TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE LITERARY TEXTS USED IN TAMIL LITERATURE SUBJECT IN 2021 IN COMPARISON TO THE TEXTS USED IN 2016

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ABSTRACT

This study is designed to identify Tamil literature teachers' perceptions towards the literary texts used in upper forms Tamil literature subject in 2021 in comparison to the texts used in 2016. It is also to identify the changes in the selection of the literary texts from the previous to the current phase. The data were analyzed based on these Tamil literature teachers' perceptions in terms of the topic/content, language and culture found in the literary texts. In the attempt of data collection, a questionnaire was designed with seven questions, which were divided into three different criteria. 116 Form 4 and 5 teachers from different schools nationwide participated in this study. The findings indicated that there were some significant similarities and differences in these teachers' perceptions of the two different sets of literary texts used in upper forms in 2016 and 2021 based on the stated criteria.

Keywords: Literary Text, Teacher's Perception, Tamil Literature Subject

Introduction

The Malaysian Ministry of Education introduced the Tamil literature curriculum in 2020. This subject is an elective lesson for Form 4 and 5 students. This enacted curriculum is more communicative because students need to talk a lot while evaluating the text as well. The content of the KSSM Tamil literature curriculum consists of two parts, namely literary appreciation and human development (KSSM Tamil Literature, DSKP, 2018).Both of these parts are a new approach introduced in the Tamil literature curriculum which needs to be mastered by the upper secondary students (Form 4 and 5). Through text study, students learn the elements of literature to assist in the production of works that meets the characteristics of good writing (Tetty Juliana Sujono,2020). In addition, the theme and sub-theme worked on by the author or poet ina work can be used as a guide in shaping students' personalities as well as contributing to the development of society and country (Kiramany& Kumar,2021).

The selection of appropriate literary textbooks is required to achieve the focused

aspirations in the curriculum. The literary genres chosen by the ministry to be used as literary materials for teaching and learning purposes in secondary schools are contemporary novels, classical drama and traditional poetry.

Since Tamil literature was introduced in the SPM examination, the selection of textbooks was done by the Malaysian Examinations Board. After the subject of Tamil literature was accepted as an elective subject in the standard secondary school curriculum starting in 2020, the selection and appointment of literary textbooks are done by the textbook division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Form 4 and Form 5 Tamil Literature Guidance Book, 2021).

Problem Statement

New literary texts for Tamil literature subject was introduced by the textbook division of the Ministry of Education in 2021. Local Tamil enthusiasts especially teachers start to explore the challenges and perceptions of different parties towards the use of literature in teaching and learning Tamil.The selected literary text should meet the instinctive demands of a student and guarantee intellectual development(Eswaran, 2019&Suppureddiyaar,2000). For that, the selected text must have several aspects that encourage students' interest in learning Tamil literature. Research by Ghazali (2009) on the teaching method used in English literature classes shows that teachers who are directly involved in this matter spent a lot of time discussing the literary elements of the text in class and students responded that the teaching strategies used were boring and not interesting. This might be because of a mismatch between the text selected and students language ability. Additionally, the literary texts selected were not contextual and culturally bound (Hariharan & Shri, 2016;Tamburaj, Ponniah, Sivanathan& Kumar,2021).This makes students face difficulties in learning literature. Hence, this study is meant to revisit the situation in school(Ponniah, Sivanadhan, Kumar &Nadarajan, 2019).

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:
1. To identify teachers' perceptions of previously used literary texts compared to the newly introduced literary texts based on the criteria of content/topic, language and culture.
2. To identify changes in the literary texts used in the 2016 cohort compared to the texts used starting the year 2021.

Literature Review

This section will summarize the related researches done to find out about Tamil Literature subjects and perception towards literary texts used in the classroom based on the criteria of topic/content, language and culture.

Kingstan Pal Thamburaj (2015) revealed that SPM Tamil literature question papers fulfil the National Philosophy of Education but there are still some drawbacks in which the National Philosophy of Education items were not included in the question paper namely spiritual and health. So, to fulfil the nation's philosophy of education, we must include and give importance to all criteria in preparing and writing textbooks and question papers.

Othna Sanub (2016) in his study on the English literature component indicated that there were some significant similarities and differences in these teachers' perceptions towards the two different sets of literary texts used in Upper Forms in 2007 and 2016 based on the stated criteria.

Lam Ai Ling (2002) study on English literature revealed that the topic/content of the literary texts used was interesting and suitable to the needs and abilities of the Form Four students thus able to arouse students' interest in learning. However, Ganakumaran (2003) showed in his research that it is imperative to maintain consistency in the topics/contents that are dealt with in the language component and the literature one. Inappropriate literary texts can place an unbridgeable gap between the student's language ability and what they are expected to read and comprehend.

Chew, F.P. & Yong, C.H. (2013)

conducteda study based on the conceptual framework of CIPP to evaluate teachers' views on the Chinese Language Syllabus at lower secondary schools in Selangor state, Malaysia. Results of the t-test, ANOVA and Chi-square test showed no significant differences in the evaluation of teachers in general despite the teachers' different backgrounds.

Sivabalan Tanggayah (2019) in his study evaluated the effectiveness of the implementation of the National Tamil Language School (BTSK) based on three dimensions, namely inputs, processes and products. The findings implied that the BTSK textbook can be improved by referring to the skills that need to be learned and the improvement of the teaching and learning process needs to be done by diversifying teaching methods by inserting elements of Information Communication Technology (ICT) to facilitate students to master language skills. It is proposed that the BTSK program should be continued because it has the potential to achieve curriculum goals optimally.

Methodology

There are two forms of research methods in this study, namely qualitative and quantitative research. Through this qualitative method, researchers can study in-depth the phenomena that occurred in the study in reality (Idris Awang, 2001). Sources of data obtained in this qualitative research are in the form of books, magazines, dissertations, journals, papers, books and seminars. Sources of data obtained through quantitative methods consist of questionnaires that have been distributed to respondents who have been selected.

This study was carried out in various schools nationwide. For data collection, 116 Tamil literature teachers who have taught the literature components to Form Four and Five students, were selected purposely as participants of the study. To obtain the needed data, a questionnaire was used. The questionnaire that covers three aspects, namely the content, language and culture of a literary text is designed to obtain teachers' perceptions. The teacher will mark the achievement scale according to the questions and categories provided.

Data received from teachers' perceptions will be collected in the form of percentages to assess the appropriateness of the content, language level and cultural influence of a literary text. The data obtained from the questionnaire were compared to identify differences between the two data were presented and discussed.

Findings And Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of this study based on the criteria of topic/content, language and culture.

i)   Novel

a)   Topic/ Content

Table 1: The responses for the criteria of topic/content

Year	2016 – 2020 (Agal Vilakku)	2021 (Vada Malar)
Items	Agree %	
Suitability	99.10	95.70
Familiarity	93.10	94.80
Setting	100 foreign	100 foreign

Table 1 shows the results of these teachers' perceptions towards the topic/content of novels. In 2016, 99.10% of the respondents agreed that the literary text novel (agal Vilakku) weresuitable to students' maturity, interests and needs. For the familiarity of the

topic/content, 93.10% agreed that all of the topics/contents were familiar to students. As for the settings, 100% of them agreed that 100 % of foreign settings were presented in this criterion.

While in 2021, the percentage of agreement was still quite high (95.70%), the respondents thought that the topic/content of the texts was more suitable for the students. In terms of familiarity, 94.80% of respondents agreed that the topic/content was familiar to the students. Many of the respondents believed that although the novel text used had foreign contexts, the students felt very familiar with the context. Likewise, all (100%) perceived that the texts have foreign settings and there were no Malaysian texts at all.Thissituation can hinder students understanding of the texts thus eventually creating a gap between them and the texts

b) Language

Table 2: The responses for the criteria of language

Year	2016 – 2020 (Agal Vilakku)	2021 (Vada Malar)
Items	Agree %	
Appropriate to all category students	76.70	80.20
Exposure to the aesthetic aspect	99.1	99.1

Table 2 shows the percentage of the respondents' answers for the criterion of language used in the texts. Teachers who participated in this questionnaire suggested that the language structure was used in both texts more appropriate to all category students since they have the attitude to seize the meaning and relate it with their experiences. As for the exposure to the aesthetic aspect, both texts scored a high percentage from the teachers which indicated that these texts did expose students to the aesthetic aspect via the exploitation of figurative language in the novel.

c) culture

Table 3: The responses for the criteria of culture

Year	2016 – 2020 (Agal Vilakku)		2021 (Vada Malar)	
Items	Agree %			
Variety of culture	Malaysian	Foreign	Malaysian	Foreign
	0	100	0	100
Culture exposure to different perspectives of life	96.4		92.3	

Table 3 showsthe percentage of the respondent's perceptions of the culture depicted in the texts. 96.4% of the teachers were agreedthat previous textand current text presented foreign culture. As for the second question,96.4% of teachers agreed that the culture presented in the 'Agal Vilakku' novel expose the students to different perspectives of life. According to the agreement figure by the teachers,'Vada Malar' novel also recorded the same trend as the 'Agal Vilakku' novel. 92.3% of teachers agreed that the culture presented in

'Vada Malar' novel exposes students to   different perspectives of life.

ii)   Drama

a)   Topic/ Content

Table 4: The responses for the criteria of topic/content

Year	2016 – 2020 (Kaciccakkaravarthi)	2021 (Pisiraanthaiyaar)
Items	Agree %	
Suitability	94.80	84.40
Familiarity	82.70	71.00
Setting	100 foreign	100 foreign

Table 4 shows the results of these teachers' perceptions towards the topic/content of dramas. In 2016, 94.80% of the respondents agreed that the drama text wassuitable to students' maturity, interests and needs. For the familiarity of the topic/content, 82.70% agreed that all of the topics/contents were familiar to students. As for the settings, 100% of them agreed that 100 % of foreign settings were presented in this criterion.

While in 2021, the percentage of agreement decreased in aspects of suitability compared to the previous text. Only 84.40% of teachers felt that the 'Pisiraanthaiyaar' drama text presented in 2021 was suitable for all students.Moreover, the 'Pisirantayaar' drama text that was introduced in 2021 showed a decrease in familiarity percentage to 71%.

Both cohorts show that 100% of respondents perceived that the setting of drama texts have foreign settings.Foreign content would cause difficulty for students to understand the storyline easily.

b) Language

Table 5: The responses for the criteria of language

Year	2016 – 2020 (Kaviccakravarthi)	2021 (Pisiraanthaiyaar)
Items	Agree %	
Appropriate to higher proficiency students	65.5	62.1
Exposure to aesthetic aspect	94	88.8

Table 5 shows the percentage of the respondents' answers for the criterion of language used in the drama texts. Teachers who answered this questionnaire suggested that the language structure used in both texts are more appropriate for higher proficiency students. As for the exposure to the aesthetic aspect, 'Kaviccakravarthi' text scored a high percentage from the teachers. 94% of teachers indicated that this text did expose students to the aesthetic aspect via the exploitation of figurative language. Meanwhile,

'Pisiraanthaiyaar' drama recorded a low score of 88.8% compared to the 'Kaviccakravarthi' text.

c) culture

Table 6: The responses for the criteria of culture

Year	2016 – 2020 (Kaviccakravarthi)		2021 (Psiraantaiyaar)	
Items	Agree %			
Variety of culture	Malaysian	Foreign	Malaysian	Foreign
	0	100	0	100
Cultural exposure to different perspectives of life	87.9		83.6	

Table 6 shows the percentage of the respondent's perceptions of the culture depicted in the drama texts. 100% of the teachers agreed that both texts presented contain foreign culture. On the item about cultural exposure to different perspectives of life in 'Kaviccakravarthi' drama, 87.9% of teachers agreed to the statement. Meanwhile, for the 'Pisiraanthaiyaar' drama 83.6%of teachers agreed that the culture presented in the drama exposes students to different perspectives of life.

iii)   Poem

a) Topic/ Content

Table 7: The responses for the criteria of topic/content

Year	2016 – 2020 (Kavithai Thokuppu)	2021 (Kavithai Polil)
Items	Agree %	
Suitability	99.2	99.1
Familiarity	98.3	98.2
Setting	98.3	98.3

Table 7 shows the results of these teachers' perceptions towards the topic/content of poems. In 2016, 99.20% of the respondents agreed that the poemsselected for the syllabuswere suitable to students' maturity, interests and needs. For the familiarity of the topic/content, 98.3% agreed that all of the topics/contents were familiar to students. As for the settings, 98.3% of them agreed that only 33.3% of poems were foreign settings.

While in 2021, the percentage of agreement wasalmost retained in aspects of suitability compared to the previous text. 99.1% of teachers felt that 'Kavithai Polil' text presented in 2021 was suitable for all students. In the familiarity element, 'KavithaiPolil' (2021) showed 98.2% of teachers agreed that text content was very familiar to the students.

For the settings element, 98.3% of teachers agreed that 58.3% of the poems are foreign settings in the 2021 syllabus. This indicates an increase in the number of foreign poems for use in the classroom.

d) Language

Table 8: The responses for the criteria of language

Year	2016 – 2020 (Kavithai Thokuppu)	2021 (Kavithai Polil)
Items	Agree %	
Appropriate to all students	67.2	66.4
Exposure to aesthetic aspect	100	100

Table 8 shows the percentage of the respondents' answers to the criterion of language used in the poem texts. Teachers' answers in this questionnaire suggested that the language structure used in 'Kavithai Thokuppu' and 'Kavithai Polil' were appropriate to all categories of students. Both texts show a percentage rate of agreement that is almost equal in value. 100% of teachers indicated that these texts did expose students to the aesthetic aspect via the exploitation of figurative language.

e) Culture

Table 9: The responses for the criteria of culture

Year	2016 – 2020 (Kavithai Thokuppu)	2021 (Kavithai Polil)
Items	Agree %	
Variety of culture (Malaysian & Foreign)	99.1	96.6
Cultural exposure to different perspectives of life	96.5	96.6

Table 9 shows the percentage of the respondent's perceptions of the culture depicted in the poem texts. More than 90% of the teachers agreed that both texts contain Malaysia and foreign culture. For the item on cultural exposure to different perspectives of life in both poem texts, more than 90% of teachers agreed to the statement.

From the above analysis, we find that the texts of Tamil literature subjects namely novels, dramas and poems got diverse reactions from the teachers who participated in this questionnaire. Literary texts are valued in terms of content, language and cultural application. The following is a summary of the findings and the above analysis:

a) Novel

From the above analysis, it is found that Agal Vilakku's novel and Vada Malar's novel are considered suitable texts to be used for the teaching and learning of Tamil Literature subjects in secondary schools. This is because these texts are suitable for use as reading material for teenagers and have a high level of familiarity. Both of these factors are driving factors in the selection of novel texts for high school students. However, both novels are foreign novels from Tamil Nadu, India. 100% of the stories of the novels are based on Tamil Nadu. This may be a barrier to moderate poor-performing students' understanding of the content of the novel.

In terms of language, both novels have a language that is easily understood by all levels of students. In addition, both novels have a high aesthetic value. This can increase students' appreciation of the novel being read.

The cultural aspect in the novels can reveal the cultural diversity within Tamil Naadu. The culture of the Malaysian community, especially the culture of the Malaysian Tamil community, is not revealed in the two novels. This needs to be given serious attention so that the cultural values of the Malaysian Tamil community can be revealed in Malaysian literature.

b) Drama

From the above analysis, the content of the dramas 'Kaviccakravarthi' and 'Pisiraantaiyaar' are considered suitable to be used for the teaching and learning of secondary school students. The suitability value agreed by the teachers who teach for the drama 'Pisiraanthaiyaar' is decreased compared to the previous drama. Although the value recorded is more than 80%, this matter needs to be given attention in detail so that students do not face problems in understanding the drama. From the aspect of familiarity, the drama 'Kaviccakravarthi' is considered to have content that is more familiar to students than the drama 'Pisiraanthaiyaar'. The familiarity value for the drama 'Pisiraanthaiyaar' is 71.00%. Nearly one-third of students, especially moderate and weak students, may have difficulty understanding the content of the drama.Both dramas are foreign. 100% of the content of the dramas is based on the classical Tamil Naadu era. This can cause students to have trouble understanding the content of the drama.

Moreover, the language used in both dramas is classic. Only students who have a high level of fluency in Tamil can fully understand the content of the drama. Other students need comprehensive tutoring and guidance from the teacher. They cannot master the text of the play without the guidance of the teacher. As for the aesthetic value, both dramas recorded a high value of the agreement.

From the cultural aspect, both dramas highlight the culture of the classical Tamil community in Tamil Naadu. This can be a challenge for moderate and weak Malaysian students to delve deeper into the drama. However, the culture featured in the dramas managed to show various perspectives on the life of the Tamil community.

c) Poem

The suitability analysis of the poetry content for both texts recorded a figure of over 90%. The teachers who participated in this questionnaire agreed that the content of the selected poems was suitable for use for teaching and learning in secondary schools. In addition, the poetic content of both texts is very familiar to students. Meanwhile, in terms of setting, the poetry anthology 'Kavithai Thoguppu' featured 41.7% foreign poems and 58.3% local poems (Kavithai Thoguppu, 2016). For the poetry anthology 'Kavithai Polil', as many as 50% of the poems are foreign poems. There was a decline in the number of local Tamil poems (Kavithai Polil, 2020). This needs to be assessed in detail to maximize the use of local poetry in the Tamil Literature curriculum.

In the aspect of language, a large number of teachers who answered the questionnaire stated that the language of both texts is more friendly to students who have a high level of Tamil fluency. Moreover, the analysis shows that the rate of application of the value of aesthetic aspects in both texts recorded a figure

of 100%. This is a positive sign in the application of the Tamil literature syllabus among secondary school students.

Over 90% of teachers agreed that both poetry texts highlight local and foreign cultures in a balanced way. At the same time, the culture can show various perspectives on the lives

of multi-religious and multi-ethnic communities.

The changes in the selection of the literary texts.

Table 10:

The literary texts used in Tamil Form Four Form Five Literature Subject in the years 2016 and 2021.

Form 4 & 5 Tamil literature text books		
Component / Year	**2016**	**2021**
Novel	Agal Vilakku (India)	Vada Malar (India)
Drama	Kaviccakravarthi (India)	Pisiraanthaiyaar (India)
Poem	Kavithai Thokuppu	Kavithai Polil
1	Tamilpperu! Tavapperu! (Malaysia)	Kaalam Parakkuthada (Malaysia)
2	Vinmeen (Malaysia)	Naalai Namathe (Malaysia)
3	Saanaikkal (Malaysia)	Sanjikkooli (Malaysia)
4	Thaay (India) Kalvi (Malaysia)	Nyana Vazhi (Malaysia)
5	Vaalnthu Kaattuvom (Malaysia)	Kaaviyamum Oviyamum (Malaysia)
6	Naan Oru Pithtan (Malaysia)	Kaadu (Malaysia)
7	Rapparum Tamilanum (Malaysia)	Kaalai Alagu (India)
8	Verungkai Enbathu Moodathtanam (India)	Sooriyan Varuvathu Yaaraale? (India)
9	Maanavarku (India)	Madamai Moodiya Iruttu (India)
10	Tamilarin Tharkaala Nilamai (India)	Vaalkaiye Oru Thiruvizha (India)
11	Thaay (India)	Mayil (India)
12	Patthtirikai (India)	Penkal Vidutalaik Kummi (India)

Implications

Based on the analysis, here are the implications of this study:

1. Teachers of Tamil literature should pay special attention to delivering the content of novels with a foreign background.
2. Effective drama content delivery techniques are needed to overcome the problem of understanding the storyline

of drama that highlights classical life.
3. More focused efforts and more interesting methods are needed to overcome language problems in drama and poetry so that all categories of students can understand the texts to the maximum.
4. The Ministry of Education should give more priority to local works (novels and dramas) to be used as learning materials for Tamil literature subjects.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the Ministry of Education Malaysia should focus on two important things in generating Tamil Literature education in secondary schools. The first thing to emphasize is to maximize the use of local literary texts. The second thing is that in the future the selected literary text should give equal weightage to the low proficiency level of students needs.

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