

**STUDENTS' PREFERENCES IN LEARNING LITERATURE
COMPONENT OF THE MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL
ENGLISH LANGUAGE SYLLABUS**

Huzaina Abdul Halim
University of Malaya

Kertas ini membincangkan beberapa aspek minat pelajar dalam mempelajari pengajamn kesusasteraan Inggeris sebagai sebahagian dari komponen sukatan mata pelajaran Baliasa Inggeris di Malaysia. Tumpuan diberikan kepada minat pelajar terhadap aktiviti-aktiviti yang dijalankan, jenis genre dan perbezaan topik sesuatu genre berdasarkan isu yang diketengahkan oleh penulis. Pemerhatian dilakukan ke atas tiga kelas yang mengenengahkan sepuluh jenis aktiviti yang berbeza. Maklumbalas dari pelajar diperolehi daripada jawapan mereka di dalam borang soalselidik yang diedarkan selepas ketiga-tiga pengajaran dan pembelajaran tersebut tamat. Hasil kajian menunjukkan pelajar cenderung untuk meminati sesetengah jenis genre, topik dan aktiviti berbanding dengan yang lain. Dengan mengetahui kecenderungan minat pelajar, adalah diharapkan pihak guru lebih kreatif dalam mempelbagaikan aktiviti ketika mengajar komponen ini. Kepelbagaian aktiviti dapat menarik minat pelajar serta menjanakan pengalaman untuk dikongsi bersama antara guru dan pelajar.

The aim of the Literature Component in the English Language Syllabus, which was introduced in 2000, is to enhance students' proficiency in the English Language through the study of a set of prescribed literary texts, contribute to personal development and character building, and broaden students' outlook through reading about other cultures and world views. The Ministry of Education hopes that the students' personal development and self-enrichment will be enhanced through literature (Ministry of Education, 2000).

By the end of the secondary school English Language program, students should be able to achieve several objectives, among them: giving a personal response to the text; showing an awareness of how language is used to achieve a particular purpose; reflecting upon and drawing valuable moral lessons from the issues and concerns of life as portrayed in the literary works and relating them to their lives; and, understanding as well as appreciating other cultures.

This article focuses on the students' preferences in learning literature which is the component of the Malaysian Secondary School English Language syllabus. A better understanding of the students' preferences can help teachers in creating interesting activities which can motivate students to learn English in a more meaningful way. The genre, poem, is used in this study due to the difficulties often faced by the students when dealing with poems. Knowing what type of poems they prefer, and what factors contribute to their preferences, will enable teachers to be more alert to the students' needs in understanding poetry.

As reading literature is a very personal experience, different readers may have

different responses to a writer's work. The response towards literature can also be influenced by our social background or experiences in life. The more we know about life and the world around us, the richer our response to literature will be. Being aware of this, students should be encouraged to learn literature through various interesting activities which can reduce the alienation towards this subject. Willing (1987) identified how differences in cognitive learning styles affected learners' preferences in six different areas. One of those areas is the preferences for particular kinds of classroom activities.

For effective learning and teaching, both learner skills and learner assumptions should be given due attention. Although many teachers acknowledge the need to understand the ways in which learners differ in terms of needs and preferences, they may not consult learners in conducting language activities. According to Bada and Okan (2000), the basis for such reluctance to cooperate may be that learners are not generally regarded as capable of expressing what they want or need to learn and how they want to learn it. Many ESL teachers experience student resistance when they introduce an instructional activity in the classroom. Some students want more opportunities to participate in free conversation, expressing their wish towards a more communicatively oriented approach. Therefore, the teacher, in making decisions regarding type of activities to conduct, should take into account learner diversity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language. The province of literature is the human condition with all its feelings, thoughts and insights. Leaves, cited in Widdowson (1975), defines the study of literature as the essential discipline of an English school, and a true discipline, because "it trains in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensibility together, cultivating sensitiveness and precision of response." Widdowson further defines literature as a subject which has the principal aim of developing the capacity for individual response to language use.

In terms of the language, literary texts offer genuine samples of a very wide range of styles, registers, and texts-types at many levels of difficulty. The fact that literary texts are, by their very essence, open to multiple interpretation means readers' understanding of, or reaction to a given text, may differ. This opinion gap between one individual's interpretation and another's can be bridged by interaction. Literary texts are non-trivial in the sense that they deal with matters which concerned the writer enough to make him or her write about them. In this way they are unlike many other forms of language teaching •input which frequently trivialize experience in the service of pedagogy.

This 'genuine feel' generated by literary texts is a powerful motivator, especially when allied to the themes of the literary texts to which learners can bring powerful response from their own experience (Brumfit & Carter, 1989). Brumfit and Carter suggest that literature teaching must direct the students to the service of the community. Besides, it must generally develop the inquiring mind and the ability to learn from others, and build confidence. In other words, it must develop specifically the skill of criticism.

According to Hess (2003), entering a literary text, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation almost no other text can produce. When we read, understand, and interpret a poem we learn language through the expansion of

our experience with a larger human reality. Through a poem, we can grapple with the problems of a parallel life. The formula adopted in dealing with a poem includes trigger, vocabulary preview, listen-react-share, language, picture, more language, meaning and spin-off.

If students are highly motivated and if they find what they are learning is of great interest and relevance to them, they can learn better (Collie & Slater, 1987). Not only is their past literary knowledge helpful but, as adults, their life experiences can facilitate understanding. The Ministry of Education has taken the right step by introducing literature in the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) syllabus. This is to encourage the reading habit and enhance English competency among the youth. All English Language teachers should carry out the 'serious business' of checking the decline of English proficiency among Malaysians students. A Language and Literature Seminar with the theme "Enhancing The Teaching of English Through Literature" was held on the 8th and 9th September, 2000 at De RiuTle^ortXuaritrlil Pahangto help teacherslvMlre'ioTMni; fonrrMe1Srrfg"wayirtcr incorporate literature into English classes.

Soraya (1994) claims that the reader-response approach can provide interesting and meaningful ways of teaching literature in a second language. She illustrates its use in teaching a short story in an English reading class for engineering students in Malaysia. It is proven that the right approach is the key to having a successful teaching and learning process, which can be meaningful for both students and educators.

Van de Berg (1990) emphasizes the value of literary reading passages as the basis for second language learning. These passages can serve as a springboard for the enthusiastic exchange of ideas in which learners focus on meaning rather than form, use the target language to argue or justify opinions, or, while playing the role of a character or engaging in a conversation.

English language teaching has seen many changes in the past twenty years and there is now far less uniformity in course content, methods of teaching and examining. Students of English Literature are becoming increasingly discriminating in their choice of learning and are selective in accepting the materials provided to them. Adept at accessing information from the Internet, they are quick to reject courses that seem unappealing to them. Amigoni and Sanders (2004) quote that the conclusion to why study English Literature reflects the intellectual diversity constantly stressed and suggests that literary studies develop an ability to think ethically: English literature... is one of the best means of accessing and beginning to understand the rich fabric of our lives.

Therefore, besides explaining the literary devices and terms, it is important for the teachers to carry out activities that will not only enhance the understanding of the texts, but also promote interest towards learning literature in general. In this way, students can be prompted to relate literature to life in order to understand the human experience and to solve problems in their daily routine.

Using Literary Text in L2 Classrooms

Barnett (1991) focuses on the importance of integrating the study of language and literature in the foreign language classroom. It is suggested that the strength of the foreign language experience depends on the interconnectedness of literature, culture and language.

One of the genres is poetry. Poetry can be used to provide a welcome change in tempo and routine without losing focus on language practice. According to Francis (2004), poetry is often described as the most intense form of literary expression because of its condensed syntax, its appreciation of the rhythm of language and its use of selective vocabulary.

Activities that can be used in conjunction with poetry itself may include active listening tasks, communicative activities, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, dictation, and memorization activities. Focus is always on language practice and enjoyment, and one must not underestimate the opportunities poetry provides for unlimited language learning and exploration. The teacher's creativity is the only limitation.

Hardfield and Hardneld (1990) state that student writers were excited when given opportunity to practise writing the language in a fun way. Their imaginations were stimulated by writing the poems and the poem models gave them the support of a linguistic pattern. The students said that they had never thought they could write a poem or a short story, but they succeeded in all the tasks.

Akyel (1995) explores the effectiveness of applying stylistic analysis of poetry to the design of language activities for use in English classes. Teachers must have in mind that the students will surely have the chance of working with the literary text, changing it, adding or removing elements. Teachers can also determine and teach aspects of cultural appreciation through foreign language literature and evaluate whether the culture depicted is authentic or a deformation.

Nielsen (2004) focuses on the opportunities for using poetry as a basis for language practice. She provides simple poems and ideas on how they can be used as a basis for activities focusing on listening, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar practice. Teachers should realize that the possibilities for poetry-related classroom activities are numerous. Most of the activities teachers normally do with prose texts can easily be done with poetry. In selecting the texts, teachers should consider the students' level. Texts are available not only for intermediate or advanced learners, but for beginners as well. Lazar (1994) discusses how literary texts can be used with elementary and lower intermediate language students. The types of tasks and activities are aimed at helping teachers overcome the difficulties of using literature at this level but also to extend the students' grammatical and lexical knowledge. Each student may derive different messages from reading a particular literary text, and this will generate discussions in the classroom.

Literature, therefore, can help in the process of language learning, as there will be attempts to produce words and expression which are relevant and significant to the context in the stories. Since the role of the literature component in the educational vision is to produce cultured and informed citizens, it is also envisaged that the component will encourage open-mindedness. In other words, the aim is to produce thinking students who will learn to form their own opinions.

OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is aimed at investigating the students' attitudes towards learning literature and determining the types of activities they prefer. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the activities preferred by the students in learning literature?
- (2) Is there any preference by the students for a particular type of genre?
- (3) Is there any preference towards the different poems learnt?

METHODOLOGY Sample

The survey was done on a group of 44 Form One students with intermediate level of English proficiency, comprising student with, average performance in most of the subjects learnt. There were 12 classes for Form One in this school and this group was in the rank of the third class from the best. The samples were selected from a school located in a suburban area in Gombak District, Selangor. The students' enrolment for 2005 was 3216, with the three main races almost equally represented in the population.

Data Collection Techniques

Three poems were taught in three different lessons. Each lesson took about 80 minutes. During the lessons, ten different activities had been carried out to see the students' reactions toward the literature class. The activities were: identifying events based on pictures given, describing the poet's feeling based on the pictures given, paraphrasing each line of the poem, writing a summary of the poem, matching words found in the poem with the meanings listed, answering comprehension questions, writing a short description under each picture to explain the message of the poem, drawing a mind map, making decisions and giving reasons for the choices made. The students were also asked to give their suggestions pertaining to the issues or conflict raised in the text.

Lesson 1

The poem selected for Lesson 1 was 'Life's Brief Candle', by William Shakespeare. In the set induction stage, the teacher brought a lighted candle to the classroom and asked students to describe what they saw and tried to associate the candle with life. As stated in line 7 of the poem.. "Out, out, brief candle" and in the last line, "Signifying nothing", compared life to a candle flame that burnt only for a short time before it was extinguished. It implied that man had a short moment of fame and glory before he was heard no more.

In the first stage, the students listened to the teacher's recitation. Then a volunteer read the poem again while the others listened and tried to understand the message conveyed through the text. Students then worked in pairs to match words in the poem with the list of meanings given. This activity enabled the average students to get a clearer picture of the poem.

The students were also given ten comprehension questions from different levels of thought processes to test their understanding and a discussion session was carried out

in stage 3 of the lesson to elicit their answers and views. For closure, the students were asked to write a short description under each picture given to depict what life is compared to in the poem.

Lesson 2

The poem taught in Lesson 2 was 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', by William Butler Yeats. Innisfree was a symbol of the idyllic world of nature or a paradise on earth. The poet had attained inner peace when he could enjoy his own company and lived alone with nature as his only constant companion. For the set induction, the students were asked to describe the place they wished to live in. They were picked at random to give their views.

After reading silently in stage 1, students worked in pairs to identify activities connected to Innisfree based on the pictures given. Students then compared their answers among themselves before discussing with the teacher.

In stage 2, students worked in groups of four to sum up what the poet was saying in each stanza. By knowing the literal meaning of the words, the students would be able to understand the first level of meaning. They were required to use simple English based on their own interpretation. A member of each group then read what the group had written. An exemplification of the task carried out was as follows:

Stanza 1:1 will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree

And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made: Nine bean-rows
will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee, And live alone in the bee-loud
glade.

The poet wants to live alone in Innisfree with sounds and sights of nature around him.

In Stage 3 of the lesson, students were given pictures again. They were to work in pairs to describe the poet's feelings under each picture. After the class discussion, each student was asked to write a summary of what the poet was saying in the poem as the closure to the lesson.

Lesson 3

The poem taught in Lesson 3 was 'The Dead Crow', by A. Samad Said. In this poem, the poet was deeply concerned about the effects of pollution on the future generation. He was appalled with the disappearance of clean air, natural forests and free flowing river. He held the politician accountable for planning a cleaner and more decent environment for the next generation. For the set induction, the teacher showed a picture of a dead crow and asked the students to predict why the incident happened.

In stage 1, students worked in groups of six to produce a mind map based on the poem given:

He saw a dead crow
in the drain
near the post office.
He saw an old man
gasping for air
and a baby
barely able to breathe
in a crowded morning clinic.
This land is so rich.
Why should we suffer like this?

I want clean air
for my children
I want the daffodils⁷⁷-
to leave the forest alone.
I want the trees to grow,
the rivers run free,
and the earth covered with grass.

Let the politician plan
how we may live with dignity,
now and always.

They were to draw the mind map on the 'mahjong' paper and select a representative to present their group work to the class.

In stage 2, the students worked in pairs and named the environmental problems around them based on the pictures. They then compared the answers with their peers.

In stage 3, students were given a list of proposed plans. They had to decide whether or not to carry out the plans and give reasons for their decisions. As a closure, students were asked to write individually on how to improve the environment.

The Questionnaire

After the three lessons had been carried out, students were each given a questionnaire eliciting their opinions towards literature, especially poetry. The questionnaire was divided into 2 sections, namely:

Section A - Students' feedback towards learning the Literature component, the genre and the poem they preferred based on their understanding of the text.

Section B - Students' preferences towards different activities carried out with the rank 1-10, with 1 for the best.

The questionnaires were self-administered and given out in the class. The responses were analyzed using frequency count and percentage.

RESULTS

The results of the study can be discussed under three main areas: the students' preferred literature lesson activities; their preferred genre; and their preferred poem among the three different poems.

Literature Lesson Activities Preferred by the Students

The activities preferred by the students can be explained by using a scale from 1 to 10 to show the degree of their preferences (refer to Table 1).

Table 1
The Students' Preferences Based on the List of Activities Performed During the Lessons

Activity	Number of students preferring the activity [7V=44]									
	Like									Dislike
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
a. Identifying events based on given	5	11	5	4	7	2	3	2	2	3
b. Describing the poet's feeling based on the pictures	3	5	4	8	2	3	7	5	4	3
c. Paraphrasing each line of	1	2	3	1	4	3	9	4	8	9
d. Writing a summary out of	1	0	6	1	0	7	4	8	11	6
e. Matching words found in with the meanings listed	3	3	5	10	8	2	4	6	3	0
f. Answering comprehension	9	7	2	2	6	7	0	4	3	4
g. Writing a short description each picture to explain the of the poem	3	3	2	7	9	10	4	2	2	2
h. Drawing a mind map	9	7	4	6	4	1	3	1	5	4
i. Making decisions and sons for the choices made	5	2	7	2	2	6	7	6	4	3
j. Writing suggestions	5	4	6	3	2	3	3	6	2	10

The activities the students preferred the most were activity f (answering comprehension questions) and activity h (drawing a mind map), with 9 (20%) students preferring each activity. Student disliked activity j (writing suggestions) the most. This was chosen by 10 (22.7%) of the subject population.

In the first stage of Lesson 3, students were asked to draw a mind map based on the poem 'The Dead Crow'. One of the groups of students produced the diagram as shown in Figure 1.

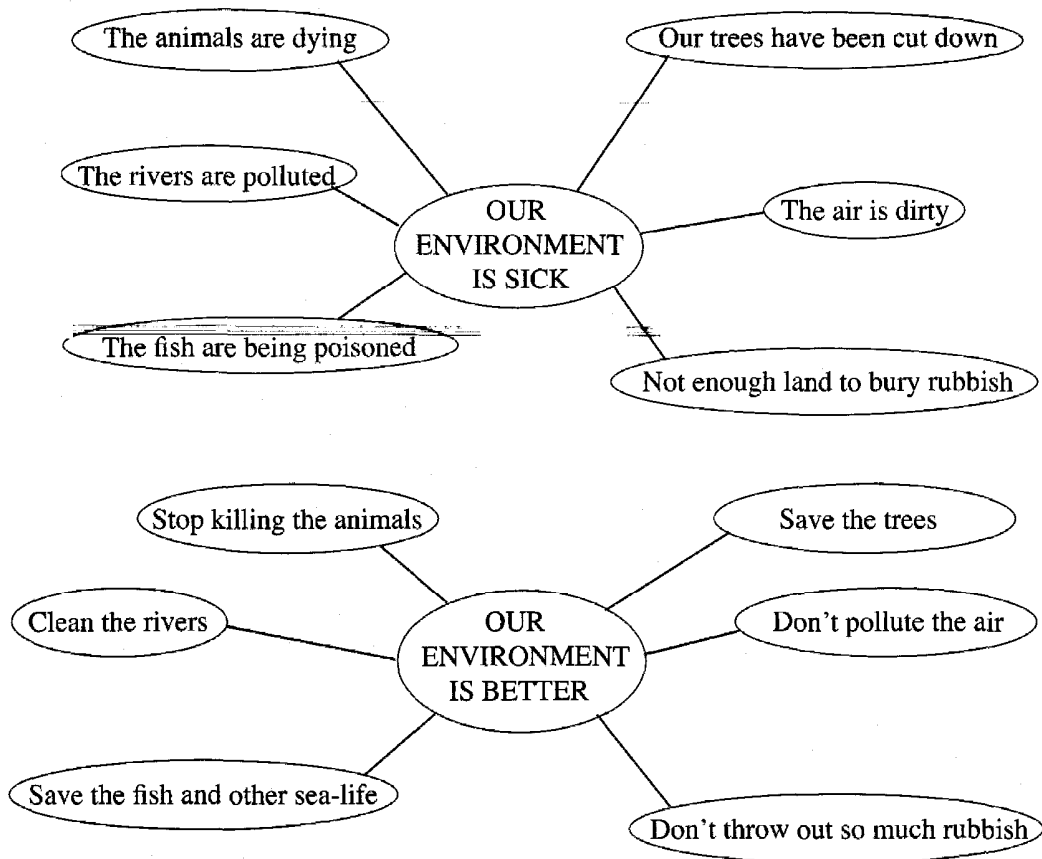


Figure 1. The Mind Map produced by a group of students based on 'The Dead Crow'

Students gave several reasons for liking the activities. According to them, mind mapping was fun because they argued a lot and they had the chance to draw. They also felt free to express their ideas on paper rather than giving opinions there and then. Students also liked comprehension questions because they were used, to them and some felt this portrayed learning more.

Table 2
Students' Feedback Towards Literature

Criteria	Frequency	Percentage I
Like	16	36.4
Dislike	28	63.6

The students' feedback in Table 2 also showed that 16 (36.4%) of them liked literature, while the rest 28 (63.6%) disliked literature. Among reasons given for liking literature were: they liked reading, literature was full of adventure to discover, literature challenged their minds and they felt satisfied when the answers given were similar with their predictions, they could read about other people's experiences in life and learn from them, and the group work in the literature class was fun because they could argue with one another.

For disliking literature, students gave reasons such as: the literary texts were too difficult to understand because the language was not direct, the unfamiliar words were scary, there was too much to read and it was very difficult to predict what was in others' minds.

The Genre Preferred by the Students

The genre preferred by most students was the short story chosen by 24 (55%), followed by the novel chosen by 15 (34%) and poetry chosen by 5 (11%). Students preferred short stories over other genres because they were familiar with the language used. They had been exposed to children's literature since they started reading. Most students disliked poems because they could not understand the message conveyed.

The Poem Preferred by the Students

As for the three poems taught, the students felt that the easiest to understand was 'The Dead Crow'. They were familiar with the situation mentioned in the poem and it was quite easy to understand as the language used was direct. Students found 'Life's Brief Candle' the most difficult because they could not associate the candle much with their life. On the other hand, they found 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' easier although it featured a few unfamiliar words, as it still talked about the surroundings that they could imagine.

It was found that 28 (64%) preferred 'The Dead Crow' by A. Samad Said; 9 (20%) preferred 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' by William Butler Yeats and only 7 (16%) preferred 'Life's Brief Candle' by William Shakespeare.

Mind Mapping as a Tool in Teaching and Learning Literature

Based on the results of the study, most students liked doing mind-mapping in the literature lesson. It is an advantage for the teachers if they have students who love learning literature using mind mapping as shown in the survey. Both teachers and students can have fun during the teaching and learning process and at the same time achieve the main purpose of learning literature.

Mind Mapping is an example of radiant thinking in action. It is the brainchild of Tony Buzan who has spent thirty years doing research on how the brain works. Buzan is also known as 'The Master of the Brain'. He claims that mind-mapping is a direct manifestation of how the brain works when it is being used correctly and to its fullest extent. It can be one of the most powerful creativity tools devised for learning, memorizing, generating ideas, note-taking and note-making. The Mind Map has four essential characteristics:

- (a) The subject of attention is crystallized in a central image
 - (b) The main themes of the subject radiate from the central image on branches
 - (c) Branches hold a key image/word printed on the associated line - details radiate out
 - (d) The branches form a connected nodal structure
- (Source: The Mind Map Book, Tony Buzan)

There are several steps in making a mind map. Table 2 explains the details.

Table 2
How to make a Mind Map

Instructions	Rationale
1. Take a blank piece of paper, A4 or larger.	Blank paper allows 360 degree freedom to express the full range of your cortical skills, whereas pre-drawn lines restrict the natural flow of your thoughts.
2. Use the paper in landscape orientation.	Words and images have more space in the direction we write, so they don't bump into margins as quickly.
3. Start in the center.	Thoughts start in the center of our mental world,
4. Make a central image that represents the topic about which you are writing/thinking. Use at least three colors and keep the height and width of the central image to approximately 2cm or 5cm. Allow the image to create its own shape.	A picture is worth a thousand words. It opens up associations and focuses the thoughts. Colors stimulate the right cortical activity of imagination as well as capturing and holding attention. This size gives plenty of space for the rest of the Mind Map. The unique shape makes it more memorable and enjoyable.
5. The main themes around the central image are like the chapter headings of a book. Print this word in capitals or draw an image. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - place on a line of the same length. - the central lines are thick, curved and organic i.e. like your arm joining your body, or the branch of a tree or a trunk - connect directly to the central image. 	The main themes, connected to the central image on the main branches, allow their relative importance to be seen. These are the Basic Ordering Ideas (BOIs) and aggregate and focus the rest of the mind map. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Printing allows the brain to photograph the image thus allowing easier reading and more immediate recall. - Word length equals line length. Excess length disconnects thoughts; equal length accentuates the connection. - Curved lines give visual rhythm and variety, are easier to remember, more pleasant to draw and less boring. - Thicker central lines show relative importance.

According to Cheah (2001), learning literature can be fun by using the diverse applications of 'Mind Mapping' and 'Brain Gym'. Combined, they provide a hands-on experience for our students who would be exposed to the concept of whole brain learning. Mind mapping is a skill that allows students to access their own intelligence and accelerates it. It helps to revise, reinforce and retain whatever they have learned.

Brain Gym is a series of simple and enjoyable movements used by students in Educational Kinesiology (Edu-K) to enhance their experience of whole brain learning. It can enhance concentration and academic skills and release learning blocks. It supplements mind mapping and uses the movement activities to draw out hidden potential and to make the potential readily available.

Diamond (1999) has conducted a rare effort to link peer-reviewed research findings and concepts from numerous disciplines, including neurophysiology, into an inclusive framework for a scientific understanding of Educational Kinesiology as a method of benefit to educators. This study includes information on the nervous system, reflexes and sensory modalities. If teachers are aware of Brain Gym and Educational Kinesiology, they can assist students in learning faster, adjusting to change, improving well-being and hence, enhancing their performance. Our curriculum developers should look into this matter seriously and conduct more related courses to promote teachers' professional development.

Besides Brain Gym and mind-mapping, other methods can be used to enhance students' understanding of literary texts. Woolfolk (1987) describes thinking in terms of brainstorming, mapping, categorizing, comparing and contrasting and using concepts, asking 5W1H questions (who, what, where, why, when and how), analyzing and formulating, inferring and deducing, using associations (visual or verbal), visualizing (put the things in the head and see them work), diagramming (as chart), verbalizing (give word to thoughts/thinking aloud), and literal thinking (imagine issues or ideas).

Most teachers are comfortable with activities such as comprehension questions because they are familiar with them. This activity is carried out not only in Literature and English Language, but also in other subjects. If teachers ask students divergent questions, this activity can enhance students' critical and creative thinking. Each question can remind students that they are engaging in some thinking strategies. According to Guilford (1956), Gallegher and Aschner (1963) and Wilen (1985), critical thinking may be taught in terms of convergent (as knowledge, comprehension, and application) and divergent (as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) questioning. Teachers should build their questions based on the level of thought processes as derived from Bloom's Taxonomy. There are other taxonomies teachers can use as guidelines in building good questions which can encourage students to think.

CONCLUSION

The English language arts need to be seen as having a critical role in the intellectual development of school children, as being the primary (though not exclusive) part of schooling where the processes of literary understanding are taught and developed. Thus, the goals, interactions, and lesson structures in English classes need to emphasize tapping initial interpretations, exploring possibilities, developing and reshaping of interpretations. We need to rethink the contribution of literature instruction to the overall curriculum and that various ways of understanding literature may in turn influence students' abilities to understand and solve problems in other coursework.

Literary texts need to be used in a literary manner, in ways that invite students into the lives, times, emotions and situations depicted in the works they read. The

processes of literary understanding need to be treated as a viable way to approach and think through course material on a daily basis, as a way to facilitate new learning and enhance already acquired understandings. This notion underlies a pedagogical framework for curriculum and instruction that focuses on the purposes to which different approaches toward thinking are applied than on a hierarchy of the thinking skills itself. The kinds of questions students are asked will need to differ when reading, writing or discussing primarily for literary or primarily for informative purposes, focusing on the possibilities students need to consider on the one hand and on the content they come away with on the other. Thus, shifts are needed in the pre-arranged lesson plans, assignments, materials, questions, and evaluations that shape each course.

This study has shown that our learners have several preferences in learning the literature component of the syllabus. Their preferences can guide teachers in promoting interest in learning English language through the literary text. As Malaysia is a multicultural country, teachers should relate to the learning of their own culture as well as others' culture. Reading literature is an inexpensive and easy way to learn about traditions and values of different cultures. In addition, it expresses the most important ideas and feelings of all human beings. Culler (1975) offers insights into theories about the nature of language and meaning, whether literature is a form of self-expression or a method of appeal to an audience, and outlines ideas behind a number of different schools, among them deconstruction, semiotics, postcolonial theory, and structuralism. Teachers should make students aware of the reasons for learning literature; learning is not only for examination purposes but also for appreciating the language.

Literature puts one in touch with the more imaginative, different and creative use of the language. Devices such as images and symbols enrich the language experience; students will experience personal growth and will have better understanding of others. Learning literature can enable them to understand and appreciate the universal values, and thus appreciate life better.

Although Malaysian students are new to literature, they can be encouraged to better equip themselves with a more thorough grounding in literature appreciation. Teachers must realize that given an environment where English language input is limited and non-conducive to learning the target language, they need to find creative ways to increase the students' motivation to learn the language and eventually appreciate the language. Though they must create a healthy balance between preparing students for the standardized examinations and for lifelong language skills, teachers must dare to teach and dare to learn. Teaching and learning will then become a truly enjoyable experience when there is excitement in the classroom.

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