

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342064650>

Student voice: A preliminary study in the teaching of English literature in secondary schools in the 21st Century in Sabah, Malaysia

Article · November 2019

CITATIONS

0

READS

118

2 authors:



Jocelyn Yee Yun Lee

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia

8 PUBLICATIONS 5 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Alice Su Chu Wong

Universiti Teknologi MARA Kota Kinabalu Sabah

7 PUBLICATIONS 1 CITATION

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



reading engagement [View project](#)



Reading comprehension and critical reading of ELL students [View project](#)

Student voice: A preliminary study in the teaching of English literature in secondary schools in the 21st Century in Sabah, Malaysia

Jocelyn Yee Vun Lee*
Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Alice Su Chu Wong
Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Research in the teaching of literature in secondary schools in peninsula Malaysia has proliferated. However, little research has been done to explore student voice on the teaching and learning of literature in the state of Sabah. The present preliminary study investigated the methods adopted by English teachers in teaching literature in secondary schools and students' modes of reading in urban areas, suburban areas and remote areas in Sabah. The findings are based on the analysis and interpretation of the data garnered from 112 first year ELL (English language learners) university students from a local institution of higher learning in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The findings revealed teachers' most common teaching approach and the least favourite approach. The study underlines the importance of teachers' choice of teaching methods and students' reciprocal response in reading the prescribed text. Findings from the current work have implications for the teaching of literature in the ESL classrooms.

KEYWORDS: student voice, teaching of literature, ELL context, teacher-centred approach, student-centred approach

Introduction

English literature has been introduced into the English Language syllabus in schools separate from the English Language since 2000 with the aims to enable learners to engage in wider reading of good works for enjoyment and for self-development. It is also meant to develop an understanding of other societies, cultures, values and traditions that will contribute to their emotional and spiritual growth. The inclusion of literature in schools is emphasized again in Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) to increase students' exposure to the English language.

In his important analysis of students' literature reading, Suthagar (2006) found that one third of Form 5 (aged 17) students did not finish reading the English novel prescribed by the Ministry of Education, and even one fifth of the 108 students who scored the Grade of A in the SPM (Malaysia Certificate of Education) made the same report. Most students relied on reading the readily accessible commercially published revision books, which contain summaries of, and notes about, the novels (Hwang & Embi, 2007; Suthagar, 2006). Instead of reading the story, students were encouraged to read the summary of each chapter or notes provided by their teachers. Before turning to the common approaches used by teachers in teaching literature in Malaysia, it is necessary to understand the learning in the 21st century.

Learning in the 21st Century

To succeed in life and work in a global age requires 21st century skills as workplace needs highly skilled workers to deal with complex and interactive tasks. Employees are expected to select knowledge from the readily available information and apply and transfer such knowledge in their professions and lives (van Laar, van Deursen, van Dijk & de Haan, 2017). Broadly, 21st century skills include collaboration, communication, digital literacy, citizenship, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and productivity (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). According to Binkley, Erstad, Herman, Raizen, Miller-Ricci, and Rumble (2012), 21st century skills comprise ten skills in four groupings: Ways of Thinking (creative and innovation; critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making; learning to learn and metacognition), Ways of Working (communication; collaboration and teamwork), Tools for Working (information literacy; ICT literacy), Living in the World (citizenship; life and career; personal and social responsibility). To promote 21st century skills demands teachers updating their knowledge and current instructional practices carefully calibrated to maximize student learning. If any of these requirements break down, the best practice may no longer become best practice.

Given the realities of an increasingly connected and complex age, there are implications for teaching literature (Choo, 2018). Specifically, Choo highlights three ways to teach literature in the 21st century: evaluation of ethical issues, explorations of ethical dilemmas, and engagement with issues of justice. Her view is that teachers can employ literature to facilitate critical ethical engagements with diverse cultures and values by means of critically evaluate the philosophical ideas during a particular period. That is, understand the philosophical underpinnings of the text articulated through the characters and their values in the story. Although Choo does not say directly, she apparently assumes that learning literature in the ELL context should be the same. However, the literature in the ELL classrooms needs

different approaches. Posing higher order thinking (HOTS) questions like inferential questions and evaluative questions is important. Inferential questions are questions to prompt students to make inferences based on the clues given in the text. These questions require students to use their prior knowledge and text clues such as words or images. Evaluative questions, on the other hand, require readers to move beyond the text to consider what they think and believe in relation to the content. It is at this juncture that readers are to justify their opinions, and critically evaluate the content and determine the claim of the author. The next section discusses the methods used by teachers in teaching literature in the English Language Learners (ELL) context.

Approaches in teaching of literature in ELL context

Numerous researchers have reported that teachers in the ELL context use different approaches to teach literature. Advanced Japanese university students preferred an integrated approach with the inclusion of context building, biography of the author and literary devices. Respondents in the study favoured readers response approach the most (Fogal, 2012). In a case study research in Singapore, Towndrow and Kwek (2017) reported that the approach used in teaching literature was centred around content knowledge and task completion. In other words, the focus of the lesson was to prepare the students for assessments.

In Malaysia, the top three favourite methods adopted by teachers were the paraphrastic approach, information-based approach and moral-philosophical approach (Hwang & Embi, 2007; Lim & Omar, 2007; Sii & Chen 2016; Rashid, Vethamani & Rahman, 2010). Paraphrastic approach deals with the surface meaning of the text. Teachers use this approach to paraphrase or reword the story and/or translate it into other languages. The information-based approach emphasises the content from the cultural, social, to the political and historical backgrounds. The moral-philosophical approach extracts the moral value in the literary texts to help develop self-understanding and self-realization.

Several studies claimed that teachers focus more on answering reading comprehension worksheets than allowing students to explore and explicate the literary texts (e.g., Sidhu, Chan & Kaur, 2010; Ramlan, 2015). Rashid, Vethamani and Rahman (2010) reported that students' "inability to comprehend the English Language" is a major determinant of teachers' approaches (p. 87). In a more recent study by Ramlan (2015), a majority of English teachers in the secondary school agreed that they provided their students the interpretation of texts such as the theme and that teachers were the sole contributors in the literature class.

Data from the studies (e.g. Hwang & Embi, 2007; Lim & Omar, 2007; Sii & Chen 2016; Rashid, Vethamani & Rahman, 2010) on the approaches adopted by teachers in teaching literature have identified a consistent trend--teachers rarely use the personal response approach

(approach that focuses on a learner's response to what they think are the author's intentions and the meanings that could be derived from the text), and critical thinking. Critical thinking comes within the domain of cognitive skills which are essential for reasoning, argument analysis and evaluation. Such skills are referred to as higher-order thinking skills (Halpern, 1998; Tsui, 2002).

Ennis (1985) defined critical thinking as ‘reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do’ (p. 45). Based on these definitions, critical thinking calls for high levels of abstract and logical thinking, commitment and attitudes (Grosser & Nel, 2013). Previous research literature claims that critical thinking can be taught (Davis, 2003; Flores, Matkin, Burbach, Quinn, & Harding, 2012; Willingham, 2007). However, translating critical thinking skills into lessons and activities remains a challenge to many teachers (Beaumont, 2010). In the class, teachers are the sole determinants of the methods they use. The next section delineates what student voice is in education.

Student voice

Engaging students in developing their voice offers students the opportunity to make informed decisions pertaining to their learning and learning environments (Quinn & Owen, 2016). To enable student voice to be heard requires a transformation of teacher and student relationships, so that students can share power with teachers and are empowered as a result (Fielding, 2004a, 2004b). Student voice has a long educational history especially in student consultation, participation, collaboration, leadership and intergenerational learning (Fielding, 2011; Fleming, 2012; Mayes, 2013). The intermingling and interdependence of both parties- teachers and student- are ‘radical or inclusive collegiality in education’ (Fielding, 1999, p. 20).

By radical, he means students are not merely ‘objects of teachers’ professional gaze’ (p. 22), but as agents in the process of transformative learning. In this respect, teachers are seen as learners and learners as teachers. Together, they become joint participants and this transformative energy encompasses all those affected by the practice (of education). Students are not just recipient of practice. In fact, the reverse is true. Teachers are co-workers with students in the pursuit of education rather than a knowledge provider.

According to Mitra (2008), student voice initiatives give young people the opportunity to share their opinions about school problems. Giving students a voice is a form of student agency. Student agency is the initiative of the learner to learn something more than the inputs transmitted by the teachers. When teachers take seriously what students tell them about their experiences at school, what hinders their learning and what encourages them to learn, students are respected (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007) and are empowered (Cook-Sather, 2014). Student voice research shows that by expanding the range of voices elicited from learners can improve teachers' classroom practice (see Cushman, 2000; Daniels, Kalkman, & McCombs, 2001; Kincheloe, 2007).

Although involving students in the education process provides teachers with suggestions for change, student voice in English Language teaching particularly in Asia receives little attention. In Japan for instance, very few studies on student voice were conducted (Falout, Murphey, Elwood, & Hood, 2008; Murphy, Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009). In Falout et al. (2008) for example, ELL students were asked to answer open-ended questionnaire pertaining to their English teachers in junior high school and high school. They were also asked to suggest the approaches they thought that could enhance their English language learning. Many proposed more interactive and communicative teaching approaches.

Studies on student voice in Malaysia

A review of literature shows that in the school setting, students' experiences are rarely solicited. Unlike in the university settings, often times course feedback questionnaires are given to students at the end of the term albeit such feedback rarely informs new pedagogical innovations (Hamalainen, Kiili & Smith, 2016). As shown in the table below, the research in Malaysia to date has tended to focus on the teachers' perspectives on the methods they use in literature teaching.

Table 1: Studies in the teaching of literature in Malaysia

Perspective	Study
Teachers	Suthagar, 2006
Teachers	Hwang & Embi, 2007
Teachers	Sidhu, Chan, & Kaur, 2010
Teachers	Suliman & Yunus, 2014
Teachers	Lim & Omar, 2007
Teachers and students** (interview)	Rashid, Vethamani & Rahman, 2010
Teachers	Divsar, 2014
Students **	Nair, et.al., 2012
Teachers and Students (Text)	Isa & Mahmud, 2012
Students**	Othman, Shah, Karim, Yusof, Ramli, & Salleh, 2015
Teachers	Ramlan, 2015
Teachers	Sii & Chen, 2016

Although some research in Malaysia has been done on the teaching and learning of literature, only three studies have attempted to investigate students' perceptions (Rashid, et al., 2010; Nair, et al., 2012; Othman, et al., 2015). Rashid, et al., (2010) focused on teachers and students' perceptions on the teaching and learning of literature. In their study, participants had positive feedback on the approaches and strategies employed by their teachers. Nair, et al., (2012)'s participants perceived that their English proficiency has improved and that their interest in reading literary texts increased. Like Rashid et al., Othman's (2015) study focused on how students felt the techniques adopted by their teachers. All the respondents in Othman's study reported that the methods used by their teachers were suitable and that their learning had improved. However, interpreting the results garnered from students who had not been exposed to other approaches and claimed that their teacher's teaching method were appropriate seems to be unreliable. To begin with, students were not aware of other ways of learning literature and their understandings were clouded by a single approach adopted by their teacher. Such research appears to "reaffirm and repeat prejudices and forces of [teacher's] domination" as Fielding (2004a, p. 297) has put it.

Most of these studies revealed that teachers used a particular teaching method to tailor to the needs of their students. It is as if to frame and reinforce students as "stereotypes" (Fielding, 2004a, p. 299), implying that students' low level of English was the reason why teachers employed a specific approach. In fact, in Rashid, Vethamani & Rahman's (2010) findings, students indicated that they preferred teachers to conduct drama and also speaking activities in their literature class, yet these voices (e.g., Nair, et al., 2012) did not seem to be adopted by teachers. It is easy for teachers to exclude the challenges faced by the underrepresented or

marginalized students, such as disengaged students (students who do not seem to be interested in reading literary texts) and disadvantaged students (students whose family, social, or economic circumstances hinder their ability to learn at school) (Sinclair, 2004). Student voice speaks volume to teachers to better understand their students and reengage them in a positive manner (Fielding, 2004a, Mitra, 2008). There is a need to investigate from the students' angle to determine the techniques used by their teachers. This study set out to investigate the types of approach employed by the teachers in teaching literature, and the students' strategies to learn literature in Malaysia.

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What approach did the secondary school teachers use to teach literature in urban, suburban and remote areas in Sabah?
2. What strategies did the students employ to complete the literature reading text in urban, suburban and remote areas in Sabah?
3. Did English teachers encourage students to read the novel?

Theoretical Concept

Two theoretical perspectives provide a frame for this study: student voice and sociocultural theories of learning. Fielding's (2004a) student voice initiatives to sustain the development of student voice as a transformative set of practices was used to guide the formation of study propositions and data analysis. Listening to the voices of students is used as a means to understand teacher practice and student agency. Student agency means students have the power to act i.e., the initiative of the learner to learn something.

The second theoretical perspective informs this study is sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory provides a lens to observe and understand social interactions (Davidson, 2010). This perspective is useful for interpreting social interactions that take place in educational settings, and for explaining about learning and developments.

Method

Design

The aim of the present study was to investigate the teaching approaches used by teachers to teach literature in the ESL classroom and to determine teachers' most preferred method through the lens of the students. Additionally, the present work also aimed to determine students' learning style as a result of their teachers' approach and whether students read the whole texts. Data were collected in one session across five different classrooms.

Participants

The present work used a convenience sample of 112 ELL first year university students in Sabah majoring in different fields of study. These students were in their first semester taking Critical Academic Reading taught by one of the researchers in this study. The participants were all indigenous students whose overall age range was between 19 and 22 years old. English was not their first language but all of them had learnt the target language for more than 12 years before enrolling in the university.

The participants came from different districts of Sabah, namely urban areas, suburban areas and rural areas. In Sabah, the urban-rural divide is pronounced. The locality of a school is therefore a major determinant of whether it is an urban school or a rural school. Out of 214 schools in Sabah, 61 schools are urban schools and 153 are rural schools. Schools in urban areas are more equipped in terms of better learning environments and educational resources. Rural schools, in contrast, lack facilities such as comfortable and stimulating classroom settings and resources such as a resourceful library or Internet access (Wreikat, Kabilan & Abdullah, 2014). Although schools in Sabah are categorised by the Ministry of Education into urban schools and rural schools, the researchers in the present study added one more category i.e., schools in suburban areas. Despite situated in the vicinity of the city, these schools are often beset by the unavailability of resources and a conducive learning environment.

Data collection and Data Analysis

We administered a survey (see Appendix A) to 112 students. While designing the survey, we included four open-ended response items, and two close-ended items. Although open-ended responses and short answers required more lengthy data analysis procedures, the responses provided us with rich data. We were able to detect trends which would not have been evident in quantitative data collection.

The questionnaire of the present study was validated by member checking. Member checking means the researchers take the data and interpretations back to the participations for verification so that they can confirm the credibility of the information (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data analysis was guided by a grounded theory approach. A grounded theory approach is substantive because it addresses problems in specific areas. “Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2) and hence the constant comparative method of coding and analysing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This means that the logic of a grounded theory can generate abstract concepts and specify relationships between them to understand problems in real contexts (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory is deemed appropriate in the present research particularly to “understand phenomena in a real world setting where the researchers do not manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 39).

Results

Two themes emerged: Teacher centred approach and Student-centred approach. The theme Teacher -centred approach encompassed the categories of doing exercises, teacher showing the video, doing past year questions, providing handouts, teacher explaining the plot and so on. Because the researchers wanted to know the percentile of methods teachers commonly favoured such as drilling and practicing, this was coded separately (see Table 2).

Student Centred Approach included listing new words, reading in class, engaging in group work, and students writing. To determine the extent of student-oriented activities such as

critical thinking tasks and interactive activities adopted by the teachers, these two were coded separately (see Table 2)

Table 2: Themes: Teacher-centred approach, Drilling & Practising, Student-centred approach, Critical thinking & Interactive activities

Teacher-centred approach	Drilling & practising	Student-centred approach	Critical Thinking	Interactive activities
Giving notes	Doing exercises	Listing new words	Asking questions	Group discussion
Teacher summarising	Memorising notes	Reading in class	Mind mapping	Presentation in class
Using notes from commercial reference books	Answering exam questions	Group work	Questioning sessions	Acting in class/drama
Writing notes about the characters	Memories quizzes	Students summarising		Taking about the stories
List moral values				Role-playing
Using Power Point slides to tell the story				
Translating the story				
Answering comprehension questions				

Research Question 1: What approach did the secondary school teachers use to teach literature?

Table 3: Most common teaching methods used in class

Category	Frequency	Percent
Teacher-centred approach	60	53.57
Drilling & practising	24	21.43
Student-centred approach	13	11.61
Interactive activities	6	5.36
Critical thinking	9	8.04
TOTAL	112	100

Table 3 presents the frequency distribution of the most common methods used in class. As can be seen, the most common method was Teacher-centred method 75% (53.57% teacher centred approach, 21.43% Drill and Practice) as opposed to Student-centred method 25% (comprised Student-centred approach, 11.61%; interactive activities, 5.36% and Critical Thinking, 8.04%). Interactive activities and Critical Thinking had relatively low frequencies i.e., 5.36% and 8.04% respectively.

Table 4: Most common methods used by teachers according to divisions

Division	Teacher-centred approach	Drilling & Practising	Student-centred approach	Interactive activities	Critical thinking	Total
Urban schools	30	10	5	4	5	54
Suburban schools	21	13	7	2	4	47
Rural schools	9	1	1	0	0	11
Total	60	24	13	6	9	112

Table 4 presents the most common methods used by teachers according to three different divisions. Findings suggest that 40 teachers (74%) in urban areas preferred teacher-centred methods including drilling and practising. Similarly, it was also found that 34 teachers (72.3%) in sub-urban areas preferred teacher-centred method including drilling and practising. Teachers in rural areas preferred teacher-centred instruction the most (91%). As shown in Table 3, out of 112 students, only nine students (i.e., 8.91%) from urban and suburban schools claimed that their teachers conducted activities revolving around critical thinking, and only six students (5.94%) claimed that their teachers conducted interactive activities in class. Tasks on critical thinking and interactive activities were not practised at all in rural schools. These findings suggest that critical thinking and interactive activities, which are crucial in the teaching of literature, are gravely neglected in the state of Sabah.

Research Question 2: What strategies did the students employ to complete the literature reading text?

Table 5: Strategies used by students to complete literature reading task

Activities	Frequency	Percent
Read the story	18	16.07
Read the synopsis only	7	6.25
Use notes in a reference book	39	34.82
Read synopsis and used notes	32	28.57
All of the above	16	14.29

N= 112

Table 5 shows the strategies employed by students to complete the literary texts. A majority of students (34.82%) used notes in a reference book to understand the story. About 30% of the respondents used the strategy of reading the synopsis and using notes at the same time. 6.25% claimed that they read the synopsis only, while 16% of students claimed that they had read the entire story. 14% said they used all the strategies i.e. they read the synopsis, used notes and also read the entire story.

Research Question 3: Did English teachers encourage students to read the novel?

Table 6: Encouragement from English teachers to read English books

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	107	95.53
No	5	4.46

N=112

As shown in Table 6, 95% of the participants reported were given support from their teachers to read literature books when they were in secondary schools.

Discussion

This study was set out with the aim of giving students a voice in the learning of literature in urban areas, suburban areas and remote areas in Sabah. Findings from the current work revealed two key findings. First, it was discovered that the most preferred method in teaching literature employed by teachers from the three divisions in Sabah is the teacher-centred instruction. Activities in classes ranged from teacher reading-aloud, teacher explaining the content of literary texts, teacher giving notes or suggesting moral values or lessons of the literary texts and paraphrasing literary texts for students. Another most preferred method appeared to be the drill and practice approach which centres on exercises, comprehension questions and repetition of key concepts found in literary texts. The finding of the study corresponds closely to those of Sidhu, Chan and Kaur (2010) who found that teachers spent a considerable amount of time on individual comprehension worksheets.

Most comprehension worksheets are exercises consisting of literal questions required students to extract answers from the text directly. Although understanding the story is important, literal questions only test students on what they have read or how much they could recall the facts. Such approaches are a far cry from the learner-centred approach. While the emphasis of literal questions is to ask about information which is explicitly stated in the text, inferential and critical questions go beyond the information represented in the text. Inferential questions ask students to derive information which is implied but not expressed in the story. Students work out the answer by considering the hints and clues in the text in the light of their own knowledge and experience. This means that students need to read the text very carefully and draw conclusions of their own from the hints and clues they are given.

Critical questions or evaluative questions, on the other hand, ask students to problem solve a situation by applying information they know through their experiences. Evaluative comprehension tasks require readers to analyse and critically interpret the text based on their

prior knowledge and experiences. At the evaluative level, readers juxtapose what they have read in the text with their own prior knowledge and experience. Such juxtaposition creates new meanings which move beyond the scope of the text (Herber, 1970). These meaning constructions and relationships involve multiple skills including divergent thinking, critical analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Vacca et al., 2009). Most of these skills are necessary in a curriculum for a 21st-century education. From the findings, it is salient that higher order thinking skills has taken a back seat, along with the opportunity for students to develop their personal response and overall love for literature.

In this new age, old methods of teaching are no longer relevant. That means most of the practices that teachers are familiar with, need to be jettisoned so that a student-centric model emphasizing thinking across disciplines can be encouraged. In short, in this transformative age, one should possess a nimble mind. It has become clear that holding on to outdated models from the past appear to be a liability in a rapidly changing transformative educational landscape.

The second key finding revealed that students had very little opportunity to engage in interactive activities such as group discussion, critical thinking tasks, role-playing and dramatization. The findings of the present study seem to highlight the reciprocal response of the students in learning literature. Students' over reliance on notes found in reference books and synopses is due in part to the way teachers taught. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous literature (e.g., Sidhu, Chan & Kaur 2010; Ramlan, 2015) which reported students' passivity in most literature classes. This is a stumbling block to student agency. When learning involves the activity and the initiative of the students, they have greater agency. In contrast, when students are not allowed to discover the knowledge on their own by actively contributing to the learning process, they are only passive recipients of knowledge. By and by, they are disenfranchised.

Role-playing, group work and dramatization are important for the development of teambuilding and language proficiency. In today's workforce, we hear calls from business and industry for young people who can work together, who are more analytic and more creative in the way they tackle problems. This implies that 21st-century skills increasingly demand creativity, perseverance, problem solving, interactions and teamwork.

Limitations

The current study did not investigate students' perceptions of effective activities in the literature classroom and this could be treated as one of the limitations of the current study. Hence, future research may consider investigating the types of teaching approaches that students find most helpful in developing their language competence and critical thinking skills in the literature classroom. Another limitation of the current work was the lack of qualitative data that could have been gathered through interviews. It would be interesting to gauge students' view on whether their teachers' approach in teaching literature affected their interest in literature and their motivation in learning the target language as a whole. Future studies should consider multiple methods of data collection probing into this issue as it would shed valuable insights on the teaching of literature from the perspective of the students.

Implications

The findings of the present study suggest that teachers maintain control over students in a literature class. A teacher-centred instruction in a literature class means the lesson is determined by the teachers. Students are often perceived by teachers as a tabula rasa or blank slate. During the lesson, teacher talk time exceeds student talk time. From the findings in the present study, the lack of student-oriented activities in the literature classroom is salient. Active student involvement in a literature lesson is crucial because knowledge discovered by the learners is authentic learning. Capitalizing the innate inquisitiveness of the learners is the key to student-oriented approach.

As the findings from this study suggest, teacher-centred approaches dominated classroom practices, leaving very little room for interactive activities to develop students' personal response to the story, their language competence and critical thinking skills. These findings raise intriguing questions regarding the nature of literature lessons in the Malaysian classrooms. It is sad to admit the theory of teaching literature contradicts with what really goes on in the classroom. The Malaysian literature component in the English Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 is to improve and upgrade the proficiency level of English as well as help promote students' personal development, character building and expand their outlook of the world. These proposed aims cannot be achieved without applying varied teaching approaches and interesting classroom activities.

Students' voices expand our understanding about the teaching and learning of literature in the classrooms. More importantly students' voices help us reconsider the common practices of the teaching of literature in the ESL context. The findings of the present study suggest the need for teachers to break away from teacher's delivery of instruction which is mostly teacher centred—an approach that seems to leave some learners minimally benefitting from the teaching and learning process, to one that is student centred—an approach that enables learners to participate in their learning. Student-centred approaches deepen and widen students' learning. In light of the insights gained from the current study, there are implications for teacher professional development support, such as programmes to teach teachers how to teach English literature in secondary schools.

Conclusion

The outset of this study viewed learners as active agents – ones who can take control of their own learning process. In other words, teachers' instructional practices could be improved by giving student ownership of learning (i.e., student voice and student agency). The findings of the present study question and challenge educators who are overly teacher-centric. If this situation remains unchanged, schooling will be characterized as stultifying. Our nation's future could be seriously jeopardised because our schools are simply not preparing sufficiently skilled workers, scientists, and scholars to fit in the 21st century workforce.

The findings of the present study also indicate that the gap between educational aspirations in the 21st century education and the actual teaching practices in the classrooms. Malaysian students entering the workforce must be able to think critically in order to thrive in today's

global economic landscape. As we think about how our schools are going to prepare students for life and work in the 21st century, students ought to be agentic in their learning.

References

- Beaumont, J. (2010). A sequence of critical thinking tasks. *TESOL Journal*, 1(4), 1-22.
- Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Herman, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., Miller-Ricci, M., et al. (2012). Defining twenty-first century skills. In P. Griffin, B. McGaw, & E. Care (Eds.), *Assessment and teaching of 21st century skills: Methods and approach* (pp. 17e66). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Singapore: Sage Publications.
- Choo, S. S. (2018). The need for cosmopolitan literacy in a global age: Implications for teaching literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52 (1). 7-12 Doi: 10.1002/jaal.755
- Cook-Sather, A. (2014). The trajectory of student voice in educational research. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 49(2). 131-148
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-131
- Cushman, K. (2000). Students solving community problems: Serious learning takes on a new look. *Challenge journal: The journal of the Annenberg challenge*, 4 (1).
- Daniels, D. H. K., Kalkman, D. L., & McCombs, B. L. (2001). Young children's perspectives on learning and teacher practices in different classroom contexts. *Early Education and Development*, 12(2), 253–273.
- Davidson, K. (2010). The integration of cognitive and sociocultural theories of literacy development: Why? How? *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 56(3), 246–256.
- Davis, W. M. (2003, July). *A cautionary note about the teaching of critical reasoning*. Paper presented at Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia (HERDSA): Learning for an Unknown Future. Christchurch, New Zealand.
- Divsar, H. (2014). A survey of the approaches employed in teaching literature in an EFL context. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 4(1), 74
- Ennis, R. H. (1985). A logical basis for measuring critical thinking skills. *Educational Leadership*, 43(2), 44–48.
- Falout, J., Murphey, T., Elwood, J., & Hood, M. (2008). Learner voices: Reflections on secondary education. In K. Bradford-Watts, T. Muller, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT2007 conference proceedings* (pp. 231-243). Abstract retrieved from <http://jalt-publications.org/archive/proceedings/2007/E136.pdf>
- Fielding, M. (1999). Radical collegiality: Affirming teaching as an inclusive professional practice, *Australian Educational Researcher*, 26(2), 1-34.
- Fielding, M. (2004a). Transformation approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(2), 295-311.
- Fielding, M. (2004b). “New wave” student voice and the renewal of civic society. *London Review of Education*, 3, 197–217.

- Fielding, M. (2011). Patterns of partnership: Student voice, intergenerational learning and democratic fellowship. In N. Mockler, & J. Sachs (Eds.), *Rethinking educational practice through reflexive inquiry: Essays in honour of Susan Groundwater-Smith* (pp. 61–75). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Fleming, J. (2012). Young people's participation – Where next? *Children & Society. Children & Society*, 27(6), 484-495. DOI:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2012.00442.x.
- Flores, K. L., Matkin, G. S., Burbach, M. E., Quinn, C. E., & Harding, H. (2012). Deficient critical thinking skills among college graduates: Implications for leadership. *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, 44, 212–230.
- Fogal, G. (2012). EFL literature studies: Student feedback on teaching methodology. *Asian EFL Journal*, 12(4). Retrieved from: <https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/PDF/Volume-12-Issue-4-Fogal.pdf>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Aldine.
- Halpern, D. F. (1998). Teaching critical thinking for transfer across domains: Dispositions, skills, structure training, and metacognitive monitoring. *American Psychologist*, 53(4), 449-455.
- Hamalainen, R., Kiili, C., & Smith, B. E. (2016). Orchestrating 21st century learning in higher education: A perspective on student voice. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 48(5), 1106-1118. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12533>
- Hwang, D., & Embi, M. A. (2007). Approaches employed by secondary school teachers to teaching the literature components in English. *Journal Pendidikan*, 22, 1-23.
- Herber, H. L. (1970). *Teaching reading in the content areas*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hwang, D., & Embi, M. (2007). Approaches employed by secondary schools' teachers to teaching the literature component in English. *Jurnal Pendidik dan Pendidikan*, 22, 1-23.
- Kincheloe, J. (2007). Clarifying the purpose of engaging students as researchers. In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (pp. 745–774). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Nair, G. K. S., Setia, R., Ghazali, S. N., Sabapathy, E., Mohamad, R., Ali, M. M. & Hassan, N. S. I. C. (2012). Can literature improve English proficiency: The student's perspective. *Asian Social Science*, 8(12), 21 –27.
- van Laar, E., van Deursen, A. J. A. M., van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & de Haan, J. (2017). The relation between 21st-century skills and digital skills: A systematic literature review. *Computers in human behavior*, 72, 577-588. DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.010
- van Laar, E., van Deursen, A. J. A. M., van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & de Haan, J. (2017). The relation

- between 21st-century skills and digital skills: A systematic literature review. *Computers in human behavior*, 72, 577-588. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.010>
- Lim, B. S. H., & Omar, S. (2007, June). *Approaches adopted in the teaching of poetry for the upper secondary school students in Tawau town area*. Paper presented at The Second Biennial International Conference on Teaching and Learning of English in Asia: Exploring New Frontiers (TELiA2), Langkawi. Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages, Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Mayes, E. (2013). Negotiating the hidden curriculum: Power and affect in negotiated classrooms. *English in Australia*, 48(3), 62-71.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2013). *Malaysia education blueprint 2013-2025: Preschool to post-secondary education*. Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.my/menumedia/media-cetak/penerbitan/dasar/1207-malaysia-education-blueprint-2013-2025/file>.
- Mitra, D. L. (2008). Amplifying student voice. *Educational Leadership*, 66(3), 520-553.
- Murphey, T., Falout, J., Elwood, J., & Hood, M. (2009). Inviting Student Voice. *Asian EFL Journal*. 36. 1-25.
- Othman, N. I., Shah, P. M., Karim, A. A., Yusof, A., Din, R., Ramli, N. A., & Salleh, N.S. (2015). Personalizing learning of English literature: Perceptions and challenges. *Journal of Personalized Learning*, 1(1), 104-112.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Quinn, S., & Owen, S. (2016). Digging deeper: Understanding the power of 'student voice. *Australian Journal of Education*, 60(1), 60-72. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944115626402>
- Ramlan, N. (2015). *Teaching approaches employed by secondary school English teachers when teaching literature component in English*. Paper presented at Prosiding Persidangan Antarabangsa Kelestarian Insan kali ke-2, 1(2), 115-125.
- Rashid, R. A., Vethamani, M. E., & Rahman, S. B. A. (2010). Approaches employed by teachers in teaching literature to less proficient students in form 1 and form 2. *English Language Teaching*, 3(4), 87-99.
- Rudduck, J., & Flutter, J. (2004). *How to improve your school: Giving pupils a voice*. London: Continuum Press.
- Rudduck, J., & Flutter, J. (2007). *Improving learning through consulting pupils*. London: Routledge.
- Sidhu, G. K., Chan, Y. F., & Kaur, S. (2010). Instructional practices in teaching literature: Observations of ESL classrooms in Malaysia. *English Language Teaching*, 3(2), 54.
- Sii, L. @ M. L., & Chen, S. E. (2016). Types of English Literature Teaching Approaches Preferred by Teachers in Secondary Schools in Miri, Sarawak. *International Journal of Language Education and Applied Linguistics (IJLEAL)*, 4, 1-14.
- Sinclair, R. (2004). Participation in practice: Making it meaningful, effective and sustainable. *Children & Society*, 2, 106-118
- Suthagar, N. (2006). *Literature in Malaysian Secondary Schools: A Post Instructional*

Analysis of Student Perspectives. Paper presented at the International Language Learning Conference organised by USM, Penang.

Towndrow, P., & Kwek, D. (2017). The teaching of literature in a Singapore secondary school:

disciplinarity, curriculum coverage, and the opportunity costs involved. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 37(3). DOI: 10.1080/02188791.2017.1302923.

Tsui, L. (2002). Fostering critical thinking through effective pedagogy: Evidence from four institutional case studies. *Journal of Higher Education*, 73, 740-763.

Vacca, J. L., Vacca, R. T., Gove, M. K., Burkey, L. C., Lenhart, L. A., & McKeon, C. A. (2009). *Reading and learning to read* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Voogt, V., & Roblin, N. P. (2012) A comparative analysis of international frameworks for 21st

century competences: Implications for national curriculum policies. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 44(3), 299-321, DOI: 10.1080/00220272.2012.668938

Wreikat, Y.A., Kabilan, M., & Abdullah, A. (2014). The rural learning environment and pupils'

learning of the English language. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 22. 35-56.

Willingham, D. T. (2007). Critical thinking: Why is it so hard to teach? *American Educator*, 8-19. Retrieved from: www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Crit_Thinking.pdf

APPENDIX A

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Year in Form Five: 20__

Name of school (Form 5) _____ in _____ (district)
in _____ (state).

1. What was the title of the story you read in your English literature class when you were in Form 5?

2. Did you have the book when you did the story at school? Circle one answer, and if *other*, please state what it is.

Yes/No/Other: _____

3. Put a tick in the correct box/boxes. You may tick more than one.

I finished reading the story.....()

I read the synopsis only.....()

I read the notes in a reference book to understand the story.....()

Other _____

4. List a few ways, the methods your teacher used in teaching the novel.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

5. Out of the five ways listed in Question 4, which two methods were always used in class?

- i. _____
- ii. _____

6. Did your teacher, the one who taught literature, encourage you to read the story?

Yes/No/Other: _____

Author Information

Jocelyn Yee Vun Lee, PhD, is a senior lecturer in Academy of Language Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Her research interests centre on ELL reading, vocabulary and academic reading, critical thinking, practitioner action research, and professional development. Her publications have appeared in Hashim and Barnard (Eds., 2017), *Research Practices in Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia* and Barnard and Ryan (Eds., 2017), *Reflective Practice: Voices from the Field*.

Alice Su Chu Wong, PhD, is a senior lecturer in Academy of Language Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Her research focuses on the interrelations between second language (L2) writing strategies, L2 proficiency and writing performance of ESL learners. She is currently working on a few studies pertaining to the relationship between predictors of second language writing, reading behaviour of university students and the effects of productive vocabulary size on students' writing performance.

