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30 June - 2 July, 2011

individual focus international vision

Malaysia Ministry of Education's Selection of Poems for the Form Four and Form Five New Literature Component

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Abstract

The introduction of English as a second language has been eleven years down the road in Malaysia. This study attempts to investigate the level of acceptability or suitability of the new set of poems for the Form Four and Form Five literature component in order to know the effectiveness of these selected poems. Pertinent issues like factors that affect students' comprehension and suitable activities to aid the learning of the poems are also being highlighted in this paper. The findings of this study are contributed by 360 of Form Four students who are currently studying the new selected poems. The overall findings show that the Ministry of Education's selection of poems in suitable for the new Form Four and Form Five literature component and although students face a few difficulties in comprehending the poems, there are suitable activities in the classroom as a solution to these problems.

Keywords: literature component, poem, Malaysia, Form Four and Form Five

Introduction

For a few years, the plunged in the English language proficiency has been the concern for many Malaysians. The ways to improve the standards of English has long been debated and making English as a must-pass subject too, has met with a dead end (Teo, 2009). One of the workable ways is the introduction of literature to the English language syllabus where the aims coincide with the Personal Growth Model suggested by Carter and Long that is to engage students with pleasurable reading (Talif & Mukundan, 1994). The stimulus from the pleasurable reading will realize the aim of the English Language syllabus that is to enable secondary school students to "listen to, view, read and respond to different texts and express ideas, opinions, thoughts and feelings imaginatively and creatively in spoken and written form" (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Literature Component in English Language

The effort to keep up the standard of English has been on the move since 1979 with the introduction of the ELRP (Pandian, 2002). Under this programme, students are offered a number of literary works to read to instill good reading habits aside from enhancing the proficiency of the Malaysian students but this programme met with its own fate since only one third of the schools in Malaysia chose to participate in this programme (Raj & Hunt, 1990).

After the demised of ELRP, CRP was being implemented and the participation of all the schools was being made compulsory (Mukundan, 1998). The programme was being implemented in 1990 with one out of five lessons of English being allocated for CRP (Raj & Hunt, 1990). The selected books were mainly written by foreign authors with cultures being the obstacles for the students as well as the teachers to understand literature and its problems that were not acknowledged back then put CRP in the same fate as ELRP (Mukundan, 1998).

The literature component was being implemented in 2000 to acquaint the secondary school students with good works of literature with the selection of a few genres of literature like poetry, short stories, drama and novel to ensure learners "enjoy literary texts as a level suited at their proficiency" (Ministry of Education, 2003). However, the old literature component is being replaced by the new literature component to ensure that each objective and learning outcome is met by the end of the year. The following table provides an illustration on the work of literatures from the old literature component to the new literature component.

Table 1 lists out the selected texts in the old literature component. Students were introduced to three genres namely poetry, short stories and novel in this old literature component. The selected texts were contributed by both local and foreign poets and authors.

Table 1

The selected texts from the Form One to Form Five for the literature component

Old Literature Component (2000-2009)		New literature component (2010-)	Authors or Poets
Selected Texts	Authors or Poets		
Form One		Form One to Form Three	

Short stories:	Authors:	Short stories:	Authors:
1)The Pencil	Ali Majod	1) Flipping Fantastic	Jane Langford
2) How Dalat Got Its Name	Heidi Munan	2)One Is One and All Alone	Nicholas Frisk
3) Of Bunga Telur and Bally Shoes	Che Husna Azhari		
		Poem:	Poets:
Poem:	Poets:	1) I Wonder	Jeannie Kirby
1)Life's Brief Candle	William Shakespeare	2) The River	Valerie Bloom
2) The Dead Crow	A. Samad Said	3) Mr. Nobody	Author Unknown
		4) Heir Conditioning	M SHANmughaligham
The Lake Isle of Innisfree	William Butler Yeats	5) A Fighter's Line	Marzuki Ali
		6) Leisure	William Henry Davies

Form Two

Novels (Chosen according to states):	Authors:	Drama:	Retold by:
1)Potato People	Angela Wright	1)Rumpelstiltskin	Angela Lanyon
2)Robinson Crusoe	Daniel Defoe		
3)Phantom of The Opera	Gasion Leroux		

Form Four to Form Five

Form Three

Novels (Chosen according to states):	Authors:	Short Stories:	Authors:
	Anthony Hope	1)QWERTYUIOP	Vivien Alcock
1)The Prisoner of Zenda	Hawkins	2)The Fruitcake Special	Frank Brennan
2)Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde	R.L. Stevenson		
		Poems:	Poets:
		1)In The Midst of Hardship	Latiff Mohidinn

Form Four

		2)He Had Such Quiet Eyes	Bibsy Soenharjo
Short Stories:	Authors:	3)Nature	H.D. Carberry
1)The Lotus Eater	Somerset Maugham	4)Are You Still Playing Your Flute	Zurinah Hassan
2)The Necklace	Guy de Maupassant		
3)The Drover's Wife	Henry Lawson	Drama:	Play Writer:
4)The Sound Machine	Roald Dahl	1)Gulp and Gasp	John Townsend
5)Looking For A Rain God	Bessie Head		

Poems:	Poets:
1)If	Rudyard Kipling
2)Sonnet 18	William Shakespeare
3)Si-Tenggang's Homecoming	Muhammad Haji Salleh

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4)Monsoon History	Shirley Lim
5)The Road Not Taken	Robert Frost
6)There's Been a Death in The Opposite House	Emily Dickinson

Form Five

Novel (Chosen according to states):	Novelists:
1)Jungle of Hope	Keris Mas
2)The Return	K.S. Maniam
3)The Pearl	John Steinbeck

Compared to the old literature component, students are being introduced to drama and they are not required to study any novel in this new literature component. The texts are also contributed by both local and foreign poets and authors but students are offered lesser texts to read in this literature component.

It is hoped with the introduction of the new literature component, the learning outcomes specified for Language Use for Aesthetic Purposes can be effectively met. In the long run, students should be able to "listen, read, view and respond to literary works" especially poems which are condensed with figurative language by understanding and retelling the subject of the poem in their own words and give their opinion on the text. Throughout the year, students should be able to recognize elements in a poem and explain the meaning conveyed (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Students should also be able to connect the author's experiences to their own experience because literature especially poetry is the only discipline that allows students to tap into their sensitive core, connect their vivid experiences and emotions to the literary work (Widdowson, 1975). Most poems stimulate students to feel the intensity of the lines written by some poets and this enables students to "express themselves creatively and imaginatively" by leaving them ample amount of freedom to "dramatize a poem", retelling the subject of the poem "from a different point of view" and some poems are even powerful enough to inspire students to write my making them aware of their own emotions (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Thus, we find ourselves reciting or interpreting a few lines differently from our peers because of the complexity of emotions that the past memories, knowledge of the world and our present needs have shaped us to feel. This enables us to experience the aesthetic value of the poem as Rosenblatt (1986) notes that "someone else can read a texts efferently for us, and acceptably paraphrase, but no one else can read aesthetically— that is experience the evocation of— a literary work of art for us".

Despite the introduction of poems by some famous poets such as William Shakespeare, Rudyard Kipling and Emily Dickinson, the proficiency level continue to fall compared to the good old days when the country is under British colonization. Most students continue to fear literature especially the poetry genre because they cannot get the gist out of the whole poem due to the lack of literary background (Chitravelu, Sithamparam & The, 2005). Teaching too becomes difficult when teachers fail to apply an approach to increase the participation of the students in the classroom and ergo, they are unable to stay interested (Huzaina, A.H., 2006).

Besides that, there are reference books in the market to aid students in mastering the themes and messages conveyed, ergo, students do not need to study the texts properly to pass an examination (Narasuman, 2007). This deceives the objectives of the Ministry of Education

in introducing literature component to students to encourage the reading habit and to inculcate the love for books. There could also be the possibilities that students rely too much on their tutors to paraphrase and decipher the meaning for them and their sole effort in securing a pass in the English paper is to do more exercises on the revision books and the past years questions (Narasuman, 2007).

Studying and memorizing for the sake of a pass in an examination does not give studenst the fulfillment and thus the weaknesses and strengths of the new literature component should be studied in order to ensure the effectiveness of the selection of texts for the Malaysian students.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research is to discover the level of acceptability or suitability towards the new set of poems in the Form Four and Form Five new literature component. Since most students find it difficult to understand poetry, this study also aims to identify the problems and factors that pose as an obstacle to readers' comprehension of poetry. Last but not least, in terms of pedagogy of effective learning, this paper determines to find out the strategies that teachers and students can use to aid comprehension.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed by this paper are:
1) What is the level of acceptability or suitability of the new selection of poems by the Ministry of Education for the Form Four and Form Five students?
2) What are the problems and factors affecting the students' reading comprehension and interpretation of poetry?
3) What are the strategies that can be used by teachers and students to aid comprehension?

Methodology

Quantitative research is being used in this study to generalize 40 students' view on the selection of poems listed in the new literature component. This data will serve as a numeric description on the effectiveness of the selection of poems by the Ministry of Education for the new Form Four and Form Five literature component. The result of this study will not change the choice of poems provided by the Ministry of Education overnight but it can at least help educationists to further understand the difficulties faced by our Malaysian students in reading and understanding poems and thus teachers will be able to select the appropriate methods to deliver their knowledge.

The research instrument used in this study is the questionnaire. The questionnaire has a list of 37 questions excluding the demographic data. This series of questions will enable the researcher to find out the level of acceptability and suitability of the new literature component in the poetry genre, the factors affecting their comprehension of poems and the effective strategies used by their teachers in helping them to comprehend poetry texts.

This research is carried out in five selected schools in Petaling Jaya since there is the urban area where first implements this teaching following the track given. The data collected

will be analyzed and organized using a computer programme known as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The mean and frequencies derived from all the data will be used as a descriptive analysis to explain the effectiveness of the Ministry of Education's selection o poems in the new literature component.

Respondents' Demographic Data

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the demographic particulars of the respondents.
Table 2
Demographic data of the respondents

No	Items		Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	180	50.0
		Female	180	50.0
2	Ethnicity	Malay	50	13.9
		Chinese	250	69.4
		Indian	60	16.7
3	Family Income	RM1000 - RM1999	20	5.6
		RM2000 - RM2999	140	38.9
		RM3000 - RM3999	50	13.9
		RM4000 and above	150	41.7
4	English Result	A	270	75.0
		B	90	25.0
5	PMR Results	1A	30	8.3
		2As	40	11.1
		3As	80	22.2
		4As	60	16.7
		5As	60	16.7
		6As	40	11.1
		7As	40	11.1
		8As	10	2.8

There are a total of 180 male students (50%) and 180 female students (50%) that took part in this survey. Although the number of male and female respondents taking part in this survey is equal, most of them are Chinese and the least are the Malays. A total of 250 Chinese students (69.4%) participated in this study, followed by the Indians being the second highest with a total number of 60 students (16.7%) and the Malays being the least with a total number of 50 students (13.9%). From the data collected, all the respondents are from families that earned at least RM1000 per month with 150 respondents (41.7%) from families earning more than RM4000 a month. The number of A scorers topples the number of B scorers by 180

people (50.0%) for the English paper. Meanwhile for the PMR results in general, there are a high number of 80 students (22.2%) who scored 3As in their PMR.

Research Question 1: What is the level of acceptability or suitability of the new selection of poems by the Ministry of Education for the Form 4 and Form 5 students?

Table 3

Students' interest on the new selected poems by the Ministry of Education

Items	Gender	Frequency (%)			Mean	S.D.
		SD or D	U	A or SA		
1 Poems are interesting	M	20	60	100	3.56	0.86
		(11.1)	(33.3)	(55.5)		
	F	40	50	90	3.22	0.94
		(22.3)	(27.8)	(50.0)		
2 Certain lines speak out my thoughts	M	50	40	90	3.28	1.13
		(27.8)	(22.2)	(50.0)		
	F	50	40	90	3.22	1.22
		(27.8)	(22.2)	(50.0)		
3 Enjoy reading poems by certain poets	M	40	40	100	3.44	0.98
		(22.2)	(22.2)	(44.4)		
	F	30	60	90	3.33	0.97
		(16.7)	(33.3)	(45.0)		
4 Enjoy reading the new selected poems	M	50	80	50	3.00	0.77
		(27.8)	(44.4)	(27.8)		
	F	60	50	70	3.00	0.97
		(33.3)	(27.8)	(38.9)		
5 Love poems because they are short	M	40	70	70	3.22	1.06
		(22.2)	(38.9)	(38.9)		
	F	40	80	60	3.00	0.97
		(22.2)	(44.4)	(33.3)		
6 Reading poem is a pleasurable way to spend time	M	40	60	80	3.28	1.07
		(22.2)	(33.3)	(44.4)		
	F	80	40	60	2.83	0.99
		(44.4)	(22.2)	(33.3)		

Note: SD=Strongly Disagree D=Disagree   U=Uncertain A=Agree   SA=Strongly Agree
S.D.=Standard Deviation   M=Male   F=Female

Out of the 18 male students, a majority of the 10 male students (55.5%) feel that the selected poems are interesting to them and a majority of 9 female students (50.0%) also feel the same way. Although on average, both the male (Mean=3.56, S.D.=0.86) and female (Mean=3.22, S.D.=0.94) respondents feel rather uncertain about their interest in this genre. The result also shows that a total of 7 female respondents (38.9%) have expressed liking towards

the new selected poems in the Form 4 and Form 5 literature component but the mean 3.00 (S.D.= 0.97) indicates that, on average, the female respondents are not sure about their interest in the new selected poems. The male respondents too, share the same mean 3.00 (S.D.=0.77) as the female respondents but the majority of 80 male students (44.4%) indicates that most of the male respondents are uncertain about their interest towards the new selected poems. It may be surprising to note that on the average, the male and the females have a rather same view about the new selected poems but most of the females expressed likings towards the new selected poems than the males who are unsure because poems with different subject matter cater to the interest of different gender and the selected poems might suit the females more than the males.

Table 4 pinpoints the level of suitability of the poems.

Table 4 The level of suitability of the Selected Poems

No	Items	Frequency (%)		
		SD or D	U	A or SA
	Students' level of maturity in engaging with the new selected poems			
1	Able to interpret poems based on my experiences	50 (19.5)	120 (33.3)	190 (52.8)
2	Themes in all the poems are universal and invoke growth	30 (8.4)	150 (41.7)	180 (50.0)
3	Able to empathize with the subject matter of the poem	70 (19.5)	100 (27.8)	190 (52.8)
4	Themes and messages in the poem are familiar to me	30 (8.4)	130 (36.1)	20 (55.6)
	Students' literary background			
1	I am exposed to other poems by more renowned poets	110 (30.6)	110 (30.6)	140 (38.9)
2	I have read poems with similar themes	50 (13.9)	80 (22.2)	230 (63.9)
3	Aware that poet's background has relation to the poem	100 (27.7)	130 (36.1)	130 (36.1)
4	Have extensively read poems' explanations and criticism	170 (47.2)	120 (33.3)	70 (19.4)
	Difficulty of the language			
1	The English language suits my level of proficiency	50 (13.9)	110 (30.6)	200 (55.5)
2	Feel slightly challenged with new vocabularies	130 (36.1)	140 (38.9)	90 (25.0)
3	Sentence pattern is not too daunting for me to comprehend	80 (22.2)	130 (36.1)	150 (41.7)

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<u>Students' cultural background</u>

1	Issues being voiced out are related to my own culture	30 (8.3)	180 (50.0)	150 (41.7)
2	The different cultures in some poems do not affect my understanding	50 (8.3)	110 (30.6)	220 (61.1)
3	Comfortable when poems exposed me to various forms of unfamiliar cultures	40 (11.1)	110 (30.6)	210 (58.3)
4	Poems by local poets are easier to comprehend	90 (25.0)	120 (33.3)	150 (41.7)
5	Issues highlighted is relevant to make me continue reading	80 (22.2)	110 (30.6)	170 (47.2)

<u>Content of the newly selected poems</u>

1	Content prompts me to do extensive reading on the issue highlighted in the poem	120 (33.3)	140 (38.9)	100 (27.8)
2	I have some background knowledge prior to the issue highlighted in the poem	80 (22.2)	120 (33.3)	160 (44.4)
3	I am only able to identify with the cultural elements that are close to my own culture	170 (47.2)	90 (25.0)	100 (27.8)
4	I can identify with different cultural elements, settings, etc because the media exposure	110 (30.6)	110 (30.6)	140 (38.9)

A total of 190 students (52.8%) agree on their ability to show empathy towards the subject matter of the poems with only 100 students (27.8%) who are uncertain and 70 of them (19.5%) who disagree with their ability to empathize with the subject matter of the poem. Most of them, with a tabulated number of 190 students (52.8%) are in an agreement with their ability to interpret poems based on their experiences while as few as 50 students (19.5%) believe that they are not able to relate the poems to their experiences. The high percentage proves that the newly selected poems suit the level of maturity most students because the poems are selected according to the issues close to their age.

Regarding the students' literary background is enough to suit them to the selected poems, the data stipulates that most of the students are not significantly exposed to literary items as 170 of them (47.2%) have not extensively read explanations and criticisms on the new selected poems, 120 of them (33.3%) are uncertain while only a total of 70 students (19.4%) are exposed to literary explanations and criticisms. However, concern should not be raised over students' lack of reading on literary criticisms, since a total of 230 students (63.9%) have read poems on similar themes that might provide them with enough background knowledge for the comprehension of the new selected poems by the Ministry of Education.

In term of the difficulty of the language used in the poems, there are 200 students (55.5%) who feel that the English language is suited their level of proficiency while another 110 of them (30.6%) feel uncertain about the difficulty of the language used in the selected poems. However, a number of 50 students (13.9%) feel that the language do not cater well to their proficiency level. Nevertheless, it is heart-warming to note that as many as 150 students

(41.7%) who feel that the sentence pattern is not too daunting for them to understand. Hence, the selection of poems seems to cater well to students' level of proficiency in which it is not too hard till the point that it frightens the students.

Looking at the students' cultural background in assessing the suitability of the selected poems, there are as many as 180 students (50.0%) who are uncertain whether the issues in the poems are related to their own culture but the 170 of them (47.2%) are certain that the issues highlighted are relevant enough to make them continue reading. A high total of 150 respondents (41.7%) are certain that the poems written by the local poets are easier to understand, while another 90 of them (25.0%) that feel otherwise, it is good to know that 210 out of the 360 students (58.3%) agree that the different cultures in some poems do not affect their understanding although 40 of them (11.1%) do not feel the same way. Thus the selected poems by two local poets and two foreign poets are acceptable to cater to the needs of the students who feel comfortable being introduced to different cultures and for students who feel rather uncomfortable with unusual items introduced by different cultures in the new selected poems.

Whether the content of the selected poems suits the student, a large number of them, 160 students (44.4%) according to the tabulated data, believe that they have some background knowledge prior to the issue highlighted in the poem while 120 of the respondents (33.3%) are uncertain and 80 of them (22.2%) feel that they do not have the background knowledge to prepare them for the content of the poems. A majority of 170 out of 26 students (47.2%) are not only able to identify with the cultural elements that are close to their own culture. This leads 140 of the respondents (38.9%) to feel that they are able to identify with cultural elements, settings, situations and values of people from another country because the media exposes them to these cultures. Another 110 of them (30.6%) feel uncertain about their ability to identify with cultural elements, settings, situations and values of people from another country while the same number of respondents (30.6%) is not able to identify with items that are not familiar to their own culture. These high percentages show that the new selected poems are suitable enough as an input for students' learning because poems act as a means to expose them to other people's culture as well as their own culture.

Research Question 2: What are the problems and factors affecting the students' reading comprehension and interpretation of poetry?

Table 5 pinpoints the poem that students feel is the most difficult of all the poems in their lower and upper secondary literature component.

Table 5
The poems listed in the Form 1 to Form 3 old literature component and Form 4 and Form 5 new literature component

	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	"Life's Brief Candle" by William Shakespeare	30	8.3
2	"The Dead Crow" by A. Samad Said	10	2.8
3	"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" by William Butler Yeats	20	5.6
4	"In The Midst of Hardship" by Latiff Mohidin	30	8.3
5	"He Had Such Quiet Eyes" by Bibsy Soenharjo	90	25.0
6	"Nature" by H.D. Carberry	40	11.1
7	"Are You Still Playing Your Flute" by Zurinah	140	38.9

The data stipulates that 300 out of the 360 respondents (83.3%) feel that the poems that they are studying in their upper secondary are the harder ones compared to the ones in their lower secondary. A majority of 140 students (38.9%) think that the poem "Are You Still Playing Your Flute" by Zurinah Hassan is the hardest of all. There is only 10 student (2.8%) that thinks the poem "The Dead Crow" by A. Samad Said being the hardest to understand.

Table 6 provides several reasons prove to be the obstacles for the successful understanding of poems.

Table 6
Problems and factors affecting students' comprehension in understanding poetry

No	Items	Frequency (%)	
		Yes	No
1	Ages and period the poem is written	150 (41.7)	210 (58.3)
2	Issues different from your cultures and norms	110 (30.6)	250 (69.4)
3	Language is for proficient students	130 (36.1)	230 (63.9)
4	Poet's background influences meaning	100 (27.8)	260 (72.2)
5	Poem is too lengthy	50 (13.9)	310 (86.1)
6	Poems are too abstract	90 (25.0)	270 (75.0)
7	Ideas are not clearly stated	180 (50.0)	180 (50.0)
8	Topic is not interesting	240 (66.7)	120 (33.3)
9	Teacher's effort is not enough	140 (38.9)	220 (61.1)
10	Others	10 (2.8)	350 (97.2)

The result shows that 240 students (66.7%) students feel that the topic or the subject is not interesting enough to capture their attention while as many as 180 students (50.0%) think that poems are too dense with many ideas that are not clearly stated and thus it makes them confused with the meanings that the poem is trying to convey. The rest of the 180 students (50.0%) feel that the density of ideas is not the factor that affects their understanding. Fortunately, a significant 310 of them (86.1%) do not feel that the selected poems are too lengthy even though 50 of the respondents (13.9%) feel that the selected poems are too lengthy. The other given answer for others is that the selected poems are not making any sense at all and thus it does not give this 10 student (2.8%) a purpose to at least want to understand the poems.

Research Question 3: What are the strategies that can be used by teachers and students to aid comprehension?

Table 7 points out some activities that are able to successfully help the students in comprehending the selected poems in their literature component.

Table 7
Activities that successfully aid students to comprehend poems

No	Items	Frequency (%)	
		Yes	No
	Activities Carried out by Teachers		
1	Watching short video or movie clip	80 (22.2)	280 (77.8)
2	Listen to songs related to the poems	30 (11.1)	320 (88.9)
3	Reading the biography of the poet	80 (22.2)	280 (77.8)
4	Charade	40 (11.1)	320 (88.9)
5	Match words with its meaning	120 (33.3)	240 (66.7)
6	Gap/blank filling	160 (44.4)	200 (55.6)
7	Reading out aloud	260 (72.2)	100 (27.8)
8	Paraphrasing	190 (52.8)	170 (47.2)
9	Quiz	150 (41.7)	210 (58.3)
10	Questionnaires	90 (25.0)	270 (75.0)
11	Sequencing	70 (19.4)	290 (80.6)
12	Reading articles related to the poems	50 (13.9)	310 (86.1)
	Students' effort to score well		
1	Teacher's notes, explanations, activities in class	120 (33.3%)	240 (66.7%)
2	Tuition	160 (44.4%)	200 (55.6%)
3	Revising revision books and do a number of practices from the revision books	70 (19.4%)	290 (80.6%)
4	The internet	10 (2.8%)	350 (97.2%)

A majority of 260 out of 360 respondents (72.2%) feel that reading out aloud helps to successfully make them understand the poems. This activity seems simple but it helps students to get the tone and mood of the poem so that it is easier for them to connect it to their experiences. A total of 190 students (52.8%) feel that paraphrasing is the second most successful activity that eases their understanding while enabling them to learn the way to decipher and interpret a poem. A whopping 320 number of students (88.9%) feel that listening to songs related to the poems do not help them to successfully comprehend the selected poems.

The tabulated data reports that 160 students (44.4%) believe that going to tuition is being the most helpful of all while only 10 student (2.8%) make use of the internet in to prepare well for their examination. The internet might not offer many resourceful materials for the students because the selected poems are only being introduced to the Form Four students this year.

Discussion

From the findings, it is reported that 38.9% of the female respondents' like reading the new selected poem compared to 44.4% of the male respondents who are uncertain. This shows

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that the female respondents' interest differ from the male respondents even though on the average, based on the tabulated mean of 3.00, both of the gender are uncertain about their interest towards the new selected poems. Chitravelu, Sithamparam and Teh (1995) supports this finding with their statement saying that gender will somehow affect students' preferences. One plausible factor might be that the new selected poems for the Form Four and Form Five students appeal more to the females rather than the males because the content fulfills the female students' needs and curiosity. While the poem "He Had Such Quiet Eyes" by Bibsy Soenharjo exposes the students to issues on relationship, the message might be more beneficial to the females because it is about the heartbreaking experiences of a girl when she fell for the wrong man (Ministry of Education, 2009). This one single poem might suit the females more than the males but seeing from another point of view, it generally teaches both of the genders to be careful when choosing a partner for themselves (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Despite the fact that one poem might suit the females more than the males, the findings show that regardless of the students' gender, 50% of the students are in an agreement that the themes in all the poems are universal in nature in which they feel that the poems are able to invoke personal growth in them. A total of 52.8% of them seem agree that their level of maturity enables them to decipher the meaning of the selected poems because their maturity makes them receptive to the issues close to their age especially issues on relationship. The four selected poems touched on general issues like hardship, relationship, beauty of nature and priorities in life (Ministry of Education, 2009) which will definitely invoke their personal growth since they are able to empathize with the subject matter. Krashen's Comprehensible Input supports the fact that children need to be given input one step beyond their current level of knowledge i.e. authentic materials that resemble the situations they might face in real life. This input provides a good face validity to scaffold their learning so that they are able to internalize the knowledge delivered by the texts (Lems, Miller & Soro, 2010). In the long run, students will be able to "understand and tell in one's own words the poem heard or read, and give one's opinion of the poem" (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Based on the findings, 61.1% of the students are not affected by the different cultures being introduced in some poems. This indicates that the selection of poems is culturally accessible to most students in spite of the two foreign poets contributing to the poems in the Form Four and Form Five new literature component. According to Chitravelu, Sithamparam and Teh (1995), students are able to comprehend poems with elements that are close to their culture rather than that which is alien and distant. Although the Class Readers Programme that was implemented in 1990 failed because the problems with the foreign cultures were not acknowledged (Mukundan, 1998), the findings in this study on the contrary, shows that 58.3% of the students are fine with various forms of items that are not familiar to their own culture.

The data shows that 55.5% of the students that the language being used in all the four poems are suited to their level of proficiency where 41.7% of them feel that the sentence pattern is not too daunting for them to understand. This is in contradiction with the old set of poems in the studies done by the other researcher which stated that the level of proficiency was not on par with the language of the texts. Narasuman's study (2007) revealed that students did not have the aptitude to paraphrase the poems by themselves and *Utusan Malaysia* also reported that students relied heavily on the teacher's translation (Syed Nasharudin, S.N., 2008). Therefore, with the language of the four new selected poems suited to their level of proficiency, students will be able to further explore the texts by indulging themselves in extensive reading at their own pace (Chitravelu, Sithamparam & Teh, 2005).

Besides that, most students find it difficult to understand the selected texts because 66.7% of them think that the subject matter is not interesting enough to capture their attention

and thus they do not have the motivation to read lines after lines to figure out the figurative meanings of the poems. Narasuman's (2007) study on the other hand states that students' level of proficiency is the contributing factor to their poor comprehension of poems. *Utusan Malaysia* (2006) supports that most students rely heavily on their teachers' translation which again pinpoints at our students' poor mastery of English.

Another reason 50.0% of the students find it hard to comprehend poems is due to the fact that the ideas in the selected poems are not clearly stated. They feel that the poems are too dense with meanings and most of the time these selected poems put students in a state of confusion with the message they are trying to convey. The study done by Huzaina Abdul Halim (2006) also shows that poems are open to multiple interpretations which most of the time is not direct and students find it hard to predict the meaning conveyed.

As a matter of fact, students will always face with the difficulty in comprehending poetry but the creativity of the teachers is the deciding factor that either helps or demotivates the students entirely. The analysis of the data reveals that among the twelve activities listed, 91.7% of the respondents state that reading out aloud is the most popular activity carried out in the classroom by their English language teachers because it helps the students to tune into a right mood and tone to get in touch with the poem. However, in the study done by Narasuman (2007), he notes that too much of reading out aloud might be counter-productive. The findings on the other hand prove that reading out aloud is the most effective way to make the students comprehend the selected poems.

Aside from the teachers' efforts to aid students in comprehending the selected poems, the tabulated data highlights a disturbing fact that 44.4% of the students seem to think that tuition makes them excel in their English paper rather than their teachers' notes, explanations and activities in the class. Only 10 student seems to think that the internet is useful in preparing her for the examination.

The result of this study points out that the new selection of texts by the Ministry of Education is suitable for the students in the upper secondary. Eventhough most students feel that the issues being voiced out in the selected poems might not be interesting enough to prolong their interest or the poems are too dense with ideas, they feel that reading out aloud is helpful in a sense that it tunes their emotions to the tone and of the poems so that they are able to feel what the poet is feeling. Aside from that, paraphrasing is another way to help them in their comprehension since this activity helps students to take note of certain figurative languages that will give them some hints to interpret the poem.

Conclusion

Generally the literature programme that is being introduced in the year of 2000 has achieved considerable amount of success compared to the English Language Readers Programme and the Class Reader Programme. Overall, the findings suggest that the new selection of poems by the Ministry of Education is acceptable and suitable for the kind of students in our Malaysian school system and therefore it is effective for the new Form Four and Form Five new literature component. The selection of poems has provided students a platform to read and learn about the items from another culture aside from enriching our students with ample amount of vocabulary and also to enhance their proficiency in English. It is undeniable that students might lack interest or the patience to decipher the meaning but all these can be easily overcome with the right activities set in the classroom.

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