

PERSPECTIVE EVALUATION OF THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE TO LESS PROFICIENT STUDENTS

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Abstract: This research was carried out to investigate how teachers and less proficient are currently adapting and coping with literature teaching and learning in schools. To examine teachers' views, 10 teachers (five taught in form one and the other five taught in form two) were selected randomly to be interviewed. To examine students' views, questionnaires were distributed to 230 less proficient students in form one and form two and 50 of them were selected randomly to be interviewed. It is found that the teachers had different views on the teaching of literature to less proficient students. Those who had positive views claimed that they believe on the potential of literature in helping the students to develop their language. The teachers with less positive views felt that it is difficult to teach literature to the students. As for the students, they reported that they still liked their literature lessons even though they perceived that there are several weaknesses in the teaching strategies employed by their teachers. The findings discussed in this paper are useful for policy makers, teachers, and parents to gain insights into the teaching and learning of literature in schools for them to take necessary actions to improve the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Curriculum, English as a second language, KSSR, KBSM, less proficient student, literature component, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of literature component in English language syllabus marked a significant change in the Malaysian national curriculum. To begin with, there was not much debate and discussion on the relationship between language and literature teaching as well as the role of literature teaching in an ESL context prior to the 1980's (Rashid, Vethamani and Basree, 2010). This is emphasized by Carter and Long (1991) when they mentioned that literature started to gain attention in the mid 1980's and starting from that, it is being reincorporated within the language teaching profession.

In Malaysia, the literature component was fully incorporated in form one and form four syllabuses in March of year 2000. After that, in the year 2001, it was extended to be included in form two and form five syllabuses and in the year 2002, it started to be included in form three syllabus making it fully incorporated in the New Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM). Literature component continues to be incorporated in the current Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR).

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The incorporation of literature component in English language paper hopes to inculcate reading habit, promote English language acquisition, and develop interests and appreciations toward literary texts (Fauziah, 2008). This is clearly reflected in the syllabus outline in which the main aims of literature component in English is to enable learners “engage in wider reading of good works for enjoyment and self-development [as well as] developing an understanding of other societies, cultures, values and traditions which will contribute to their emotional and spiritual growth” (MOE, 2000, p.1)

The incorporation of the literature component had initially mixed responses from teachers, parents and students. However, the responses from teachers and students have become more positive with its full implementation (Vethamani, 2007). Initially, many school teachers were worried as they did not have enough knowledge on the methodology to teach literature (Tina, Hassan, Fauziah, Fara Adlina, & Marzilah, 2007), while some were worried of the time needed to cover the syllabus so that they would be able to prepare their students for examination (Rashid, Rahman & Rahman, 2016). Another interesting reaction put forth by Tina et al., (2007) came from the learners themselves as “they were anxious about having to read and discuss the works of writers that seemed difficult and foreign to them” (p. 16).

The year 2016 marked the first 16 years of the literature component being incorporated in the curriculum. After having been around for more than 16 years, one would tend to expect that teachers and students have developed positive attitudes towards the literature component as it is introduced by the ministry of education as a means to help improve students’ language proficiency. It is with this belief in mind that this research be carried out to actually have a look at how teachers and students, especially the less proficient ones, are currently adapting and coping with literature teaching and learning in schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Models of Teaching Literature

Carter and Long (1991) state there are three models of teaching literature which are the cultural model, the language model and the personal growth model. They emphasize that these three models are not “mutually exclusive and should be preferably viewed as tendencies; but they do represent distinct models which are embraced by teachers as reasons or purposes for the teaching of literature and they are related to specific pedagogic approaches” (p. 2). This implies that approaches and strategies employed by teachers in teaching literature are related to the three models.

The Cultural Model

The cultural model is a traditional approach of teaching literature where learners need to discover and infer the social, political, literary and historical context of a specific

text. It reveals the universality of thoughts and ideas and learners are encouraged to understand different cultures and ideologies in relation to their own (Priyatni, 2016). This model views literature as a source of facts and it is teacher centered where the teacher passes knowledge and information to the students.

It is argued by Carter and Long (1991) that the teaching of literature based on this model exposes students to various expressions that are often “of universal value and validity over an historical period or periods” (p. 2). According to Carter and Long, the cultural model is often associated with teacher-centered teaching approaches. This is because the “focus is on the text as a product which students learn to acquire information” (p. 5).

Carter and Long (1991) summarize the significance of teaching literature using cultural model as follow:

Teaching literature within a cultural model enables students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space and to come to perceive tradition of thought, feeling, and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endow (p. 2).

The Language Model

The language model is an approach that offers learners an opportunity to access a text in a systematic and methodical way. Carter and Long (1991) argue that the main reason for adopting language model in literature teaching is “to put students in touch with some of the more subtle and varied creative uses of the language” (p. 2). However, they advise teachers to be careful when teaching using this model as not to “result in mechanistic and demotivating teaching practices which substitute language activities in place of a genuine engagement with the work as literature” (p. 2). This is because it could spoil the pleasure of reading the texts.

Carter and Long (1991) add that literature can be seen as medium of language development but the “main impulse of language-centered literature teaching is to help students find ways into a text in a methodical way and for themselves” (p. 2). Hence, the language model is often associated with learner-centered approaches. It is activity based and special attention is given to the way language is used in order for students to interpret relations between linguistic forms and literary meanings.

The Personal Growth Model

The personal growth model is an approach that focuses on the personal development of the students including emotions and personal characteristics. The main aim of using this model in teaching literature is to engage students with the reading of literary texts. Hence, in a literature classroom that adopts this model, students are required to relate and respond to the themes and issues by connecting them to their

personal life experiences. One of the strategies to promote personal growth as suggested by Carter and Long (1991) is for the teachers to select texts that enable students to respond and participate imaginatively.

In their explanation on the personal growth model, Carter and Long (1991) emphasize that:

the test of the teacher's success in teaching literature is the extent to which students carry with them beyond the classroom an enjoyment and love for literature which is renewed as they continue to engage with literature throughout their lives....This personal growth is rewarding because it results from learning how to appreciate and evaluate complex cultural artefacts: it is fulfilling because it is stimulated by an understanding of our society and culture and of ourselves as we function within that society and culture (p. 3).

Carter and Long (1991) conclude that the personal growth model is influenced by both cultural model and the language model where the focus is on the particular use of language in a text in a specific cultural context.

Problems in Teaching Literature

Parkinson and Thomas (2000) discuss a few major problems in teaching literature to second language learners. The first problem is that of remoteness, which can be in many ways such as historically, geographically, socially and in terms of life experience. Because of that, the literary texts cannot be accessed by the learners and this hampers their learning. This is especially true in Malaysian context in which students were found to have problem comprehending literary texts that were not set in local contexts such as novel *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck, novel *Potato People* by Angela Wright and short story *Looking for a Rain God* by Bessie Head due to cultural differences thus affected their interest in reading those texts (Yunus, Mohamad, & Waelateh, 2016; SitiNorliana, 2008; Tina, et al., 2007).

The second problem relates to the difficult and odd language as agreed by Ismail and Yusof (2016). Parkinson and Thomas (2000) claim that literary texts can be so difficult that second language learners are not able to comprehend them or would only be able to understand them "by dint of time-consuming and wearisome dictionary work" (p. 12). This claim is very significant for the present research as it reflects the difficulties of the second language learners to cope with the language of literary texts and what is more, if they are less proficient students.

The third problem pointed out by Parkinson and Thomas (2000) is the lack of functional authenticity. This is because literature is written mainly "to entertain, to move, to amuse and to excite" besides for the purpose of political or religious persuasion, enjoyment in sharing ideas, personal therapy or catharsis for the writer

(p. 12). Hence, Parkinson and Thomas argue that students will not be able to see the texts as relevant for them to read, listen, write and speak as they would in real life. Perhaps, this is among the reasons why students perceived their texts as uninteresting, dull and boring (SitiNorliana, 2008; Sidhu, 2003).

The fourth problem is the imbalance between the four language skills which are speaking, reading, writing and listening. Parkinson and Thomas (2000) argue that many teachers throughout the world teach literature using the teacher-centered approach. Hence, they allow very little opportunity for students to speak in literature classes. Instead, they focus more on reading which is followed by writing whilst listening and speaking are ignored. It is not a good practice to pay no attention to the listening and speaking activities in literature classes as second language learners need to develop their confidence in using the language (Rashid, Vethamani, & Rahman, 2010).

Last but not least, the teaching of literature is associated with the imbalance of knowledge and power between teacher and learner. Parkinson and Thomas (2000) argue that the teacher often has a well grasp on the biographical, historical, cultural and linguistic aspects of the literary texts while the learners has none. Hence the teacher feels that they should give lecture to the students simply by telling the learners what they should know and how they should think and sometimes translate parts of the text to prepare students for examination. However, Parkinson and Thomas argue that this is not the way a literature class should be as students need to be given opportunity to talk about themselves and what they think. In Malaysia, the problem of teachers dominating the literature classes is not an uncommon phenomenon as reported by researchers such as Fauziah (2008), Diana-Hwang and Amin Embi (2007) and Tina et al., (2007).

The teaching of literature could be problematic if all the issues pointed by Parkinson and Thomas (2000) were not tackled wisely by the teachers who are given responsibility to teach literature. The problems could become worse if the class involved less proficient second language learners as there is a big gap between the language of the literary texts and the students' proficiency level.

Previous Research on Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes towards the Teaching of Literature

Review of the related research revealed that teachers had varied perceptions and attitudes towards the teaching of literature. To begin with, Sidhu, Chan and Kaur (2010) conducted a research involving five English teachers teaching year four students and they found that the teachers had positive view on the teaching of literature. The teachers were found to be aware of the benefits brought by literature into ESL classroom thus gave full support to the Contemporary Children's Literature Program in primary schools. However, majority of the teachers felt that they need

more training on literature teaching methodology. Interestingly, the teachers felt that the texts match their students' proficiency level even though some books were reported to be slightly challenging for less proficient students.

The findings of the research conducted by Sidhu, Chan and Kaur (2010) relate to the present research in the sense that it reveals the current scenario in the teaching of literature in Malaysian schools. Since the teacher involved in the study reported that they need more training on how to teach literature, it can be inferred that they are still not well-versed with the knowledge and methodology of literature teaching. Hence, it is justified for the present research to investigate the approaches that are currently employed by teachers in teaching literature to less proficient students as to determine whether it helps to meet the aims of literature teaching outlined by the ministry.

Another finding that relates to the present research is that the teachers felt that the literary texts match their students' language proficiency even though it is slightly challenging for the less proficient students. This implies that the text selection for the Contemporary Children's Literature Program in primary schools has been done carefully by the ministry to cater for the students' language needs. In the context of the present research, it would reveal the suitability of the text selection for the Literature Component in English which is incorporated in KBSM.

Fauziah (2008) who conducted a research involving 969 English teachers teaching in secondary schools in Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur (WPKL) revealed a similar finding to Sidhu, Chan and Kaur (2010) in which she found that the teachers had very positive attitudes towards literature and the teaching of literature. The teachers were found to be aware of expectation they had to fulfill and managed to confront challenges faced in the teaching of literature.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Sidhu, Chan and Kaur (2010), Fauziah (2008) found that the teachers felt they have clear ideas of the teaching approaches and strategies to teach literature regardless of the students' proficiency level, responsiveness and motivation. Hence, comparing the findings of the two studies, it can be inferred that teachers who teach literature in secondary schools seem to be more well-versed with the knowledge and methodology of literature teaching compared to teachers who teach literature in primary schools. Since the secondary school teachers reported that they have clear ideas of how to teach literature regardless of the students' proficiency level, it is interesting for the present research to investigate how literature is taught to less proficient students in secondary schools.

Slightly different with Fauziah (2008) and Sidhu, Chan and Kaur (2010), Tina et. al., (2007) found that secondary school teachers involved in their study felt that the teaching of literature is only suitable for advanced students and it was deemed irrelevant to less proficient groups. Besides that, the teachers viewed the text selection for the teaching of literature was unsuitable which contrasts the finding

reported by Sidhu, Chan and Kaur. The texts were reported to be difficult for students to comprehend due to cultural differences and did not cater for students' interests. This is a significant finding as it reveals that there is a language gap between students and the texts selected by the ministry. Hence, it is interesting for the present research to investigate the approaches and strategies employed by teachers in bridging the language gap between the students and the texts in literature classes.

In addition, Tina et al., (2007) found that the teachers felt they need more support assistance in the form of training and in-class materials which is similar to the finding reported by Sidhu, Chan and Kaur (2010). Besides, Tina et al., found that inexperienced teachers favoured conventional teaching methods whereas experienced teachers preferred to experiment with new teaching styles. However, both groups of experienced and inexperienced teachers had a consensus that literature as content, language-based and communicative approaches are the possible approaches to be employed in literature classes. Nevertheless, experienced teachers were found to have more positive perception of the use of the literature for personal enrichment compared to inexperienced teachers. All the findings highlighted above relate to the present research as it reflects the teaching styles and types of approaches and strategies that are favoured by teachers in teaching literature.

In short, it can be concluded that teachers have very positive perceptions and attitudes towards the teaching of literature to advanced students. However, the teachers seem to have difficulties in teaching literature to less proficient students due to the mismatch between the students' language proficiency and the language of literary texts. Consequently, they asked for more training on literature teaching methodology as to improve their teaching.

Previous Research on Students' Perceptions and Attitudes towards the Learning of Literature

Review of the related research revealed that students had diverse feedback and attitudes towards the learning of literature. To begin with, Sivapalan and Wan Fatimah (2010) found that students no longer preferred literature to be taught face to face by their teachers instead they preferred self-access learning using web-based multimedia literature platform (WBMLP). The students also perceived their learning experience using WBMLP as more enjoyable and engaging compared to traditional classroom teaching sessions. In addition, the students felt that they better understand the texts when learning literature through WBMLP. Besides that, students also felt that WBMLP provided more rooms for them to improve their reading and speaking skills. All the findings highlighted above relate to the present research as it reveals that students favour teaching strategy which incorporates the use of ICT in literature classes. Hence, it is interesting for the present research to investigate whether teachers employ teaching strategy which incorporates the use of ICT when teaching literature to less proficient students.

In contrast to Sivapalan and Wan Fatimah, SitiNorliana (2008) found that students still perceived the learning of literature as an enjoyable experience even though their teachers do not incorporate the use of ICT in literature classes. Interestingly, the students felt that the texts prescribed by the ministry suit their interest and useful to them. Besides that, the students felt that they could develop their language proficiency and learn more about other people through literature.

However, SitiNorliana (2008) found that students perceived their teachers' teaching methodology as uninteresting and inadequate in preparing them for exams. Nevertheless, in comparison, students from rural schools were found to perceive their teacher's teaching methodology more positively compared to students from urban schools. This is a contrast to Fauziah (2008) who found that students had positive perceptions towards their teachers' teaching attitudes in literature classes.

Besides that, SitiNorliana (2008) found that students preferred their teachers to use information-based approach and personal response approach more than other approaches. Interestingly, SitiNorliana reported that students felt that it was acceptable for the teachers to teach English literature using Bahasa Malaysia.

Tina et al., (2007) reported a similar finding to Fauziah (2008) that students had positive perceptions towards the learning of literature. Majority of the students felt that it was necessary for them to learn literature as it helped them to learn new vocabulary hence improved their language proficiency. The students also felt more motivated to learn English through literature.

Interestingly, Tina et al., (2007) found that students felt that they should be given autonomy to select the literary texts instead of being prescribed by the ministry. Nonetheless, the students still wanted their teachers to explain the main content of the texts to them. This finding is related to the present research as it reveals students' expectation of how literature should be taught to them.

In short, it can be concluded that most of the research revealed that students had positive perceptions and attitudes towards the learning of literature. However, there were few issues raised by the students especially ones that relate to the text selection by the ministry and the teaching approaches employed by their teachers.

METHODOLOGY

There were two targeted groups in this research. The first group was English Language teachers who taught less-proficient form one and form two classes. Ten teachers (five taught in form one and the other five taught in form two) were selected randomly to be interviewed. The second targeted group was the less-proficient students. The determination of the less-proficient group was based on the band score for School Based Oral Assessment (SBOA) and the writing test outlined by Ministry of Education. For the purpose of the present research, less-proficient students were those who scored below the Satisfied Band for both the SBOA and

the writing tests. The writing tests in the present research refer to the previous monthly tests conducted by their schools. A set of questionnaire was distributed to 230 less proficient students in form one and form two and 50 of them were selected randomly to be interviewed.

Open-ended questions were employed for the in-depth interviews carried out with the teachers and the students as “to ensure the flexibility to shape the content of the interview” (Norherani, 2007, p. 129). Merriam (1998) states that most of the part in semi-structured interview “is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the exact order of questions is determined ahead of time” (p. 74). This enables the researcher to respond to the situation at hand to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas to the topic. May (1993) agreed with Merriam that the interviewer who can seek both “clarification and elaboration on the answers, can then record qualitative information about the topic [and] this enables the interviewer to have more latitude to probe beyond the answers and thus enters a dialogue with the interviewee” (p. 123).

The interview transcripts were grouped, coded and verbatim from the transcripts and were quoted to be used as a basis of the argument. The interview questions for teachers were categorized and coded into a few constructs, namely profile of teachers (Q1), teachers’ views of the teaching of literature to less proficient students (Q2), teaching approaches and strategies employed (Q3), factors that influence teachers’ selection of approaches and strategies (Q4) and students’ reactions to the approach and strategies used (Q5). The interviews were audio taped, transcribed and interpreted.

The interview questions for students were also categorized and coded into a few constructs, namely profile of students (Q1), their feelings towards the approach employed by their teachers (Q2), their evaluation on the effectiveness of the approach employed (Q3) and their suggestions on how literature should be taught in class (Q4).

FINDINGS

Teachers’ Views on the Teaching of Literature to Less Proficient Students

Teachers seem to have different views on the teaching of literature to less proficient students. Among all the respondents interviewed, 38% had positive views and another 62% seemed to have negative views on the teaching of literature to less proficient students.

Positive Views

Those who had positive views claimed that they believe on the potential of literature in helping less proficient students to develop their language. However, they

emphasized that teachers really need to play their roles in giving proper guidance to the students. Among their reactions were:

Teaching literature component to less proficient students is always a challenging task beginning from the day one up to now. It is difficult as they do not have the language whilst the language of the literary texts is of high level. However, I perceive it as a challenge that need to be dealt with. Ministry of education has decided and we as teachers must follow. The best we can do is to find the best approach to teach these less proficient students. Once the best approach has been identified, I'm very convinced that the students will be able to reap the benefits of learning literature. I believe literature has much to offer for these students. [ITG/Q1]

Good idea but needs good methods. Student could be helped through literature but they need to be guided properly. It requires hard works from us as the teachers. Our times, our attention, our patience...If we are willing to sacrifice all that, I believe the objectives outlined by the ministry would be achieved. [ITH/Q1]

Many teachers out there feel burdened with the teaching of literature to students with low language proficiency. They just don't get it. I was a less proficient student during my time. Guess what I did to develop my language? I read children's literature. I read Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Rumpelstiltskin, Sleeping Beauty and many more. The abridge versions of them. And I managed to slowly develop my language. That's the power of literature. It can help to improve students' language proficiency. Perhaps, when it comes to less proficient students, the ministry should choose literary texts with more simple language compared to what we have now. Or perhaps, we as teachers should take our own efforts to make the current literary texts more comprehensible to the less proficient students. One way of doing it is to guide students properly. [ITA/Q1]

From the excerpts above, it is discernible that teachers who had positive views on the teaching of literature to less proficient believe that the students could slowly improve their language skills through the learning of literature. Because of that, they are willing to guide the students even though it requires hard works and sacrifice from them.

Less Positive Views

Teachers who did not have positive views on the teaching of literature to less proficient students found that it was a difficult task to do. This was mainly related to students' proficiency level which affected the flow of teaching and learning process. Among their reactions were:

Simplification of the texts is needed. It's so hard for less proficient students. I was wondering how to make literature lesson interesting. Even for the second cycle of the texts, I myself don't really understand the texts yet. My suggestion is to take out the literature component from English language paper...or if the ministry still insists to incorporate the literature, replace the current texts with more simple children's literature so that it is fair for less proficient students. From what I see, the current texts just cater for the need of advanced students and not doing justice to the less proficient ones. [ITB/Q1]

Difficult...It's a real challenge for teachers. Literature is too foreign for the students. How can they learn when they never read at the first place? This is not a sweeping statement from me. But it is true that less proficient students often have attitude problems. They are lazy to read, lazy to write and lazy to think. The fact is if they want to score well in the literature component, they have to read and think critically to analyze and synthesize bits of information. From my experience, the learning of literature requires high thinking skills and language proficiency. And the less proficient students just don't have that. Thus I see no future for literature component for less proficient students. [ITC/Q1]

At the first place, I don't agree with the decision from the ministry to incorporate literature component into English language paper. It really affects less proficient students especially those in the rural schools. My students for example, have great difficulties to understand simple reading passage. They do not even understand the work angry, money, upset etcetera. Can you imagine how are they going to cope with the language of literary texts? I believe that it is the literature component that contributed to the high rate of failure in English language paper among students in rural schools all this while. [ITD/Q1]

From the excerpts above, it is discernible that teachers who had negative views felt that the teaching of literature to less proficient students is irrelevant as the students cannot gain access to the text due to the language barrier. They believe that there is a mismatch between the level of students' language proficiency and the language used in the literary texts and because of that, students would not be able to develop their language skills as the learning does not take place.

Students' Feedback of the Approaches and Strategies Employed by Teachers

Data for this section was gained through the survey questionnaires distributed to 230 students as well as semi-structured interview with 50 students that have been selected randomly. Table 4.1 below displays the frequency and percentage of students' feedback on the approaches and strategies employed by the teachers.

TABLE 4.1: FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS' FEEDBACKS

<i>Item</i>	<i>Frequency</i>		<i>Percentage</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
1. Like the way my teacher teaches literature	196	34	85	15
2. Literature lesson is interesting	192	38	84	16
3. The way my teacher teaches literature helps me to understand the text well	166	64	72	28
4. Literature lesson is easy to follow	124	106	54	46
5. The way my teacher teaches literature makes me become more interested in learning literature	170	60	74	26

The findings, as reported in Table 4.1 above, indicate that students do have positive view on the approaches and strategies employed by their teachers. A total of 85% ($n = 196$) respondents reported that they like the way their teachers teach literature. As supported by the interview, the students like the teaching strategy as it makes them feel more prepared to sit for exam since they have pages of notes in their book.

A total of 84% claimed that their literature lesson was interesting. Out of 230 respondents, it was found that only 38 of them felt that the lesson was boring and uninteresting. Data gained from the interview revealed a few reasons behind why the students perceived literature classes as boring and uninteresting. The main reasons seem to relate to the teaching strategies as well as the language of the texts which was too difficult.

However, as discernible in Table 4.1, a total of 72% ($n = 166$) claimed that the way their teachers teach literature helps them to understand the text well. Only 28% were found not to see their teachers' teaching strategies are helpful. Item no. 4 which is whether literature lesson is easy to follow has almost balanced response between yes and no. A total of 54% of the respondents reported 'yes' and 46% reported 'no'. Nonetheless, majority of the respondents (74%) reported that the way their teachers teach literature make them become more interested in learning literature.

The findings from the semi-structured interview can be categorized under two categories which are positive feedbacks and less positive feedbacks. Below are examples of positive feedbacks gained from the students:

I like the way my teacher teaches literature. I managed to get useful information about the short stories and poems. My knowledge increases tremendously [IS1/Q1 - Translation]

My teacher translated the poem line by line. It really helps my understanding [IS11/Q3 - Translation]

I like the teaching styles. She asked us to do role plays and she also photocopied notes for us to read. It is difficult to understand the novel without the notes supplied. [IS21/Q1- Translation]

On the other hand, those who had less positive feedbacks mostly mentioned that they did no other activity in literature classes except for copying notes and listening to the teachers' explanations which are not understandable. Moreover, they express dislike of being asked to memorize the contents of the texts. Below are some of their feedbacks:

It is boring. I got tired every time we have a literature class. It's tiring to copy the notes. The whole whiteboard is full of the notes that we need to copy. I copied but I did not understand anything. [IS9/Q2 - Translation]

Not really interesting. Very difficult to understand, except for the Black Beauty since it is a graphic novel. [IS10/2 - Translation]

I don't like it. It is always the same thing. Copying notes, doing exercises and memorizing things. Boring. I don't like it. [IS16/Q1 - Translation]

Table 4.2 presents the activities and lessons suggested by the students to be included in their literature classes.

TABLE 4.2: FREQUENCY AND MEAN OF ACTIVITIES/LESSONS SUGGESTED BY STUDENTS TO BE INCLUDED IN LITERATURE CLASSES

<i>Activities / Lessons</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Mean</i>
1. Drama	74	4.5
2. Quiz	72	4.2
3. Speaking	46	2.7
4. Exam-based Questions	28	1.6
5. Writing	26	1.5
6. Games	20	1.2
7. Group work	18	1.1
8. Spelling	18	1.1
9. Reading	18	1.1
10. Drawing	10	0.6
11. Choral speaking	6	0.4
12. Singing	6	0.4
13. Listening	4	0.2
14. Moral value	12	0.7
15. Portfolio	2	0.1
16. Meeting the author, poet	2	0.1
17. Story telling	2	0.1

As shown in Table 4.2, drama activity is the most favoured activity (mean = 4.5) followed by the quiz activity (mean = 4.2) and the speaking activity / lesson (mean = 2.7). Only 12% of the respondents (mean = 1.6) reported that they want to have exam-based questions as an activity. This is followed by writing activity (mean = 1.5) and game-based activity (mean = 1.5). Group work, spelling and reading activity have the same mean score (mean = 1.1). Only 18 respondents out of 230 want to have these three activities in their literature class.

Drawing activity (mean = 0.6) is the last activity to fit in the top 10 most popular activities suggested by the students. It is followed by choral speaking and singing activities which share the same mean score (mean = 0.4), listening activity (mean = 0.2), moral value activity (mean = 0.7) and portfolio, meeting the author or poet, and storytelling activities which share the same mean score (mean = 0.1).

Data from the interview revealed that drama activity was most favoured by the students because they felt that it would enhance their understanding and knowledge retention as well as enjoyable. Besides that, the students also felt that drama activity is able to improve their confidence to speak English.

Below are the responses from students regarding the suggestion to include drama activity in literature class:

I like drama activities. We used to have a teacher who incorporated drama in literature lessons. I found it very easy to understand the plot when watching the drama. [IS25/Q5 - Translation]

Drama is very interesting. We act as someone else, make movements, and laugh together. I don't feel tension at all to learn literature this way. [IS26/Q5 - Translation].

My friends who are good at acting can speak English very well. At first they just memorized the script, but then they managed to use the language in their daily life. It is okay even though they just say something that is very similar to their scripts. At least they have the confidence to use the language. I believe I can be like them if I have the opportunity to get involved in drama activities. [IS27/Q5 - Translation].

On the other hand, quiz activity was suggested by the students because they felt that the activity could help to improve their understanding and better prepare them for examination. Below are some of their opinions regarding the inclusion of quiz activity in literature classes:

I like quizzes because it helps to prepare me for the exams. I can expect what will come out in the exam by scrutinizing the quiz questions. [IS18/Q5 - Translation]

I like quiz because it helps to improve my understanding. The teacher often discusses the answer after the quiz session and this is very helpful for me. [IS19/Q5 - Translation]

In short, it can be concluded that majority of the less proficient students involved in the present study had positive feedbacks on the approaches and strategies employed by their teachers in teaching literature. Nonetheless, these students requested for more student-centered activities to be incorporated in literature classes as the activities were perceived to be more meaningful and enjoyable.

DISCUSSION

In terms of teachers' perspective on the teaching of literature to less proficient students, only a handful of respondents had positive views. This finding is indeed a matter of concern and their views will determine how they teach in the literature lessons. Peterson and Clark (1984) through their model of teachers' thoughts and actions clearly show that how teachers perceive things in their mind will influence their actions in classroom. In other words, only the teachers with positive views on the teaching will attempt to be creative and develop fun activities in the lessons by incorporating drawing activities, bodily kinesthetic movements and other activities.

The teachers also still felt the texts prescribed by the ministry were too difficult for less proficient students and hoped for simpler texts. Perhaps, it is now time for the ministry to consider the notion proposed by Rashid (2011) of bringing into the classroom children's literature which are more familiar to students like Cinderella, Beauty and The Beast and Sleeping Beauty to enhance language proficiency of less proficient students.

As revealed in the interviews, teachers who had positive perceptions towards the teaching of literature held on to two positive beliefs. First, less proficient students would be able to slowly pick up the language if they have enough exposure to the language hence the medium of instruction should be in English or code switch. Second, less proficient students are usually those who lack moral value and have relatively low interest in study so they need to be exposed to moral values which could be done through the teaching of literature.

Those who had negative views towards teaching literature are more likely to merely provide information to the students thus made the literature lessons less interesting and dull. As reported by Sidhu (2003), students felt that their literature classes were not interesting. The lessons were not beneficial for the students and they gained very little from the lessons. The students often merely copied notes that were given to them without thinking or trying to present their own interpretations on what was read.

Most of the teachers who had negative perceptions towards the teaching of literature to less proficient students have negative beliefs which may influence their

actions in classroom. First, less proficient students are weak and unable to learn without being 'spoon fed'. The second belief is that less proficient students are unable to understand English, thus the medium of instruction should be in Bahasa Malaysia. Third, the language level of the literary texts is too high for the less proficient students, thus they need not to be made to study literature. Fourth, less proficient students are passive thus they should be taught using teacher-centered approach. In short, it is these negative beliefs that influence teachers to use Bahasa Malaysia and resort to spoon feeding when teaching literature to less proficient students.

Findings on the students' feedbacks of their classroom learning experience presented in this study perhaps were a surprise to many. Despite having rather uninteresting literature lessons, the students still claimed that they liked their literature lessons. The findings were clearly reflected in the data gained from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews discussed earlier.

As determined by the interview, the main reason why these less proficient students liked their literature lessons is because the "spoon feeding" lessons made it easy for them to pass examinations. Perhaps, another reason is that it has become part of their learning culture to say they like what they have to do in school.

To make literature lessons more engaging, the students requested for more interesting activities in the lessons. Still, drama activities and quizzes were the most favoured activities to be included in the literature lessons by the students. For instance, drama activities which require students to speak and move are favoured by the students.

In short, it can be concluded that even though majority of the students reported that they like the approaches and strategies employed by the teachers, their interests are not catered for and their needs are not fulfilled. This is indeed a serious problem in the teaching of literature as it does not seem to help meeting the aims and objectives of literature component in English outlined by the ministry.

CONCLUSION

Having been around in the curriculum for more than a decade, literature is no longer a new component in the syllabus. One would expect that teachers could be able to teach the literature more effectively than when it was first introduced. Nonetheless, teachers, students, researchers, parents as well as the policy makers are still arguing about the effectiveness of the teaching of literature component. The present research allows one to see and understand how teachers and less proficient students view their experience of having to engage with the literature component. More importantly, it reveals the fact that the teachers who are at the front line of teaching face great difficulties in meeting the needs of the less proficient students so that aims and objectives of the Literature Component in English will be attended to. Since the

teachers tend to resort to spoon feeding when teaching the less proficient students, it is more likely that all the objectives outlined by the ministry will not be achieved successfully. Moreover, the students will not be able to reap the benefits of learning literature as they were only prepared to pass the examinations.

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