

English Literary Texts used in Form Four AND Five English Literature Component 'Revisit'

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Abstract: This study is designed to revisit ESL teachers' perceptions towards the literary texts used in upper forms English literature component in 2007 in comparison to the texts used in 2016. It is also to identify the changes in the selection of the literary texts from the first to the current phase. The data were analysed based on these ESL teachers' perceptions in terms of the topic/content, language, culture and authenticity found in the literary texts. In the attempt of data collection, semi-structured interview was designed with twelve questions which were divided into the four different criteria. A number of twenty five form four and five teachers from different schools within the state of Sarawak were interviewed. The data obtained were compared with the data collected from a parallel study done in 2007. The findings appeared to indicate that there were some significant similarities and differences in these teachers' perceptions towards the two different sets of literary texts used in upper forms in 2007 and 2016 based on the stated criteria.

Keywords : literary texts, revisit, ESL teachers, perceptions

In March 2000, the Literature Component in English made a comeback not only into the Malaysian English Language Education Syllabus but also into the formal examinations in the Malaysian Secondary Schools (Sivapalan & Subramaniam 2008). This move signified the formal acknowledgment of the role of literature in English language teaching in Malaysia (Curriculum Development Department, Ministry of Education, Malaysia; Govindarajoo & Mukundan, 2013). This return was due to the persistence of low proficiency in the English Language among Malaysian students (Melor et al., 2014). In order to overcome this problem the Ministry of Education had made it compulsory for all students to read literary texts by integrating the Literature Component into the English Language Syllabus. The Literature component was implemented in stages over a period of three consecutive years: in March 2000 it was included into Form 1 and 4 English Language Syllabus, in 2001 into Form 2 and 5, and into Form 3 English Language Syllabus in 2002.

As cited in Ganakumaran et al. (2003), the main aims of the literature component are to enhance students' proficiency in the English language through the study of a set of prescribed literary texts; to promote interest in reading in the English Language; to appreciate aesthetic values and the beauty of the English Language; and to know and understand other cultures and universal values. Consequently, a variety of complete literary works in English, translations, and adaptations or simplified versions of novels are used in order to achieve these aims. However, it has to be stated that this move will only improve the proficiency level of learners if the literary texts used are readable, comprehensible and interesting (Chitravelu et al., 2000).

Problem Statement

When literature was initially incorporated into the school curriculum, local research

enthusiasts began exploring the challenges and perceptions of different parties towards the use of literature in teaching and learning of English. Ghazali et al (2009) study exposed that teachers spent a lot of time discussing the literary elements of the texts in class and the students responded that the teaching strategies used were boring and not interesting. Aziz et al (2010) revealed that teachers do not know the best approach to teach Literature in order for students to gain both language and appreciation of the Literature itself. In terms of texts used, Irene (2015) showed that there was a mismatch between the texts selected and students' language ability. Additionally, literary texts for Malaysian students are not contextual and culturally bound, thus making them difficult for students (Hariharan & Shri, 2016). Hence, this study is meant to revisit the situation in school.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To revisit ESL teachers' previous perceptions and comparing them with the current ones towards the literary texts used in English Form Four and Five Literature Component based on the criteria of topic/content, language, culture and authenticity.
2. To identify the changes in the selection of the literary texts from the first to the current phase

Research Questions

These are the questions of this study:

1. How do ESL teachers perceive the literary texts used in Form Four and Five Literature Component based on the criteria of topic/content, language, culture and authenticity in comparison to the previous perceptions?
2. What are the changes in the selection of the literary texts used in English Form Four and Five Literature Component from the first to the current phase?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will summarize the related researches done to find out about ESL teachers' perception towards literary texts used in ESL classroom based on the criteria of topic/content, language, culture and authenticity.

Topic/content

Lam Ai Ling (2002) study revealed that the topic/content of the literary texts used was interesting and suitable to the needs and abilities of the Form Four students thus able to arouse students' interest in learning. However, Ganakumaran et al. (2003) showed in his research that it is imperative to maintain consistency in the topics/contents that are dealt with in the language component and the literature one. Inappropriate literary texts can place an unbridgeable gap between the student's language ability and what they are expected to read and comprehend.

Language

Ganakumaran et al. (2003) in his study showed that the literary texts are readable to students. This to a large extent involves the match between the language of the text and the proficiency level of the students. Fauziah and Parilah (2005) indicated that some literary texts are written in language that has difficult vocabulary and grammatical structures. They expressed

concern about having text with difficult language when students have not yet even fully acquired the basic rules of English grammar and word formation.

Culture

Jelena and Elena (2014) in their study indicated that literature is probably one of the best ways to understand the culture and traditions of the target language, especially in those cases in which a visit or a stay is virtually impossible. This enables students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought and feeling and artistic form in those cultures (Melor et al., 2014).

Authenticity

In Kilickaya's (2004) study viewed that the used of authentic texts provide many advantages to the teaching of literature. They are: they have a positive effect on learner motivation, they provide authentic cultural information, they provide exposure to real language, they relate more closely to learners' needs and they support a more creative approach to teaching. Authentic materials are significant since it increases students' motivation for learning (Pritipal, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in various schools within the state of Sarawak. For data collection, 25 English language teachers who have taught the literature components to Form Four and Five students, were selected purposely as participants of the study.

To obtained the needed data, a semi-structured interview was used. The data obtained from the interview were then compared to the previous data collected from a similar study that was done in 2007 by the same researcher. The data were than descriptively reported in percentage form where pertinent results that show a match or different between the two data were presented and discussed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of this study based on the criteria of topic/content, language, culture and authenticity.

Topic/content

Table 1: The responses for the criteria of topic/content.

Years	2007	2016
Items	Agree (%)	
Suitability	96	89
Familiarity	52	45
Settings	100	100

Table 1 shows the results of these teachers' perceptions towards the topic/content of the texts. In 2007, 96% of the respondents agreed that the literary texts were suitable to students' maturity, interests and needs. For the familiarity of the topic/content, 52% agreed that all of the

topics/contents were familiar to students. As for the settings, 100% of them agreed that 30% of local and 70% of foreign settings were presented in this criterion. These findings are in concurrent to Lam Ai Ling (2002) where the topic/content of the literary texts used was interesting and suitable to the needs and abilities of the Form four students.

While in 2016, even though the percentage of agreement was still quite high (89%), the respondents thought that the topic/content of the texts were more suitable to students of high proficiency level in English language and students of urban schools. In terms of familiarity, less than half (45%) agreed that the topic/content was familiar to the students. Most of them perceived that all of the texts were of foreign contexts thus the students were unfamiliar to the texts. Like wise, all (100%) perceived that the texts have foreign settings and there was no Malaysian texts at all. This situations can hinder students' understanding of the texts thus eventually create gap between them and the texts (Ganakumaran et al., 2003).

Language

Table 2 : The responses for the criteria of language

Years	2007	2016
Items	Agree (%)	
Appropriate to higher proficiency students	100	100
Exposure to aesthetic aspect	92	89
Language structure	92	89
Figurative language	100	85

Table 2 reveals the percentage of the respondents' answers to the criterion of language used in the texts. In both studies, all of the teachers suggested that the language structure was more appropriate to higher proficiency students, since they have the aptitude to seize the meaning and relating it with their experiences (Ganakumaran et al., 2003) . As for the exposure to aesthetic aspect and figurative language, both years scored high percentage from the teachers which indicated that these texts did expose students to the aesthetic aspect via the exploitation of figurative language especially in the poems. Meanwhile, for the language structure presented in the texts, the current study showed similarly high percentage of agreement as the previous one that the language structure did not help students of different proficiency levels in sentence construction because most of the texts were using difficult language structures. This is supported by a study done by Fauziah and Parilah (2005) which indicated that some texts are written in difficult vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Culture

Table 3 : The responses for the criteria of culture.

Years	2007	2016
Items	Agree (%)	
Variety of cultures	100	63
Culture attracts interests	100	60
Culture exposure to different perspectives of life	100	67

Table 3 presents the distribution of frequency of the respondents' perceptions for the culture depicted in the texts. While all the teachers were in agreement with the three questions

in the previous study, the current one showed a drop in the percentage. The results show the range from 60% to 67% agreed to the questions. According to these teachers, unlike the previous study where the culture presented was varied between local and foreign, the current texts are all of foreign cultures. Thus, even though the culture did attract the interests and expose to different perspective of life, unfortunately only to the students with the high level of proficiency in the language. The low proficiency ones did not benefit from the culture presented in the texts. According to these teachers, these students did not even care about these foreign cultures.

Authenticity

Table 4 : The responses for the criteria of authenticity

Years	2007	2016
Items	Agree (%)	
Texts authenticity	52	67
Authentic English Language	96	97

Table 4 shows the perceptions of the respondents towards the authenticity of the texts. In the previous study, 52% of the teachers agreed that 86% of the texts were adapted from the original versions which seem to cater the advanced students. Almost all of them agreed the texts used more authentic English Language in the short stories as well as the novels which could motivate the students because they see the need of learning the language outside the classroom (Kilickaya, 2004). In the current study, 67% of the respondents agreed that all of the texts were from the original versions since all of them were of foreign contexts. 97% of them were in agreement that since the texts were of foreign texts, more authentic English Language was present in the poems, short stories, dramas and especially the novel, Captain Nobody, thus making them more difficult to comprehend by most of the students.

The changes in the selection of the literary texts.

Table 5 : The literary texts used in English Form Four Literature Component from the first to the current phase.

Form 4 Literature Component		
2000-2010	2011-2014	2015 onward
P: Si Tenggang's Homecoming [Malaysia] P: The Road Not Taken [UK] P: Sonnet 18 [UK] SS: The Neckless [UK] SS: The Drover's Wife [UK] SS: The Sound Machine [UK] SS: The Lotus Eater [Italy] SS: Looking for a Rain God [Africa]	P: He Had Such Quiet Eyes [Jakarta] P: In The Midst of Hardship [Malaysia] SS: The Fruitcake Special [US] SS: QWERTYUIOP [UK]	P: The Living Photograph [USA] P: Charge of the Light Brigade [UK] SS: Leaving [Tanzania] SS: Tanjung Rhu [Singapore] D: The Right Thing To Do [USA]

Table 6 : The literary texts used in English Form Five Literature Component from the first to the current phase.

Form 5 Literature Component		
2001-2011	2012-2015	2016 onward
P: If [UK] P: Monsoon History [Malaysia] P: There's Been a Death in the Opposite House [USA] N: Jungle of Hope [Malaysia] N: The Pearl [Mexico] N: The Return [Malaysia]	P: Nature [Jamaica] P: Are You Still Playing Your Flute? [Malaysia] N: Catch Us If You Can [UK] N: Step By Wicked Step [UK] N: The Curse [Malaysia]	P: What Happened to Lulu? [UK] P: A Poison Tree [UK] N: Sing To The Dawn [Thailand] N: Captain Nobody [USA] N: Dear Mr. Kilmer [USA]

From Table 5, it is obvious that in the first phase (2000-2010), there were more texts to be analysed in Form Four, with an extra poem and three additional short stories, if compared to the second phase (2011 - 2014) and the current one. However, drama was introduced for the first time in the later phase. In the first two phases, at least one local text was used but non of this text was introduced in the current phase which indicated that all of the texts were of foreign contexts.

From table 6, in the first phase (2001 - 2011), the Form Five texts had an extra poem if compared to the second and the later phases. In the first and second phases, at least two literary texts from Malaysia were analysed at this level. However, similar to the Form Four present situation, the Form Five current texts were all foreign ones.

IMPLICATIONS

Based on what has been presented, here are the implications of this study:

1. ESL teachers who use these texts should give more attention to the language structure used in them.
2. Some interesting strategies and activities need to be done to match the language used in these texts with their students' level of proficiency in the language.
3. Aids to enrich the students' vocabulary knowledge and enable them to explore cultures different from their own as well as general knowledge of the world.
4. The idea of using literary works in English by Malaysian writers should be considered to overcome the problem of culturally prejudice content.
5. The Ministry of Education should introduce contemporary and up-to-date literary texts to be used in the teaching of literature to these students.

CONCLUSION

Since it was also found in the findings that most of the literary texts are meant to cater the needs of advanced and some of the intermediate proficiency levels of students with less attention is given to the low proficiency level of students needs, the future set of literary texts should give equal weightage to this particular group of students needs too.

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