

## Article

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### Using Character Maps to Learn English Literature

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#### ABSTRACT

Learning English literature has always been a challenge, as it demands advanced analytical skills, especially when learners are expected to critically analyse and discuss literary texts. Character mapping is proposed as a technique that develops analytical and critical thinking skills among learners. Drawing theoretical basis from cognitive science, constructivism, and cognitive stylistics, character mapping helps learners visualise connections between characters and events in a literary narrative, which then allows better comprehension of the literary text. 18 respondents from a Form 4 secondary school in Sabah, Malaysia, participated in a small-scale action research study. First, their previous experiences learning English literature was extrapolated via a need analysis, after which the respondents were then exposed to character mapping and its underlying principles. Then, they were asked to reflect and provide feedback on their experiences learning English literature using character maps. The feedback indicated positive support from the respondents, suggesting that character mapping can help learners learn English literature more effectively. Key observations include enhanced levels of comprehension, engagement, creativity, memory retention and organisation of thoughts. Two negative feedback were observed: (i) character mapping is time-consuming, and (ii) overusing character mapping might impede learning engagement. Future studies need to recruit larger sample population and potentially an experimental paradigm to investigate the impact of character mapping in greater detail.

**KEYWORDS:** Character Maps, English Literature, Mind Maps, Cognitive Stylistics

#### Introduction

Recent curricular developments concerning the teaching and learning of English in Malaysia demand a review of the role of literature in our classrooms. The latest iteration of the English language syllabus (SBELC), which adopts the *Common European Framework of Reference*

(CEFR), challenged, and questioned the role and contribution of English literature to the overall English language proficiency among Malaysian learners. The outcome of this discourse resulted in a consensus; literature remains integral to the language classroom, as learners are expected to “develop Literature in Action skills simultaneously over the school year” (Curriculum Development Division [CDD], 2020, p.39). Despite listed as one of the “Subject Objectives” (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia [LPM], 2020, p.9), English literature will no longer be tested in the now CEFR-aligned *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) English Language (EL)* paper. Nevertheless, a separate paper, *Literature in English (LiE)*, remains an elective SPM paper that Malaysian learners can enrol and sit for.

Regardless of how its role has reduced, English literature remains crucial to the development of mature and critical Malaysian learners. The English literature curriculum (SBELitC) strives to produce “critical readers who make informed arguments and decisions with culturally sensitivity, empathy and awareness” (CDD, 2018, p.2), hoping that such developments will translate into the ability to produce “coherent and constructive personal responses and arguments supported by textual evidence” (p.10). In turn, our learners should attain enhanced maturity and cognition, which theoretically leads to better English proficiency. Unfortunately, no concrete attempts to date have investigated the correlation between learners’ achievements in SPM EL and LiE paper.

Globally, the teaching and learning of English literature have always been a subject of interest, where numerous opinions regarding how literature could and should be taught persist (Akyel & Yalcin, 1990; Lazar, 1990; Ross, 1991). In Malaysia, there is a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity on how English literature is best taught (Kaur and Mahmor, 2014), despite many teachers and learners reporting positive perception of English literature (Abdullah et al., 2007). In particular, learners struggle most with identifying literary elements and interpreting literary texts (Abdullah et al., 2007). While most can understand the more literal meaning of a text, learners struggle when producing in-depth analysis of figurative meanings or symbolisms. This is a challenging for teachers and students.

In present literature, one popular means of addressing the struggle in learning is through our understanding of schema theory. The incorporation of schema theory into pedagogy is well documented; we use it to facilitate receptive skills and promote better text comprehension (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Barrot, 2016; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Uba et al., 2017; Xi, 2018), or as a framing device to guide productive skills and expression of ideas (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Rahmat, 2018; Singh et al., 2018, 2020). However, studies using schema theory to produce interventions in teaching or learning of literary texts are extremely scarce.

Therefore, this paper utilised the principles of schema theory and graphic organisers (GOs) to devise a technique for learners to learn English literature. This paper intends to argue that English literature, despite its waning relevance, can still enrich learners’ learning experience when coupled with our understanding of schema theory. To do so, this paper introduces character maps, which is a form of GOs, as a pedagogical tool to learn English literature. Character mapping is derived from the principles of cognitive science, constructivism, and cognitive stylistics, which could

promote engagement between teachers and students, facilitate discussions among peers and develop critical thinking among individuals. As such, the research objective of this study is:

RO: To evaluate and determine if character mapping should be incorporated into future English literature lessons.

Correspondingly, the research questions are:

R<sup>1</sup>: How do respondents usually learn English literature and what are the common techniques used?

R<sup>2</sup>: How do respondents feel about character mapping? Do character maps motivate respondents to learn literary texts? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this technique?

## Literature Review

This section provides a brief review of recent literature on the use of GOs in classrooms by tracing its underlying principles and origin in schema theory, as well as how these feed into the conceptualisation of character mapping. Then, these will be synthesised with the discussions on literary theories of characterisation in literature.

### *Schema Theory*

Xi (2018) defined schema as the “prior knowledge in human’s mind when they perceive the world”, which become the basis on which “guidance for the understanding of the world” is based on (p.623). Therefore, schema theory posits that one’s knowledge and perception of the world manifest in the form of elaborated mental networks, which are constantly revised and added onto (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Barrot, 2016; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017; Xi, 2018). The notion of schema as a collection of mental inventories stemmed from the traditions of Constructivism and Cognitivism. A schema is, therefore, made up of small units of mental constructs that gradually expand and develop into a more complex web of inventories, as one gains knowledge and experience throughout a lifetime (Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017). While schemata are often presented visually, they are initially generated as mental images because “the human mind actively constructs various types of cognitive representations” (Culpeper, 2002, p.258). In many ways, schemata are materialised neural/cognitive networks, which is why scholars have used schema theory to describe how the human mind operates (Barrot, 2016; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017; Xi, 2018). By understanding how the human mind perceive and construct information, we have learnt to leverage this to facilitate learning. One popular manner of operationalising schema theory in the classroom is in the form of graphic organisers (GOs).

### *Graphic Organisers*

GOs are relatively common constructs in educational settings (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018). They can come in various forms, and display visual information within flexible spatial constructs that illustrate the relationships between different elements that they contain (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Rahmat, 2018; Uba et al., 2017). GOs assist and promote comprehension by associating the learners' prior knowledge with the text that they are reading or listening to (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Uba et al., 2017). Similarly, they utilise the learners' existing knowledge and prior experience to guide idea and content generation when planning written or verbal presentation (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Rahmat, 2018; Singh et al., 2018). This is more apparent when it comes to second language (L2) production (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Rahmat, 2018; Singh et al., 2020), where L2 learners may not have sufficient exposure to the target language culture and norms to use the language with a near native-like proficiency.

Despite their benefits, using GOs in the teaching and learning of English literature is regrettably scant at best. Akyel and Yalcin (1990) conducted a survey on how literature was taught in Turkish high schools, where they recommended teachers to bridge the gap between learners' content schemata and literary texts. Lazar (1990) highlighted the importance of carefully considering the cultural background of a literary text chosen for the learners. In Malaysia, teachers are encouraged to "acknowledge and promote our own local Malaysian literature" (Kaur & Mahmor, 2014) through their literary text selection, as appealing to their learners' cultural background is deemed quintessential to their engagement when learning literature. Abdullah et al. (2007) proposed Malaysian teachers to draw on learners' previous knowledge and understanding when designing lessons to teach English literature. Unfortunately, these papers failed to provide concrete methods or techniques that teachers can apply when teaching English literature. Uba et al. (2017) attempted an experimental approach using GOs to teach English literature in Nigerian schools, but the choice of literary texts, subjected to cultural, social, and linguistic norms, limited the implications and significance of its findings when discussed in the Malaysian context. So, this study was conceived to evaluate the adoption of schema theory in the teaching and learning of English literature, which is manifested in a form of GOs called character maps.

### *Character Maps*

In literary theories, schema is a well discussed and explored concept. Short (2018) described schemata as "connected bits of information" that are "stored as packages" (p.227). Schema theory is mainly used to explain how readers "interpret what is said and done" in ways that are similar (or dissimilar) to others (Short, 2018, p.228). The nature of character maps also reflects this perspective. As a derivation of GOs, character mapping is deeply rooted in the constructivist and cognitivist tradition, where one constantly constructs, modifies and de-construct information or subject knowledge (Derry, 1996). This is usually done by transferring information identified from lyrical or linear text into non-linear, graphical, spatial networks. However, character maps is slightly different in that they focus on the characterisation of the characters or personas with close attention paid to the events that embody them.

The core principle of character mapping is characterisation being “one of the most powerful of the literature elements” (Norton & McClure, 2003, p.82, as cited in Roser et al., 2007). Also, characters’ beliefs, desires, feelings and thoughts are actual elements that drive the plot, and bind characters to context (Roser et al., 2007). Consequently, Roser et al. (2007) strongly recommended guiding learners to follow characters when studying literary texts. As the primary driving force in narratives, individual character’s traits and behaviours, which are strongly associated with the events that occur throughout the story, are closely examined. According to Phelan (1989), plot is progressed by instabilities that occurred within prose. Similarly, characters are mental products of “complex interaction between the incoming textual information” and the readers or audiences’ prior knowledge (Culpeper, 2002, p.251). Culpeper and Fernandez-Quintanilla (2017) added that characterisations are results of readers’ deductions which are based on descriptions of a given character.

As such, our interpretations of the literary text, as readers and audience, result from our assumptions drawn from raw texts and schemata (Culpeper, 2002). Character mapping, therefore, translates characterisations of a literary narrative or prose into GOs. When this process is repeated throughout a literary text, patterns of character traits and choice emerge as plot progresses. Consider the following example of the character mapping of a short excerpt from the novel *The Curse* by Lee Su Ann:

Her mind wandered off to her sister. Madhuri was four years older than she. And oh, how Azreen had despised her! Madhuri was always the pretty one. The charming one. The filial one. Nobody would notice her or pay her much attention when Madhuri was around. Who would want anything to do with a short, bespectacled and fiery-tempered girl who always spoke her mind, no matter how improper the ideas were? Who would love an obstinate child who was such a contrast to her beautiful and soft-spoken sister?



### *The Curse*, Chapter 2

Figure 1 Literary Text Excerpt and Corresponding Character Map

Generally, the underlying principles of character mapping resonate with what Uba et al. (2017) observed. Learners’ short-term memory and long-term achievement are notably enhanced through the recurring acts of summarising and manipulating concepts using GOs. Similarly, character mapping is a good technique for learners to organise their understanding, which corresponds with using GOs to “represent their [learners’] own understanding from a multimodal reading of texts” (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020, p.143). With character mapping as a learning technique,

learners can make connections between complicated notions and concepts, as it enhances their ability to stimulate and collect information from a literary text (Singh et al., 2020).

Therefore, character mapping can highlight crucial information in a literary text effectively. It allows readers to scrutinise texts for details that help them link characterisation and plot development. Mind mapping makes it easier and quicker to recall information (Buzan, 2006), so character mapping can similarly demonstrate connections between different characters in a literary text. Relationships between characters are often the most intriguing parts of a story, and as such could be multi-layered, confusing, and difficult to keep track. In this study, character maps can demonstrate the relationships of different characters, and how these contribute to plot progression of a narrative. This allows learners to examine the characters and their characterisation, before repackaging them in the form of schemata, which are far more manageable than the original text. When learners have a clear framework to approach the text, their “comprehension level could increase” (Thompson & Thompson, 2004), and thus learning literature could become more effective.

## Method

### The Action Research Framework

It is paramount for learners to be aware of various literary elements in a literary text (Kaur & Mahmor, 2014) and able to discuss them critically (Abdullah et al., 2007). Character mapping is proposed as a viable technique that can achieve these two objectives. An action research, with an emphasis on problem-solving (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982), was commissioned to evaluate the use of character maps to address the challenges of learning English literature among Malaysian learners.

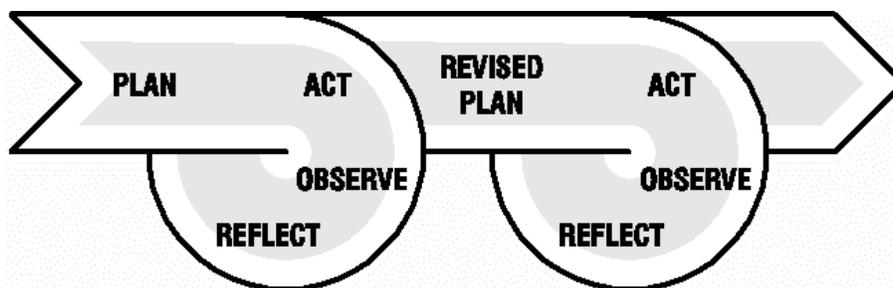


Figure 2 Action Research Framework (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982)

### Planning: Identifying Learning Needs

A needs analysis was conducted to determine learners’ needs in SPM *LiE* to refine the parameters of the study. A group of students from a school in Sabah was selected as respondents of this study.

Although it is an elective subject, many respondents were encouraged to take SPM *LiE* by their teachers or parents, rather than by choice. They are profiled as such:

*Table 1 Respondents Sampling Profile*

Profiling:	
•	Form 4 Science Stream (1 <sup>st</sup> Set)
•	18 respondents
•	Good English proficiency
•	Low motivation to learn English literature

A major challenge with these respondents is that they are not always motivated to learn English literature. Despite having good English proficiency, they struggled to sustain their concentration and interest during lessons. They were posed two questions regarding their experience learning literature. The questions are:

1. *How did you learn literature in in the past?*
2. *In your opinion, how effective were those learning methods/techniques?*

The need analysis indicated that the respondents mainly learnt literature through typical and conventional methods, which are also examination-oriented. The most popular technique is “reading the literature text” (72%).

*Table 2 Common Techniques used when learning English Literature*

Techniques	Tally	Percentage
Reading text	13	72%
Note-taking	5	28%
Imaginative Reading	4	22%
Doing exercises	3	17%
Summarising texts	2	11%
Note: Total responses, $n = 27$		

Unsurprisingly, the techniques listed in Table 2 are incongruent with the SBELitC curriculum objectives. The curriculum intends to develop an interest and love for literature among learners, which would catalyse their aesthetic, imaginative and intellectual growth (CDD, 2018). In the process, they are also expected to “explore, reflect and adopt values in literature on universal concerns and issues from various periods and cultures” (p.2), an objective that works towards developing skills to “read, analyse, reflect, discuss and respond to text critically and with maturity of thoughts” (p.10). Arguably, teachers could have incorporated Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) through these techniques (Table 2). However, there was little indication from the respondents that these technique successfully developed their critical thinking and reasoning skills, which are key objectives of the SBELitC (CDD, 2018).

*Table 3 General Opinion towards Common Learning Techniques in English Literature*

<b>General Opinion</b>	<b>Tally</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Effective	11	61%
Unsure	2	11%
Not Effective	5	28%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

Ironically, most respondents find these techniques effective, possibly due to the highly examination-oriented nature of our education system as described by the need analysis (Table 2). Only 5 respondents believed that those techniques were not effective learning techniques (Table 3), whereas the remaining two were unsure. Clearly, the respondents were exposed to techniques that prioritise memorisation and regurgitation of facts (Table 2). Hence, this study utilised character maps to complement these highly examination-oriented techniques to explore “relationships, ideas, places, time and events” (CDD, 2018, p.1) and cultivate HOTS (CDD, 2018, p.12), while adhering to the SBELitC.

### **Acting: Addressing Learning Needs**

Next, the respondents were introduced to character mapping over several lessons. The chosen text was a short story entitled “Leaving” by M.G. Vassanji. This was included in the English literature component of the previous English language curriculum (CDD, 2000). It was chosen considering the respondents’ English language proficiency and their exposure to similar literary texts in previous years. This parallels with an objective in SBELitC, where “selected literary texts...should be accessible to a good percentage of pupils in terms of language, concepts, ideas, cultural references and in line with the values and aspirations of the Malaysian culture and norms” (CDD, 2018, p.5). The following is a brief demonstration how character mapping can be operated. While a short story was used here, character mapping can apply to other literary genres like poems or plays:

*Table 4 Excerpt from the short story "Leaving" by M. G. Vassanji*


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Kichwele Street was now Uhuru Street. My two sisters got married, and Mother was sad to see them leave home. Mehroon and her husband lived in town, but Razia was a rich housewife in Tanga, a town on the coast north of Dar es Salaam. Firoz, my older brother, did not finish his last year at school, and no one was surprised at that he was working in the office of a big shop.

Mother’s hopes were now on the youngest two of us, Aloo and me. She wanted us to study hard and not spend time working in our store. So one evening she locked up the big doors for the last time, and sold the store. That was just one week after Razia got married.

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Firstly, an expository reading of the literature text (Table 4) was conducted, with special attention paid to the minute details provided by the narrator. As the reading progressed, a character map was constructed on the board, firstly, by identifying the key characters in the passage (i.e. “Aloo”, “Mother”, “Me”). Then, information about the characters, for example, keywords from the narrator’s description of the said characters and actions were recorded and added onto the map in the form of little nodules. Figure 3 presents a complete character map. New information that could be important was added onto the character map (Figure 3) as the reading progressed, gradually making the character map more intricate and complex.

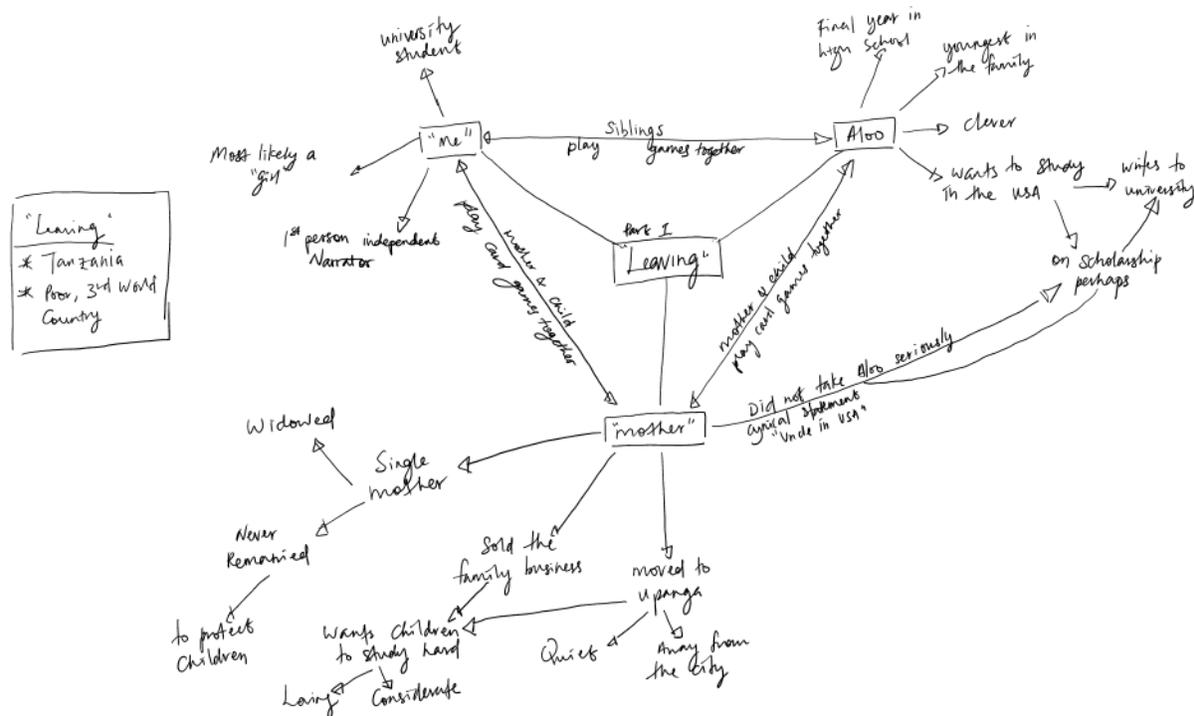


Figure 3 Character map corresponding to the excerpt

By the end of the expository reading, a comprehensive summary of the excerpt was produced. This is achieved by highlighting keywords that were interconnected and linked to each other based on the characterisation of its characters. The teacher then demonstrated how the respondents can use the character map (Figure 3) to guide the arguments and link them to the textual evidence in the short story. In the subsequent lesson, the respondents were given an essay question to respond to in writing, where they had to describe the main character, Aloo, and his relationship with his family based on the whole short story. They were encouraged to use the character map as their main reference to plan their written response. Their written work was not assessed for its accuracy but served as a platform to generate discussions and feedback about the advantages or disadvantages of character mapping when learning English literature.

### Observing: Gathering Feedback

After completing their written response, the respondents were asked to reflect on their experience using character maps to learn the short story. Several questions were provided to guide this reflective process:

1. *What is your general impression towards using character maps to learn the short story?*
2. *In your opinion, what are the strengths or weaknesses of this technique?*
3. *Do you agree that character maps help you to learn the short story better? Why? How?*
4. *Do you agree if character maps are used extensively when learning short stories? Why?*

Recurring or repetitive responses were expected as these overlapping questions were intended to elicit more responses.

### Results and Discussions

#### Reflecting: Analysing Feedback

The respondents' reflections were collected and summarised, which revealed some interesting findings. Note that responses that are covered in earlier sections will not be discussed again, even when similar responses reoccur.

#### *General Impression towards Character Mapping*

Generally, the respondents welcomed the use of character maps in English literature classes. Roser et al. (2007) noted that investigating a character's motives is an effective way of understanding a complex narrative. This is possibly why the respondents found the text simpler and easier to understand with character mapping (Table 5), which allowed them to analyse the characterisations with greater scrutiny. This is congruent with recent findings (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020), and Megat Abdul Rahim et al. (2017) attributed enhanced comprehension of literary text to the effects of "spatial graphic displays" in GOs (p.33). Character maps, as a form of schemata, can facilitate the process of understanding of the written text (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018).

*Table 5 General Impression/Opinion towards the use of Character Maps*

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Responses (Summarised)</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simpler and easier to understand the text</li> <li>• Allows a holistic view/understanding of the story</li> <li>• Fun and engaging</li> <li>• Creative way of learning</li> </ul>	14
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time-consuming during examinations</li> <li>• Time-consuming when learning literature</li> <li>• Potentially source of confusion</li> </ul>	3

In addition, character mapping incorporates elements of creative learning which were absent in the respondents' experience learning literature. To them, learning literature using character mapping was fun (Table 5). Again, Roser et al. (2007) speculated that latching on to the major characters of a story helps readers to untangle plot lines. Breaking down complex plots alongside the characterisation of the literary text is akin to a detective gathering evidence at a crime scene to deduce the identity of the criminal. In other words, character mapping can promote a form of deductive reading, which engages learners to "interact" with the literary text at levels that were previously unimaginable (Barrot, 2016; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017). This is also reflected in the literary theory of narrative co-creation, where readers/audiences "co-create the narrative through their engagement with the story world and its characters" (Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2017, p.115).

Also, the respondents indicated that character mapping is a creative way for them to study the literary text (Table 5). This parallels with studies that justified the use of GOs in the language classroom, where it encourages creativity and inspire innovation among learners (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2020; Uba et al., 2017). Specifically, Uba et al. (2017) noted that using GOs addresses the learners desire for aesthetics, as they can be an avenue for self-expression. When learning English literature, this could result in heightened levels of engagement and interest among learners (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2020; Uba et al., 2017) which conventional learning methods are not capable of inducing (*see* Table 2).

Nevertheless, there were concerns regarding character mapping. For learners, whose main objective is passing the paper, time is seen as a valuable resource, as they have limited time to demonstrate their understanding of the literary texts. Therefore, character mapping is presumably a time-consuming technique, as devising character maps for a literary text is an additional workload. A respondent expressed doubt about its practicality during examinations (Table 5); how realistically can one generate a character map that is effective in helping to guide and plan a good written response under pressure? For teachers, Uba et al. (2017) reported that using GOs is indeed more time-consuming because they will require more time devising GOs that are suitable for their learners. Al Asmari & Javid (2018) strongly recommended teachers to incorporate the use of content schema when teaching reading, although they recognise that this inevitably amounts to extra time and effort.

In addition, the respondents also mentioned that their unfamiliarity with character mapping was a source of confusion, especially in the first few sessions (Table 5). This correlates with what Barrot (2016) observed, where using GOs was the least applied reading strategy, despite their proven benefits. She suggested that the "heavy extraneous cognitive load that visualising had on students" (p.889) can discourage learners from adopting GOs as a learning strategy. Therefore, the heavier mental and cognitive workload that come with character mapping may dissuade learners from truly embracing this technique.

### *Strengths and Weaknesses of the Character Maps*

When probed further, the respondents reacted positively to character mapping. First, character mapping seemingly strengthened memory retention (Table 6). Using character maps helped the respondents retain information about the literary text longer, which allowed them to access key evidence quicker, and thus able to formulate arguments more efficiently, especially when planning their written response. This is consistent with findings theorising that the use of GOs, as a form of schemata, can enhance short- and long-term memory (Barrot, 2016; Singh et al., 2018; Uba et al., 2017). From a cognitive stylistics' perspective, information stored in a schema represents the nodules of information pertaining to a literary text, which is crucial to one's abstraction of experiences and prior knowledge (Culpeper, 2002; Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2017).

*Table 6 Strengths and Advantages of using Character Maps*

<b>Strength/Advantage</b>	<b>Responses (Summarised)</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Strengthen Memory Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easier to remember</li> <li>• Not hard to remember</li> </ul>	9
Promote Better Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better time management when writing</li> <li>• Useful</li> <li>• Simple notetaking</li> </ul>	8
Total		17
Total number of responses provided, <i>n</i>		28
Note: Previously discussed responses were ellipted		

Secondly, the respondents noted that character mapping improved their organisational skills (*see* Table 6). Character mapping, as an organisational tool, helps put mental representations and inventories into structures that they can easily comprehend (Uba et al., 2017). More importantly, it can be manipulated to produce language output that fulfils specific function or purpose (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017). As the “organisation of the text must play a part in our impression of a character” (Culpeper, 2002, p.255), the respondents' interpretation of characters and plots of a literary text becomes structured and methodological, thus improving their reading skills. Concurrently, enhanced organisational skills resulting from character mapping translates into better time management when the writing process was guided by character maps. So, learners can elicit more ideas from spatial illustrations (Singh et al., 2018), maintain a form of “information checklist” (Singh et al., 2020), and model paragraph construction (Rahmat, 2018) using character maps. Regarding Malaysian learners' well-documented struggles in writing, Singh et al. (2018) concluded that schema theory can help to organise ideas and content, which is crucial to developing HOTS. Character maps seemingly facilitate similar benefits.

*Table 7 Disadvantages/Weaknesses of using Character Maps*

<b>Disadvantage/Weakness</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Repetitive – Boring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boring if done often</li> <li>• Cannot be used often</li> </ul>	3
Requires high English Proficiency Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not easy for those with weak English to use</li> </ul>	1
Total		4
Total number of responses provided, <i>n</i>		9
Note: Previously discussed responses were ellipped		

Conversely, character mapping can alienate learners because it could get monotonous when overused (Table 7). Recent studies did not consider how learners may end feel indifferent towards GOs due to overuse. Conversely, they overwhelmingly believed that GOs can break the monotony of the language classroom in Malaysia (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017). Therefore, this contradiction reminds teachers the need to manage character mapping to minimise the effects of overuse. Ideally, they must interject character mapping with other learning strategies such as roleplaying and group work.

The second concern with character mapping is that a certain English language proficiency is required to use this technique. Some respondents feel that they lack the required proficiency in English (Table 7) to produce simple yet effective character maps. While some scholars agree that schema theory and GOs do enhance learners' English language proficiency (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Rahmat, 2018; Uba et al., 2017), others cautioned that their usage need to be tailored to the learners' needs, especially with low proficiency learners. Notably, learners with higher English proficiency benefit more from using GOs compared to weaker learners, especially in their verbal presentation skills (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020). Weaker learners would need more support and scaffolding from teachers, even if they are adept at using GOs to frame their ideas and plan their presentation. Despite its reported ability in enhancing learner autonomy, teachers are instrumental in facilitating learners' reading tasks, as "poor English language proficiency can seemingly impede activation of content schemata" (Al Asmari & Javid p.103).

#### *Effectiveness of using Character Maps to learn literary texts*

Most learners, "despite their proficiency in English, agree that the use of GOs is an effective language learning strategy" (Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020, p.149). Unsurprisingly, the respondents unanimously supported using character maps when learning literature (Table 8). They provided two interesting comments that warrant further discussions.

Firstly, some respondents believed that character mapping strengthened their ability to identify key ideas in the literary text (Table 8). As they constructed the character map, they gradually identified key events and characters by scrutinising the linguistic patterns in the text. This finding agrees with current literature; GOs are reportedly useful for identifying topic sentences and

supporting details (Barrot, 2016). Abdul Aziz et al. (2018) advocated for GOs to help learners “focus on what is really important” by diverting “their attention to the keyword, key concepts and relationships of the information” (p.30). Learners were observed delineating the structures of a text with the use of GOs through its “visual and spatial symbols”(Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020, p.143). These findings are congruent with the assumption that people tend to pay more attention to “information that is consistent with expectations derived from their schemata” (Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2017, p.99).

*Table 8 Effectiveness of Character Maps in learning English Literature*

<b>Do Character Maps help in learning literature?</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Agree	16
Disagree	0
Unsure	2
Total number of respondents, <i>n</i>	16
<b>Why? How?</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Identify key ideas easily	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help to search for key points and ideas</li> <li>• Easier to find evidences when writing literature essay</li> </ul>	3
Promote social interaction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussing and sharing ideas with friends</li> <li>• Discussing with teachers and friends.</li> </ul>	2
Total	5
Total number of responses provided, <i>n</i>	25
Note: Previously discussed responses were ellipited	

Secondly, character mapping also provided opportunities for the respondents to discuss learning English literature (Table 8). It became easier to share ideas with their teachers and peers, as the character maps served as a metalanguage and common starting point for discussion. This is consistent with previous studies observing better interaction among learners, when using GOs (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Uba et al., 2017) or incorporating schema theory into lessons (Singh et al., 2018). From the perspective of literary theory, character- and characterisation-driven analysis of literary texts can trigger discourse which help to construct and elaborate meanings (Roser et al., 2007). Hence, character mapping creates a platform on which learners can discuss literary texts.

Unexpectedly, the respondents were also observed comparing their personal character maps with their peers without being instructed, which was then followed with impromptu discussions about the literary text, suggesting that they may have developed greater extent of learner autonomy through character mapping. This agrees with what Singh et al., (2020) reported, where GOs may help to develop higher degrees of “autonomy as learners towards personal discovery and self-expression” (p.218). Likewise, Megat Abdul Rahim et al. (2017) also lobbied for the use of GOs to move learners towards a learner-centred paradigm by encouraging active learner participation.

### *Opinion towards extensive use of Character Maps*

Surprisingly, when asked if character maps should be used extensively when learning and teaching English Literature, most respondents disagreed (Table 9). The key reason is because the respondents find the technique boring if used too frequently. Therefore, character mapping should be alternated with other techniques such as role-playing, miming and animation. Nevertheless, teachers need to consider whether these techniques are compatible with the literary genres that the learners are learning. For instance, role playing is mainly restricted to narrative-driven prose such as short stories, novels and plays, so learners would struggle to role play poems or limericks (unless they inhibit a clear narrative structure). Hence, further studies into how readers approach characterisation in various genres, as advocated by Culpeper (2002), might help us derive better ways of studying and teaching English literature that complements the character mapping technique. In short, overusing new approaches can demotivate or discourage learners, which may happen with character mapping. Teachers need to manage character mapping and mitigate its possible drawbacks. For one, scholars believe in investing time and effort to train learners to use GOs or schemata independently (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017). Once learners are adept at using character maps, they can decide where and when to use this technique, with or without specific instructions from their teachers.

*Table 9 Opinion towards extensive use of Character Maps*

<b>Do you agree with using Character Maps extensively in class?</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Agree	6
Disagree	10
Unsure	2
Total number of respondents, <i>n</i>	18
<b>Why?</b>	<b>Tally</b>
Disagree Prefers alternative approaches: • Role-playing	1
Total number of agreements, <i>n</i>	9
Total number of disagreements, <i>n</i>	8
Note: Previously discussed responses were ellipited	

### **Conclusion**

The key to using any technique or method is to use it wisely and in accordance with learners' needs. The need analysis of this study indicated that the respondents were only familiar with typical and conventional examination-oriented techniques to learn English literature. By extension, this study, with due discretion, assumed that many learners suffered from a lack of alternative techniques when studying literary texts. This could be an interesting phenomenon that warrants further investigations. Having said so, learners who are mature in thoughts or have advanced English proficiency would probably benefit less from using character maps, as they may have other

learning strategies that suit them better. Nonetheless, character mapping could still be an alternative to enhance learning as part of enrichment or remedial programmes.

Overall, the respondents received character maps positively. The findings of this study are relatively congruent with studies investigating the use of GOs or schema theory to enhance learning and teaching experience in the classroom (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020; Barrot, 2016; Kafipour & Jahansooz, 2017; Megat Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Rahmat, 2018; Singh et al., 2018, 2020; Uba et al., 2017). Beyond the context of English literature, enhanced proficiency to read for specific key content, and the reinforced ability to organise writing with the use of GOs are exceptionally useful repertoires – the art of summarising ideas and extrapolating them are crucial academic skills that learners need, especially in tertiary education.

However, there are several adverse reactions to character mapping, such as it being time-consuming (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Uba et al., 2017), linguistically demanding (Al Asmari & Javid, 2018; Aprianto & Syarifaturrahman, 2020) and potentially demotivating due to overuse (*see discussions around* Table 7). But investing time and effort training learners to use character maps when learning literature can be richly rewarding, as with adopting schema theory or GOs (Abdul Aziz et al., 2018; Barrot, 2016). Therefore, teachers must pre-empt the learners' lack of confidence in their English proficiency and minimise possible overuse of character mapping. This can be achieved by providing more scaffolding when using character mapping (*see discussions around* Table 7) or alternating this technique with other methods (*see discussions around* Table 9). However, more research is required to investigate the full extent of these negative outcomes, as no other studies to date reported similar observations.

There are several limitations to this study. With a single group sampling, it was not possible to compare the impact of character mapping on respondents with a control group. Thus, this prevented a more empirical dissection of its impact on the respondents, meaning that character mapping, though promising, may not absolutely be a more effective learning strategy. Also, the small sample size of this study limits the generalisability of its findings. Any replication of this study should endeavour to recruit a larger sample population, perhaps utilising an experimental paradigm, to produce more comprehensive and conclusive findings.

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