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## LITERATURE IN ENGLISH STUDIES: A THEORY OF HOW TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN SINGAPORE SECONDARY SCHOOLS DEAL WITH THE SUBJECT

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### Abstract

Recent research on Literature education in Singapore has highlighted the state of ambivalence of the Literature curriculum (Choo, 2004); suggested possibilities for its reconceptualisation, taking into consideration the environment and impact of globalisation (Holden, 2000; Choo, 2011); and considered the offering of alternative curricula (Poon, 2007). An exploration into the state of Literature as a subject in Singapore secondary schools in relation to this recent research was carried out, by considering the role of Literature in the current political, economic, social and educational climate. This paper presents the findings and analysis of students' perspectives, obtained through in-depth interpretivist case studies conducted at five sites, purposively selected to incorporate the range of school types in Singapore. Data collection methods included focus group interviews, written protocol and document analysis. Emergent themes included: the insignificant impact of local literature on the study of Literature, the low status and the lack of desirability of Literature as a course of study, which led to the formulation of four key propositions supporting development of theory on ways in which students deal with Literature in English studies in Singapore secondary schools. The findings drawn from original empirical data from students have implications for theory, policy and practice.

### Background

The study took into account the education policies of the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) that have directed the teaching and learning of Literature in English in secondary schools, and sought the perspectives of students on the importance and relevance of its study in the context of the existing political, economic, cultural and social climate in Singapore.

### Political and Economic Factors

Singapore, despite its small size and lack of resources, "took full advantage of globalisation" (Lee, K.Y., 2009, p. 2) and has long since encouraged manufacturing and investment by multi-national companies from all over the world in an effort to compete and survive as an independent nation. The forces of globalisation bring with them a variety of effects, among which many have impacted on literary studies. As this research was located within the broad context of global trends towards knowledge-based economies, it is necessary to examine features of globalisation which affect the study of Literature (Miller, 1998, 2002).

Changes to the education system in Singapore have always occurred as a result of the impact of globalisation and economic challenges. Education policies are planned based on economic planning and manpower needs of the country (Goh & Gopinathan, 2006). The restructuring of the education system aimed to sustain Singapore's competitiveness in the global market (Goh & Gopinathan, 2006, p. 51).

Schools were geared "towards innovation" with the "innovative use of ICT in teaching and

learning” in order to prepare the students for a “fast-evolving and challenging future” (Lui, 2007, para 2, 24). This research specifically explored the relevance of Literature<sup>1</sup> education in Singapore in the context of increasing emphasis on technology and skills.

Singapore aspires to be a regional hub and a major economic force. To fulfil this national aspiration, Singaporeans need to be highly competent in the English Language in order to compete internationally (Ng E.H, 2010). This research study investigated how Literature studies might be constructed in this context, and whether it was considered to be contributing to the country’s agenda of progress and achievement. It reviewed the policies of the MOE and examined the impact of these policies on Literature studies.

Meritocracy is a key political concept and is practised in almost all aspects of life in Singapore. In education, it ensures equal opportunities for all and this emphasis on individual achievement encourages the pursuit of excellence. Students choose subjects and courses of study based on what they believe they can excel at and on the perceived economic demands of the country. However, opportunities are tied to the political and economic goals of the country. This affects the study of Literature which is being “widely perceived as a difficult subject suitable for an elite few” (Poon, 2007, p. 51) as well as considered by many to be an indulgence.

The political and economic discourses of the Singapore government continually highlight the importance of Mathematics and Science (Lee, H.S., National Day Rally speech, 2010; New Year Message, 2010). In addition, as part of the educational initiative of Thinking Schools Learning Nation (Goh, C.T., 1997), the focus on Innovation and Enterprise has paved the way for achievements in the areas of Mathematics, Science and Technology. In the midst of all these advancements, there is an uncertainty about the place of Literature in the curriculum. As a result, Literature as a subject is marginalised, and by association so are its teachers and students.

## **Cultural and Social Factors**

As a multi-racial country with four dominant racial groups (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian), as well as expatriates working and living in Singapore, the cultivation of a shared cultural identity is a challenge. Added to this are the ties to the colonial past from which Singapore has not apparently broken away, as evidenced in the predominance of British texts in the Literature curriculum, despite calls for revision of syllabuses and reforms to the curriculum (Holden, 2000; Choo, 2004; Poon, 2007, 2009). Although revisions had been made to the ‘O’ and ‘A’ level syllabuses to include post-colonial literatures, they are ultimately part of the national curriculum of another country and therefore, “transplant(s) uneasily to the Singapore context” (Holden, 2000, p. 40). This could be the reason why secondary students could never really feel a close connection to Literature as a subject.

Statements on language and language policies consistently referred to English as the language of commerce while mother tongue languages<sup>2</sup> were regarded as languages of heritage and identity (Silver, 2004, p. 61). In this respect, the study of Literature in English proves to be a highly challenging task for students from non-English cultural backgrounds. Singaporean literature may be the common ground to help establish a common cultural identity among the different cultures.

Equally important is the issue of national identity. Velayutham (2007) outlines the problems and paradoxes faced by the establishment of Singapore as both a city-state and a nation. Singapore’s emergence as a “Newly Industrialised Economy and its engagement with the ‘global’ and the West was seen as a threat to its social cohesion” (ibid., p. 203). The ambivalence towards the study of Literature, which had been associated with the West, could be attributed to this uneasiness about the ‘negative’ influences of the West.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Literature” is used throughout this thesis to refer to the subject Literature in English.

<sup>2</sup> All students who are Singaporeans or Singapore Permanent Residents study their respective official Mother Tongue Language: Chinese, Malay, Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi or Urdu (MOE, 2011).

As Singapore progresses and develops as a nation, the importance of literature as a unifying agent becomes more evident. The changing arts scene in Singapore can be seen as a move towards a change in social attitudes towards literature. However, the relatively slow response to change with respect to the Literature curriculum in Singapore is not in sync with the rapid developments in the local arts scene. The vision of Singapore as a global arts city by the 21<sup>st</sup> century entails the promotion of culture and the arts. The study of Literature complements this objective and has the potential to contribute to its achievement. This research explored, among other aims, the role of Literature in the promotion of culture and the arts.

## Education Policy Factors

Introduced to Singapore in 1891, Cambridge examinations syllabuses have since been revised to include post-colonial literatures, with the most recent long awaited change to the Literature curriculum in 2008, which saw the introduction of some local texts for study. That was the extent of the change to the Literature curriculum in Singapore in the midst of extensive international debate on the future of “traditional literary study” (Miller, 2002, p. 10). This research brings the Singapore literary scene to the forefront and situates it in an international context as it draws on an analysis of international trends and contexts in literary studies.

Students in Singapore sit the Cambridge University General Certificate of Education (GCE) at either Ordinary (‘O’) or Advanced (‘A’) levels. The ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels literature syllabus for secondary schools have been reviewed to feature the work of local writers as well as providing a more varied selection of set texts. The inclusion of a controversial play “*Off Center*” by local playwright Haresh Sharma as an ‘O’ level examination text in 2008 among other set texts like Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* was a bold move on the part of the MOE to incorporate more Singaporean literature into the syllabus.

Concerns over the falling numbers of students studying Literature in secondary schools have been raised by teachers, educators, researchers, writers and members of the public who felt the drastic drop of 42.4% over a 7 year period (1990 to 1997) warranted desperate measures to curb the dangerous trend before the demise of the subject altogether (*The Straits Times*, 1997). This overall trend, evident in most schools, is however not the case in some of the independent and government-aided schools where there seems to be a tradition attached to the study of Literature. This raises the question of whether the subject Literature is only to be studied by a select few, those considered ‘good enough’ to study it at a higher level, and not for the masses. This research attempted to account for the lack of interest among students that make them reluctant to take up Literature as a subject of study.

The number of literary arts societies and organisations in Singapore has increased and many local top writers have participated in prestigious international literary events. The National Arts Council has also promoted literary arts through numerous initiatives and projects to nurture local writers. The *Renaissance City Report* (Ministry of Information and the Arts (MICA), 1999) outlined two aims for Singapore, the first of which was the establishment of “Singapore as a global arts city... a key city in the Asian renaissance of the 21st century and a cultural centre in the globalised world” and second of which was “to inculcate an appreciation of our heritage and strengthen the Singapore Heartbeat through the creation and sharing of Singapore stories, be it in film, theatre, dance, music, literature or the visual arts” (ibid., 1999, p. 4). This present research explored the role Singapore literature played in the Literature curriculum in secondary schools towards the achievement of this goal.

The specialised School of the Arts (SOTA) was established in 2008 by the MICA with the aim of providing “a vibrant environment for learning that is uniquely anchored in the arts” in an effort to “nurture Singapore’s artistic and creative leaders for the future” (Lee, B.Y., 2005) through its integrated, multi-disciplinary academic and arts curriculum. With such a vibrant arts scene, it is timely that the teaching of Literature in schools be revised to encourage the younger generation to create “works that fuel the imagination of our fellow citizens and promote an active, thinking society” (Shanmugaratnam, 2005, para 8).

Significant expansion of and participation in the Arts will depend on encouragement of young people as producers (writers, directors, actors for example) and consumers of Arts products. This paper reports the perspectives of secondary school students on the status of literature studies, and their potential to provide pathways to employment or participation in the Arts.

With the exception of several research papers on the state of Literature education in Singapore (Choo, 2004, 2011; Poon, 2007, 2009), no empirical study has been done to seek the perspectives of teachers and students on the teaching and learning of Literature in English in secondary schools. The research on which this paper draws generates such a theory, providing valuable data for future study and to review and refine current practices and curriculum. The findings from this study also serve to support the earlier mentioned research.

## Literature Review

The close relationship between English and Literature is explored through the work of Ball, Kenny and Gardiner whose model of the constructions of English (1990) was adapted by O'Neill (1995) and used as the basis for the conceptual framework in this research. O'Neill's quadrant model was used to analyse the aims of the MOE Literature syllabuses for secondary schools. The key elements of the model are the four orientations of Functional English, English as the Great Tradition, Progressive English and Radical English; and the roles of the participants within each of the various orientations. The aims and objectives of the Literature syllabus can be placed within the various orientations.

The current state of Literature as a subject as discussed by Chambers and Gregory (2006), identified factors, such as the "retail model of higher education", that could threaten its future in the school curriculum and beyond. Miller (1998) focussed on the issue of globalisation and its effects on literary studies. He concluded that massive economic, political and technological changes brought about by rapid globalisation would change the nature and essence of literature, such as the rise of new forms of non-print media altering the transmission of literary language and narrative techniques.

The role of Literature in the curriculum in terms of its functionality and relevance is discussed by McGregor (1992), recognising the role of literature in shaping values. Similarly, Chambers and Gregory (2006) investigate how students can feel connected with works of literature. Specifically, Singh (1999) and Yeo (1999) explore the Literature curriculum in Singapore while Holden proposes a post-colonial curricular reform which includes changes to the manner and rationale of study and the types of literary texts for study (1999).

The teaching and learning of Literature in post-colonial countries such as Australia and Canada provided a background for comparisons, while Malaysia is chosen as a post-colonial South-East Asian nation that made different decisions about English Language and Literature. In addition, current research papers (Choo, 2004; Poon, 2007, 2009) on issues pertaining to Literature studies in Singapore have found that Literature education in Singapore is in a state of ambivalence and that the future of the subject is uncertain with the introduction of Social Studies as a compulsory humanities subject, with schools choosing History or Geography electives instead of Literature.

Several key findings of this relevant literature supported the rationale for this present study and were incorporated into the development of research questions.

## Research Methodology

This study is located within the paradigm of interpretivism and uses the grounded theory approach. The collective case study method was used in this research as it involved multiple cases. Each school presented a unique context and data was gathered from a variety of sources such as focus group interviews, written protocol and documents. The study population comprised teachers and students from five secondary schools: three autonomous, one government-aided and one mainstream

school which were identified at random and provided the range and diversity needed for a comprehensive study, the only prerequisite being that they offered Literature as a subject at the upper secondary levels.

Data were analysed using the process of inductive analysis (O'Donoghue, 2007), individually and then collectively, and the cross-case analysis culminated in the generation of propositions which supported the development of theory.

This study undertook to answer the following two Central Research Questions:

Central Research Question 1: What meanings and values do teachers and students ascribe to studying Literature in English in the contemporary Singaporean environment?

Central Research Question 2: What impact do educational policies and curriculum changes have on the choice of Literature in English as a desirable curriculum subject?

A number of guiding questions were developed to help answer the two Central Research Questions.

Students were involved in focus-group semi-structured interviews. All groups were asked the same set of questions although the sequence in which these questions occurred might not necessarily be in the same order. Opportunities were given for clarification and elaboration. Each focus group had no more than five students and took up about 40 minutes of interview time. Members of the groups were chosen at random by teachers. At the end of the interviews, students were asked to fill in a written protocol which consisted of seven Likert items, worded in the form of statements, to which students had to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a four-point scale. The items focused on two areas: text selection and value of literature; and students' responses were used to validate the data derived from the focus group interviews. The responses were compiled and recorded in a focus group summary sheet from which main themes were identified. Students' responses to the statements were used to check the student interview data. The written protocol was also a means of verifying interview data and establishing the degree of consensus with which key views were held. The use of the written protocols was appropriate in managing the large quantity of data provided by the 89 students who were involved in the study.

Two Literature teachers from each of the schools identified were invited to take part in the research by completing an open-ended survey. In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with the Heads of Department (HODs).

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Global Economic Forces**

Singapore's open economy responds to globalisation by aligning its foreign and domestic policies to maximise growth and in order to produce "the best workforce in the world" (Lee, K.Y., 2009). Education and training are vital means to develop Singapore's only resource – its people. Education policies of the MOE are formulated to meet the changing demands necessitated by global economic forces.

This study was conducted in the midst of the Global Financial crisis, which had its beginnings in mid 2007 and which progressed well into 2008. The uncertainty engendered by the economic climate had to be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. The revised syllabuses for 'O' and 'N' level examinations provided for a wider range of texts. Normal anxieties about syllabus change seemed to be exacerbated by the uncertain economic climate. Participants' responses to some of the interview questions did reflect these economic concerns. The perception that Literature was a subject in which it is difficult to achieve high grades had long been embedded within the Singapore education system (*The Straits Times*, 30 May, 16 August 1997), with more students choosing to study

History and Geography instead of Literature as it was easier to score distinctions in these two subjects. Although changes have been made to the education system with respect to the school ranking exercise<sup>4</sup> and the introduction of the Humanities subject with its flexible combinations of subjects for study, the choice to study Literature is still viewed as limiting the overall academic standing of individual students. This has implications in a meritocratic society like Singapore. The need to excel academically, especially in the present economic climate, is crucial and the prevailing belief that Literature graduates would not be able to get jobs in the uncertain economic climate, where the demand is in the financial, technological and scientific sectors, does not encourage students to pursue Literature studies at secondary school. Literature education is not seen as relevant in the current Singapore environment.

### Societal Influences: political, social and cultural

Interviews with teachers and students revealed the undeniable importance of Literature as a subject in secondary school. Many participants noted that the subject encourages the development of higher order thinking and creativity. The findings also showed that that the vision and mission of the school and its performance in the School Achievement Table (School Accountability Framework Review, 2006) have an impact on the degree of importance students placed on the subject. Students in the high performing schools were more receptive to Literature studies and this was reflected in their positive feedback and points of view.

Literature had a high functional element; the majority of students commented on its role in the improvement in English Language. There was consensus among students, teachers and HODs that the study of Literature in English contributed greatly to increasing students' proficiency in English Language. This placed Literature in the English as Skills quadrant (O'Neill, 1995), highlighting the authoritative and highly prescriptive control exerted by the top-down approach of the government and the MOE in educational issues.

The study of Literature focussed mainly on the mastery of skills related to textual analysis and analysis of literary devices and techniques as reflected in the aims of the Literature syllabus (CPDD, 2007). In this respect the aims of the syllabus had been achieved. Nearly all participants in this research acknowledged the role of Literature in contributing to increased proficiency in English Language.

There was a general consensus among the participants that the study of Literature can make an important contribution to the holistic education of students. The Literature syllabuses consisted mainly of political, aesthetic and linguistic objectives. Although it was noted by participants that the study of Literature could promote the values of National Education, this was not made part of the Literature teaching syllabus in schools. The subject Social Studies appeared to have taken over the role of Literature in schools as the vehicle for the transmission of moral and social values through the teaching of National Education<sup>5</sup> messages.

Despite the importance placed on Literature in secondary schools, the subject had endured a very low status compared to other Humanities subjects. Many students did not consider the subject relevant to the contemporary Singaporean environment. The political and economic 'directions' that the country is taking appear to reinforce the irrelevance of the subject. Education policies such as the national ranking exercise and the reluctance of schools to offer the subject at 'O' level did not help to improve its status. The lack of emphasis on Literature and the over-emphasis on subjects such as

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<sup>4</sup> The annual school ranking exercise was introduced in 1992 to "induce a healthy competition among secondary schools and junior colleges" (Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002, p. 156).

<sup>5</sup> The National Education programme was implemented in schools and tertiary institutions in May 1997, and aimed to "develop national cohesion, cultivate the instinct for survival as a nation and instil in our students, confidence in our nation's future...cultivating a sense of belonging and emotional rootedness to Singapore" (MOE, National Education, 2011). It is infused across the curriculum mainly through subjects like Social Studies, Civics and Moral Education, History and Geography.

Mathematics and Science served to highlight the fact that Literature is not important or relevant in the future. Teacher shortage was a problem faced by the schools and the use of unqualified relief teachers to teach the subject added to its lack of credibility and status. Literature was also perceived as a difficult subject due to its subjective nature and lack of tangible facts which could be memorised. All these factors have huge implications on the process of teaching and learning.

The discourse of government policies which highlighted Singapore as a centre of excellence in Mathematics and Science, and the promotion of a knowledge-based economy, made students move away from the study of Literature to subjects which they felt would get them jobs in the future. National Day and New Year ministerial speeches constantly highlight Singapore's educational achievements in Science and Mathematics (2010) and MOE's efforts to increase Singapore's global competitiveness through establishment of specialised schools and FutureSchools underscore the importance placed on Mathematics, Sciences and Technology (2007, 2008, 2011).

Singapore's meritocratic system where individuals are recognised and rewarded solely on the basis of achievement, merit and hard work encourages vigorous competition at work and in schools. As a nation, Singapore needs to "have a competitive edge" (Lee, K.Y., 2009) over neighbouring countries and as people are the main resource, every individual feels the need to excel. However, as opportunities are tied to the goals of a knowledge-based economy, students do not follow through on their literature study because of its low marketability. Career prospects for Literature graduates were not considered by students in this study as good as those for Mathematics and Science graduates.

According to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the National University of Singapore, Literature graduates are "well equipped for a number of jobs – typical career areas of recent graduates include journalism, television, public relations in banks and other corporations, teaching and publishing" (NUS website, 2010). These careers, however, were not considered attractive in terms of status or financial remunerations as indicated by most of the participants in this research.

The responses from participants for Central Research Question 1 have led to the development of the first proposition - *although teachers and students recognise the functional importance of Literature and acknowledge its moral and social importance, they do not consider it an economically viable course of study.*

## Policy Makers, Teachers and Students

Changes to the syllabus and examination formats appeared to be the key movers of change within the Singapore education system. Teachers and HODs were aware of the change in syllabus to include local literature though only one HOD could explain the reasons for this shift as she had been part of a review committee on the proposed syllabus change.

The lack of communication between policy-makers and practitioners in schools was highlighted by the poor dissemination of information regarding the pathways of study for Literature beyond secondary levels. The majority of the participants had no knowledge of the H1, H2 and H3 pathways of study for Literature; teachers and HODs were therefore not in a position to advise students of opportunities available for further study, thereby indirectly emphasising the lack of desirability of Literature as a subject in secondary school.

In an effort to overcome what Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong called "the most serious recession in half a century" (Lee, H.L., 2009), the introduction of local literature could be seen as a national move to promote harmony and strengthen local ties within the multi-racial communities. However, despite the merits of Literature (Lui, 2006), the objectives of studying it appear to overlap those of History, Geography and Social Studies subjects, which therefore diminishes the need to study Literature. Literature as a subject is therefore in direct competition with other Humanities subjects such as History and Geography and the introduction of Social Studies as a compulsory elective component of the Combined Humanities subject at upper secondary level, through which National Education messages are conveyed, nullifies the role of Literature in the teaching of moral and social

values.

Research shows that not many changes were made to the Literature syllabuses other than the introduction of local texts and their inclusion in the 'O' Level examination. Choo (2004) attributes the ambivalent status of the subject Literature to the conflict in ideologies inherent in the subject and those of competing social groups, as well as ties to the colonial heritage in terms of texts and assessments, which have remained largely unchanged. Although there were calls for schools to "introduce local writers to students" (*The Straits Times*, 1997) by Associate Professor Kirpal Singh, then Head of Literature and Drama at the Singapore National Institute of Education, local texts were introduced in the 'O' Level syllabus only in 2008. He also commented that Singaporeans were "lacking confidence in their own literature" (ibid.) and this was illustrated in the responses of some of the participants in this study. Poon (2009) contends that the current Literature syllabus statements and goals do not take into consideration the current global social, political, ethical and cultural issues. An analysis of MOE Literature syllabus statements highlighted the fact that very few changes had been made over the years. Poon's suggestion that cosmopolitanism be made an intellectual and ethical goal in order to ignite interest and significance in the subject entails the inclusion of more multi-cultural and international texts. To some extent this was supported by some of the students in this research in terms of their positive responses to local literature. The mixed reactions of students to the move to include more local texts reflect their resistance to change. Therefore changes such as the introduction of local texts in the Literature curriculum and the introduction of Social Studies as a school subject can only be effected from a top-down approach, consistent with the tight control exerted by the Singapore government on education.

Based on the views of the participants on Central Research Question 2, a second proposition was developed – ***teachers and students respond primarily to changes initiated at the policy level by policy makers, who in turn develop policies based on societal influences and global economic forces.***

The traditional British canon had become less significant with the introduction of many literary texts from other parts of the world. Although its influence was still felt among the teachers and HODs interviewed who preferred the more "traditional texts" and the "classics", the majority of students had no knowledge of the canon or canonical writers. Majority of the participants were quite supportive of the move to include local literature in the curriculum. However, there was still a reluctance to move away from the more familiar traditional texts. The use of the colloquial variety of English, Singlish, in local texts was not viewed as setting the right example for students. The strong government policy of encouraging the use of Standard English is in conflict with the use of Singlish by characters in many local texts, as well as by many teachers and students in communication with their peers and family members. The lack of value attached to Singlish may have affected teachers' and students' perspectives on local literature, as these texts were considered of inferior quality in comparison to foreign texts. Most students did not think the move to include local literature would encourage more students to take up the subject.

The use of local texts to engage students "on an intimate and personal level" can be viewed as an attempt to forge a national identity within the multi-lingual and multi-cultural Singaporean community. However, given the tension between Singlish and Standard English, this notion of identity may continue to be a contentious issue.

Despite the huge success of local plays and sitcoms which make use of Singlish, there appears to be a divide between the performing arts scene and the literary scene. The vibrant cultural arts programme and vision of a global arts city do not appear to support the growth of the literary scene in schools where local literature still needs to gain wide acceptance.

These findings lead to the development of the third proposition – ***local literature has not yet made any significant impact on students in secondary schools in terms of promoting and encouraging the study of Literature.***

Based on the interviews conducted, it can be concluded that the culture of the school plays a huge part in determining the direction of curriculum programmes. The vision and mission statements drive the learning programmes and school leaders play an important part in influencing the direction of learning programmes. One HOD was able to lift the profile of Literature in his school and generate enough interest to get students to take up the subject as a course of study. Another HOD was able to encourage all students from Secondary 1 to 4 to study the subject as a pure subject or an elective. Similarly, the tremendous increase in the number of students studying Literature since 2001 in another school was due to the extensive promotion of the subject by the HOD to parents and students. Based on these observations, a fourth proposition was developed - ***school leaders have the autonomy and the ability to initiate change through the implementation of programmes and courses of study at the school level.***

## Conclusion

The aim of this research was to generate theory on how teachers and students in Singapore secondary schools deal with Literature in English studies, by looking at the meanings and values teachers and students ascribe to studying Literature in the contemporary Singaporean environment and evaluating the impact of educational policies and curriculum changes on the choice of Literature as a desirable curriculum subject. Based on the four key propositions, this theory proposes that teachers and students possess a strong sense of complacency and ambivalence towards the teaching and learning of Literature. They do not see the economic viability of pursuing Literature studies beyond the secondary levels. There is a tendency for the subject to be seen as an 'elite' subject, suitable only for students from the better performing schools. The subject Literature is seen as a disparate entity, unrelated to the vibrancy of the local Arts and literary environment. The future of the subject is dependent upon the formulation of policies by policy makers at the institutional and governmental levels, which are enacted at the school level without much resistance.

This research recognises the fact that it takes a long time for a literary culture to be established, especially in post-colonial countries which still retain some of the educational practices and standards of the colonial past. Having attained economic stability and internal cohesion, the time is conducive for the concerted development of a multi-racial literary culture in Singapore. Singapore is fast becoming a regional financial and technological hub, with a vibrant Arts scene especially in the area of performing arts. Within this stable environment, the potential for the development of an exciting, current and meaningful literature programme would only enhance one of the best performing school systems.

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