

**PROBLEMS FACED BY FORM 4 STUDENTS IN UNDERSTANDING  
SHORT STORIES IN THE ENGLISH LITERATURE COMPONENT IN  
SEMI-URBAN SCHOOLS IN THE KUCHING-SAMARAHAN DIVISION**

**by**

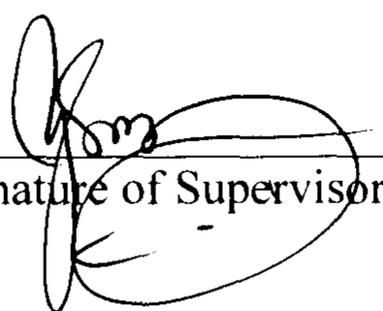
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A project entitled **Problems Faced by Form Four Students in Understanding Short Stories in the English Literature Component in Semi-Urban Schools in the Kuching-Samarahan Division** was written by Lambros Daib and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science with Honours (Teaching English as a Second Language)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CDC</b>	- Curriculum Development Centre
<b>EFL</b>	- English as a Foreign Language
<b>ESL</b>	- English as a Second Language
<b>PMR</b>	- <i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i>
<b>SMK</b>	- <i>Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan</i>
<b>SPM</b>	- <i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i>
<b>UNIMAS</b>	- <i>Universiti Malaysia Sarawak</i>

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Problems Faced by Form Four Students in Understanding Short Stories in the English Literature Component in Semi-Urban Schools in the Kuching-Samarahan Division**

**Lambros Daib**

This study seeks to find out Form Four students' general attitudes and perceptions towards the selection of short stories in the Form Four English Literature Component. It also aims to identify the their problems in understanding short stories.

The samples for this study involved one hundred and ninety Form Four students from five semi-urban schools in the Kuching-Samarahan Division. The data were obtained through open and closed-ended questionnaires. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The findings of the study indicated that the Form Four students have positive attitudes and perceptions towards the selections of short stories. At the same time most of them considered that the difficulty level of the texts chosen suits their level of proficiency. However, the cultural elements found in the texts are the major problems among these students.

## **ABSTRAK**

### ***Kajian Mengenai Masalah yang Di Hadapi oleh Pelajar Tingkatan Empat dalam Memahami Cerpen di dalam Komponen Sastera di Sekolah Luar Bandar di Bahagian Kuching-Samarahan***

***Lambros Daib***

*Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sikap dan persepsi pelajar Tingkatan Empat terhadap cerpen yang telah dipilih di dalam Komponen Sastera Bahasa Inggeris Tingkatan Empat. Ia juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti masalah-masalah yang dihadapi oleh pelajar berkenaan dalam memahami cerpen.*

*Sampel bagi tujuan kajian ini melibatkan seramai seratus sembilan puluh pelajar Tingkatan Empat dari lima buah sekolah luar bandar di Bahagian Kuching-Samarahan. Data dikumpul melalui soal-selidik yang diolah secara terbuka dan tertutup. Data tersebut dianalisa menggunakan statistik deskriptif.*

*Hasil daripada kajian mendapati bahawa pelajar Tingkatan Empat berkenaan mempunyai sikap dan persepsi yang positif terhadap pilihan cerpen tersebut. Pada masa yang sama, kebanyakan daripada mereka berpendapat bahawa tahap kesukaran teks yang telah dipilih setaraf dengan tahap pengetahuan mereka. Walau bagaimanapun, unsur-unsur budaya yang terkandung di dalam teks berkenaan merupakan masalah utama di kalangan pelajar-pelajar tersebut.*

## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Background of the Study:**

Literature is a rich resource for learning the English Language in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. It also provides many benefits to both teachers and students in the ESL classroom, through the exposure to a variety of literary genres. The exposure to the various literary genres encourages reading interests as well as provides models of the target language at its best. Besides, it also integrates areas of language skills, language contents and moral values. According to Collie and Slater (1987, p.2) “literature was thought of as embodying a static, convoluted kind of language far removed from the utterances of daily communication”. However, in the middle of 1980s, educators saw that literature plays an important role in the study of language because in literature, language is manipulated and used creatively in order to convey meaning. Therefore it offers a rich resource for language learning. Seeing the great potential of literature in language learning, the Literature Component in English Syllabus is undertaken by the Education Ministry to bring back the subject of literature in schools in terms of its significant role in fostering students’ linguistic competence, develop their cultural awareness and bring about moral development as demanded in the National Education Philosophy.

The CDC (1990) suggests that students should be exposed to both excerpts of the literary materials and whole texts for critical analysis. For instance, plays and other suitable literary texts can also be included:

“Teachers should expose students to models of the English Language. They should use interesting excerpts of novels, short stories, legends and poems as reading texts for study and for enjoyment. In this way, students are not only encouraged to read but also introduced to the patterns and styles of the language” (CDC, 1990, p.4). The use of literature in the ESL classroom is of paramount importance; not only in providing diverse genre but also in making the English Language class more interesting for both teachers and students, as agreed by Short (1998), Protherough (1986), Hedge (1993) and Rosli Talif (1995).

The inclusion of Literature Component program in the English Language Syllabus for Secondary Schools has been made compulsory for every secondary school student from Form One to Form Five. The implementation is made in stages. The Literature Component had been introduced to Form One and Form Four in schools in March 2000. In the following year 2001, the Literature Component was included in the SPM English Language for the first time. In the year 2002, it was included in the PMR English Language.

The Literature Component Program focuses on the four language skills namely, listening and speaking, reading and writing. This component is being allocated one period out of five English Language periods in a week to teach short stories, novels and poems. Students are taught selected texts from three genres that have been fixed as follows:

Form One : Three short stories and three poems

Form Two : One novel (from three titles)

Form Three : One novel (from three titles)

Form Four and Form Five : Five short stories, six poems and one novel (from three titles)

**List of Selected Reading Materials for Literature Component in English Language Subject for Secondary Schools**

<b>POETRY</b>			
<b>Form 1</b>	<b>Form 2</b>	<b>Form 3</b>	<b>Form 4 and Form 5</b>
1. Life's Brief Candle (William Shakespeare)  2. The Dead Crow (A. Samad Said)  3. The Lake Isle of Innisfree (W. B. Yeats)	No poems	No poems	1. If (Rudyard Kipling)  2. Sonnet 18 (William Shakespeare)  3. Si Tenggang's Homecoming (Muhammad Hj. Salleh)

			<p>4. Monsoon History (Shirley Lim)</p> <p>5. The Road Not Taken (Robert L. Frost)</p> <p>6. There's been a Death in the Opposite House (Emily Dickinson)</p>
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<b>SHORT STORY</b>			
<b>Form 1</b>	<b>Form 2</b>	<b>Form 3</b>	<b>Form 4</b>
<p>1. The Pencil (Ali Majod) - unabridged version</p> <p>2. How Dalat Got Its Name (Heidi Munan)</p> <p>3. Of Bunga Telur and Bally Shoes (Che Husna Azhari)</p>	<p>No short story and poems</p>	<p>No short story and poems</p>	<p>1. The Lotus Eater (Somerset Maugham)</p> <p>2. The Necklace (Guy de Maupassant)</p> <p>3. The Drover's Wife (Henry Lawson)</p> <p>4. The Sound Machine (Roald Dahl)</p> <p>5. Looking for a Rain God (Bessie Head)</p>

<b>NOVEL</b>			
<b>Form 1</b>	<b>Form 2</b>	<b>Form 3</b>	<b>Form 4</b>
No novel	1. Potato People (Angela Wright) - unabridged version  2. Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe) - retold  3. Phantom of the Opera (Gaston Leroux) - retold (translation version)	1. Walkabout (Vance Marshall) - simplified version  2. The prisoner of Zenda (Anthony Hope Hawkins) - simplified version  3. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (R. L. Stevenson) - retold version	1. Jungle of Hope (Keris Mas) - translation and abridged version  2. The Return (K. S. Maniam) - unabridged version  3. The Pearl (John Steinbeck) - unabridged version

The aims of the Literature Component in the English Language Syllabus are to enhance students' proficiency in the English Language through the study of a set of prescribed literary texts, to use literature to contribute towards personal development and character building of the students, to broaden students' outlook through reading about other cultures and world views, and to encourage and facilitate more and keener interests for reading literature and literary texts among students (CDC, 2000, p.2).

## **1.1 Statement of Problems**

The introduction of Literature into the English Language Syllabus has been and still is a debated issue not only among teachers of English Language but also among students learning the language. Since its introduction which started with the Form One and Form Four, back in March 2002, countless opinions regarding the step taken by the ministry of education have been voiced by both the teachers and students either formally or informally. Regardless of a series of seminars and workshops organized, most practicing English language teachers are likely to be confronted with many complex problems such as the language used, culture differences and especially in the area of teaching literature to non-native speakers of English (Rosli Talif, 1995). Talif further stated that the lack of research studies in the area of literature in Malaysia could restrict this prospect. More research studies on literature in ESL instruction, especially in the Malaysian context are needed to identify areas needing careful consideration. In addition to that, literature teaching has always been taken for granted by both ESL/EFL teachers and students. This means that they are taught just to fulfill the requirement in the syllabus and for examination purposes. ESL/EFL students are especially affected by the immense difficulties involved in understanding and appreciating literature in English.

This triggers the researcher to carry out a research study to find out the problems faced by students that leads to the failure of understanding short stories. Thus, this study is intended to investigate the problems students in the sub-urban areas faced in understanding short stories. It will look into possible contributing

factors which include the students' attitudes and perception towards reading short stories and the student's view on the short stories selected, their linguistic competence, and the cultural elements found in the text. The selection of literary texts and teaching materials is considered a major criterion for the success of the teaching of literature because the selections could influence students' reading interest. This is based on the researcher's experience in teaching the subject. The teaching materials essentially refer to textbooks, readers and workbooks. The lack of research on students' preferences and responses to certain books further complicates the problem. The complaint made by the students is the basis of this statement. The lack of interest in reading among Malaysians is one of the prevailing issues focused on by various authorities. This concern was also highlighted in a survey by Raj and Hunt (1990) on the reading habits and interests of Malaysians. The major findings of the survey revealed that (i) the respondents spent RM10.00 or less on books and magazines a month and (ii) only half of the forty-two percent of the respondents who had read books could provide the titles of the books which they had read (Raj & Hunt, 1990).

Critics of using literature in ESL instruction, like Lazar (1993), contend that students must be prepared linguistically before being introduced to the intricacies of literature. He further states that most ESL/EFL students are not competent enough to undertake the study of literature. It is beyond their comprehension, leading to students manipulating critical terms without understanding their implicit meaning. Raj & Hunt (1990) on the other hand, believes that the crucial factor is the extent to which the students can enter the world as an involved

“onlooker”, for which there must be no cultural barriers and the experience portrayed in the work must make contact with the students’ experience at some point. Based on the researcher’s experiences in the teaching of Literature, Malaysian students especially those who have poor command of the English Language will find difficulties in studying the subject. Apart from their low level of proficiency in the English Language the literary elements found in a text will make the problems more complicated.

The Literature Component is only about four years in the English Syllabus. It is found that western writers write most of the texts chosen in the Component. Therefore, there is a high possibility that both the teachers and students are still facing problems in the teaching and learning of this subject. The researcher’s brief experience of teaching this subject during the teaching practice has provided some glimpses of problems faced by students in understanding some of the short stories read. This insight has prompted the researcher to investigate these problems as well as coming out with some possible recommendations and suggestions that can help to overcome these problems.

## **1.2 Scope of the Study**

This research study involved about one hundred and ninety Form Four students in sub-urban schools in the Kuching-Samarahan Division. It focuses on the problems that these students are facing in understanding short stories in the Form Four English Literature Component.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the problems encountered by Form Four students in studying short stories.
2. To come out with some possible recommendations and suggestions that can help to overcome the problems faced by Form Four students in studying short stories.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What are the students' general attitudes and perceptions towards reading short stories and their views on the selection of short stories in the Form Four English Literature Component?
2. Is the difficulty level of the selected short stories beyond the students' linguistic competence?
3. Do the students find any problems in understanding the cultural elements that are found in the short stories?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is to get some insights into the problems faced by Form Four students in studying the short stories and the factors that contribute to the problems. Results from this study is hoped to act as a guideline for teachers of the English Language and teacher trainees. The useful information gathered will enable these teachers to take necessary action and at the same time come out with

suggestions to overcome the problems. This will then ensure that the objectives and aims set by the Ministry of Education can be achieved.

## **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

Since this research study is limited to only about one hundred and ninety Form Four students from five selected secondary schools in the semi-urban area in Sarawak, the limitation is that the respondents do not represent the whole population.

Furthermore, the technique for gathering data in this study that is by using questionnaire alone means that there is a high possibility of a low return rate. Respondents who have low command of the language might also misinterpret the questions asked in the questionnaire.

The open and closed-ended questionnaire is limited in collecting the data in the sense that the respondents are restricted to view their opinions freely. Their responses must be based on the questions only.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

It is essential to define some terms used in this study to make them explicit in meaning and purpose for this research study. Apart from that it is also useful to avoid confusion for the readers.

### **1.7.1 Literature**

‘Literature’ is described as any literary text whose imaginative content will stimulate reaction and response in the receiver or reader (McRae, 1991). However, it is also explained as literary texts of various genres imaginatively created, recorded, explained, explored, and shaped through experiences and feelings (Nesamalar Chitravelu, et. al. 1995)

### **1.7.2 Perceptions**

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary (1995), ‘perception’ is defined as ‘a way of seeing, understanding or interpreting something’. Therefore, the ESL students’ perceptions refer to the different opinions or point of views of the students’ hold towards the selection of short stories and the act of reading them.

### **1.7.3 Attitudes**

The Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary (1995) defines ‘attitude’ as ‘a way of thinking about somebody/something or behaving towards somebody/something’. Thus, the students’ attitudes refer to the way ESL students think or feel towards the selection of texts and the act of reading.

### **1.7.4 Literature Component**

Literature Component refers to the literature with small ‘l’ in the English Language Curriculum. For this study, literature is learned as small ‘l’ in Malaysian classroom. The literary texts is used as a medium to enhance

and improve learners' proficiency in English such as the teaching of grammar items, pronunciation and the four language skills (CDC, 2000).

### **1.7.5 ESL**

The Committee for Planning and Coordination of English Language Programmes in Schools, Ministry of Education, Malaysia (1991), defines ESL as learners in Malaysian primary or secondary schools who learn English as a second language.

This chapter is followed by Chapter Two, which discusses critical review of literature both from general readings (related literature) and previous findings or reports by other researchers (related research). This will be followed by the research methodology in Chapter Three and the analysis and discussion on the findings in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five will provide the summary of the study and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter begins by looking at several interpretations of literature. Then, it discusses the significance of studying literature and the problems faced by the students in studying it. This review of the literature is to be based on the theoretical knowledge or background issues concerning the importance of literature in Malaysian ESL classroom as a whole.

### **2.1 What is Literature?**

The meaning of the word 'literature' carries several interpretations. According to Carter and Long (1991), literature is only written texts with a certain aesthetic value. Meanwhile, Collie and Slater (1987) state that literature is "authentic materials", which provides to the real world situation of the language structure, such as different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode.

In addition, Nesamalar Chitravelu, et. al. (1995, p.4) explain that literature is how words are used to "imaginatively record, explain, explore and shape the happening" based on "experiences and feelings" of the writer in the literary writing. This piece of literary writing conveys meaning to the readers through the