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Building National Identity through the Secondary School Literature Component in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to analyze the themes prevalent in the Form 1-3 literary texts since the reintroduction of the literature component into Malaysia's secondary school curricula in 2000, up to the most recent Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) which is to be implemented in 2017. According to the National Education Blueprint (2013-2025), national identity is one of the six student aspirations. The incorporation of this theme would aid students to better understand their multiethnic culture and build their national identity (Kaur and Mahmor, 2014); this paper employed thematic analysis to further investigate the prevalence of the theme of nationhood in these texts. Findings show that only one text hinted the theme of nationhood out of 10. Other foreign texts contained a variety of themes other than that of nationhood. Past studies indicated that the literary texts should have a balance of local and foreign texts. Local works should be introduced first, especially in the lower secondary level (Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy, and Jusoff, 2009; Isa and Mahmud, 2012; Kaur and Mahmor, 2014). However, the current literary texts in the KSSM do not correlate with the aspiration in the National Education Blueprint.

Keywords: National Education Blueprint. KSSM. Malaysian literature in English. Nationhood. National Identity

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INTRODUCTION

After five decades of independence, there are still initiatives in place to foster and sustain racial harmony among Malaysians. One such example would be the concept of 1Malaysia introduced by Prime Minister Najib Razak in 2010 which “emphasises the importance of national unity regardless of race, background or religious belief” (1Malaysia.com.my). Nevertheless, the nation’s road to unity is beset with challenges such as the recently held 916 Rally that according to Minister of Transport Liow Tiong Lai “intended to stoke fear and create racial tension” (Foong, 2015). Ironically, the local political scene is dominated by race-based parties from both the ruling and opposition parties that fights for the rights of their own people. Ethnic segregation and religious revivalism have also been the tenets of government policies so as to consolidate the ruling coalition’s influence (Loh, 2009).

Against such a background, education is perhaps the best catalyst for changes that are much needed if equality and harmony is to be achieved. While nationhood is not being taught as a subject in school, elements of it are scattered across the main texts of subjects such as Moral Education, languages i.e. Malay, Chinese, English and so on. Since literature is a compulsory component in the English syllabus, it could be used to foster an understanding of the country’s history and common aspirations as mentioned in the National Education Blueprint 2013-2025. This will eventually lead to Malaysians sharing a common national identity. But in order to achieve that Malaysian literature in English which offer a more familiar setting and cultural elements should be incorporated. It could inspire students to enjoy reading the literary texts as they would be able to identify with the local elements (Vethemani, 2004). In addition to that, it could also overcome the problem of students finding foreign texts incomprehensible and unrelatable – a hindrance faced by many teachers in the teaching of literature in schools.

The year 2000 saw the reintroduction of the English Literature component, which almost disappeared from the Malaysian education system in the 1970’s. This occurred when the Malay language was gradually replacing the English language as the medium of instruction, diminishing the role of literature to reading programs that failed to succeed (Pillai, Menon, and Vengadasamy, 2016). After a few decades, the Ministry of Education decided to reintroduce the English Literature component into the syllabus. The subject, first reintroduced in the secondary school level, was classified under the learning outcomes as “language for aesthetic use”, which is to help students to appreciate literary texts and to teach them to express themselves in a creative manner (Ministry of Education, 2003). This was implemented to increase the level of proficiency among Malaysian students and also to raise the standard of the language in the country (Suliman and Md Yunus, 2014b), which is stated in the National Education Blueprint (2013-2025) as well. It is planned to be achieved within the period of 2016-2020, as stated in the 2nd of the 11 shifts in the Blueprint. A series of studies followed since its reintroduction regarding the appropriate selection of texts, however, many of the students were faced with difficulty in understanding and relating to the texts, due to problems in comprehending the context and vocabulary in which most of the foreign texts were written (Ghazali et al., 2009; Isa and Mahmud, 2012; Kaur and Mahmor, 2014).

According to Yahya (1999), it is of vital importance to decentralise western canon and

reintroduce the “centrality of our own country and our own region as a base” in the English syllabus. This led past researchers to emphasize the importance of local literary works and to search for the appropriate selection of literary texts (Ghazali, et al., 2009; Isa and Mahmud, 2012; Subramaniam, 2003). The result of these studies was a proposal to select texts that include a fair balance of local and foreign texts, rather than solely focusing on American and British literature that students struggle to comprehend and relate to (Ghazali et al., 2009; Isa and Mahmud, 2012; Kaur & Mahmud, 2014). According to studies on students’ preference of literary texts, students liked stories with themes of adventure, mystery, adolescent, science fiction, and life experience – themes that they could relate to (Ghazali et al., 2009; Isa and Mahmud, 2012). However, even after such propositions the second batch introduced in 2010 was a far cry from popular demand, containing more foreign texts than local ones. The second batch of texts only had three literary texts from local authors (“In the Midst of Hardship” by Latiff Mohidin, *The Curse* by Lee Su Ann, & “Are you Still Playing Your Flute” by Zurinah Hassan).

The call for a balanced selection of texts is not only crucial to aid students’ understanding or to accommodate to their preferences, but also to catch the attention of educators and researchers regarding the importance of an education system that is inculcated with the nationhood values. Recently, researchers also realized the potential of literature to integrate a sense of nationhood and investigated particularly into the building of a national identity in the Malaysian classroom (Idrus, 2012; Naidu and Naidu, 2012). Yahya (1997) also reinforces the idea of incorporating more “locally rooted” literary texts into the curriculum in order to instill the love to our own literature. Such a sentiment was echoed by Roxas-Tope (1998) who holds that literature is a catalyst to the development of a national consciousness - one which is especially crucial among postcolonial nations where a sense of nationalism is informed by “cultural dualities and tensions caused by colonial cultural imposition”. With Malaysia’s multi-ethnic makeup and the long-standing interracial gap, the education system is likely to benefit from the usage of literary texts that could expose the younger generation to its unique history and cultures. After all, it is only through cultural awareness that unfounded prejudices can be removed, thereby allowing stronger ties to develop among the people.

Therefore, this study believes in the need and the possibility of using the English Literature component to introduce the theme of nationhood. The development of national consciousness via literature component exposes and familiarises the students to the formation of nation. Moreover, the need for a shared national identity or nationhood in Malaysia has been stated as one of the six students’ aspirations in the Blueprint (2013-2025). It is also aimed to be accomplished in the 3rd of the 11 shifts in the Blueprint. Local texts naturally tend to produce the theme of nationhood, due to the local context in which the story has been created. This theme will introduce the younger generation to the history of Malaysia, specifically the struggles of our forefathers in building this nation towards not only a developed nation, but a unified one. This study is conducted on the belief that literature can not only be used as an enhancer of language proficiency, but also as a tool of unity.

Although few studies have conducted research in this area, this study aims to investigate the themes of the current batch, which is the third batch since 2000. This study is in favour of a

selection of local works with values, which the Malaysian student is able to relate to, is capable of bringing them into an understanding of their own culture and that of their peers from different cultural backgrounds. It supports the propositions previously made by researchers regarding a balance of local and foreign texts. Thus, it aims to investigate for any usage of local works and the themes in these texts, especially the theme of nationhood.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the themes that are prevalent in the KSSM Form 1-3 literature component in relation to the curriculum proposed by the Ministry of Education.
2. To investigate the differences or similarities between the current batch of Form 1-3 literature component textbooks and the two previous batches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The English Literature component has evolved from a key part of the English Language curriculum to being removed from the education scene, only to appear again in 2000. The English Literature component was introduced during the colonial period in Malaysia, and it initially was meant to serve as support material with the teaching of English. However, it was incorporated into English language reading programs in 1976 (Subramaniam, 2003). According to Isa and Mahmud (2012), the English Literature component is defined as:

In the Malaysian secondary school syllabus, a literature component is added to the curriculum for English from Form One to Form Five. This will enable learners to engage in wider reading of good literary works for enjoyment and self-development...The texts selected are from various genres comprising short stories, novels, drama and poems. A range of texts are offered in the secondary school curriculum and covers Malaysian, British, European, Australian, American and African works. Learners are expected to be able to follow a storyline and understand a poem and to give their own personal response to the text. The study of these texts is meant to inculcate values and broaden learners' outlook. (p. 76)

When it was re-introduced into the education system in 2000, the English Literature component was emphasized on more than before its removal. It was required that secondary schools devoted one period to teaching this subject. Back then, students were required to undergo exams for this subject in the national examinations – Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) and Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). According to Subramaniam (2003), this is incorporated in the system for the purpose of enriching students' language proficiency and building students' characters. Although it was stated to be used for aesthetic purposes, the subject was meant to help students cultivate the habit of reading (Suliman and Md Yunus, 2014a). Aspects of vocabulary and grammar can also be improved together with the effective teaching of this subject (Sidhu, Chan and Kaur, 2010).

In 2012, a new educational plan, the National Education Blueprint (2013), was drafted:

The result is a preliminary Blueprint that evaluates the performance of Malaysia's education system against historical starting points and international benchmarks. The Blueprint also offers a vision of the education system and students that Malaysia both needs and deserves, and suggests 11 strategic and operational shifts that would be required to achieve that vision (E-1).

It contains the steps and shifts that the Ministry of Education will take to revamp the Malaysian education system from 2013 till 2025. In the second of 11 shifts or Wave 2, one of the aims is to "expand opportunities for greater exposure to the language" through the English Literature module, as the said research found that there was a 15-20% of exposure require to use the language more effectively. Its initial purpose was still retained, but the Blueprint planned to expand the module from 2016-2020, the intended period for Wave 2. These intentions and plans are altogether for the betterment of the future generations and the nation as well. The question, however, lies in the implementation of the plan.

Students and teachers were said to have positive reception and feedback regarding the use of literature in English language instruction (Ismail, Abdul Aziz, and Abdullah, 2008). In a way, it is helpful to the enrichment of students' proficiency and literacy. However, there were other problems that students faced in the course of learning this module. They felt that there was a lack of relevance between the literary materials to that of themselves (Vethemani, 2004). Poor understanding of the texts due to the poor grasp of the language was one of the reasons, although this was not usually found among schools in urban areas (Isa and Mahmud, 2012). Participants in both studies faced difficulties in understanding the underlying meanings, due to the literary style and structure, cultural background of the text, and the absence of knowledge of the context in which the text was written.

Due to these problems, researchers became concerned of the suitability of the text selection. Isa and Mahmud (2012) deducted that the selection of texts should include students' ability to relate with the text, characters and issues, students' ability to grasp the text in terms of language and sufficient moral, social, emotional and intellectual understanding, appreciation for literature and prior knowledge and experience. Ghazali et al. (2009) concluded that an appropriate selection of texts would be one that fit well with the students' interest. Govindarajoo and Mukundan (2013) took a different approach in focusing only on the students' abilities to identify with the themes of the three novels in the 2nd cycle batch through the concept of the Young Adult Literature. Through interviews and analysis of the students' reflective journals, the researcher found that they were able to relate to the characters in the texts. In other studies, students preferred stories with themes of adventure, mystery, adolescent, science fiction, and life experience – basically themes that they can relate to (Ghazali et al., 2009; Isa and Mahmud, 2012).

Researchers even challenged the intended purpose of the literature component and its effectiveness in the curriculum. Kaur and Mahmud (2014) challenged the original intent of the teaching and learning of literature, which was to improve the students' English proficiency to

enable them to communicate effectively. Researchers and teachers began to propose for a balance of local and foreign texts (Ghazali et al., 2009; Isa and Mahmud, 2014; Kaur and Mahmor, 2014)

Regardless of their proposals, the text selection took an unexpected turn. The first batch from 2001-2010 reflected a balanced number of local and foreign texts, comprising eight local and 17 foreign ones. In 2011, the local texts were reduced to only five, while the foreign texts increased to 20. The year 2015 saw another revision of literary materials with an outcome of the absence of local texts.

This move by government was not according to what was proposed in previous studies. However, the importance of local literature in the education system has been gaining ground among researchers recently. They indirectly began challenging the sixth of the six students aspirations in the National Education Blueprint (2013), which is National Identity. Based on previous studies, researchers began to propose that literature be used as a tool to bring the nation together, beginning in the Malaysian classroom itself.

Kaur and Mahmor (2014) made this statement: “Literature should no longer be considered as a tool merely to increase English proficiency; it should serve as a bridge to educate young Malaysians of their rich literary traditions, heritage and culture.”

Idrus (2012) had a similar vision, but she took a step further to explore this possibility. She explored into the extent that literature component is able to build a shared identity in the Malaysian classroom through questionnaires and interviews with teachers and students to discover the prevalence of the 1Malaysia concept in the Malaysian classroom and their views toward the concept. In addition to that, she also gave a one-day workshop and conducted non-participant classroom observations. In another research (Idrus, 2015), she also found that the possibility is there, but several factors, like the teachers’ approach and the students’ autonomy, improved for that to occur.

Naidu and Naidu (2012) conducted a similar study to Idrus’, looking at the extent to which the literature component can inculcate nationhood values into students by interviewing students and teachers alike. Generally, they felt that the literature component does not perform such a role in national harmony. Another study discussed the role that local literature has played in the Malaysian secondary school education (Pillai, Menon and Vengadasamy, 2016). They, too, are concerned about the duty literature can play in social cohesion in the Malaysian classroom. In their research, they particularly scrutinise the texts for the theme of marginalisation. This, they analysed the implications of inclusion and ethnic diversity instead of conducting surveys or interviews.

This study manifests the concerns of the previously mentioned studies, yet the method is entirely qualitative. Like that of Pillai, Menon and Vengadasamy’s research (2016), this study incorporates thematic analysis of theme of nationhood in the current literature component. This would aid in gauging the kinds of themes that have developed in the texts of the 3rd cycle. In

addition to that, a comparison of themes with that of previous batches will also be made.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the literature component of the Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM), particularly the texts of lower secondary level (Form 1-3) taught in the northern and central regions of Malaysia. There is a total of 10 different literary texts analyzed in this study. The definitions and aspirations from the National Education Blueprint are used to compare to the themes of the literary texts for signs of correlation or discrepancies.

Drawing the ideas from Anderson's (2006) concept of "imagined communities", this study believes that through the use of the English literature component, an imagined community can be built in the minds of the people. The concept is based on the idea that despite never having met the other individual, people of a community or nation are a homogeneous entity or imagine themselves to be that, resulting in the formation of a shared national identity. In other words, national identity is the glue that binds the people together and such an element is especially fundamental in a multiethnic, multicultural nation such as Malaysia. The need for a shared national identity or nationhood is so important that it has been included as one of the six students' aspirations in the Blueprint (2013-2025), aimed to be accomplished in the 3rd of the 11 shifts. The Ministry of Education is therefore confident that the development of a national identity should begin from young, and an ideal environment for such implementation is perhaps in the ESL classroom through literary texts written by Malaysian authors. Due to the local context in which the stories have been created, literary texts written by local authors tend to contain elements of nationhood even if it is not their main theme. This will introduce the younger generation to the historical background of Malaysia, specifically the struggles of our forefathers in building this nation towards not only a developed nation, but a unified one. This study is conducted on the belief that literature can not only be used as an enhancer of language proficiency, but also as a tool of unity if given proper implementation.

Qualitative in nature, this study only used one instrument to conduct the research, which is thematic analysis. However, the analysis started with a literary analysis of the texts, drawing out the prevalent themes from these texts. The texts were read again and again to look for patterns between the themes. Similar themes were then grouped together according to where and how their patterns occur, a stage in thematic analysis that is called data coding. These broad categories were defined, representing the pattern of themes that arise from the literary texts. These themes were then analyzed further to see whether there was any hint of the theme of nationhood in these texts.

These themes were then compared to the National Education Blueprint and the literary texts of the two previous batches to draw out the discrepancies and correlation. The themes were compared to the aspirations and definitions given by the Blueprint for the purpose of investigating into whether the Malaysian education system has attempted to achieve its goals, as set out in the Blueprint. The themes of nationhood in previous batches were drawn to compare with that of the current batch. The main aim of exploring this issue was to explore the prevalence of the theme of nationhood in these texts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Relevance of themes to KSSM aspirations

The general aim of literature as a component in the national education syllabus is to ensure that students will develop their proficiency in the English language (National Education Blueprint, 2013). Together with the goal to instill national identity in students, the two aims can be combined and achieved simultaneously. According to the National Education Blueprint (2013), "...achieving this patriotism [national identity] requires that every child understands the country's history, and shares common aspirations for the future." Through analysis of the themes conjured from the literature component of the KSSM syllabus, the corresponding themes show little effort of teaching the secondary school students the "country's history or shared common aspirations". The following is a list of texts analysed in this study and their corresponding themes:

Table 1
List of current batch of literary texts and their corresponding themes

Genre	Title	Themes
Form 1		
Poems	<i>News Break (Poem to make you laugh)</i>	Suspicion, doubt, masking, cheating, human nature, rebel, pretense, sarcasm, sly,
	<i>Sad I Ams (Feelings)</i>	Wastage, recyclables, brevity, transience, ungrateful, irresponsible, taken for granted, useless, abandoned
Short Story	<i>Fair's Fair</i>	Honesty, generosity, kindness, empathy, friendship, multiculturalism, perseverance, teamwork
Graphic Novel	<i>20,000 Leagues under the Sea</i>	Exploration, adventure, bravery, courage, innovation, ambition, creativity, hatred, bitterness, grief, escapism, loyalty, beauty of nature
	<i>Swiss Family Robinson</i>	Family, survival, love, sacrifice, relationships, creativity, innovation, cooperation, teamwork, courage, loyalty
Form 2		
Poems	<i>My Hero (Poem to make you laugh)</i>	Fathers, dads, bravery, fearlessness, fear of spiders, irony, humour, sarcasm
	<i>What is Red? (Pleasure)</i>	Types of things that look red, characteristics of red, connotations of red, significance of red, pleasure

Short Story	<i>Cheat!</i>	Misunderstanding, problems with assumptions, cheating, hatred, revenge, guilt
Drama	<i>A Night Out</i>	Dishonesty, deception, importance of being honest, social rank, status, wealth
Form 3		
Novel	<i>The Railway Children</i>	Love, perseverance, gratefulness, joy, generous, honesty, patience, generosity, sincerity, helpful, thrifty, faith, teamwork, love of siblings, family, adventure
	<i>How I Met Myself</i>	Mystery, relationships, love, perseverance
Poems	<i>The Fighter's Line</i>	Patriotism, nostalgia, justice, unity, bravery, courage, freedom, independence, sacrifices
	<i>Leisures</i>	Love for nature, appreciation for nature, contentment, appreciation

The themes of adventure and mystery were usually found in Form 3 novels or Form 1 graphic novels. The former, “*The Railway Children*”, “*Around the World in Eighty Days*” and “*How I Met Myself*” edged toward the theme of mystery. The latter, namely “*20,000 Leagues under the Sea*” and “*Swiss Family Robinson*”, are mainly about adventures and exploration. These texts were probably chosen due to studies that were conducted on students’ preferences and interest in their choice of literature (Ghazali et al., 2009; Isa and Mahmud, 2012). Adventure was the top on the list of students’ preferences according to their studies.

Feelings and emotions were usually emphasized in poems. All of the poems appeal to human emotions. “Sad I Ams” evoke feelings of uselessness and abandonment. Another Form 1 poem “News Break”, however, is different as it has a humorous and cheeky tone. Form 2 poems appeals to laughter and pleasure, while Form 3 poems are deeper in their underlying meaning, appealing to emotions of contentment and appreciation of nature in “Leisures” and patriotism and bravery in “The Fighter’s Line”. These are probably to appeal to the students’ emotions and help them relate to the writer, character or persona of the texts.

Virtues, together with vices, were generally highlighted in the each of the texts. Except for a few poems that appeal to laughter, a fair share of texts are cautionary in nature - consequences of good versus bad behavior are exhibited to remind readers of the importance of being on the right path.

The theme of relationships, be it with friends or families, are greatly emphasized in these texts. The love, cooperation, and sacrifices for loved ones are the themes that appear the most compared with others.

While the theme of nationhood is not directly emphasized in any of the texts, there are two poems from this batch of lower secondary literature component that hint at nationhood. The Form 1 short story, “Fair’s Fair” has the theme of multiculturalism, as the main characters in the book are called Raj, Sam and Lee. These names and illustrations suggest that each of them are each from a different race with Raj being an Indian, Sam being a Caucasian and Lee as a Chinese. The story portrays inter-ethnic engagement, as they work together to help Lee earn money to attend a fair that came to town. Although written by a foreign writer, the plot of the story indirectly suggests unity and nationhood, as people from different races work toward a common goal.

Another text, “A Fighter’s Line”, was brought forward from the second batch to be used in the current batch of Form 3 literary texts. This poem carries a demure and serious tone, as the persona who is war veteran calls out to the younger generation to take up the baton and continue the fight for independence. It is not implied whether it was foreign domination that they were to fight for freedom, but the tone of the poem holds a patriotic aura. Pillai et al. (2016), however, felt that the poem evokes the theme of marginalisation due to references like “sons of our ancestor” and “heirs of our freedom”. They perceive that the writer, Marzuki Ali, was particularly referring to the Malay community, the *bumiputera* or “sons of the soil”, who were said to be the owners of Malaya. However, this poem can be said to evoke the feeling of unity as well. Although we do not know who the writer is referring to, it is safe to assume that he may be calling all the citizens of Malaysia, regardless of race or ethnicity, to engage in the struggle for their freedom from the colonial powers. The theme of nationhood and national identity is being hinted with first-person references like “our ancestor” and “our freedom”.

The lack of understanding among the different races in the newly emergent nation could be solved via the introduction of literary works produced by local writers. The imperialised corpus in the KSSM English Literature component deters the formation of collective national identity in the ESL classroom. The lack of locally rooted literary texts in the curriculum shows our inferiority towards the colonial center and further reinforces the inability to be separated from the Western canonical domination. Yahya (1999, p. 13) argues that the reading of local literary texts helps to “reinforce our ethnocentric perspective and make it prevail even over texts which are overtly eurocentric.” Vethamani (2005, p. 10) in a similar vein calls for local texts to be recognised as canon and “serve as a valuable guide to what should be read in the literary tradition of Malaysian Literature in English.” When we introduce local texts to readers, we are at the same time offering them “a glimpse into the possibilities of being a Malaysian (Mohd Mydin, 2005, p. 87) - a concept of communality with the nation at its core that transcends the confines of race or culture.

Comparison between different batches of literary texts

In the National Education Blueprint, one of the six student aspiration is national identity, which is defined as follows:

An unshakeable sense of national identity, tied to the principles of the *Rukunegara*, is necessary for Malaysia’s success and future. Every child will proudly identify as

Malaysian, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status. Achieving this patriotism requires that every child understands the country's history, and share common aspirations for the future. Establishing a true national identity also requires a strong sense of inclusiveness. This can be achieved through not only learning to understand and accept diversity, but to embrace it. (E-10)

Since this is one of the aspirations the Ministry of Education aims to achieve, it is only appropriate for the literature component to contain local texts that promote inter-ethnic understanding and unity among the people of Malaysia. However, there seems to be an obvious discrepancy between the aspiration of the Blueprint and the selection of text for the literature component. As stated in the Blueprint, the Ministry of Education plans to promote national identity through community service, co-curricular involvement and a cross-school activity program called *Rancangan Integrasi Murid Untuk Perpaduan* or RIMUP (National Education Blueprint, 2013. Although it is only in Wave 3 (2021-2025) that national identity is focused on, incorporating this value in the current Wave 2 through the use of literature is feasible.

Table 2
List of first batch of literary texts and their corresponding themes

Genre	Title	Themes
Form 1		
Poems	<i>Life's Brief Candle</i>	Life
	<i>The Dead Crow</i>	Nature/ Environment
	<i>The Lake Isle of Innisfree</i>	Nature/ Environment
Short Story	<i>The Pencil</i>	Honesty
	<i>How Dalat Got Its Name</i>	Order vs Chaos / Family
	<i>Of Bunga Telor and Bally Shoes</i>	Traditional marriage, traditional culture
Form 2		
Novel	<i>Potato People</i>	Poverty
	<i>Phantom of the Opera</i>	Love
Form 3		
Novel	<i>The Prisoner of Zenda</i>	Love and sacrifice, integrity, honour
	<i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>	Good vs. evil

Table 3
List of second batch of literary texts and their corresponding themes

Genre	Title	Themes
Form 1		
Poems	<i>The River</i>	Nature/ Life
	<i>Mr. Nobody</i>	Family / Moral values
Short Story	<i>Flipping Fantastic</i>	Family
Graphic Novel	<i>The Mystery of Boscombe Valley</i>	Truth
Form 2		
Poems	<i>I wonder</i>	Nature/ Curiosity of children
	<i>Heir Conditioning</i>	Negative impacts of Technology/ Environment
Short Story	<i>One is One and All Alone</i>	Family love/ Loneliness
Play	<i>Rumpelstiltskin</i>	Power/ Greed
Form 3		
Poems	<i>A Fighter's Line</i>	Patriotism/ Unity
	<i>Leisure</i>	Enjoy life and nature
Novel	<i>The railway Children</i>	Family/ Moral value
	<i>How I Met Myself</i>	Mystery, relationships, love, perseverance

Comparing the current batch of texts to its predecessors, there is a stark difference between the central themes that are present. This study analyses the themes underlying the current batch of texts and compares them against the findings of Pillai et al. (2016). The selection of the local Malaysian texts in the first cycle contains the theme of national identity. Even though Pillai et al. focused on the marginalization of the ethnic communities in the previous batch of texts, they find that it contained texts that “allowed for the negotiations of the diverse ethnic identities of students and the honing of inter-cultural awareness in the classroom.” In the second batch, the element of nationhood is still present, yet there seem to be a segregation between ethnic minorities from the majority. The current texts introduced confirmed the narrowing of the theme of nationhood to a hint of its theme in a foreign text (Fair’s Fair).

Although these local texts display hints of national values or patriotism due to the Malaysian context, Pillai et al. (2016) discovered a lack of promotion of ethnic diversity or multiculturalism. Some of the texts marginalizes another race, sometimes portraying them in a negative light or stereotyping. Usually predominantly focusing on one race, the texts do show occurrences of inter-ethnic engagement, but to a very little extent. Using Jane Jenson's dimension of inclusion to analyse the marginalisation of races in Pillai's study, the 'space' for interethnic understanding and interaction is reducing with the gradual disappearance of local texts from the literature component. There is more occurrences of ethnic diversity in the first cycle, but a slow waning away of it in the second and third cycles.

Aside from the lack of emphasis on nationhood, it should also be noted that the current literature component consists solely of foreign texts set in unfamiliar backgrounds. As discussed in previous chapters, this begs the question of whether students would be able to relate to the texts. Language has always been regarded as constitutive in that "it both shapes and is shaped by society." (Machin and Mayr, 2012, p.4) In other words, language is used not merely to represent reality, but also to construe it. In the case of literature, such as property is pivotal in shaping the worldview of readers which would in turn affect their behaviour in the future. Having said that, the implications of using only foreign texts is, to the very least, twofold: i.) students might develop the perception that foreign texts/authors are superior to local ones and ii.) they lose the opportunity to immerse in the cultures upon which the nation was built and what makes it so unique. In regard to the latter, an identity which is formed without proper exposure to other cultures increases the likelihood of resistance being developed when new information about them are presented. However, the introduction of local texts that expose students to various cultures surrounding them would perhaps facilitate the process of people from a myriad of backgrounds assimilating into Malaysians - a category free from the constraints of race, religion and creed. All of this, however, can only be achieved if concepts such as nationhood and national identity are actively being promoted in classrooms be it through the literature component or other mediums.

CONCLUSION

While it is crucial for universal values such as patience and kindness to be instilled in the young, the multicultural setting of Malaysia calls for more - a sense of national identity and unity that could transcend the many differences among its people. Therefore, the motivation behind this paper is the belief that Malaysian literature, with the proper literary texts written preferably by local authors or texts that incorporate the value of nationhood, can build a shared national identity among the younger generation in Malaysia. We also believe that the literature component should be used beyond an aid to language proficiency. In contrast to the aims of the Blueprint, a review of the current texts has revealed an obvious turnaround - the literature component of KSSM for lower secondary students contains only foreign texts which are embedded in equally foreign contexts. The theme of nationhood seems to be dissipating with every revision of the literature component, despite Vethamani and Nair's (2009) findings that cultural background must be taken into consideration of choosing the appropriate texts that is suitable to meet the students' needs and the nation's aspiration. If Malaysia is to achieve the 1Malaysia aspiration, its implementation will work best amongst the young. Hence, education is

the best medium for its execution.

This paper also serves as a call for policy makers to reevaluate the current literature component in terms of its alignment to the National Education Blueprint. As emphasised by researchers such as Yahya (1999) and Vethamani (2005), local texts play an important role in forming a communal identity capable of transcending the seemingly irreconcilable differences that have separated Malaysians since colonial times under the divide and rule policy. Therefore, the works of local authors such as Said, Lim, and Maniam should be (re)introduced into the literature component as core texts. Aside from being more relatable to students due to their familiar settings, local texts could expose readers to the fact that even though the ideals and beliefs of each community are inherently different, they are all unique and deserve to be respected. Such a move would hopefully open up the possibility of achieving unity in diversity - an act that is perhaps implausible without a thorough understanding and acceptance of disparate cultures given the multiethnic makeup of Malaysians. Nevertheless, this is not say that only local texts should be incorporated into the literature component. A better way is perhaps for there to be a balanced mixture of both local and foreign texts which covers a plethora of themes including nationhood. A comprehensive selection is vital in ensuring that students develop a holistic sense of national identity by first understanding their own social, cultural, and political issues before moving on to the issues faced by others. A greater understanding of self and others would hopefully lead to more united nation.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the teaching of literature is compulsory under KSSM, its implementation lacks standardisation. Given that schools in different regions are assigned different texts, the findings of this study could not be generalised. This also raises the question of whether such a policy would be able to ensure that the values instilled in students are consistent, especially that of a common national identity which it currently lacks. Such a concern, however, was not addressed in the current research and serves as a possible area for future studies. A more comprehensive study which examines all the literary texts available under the curriculum could also be conducted for more conclusive findings. In addition, it would also be interesting to obtain the feedback from English teachers or even students regarding the effectiveness of the literature component when it comes to character building.

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