Article

Challenging yet Rewarding! : Group-Work Video Essays in the English Literature Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Because English literature degree programs are expected to produce graduates competent in speaking, reading, and writing, course works are usually designed to enhance these skills. However, in an increasingly globalized world characterized by IT usage, 21st century skills such as creativity, media and technology literacy are equally important. Such skills are often integrated through instructional approaches such as project-based learning. This paper reports on a study that examined the use of group-work video essay in an undergraduate English literature classroom at a public university in Malaysia. This study relied on an evaluation of the students' video essays and an open-ended interview with the students. The findings reported a positive feedback from the students who mostly agreed that the video essay was similar to written essay; challenging where the technical aspects are concerned; yet immensely rewarding. The findings imply the desideratum of adopting the video essay as a coursework in the literature classroom provided that it is done as a project-based group-work effort, substantial marks are allocated, and technical training in video production is provided. The paper closes with recommendations for further research on incorporating the video essay as a course work in the literature classroom.

KEYWORDS: Video Essay, Literature Classroom, 21st Century Skills, Video Production, Literature Coursework, Project-Based Learning

INTRODUCTION

Doing a degree in English literature entails primarily studying major authors, literary movements and periods, and critical theories; discovering critical and new ways of reading and thinking; and reading, writing and communicating with clarity and confidence. Thus, English literature degree programs are usually expected to produce graduates competent in reading, writing, communicating, debating, analysing varied levels of meaning and understanding social and cultural issues. Consequently, course works are usually designed to emphasize and enhance speaking, reading and writing skills. However, in an increasingly globalized world characterized by the incorporation of IT and domination of digital natives in the classroom, 21st century skills such as creativity, media literacy and technology literacy are equally important. Such skills are often integrated through instructional approaches such as project-based learning, which promotes the application of knowledge and skills through an engaging experience. Essentially, in project-based learning, students work on their own ideas based on an inquiry, make decisions that affect project outcomes or learning process, and come up with an end-product.

Project-based learning seems ideal for 21st century learners who are usually attributed with: short attention spans, multitasking, and the desire for speed in communication and accessing information using digital technology; preference for problem-solving activities, social learning and unrestricted freedom to the use of technology for learning (Matulich et al., 2008). Because of their attachment with technology, they are audacious, self-motivated and more likely to set highly challenging learning goals for themselves (Doll et al., 2010). Their curiosity and desire for more knowledge depends on their satisfaction with the learning process (Garba et al., 2015).

Incorporating effective course works that bring together the expected reading and writing skills and 21st century skills like creativity and technology and media literacy requires careful consideration as they involve students' ability to experiment with technology and what they would find rewarding and challenging in view of the learning process they have to go through. Drawing on this context, we investigated the use of video essay in an undergraduate English literature course (Malaysian literature in English) at a public university in Malaysia. Our investigation adds to the understanding of the use of video essay in the 21st century classroom and how it supports project-based learning. A video essay can be defined in a variety of ways, but for this project, a video essay is described as an audio-visual equivalent of the written essay. A video essay – like a written essay – develops an argument (or thesis statement), supported by clear and specific evidence. It combines different forms of media such as video (film), audio (voice-over, music, sounds), and a literary text to study or analyse.

The article begins by describing 21st century literature students and the need for developing relevant 21st century skills, followed by the teaching of English literature in Malaysian higher education institutions, the video essay in the classroom, and project-based learning. The next section presents the methodology, results, and discussion, as well as findings and recommendations for future application and research. The article ends with concluding thoughts on the video essay as a coursework in the literature classroom.

The following questions guided the study:
      1. How do video essays compare to written essays from the perspective of the learners?

2. What are the students' perceptions on producing a video essay for the 'Malaysian literature in English' course?
3. What is the potential of using video essays as project-based learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW
21st century skills and literature students
A typical 21st century classroom would have the following characteristics: student-centered, learning and doing, using information, teacher as facilitator, flexible grouping on individual student needs, multiple instructional and learning modalities, higher-order thinking skills, interdisciplinary, collaborative, performance-based assessments, multiple sources of information including technology, full integration of technology, consideration of different learning styles, using a variety of types of information to complete authentic projects, and engaging the 21st century student. The last characteristic implies that teachers need to take into account how to optimize the unique criteria and habits of the 21st century who are often referred to as 'digital natives' to provide engaging and meaningful lessons.

According to Bassnet (2005), students studying English literature in the 21st century are "visually literate, they can follow highly complex plot lines . . . they are more sophisticated potential readers" that classroom teaching and learning must "[face up] to the changes in reading, in information-gathering, in types of literacy, and in seeking to provide students with useful tools for their future". These unique characteristics of 21st century students, however, is not the only challenge facing teachers nowadays. The influx of text media in the 21st century has also compelled teachers to broaden their understanding of literature. As Braeur and Clark (2008) posit, teaching literature now requires the incorporation of "fuller range of production methods (film studies and TV production along with writing and composition) and text media (TV, radio, film, and other nonprint media along with literature anthologies, textbooks, and other print-based text)." Sefton-Green (2006) assert that this has brought "a renewed focus in young people as writers or producer", as "production can also help students understand the language and choices of media presentation" (Braeur & Clark, 2008). George (2011) also highlights how 21st century literature students' content knowledge now not only includes knowledge of varied works of literature but also skills in writing, speaking and creating visual images, as well as skills in composing and responding to literature through the use of current technology. These developments and challenges in the learning landscape imply that literature teachers need to change and adapt to 21st century learning by incorporating classroom activities or course works that bring together the expected reading and writing skills and "skills that are specific to the information era we are now living" (Chu et al., 2017).

Teaching of English literature in Malaysian tertiary institutions
Generally, there is relatively little knowledge about what happens in the English literature classroom at the tertiary level in Malaysia. This is understandable since research in the teaching of English literature in Malaysia is by and large concentrated in schools, based on the premise that English literature is taught as a skill subject, with the overarching aim of helping students improve their English language proficiency. Since 2000 onwards, the English syllabus in Malaysia schools have aimed to inculcate reading habit among students, enhance students' English proficiency, contribute to personal development and character building, and broaden students' outlook through reading about other cultures and world views (Teh and Isa, 2016). For the past decade, much

research on the teaching of English literature in schools has focused on the role of English literature in the education system (Kaur & Mahmor, 2014; Mohamed, 2018; Xian et al., 2017), position (Khatib & Rahimi, 2012; Mohamed, 2018; Pillai, Menon & Vengadasamy, 2016), attitudes (Muthusamy et al., 2017; Nair et al., 2012a), challenges (Mohamed 2018; Omar, 2017; Othman et al., 2015), perceptions (Mustakim et al., 2014; Nair et al., 2012b), approaches (Ahmad & Juin, 2014; Dhillon & Mogan, 2014; Engku Atek et al., 2020; Hashim, 2011; Kadir et al., 2014; Liau & Teoh, 2016; Ling & Eng, 2010; Too, 2018) and teaching tools (Choo & Nawi, 2017).

At the tertiary level, English literature is mostly taught as skill subjects, particularly in undergraduate programs. A considerable amount of literature has been published on the teaching and learning of English literature at tertiary level, mainly focusing on approaches (Muhammad, Nuwairi & Rani, 2017; Muthusamny et al., 2017), perceptions (Kayad, 2015; Sivapalan et al., 2017), teaching tool (Rajendram & Govindarajoo, 2016), and attitudes (Muthusamy et al., 2017). Some researchers have mainly been interested in questions concerning the use of ICT and Web 2.0 in the literature classrooms (Muhamad, Abdullah & Hamzah, 2015; Saxena, 2018; Zainal & Deni, 2012; Zainal & Deni, 2015; Zainal & Deni, 2017).

To date, only two public universities offer full-fledged degree programs in English literature and thus teach English literature as content subjects. The present study was undertaken at one of these universities, with students from the English literature undergraduate program as the subjects. Under this program, teaching is conducted mainly in the forms of lectures and tutorials, with an increasing emphasis on blended learning. Most courses adopt either a 60:40 or and 70:30 ratio in assessment, with 60% or 70% of total assessment premised on course works, and 40% or 30% from final examinations. Some courses such as Play Production and Creative Writing are assessed entirely from coursework. Course works often entail quizzes, written tests, assignments, and presentations. Some of these might be carried out as part of pair or group projects.

In our past practice, summative assessments often comprised of written essays. Our analysis of students' writing showed a growing issue with reading (i.e., shallow engagement with literature) and inability to express thoughts in words. Many of our students, however, were able to present their ideas effectively through a multimedia presentation. Changing the assessment strategy from requiring students to produce written essays to written work thus seems viable as it incorporates the expected reading and writing skills, 21st century skills, as well as the use of technology. Despite this, it was unclear as to whether students would produce better quality 'essays' when presenting their ideas in video formats. Hence, the study explored how students perceived video essays, compared to written ones, and investigated the process that students' undergone to produce the video essays. This exploration provides valuable information on students' receptiveness of this kind of assessment and whether the process that they have undergone to produce video essays support their expressions of thoughts and ideas.

A recent study by Redmond and Tai (2021) found that the video essay could potentially be a part of a radical pedagogy in the arts and humanities, thus serving as an empowering learning alternative to traditional forms of knowledge generation such as the written essay, "resist[ing] forms of rationalised and goal-oriented governance within higher education". Student-produced video production seems like a practical classroom project nowadays as students' interaction and multitasking with multiple media increases (Roberts & Foehr, 2008). As Norton and Hathaway

(2010) assert, today's student attributes are "media savvy, multimodal and multitasking". Another important feature of students' attributes nowadays is that they are surrounded by portable and hand-held technological gadgets that easily enable video recording and editing. Moreover, Siegle (2009) argues that projects such as a video production would be advantageous to educators because young people are not only surrounded by visual images but also naturally attracted to viewing and producing videos. Additionally, there is a growing number of youths who use video as a means to communicate and express themselves (Spires et. al., 2012). In fact, because video-making projects encourage students to communicate their emotions and thoughts, Siegle (2009) asserts that they are similar to writing projects, and he recommends modifying writing projects to video format in order for students to gain the added benefits of media-based activities. Hence, it is important to examine the use of the video essay and in what ways it is similar or different from the written essay.

Video essay and Project-Based Learning
The use of video in the classroom is not new. From merely viewing to enhance understanding of course content (Gotfredson & Engstrom, 1996) and as part of an assessment tool (Johnson, 1985) in the '80s and '90s, the video essay has evolved as a replacement to writing (Aksel & Gurman-Kahraman, 2014; Baeplera & Reynolds, 2014; Hafner, 2014; Thomas & Marks, 2014; Zellner, 2018), with students actively involved in producing video. Its use has grown across fields and disciplines such as pure sciences (Baeplera & Reynolds, 2014; Meyer & Forester, 2015; So, 2010) broadcast journalism (Gotfredson & Engstrom, 1996), law (Johnson, 1985), language (Aksel & Gürman-Kahraman, 2014; Coe, 2017; Ng, 2013; Sugawara et al., 2015), liberal studies (Jensen et al., 2012; Levinson et. al. 2016), marketing (Hafner, 2014), management (Shultz & Quinn, 2014), social work education (Levinson et. al., 2016; Thomas & Marks, 2014), theory (Alpha & Hurst, 2014), teacher education (Girod et al., 2007; Miller, 2015) and new literacies (Miller, 2015), to name a few.

Student-produced video productions have resulted in many positive outcomes such as increased confidence (Baeplera & Reynolds, 2014), engagement (Baeplera & Reynolds, 2014; Coe, 2017; Ng, 2013), motivation (Zellner, 2018), creativity (Gotfredson & Engstrom, 1996; Thomas & Marks, 2014), praxis (Thomas & Marks, 2014), language acquisition (Aksel & Gurman-Kahraman, 2014; Alpha & Hurst, 2014; Meyer & Forester ,2015; Sugawara et al., 2015), technical skills (Thomas & Marks, 2014; Aksel & Gurman-Kahraman, 2014), critical thinking (Aksel & Gurman-Kahraman, 2014), multimodal literacy (Baeplera & Reynolds, 2014; Coe, 2017; Jensen, Mattheis & Johnson, 2012), and problem-solving skills (Kearney & Schuck, 2006; Morgan, 2013). It is interesting to note that most of the studies on video essays are in the areas of teacher education, journalism, visual arts, and the sciences. Even though there were studies on its use in the literature classroom, i.e., Redmond and Tai (2021), Coe (2017), and Alpha and Hurst (2014), these were inadequate to fully understand how students perceive this method of assessment. Most importantly, the scarcity of research on video essays in Malaysia draws the need for such study to be conducted within the context of a Malaysian Higher Education institution; hence, the current study.

As a teaching strategy, video projects have been argued to support varied learning approaches such as authentic learning (Morgan, 2013), experiential learning (Thomas & Marks, 2014), constructivist learning (Meyer & Forester, 2015), multimodality learning (Coe, 2017), and new literacies (Coe, 2017; Miller, 2007). Despite these positive outcomes, however, a number of

challenges have been noted by researchers. Many reported producing videos was too time-consuming (Girod et al., 2007; Levinson et. al., 2016; Meyer & Forester, 2015; Miller, 2015; Schultz & Quinn, 2014; Thomas & Marks, 2014). Limited access to technological resources was also another challenge (Levinson et. al., 2016; Miller, 2015; Schultz & Quinn, 2014; Thomas & Marks, 2014). Another challenge recorded was low motivation and apprehensiveness in producing a video (So, 2010; Thomas & Marks 2104). Concerns with lack of familiarity with the technology involved were also raised (Levinson et. al., 2016). Grading student-produced videos also seemed to cause anxiety among teachers or instructors (Alpha & Hurst , 2014; Girod et al., 2007). Lastly, low quality of audio-visual images due to technical errors also posed as a hurdle (Hafner, 2014; Meyer & Forester, 2015). However, as Norton and Hathaway (2010) posit, these challenges should be seen as problems to solve rather than barriers. In the words of Girod et. al. (2007), challenges should be seen as "cautions".

One way to approach video essay is through project-based learning. Project-based learning practices vary according to subject areas and educational levels. The adoption of this approach cuts across a wide breadth of disciplines such as Engineering, Media Studies, Education, and English. Typically, a project-based learning involves organizing learning around complex-task projects, driven by an inquiry question that drives research and allows students to work autonomously (Bell, 2010). Its key features include: 1) learning by doing 2) real-world task/problem 3) teacher as 'guide-on-the-side' 4) interdisciplinarity 5) collaboration and group work and 6) an end-product (Harmer, 2014). Examples of projects include research-based project typically resulting in traditional academic outputs such as literature review, reports and seminars; construction project (widely-implemented in engineering education) resulting in the design of a technical product or artefact; and real world project, which entails working with communities beyond academia and coming up with products such as music video and actual homes (Harmer, 2014). The benefits of project-based learning include improved academic performance (Pawar, Kulkarni & Patil, 2020), development of varied 21st century skills such as social, team-work, problem-solving, communication and IT (Bell, 2010; Musa et al., 2012; Styla & Michalapoupou, 2016; Wongdaeng & Hajihama, 2018), increased motivation (Bell, 2010; Wongdaeng & Hajihama, 2018), and outreach (beyond academia) (Nation, 2008). Assessment proves to be varied, usually involving multiple stages and methods (peer, teacher, or industry assessments). Van den Bergh et al., (2006) found identifying suitable assessment for projects problematic and suggest tailoring the assessment to the learning environment and using a diversity of types of assessment. Among the challenges noted are group work dynamics, preference for traditional teaching styles, time and resources, evaluation and weightage of work (Harmer, 2014). In view of all that have been discussed so far, project-based learning and 21st century skills can be integrated productively in the literature classroom through the group-work video essay.

METHODOLOGY
This study employed a qualitative approach (Cohen et al., 2017) to understand the participants' perceptions of video essays and their experiences in completing a group-work video project. The participants were 28 students majoring in English literature, who in groups of 4 or 5, produced a 3 to 5-minute video essay of original 'footage' of on any one of the poems, short stories, plays and novels covered in the literature course 'Malaysian literature in English' they enrolled in. The students were instructed to produce original 'footage' (whatever that is filmed by their video camera). 'Footage' or images sourced from libraries, archives, or other sources like YouTube were

not allowed so as to avoid copyright infringement and to motivate students to be creative in their video essays. Technical training was not provided because from a quick survey conducted by the instructor, all students had done video productions in other literature classes.

Over the course of two weeks, students recorded video and took pictures, which were subsequently edited together with soundtrack, audio narration, and other visual and sound effects of their choice. The design of the video essay project, including the assessment criteria received feedback from an instructor from another institution who had vast experience in using video essays for his 'Film Theory' Course of a Film and Performing Arts programme.

For the purposes of the present study, the primary data consist of the videos that the students produced, followed by data from structured interviews with students. The videos were evaluated by two instructors: One was the instructor of the literature course, and another was the external instructor. Students' video essays were evaluated separately by the two evaluators based on a standard set of criteria: subject content (knowledge of literary text), video content and organization (a clear thesis, followed by points presented in a logical order), introduction (motivating, hooks the viewer from the beginning), mechanics (subtitle, audio and visuals have no errors) and production (video is edited, runs smoothly from shot to shot, visuals and audio explain and reinforce key points in the video). A meeting was then held to discuss discrepancies and get feedback from the external evaluator for feedback on the quality of marking. Findings from this evaluation process were important to support findings on comparison between video and written essays.

The second set of data was derived from face-to-face interviews which were conducted by the instructor, with students in their respective groups. These interviews were recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The interview questions were designed to generate responses that are both descriptive and reflexive about 1) the students' experience in completing the video essay, 2) the process they go through to complete the video, 3) their comparison of video essays to written essay, 4) as well as the challenges involved in producing video essays. The final part of the interview recorded students' preference when asked to choose between written essay and video essay. Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis provide the framework to guide analysis: coding, generating themes, followed by reviewing and naming themes. Standard procedures of ethical research practice were adopted, with all students giving their informed consent to participate in the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Two broad themes emerged from the thematic analysis relating to the process of video essay production and they are challenges (subthemes: 'time limitation', 'conveying thoughts and ideas in visual form') and rewarding experiences (subthemes: 'experiential learning', 'engaging task') in producing the video essay. Analysis of the video essays identified some similarities in the structures of the video essays with written essays, and the process of essay production. It also highlighted issues with the quality of videos produced which at times impacted meaning/ ideas conveyed.

Video Essay versus Written Essay

An evaluation of the 8 videos that were created by the students revealed that the video essays mostly had similar structures to the written essay. Six out of 8 video essays had the structure of

written essays, which typically consist of an introduction, body and conclusion, tied to an argument (thesis statement). Two videos however, did not have a thesis statement, with one having a conclusion that does not reinstate the argument. Instead, it introduced a new idea. One video which had a thesis statement showed that the thesis statement needs improvement. This seems to imply that regardless of medium of presentation, similar structural issues that are generally found in written essays were also evident in the video essays.

Overall, the videos revealed a range of technical quality. Some showed strengths such as balanced sense of composition, whereby visual shots are symmetrical and consistent. Shots were also in high resolutions, sharp, and crisp. Good subtitling was also another added value. In addition, some showed consistent use of font and size throughout the video. Students were also able to translate the main points of the video essay into the subtitles. One notable quality is the translation of literary elements found in the literary texts into visual metaphors. Using visuals like a child on a swing to indicate childhood and innocence was effective in letting the visuals 'speak for themselves'. Such technique let viewers 'see' two narratives – the narrative of the voice over and the visual. This gave the video essays an added advantage as it enabled the sending of one message through multiple medium, unlike in written format, where ideas or thoughts can only be transmitted through words. It also posed a unique challenge to students particularly in ensuring that the intended meaning was sent effectively through the selected sequence of visuals.

A number of problem areas were also observed in the videos, but they were mainly problems related to the technical aspects of the video. One technical problem identified was poor audio quality. This is due to having voice-over (narration) and music at the same time, resulting in the music being too loud and 'drowning' the voice-over. Moreover, some videos showed inconsistency with the audio level, resulting in some voice-over louder or lower in some footage. Another inherent problem is video editing. It appears to be challenging for the students to know what shots/visuals to use, resulting in the repetition of shots and use of shots that were not representing the point(s) being communicated. When to 'cut' these shots was also a problem. This impacted the pacing – sometimes the unfolding of shots/visuals happened at a pace that was too fast or too slow. Problem with visuals was also detected. Some videos had 'shaky' visuals, indicating shots taken were not steady and camera movements were inconsistent. Other technical problems detected include missing relation between the interview footage and the argument advanced, too many titling/texts used with visuals to support ideas, as well as grammar and spelling mistakes in the titling/texts displayed. This shows that despite students' previous experience with video production, it was inadequate to support the technical production of the video essays. Most importantly, because meaning was affected by the quality of video essay produced, it is important that training is video production is conducted prior, and technical support is provided during the project.

Process of Video Essay Production
Based on the interview with the students regarding the process they went through in producing the video, all of them started the production with deciding the text they want to analyze, followed by discussing how to approach the text by choosing a critical framework. Some groups proceeded with looking for textual evidence in the text, followed by dividing the tasks among the group members, then working on technical aspects such as shooting the video, choosing animation, doing the voice-over, compiling all these together, and then editing. Some groups proceeded by outlining

the argument and supporting points, then delegating tasks such as finding suitable images and sounds to convey the arguments among group members, ending with editing. All of the students agreed that the video essay and the written essay are similar in terms of the structuring/organizing that has to be done. In written essays, students typically have to outline and present in writing their argument and supporting points (textual evidence) coherently. The same process applies to the video essay, except supporting points are in the forms of visuals and sounds. Like the written essay, they have "to come up with a thesis statement and a proper title to actually show our point". A student found that her group was really preoccupied with "how we are going to present it (the argument) in the video … we can't just put the words there." This means that the group-work video essay is driven by research, a key aspect that encourages project-based learning.

Challenging
The responses indicate that most students perceive the video essay as a challenging course work. Most of the students were preoccupied with producing a video that is interesting and easy to understand. A student remarked that the she felt challenged to come up with the kind of "video that we want to show to everyone, make it understandable and easy for them to grasp… that grabs their attention." Another student said that her group tried hard to "articulate nicely and not make it boring." Another student said the challenge was communicating their argument. This "must tally with the video" and "people should understand what we're trying to convey." Despite being a challenge, this aspect of video essays production seems to create a meaningful learning experience for students as they engaged in 'learning by doing', a key feature in project-based learning. They were challenged to articulate meanings with visuals and other medium (i.e., audio and words (through subtitles). Merging multiple mediums to send a message or their thoughts across added a layer to their thinking process and made the assessment task more realistic, if compared to written essays.

Another challenge raised was time. Students had to plan carefully and complete the assignment within two weeks. A student commented that the time given to complete the video essay has to be right, "I think it's towards the end of the semester, we find it quite difficult because we're doing interviews…quite difficult to find people to interview and the timing also…too little time…". Some students thought that that the video essay task should be given or informed earlier in the semester, instead of two weeks before the date due. Most of the students agreed those two weeks was enough, but thought that a time frame of three or four weeks is better.

Students were also asked whether they preferred doing the video essay in a group or individually. All of the students agreed that producing the video essay individually would be a challenge. Working in a group is easier. A group remarked that they "need a team" for producing a video essay. Doing the video essay in a group also enabled the students to "choose group members", "help each other (to) expand ideas", "share ideas", "cater to different abilities" and "because some do not know how to do technical things". Thus, the video essay has the potential to encourage project-based learning by enabling students to share and exchange ideas, and collaborate in a group work.

Rewarding
All of the students agreed the video essay should be part of the coursework for the literature course. Reasons provided were varied: video essay was "fun", "engaging", "interesting", "a different kind

of assignment", "can help with (the) grade" and "hard to write an essay". One group described it as an experiential learning process because "we get to experience" the poem. This particular group went to the place mentioned in the poem "Still Brickfields" written by Malachi Edwin Vethamani and shot videos of most of the places in Brickfields to visualise the imagery found in the poem. They said that if it were not for the poem, they would not have known or stepped foot in Brickfields, an Indian enclave right in the middle of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The students also found the video essay rewarding in terms of the marks allocated for the video essay. The video essay was allocated 10% of the total evaluation for the course. Most students agreed with the 10% allocation, but some thought that the marks should be between 10-20%. When asked if they were given a choice between producing a video essay and a written essay, what would they choose, 60% of the students said they would choose the video essay, 22% said they would choose the written essay, 3% said they did not mind both, and 15% said it depends on the requirement of the video essay. Those who opted for written essay cited reasons like "not well-versed in video essay", video essay "require creativity", "need to synchronize", "I get more ideas when I write", and "Written essay is what I'm good at" and "time-saving". These findings signal diverse students' preference which may need to be considered to ensure inclusivity.

Students who opted for video essay said video essay was their choice because it is "fun", "tiring but individual (written essay) – have to think more)", "work in group – creativity develops", and "(producing a video essay) is more interesting than writing it". Students who said it depends on the requirement of the video essay cited reasons like it depends on the nature of the video assignment. A student mentioned that if "it was more towards like, character analysis, I won't be sure how to approach that visually." Another student echoed this sentiment, saying that the video essay allowed her group to actually go to the place and shoot images to represent the imagery in the poem but if it were some other courses – "Shakespeare for example...what do you want to put? Where are you going to find castles, costumes and whatnot?"

Recommendations
Our goals for this project included investigating in what ways the video essay is similar or different from the written essay, as well as students' perceptions on the process of producing the video essay. Generally, most students perceived the video essay as similar to the written essay in that it requires them to structure their video by developing an argument (or thesis statement), supported by clear and specific evidence. This is evidenced by the videos the students produced, most of which showed a written-essay structure, complete with an argument and supporting details. The process they went through, which for the most part involved analyzing the text through a framework, looking for textual evidence, imply that students went through the same process of drafting a written essay. The only difference is that the video essay involved shooting the video, adding in sounds/music and narration, followed by editing. Problems such as missing thesis statement, and having a conclusion that does not reinstate the argument imply that the students made mistakes/showed weaknesses which can also be found in written essays. Indeed, the video essay seems similar to a written essay, and helped the students to communicate their arguments in media-based formats (Siegle, 2009).

Students' perceptions regarding the video essay seem positive. They seem to prefer the video essay compared to the written essay, provided the video essay is done in groups. This is because the bulk

of behind-the-scene work in producing video essays was high as students need to conduct research for the right visuals (which for some students involved going to and experiencing the site of the poem/short story) and they need to merge different mediums to effectively send the message or ideas intended.

The students also agreed that the video essay should be made into a coursework in the literature course, but marks allocated for the assignment should be higher than 10% of the total evaluation. This is understandable as students worked harder when producing video essays than when writing one. In addition, the video essay highlights the issue of time. The students agreed that longer time should be given to complete the video essay (ideally 3-4 weeks) and that it should be given much earlier and not towards the end of the course when students are busy catching up with a lot of deadlines involving other courses. These two recommendations again reiterate that producing a video is a lot of hard work and those special considerations should be given to marks allocated and timing.

Technical errors detected in the video essays indicate that it is not structuring the essay that is the main problem of the students but it was the technicalities of producing a video, even though the students have had some experience producing videos in other classes, and have been shown examples of good video essays in class. This implies that the students need more specific technical training in producing a video prior to embarking on the video essay. As Gotfredson and Engstrom (1996) assert, "when producing a video essay, videographers take over the roles of story producer, reporter and videotape editor". To take on all these roles is not easy, therefore students need to undergo a training in video production so as to ensure technical errors do not pose as a hurdle (Hafner, 2014; Meyer & Forester, 2015). Students must know that a video production involves three stages: preproduction, production and postproduction. Therefore, a training in video production should cover and prepare students for all three stages. Preproduction involves planning – this is when students learn how to plan the concept, write the script, get the right equipment, and learn rules of shot composition (that shots must have a specific purpose in the video essay) and made aware that the structure of the visuals/shots are equally important as the structure of the essay so as not disrupt the viewers' viewing and orientation. Production involves mainly shooting. Postproduction entails editing – this is when editing software play a role.

Challenges experienced by the students suggest that it is not the technical aspects that are daunting. Rather, it is concerns such as what to put as the content of the video as well as producing a video that is interesting and easy to understand. This implies that the concerns mainly revolved around the content, as in writing an essay. Frequent consultations with the teacher are needed to ensure the content is organized and cohesive, and that the choices of visuals are appropriate and relevant to the literary work chosen.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the understanding of the use of group-work video essay project in the 21st century literature classroom through the evaluation of video essays produced by students and interviews about their experiences. As a coursework done as a group project, the video essay is an example of how expanding options for writing conventional essays, using different forms of media such as video (film), audio (voice-over, music, sounds), and text to study or analyse a literary text offers students rewarding and meaningful learning experience. Studying the students' perceptions

resulted in recognising that 21st century literature students' content knowledge should now include skills in composing and responding to literature through the use of current technology. While there seemed to be technical challenges, students took this course work earnestly and performed to the best of their abilities.

Learning wise, the video essay assignment worked in providing students the opportunity to experiment with technology, and the educational leverage to further expand the influx of text media and technology in the 21st century and develop 21st century skills such as creativity and media and technology literacy students they were expected to acquire. This shows that the video-essay assignment involves a lot of effort, complex skills, and technology expertise. Students' effort thus must be reflected in the students' marks as emphasised by many students in this study. This also highlights the importance of making the video-essay assignment a group project as this may improve inclusivity as students with limited access to technology or have limited skills in using technology can work closely with those who were better equipped and have better skills in using technology. This implies that grouping needs to be considered very carefully and technical training in video production is a skillset that needs to be developed prior to the project so that all students would have similar opportunities to produce good video essays. The findings of the study also shows that the video-essay assignment supports project-based learning pathway as students reported experiencing the following: student-led inquiry, autonomy, and teamwork in producing the final artefact. In short, the study shows that the video essay has a place in the literature classroom provided that it is done as a project-based group-work effort, substantial marks are allocated, grouping is considered carefully and training in video production is provided.

This study has implications on undergraduate Literature programme development, pedagogy, assessment, and practice. The finding shows that the video essay assignment should be incorporated into literature programmes because of its effectiveness in developing highly sought 21st century skills. Doing so will also diversify assessment strategies in Literature programmes as current approaches seem to be limited to written essays.

This study, however, is limited to a small sample size and a literature course. Future studies could focus on larger samples, comparing challenges of producing video essays for multiple genre (poems, short story, plays, etc.). Other identified areas of research are on the assessment of video essays, the collaborative aspects involved and the required competencies (i. e. technology and video production) required from teachers and students in producing a high-quality video essay.

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