Literary literacy for professional preparation of pre-service and conversion English teachers in Malaysia

Florence Gilliam Kayad

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Abstract

Pressures of internationalisation and globalisation, and the ambition to compete as a developed nation in the global economy without jeopardising its agenda for national identity, unity and equality of opportunity have forced Malaysia to reconsider earlier language policies. Recent strategies have incorporated a literature component in the English Language subject in primary and secondary schools but despite more than a decade of literature instruction, results in national and international tests show that literacy and proficiency in English among Malaysian students are below standards. With students’ poor performance in English linked to teachers’ apparent lack of proficiency in English and the expectation that all teachers of English in Malaysia are able to teach literature, it is necessary to examine how prospective teachers are prepared for the task.

The study reported in this thesis provides insights into how pre-service and conversion teachers of English deal with studying literature in English as part of their teacher education at tertiary level. This experience reflects the interface between theoretical and pedagogical knowledge of literature, conceptualised as literary literacy. The aim of the study was to develop a substantive theory on the literary literacy of pre-service and conversion teachers of English in Malaysia based on their experiences studying various literature courses at a Malaysian public university. This was achieved
by investigating the participants’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature, comparing how they dealt with studying literature, and identifying literary literacy practices they considered useful for their professional preparation as future English and literature teachers at secondary school.

An interpretivist case study method was used to collect data from the two sub-case groups of participants. Primary data were drawn from a series of focus group interviews with 23 pre-service teachers and 16 conversion English teachers enrolled as undergraduates in a teaching degree programme at a Malaysian public university. Non-participant observations were conducted in the semester of study and documentary data such as course syllabus and reports, and the participants’ written works were collected. Individual interviews with the two lecturers who taught the literature courses were also conducted. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and documentary data were content-analysed. The sub-case studies were cross-analysed for divergent and convergent perspectives and emerging themes.

The findings of the study revealed that a variety of factors and the complex interplay between them accounted for the participants’ diverse perspectives. Key propositions implicating the literature learner, the literature teacher, and the literature curriculum in the Malaysian context were produced. A model of literary literacy for professional preparation was proposed as the intersection of language competence, literary competence and pedagogical knowledge. The participants’ literary literacy for their professional preparation was theorised as in a nascent state. The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice for the provision of quality literature education at all levels in the non-native English language context of Malaysia.
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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BM</td>
<td>Bahasa Melayu/Malaysia (Malay Language)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CET</td>
<td>Conversion English Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dip. Ed.</td>
<td>Diploma in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIL</td>
<td>English as an International Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<td>LCE</td>
<td>Literature Component in English</td>
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<td>MELTA</td>
<td>Malaysian English Language Teachers’ Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoHE</td>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUET</td>
<td>Malaysian University English Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PST</td>
<td>Pre-service Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education – ‘O’ level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STPM</td>
<td>Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Higher Education – ‘A’ level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ed. TESL</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education in the Teaching of English as a Second Language</td>
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Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1  Background and rationale

In multicultural and multilingual Malaysia, where more than 140 languages are spoken (David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009), English is recognised as the “second most important language” (Razak Report, 1956 as cited in Omar, 1992, p. 84) after the national language, Malay (Bahasa Melayu or Bahasa Malaysia - BM). The teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) has occurred since colonial days with government policies evolving over time to meet the economic and political ends of the nation. Despite a history of English language instruction, the standard of English among Malaysian students is still below global average (Kang, 2013b).

Recent policy initiatives such as the Literature Component in English (LCE) have focused on the inclusion of literature in English as a strategy to improve the standard of English among Malaysian schoolchildren, raising concerns about the ability of English language teachers to provide effective literature instruction. This ability, conceptualised as literary literacy, which reflects the interface between theoretical and pedagogical knowledge of literature, is examined in this study. This study explored the perspectives and experiences of pre-service, and conversion English teachers in dealing with studying literature in English as part of their teacher education programme at university in order to ascertain their literary literacy for professional preparation.
Literature in English, hereafter in this study known as literature, has been made a compulsory component of the English language subject in Malaysian schools for its potential in enhancing students’ proficiency in the English Language, contributing to personal development and character building and broadening students’ outlook through reading about other cultures and worldviews (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1999). Indeed, literature education in Malaysia has evolved from supplementary literature-based reading programmes in primary and secondary schools to a compulsory subject for all schoolchildren in Malaysia when it became a tested component (20%) of the English Language subject in secondary schools beginning in 2000. Consequently, all English teachers in Malaysia are literature teachers by default, and they are expected to be able to teach literature in schools because literary studies in English are a compulsory component of their teacher education. Given that Malay has been the medium of instruction in schools for about four decades, this was considered a radical move by the government in its effort to improve the standard of English language among Malaysian students (Subramaniam, Hamdan & Koo, 2003; Subramaniam, 2007a).

Despite over a decade of literature in the English language classrooms, the current standard of English among Malaysian schoolchildren is still below international standard, as shown by continuous poor performance in Reading in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). According to this international assessment, developed and administered by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) every three years on 15 year olds in both OECD and non-OECD countries, Malaysian students still ranked in the bottom third in 2009 and 2012, with the lowest scores in Reading (Kang, 2013a). In the 2009 PISA, 44% of Malaysian adolescents who participated in the test failed to meet minimum proficiency in Reading. In 2012 it was reported that 51.8% Malaysian participants failed to reach the baseline level for Reading, Mathematics and Science (Putra, 2013a). This result is not only well
below the international and OECD standards, but also below the level of expected performance that reflects Malaysian’s income level and its high investment in education.

Performance in national assessments also affirms Malaysian students’ poor proficiency and literacy in English. The Minister of Education of Malaysia said that 20% of Malaysian secondary school students fail English in SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, Malaysian Certificate of Education - ‘O’ level) every year (Singh, 2013). In the 2011 English paper against Cambridge 1119 (GCE ‘O’ level) standards, only 28% of Malaysian students achieved a minimum credit (Master of languages, 2012). More alarming is the media reports on the low English proficiency among Malaysian English teachers as indicated by a significant number failing to meet the minimum proficiency standard required to teach English, according to the Cambridge Placement Test (CPT). It is widely believed that teachers’ low proficiency in English contributed to students’ poor performance in English (Low proficiency teachers, 2012). Proficiency in English has implications not only for teaching English, but also for teaching literature in English. This study investigates proficiency in English as part of the competencies required of pre-service and conversion English teachers’ literary literacy.

The recently announced *Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025* aspires for every student to be taught English by a teacher who is proficient according to international standards and that proficiency in English be boosted through more exposure to literary materials in English via an expanded, compulsory literature module at the secondary level. While applauding the ministry’s emphasis on literature in English Language Teaching (ELT), the president of the Malaysian English Language Teachers’ Association (MELTA) stressed that the lack of well trained teachers in literature caused the lack of effectiveness in using literature to help students improve their proficiency in English. (Melta: Using literature to teach, 2012).
While several studies have been conducted on schoolchildren and schoolteachers’ response and experience in teaching and learning literature (Abdul Halim, 2006; Kayad, 2007; Sidhu, 2003; Subramanian et al., 2003), little is known of how pre-service teachers are trained to teach literature and the effect of this training. This study aims to provide insight into the literature teacher education in Malaysia in order to generate a theory on literary literacy for professional preparation of literature teachers.

Studies on Malaysian schoolteachers and schoolchildren’s perspectives on literature and the impact of the literature component in English in secondary schools have indicated a general ambivalence towards literature in language education. A survey of Malaysian English schoolteachers’ reaction to literature and the literature component programme (Subramaniam et al., 2003) found that many practising schoolteachers lacked the confidence and ability to teach literature due to their perceived limited experience in literary studies and pedagogical knowledge in literature. These limitations were amplified by the constraints in the schools such as students’ lack of interest in literature and their low proficiency in English to study literature.

Schoolchildren demonstrated mixed reactions to literature, mostly influenced by the ability of the teacher to provide effective literature instruction. For example, advanced-level students in urban schools were highly critical of their teachers’ competence in English and ability to teach literature, commenting that their teachers were “dull, boring, uninteresting” and believed that they “should be more creative and pronounce words well” (Sidhu, 2003, p. 104). Intermediate-level students preferred a more creative teacher to a plethora of routine tasks and activities (Abdul Halim, 2006) such as completing comprehension task sheets. For these students, literature has not significantly improved their reading habits and skills. Further, the findings highlight teachers’ weaknesses, including poor proficiency in English and limited pedagogical content knowledge of literature.
On the other hand, students from rural areas attributed their perceived improvement in interest and ability to read literary texts to their capable and competent teachers, as well as the appropriate selection of literary texts (Kayad, 2007). Apparently, the literature component programme was their only exposure to literature in English, and they depended on the teacher as their source of information and motivation in learning literature. This indicates that teachers are important agents of change and literacy development among rural students of English and literature.

Another survey, which involved both the teachers and their students in an urban setting (Ahmad & Aziz, 2009) found that students have more positive attitudes towards literature and the teachers’ general ability to teach literature. Nonetheless, the literature classrooms were discovered to be less learner-centred than espoused by the literature curriculum.

While the top-down policy on literature has affirmed the role of literature in English language education in Malaysia, the effect of literature instruction has yet to be optimised. Emerging deficiencies in language and literary competence, as well as in pedagogy, call for an in-depth examination of the teacher education classrooms, particularly as teachers’ classroom practices reflect their teacher education (Marshall, 2000). The study reported in this thesis answers this call by exploring the experiences of pre-service and conversion English teachers in dealing with literary study at tertiary level as part of their teacher education.

Moreover, a review of the literature indicates a lack of empirical evidence to inform practice and policy on the use of literature in language education (Hall, 2005), particularly in non-native English Language contexts, despite current trends in second and foreign language teaching indicating significant integration of language and literature at various levels of education (Paran, 2008). While there was an explosion of interest and research in the role of literature in language teaching during the 1980s,
Carter notes that “literature has begun to assume a higher profile in contexts of second language acquisition, a dimension absent from the research radar in 1986” (Carter 2007, p. 10). This is true particularly for Malaysia, where literature has become a compulsory study within the English Language subject for all secondary schoolchildren.

*The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025* recognises literature as a strategy to promote critical and creative thinking beyond classrooms, improve language proficiency and enhance reading skills. The Malaysian Prime Minister said that English Literature would improve Malaysian students’ proficiency in English and develop their reading skills in stages (Turning a new chapter, 2012). He also urged Malaysians to be multilingual which would contribute to producing thinking and innovative students to meet future needs of the knowledge economy.

Steps taken to develop reading skills and improve proficiency in English through literature include increased time allocation for the English Language subject and the possibility of literature in English as a separate subject in secondary schools (Sebahagian besar murid tak upaya, 2011). Further, the Malaysian Minister of Education announced that from 2016 it would be compulsory to pass the English Language subject, of which 20% is literature in English, in order to pass SPM or the Malaysian Certificate of Education (Singh, 2013). In other words, in order to obtain a high school certificate, Malaysian students must pass English.

With literature an inextricable part of English language education, teachers of English in Malaysia are expected to be proficient in English and competent in literature. Yet, there are doubts about the quality of Malaysian English teachers: the Ministry of Education (MoE) has acknowledged that many current English teachers have an insufficient level of proficiency in English to teach English and about 30% of the current English teachers were not originally trained to teach English (Low proficiency teachers, 2012). The revised education system would prioritise quality teacher education to provide effective
training for teachers and retraining for under-performing English teachers. In fact, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has started to train 61,000 teachers to be more proficient in English (Singh, 2013). However, details on the kind of training, and measure of its effectiveness have not been provided.

The issue of teacher competence, which is common in the English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) contexts (Subramaniam, 2003b), is becoming more pressing in the light of recent developments in English language policy in the country. Major stakeholders, particularly parents are calling for a serious review of the existing curriculum, teaching method and teacher training pedagogy (Putra, 2013b).

There seems to be very little data about how individual readers or a group of ESL learners read and respond to literature in English as a content subject, particularly at the university level despite the fact that:

studies of teachers’ source of knowledge and years of anecdotal teacher reports suggest that the literature instruction teachers receive in college – the texts that are taught, the discussions that are held, the writing that is assigned – profoundly affects the instruction they provide when they begin teaching (Marshall, 2000, p. 396).

The scarcity of research on the learners’ perspectives and response to literature at the tertiary level needs to be addressed urgently. Marshall (2000) highlights that:

literature teaching at the university level probably does more to shape literature teaching in secondary school settings than any other single influence; and yet we have had virtually no systematic studies of how literature teaching at university proceeds (Marshall, 2000, p. 11).

This issue is reiterated by Carter (2007) who calls for more “empirical classroom-based research” and to “ensure that very proper concerns with pedagogic process are better rooted in verifiable evidence of classroom practice” (p. 11). Within the current development in literature education in the context of Malaysia, it is imperative to ascertain that prospective English teachers are appropriately and adequately prepared not only to study literature but more importantly, to teach literature.
While there are many studies on how teachers prepare themselves to teach literature to schoolchildren (Agee, 1997, 1998, 2004, 2006; Baleiro, 2011; Lehman & Scharer, 1996; Pace, 2006; Sumara, Davis & Iftody, 2006), they are mostly concerned with pre-service teachers or novice teachers who are predominantly white, competent, and highly motivated to teach literature, and more importantly, in the native language contexts. The present study examines literature teacher education in the non-native context whereby the participants are required to study literature as part of their professional preparation to teach the target language and literature in that language.

The key motivation for this study is the development of knowledge to improve the provision of quality English and literature education for Malaysian students, which hinges on the availability of sufficiently proficient and competent English teachers. Specifically, this study is concerned with the development of knowledge to improve the provision of effective literature education for pre-service and conversion English teachers within the teacher education programme at the tertiary level.

My personal motivation for this study stemmed from my experience as a student of literature and as a teacher educator in literature within the Malaysian education system. In secondary school, I studied literature as an elective subject for examination at the ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels with excellent results in the former but just a pass in the latter. My initial shock and disappointment turned to anger when I recalled how one of the teachers had taught the class literally using the ‘chalk and talk’ method. She would spend the whole 80-minute lesson practically narrating the events in the story and writing short hand notes on the literary elements of the text on the board. We were hardly involved in the lesson as we were expected to copy the notes. There was little opportunity for writing practice, such as an essay or critique on the reading, whether in the literature classroom or on our own. Consequently, we did not know how to study literature, much less to prepare for literature examination. Moreover, many texts and resources took a long time.
to arrive or were not available altogether in the bookstores in East Malaysia then, which was the pre-internet era. I could not help but compare her with the teacher who taught me literature at ‘O’ level who did not give notes but asked a lot of probing questions instead. She also made us recite poems and pertinent parts of the texts studied, such as the key speeches in the Shakespearean plays.

In retrospect, I believe my Form Six teacher’s teaching method was ineffective and contributed to my poor experience in ‘A’ level literary studies and so I was determined to prove myself in the Bachelor of Education in Teaching of English as a Second Language (B. Ed. TESL) programme at a public university in West Malaysia. Back then, TESL majors were allowed to choose a minor from a few options such as Literature or Malay Language. I chose Literature in which I thrived and for which I attribute my positive experience to my excellent teachers and my study-group members who were passionate about literature and were competent in English.

At university, I was involved in many exciting activities such as a full scale play production (on Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*) and a study-cum-backpacking trip to various parts of the United Kingdom and Europe where we visited Shakespeare’s birth-place and other famous places of writers and stories we had discussed in the university literature classroom. I am convinced that these opportunities for meaningful practice and application of knowledge gained in literature contributed to my positive experience of studying literature at tertiary level in the teacher education programme which I believe was effective in nurturing a love for literature and boosting confidence to teach literature.

During my first professional posting at a rural secondary school in my hometown in East Malaysia (Borneo), I often made use of the class readers under the literature-based reading programme to teach English although literature was not a compulsory component of the subject. Despite their limited proficiency in English my students
appreciated my weekly *story-time* in English class when even the most difficult students enjoyed an animated discussion, albeit in Malay sometimes, of a story or a poem written in English. After about two years teaching in secondary school, I embarked on a career move to teach at the tertiary level.

After obtaining a Masters degree in Applied Linguistics, I began my career as a teacher educator in the TESL programme at a local Malaysian public university. Very soon, I discovered that a Masters degree from a foreign university and a passion for English and literature were not adequate for teaching many of the pre-service and conversion English teachers who seemed to have limited interest and ability in literature. Thus, teaching and learning literature became a daunting task for both the prospective teachers and the novice teacher educator. I find it ironic that while literature is now a compulsory strand in the language teacher education programme, many student teachers do not seem to be able to deal with studying literature. In my nine year experience as a teacher educator, teaching mainly literature courses, I have witnessed how many students struggled with studying literature. Some students repeatedly failed certain literature courses, and most students considered literature courses ‘killer papers’. Hence, I was moved to explore the challenges students like these experienced in dealing with literary studies which would help me understand their situation and help me to be a better teacher educator.

This doctoral research has provided me an opportunity to gain an understanding of the experiences of pre-service and conversion teachers of English in dealing with studying literature in English as part of their professional preparation. Generating a substantive theory of their literary literacy provides invaluable insights for the development of knowledge to improve the provision of effective literature education at all levels in the Malaysian ESL context. With literature assuming a significant role in English language
education in Malaysia, it is imperative that literature teacher education be a positive experience for both the teacher educator and the student teacher.

1.2 Aim and objectives of the study

The overarching aim of this study was to generate a substantive theory on the literary literacy for professional preparation of Malaysian pre-service and conversion English teachers. This was achieved by exploring the participants’ perspectives on literature and experiences in dealing with studying literature as part of their teacher education programme at university. The findings of this study provided new insights into literature in language education in the non-native context, with implications for policy and practice in literature education, particularly for prospective English teachers in Malaysia.

The objectives of the study were to investigate the participants’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature, to examine and compare their experiences in dealing with studying university literature courses, and to identify literary literacy practices in university literature classrooms that they considered useful for their professional preparation to teach literature.

1.3 Definition of key terms

This section presents an operational definition of the key terms used in this study, namely, literary literacy, pre-service teachers and conversion English teachers. The former describes the key concept and the latter the participants of the study. The conceptual framework will be discussed further in Chapter Three and the participants will be described in detail in Chapter Four.
1.3.1 Literary literacy

In this study, the concept of literary literacy is framed by the principles of literacy and the literary. Literacy is viewed from the socio-cultural perspectives (Street, 1984, 1995, 2001, 2009) in which literacy is understood as a set of contextualised practices rather than a set of technical skills. Literacy as a social practice is concerned with what people do with reading and writing, and the reasons for their actions (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). At the same time, it is bigger than actions as language “always comes fully attached to ‘other stuff’: to social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world” (Gee, 1996, p. vii). Literacy is viewed as a situated practice, and an understanding of it “requires detailed, in-depth accounts of actual practice in different cultural settings” (Street, 2001, p. 430).

In this study, literary literacy draws from the notion of literary competence, which is the implicit understanding of, and familiarity with, certain conventions that allows readers to take the words on the page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meanings (Culler, 1975). Carter and Long (1991) distinguish between knowledge about literature and knowledge of literature. The former involves accumulating facts about literary context such as dates, authors, titles of texts, names of literary conventions and literary terms, whereas the latter refers to the personal pleasures and enjoyment in reading and responding to literature. Knowledge of literature comprises “emotional and experiential response and involvement” (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 4). In other words, readers of literature will not only read the literary text to make meaning and interpretations but also to relate these meanings to themselves and others. In the context of this study, literary literacy is conceptualised broadly as the ability to not only read and respond to literary works but more importantly to communicate these understandings and responses for pedagogical purposes.
The nature of literacy is best understood as a set of social practices, which are inferred from events mediated by written texts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000). In this study, the literacy event occurs when the pre-service and conversion English teachers deal with literary studies in the teacher education programme at tertiary level. For this, an examination of their literary literacy practices would encompass “the various types of complex knowledge” they need in order to “to effectively practice literacy” and this information would contribute in developing appropriate literacy and effective literacy instruction in their context (Perry, 2012, p. 62). The major knowledge types that contribute to the working definition of literary literacy in this study are knowledge of literature (content knowledge) and knowledge of teaching and learning (pedagogical knowledge). In short, literary literacy is conceptualised as the interface between the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge of literature.

For this study, the working definition of literary literacy draws from two related kinds of literacy: Baleiro’s (2011) definition of literary literacy based on academic literacy models and Maclellan’s (2008) conceptualisation of pedagogical literacy. Works on teacher knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Shulman & Shulman, 2004) and teacher education (Korthagen, Loughran & Russel, 2006; Loughran, 2006) also informed this study. This conceptual framework will be presented in details in Chapter Three.

1.3.2 **Pre-service English teachers**

In this study, the term pre-service English teachers, hereafter known as PST, refers to secondary school graduates with ‘A’ level certificate or recognised diploma who enrolled in the TESL degree programme at the university. They were selected by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MoHE) based on their academic merits and the *Malaysian University English Exam (MUET)* results for placement in teacher education programme at public universities.
1.3.3 Conversion English teachers

The term conversion English teachers, hereafter known as CET, is coined in this study to reflect the participants’ conversion in two aspects: from teaching in primary school to teaching in secondary school, and from teaching subjects other than English to teaching English Language and Literature. Most of them had been teaching in primary schools, in remote and rural areas for a stipulated period before applying for further study in the teacher education programme at tertiary level.

While all had obtained a Diploma in Teaching from Teachers’ College, some were trained to teach subjects other than English including Mathematics, Chinese Language and Malay Language. They were selected by the Ministry of Education (MoE), based on their professional merits, as well as their personal interest to pursue a degree in teaching to enable them to teach in secondary schools. Teachers who possess a teaching degree would be appointed to teach in secondary schools, which are located mostly in urban to semi-rural areas with a higher salary scale.

1.4 Overview of the literature

This study on the literary literacy of pre-service and conversion teachers of English in Malaysia was informed by the theoretical and empirical literature from three cognate fields of research: literary studies, literacy studies and teacher education. The literature review consists of two parts: the value and role of literature in language education and the conceptualisation of literary literacy.

The value and role of literature in education are determined by the orientation to its language (O’Neill, 1995). Globalisation has asserted the role of English as the language for knowledge economy, particularly for developing countries like Malaysia (Nunan, 2003). Literature in English is being studied in the language classroom to enhance cultural awareness, language awareness, personal growth and literacy development.
Models and approaches to teaching literature are useful to explain the variety of literature curricula and to understand the roles of the key stakeholders in their respective contexts. While there are apparent benefits of using literature in the language classroom, teachers need to be prepared to address accompanying pedagogical issues and challenges, particularly in the non-native contexts.

In essence, literary literacy is a type of literacy pertaining to the study of literature, whether as a content subject or as a resource in the language classroom. In this study, the socio-cultural perspective of literacy (Street, 1984, 1995, 2001, 2009) is useful to explain literary literacy within the Malaysian ESL context. This is a broader view of literacy as a set of contextualised practices rather than a set of discrete skills to be learned. These practices may be reflected in the activation of knowledge and skills relevant to the context of use.

Examining literary studies from the learners’ perspective essentially highlights the reader response approaches to literary studies. It focuses on the learners’ interaction with the literary texts and factors that might facilitate or inhibit their successful experience in studying literature. As the learners are prospective teachers of literature, a conceptualisation of literary literacy must take into account the knowledge bases for teachers.

1.5 Overview of the research method

This study involved an in-depth investigation on the participants’ experiences in dealing with literary studies as part of their teacher education. Hence, the qualitative approach was suitable to get personal insights into the participants’ experience. The interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand the participants’ lived experiences by accessing their perspectives (O’Donoghue, 2007; Patton, 2002). While there have been several studies on schoolteachers and schoolchildren’s perspectives on the teaching and learning of
literature within the school contexts, there has been no direct qualitative reporting of prospective teachers’ experience in dealing with literary study within the teacher education context. This study provided the pre-service and conversion English teachers the opportunity to present their perspectives on the teaching and learning literature in the Malaysian ESL context and in their own voices.

The study was located at a single university site and involved participants from two sub-groups: the pre-service teachers (PST) and the conversion English teachers (CET). Data were collected from multiple sources comprising focus group interviews and their accompanying written summary, non-participant classroom observations, individual interviews, reading journals and other documentary data. Data analysis entailed an inductive analysis in which emerging concepts from raw data were constantly coded and compared. Cross-case analysis of the data from the two sub-groups identified convergent and divergent perspectives on teaching and learning literature, experiences in dealing with studying literature at tertiary level and literary literacy practices useful for literary studies. Emerging themes and categories produced propositions that generate a theory of the participants’ literary literacy for professional preparation.

1.6 Overview of the findings

The findings of the study show that the participants’ diverse backgrounds and prior experiences in literature significantly influence their attitude towards teaching and learning literature, their motivation to study literature, and their ability to deal with studying literature. Limited exposure to literature in English and limited experience in literary studies contribute to the lack of interest in literature. In addition, lack of reading and limited ability to read critically and think creatively adversely affect level of language competence, literary competence or both. There was little opportunity for
practice and development of pedagogical content knowledge of literature due to limited exposure to the real secondary school classrooms.

The emerging themes of the study have produced key propositions to generate a substantive theory of literary literacy of pre-service and conversion English teachers in Malaysia. The themes are: appropriateness of preparation to study literature, adequacy to study literature, appropriateness of preparation to teach literature, dissonance between ideational curriculum and operational curriculum and commitment to the profession. These themes can be categorised into complexities of literary studies for the Linguistically and Culturally Diverse (CALD) learners, pedagogical challenges of literature teacher education and definition of literary literacy in the ESL context of Malaysia.

The findings of the study have generated a substantive theory of literary literacy for professional preparation as the intersection of language competence, literary competence and pedagogical knowledge. The findings show that the participants’ current literary literacy for professional preparation is in a nascent state or at an early developmental stage. A model of literary literacy for professional preparation is proposed to inform literary literacy instruction for pre-service and conversion English teachers in the non-native context of Malaysia.

1.7 Significance of the study

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the findings of this learner perspective study contribute the much needed empirical data on literature in language education, particularly in a non-native context (Paran, 2008). While theoretical propositions about the role and value and literature in language education have been established, they need to be validated by sufficient empirical evidences and applied in context (Hall, 2005). This study conceptualised literary literacy in English in teacher
education and in a non-native context based on the experiences of pre-service conversion English teachers in Malaysia.

Secondly, this study provides insight into the teaching and learning of literature at the micro-level, based on the learners’ experiences and in their own voices. The focus on learners’ perspectives enabled the study to capture the effect of literary study on the learners’ affective domain. For example, participants who believed they had limited positive experience in literature and were linguistically challenged for literary studies at tertiary level became highly apprehensive about literature throughout the teacher education programme. This suggests that they will not be adequately prepared to teach literature effectively when they are posted to secondary schools. The findings of this study provide information on factors influencing participants’ literary literacy and possible solutions to their problems. Using the case study method, and with rich data gathered from multiple sources, the study covers the micro-level, classroom-based challenges of literary study, learner motivation, and learner needs.

Thirdly, this study contributes insight on the use of a qualitative approach using the case study method to produce an in-depth examination of the learners’ perspective. Learners’ elaborate accounts of their experience in dealing with studying literature were captured and triangulated with other sources of information, including their written work and the researcher’s field notes on their activities in the literature classrooms during non-participant observations. These rich data provide first-hand information in the context of the real classroom added to the data from previous related studies gathered mostly from self-report surveys and secondary sources.

For learners of literature, particularly the participants of this study and others with similar characteristics and in similar situations, the rich data in this study may help them become aware of how they deal with literary studies compared with their peers. For teachers of reading and language, as well as teacher educators, the information is useful
for a deeper understanding of the learners’ perspectives. For curriculum developers and policy makers, these insights are crucial for planning and management of literature programmes that take into account learners’ real needs.

Fourthly, the findings of this study provide evidence for assertions made in previous related studies and highlight paradoxes in the current state of literature in language education in the Malaysian context. For example, the pre-service teachers’ recounts of their experience learning the literature component in English in secondary schools confirms a mismatch between the ideational literature curriculum and the operational curriculum which negatively affects their ability to deal with literary studies at tertiary level. Despite much effort and investment in literature instruction at school level, there seems to be minimal effect on the learners’ interest and ability in literature post secondary school. Contrary to its objective, literature instruction in secondary schools has not prepared students for literary studies at tertiary level.

Another paradox concerns the status of English in Malaysia. Based on the study participants’ experience in English, there is a disparity between the declared status and the operational status of English in Malaysia. The limited use of English, not only in rural areas but also among urban populations due to a wide range of language choice in the multilingual context of Malaysia, is making English increasingly a foreign language. The participants’ low level of competence in English, much less in literature, is alarming and implies little improvement in literacy and proficiency in English in the future.

While there have been calls for intervention such as providing effective teacher education, there are few guidelines for planning and implementation. The findings of this study provide insights for an intervention plan to deal with the challenges faced by learners of literature. For example, an effective intervention plan should address
language competence needs by providing appropriate and adequate language support before, during and after the teacher education programme.

1.8 Conclusion

Malaysia’s aspiration to develop its knowledge economy and compete in the global market will be jeopardised by its students’ poor proficiency and literacy in English. There is an urgent call to improve and intensify the teaching of literature component in the English Language subject at primary and secondary school levels. Yet, recent media reports revealed that not only is there a lack of teachers well-trained to teach literature, but many Malaysian teachers of English do not have sufficient proficiency in English to begin with. The study reported in this thesis explores what happens in the literature classroom of the teacher education programme to determine how well teachers are prepared to teach literature, as measured by their literacy literacy.

In this study, literary literacy is conceptualised as the interface between theoretical knowledge and pedagogical practices in literature. By exploring the participants’ experience in dealing with studying literature for the professional preparation to teach literature, the study has developed a substantive theory of their literary literacy, which has implications for policy and practice of literature in language education.

This chapter has provided an overview of the study reported in this thesis. The next chapter traces the development of English language policy and practice in Malaysia from the colonial period until the present day. The policy shifts reflect theoretical shifts in the relationships between English Language study and the role of literature in that process.
Chapter 2  Context and Rationale

2.1  Introduction

This chapter describes the historical background encompassing socio-cultural, political and economic situations that have impacted on language education policy, resulting in the present state of literature education in Malaysia. The diverse socio-cultural, linguistic and economic background of Malaysia’s population contributed to shifts in educational policy, which are deemed necessary for national integration and nation building. Shifts in educational policy, which impacted on the teaching and learning of English language, present many pedagogical challenges to the major stakeholders, particularly Malaysian teachers of English. Since the year 2000, all teachers of English are required to teach literature in English, which is a tested component of the compulsory English Language subject in secondary schools. An overview of the development of literature education in Malaysian schools, the literature curricula, and empirical data identifying emergent issues in teaching and learning literature in Malaysia provides context and rationale for this study on the literary literacy of pre-service and conversion English teachers in Malaysia.

2.2  Historical background

This historical background focuses on Malaysia’s language policy for nation-building, national identity and unity within its multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual society.
With a population of about 28.3 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010), Malaysia is a truly multiracial and multilingual society where 140 languages are spoken (David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009; Grimes, 2000). There are three major ethnic groups: Bumiputera (67.4%), literally translated as ‘sons of the soil’ (Gill, 2005) comprising Malays, natives and indigenous people, Chinese (24.6%), and Indians (7.3%), with other minor groups such as Eurasian (0.7%).

Sarawak, the research site, is East Malaysia’s biggest state situated on the island of Borneo, has an estimated population of 2,557,101 with a wide variety of native and indigenous groups. While the Malays are the majority Bumiputera in West/Peninsular Malaysia, the native Ibans are the majority 738.7 (28.9%) in Sarawak, followed by Chinese 643.3 (25.2%), Malays 572 (22.4%), Bidayuhs 204.8 (8.0%), Melanaus 143.5 (5.6%), other Bumiputera (other natives and indigenous groups) 144.4 (5.6%), others (such as Eurasians) 10.0 (0.4%) and non-Malaysian citizens 100.4 (3.9%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). The researcher is a member of the native Bidayuh ethnic group.

While it is generally assumed that there are three main languages spoken in the country, in reality, there is a multitude of languages and dialects spoken within and between the multiethnic groups (Hassan, 2004). For example, among the Chinese community, there are several mutually unintelligible ‘dialects’ such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainanese. In Sarawak, there are 46 known indigenous languages (Grimes, 2000) in addition to Malay language and its variations, and Chinese language and dialects. This diverse sociolinguistic context naturally produces sensitive reactions toward a common national language despite its aims for modernisation and social integration (Hassan, 2004). Nonetheless, establishing a common national language was the nation’s first step toward a national identity and achieving unity in diversity immediately after its independence from the British colonialist rule in 1957. Thereafter, independent
Malaysia focused on educational agendas for nation-building, national identity and unity with language policy its powerful tool (Gill, 2005).

Historically, the education system in Peninsular Malaysia was diverse and divided, consistent with the British policy of divide and rule which ensured that the major ethnic groups were kept within their respective territories and roles (Hassan, 2004). The Malays, and Indians, particularly boys, were provided up to six years of elementary education on basic skills such as simple arithmetic to prepare the former for government service and the latter for work in the rubber plantations and railways. The Chinese, who worked the tin mines and operated business in urban areas, were allowed to establish their own schools supported by China. Vernacular languages were used in the Chinese and Indian schools, with curricula, textbooks and teachers imported largely from China and India. At the same time, English education was made available, first by various Christian missionary groups and later by the British colonial government, but mainly in the urban areas. These English schools, with English language curriculum from the UK and America, became remarkably successful and popular because English education was associated with economic opportunity and social mobility (Gill 2005). However, they benefited only the urban communities, comprising mostly Chinese immigrants and the Malay elite. The majority of the Malays who resided in the rural areas received their elementary education in religious schools in which Arabic was taught for reading the Quran, or in Malay-medium schools.

Despite the fact that English was then the official language and was made compulsory in all primary and secondary schools, this policy was not implemented in vernacular schools due to a lack of qualified English teachers. This fragmented education system (Foo & Richards, 2004) would not sustain a nation striving for independence. The disparity in education was the impetus for a national language and language-in-education policy in post-independence Malaysia. Bahasa Melayu (BM) or the Malay
Language was selected as the national and official language of Malaysia and the medium of instruction in education for ethnic and nationalistic reasons and to achieve social and economic balance (Gil, 2005).

2.3 Language policy shifts

The development of English language education in Malaysia has been affected by policy shifts dictated by the needs for nation building and national integration. Throughout its five decades of independence, Malaysia has undergone several shifts in language policy, the first one in 1970 from English to BM, the second one in 2002 from BM to English, and another reversal from English to BM in 2012. The shifts in language policy had strong socio-political impact, but were necessary for nation-building dictated by globalisation and the new knowledge economy (Gill, 2005). The following sections provide a chronology of the historical development of language and educational policy, explaining the reasons for the changes.

Towards independence, the Ministry of Education commissioned a committee to review the education system with a view to establishing a national education system for its multicultural and multilingual citizens. The report of this committee, known as the *Razak Report 1956* began the groundwork for the *National Education Policy (NEP)*, which was to be implemented in the 1970s. The two most significant contributions of the *Razak Report* were the establishment of a national school system with BM as the medium of instruction and the development of a common content curriculum for all schools (Foo & Richards, 2004).

While BM was declared the national language and medium of instruction in national schools, English was still recognised as an important language for employment opportunities and higher education, and was made a compulsory subject in all schools. *The Razak Report* defined the position of English in Malaysia as “the second most
important language” (Omar, 1992, p. 84) and paved the way for the NEP which made English language education accessible to all levels of society. As such, bilingual education using Malay and English was allowed, although in reality, such a situation was possible for just over a decade.

Soon after independence, driven by strong nationalistic sentiment, another review of the NEP made explicit that Malay would be the official language and the medium of instruction in all national schools. The review, known as the Rahman Talib Report 1960, became instrumental in converting all schools in Malaysia into Malay-medium schools (Vethamani, 2007). This move was expedited in July 1969, when following massive racial riots in Malaysia, the Minister of Education declared that all English-medium schools would be converted into Malay-medium schools from January 1970, with all other subjects taught in BM.

From 1970 to 1990, under the implementation of the National Language Policy (NLP), English was phased out as the medium of instruction and was relegated to a subject taught one period per week. This first drastic change in language policy would have many immediate and long-term implications for the major stakeholders, particularly schoolteachers and schoolchildren (Gaudart, 1987; Gill, 2005). This occasioned troubled times for those English medium teachers, especially in the upper forms and tertiary level, who found it difficult to communicate in BM. The change in the medium of instruction made them feel suddenly inadequate and many either migrated to English speaking neighbouring nations or became English teachers (Gaudart, 1987). The former resulted in the loss of qualified subject teachers, whereas the latter produced many English teachers who were not adequately trained in English teaching methodology.

By 1983, English as a medium of instruction in school was completely phased out and the BM medium was implemented at tertiary level. However, a lack of textbooks in BM and the complexity of appropriate translations of materials into BM, ensured that
disciplines such as medicine, law and engineering continued to use English as the medium of instruction (Omar, 1992).

Omar (1992) noted that the rate of English literacy among Malaysians was 30% during the decade of transition from English medium to Malay medium in 1970 and 1980, and there was a general belief that the standard of English had declined. The perceived ability in spoken English did not correlate with the ability to read and write and general proficiency in English. She argued that the decline in the level of proficiency was a consequence of the drastically reduced time for English teaching. In principle, English was an important second language but in reality, it was taught as any other subject such as Geography, albeit a compulsory subject.

It was also observed that Malaysians who were brought up during the English medium period seemed to have a higher level of proficiency than the new generation with a lower proficiency of a variety of Malaysian English. Further, it was alarming for the newly independent government that many Malaysian students in the new generation had not achieved an “internationally intelligible” standard of English, required for international communication (Vethamani, 2007, p. 4).

English teachers generally agreed that schoolchildren from the BM medium education system were not able to express themselves clearly and fluently in English, particularly in the productive skills of speaking and writing (Hassan & Selamat, 2002b). Weaknesses in their receptive skills of listening and reading were inferred on the premise that if the students had read and processed information better, they would be better able to generate and express ideas. In short, policy shift had adverse effects on the literacy and more importantly, proficiency in English. Moreover, English was a second language only in the urban areas; rural populations in multilingual Malaysia communicated mainly in Malay and in their vernacular languages (Rajaretnam & Nalliah, 1999).
The adverse effects of the first language policy change from English to BM on the literacy and proficiency in English among Malaysian students became more prominent in the 1990s, in view of the predominance of English as the undisputed language of Science and Technology and the universal language of communication (Nunan, 2003). It was imperative that Malaysian students improve their proficiency in English and achieve international standards in order to compete in the international market. Influenced by factors of globalisation, the 1990s saw a re-establishment of English in the Malaysian education system (Omar, 1992). In 1991, Malaysia’s Prime Minister announced Vision 2020 which would be Malaysia’s blueprint for its complete transformation into an industrialised nation by the year 2020. To ensure the availability of innovative knowledge workers who are not only consumers but more importantly contributors of technology, the position of English language in the Malaysian education system was reaffirmed.

In 1996, the *Education Act* advocated the use of English as a medium of instruction for technical areas in post secondary curriculum and in 2003 English became the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics subjects not only at tertiary levels but for all levels of education, beginning with the first year of primary schooling. This language policy, known as *English for the Teaching of Mathematics and Science (ETeMS)* was considered another drastic change in language policy involving the re-establishment of English in modern Malaysia which would occasion another wave of implications for the Malaysian education system (Gill, 2005).

While these changes were imperative for globalisation in the new economy, they were not accompanied by appropriate preparations and resulted in apparent failures, as indicated by the dismal performance in English, not only among schoolchildren, but also among Malaysian English teachers. Recent statistics on Malaysian schoolchildren’s performance in English in national public examinations, as well as international
assessments published in a special media report in conjunction with the announcement of the *Malaysian Educational Blueprint 2013-2025* (Goh et al., 2012), show a continuously low proficiency in English. While there is widespread operational proficiency in BM with 75% students achieving minimum credit in 2010 SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education – ‘O’ level), only 28% achieved a minimum credit in the English paper. There are also notable differences in outcomes by ethnicity: Bumiputera students performed very strongly (84%) in BM but very poorly (23%) in English. Students’ low performance in English language was linked to low proficiency among English teachers as evidenced by the fact that a significant number of over 7,500 English teachers who took the *Cambridge Placement Test (CPT)* did not meet the minimum proficiency standard required for teaching English.

The dismal performance in the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* 2009, placed Malaysian students in the bottom third in the international assessment, with 44% failing to meet minimum proficiency in Reading, indicating low literacy and proficiency in English among Malaysian adolescents. In 2012 Malaysian students still ranked in the bottom third with 51.8% participants failing to reach the baseline level for Reading, Mathematics and Science (Putra, 2013a).

The ability to use English effectively has been identified as an important factor for employability among Malaysian graduates. Since 2006, poor English proficiency among fresh graduates has been consistently ranked as one of the top five issues facing Malaysian employers. Graduates from the English-medium private universities were preferred due to their competency in English compared with graduates of BM-medium public universities. This became a socio-economic factor when in 2002, about 40,000 graduates from public universities, mostly members of the dominant ethnic group, the Malays, were unemployed (Gill, 2005). Indeed, the first policy change from English to
BM has systematically produced a monolingual group among the Malays (Hassan, 2004) whereas the other ethnic groups in Malaysia are largely multilingual.

Faced with a bleak future in English, the Malaysian government conceded that the recent language policy changes had failed and the present education system needed a major revamp. In 2011, the Minister of Education Malaysia announced that ETeMS had failed because only 5% of the 7000 primary schools and 9% of the 2000 secondary schools were using English, whereas the rest continued to teach Mathematics and English bilingually or in BM. This is because the students, particularly in the rural schools, were not able to understand English (Sebahagian besar murid tak upaya, 2011). For the sake of these students, ETeMS is to be abolished by 2016 in primary schools and 2021 in secondary schools. A new bilingual language policy, known as Memartabatkan Bahasa Melayu dan Memperkasakan Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI) translated as To uphold the Malay Language, to strengthen the English Language was launched in 2010. This language policy aims to balance the importance of English for nation-building and BM for national identity (Badri, 2010).

In 2012, the Malaysian Prime Minister launched the Malaysian Educational Blueprint 2013-2025, and emphasised that Malaysian should be bilingual, if not multilingual in order to compete in the new economy (Turning a new chapter, 2012). The present education system needs to be revamped to produce thinking and innovative students to meet future needs of the new economy focusing on knowledge, innovation and technology.

In conclusion, while the national education policy through BM as the national language and medium of instruction provided equal opportunity in national education with a common curriculum for national integration, it has contributed to a huge gap in English literacy and proficiency in English among its multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural society. Recognising the international dominance of English as a global language for the
new knowledge economy, Malaysia has to take effective means to improve English proficiency and competence among its new generation of school and university students such as by using literature in English in ELT.

2.4 English and literature education in Malaysia

Language policy shifts have determined the role and position of literature in English in the Malaysian education system, as reflected in the changes in the English language syllabuses. Until 1983, the English syllabus for primary and secondary education was divided into three phases spanning three different approaches (Pandian, 2002). The primary school syllabus was based on a structural-situational approach or the Oral Method whereas the lower secondary syllabus employed a contextually-based approach to teaching the language structures. Grammar was taught discretely and in isolation, with rote memory and repetitive drills commonly used in class. Hence, it was essentially a teacher-centred approach, which emphasised accurate use of the language at the expense of real communication.

*The Third Malaysian Plan 1976-1980* recognised the role of English as the lingua franca of trade and commerce as well as the language of Science and Technology. In line with the nation’s aspiration to produce competent human resources who are proficient in English, the upper secondary school syllabus developed in 1980 adopted the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, in keeping with the trends of the time (Foo & Richards, 2004). Ironically, this sudden change to a communicative approach and the discrepancies between the primary and secondary school syllabuses (Pandian, 2002) made it difficult for students and teachers to adjust. For example, the switch of focus from accuracy to fluency resulted in the teaching of reduced and simplified grammar. The syllabus was found to be designed more for students who were constantly exposed to English, and so this approach did not benefit students whose
backgrounds were not English speaking, and/or those from the rural areas who continued to have very low proficiency in English at exit point (Rajaretnam & Nalliah, 1999). Movement toward a curriculum that was truly common in terms of its direction and approach resulted in a review of the syllabus in 1979 and the development of a skills-based approach to language teaching at all levels of education. The new syllabus included a greater emphasis on developing adequate proficiency in English for the acquisition of knowledge in Science and Technology, to cater for the needs of the nation in producing competent and capable workforce.

The New Curriculum for Primary School, known in Malay as Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) was introduced in 1983 and The New Curriculum for Secondary School, Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah (KBSM), was implemented in 1989. These syllabuses were skills-based and used a thematic approach to teach oracy (listening and speaking) and literacy (reading and writing) skills. At primary school, students were taught the basic skills and knowledge of English to enable them to communicate in and out of school. At secondary school, these skills and proficiency were extended to situations that reflected authentic use of the language to prepare students for further studies and communication at the workplace. Classroom practices allowed for more opportunities for students to use the language to present their ideas and opinions during group work and open discussions on themes that were deemed relevant and interesting. This signified a move toward more student-centred learning. However, the concept and its practices were not applied effectively in real classrooms. Studies conducted by the curriculum development centre (Pandian, 2002) found that the English classes were far from innovative and fun as the teachers resorted to drills using past-year exam questions and worksheets to prepare students for the public examination. Further, many teachers were not trained to teach English and were not able to appreciate the ideologies of communicative language teaching in an exam oriented education system.
It was within the common curriculum in the 1980s that literary materials were formally integrated in the English Language classrooms to develop literacy. At the primary school level, the objectives of the KBSR included developing literacy practices and good reading habits through literature. At the secondary school level, the KBSM included a literature component in the English to enable students to “engage in wider range of good works for enjoyment and for self-development” (Foo & Richards, 2004, p. 235). This means a major thrust of the new English curriculum was the development of a holistic person through good literacy practices using literary texts.

In 2000, the English language curriculum for Malaysian schools was revised in line with needs and changes in various areas such as technology and higher education. Known as the Language Use Syllabus, it was implemented in 2003 and is still used today. It defined the current role of literature in the English Language syllabus in secondary schools. The main thrust of this syllabus is to extend the teaching of oracy and literacy skills within the three domains of the interpersonal, informational, and aesthetic. The communicative approach to language teaching is still advocated, together with the thematic approach, but the focus is on depth rather than breadth. For example, the number of themes has been reduced from eleven to five, namely people, environment, social issues, health, science and technology. Grammar is taught in context and a running word list is used for flexibility. Literature in English is taught, within the domain of the aesthetic use, as a tested component (20%) of the English Language subject, making literary study compulsory for all secondary school students. Students are exposed to a variety of literary texts to allow them to “enjoy literary texts at a level suited to their language proficiency and [to develop] in them the ability to express themselves creatively” (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003, p.2).

Within the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the role of literature in ELT is emphasised as a means to improve reading, and proficiency through reading (Turning a
new chapter, 2012). Time allocated for English will be expanded from 240-300 minutes in primary school, with an additional one hour in secondary school. There is also a possibility of making literature a compulsory subject on its own (Sebahagian besar murid tak upaya, 2011). Clearly, the development and implementation of language education policy in Malaysia has recognised the importance of literature in English for the improvement of literacy and proficiency.

2.4.1 Development of literature in language education

Prior to independence in 1957, English literature was taught as a subject in English schools and was embraced as part of English education. The English educated were expected to read and appreciate literary texts mostly from the British or American canon, according to the missionary group that funded the schools. In the 1950s and 1960s, English literature was offered as an elective subject for examination at the national ‘A’ level, with its syllabus and examination from Cambridge University, UK. As English was the official language then, and was used widely in the schools, there were many candidates for the paper (Subramanian, 2003b). However, because these English schools were located mostly in the urban areas and populated by the more privileged children of migrants and local aristocrats, English and English literature became the domain of the elite.

The fact that English education ensured a good position in the government service and opportunity for higher education abroad motivated many to learn English and literature, and to become teachers in the government schools after independence (Gaudart, 1987). English teachers who came from this era were more confident in teaching literature than the new generation of English teachers because they were more exposed to the study of literature (Omar, 1992).
Post independence, the implementation of the NEP in 1970 resulted in English being a compulsory second language in all schools. The positive effect of this was that literary texts in English, which were largely used as resource material in English Language Teaching (ELT), became accessible to all schoolchildren in all Malaysian schools. However, in practice, rural students were not significantly affected as there was little need to use English in their lives and hence a lack of motivation and proficiency in English (Ismail & Arif, 2002) much less in literature in English (McRae, 1992).

Post-independence, literature education in Malaysian schools has existed in the form of supplementary reading programmes, literature as an elective subject for examination, and since 2000, as a compulsory component of the English Language subject. Literature-based reading programmes have been implemented at both the primary and secondary school levels with the aim of developing proficiency in English through good reading habits and skills among schoolchildren (Subramaniam, 2003b). The first reading programme was the New Zealand Readers Programme (NZRP), introduced in the 1970s for upper primary schools, in line with the government’s policy to ensure accessible and quality English education for all, including rural children. While simple graded readers, comprising mostly fairy tales and simple stories from abroad were provided, how they were utilised was unmonitored, and their impact inconclusive.

In the 1980s, a similar reading programme known as the World Bank Reading Project (WBRP) was implemented, with an additional aim of widening the reader’s knowledge and worldview, in line with the aspiration of the country to become an industrialised nation (Subramaniam, 2003b). Malaysian folk stories such as Hang Tuah and Mahsuri were included. As the implementation of this programme was not monitored, its effectiveness was not determined. Consequently, a more structured reading programme was implemented in 1998. The programme, commonly known by its acronym NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca, translated as Reading is the pulse of knowledge) is the
existing extensive reading programme which involves all primary school children (Primary One to Six) as well as lower secondary school children (Form One to Three). Designed to encourage reading outside school hours, the NILAM programme is incentive-based and runs at two stages: JAUHARI and Reading Partnership for the primary and lower secondary school level respectively. Schoolchildren are encouraged to read any reading material available in the school library or other resource centres. While the reading texts are not prescribed, students are expected to record the number of books read and at the later stage, write a short book report. Although this programme is not incorporated in the English Language classroom, students keep a NILAM record book. Incentives such as a recognition statement written in the students’ report book or school leaving certificate can be used for selection into controlled and residential schools or for scholarship award. Students who have read the targeted one hundred books will be recruited in the Reader Partnership team in which they will assume leadership roles and be involved in more activities related to reading.

Additionally, another literature programme for primary schools was implemented in 2004, known as the Primary Literature Project (PLP). This class reader programme aims to improve competence in English among primary school children through intensive reading of three prescribed literary texts per year, comprising short stories and poems (Subramaniam, 2007b). It focuses on upper primary school classes (Primary Four to Six) and is more structured in that it is formally incorporated in English Language classrooms, whereby one of the weekly English Language periods will be used to read and discuss the literary text read. While the students will not be formally tested on the literary texts read, they are expected to participate in the reading and comprehension activities in class. The aim of this programme is to expose primary school students to the study of a literary text in preparation for the tested literature component in secondary schools, and to provide them with models for classroom
activities. Thus, at present, two literature programmes are being implemented concurrently in primary schools: the incentive-based extensive reading programme NILAM and the intensive reading programme PLP. Evidently, the government is concerned for an early start in reading and literature in English to develop competence in English.

At the secondary school level, literature in education has evolved from an extensive reading programme to a compulsory and tested component in the English Language subject. The first extensive reading programme for secondary school was the English Language Reading Programme (ELRP), piloted in residential schools in 1979 and extended to all Malaysian secondary schools by 1983. More than 200 graded texts, together with a primary vocabulary list and key grammar items were provided and learners were encouraged to read 100 books in three years. However, the ELRP was not formally incorporated in the English classrooms and was replaced by the Class Reader Programme (CRP), which stated that it aims to increase language proficiency and to generate interest in literature to prepare secondary school students for the study of literature (Subramaniam, 2003b). The CRP was incorporated in English Language classrooms, whereby prescribed texts were taught in one of the English periods weekly. These texts were abridged and/or specially written texts classified as elementary, intermediate and advanced readers, and included literature in English written by local writers. English teachers were provided with a teaching file containing teaching notes, exercises, and suggested activities for each prescribed text to be used in the classroom. Despite much effort and money invested in the CRP, it “failed to make much impact on improving English Language standards in Malaysian secondary schools” (Subramaniam, 2003b, p. 39) because it was not included in the public examination, and the teachers lacked training in using literary texts in ELT. Although the CRP was not formally abolished, and the literary materials are still available in schools, a more
structured literature programme, known as the *Literature Component in English (LCE)*, was implemented beginning the year 2000.

### 2.4.2 Literature component in English (LCE)

The implementation of the *Literature Component in English (LCE)* programme has defined the role of literature in the Malaysian education system because literature is not only taught in the English Language classroom, but is also tested as part (20%) of the English Language paper in the national secondary school examinations. Hence, the study of literary texts in English has become compulsory for all secondary school students in Malaysia and all English teachers are expected to teach literature in one of the five weekly English periods. In other words, all teachers of English in Malaysia are teachers of literature by default. This would have implications for English teacher education and professional preparation, the key concerns of the present study, which aimed to provide information on how pre-service teachers are being prepared to teach literature.

As all teachers of English will teach the literature component in the English Language subject, it is important to know the details as well as the pedagogical implications of this programme. The syllabus (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1999) stated the aims of the *LCE* as enhancing students’ proficiency in the English Language through the study of a set of prescribed texts, contributing to personal development and character building, and broadening students’ outlook through reading about other cultures and worldviews. Its objectives are to enable students to give personal responses to texts, to show an awareness of how language is used to achieve a particular purpose, to reflect upon, and draw valuable moral lessons from issues and concerns of life as portrayed in the literary works and relate them to one’s life, and to understand and appreciate other cultures. Within the current *English Language Use* syllabus, literature is taught under the aesthetic use domain (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003).
In the *LCE* programme, literature is taught both as a tool for language learning (small ‘l’) and as a content (big ‘L’), as reflected in the learning outcomes involving the study of literary conventions such as plots and character (Subramaniam et al., 2003). This implies that both the teacher and the students should be prepared for overt study of the literary, which involves deep engagement with the literary texts in order to make critical interpretations, rather than mere reading comprehension.

The prescribed literary texts for the *LCE* include unabridged and abridged versions of the British and American canon and contemporary literature in English by local writers as shown in Table 2.1. The list will be revised periodically and according to school zones. Schools can choose from the list of prescribed literary texts according to the set requirement: all three poems and all three short stories for Form One, one novel each for Form Two, Three and Five, and all five short stories and six poems for Form Four.

There are pedagogical implications pertaining to the text selection as revealed by studies involving schoolchildren and their teachers. For example, the appropriateness of introducing literary study in Form One using poetry, especially culturally foreign poems is questionable. Abdul Halim’s (2006) study involving 44 Form One students identified as having Intermediate level of proficiency in an urban school in a big city found that the poems, ‘*Life’s Brief Candle*’ by Shakespeare and ‘*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*’ by Yeats, were too advanced for the students. They were not able to understand the message of the poems, such as they could not associate the candle in Shakespeare’s poem with life, which suggests that they did not have the maturity to deal with advanced themes. Instead, they preferred the poem *The Dead Crow* by a Malaysian poet because they were familiar with crows, a common sight in their neighbourhood. The study also revealed that 63.6% of the participants disliked literature and were highly apprehensive about making interpretations on the meaning or the message of the poems, as they were more difficult and abstract than the short story.
Similarly, Sidhu’s (2003) study with 30 Form Two students at an urban girls’ school in the same city found that students, particularly the Elementary level, preferred stories or narratives, which they could understand better than poetry. It can be inferred that poems, particularly foreign ones, are not only culturally and linguistically challenging for Form One students, but also a less motivating way of introducing literary studies to secondary school students.

Table 2.1
List of prescribed texts for the LCE according to class level and literary genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class level</th>
<th>Short story</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Novel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Form One    | *The Pencil* (Ali Majod)  
*How Dalat got its name* (Heidi Munan)  
*Of Bunga Telur and Bally Shoes* (Che Husna Azhari) | *Life’s Brief Candle* (Shakespeare)  
*The Dead Crow* (A. Samad Said)  
*The Lake of Innisfree* (W. B. Yeats) | |
| Form Two    | *Potato People* (Angela Wright)  
*Robinson Crusoe* (Daniel Defoe)  
*Phantom of the Opera* (Gasior Leroux)  
*All abridged versions* | | |
| Form Three  | *The Prisoner of Zenda* (Anthony Hope Hawkins)  
*Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (R.L. Stevenson)  
*All abridged versions* | | |
| Form Four   | *The Lotus Eater* (Somerset Maugham)  
*The Necklace* (Guy de Maupassant)  
*The Drover’s Wife* (Henry Lawson)  
*The Sound Machine* (Roald Dahl)  
*Looking for a Rain God* (Bessie Head) | *If* (Rudyard Kipling)  
*Sonnet 18* (Shakespeare)  
*Si Tenggang’s Homecoming* (Muhammad Haji Salleh)  
*Monsoon History* (Shirley Lim)  
*The Road Not Taken* (Robert Frost)  
*There’s been a death in the house opposite* (Emily Dickinson) | |
| Form Five   | | | *Jungle of Hope* (Keris Mas) (translation)  
*The Return* (K.S. Maniam)  
*The Pearl* (John Steinbeck) |

(Source: Subramaniam, 2002)

In terms of literature assessment, the questions reflect a mixture of personal response, indicated by the extended essay, and close reading indicated by the multiple choice and
short answer comprehension questions. While the students are encouraged to express their personal response to the text, they are required to keep close to the text by providing evidence from the text to support their answers, including their personal opinions and feelings. Multiple choice and short answer questions require close reference to the text and ‘right response’ reading. Table 2.2 presents a juxtaposition of the learning outcomes of the LCE programme and sample examination questions at the lower and upper secondary school levels.

Table 2.2
Aims and learning outcomes of the literature component and sample examination questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims and learning outcomes</th>
<th>Sample literature examination questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims: Form 1 &amp; 2: Read and enjoy poems and short stories Form 3: Read and enjoy poems and stories Form 4: Read and respond to poems and short stories Form 5: Read widely and enjoy poems and short stories</td>
<td>Penilaian Mengengah Rendah (PMR) 2007 Lower Secondary Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes:</td>
<td>Section C: Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Listen to, read, view and respond to literary works by:</td>
<td>Based on one novel (from the list of novels studied in the literature component in English Language), write about how two characters work together to obtain success Support your answer with evidence from the novel. Your response should be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- understanding and telling in one’s own words the story and giving one’s opinion;</td>
<td>- not less than 50 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- recognizing elements in a story such as characters and setting;</td>
<td>- in continuous writing (not in note form)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- explaining the message the writer is trying to convey and discussing how this relates to one’s life;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- understanding other people’s cultures, traditions, customs and beliefs;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- reciting poems with feeling and expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Express themselves creatively and imaginatively by:</td>
<td>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) 2006 English 1119/Paper 2 Section D (20 marks) Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dramatizing text and role-playing characters;</td>
<td>Text 1: Poem The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Retelling a story from a different point of view and presenting it in another genre;</td>
<td>Questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Composing simple poems, stories and dialogues;</td>
<td>a. Which phrase in stanza 1 shows that the traveller wanted to take both roads? Give the meaning of the following words: wood (stanza 1) ages (stanza 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Would you like to take the road less traveled by? Explain your choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text 2: Short story (an extract) The Drover’s Wife by Henry Lawson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Where is the snake?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. What two items does the Drover’s Wife get for the children before it is dark?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Do you admire the action of the mother? Give reasons for your answer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In contrast, the curriculum specifications for literature emphasise personal response to the literary texts studied in that students are expected to be able to give personal response to the texts, explain the message the writer is trying to convey and discuss how this relates to their lives (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003). These expectations reflect a holistic education focusing on the learners’ personal growth and emphasising the aesthetic value of literature. However, as Subramaniam (2002) forewarned, it remains highly challenging to assess these features effectively within the current system of formal evaluation which takes into account the learners’ level of proficiency as well as political implications of examination results. Students’ personal responses would depend on their language proficiency and are subject to the conventions of the examination.

A comprehensive analysis of the quality of students’ answers to the questions in the literature paper provided every year by the Malaysian Examination Board has revealed that poor proficiency in English resulted in students’ lack of understanding of the literary texts as well as the questions on the texts. In view of the apparent disparity in the literature curriculum and the operational curriculum, the current modes of formal assessments appear inadequate to capture and measure all the desired learning outcomes (Subramaniam et al., 2003). Subramaniam (2002) believed that the LCE programme was a drastic change in English education in Malaysia as most students and teachers had limited “previous exposure to literature and literature teaching methodology due to the long absence of literature in English in the Malaysian English language syllabus” (p. 58). These issues are elaborated in Chapter Three which locates literature education in Malaysia within the theoretical conceptualisation of literary studies particularly in the second language contexts.

Since its inception in 2000, there have been several studies (Abdul Halim, 2006; Kayad, 2007; Sidhu, 2003; Subramanian et al, 2003) on the perspectives of schoolteachers and
schoolchildren on the *LCE*. A common theme in these studies is the ability of the English teachers to teach literature in a manner which positively influences the students’ interest and ability in reading and in literature.

In 2003, Subramaniam et al. published a seminal study on the perspectives of practising schoolteachers on the implementation of the *LCE* during its early stages. The survey involved 500 English teachers in urban and rural schools in five states in West Malaysia. The study examined the teachers’ perceptions, attitudes and perceived needs in relation to the teaching and learning of the *LCE*, identified the overall pedagogical implications and needs for the implementation of the *LCE*, and provided suggestions and recommendations to address these needs. The majority of the participants were considered trained and experienced English teachers: 76.87% were degree holders, and 68.03% had received formal training and/or attended in-service courses in the teaching of literature, 28.57% had 6 to 10 years teaching experience and 21.09% had 11 to 15 years teaching experience. Despite their qualification and teaching experience, 49% lacked knowledge and sincere concern for the subject, 48% believed they lacked the knowledge about literature teaching methodology and 43% were in desperate need of support and training in teaching literature. The remaining 57% said they would teach to the *LCE* exam paper, known as an exam-oriented approach to teaching literature.

The findings of the study suggest that in order to achieve the desired impact, the *LCE* needs to address pertinent issues such as the linguistic and cultural suitability of the texts selected, and the lack of enthusiasm from the society in general regarding the importance of literature for aesthetic development, self-enrichment and personal growth. Most critical was the level of English proficiency of the teachers, which affected their ability in teaching literature in the language classrooms. Consequently, the study recommended that teacher education develop new literacies for teachers untrained in literature and provide interconnecting literacies to the expanded concepts in the
current English syllabus for teachers trained in traditional literature. The study reported in this thesis addressed the issues related to teacher competence through an in-depth examination of prospective teachers’ experience in dealing with literary studies as part of their teacher education.

Studies conducted among schoolchildren have identified the teacher as a determining factor in the effectiveness of the LCE programme in schools, particularly in the rural areas where there is limited exposure to English and literature. Kayad’s (2007) study in a boarding school in East Malaysia involving 30 Form Four students from low income families and rural communities found that despite their limited proficiency in English, the students were highly positive about learning literature mostly because they enjoyed the literature classes taught by teachers, whom they perceived to be knowledgeable in literature. For many of these rural students, the English language classrooms were their only opportunity to engage in literacy practices in English and their only experience with literature in English. They enjoyed their literature classes because their teachers employed a variety of techniques in teaching literature such as role-playing and storytelling. In fact, the students complained that they had limited time for literature as the LCE classes were not conducted weekly as scheduled. Students with elementary levels of proficiency in English said that they depended on their teachers to help them understand the literary texts, and that their teachers often resorted to telling them the whole story and to drilling them with the appropriate response in order to prepare them for the literature exams. They claimed that the LCE programme improved their interest in literature and their general ability in English.

In contrast, urban schoolchildren, particularly those with good proficiency in English, were generally ambivalent about the LCE programme, and were more critical of their teachers’ ability to teach literature. The advanced level Form Two students in Sidhu’s (2003) study in an urban school in West Malaysia described their teachers as “dull” and
“boring”, and wished that they were “more creative and pronounce words well” (Sidhu, 2003 p. 104). This suggests that some teachers lacked appropriate methods to teach literature and displayed poor proficiency in English, which contributed to the students’ lack of interest in learning literature. The students expressed their dislike for worksheets, which were commonly used in class, and their desire for more challenging tasks and a more learner-centred approach in the literature classrooms.

Similarly, the Form One students in Abdul Halim’s (2006) study called for a variety of tasks in literature classrooms, particularly tasks that involved collaborative effort and more intervention from the teachers. Perhaps due to their intermediate level of ability, which was measured by their performance across subjects, 63.6% of the 44 students said they disliked literature and were highly apprehensive about making interpretations on literary texts. Thus, they required explicit scaffolding from the teachers in addition to the variety of tasks. Clearly, the quality of instruction provided by the literature teachers is crucial to the effectiveness of the tasks and activities conducted in the literature classrooms.

Despite more than a decade of exposure to the study of literary texts in English through the LCE programme, there seems to be little improvement in literacy and proficiency in English among Malaysian schoolchildren. Proficiency in English, measured by the Malaysian University Entrance Test (MUET) taken in Form Six, shows a decline as indicated by the students’ results between 2006 to 2008 in Table 2.3. It must be noted that the students who took the MUET in these years had considerable experience learning literature in the primary schools as well as the LCE throughout their five years in secondary school. Also, Malaysian students’ lower performance in English has been linked to low proficiency in English among Malaysian teachers of English (Low proficiency teacher, 2012).
Table 2.3
MUET results from 2006-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Limited user</td>
<td>33.57</td>
<td>38.81</td>
<td>37.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Modest user</td>
<td>37.53</td>
<td>34.53</td>
<td>33.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Satisfactory user</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>11.53</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Proficient user</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Highly proficient user</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education Annual Report 2006-2008

Further, surveys on the reading habits of Malaysians revealed that they do not read enough whereas those who read are more inclined to read light material (Tharumaraj & Noordin, 2011). For example, a survey involving 60,441 Malaysians found about 50% read less than seven pages a day (Bakar, as cited in Tharumaraj & Noordin, 2011). A survey on students’ reading behaviour in a Malaysian university found that 80.1% participants were reluctant readers in English (Pandian, 2003). Even English teachers were found to be reading less than expected, as revealed by Tharumaraj and Noordin’s study involving 65 secondary school English teachers in an urban area in West Malaysia. While these teachers believed in the values of reading, and were able to use a variety of appropriate strategies to teach reading in their English classrooms, reading was not their preferred leisure activity and they read mostly light materials such as newspapers and magazines.

In the above studies, teachers are implicated as a key factor influencing students’ literacy and proficiency in English. All English teachers are expected to not only be able to teach literature, but more importantly, to make a positive impact on the students’ interest and ability in learning literature. Hence, it is imperative to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared not only with the appropriate methods of teaching literature, but also with positive attitude and motivation towards literature. The present study examined prospective teachers’ preparedness to teach not only the literature component,
but also literature as an examination subject at Form Five/ ‘O’ level and Form Six/ ‘A’ level in schools which offer this elective subject.

2.4.3 Literature as a subject

At the secondary school level, literary study is available nationwide as an elective subject for examination to interested candidates since independence. Earlier, in the 1950s–1960s, the elective English Literature paper was sourced from Cambridge University, and the prescribed texts were mostly from the British canon. The aims and syllabus of elective literature have been revised according to the priorities of the nation in the global economy, showing a remarkable transition from the traditional focus on literature as cultural studies to a more globalised and critical approach to literary studies (Subramaniam, 2007a).

Based on the revised literature syllabus in 1999, the national ‘A’ level English Literature paper was renamed Literature in English. Table 2.4 presents a summary of these changes. Notwithstanding the changes toward a wider and contemporary literature study, the number of candidates for the subject literature is small and inconsistent. For example, nationwide, there were fewer than 50 candidates for the Form Six literature paper in 2000 (Subramaniam, 2002) and 64 candidates in 2002 (Subramaniam, 2007a).

Despite the small number of literature takers at the ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels, the implication for English teachers posted to schools which offer literature as an elective subject is that they must be prepared to teach literature in greater depth through extensive reading of a considerable amount of literary texts from various traditions and periods. In the past, senior English teachers and teachers who came from the British colonial education era were assigned to teach the elective subject literature (Gaudart, 2008) but as these teachers either have retired or are retiring, the new generation of English teachers is expected to continue the tradition.
### Table 2.4
The development of literature as a subject in Malaysian schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>1950s – 1980s</th>
<th>1999 – present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To develop interest and enjoyment in literary texts</td>
<td>To develop critical awareness for meaningful engagement with literary texts from different literary traditions and genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To enable students to read and evaluate literary texts in English with a high level of critical cultural awareness and sensitivity for linguistic precision</td>
<td>To establish a new orientation that requires movement from text to context, from European to local perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To equip students with specialised knowledge about histories of literature in English and relations between culture and society</td>
<td>To enhance critical appreciation of literary works via exposure to current approaches to criticism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002: two papers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comment and appreciation; English literature according to selected authors and periods</td>
<td>Critical Appreciation; Shakespeare and other British writers; New Literature in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002 – Shakespeare and other British writers; New Literatures in English (works from Malaysia, Indian sub-continent, West Indies, Africa)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Subramaniam, 2007a)

At the tertiary level, literary studies are offered as a stand-alone degree programme or as part of the English teacher education programmes. However, at the few select public universities which offer literary studies, the annual intakes are relatively small. For example, in University Malaya, there were 98 students in 1981 but only 27 in 1985 (Omar, 1992). In recent years, a consistently small intake has forced some universities to either shelve or close the literary studies in English programme, as in the case of a large public university in West Malaysia which closed its Bachelor of English and Literary Studies programme in 2011 (personal communication with graduates of the programme).

On the other hand, literary studies are a compulsory strand in the English teacher education programme offered at various teacher education institutes (upgraded from teachers’ colleges) and public universities in Malaysia (Gaudart, 2008).
English teachers for the primary school level received their basic teacher education at teachers’ colleges/institutes and were mostly Diploma in Education holders. Since the 1990s, graduates from other disciplines, including from the sciences, and especially graduates overseas, have been recruited in an intensive one year teaching programme in ELT for the primary schools. This is part of the government’s efforts to address the shortage of English teachers and to provide quality education at the foundational level in primary schools.

English teachers for the secondary school level must have a recognised degree, preferably in the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL). In the past decade, primary school teachers who have experience or interest in teaching English have been recruited in the ESL degree programme under the in-service teacher programme. This programme is slightly shorter (usually by two semesters) than the pre-service TESL degree programme because with their teaching diploma and teaching experience, candidates are exempt from taking a few education component subjects. Nonetheless, literature is a compulsory component in English teacher education as all English teachers will teach literature in schools.

2.5 Issues in teaching and learning literature

The recent emphasis on literature in the Malaysian English Language curriculum and the widespread belief that the standard of English among Malaysian students is in decline has brought much attention to the English teacher and English teacher education. From the onset of the literature component programme, there was a legitimate concern that teachers were not prepared to teach literature due to limited exposure to literature in English as a result of language policy change to BM in the past decades (Subramaniam et al., 2003).
As presented in the previous sections, recent evidence of poor performance in English among Malaysian schoolchildren and tertiary students signifies poor literacy and proficiency in English despite a decade of the revised English Language curriculum incorporating literature in the classrooms. Many of the participants of this present study, particularly the pre-service teachers, belonged to that generation of students.

In particular, Malaysian adolescents were found to lack Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) such as the cognitive skills of application and reasoning, as indicated by their poor performance in Reading in PISA 2009. They were found lagging by three or more years of schooling behind their peers in Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong and Shanghai (Improved curricula with HOTS, 2012). In other words, Malaysian students were less able to demonstrate creative and critical thinking than expected, despite the core purpose of using literary materials in the language classrooms to develop HOTS. Poor proficiency in English, coupled with lack of creative and critical thinking skills would make learning literature in English a daunting task indeed.

Studies on learners’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature have revealed some pertinent issues implicating Malaysian teachers’ competence in English and literature. Recently, the Prime Minister of Malaysia announced that improving language mastery is a national priority, with the immediate focus on the teacher and on teaching (Turning a new chapter, 2012).

According to a prominent English teacher educator and president of the Malaysian English Language Teachers Association (MELTA), the lack of teachers well-trained to teach literature resulted in the lack of impact in using literature to improve Malaysian student’s proficiency in English (Melta: Using literature to teach, 2012). Indeed, the issue of teacher competence, which he highlighted a decade ago, remains.

Subramaniam et al. (2003) found that teachers were apprehensive about teaching literature due to their perceived lack of competence in literature and appropriate
methods of teaching literature, especially within the constraints of the school and education system. The perceived lack of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in literature among English teachers needs to be surmounted by adequate and appropriate training, which in reality is a major problem (Nunan, 2003).

While studies on student perspectives (Abdul Halim, 2006; Ahmad, 2008; Ahmad & Aziz, 2009; Ghazali, 2008; Kayad, 2007; Sidhu, 2003) have shown that attitudes towards literature and learning literature have generally improved as students are aware of the benefits of learning literature, the ability to study literature and the impact of literature on their literacy and proficiency remain questionable. Recently, negative reports on the literacy practices and proficiency levels of English teachers have put English teachers and English teacher education under scrutiny.

Low proficiency in English among Malaysian English teachers is a key concern particularly in a non-native context in which teachers are expected “to provide learners with the rich input needed for successful foreign language acquisition” (Nunan, 2003, p. 607). Another prominent English teacher educator in Malaysia with extensive experience in teaching pre-service and in-service teachers stressed the importance of “basic knowledge, which is the ability to function in English” in teacher education (Gaudart, 2008, p. 206). She cited examples of poor writing of pre-service English teachers displaying basic grammatical mistakes and inappropriate vocabulary which impede understanding of the ideas conveyed. She stressed that teacher education programmes should provide practical help for improving the pre-service language competence early in the programme. Similarly, Nunan (2003) recommended that effective steps be taken to enhance teachers’ own language skills as poor language skills will impede understanding of pedagogy.

The lack of pedagogical knowledge in literature is a critical issue to be addressed by providing adequate and appropriate teacher education. Apart from limited language and
and literature competence impeding pedagogical knowledge, there are contextual issues such as the lack of teachers trained to teach English. Recently, it was revealed that 30% of the teachers currently teaching English were not originally trained to teach English (Low proficiency teachers, 2012). Studies on schoolchildren’s perspectives on literature have revealed that teachers were largely teaching to the text and to the examination (Subramaniam, et al., 2003) which is essentially a teacher-centred approach.

While most students, particularly in rural areas were generally positive about their teachers’ teaching styles and knowledge in literature (Ghazali, 2008; Kayad, 2007), urban students with better proficiency in English preferred more challenging texts and tasks, and more learner-centred literature classes (Ahmad, 2008; Ahmad & Aziz, 2009; Sidhu, 2003). Clearly, contextual factors and students’ diverse ability in English influence the English teachers’ choice of teaching approach and methods in the classrooms. Nonetheless, teachers need to go beyond the utilitarian purpose of teaching literature to holistic education through literature (Sidhu, 2003; Subramaniam, et al., 2003) for a truly effective literature education.

At the macro level, an apparent disjunction between curriculum rhetoric and pedagogical reality (Nunan, 2003) is prevalent in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situation. This has been true for literature since the 1990s, when literature first made its comeback in the Malaysian ELT scene. Secondary school English teachers have experienced a dilemma in matching curriculum rhetoric which advocates ESL methods and pedagogical reality which shows EFL contexts (McRae, 1992). The challenges of limited exposure to English, particularly in rural areas, complicated the English teachers’ task of teaching literature. Consequently, many teachers felt inadequately prepared to deal with teaching English and literature in challenging situations.
In reality, standard English Language is not widely used in communication among Malaysians, and outside the academic spheres. A study on the language choice of pre-service English teachers revealed that English was not their language of choice for communication, mostly because they faced difficulty in expressing themselves fluently and accurately in English (Gaudart, 2008). Perhaps due to the complexity of the contextual situation in multicultural and multilingual society, the reality of English in the Malaysian context can be more accurately described as a hybrid of ESL and EFL. This is because in a truly ESL situation, there must be adequate exposure to the target language to allow assimilation of it, reaction to it and awareness of it (McRae, 1992). Further, consistent and measurable improvements in the target language can only be determined after a considerable exposure to it (Nunan, 2003).

In the case of literature, adequate exposure to literature means actual reading of literary texts. Students should be enabled to read literary texts for themselves, and not depend on teachers to retell the story, as was reported in the literature classrooms with poor proficiency students (Ghazali, 2008; Kayad, 2007). This implies that in order to be enablers of literacy and proficiency in English, the teachers themselves need to appreciate the value of learning literature, and be readers themselves before they can enable others to read literature. However, Malaysian and English teachers have been found to read less than they should (Tharumaraj & Noordin, 2011). Indeed, the ability to read literature is the basic definition of literacy in literature and the foundation for literary studies.

Yet another way to ensure consistent and adequate exposure to literature in English is through a broadened definition of literature within the ESL/EFL context of Malaysia. Talif (1992) argued for a broader definition of literature, which goes beyond the limits of canonical printed materials and their aesthetic and intellectual worth to take into account Malaysian students’ multicultural and multilingual backgrounds. He proposes
that literature be viewed as an approach to reading and that it is multimodal to include film and TV drama, oral narratives, folk songs and popular novels.

Clearly, the issues pertaining to English teachers and teacher education are interconnected and embedded in the wider context of the Malaysian ESL/EFL situation. A common thread in the studies on students and teachers’ perspectives and experiences in teaching and learning literature is that literature education for English teachers be prioritised. Nunan’s (2003) study on the situation of English in the Asia Pacific region concluded that in order to sustain quality English education, local governments should focus on enhancing the proficiency and professional skills of local teachers.

Drastic change in top down policy, as in the case of Malaysia, needs to be accompanied by adequate preparation of major stakeholders (Nunan, 2003; Subramaniam et al., 2003). The sudden and increased interest in literature and English teacher education justified the present study as there is a dearth of information on how teachers are being prepared to teach literature. This study explores the experiences of pre-service and conversion English teachers in dealing with studying literature as part of their teacher education programme. It aims to contribute first-hand empirical evidence on teacher education from the teachers’ perspectives.

Unlike previous studies using survey data, this study employs the case study method within the interpretive research paradigm to provide in-depth information on the reality in English teacher education classrooms. While most related studies focused on students and teachers’ responses to literature within the school contexts, little is known about how prospective teachers themselves study literature within the teacher education context. The present study examines pre-service and conversion English teachers’ literary literacy practices which will determine their level of preparation to teach literature. The issues in teaching and learning literature from the theoretical and
empirical data presented above are addressed in the study through the multiple data sources such as interviews and classroom observations protocols.

2.6 Conclusion

The emergence of English as a global language has re-instated English and literature in the Malaysian education system, making literature an integral part of the compulsory subject English. Literature is believed to be a powerful tool in developing proficiency and literacy in English, as well as producing holistic and good citizens. However, there is an apparent policy/practice paradox concerning literature in ELT in Malaysia.

Despite a history of literature in the English language classroom, many schoolteachers and schoolchildren still believe that they lack exposure to literature in English. After more than a decade of the compulsory literature component in the English Language subject, the standard of English and the reading ability of Malaysian students at all levels, is still below global average. Clearly, frequent shifts in language education policy and top down policy have contributed to this paradox.

This chapter has sought to identify significant contextual influences that Malaysian education has faced in the struggle to promote universal proficiency in English language for its citizens. Firstly, the diversity of the multilingual and multicultural population of 28 million people speaking approximately 140 languages has meant that English is rarely genuinely a second language for most people. Secondly, the rural/urban divide suggests that English and literature education are limited to classrooms, creating a foreign language (EFL) situation. For that, teachers of English are viewed as important agents of change who will teach literature well to motivate their students to read extensively and critically. Yet, many teachers lacked sufficient proficiency in English and are not well-trained to teach literature. This signals a deficiency in English teacher education.
This study sought to address the paradox and deficiencies above by examining English teacher education and preparation from the perspectives of the pre-service and conversion teachers. It explored the participants’ experiences in dealing with literary studies as part of their professional preparation as future English and literature teachers in secondary schools. It is a bottom up approach to investigate the participants’ response to top down language education policy within the context of teacher education.

The next chapter proceeds with a discussion of literature in English education in non-native English Language context and a conceptualisation of literary literacy for professional preparation.
Chapter 3 Literature review

3.1 Introduction

The literature review provides the conceptual framework for this study on literary literacy for professional preparation of pre-service and conversion English teachers in Malaysia. It begins with a discussion of the values and roles of literature in language education. Related models and approaches to teaching and learning literature are examined to explain the current situation of literature in language education, particularly in the ESL context of Malaysia. The Malaysian school and tertiary literature curricula are mapped to the relevant models and approaches to teaching literature. Empirical data are presented to address critical issues pertaining to teaching and learning literature in native and non-native language contexts.

A conceptual framework on literary literacy is informed by the theoretical and empirical literature across three research cognate fields of literary studies, literacy studies and teacher education. Given that the purpose of literature in this study was to promote literacy and proficiency in English, the interconnection between theories and practices associated with literacy and the literary is explored. Further, as the research involved a teacher education programme to prepare teachers for employment in the English Language curriculum in Malaysian secondary schools, the definition of literary literacy takes into account concepts of teacher knowledge. Graduates from this programme might expect, not unreasonably, to feel confident and competent to contribute to...
developing adolescent students’ interest and competence in reading and responding to literary texts.

3.2 Literature in language education

In the institutional contexts of schools and higher education, literature has become a significant part of language education. Carter (2007, p. 10) notes “an explosion of interest in work of literary and cultural theory” in the recent decades, fueling research on literature in second language acquisition contexts. Indeed, the current trend in English Language Teaching (ELT) is the integration of language and literature (Paran, 2008). While there are indications that there has been a significant decline in the quantity and quality of literature readers (Sumara, 2003; Verboord, 2005), literature is still relevant, particularly in the classroom setting for cultural awareness, language awareness, personal growth and literacy development.

3.2.1 Values and roles of literature

Literature represents works valued in a culture and by reading these works learners are exposed to different cultures and ideologies, provided they read across different cultural canons. Literature broadens their perspectives of the world and of others, and enables them to understand and appreciate the culture represented (Carter & Long, 1991). Comparing a foreign culture with one’s own culture promotes cultural awareness that enables readers to understand and appreciate their own culture (McKay, 1986).

Literary texts provide authentic materials for the aesthetic use of language. By studying the extensive use of figurative language and compression of meaning in literary texts, learners can develop their language awareness (Carter & McRae, 1996). Evidence of language awareness includes the ability to make interpretations based on linguistic cues in a literary text. Literature provides stimulus for writing (Langer, 1997), which in turn
enables learners to acquire and develop their language in the process. Close reading, as well as extensive reading of literary texts, particularly of the learners’ choice, develops interest and skills in reading.

Literature is essentially about life: “everything that human beings have thought, or felt or created” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 5). Through reading literature, individuals can learn about life, themselves, and others. Engagement with a literary text allows readers to use both their intellect and feelings and to see things from other people’s perspectives. Literature not only conveys information but more importantly, involves the reader in vicarious experience, depending on the appropriate processing of the information contained (Duff & Maley, 1990).

Rosenblatt, (1938/1995, 1978, 1985) one of the proponents of the reader response approach to literature, distinguishes between efferent reading and aesthetic reading in terms of purpose and process. In efferent reading, the purpose is to extract specific information, whereas in aesthetic reading, the focus is on the ‘lived-through’ experience of the reading. Aesthetic reading of literary texts involves personal transaction with the text whereby the reader is constantly relating the text to their personal experiences in order to construct and validate meaning. This experiential approach to reading allows the learner to engage emotionally with the text, making the reading experience more meaningful and memorable to the learner.

Personal interaction between reader and text can become a source of enjoyment for students particularly when students feel “empowered by their ability to grapple with the text and its language, and relate it to the values and traditions of their own society” (Lazar, 1993, p. 19). Deep engagement with literature may involve both ‘pain’ and pleasure because while learners may struggle with some difficulties in the process of reading, they may eventually gain some understanding of the literary text. This understanding will give them a sense of achievement, thus enabling them to enjoy the
text (Hall, 2003). This positive experience with literature will encourage learners to read on, and engage in literacy practices.

In recent decades, literature has been recognised widely as a powerful tool for the expansion of literacy, particularly in developing vocabulary acquisition, reading strategies, and the training of critical thinking (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000). The language of literature which is rich and multi-layered requires the learners to infer meaning and make interpretations (Lazar, 1993) based on their prior knowledge as well as knowledge of the world, in addition to analysing the stylistics or linguistic cues found in the printed text.

Literacy learning is dependent upon the uses and forms of literacy that people in particular cultures and social traditions deem valuable (Langer, 1997). As such, connection to the community is critical. The use of literary texts, particularly within the reader response paradigm, which values the personal response of the learner, facilitates literacy development. Learners will be more interested to participate in stimulating literacy practices based on literary texts to which they can relate.

Langer (1997) reports a successful experiment using literary texts to initiate and sustain literacy practices among immigrant learners of English as a second language in an urban inner city school. Students were encouraged to collect, tell, record, and eventually write their own stories based on their cultural heritage. The process of collaborating and writing these stories improved the learners’ literacy practices, and they gained language as well as cultural awareness, which motivated them to engage in similar meaningful activities with literature. The successful result of this experiment with literature and literacy demonstrates that literature is a valuable and effective way for developing literacy of linguistically challenged learners. Langer (1997) emphasises that when students engage in reading literature, “horizons of possibility come to mind, moving them to reflect on and interpret ideas at hand; students raise questions, recognise
problems, seek causes and solutions, and make connections” (Langer, 1997, p. 607). Subramaniam (2007b) recognises the above as ‘envisionments’ through literature that form the “core of literary education as they illuminate important themes in the text and reveal areas of insight or confusion on the part of the reader” (p. vii).

If literature is to stimulate the kinds of response described above, there are fundamental assumptions and considerations. Firstly, learners must be willing to read the literary text. Thus, text selection must be appropriate and varied to cater to the learners’ interests, needs and abilities. Secondly, learners should have sufficient abilities to engage with the text, such as proficiency and competence in the language of the literature studied, some knowledge of the world and acquaintance with the culture of the texts studied. Otherwise, they should at least be competent in their own language and culture, and have sufficient reading skills in their own language to facilitate knowledge or skills transfer. Thirdly, while the reader response approach may help learners to begin interacting with the text from a personal perspective, it may lead to the “misguided conclusion that other people and other cultures are in essence no different from themselves and their own cultures and that writing from a subjective point of view is always an acceptable form of the analytical” (Kern & Shultz, 2005, p. 382). Hence, the use and teaching of literature in the language curriculum must take into account contextual and learner factors such as the aims of the literature programme, learner needs and abilities.

3.2.2 Models of teaching literature

The revitalised interest in literature in language education has produced various models of teaching literature, known as the language model, cultural model and personal growth model (Carter & Long 1991; Lazar, 1993). In the cultural model, literary texts are viewed as products and sources of information on the target culture. Close readings and analytical or critical study of the texts are favoured over personal response, drawing on
textual evidence and historical context. Authorial-based reading is emphasised, and informed, right reading response is advocated. Consequently, the study of literature can be dry and irrelevant to the average learner, particularly in the traditional literature classroom which tends to be teacher-centred, as the teacher is recognised as having superior knowledge and extensive experience in literary studies. The cultural model is often found in university literature courses.

In the language model, literature is used to enrich the learners’ language competency by exposing them to various literary texts which they can analyse according to linguistic cues (Carter & Long 1991; Lazar, 1993). In this model, language and literature are closely integrated through classroom procedures that promote an activity-oriented, student-centred, and language-sensitive approach. The language-based approach to literature is beneficial in the second language context to promote language awareness, interpretive skills, and general improvement in the four main language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Saraceni, 2003). Literary texts which can create interest and provide multiple possibilities for language activity are suitable for this model.

In the personal growth model, high engagement with literary texts creates a pleasurable reading experience which will encourage learners’ personal growth (Carter & Long, 1991). This model focuses on the processes involved in reading literature, and shifts the attention from the author to the reader as the source of meaning, drawn from personal experience and knowledge of the world. This experiential based reading values each learner’s personal response to the literary text. A learner-centred curriculum, which includes the learner’s choice of literary text, is suitable for the personal-growth approach to literature, but that is not always possible in the real classroom. A potential problem is that the approach requires shared reading responses and experiences, and
therefore, requires at least small groups of students to have read the same text rather than each individual reading their preferred texts (O’Neill, 1995).

In practice, these models are not mutually exclusive but are interrelated and often used concurrently, according to the orientation to literature within a particular contexts. It is important to distinguish between two key orientations to teaching literature, namely, literature as a content and literature as a resource. The former is also known as the study of literature (Carter & Long, 1991) or the big ‘L’ (McRae, 1991) whereas the latter is characterised with a small ‘l’.

The study of literature as the big ‘L’ is associated with reading literature within “an academic, institutionalised setting for the purpose of obtaining qualification in literary studies” which requires a “considerable baggage of critical concepts, literary conventions and metalanguage” as students are often expected to “show an ability to use such terms and concepts in talking and writing about literature” (Carter & Long, 1991, p.3-4). In short, a considerable level of literary competence is expected of the literature learner within the big ‘L’ context, such as in the university literature curriculum.

On the other hand, literature as a resource or the small ‘l’, “suggests a less academic though no less serious approach to reading of literature” (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 4) because the literary text is used for the purpose of providing context for, and stimulating interest in the study of how language is used to convey meaning. It capitalises on the students’ interest in and engagement with the literary text to provide opportunities for language learning. For this, the difficulty of the literary texts with which the students are expected to engage must be appropriate to the students’ level of literacy.

3.2.3 Locating literature education in Malaysia

The role of literature in English language education is determined by orientations to the language and its literature. O’Neill (1995) adapted Ball, Kenny and Gardiner’s (1990)
conceptualisations of English, represented in Figure 3.1, to explain how different ideologies underlying these orientations influence the form of literacy and role of literature in education.

![Figure 3.1: English and forms of literacy](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHORITY</th>
<th>DIRECTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘THE STATE’</td>
<td>‘NOT SELF’</td>
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<tr>
<th>FUNTIONAL ENGLISH</th>
<th>CULTURAL HERITAGE</th>
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<tr>
<td>ENGLISH AS SKILLS</td>
<td>ENGLISH AS THE GREAT LITERARY TRADITION</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Communications’</td>
<td>‘Standards and sensibilities’</td>
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<td>‘Life-skills’</td>
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<th>SELF</th>
<th>NOT SELF</th>
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<td>INDIVIDUAL</td>
<td>COLLECTIVITY</td>
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<th>GROWTH MODEL</th>
<th>CULTURAL CRITICISM</th>
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<tr>
<td>PROGRESSIVE ENGLISH</td>
<td>ENGLISH AS CRITICAL LITERACY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Individuality’</td>
<td>‘Assertive, class conscious, political in content’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Creativity’</td>
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<td>‘Self-expression’</td>
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<tr>
<th>AUTHENTICITY</th>
<th>NEGOTIATION AND PARTICIPATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘THE PEOPLE’</td>
<td>‘SELF’</td>
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</table>

**Figure 3.1: English and forms of literacy**

The present study draws on O’Neill’s (1995) model to locate the literature in the Malaysian curriculum. As discussed in Chapter Two, literature is a significant part of English language education in Malaysia as it is compulsory for all secondary schoolchildren to learn and for all secondary schoolteachers to teach literature. This model informs three aspects of the conceptual framework of this study: the relationship between the key stakeholders, the key characteristics of the various orientations to
English and its literature, and the roles of the stakeholders within their respective contexts.

The four orientations to English, namely, Functional English, Cultural Heritage, Growth Model and Cultural Criticism, frame the conceptualisation of the form of literacy and literature in language education within the Malaysian context. The Malaysian school and tertiary literature curricula are mapped to the related orientations to English, focusing on the roles of the literature learner and the literature teacher in their respective contexts.

In English as Cultural Heritage, canonical texts from the great English tradition are studied closely for the purpose of transmitting values and practices prescribed by a dominant culture for the promotion of a common cultural identity and aesthetic study of the language used. The selection of literary works for study and decisions about how they are to be studied are made top-down, with little consideration for individual (self) interest but for the ‘good’ of the whole group of learners. According to O’Neill (1993, 1994, 1995) this cultural import has created conflicts in colonial countries such as Canada and Australia. Further, the pedagogical implications include a right response reading and an emphasis on literary competence.

In contrast, English in the Growth Model extends to personal response pedagogy (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978) which facilitates the personal growth of the learner through meaningful and personal engagement with the literary text. In this orientation, the learner plays a more active and significant role in the construction of meanings by drawing on their personal experiences and knowledge. The focus is on the experiential reading of the text, which is seen as a process rather than a product. An extreme version of this approach may promote idiosyncratic responses based on these personal experiences and readings. Proponents of this approach emphasise a balance of personal response and textual reference. In exam-conscious situations, learners are guided to
produce responses that are justifiable by the texts and appropriate readings. The reader response pedagogy has been criticised as being difficult to implement in its fullest sense as its deficiencies include inadequate support for teachers on how to deal with classroom management in a classroom that promotes personal response to literary texts. Indeed, the exam-oriented education situation such as in Malaysia would pose a great challenge for this approach in literature classrooms.

In the Functional English model, which aims to develop skills and competency in English as required in business and industry, learners are taught the correct and appropriate forms and skills in the language needed to become skilful and literate workers. The emphasis on a standard form of the target language has been criticised as promoting a right response reading. Specifically, the prescriptive approach to reading literature within this orientation, for example in producing formal critical essays conflicts with the ideals of the personal response approach to literature. Nevertheless, Functional English has been consistently featured in classroom practices.

In English as Cultural Criticism, literary texts are used as a tool in advocating social justice when learners are able to produce multiple and conflicting readings and to evaluate the social consequences of promoting one reading above others. While the reader’s critical reading is valued, similar to the reader response approach, s/he is seen as operating as a member of a social or cultural group. In some respects, this is the most challenging orientation, requiring readers to entertain simultaneously multiple readings of literary texts, and those ideological critical reading positions and practices which support them. This orientation has become the dominant discourse in native language/mother tongue contexts but little represented in the non-native contexts, as found in this study.

The model in Figure 3.1 is useful to develop a framework which describes the forms of literacy and literature education in Malaysia. Firstly, it highlights the relationship
between authority and authenticity, represented by the state and the people respectively. The various orientations to English are determined by the movement along the continuum of the axes whereby the vertical axis represents the relationship between the authority (state) and the people (self), and the horizontal axis represents the interest of the individuals concerned.

As explained in Chapter Two, the Malaysian educational policy is determined by political and economic interests. Decisions on language policy are made by the government and delivered top-down to the people. In particular, literature has been included as a compulsory component of the English language in secondary school since 2000 and all English teachers in Malaysia are required to teach literature. After a decade, in view of the low proficiency in English among Malaysian students, this policy has been reinforced by an increase in time allotted to literature classes, as well as the proposed requirement for a compulsory pass in English in order to obtain the Malaysian Certificate of Education, beginning in 2016 (Singh, 2013). This policy is based on the belief that literacy and proficiency in English can be improved with more reading and more practice in responding to reading as facilitated by literature in language education. Clearly, the people are expected to accept this decision which would improve literacy and proficiency in English to international standards to compete in the global market. This study uses a bottom-up approach by presenting the key stakeholder’s perspectives on this policy, namely the prospective teachers of English and literature.

Secondly, the Malaysian English and literature curricula can be mapped to the related orientations by means of content analysis of the school and tertiary literature curricula. The aims and objectives of the literature component in English, stated in the English Language Syllabus (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003) and in the circular on the implementation of the literature curriculum in secondary schools (Ministry of Education
Malaysia, 1999), are mapped against the various orientations to English and presented in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1
Mapping the Malaysian school literature curriculum to orientations to English

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School literature curriculum</th>
<th>Orientations to English/Models of teaching literature</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aims:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To enhance students’ proficiency in the English language through the study of a set of prescribed literary text.</td>
<td>Functional English/Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to personal development and character building.</td>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broaden students’ outlook through reading about other cultures and world views.</td>
<td>Cultural Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give a personal response to texts.</td>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show an awareness of how language is used to achieve a particular purpose.</td>
<td>Functional English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect upon and draw valuable moral lessons from the issues and concerns of life as portrayed in the literary works and relate them to one’s life.</td>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand and appreciate other cultures.</td>
<td>Cultural Heritage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hall (2005, p. 146) views the Malaysian school literature curriculum within the “response and pleasure paradigms” with largely implicit linguistics abilities development and more of a “moral subject”. He also notes that the while the aims of the programme may reduce the “experience of a successful literature or poetry reading”, they may guide the teacher or the test writer to a certain extent.

At the tertiary level, literary study is a compulsory strand in teaching degree programmes such as the Bachelor of Education in TESL (B. Ed. TESL). At the time of the study, in the research site university, there were 10 different literature courses offered in the B. Ed. TESL programme. Every student was required to take and to pass the courses specified for their cohort. Based on their objectives, these courses can be divided into three broad categories:
The first two courses: *Literature in English* and *Introduction to Critical Appreciation*, offered in the first academic semester to freshmen, are pre-requisites for the rest of the literature courses in the cohort’s package. Clearly, literary criticism and genre study are emphasised, with four courses for the former and five courses developed for the latter. There is only one course on the teaching of literature. Pre-service teachers are expected to complete all of the 10 literature courses listed throughout their four-year teacher education programme, whereas conversion teachers (also known as in-service teachers) study only six selected literature courses in their three year programme. While a wide range of literary works are studied, comprising the literary canons to contemporary works and works by non-native writers, the focus is on literary theories. Learners are expected to develop their literary competence through close reading of these works and applying their understanding of the relevant literary theories to their reading.

The school literature curriculum reflects a mixture of mostly Functional English and English for Personal Growth with the inclusion of some English as Cultural Heritage (Figure 3.1), whereas the tertiary literature curriculum maintains a traditional approach to literary study focusing on English for Cultural Heritage. This shows a considerable gap between literature curricula at school and tertiary levels in Malaysia, suggesting a dissonance in the integration of literature in language education and the preparation of prospective teachers to teach literature. This gap is a key concern of this study.
In order to understand the experience of the key stakeholders in literature programmes, and how literature instruction has affected them, it is important to know the characteristics, key values, learner and teacher roles, and pedagogical implications of the orientations to English. A synthesis of these, adapted from O’Neill (1995) and presented in Table 3.2 helps in understanding the state of literature in language education in Malaysian schools. This information guided the data collection and analysis of this study.

As discussed in Chapter Two, literature instruction in the Malaysian English Language classroom has not been fully effective due to the disparity between the ideational curriculum and the operational curriculum. While students’ experience and ability in learning literature vary considerably according to their respective contexts, there seem to be a general ambivalence towards learning literature. Studies based on learners’ perspectives presented in Chapter Two have highlighted various pedagogical challenges which resulted in literature making little impact on students’ literacy and proficiency in English. Many schoolchildren are not reading the prescribed literary texts and depend on their teachers to tell them the stories and give them the necessary information to prepare them for the examination.

Not discounting the many factors contributing to the lack of effectiveness of literature instruction in the Malaysian curriculum, this study focuses on the teacher and teaching of literature. The study investigates the extent to which prospective teachers are aware of the characteristics, key values, learner and teacher roles, and pedagogical implications of the orientations to English and know how to integrate the various approaches to teaching literature, which would help them in providing effective literature instruction in schools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientations to English and literature</th>
<th>English as cultural heritage/Cultural model</th>
<th>Progressive English/Growth model</th>
<th>Functional English/Language model</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>English as the great literary tradition</td>
<td>(elsewhere known as Growth Model English, Whole Language, New Literacy)</td>
<td>Literary texts for language learning, stimulus for language activities Improve language awareness and competence Develop four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature text as product of culture</td>
<td>Focus on reading as a process</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Literary study to understand target culture</td>
<td>Emphasis on experiential based reading</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Canonical texts are prescribed</td>
<td>Text of student choice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus on authorial based reading</td>
<td>Personal response to reading</td>
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<td>Close reading</td>
<td>Learner-centred classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key values</strong></td>
<td>Conservation and transmission of the canon of great works of literature</td>
<td>Respect for the individual qualities of the learner Child-centred, experiential for production of personal meanings and growth in language competence Production of self-actualising individuals</td>
<td>Knowledge about language, patterns and sounds of language, forms and functions of language</td>
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<td>Production of keepers of the cultural flame</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Perpetuation of universal human themes and values</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role of teacher</strong></td>
<td>Transmission of knowledge and values of the cultural tradition Induction of students into the language of literary criticism</td>
<td>Facilitation of language-rich experiences and contexts Collaboration and negotiation with the learner Provision of appropriate resources and information as the learner needs them</td>
<td>Inculcation of knowledge about language Correction of student products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of learner</strong></td>
<td>Assimilation of information about the literary tradition and great works Interpretation and reproduction of the ‘right response’ Assimilation of literary critical discourse Development of moral and aesthetic sensibility</td>
<td>Participation and engagement in learning experiences Articulation of personal response Co-operation and collaboration in learning experiences Respect for responses and products of other learners</td>
<td>Assimilation of knowledge about language Application and practice of language use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogical implications</strong></td>
<td>Foreground information on author, culture and period to assist students understand the text Highly context-reduced Remote and unfamiliar culture problematic for second language learners Local and uncomplicated text to bridge the gap</td>
<td>Open assessment not practical in formal classroom setting Suitable for extensive reading programme out of class Reader response approach as point of entry into text analysis</td>
<td>Focus on language instead of text “flight from text” Pseudo understanding through rehearsed response based on linguistic and textual cues</td>
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3.2.4 Literature in the ESL/EFL contexts

As mentioned earlier, integrating language and literature has become the trend in ELT especially in ESL/EFL contexts (Paran, 2008). Paran explains that the relationship between literature and language learning is determined by the extent to which a programme or lesson focuses on literature or on literary competence and the extent of engagement with language learning, as represented in Figure 3.2.

![Figure 3.2: The intersection of literature and language teaching](Source: Paran, 2008, p. 467)

Based on this model, Quadrant 1 and 3 best exemplify the forms of literature education in the Malaysian ESL context at the school and the tertiary levels respectively. In the Malaysian secondary school English language curriculum, both areas of literary knowledge and language skills are emphasised. In principle, students are encouraged to explore the literary texts and give their personal response to the texts. In practice, as evident from the empirical data presented in Chapter Two, the literature lesson generally resembles a reading comprehension lesson. It has been found to be teacher-centred whereby students are drilled on the knowledge and skills in literature such as the literary terms and conventions. This is necessary to complete the syllabus and to prepare students for the examination in which literature constitutes 20% of the English Language paper.
In the Malaysian university, like in many universities around the world, literature courses are ‘purely’ literature in that there is “no overt focus” on language development because “it is assumed that the learner has reached the linguistic level needed to discuss literature in the foreign language” (Paran, 2008, p. 467). In view of the low literacy and proficiency in English among teachers of English presented in Chapter Two, this assumption of language competence foreshadows a challenging experience in literary study for the linguistically challenged literature learner at tertiary level. This study examines the language and literary competence of the pre-service and conversion English teachers as part of their literary literacy for their professional preparation to teach literature in secondary schools.

While the model in Figure 3.2 is useful to contextualise the form of literature education and literacy practices, Paran (2008) notes that this figure is a “simplification” due to the possibility of other elements such as “reading and the study of reading comprehension, the issue of culture, cultural knowledge, and intercultural competence” (p. 467). Taking this cue, the present study takes into account the participants’ past and current experience in reading and in literature, as well as their cultural knowledge for a comprehensive coverage of the factors that may influence their literary literacy.

Justifications for using literature in the language classroom have been largely based on the theoretical merits of literature and the assumptions that readers have adequate mastery of the target language and the basic reading skills in the target language. Provided learners are willing and able to read the literary texts, literature can be an effective way of learning through reading because the authentic representational texts offer a much needed change from the academic and non-fictional materials learners normally encounter in the formal instructional context. The complex themes and fresh, unexpected use of language in the literary texts can motivate reading (McKay, 1986). Literary texts provide valuable opportunities for learners to engage in aesthetic reading.
in which they relate to the lived through experience of the text (Rosenblatt, 1978; 1995) and engage in thought provoking comparison with one’s own life (Carter & Long, 1991). Such reading is most suitable for adult readers as it gives them the opportunity to compare and evaluate values represented in literature texts with their own. In short, engaging in aesthetic and experiential reading of literary texts promotes critical and creative reading skills.

Further, literature provides the “human sense” in learning (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 2) which can be a powerful motivating factor in studying for the second language learner. Reading literature provides the learner with the opportunity to respond by engaging their emotions. Thus, literature can be a powerful tool to shape the reader, personally as well as socially (Willinsky, as cited in Marshall, 2000). These are the purported reasons for integrating literature in language education in Malaysia. However, in reality, the emotional and affective responses to literary texts are difficult to measure, particularly with schoolchildren’s apparent lack of literacy and proficiency in English to express them. Literary study in institutional context is typically for meaning rather than for pleasure and personal response (Hall, 2003).

Indeed, reading in a second language is a difficult task for most ESL learners due to linguistic difficulty, and inappropriate standard or measurement of reading comprehension (Hassan & Selamat, 2002a). If reading the usual, academic or non-fictional texts is challenging for ESL learners, reading literary texts in English can be daunting. Hall (2005) explains that reading literature in the second language is can be highly demanding because of low linguistic proficiency (2005). Further, readers’ background and prior experience shape their reading capacity, which will always be unevenly distributed as it “amounts to much more than a decontextualised exercises of psycholinguistic skills and involves the whole person, with an ongoing history and identity in construction” (p.158).
In their study on using literary materials to teach writing among ESL college students, Zamel and Spack (2006) observed that linguistic and cultural factors influenced how the students respond to classroom literacy practices. They emphasised that language and academic literacy acquisition is a long and evolving process which involves multiple and complex experiences. As such, these students cannot be expected to have achieved English language mastery within a limited period of training. Teachers need to recognise the multiple challenges the students might face such as individual differences, proficiency levels, opportunities to communicate in English and attitude towards the language.

Saraceni (2003) argues that integrating the use of literature in the EFL context can be more difficult than is sometimes optimistically assumed as the key problems in reading literary texts in the second language include linguistic complexities and unfamiliar culture, which will hinder readers from grasping the meaning of the text. Citing empirical data on Thai university students of literature, Saraceni highlights four main problem areas with literature, namely, difficult language, unfamiliar culture, inadequacies in extensive reading experience and skills, and inability or unwillingness to participate in classroom activities such as discussions.

An in-depth analysis of these problems as they occurred in their respective contexts of learning revealed socio-cultural underpinnings. For example, Thai university students reported that they loved reading comics and other visual representation of text. If these texts were considered literary texts, the students may not be deemed to lack extensive reading habits and practices. They also did not appreciate the ‘question-discussion’ type of methodologies in the literature class because it went against their cultural principle of losing face when giving the wrong answer, a very real fear in the educational tradition that the teacher has superior knowledge and therefore knows the ‘right’ answer. Clearly, the implication for literature teaching is that literacy is multimodal and culturally
sensitive. Possible ways to bridge this literacy and cultural gap include choosing linguis-
tically and culturally relevant and familiar texts and pedagogical approach which are
culture sensitive to create a stimulating and non-threatening learning environment
(Saraceni, 2003).

Another way to bridge the gap is to equip and empower literature teachers to be agents
of change in attitude and ability in literature. Hall (2003) proposes that the literature
teacher “must fully consider what the concept of literature implies for the reader – the
expectations, attitudes, and techniques that the reader brings to the reading task” (p.
232). It is the literature teacher’s duty to “motivate, to contextualise and to individualise
often anxious and insecure readers’ experiences to texts to promote both pleasure and
understanding and so to promote meaning and memorability” (p. 232). Indeed, in the
second language literature classroom where the “dominant paradigm in literarure
teaching world-wide is still teacher-based input” (McRae, 1996, p. 228), the literature
teacher plays a major role in determining the effectiveness of literature instruction.
However, it has been observed that within second/foreign language contexts, non-native
teachers often felt inadequate in interpreting foreign texts for which they were not
culturally informed (Kramsch 1993, cited in Paran, 2008), resulting in the reliance on
secondary literature in responding to literature texts (Bernhardt, 2002).

According to Paran (2008) most of the writing in this area of literature in second/foreign
language has been “theoretical” and so “the challenge of research is to validate this
theoretical position, and to support the claims that literature can contribute to language
learning” (p. 470). This study aims to fill this research gap by providing empirical data
based on learners’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature in the non-native
context of Malaysia.

Paran (2008) concludes that literature in the second/foreign language context needs
“adequate direction and clear scaffolding” (p. 490) provided by the teacher. This
highlights the need to produce teachers who are capable of playing this role. The present study will investigate elements of teacher competence in the conceptualisation of the literary literacy of the pre-service and conversion English teachers in Malaysia.

3.3 Conceptualising literary literacy

In this study, the conceptualisation of literary literacy is shaped by an understanding of the interconnection between theories of literacy and the literary. It is concerned with what learners do while dealing with literary studies and what they do with the knowledge they have gained from that experience. For this purpose, an in depth study of the learners and their learning context is crucial and is appropriately informed by the socio-cultural perspectives of literacy and the reader response pedagogy.

A working definition of literary literacy in this study draws from the cognate fields of literacy studies, literary studies and teacher education. In essence, literary literacy is a type of literacy and draws from the socio-cultural perspectives of literacy studies, specifically literacy as a social practice. Approaching the study from the learner’s perspectives highlights the reader response to literary studies, which is dominant in literature in ELT in non-native contexts (Kern & Schultz, 2005; Paran, 2008). As the participants of this study are preparing themselves to become teachers of English and literature in secondary schools, it is imperative to look into the types of knowledge and the sources of knowledge appropriate for teachers.

3.3.1 Literacy as a social practice

Literacy as a social practice is one of the major socio-cultural theories of literacy. Perry (2012) asserts that within the socio-cultural perspectives on literacy, literacy is viewed as a form of language use in which language “always comes fully attached to ‘other stuff’: to social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the works” (Gee, 1996,
Indeed, literacy is influenced and shaped by its context which encompasses the social, cultural, historical, political and economic (Barton, 2009).

Street (2001, p. 430) advocates a “detailed, in-depth accounts of actual practice in different cultural settings” for a situated understanding of literacy in use. Such an approach to literacy will uncover the “diverse forms and meanings that literacy takes on, especially when the perspectives of actual readers and writers are consulted” (Brandt & Clinton 2002, p. 340). This study takes into account the social and cultural contexts in which literary literacy is acquired and used. This is done by exploring the perspectives of the pre-service and conversion English teachers who are required to study literary texts as part of their professional preparation as future secondary school English and literature teachers.

Literacy as a social practice, is heavily influenced by Street’s (1984) ideological model of literacy whereby literacy is conceptualised as a set of contextualised practices which are “inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society” (p. 433). Literacy is viewed as a social practice as many social activities revolve around text, such as in reading, processing and interacting with texts as well as interactions among people mediated by texts (Barton, 2009). This broad perspective of literacy is ideological, focusing on meanings and uses of literacy practices that vary according to context (Barton, 2009). It is more culturally sensitive and recognises that “the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being” (Street, 2009, p. 23). It opposes the autonomous model of literacy which views literacy strictly in technical terms as a set of neutral, decontextualised skills that can be applied in any situation. It is useful for challenging “contemporary discourses about the changing workplace and about education, which often draw upon a narrow skills discourse and the deficit discourse of blame” (Barton 2009, p. 40).
Practice is larger than skills. Drawing upon Vygotsky’s (1978) work, Baynham and Prinsloo (2009) differentiate between practice and skills. Practice is “a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular system of knowledge” whereas skill is “the coordinated set of actions involved in applying this knowledge in particular settings...comprising sensory-motor, linguistic and cognitive skills” (p. 3). Practice encompasses skills as “the nature of practices will determine the balance of skills and the consequences associated with literacy” (p. 3).

Central to the socio-cultural approach to literacy is the concept of literacy practices. According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), literacy practices are “what people do with literacy” (p. 7) and the ways in which these actions are influenced by values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. Because they are connected to unobservable beliefs, values, attitudes and power structures, literacy practices must be inferred from observable literacy events which are normally text-mediated (Perry, 2012, p. 54). Purcell-Gates, Perry and Briseno’s (2011) model of a literacy practice shows how the observable literacy event of an agent’s intent for reading and writing are contextualised and shaped by the larger literacy practice.

Perry’s (2009, as cited in Perry, 2012) study on Sudanese refugees who sought informal help with texts and literacy practices demonstrates that the theory of literacy as a social practice is useful in describing the types of knowledge needed for effective engagement in given literacy practices. This theory explains that individuals need “a great deal of context-dependent knowledge to engage in a literacy practice” because “cognitive skills (e.g. the ability to decode) are only one part of what it takes to be literate (p. 57). The study reported in this thesis draws on the literacy as a social practice model to identify and describe the types of knowledge pre-service and conversion English teachers need in order to engage in literary literacy for their professional preparation as secondary school literature teachers.
The contextual and situated nature of literacy practices aligns it with the social practice view of learning as a situated activity constituting construction of identities, knowledgable skills in practice and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This situated learning view requires that a learner commits full participation in not only the task but more importantly, in the learning community: “it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities – it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). The social community in which the learning takes place is known as a community of practice, also known as a group of practitioners who work as a community in a certain domain (Jacobs, 2005). In this study of literary literacy, the community of practice is made up of the ‘interpretive community’ of people who are involved in reading and interpreting the literary texts studied (Iser, 1978).

The community of practice plays a pivotal role in situated learning as learning is located within the social practices and contexts of a given community, learning entails a process of engagement in a community of practice, and students acquire the skills and practice of their profession by participating in those practices rather than learning about them. In short, effective learning of a new literacy depends on the extent of participation or engagement in actual literacy practices. Central to this notion is the role of networks of support within the contexts of learning such as mentors and sponsors. The community of practice and the group dynamics involved are part of the contextual characteristics addressed in this study.

Within the concept of learning as a situated activity, learning a new literacy, in this case literary literacy is “easiest when the new literacy is not completely unlike the old one” (Carter, 2006, p. 96). In her study on a new model for basic writing instruction for university students, Carter attributes the success in developing confident basic writers to the process of legitimate peripheral participation whereby novice writers are encouraged
to become part of a community of practice by drawing from their familiar literacy practices relevant to the new literacy. In Malaysian secondary schools, Malay literature is a compulsory component of the Malay Language subject and constitutes 10% of the examination. The Malay literature component, known as KOMSAS (Komponen Sastera) was implemented around the same time with the LCE in 2000 and was tested beginning 2005 (Saamah, 2001). As such, this study investigates to what extent the study of literature in the Malay language, or any other language might be deemed transferrable to the study of literature in English in the programme.

While the social practices and the contexts of community of practice are powerful factors in situated learning, the individual learner’s participation and attainment in learning are influenced by their past experience and dispositions, known as ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1991) which can act as both enabler and inhibitor of an experience. Hall (2005) explains that in the second language context, readers’ background in terms of their own culture and personal experience contribute to the challenges they face in studying literature. This study takes into consideration participants’ past experiences in literary study and in teaching to understand their current literary literacy practices.

The framings provided by the theory of literacy as a social practice are central to the conceptualisation of literary literacy. In this study, literary literacy practices include a set of practices associated with literary studies and the types of knowledge needed in order to engage in literary literacy practices. The social structure comprises a community of practice in an institution of higher learning, which entails a dominant academic literacy practice and power relationship. An investigation into literary literacy of the study participants begins with the observable literacy event of what they do when they deal with studying literature in the teacher education programme. Interactions and practices in the literature classroom revolved around the literary texts studied and the
intent of these practices are to prepare them for their future profession as secondary school teachers of literature.

To conclude, the socio-cultural approach to literacy is appropriate for this study for two main reasons. First, the broad and ideological model of literacy is suitable to explain the complexities of literary study in the ESL context of Malaysia where the decisions about, and the approaches to literacy study are determined mostly by social, cultural, political and economic motivations. Second, this approach emphasises literacy as a social practice which is culturally bound, rather than an issue of measurement of skills per se. In other words, it goes beyond mere ability, usually measured by knowledge and skills, towards diverse meanings and uses of literacy according to a particular context.

3.3.2 Literary reading

In literary studies, reading literature is synonymous with making critical literary interpretation. Eckert (2008) argues for the integration of literary interpretation and reading pedagogies as a way of explicitly teaching novice readers to develop their literary literacy. To understand what readers do is a mirror to the place and functions of literature in the context of which it is studied. Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) in her theory of reader response to literature asserts that literary text comes into being only when the reader transacts actively with it. Meaning is no longer the exclusive domain of the author and the text, but encompasses the reader who brings multiple perspectives to the reading. The text constrains the degree of freedom permitted to the reader. This study is informed by research on response to literature among adolescent and adult students of literature in the classroom context. With the growing interest in the text-reader-relationship, understanding of the students’ literary reading process will influence the quality of their reading (Janssen et al., 2006, p. 36).
High engagement with literary texts can be achieved by drawing on personal narratives when transacting with the text (DeBlase, 2005). This engagement can be an effective springboard to understanding literary practices as points of entry into critical inquiry around the text and its representations of experience. Accommodating personal narratives in the classroom is giving students voice, and when they can see how relevant the text is to their everyday lives, reading becomes more meaningful.

Making students’ lives an important source of knowledge in discussions of literature is necessary for engagement with the text (Smith, 1996). Authorial reading, on the other hand, may limit the students’ thinking and skills to the author’s intent and use of literary devices. Smith’s (1996) research comparing the patterns of discourse in adult reading clubs with secondary school literature classes identified some pedagogical implications for the ideal literary discourse, namely, the social aspect, the equality among members, and the spirit of cooperation. Although the shared characteristics of the adult reading clubs, such as highly motivated and skilled mature readers, were impossible to achieve in the real classrooms, some pedagogical practices in the classroom should be altered such as making the tasks given to students more personal. Equality can be achieved by focusing on the immediate, spontaneous response of both the teacher and the students, and the spirit of cooperation can be fostered by allowing students to share their ideas and feelings in reading freely in a non-threatening environment.

Good readers of literature tend to be more reflective and flexible in their responses, drawing from personal experience and understanding (Janssen et al., 2006). A comparative analysis of 92 think aloud transcripts across good and weak students of literature showed good students engaging in evaluative and emotional responses more often – activities that reflect a personal, subjective engagement with the stories – whereas weak students engaged in retelling and making inferences – activities that are directed towards a (re)construction of the text. Good students produced significantly
more evaluative statements compared with their weaker peers. Poor readers seemed to be preoccupied with “reconstructing” the text and analysing it critically in an attempt to get to the ‘right’ meaning or answer. They seemed to process the text cognitively but not affectively. A possible explanation to this is that they have to devote so much mental effort to reconstruct the text and reach a basic understanding that they have no processing capacity left for carrying out higher order processes, such as evaluating, emotionally responding, or making associations. Therefore, the literature classroom should allow closer engagement with literary texts through mature reflective writing and discussion (Lehman & Scharer, 1996; O’Neill, 1984).

Initial or primary, spontaneous personal response forms the basis of the students' understanding of a literary text (Leaper, 1984), enhances a child’s pleasure in literature and increases motivation to read (Lehman & Scharer, 1996), encourages personal identification with the character and issue of the stories, making the text more meaningful and relevant to their own lives (DeBlase, 2005; Pace, 2006). Initial, spontaneous response acts as a catalyst for informed response. It is the first step to analysing text and can be shaped and refined toward a mediated response.

The nature of discussion influences the nature and extent of the mediated response. Pace (2006) found that students were pressured to accommodate the dominant discourse from the discussion, suggesting that interpretive communities can conserve social norms and suppress critical literacies. The reading process of two female students: an Indian migrant and White American, from initial responses to interpretations of a short story studied, showed that their final written responses – the modified responses – were significantly altered and influenced by the literacy practices and dominant discourse in the interpretive community. Data sources included reading-response journals, transcripts of class discussions of the short story and participant interviews. While their initial spontaneous responses seemed to be aligned, their different cultural background
and personal perceptions influenced their responses to the discourse about marriage and gender roles. In the progress of the course, and during class discussions on the text, these initial responses were substantially changed by the collective interpretations offered by the rest of the class, particularly by the male students, and eventually through more guided discussions with the instructor.

Pace’s (2006) study highlights the difficulty in sustaining resistant stances by nurturing the tenuous separation between personal perspectives and dominant discourse. Students are not passive participants; they face intense peer pressure and enact multiple identities in classrooms. Explicit strategies for discussing texts and resolving the tensions that can accompany intellectual differences should be a part of teachers’ professional development.

Teachers of literature can use various methods for encouraging students to investigate their critical questions about literature. For example, small-group discussions, where more personal responses might be shared, can be effective in helping students build on personal responses while accounting for and respecting authorial intentions. Small groups of like-minded students may support one another’s thinking.

Essentially, literature reading involves ‘dialogic processing’ (Hall, 2003) which is possible when the reader is intrinsically motivated in the subject of the text. It implies that readers need to be adequately motivated and guided in this dialogic reading, especially when the literary text is challenging and prescribed. When the reader is able to gain some understanding of the text, this achievement becomes a motivation to read on.

DeBlase (2005) observed that when a teacher failed to recognize the real meaning of the student’s personal response during discussion, it could cause a disconnection which may discourage further engagement with the text. It is important for teachers to be ready
to explore as well as familiarise themselves with various conversation and dialogic discourses in literature, which is acquired mostly through experience.

Appropriate selection of literary text is crucial for effective literary studies. Using captivating, multicultural literary texts in the multicultural classroom can promote literary engagement. Bean, et al. (1999) compared the reading engagement and interpretation of a young adult multicultural novel dealing with biethnic identity of twenty-two ninth grade English students from two schools located in two diverse settings and with multicultural students. Data sourced from students’ journal freewriting, character interpretation dialogue journals, and research papers on the novel’s cultural authenticity show that the multicultural literature encouraged cross-cultural insights, which contributed to high engagement with text and reading tasks given. The discussions on the text allowed the students to explore their own diverse background, increased their confidence and motivation to talk about and write about their reading. Thus, using multicultural literary texts in a multicultural classroom is a powerful tool for engagement not only with literature but literacy practices.

Although canonical texts have been gradually displaced by “more pragmatic concerns and the power of more contextualised and relativised theories of language and literature” the issue of value continues to challenge and influence text selection for the literature classroom (Carter, 2007, p. 6). Post-colonial literatures in English have now been recognised as appropriate inclusions in literature curricula, particularly in post-colonial contexts (Subramaniam, 2007c).

Carter (2007) posits that literary texts are “socially, culturally and historically variable, should be defined as part of institutionalised social processes, and are discourses that, far from being separate from other discourses, share characteristics with them” (p. 5). He recommends the inclusion of a greater variety of texts and text types, consistent with the notion that literacy is multimodal. He also asserts that with the “growing influence
of Vygotskian socio-cultural approaches to learning… there is no single ‘correct’ way of analysing and interpreting the text nor any single correct approach to reading literature” (p. 10). Instead, the appropriate method is “a very much ‘hands-on’ approach taking each text on its own merits, using what the reader knows, what the reader is aiming for in his or her learning context, and employing all of the available tools, both in terms of language knowledge and methodological approaches” (p. 10).

Both literacy studies and literary studies are concerned with practices mediated by texts: the process of meaning making and individual responses to texts (Kern & Shultz, 2005). In the classroom, activities and interactions revolve around texts so that “engagement with texts of various kinds is central to examining changing social practices” (Barton, 2009, p. 50). The experience of engaging with text can be described by giving form to the experience, a process known as ‘reification’ (Wenger, 1998). Literary texts meet all four characteristics of reification for 1) succinctness and power to evoke meanings, 2) portability across time, physical space and contexts, 3) potential for physical persistence or durability, and 4) focusing effect and drawing attention to specific features or distinctions within social reality. Consequently, participation in a community of practice depends on reification, which is “the process of giving form to experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’” (Wenger, 1998, as cited in Barton & Hamilton, 2005, p. 8). In this study, the participants’ experience in dealing with studying literature as part of their teacher education is reified as both the process and the product. The community of practice consists of the pre-service and conversion English teachers as well as the academics who are involved in interactions and activities around the literary texts studied in the literature classroom.

Literary texts are essentially multiple-layered in meaning for interpretation and the act of reading is the basis of all interpretation processes (Iser, 1978). This multiple-layered reading fits into the broader framework of literacy as a social practice which “highlights
the reciprocal relationships among readers, writers, texts, culture and language learning” (Kern & Shultz, 2005, p. 382). Taking into account the parallels between new concepts of literacy such as multiliteracies and multimodality, and the characteristics of literary reading such as making critical interpretations, Kern and Shultz (2005) argue for a context-sensitive and integrative approach in literature in a foreign language. This reframed and redefined literacy involves “becoming familiar with new ways of signifying, new genre, new social practices, and new ways of thinking in and about the language” (p. 383). This means going beyond predominant pedagogical practices such as mere reading comprehension, or reader response approach, to accommodate cultural differences in pedagogies and other contextual factors such as purpose of reading and language competence.

Literary reading is a complex cognitive activity, requiring readers to use advanced reading strategies and interpretive approaches, to engage with the text and to assume an interpretive stance (Eckert, 2008 p. 111). Through explicit teaching of literary theory and reading strategies, novice readers can be empowered to cope with literary reading. Drawing from common themes across Goodman’s (1996) psychoanalysis/mis-cue analysis and Iser’s (1987, 2000) phenomenological/gaps analysis of readings Eckert (2008) developed a project requiring grade 6-12 students to conduct a miscue analysis based on a diagnostic approach on their reading. The students’ needs were identified based on their miscues on a miscue coding chart. Literary literacy instructional plans to encourage progress in literary reading were designed based on the students’ strengths and weaknesses. Explicit teaching of specific literary theories and reading strategies were effective methods of scaffolding literary instruction.

Indeed, an understanding of the students’ specific needs in learning is necessary for effective support (Hammond, 2006). The academically gifted ESL adolescents and recent migrants to Australia who participated in Hammond’s study needed support in
developing critical and analytic reading approaches and in using more specialised oral registers in English. The teacher successfully used drama activities based on the play *Romeo and Juliet* to teach academic English language. In short, effective support depends on understanding of specific needs and explicit language teaching.

Another effective way of bridging the gap between the literary and literacy is to draw from the familiar to help with the unfamiliar (Carter, 2006). Basic writers at university level can make use of the literacy practices they are familiar with, such as home literacy practices to understand a new literacy. In Malaysia, students could be taught to transfer appropriate reading skills and content knowledge from their study of the *KOMSAS – Malay Literature* to their study of literature in English.

In terms of methodology, the literature on literary reading reviewed above informed the research design and data collection of the present study. The qualitative case study method was deemed suitable for an in-depth study on learners’ perspectives and experiences. Research questions pertaining to the teaching and learning practices, particularly in the university literature classroom were formulated. Observations of actual university literature classes revealed the actions and interactions of the participants in dealing with studying the prescribed literary texts and to what extent the classroom practices developed their literary literacy. Issues and challenges such as the selection of literary texts and literature assessment were addressed. Instruments such as reading journals provided deeper insight into the participants’ experiences.

### 3.3.3 Teacher knowledge

Given that the participants of this study were pre-service and conversion English teachers enrolled in a teacher education programme in a public university, conceptualisation of literary literacy draws from concepts of teacher knowledge.
Specifically, this study addresses the types of knowledge needed in learning how to teach.

In preparing to teach, it is assumed that “most teachers begin with some expertise in the content they teach” (Shulman, 1986, p. 4). Subject matter knowledge (SMK) is the foundation for developing knowledge for teaching. Grossman, Wilson and Shulman (1989) identify four dimensions of SMK: 1) content knowledge such as facts and concepts, 2) substantive knowledge such as frameworks for inquiry in the discipline, 3) syntactic knowledge which is canons of evidence for new knowledge in the community, 4) beliefs relating to the subject matter, and in the form of teacher’s orientation toward the subject matter. A knowledge base for teaching, which is not fixed or final, comprises content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds (Shulman, 1986, 1987). The processes of pedagogical reasoning and action are made possible by the availability of these categories of knowledge and the process of transferring them to instruction. This process involves comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation, reflection and new comprehension of a specific content knowledge to instruction.

The teacher’s understanding of subject matter is transformed to make it ‘teacheable’ by tapping the different knowledge sources, of which pedagogical content knowledge is most important as it distinguishes the teacher from the subject matter specialist (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman. 1987). Since Shulman’s (1986) seminal publication on a model of pedagogical reasoning, the concern has been on balancing knowledge of content and pedagogy for effective teaching. Shulman asserts that “mere content knowledge is likely to be useless pedagogically as content-free skill” (p. 8).
Maclellan (2008) argues that pedagogical literacy, viewed as a cognitive tool to enable pedagogical development distinguishes a professional teacher. It is a “reflexive concept (automatic, spontaneous) in which reading and writing (through a knowledge-transforming model) about pedagogical content knowledge is the essential means through which the teacher’s pedagogical reasoning develops” (p. 1986). As a cognitive tool, pedagogical literacy empowers learners to extend received representations of knowledge creatively and meaningfully through deep reflective thinking.

According to Maclellan (2008) pedagogical literacy is the “fundamental competence of being able to read, understand and criticise the documents that make up the professional knowledge base of teaching and learning” through “the construction of written representations about teaching and learning” (p. 1987). This calls for reflective thinking, hypothesising and writing about pedagogical practices as the means of transforming and extending pedagogical content knowledge. The necessary conditions that support the development of pedagogical literacy are access to pedagogical documents, and more importantly, a considerable teaching experience to allow for knowledge transforming writing about teaching and learning. Pedagogical literacy goes beyond the observable and procedural pedagogical content knowledge to the symbolic representation of reasoning, taking into account beliefs and identity to meaningfully transform knowledge by “engaging in knowledge transforming writing to deepen understanding, revise misconceptions and build up an increasingly sophisticated corpus of case knowledge, thereby extending expertise” (p.1991).

Drawing from Korthagen et al.’s (2001) distinction between “epistemic and phronesic knowledge” Loughran (2006, p. 9) expounds the complexities of teaching and learning about teaching. Epistemic knowledge is characterised as propositional, scientifically derived knowledge, abstract, objective and timeless. Phronesis is developed through experience whereby the knowledge gained, while appropriate to the situation, may not
be immediately generalizable. Its implication for learning to teach is that the student teacher can only appreciate a particular knowledge imparted by the teacher educator when the knowledge is contextualised and applied to real situation. This concept is aligned with the constructivist approach to learning in which the student teacher needs to be engaged and involved in transforming acquired knowledge into new knowledge, appropriate and applicable for instruction. Loughran further suggests that tensions, dilemmas and problems of practice are necessary experience in learning to teach and that knowledge about teaching needs to be taught explicitly. This is supported by Galman’s (2009) study on beginning pre-service teachers’ experience in a teacher preparation programme which revealed that dissonance was a catalyst for their identity development as teachers.

Shulman and Shulman (2004) emphasise the need for students of teaching to have a vision of the possible understandings and learning they can accomplish, a motivation to initiate and persist in that learning, an understanding to pursue such learning and the skills at negotiating the complex participant structures, and opportunities for practice and reflection. Learning how to teach is most effective with “metacognitive awareness and the analysis of one’s own learning processes, and is supported by membership in a learning community” (p. 267).

The fundamental concepts of teacher knowledge discussed above guide this study of pre-service and conversion English teachers’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature. The study examines the participants’ experience in learning literature in order to develop their content knowledge of literature and to prepare them to teach literature in the future. It investigates their attitudes and beliefs about teaching and about teaching literature, and their existing framework of teaching and learning, including their motivation and understanding.
Learning to teach literature can be a daunting task and the cause for much anxiety for teachers at all stages, due to doubts of authority as a teacher over various matters such as literary content, performance and evaluation (Showalter, 2003). One way of dealing with teaching anxiety is to address teaching skills and expertise, as well as developing confidence by drawing from other teachers’ perspectives and experiences.

Preparing teachers to teach literature is crucial yet challenging because they do not come into teacher education as clean slates, but rather they bring in their literary experience and life experience, perceptions and values. Pre-service teachers tend to rely on their prior knowledge and experience as students of literature. Agee (1997, 1998) found that pre-service teachers who had positive experiences learning literature in high school had idealised conceptions of literature as cultural transmission and, consequently, were resistant to the possibility of a student-centred approach to literature. Novice or beginning teachers often struggle to match their ideologies with the reality and pressure of the classroom (Agee, 2004). Therefore, it is important to negotiate change, and to respect pre-service teachers’ prior experiences and existing conceptions of literature in order to understand what they can do, learn or change, where necessary, in teacher education.

Teachers’ prior experiences will influence their values and pedagogy. Pre-service and novice teachers mostly draw on their memory of prior experience in their development of professional constructs as literature teachers (Agee, 2006). Tensions occur when their imagined roles of teacher clash with models for teaching advocated in the teacher education programme. Agee (2006) identified four major sites of tensions in literature teacher education: 1) a traditional English curriculum that consists largely of canonical literature versus a more broadly defined curriculum that includes young adult literature, contemporary literature and film, 2) literature reflecting middle-class values versus literature that challenges or questions those values, 3) conceptions of teachers as expert
knower/reader and conservator of a literary canon versus teacher as explorer of contemporary literature and advocate for diverse perspectives, 4) a content and teacher-centred pedagogy versus a student-centered, constructivist pedagogy (p. 203).

Providing pre-service teachers with appropriate teacher education is paramount because they will in turn influence their students through various ways such as incorporating their personal stance on literature in their courses through the values they teach (Agee, 1998; Beavis, 2001; DeBlase, 2005). Pre-service teachers need to have access to various knowledge sources to establish their content knowledge in literature, and a supportive environment for the development of pedagogical content knowledge through reflective thinking and writing about learning literature and learning to teach literature. From the preceding discussion, it is clear that personal as well as contextual factors work together to influence the success of teacher education.

3.3.4 Defining literary literacy

To reiterate, this study on literary literacy is located within the larger field of literacy studies. Maclellan (2008) notes that “contemporary views of literacy now encompass notions of active citizenship, new communications practices and information technologies, critical thinking and linguistic and cultural diversity” (p. 1986). Hence, there are many forms of literacy such as academic literacies (Lea & Stierer, 2000; Lea, 2004) and pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008). In this study on literature teacher education, literary literacy is being understood as a form of literacy that involves the teaching and learning of literature.

The concept of literary literacy is based on the notion of literary competence which has been noted as “intimately connected with the ability to perceive how patterns of language reinforce the message in the literary text” (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 7). It builds on the distinction between knowledge about literature and the knowledge of literature. The former involves accumulating facts about literary contexts, dates,
authors, titles of texts, names of literary conventions, literary terms, for example, whereas knowledge of literature refers to the personal pleasures and enjoyment in reading and responding to literature. Knowledge of literature comprises “emotional and experiential response and involvement” (p. 4). In other words, readers of literature will not only read the literary text to make meaning and interpretations but also to relate these meanings to themselves and others. Both types of knowledge are useful for the development of literary competence. Just as pedagogical literacy begins with content knowledge (Maclellan, 2008), literary literacy requires literary competence, which has been described as the implicit understanding of, and familiarity with, certain literary conventions in order to make literary meanings (Culler, 1975; 1983).

Baleiro (2011) suggests that a “good starting point to define literary literacy is to identify the skills that should be activated when reading a literary text in a higher education context” (p. 18). Her skills-based definition of literary literacy was deduced from a content analysis of 14 syllabuses (in Portuguese and English literatures) used in four Spanish universities, as well as 12 interviews with Portuguese lecturers of literature in two of the universities. Skills associated with literary literacy were analysed and presented according to the three-dimensional structure of academic literacy by Green (1990) and Green and Durrant (2001), namely the critical, cultural and operational dimensions. The findings were ordered based on frequency of mention. The skills identified for literary literacy involved the ability to 1) place literacy texts and their authors in an historical and cultural context, 2) conduct, organise and display bibliographical research, 3) establish connections between texts or works of art and to write a coherent interpretation of a literary text for a literature class, and 4) read critically and do textual analysis. The study concluded that “the traditional stress on textual analysis and close reading is decreasing in favour of the skill to analyse the social, cultural and historical forces that shapes the writer’s vision of the literary works”
(p. 22) supporting a socio-cultural view on literary literacy. Taken together, literary literacy was defined as “the competency to amplify individual self-reflective interaction with literary text in order to produce an interpretation” by activating “a web of specific skills that reflect literacy practices” within the context of the study (p. 22).

While Baleiro’s (2011) study subscribed to the socio cultural approach to literacy, it seemed to confine literacy to a set of skills to be activated in literary reading. In addition, the data and findings of the study were derived from the literature syllabuses and lecturer perspective, limiting it to the ideational rather than the actual practice of the students as learners of literature in the real context of literature classroom. In contrast, the study reported in this thesis conceptualises literary literacy in its actual context. It draws from the learners’ actions and interactions in the real university literature classroom, in addition to what their lecturers expect them to demonstrate as literary literacy. It expands the scope of the concept to show that practice is larger than skills, and these practices are influenced by beliefs, values and experiences the literature learners bring into their context of learning. In short, literary literacy is examined as situated learning, bound by the socio cultural context.

Given that the participants are studying literature in English in an ESL context, competence in the target language is an important aspect of knowledge in the conception of literary literacy. Gaudart (2008), a prominent teacher educator in Malaysia maintains that the basic requirement of a professional English teacher is fluency in oral and written English. She laments that many English teachers in Malaysia still lack these basic skills. Indeed, as discussed previously, a sufficient level of competence and proficiency in the language is a basic requirement to begin reading literature in the language.

To conclude, the conceptual and empirical review has identified key elements and fundamental knowledge that shape literary literacy. This study explored the interactions
and interconnections between these elements and knowledge to produce a definition of instructional literary literacy for professional preparation of literature teachers.

3.4 Conclusion

The review of the related literature has established some prevailing points pertaining to literature in language education. Firstly, the many benefits of integrating literature in the language classroom are accompanied by high pedagogical challenges, particularly in the second and foreign language contexts. Effective support requires understanding of the learners and their contexts. Currently, there is a scarcity of empirical data to inform policy and practice of literature instruction. This present study contributes to the knowledge in the field by providing insights into the actual situation in a teacher education classroom from the learners’ real experience and in their own voices.

Secondly, the notion of literary literacy for professional preparation shaped by the interconnected concepts in literacy studies, literary reading and teacher knowledge needs to be examined in the context of actual practices. For example, the extent to which the knowledge sources required for teacher knowledge are accessible to the student teacher and the appropriateness of the kind of approaches used in teaching literature. This study seeks to unpack the discrete components of literary literacy and detail the complex and interrelated factors that contribute to the professional preparation of literature teachers.

Finally, the empirical data reviewed in this chapter has identified key elements and concepts that would guide the design of the present study. They include the learners’ culture, previous experience, language proficiency and motivation, which would be included in the focus group interviews. The next chapter presents the research design and instruments used for the study.
Chapter 4  Research method

4.1  Introduction
This chapter presents the research design and methods used in this study. It begins with the aims of the study and the research questions that guided the study. Next, it discusses the theoretical considerations that determined the research design and methods used in data collection and data analysis. It also provides a detailed description of the research site, the participants of the study and the participant selection procedure. The chapter ends with a description of ethical considerations addressed in the study.

4.2  Research aims and questions
As mentioned in Chapter One, the overaching aim of this study was to generate substantive theory on the literary literacy for professional preparation of pre-service and conversion English teachers. This was done by examining the participants’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature based on their experiences dealing with studying literature courses in the teacher education programme. Hence, the central research question of the study was:
What are the experiences of pre-service and conversion English teachers in dealing with studying literature as part of their professional preparation to teach literature in secondary schools?
The specific questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the participants’ perspectives on learning literature in English?
2. How do they deal with studying university literature courses?
3. What are their perspectives on teaching literature in English?
4. What is their perceived level of literary literacy?
5. What literary literacy practices in university literature classes do they consider useful for their professional preparation?
6. To what extent do literary studies in the teacher education programme prepare them to teach literature in secondary schools?

These questions relate to the conceptual framework of literary literacy discussed in the Chapter Three. For example, questions 2 and 5 examine the participants’ literary literacy practices both inside and outside the teacher education classroom. In the semi-structured focus group interviews and their accompanying summary sheet at the end of the interviews, the questions are phrased such as learning strategies and teaching approaches used by the participants and their lecturers respectively. The mapping of these questions to the conceptual framework, the interview questions, and data triangulation is shown in Appendix 4.1. As expected in a qualitative inquiry, these links are tentative and would be confirmed by the outcome of the data collection and analysis.

### 4.3 Research paradigm

This study is located within the interpretivist paradigm under naturalistic, qualitative approaches to inquiry. Interpretivism is useful in investigating human actions and social phenomena in which social actors construct social realities (Esterberg, 2002). It builds on the key characteristics of human beings, their daily activities and their social interactions. Human beings are seen as purposive, active and involved with life
experiences, capable of monitoring their own behaviours and using speech to make comments on their performance (Cohen & Manion, 1985).

In their daily activities, people make use of their freedom and autonomy over their actions, are involved in social interaction through which they interpret the actions of others, modify their perspectives and negotiate meaning (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985). Thus, interaction and context are necessary for understanding actions and meanings associated with them.

This study draws on the symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) approach to inquiry, which is a major influence in interpretivism. The principles of symbolic interactionism emphasise that “human beings act toward things on the basis of meaning they have for them” whereby meanings are “derived from social interactions in which people use interpretive process to make sense of things” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Through interactions between actors, meanings are constantly being created, modified and developed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Indeed, meanings are constantly “handled in and modified through an interpretive process in dealing with the things they encounter” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 19). This approach is suitable to “uncover people’s perspectives on a phenomenon” which is useful in understanding the “actions people take in the light of their perspectives” (p. 20). O’Donoghue posits two types of studies that build on the principles of symbolic interactionism: one focuses on the participants’ perspectives on things and the other involves how the participants deal with things. This study is concerned with both which contribute to the participants’ lived experiences in literary studies in the teacher education programme.

Interpretivism, as a worldview, helps people to understand the “subjective meanings of their experiences” that they have developed over time and “are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 21). The interpretivist paradigm focuses on
social interaction as the basis for knowledge, which is mutually negotiated by the researcher, using his or her social skills with the participants, in its natural setting (O’Donoghue, 2007). Thus, it is important that the study be conducted in its natural setting in which the researcher is able to interact with the research participants and observe their interactions as they occur in context.

In this study, the process of interpretation of meaning takes into account the personal as well as contextual factors that contribute to the participants’ experiences. This is consistent with the current approach in perspectival studies on the teaching and learning of literature, which is more holistic as it takes into account different aspects of the learner and the context of learning. This approach looks at the whole person and the whole culture and takes into account the learners’ affective development and affective factors (Paran, 2008 p. 469).

While there have been several studies on pre-service and in-service teachers’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature, there is little direct qualitative reporting of non-native English teachers in the non-native context such as the Malaysian ESL context. This study aimed to give these teachers opportunities to explore their experiences and voice their perspectives on learning literature and learning to teach literature in the ESL context.

4.3.1 Case study method

The key features of the case study method are suited to the purpose of this study for an in-depth understanding of the research participants’ experiences in teaching and learning literature in their natural setting. A case study is defined as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded-system (a case) or multiple bounded-systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, documents and reports) and reports a case description and case...
themes” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 97). This study was organised according to these key principles.

The issue of dealing with literary studies as part of teacher education was considered an intrinsic (Stake, 1995) intent of the study in that it was a case that had unusual interest in and of itself and needed to be described and detailed. The issue was based in real-life and contemporary as it was set during the period when the research participants were engaged in literary studies in the teacher education programme at the research site. Thus, the parameters of the context were clearly defined to the research participants and their lived experiences within the context of the teacher education programme. The qualitative case study method allows for a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2008) and recognises the complexity and context (Punch, 2005) of the case. Thus, it is “valued for its ability to capture complex action, perception and interpretation” (Stake, 2006, p. 3) and provides “in depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40).

The “special features” of qualitative case studies, namely “particularistic – focusing on a particular situation, event, programme or phenomenon; descriptive – providing a rich and “thick” description; and heuristic – bringing discovery of new meanings, extending the readers’ experiences or confirming what is known” (Meriam, 2009, p. 43-44) suit the purpose of this study. The case study method was used to collect data from two groups of participants: the pre-service teachers and the conversion English teachers enrolled in various literature courses at the university. Both groups were investigated over a period of one full academic semester, which lasted about five months, from the beginning of the course to the announcement of final results. Data from multiple sources comprising focus group interviews, classroom observations, reading journals and other relevant documents were analysed and triangulated to provide a ‘thick’ description of the case. The findings of the two cases were compared and cross-analysed
to identify broader, collective issues (Cresswell, 2007; Punch, 2005) to help in the understanding of the participants’ experiences.

In this study, generalisability was not the objective due to the scarcity of studies in similar (ESL) contexts. The study did not seek universals in human perspectives and actions but emphasised the value of context dependent knowledge (Merriam, 2009). While there are available case studies on the perspectives and experiences of pre-service and practicing teachers of literature (Agee, 1997, 1998, 2004, 2006; Beavis, 2001; DeBlase, 2005) they were conducted in the native English speaking contexts, with predominantly Anglo participants who were generally experienced and motivated about teaching and learning literature. Using the case study method, these studies have provided useful information with implications for theory and practice in teaching and learning literature, particularly in the native speaking contexts. With the increasing attention to the integration of literature in the second and foreign language context (Carter, 2007; Paran 2008) but relatively few empirical studies available, there is an urgent need to conduct studies using similar methods in the non-native context with non-native speakers. Moreover, the intrinsic case study was necessary to understand the case in its complexity and entirety, in the unique context (Punch, 2005).

4.4 Research participants

The participants of this study were selected from three cohorts of pre-service and conversion English teachers enrolled as undergraduate students in a teacher education programme for English as a Second Language (ESL). This purposeful sampling of the research participants ensured comprehensive and first hand information on the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2008). This strategy facilitated an “understanding that provides voice to individuals who may not be heard otherwise and might give voice to ‘silenced’ people” (p. 214). In addition, two lecturers who were teaching the
participants the various literature courses at the university, which is the research site, were also interviewed for their perspectives on the participants’ literary literacy.

The student participants were apt informants because being in the final year of their teacher education programme, they had a considerable experience in dealing with studying various literature courses to be able to provide rich and in-depth data on the issue of teaching and learning literature. Further, as the participants were familiar with the researcher (she had taught them one literature course in their first year) the social interaction was enhanced in that they were willing to engage in open discussion with her as well as with other participants during the focus group interviews.

4.4.1 Conversion English teachers (CET)

As mentioned in Chapter One, the term Conversion English Teacher (CET) was coined for this study to reflect the participants’ conversion in two aspects: from teaching at the primary school level to being trained to teach secondary school students, and from teaching subjects other than English to teaching English Language and Literature at secondary school level. All except one were originally trained to teach in primary schools. A few were previously trained to teach subjects other than English, such as Chinese Language, Malay Language and Mathematics.

Prior to enrolling in this secondary school teacher education programme, the CETs in this study had been teaching in primary schools, mostly in remote and rural areas, for periods ranging from five to 17 years. As such, they were essentially in-service teachers who had been selected from primary schools across the nation by the Ministry of Education (MoE) for placement in secondary school English teacher education programmes at public universities nationwide, as part of its effort to deal with the shortage of qualified English teachers. According to the participants, they were selected based on their merits in-service, their general teaching experience and their expressed
interest and potential to teach English at secondary school level. Ultimately, the bachelor degree in ESL would qualify them to teach in secondary schools and eventually obtain a promotion.

The 16 CETs who participated in this study came from two cohorts: four from the senior cohort and 12 from the junior cohort. The senior cohort’s programme structure was a conventional four year bachelor of teaching in ESL whereas the junior cohort’s programme was compressed and accelerated into three years. At the time of the study, all CETs were in their final year of study at the university.

At the university, the CETs were considered mature age students with age ranging from 27 to 44 years, and six were married with children. They were from various ethnic groups: Chinese, Malay, Iban, Bidayuh, and Melanau. There were 10 females: four from the senior cohort and six from the junior cohort, and 6 males, all from the junior cohort.

In terms of qualifications, all CETs had a Diploma in Teaching (Primary School) from Teachers’ College which qualified them to teach in primary schools. Apart from merit points which they accumulated from their contributions to teaching and extra curricular activities, and their general teaching experience in primary schools, there was no indicator of the conversion participants’ competence and proficiency in English. For the CETs who were not previously trained to teach English, it was assumed that their experience as substitute English teachers and their ability to speak English indicated their potential to be trained to teach English through this secondary school teacher education programme. Nonetheless, their performance in various literature courses taken over the previous years at the university suggested a range of abilities: the four members of the senior cohort were considered under-achievers because they had failed at least one literature course which caused them to stay an extra semester, whereas the junior cohort members mostly achieved a grade B average in literature.
4.4.2 Pre-service teachers (PST)

Pre-service teachers (PST) were high school graduates with a Malaysian High School Certificate (MHSC), known as Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) after completing two years of Form Six, which is equivalent to ‘A’ level. Alternatively, they had completed a diploma level education, for example one PST participant had a Diploma in Business Studies.

All PSTs had applied for a place in tertiary education by submitting their application into a bachelor degree programme in various fields, including TESL, to the central student admission unit of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). Unlike the CETs, selection and placement of successful PST candidates were based on overall academic merits, with an additional requirement for English Language proficiency, measured by the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) at a minimum of Band 3 (described as “Modest User”) for English and TESL majors. The MUET is a taught and tested subject for all Form Six students in Malaysia. There was a range of proficiency in English among the PST participants of the study: two were in Band 3 (described as “Modest User”), 11 had achieved Band 4 (described as “Satisfactory User”), nine achieved Band 5 described as “Proficient User”, and only one had Band 6, described as “Highly Proficient User” (see Appendix 4.6 for MUET band descriptors).

From the total population of 63 registered pre-service teachers (PST) in the secondary teacher education programme at the period of study, 23 (36.5%) volunteered to participate in a series of focus group interviews conducted outside their literature classes for the study. There were seven males and 16 females, aged between 23-25 years. All were in the fourth and final year of the Bachelor of Education in TESL programme. All had studied literature as a component of the English Language in secondary school. In fact, they were the first cohort to study literature in English as a compulsory component in English Language when it was first implemented in the Malaysian secondary school
curriculum in 2000. Only one participant had studied Literature in English in Form Six
(‘A’ level) and obtained a grade A in the public examination.

In terms of teaching experience, only one participant had taught English for two and a
half years to upper secondary school students as a temporary teacher. He had obtained
both STPM and a Diploma in Teaching (Primary School). One participant had a
Diploma in Business Management, and another participant had withdrawn from a
Nursing programme in the second year to begin the secondary teacher education
programme. The PST participants came from various parts of Malaysia and had
multilingual and multicultural backgrounds such as Chinese, Malay, and indigenous
Iban, Bidayuh and Kelabit. All were unmarried at the time of the study.

4.4.3 Literature course lecturers

In addition to the student participants’ perspectives, the literature course lecturers’
perspectives were sought to facilitate understanding of literary literacy in the context of
this study. Two junior lecturers, one male and one female, were involved in teaching the
three different literature courses in the semester of study. In this study they are known
by their pseudonyms Syamri and Eva.

Syamri, a Malay in his mid 30s first joined the university as an English tutor. With a
bachelor degree in TESL and a Master of Arts in Literary Studies from a university in
West Malaysia, he specialised in teaching literature courses in the TESL programme. At
the time of the study, he had held the junior lecturer position for about three years and
had taught both the CET and the PST groups.

Eva, a 29-year-old Eurasian, obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in English
from another university in West Malaysia also started as a tutor. After completing a
Master of Arts in Literary Studies from a university in the UK, she was promoted to
junior lecturer. While she had started teaching literature courses in the TESL
programme at the university at the same time as Syamri, she had never taught the CET group prior to the semester when this study was conducted.

The two lecturer participants provided vital information on the literature courses such as course content and pedagogical approaches used in the university literature classes. The course lecturers’ perspectives were compared to the student participants’ perspectives to obtain a better understanding of the CET and PST participants’ literary literacy practices in dealing with studying literature.

4.5 Data collection

Multiple methods were used to obtain data from multiple sources to ensure research credibility through triangulation of data. The primary source of data was the participant interview comprising focus group interviews with the CET and PST participants and individual interviews with their two lecturers. This method allowed the participants to present their views in their own voice directly and in a non-threatening environment. Interview data were supplemented by non-participant classroom observations and documentary data such as the course syllabus and the participants’ written work. Researched participants were also requested to keep a reading journal throughout the semester of study. The following sub-sections elaborate the data collection instruments and procedures.

4.5.1 Research site

The study was conducted at one site, which was a public university in East Malaysia. The secondary school English teacher education programme, B. Ed. TESL, took its last cohort of students in 2006 and was closed indefinitely with their graduation in 2009. The decision to close the programme was related to the Malaysian Ministry of Education’s move to upgrade the status of teachers’ colleges to institutes of teacher education, which offer degree level specialist programmes for teachers.
4.5.2 **Focus group interviews**

An in depth exploration of the participants’ perspectives and experiences in dealing with literary studies requires the collection of comprehensive and rich information directly from the participants’ point of view. Focus group interviews were most suitable because they use “guided, interactional discussion as a means of generating rich and thick data” based on the participants’ “personal experience” on a given topic (Powell & Single, 1996 p. 499). This “experiential feedback” enables the researcher to “identify quickly the full range of perspectives held” and allows the participants to “clarify or expand their contributions to the discussion in the light of points raised by other participants, thus expanding on contributions that might be left underdeveloped in an in-depth interview” (Powell & Single, 1996, p. 504).

Morgan (1997) notes one of the advantages of using the focus group is the “explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group” (p. 2). Participants in focus group interviews not only respond to the topic of discussion but also to the response of the group members. This group interaction “may present the need to explain or defend one’s perspective to someone who thinks about the world differently” (p. 46). Hence, focus group interviews allow the researcher to cover a range of relevant topics and explore the participants’ reactions and feelings in depth to produce thick and rich data.

A focus group interview should include participants who have “certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic” (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 2) and a moderator who ideally shares some of the participants’ characteristics (Powell & Single, 1996). In this study, the CET and PST participants were considered experienced students of literature as they were in their final year of the teacher education programme. The researcher, who was the moderator for the focus group interviews, shared a similar background
with the participants as she had gone through the same schooling system and completed a similar secondary school teacher education degree in TESL.

The ideal environment for effective focus groups is permissive, non-threatening, relaxed and comfortable, such as in a quiet place, over a meal to share, in order to allow all members to discuss a topic or issue at ease (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In this study, focus group interviews were conducted at the participants’ convenience, usually during their lunch break or after class, in a sizeable and comfortable room reserved for visiting professors and scholars, which the faculty had provided the researcher throughout the data collection period. The researcher provided lunch or tea for every interview and the participants were allowed to eat or drink during the interview. Participants were seated on a sofa and comfortable chairs which were arranged in a circle to allow face to face communication.

While a focus group should be a carefully planned series of discussion on the topic of the research, the discussion must be comfortable and enjoyable (Krueger & Casey, 2000) to allow participants to express themselves freely. A focus group is usually guided by a “semi-structured interview schedule consisting of 5-6 open ended questions phrased clearly and simply, drawing from concrete examples” (Powell & Single, 1996, p. 505). The purpose of the small group interview is to obtain high quality data as a result of interactions among participants which help to avoid false or extreme views (Krueger & Casey, 2000, 2009).

Merriam (2009) stresses the importance of pilot interviews to try out the questions and for interviewing practice. In this study, a pilot focus group interview was conducted with three PSTs to test the suitability, clarity and phrasing of the questions for the topic of discussion. The researcher also took note of the appropriate procedures related to seating arrangements and moderating discussion. The pilot focus group was useful to remind the researcher to practice good listening, to capitalise on key words and issues.
offered by the participants and to balance focus on the topic with flexibility to digress where necessary.

In this study the types of questions used comprised the four types suggested by Patton (2002, p. 387): experience and behaviour; opinions and values; feelings; background or demographic types of questions. Probes, comprising comments and related questions were used to gather further details on the topic of discussion. For example, the participants of this study were asked to describe their experiences dealing with studying literature throughout the teacher education programme. They were asked to account for any difference or improvement in their interest or ability to study literature and to provide concrete examples.

A series of different focus group interviews are necessary to provide a “variety of perspectives and increase confidence” in the patterns that emerged (Patton, 2002, p. 385). In this study, a series of focus group interviews were conducted in three rounds: at the beginning, in the middle and towards the end of the academic semester. Every round consisted of two to four focus group discussions on a topic which served as a guide for the interview and was flexible enough to allow discussion of a range of related topics. The first round focused on perspectives on learning literature, the second round focused on dealing with learning literature and the third round focused on perspectives on teaching literature. While the focus group interviews were planned according to this broad structure, in practice, the discussions were not restricted to the scheduled topics. For example, during in the first round focusing on perspectives on learning literature, participants were eager to share their teaching practicum experiences, which revealed that their perspectives on teaching literature influenced their feelings and attitudes towards learning literature. In short, the topics discussed were interrelated and repeated with several focus groups to the point of saturation to reveal emerging patterns and themes in the participants’ responses.
A short interval of about a week or two between these rounds of focus groups, particularly during mid-semester exams and in-class graded presentations, enabled the researcher to reflect on the data collated, to identify the trends in views and opinions expressed through a systematic analysis of the interview transcripts (Krueger & Casey 2009), which provided directions for the subsequent interviews.

At the onset of the study, the researcher visited the CETs and PSTs in their respective literature classes to explain the purpose and procedures of the study and to invite individuals to participate in the focus group interviews. Participation in focus group interviews was on a voluntary basis and group membership was not fixed. The participants were free to form their own focus groups and the meeting schedule was negotiated around their routine. Each focus group consisted of three to four members which allowed equal opportunity for every member to be heard.

In the focus group interviews, open-ended questions were used such as “How has learning literature in English in this teaching programme been for you so far?” or “Tell me about your experience dealing with studying literature in this programme” which led to more probing yet simply phrased questions such as “Why?”. The interview structure for focus group interviews and reading journal is provided in Appendix 4.2. The discussions were conducted in a conversational and informal manner in which everyone was given equal opportunity to express himself or herself. While the questions were phrased in the English Language, the participants were allowed to code switch to Malay Language or a local dialect understood by all when necessary.

The comfortable setting and the good rapport between the researcher and the participants created a casual atmosphere in which the participants not only responded to the questions asked but also were bold enough to raise issues related to the topic of discussion. Indeed, there was a good rapport between the participants as the focus groups were formed by friends or members of a study group (it was a common practice
for students to keep one or two study groups for the purpose of completing group assignments). There was no incidence of a focus group member dominating the discussion session and influencing the others. On the contrary, there were critical and lively discussions whereby the participants freely expressed opposing viewpoints. Such discussions produced thick and rich data.

Each focus group interview session lasted 40 to 80 minutes according to the number of members present. At the end of the interview session, the participants were given a take-home summary sheet of the main questions asked during the interview (see Appendix 4.3 for sample focus group summary sheet). This written protocol gave the participants an opportunity to provide individual written summaries of their key ideas verbalised during the focus group discussion. It also allowed for relevant private comments and thoughts not recorded during the focus group discussion. In addition, it included items best presented in writing, such as ranking of literature courses according to interest and importance. The interview transcripts and written protocol were compared and triangulated with supporting data such as coursework results and classroom observation notes. All focus group interview sessions were audio-taped with the informed written consent of the participants.

4.5.3 **Individual interviews with lecturers**

The perspectives of the two lecturers who were teaching the various literature courses taken by the CET and PST participants were sought as key supporting data. They were interviewed individually and separately, once at the beginning of the semester and once towards the end of the semester. The semi structured interviews used open ended questions to seek information on the CET and PST participants’ performance in the tertiary literature course.
There was a good rapport between the lecturers and the researcher as they were colleagues in the same department at the university. Nonetheless, the researcher began the interview by asking questions on their background and experience in teaching literature in order to determine their general teaching philosophy and approaches to teaching literature. Next, they were asked to describe the conversion and pre-service teachers, particularly regarding their performance in the literature courses taught.

The discussion was also stimulated by current events, such as a recent series of student presentations and the grading of the mid-semester examination which triggered a lively discussion on the issues of literature assessment and learner competence. They also provided samples of their students’ written work and examination scripts to support their views on the participants’ performance in literature. They expressed their concerns over various aspects of the teacher education programme, such as the apparent mismatch between university and school literature curriculum. The lecturer interview data were triangulated with student interview data and classroom observations for consistency and credibility.

The interviews were conducted in the respective lecturers’ office rooms at their convenience and each interview lasted about 40 to 60 minutes. All interviews were audio taped with the participants’ written consent.

4.5.4 Non-participant observations

Non-participant classroom observations were necessary to record data and to provide first hand experience in the real classroom (Cresswell, 2009), particularly the interaction between the students and their lecturers. The researcher played the role of a non-participant observer (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) to witness and identify literary literacy practices in their natural setting. A series of classroom observations was conducted during lectures, which involved the whole class, as well as during tutorials.
involving small group discussions. The researcher, as a non-participant observer, mostly sat at the back of the class, behind the students during the mass lecture and presentation but occasionally moved around the small groups during group work and discussions.

The non-participant classroom observations focused on the teaching and learning activities in the class, specifically the types of interactions and types of questions asked. The researcher kept field notes of the quantity and quality of teaching materials used, lecturer and student behaviour, and types of questions used during the lesson or discussion. This information reflected the suitability of the teaching approaches, materials used, adequacy of teaching preparation, and the suitability of the presentation. For example, questions such as the following guided the classroom observation: Were notes and readings given before class or on the spot? How were the students scaffolded to analyse the prescribed literary works? How conducive was the classroom in terms of time allocation, pace of presentation, grouping of students?

The types of tasks, particularly the written assignments, and the participants’ interactions over the tasks, were also taken into account. Tasks and assignments may be given during or after the class (during a tutorial or after a lecture) such as sharing primary spontaneous response, relating text to personal experience, writing/presenting a character sketch, or a speech in the role of one of the characters, and interpreting and presenting a critical analysis of excerpts from the text. The above information was recorded in the researcher’s field notes.

4.5.5 **Field notes**

Throughout the data collection period, the researcher kept field notes which provided descriptive, reflective and observational notes to supplement data collated from interviews and classroom observations. This information provided non-verbal evidence
(Cresswell, 2009) useful for profiling the participants and for contextualising the data for analysis.

Descriptive field notes provide descriptive details of the participants’ impressions and expressions during the interviews and classroom observations such as the time and venue of the interview, and demographic information of the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Reflective field notes recorded the researcher’s personal comments and critical observation of the data provided by the participants. Observational field notes recorded the descriptive and reflective notes on interactions and information that transpired during the non-participant classroom observations.

4.5.6 Documentary data

Both public and private documents were used to add valuable data for this case study (Punch, 2005). The former comprised course outline and teaching materials, including lecture notes/handouts and task sheets, whereas the latter consisted of student participants’ written assignments, examination scripts, personal reading journals as well as the course lecturer’s lesson plans and marking schemes. The participants’ written works represented their language and words, reflecting their written language competence. Triangulated with other data sources, they provided credible, consistent and complete data for analysis.

In addition, every CET and PST participant who volunteered in the focus group interviews was requested, but not forced, to keep a personal reading journal throughout the period of the study. They were encouraged to record their primary spontaneous responses to literary texts, followed by a reflective comment on their readings, including the difficulties they encountered and the feelings evoked. More importantly, they were to indicate whether they would use the text read with their own future
students and if so, to describe possible teaching strategies they would use in their literature classroom.

While the reading journal was not made compulsory, participants who chose to do so were offered opportunities to get feedback from the researcher on their reading responses, outside of their literature class. The researcher also explained to them the benefits of recording their initial, spontaneous response to help improve their engagement with the literary text and to shape their responses toward a more critical analysis of the texts. In order to create the richest and most accurate data source of participants’ experiences, strategies and perspectives of their learning, they were permitted to write in Malay or English, code-switching as they found it necessary. Participants could submit their reading journals to the researcher at anytime up until the end of the semester. They were also allowed to keep a digital reading journal which they could email to the researcher.

The documentary data offered the main control for potential researcher bias. Looking for divergent or alternative interpretations ensured that the data was scrutinised to avoid researcher bias. The course outlines, lesson plans and teaching materials were designed independently by the course lecturer, as were the written assignment tasks. The personal reading journals collected the primary spontaneous responses of the student participants, and their thoughts about how they might use the texts in their future classrooms.

### 4.6 Data analysis

The data gathered from multiple sources were organised, coded, clarified and categorised according to “inductive analysis” strategies and “creative synthesis” to “discover patterns, themes and inter relationships” (Patton, 2002, p. 41). Inductive analytic procedures of organising the data, immersion in the data, generating categories
and themes, coding the data, interpreting the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) were followed.

For data managing purposes all the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were stored securely on a password protected computer as word documents. All the participants’ completed written summary sheets were also typed, transcribed, and organised according to the questions and sections in the written protocol. The researcher’s field notes, including classroom observation notes were labelled and arranged for easy access and archiving.

Immersion in the data was done through intimate engagement with the data whereby the researcher read all the transcripts and text data thoroughly and repeatedly to ensure that she was familiar with every part of the information. Memos and annotations were constantly made of emerging patterns, categories and themes, as well as irregularities and inconsistencies for further verifications.

In coding the data, the grounded theory methods of open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were applied throughout the data analysis. In open coding, the raw data were broken down, examined, compared, conceptualised and categorised in order to identify and develop concepts. Each transcript was coded line-by-line with the code words written in the right hand margins. For example, words or lines in the transcript were highlighted with different coloured markers under different categories noted in the margin such as “attitudes towards literature” and “coping strategies”.

Other relevant documentary data such as the participants’ written work (including reading journals) were also subjected to open coding procedures. Emerging concepts and categories were constantly questioned and compared, with the help of code notes and memos made throughout the coding process. A sample of the open coding of a data text is provided in Appendix 4.4.
Next, axial coding involved “grouping the codes according to conceptual categories that reflect commonalities among codes” whereby the codes were “clustered around points of intersections or axes” (Strauss & Corbin, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2011 p. 214). This phase is concerned with making connections and generating hypotheses about emerging relationships between conceptual categories obtained in open coding. This was done by establishing cause and effect relationship, making comparisons and contrasts, and describing processes and procedures. Propositions were developed using both inductive and deductive analytical processes. As with open coding, code notes and memos aided the axial coding process – for example, why certain coping strategies in studying literature were preferred by a certain group of participants. A sample of the axial coding of a code note is provided in Appendix 4.5.

Codes used in the coding process were generated from theory (for example, reader response approach vs. right reading approach) or “invivo/emergent, real-life data – from actual words and behaviours in the data and the creative insight of the researcher” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 214) such as “experience vs. head knowledge”. Codes were developed to encompass a broad spectrum of contextual and ideological structure such as definition of situation, and perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The process of interpreting requires integrative interpretation by “making means of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, and making inferences” (Patton, 2002, p. 480). This involved “creative synthesis” (Patton, 2002, p. 41) of the data and the findings by linking the researcher’s creative interpretation with theoretical considerations drawn from the literature. The analytical memos were particularly useful for this purpose (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The flow chart of data collection and data analysis processes is presented in Figure 4.1.
This study used various strategies as recommended by Merriam (2009, p. 228) to enhance “rigor and trustworthiness” and to promote “validity and reliability”. These strategies are triangulation, adequate engagement in data collection, peer review/examination, audit trail and rich, thick description.

Triangulation was possible by means of multiple data collection methods to collect data from multiple sources comprising focus group and individual interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and documentary data. Multiple data such as
interview transcripts, field notes and documentary data were compared and cross- 
checked to develop emerging patterns and themes.

There was adequate engagement in data collection as indicated by ‘saturated’ 
information from a series of focus group interviews and non-participant classroom 
observations when the researcher began to hear and see the same things repeatedly, even 
with more data collected such as participants’ exam scripts.

Peer review/examination in the form of frequent discussions with colleagues in the field 
(fellow research students at the graduate school as well as colleagues at the research site 
during data collection visits) and the supervisors of this study. The researcher also 
gained valuable and critical feedback from her audience, including scholars in the field, 
during her oral presentations of the research findings at several graduate seminars and 
international conferences.

An audit trail in the form of “a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and 
decision points in carrying out the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229) was also made 
available in the researcher’s notes and write-ups presented to the supervisors of the 
study. Rich, thick descriptions of the findings provided adequate description to 
contextualise the study. This is important to enable readers to determine the 
transferability of the findings to appropriate contexts.

4.8 Ethical considerations

This study complied with all requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct 
in Human Research (2014) and received ethics approval from the two universities 
concerned. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Higher 
Education Malaysia (MoHE). The researcher had acquired the permission and support 
of the university management to conduct the field work at the research site throughout
the semester of study up to a subsequent visit to collect additional documentary data after the semester concluded.

All participants in the study were informed about the purpose and nature of the study through an information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 4.7). It was stated in the form that participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without providing any reasons. Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality was given as all data obtained would be kept in locked cabinets accessible only to the researcher and the supervisors of the study. All participants were given pseudonyms for the purpose of reporting. All interviews were audio taped with the consent of the participants.

At the onset, the researcher went to the respective classes to explain the purpose and nature of the study prior to the actual fieldwork. She addressed questions from the students and emphasised that participation in the study was strictly voluntary. Students who volunteered to participate in the study were given the information sheet and consent form which they were required to sign. All participants were given a copy of their signed forms to keep.

The researcher had a good rapport with the participants as she had taught them during their first year at the university. At the time of the research, the researcher did not hold any position of authority or line management over any of the participants. There was no apparent attempt to ‘please the researcher’ because at the time of the study, the participants were completing the final units of their teacher education programme, and so their grades could not be adversely affected by the outcome of the study. Moreover, the interactions during focus group interviews proved that the participants were focused on the topic and each other’s responses rather than on the researcher. Any potential researcher bias was controlled by the multiple sources of data collected, particularly the documentary data in the form of the participants’ written work such as their exam scripts.
4.9 Conclusion

Justifications for the use of literature in the language classroom have been based mostly on theoretical knowledge and there is an urgent need for these claims to be “framed more empirically and precisely” (Hall, 2005, p. 48). Hall stresses the need for more “ethnographic and contextually sensitive” case studies on literature reading and teaching in the second language, which are “inherently complex” and “less studied” (p. 122). The study reported in this thesis contributed to such case studies by providing a perspectival case study on the learners’ experience in dealing with studying literature in a second language within the teacher education programme. To the researcher’s knowledge and from the literature review, this case study is the first in ESL context of Malaysia.

This chapter has described the research paradigm that determined the research design and research method employed in this study. To summarise, this study adopted a symbolic interaction approach within the interpretivist paradigm to generate substantive theory on the literary literacy of pre-service and conversion English teachers in dealing with studying literature as part of their teacher education programme. The participants’ perspectives and experiences were explored based on their own voices and in context using the case study research method. Data collected from multiple sources using multiple methods were triangulated according to grounded theory method of data analysis to produce creative interpretations and propositions, which constitute the theory on literary literacy for professional preparation. Issues of research credibility and ethical considerations were also addressed. The findings of the sub-case studies are presented in Chapters Five and Six.
Chapter 5 : Case study of pre-service English teachers

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of a sub-case study of the pre-service English teachers (PST) who were enrolled in a four-year secondary teacher education programme in Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL). There were 23 participants in this study. Data were collected from a series of focus group interviews with the participants, individual interviews with their lecturers, and a series of classroom observations conducted during the semester of study. The primary data were supplemented by documentary data comprising course documents, reports and participants’ written works. The findings answer the following research questions:

1. What are the participants’ perspectives on learning literature in English?
2. How do they deal with studying university literature courses?
3. What are their perspectives on teaching literature in English?
4. What is their perceived level of literary literacy?
5. What literary literacy practices in university literature classes do they consider useful for their professional development?
6. To what extent do literary studies in the teacher education programme prepare them to teach literature in secondary schools?
This chapter begins with a profile of the participants, which provides context for the emerging themes and issues that constitute the findings and concludes with a summary of the findings. Participants are given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

5.2 Participants’ profile

A profile of the PST participants was drawn from their demographic information and previous experiences in learning literature. The profile provides a context for the emerging themes and issues pertaining to the participants’ experiences in the programme. While the participants shared some similarities, they developed some differences in their perspectives on teaching and learning literature.

The PST participants were similar in age and secondary school education. Aged between 23 to 25 years at the time of the study, they entered the programme as high school graduates with STPM (Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia, or Malaysian High School Certificate, MHSC), equivalent to Cambridge ‘A’ level. They had applied for placement in tertiary education through the admission unit of the Ministry of Higher Education. Successful candidates were selected on merit, with emphasis upon their overall academic points. English Language proficiency, set at a minimum Band 3 (defined as “Modest User”) of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) was a pre-requisite for English and English Education majors. While applicants could nominate choices of up to eight different programmes at different public universities, they were not guaranteed their preferred programme or university. Most participants reported that the programme or the university, or both assigned to them was either their least preferred or not in their list of preferences. In other words, many of them had not planned to study TESL or to become English teachers.

Another commonality among the participants was their background in learning literature. All, except one participant, Hazem, were from the first cohort of Malaysian
secondary school students to be taught literature in English as a tested component of the English Language subject in Form Four and Form Five. Hazem, two years older than his classmates, had not studied the literature component, but had studied a one-semester literature course at a teachers’ college and had taught literature to Form Four students as a substitute teacher before enrolling in this teaching degree. Thus, all participants had previous exposure to formal classroom literature learning. Yet, they all claimed this previous experience was limited and entirely different from their current experience in university literature courses. In short, they believed that they were not adequately prepared to study literature at tertiary level.

In this study, the participants’ ability in English and literature was defined according to their proficiency in the English Language ranking in the *MUET*, and their competence in literature indicated by their grades in a previous literature course, *Malaysian Literature in English (MLE)*. This course was common to both the pre-service and conversion English teachers groups and, therefore, used as a benchmark for measuring their competence in literature.

The existing pattern in scores for university literature courses shows relatively few A to B+ grades. Grades B to C+ were common and thus adopted as the average score. The categories of levels of competence in literature were set according to grades obtained in literature courses, namely, above average (grades A, A- and B+); average (grades B, B- and C+); and below average (grades C, C-, D and F). While ‘C’ was a passing grade at the university, it was considered a weak or borderline pass.

As proficiency level in English is widely accepted as an important dimension of literary reading, it was expected that the *MUET* and literature score would be close. However, while 47.8% (eleven) of the participants achieved Band 4 in *MUET*, described as “Satisfactory User”, 8.7% (two) of them had Band 3 categorised as “Modest User”. On the other hand, 39.1% (nine) of the participants achieved Band 5 described as
“Proficient User”, and 4.4% (only one) participant had Band 6, described as “Highly Proficient User” (refer to Appendix 4.6 for MUET band descriptor).

While the participants’ performance in the literature course MLE was generally consistent with their MUET score, there were a few notable exceptions. Wang, with MUET Band 5 obtained a C+ in MLE. Similarly, Tony, with MUET Band 5 and two years experience in Form Six literature, only managed a B in MLE. On the other hand, Flora, with MUET band 4, scored a B+ in MLE. Perhaps, MLE alone was not adequate to identify the participants’ level of ability in literature. Therefore, their performance in the two current literature courses was taken into consideration, and the average of the three literature courses were used, together with the MUET score, to identify their levels of ability in English and literature.

The two literatures courses taken in the semester of the study were Young Adult Literature (YAL), and New Literatures in English (NLE) taught by two different lecturers. The aggregated scores from the three literature courses provided a more consistent pattern of their ability in English and literature, such as Tony’s aggregate of B+ which put him in the above average category. Nonetheless, Wang’s aggregated C- in literature suggests that there might be other significant factors influencing his performance in literature apart from language proficiency, which will be discussed in a later section.

Notably, while participation in the study was voluntary and random, the participants’ range of ability in English and literature were reflective of the whole cohort’s range of ability. Table 5.1 presents a summary of the PST participants’ background information.
Table 5.1.  
PST participants' demographics, literature competence, and educational background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name*/gender/age</th>
<th>MUET (Band)</th>
<th>Literature competence</th>
<th>Educational background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony - M/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>STPM Literature as elective subject in Form 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie - F/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyndi - F/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estella - F/23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin - M/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phan - F/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leann - F/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazem - M/25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma in Business Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azmi - M/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Literature component Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Najwa - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zelda - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy - M/23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie - F/24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmi - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teong - M/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna - F/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sing - F/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang - M/23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>STPM Literature component in Form 4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All names are pseudonyms.

### 5.3 Perspectives on learning literature

The PST participants’ perspectives on learning literature were largely influenced by their personal experiences in literature in their childhood and from previous experiences learning literature at secondary school. These experiences shaped their attitudes and motivation towards learning university literature courses.

#### 5.3.1 Previous experiences

The earliest experiences with literature in English reported were during early childhood and in the home environment, but for only three participants: Annie, Tony and Estella.
Their early exposure to reading literature in English was provided by their parents and the community in which they grew up. For instance, Annie recalled the collection of children’s stories such as *Lamb’s Tales and Fables*, which her mother used to read to her when she was a child. She said she grew up reading popular titles such as *Secret Seven* and *Nancy Drew* and popular authors such as Agatha Christie and Enid Blyton. She recognised that the early exposure to literature in English cultivated her love for reading. Although she described herself as an avid reader, she distinguished her “pleasure reading” from the “required reading” she was expected to complete in her university literature courses.

For Estella, reading was a significant part of her family activity. As soon as she could read on her own, her parents had taken her to the public library every weekend where the family would stay for the whole afternoon reading their own preferred materials. Hence, she had acquired the habit of going to the library and purchasing books and other reading materials she liked. She rated herself a fast reader and attributed her ability to read extensively to her early reading experiences.

Tony’s first encounter with literature in English was through religious literature in the church he attended. He said he started to read the Bible in English as a child and was even exposed to the King James’ version of the Bible. Tony was a keen reader and competent in English, which was used widely in his church and religious meetings, as well as spoken in his home with his parents and siblings. It can be concluded that early exposure to literature in English in their home and community had enabled Annie, Estella and Tony to acquire the habits and skills required in extensive reading in English. As a result, they were not easily daunted by the extensive reading required in university literature courses and were in the above average level in literature in this group.
The rest of the participants believed they had limited experiences in literature in English despite having studied the literature component in the English Language subject in Form Four and Form Five. For example, Anna claimed she had very limited experience not only in literature but also reading in English: “I just (learned) to speak English when I (came) to (the university) for first year of my programme… read English book also in the first year”. This is a serious lack of reading and low proficiency in English.

In terms of previous experiences in learning literature in the formal classroom setting, there were three different backgrounds: literature component in upper secondary school, Literature in English as an elective subject for public examination in Form Six, and literature at teachers’ college.

*Literature component in English*

As mentioned earlier, all PST participants had studied literature in English in upper secondary school under the *Literature Component in English (LCE)* programme in which they were expected to read five short stories and six poems in Form Four, and three novels in Form Five. They had one forty-minute period of literature per week and at the end of Form Five they were required to answer a set of questions pertaining to the prescribed texts studied which constituted 20% of their English Language exam paper. The questions tested their ability to explain certain literary terms and devices used in the texts as well as their personal response to the texts.

Despite having studied the prescribed literary texts over the period of two years in secondary school, none of the participants considered the literature component a real literature learning experience. They explained that their reading habits and ability had not improved, the literature classes were mere extensions of their English reading comprehension lessons and in reality, their literature class time was reduced to give way to “more important lessons” such as grammar. Most of them reported that they did not
finish reading the prescribed texts, with some not able to read the text on their own at all throughout their secondary school literature classes, as in Anna’s case:

(the literature component was) more to exam oriented where you don’t have to read the novels for the two years. Even though the teacher gave us (time) from Form 4 until Form 5 to read (all the literary texts) I don’t manage to read even half the novel. I just read the synopsis and then I can get B for my SPM. (Anna, FG1)

From the above description, learning literature in secondary school was reduced to merely reading information to be memorised for the examination. The participants reported that there was no difference between the way the literature classes were conducted and their reading comprehension lessons in the English Language subject. Hence, they did not see the need to read the literary texts because they could rely on their teachers to provide the necessary information on the texts, including model answers to the forecasted examination questions pertaining to the texts. Norma described her secondary school teacher’s approach to teaching literature as teacher-centred and exam-oriented:

my teacher is more towards… “ok, for this certain character, this is the notes”, or “Follow this. If you are out of these notes, the answer for the exam is wrong, totally wrong. I will not accept…” You need to memorise everything… and then when you got the SPM, oh, the same question! (Norma, FG1)

While they could not remember reading the prescribed literary texts in secondary school, the participants could recall how they were drilled on the “model answers” to the examination questions predicted by their teachers based on the trends in examination questions from past years. Their teachers seemed to be more concerned about preparing them for the examination rather than guiding them to experience reading a literary text. Consequently, they were used to rote-learning and memorising the “correct answers” to the questions on the literary texts studied to the extent of being able to identify but not justify the answers. For instance, on the poem *Sonnet 18* by
William Shakespeare, Hazem was able to identify “the eye of heaven” as the sun but was not able to explain its meaning.

According to the participants, their secondary school teachers would often resort to telling them the whole story and providing them with appropriate information on the prescribed literary text. Perhaps it was their teachers’ strategy to deal with students not reading the literary texts and to cope with the pressure of having to complete the subject syllabus in time for the examinations. There seemed to be limited time and space for creative and interesting activities in the secondary school literature classrooms, which resulted in their teachers’ heavy reliance on the teaching module and commercial reference books. In fact, it was common for secondary school students to acquire and read the recommended reference books instead of the prescribed literary texts. Moreover, one period per week for literature proved to be too limited a time allocation for literature to have any impact on the students.

Apparently, being a small component of the English Language subject, literature was not a priority for many teachers and students in secondary school, especially in the Science stream classes. For example, Annie who was in the best Science stream class at her secondary school recalled that her English teacher would leave literature to the last part of the school calendar, resulting in a “rushed comprehension lesson” manner.

In retrospect, the participants found their literature classes during secondary school superficial and of little value. Further, they were aware of the disparity between the literature curriculum and its actual implementation in the classrooms. Their teaching practicum experiences confirmed that the teaching and learning practices in secondary school literature classrooms did not reflect the aims of literature in ELT to promote creative and critical thinking. According to Najwa:
The participants concluded that without the critical and creative elements in their secondary school literature classes, learning literature was similar to other subjects, which mostly involved the processing of factual information. Anna summarised her experience learning literature in secondary school as reading comprehension and identifying literary conventions and figurative language.

**Literature in English as an elective examination subject**

In this group, only Tony had studied the *Literature in English* for two years in Form Six (Lower and Upper Six) as an elective examination subject. Consistent with the drastic decrease in literature exam takers nationwide, Tony said he was among only six students in the whole state who sat for the *Literature in English* examination in that year. Moreover, as the subject was not offered at his school, he had to enrol for the subject as a private candidate. Thus, his literary studies experience was a self-directed study driven by his love of literature. He dealt with studying literature as an independent learner outside of a formal classroom setting by purchasing the prescribed texts, sourcing for notes on the texts on the internet, visiting the school in which the literature subject was taught and appealing to the teachers for supplementary notes. He managed to obtain an A- despite missing two novels which were not available in his part of the country. Clearly, Tony’s experience of independent learning during the two years was challenging but in retrospect, he believed that it had prepared him to study university literature courses.
Literature at teachers’ college

Hazem was the only participant who did not study the LCE because at the time he was in secondary school, it had not been implemented. However, he had one semester of an introductory literature course at a teachers’ college where he pursued a diploma in education.

According to Hazem, the literature course at the teachers’ college focused on the methods of teaching the prescribed texts in secondary school. During the three years of training at the teachers’ college, Hazem had undergone teaching practicum conducted in two parts: in the middle and towards the end of the programme. With the teaching diploma, he had worked as a substitute teacher at a secondary school for two years as an English Language teacher where he taught the LCE to upper secondary students. Thus, he was familiar with the LCE and he believed that the teachers’ college training had prepared him well to teach it. Table 5.2 provides a summary of the types of literature learning experiences of the participants in this case study.

Table 5.2
PST participants’ previous experiences in learning literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of study</th>
<th>Literature component in English</th>
<th>“A” level Literature in English</th>
<th>Teachers’ college literature course</th>
<th>University literature courses B. Ed. TESL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key characteristics</td>
<td>Compulsory and tested component of the English Language subject in Form 4 and Form 5</td>
<td>Elective examination subject (STPM) in Form 6</td>
<td>One course focusing on literature teaching method</td>
<td>One of the four major strands in the TESL programme Total of 14 compulsory literature courses in four years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>One period (forty minutes) per week</td>
<td>Two years: Lower and Upper Six</td>
<td>One course in one semester</td>
<td>Three contact hours per week (lecture and tutorial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants involved</td>
<td>All participants, except Hazem</td>
<td>Tony – as a private candidate</td>
<td>Hazem</td>
<td>All participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.2 Attitudes and motivation

The participants’ attitudes towards literature and learning literature could be categorised along a continuum from extremely negative to extremely positive, with the majority within the neutral range. At the negative end were Hazem and Norma who developed an extreme dislike for literature mainly because they were not able to deal with studying university literature courses. They found studying literature at tertiary level highly challenging due to its multi-layered meanings and subjective multiple interpretations. They were frustrated by the constant search for the “right interpretation” and the sense of uncertainty in the process. Hazem described how his attempt at interpreting a literary text usually left him confused and frustrated:

(for instance) what do you think the themes of this short story? Ok I have my point of view. But I think that is the themes of that particular story. So I wrote it. But at the end it’s wrong. You see? Sometimes I think in class I think this A, and then the other person (thinks it’s) B, C and D. At the end, I don’t know which one to choose... You know I scored in my literature during my training at teachers’ college, but here… (Hazem, FG1)

Apparently, Hazem was more concerned about getting the “correct answer” and obtaining good grades. He had little tolerance of ambiguity, which he believed to be the nature of literary studies. As a result, he became increasingly apprehensive about studying literature and declared: “I hate literature…all of them (his cohort) know I really hate literature because no matter how I struggle…my highest grade is B”. However, Hazem, like the majority of the PST in his cohort soon realised that getting a high grade (B+ and above) in university literature courses was very difficult.

Hazem also realised that his exam-oriented approach to studying literature contributed to his frustration with studying university literature courses when he said that he “studied very hard, did all the assignments, etc… purposely (for the) grade… not (for) learning anything”. In other words, he was focusing on the grades rather than the knowledge or experience in literature. Thus, when he did not get the grades he hoped
for, he felt that he did not learn anything. Unlike Hazem, Norma said she only “disliked literature” because she “could not understand the various interpretations” to a literary text studied.

At the extremely positive end were Tony and Estella who professed their love and passion for literature. Both said they loved reading and literature, having read extensively since their childhood and developing a passion toward literary studies since secondary school. Tony was determined to pursue literary studies at a higher level by opting for the Literature in English as an examination subject in Form Six, fully aware of his disadvantages as a private candidate with limited access to support and resources. Driven by his passion for literature, he was resourceful and responsible for his own learning over the two years by reading extensively and searching the internet for commentaries and supplementary materials, which helped to build his understanding of the texts studied. He enrolled in the teacher education programme not because he planned to be an English teacher but because it was the closest to English (and literary) studies for him.

On the contrary, Estella’s passion for literature motivated her to pursue literature as her field of study as well as a possible career path:

... I love literature so I really enjoy all literature classes. I have an interest in literature, so to me it’s fun... because from a very young age I wasn’t very good in science subjects (or) Mathematics. So my strong subject was English and I love reading... From there I kind of like thinking, maybe this is something I could do in the future... I chose TESL, and it was my third choice, and I accepted because of the literature (strand). (Estella, FG2)

Indeed, Estella “longed for a more in-depth study of literature” than the current university literature courses, which she felt to be “all very surface level”. However, Estella and Tony seemed to be the only ones who wished for a more in-depth study of literature at this level and were intrinsically motivated for literary studies from the beginning to the end of the programme.
The rest of the participants were located in the middle of the attitude continuum as they were generally neutral to positive about literature because they acknowledged that literature was an important part of the secondary teacher education programme. Initially, many of them were not particularly interested or were indifferent about learning literature because of their lack of reading and unsuccessful literature learning experience at secondary school. For example, Cyndi said she did not like learning literature in secondary school because it was “memorizing all the themes and so on”. Thinking that university literature courses were going to be something like that, she was not motivated in the first semester. However, she soon developed a keen interest in literature due to positive peer influence and interesting activities in the literature classes such as group work and reading of plays. Cyndi recognised that this positive experience had “changed” her from being a “non-reader” to an “avid reader”.

Similarly, Annie, who had studied in the Science stream from Form Four to Form Six, was also initially indifferent about learning literature which was “just a subject to be scored”. The LCE class was no different from other subjects as the teacher provided notes and necessary information on the literary texts such as the plot, character and themes. The literature class was “very structured and academic” and she was content to “just listen and sometimes just copy and memorise” whatever was given by the teacher. In contrast, the learner-centred approach using a variety of interesting activities in the university literature classroom helped her to explore literary texts deeper and this changed her attitude. Although “burdensome” and “frustrating” in the first year, literature eventually became an exciting and fulfilling study. By the final year, she wished there “should be more” literature courses as she had “just begun to like literature” and gathered enough confidence to “go beyond” to tertiary level literary studies. Sing, another participant with a Science background said that while was
ambivalent about learning literature, she was able to appreciate that it was “really enriching” because “it makes you reflect… think about humanity”.

Participants who said they enjoyed reading literature such as the novel and short story in their leisure or as a hobby were more positive towards studying literature. Leann, a high achiever in the group, explained that studying literature “was easier” for her because she liked reading. She had developed adequate reading skills to deal with extensive and analytical reading. Nonetheless, there were participants who also liked reading, yet found studying literature difficult because they were unable to read critically and make interpretations.

According to the lecturers, the participants were generally positive about literature and learning literature despite their perceived limited experience in literary studies. However, a small group of participants were initially resistant to studying literature due to “fear of literature”. This group of “reluctant” literature learners had the “pre-conceived idea” that literature was “difficult”, “confusing” and that they “could never understand” literature. Nonetheless, according to the lecturer who had taught this cohort from their first year to this fourth and final year, there has been a remarkable improvement in terms of interest and confidence in studying literature as evident in their increased participation in various activities. Many participants were enthusiastic during classroom discussions and showed signs of becoming more critical in their reading of the prescribed texts by asking many questions and giving opinions, which resulted in the lecturer having to extend the time he originally scheduled for certain topics.

While the TESL programme was not the choice of study for many of the participants, they readily accepted it because it was their only opportunity for tertiary education and a secure job as a teacher. They also realised that studying literature in this programme was necessary for their future career as English and literature teachers at secondary school. Even Wang, who believed that literature was more relevant for a career in
creative or journalistic writing rather than teaching, recognised that studying literature was useful for his professional preparation.

For Teong, enrolling in this programme was his family’s decision as his parents preferred him to study close to home, which would be convenient and affordable, and they wanted him to follow the lead of his elder brother who had graduated from this programme the previous year. As for Azmi, a TESL degree would be beneficial for his future career in journalism, as he believed it would improve his English proficiency and writing skills.

Indeed, only a few participants entered the programme with a clear intention of becoming a teacher. Bella had studied Nursing for a year before deciding that she wanted to be a teacher instead, whereas Leann’s initial “pure intention” of being an educator seemed to have diminished over the years in the teacher education programme. Leann’s “traumatic” experience during teaching practicum has changed her motivation for becoming a teacher merely to “secure a salaried job”.

It can be concluded that the participants’ attitudes and motivation in studying literature in the teacher education programme were shaped by their previous experiences as well as the requirements of their future profession as English and literature teachers in secondary schools.

5.4 Dealing with studying literature

All participants, except Tony considered university literature courses their first real experience in literary studies. They believed that they were not adequately prepared to deal with studying literature at tertiary level which involved extensive and analytical reading of foreign canonical texts. They had to learn new ways of reading and responding to literature, conceptualised as literary literacy practices in this study.
participants’ literary literacy practices were shaped by their perceived ideas and benefits of studying literature, as well as the perceived problems and coping strategies in dealing with studying university literature courses.

5.4.1 Reading vs. studying literature

All participants distinguished between reading literature for leisure and studying literature. Studying literature was a daunting task, particularly for participants with limited proficiency in English and inadequate reading skills. Zelda, Ellie and Anna were not able to finish reading a prescribed literary text because of their limited vocabulary and inappropriate reading skills. While they were interested in literature, they considered themselves “poor” and “slow” readers. They were not able to deal with lengthy texts such as the novel because they spent too much time looking up difficult words and trying to understand unfamiliar culture in the foreign literary texts.

Even participants who seemed to have a good command of English found studying literature highly challenging. Edwin perceived “English (language) and English literature are two different things” because while he was proficient in English, he believed he lacked exposure to the language of literature. Studying literature became stressful because of factors related to extensive and critical reading such as limited time for in-depth analysis, and text preference. Studying literature involved dealing with prescribed texts and concerns for examination, which made it highly demanding for most of the participants, even those with positive attitudes towards literature.

5.4.2 Personal response vs. ‘right’ reading

Studying literature was being understood as reading and responding to literary texts by making valid and acceptable interpretations. This implied a focus on right response approach, although the participants said that they preferred the personal response in studying literature. The personal response approach was highly appreciated by the
participants because it allowed them to draw on their personal experiences to make sense of the text studied. This encouraged deep engagement with the text and helped facilitate understanding of it. For example, Holly described how she used the personal response approach to analyse a short story:

> When I noticed the characteristics of the lady nails painted red… I think of “nenek kebayan” always associated with witchcraft so that’s how I characterized the character. From there I make a few assumptions or conclusions of the story... if I’m unable to understand the language or what the text means, I always relate and make assumption first, my prediction first with my background knowledge or experience… only after that I’ll check with my friends whether what I think is correct… (Holly, FG2)

From the description above, Holly drew from the familiar to deal with the unfamiliar to make interpretations. Nonetheless, the concern for the “correct” interpretation caused her to depend on peer approval.

Using personal response, particularly at the initial stage of studying a literary text was useful to create the confidence necessary to begin interpreting the text from a personal perspective and eventually moving on to critical analysis. For Anna, personal response not only improved her reading skills but more importantly, her confidence in studying literature. She was able to “explore the text” based on her personal opinion without worrying about getting the “right” interpretation. Nonetheless, she recognised that her personal response needed to be justified with evidence from the text as well as further research to produce an informed response, acceptable interpretation or critique of the text studied. Most participants described a similar experience and so it can be concluded that the personal response was useful at the initial stage of reading but the right reading response remained the dominant practice in studying literature.

Right response reading was valued as more critical, using close reading for textual evidence. There was a strong concern over getting the “right” interpretation, especially in examinations and this has created a conflict in choosing which type of response to use. The lecturers kept reminding the participants that there were “no right or wrong
answers in literature” yet in the literature examinations, their answers were usually found to be “wrong”.

From the lecturers’ view, the participants were pre-occupied with finding the “right answer”, thus prioritising the product rather than the process. The lecturers wanted the participants to “enjoy” the process of reading the text using the personal response approach, which would enable them to engage meaningfully with the text. Their constant reminder that “there was no right or wrong answer in literature” was a way to encourage the participants to engage with literary texts, which would eventually enable them to make valid and acceptable interpretation.

However, there existed an extreme notion of personal response as indicated by Mary when she said that “in reader response we can put anything”. This suggests that the personal response approach was being understood as a subjective, idiosyncratic reading. Mary rightly observed that in this sense, it was not a suitable practice in the exam-oriented context because “there’s no answer (if) we can put anything we want”.

Tony claimed that he used both approaches when analysing a literary text, particularly in preparing for an assigned task or presentation:

First I have to do a lot of research. Because… I prefer personal response, but because I can’t use my own opinion right, I have to go and search for commentaries from others, the “who’s who” in that field… So you combine all the ideas and then you come up with conclusion... They somehow inspire me like that but I don’t actually draw all of my understanding from their commentaries. (Tony, FG2)

Tony was willing and able to conduct further research on the text studied in order to expand his initial personal response into a more informed and critical response. His research and further reading of the supplementary resources were used to test his own hypothesis and understanding of the text. The effort to conduct research on the literary text studied was indicative of Tony’s level of commitment to engage with literature. In
contrast, Holly and Mary reported that they “rarely” did such research, unless it was for examination purposes.

Many participants argued that while they enjoyed personal response, an acceptable interpretation of the literary text studied was usually text-bound and called for appropriate analytical skills they often lacked:

It’s not getting it right, it’s just that it’s hard for me to understand how we should answer the question, how we should look at the text… we need some knowledge on how to… understand the text first. You cannot come up with an answer which is totally out from the text… (Salmi, FG1)

Many participants were afraid to be creative in their responses and exploration of the text studied. The lecturers complained that most participants could not “think outside of the box” and depended on them for the “right answer”. Even Estella, who was among the most confident and capable in literature, was concerned about getting the kind of answer that would please the lecturer:

We’re always trying to figure out what does the lecturer want me to answer. A lot of times we don’t trust our own (answer) – still trying to see whether, if I read it this way, will the lecturer like this? If not, I better change my response to fit what the lecturer wants. (Estella, FG2)

The above statement implied that while the learner-centred approach was advocated in the university literature classroom, the learner’s original voice remained unheard. Estella called this a “Malaysian (education) problem” in that learning was still very much exam-driven than knowledge construction, even at the tertiary level. In short, this exam-driven context was not conducive for studying literature.

Within the personal response approach, the reading journal has been used to encourage participants to reflect on their reading, hence providing them writing practice in studying literature. In the previous semester, participants were assigned to keep a personal reading journal whereby marks were given as long as the required number of entries were submitted on time. However, in the semester of this study, the reading
journal was not required and so all participants reported that they did not keep a reading journal on their own accord because it was not their common practice. Their reasons for not keeping a personal reading journal were: writing a journal entry was “a burden”, “not practical” and “not the best method” to learn literature because it was “time consuming”.

Content analysis of the assigned-and-assessed reading journals in the previous semester course showed that participants had kept a diary of the activities in the literature classroom rather than their personal responses to the literary text studied. As for this study, only a few participants submitted their reading journals as requested by the researcher. Apparently, the participants valued personal response approach to study literature but were not willing to make time and effort to keep a personal reading journal. Perhaps a dialogue journal whereby the journal writer could obtain constructive feedback on the entries would be more useful. This would be time consuming and difficult to manage for a large class. Moreover, most participants believed that even without the reading journal, they had become more critical in their reading by asking questions pertaining to the literary conventions they had been taught.

5.4.3 Perceived benefits of studying literature

Most participants, irrespective of their results and performance in university literature courses believed that their experience studying university literature courses over the years had generally improved their interest, motivation and ability to study literature. They became more interested in studying literature when they were able to relate it to their own lives. For instance, Teong was able to “understand the text better” when he related some of the incidents in the literary works to his own life experience. Engaged reading enabled the participants to discover the relevance and value of literature in reflecting on life’s issues portrayed in the texts. This sense of importance of literature
motivated Anna to complete reading a prescribed novel – something she was not willing and not able to do previously:

Before, I never read an English story book… I never read anything regarding English language. Now I think I can finish one novel after (going) through these courses… because we have something to relate to… We can value the things that we read…there’s something that we can think of, why those things happen… (Anna, FG1)

The varied and stimulating pedagogy and collaborative learning used in the literature classroom provided a supportive environment for the development of interest and confidence in studying literature. Even those who considered themselves poor in literature, like Jimmy and Ellie, became more motivated to learn literature as they did not want to “lose out” on the perceived benefits of learning literature. According to Jimmy, there was “something so wonderful” about literature and it would be “so sad” if he could not enjoy it with his classmates. For Ellie, literature became more significant after her experience teaching a few classes of literature during practicum in a secondary school. The sense of achievement that came with her perceived success in conducting a literature class for her secondary school students by drawing from the knowledge gained in her university literature classes motivated her to study literature more. Many participants believed that studying literature enabled them to improve their language proficiency and appropriate reading skills through “critical and creative thinking.

Regardless of their individual attitudes and ability in studying literature, all participants agreed that university literature classes were a refreshing change from other core courses in the programme. They appreciated the learner-centred approach with opportunities for participation in open discussions and group presentations. They enjoyed the stimulating activities such as readers’ theatre, debates and forums, which had “life changing” effect on some, for example Cyndi and Anna, who became more interested and engaged in studying literature.
The teaching approach used in the literature classroom also encouraged the participants to become active learners and to voice their ideas and opinions freely. The lecturers were approachable and emphatic so that the participants were not afraid to ask “silly” questions or to confess that they did not know the answer to some of the questions asked. The variety of courses offered in the programme introduced participants to new literary theories, expanding their content knowledge of literature.

5.4.4 Perceived problems and coping strategies

While the participants displayed generally positive attitudes and motivation to study literature in the teacher education programme, they encountered many problems, which made them develop some practical, if not effective accompanying coping strategies. The problem sources were identified as limited experience in literary studies, low proficiency in English, written examination, literary theories and genres, text selection and availability, and individual differences.

Limited experience in literary studies

Limited experience in literary studies in English was a significant source of problems encountered by most participants. To reiterate, their previous experience in LCE in secondary school failed to make any significant impact on their reading ability and interest in literature. Contrary to its curriculum specifications, the LCE did not prepare the participants for literary studies at tertiary level as evident in their lack of reading and lack of knowledge about literature. In fact, many participants were not able to cope with the introductory literature courses at the beginning of this teacher education programme. Ellie and Zelda said that they were “totally lost” in the first year that they failed a few courses. It was only when repeating those courses that they eventually managed to grasp the fundamental concepts such as close reading and literary conventions. Nonetheless, they were usually unable to finish a required reading, especially a lengthy foreign text,
and often resorted to reading the synopsis online and waiting for class discussion for ideas on the text. They were not confident in making interpretations on their readings on their own.

Some of the participants like Sing and Wang were Science students in secondary school up to Form Six (A level). They were not familiar with the learning style required in the Arts, and found literature particularly challenging because it dealt with subjective rather than objective reasoning. They were uneasy about making interpretations, which were subject to scrutiny and debate. Studying university literature courses not only require them to learn a new content knowledge, but also to adopt a new way of learning. They took sometime to get used to the learner-centred approach and the open-ended questions used in university literature classes.

The collaborative learning practices advocated in the literature classroom such as open, whole-class discussion and small/study group discussions provided a platform for participants to practice voicing and testing their ideas and opinions. Membership in various groups for the purpose of completing a task collaboratively created a community of practice to support their literary studies. Peer influence was a strong change factor for many participants. For instance, Jimmy began to take literary studies seriously when he sensed that his friends were discovering “wonderful things” in literature. Likewise, Cyndi became passionate about studying literature with the influence of her close friends such as Estella.

While activities such as readers theatre, forums and debates were stimulating, they could be highly challenging for some who were still unable to finish reading the text and do further research. Making interpretations and communicating these interpretations to others proved to be a daunting task especially when they perceived that their ideas and interpretations were constantly scrutinised and evaluated by their lecturers. Consequently, most participants became reluctant to voice their ideas and volunteer
interpretations of a literary text especially in open, whole-class discussions for fear that the “answer will be wrong”. Studying literature became a search for the “real meaning” or the best interpretation amidst the multitude of views and answers offered during class discussions.

Because the lecturers did not believe in “telling the answer” but encouraged exploration of the responses gathered during class discussions, many participants remained uncertain about the most appropriate interpretation in the end. This elusive “right interpretation” became a source of frustration for many, such as Hazem who said he had simply given up because his ideas were usually not as good as the others’ despite his best efforts. He concluded that interpretations were subjective to the lecturer’s approval. While Tony and Estella were able to make acceptable interpretations, they agreed that the lecturer’s approval was a determining factor.

In order to begin making interpretations, it was important to complete the prescribed reading. However, many participants were not able to finish reading a literary text due to its complexity or length and so they often resorted to other versions such as a movie version of the novel, or a synopsis and analysis on the text found in online resources, such as Sparknotes. Some participants reported that they relied solely on Sparknotes to help them approach and understand the prescribed literary text. Often, this dependence was due to their limited literary and language competence.

Yet, some participants said that they deliberately substituted reading the authentic literary text with the synopsis and analysis provided on Sparknotes due to time constraints and a lack of interest in reading or in the literary text prescribed. Participants also relied heavily on lecture notes and study guides, which they would often memorise for exams.

Participants who were more confident in studying literature, such as Tony and Estella, said they preferred to listen to and “digest” the lecture, without worrying about taking
down notes during the class. In their views, the lecture notes were sometimes insufficient or “surface level” quality and so they yearned for more extensive and deeper information on a literary work studied. While they also used Sparknotes they insisted that they referred to Sparknotes only after they had finished reading the prescribed literary texts and started their own analysis of the work. The supplementary materials were used mainly to compare their interpretations with other perspectives on the reading.

Participants with above-average results in literature were able to study a prescribed text on their own before participating in small group or whole class discussions. The discussions generated more ideas and stimulated deep thinking and analysis of the texts studied. Active participation in these discussions motivated further study on the literary text. For example, Najwa became motivated to finish reading a prescribed text, not once but a few times. Unlike Hazem who would jump into a discussion just for the sake of participating, Najwa used the discussions to test and refine her ideas to produce an acceptable interpretation on the literary work studied. As such, her participation in class discussion became more meaningful and she put the literary text before the notes or other supplementary materials in preparing for literature examinations:

*Low proficiency in English*

Low level of proficiency in English was a fundamental inhibitor in studying literature in this English teacher education programme. Several participants had minimum English requirement for the programme with Band 3 in the *MUET* categorised as “Modest User”. These participants, as well as many others, expected the teacher education programme to help them improve their language proficiency and linguistic competence.

Participants with low English proficiency found it very difficult to read and understand a literary work with dense figurative language and complicated expressions. Reading became very time consuming and frustrating when they had to constantly refer to the
dictionary for every difficult word and new term they encountered. They became very distracted and discouraged and some gave up trying to complete the reading. Similarly, they were not able to respond to these literary works because they could not find the appropriate words and language to express their ideas and opinions, as Ellie described:

Because first, language. To me, it’s very difficult to express something in English - even though I have the idea or knowledge, it’s very hard for me to put it in words. (Ellie, FG2)

In order to deal with her “poor” proficiency in English, Ellie depended on “reference book and grammar book from the library”. However, when the reading became too difficult, “avoidance” strategy was often employed, as Holly explained: “If I don’t understand the language then I just put the text aside… after some time, I started to read it”. Consequently, the delay put her in distress when she could not finish the reading for an assignment. Indeed, limited vocabulary and poor communication skills in English proved to be a fundamental problem for many participants such as Anna:

… we have ideas but we do not know how to express it. They cannot get it…We understand how is it but when (it) comes to explanation, we don’t have… I mean me myself – don’t have the language to say it out. (Anna, FG1)

Limited language competence was a major cause of communication breakdown, particularly in writing about literature. The participants were aware that to be competent in literature, which was expected of them as future literature teachers, they must not only be able to understand the piece of literary work but also explain it to others.

Remote settings and unfamiliar cultures contributed to the complexity of the texts studied. Limited world knowledge due to lack of reading made it difficult for many participants to appreciate a literary text. Thus, their challenging experience studying university literature courses made them realise the need to read, and to read more extensively.
Written examinations

Notwithstanding the perceived benefits of studying literature and the enjoyable literature classes, all participants were concerned about literature examinations, which they viewed as highly “subjective”. While they were able to express their ideas and interpretations during classroom discussions, many participants, including Tony, were not able to transfer their creative and critical responses in writing, especially during examinations. The lecturers were concerned about their poor results in literature examinations, usually in the mid-semester papers.

While coursework assessment tasks were assigned as group work and included oral presentations, literature examinations for all the literature courses were strictly in written form, to be completed individually. According to the lecturers, there was a pattern in the examination performance in that the mid-semester exam results were usually very poor whereas there would be a slight improvement in the final examination results. Most participants said that they did poorly in the former because they were not sure of the kinds of questions that would be asked and therefore, what they should study. This suggests that they practice the study-to-the-test approach rather than study for understanding of the literary texts.

On the lecturers’ part, they explained that they usually informed the participants of the scope and types of examination questions, which were similar to the study questions used in the whole-class discussions prior to the examinations. Perhaps many participants did not follow the class discussions well enough as they were usually dominated by the few regular contributors. Indeed, many participants claimed they were often confused by the variety of responses and interpretations produced during the classroom discussions, especially when the lecturers did not offer any conclusive remarks or answers at the end of the discussions. The lecturers argued that many participants were reluctant to “think for themselves” and expected to be “spoon-fed”.
Consequently, when a similar question or topic was asked in a slightly different way in the examination, they attempted to recall and regurgitate all that they could glean from the classroom discussions. This resulted in fragmented, incoherent information, which suggested that they had little understanding of the text studied.

When asked how they prepared for a literature examination, most participants said they were not sure how to study literature for examination and so they often resorted to the strategies they employed in secondary school, which included memorising lecture notes and even “spotting” possible exam questions. For example, in his determination to obtain high marks, Hazem practiced “spotting” exam questions based on the lecturers’ “hints” during class discussions. He took elaborate notes and studied the notes to help him predict possible exam questions and their answers, which he discussed with his study group members:

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We exchanged notes. We sit and discuss… we think tomorrow the exam will ask like this one. The answer should be like this; should include this one, yes. We did… but it doesn’t work. (Hazem, FG2)

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Instead of investing more time and effort on reading the literary text and conducting further study on it, Hazem focused on “studying” the notes. One of the lecturers commented that Hazem’s problem was that he lacked understanding:

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I’m taking (Hazem) as an example because if you have a look at the presentation, the discussion, he’s very active. But if you look at his exam, his mid-semester exam, his written work, throughout the past semesters, yeah he doesn’t really understand what he’s saying. When you asked one question, he will answer with a totally different answer… for Hazem, it’s not there… Yes, they do study. But I think if I were to guess why this happen, it would be organization. They cannot organize their thoughts. (Syamri, LI2)

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Hazem admitted that he often voiced his opinions during whole-class discussions just for the sake of participating. Most of the time he was not sure of his own ideas and hoped that his peers or his lecturer would provide a conclusive interpretation.
Yet Tony, who was passionate about literature and was confident in studying literature, was not able to perform in exam condition:

I hate exams… somehow I cannot really show my ability (through) what I get for exams. It does not reflect what I can do… ‘coz exam, it only examines one part of the overall thing… I think the exams that we have here, usually it depends on the way you write your answer… So maybe it’s the style, the way we answer. The way we write down our answers… Maybe we… didn’t really… do what (the lecturer) wanted us to do… we get low marks not because we don’t know how to answer it. We know how to answer it but just not the right one for the question. (Tony, FG3)

From Tony’s view above, two issues emerged: performance in literature examinations was not reflective of a learner’s true ability in literature, and the element of subjectivity in the way examination scripts were graded. Both are concerned with creativity vs. the “right answer” which the lecturer explained using Tony as an example:

(Tony) is creative… whenever he wants to know something, he always refers to internet, to books and so on and so forth. He’s very clear. But in terms of exam, for me… his answers tend to be very straight to the point… Even though he’s creative in terms of presentations … in his writings his exams he’s very straight forward. He writes what’s needed to answer the questions. That would make him above average but not…ah, not on the very top of the class. (Syamri, LI2)

Apparently, Tony restricted himself to what he presumed to be the “right answer” to the exam questions whereas the lecturer believed that creativity in applying and evaluating the knowledge in literature was the trademark of an exceptional literature learner. However, in the participants’ views, the type of questions asked in the examinations did not allow for creativity, which they were taught in the literature classes.

According to Wang, the fact that the exam questions were focused on the topics and issues previously discussed in class encouraged study-to-the-test approach, not creative and critical understanding. Moreover, there were also questions on technical aspects, such as definition of figurative language and literary terms which, encouraged rote learning and regurgitation of lecture notes and discussion points. Estella said that this
type of examination questions was not agreeable to her because it restricted her to the “right” answers hinted in lecture notes and discussion.

Yeah, a lot of times you see the scores: it’s actually… not a reflection of whether they understand what has been taught. It’s more a reflection of how well they go to memorize…So, sometimes it gets a little frustrating because I can’t memorize. So when it comes to things like defining theories, I can’t. I can’t do it. And this is where other people who can memorize but who maybe don’t understand literature, they score. (Estella, FG3)

The “theoretical/technical” type of literature exam questions mentioned above compelled Estella to change her learning strategy in class: from attentive listening and internalising to more note-taking. Although she usually managed to pass even the toughest of literature examinations, Estella was frustrated with the constraints posed by the “exam-oriented” element in the university literature courses. Wang concluded “… in this Malaysian context it’s always exam-oriented, you can’t really express too much of different kind of view”. Most participants believed that examination results were not reflective of their true ability in literature.

Leann and Estella, who usually scored high marks in literature examinations claimed that they “did not study” for literature examination – at least not in the way Hazem described. Instead of memorising lecture notes, they prioritised complete reading of the prescribed texts, even reading them a few times over, and conducted deep analysis using other relevant materials for better understanding of the text.

Literature examinations remained highly frustrating for both the lecturer and the learner because the results, particularly of the mid-semester exams, were usually shockingly poor. For instance, the mid-semester exam for a literature course taken in the period of this study showed mostly failures, with marks as low as 1/20. An analysis of the participants’ examination scripts showed a wide gap in the performance, the lowest score was 1 and the highest score was 18 marks. There is also a clear difference between the performance in coursework and in written exams.
With only about 10% of the population scoring high marks in literature examinations, the participants realised that it was difficult to excel in literature examination and many were content with a pass or “average” marks. But for Hazem, ‘average’ results in literature caused him to be apprehensive and deeply frustrated with studying literature.

_Literary theories and genres_

Pre-service teachers were required to complete 14 different literature courses in this teacher education programme and while the participants were fascinated with the new literary knowledge, they found studying unfamiliar literary theories and genres intimidating. In particular, one of the courses taken in the semester of this study, namely, _New Literatures in English (NLE)_ had a considerable portion on contemporary literary theories of post-modernism, colonialism and post-colonialism, existentialism, and multiculturalism as ways of reading the various literary works studied in the course. Most participants found the literary theories highly challenging to the point of being almost incomprehensible to them. They were overwhelmed by the complexity of the concepts presented. Some participants were resistant to some of these concepts, which conflicted with their personal beliefs and values. Moreover, they believed that the literary theories were too advanced for their current level of needs and ability in literature. Instead of facilitating their reading, some viewed these theories as an extra burden as Cyndi explained:

_I don’t like reading literature when you have to associate it with some theories. I never can understand the theories and then how you’re going to relate it to the stories? For me, read it, enjoy it, ok fine, that’s all. Just know the meaning, ok that’s fine. But to relate it to a theory is like very frustrating!_ (Cyndi, FG2)

Cyndi’s performance in literature courses was consistently above average but she was clearly grappling with studying literary theories. It would be more difficult for the below average literature learners. The poor results in the mid-semester exam proved that learning literary theories was beyond the participants’ current ability in literature.
Syamri, their lecturer conceded that they were “just not ready for literary theories” and further questioned the suitability of these courses for the pre-service teachers when he said:

*We have more difficult courses here in (this university). Literary theories – we didn’t study literary theories (during our time) right? We didn’t have post-modern, post-colonial when we were studying B. Ed. TESL… We studied romanticism, romantic era… and the style of writing. But we did not study this (literary theories)… (Syamri L2)*

Syamri was referring to his own experience as an undergraduate in a similar TESL programme, at a local public university many years ago. He also cited a study conducted by his colleague on the pre-service teachers’ perceptions towards literary theories as an integral part of the university literature curriculum. The study showed that the participants were not willing, nor capable of learning these theories at the undergraduate level.

In addition, poetry was named the most difficult literary genre to study because of the intensity of the figurative language and poetic devices used. Most participants, including the capable ones, lacked confidence in making interpretations on a poem. Poetry was popular as a light reading material, but analysing poetry was a dreaded task. For example, Azmi refused to analyse the technical aspects of poetry because he said it took the fun out of reading poetry. Similarly, Estella became unmotivated to study poetry because she found it “restrictive” when “some lecturers insist on a particular interpretation of the text”.

Participants who considered themselves below average in literature and less proficient in English were not able to cope with the figurative language of poetry. For example, Jimmy found poetry extremely difficult because it required “deep thinking” in order to interpret the meaning and message conveyed. On the other hand, the novel and the short story were more popular with everyone because the narrative structure was familiar and manageable. Participants who had poor language proficiency and reading skills
preferred to work on literary texts that were shorter, less complex, and contemporary in terms of language use and issues. They also enjoyed the play, albeit in “translated” or abridged version because it involved physical activities and role-playing.

*Text selection and availability*

According to the lecturers, selecting literary texts that would be suitable as well as stimulating was a challenging and time consuming task because they needed to consider, among other aspects, the reader’s interest and ability. In order to do that, they often allowed the readers to choose, from a list of suggested titles, the texts they preferred to study. The disadvantage of this democratic practice was that the reading list could not be finalised until a few weeks into the semester so that by the time they managed to acquire the materials, there was little time left to complete the initial reading before the texts were discussed in class. While this was a reasonable excuse for those with limited reading ability to deal with lengthy and complicated texts in a short time, it was frustrating for the few others who, like Sing, were able and willing to complete their own reading before class discussions.

In addition, some participants found certain texts to be undesirable or even “offensive” because they clashed with their personal values. During one classroom observation, one participant refused to conduct a required presentation on a poem with her study group because she disliked the poem, which challenged her religious beliefs.

Yet another problem was accessibility and availability of prescribed texts and reading materials. Some participants had difficulty in accessing authentic texts because they were out of stock or not sold in their local bookshops. Indeed, it was difficult to find literature books in this part of Malaysia compared to the bigger cities in West Malaysia. Although orders were made early through local bookshops and agents, it took time for
them to arrive. That was part of the reasons many participants requested that the reading list be given before the semester commenced.

In some cases, only translated and abridged versions were available, and this was disappointing for passionate readers like Estella. She found reading abridged version "less stimulating", leaving her feeling "unfulfilled" as a reader. Even Sing, who was beginning to develop a keen interest in literature, noted that translated versions of the literary work from an originally foreign language such as from Russian into English, confusing and inaccurate in certain aspects.

*Individual differences*

The learner-centred pedagogy in the university literature classroom was a new thing for most participants. While all of them found the open-ended classroom discussions refreshing and stimulating, most of them were not confident to voice their ideas and opinions, or even to ask questions on the topic discussed. From the classroom observation, it was evident that the lecturers endeavoured to ensure that everyone was given an equal opportunity to be heard in the open discussions, yet the majority preferred to keep silent. Only ten naturally outspoken ones regularly initiated discussions and contributed their ideas and opinions during whole-class discussions and presentations.

The rest of the class seemed to be content to remain in the background, so much so that the lecturers described them as "passive". One of them, Holly, explained that her personal learning style as a "thinker" caused her to remain reserved. However, she admitted that most of the time, she preferred to keep her thoughts and ideas to herself because she did not know how to express them to others. Many, like Holly, would rather wait for the lecturer to call them out by name to express their ideas. They
preferred to share their ideas with a close friend or a trusted group member because they would not risk being judged or evaluated.

The lecturers said that they had taken all necessary measures to ensure a non-threatening classroom environment but many participants remained apprehensive about voicing their uncertainties, ideas and opinions openly. It could be that they were not used to such “freedom of expression”, coming from a teacher-centred background during their secondary school education. The “passive” ones enjoyed listening to the lively discussion sustained by their more vocal classmates. Some said that they looked forward to hearing what the regular contributors had to say about a topic of discussion, without even preparing anything on it themselves.

Not all who were vocal and active during classroom discussions were truly capable of studying literature. For Azmi, his extrovert personality enabled him to speak out in class, spontaneously and without completing his reading task. He said he was “lazy to read something that people told (him) to read” which resulted in incoherent ideas and opinions. As for Hazem, he was merely “going through the motion” and being naturally outspoken in class. He was not fluent in English and his ideas and opinions were usually insubstantial or incoherent because he did not understand the topic or issues discussed.

5.5 Perspectives on teaching literature

The participants’ perspectives on teaching literature were largely influenced by their previous experience during secondary school and their recent practicum experience in the teacher education programme. No participant, except Hazem and Edwin had any teaching experience. With his teaching diploma from a teachers’ college, Hazem had taught English at upper secondary school for two years prior to enrolling in this programme, whereas Edwin had taught English at upper secondary school as a
substitute teacher for several months while waiting for his Form Six results. The teaching experience of the remaining participants was limited to the nine-week practicum, during which some did not have the opportunity to teach a literature class.

5.5.1 Practicum experiences

The teaching practicum was conducted in the semester before this study. All pre-service teachers were placed in participating urban secondary schools in the state. Time constraints, partly due to school activities such as examinations, reduced the time for actual classroom teaching to about four weeks. Some participants did not even have a chance to teach literature.

Regardless of the kinds of experience they had in teaching literature to secondary school students during the practicum, it was “over too soon” for all the participants, especially for those who were eager to experiment with the teaching methods they had experienced and were taught in their university literature courses in their secondary school literature classrooms. They expected the teaching practicum to be the testing ground for all the knowledge they had gathered on teaching and learning literature.

Highly positive experience resulted from positive reactions of schoolchildren to the various approaches and strategies introduced in the literature classroom. For example, Tony reported that his students enjoyed the stimulating class discussions and activities, which allowed them to be creative and to participate actively in class. They enjoyed the drama and play-acting activities and were fascinated by the supplementary materials and extra information on the literary texts studied which Tony had sourced for them. They demonstrated some notable improvements in their interest and motivation to learn literature. However, Tony said that he had to work hard in order to encourage his students to have some interest in literature. Moreover, he had to deal with his supervising teacher’s “cynical attitude” towards teaching literature in that she believed
students with poor proficiency in English would not do well in literature and discouraged Tony from using a variety of methods in his literature class.

Similarly, Annie was discouraged from spending time and effort in using a variety of activities with poor proficiency students whom her supervising teacher predicted would not do well in literature exams. Yet, both Tony and Annie gained a personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement when they were able to apply various methods of teaching literature and received positive responses from their students.

Contrastively, both Edwin and Phan’s supervising teachers were supportive and helpful. They commended Edwin and Phan’s effort and contribution to increase the students’ interest and participation in their literature class. Edwin’s practicum experience was successful because he had been exposed to teaching and secondary school students during his previous experience as a substitute teacher. He had realistic expectations of the students, in terms of their abilities, as well as their attitudes towards literature and learning. He anticipated that his students would enjoy multimedia presentations, so he effectively incorporated “power points, slide shows, and video clips” in his lessons to capture their interest. He also had good support from the school, which happened to be his alma mater, and from his colleagues who were his former teachers.

Phan’s colleagues were not as supportive as Edwin’s, but she was encouraged when her students expressed their appreciation of her efforts in making them learn literature. While this successful experience gave Phan the confidence in teaching, it also caused her to reconsider her decision to be a teacher when she realised the high amount of work expected of a teacher. Phan believed that a truly committed teacher should be willing to make many sacrifices for the sake of her students’ success in learning. This includes an enormous physical effort in preparing good lessons, which take into consideration individual differences and students’ needs, as well as the moral commitment of teaching
the student to learn effectively. In short, she believed that teaching would require absolute physical and moral commitment, of which she was currently uncertain.

Highly negative experiences during teaching practicum were due to tensions created when personal values and principles about literature, teaching, and teaching literature were challenged. One distinct example was Leann’s practicum experience she described as “chaotic”, which stemmed from her inability to empathise with her students’ low proficiency in English and their lack of interest in learning literature. Being personally interested in literature and highly capable in studying literature at university, Leann was shocked by her students’ low level of proficiency in English and poor learning skills. She tried to conduct activities which she believed would encourage the students to explore a literary text, but when they were not able to participate, she found herself telling them everything about the text. Realising that she was resorting to this “worst way to teach” she experienced guilt and low self-esteem. As a result, her teaching became “disorganised” and she often deviated from her painstakingly prepared lesson plan. She tried to rationalise going against the “basic principles of teaching” in the face of the students’ poor attitudes towards learning and literature:

maybe because I don’t have the ability to control them… Probably it’s my negative thinking - I expected it would be like that and then when it really ends up like that… sometimes I think that what I’ve gone through these three years - I don’t seem to be applying them. I would say that most of the time I broke the rules like in literature, I ended up telling them… I ended up giving the ideas… I’m so useless! (Leann, FG3)

Leann blamed herself for her lack of classroom management ability, especially in dealing with unco-operative and unruly students, which was the root of her problem. It was only after she had left the school and completed the practicum that she found out she was in fact, unfortunate to be given one of the most difficult classes in a notorious school.
On the contrary, Flora, who had similar “traumatic” experience in her practicum literature classes, blamed her students’ poor attitude and ability, her supervising teacher’s and her supervising lecturer’s indifference towards literature, and the lack of support from the school administration. Flora described her highly challenging situation in which she was assigned to teach four different classes, which was double the normal package for a student teacher, and one of these classes was the weakest in the whole school. The students were mostly unmotivated, disinterested, and were not able to understand any English. In this situation, Flora felt she was not able to apply the knowledge and methods she had learned at university, which she found highly frustrating, herself being highly motivated in teaching and learning literature.

Yet another participant, Estella described her practicum experience as “very traumatic” in trying to teach literature to her all-boys class with extreme discipline problems. This experience affected her self-esteem, resulting in self-doubt, self-blame and resentment:

> The teachers there actually said that, in a sense I couldn’t do anything to discipline them. So I basically lost my motivation to teach anything. So, I went in and I would come out, every day, I would go home, I would rant, be angry, complained... After (practicum), I was like, I’m definitely not going to teach... (Estella, FG3)

Despite her strong determination and resilient character, Estella was overcome by her circumstances. To survive her teaching practicum, Estella experimented with a “diplomatic” approach, in which she assumed the role of a friend to her students, rather than their teacher. While this approach allowed her to break their resistance, she felt that she risked losing her image as a figure of authority, thus losing her students’ respect:

> I stopped becoming a teacher figure and I was more like a friend for them. Which was good, but then they didn’t listen to me because I didn’t have that authority... they stopped treating me like a teacher. I think it’s my fault because I didn’t have that separation... (Estella, FG3)

From her statement above, Estella seemed to have an idealistic image of a teacher as one who was always in charge, and revered by students. This image of a teacher was
consistent with the conventional teacher figure in the Malaysian classroom. When this ideal image was distorted in the process of adapting to the situation, it created a personal conflict within Estella. While this “compromise” worked in getting the students’ co-operation, she considered it a failure on her part. Both Leann and Estella were equally high performers and so they had high expectations of themselves as well as their students.

It must be emphasised that it was not appropriate to expect these inexperienced and young pre-service teachers to deal with extremely difficult classes, especially in their first and only practicum. Dealing with extreme behaviours was an extra burden and an added challenge to them when they needed to grapple with first-time teaching in the real classroom. Many participants reported that their students were generally not interested in learning literature and learning English. While the usual reason for their disinterest in literature was poor proficiency in English, there were students who were fluent in English, but were not serious about learning literature.

Bella, who was placed in a full residential Science school felt unappreciated when her Form Four students indicated that English and literature were not as important as their Science subjects. She consoled herself by imagining that teaching younger children in rural schools would be a better alternative for a future in teaching:

I think it’s a negative impact to me. After the (practicum) I really, really find that I am very down. I think that after I am posted, if I can’t cope with the teaching, I think I would apply to go back to teach at my (village). (Bella, FG3)

The strong feelings expressed by these participants proved that practicum had significantly altered their imagined roles as a teacher and their professional construct of a teacher, resulting in very little prospect for teaching at secondary school level. Nonetheless, a few participants reported having rather moderate to satisfying practicum experiences with a prospect for teaching. For example, the group of participants who considered themselves “poor” literature learners according to their below average
results across literature courses reported that they were greatly encouraged by their positive practicum experiences.

Jimmy, Ellie and Zelda were pleasantly surprised with their respective students’ positive reactions to their literature lessons. Ellie’s interest and confidence in teaching literature increased when she discovered that she was able to impart her interest and knowledge in literature to her students by using role-playing activities:

I have interest to teach the students even though... (at university) it’s very hard for me to learn the literature. But when I’m teaching it during my teaching practice, I feel it’s different. Because I like the story, I know how to teach the students. Student like to do the role play, drama...from my experience during the teaching practice, they like to act. (Ellie, FG1)

Ellie described her students as poor learners because they were streamed into the last classes in the school. She said “all the students got zero” in a previous literature test conducted by her supervising teacher, which she was asked to mark. She was “shocked” at their poor performance in literature and endeavoured to teach them using some new methods she had learned in her university literature courses, as she described below:

… I teach them The Lotus Eater. I do activity with them, and then I teach them how to describe the characters in the short story… I gave them a new exercise, something like work sheet, then I realised that the student can (read)... I think the teacher need to push the students to read the short story, so they can enjoy. I showed them a courseware also. They really like it because they can… see the picture right, the sound and the song in The Lotus Eater. They enjoyed it. (Ellie, FG1)

Drawing from her own experience as a secondary school student where she did not read the prescribed literary texts, Ellie was able to empathise with her practicum students whom she believed needed to be motivated to read and engage with the literary text. She emphasised the importance of encouraging the students to read using a multimodal approach to literature such as visual aids and other media to facilitate their learning. Her students’ positive reaction was a personally, and professionally satisfying experience for Ellie because she was reassured of her ability to teach literature to secondary school students in a more interesting and meaningful way. Seeing that she was able to make a
difference in her students’ interest and ability in learning literature, her confidence was boosted and she believed she could be a good teacher despite her below average performance in university literature courses.

Similarly, Zelda used pictures to teach her Form One students poetry and was thrilled when she saw that they were able to understand better and showed interest in literature. Clearly, both Ellie and Zelda had experienced a sense of accomplishment in teaching their students literature during the practicum, which gave them the confidence to pursue a teaching career upon graduation. Despite the fact that they did not perform well in some of their university literature courses, they had increased interest and confidence in literature because they found that they were able to teach literature during the practicum.

5.5.2 Perceived problems in school

The participants were asked to list their major concerns about teaching in the secondary schools based on their practicum experience. Three main concerns were identified: supervising teachers’ attitudes and practices, students’ poor proficiency in English and negative attitudes towards learning and literature, and the school administration’s attitudes. They believed that these aspects constitute the existing norms observed in the schools, which created dissonance between what they had been taught in teacher education programme and what they experienced during the teaching practicum in the secondary school classrooms.

Attitudes and practices of supervising teachers

According to most participants, their supervising teachers in secondary schools displayed disillusioned and cynical attitudes about teaching literature. One possible reason for this was perceived to be their inability to cope with their mounting workload of increased administrative work and extra-curricular responsibilities. Consequently,
they became more selective in their priorities, the least being literature. For instance, Tony observed that his supervising teacher lacked the passion for literature, and “gave up on weaker students – dismissed them as hopeless” when she “should be responsible to change students’ (attitudes)”. Annie remarked that her supervising teacher “put less effort” on teaching literature, using photocopied task sheets without any critical thinking. Wang also commented that the teachers “lack teaching aids” and Phan highlighted the “lack of creativity in the teachers”.

The participants were disappointed with their supervising teachers’ poor attitudes and practices, which they believed had negative influence on the students’ already poor attitudes towards learning, English and literature. According to Annie, the students were not interested in reading literature because their teachers prioritised the core subjects such as Science and Mathematics and taught the literature component to the examination rather than appreciating the aesthetic values of literature. Wang argued that students were bored with the chalk/worksheet-and-talk method of teaching literature. Bella blamed the schoolteachers for not emphasising the importance of English and the value of literature for the students’ future. Indeed, some supervising teachers insisted that the pre-service teachers not teach literature but focus on finishing the syllabus in time for the upcoming school examination. Further, Tony reported that his supervising teacher discouraged him from experimenting with fun and stimulating activities in his literature classroom because the effect was “temporary” and the efforts a “waste of time”.

*Students’ poor proficiency in English and negative attitudes*

The participants believed that their students’ poor attitudes towards learning and literature were influenced by their teachers’ negative attitudes and practices. In other words, the teachers were largely responsible for their students’ lack of interest in literature.
Some participants attributed the students’ inability to learn literature to their level of proficiency in the English Language. It was found that during practicum, the classes assigned to the participants were usually the top or the bottom, or a combination of both. Thus, they were exposed to the “best” and the “worst” of secondary school students in terms of academic ability and behaviour. Each category has its own set of problems. Bella and Annie found their Science students indifferent towards English and literature because they wanted to focus on their Science subjects. Being proficient in English, they did not see the value of learning literature, especially when it was taught as an extended reading comprehension lesson. In contrast, Teong and Anna were at a loss on how to teach their almost illiterate students.

Others, like Estella and Leann had to deal with extreme behaviours, which indicated that these students were not interested in learning in general, much less in literature. While they were willing to help the students deal with learning literature with their limited proficiency in English, the participants needed collegial support in managing the behavioural problems. In many cases, this was not available, leaving the participants feeling unappreciated and discouraged.

*School administration and literature curriculum*

Many participants complained that during their practicum, they did not get much support from the school administration. Estella and Leann felt they were left to deal with their students’ negative behaviours on their own. In retrospect, it would have saved everyone a lot of anguish if the participating schools had assigned only their best or average classes to pre-service teachers for their teaching practicum in order to minimise classroom management issues.

It was also observed that many schools seemed to have neglected the basic needs of literature education by not providing ready access to supplementary materials such as a variety of books, readers and references, as well as teaching aids. Some schools did not
have adequate library facilities: there were not enough books and no library time allocated for reading books in school, making it difficult to ensure reading in the classroom, much less extensive reading out of the classroom.

Stimulating teaching aids incorporating the use of multimedia was scarce and the usual worksheets/chalk-and-talk method prevailed. Many participants believed that their schools did little to promote the learning of English or literature. Further, the participants felt that there was a serious mismatch between the secondary school literature curriculum and actual classroom practices. Najwa pointed out that teaching and learning practices in the classroom did not reflect the objectives set in the curriculum specification for secondary school literature component:

... in the (literature curriculum) specification it says that to instil creative imaginative thinking in students, for them to come out with their own interpretation... their role playing. They are all there in the curriculum specification. But in class it’s not there. (Najwa, FG1)

Participants observed that the literature class was no different from the English Language reading comprehension class. Students did not even have to read the prescribed literary texts because the teachers provided all the necessary information on the story for them to memorise in preparing for the literature component exam. Hazem voiced the concern of many pre-service teachers that at the secondary school level literature was being taught-to-the-exam whereas university literature courses trained them to teach literature creatively. Hazem implied that the university literature courses prepared them beyond the needs of the real classrooms so that they found it hard to adjust to the level of the students’ needs and abilities in literature.

The emerging disparity between literature education at secondary school and university levels created a personal conflict among participants who were more passionate about literature. Tony, for example, decided to either delay or not teach in school altogether because he anticipated frustrations with the many constraints of conservatism at school.
Leann was fearful that she would not be able to cope with her students’ poor attitudes and abilities not only in literature but also in learning. Estella believed that a “good” literature learner would actually make a “terrible” literature teacher because of the high and unrealistic expectations placed on the students. Yet, a “good” literature learner with a passion for literature would make a “better” literature teacher than the existing teachers in school who lacked interest in literature and teaching literature.

Conversely, participants who rated themselves “poor” literature learners at university, such as Ellie and Zelda developed confidence in teaching literature during practicum because they were encouraged by their students’ positive reactions to their teaching methods. Paradoxically, the “moderate” and even “poor” literature learners became optimistic about teaching literature at secondary school when they realised it was actually manageable with the knowledge and skills they had acquired in university literature courses.

5.5.3 Types of teacher: Transformers, conformers, avoiders

The participants’ different practicum experiences and perceived problems in schools resulted in three types of teachers, namely, transformers, conformers and avoiders.

Transformers

The initial reactions of some participants, especially those who were passionate about literature were to go against what they perceived to be the school and teacher norms. The norms encompass practices within the teacher-centred approach, which resulted in the lack of stimulating activities and meaningful interactions between the teacher and the students, between the students and the texts, in the literature classroom. To counter that, the participants were eager to introduce new methods of teaching literature such as readers’ theatre and avoid the conventional reading-comprehension type of lesson.
Championing their students’ right to have a more effective and meaningful experience in learning literature through new methods and approaches, the participants aspired to be transformers of the existing school norms. For example, Tony claimed that as an English and literature teacher, he would “beat the system” and Annie concurred because she thought it was “the right thing to do to help the students”.

Tony’s recount of his practicum experience depicted his determination to make a difference in his literature classroom and the school. He said he rejected his supervising teacher’s teaching methods and advice, which he believed were conservative, teacher-centred, and therefore, would be less effective for his students. Instead, he employed a variety of methods of teaching literature both in and out of his classroom. For example, he volunteered to write and direct the school play, and led his students to win an interschool drama competition during his practicum. He also taught all the prescribed texts and completed the literature syllabus although he was not expected to because he believed that effective teaching required transforming the school and teacher norms. As for Estella using the student-centred approach was an effective way to persuade her disaffected students to be interested in learning, and in literature. She envisioned herself to be a friendly, informal, and democratic type of teacher instead of the conventional authoritarian teacher.

As much as they wanted to change the “wrongs” they perceived existed in the school, the pre-service participants lacked the teaching experience and tacit knowledge, which made it difficult for them to make this change. While they came equipped with fresh ideas and stimulating teaching methods they had learned in their university literature classes, they were not able to fully apply these within the constraints of the real classroom.
Conformers

Some participants had to conform to the existing school norms in order to deal with the challenges they encountered, such as the students’ negative attitudes and poor proficiency in English. For example, Leann found herself compelled to follow the norms in “giving the answers” to her students as her last resort to teach her disinterested students. She felt that conforming to the norms was inevitable at some points of teaching in the real classroom although it meant going against her personal values as well as principles of teaching. This conflict diminished her motivation and enthusiasm to teach.

As for Anna her “worst moment” was when she discovered that her secondary school students “could not even read”. Teong added that his students were “not interested in reading… and studying at all” and so he was advised by his supervising teacher to “give them the synopsis (of the prescribed literary texts), as long as they know who is the character - what happen in the story”. Although Teong said he disagreed with the advice, he found that it worked with his poor students:

> I was asked to teach the end class... they can’t understand English. They can’t read, they can’t write, they can’t listen or understand most of the English Language so most of the time I need to spoon-feed them. But the important thing for me is that, when I taught them literature, they can memorize the incidents, the events happen in that stories. That is more important for me. (Teong, FG1)

On the other hand, Salmi learned that certain techniques worked with appropriate age and proficiency levels. She used questioning techniques to guide her older and more proficient students to explore the themes of story, to lead them to think for themselves. However, with her low proficient students, she had to resort to “spoon-feeding” to a certain extent.

Many participants reported that they were pressured to conform to the norms by their supervising teachers and university supervisors who were not in the field. For example,
Hazem said both his supervising teacher and university supervisor discouraged him from spending time on fun and creative activities in class and instead, recommended that he kept to “drilling the students on the correct answers” in preparation for their upcoming literature exam. Moreover, drawing from his previous experience teaching English at upper secondary school for two and a half years prior to enrolling in this teacher education programme, he was convinced that the best way to cope with the reality of school was to conform to the existing norms.

It is important to note that the participants eventually conformed to the school norms and teacher norms as their last resort to deal with their circumstances.

Avioders

Participants who had highly negative experiences during practicum not only doubted their ability to teach but also reconsidered their decision to become teachers. The poor reactions from their students and the lack of support from their colleagues during practicum resulted in their lack of confidence in teaching, and uncertainty of the future. Consequently, they decided to avoid becoming schoolteachers. For example, Azmi explained his change of heart toward teaching was due to his rather unfulfilling practicum experience:

No. I’m not going to be a teacher... I’m not that good... honestly I think what I taught to my students... I was not a good teacher... I taught them the right, the correct things I guess. But I didn’t really had any contributions to (their) development. No, in my classes we kind of played games a lot... games in English. So what’s the purpose? If you cannot contribute to any development or anything. (Azmi, FG3)

It was difficult to ascertain any improvement or “development” in the students in a brief teaching practicum and Azmi had idealistic image of the literature teacher as one who would contribute not only to the students’ academic development but also to the personal growth.
For others, the brief experience in the real classroom had tainted their image of an effective teacher and relegated teaching from a “noble profession” to a “secure job”, as described by Leann:

Initially when I join this (programme) - why I choose teaching, I have very... pure intention: I want to educate and all that... but throughout the years, I seem to lose that drive. I question why this, why that, and all that. So I think now the reason for continuing would be just to get a job, to get a job and to be able to like... survive - to get a pay cheque and all that. I’m not sure if I’ll be a good teacher. (Leann, FG3)

Clearly, Leann’s “chaotic” practicum experience described earlier had disturbed her equilibrium about teaching. The sense of uncertainty about her ability to deal with unruly and disinterested school students had discouraged her from being an educator. While she had good content knowledge of literature, she was not able to impart them to the students because of her poor classroom management.

As for Estella her “traumatic” practicum experience described earlier confirmed her decision not to become a schoolteacher after all:

It was very traumatic. I don’t wanna teach. I’m not gonna be a teacher. Before going to (practicum) I was like 50/50. I’m probably not gonna teach. After (practicum) I was like I’m definitely not going to teach. (Estella, FG3)

Because of their intense practicum experiences, many pre-service teachers became disillusioned not only about teaching as a profession, but also about teaching difficult adolescents, which would be unfulfilling and frustrating. Instead of giving up on teaching, some participants said they would teach students other than secondary school students. For instance, both Azmi and Estella said that they would love to teach literature, but to college level students who would be more matured and serious about their education. Estella assumed that it would be “easier” to teach university students who were more motivated and responsible about learning. On the other hand, Bella had become more interested in teaching “younger children” whom she believed would be easier to guide to like English and literature. In short, as aspiring schoolteachers, they
would have to battle the school norms, teacher norms, and the student norms. These challenges would cause many pre-service teachers to delay or avoid entering the workforce in schools altogether.

5.6 Perceived levels of literary literacy

When asked if they considered themselves good literature learners, most of the participants, including those with above average results in literature, said “no” or “not really” because of their “inconsistent” and “below expectation” results in university literature courses, and their perceived lack of creativity in interpreting the literary texts studied. Even those who seemed proficient in English and fluent during classroom discussions perceived themselves “moderate” or “average” literature learners because they believed they had limited experience in reading and interpreting literary works.

5.6.1 The “poor” to “moderate” literature learner

A few participants perceived themselves as “poor” in literature due to their inability to “understand” literature. For Jimmy, Zelda and Ellie, it was mostly due to their slow start, influenced by their lack of reading literary materials in English, lack of interest in literary studies and low proficiency in English. Hazem and Wang remained uninterested in literature, which affected their performance across university literature courses. Wang explained that he did not read much and was unable to express himself, verbally and in writing whereas Hazem said that he was unable to express his ideas in writing because he was basically unsure of his ideas. Despite his good command of English (MUET Band 5 “Proficient User”), Wang’s results across university literature courses were consistently below average; he failed both the literature courses in the semester of this study.

Participants who considered themselves “poor” literature learners demonstrated the following characteristics: mostly passive during discussions, dependent on peers and
lecturers for input, had poor proficiency in English and performed poorly in written assessments. These characteristics were underpinned by persistent behaviours such as lacking in determination and effort in studying literature. For instance, participants failed to complete the required readings and were reluctant to answer the study questions given, hence, relying on the input of others.

Participants who had genuine difficulty in studying literature usually looked forward to group discussions to help them begin analysing the text. While they enjoyed the variety of stimulating classroom activities that involved a lot of group work and hands-on activities, they preferred to work with their close friends because they were felt intimidated in a mixed-ability group. They said others sometimes perceived them as “slower” and less coherent in expressing their ideas, and so they would “just interrupt and gave their own opinion” or gave “very negative feedback”. Often, they had the same ideas as articulated by the others, but they were not able to express these ideas due to their limited language and communication skills. Participants who rated themselves “moderate” literature learners also said they sometimes felt inadequate in studying university literature courses despite showing higher proficiency in English and better results in literature examinations.

5.6.2 The “good” literature learner

Only two participants, Tony and Estella, considered themselves “good enough” in literature primarily because of their “great interest” in literature. Many of their peers also acknowledged them as “good” literature learners because, as Wang noted, they “read a lot” and “like literature”. They considered Tony, and especially Estella “established readers” as they had been reading literature “since childhood”. Hazem described them as “perfect” because “they not only have the knowledge about literature but also they were able to explain these ideas and knowledge clearly to others”. The
ability to inspire others, which extends the ability to study and understand literature beyond the private domain, constitutes a high level of literary literacy.

When asked how she dealt with studying a literary text, Estella claimed that she did not consider it a “study” because she took pleasure in reading literature, which in turn, made it “much easier” for her. She explained that she usually tried to “understand the gist, and to understand the entire (literary work) as a whole” before focusing on a theme gathered from the various group presentations. In other words, she was capable of managing her own learning without depending on the input from others.

Both Tony and Estella demonstrated the following characteristics: they were passionate about literature, they were able to participate in any activity in the literature classroom and often took the lead in discussions and presentations, they were well-read, diligent and resourceful. They were able to produce a well-researched work so that their peers such as Hazem, considered them their “points of reference” in literature.

While Tony took pleasure in completing the prescribed readings and in researching the topics given, but was apprehensive about literature examinations in which he usually fell one or two marks below the “A” grade every semester. He could not explain his problem with examination, but he believed it was related to his personal philosophy that literature was “to be enjoyed, not tested”. Estella also shared this belief although fortunately for her, she consistently achieved the highest marks in literature examinations in this cohort.

There were other participants who consistently achieved above average results in literature and were fluent in English but were reluctant to call themselves “good” literature learners because they believed they lacked the ability to “spontaneously” interpret and understand literature. Apparently, they had very high expectations of the “good” literature learner such as the ability to produce critical and creative ideas spontaneously every time and “constantly” perform well in any situation.
In addition, the “good” literature learner should have flawless language and no problems at all with understanding any literary text. Estella defined “good” achieving global standard in literature. While she was aware that her lecturers and her peers recognised her current level of ability in literature, she felt that she might not be as good as literature students in the native (Western) contexts. It can be concluded that the participants expected a “good” literature learner to be highly capable in all aspects including linguistic, cognitive, and cross-cultural communication.

5.7 Professional preparation

With little or no teaching experience, the brief professional practicum was the benchmark for the participants’ professional preparation for teaching literature. Drawing from their diverse practicum experiences, they made some suggestions to improve practicum experience and pedagogical knowledge in literature.

5.7.1 Improve practicum

Teaching practicum has a significant influence on the participants’ perspectives on teaching and their professional construct of the literature teacher. It was imperative to optimise practicum experience by improving the theory and practice interface, conducting frequent or extended practicum, and improving the supervision and evaluation of the practicum.

Many participants, including the “good” literature learners, were not able to apply the content knowledge of literature in the real classroom during practicum due to the contextual constraints discussed in previous sections. For example, Leann’s content knowledge of literature was overwhelmed by classroom management problems:

“I’ve learned about the big L and the small l, how to teach literature in class. But when it comes to the situation, it’s like I forgot about everything of what I’ve learned. And then maybe because I panic so I’ve to teach according to how I think they would learn. (Leann, FG3)
Clearly, pre-service teachers would benefit from more exposure to the real classroom such as through video-taped sessions of actual teaching in the real classroom, and an additional practicum. This would help pre-service teachers to visualise the challenges and create opportunities in the real classroom before they are expected to teach and be evaluated, as Leann commented:

…they’re (the teacher education programme) teaching us the ideals but they forgot to tell us like… and what we should do. Could it be the lacking in the time we have in our teaching practice? the duration of our teaching practice? And we need more time in order to, first we have to, how to say, familiarize with the environment first. (Leann, FG3)

Many participants believed that the practicum, with only about four weeks of actual teaching opportunities, was too “brief” and “superficial” for any significant impact on their professional construct. Many, like Teong, believed that the university literature courses did not explicitly teach them how to “conduct literature classes in schools or how to overcome problems faced by the students especially in language aspect”.

While it was important to prepare pre-service teachers for the harsh realities in the real classroom, the teaching-to-the-school approach would limit autonomous and independent learning as advocated in the university. According to the lecturers, “university students should not expect to be spoon-fed” but to think about how they could apply the knowledge into practice in the real classroom. They found that many pre-service teachers were not willing to “think for themselves” but expected instant solutions and teaching methods from them.

One of the lecturers, Syamri, said that he usually integrated the small ‘I’ – using literature to teach language by modelling techniques like suspense, and role-play in his classes. He said he even pretended not to know certain figurative language and literary terms in order to “provoke” the pre-service teachers to try explaining these clearly to him. Perhaps this was not the same as dealing with real students, as Anna said “micro-teaching sessions” with their peers as audience/students seemed “artificial”.

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In terms of practicum supervision and evaluation, many participants were disappointed that they were not supervised by any TESL or literature lecturers during their practicum. As such, they were not able to discuss matters specifically related to teaching literature with their appointed university supervisors, as Flora complained:

… if we were to be assessed on our capability on teaching literature, they (assessors) should have this knowledge. What happened is, during teaching practice, we are just being randomly arranged and whoever would supervise us, their background doesn’t matter… my (university) supervisor he didn’t say anything. So it is not clear what he wants to evaluate. (Flora, FG3)

Like Flora, participants who had the opportunity to teach literature during practicum were eager to obtain constructive feedback from university supervisors who specialised in English and literature. This was important for them especially when they felt discouraged that they did not do too well. In fact, some participants said they valued critical and constructive feedback more than the grades awarded. However, for some administrative reasons, none of the TESL or literature lecturers were involved in supervising the practicum in that session.

5.7.2 **Content knowledge vs. pedagogical knowledge**

Most participants believed that the way they were taught to study literature in the teacher education programme was the “real” and “proper way”, which had significantly improved their interest and ability in literature. They appreciated the variety of activities in their university literature classes such as open discussions, debates and forums, which promoted critical and creative thinking. They even looked forward to their long stretch of literature classes in which they could “bring their brains” to think for themselves rather than merely receiving facts and information. Therefore, they wanted to apply similar literary literacy practices in their secondary school literature classroom during practicum. However, they were disappointed that they were not able to do so due to the many constraints encountered such as the students’ lack of interest in literature and poor
literacy. Secondary school students were not used to expressing themselves in these ways and so it would take enormous amount of effort and time to change the norms in school. It was concluded that the “real” way to study literature was not applicable in the real school context.

Most participants believed that while the literature courses in the teacher education programme provided adequate content knowledge for them to teach the LCE in school, they were not equipped with the pedagogical knowledge to do so. Only one out of the 14 literature courses, namely, Methods of Teaching Literature focused explicitly on the methods of teaching literature. The rest were considered “pure” literature courses or the Big “L”, which emphasised literary criticism.

The two literature courses taken in the semester of the study focused on literary theories which were highly challenging new knowledge for many. These courses provided good content knowledge but were deemed “too advanced” to be applied in the secondary school literature classroom. Even Leann, who was able to appreciate the literary theories, found that she was not able to use this knowledge in her secondary school literature classroom:

“The (university literature) courses gave a lot of theories but I am still lost on how it can be applied. I find it hard to imagine the application bit. I think the lecturers just want us to be independent to find out how to apply it but… if lecturers can provide examples of situations in class or things that happen in real life…it can give us a general idea on how the theory can be carried out and be useful/relevant to us”. (Leann, ss3)

Contrary to the participants’ complaints that they lacked adequate exposure to pedagogical skills in literature, one of their lecturers, Syamri explained that he usually integrated literary criticism and methods of teaching literature in his lessons. He described how he modelled a lesson using the poem Road Not Taken by Robert Frost to show how knowledge of the reader response theory could be used in guiding the secondary school students in exploring a literary text:
I gave them an example: “Road Not Taken” - a poem that they are studying in school… you can, for example, ask the students to discuss or come up with activities. So how do you get the students to discuss? Once you get the students to personalise the poem, the short stories, I think they will be able to better understand the text instead of just memorizing everything. (Syamri, LI1)

The other lecturer, Eva admitted that because she did not have a teaching or education background, she was not able to explicitly guide the pre-service teachers on how to teach literature to secondary school students. However, she said that she incorporated a variety of activities and techniques to teach them literature, such as using songs and games which she hoped they would use with own students in the future. Notwithstanding the anxieties over the perceived lack of pedagogical skills in literature, most participants viewed secondary school literature component requirement “quite basic” and that teaching literature would be manageable if they conformed to the existing practices and standards in school. Based on both the student and lecturer participants’ perspectives, there needs to be a balance of theoretical and pedagogical knowledge which are taught in context. The interface between the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge is conceptualised as literary literacy in this study.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of the pre-service case study derived from a triangulation of multiple sources of qualitative data comprising focus group interviews with the participants, individual interviews with their lecturers, non-participant classroom observations and documentary data. Emerging themes and issues can be categorised as appropriateness of preparation to study literature, dissonance between literature curricula, adequacy to study and teach literature, and commitment to the teaching profession.

Despite having a range of prior experience in learning literature, most participants believed they were not appropriately prepared for the literary studies at tertiary level.
The literature component in secondary school has failed to enhance their reading skills and ability, as well as their interest in literature. This not only confirms the findings of previous studies concerning schoolchildren’s perspectives on the LCE but more importantly provides a detailed description of the situation. The disparity between the ideational and the operational curriculum of the LCE has created a huge gap between literature studies at school and tertiary level. There was no mention of their experience in learning literature in the Malay Language (KOMSAS). The participants felt inadequate and unprepared for advanced level literary studies due to limited literary competence, cognitive and linguistic ability.

The pedagogical approaches used in the university literature classroom have stimulated a deeper interest in literature but the participants are clearly in need of high support to deal with high challenges of literary studies at tertiary level. Despite its learner centred pedagogy, the university literature curriculum is highly traditional and laden with literary theories beyond the learners’ grasp and needs. For a teacher education programme, content knowledge in literature needs to be balanced with pedagogical knowledge.

The findings revealed that teaching practicum plays a significant role in developing the pre-service participants’ professional identity and literary literacy. This calls for a more organised practicum to provide opportunity to contextualise the content knowledge gained and to acclimatise to the demands of the profession. The dissonance and conflicts experienced during practicum suggest that the participants are in the process of negotiating their ideational construct with the reality of school and the profession. Nonetheless, practicum experiences assured most participants, including those who rated themselves “poor” in literature, that their content knowledge of literature was adequate for teaching the secondary school literature component which they considered elementary level literary studies.
Practicum experience also caused the participants to reflect on their commitment to the teaching as a career. Three types of teachers emerged: transformers who would attempt to change the norms in schools, conformers who would teach literature according to the existing norms and practices to deal with the many constraints of teaching literature in schools, and avoiders who would delay or avoid teaching altogether. These types are not exclusive and will evolve in context. The novice teacher can move from one type to another at different points and according to the demands of the job. This typology suggests that while graduates of the programme may supply trained teachers in schools, there will be issues of commitment and quality of teachers. For example, participants who were proficient in English and good in literature said they would not teach in secondary schools. Instead, those with poor proficiency in English and poor ability in literature were content to stay in the school system.

Based on the participants’ experiences dealing with studying university literature courses in the teacher education programme, it can be concluded that their literary literacy for professional preparation is at the developmental stage. The findings of this sub-case study have described specific areas of needs to be addressed through appropriate literary literacy instruction for professional preparation of pre-service teachers. The next chapter will present the findings of the sub-case study of the conversion English teachers.
Chapter 6: Case study of conversion English teachers

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of a sub-case study of the conversion English teachers (CET) who were enrolled as undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Education in English as a Second Language (B. Ed. ESL) programme at the public university of the research site. As explained in Chapter Four, the term “conversion English teacher” was coined in this study to reflect the participants’ conversion from being primary school teachers of subjects other than English to becoming trained secondary school teachers of English and Literature. The findings answer the following research questions:

1. What are the participants’ perspectives on learning literature in English?
2. How do they deal with studying university literature courses?
3. What are their perspectives on teaching literature in English?
4. What is their perceived level of literary literacy?
5. What literary literacy practices in university literature classes do they consider useful for their professional preparation?
6. To what extent do literary studies in the teacher education programme prepare them to teach literature in secondary schools?

The findings encompass themes and issues emerging from the qualitative data derived from multiple sources, particularly, focus group interviews, non-participant classroom observations and relevant documents. The chapter begins with a profile of the CET participants and concludes with a summary of the findings.
6.2 Participants’ profile

A profile of the CETs was drawn from 16 participants from two different cohorts: four from the senior cohort and 12 from a junior cohort. The senior cohort was completing a four-year teacher education programme and the junior cohort a three-year programme, after which the university will no longer offer the secondary teacher education programme. Hence, they were all in their final year of study and the last cohort of CETs at the university. The CETs in this study had been teaching in primary schools from five to 17 years, mostly in remote and rural areas, before enrolling in the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher education programme. Like other in-service teachers nationwide, they were selected by the Ministry of Education (MoE) Malaysia to be given study leave and scholarship to enrol in the ESL programme at participating public universities as part of the ministry’s effort to provide trained English teachers to teach in secondary schools.

The senior cohort consisted of four mature female students who had failed to graduate with their peers at the end of their four-year programme. To complete failed units, mostly literature, they had re-enrolled for an additional semester. During this study, they undertook two literature courses: Young Adult Literature (YAL) and New Literature in English (NLE) together with the larger (N=65) and younger pre-service teachers’ group. They formed a close-knit group and worked together for most of their assigned coursework. They reported that they were constantly stressed and frustrated in learning literature, particularly as they had to deal with two literature courses in that semester. They sat together at the same spot for every class and rarely contributed unless called out by their lecturer during whole class discussion.

The junior cohort comprised six males and six female CETs who volunteered to participate in this study. They were mostly in their early 30s and younger than the
senior cohort. During the semester of this study, they were taking one last prescribed literature course, Reading Plays. Unlike the senior cohort, they seemed more comfortable in their literature class as they did not have to take the course together with the large pre-service group and so they were able to enjoy the benefits of a small group, such as individual attention from their lecturer. From the classroom observations, everyone seemed willing and able to contribute to a lively class discussion. This shows that they were less apprehensive about learning literature compared to the senior cohort of conversion teachers. Table 6.1 provides a summary of the participants’ cohort description and demographics.

Table 6.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort description</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Gender/No. of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior cohort</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme: 4 year ESL secondary teacher education</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total of 14 literature courses</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature course(s) taken in the semester of study: 2, taken together with the pre-service group</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior cohort</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme: 3 year ESL secondary teacher education</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of 10 literature courses</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature course(s) taken in the semester of study: 1, taken in their own group</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3 Perspectives on learning literature

The conversion teachers’ perspectives on learning literature were influenced by three major factors: personal background and previous experiences in learning literature, attitudes towards literature and learning literature, and motivation to learn literature. Due to their different learning situations described previously, these factors will be discussed according to the respective cohorts.
6.3.1 Senior cohort’s experiences, attitudes and motivation

The four participants from the senior cohort were homogeneous in terms of English Language proficiency and ability to learn literature as evident in their results and performance across several university literature courses. They were categorised as below average by their lecturers because they had consistently performed poorly in most literature courses - they had failed several courses, which they had to repeat and as a result, they could not graduate together with their peers.

Despite having been in the programme for four years, they felt they had limited and negative experiences in learning literature. They could not recall their experience studying literature at secondary school because it had been either too long ago or too different to have any significant impact on their current situation learning literature. Sally said that they had left school “for such a long time and don’t even read literature books as much as (the pre-service teachers) do”. Being mature aged learners, they believed that there had been many changes in the education system since their own schooldays, which had influenced their ability to cope with their present situation. For example, Imelda found that the school curriculum had changed considerably from her secondary school time in the 1980s. Moreover, she was a Science stream student and had a bad experience with literature during her school days, which adversely affected her attitude towards poetry:

The poem is quite difficult because I dislike it because I cannot interpret what the poet is trying to say. I remember when I’m [sic] in secondary school, my teacher always ask [sic] me. I answer [sic] but always stand [sic] on the chair (laughs)... I cannot [sic] give the right answer... what she want [sic]. Because of that I feel [sic] humiliated and I hate poems until now. (Imelda, FG2)

The anecdote above suggests that the secondary school literature class focused on right response reading, which created a threatening environment for Imelda as a novice literature learner.
While they had all studied literary texts (in English or Malay Language) as students in secondary school, they considered their first encounter with “real” literary studies at teachers’ training college where they were trained for primary school teaching. Sally, in her early forties and the oldest in this group, studied Malay Literature in school and at Teachers’ college where she was trained to teach the Malay Language.

All had completed one introductory course on literature during a fourteen-week immersion programme prior to enrolment in this secondary teacher education programme at the university. This compulsory programme, conducted at a local teachers’ college and taught by lecturers from both the college and the university, aimed to prepare the conversion teachers for their secondary teacher education programme in ESL. With their generally poor results across various university literature courses to date, the senior cohort were categorised below average in literature.

The senior cohort of CETs was highly apprehensive about learning literature, particularly poetry as Pamela explained:

...literature is very, very tough for me. Actually, although I’m enjoy [sic] reading, especially short stories or novel but I also hate poetry... I’m afraid when I interpret something, it contrast [sic] with other, so sometimes when I interpret something about the poem, maybe it’s wrong. So, just sometimes I give up... Maybe others… friend’s opinion is good. So I think my opinion is not good. (Pamela, FG2)

They also said that they felt demoralised by the stigma of being perceived as a group of below-average, left-behind seniors, even “failures” by their peers and lecturers. They were visibly frustrated and stressed with learning literature. During the focus group, Sally became emotional and cried when she described her stressful experience trying to cope with every literature course she was required to take in the programme. Although she did not regret her decision to enrol in the teaching degree programme, she believed that the personal as well as professional sacrifices (she was trained as a Malay Language
teacher) she had made to stay in the programme seemed futile because of her poor performance.

While they felt that their general interest in literature had increased since they enrolled in the programme, they believed that they had not achieved much pedagogical knowledge and skills in literature. Consequently, they began to question the relevance of learning “deep” content knowledge in the form of literary theories and criticisms, not for its importance, but for its usefulness and applicability to the secondary school literature classrooms, in which they were going to teach when they graduate. The stress of dealing with studying two literature courses in this extended semester and the fear of failing, which would cost them their graduation, created a threatening learning environment. As if a self-fulfilling prophecy, all except Imelda, failed both the literature courses they studied in that semester. According to their lecturers, they failed due to poor performance in both the mid-semester and the final semester examination of each course. This shows that they were not able to work independently to produce a critical response in writing as required in literature examination.

While they were aware of their own lack of ability in literature, the participants seemed to attribute their failure to perform to their circumstances and the people involved. They recalled negative experiences with their lecturers in which they were made to feel inadequate and inferior, such as the following anecdote by Sally:

We have one experience that we were asked to present our topic based on a subject. But then that lecturer... when we present, sometimes she won’t even look at us... She just put down her head and then write [sic] some remarks or whatsoever… Never shown how we have performed. And at the end of the day, we can see that all our marks are in red. So... we can’t understand how they look at us. (Sally, FG2)

They believed that some lecturers were prejudiced against them, which stemmed from a general stereotyping of in-service teacher as a difficult group of learners. Consequently,
they were self-conscious and felt inferior from constantly comparing themselves with the pre-service teachers:

...this (pre-service teachers), their ideas are always right. When compared to us, I have to say to you that all lecturers grade us as you know... “this in-service teachers they are useless.” I think I have the courage to say that due to my experience with them. (Sally, FG2)

The rest concurred with Sally, and Patricia added an incident in which she believed she had been misunderstood and mistreated. They took issue with their lecturers’ perceived poor opinion and treatment of them, which contributed to their negative attitudes toward literature and inhibited them from participating actively in the literature classrooms.

The participants’ opinions were compared with their lecturers’ perspectives, drawn from individual interviews with the lecturers who taught the two courses taken by the participants. Syamri, the lecturer who had taught the participants several literature courses, including the present two courses, described them as “passive” and “withdrawn”, regardless of his efforts to include them in small-group or whole-class discussions. Classroom observations confirmed this with Syamri making them work together with the pre-service teachers groups to present a response to a literary text. He often called on them to contribute their ideas and even appointed them as a group leader or spokesperson. In short, Syamri proved that he was not prejudiced against them and treated them equal to the rest of the class. In fact, on one such occasion, Imelda simply said “I have no idea” or “I don’t know” when Syamri tried to encourage her to give her ideas on a literary work studied. They seemed to refuse to try and were content to receive information from others. In their view, the environment compelled them to become passive in class because some of the pre-service teachers were dominant.

Based on their unsuccessful experience to date, the senior cohort participants did not seem to be very motivated to learn literature. Although at the beginning, they were enthusiastic about the prospect of upgrading their knowledge and skills as English
teachers, they eventually began to doubt the impact of university literature courses on their professional preparation. Sally implied that university literature courses were not only too deep and difficult for her but more importantly, not applicable to secondary school level:

_Not to say not useful, but because due to my grades... will I be better English teacher when I graduate? Or you just have that piece of (certificate that says) “you are a graduate. You have a degree.” But will I perform well in school with that degree? (Sally, FG2)_

She argued that the difficult language, foreign culture and ideas, as well as sensitive issues contained in most prescribed texts of the university literature courses were not suitable for secondary school. Further, while there was adequate exposure to content knowledge, they believed they lacked explicit methods and techniques in teaching literature at secondary school, which in their view, was more important and urgent. Hence, they wanted more courses on methods of teaching literature to secondary school students, as suggested by Sally:

_... for literature we need special slot for us how to teach students. Like for this (pre-service group) they will go out, they will graduate right? But they are not all, not all of them are going to be teachers. For us in-service teachers, that is what we need. (Sally, FG2ct3)_

Apparently, for Sally and her group members, the motivation to learn literature was primarily instrumental and extrinsic in that they just wanted to improve their skills in teaching literature. They seemed to limit their scope of learning to what was directly related to and relevant for the secondary school literature classroom.

6.3.2 *Junior cohort’s experiences, attitudes and motivation*

The junior cohort of CETs had a diverse background in learning literature albeit in a different language and at secondary school level. Jonas studied Malay Literature in Form Six, Jessy was in the Science stream but studied English Literature as an elective examination subject in Form Six, Sheila and Chan read Chinese literature at home and
at teachers’ college. A few had early exposure to reading literature at home and in primary school: Jariah’s mother included English classics in her home library, Sheila’s father read Chinese literature and her mother read English literature at home, and Melba went to the public library to borrow books for her daily book report assigned by her headmaster in primary school.

In terms of proficiency level, the majority (eight) of them were average, three below average and one above average according to their performance in several literature courses, particularly Malaysian Literature, which was a common course taken by both conversion and pre-service teachers. It was remarkable that Sheila, who had mostly Chinese language and literature experience, was the top student in literature in this cohort.

Contrastively, Jessy who had studied English Literature in Form Six, showed below average performance in this programme. It was also observed that those with the same proficiency level tended to work together in small study/discussion groups. For instance, Jessy, Imran and Melvin who were below average in literature usually worked together for class discussion and group assignments.

A few participants in this cohort had non English Language background: Sheila and Chan were trained in Chinese Language whereas Jessy was trained in Mathematics. However, like their seniors, all had completed one introductory course on literature during a 14-week immersion programme which was a pre-requisite for their enrolment as undergraduates in the teacher programme at the university. The immersion programme was Shelia and Chan’s first experience of literature in English.

Most of the participants from the junior cohort described a generally positive attitude towards literature. Those with early exposure to literature at home or in primary school developed a good reading habit and an interest in literature. Jariah recalled seeing her mother read some English classics at home and so when she studied some of these texts
in the literature education programme, she said she became more interested in reading them because she was learning new ways to appreciate the texts. Sheila preferred to read Chinese literature because she grew up reading Chinese texts at home and in school, up to teachers’ college where she was trained to teach Chinese Language. She was proficient in both languages but found it fascinating to read the English text in its Chinese translation:

... the ones (literature) we have at home, mostly are Chinese version. That’s why I read first in Chinese and after I took up the course, I read the English version... I try to look for the original English version and compare it with the Chinese one... it’s an advantage for me because I can actually have the comparison between the two languages and how the translator - they’re trying to put all those ideas as close to its original text but at the same time take into consideration the reader’s background like us Chinese. Some expression used in English, if you translated it directly into Chinese... might not be appropriate. (Sheila, FG2)

Reading English literary texts in Chinese translation enabled Sheila to manage her reading and develop appropriate skills by drawing from the linguistically and culturally familiar (Chinese) to understand the unfamiliar (English). This has made her read extensively and become more critical in her reading, which contributed to her good results in literature courses. For Melba, going to the library to borrow books for the assigned daily book report during primary school was a burden, but it developed in her a habit of reading and writing which became very useful in learning university literature courses.

Clearly, home literacy practices and literary literacy events in the past, such as completing daily book reports and reading literature in the mother tongue not only developed positive attitudes towards learning literature, but became a foundation for their current literary literacy practices. By constantly drawing from their experience learning literature in other languages (Malay and Chinese) to literature in English, the participants developed realistic expectations that studying would involve extensive reading and critical analysis of a variety of literary texts. They were able to draw on the
relevant knowledge and skills in reading a literary text in other languages to reading literature in English, such as translating similar literary terms and concepts to facilitate their understanding.

In terms of motivation to learn literature, most participants in this group believed that learning university literature courses was necessary to prepare them to become teachers of literature in secondary school. Additionally, some participants were personally passionate about literature because they found it to be a culturally enriching experience and beneficial for their personal growth, enabling them to acquire new perspectives in life. For example, Jariah believed that learning literature had improved her reading skills and habits in that she had become more critical when reading.

Jonas had not only become more tolerant of ambiguity, but also viewed multiple interpretations as “the beauty of literature”, and that his ability to enjoy literature was not defined by his average grades. Marcus and Jonas were passionate about literature because they believed literature had developed their knowledge and awareness of other cultures and hence, improved their perspectives of themselves and the world.

Table 6.2 presents a summary of the senior and junior cohorts’ level of literature competence, educational and literature background, and attitude towards literature.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Participant Name*</th>
<th>Literature competence</th>
<th>Previous literature experience</th>
<th>Teachers college major</th>
<th>Attitudes towards literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior cohort</td>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>Teachers’ college: one literature course (introductory level)</td>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>Enjoyed novels/short stories but hated poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imelda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td></td>
<td>Malay Literature in secondary school</td>
<td>Malay Language</td>
<td>Did not read much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior cohort</td>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Chinese literature at home and at teachers’ college</td>
<td>Chinese Language</td>
<td>Read Chinese and English literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Teachers’ college: one literature course One year special course for in-service English teachers</td>
<td>Chinese Language</td>
<td>Loved literature - for cultural exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Taught literature programme for primary school</td>
<td>Chinese Language</td>
<td>Taught children’s literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jonas</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Malay Literature as examination subject in Form 5 &amp; 6</td>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>Loved literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td></td>
<td>Malay Literature as examination subject in Form 5</td>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>Disliked literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donny</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liked reading and English literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jariah</td>
<td></td>
<td>Read English novels at home as a child with her mother</td>
<td>Chinese Language</td>
<td>Loved reading and literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melba</td>
<td></td>
<td>Library books for daily book report in primary school</td>
<td>Chinese Language</td>
<td>Preferred short stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chan</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>Chinese literature at home and at teachers’ college</td>
<td>Chinese Language</td>
<td>Preferred local Malaysian literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jessy</td>
<td></td>
<td>English Literature as elective examination subject in Form 6</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Enjoyed reading literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imran</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers’ college: one literature course (introductory level)</td>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>English as favourite subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melvin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preferred local Malaysian literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All names are in pseudonyms
6.4 Dealing with studying literature

6.4.1 Reading vs. studying literature

All participants, including those who were passionate about literature, distinguished between leisure reading of literature and studying literature, which Imran described as “reading for pleasure and reading under pressure”. The two types of reading can be categorised as reading for pleasure, with a small ‘r’ and reading for literary study, with a big ‘R’. Studying literature has brought a considerable pressure on the participants for two main reasons: assigned reading was a burden and literary studies required critical analysis for which they were unprepared due to difficulty in making interpretations for lack of linguistic and literary competence.

For some, particularly those previously trained in other languages and disciplines, studying literature in English at tertiary level was initially daunting because they were dealing with a new language as well as a new knowledge. They were overwhelmed by the extent of required reading and difficult language of the literary texts. However, as they began to study literature in a variety of new ways introduced in university literature classes, they began to enjoy literature. Jackson, who initially had an intense dislike for literature and did not read much, said he eventually developed an interest in literature and reading. Donny, who had always loved English and reading, became motivated to buy original texts as part of his private collection of English literature. These books are costly in Malaysia and purchasing original literary texts while on a tight budget was not a common practice for many Malaysian undergraduate students.

Unlike the senior cohort, the participants reported having positive experience learning literature in the programme. The three-year programme required them to do four literature courses less than the senior cohort and the pre-service teachers and being the smallest cohort (total population: 15) they were able to enjoy the benefits of a small class, such as an affinity with each other and a good rapport with their lecturers. The
small group was more manageable and allowed for a variety of learning activities in the classrooms. They had become so comfortable and confident within their small class to the extent that when they had to do a course together with the larger pre-service group, they were not intimidated and did not feel inferior to them. They viewed open discussions and presentations in class as a “chance to share” (Jariah) which they enjoyed as a new and exciting learning strategy.

The learner centred approach in the university literature classroom provided a non-threatening learning environment in which they were given ample opportunities to express their opinions and ideas on a reading. Their voices were heard and they were made to feel that their opinions were valued by others. They learned to listen to other peoples’ ideas and were not reluctant to participate and contribute their ideas during open discussions. Many had come to appreciate the ambiguity and subjectivity in literary interpretation, which they were not able to tolerate previously. They also began to appreciate that exam questions were stimulating as they were of an application type, which required “more to higher order thinking” (Jariah). Despite their generally average grades in literature, they were able to gain some kind of personal satisfaction in learning new knowledge and skills in literature. They realised that it was difficult to obtain high scores in literature.

6.4.2 Personal response vs. ‘right’ reading
Reading literature, with a capital ‘R’ or studying literature has become synonymous with making interpretations of the literary works. Participants across cohorts believed that studying literature was all about making the most appropriate interpretation of a literary work. Dealing with studying literature involved ways of responding to a literary text. In this study, the types of reading response, reading strategies and practices are conceptualised as literary literacy practices.
Compared to their previous experience learning literature at secondary school level and at teachers’ college, the participants believed that university literature courses have introduced new literary literacy practices such as the reader response approach to literary text by relating to personal experiences to understand the text studied. University literature classes were learner-centred which encouraged creative and critical response. Close reading practices and extensive reading required learners to activate various strategies to deal with the literary texts studied.

All participants, except Imran, considered personal response more important than right reading response because they needed to be able to respond to the literary text “freely” and “creatively”, especially at the beginning stage before they could make critical interpretations. It was observed that during class, their lecturers often encouraged them to participate actively in discussions by assuring them that “there (was) no right or wrong answer” but below average learners remained sceptical because their “answers” were usually rejected. They often failed to communicate their ideas clearly and convincingly to others. Consequently, they became discouraged and lost confidence in making interpretations of a literary work, and they blamed it on the subjectivity of literary interpretation.

The issue of subjectivity in literary interpretation seemed to be a major concern for many. Personal response was acceptable at the initial stage of exploring a literary text but its idiosyncratic nature was deemed risky for graded tasks. Notwithstanding the risks, most participants valued personal response as it helped them appreciate literature more when they were able to relate it to their own personal experiences. Relating the literary work to one’s personal experience produced deeper understanding of the literary work. For example, Jessy described how in relating the conflict between the two families in Romeo and Juliet with her own personal experience of marital conflict, she was able to understand why the “star-crossed lovers” were “forced” to kill themselves.
The personal response became a preferred strategy as it provided the opportunity to assert their own points of view and personal opinions on the text as a kind of initial spontaneous response to generating ideas on the literary text studied. In this way, they were getting a sense of the text, which encouraged them to analyse the text further:

A reader needs to react in his/her way and interact with the text as he/she is reading. By interacting with the literary text in any way they most comfortable, it helps readers to analyse the story. Hence, readers must be given the opportunity to explore the text as they wish. (Jariah, FG2)

The “freedom” to respond to the literary texts studied without concerns over literary theories or ‘correct’ interpretations was especially important for the senior cohort of conversion teachers as it would help them manage their fears and anxiety about learning literature. In their view, using the personal response approach helped them “to interpret creatively”, “to understand” and to use their “points of view to do the interpretation”. This implied that apprehensive literature learners needed to be eased into making interpretations and appreciating a literary text, particularly at the beginning stage.

Nonetheless, all CET participants from the junior cohort recognised the usefulness of right reading response to “reinforce the whole idea being discussed” and to “justify the opinions or ideas”. Imran prioritised right reading response from the beginning because it enabled him to “explore all the possible correct interpretations” because “personal response sometimes can be misleading.” He believed that relating the text to his personal experience would lead him “astray” and so he tried to avoid personal response to a literary text.

Indeed, there was a prevailing notion that a literary text was full of hidden meanings, which must be discovered and interpreted “correctly” according to the author’s intent. Thus, while they preferred personal response to begin their study on a literary text, they practiced right reading response because they believed that the author’s intent and message was priority.
6.4.3 Perceived problems and coping strategies

Across cohorts, there were three major problem areas in dealing with studying literature namely, literary competence, language competence and time constraints. These perceived problems and the coping strategies used to deal with them formed part of the participants’ literary literacy practices in the university literature classroom.

Literary competence

Despite their experience learning literature in secondary school and at teachers’ college, participants from both cohorts lacked knowledge of literary terms and conventions. The course lecturers, particularly Eva, found this “lack of basic knowledge in literature” disturbing as some of the participants could not differentiate between simile and metaphor at this final stage of the programme. She tried to help them by providing supplementary notes and exercises on some basic literary terms and devices but she was not confident that they would be able to understand and apply them, especially in examination situations.

Participants who were not previously trained in English and literature struggled with basic literary terms and conventions, as in Chan’s experience:

... terms (and) literary devices… it’s quite alien to me because I never (saw) these words before. Even like I read English books, novels… I never categorize things like that. So it was quite tough for me during the first semester. (Chan, FG2)

The participants believed that knowledge of literary conventions such as plot, setting, and character in a literary text was most important in studying a literary text because it provided a structure to begin analysis of the text. This helped the less confident conversion teachers in the senior cohort to “generate ideas” and to provide “more details” about the poem. Knowledge of the author, the period, and literary criticism, were imperative “in order to know what the author really wants”. This indicates their preference for right reading practices.
Studying literary theory was a new knowledge to all participants, including those who were trained in English at teachers’ college. While they recognised the usefulness of literary theories as a tool for reading, they were not able to understand and apply some of the abstract and complex concepts. Perhaps they needed more time and practice applying this new knowledge to their reading.

While the participants managed to appreciate the novel and the short story, they found reading poetry daunting due to its condensed form with multi-layered meaning and interpretations. The senior cohort’s reasons for their persistent difficulty in reading poetry included their preoccupation with the author’s intention and meaning, fear of making the ‘wrong’ interpretation, and inability to analyse poetry in a “proper way”. They were also aware that their lack of reading contributed to these problems. They believed that the first step in dealing with reading poetry would be to manage their negative feelings and fear of interpreting poems by doing the following:

- Start with uncomplicated poems, preferably by local and contemporary poet
- Avoid controversial and complex poems
- Allow them the freedom to analyse the poem based on personal response at the initial stage
- Conduct group discussion for collaborative learning
- Allow inductive learning: drawing from various “free interpretations” to acceptable interpretations

From the above suggestions, it was clear that participants who were highly apprehensive about learning literature needed affective strategies that address their psychological needs such as the constant assurance that they would not be judged negatively when they attempt to interpret the poem studied. Acceptance and approval from their lecturer and peers were essential to their motivation and confidence to continue reading.
From their experience in the programme, the participants concluded that learning literature was all about making interpretations:

... I think sometimes it’s how we interpret the story actually - the play, the short stories or the poem that’s given to us. That’s the most important thing. Sometimes we interpret like, how the markers, the lecturer said, we got marks. But if the lecturer cannot see how we interpret it, we get less mark. (Jonas, FG1)

Jonas was drawing from his experience learning Malay Literature as an elective examination paper in Form Five and Form Six. Coming from a predominantly exam-driven background in literary studies, Jonas continued to focus on a right reading response to literature. In his view, the authority: the exam marker or the lecturer determined the “right” or “acceptable” interpretation. Jackson believed that this “subjectivity” made it very difficult for learners like him to study literature. In order to deal with subjectivity in interpretation, Imran said that he would insist on his own ideas and interpretation unless and until others could convince him otherwise. In one sense, this suggested confidence on his part, but on the other hand, it could encourage an attitude of unteachability and develop a set mentality, which may result in narrow-mindedness. There would be instances when Imran risked believing in his own interpretation, even when it was not acceptable and cost him his grades:

I always resort back to my own interpretation instead (of) using the norms. ... even though I know there is a risk of having to fail that paper. But for me, if I can argue or justify my interpretation, then maybe at some point the lecturer in a sense, can accept my idea. (Imran, FG2)

When asked how they approached a literary text, most participants explained that they would go straight into uncovering the “hidden meaning” of the text. They aimed to analyse the text “correctly” and so they used their knowledge of literary conventions to begin their critical reading of the literary text.
Language competence

All participants across cohorts struggled with “difficult language” found in the literary texts studied, particularly the “old English” and unfamiliar language found in classic literature texts. Unfamiliar setting and foreign culture added to this problem:

...the problem would be the Romeo and Juliet play because of the language. But for...We *censored* you Mr. Birch, I don’t think I would face much problem... because... it’s a Malaysian setting, we can relate to it. We know the history of Mr. Birch and the Pasir Salak. (Jessy, FG2)

Most participants, regardless of their language proficiency, preferred local or Malaysian literature, which they could “relate to” due to familiar cultural and social setting, language and expressions, as well as issues and themes. Some, including the senior cohort, reported that their best experience and best results in university literature courses were for the Malaysian Literature course.

The participants’ limited language proficiency impeded their ability to respond and express themselves effectively, especially in writing. For example, Chan had limited English vocabulary to express her ideas fluently:

I think my problem is I know how I feel towards the text but sometimes I’ll have to find the words to... express it... so that my friends can understand what actually I’m thinking now. It was really a big problem for me from the starting of the course...I have to find words when I speak in English... (Chan, FG2ct2)

Chan was average in terms of her overall performance and results in literature courses, but she had real difficulty in the English Language because of her Chinese education background. She found it extremely frustrating and time consuming to have to constantly refer to the dictionary as a coping strategy:

... I still have a habit of grabbing a dictionary...We were taught how to understand one word in the language... we will find in the dictionary. So, it’s very automatically [sic] that I’ll go to dictionary or go online to find the meaning of the word. Sometimes it’s quite taking time [sic] you know. Only one page and I don’t know so many words! (Chan, FG2)
Chan, like many others in her group, was dealing with not only reading literature but also learning English. She realised that using the dictionary was not the most efficient way to read literature and she needed new strategies to manage extensive reading. Indeed, with limited proficiency in English, many participants had to work extra hard to deal with studying university literature courses.

While the lecturers were aware of the participants’ language needs, they felt that there was limited time and resources to meet these needs because the programme expected them to already have sufficient, if not good language competence. Drawing from the communicative language teaching approach, one of the lecturers, Eva said she was willing to excuse the participants’ poor language if they could get their message across. However, with many examination scripts that were barely intelligible, she concluded that many participants in this group did not have the adequate language competence to deal with literary studies. She also noted that most CET participants were able to generate ideas on any topic of discussion verbally in class, because they were mature and experienced but they were not able to express their ideas clearly in academic writing.

**Time constraints**

Time was a real factor for most participants particularly those categorised below average and depended on others for guidance and support in analysing a literary text. For example, Melvin, who considered himself “slow in learning” said he needed more time and more scaffolding in studying literature. The only way he could attempt to understand the reading, or in his own words, “grasp the whole thing” was through group discussion with his friends. Even those who did not consider themselves slow learners needed more time to cope with the extensive reading in the literature courses. For this, Chan suggested that all reading texts and tasks be given at the beginning of the semester, to give more time for reading rather than a few weeks into the semester,
which was the common practice. Moreover, while there were ample opportunities to discuss the readings in class, there was very little writing practice.

The intensive nature of the teacher education programme had negative effects on the personal lives of some participants, which in turn affected their ability to perform in literature courses. Most CET participants were mature-age students with families. Weekdays were filled with classes and discussions, which often spilled over to the weekends leaving little time for families and personal activities. This increased the stress level of struggling learners like Sally. Living apart from her husband and four children who lived in another town for months put a strain on her family and personal relationships. In view of her continuously poor performance in literature despite the sacrifices made, she had become disillusioned and wondered if pursuing the teaching degree was “worth it”.

Coping strategies: Group discussion

All CET participants mentioned group discussion as their preferred strategy in learning literature, albeit for different reasons and purposes. Those who were more confident and able to work independently used the group discussion to check their analysis of a prescribed text after they had read the text a few times on their own. Peer discussions in small groups or whole class served to add to or to reinforce the ideas and hypotheses they had previously generated on their own.

On the other hand, those who depended on the support of others in the forms of directions from lecturers, and opinions of peers, expected that the group discussion would generate ideas and enable them to understand the literary text from the beginning. They said that they launched immediately into discussion without attempting to read and analyse the text on their own. For example, Melvin depended on group discussions to scaffold his learning:
The most important thing is the discussion. Because from the discussion we can share with others the opinions... we need our friend to discuss and the lecturer also helps... Discussion... really reinforce what the lecturer taught. (Melvin, FG2)

Imran, on the other hand, was not as dependent on discussions and input from others, but he found discussions most useful when dealing with difficult texts such as Shakespearean plays which used “old English”. He made use of the group discussion to help him look for ideas and interpretations that were congruent with his own. Otherwise, he preferred to study the text on his own and maintain his own ideas and interpretation, even if others, including the lecturer, disagreed with him.

For CET participants who were highly apprehensive about learning literature, group discussions that were free of assigned tasks, particularly at the initial stage helped them to establish a kind of confidence in analysing the literary text:

Sometimes if the poem relate to my personal experience then I can interpret it through what I have experienced in my life with that particular poem. If not, it’s very difficult. That’s why I prefer a group or group discussion but then, give us freedom to discuss it based on our first interpretation. Not based on the theory. (Patricia, FG2)

When asked to describe how they normally approached a literary text, most participants reported that they would begin by scanning the text for “the gist of the story” and reading through the text at least twice, as they had been taught in all the literature courses. At the same time, they would relate the story to their own experiences for a better understanding of the text. Very soon, they would move to right reading response in order to analyse the text critically in group discussions. They also made use of relevant supporting materials such as a movie version of the story, or other related works by the same author to support their reading.

When asked whether they had any difficulty following their university literature classes, all participants in the junior cohort reported that they did not have any problem with any of their literature classes. They said they were very happy with most of their
literature classes because of the variety of teaching strategies used, stimulating classroom learning activities, and ample opportunities for group discussions and group assessments.

Participants from the junior cohort were fascinated by new and interesting activities inside and outside of the classroom, such as the reader’s theatre, which allowed them to exercise their creativity in re-writing the script and play-acting the dramatic scenes. This way, they were able to appreciate the literary text in a more creative and meaningful manner and in a non-threatening and fun context. They also enjoyed the lecturer’s variety of teaching techniques such as creating suspense or using their personal anecdotes to stimulate classroom discussion. They said their lecturers were very approachable and established a good rapport with them both inside and outside of the classroom. Hence, it was common to have a lively open discussion on any given topic based on a literary text studied in the literature classroom, such as debates on a ‘controversial’ topic in which everyone participated freely.

Small group discussions were held at the end of every literature class, usually after a typical one-hour lecture. Participants looked forward to these discussions where they could work together to answer a list of study questions. Usually they would be given up to thirty minutes for small group discussions, after which they were required to present their work in an open, whole-class discussion, facilitated by the lecturer.

Despite having similar approaches and activities in their literature class, CET participants from the senior cohort had a difficult time following the lesson. Being a small minority in the class with the pre-service teachers, they struggled to participate in these activities because they could not overcome their apprehension of learning literature. Understandably, they did not have a sense of belonging in this class and so they found little benefit in discussions and group work. In fact, they were constantly fearful of being called out by the lecturers to share their ideas during whole class
discussions. As such, the learning environment became threatening for the senior cohort. From the focus group interview, it became apparent that the senior cohort participants had urgent psychological and emotional needs, which had not been addressed to date. They could use a remedial or complementary course to provide them the appropriate tools to manage their learning and practice self-efficacy.

Most coursework tasks were assessed in groups, and this should help those who were weak in written exams. While most participants appreciated group work assessments, there were reports of problems associated with group work, such as unequal contribution from the group members.

*Coping strategies: Reading journals*

Another coping strategy suggested was a reading journal associated with the reader response approach to a literary text. While most participants across cohorts practiced the personal response approach to literature, none of them kept a personal reading journal, unless it was part of an assigned and graded task. According to them, keeping a personal reading journal was “not a common habit”, “cumbersome” and “quite troublesome” due to “time constraint”. Nonetheless, they were aware of the importance of keeping a personal reading journal to monitor and “assess” their own development in learning literature.

Understandably, participants kept a reading journal only when it was required as part of an assessed coursework. The participants needed all the marks they could possibly get to help them pass the literature course:

...It could be cumbersome. But if it is one of the requirements of the course, I would have to keep a personal reading journal, albeit reluctantly, for the sake of gaining marks. (Jessy, FG2)
Consequently, many began to consider keeping a personal reading journal a superficial and meaningless activity:

> Sometimes we do it because other people force us to do it. When we write journal... sometimes we didn’t write it in honesty….Because of the marks. (Pamela, FG2)

As such, keeping a reading journal was not considered an effective strategy in learning literature. Alternatively, many were content to maintain their own practice of annotating the text as they read:

> ...It would be good if one has (a reading journal). But as for myself, when I read or study literature, I’ll automatically (be) jotting down any points or making and highlighting the points that trigger me of something. (Jariah, FG2)

Annotating the text read and answering the study questions given on it were strategies that they were taught to use in analysing a literary text. These were considered useful strategies which they readily practiced.

### 6.5 Perspectives on teaching literature

Given their in-service teacher status, the CET participants have accepted the fact that they are expected to teach English and literature in secondary schools, irrespective of their individual ability in literature. As such, they prioritised pedagogical content knowledge and expected to be explicitly taught specific methods of teaching literature for the prescribed literary texts in secondary school. Many of the participants expressed their preference to this teaching-to-the-school-curriculum approach, which was used at the teachers’ college. While they believed that they had learned a lot of content knowledge about literature in university literature courses, they felt that they lacked the pedagogical knowledge on how to teach literature.

The CET participants also called for “explicit” teaching techniques that were contextualised in the real secondary school classroom. They wanted more than the
simulated, “micro-teaching” type of theoretical discussions set in the university literature classroom on how to teach schoolchildren:

The way how the teachers teach the students in the class... we need more! more example. (Patricia, FG2)

The senior cohort participants believed that pedagogical skills were more valuable than literary criticism, which they perceived to be the focus of the university literature courses they had taken. For instance, in the semester of the study, they were required to take two literature courses containing some new literary theories which they believed were not applicable in schools. Based on their previous practicum experience, they believed they lacked effective techniques for teaching literature to secondary school students. It could be that because they were poor in the content knowledge of literature they were not able to teach it to their own students.

Conversely, many CET participants in the junior cohort believed that they were responsible for developing appropriate teaching skills based on the content knowledge they gained in university literature courses. For example, Sheila was able to recognise that university education expected them to be more independent and active learners by building on accumulated or given knowledge to create new knowledge:

The literature courses in university provided somewhat sufficient exposure, the rest is left for me to learn as I go along. I do not expect to be fed and provided with EVERYTHING [sic] I need to know about teaching literature in school over this three-year course…(Sheila, FG3)

Based on their recent practicum experience, most of the junior cohort participants believed that university literature courses had prepared them “more than enough” to teach literature to secondary school students. From their observation of the school literature curriculum and the common practice in the real classroom the participants concluded that the school literature component did not demand more of their knowledge and skills in teaching literature than they already had. According to Jonas, literature
component in secondary school was “nothing…just understand the figurative language”.

The CET participants were familiar with the current teaching approach in schools which was teaching-to-the-book and to-the-examination. They observed that the common practice in school was to teach literature by drilling the students on specific points or answers required in the exams. Thus, Jonas and Jackson were very confident that they were competent enough to teach the *LCE*, as well as literature as an elective examination subject in Form Six as Jonas explained:

> I am ready to do it. I have the books, and I have the knowledge. So why not… because it’s all about… at the end of the day, how the students perform in the exams… if I know the exam’s marking scheme, and how the paper look like, maybe I will say I can do it…” (Jonas, FG3)

However, Jackson added that they would need the assistance of their “more experienced colleagues” and access to appropriate teaching aids such as teaching modules prepared by the Ministry of Education. This optimistic view on teaching literature was clouded by their dependence on input from others, which made them vulnerable to risks such as un-cooperative colleagues and poor resources. The lecturers were concerned that many of the CET participants were reluctant to broaden their views on teaching and to develop new ways of teaching.

### 6.5.1 Practicum experience

The CET participants’ perspectives on teaching literature, particularly for the junior cohort, were mainly influenced by their recent practicum experience. They had just completed a nine-week teaching practicum in the previous semester at participating urban secondary schools. This was their first experience in secondary school teaching and in teaching literature. Their prior teaching experience was at a different level and in a different situation: most of the participants had been teaching in remote and rural primary school for a period ranging from 5 to 17 years.
However, during practicum, not all of the participants had a chance to teach literature due to factors such as time constraints, school examination and directives from their supervising teachers at the school. In reality, the nine-week practicum was reduced to about four weeks of actual teaching. As such, their perspectives on teaching literature were based on this brief practicum experience, resulting in a mixture of ideas and concepts, which at times appeared confusing and contradictory.

The participants reported that literature was not a priority subject in school and so those who had a chance to teach literature only managed to teach one or two literature lessons over the whole period of the practicum. Jackson and a few others did not have a chance to teach literature at all because they were asked to focus on finishing the English Language syllabus in order to prepare the students for their examination. Those who had the opportunity to teach literature had generally positive teaching experience. Factors that influenced their positive teaching experience were categorised into personal and contextual factors.

**Personal factors: willingness to apply new methods of teaching literature**

The few participants who had the opportunity to conduct literature classes during their practicum were eager to try some of the creative activities and new methods that they had learned in the programme with their students. Their students found these student-centred activities stimulating and enjoyable. For example, Greta experimented with classroom activities which stimulated her students’ interest and ability in literature:

> I involved them in a lot of activities... led them into imagination, and envision of conflicts in your family, how would you deal with problem? My students liked it so much, and they finished their work fast - very efficient and they (wanted) more discussions, group discussions. I got the feedback: “Teacher, what you’ve taught us is different from other teacher taught... just asked us to copy note and copy the synopsis.” So my students said they learned a lot from this kind of experience. (Greta, FG3)
The students’ positive reactions to new techniques in learning literature motivated Greta to teach students who had poor proficiency in English and who seemed disinterested in literature. Hence, the positive experience in Greta’s class benefitted both the students and the teacher.

On the other hand, some participants reported that they were reluctant to try new methods in their literature classes because they believed that the teaching practicum was too brief to change the way their students responded to literature. They also felt that their efforts might be futile against time constraints and the school norm of drilling and rote memorisation methods with which the students were familiar. They believed that keeping to the “common” methods of teaching would better prepare their students for the upcoming school examination, as Jonas explained:

I’m using what the (practising) teachers are doing because I just follow (the scheme of work). I didn’t even try my own method, what I’ve learned… I just follow what the teachers said… because I get marks… if I try to change anything, when someone come and observe me, surely I will die… Yes, that’s very hard to change. (Jonas, FG3)

Clearly, the high-stakes involved: the upcoming school examination and his own practicum evaluation affected Jonas’ judgement in that he was not willing to risk his own grades as well as his students’ English grades by using different methods of teaching the students. In this sense, he was clearly the product of the exam-oriented system whereby results were prioritised over meaningful learning experience.

**Contextual factor: conforming to the school norms**

Confronted with the realities of the secondary school, such as students with low proficiency in English and students who were disinterested in learning and literature, some participants were convinced that conforming to the existing teaching practices in schools was necessary and beneficial for both teachers and students. Jonas, who said that he loved literature and was aware that there was more to literature than mere comprehension, felt compelled to resort to routinised teaching, and to embrace
conservatism and conformity in an exam-oriented school system. He tried to justify his conformity to fit into the school system:

...teachers today, they teach the students using the reference books... the (teaching) module... so whatever the students answer must be (consistent) with the reference book. So the students will not give out their own idea... maybe when I become a teacher again, maybe that is one way to... do it. I say so because everybody will look at the results. They don’t care if children can interpret or love or appreciate the literature work – as long as they got (grade) ‘A’ or distinction 1 in their results. This is what everybody will see; the parents, the Ministries...So if I am the teacher, I got ten students get A so I’m a good teacher – although they don’t know how to interpret, appreciate, or love the literature work. (Jonas, FG3)

In their view, conforming to the norms was necessary to safe-guard their students in the context of the existing education system. Jonas believed that “real” way to study literature such as interacting with the text, appreciating the aesthetic values of the literary work studied, would not fit into the context of the performance-based Malaysian education system. In this sense, Jonas was actually expressing his dilemma between providing “real” literature education and achieving examination results expected by the stakeholders.

Similarly, although Jackson did not have the opportunity to teach literature during practicum, he reasoned that maintaining the “status quo” in keeping to the existing teaching and classroom practices was necessary to “protect” the students from having to adjust to different teaching style with every new teacher. Further, he argued that routinised teaching using rote memorisation techniques and worksheets were “most appropriate” to the students’ needs and abilities. New techniques in teaching literature such as dramatisation and role play were uncommon and unpractical:

Role play or reading theatre... is not common to the students... The previous teacher said it’s very risky for them to go for group discussion. Because they can’t control their disciplinary problem [sic]. They might not learn when they go for discussion... listen to me and… better you write down the notes which is going to come out in the exams. Read at home and answer the question. (Jackson, FG3)
Jackson was convinced that the experienced practicing teachers knew what was best for the kinds of students and constraints in the school. He was not willing to waste his time and efforts to do otherwise, and rationalised that the teacher-centred approach was still relevant because it would maintain order in the classroom and provide clear directions for student learning. Many other participants, like Jonas and Jackson believed that the demands of the exam-oriented curriculum as well as extra-curricular workload on the teacher would inevitably result in conformity. Thus, it was not an issue of their willingness to change to accommodate new ways of teaching literature, but their inability to change. In Jonas’ own words “we cannot change”, due to the existing constraints in schools.

Moreover, during practicum, the CET participants observed that many students and teachers in schools considered literature unimportant and superficial:

Some of the teacher that I encounter said, “you want to teach literature? How could they learn literature if their grammar is bad, their comprehension is bad?” So, literature is the third thing you will choose... First teach grammar, teach comprehension, then literature. (Jackson, FG3)

Participants like Jackson used the above situation in schools to vindicate their conforming to the existing norms and joining the community of practice in school. In their view, it would be easier to assimilate to the school norms than trying to change the system by introducing new methods of teaching literature.

The tendency to conform to the existing school norm was partly influenced by previous teaching experience, albeit in the primary school. Being essentially in-service teachers who knew the system and the profession well, the participants had realistic expectations of schools and students. Thus, they were not greatly surprised by the constraints they encountered at schools. In fact, their practicum experience confirmed their hypothesis that conservatism was a pragmatic response to the challenges of teaching literature in
English in the existing school system. Greta, the most experienced teacher in the group, explained why most of them would eventually embrace conformity:

I would like to change. But on another hand, I also realise that it is a huge job when we go back to school because we are not just there to teach one subject and you know, just few period. To be in-service teachers we have many other work loads. So to keep up with that…what we’re practicing during the teaching practice, I think it is quite impossible. (Greta, FG3)

All participants were convinced that the constraints in the workplace, such as limited time and resources, as well as poor attitudes of both the students and other teachers towards literature would demand conformity to the existing norms. Nonetheless, practicum was a valuable teaching experience because it allowed them to experiment using the new teaching methods they were taught in university literature courses with their own students.

While there were a few participants who realised the limitations of such conformity, they recognised that any change in school was only possible through collaborative effort and collegial support as Sheila explained:

...it would depend much on our colleagues… the most important… and then the head of panel, the school admin… It’s no point you are doing it on your own, and you want to do something big. But if with my own class, the class given to me, I believe that I would be able to do it (change) but if it involves more than that then the cooperation from others would be most important. (Sheila, FG3)

Sheila believed that the context and the community of practice would determine the change in literary literacy practices. However, unlike Jonas and Jackson, she was willing to try and make a change in her own literature classrooms. She described how she persevered in teaching literature using learner-centred activities that would appeal to her students’ interest. By showing her genuine interest in the subject as well as in her students, Sheila eventually witnessed a remarkable improvement in her students’ attitudes. By sharing her favourite stories and books with her students, Sheila was able to “convert” some of them from being “reluctant” readers to budding readers. She was
pleased that the students who were initially resistant to her and her teaching style continued to contact her via text messages, sometimes asking reading materials from her, even post practicum. By trying to understand her students’ needs and by constantly improving her teaching methods to meet these needs, Sheila not only achieved good class management but more importantly, she was able to change the attitude of her most difficult students. Sheila resisted conforming to the teacher-centred approach normally found in schools by constantly reflecting on how to improve her teaching to meet the students’ needs as well as potentials.

Given their teaching experience, albeit in the primary school, most participants were able adapt to the secondary school system and had no major problems managing their classes. However, young female participants initially expressed anxiety about dealing with difficult adolescent male students. They anticipated that they would try to draw on their previous experience as primary school teachers to deal with classroom management and general issues on teaching where necessary.

6.5.2 Perceived problems and possible solutions

During practicum, the CET participants identified some problems pertaining to the implementation of the Literature Component in English (LCE) programme. Most of the participants were not impressed by the way the LCE programme was being taught in schools. They observed that the LCE was conducted as mere reading comprehension lesson. Students did not read the prescribed literary texts and so the teachers often told them the story with notes and model answers to prepare for examinations. Based on their own experience learning university literature courses, the CET participants concluded that the LCE was “not real literature” study.

Apparently, practicing schoolteachers’ attitudes influence their students’ attitudes and so there is an urgent need to convince the schoolteachers that they can be effective agents of change. The participants suggested that these schoolteachers be trained
alternative methods to teach literature and be given continuous support to implement these new methods in their classrooms. Further, for literature to be taken seriously by both schoolteachers and schoolchildren, Jonas suggested that it should be a “stand alone” and tested subject. For this, schoolchildren should be exposed to literature reading from the primary school level, so that they would be prepared for literature in secondary school. The perceived problems and their possible solutions are summarised in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3
Perceived problems in teaching literature in school and possible solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems/concerns</th>
<th>Possible solutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor attitude towards literature because literature lessons were boring; literature was not beneficial for their future</td>
<td>• Try new techniques in teaching literature such as dramatisation and role play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students had difficulty in learning literature because of poor language proficiency and lack of reading</td>
<td>• Encourage extensive reading by introducing relevant reading materials outside the classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Practicing teachers had poor attitude towards literature: they were either indifferent or ambivalent about literature</td>
<td>• Provide more training in literature teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of well-trained literature teacher</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor support from school administration, other teachers</td>
<td>• Provide more resources such as local literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of resources and reading materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The LCE programme was superficial</td>
<td>• More time allocated for teaching literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Literature was taught as mere reading comprehension</td>
<td>• Literature as a “stand alone” subject rather than a small component of the English Language subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Literature as tested component at primary school level</td>
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</table>

6.6 Perceived levels of literary literacy

Participants from the junior cohort rated themselves “average” in literature because they were able to “follow” the university literature classes and “maintain” an average grade in most of their literature courses. They were content to be able to just pass every literature course because they realised that it was difficult to score above average grade of B+ and above in literature. The practicum experience assured them that their current
level of knowledge and ability in literature was adequate for teaching the LCE. They believed that the ability to apply the necessary content knowledge of literature in their future secondary school literature classrooms was more important than their literature grades in the teacher education programme.

On the contrary, the lecturers who taught the participants from both cohorts were concerned about the apparent lack of fundamental knowledge and skills in literature among many of them. Eva observed that most of the junior cohort participants were fluent in speaking but poor in writing. This poor writing ability was attributed to poor language proficiency and lack of appropriate writing skills, particularly in academic writing. Many participants were not able to show sufficient understanding of content knowledge in writing. From their poor performance in the recent mid-semester exam, Eva concluded that many of the participants were at elementary level in literary studies for the following reasons:

half of them did not have the basic knowledge of literature...You can see in the exam questions… They’re only up to the analysis knowledge! When it comes to evaluating, synthesizing, application... they failed there. (Eva, LI1)

According to the lecturers, most of the participants’ knowledge in literature was limited to passive knowledge, comprising received information from others such as their lecturers and peers. They were not able to process and transform the transmitted knowledge at a higher level and into pedagogical content knowledge of literature. Eva remarked that most participants were highly dependent on their lecturers’ input because they expected to “learn so much in a short time” and they wanted to “learn about how to teach literature only”.

It was more complicated for the senior cohort participants. Despite having studied more than ten literature courses in the four-year programme, they remained very poor in literature. According to their lecturer Syamri, the participants could only manage
“surface-level” understanding of literature as “they were not critical, nor creative enough to synthesise what they received in class” and to construct a deeper understanding of literature. This limited knowledge in literature contributed to their lack of confidence and low self-esteem. Their apprehension about learning literature translated as passivity in literature class, which Syamri observed as being “laid-back” and “just take things as how it is”. To prove how poor they were in literature, Syamri said that a few literary texts had been “recycled” across a few literature courses yet the senior cohort participants still could not understand these texts. Further, the participants were not able to work independently but relied on his instructions: “... they don’t really question. They just accept ok, ok, this is what they have to do”. It could be this lack of knowledge and skills that underpins the attitudes and practices in dealing with studying literature.

6.6.1 Experience vs. knowledge

All participants across cohorts were more concerned about their ability to teach literature in the near future. Indeed, they valorised pedagogical knowledge over content knowledge of literature. Despite their limited content knowledge of literature, they believed that their general teaching experience, albeit in the primary school, would enable them to adapt quickly to the school context and to teach literature.

The junior cohort participants also believed that their teaching experience, coupled with their general knowledge of the world would give them the advantage over the pre-service teachers in that they were able to talk about a variety of topics and issues in their literature classes. While they acknowledged that several pre-service teachers were more competent in literature, they were not intimidated by them as the senior cohort CET participants did.
6.7 Literary literacy practices for professional preparation

In this study, teaching and learning activities in the university literature classroom were conceptualised as literary literacy events, whereas the ways of dealing with them are conceptualised as literary literacy practices. Drawing on the CET participants’ reports and from the classroom observations of their respective literature classes throughout the period of the study, the common activities comprised whole class discussions, small group discussions, presentations, debates and readers’ theatre. These activities provided opportunities for participants to develop their literary literacy practices such as reading extensively and conducting library search, improving their communication and presentation skills, and writing critiques on the literary works studied.

While these activities were challenging for many participants, especially the senior cohort, they were generally accepted as interesting and suitable for their professional preparation as literature teachers. These practices involved collaborative learning, which the participants preferred. They found these activities stimulating and engaging, and therefore generally manageable. In fact, many participants in the junior cohort said that their experience learning literature at the university had been fun and memorable with these activities.

The learner-centred approach provided opportunities for participants to explore and share ideas in a non-threatening context. It enabled participants to develop their creative and critical thinking skills. All participants believed that these practices were essential for the “real” literature learning. Some participants who had the chance to teach literature during practicum attempted to replicate some of the activities in their literature classroom and received positive feedback from their students. They noticed that these kinds of activities helped to develop their students’ interest in literature. However, they also noted that some students were not able to appreciate some of these activities with which they were unfamiliar:
I try to use readers’ theatre...but then they memorised. At last it becomes just a role play. They try to do but the students were shy when they go in front... they never do this kind of activity. (Jonas, FG3)

It could be that the way the readers’ theatre activity was conducted was not suited to the students’ level, and that they needed more scaffolding. Due to time and other constraints of the short practicum, Jonas resorted to the teacher-centred approach and used the drilling and rote-learning techniques in teaching his students without disrupting their usual practices.

Participants who had positive experience applying new teaching techniques in their literature classroom during practicum realised that it was difficult to sustain these techniques within the real school context. In their views, it would take extraordinary time and effort to conduct a “real literature” class with secondary school students within the existing school norms. Therefore, it was concluded that some of the literary literacy practices that worked for them at university were not necessarily practical and applicable to the secondary school classroom.

Further, while the participants recognised that these practices prepared them with the necessary content knowledge of literature, they were not able to link this knowledge with pedagogical knowledge for the secondary school literature classroom. Hence, many participants, especially those who lacked the confidence and ability in learning literature, continued to call for “more, and more explicit” training in literature teaching methods:

… teach us how to use methods… how to teach children - the students later on. Because we are going to go out to the school right? So we need methods, we need techniques. Yes, techniques. How to teach… how to teach literature in a very effective way. Because most of the students they don’t like literature in schools. (Sally, FG2)

Like Sally, many participants wanted quick solutions to the perceived problems in school in the form of ready-made teaching techniques for every situation. Jonas and
Jackson said that they would consult senior schoolteachers and rely on teaching modules and resources prepared by the Ministry of Education. Perhaps this is what the lecturers called the “teacher mentality” which they believed was developed at the teachers’ college. Syamri commented that many conversion teachers would not attempt to “think-out-of-the-box”.

The participants’ pre-occupation with pedagogical skills suggests that they distinguished between content knowledge of literature and pedagogical skills of literature. They failed to see how these two types of knowledge are inter-related; that sound content knowledge would actually contribute to a construction of effective ways to teach.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has delineated the key findings of the sub-case study of the conversion English teachers. The findings were deduced from an interpretivist approach to qualitative data analysis of focus group interviews with the participants, individual interviews with their lecturers and observations of their respective literature classes. The emerging themes can be concluded in three categories: commitment to learn and teach literature, adequacy to deal with studying literature, and adequacy to teach literature.

Owing to their in-service teacher status, the participants seemed generally committed to learning literature to prepare them to teach literature in secondary school. The junior cohort participants were generally optimistic about dealing with literary studies at tertiary level by drawing from relevant previous experience. Participants who had read literature in the Malay Language or Chinese Language were able to transfer literary reading skills to deal with studying literature in English in this programme. On the other hand, the senior cohort participants’ commitment to learning literature was adversely
affected by their unsuccessful experience dealing with studying literature courses in the programme.

Participants who were not previously trained in English and who had taught other subjects in primary school had to deal with not only studying a new content knowledge in literature but also a new medium of instruction in English Language. Indeed, many participants still lacked literary as well as linguistic competence to deal with extensive reading and interpreting of literary texts. Nonetheless, all junior cohort participants believed that the teacher education programme had adequately prepared them to teach literature in secondary school because they considered the LCE “basic” level literature reading.

Being in-service teachers, they viewed practicum as a platform to introduce them to the LCE programme and to secondary school students. Their successful practicum experience confirmed their hypothesis that the best way to deal with the many constraints of teaching literature in schools such as students’ poor attitude and teachers’ heavy workload would be to conform to the existing norms. This implied a deficiency in their literature teacher education experience in that they were ready to perpetuate the existing practices in schools rather than becoming agents of change. While they were able to criticise many aspects of the LCE programme in school, they were not willing to improve the situation. Perhaps they had not acquired sufficient and appropriate literary literacy to do so after all.

Triangulation of the participant interview data with other data from multiples sources: classroom observations, lecturer interviews, and the participants’ written works and results provided contradicting insights on the participants’ perspectives. Firstly, their optimism about learning and teaching literature was not reflected in their literary literacy practices. Many of them displayed a level of literary literacy below the requirements of a literature teacher. They lacked basic knowledge of literary terms and
conventions, and critical ability to interpret a literary text. Underlying these limitations was their lack of competence and proficiency in the English language. For many participants, their ability to read critically and think creatively was only to the extent of building on information and ideas generated by their lecturers and more competent peers, particularly in the pre-service group. Some demonstrated a dependency on received knowledge and were not able to construct new knowledge.

Secondly, according to the lecturers, most participants displayed a generally ‘laid-back’ attitude toward teaching and learning literature because they believed that the content knowledge that they gained from university literature courses was “more than enough” for them to teach literature component in English at secondary schools. This complacency may limit their development of literary literacy for professional preparation.

The findings of this sub-case study have provided insights on the participants’ specific needs that would inform their re-training and instructional literary literacy for professional preparation as secondary school English and literature teachers. The next chapter will present a cross-case analysis of the perspectives of both sub-groups of conversion teachers and pre-service teachers to discuss appropriate and adequate literary literacy instruction for their professional preparation.
Chapter 7  Cross-case Analysis and Discussion

7.1 Introduction
This chapter presents a cross-case analysis of the findings from the two sub-cases and discusses the propositions derived from the emerging themes and key categories. The cross-case analysis produced convergent and divergent perspectives on the following emerging themes:

1. Appropriateness of preparation to study literature
2. Adequacy to study literature
3. Adequacy of preparation to teach literature
4. Dissonance between the ideational and operational literature curriculum
5. Commitment to teaching as a career

7.2 Convergent perspectives
Despite remarkable differences in their demographics and backgrounds, the pre-service and conversion participants had all been educated in Malaysian schools and were familiar with the exam-driven, teacher-centred approach in the classroom. They also had parity as university students enrolled in the teacher education programme. They expressed many similar views within the emerging themes of this study.
7.2.1 Appropriateness of preparation to study literature

Participants from both groups believed they had been inadequately prepared to study literature in English at tertiary level. Their previous experiences in literature were deemed completely different from the literary studies in the teacher education programme. In their view, university literature courses, which focused on literary criticism and literary theories represented “pure” literary studies, the big “L”. Their previous exposure to literature had been limited to leisure reading, with a small “r”, whereas literary studies require extensive and critical reading, with a big “R”.

While the pre-service teachers had been introduced to various literary genres in the Literature Component in English (LCE) programme in secondary school they felt that the experience had been “very different” and “too basic” to prepare them for literary studies at advanced level. They felt they lacked the necessary attributes to begin literary studies, such as a basic knowledge of literature and a deep interest in reading literary materials. The conversion teachers who came from non-English major backgrounds, had even less exposure to not only literature, but academic English. After many years of teaching subjects other than English in remote and rural schools, it was difficult for them to adjust to their new role as university students. The English teacher education programme not only required them to study literature, but also to study English for the first time.

Many pre-service participants reported that they did not apply for teaching degrees, but accepted the offer as their ticket to tertiary education and a job prospect in the future. Similarly, conversion teachers enrolled in this degree programme to achieve promotion in their careers. These purely pragmatic motivations were not compensated for by adequate personal preparation to study literature. Many participants across groups reported that they had read hardly any literary texts in English prior to this programme and were either completely ignorant or from the very beginning had negative pre-
conceived notions about literary studies. According to their lecturers, some of them were cognitively and physically unprepared for tertiary education, much less for literary studies at tertiary level. As such, the initial stage of their literary studies in the teacher education programme was spent on dealing with their prejudices against literature. They first regarded literature as boring, difficult or irrelevant to their future careers.

7.2.2 Adequacy to study literature

At the time of their interviews, many participants from both groups felt incapable of studying literature in English. As most of their literature courses involved literary criticism and literary theories per se, the participants formed the opinion that studying literature revolved around making the “right” interpretation, which was highly challenging. These challenges can be analysed according to the socio-cultural, linguistic, and cognitive dimensions.

Socio-cultural dimension

The socio-cultural dimension refers to the participants’ reading and learning culture, as well as the cultural contexts of the required literary texts in the teacher education programme. National surveys on the reading habits of Malaysians have shown that Malaysians, including English teachers still do not read enough as they mostly read light materials such as magazines (Tharumaraj & Noordin, 2011). In this study, most pre-service participants said that they did not read the prescribed literary texts in their secondary school LCE classes. Consequently, they experienced a kind of “culture shock” when they were expected to read extensively and critically for literary studies in the teacher education programme. To date, many participants from both groups found it highly challenging to read literary texts that were lengthy, containing complex themes and issues, difficult language, and from foreign cultural settings.
Emergent patterns in their literary literacy practices indicated they were also under-prepared culturally to engage critically with literary texts. Coming from a teacher-centred and exam-oriented school system, they were not used to the freedom of interpretation promoted in the university literature classroom. Particularly at the initial stage of their studies, they were unwilling to engage in active learning. Instead, they relied on explicit guidance and directions from their lecturers; waited for the contribution of ideas from regularly outspoken students during classroom discussions; or copied notes and supplementary materials to be memorised for exams.

Participants across groups were reluctant to make “guesses” at the meaning and message of literary texts because they were pre-occupied with looking for the “correct” interpretations. They were unwilling to assert their opinions and pursue their ideas through further research because they assumed that others who were more knowledgeable were always right. Practices described above suggest that participants drew from their previous learning culture, in secondary school or at the teachers’ college, where the teacher was regarded as the “transmitter” of knowledge and students as mere “receivers” of that knowledge. Many were unwilling to make extra effort to process the received knowledge to construct meaningful new knowledge.

Based on the classroom observations of the various university literature courses, it appeared that the lecturers worked hard at changing this culture or “mentality”, by using learner-centred approaches, which required active learning in all classroom activities. They introduced a variety of learning activities such as open discussions, debates, forums, presentations and role-plays. Many participants began to enjoy and appreciate these activities as they developed interest and confidence. Others, however, remained “passive” in literature classes because of their inability to communicate effectively. The senior cohort of conversion teachers remained highly apprehensive about learning literature due to their unsuccessful experience to date.
Linguistic dimension

A high level of English Language proficiency is crucial for literary studies at tertiary level. Literary criticism requires good command of the language, meaning an extensive vocabulary and effective communication skills. Yet, many participants across both groups had low proficiency in English. They were unable to manage extensive reading because of their limited vocabulary and knowledge of literary terms. Similarly, their attempts to express their ideas and responses to the literary texts were hampered by the lack of “suitable words” and effective “ways with words” to express themselves. They did not have adequate command of academic language and appropriate registers to communicate their ideas and interpretations.

While the pre-service participants’ proficiency in English was measured by the MUET scores, there was no specific English proficiency indicator for the conversion teachers who had entered the programme through a channel which required different criteria including extra-curricular points. Many conversion teachers had no previous training in the English Language as they were trained to teach other languages and other subjects. Some pre-service participants had Band 3 in MUET, categorised as “Modest User”. The verbatim transcripts of the participants’ interviews and their written work had gross grammatical errors.

The lecturers who taught the literature courses said that there was not much they could do in the literature classroom to help participants improve their language proficiency because, the focus was on teaching literature, and not language. Nonetheless, many participants had expected the programme to improve their language proficiency.

Cognitive dimension

One of the lecturers categorised a third of the pre-service and conversion teachers in the programme as “not fit” for tertiary education because they lacked the cognitive ability
or “aptitude”. He made that judgement based on his experience teaching them a few literature courses throughout the duration of the programme. In this case, “aptitude” was understood to encompass the general ability to process learning at a higher level. The generally mediocre performance in literature of the majority of the participants suggested that they were not able to go beyond the “analysis” level of the cognitive domain of Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of learning objectives. In fact, some participants, such as the senior cohort of conversion teachers, did not know the basic literary terms and conventions after undertaking more than ten literature courses in their four year programme. They were not able to comprehend fully the new knowledge such as literary theories to analyse, much less to evaluate their readings. Their writing was poor because they lacked creativity, language competence and more importantly, higher order thinking skills.

7.2.3 Adequacy of preparation to teach literature

While the participants’ perspectives on the adequacy of their professional preparation to teach literature were largely divergent, both groups acknowledged the role of practicum in shaping their attitudes toward teaching literature. As pre-service teachers had no previous experience in teaching and conversion teachers had taught only in remote and rural primary schools, practicum was their first encounter with teaching in secondary school literature classroom. They had diverse practicum experiences, but both groups shared common concerns regarding the situation in schools, namely, the schoolchildren’s poor attitudes towards learning and literature; the practicing schoolteachers’ indifferent attitudes toward teaching literature; and the lack of collegial support for effective literature education in schools.

Both groups shared a belief that the content knowledge of literature provided by the university literature courses was adequate for teaching literature at secondary school level. This also means that the content knowledge base in their professional preparation
to teach literature was deemed appropriate. However, post-practicum, participants from both groups were concerned that they had not received adequate and explicit pedagogical knowledge for teaching literature in the university literature courses. To compound their problems, participants who encountered unruly and resistant students realised that they did not have adequate preparation in dealing with classroom management so that they could begin teaching the subject matter.

7.2.4 Dissonance between the ideational and operational literature curriculum

While the study of literature within the teacher education programme was intended to prepare the participants to teach literature in secondary schools, the university literature curriculum was traditionally inclined. Emphasis was on knowledge about literature through the study of canonical texts, literary figures and literary periods. Although contemporary works and local writers were included, mostly in the *Malaysian Literature in English (MLE)* course, the thrust was still on literary criticism and literary theories. There was little overt attention to pedagogy and practice to link knowledge about literature with pedagogical knowledge. Only one out of the ten (for conversion teachers) and fourteen (for pre-service teachers) literature courses was specifically on methods to teach literature.

The practicum experience exposed dissonance between the ideational and the operational curriculum in schools. Participants observed that although the objectives of the *LCE* included values such as the enhancement of literary appreciation and the promotion of personal growth, these were not reflected in actual classroom practices. Instead, they noted that schoolchildren were not reading the prescribed literary texts because teachers were teaching-to-the-exam in order to complete the syllabus on time. Neither were affective values of that literature a priority. Reading literary texts was treated in classrooms as an extended reading comprehension exercise.
Participants discovered that the LCE in secondary school was not implemented as intended in the curriculum. While it may have been a disappointing revelation that schoolchildren were not experiencing a quality literature education that the curriculum envisaged, it lifted the pressure off pre-service and conversion teachers to teach the “real” literature in the “proper” way as they had experienced it in the university literature classroom.

7.3 Divergent perspectives

While they shared many similarities in their new roles as literature learners in the programme, the two groups of participants differed markedly in their perspectives on teaching literature and on teaching as a profession.

7.3.1 Appropriateness of preparation to study literature

Of all the participants from both groups, only two pre-service participants, Tony and Estella, seemed predisposed and appropriately prepared for literary studies at tertiary level. Both participants were passionate about literature and were attracted to enrol in the secondary school English teacher education programme by the literary studies strand. Tony had studied literature in English as an examination subject in Form Six for two years whereby as a private candidate his literary studies experience was self-directed. Estella’s extensive reading and high level of language competence – she was the only member of the pre-service cohort who had achieved MUET Band 6 (“Highly Proficient User”) – contributed to her successful experience in literary studies at tertiary level. Tony and Estella demonstrated that good reading habits and skills, sufficient language competence, and intrinsic motivation constitute appropriate preparation for literary studies at the tertiary level.
Some of the conversion teachers in the junior cohort were able to transfer their knowledge and skills in literary study in the Malay or Chinese Language to deal with difficulties in studying literature in English.

### 7.3.2 Adequacy to study literature

Most participants from both groups felt that they were inadequately prepared for advanced level literary studies, and only about 10% of each group considered “good” in literature by their peers and lecturers. They included Tony and Estella who had been appropriately prepared from the beginning of the programme, and a few others who quickly developed interest in literature and performed well in their literary studies. Evidence of improvement include participants becoming intrinsically motivated and more engaged in classroom activities, completing assigned readings and conducting extended research assigned tasks. Positive influence of motivated peers also helped in developing participants’ literary competence such as Cyndi who became more passionate about literature after working closely with Estella and Tony.

The way participants dealt with literature examination also reflected their level of adequacy in literary studies. Classroom practices promoted learner-centred, collaborative learning and oral production, whereas literature examination demanded individual written production. This mismatch between classroom practices and examinations posed real problems for many participants, especially among the senior cohort of conversion teachers who failed several literature courses due to their inability to perform in written examinations. Participants also observed a mismatch between the rhetoric of “personal response” in the classroom, and literature examination, which appeared to reward “right responses”.

Most participants in both groups said they did not know how to prepare for literature examination. Many pre-service teachers were observed to resort to rote learning and
memorising, techniques drawn from their strategies in dealing with examinations during secondary schools. They took elaborate notes, memorised supplementary notes and commentaries, and even “spotted” possible questions. Their lecturers disapproved of these exam-oriented practices and tried to encourage them to be more critical and creative in their responses. Nonetheless, pre-service teachers generally performed better than conversion teachers in literature examinations. The lecturers acknowledged that conversion teachers were orally fluent in sharing their ideas but were unable to transpose these ideas and interpretation in academic writing. The fact that they often misunderstood some examination questions suggests a serious cognitive or linguistic deficiency. Apparently many did not prepare well for literature examination and yet they commented that they were not impressed with pre-service teachers who “memorised” notes for exams. In this case, having a “not-so-good-strategy” is better than no strategy at all.

The lecturers also commented that the conversion teachers displayed a “laid back” approach to learning whereas the pre-service teachers were “more enthusiastic to learn new things”. There was a sense of competitiveness among the pre-service teachers, compared with the conversion teachers who were content just to pass the course.

7.3.3 Adequacy of preparation to teach literature
Pre-service and conversion teachers differed considerably in their perspectives on their professional preparation to teach literature. Pre-service teachers without teaching experience needed to learn not only about teaching English Language and literature but more importantly, about teaching as a profession.

Teaching practicum provided an opportunity for connecting theory and practice, which is crucial for pre-service teachers’ development of their conception and beliefs about teaching (Nettle, 1998). Post-practicum, the pre-service participants realised that they
were not adequately prepared for the challenges of teaching in schools where they encountered uninterested students, indifferent schoolteachers and unsympathetic administration. Struggling to deal with student behaviour and classroom management, which occupied most of their time and effort, pre-service teachers became more concerned about their lack of pedagogical knowledge than their content knowledge of literature.

While practicum provided the pre-service participants with the necessary socialisation to the school and to the teaching profession, it seemed to produce more questions and uncertainties about their ability to teach students in the real classroom. Apparently, with limited teaching practice, they continued to have idealistic views about teaching, the classroom and their pupils (Skhedi & Laron 2004). Consequently, they often drew on memories of their prior experiences as learners, both at school and at university, in creating their imagined roles as teachers (Agee, 2006). Practicum was an initiation into the work field, as they struggled to match their idealistic personal and professional ideologies with the reality and pressure of the classroom (Agee, 2004).

Contrastively, conversion English teachers believed they had adequate teaching experience and only needed to know more techniques to teach literature. Practicum experience confirmed their expectation that teaching literature would not differ greatly from teaching any other subject. While they were curious about the secondary school classroom pre-practicum, their post-practicum experience assured them that the only difference was the students’ age and “psychology”. They planned to apply the same pedagogical practices that worked for them in their previous primary schools, or to conform to the norms of the practicing teachers in the secondary school when necessary. They believed that their existing experience in teaching was adequate preparation to teach literature. However, it became apparent that for some conversion teachers, their poor English or reluctance to apply relevant knowledge gained in the programme in the
real classroom suggested that they would contribute little to improving the teaching of literature in schools.

Indeed, post-practicum perspectives on teaching showed a wide gap between the two groups, particularly on the adequacy of professional preparation. Pre-service participants perceived their professional preparation inadequate because they had little explicit instruction in teaching methods. They were not able to apply new approaches to teaching literature in their real classroom because of their limited practical and pedagogical experience. They believed they had adequate content knowledge of literature, but lacked opportunities and skills to translate their knowledge into teaching practice. Nonetheless, the pre-service participants’ reflections on their intense practicum experience, including uncertainties and dissonance indicate that their professional identity was in progress. Uncertainty is evidence of professional image and role under construction (Helsing, 2007) for which practicum has become the catalyst (Galman, 2009).

Most pre-service participants felt that, as final year students, they had insufficient time and opportunity to transform their content knowledge of literature into pedagogical content knowledge for the real classroom. This is partly due to the imbalance in the literature courses offered in which only one course focused on methods of teaching literature. The rest of the university literature courses focused on literary criticism and theory. To deal with this lack of pedagogical knowledge in literature, the conversion teachers adopted a more realistic attitude and a pragmatic approach to teaching literature. They were ready to conform to the existing norms in school such as teaching-to-the-exam and teacher-centred approach. The dissonance between the ideational curriculum and the operational curriculum encouraged that pragmatism.

The participants’ practicum experiences can be arranged along a continuum from highly negative to highly positive. Pre-service teachers’ experiences were spread along the
continuum, but conversion teachers’ experiences clustered in the middle. These experiences are not fixed or exclusive categories but move along a continuum according to their respective situations, summarised in Figure 7.1.

![Figure 7.1: Practicum experiences and their contributing factors](image)

The participants’ practicum experiences were determined by their personal as well as contextual factors. Successful or positive practicum experience depended on the participant’s ability to connect the personal and the contextual factors. For example, while Tony was disappointed by his supervising teachers’ indifference about teaching literature, he was generally satisfied with his practicum experience because he believed he managed to encourage his students to be more engaged in learning literature. In contrast, Leann needed time to recover from her shock in dealing with classroom management to regain her confidence in teaching literature. Being in-service teachers, the conversion teachers did not have to deal with as many challenges, particularly...
concerning classroom management and were confident that they were adequately prepared to teach English and literature in secondary school.

Given that teaching practicum had a significant impact, particularly on the pre-service participants’ perspectives on teaching and professional identity, it is imperative to improve its implementation and evaluation paradigm. According to Ferreira (2009), the existing models for teacher training, which focus on the practical, academic, technical approach to teaching are seen to be inadequate in developing democratic, responsible, peaceful, critical, and respectful teachers to meet the current needs. Therefore, alternative models of teacher formation are advocated, which would include characteristics such as taking account of people’s emotional spheres, recognizing the complex and unpredictable life of the school, integrating and producing knowledge, and developing critical thinking (Ferreira, 2009, p. 83).

Practicum, as a formal formative assessment, is beneficial to pre-service teachers as it is not only evidence of their progress and achievement in pedagogical skills, but also assists such progress through collaborative effort of parties involved (Yorke, 2003). During practicum, the pre-service teacher, as the apprentice, is guided by the expert: school or university supervisor, by means of feedback and comments for improvement. Thus, it is essential to provide adequate and quality feedback, or supportive criticism, in order to assist the student teacher in understanding their situations and negotiate ways to achieve their potentials as effective teachers.

### 7.3.4 Commitment to teaching as a career

The participants’ commitment to teaching as a career was influenced by their experience within the school and the perceived appropriateness of their preparation for teaching. As in-service teachers bonded to the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the conversion participants must continue their service as teachers, albeit in a different context of the secondary school and teaching the specific subject for which they had been re-trained.
This teaching degree would qualify them for career advancement opportunities and salary increments. They could also expect to be posted to urban secondary schools as they had completed the required service in remote and rural primary schools. In short, the conversion teachers were ensured a brighter career future, a very good reason to remain in the profession. This could be one of the reasons why they maintain a more optimistic and pragmatic attitude throughout the programme.

On the other hand, the pre-service teachers were selected into the programme by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia to meet the demand for more trained secondary school English and literature teachers. However, as most pre-service teachers were not bonded to the Ministry of Education they could choose whether to become teachers or to seek alternative careers after graduation. Further, as mentioned previously, the dissonance between their professional preparation in the teacher education programme and their practicum experiences shook the resolve of many.

Pre-service teachers who were passionate about literature and enthusiastic about “transforming” the existing norms of teacher-centred, exam-driven teaching in the literature classroom were in a dilemma between teaching “real” literature in the “proper way” and teaching “basic” literature according to conservative norms. Attempts at transforming the norms comprising pupils’ attitude, teacher norms, and school norms suggest that the teacher education programme has positively influenced the pre-service teachers’ conceptions and beliefs about teaching and learning (Nettle, 1998). They were drawing on their university literature experience: their knowledge of the subject and knowledge of themselves as literature learners, to improve the implementation of the literature curriculum in school. Their emerging professional image is highly personalised, as they draw from aspects of self and the subject (O’Sullivan, 2008). Acknowledging the need to change the norms is a sign of progression (Shkedi & Laron, 2004) and this should be supported, post practicum.
Nonetheless, the pre-service participants realised that transforming the norms in teaching and learning literature was highly challenging within the constraints of the existing school system. The foreseen difficulty in balancing quality literature education with surviving the current school system caused some pre-service participants to reconsider their future profession as teachers. Pre-service teachers who had sufficiently high level of English proficiency, a passion for literature, and who were capable of teaching literature seemed reluctant to commit to the non-conducive environment of the current school system.

Those who remained committed to teaching as a career included conversion English teachers who were generally less proficient in English, not as passionate about literature, and who barely managed literary studies in the teacher education programme. In particular, the senior cohort of conversion teachers who repeatedly failed literature examinations and who were highly apprehensive about learning literature remained uncertain about their ability to teach literature in secondary school. In addition, pre-service teachers who rated themselves “poor” to “average” in literature because they lacked proficiency in English and literary competence confirmed their intention to become English and literature teachers.

It appeared that the conversion and pre-service teachers committed to the teaching profession might teach English and literature according to their minimal level of competence and by conforming to the norms. Conforming to the norms suggest a lack of change in the participants’ conceptions and beliefs about teaching. The participants’ unwillingness to consider change despite going through years of university teacher education is alarming. Conforming is a sign of regression (Shkedi & Laron, 2004) and will have adverse effect on the pupils’ interest and ability in learning literature.

Further, some pre-service teachers expressed their intention to avoid or delay becoming teachers in secondary school. This will result in a loss of valuable human resource in the
field. Potentially good teachers, who are competent, reflective, and charismatic (Moore, 2004) will not go into schools where they are most needed to motivate and inspire schoolchildren to read literature. Thus, there is an urgent need to address this problem, particularly immediately after practicum so that these teachers will be persuaded to try teaching in schools. This way, they will reflect on their ideas about teaching and their identity as teachers in order to make a more informed decision about their commitment to the profession.

The findings of this study suggest that teacher educators need to recognise the potency of practicum to shape and determine professional development and identity of prospective teachers. It is important to optimise practicum experience by improving the design and implementation of practicum as a formative assessment which would support not only pedagogical but psychological development of prospective teachers by doing the following:

- Reviewing the practicum in terms of frequency to include smaller, formal or informal visits to schools at least once in the first or second year to introduce the prospective teachers to the reality of the schools and pupils, and to initiate school socialisation;
- Giving participants more opportunities to teach and to reflect on their teaching;
- Involving participants in the evaluation of the practicum, to emphasise the reflective aspect – for higher psychological growth and maturity (Ferreira, 2009)

In addition, the teacher education curriculum needs to be reviewed to take into consideration the participants’ real needs, including affective and psychological dimensions of the teacher, which will promote critical and independent thinking (Ferreira, 2009).
7.4 Key categories and propositions

The findings of the cross-case analysis have identified three key categories, namely, the complexities of literary studies for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) learners, the pedagogical challenges of literature education for teachers, and the definition of literary literacy in the Malaysian context. These categories led to propositions, which have implications for curriculum, practice and policy for literature education in the ESL context of Malaysia.

7.4.1 Complexities of literary studies for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) learners

Proposition: To improve the efficacy of teacher education programme in English literature it is necessary to bridge the gap between previous educational experiences and tertiary literature studies.

Discussion:

Cultural diversity can be viewed from two aspects: the multicultural demographics and backgrounds of the participants and the learning cultures from which they came. The demographics showed the participants represented many ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese and various indigenous tribes, including Bidayuh, Iban, Melanau and Kelabit. Although the study did not focus on ethnicity, the multicultural backgrounds of the participants explain their multilingual practices. Their depiction of their home literacy practices indicated that English was not commonly used; they rarely read, and they had little or no experience reading literary materials in English. Those who read usually choose literary works in their mother tongue or a language commonly used in their schools and communities, such as the national language, Malay.

The participants had varied educational backgrounds, few of which transferred easily to the university context. Most disadvantaged were the senior conversion teachers who had no previous experience of literary studies, who were not trained in the English
Language in their previous primary school teacher education, and whose teaching experience in remote and rural schools had offered no opportunity for improving their English language competence. English is not commonly used in these schools because the lingua franca is Malay. Even the few who had taught English as a subject reported that they often delivered lessons in translation to either Malay or their mother tongue. This practice is supported by the *Pupil’s Own Language (POL)* policy, which allows the use of the pupil’s mother tongue in the classroom to gradually introduce the students to the formal medium of instruction. Paradoxically, this practice contributes to the limited exposure to the target language and continuous reliance on the translation method into their mother tongue to study English. Further, resources and reading materials in English were scarce, and reading in English was rarely practised.

The wide gap between the literature component in school and literary studies at tertiary level needs to be bridged firstly, by creating a non-threatening learning environment, and secondly, by providing adequate support to develop English language and literary competence. Subramaniam (2003a) advocates linguistic pathways to the study of literature by using language based approaches and stylistic analysis to begin studying literary texts. Within the stylistics approach, the study of linguistic and pragmatic elements in the literary texts, such as transitivity, modality and lexical selection may facilitate learners’ interpretation of meanings.

Pillai (2007) incorporated key aspects of significant literary theories and critical reading approaches including Formalism, Reader Response and Feminism to help her Malaysian university students of literature move beyond the mere re-telling stage in literary analysis. By presenting their response to literary works in various forms such as folios and multi-media presentations, the students became more engaged in the task.

Further, the impact of the *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)* contexts of Malaysian education on the literature learner necessitates new approaches to literary
studies, which take account of the learner’s cognitive status and affective state. Apparently, the affective domain crucial to the study of literature has been neglected, as was exemplified by the senior cohort of conversion teachers who had unsuccessful experience in literary studies.

Another way to bridge the gap between previous educational experiences and tertiary literary studies is to provide explicit transfer of knowledge and skills in reading literature in any other languages, such as literature in Malay or Chinese, to the study of literature in English. The teacher education programme needs to take advantage of the fact that contrary to what they believed, the participants have had some exposure to literature, albeit in languages other than English. Overt comparison between literature across languages and explicit teaching of reading techniques would help learners to draw on the familiar: literature in their first language, to deal with the unfamiliar: literature in the target language, English.

**Implications:**

*At university level:*

- Develop objectives to foster interest in literature and intrinsic motivation to study literature (e.g. by including literature which is linguistically and culturally familiar);
- Provide more supportive learning environments, with teacher educators who recognise needs and potential of learners and who can provide moral and material support for learning;
- Deploy classroom practices to bridge gaps between previous learning experiences and interactive reading and writing practices;
- Develop strategies to transfer competence from oracy to written discourse, developing metacognitive awareness of learning processes; and
• Resolve the mismatches between teaching and learning processes and examination practices.

At school level curriculum implementation:

• Ensure that the school literature education provides appropriate preparation for advanced literary studies (development of language and literary competence and literacy in English);

• Monitor closely how the school literature curriculum is implemented to ensure quality teaching and learning of literature from early childhood (e.g. emphasis on the experience of reading literature rather than mere reading comprehension); and

• Ensure that the status of literature in the primary and secondary schools is raised by making literature a separate subject.

At policy level:

• Commence English language competence and literary studies in primary school;

• Select teacher education candidates (including conversion English teachers) based on high academic merit; and

• Select candidates for English language/literature studies on academic merit, English language competence and intrinsic interest in literary studies.

7.4.2 Pedagogical challenges of literature teacher education

Proposition: Improving the theory and practice interface for quality teaching relies on improving the relationship between university teaching programmes and teaching practice experiences in schools.

Discussion:

The aim of literature education for teachers is to produce competent teachers who will facilitate successful literature learning experience for their students. The quality of
literature education is determined by a fundamentally sound interface of theory and practice. It is imperative to balance theoretical knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of literature in the teacher education programme.

Firstly, good literature teachers need to achieve sufficient levels of language and literary competence to study and to teach literature. They need to acquire not only content knowledge of literature, but also the ability to relate it to pedagogical knowledge in order to develop pedagogical content knowledge for literary studies. Secondly, effective literature teachers need to have sufficient interest in literature and literary studies to foster in their pupils similar interest in reading and in literature. The motivation to study literature should go beyond the instrumental: teachers who are passionate about literature will commit to effective literature teaching.

Literature teachers are expected to be proficient in the language, as it is one of the key indicators of their level of competence, which can influence students’ attitude and motivation to study literature. Studies on schoolchildren learning the literature component in secondary schools (Ghazali, 2008; Sidhu, 2003) have shown that students with advanced level proficiency in English were critical of their teachers who demonstrated poor proficiency in English in their pronunciation, spelling and grammar when teaching literature. On the other hand, rural students who were impressed with their teachers’ fluent language and knowledge in literature, became more motivated to study the literature component (Kayad, 2007).

Similarly, teacher educators are expected to be highly competent in their discipline as well as in the art of teaching. The teacher educator role encompasses other expectations beyond “doing teaching” which makes the teaching of teaching highly problematic (Loughran, 2006, p. 9). To ensure quality in teacher education, more opportunities for professional development for teacher educators are necessary to keep up with the latest technology and research in the field.
Many participants from both groups felt that they had not been given adequate and appropriate instruction on how to study literature. They were expected to acquire the techniques in teaching and learning literature from the activities in the university literature classroom. The learner-centred approach and emphasis on independent and autonomous learning were a big jump from their previous educational experiences. They needed more scaffolding in the forms of overt modelling and explicit instruction. For example, many participants expected a consolidation of ideas and interpretations offered at the end of an extended discussion in class, which was not always provided by the teacher educator.

Moreover, most of the literature courses in the teacher education programme focused on literary theory and criticism, with only one course on methodology in literature. As such, participants from both groups criticised the limited pedagogical knowledge provided in the programme. Their post-practicum awareness that they lacked teaching methods and skills caused many pre-service participants to doubt their preparedness for teaching.

According to the literature on teacher knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Shulman & Shulman, 2004) and pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) good comprehension of content knowledge is crucial for the construction of pedagogical content knowledge. Within the model of teaching and teacher learning (Shulman & Shulman, 2004), effective teacher learning requires a vision for accomplished understanding and the motivation to pursue that learning by activating metacognitive strategies to constantly monitor their own development in learning to teach. In short, the student teacher is responsible to pursue mastery of the content knowledge, which will enable a transformation of the knowledge into comprehensible instruction for their future students.
Research studies comparing the knowledge and skills of the novice and the experienced teacher (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987; Shulman & Shulman 2004) show that good comprehension of content knowledge and vast experience in teaching determine the teacher’s ability to transform content knowledge into pedagogical content knowledge useful for classroom teaching. It may be that many participants in the present study did not have adequate comprehension of the content knowledge or adequate opportunity and teaching experience to transform their content knowledge of literature in the classroom, or both. Therefore, efforts to improve teacher education for these future literature teachers should include providing good content knowledge as well as more opportunities for teaching practice to develop pedagogical content knowledge.

**Implications:**

*At university level*

- Recruit teacher educators with deep understanding of the content knowledge of literature and a sufficient if not extensive teaching experience;
- Enhance opportunities for professional development for teacher educators in both the substantive content area (literary studies) and pedagogical practices relevant to schools;
- Provide a balance of theoretical knowledge and practical or pedagogical knowledge of literature with equal emphasis on literary criticism and on methodology in literature education courses;
- Increase opportunities for teaching practice by conducting the *Teaching Practicum* in at least two sessions, at the beginning and in the middle of the teacher education programme, for more exposure to school classrooms and teaching experience; and
- Provide more opportunities for student teachers to reflect on teaching and learning practices, and to express themselves in writing so that they can monitor their own literary literacy development during and after the programme.
At policy level

- Recognise that quality teacher education requires academic staff with expertise in both the substantive content field (literary studies) and methodological expertise to maximise the theory/practice interface;
- Recruit suitable candidates with sufficient language competence and the right motivation for literature teacher education;
- Ensure continuous quality improvement by providing professional development support for pre-service as well as in-service teachers when necessary.

7.4.3 Definition of literary literacy in the Malaysian context

Proposition: Literary literacy in the Malaysian context is more productively understood from a socio-cultural perspective which recognises the cultural and linguistically diverse milieu.

Discussion:

The cultural diversity of Malaysia suggests that for the foreseeable future both learners and teachers will operate in a complex linguistic and cultural milieu. Even though Malaysia has been categorised as an Outer Circle EL environment (Kachru, 2005), changes in education policies since independence have been accompanied by a decline in English language competence within schools. The assumption that reading literary texts in English in schools will enhance English language acquisition will hold true only when there is available a sufficient number of skilled teachers who are highly competent in English and similarly knowledgeable about literature.

Evidence from this research showed that conversion English teachers who had minimal proficiency in English found reading and understanding literary texts highly challenging. While most conversion participants demonstrated remarkable optimism
and professed increased interest in literary studies, their levels of literary literacy might be best described as early stage of development. Their practicum experience indicated that this beginner level literary literacy and complacent attitude would continue the cycle of ineffective literature teaching and learning in secondary schools.

The notion of a good literature learner is central to the concept of literary literacy. The pre-service participants’ idealistic definition of a good literature learner contrasted markedly with the conversion teachers’ pragmatic views. According to the pre-service participants, a good literature learner is highly enthusiastic about literature and demonstrates a sound knowledge of literature. Such attributes will contribute to effective teaching, motivating and guiding students toward a successful experience in learning literature. On the other hand, the conversion teachers viewed effective literature teaching as guiding students towards achieving excellent results in examinations. They argued that within the context of the operational curriculum, the concept of a good literature learner was defined by student performance in examinations, not a successful experience in learning literature.

The idea of being literate in literature goes beyond the ability to read and understand a literary text. Hall (2005) asserts that “reading and literature are not always the same in all contexts, but rather vary with their uses and users, and have a history” (p.83). In the context of teacher education, the concept of literary literacy must take into account that the purpose of studying literature is to teach literature within the second language classroom. Hence, literacy in the second language, particularly proficiency and competence in the language is a vital component of literary literacy. If the presumed relationship between studying literary texts in English and enhancement of English language competence is to be fulfilled, a working definition of literary literacy in the multicultural context of Malaysia must encompass the three domains of literacy in English, literacy in literature in English and pedagogical literacy.
Implications:

At university level

- Improve alignment between the university literature curriculum and the school literature curriculum to recognise the socio-cultural context of Malaysia;
- Institute more pedagogically contextualised teaching of content knowledge of literature as “mere content knowledge is likely to be as useless pedagogically as content-free skill” (Shulman, 1986, p. 8); and
- Provide appropriate support for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) participants such as compulsory language enhancement courses.

At policy level

- Unpack the broad concept of literary literacy into discrete components of language competence, literary competence, and pedagogical knowledge;
- Include proficiency and competence in the target language as part of selection criteria (especially for in-service teachers); and
- Determine benchmarking standards to ensure quality literature education produces literature teachers with high level of literary literacy.

7.5 A theory of literary literacy for professional preparation

Within the evolving concept of literacy, the literary literacy for professional preparation of pre-service and conversion English teachers is ideological and developmental. The findings of the study show that the traditional literature curriculum in the teacher education programme at the university focuses on developing literary competence. There is no overt teaching of language to address issues of language competence. According to the lecturers, there was no time and place for overt teaching of language as the participants in the programme were assumed to have sufficient language competence to deal with studying literature in English.
Yet, the findings of this study suggest that there is serious deficiency in the language competence of many participants. Despite years of studying literature in the programme, many participants were still unable to read extensively and critically. They were unable to communicate their response to literature effectively due to limited proficiency and competence in the language, particularly in academic writing required in literature examination. Clearly, language competence has been a neglected component in the teacher education programme.

Language competence is an important means for developing content knowledge of literature. In turn, a sound content knowledge of literature is necessary for constructing pedagogical content knowledge. The findings of this study call for a definition of literary literacy within its actual context of teacher education and in the second language. Learning to teach literature must be based on situated learning approach which requires a contextualised practicum necessary to provide real exposure to the real classroom. Yet, in the participants’ own words the present literary study in the teacher education programme had given them “more than enough” knowledge of literature but little pedagogical knowledge, and much less support for language proficiency.

In the university literature classroom, the community of practice is an interpretive community of lecturers and students. Membership in this community through active participation is crucial for learning. Similarly, introducing the student teacher to the community of practice in schools is necessary and beneficial for their professional identity development. The dissonance and uncertainties experienced, particularly among pre-service teachers during practicum suggested that they were in the process of developing a concept of literary literacy for their professional preparation. The literary literacy for professional preparation of literature teachers in the Malaysian context might best be described as the intersection of:
- Language competence: sufficient level of proficiency and competence in English;
- Literary competence: adequate content knowledge of literature in English, moving beyond basic knowledge of literary terms and concepts toward understanding of literature in its broader sense, including culture and curricula;
- Pedagogical knowledge: appropriate pedagogical practices based on multiple sources including knowledge of literature learners and literature curricula.

A conceptual model of literary literacy for professional preparation is presented in Figure 7.2.

![Figure 7.2: A model of literary literacy for professional preparation](image)

This model identifies the components needed in developing literary literacy for professional preparation. Derived from the perspectives of conversion and pre-service English teachers in Malaysia, encompassing cultural and linguistic complexities of their experience dealing with studying literature at tertiary level, the model is useful for literary literacy instruction for their professional preparation.
7.6 Conclusion

The findings of the cross-case analysis amplify the complexities of the participants’ experience in dealing with studying literature at tertiary level in the teacher education programme. The convergent and divergent perspectives on the emerging themes of the sub-case studies reveal several prevailing points leading to the development of their literary literacy for professional preparation.

Firstly, an understanding of the learners and their contexts of learning is crucial in determining their specific needs in the teacher education programme. This includes their personal history, educational background, attitudes and motivation toward literature and teaching. Their identified strengths and weaknesses will inform literary literacy instruction, such as the need to unlearn some habits and practices that are not appropriate for literary studies in this programme.

Secondly, the literature curriculum in the teacher education programme must take into account the learners’ contextualised needs. The current traditional literature curriculum is not suitable for a teacher education programme in which theoretical knowledge must be balanced with pedagogical knowledge in literature.

Thirdly, teaching practice experience can either make or break the student teacher. The findings of the study suggest that it is the climax of the teacher education programme. It should provide opportunity for participants to test their ideology about literature and teaching, and create space for participants to develop their pedagogical content knowledge.

Finally, sufficient levels of proficiency and competence in the language are expected for the study of its literature. Practical steps must be taken to ensure that novice literature learners are linguistically prepared for advanced level literary studies in a teacher education programme.
Propositions to meet these expectations include bridging the gap between previous educational experiences and tertiary literature studies, improving theory and practice interface, and broadening the definition of literary literacy from a socio-cultural perspective. These propositions have clear implications for policy and practice to enhance the participants’ literary literacy for professional preparation.

This study has yielded rich data based on the participants’ real experience and contextualised literacy practices in dealing with studying literature in the teacher education programme. Drawing on the learners’ needs in this context, a theory of literary literacy for professional preparation is proposed to include literary competence, language competence and pedagogical knowledge.

The significance of the study in its contribution to empirical research and knowledge in the field, and the potential for further research will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.
Chapter 8  Summary and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction
The study reported in this thesis was concerned about the provision of quality literature education at all levels in Malaysia, which requires teachers who are well trained to teach literature. Related studies and recent reports in the local media have highlighted that many English teachers in Malaysia lacked pedagogical skills, competence in literature and proficiency in the language. This study sought to understand how prospective teachers are prepared for the task by exploring their experiences in the literature classroom within the teacher education programme. The participants’ experiences reflect the interface between their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge of literature, conceptualised as literary literacy. This study unpacked the discrete components of literary literacy and analysed the complex interplay between them. The findings of the study have implications for policy and practice of literature education in the second language context of Malaysia.

This concluding chapter presents a summary of the study, outlining its aim and objectives, research design, key findings and research parameters. It discusses the significance of the study and its original contributions to knowledge in the field. It ends with a discussion of the implications of the findings for policy, practice and further research.
8.2 Summary of the study

8.2.1 Aim and objectives
The overarching aim of the study was to generate a substantive theory on the literary literacy of Malaysian pre-service and conversion English teachers in the English as a Second Language (ESL) context of Malaysia. This was achieved by exploring the participants’ experiences in dealing with studying various literature courses at tertiary level as part of their secondary school teacher education. The objectives of the study were to investigate the participants’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature, to examine and compare the participants’ experiences in dealing with studying university literature courses, and to identify the literary literacy practices in the university literature classroom that the participants perceived useful for their professional preparation to teach literature in secondary schools.

8.2.2 Research design
The study adopted an interpretivist approach, within the qualitative research paradigm using the collective case study method (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) to examine the perspectives of the two groups of participants. This method is suitable to capture the participants’ perspectives in their direct voices and first hand experience in context. Data were sourced from focus group interviews with the participants, individual interviews with their literature lecturers, non-participant classroom observations, public documents such as the literature curricula and reports, and private documents such as the participants’ written work. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed and analysed according to grounded theory method, whereas the supplementary documentary data were content analysed.

The participants of the study comprised 23 pre-service teachers and 16 conversion English teachers who were in their final year of study in the secondary school English
teacher education programme at a public university in East Malaysia. The participants were interviewed in a series of focus groups conducted at the beginning, the middle and at the end of the semester, and were observed in their respective literature classes over a period of one academic semester. Collection of documentary data such as examination results and reports, as well as the reading journals continued a few months after the semester ended, through electronic and personal communications between the researcher and the participants.

8.2.3 Findings and implications

The findings of the study can be summarised according to the three research objectives:

Objective 1: The participants’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature

The findings of the study show that the participants’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature were influenced significantly by their previous experiences in literature. Personal history and identity, educational and social background compounded their experiences in the programme in which they were expected to not only learn literature but also learn to teach literature.

There was a huge gap between the participants’ previous experiences in learning literature and the current literary studies in English in the teacher education programme. The pre-service participants believed that the literature component taught in secondary school had failed to prepare them for literary studies at a higher level. Many participants from both groups believed that their limited exposure to literature, their poor reading habits and their negative or idealistic pre-conceived ideas about literature contributed to their slow progress in studying university literature courses. The most disadvantaged were participants with low proficiency in English and the conversion teacher participants previously trained to teach other languages and disciplines at teachers’ college.
The motivation to study literature was largely instrumental as the pre-service participants needed to secure a job in an increasingly competitive market, whereas the conversion teachers desired opportunities for career advancement that come with the teaching degree. Recognising that literature is part of the English Language subject for which they are trained to teach they embraced this advanced level literary study despite their apparent limitations to deal with it.

The participants’ beliefs, values, attitudes and practices in teaching and learning literature were altered greatly by their current experiences in studying literature, particularly post-practicum. While both groups believed that the literature programme has provided them with adequate content knowledge of literature, the pre-service participants needed more exposure to the real classroom and more pedagogical knowledge. Clearly, the participants needed more opportunities to transform their content knowledge of literature into pedagogical content knowledge of literature. For instance, it would be beneficial to add more courses on methodology in the programme and to provide explicit instruction for integrating new pedagogical approaches in the real classroom. At the same time, participants should be taught to focus on how to learn from experience such as micro-teaching and practicum to deal with continuously conflicting and competing demands of the profession, as teacher education is inevitably inadequate to prepare them for their entire career (Korthagen et al., 2006).

**Objective 2: Dealing with studying literature**

The participants’ literacy practices in dealing with studying literature in the teacher education programme are complex, multiple and multimodal. Most of the participants were inexperienced or novice learners of literature and they faced multiple and interrelated challenges in the socio-cultural, linguistic and cognitive domains in this first encounter with “real” literary studies in English in the teacher education programme. This is particularly so with Malaysia being more accurately categorised as a *Culturally...*
and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) context, sharing more characteristics with the Expanding Circle contexts than the Outer Circle (Kachru, 2005). Contact with English and literature seemed to be confined to the literature classroom.

While they enjoyed the learner centred approach and stimulating activities in the university literature classroom, most participants were not able to practice autonomous and independent learning as expected in higher education. Lacking in cognitive and linguistic ability to read and respond critically, they often reverted to their old practices such as rote learning and memorising, and reading synopses of the literary works instead of the original works.

Dealing with literature examination was a major concern and a great challenge for all, including the participants who were considered “good” in literature by their peers and lecturers. Poor performance in written examination suggests discrepancies in the teaching and assessment of literature in the programme. The pedagogical approaches promoted reader response whereas the literature curriculum was essentially traditional, as reflected in its focus on literary theories and criticism.

The findings of the study suggest that participants need to be prepared emotionally and physically to deal with studying literature, and one way to do this is by making the purpose of each task clear and meaningful to them. For example, the purpose of learning literary theories and how to integrate these theories into pedagogical practices must be made explicit to the participants. There is also a need for affective strategies to help participants who are highly apprehensive about studying literature.

In addition, multimodal approaches such as learning through multimedia and technology should be encouraged. Participants reported using internet resources to begin studying a literary text and enjoyed film versions of the literary works. Multimodality in the literature classroom stimulates interest and provides opportunities for critical and creative response to literature.
It is important to provide adequate linguistic support to help participants complete and understand a prescribed reading, which is much needed by participants with low proficiency in English. In this case, stylistic approaches to literary studies (Brumfit & Carter, 1986; Carter & McRae, 1996; Simpson, 2004; Verdonk, 2002), which focus on linguistic features foregrounded in the literary texts, might be useful. Hall (2007) posits that stylistic approaches promote metalinguistic reflection and discussion, which “contribute to deeper processing, understanding, memorability and development of the additional language in use” (p. 4).

**Objective 3: Literary literacy practices for professional preparation**

All participants across groups found the variety of teaching techniques and activities in their university literature classroom stimulating and beneficial in developing their interest and ability to study literature. Typical activities in the literature classroom include small group and whole class discussion, debates, forums, drama activities and critiquing film adaptation of a literary work. The participants recognised that these activities promote active learning and are the “proper” way to teach literature but are only applicable to the “real” literary studies contexts such as the current programme. They perceived that the constraints in schools such as school students’ low proficiency and literacy in English would discourage their attempts to replicate these techniques and activities in the secondary school classrooms.

The findings of the study ascertained that the participants’ literary literacy for professional preparation is in a nascent state. As such, the participants were beginning to break away from their previous conceptions of literature, and of teaching and learning literature, to adopt multiple and new literary literacy practices. Understandably, there were many apparent gaps in their knowledge as well as inconsistencies in their literary literacy practices. Nonetheless, the participants believed that their content knowledge of
literature obtained from studying university literature courses was adequate for teaching
the literature component in secondary school.

While most participants seemed to have become more interested in literature and more
confident to study and eventually teach literature, many would conform to the teacher-
centred, teach-to-the-exam approaches in order to survive the many challenges of the
real classroom. Moreover, basic knowledge of literature coupled with low proficiency in
English will not improve the quality of the teacher and consequently, the contribution of
literature studies to language education.

Themes, key categories and propositions

The cross-case analysis of the findings identified convergent and divergent views on the
emerging themes which are: appropriateness of preparation to study literature, adequacy
to study literature, appropriateness of preparation to teach literature, dissonance between
ideational and operational literature curriculum, and commitment to teaching as a
profession. These themes, elaborated in Chapter Seven, produced three key categories:
the complexities of literary studies for the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
learners, the pedagogical challenges of literature education for teachers, and the
definition of literary literacy for professional preparation in the Malaysian context.
From these categories three propositions were developed:

Proposition 1: To improve the efficacy of teacher education programmes in English
literature it is necessary to bridge the gap between previous educational experiences and
tertiary literature studies.

Proposition 2: Improving the theory and practice interface for quality teaching relies on
improving the relationship between university teaching programmes and teaching
practice experiences in schools.
Proposition 3: Literary literacy in the Malaysian context is more productively understood from a socio-cultural perspective, which recognises the cultural and linguistically diverse milieu.

Implications for policy and practice

The implications of these propositions for policy and practice at various levels have been discussed in Chapter Seven. In essence, there is a need for a reconceptualisation of the school curriculum for English Language and literature, a development of new syllabus statements and supporting teaching materials, as well as a review of the university literature curriculum within the teacher education programme. The school and the university literature curriculum should be interconnected and balanced in terms of content and implementation.

English language instruction in Malaysia might be more productively approached through practices and strategies of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as an International Language (EIL). Inclusion of literature in English Language courses might contribute more to enhancement of English Language learning if a) more local literature written in English were included in the syllabus, b) personal response and interactive approaches, rather than literary critical approaches to texts were emphasised. Specialist studies of English Literature at a pre-university level should be offered as stand-alone courses in Form Five and Six.

Because the participants’ literary literacy is in a nascent state or at an early developmental stage, dissonance and uncertainties need to be viewed as opportunities for learning and intervention through revised policy and improved practices in literature teacher education. Practical measures need to be taken at the planning, recruitment and training stages of the teacher education programme to ensure that participants are culturally, linguistically and cognitively prepared to deal with studying literature at tertiary level.
There is a possible threat of teacher attrition in that some pre-service teachers who experienced dissonance in their preconceived values and beliefs about literature and teaching may decide to avoid or delay teaching in secondary schools. Thus, the teacher education experience needs to be optimised by improving the relationship between university teaching programmes and teaching practice experiences in schools. Within the teacher education programme, the traditional approach to literary studies needs to be replaced with a more pragmatic approach that balances content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge.

_A theory of literary for professional preparation_

The findings of the study have generated a theory of literary literacy for professional preparation of pre-service and conversion English teachers in the ESL context of Malaysia. This theory can be summarised as the fundamental competence and ability to study and teach literature using sufficient levels of competence in English, competence in literature and knowledge of pedagogy. The findings of the study indicate that the participants’ literary literacy for professional preparation is in the nascent state, and these key components are found to be seriously imbalanced. Literary studies in English within this present teacher education programme emphasised literary competence whereas pedagogical knowledge was limited. Language proficiency received minimal attention and participants were expected to acquire the language in the process of studying literature. At this early developmental stage, the participants’ literary literacy practices, shaped by their values, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and actions changed and varied according to different contexts.

The socio-cultural approach to literacy study is useful and relevant to explain the findings of the study whereby the socio-cultural factors have emerged as the dominant influence in the participants’ perspectives on literature, on learning literature and on
teaching literature. The definition of literary literacy needs to be broadened to accommodate the context of teacher education, the socio-cultural factors that influence the perspectives and practices of the participants and the non-native context of Malaysia.

8.3 Parameters of the study
The theory of literary literacy for professional preparation has been demonstrated as robust for the participants in the context of this study. According to the notion of “transferability” (Punch, 2005), this theory may be applied to similar contexts and participants in the same categories of this study. Readers can make judgements about the appropriateness and extent of its generalisability by scrutinising the detailed context information and audit trail provided in this study. Triangulation of data from multiple sources and strategies enhanced the credibility of this study.

The scope of the study was limited to a single university, and thus the propositions developed from it are tentative, and need to be tested through further research in similar contexts and more participants. Nonetheless, the implications of the propositions are sufficiently significant to warrant serious consideration in reviewing policy, practices, and developing further research.

8.4 Significance and original contribution
The findings of this study make an original contribution to theory and practice of literary literacy in English. The theory of literary literacy for professional preparation generated by the propositions produced from the findings of this study develops understanding of pre-service and conversion teachers’ experiences in dealing with studying literature as part of their teacher education.

This study ascertained that the participants’ literary literacy for professional preparation is in a nascent state. The findings of the study provide insights into the complexities of
literary literacy at tertiary level and in the context of teacher education, particularly for the *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)* learners. A model of the theory, which has identified the components of literary literacy for professional preparation, will inform literary literacy instruction and is available for further testing.

The theory synthesised broad fields of literacy studies, literary studies and teacher education, within the non-native context, in ways not previously undertaken. To the researcher’s knowledge, and from the review of the literature, this is the only study on literary literacy in teacher education and in the ESL context of Malaysia. Related and previous studies mostly focus on response to literature, response to a literature programme, or a particular teaching methodology in the literature classroom, whereas literacy studies in the context of Higher Education (HE) in Malaysia focus on academic literacy and reading literacy, with particular interest on styles and strategies in reading and writing (Musa et al., 2012).

Shifting the research focus to the learners’ direct experiences in learning is in line with the current trend in research on literature in the second and foreign language contexts (Carter, 2007; Paran, 2008). The present study has documented a comprehensive account of the pre-service and conversion English teachers’ experiences in dealing with studying university literature courses, giving them voice through an in-depth case study. Unlike Baleiro’s (2011) theory of literature learners’ literary literacy, drawn from lecturer’s perspectives and literature syllabuses, the literary literacy theory in the present study is derived from the learners’ first-hand experiences. Hence, this study has contributed to the depth of empirical evidence on learners’ perspective on literature teaching and learning within their respective contexts.

In terms of methodology, this study adds a qualitative dimension to research on learners’ perspectives. It offers insight from an in-depth qualitative case study whereas most related studies have been quantitative surveys of participants’ beliefs and
practices. The findings of the study identified patterns and processes, trajectories and issues in literature teaching and learning, and discussed implications for policy and practice at various levels to provide quality training for future literature teachers.

While the focus of this study was on the participants’ current experiences in studying university literature courses, the pre-service participants gave insights into their previous experiences of the *Literature Component in English (LCE)* language classrooms as secondary school students. This is a bonus as it provides first-hand experience in literature teaching and learning within both contexts of the secondary school and university literature classrooms.

This study has filled the gap in research by providing in-depth investigation into the current state of literature in English Language education in schools and literary studies at tertiary level in the context of teacher education. It has unveiled the complexities of literary literacy embedded in teacher education programme in a *CALD* environment. It has documented the participants current practices, proficiency level and predicaments in dealing with studying literature in the programme.

The findings of this study defined literary literacy for professional preparation of literature teacher in Malaysia within the multicultural and multilingual context of Malaysia. This study has approached literacy from a broader perspective, shifting the focus from literacy as decontextualised skills to a focus on the learners and their contextualised practices.

### 8.5 Implications for further research

This study has contributed empirical data on literature in the second language, which is inherently complex and under-studied. This study theorised that the literary literacy of pre-service and conversion English teachers is in the nascent state and produced a model to inform literary literacy instruction for a more robust professional preparation
of English Language teachers. The theory and the model need further testing and verification to validate the propositions on which they are based.

In particular, further research is needed to determine how proficiency and competence in the language may be supported in the literature teacher education programme. As literature education in Malaysia is focused on language development, stylistic approaches to literary studies may be useful. For example, language-based approaches and stylistic analysis may be developed and incorporated in the teacher education literature curriculum. Subsequently, classroom-based studies are needed to determine the effectiveness of the revised curriculum in improving the participants’ literary literacy. A revised curriculum should incorporate the use of multimodal and contemporary literature to promote active learning.

Another direction for further research is the development of a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) programme on the participants’ literary literacy post-teacher education programme at the university. Given that the participants’ literary literacy is in the nascent state at the exit point of their teacher education programme, opportunity for continuous professional development in-service should be provided. This would include language competence courses for in-service teachers who demonstrate poor language proficiency and competence in addition to the methodology courses, which are usually provided as part of in-service professional development programmes.

To add a comparative dimension to the findings of this study, replication of this study with participants in similar categories and in teacher education contexts would be useful and appropriate to test the robustness of the theory and the model. The research design may be used to conduct similar studies with participants in teacher education contexts such as in teachers’ colleges.
8.6 Implications for policy and practice

This study contributes valuable new insights into the concerns and experiences of pre-service and conversion English teachers in dealing with studying literature at an advanced level as part of their teacher education. It reveals that literary literacy in English is complex and highly contextualised. This calls for a greater understanding of the processes involved and the many challenges that the participants encountered in developing literary literacy in their professional preparation as future literature teachers. Policy makers and educators need to consider learners’ diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and to be sensitive to their needs.

In planning and implementing top-down policies impacting literature in language teaching, policy makers need to have a micro-view of the situation, drawing from the perspectives and experiences of the key stakeholders. The findings of this study discovered huge gaps between the participants’ previous experiences in literature and their current experience studying university literature courses. The main reasons for these gaps include the dissonance between ideational and operational literature curriculum both at school and at tertiary levels, and the expectation for the participants to master the language and its literature at tertiary level. Policy makers and teacher educators need to take effective measures to bridge the gaps and address the issue of low language proficiency among practising and prospective English teachers in Malaysia.

The findings of this study were reaffirmed in a survey that revealed that two-thirds of 70,000 English teachers in the country failed to reach a proficient English level and were required to take the Cambridge Placement Test and that two in three students failed to meet the basics in English proficiency based on comparison of the students' results in SPM English and Cambridge 1119 (GCE ‘O’ level English paper) standards. Singh and Choo (2012) called for intervention to improve English language proficiency
at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. They emphasised the importance of English in everyday use to ensure that the teaching of English will respond to workplace demands in a globalised economy. The study reported in this thesis identified the complexities of meeting such demands in Malaysia’s culturally and linguistically diverse environment. Aspects of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2012) resonate with the findings of this study:

- Upskilling English teachers and expanding opportunities for greater exposure to the language;
- Every student to be taught English by a teacher who is proficient according to international standards;
- Students to have greater exposure to the language, for example via an expanded, compulsory English Literature module at the secondary level;
- English to be made a compulsory subject to pass for SPM from 2016; and
- Recognition that as a multilingual country, Malaysians needed to be bilingual, if not multilingual.

The timeline for English to be a “compulsory pass” subject by 2016 seems remarkably short, given the research reported in this thesis. This study has answered urgent calls, such as Putra’s (2013b) for an education transformation based on substantial empirical evidence, rather than political rhetorics.

8.7 Conclusion
The study reported in this thesis is a bottom-up research project to address a top-down policy on literature in English language education in Malaysia. This study answers the call to investigate how prospective teachers are prepared for the task of teaching literature in secondary schools. This study provides a detailed description and theoretical explanation of literary literacy for professional preparation of pre-service and
conversion English teachers in Malaysia, which have implications for further research, policy and practice for literature education at all levels in Malaysia.

This study is timely and strategic amidst mounting concern about the quality of Malaysian teachers of English. With literature in English playing a prominent role in English Language education in Malaysia, there is an urgent need to ensure that English teachers are well-trained to teach literature and to provide quality literature education at all levels.

“To teach is to learn twice”

(Joseph Joubert 1754-1824)
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Appendices
## Appendix 4.1 Mapping of research questions to conceptual framework and data triangulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding questions (related to issues/concepts of literary literacy)</th>
<th>Interview questions (semi-structured)</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Data analysis and triangulation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. What are the participants’ perspectives on learning literature in English?</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Feelings&lt;br&gt;• Attitudes&lt;br&gt;• Motivation&lt;br&gt;• Previous experience&lt;br&gt;• Reading skills/practices</td>
<td>Do you like learning literature?&lt;br&gt;What do you like/dislike about literature?&lt;br&gt;Describe your experiences learning literature?</td>
<td>Student interviews: Focus group 1 (FG1)&lt;br&gt;Lecturer interviews: what they think students’ attitudes toward literature&lt;br&gt;Classroom observations&lt;br&gt;Reading journal&lt;br&gt;FG1 summary sheet</td>
<td>Triangulation of interview data from students and lecturers with observational data and content analysis of FG1 summary sheet&lt;br&gt;Open coding of interviews. Developing thematic clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. How do they deal with studying university literature courses?</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Approaches to literary reading&lt;br&gt;• Learning strategies&lt;br&gt;• Reading skills/practices&lt;br&gt;• Factors affecting learning of literature</td>
<td>How do you study a literary text?&lt;br&gt;Do you face any difficulty/problem?&lt;br&gt;How do you deal with these problems?&lt;br&gt;What methods/activities in the literature classroom do you like/find helpful?</td>
<td>Student interviews: Focus group 2 (FG2)&lt;br&gt;Lecturer interviews: opinions on students’ performance in literature courses&lt;br&gt;Classroom observations&lt;br&gt;FG2 summary sheet&lt;br&gt;Course outlines&lt;br&gt;Student reading journals and written works&lt;br&gt;Examination results</td>
<td>Triangulation of interview data from students and academics with observational data and content analysis of FG2 summary sheet, course documents and examination results&lt;br&gt;Open coding of interviews. Developing thematic clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. What are their perspectives on teaching literature in English?</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Pedagogical approaches to literature&lt;br&gt;• Attitudes and motivation to teach&lt;br&gt;• Practicum experience&lt;br&gt;• Teacher role</td>
<td>Tell me about your teaching experience/how was your practicum experience?&lt;br&gt;What are the problems/needs in schools and their possible solutions?&lt;br&gt;How confident are you to teach literature in schools?</td>
<td>Student interviews: Focus group 3 (FG3)&lt;br&gt;Lecturer interviews: views on students’ ability to teach literature (creativity)&lt;br&gt;FG3 summary sheet&lt;br&gt;School literature curriculum/syllabus&lt;br&gt;University literature curriculum/ course outlines, results and reports</td>
<td>Triangulation of interview data from students and lecturers with observational data and content analysis of FG3 summary sheet&lt;br&gt;Open coding of interviews. Developing thematic clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. What is their perceived level of literary literacy?</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Literary</td>
<td>How is your performance in literature?&lt;br&gt;Does your performance</td>
<td>Student interviews: Focus group 2 &amp; 3 (FG2&amp;3)&lt;br&gt;Practicum experiences</td>
<td>Triangulation of interview data from students and lecturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Lecturer interviews: opinions on students’ performance in literature courses</td>
<td>with observational data, content analysis of FG2&amp;3 summary sheets, course documents and examination results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language competence</td>
<td>Results in literature course assignments and examinations FG2&amp;3 summary sheets</td>
<td>Open coding of interviews. Developing thematic clusters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and contextual factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. What literary literacy practices in university literature classes do they consider useful for their professional preparation?
- Pedagogical approaches to literature
- Attitudes and motivation to teach
- Practicum experience

| How would you teach literature to your secondary school students? | Student interviews: Focus group 2 (FG2) |
| What teaching methods/activities can you apply in the real classroom? | Lecturer interviews: what the lecturers think would be helpful – why they do what they do in their courses |
| Researcher observations of university classes FG2 summary sheet | |

6. To what extent do literary studies in the teacher education programme prepare them to teach literature in secondary schools?
- Theoretical and pedagogical knowledge
- Commitment to teaching

| How relevant are the literature courses in the programme? | Student interviews: Focus group 3 (FG3) Post-practicum |
| How confident are you to teach literature in schools? | Lecturer interviews: what the lecturers think would be helpful – why they do what they do in their courses |
| Is there anything lacking in this programme/what can be improved in this programme? | FG3 summary sheet |
| How do you think you can better prepare yourself to be a good literature teacher? | | |

Triangulation of interview data from students and lecturers with observational data and content analysis of FG2 summary sheet
Open coding of interviews. Developing thematic clusters
Appendix 4.2 Interview structure and reading journal

**FG1: Perspectives on learning literature in English**
Feelings/attitudes/previous experiences in literature

*Key questions:*
Do you like/dislike literature? Why?
Tell me about your experiences in learning literature.

**FG2: Dealing with studying literature courses**
Teaching and learning activities in the university literature classroom
Problems and coping strategies

*Key questions:*
What do you do to study a literary text?
What do you do in the literature class?
What methods/activities do you like/find helpful?
How do you prepare for literature exams?

**FG3 Perspectives on teaching literature in English**
Previous teaching experiences
Practicum experiences

*Key questions:*
Do you have any experiences teaching literature?
Tell me about your teaching practice experiences.
Do you think that the university literature courses have prepared you well to teach literature in schools?

**Reading journal**
You are encouraged to keep a reading response journal throughout the course. There is no limit to the number of entries but you need to include the following

1. a description of yourself as a student of literature, such as which texts do you prefer and why
2. your personal response to the literary texts you are studying
3. your reflection of what you have learned in the literature course(s) and how you might apply it in your own literature class when you start teaching literature

The reading journal will be collected toward the end of the semester.
Appendix 4.3 Sample of focus group summary sheet

Focus group 3 summary Sheet

Name: ______________________________    Date: _____________

Part A: Student information
Please tick (√) the box that matches your current position and years of teaching experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Brief description (e.g. where did you teach? Primary or secondary level? For how long?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-service teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No teaching experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than five years teaching experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five or more years teaching experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part B: Students’ perspectives on teaching and learning literature
Answer the following questions briefly.

1. Do you think you are a good literature student? Why?

2. In your opinion, does your result or performance in a literature course reflect your true ability in literature? Why?

3. Do you think that being a good literature student will make you a good literature teacher? Why?

4. How was your experience teaching literature to secondary school students during your recent Teaching Practicum (TP)?
5. Based on that experience (TP) what do you think are the THREE (3) immediate needs/problems for teaching literature in schools?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

6. What do you think are the possible ways to meet these needs?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

7. How confident are you to teach literature in school – literature component for Forms 1-5 as well as literature as elective subject in Form 6? Why?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

8. Do you think that the university literature courses have prepared you well to teach literature in schools? Why?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

9. On a scale of 1-5, (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest) rank the following literature courses (which you have studied/will study in this teaching degree) in terms of your personal preference, and in terms of their relevance or applicability to your profession as future literature teacher. Put NA where not applicable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature course</th>
<th>Rank (1-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal preference/interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Teaching Literature in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Narratives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysian Literature in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Plays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Critical Appreciation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adult Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Literature in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Culture and Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4.4 Sample of open coding of data

Folder B: Focus Group 2 – Pre-service
Date: 5/8/2008
Time: Afternoon
Duration: 53 mins

Students:

F Good afternoon Meren, Helen and Teddy. Thank you for this interview. And we’re going to talk about your experiences in studying literature. How has it been for you so far, it’s... you’re in your final year? How has it been for you, studying literature in English in this teaching degree? How do you find studying literature?

H (M & H giggle) Sometimes it’s fun, sometimes it’s not. Depends. Sometimes depends on the lecturer.

M Short story... I think I’m more interested in short story rather than poems. Poem is quite hard.

H I like reading poems but I don’t like analyzing it. Same with short story, novel. Because I don’t like to read things that are too thick for me. That’s why I prefer poems.

F Too thick and too lengthy.

H Yeah. And then sometimes if I don’t understand the language then I just put the text aside.

T To learn literature is love-hate relationship; you love some parts, you hate some parts.

F But the strategy that you used is the ones that you hate you just put aside.

H I put aside but... and then... after some time, I started to read it.

F There’s no way you can ignore it.

H Yeah! I still remember when I was in second year, I did cry because I didn’t know how to do the assignments. And then it’s...

T What’s the assignment about?

H Chinua Achebe

T Oh that one...

H I can’t remember the names, I don’t know why.

F Things Fall Apart?

H Yes, Things Fall Apart.

T That’s very nice. I like it!

H I don’t like, I don’t know.

T Yeah you’re supposed to write a critique. A very long critique. And she cried? (laughs)

H I don’t know. I just...

F Was it an individual work?

T Pair and individual. I did by myself.

H Pair and individual because I did it myself leh. Supposed to be me and Merien but then I choose to do it myself. We have a few hours left and then I started to go... forced myself to go...

T Oh you last minute?

H Yeah! (the girls laugh)

F Because you’ve been putting it aside...
Appendix 4.5 Sample of axial coding of data

FG3 Q3: Perspectives on teaching and learning literature

Code note: Good literature teacher
Related codes: results in literature courses reflecting true ability; good literature learner; good literature teacher; literature examination; teaching practice experiences

How did they teach literature during TP? Were they willing and able to apply what they have acquired during their literature education at uni to high school literature classroom?
J taught a few literature lessons but was very conscious of being assessed, so he was very careful to “just follow...”. Fear of breaking the consistency of the teaching style, system that students were used to. Quite unwilling to apply “new method” (only twice) because he thinks students would not be able to handle it – again deflecting it to the students inability to adapt to change (when it is the teacher himself who has a lot of anxieties) Would not risk changing existing classroom culture and teaching method.
There is a clear struggle within the responsible teacher during TP: struggle to balance the new found personal principle of learning literature (influenced by university literature education) and the requirement of reality. J thinks he is ‘protecting’ the students’ interest when he resorts not to disturb the status quo in school.
S thinks that university literature courses did not give enough techniques how to teach literature, so she resorted to her primary school method.

Note the tone: Regret? Uncertainty? Un-enthusiastically? Like he is forced to join the crowd of practicing teachers. He is aware of the conflict – that it is not a right way to teach literature, but it is the reality out there, and he is forced to accept the reality.
Emergent issue: conflict between personal principle (acquired during the uni literature course teaching and learning exposure) and reality (TP- few weeks in the real world)

Questions:
Do you think that being a good literature student will make you a good literature teacher? How would you perceive or see yourself in future when you go back to the service as literature teachers. Do you think you’ll be good literature teachers?

Some observations of the conversion teachers’ personal beliefs about teaching and learning literature:

- They are excited about the new found knowledge and skills in learning literature from the university courses (satisfied with the content – very good, adequate)
- They have developed their literary literacy: becoming more critical and skillful in appreciating literary texts and applying to own personal experience in order to make their literature learning more meaningful
- They have developed the awareness of what is lacking in the existing literature education in the Malaysian school system, identifying the factors that contribute to these problems
- However, the reality of the situation: constraints in the school system seems to override this new found knowledge and enthusiasm
- They show signs (expressions of their struggle, focus on problems and constraints, their tone of regret, etc.) that they will resort to their ‘old’ ways when they go into the real classroom.
- Factors to consider: age, experience, background, personal motivation (instrumental motivation)
## Appendix 4.6 MUET band descriptors

### Description of Aggregated Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggregated scores</th>
<th>Band</th>
<th>User</th>
<th>Communicative Ability</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Task Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>260 – 300</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Highly proficient user</td>
<td>Very fluent; highly appropriate use of language; hardly any grammatical error</td>
<td>Very good understanding of language and context</td>
<td>Very high ability to function in the language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220 – 259</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Proficient user</td>
<td>Fluent; appropriate use of language; few grammatical errors</td>
<td>Good understanding of language and context</td>
<td>High ability to function in the language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180 – 219</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Satisfactory user</td>
<td>Generally fluent; generally appropriate use of language; some grammatical errors</td>
<td>Satisfactory understanding of language and context</td>
<td>Satisfactory ability to function in the language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140 – 179</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Modest user</td>
<td>Fairly fluent; inappropriate use of language; many grammatical errors</td>
<td>Fair understanding of language and context</td>
<td>Fair ability to function in the language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 – 139</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Limited user</td>
<td>Not fluent; inappropriate use of language; very frequent grammatical errors</td>
<td>Limited understanding of language and context</td>
<td>Limited ability to function in the language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very limited user</td>
<td>Hardly able to use the language</td>
<td>Very limited understanding of language and context</td>
<td>Very limited ability to function in the language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Malaysian Examination Council: MUET
INFORMATION SHEET

Research title:
Literature education in the ESL context: An interpretivist study of how pre-service and in-service English teachers in Malaysia study literature at tertiary level.

Research Purpose:
Research on literature education suggests that literature positively affects learning, including improving reading ability and motivation, language and literary awareness, and personal development. Most studies, however, have been conducted among children and adolescent learners and in the mother tongue environment. Little is known of literature education in the English as a Second Language (ESL) context. While literature education plays an important role in the Malaysian English language curriculum, research shows that it has not fully met its objectives. One way to address this issue is to consider the training of literature teachers as they are an important agent of change in the English curriculum. Therefore this study aims to explore the perspectives and experiences of pre-service and in-service English teachers as they study literature in their university literature classroom, as part of their training to be literature teachers. The information drawn from this study will contribute to the understandings of literature education in the ESL context and improvements in practices related to English language and literary literacy.

Research Participants:
Pre-service and in-service English teachers enrolled in a literature course, and their course lecturer.

Research Procedures:
Participants will be interviewed in small groups of 3-5 for about 1-1.5 hours on a given topic. At the end of the interview, participants will complete an individual written summary form of the key ideas presented. The focus group interviews will be conducted three times throughout the semester: at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the course. Membership in the focus groups is not fixed and every interview will be audio-taped. The course lecturer will be interviewed on his/her opinions and perspectives of the course, and the learners’ performance in the course. The lecturer interview will be conducted separately, once at the beginning and once at the end of the course. Informal, non-participant classroom observations will be conducted following every round of interviews. Participants will also be required to keep a personal reading response journal, based on a given task, and these diaries will be collected once, at the end of the semester. Journal entry is unlimited. The research requires access to relevant documents in the course such as students’ written assignments, course syllabus and lesson plan.
**Benefits:**
Participants will be offered feedback on their reading journals. Participants will gain an awareness of how they learn literature as compared to their peers. They will be able to draw from the perspectives and experiences of others in order to confirm their own ideologies and practices in the teaching and learning literature.

**Participant rights:**
Participation in this research is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason, without prejudice in any way. In such cases, the research records will be destroyed. Participant confidentiality will be respected at all times. The project investigators will have sole access to the data collected, and it will be stored in a secure storage facility. The results of this research may be published, but without revealing the participants’ identity. All data will be coded so as to preserve the identity and confidentiality of the participants.

Further information about this study can be obtained from any of the following research team members:

- Assoc. Prof. Marnie O’Neill  Research Supervisor  +61 8 6488 2392
- Dr. Marie-Eve Ritz  Research Supervisor  +61 8 6488 3513
- Florence Gilliam Kayad  Researcher  +61 8 6488 2300

If you would like to take part in this research, please read and sign the attached consent form.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Marnie O’Neill

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Australia requires that all participants are informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Registrar’s Office, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009 (Ph: +61 8 9380 3703). All study participants will be provided with a copy if the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their personal records.
Literature education in the ESL context: An interpretivist study of how pre-service and in-service English teachers in Malaysia study literature at tertiary level.

STUDENT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I (the participant) have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study, which includes the focus group interviews, classroom observations, personal reading response journal, and other required course documents, realising that I may withdraw at any time without reason and without prejudice during the data collection phase of the study.

I understand that all information provided is treated as strictly confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to by law. I have been advised as to the nature of data being collected, what the purpose of the study is, and what will be done with the data upon completion of the research. Participants who refuse to participate in the study will not be prejudiced in any way.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published, provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

Name:

____________________________________

Signature:

____________________________________

Date:

____________________________________

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Australia requires that all participants are informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Registrar’s Office, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009 (Ph: +61 8 9380 3703). All study participants will be provided with a copy if the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their personal records.
Literature education in the ESL context: An interpretivist study of how pre-service and in-service English teachers in Malaysia study literature at tertiary level.

LECTURER PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I (the participant) have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study, which includes the classroom observations and individual interview, and other required course documents, realising that I may withdraw at any time without reason and without prejudice during the data collection phase of the study.

I understand that all information provided is treated as strictly confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to by law. I have been advised as to the nature of data being collected, what the purpose of the study is, and what will be done with the data upon completion of the research. Participants who refuse to participate in the study will not be prejudiced in any way.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published, provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

Name: ___________________________________________________________

Signature: _________________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________________________

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Australia requires that all participants are informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Registrar’s Office, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009 (Ph: +61 8 9380 3703). All study participants will be provided with a copy if the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their personal records.