007) assessed the effects of philosophical thinking on primary school students. The study comprised of 105 students who practiced doing philosophy for one hour a week, over a period of sixteen months. One of the significant findings was that the experimental group showed significant improvement in communication skills, concentration and social skills. Two studies in Singapore revealed that doing philosophy has potential to foster critical thinking skills

and improve students' spoken English and English communication skills (Seet, 2006; Gan, Ng, Lee).

Finally, Rear (2010) conducted a course on debating social issues, with twenty, third and fourth year EFL students at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba Prefecture, Japan. The learners' language abilities ranged from elementary to intermediate, and they were split evenly between males and females. The course ran for one, thirteen week semester and sessions lasted for ninety minutes, twice a week. Students found the course challenging, but their responses showed a high level of interest due to the topics and skills of: critical thinking, collecting data, debating and speaking more confidently being perceived by students as relevant to today's society and to their future studies and careers.

The implications of these studies are that doing philosophy has much to offer ELT in terms of reading, speaking, critical thinking, communication skills and building students' confidence.

### **Materials for Doing Philosophy**

The kind of materials that are best suited to doing philosophy are those which stimulate students' inquisitiveness and engender philosophical discussion. That is, materials that contain unclear concepts; inconsistent reasoning; irrational behavior or philosophical issues raised by prominent philosophers. Fisher (1998) recommends the following types of materials for doing philosophy: "...novels; thinking stories; folktales; children's fictions; picture books; poetry; pictures and photos; artifacts and objects; drama, role plays and first hand experience; music; video clips and movies;

factual narrative or history in narrative form” (p. 211). Materials for doing philosophy should also have engaging plots; characters of an appropriate age; adventures that are relevant to learners’ lives and examples of characters engaging in thinking and questioning as a role model for readers (Fisher, 1998).

### **Writing the materials**

The researcher wrote a sample of materials as a stimulus for CI, consisting of two stories, divided into five episodes. Table 1 shows episode one of a story entitled “*Girls into maths*”. Difficult or new vocabulary items have been made bold to enable students and teachers to focus on the new words before reading.

‘*Girls into maths*’ tells the story of an Asian Mathematics teacher who has to deal with a girl who refuses to study Maths because she believes it will not be useful for her in her future life. The story also touches on issues such as racism and corporal punishment.

Table 1  
Episode 1 – ‘*Girls into maths*’

Miss Khan was the only female Asian teacher at Meadowbrook, an inner-city primary school that looked as though it had been built during the time of the dinosaurs. Its **ancient** doors **creaked** and the old wooden windows let rain and cold air into the classrooms during the winter. Yet, Meadowbrook had a warm **atmosphere**. The students came from a wide variety of backgrounds - whites, blacks, Asians and Arabs all studied at Meadowbrook. As a result, there was a real **cocktail** of religions; but Mr. Stanley, the head teacher, made it his business to ensure that the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh children lived together in peace and **harmony** most of the time. It was only occasionally that **racial conflict** broke out, but when it did, it took Miss Khan and her colleagues all their training and skills of **diplomacy** to **resolve** the situation. Miss Khan had often wondered what caused **racism**, and how it can be **overcome**. Her approach was to treat all the children the same.

“Good morning children,” called out Miss Khan as she walked into class one Tuesday morning.

“Good morning,” mumbled the children. Wayne and Mohammed stopped playing knuckles and looked up. They noticed their teacher was carrying a bright yellow textbook, which they had not seen before, with the words ‘Elementary Algebra’ on the cover. They were **curious** to know what Algebra meant and so a hubbub of discussion began among the children.

Miss Khan coughed and announced, “We’re starting a new topic today called Algebra, so I want you to pay close attention to what I’m going to say.”

A Yemeni student called Abdullah put his hand up, “Madam what does Algebra mean?”

Miss Khan paused for a moment, “Now that’s an interesting question, Abdullah. It actually comes from Arabic, so perhaps your father would know what it means.”

Everyone looked excited. Some children had heard that Algebra was tough, so they were **eager** to try it out to see if they could understand. Everyone that is, except Fatima, who pulled a long face and declared, “I don’t want to do Algebra.”

Miss Khan stopped for a moment and then asked her, “Why not?”

“Because I’m a girl,” replied Fatima indignantly.

“So?” enquired Miss Khan

“Girls aren’t good at Math’s, and besides, we don’t need it in our lives.”

The other children looked at Miss Khan, then at Fatima, then back at Miss Khan again to see what her **reaction** would be. Miss Khan remained calm. She walked across the front of the class to the table in the middle and sat upon it. She placed the bright yellow book slowly beside her and then looked at Fatima seriously. The class fell silent. They wondered if Miss Khan was going to hit Fatima. But that would be impossible; it was against the law to beat children, even if they were rude to their teachers. A boy called Chester, in the class next door, regularly hit other children and **terrorized** the playground. In fact, one trainee teacher had left because Chester made his life such hell. But all the teachers did, was to send him to the **discipline** teacher, call his mother and then it was back to his monkey business all over again. Some of the older teachers felt that Chester needed a good **caning**.

At last, Miss Khan asked, “And why is that Fatima?”

Fatima looked down and shyness or **stubbornness** seemed to take her over. She refused to answer. For a moment, the class thought Fatima was going to cry. Then suddenly, Ahmed shot up his hand and said, “Madam, I know what she means.”

Miss Khan turned to Ahmed and enquired, “Yes, Ahmed?”

“She means girls don’t need to do Maths because they’re going to grow up and have lots of babies!”

Everyone laughed.

Then Anisa, a pretty Asian girl with green eyes said, “My auntie’s good at Maths and she said, “Girls into Maths *can go*?”

“That’s a clever **metaphor**!” exclaimed Miss Khan.

Vinesh, who was sitting in front of Miss Khan’s desk looked confused, “I don’t get it Madam,” he complained.

“Well,” said Miss Khan, “When we do division in Maths, if we can divide one number into another, we say one number *goes into* another, don’t we? For example, two goes into ten five times, right?”

“Yes,” replied Vinesh.

“But if the number cannot be divided into another; like six into eight, we say eight can’t *go into* six.” explained Miss Khan.

Then John shouted out, “I get it Madam! When Anisa’s Auntie said, ‘Girls into maths *can go*’, she meant girls *can* do Maths?”

“Well done John, that’s right!” said Miss Khan, “But anyway, I don’t think Ahmed said that girls weren’t *good* at Maths, I think he meant girls don’t *need* Maths, am I right Ahmed?”

“Yes Madam. My mum said that women should stay at home and look after their children.”

“What if they don’t have any children? said Sarah in a sour voice.

“Then they should stay home and look after their husbands!” replied Ahmed, grinning at the other boys.

“What if we don’t want a silly man bossing us around and telling us what to do?” said Sarah, turning up her nose at Ahmed.

All the girls laughed, but Miss Khan raised her hands saying, “Children, children, let’s not fight over this, let’s use some **logic**.” Just then the bell rang for morning snack, so Miss Khan walked the children down to the playground and then headed off to the staff room for a well-deserved cup of tea.

## **Methodology**

### **Materials Evaluation**

The thinking stories were taught to a class of intermediate level, English second language learners at the Centre for English Language and Pre-academic Development (CELPAD), in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The programme consisted of five, two-hour sessions, spread over a five week period. Qualitative research methodology was used to evaluate learners’ reactions and responses to CIMM by means of the following data collection instruments: ‘In-depth Interviews’, ‘Student Diaries’, ‘Field Notes’ and a ‘Teacher’s Diary’ containing reflections after each lesson. In addition, documents like lesson plans and class worksheets were kept, and a ‘Focus Group Observation’ was conducted using a video recording of the first and last lessons. The latter was subsequently transcribed to provide extra information about the interactions and responses of students to CIMM (Sherman & Webb, 1990). The data collection process spanned the whole period of implementation and aimed at providing rich data about students’ thinking, feelings and reactions to CIMM. Using multiple data-collection methods yields a wealth of information and increases reliability by minimising bias, also known as triangulation (Nagy Hesse-Biber, S. & Leavy, P., 2006).

## **Sample**

### *Interviews*

A total of eighteen students were interviewed; however, five were eliminated because they failed to yield 'rich' data i.e. they gave short responses that did not add anything to the information already collected. The remaining thirteen interviewees were narrowed down to eight, using the following criteria: 1) those who attended all classes; 2) four students who were talkative in class and four who were quiet.

### *Student Diaries*

At the beginning of the programme, students were given diaries to write down their thoughts and feelings about the class and issues discussed. Eighty diary entries were collected from a total of twenty two students; however, some diary entries were discarded due being short and lacking in rich data. Thus, nineteen diary-entries in all were chosen to triangulate the information gathered from the other sources i.e. interviews, focused group observation and the teacher's diary.

### *Focused Group Observation (FGO)*

All five lessons were recorded on video camera, but only the last lesson was transcribed. This is because students were unfamiliar with the CI method in the earlier lessons, therefore the quality and amount of student-participation was limited. By the fifth lesson, students had got the hang of CI and displayed more confidence and participation. The video of the fifth lesson was analysed and then detailed notes were made about learners' reactions and interactions. This was added to the researcher's field notes.

*Teacher's Diary (TD)*

A detailed teacher's diary was kept at the end of each lesson comprising of observations and reflections about the lessons. Objectivity was maintained at all times meaning that both positive and negative information was noted about students' reactions and performance.

**'ARCS' model of motivation**

Keller's 'ARCS' model was selected to gain information about students' motivation towards CIMM. The ARCS model was originally designed to coincide with Gagne's nine events for instructional design; however its close correlation to learner's motivation makes it suitable for evaluating any learning programme (Kruse, n.d.). The researcher referred to the four categories of ARCS to guide interview questions, focus group observation and the data analysis (See Table 2).

Table 2  
Keller's ARCS model of motivation

1) 'Attention'	How instructional materials gain and hold students' attention.
2) 'Relevance'	Students will not want to learn unless the program is relevant to their needs.
3) 'Confidence'	Students are more likely to put effort into a programme if they are 'confident' that they will be able to achieve the objectives of the course i.e. a programme requiring too much time and effort could demotivate them.
4) 'Satisfaction'	Learners need a sense of achievement and satisfaction at the end of the course i.e. that the programme has been beneficial for them because they have acquired new skills (Kruse, n.d.).

### **Content analysis**

‘Content Analysis’ was chosen for the data analysis stage, which, Ratcliff (2002) explains as a process having four stages: 1) coding various units, 2) developing categories, 3) giving examples of categories and 4) linking between categories of time, space, causation, and social/interpersonal links.

The researcher adopted a ‘theory first approach’, moving from the ARCS model of motivation to looking for evidence in the different sources of data namely: in-depth interviews, focus group observation, student diaries and the teacher’s diary. This is confirmed by Matthew, Miles & Michael Huberman (1994) who state:

Qualitative studies are often mounted to explore a new area and to build or “emerge” a theory about it. But they also can be designed to confirm or test an existing theory. In the confirmatory mode, as Gherardi and Turner (1987) point out, data are used to fill gaps in a puzzle. In the exploratory mode, it’s as if we are trying to solve an unstated or ambiguous problem, which has to be framed and reframed as we go. Wolcott (1992) talks about this as the “theory first” or “theory after” approach. Both are workable (p. 90)

### **Interraters**

To maintain objectivity, reduce bias and strengthen reliability the researcher engaged two interraters to corroborate the findings: “Not just as a means of verifying coherence in understanding, but at the same time a method of strengthening the findings of the entire qualitative study” (Marques, 2005, p. 439).

The first interrater was a lecturer from the Institute of Education (INSTED) at IIUM who is familiar with CI method. The second was an ESL teacher at CELPAD with ten years of teaching experience. The interraters were asked to review the video-recordings of the second and final lessons and then give feedback by responding to questions about the benefit of CIMM for students' motivation and English language skills.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Benefit for English**

The results of the study for Motivation to study English were organized according to the four major categories of Keller's ARCS model: 1) Attention, 2) Relevance, 3) Confidence and 4) Satisfaction. Each of these categories gave rise to further sub-categories that showed how CIMM motivated students to learn English. However, the main focus of this paper is how CI method improves learners' English language skills in the ESL classroom. This came about as follows.

It is a feature of qualitative research that results are often unanticipated and emergent. In the case of this study, the researcher started by looking for evidence of learners' motivation to study English; yet during the analysis of the data, the second category of Keller's ARCS model - 'Relevance' seemed to refer to the ability of CIMM to benefit learners' English. In other words, since learners were studying English language, for CIMM to be 'relevant' to them it would mean that CIMM should help their English language in some way. For this reason, the researcher re-named the category 'Relevance' as a new theme - 'Benefit for English'. Benefit for English was found to

have four emergent sub-categories, each having its own minor sub-categories, as will be seen.

The four main sub-categories of ‘Benefit for English’ were: 1) ‘Listening and speaking’; 2) ‘In-context language’; 3) ‘Reading’ and 4) ‘Writing’ (See Table 3).

Table 3  
 ‘Benefit for English’

No.	Sub-themes	Focus group observation	Field notes	In-depth interviews	Student-diaries
1.	Listening & Speaking	X	X	X	X
2.	In-context language	-	X	X	X
3.	Reading	X	X	-	-
4.	Writing	-	-	-	X

The sub-category of ‘Listening & Speaking’ was supported by its own minor sub-categories which are: 1) Hear others’ views; 2) Discussion; 3) Share opinions; 4) Confidence to speak; 5) Asking questions; 6) Modeling; 7) Pronunciation and 8) Push to the limit (See Table 4)

Table 4  
 Listening and speaking

No.	Listening & Speaking	Focus group observation	Field notes	In-depth interviews	Student-diaries
1.	Hear others' views	-	X	X	X
2.	Discussion	-	X	X	X
3.	Share Opinions	-	X	X	X
4.	Confidence to speak	X	X	X	X
5.	Asking questions	X	X	X	X
6.	Modeling	X	X	X	-
7.	Pronunciation	-	-	X	X
8.	Pushed to their limits	X	X	X	X

### **Hearing others' views**

Hearing other students' views, improved students' understanding, gave them new ideas and helped them to analyze others' statements before they replied. They also appreciated hearing the viewpoints of different cultures and felt able to transfer this information into their own lives. Some students felt shy to speak but said they still benefitted from listening to other students speaking. "*...all of us gave his opinion about the things we discussed thus, everyone learned something from the others. Yes, it did. It allowed me to know what the other people in the class also think ...We were talking and everyone was given his opinion about something*" (KAD1, 16). And also:

*Because err we have different (nationalities and) culture, we have different perspective, (continuous thump noise) so we can share with each other ...[We can know their] what, maybe err in their country they have this err this opinion like this, like what err in.. like Ibrahim and the others said that in Arabic country they do not really what err... give to have a relationship between boyfriend and girlfriend right, so (whereas) in Malaysia is actually err.... err is a usual..(quite normal) (SHI, 997).*

### **Discussion & Sharing opinions**

CI discussions gave students the chance to practice their speaking and encouraged them to speak more. CI discussions also taught them how to draw conclusions that were acceptable to the majority, requiring them to use higher-order thinking skills. Students found the Islamic topics of the discussions useful and relevant to their lives, and sharing their ideas in English required them solve problems and elaborate on the

issues in the stories. In short, the meaningful discussions of CIMM were one of the most important factors that engaged students and motivated them to study English. *“(the lessons helped to improve my English) Because er.... the lessons that we have to, speak a lot when we discuss, than another, than another class, we just sit and then write, listen, no more speak”* (LI. 117). Students also said that the Islamic topics helped to stimulate discussions:

*“Honestly, this was the first time for me discussed about Islam by using English language. For me, it was very interesting rather than discuss about Internet brings more harm than good or about marriage too early. I hope CELPAD will more concern to Islamic content when they teach the students”* (LID1, 22).

### **Confidence to speak**

Students' confidence to speak was increased by sitting in a circle, reading the stories and having the opportunity to speak. Also, having the teacher write their names on the board beside their questions made some students try harder to speak; however, shyness and lack of knowledge about Islam made some students less confident to speak. *“I think this class makes me have more confidence to speak English”* (AND3, 17).

*(putting students' names beside their questions on the board makes us feel) Confident because like today I, (that's my question, but some students didn't ask questions) ...Err because this for us the first time you have to make question to (by) yourself ...Yes. After maybe like me also, the first I don't.. share in the class ...then after I feel okay ...Yes, the second class I can get this..(KHI, 913).*

Another student said:

*I have confident (using English after the lessons) ...You know before this I am not dare to speak with friends in the class when we read the book I not feel confident, now when we see the title we compulsory to speak, so I speak it out and I feel have more confident (ANI, 405).*

### **Asking questions**

The stories and content helped students to think critically; answer questions and formulate their own philosophical questions, although they found the latter quite difficult at times. *“(The lessons made us think because) You have just to keep looking inside, deep in the story, just to came up a lot of questions, open-ended questions”* (II, 241). And: *“The students come up with more question and I trying to find answer for them, so these question helped me to remember and prepare reasons as answer. I learned the skill of thinking when people question me with “why?”* (SYD1, 16).

### **Modeling and Pronunciation**

The conversational style of the stories provided a model of correct English for students to imitate. It also supplied them with new grammar and vocabulary within a meaningful context. Some students emulated the questions raised by characters in the stories while formulating their own questions. The teacher corrected students' pronunciation during the reading of the stories and modeled how to put emphasis and emotion into the reading of the stories: *“Because it was, I found new expression inside, and I found that, that, that, a normal discussion between (in the) stories, it was good for my conversation”* (SYI, 116). And: *“...It has a lot of new vocabulary ...I learn how to pronounce the words in correct way”* (AND1, 4).

*“It uhm... improve (my English) better. Because err.. because I learn new expressions from the story ...Of course, I, (like these stories) and I’m going to, to read that, more and more to, to pick up all expressions ... (I plan) To use them (the expressions) in, in, when conversation (SYI 210, 689 and 694).*

### **Pushed to the limit**

Some students were heard to complain that they could not explain themselves during discussions. This meant that they were being pushed to the limit of their language ability. This is a good thing because it forced them to find new vocabulary and language to express themselves, which is an important feature of learning a second or foreign language. *“I have the, a lot of idea in English, \* I in about Islam, and I, I cannot express them in, in English language because I need to practice, I need to read, I need to” (SYI, 351).* And also: *“I like it so much, but I lost of vocabulary and I can’t contribute my idea, I do have to say something. Then, I just discuss with my friend beside me” (AD5, 18)*

### **In-context language**

‘In-context language’ had two minor-sub-categories which are: 1) In-context grammar and 2) In-context vocabulary (See table 5).

Table 5  
 In-context language

No.	In-context grammar and vocabulary	Focus group observation	Field notes	In-depth interviews	Student-diaries
1.	In-context grammar	-	X	X	-
2.	In-context vocabulary	-	X	X	X

The thinking stories were a good model of the correct *use* of grammar and vocabulary within a meaningful context. This not only enabled students to understand the

meaning of new words, but also helped them when formulating their own questions i.e. they could apply the new vocabulary introduced in the stories. Some students said they re-read the stories after class, which is another good way to reinforce new vocabulary. One more advantage of CIMM was that students' errors were corrected by the teacher on the spot as they arose, either pronunciation errors during the reading stage or grammar errors during the question formulation stage. This immediate, contextualized feedback is more likely to be remembered by students than learning grammar and vocabulary out of context in the form of grammar rules and wordlists: “...I think it's a little bit boring ...To study the grammar again and again. (Is that what you've been doing in other classes?)...Yeah” (KAI, 184).

*(The stories helped us make questions) Because some sentences have er., good sentence, you can make questions ...And then inside have important keywords and sentence you can make words and some just like linking word...Like er.... (the sentence) teach the Qur'an through, before not question ...you can get this in sentences and you just use it. (to make a question)... (KHI 996).*

*“Yes I learned new words and their meanings. I know how to use them and everything ...I think the one (where the vocabulary is) in the story (is better than in a list) so we can, we will know how to use them and in which suggest...” (KAI, 96).*

## Reading

The sub category ‘Reading’ had two minor-sub-categories which are: 1) In-context grammar and 2) In-context vocabulary (See Table 6)

Table 6  
 Reading

No.	Reading	Focus group observation	Field notes	In-depth interviews	Student-diaries
1.	Reading	-	X	X	X
2.	Reading Corrections	X	X	-	-

Reading aloud in a circle gave all students the chance to participate and improve their pronunciation and to be corrected by the teacher. Students claimed this motivated them to study more. They also found the conversational style of the stories, in the form of a play script, made the reading more enjoyable. It also helped them to improve their intonation and express humour and emotions displayed by characters in the stories. Some students were even motivated to read the stories outside the class time, as well as conduct their own research into the issues raised: *“Actually, the story persuade me to study one more, (chuckles) when, when I went to my room, (I read the stories again at home) (SYI, 111). Of course, I, (like these stories) and I’m going to, to read that, more and more to, to pick up all expressions” (SYI, 696).*

*“Reading, yeah, also (lessons helped to improve) reading. Because when we reading, er.. when we read a story...When I try to understand the story...just try to understand because er.., I think the story is about Islamic, and, and it was make me interest.(it motivates me to read)” (LI,151)*

*Yeah,(about) this, this issue (on divorce in KSA) ...Yes, (I checked something after class) just to make sure you said about the divorces in Saudi Arabia. I told you that divorces in Saudi Arabia its in the high percentage. Yeah, I make sure exactly, its 60 % ...(I found the information) From the internet, but you've got something you need to hove to know better you know, in the internet, its taken from one website. It's not fair (...) or one article, better like 4 articles, 5 articles, 6 articles and after all you are going to decide ...(I checked) About 6 (articles on-line)Yeah, cross my heart (honestly)... (II, 611).*

### **Writing**

The sub-category ‘Writing’ was demonstrated by the numerous diary entries where students’ wrote their opinions and ideas about the issues and questions discussed in class (See Table 7).

Table 7  
Writing

No.	Writing	Focus group observation	Field notes	In-depth interviews	Student-diaries
1.	Writing ideas & opinions	-	-	-	X

Students were asked to write diary entries for homework about the philosophical issues and topics discussed in class. The diary entries varied in length, with some students taking great care to correct their grammar and vocabulary. As a result, students’ written language tended to have fewer errors than their spoken language did during class discussions. A student’s written answer to the issue of gender-equality is as follows: *“I agree that men and women are different, but they have an equal position in live. It is all about our purpose in our lives, there is nothing the best in this World*

*because God already created us equal” (Lala Diary2, 17). The next is a student’s diary entry about the question “What is justice?”:*

*Justice can be defined as put something in the right place. Sometime it is difficult to define something is justice. The conclusion for these topic (that we discussed) we all decide that everything that we want do we must have the right intention and be justice in our life ...For solution, I agree with that point. Before we doing. We must have intention that will show us to do what is good and bad (SHD2, 14).*

The third, example is a student’s written answer to the question ‘Should husbands boss their wives around?’

*...husband have the right to command their wives. That doesn’t mean that they have to be after them all the time to tell them what they have to do or not. In contrast, husbands have to give advices to their wives, that will help them to not do wrong things ...In my opinion, men and women should trust and understand each other in order to ensure their marriage be eternal forever. Men also should not boss their wives because women also need privacy and freedom.*

A summary of the results for CIMM’s benefit for learners’ English can be seen in Figure 1 below.

## Conclusion

The results of the study show that CIMM possesses great potential to benefit learners' English language skills. First of all, CIMM integrates all four language skills, with learners getting the opportunity to practise their listening and speaking through sharing their views in a community of inquiry. Secondly, learners' confidence to speak and ask questions grew as the programme progressed. Indeed, CI discussions

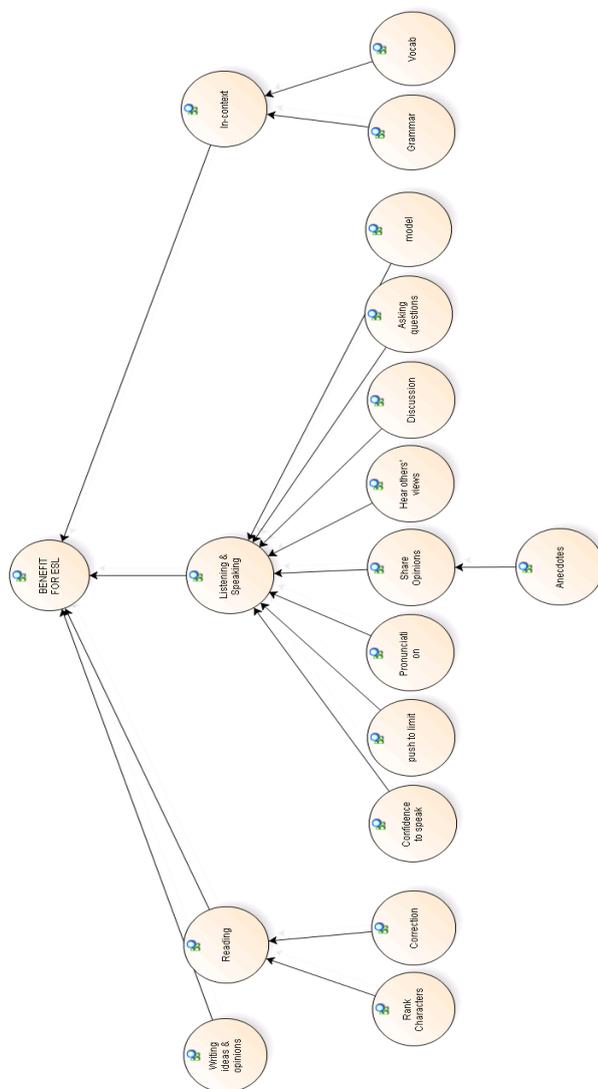


Figure 1 Benefit for English

took learners out of their ‘comfort zone’ and pushed them to the limit of their language ability. This is unusual in many ESL classrooms. Tickoo (1987) maintains: “...In order to learn a language it is important that learners ... become involved in real-life communication, that is to say, not simulation, role-playing or other games, but genuine communication in which the learner has to participate” (p. 54). Thirdly, reading the thinking stories aloud in a circle helped students’ pronunciation and provided them with a model of ‘correct’ English that they could emulate in their own speaking and writing. Fourthly, CIMM acted as a stimulus for written work, with students writing diary entries of their ideas and views on the issues and topics discussed in class. Equally valuable was the introduction of vocabulary and grammar in-context, through the thinking stories. This not only made language learning more meaningful than learning lists of grammar and vocabulary, but it also helped students to recall the meanings of the new language items. Tomlinson (1998) supports the use of narratives in ELT materials claiming that it promotes effective language acquisition:

They have the potential to engage the learners both cognitively and affectively. My own preferred genre is narrative whether it be in the form of novels, short stories, plays, poems, oral stories or songs. I find that narratives which engage the reader in interaction with characters, events and themes which are meaningful to them have the potential to utilize and develop personal experience as well to provide ‘positive evidence’ for language acquisition (p. 324).

Experts in the field of second language acquisition like Krashen (2003) advocate ‘comprehensible input’ as the best way for learners to acquire more complex grammar structures (Cam, 1995). Bigelow (2000) and Swain (1985) argue that extended opportunities to produce output and receive relevant input were found to be crucial in improving learners’ use of the grammatical structure” (p. 299).

Overall, it can be seen that CIMM benefitted learners' English language by motivating them intrinsically; providing them with comprehensive input in the form of narratives; offering them opportunities to produce output in CI discussions and making the content relevant to learners' values, culture and worldview. As such it represents a new and exciting constructivist approach to ELT that merits attention not only for the area of ESL, but from other subjects areas such as: Language Arts, History and Moral Studies etc.

### **Recommendations**

After implementing and evaluating CIMM, the following recommendations are made for future implementation:

1. As a new approach to ELT, teachers need training, to help them understand CI and to enable them to become skilful facilitators of CI.
2. CI was not originally designed for ELT therefore ESL practitioners should adapt it to the needs of their students and their classes. For example: pre-reading exercises or 'readiness activities' could be added to prepare students for the reading stage. Secondly, second language learners would benefit from small-group discussions before discussing in a large group, to allow them to reflect on the issues within the stories and familiarise themselves with any new vocabulary. This would also help to build their confidence.

3. CIMM would be best introduced as a ‘supplementary unit’ in addition to regular ELT classes - perhaps two contact hours per week. This would give students valuable opportunity to practice the four language skills holistically.
4. CIMM programme should run for at least one whole term, of twelve to fourteen weeks, to allow students to become familiar with this new approach.
5. Different media should be used as a stimulus for CI such as: video clips, audio clips, newspaper articles, pictures, music etc.
6. One possible criticism that could be leveled at CI is that discussions appear to favour confident, extrovert students; leaving shy, introverted students to listen and not participate. Krashen’s (1987) ‘silent period’ hypothesis refutes this, since he claims that learners may remain silent as they absorb the language, until they are ready to speak: “...building up competence in the second language around him ...speaking ability emerges on its own after enough competence has been developed by listening and understanding (Ellis, 1993). To support this, quiet students claimed they were benefitting from CIMM, even though they did not speak, because they listened and learnt from other students discussing. More research is needed to ascertain why ‘shy’ students remain silent and how they could be encouraged to participate, particularly in the Asian context.

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