

Sexuality Education through Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

Issues pertaining to sexual misbehaviour among adolescents have continued to make headlines in the Malaysian media. In response to this, the Malaysian government decided to introduce sex education in the schools beginning January 2011. However, with resounding pessimistic views from conservatives that the introduction of sex education in schools could be misconstrued by students as an initiation to sexual activities, careful consideration needs to be given to how the topic is introduced and handled and the materials utilised in the teaching of sexuality education. In the West, literature has been successfully utilised in various fields of works in a bid to alter perceptions and awareness of individuals. This paper seeks to discuss the feasibility of using short stories to enhance students' level of awareness on issues pertaining to sexuality. A research was conducted to study the feasibility of teaching sexuality education through selected short stories that deal with issues on abortion, pre-marital sex, gender roles, and gender equality to a group of students in a Malaysian classroom. The first section provides a literature review and argues the rationale for the selection of short stories to teach sexuality education. Data from a pilot study will provide indications as to the feasibility of using short stories to teach sexuality education. This paper concludes by deliberating on the feasibility of using short stories as an alternative way to enhance students' knowledge and awareness on issues pertaining to sexuality.

Keywords: sexuality education; effective alternative; social interaction in learning; short stories; text selection

INTRODUCTION

Issues pertaining to sexual misbehaviour among adolescents, especially concerning teenagers abandoning newborns and the high abortion rate among school students, have continued to make headlines in the Malaysian media. In view of this, the Deputy Prime Minister announced that sex education will be implemented in schools beginning 2011. Nevertheless, with resounding pessimistic views from conservatives that the introduction of sex education in schools can be misconstrued by students as an initiation to sexual activities, there is a need to consider alternative avenues in teaching sexuality education. Considering the fruitful results produced by studies in the West that utilised literature in various fields of works that were able to alter perceptions and awareness of individuals, a research was conducted to study the feasibility of teaching sexuality education through selected short stories that deal with issues on abortion, pre-marital sex, gender roles, and gender equality to a group of students in a Malaysian classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sex is defined as the physical activity that two people do together to produce babies, or for pleasure. Sexuality, on the other hand, is the things people do, think, and feel that are related to their sexual desires (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*). It is a function of the total personality and is concerned with the biological, psychological, sociological, and spiritual variables of life, which affect personality development and interpersonal relations. It includes one's self-perception, self-esteem, personal history, personality, concept of love and intimacy, body image, etc. (*Sex Glossary*).

This paper uses the term 'sexuality education' instead of 'sex education' as the former is more comprehensive in meaning. 'Sexuality Education' as described by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States' (SIECUS) provides the parameters for discussion in this study. According to SIECUS, all people have the right to comprehensive sexuality education that addresses the socio-cultural, biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of sexuality by providing information; exploring feelings, values, and attitudes; and developing communication, decision-making, and critical-thinking skills (*Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, 2004*).

Thus far, there has been a number of newspaper reports and articles regarding sexuality education in Malaysia. An empirical study undertaken by Azlinda (2005) is of particular relevance to this paper. Azlinda examined sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviours among Malaysian school-aged adolescents who participated in a *Rakan Muda Programme* (A Malaysian Youth Program). The research found that there is a low prevalence of contraception use among sexually active adolescents. It was also discovered that sexual knowledge and sexual attitudes were not correlated with engagement in sexual intercourse. Interestingly, those who attended courses on sexuality were not necessarily engaging in sexual intercourse, but show more support for sex education. Overall, the adolescents indicated their need for sex education. This doctoral study, however, did not explore how sexuality education should be undertaken.

Various writers in Malaysia have given their views on sexuality education. According to Noor Zainal (2000), sexuality education involves explanation, guidance, and counselling on the sexual understanding and health care of the reproductive organs. It also touches on the abnormal aspects and unacceptable behaviours in relation to sex and the dangers of the diseases that one may be exposed to. In viewing sexuality education through the Islamic perspective, Abdullah (2000) states that sexuality education is aimed at teaching a child from young the factors related to sexuality, and their connection to human's natural practice of marriage. When the child grows up with the knowledge on how to manage his life, he would definitely know about what is allowed and what is forbidden in his religion and culture.

The Malaysian context, with its Asian mores and religious mandates, requires that sexuality education be more of an abstinence program. The abstinence programme implemented in the United States of America (USA) requires the participating schools to teach that:

- i. abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage is the expected standard
- ii. abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and other associated health problems
- iii. a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity

- iv. sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects
- v. bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society.

(Roleff, 1999, p.6)

The principles of abstinence-only sexuality education programme above are definitely applicable in our country. These principles adhere to the demands of the religions practised by the people of Malaysia. Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, for example, forbid or discourage sex before marriage (Surhone, Timpledon & Marseken, 2010; Deem, 2006; Jayaram, 2010).

Studies reveal that young Malaysians, specifically students, bear a disproportionate burden of sexual and reproductive ill health because they have not received adequate preparation about matters regarding sexuality. This leaves them vulnerable to coercion, abuse, exploitation, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Hence, this study attempted to fill this gap by offering an acceptable alternative in addressing sexuality issues among students, i.e. through the discussion of issues related to sexuality as addressed in literature, specifically short stories.

Since childhood, a person often encounters stories that are related to literature. This acquaintance, in one way or another, influences children either to imitate what is good and virtuous or to hate what is bad and vicious. It can be concluded that most literatures are equally effective in teaching students the value of righteousness, honesty and other virtues in comparison to expository texts which often teach mere facts. Amitai Etzioni's opinion on how sexuality education should be viewed appears to mirror the above explanation about the relation between literature and values. He states that "Sex should always be viewed, treated, and taught within the context of values and relations" (cited in Roleff, 1999, p. 29). Etzioni adds that,

Sex should be viewed originally as a primordial urge. Like all others, it cannot be ignored and should not be suppressed but its expressions must be subject to self-control. What is needed is (a) that a person will form judgements before he or she acts and (b) that a person will channel expression of this urge into morally and socially proper, responsible channels' (Roleff, 1999 p.30).

The above view is indeed applicable to our society. Malaysian society, in general, forbids any form of extreme sexual misbehaviour in public and regards premarital sex as taboo. Exposing students to relevant literary texts on sexuality issues and triggering their critical and creative thinking skills on the actions and behaviours of the fictitious characters can lead to students forming relevant and suitable values and opinions about their own actions and behaviours in real life.

The choice of texts that could be utilised in addressing sexuality issues needs careful consideration. Basturkmen (1990) points out that literary texts should be selected through the eyes of the students as the complexities of the language can lead to frustration rather than enjoyment in reading. Unlike adults who choose books based on their preset values, young adults actually opt for books which satisfy their curiosity in "searching for ideas, information, and values to incorporate into their personalities, and into their lives" (Asher, 1992, p.79). Besides being relevant to students' lives, literature should also push students to expand their personal horizons (Annenberg Media Learner.org. 1997-2009).

Protherough (1989, p.160) has added the aspects of “likely emotional impact” and “the attitudes conveyed” as considerations in his discussion on text selection. His concern is “the influence of bad behaviour” in texts on the readers. He cautions on the extent to which children should be allowed to read of naughtiness, violence, wickedness and evil while questioning if this would harm or encourage them to imitate undesirable behaviour, or if it would help students by showing them how undesirable such behaviour is. Taking into consideration Protherough’s views, any text selected for teaching sexuality education should reflect the norms and values of our society at large. The texts have to be explicit enough to address issues pertaining to sexuality and yet conservative enough as not to compromise our values and norms in matters pertaining to the highly controversial subject.

RATIONALE FOR THE SELECTION OF SHORT STORIES

Even though there are variations in culture and religion between America and Malaysia, the stalemated polemic discussion between the groups for and against the introduction of sexuality education in secondary schools in Malaysia has prompted us to look at alternative methods and instruments. The dearth of academic research on the topic in Malaysia has prompted the researchers to look at studies conducted elsewhere.

In America, literature has been successfully utilised as a form of rehabilitative therapy. For example, within the scope of education for the special needs students, literature has been used “to complement the usual research-oriented approach to the field of child development and education” (Landau, Epstein & Stone, 1978, p.xi). Children with disabilities have benefitted through this approach as it prepared educators to serve individual learners with special education needs better. Similarly, in Massachusetts, United States of America, novels and short stories have been used to rehabilitate criminals in prisons. (Waxler, 1997) claims that when criminals are exposed to good literature they are affected sociologically, ethically and spiritually. .

The short story has been identified for this research as a possible alternative instrument in teaching sexuality education to Malaysian students. This is due to the fact that the genre of the short story, which often has a linear plot structure, a limited character list and one dilemma to be solved, is short enough to be exploited within the confines of one or two 40 minute lesson periods. It was hoped that by observing the characters, their behaviours, and their actions in the short stories, students would be more aware of their own actions and behaviours, and the possible consequences with regards to matters pertaining to sexuality.

The short story utilised in this study was *A Great Injustice* by Heah Chwee Sian (1982). The short story was identified as being suitable for the purposes of the study as the dilemma faced by the teenage protagonist has been identified as one of the issues related to sexuality education. Even though the story was published almost thirty years ago, the issues raised in the story are still relevant today. The story is about Ah Nya, a teenage girl who has the strong will to continue her life after being dumped by her boyfriend upon finding out that she is pregnant. He chooses to marry a girl of his parents’ choice citing family obligation as an excuse. Ah Nya is not only left to deal with the emotional pain of losing the man she loves, but also the burden of being pregnant and the pressure imposed onto her by the society she lives in. Ironically, Steven, her ex-boyfriend, is treated with respect by the members of the society even after they learnt that he is indeed responsible for her pregnancy. The story deals with issues on premarital sex, abortion, gender roles, and gender equality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bearing in mind the teaching and learning context of Literature in English in Malaysia is in an ESL situation, the underlying theoretical framework for this research relied on the model of teaching and learning developed by Dunkin and Biddle (1974). The research utilised the classroom setting that combined personal response with social interaction with other students and the teacher. With regards to this, the research employed Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory in referring to the definition and dynamics of personality development, Albert Bandura's social learning theory, and Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to provide the parameters for the teaching of the selected text.

Freud's psychoanalytical principles, his *structure for the personality* in particular, involves three parts: the *id*, the *ego*, and the *superego*. The *id* contains the drives or desires that people have. It is governed by the *pleasure principle* and is almost completely unconscious, and wants its wishes immediately and directly fulfilled (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, & Willingham, 1992). The *superego* contains all of the moral lessons the person has learned in his life. This is the internalized voice of authority. *Superego* is governed by the *morality principle* and it is partially unconscious. The *ego* is the mediator between the *id* and the *superego*. The *ego* tries to reconcile the wishes of the *id*, and the moral attitudes of the *superego*. That reconciliation may entail that the *ego* postpone the immediate gratification demanded by the *id* for later, and greater, gratification. The *ego*, the conscious mind, is governed by the *reality principle*, which suggests that it helps us to be healthy human beings by maintaining a balance between these two opposing forces, the *id* and *superego*. Guerin concludes that the *id* would make us devils, the *superego* would have us behave as angels (or, worse, as creatures of absolute social conformity), and it remains for the *ego* to continue its struggle to maintain a balance between the two (ibid).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, on the other hand, is concerned with the understanding of human cognition and learning as social and cultural rather than individual phenomena (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003). A key characteristic of this emergent view of human development is that higher order functions develop out of social interaction. In order to help explain how this social participatory learning takes place, Vygotsky developed the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD is defined as "the distance between the actual development level as determined through independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p.86). Despite having unequal knowledge concerning the topic under study or discussion, active agents in the ZPD can contribute to the emergent understandings of all members through scaffolded instructions from more capable others or 'More Knowledgeable Others' (MKO).

Another theory that was used in this research in relation to changing or altering attitudes or perceptions of students to sexuality issues is Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Bandura (1977, p.vii) advocates that most learned behaviours occur when there is a continuous reciprocal interaction between "cognitive, behavioural, and their environmental determinants". This view suggests that human beings learn certain behaviours primarily by socialization, observation, explanation, and acquiring social feedback. Bandura states that simply observing others being rewarded for certain behaviours will encourage the observer to engage in the same behaviours. Besides this, the modelling and imitating of others' behaviours lead the individual to produce new behaviours (Hagenhoff, Lowe, Hovell, & Rugg, 1987; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce,

Radosevich, 1979; Bandura, 1977). This, according to the social learning theory, is because the observer generally learns faster than the performer.

The principles of Bandura's social learning theory are applicable to an understanding of adolescent sexual behaviour and sexual activity (Azlinda, 2005). This is pertinent because adolescents learn behaviours from social communication and socialization within their specific groups, primarily peer affiliations (Benda, DiBlasio, & Kashner, 1994). In addition, the concept of vicarious experience or "seeing what happens to others when they perform certain activities that engender specific consequences" helps adolescents to learn about sexuality issues. This concept is particularly important when considering sexuality education as an important means for adolescents to gain better understanding of issues related to sexual activity (Azlinda, 2005).

THE STUDY

A study to gauge the feasibility of using short stories to determine teenagers' awareness regarding sexuality was conducted, involving a group of thirty-five students in a Form 4 class from a national-type secondary school in Kuala Lumpur. The two objectives below guided the study:

- How can short stories be used to teach matters pertaining to sexuality effectively?
- To what extent can short stories be used to enhance students' knowledge and awareness in matters pertaining to sexuality?

Two 40-minute periods (the teaching and learning session or the treatment) were used to teach students matters pertaining to abortion. The lesson employed the teaching strategies identifiable with the principles of Freud's psychoanalytic theory that emphasises personality development (analysis of fictional characters), Bandura's social learning theory (discussion, role-play, and problem-solving), and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (group discussion, role play, and problem-solving activities). The blend of theories is in tune with the method of triangulation that is common with the social sciences. This triangulation technique (eclecticism) allows the handling of complex concepts such as the present concept, sexuality education. The study integrated both the qualitative and quantitative modes of data collection. Research instruments used in the research were pre-test and post-test, researcher observations, and interview.

THE LESSON

The topic for the lesson, utilising Heah Chwee Sian's short story, *A Great Injustice* was abortion. The lesson was designed using the following selected curriculum specifications, from the Malaysian secondary school syllabus for the upper secondary:

- 2.1.i Obtain information for different purposes by listening to and understanding a variety of texts.
- 3.1 Listen to, read, view and respond to literary works
In addition, the lesson also incorporated content elements from the *Family Health Education / Sexuality* modules. They include:

- 2.2 Adolescence Sexual Behaviour
- 2.2.5 Realise the importance of healthy sexual attitude and behaviours
- 2.2.7 Evaluate issues related to sexual drives

Critical thinking skills like analysing information, making decisions and problem-solving were also utilised.

The lesson started with a set induction activity entitled “*id* in Action” where students were given a piece of paper and asked to write based on the situation below:

If there is no law or restriction in any form in this world and you do not care about what people say, what would you like to do or what have you longed to do? You don't have to write your name on the piece of paper.

After the teacher reviewed feedback from the students, the teacher introduced Freud’s concepts of *id*, *superego* and *ego* i.e. the ISE Concept using a scale.



id superego
 ego

FIGURE 1. ISE Concept

To clarify and simplify the concepts, the terms Individual, Society, and Equilibrium were used to explain *id*, *superego*, and *ego* respectively. The diagram below was used to further explain the ISE Concept.



FIGURE 2. ISE Concept in practice

The above representation was explained using the example below.

Rizal is determined to get a beautiful car. He contemplates stealing the car as his desires to own the car is overwhelming. However, in our society, stealing a car is considered wrong. So, Rizal needs to make a balance between his desires to own the car and not getting into trouble with the police. Rizal decides to work very hard to save enough money to buy the car. He takes up part time jobs. He also gets a bank loan.

Working in groups, students were then given an extract from the short story *A Great Injustice* and were required to analyse a character from the story using the ISE Concept. The third group activity, *To abort or not to abort?* involved students explaining their thoughts as to whether Ah Nya should have gone ahead with the pregnancy or aborted the foetus? The final activity had the students working in groups to discuss how they might prevent themselves from being caught in a situation similar to Ah Nya and Steven, i.e. out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

FINDINGS

The data collection involved a number of instruments, which included the pre-test and post-test, researcher observations, and interviews. The data is as follows:

PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

Table 2 below shows the summary of the results of the paired *t*-test analyses on the marks obtained by the students. The table shows that the scores for all the items were much higher after the lessons as compared to before. The overall mean performance for the responses on abortion was 2.52 before and 4.27 after the lessons.

TABLE 2: Results of the t-test analyses for the pre-and post-test items for abortion

No.	Statement	Phase		<i>t</i> -test	
		Pre	Post	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
1.	What is abortion?				
	Mean	2.59	3.92	-12.87	0.00*
SD	0.73	0.64			
2.	What do you think Ah Nya should do? And Why?				
	Mean	2.57	4.38	-19.34	0.00*
SD	0.65	0.64			
3.	How do you think Ah Nya could have avoided getting pregnant?				
	Mean	2.41	4.51	-27.97	0.00*
SD	0.50	0.56			
Overall (Abortion)					
	Mean	2.52	4.27	-29.25	0.00*
	SD	0.49	0.49		

The results indicate that the students performed much better in the post-test as compared to the pre-test. This suggests that the students had better understanding on matters pertaining to abortion after the lessons. The quality of their answers was found to be much better. Table 3 below shows some of the students' responses after the 'treatment' as compared to 'before'.

TABLE 3: Students' responses in the pre-test and post-test

Item	Student	Response	
		Before	After
1. What is abortion?	37	Abortion is removing a foetus from its mother's womb before it is born.	Abortion is a surgical method of discarding a baby (foetus) in a mother's womb during the early stage of pregnancy, thus snuffing out an innocent life.
2. What do you think Ah Nya should do? Why?	18	Ah Nya should consult her parents first about this matter and then only take the appropriate decisions.	Ah Nya should tell her parents the truth because it is the right thing to do. By telling her parents, Ah Nya would be able to obtain some advice from her parents. As Ah Nya is only nineteen years old, she is still young and living (sic) a teen's life. Making complex decisions are not easy at this stage (sic). Thus, she should tell her parents and then only make decisions with their approval.
3. How do you think Ah Nya could have avoided getting pregnant?	1	By reminding her lover to take contraceptives in the beginning and taking precaution (sic) steps herself.	She should have said 'no' to Steven when he wanted sex or should have take (sic) precautions (sic) steps before doing it. It is better for (sic) not to do it in the first place and she should be aware of the consequences of her doings (sic). She should take a longer time to get to know Steven before applying (sic) any sexual connections (sic) with him.

As can be seen from the above, for item 3, for example, Student 1 exhibited better awareness on how a girl can avoid getting pregnant out of wedlock. In the pre-test, her response was rather factual, quoting taking contraceptives as a means of avoiding pregnancy. However, she was more analytical in the post-test when she adopted a more 'abstinence-like' approach to avoiding pregnancy. She emphasized on girls being more careful in committing themselves to a relationship. They should take their time in getting to know their partners and they should also learn to exercise their rights in saying 'no' to engaging in sexual activities.

OBSERVATION

The results above are also supported by data from the researcher's observation. In the activity, *Character Analysis*, the students worked in groups to analyse and present their findings on one of the two main characters in the short story *A Great Injustice*, Steven and Ah Nya.

Analyses of Steven. Three of the groups assigned to analyse the male character, Steven, branded him as bad and wicked. They said that Steven's *id* got the better of him. He satisfied his sexual desires for Ah Nya and dumped her in the end. Thus, his *ego* did not strike a good balance between what he wanted (his *id*) and what the society would have expected him to do (the *superego*). They agreed that the society would expect a man to marry the one he loves..

Interestingly, the other group that analysed Steven thought that he was not a bad person after all. The group said that he is more of a victim of circumstance rather than the antagonist in the story. They used the phrase ‘It takes two to tango’ to defend Steven, claiming that he alone could not be blamed for Ah Nya’s pregnancy. The students emphasized that both Steven and Ah Nya should have been more careful.

Analyses of Ah Nya. Two groups were very sympathetic with the character and her ordeal. They said that she was a victim of her true love for Steven. She was ready to give him everything (including her virginity) because her love for Steven was true in every sense. The students were able to utilise the ISE concept in the analysis of their chosen/assigned character. Through the student discussions observed by the researcher, the students demonstrated their understanding of why Ah Nya decided to have an abortion.

A discussion on whether or not abortion is wrong followed the presentation. Below is a part of the discussion:

Student 1 :	Abortion is okay. Sometimes we have no choice.
Student 2 :	I don’t think it is okay. How can you take a life? You are not God.
Student 1 :	So, what a girl should do if she gets pregnant? If her boyfriend runs away?
Student 2 :	She should continue to give birth.
Student 3 :	You think that easy, ah? She cannot hide, you know. Everyone can see.
Student 2 :	That’s why she should continue to give birth.
Student 4 :	It is unfair. Why only the girl has to go through so much of pain? The guy escape.

When the groups of students were given the task of discussing how to prevent ‘out-of-wedlock’ pregnancy, an interesting exchange on contraceptives took place. The excerpt below shows students who were involved in a discussion where there was expansion of knowledge for students from the MKO in the group.

Student 1 :	What are contraceptives, ah? I mean in good explanation. I know (sic) not to get pregnant.
Student 2 :	Tools to prevent pregnancy?
Student 3 :	Not only tools la, operation also.
Student 2 :	Maybe we can say like... tools, or objects, or operation to prevent pregnancy after intercourse.
Student 1 :	I think that’s (sic) better explanation. What are examples of contraceptives? I know condom is one.
Student 3 :	Diaphragm.
Student 1 :	What’s that?
Student 3 :	For guys condom, for women diaphragm la. There’s also spermicide.

Student 4 :	You're kidding, right? I've never heard the word before. Sounds like homicide, suicide...
Student 1 :	Actually what's that?
Student 3 :	It's also for the women. Something (sic) put into their... you know what! It's to kill the guys sperm.
Student 1 :	Wah! Like the antivirus shield ah?
Student 3 :	There's also another thing called 'ligation'. This one right... is again for the women. It's like permanent birth control.
Student 2 :	How's that?
Student 3 :	The woman's tube will be cut off so that she won't get pregnant.

Student 3 appeared to be more knowledgeable than the others in the group. He voluntarily shared his knowledge on contraceptives. The students appeared to be learning from each other.

INTERVIEW

Student 4, in the interview session, stated that most students are not really exposed to the whole idea about abortion. Quoting the theme of abortion in *A Great Injustice*, she said,

“You ...just read the newspaper ok... the case of abortion, that's all. But we don't get to see the behind side (sic)... what's really going on. It just says this girl had an abortion or the guy made the girl have an abortion but they don't say what the girl faces or the guy faces.”

However, through studying the short stories, she implied that the reader is brought to see the complexities of the issue and understand what the characters have to go through mentally and psychologically. Another student, Student 8 said that the lessons on the teaching of sexuality education through short stories actually made her more mature in addressing the issue on abortion. She quoted, “It helps me to think more about abortion, the idea of it, everything... that is the right thing to do or wrong choice. And it makes us think before we do something.”

Students were also in agreement that through discussions with the teacher and other members in the class they were able to learn and understand the issues on abortion better. The reason for this, according to Student 4 is ‘we do not see any barriers like... mmm...rights or... any blocks. So, I think it's better and then we can share different experiences’.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research show a significant increase in the students' ratings on the use of short stories to teach issues associated with abortion. The students agreed that short stories can be used to increase their knowledge about the social problems related to sexual behaviour. They affirmed that reading short stories that entail themes related to abortion enhances their

awareness on the issue. The findings also prove that students have become more aware of how to prevent pregnancy and the implications of using contraceptives. In short, data obtained through the research instruments suggest that short stories can be an effective way of teaching students about abortion and issues related to it.

Students' analysis of the characters in the short story and their responses to the issue of abortion show that they are now aware of the functions of *id*, *ego*, and *superego* in an individual as suggested by Sigmund Freud. Their responses indicate that they acknowledge that human beings have sexual desires but the students do not need to act on these desires immediately.

Students' views that they were able to learn and understand the issues on abortion better through discussions with the teacher and other members in the class exemplifies Vygotsky's socialcultural theory. Their belief that such discussions enabled them to share their ideas and thoughts on abortion without any barrier or block mirrors Vygotsky's learning theory that pillars on the roles of active engagement and social interaction in the students' own construction of knowledge (Kafai & Resnick, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is a social process. Many environmental factors, including how the teacher or instructor teaches and how actively engaged the students are in the learning process, positively or negatively influence how much and what students learn (Lambert & McCombs, 2000).

The MKO concept in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was also well personified during the lessons. During discussion on contraceptives, it was found that Student 3 had better understanding or more knowledge on the topic. His contribution in the discussion on the types of contraceptives benefitted other members of the group. He knew about diaphragm, spermicide, and ligation and thus, he was the 'More Knowledgeable Other'. His willingness to share his knowledge with other members of the group resulted in them learning more about contraceptives.

Vygotsky's MKO theme complements his ZPD theme, the zone where learning occurs. This premise is indeed explainable through the same example mentioned above. In the discussion on contraceptives, Students 1, 2, and 4 appeared to have learned more about the various types of contraceptives through their collaboration with their peer, Student 3. They, independently, could not have listed the various types of contraceptives as they did not know about them. However, after the discussion, with the guidance of their MKO peer, they have learned about diaphragm, spermicide, and ligation. Viewing the findings of this research, the elevation from students' existing knowledge to the next level that they were helped to achieve with competent assistance" occurred in the ZPD - epitomising Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in practice.

Bandura's social learning theory states that in reality "coping with the demands of everyday life would be exceedingly trying if one could arrive at solutions to problems only by actually performing possible options and suffering the consequences (Bandura, 1977, p.27)". This view holds great truth in adolescents learning about matters concerning sexuality. Learning about sexuality through 'trial-and-error', in most cases, may neither be practical nor wise. Teenagers cannot be expected to indulge in premarital sex or go through an abortion to actually know or realise the agony and misery the perpetrators have to endure. As an effective alternative of learning about such matters, Bandura's social learning theory concentrates on the power of exemplification. Through the research, it was found that the students agreed that by observing the characters in the short stories, they were able to model or imitate the characters' good behaviours and actions with regards to sexuality and also learn about what they should not do from the characters' mistakes. Quoting the irresponsible behaviour of Steven in *A Great*

Injustice, Student 2 implied that one should be more responsible in a relationship. It was evident that he learned from Steven's mistake of not being there for Ah Nya when she needed him most to deal with the pregnancy and abortion. He went on to pronounce his stand, "To me, premarital sex is not good. So, why not wait till we get married? What's the rush?"

CONCLUSION

The research findings evidently suggest that short stories can be a useful tool in addressing issues pertaining to sexuality among students of form four in Malaysian schools. It shows that it is possible to educate teenagers in schools to be well-informed about sexuality issues through the reading and analysing of short stories. The results obtained through the research show that the students' level of knowledge and awareness on abortion and issues related to it has increased after the reading and analysing of the short story. Through this subtle but effective approach, sexuality education can be taught in a more acceptable and diplomatic manner. As such, it is hoped that the findings from this research would convince the Ministry of Education Malaysia to seriously consider including short stories such as Heah Chwee Sian's *A Great Injustice* into the literature component of the Form Four syllabus as a means of educating teenagers in matters pertaining to sexuality.

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