

Bachelor's Thesis:
Language Arts (LA) in ESL
From the Perspective of Hong Kong High School Students

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Abstract

Since 2009, four language arts (LA) elective modules, Popular Culture, Drama, Short Stories and Poems and Songs, were introduced in the English language curriculum as a part of the curriculum reform. After 10 years of the implementation, however, the modules were unpopular among students according to the candidate statistics of the HKDSE exam. There is also a lack of research about these modules, especially research focusing on students' perspective. This study looked into how the LA modules affect students' intrinsic motivation of learning English and their perceived performance in the subject. Questionnaires were collected from 100 participants who studied these modules, and 8 respondents took part in a semi-structured individual interview. The data collected was then analysed by SPSS (quantitative) and checked by the interviewees (qualitative). The findings revealed that the modules could raise students' intrinsic motivation of learning English and their perceived performance in reading, writing, speaking and vocabulary. Recommendations to teachers and curriculum developers concerning how to maximise the benefits from the LA modules were also given in this paper, including how to improve the content, activities and assessments of the four LA modules.

Key words: Language arts (LA), Intrinsic motivation of ESL/EFL students, Perceived performance of ESL/EFL students

1. Introduction

English language arts (LA) refers to a variety of activities designed based on a range of literary genres, such as novels, poems and plays (Mok, Chow & Wong, 2006). These genres are more representational, which means the processes of inferring messages and imagination are involved, than referential, which means the focus is on communications about social situations (McRae, 1991).

LA aims not only at improving English learners' language skills and cultural awareness, but also fostering their creativity and critical thinking (CDC, 2007). Using LA in English classrooms can offer authentic opportunities for students to integrate and practise the four language skills, as well as develop their generic skills such as collaboration skills and problem-solving skills (CDC, 2018). It can also avoid the mechanical learning and engage learners in an emotional experience while interacting with the texts.

With all these benefits under the three categories of language enrichment, cultural enrichment and personal involvement, the four LA elective modules, were introduced in the Hong Kong New Senior Secondary (NSS) English Language curriculum since the curriculum reform in 2009, which include:

1. Learning English through Popular Culture;
2. Learning English through Short Stories;
3. Learning English through Drama; and
4. Learning English through Poems and Songs.

Schools are required to provide two to three modules to Secondary 5 and 6 (grade 11 and 12) students, in which at least one LA module should be included. According to the CDC (2007), each of the elective module should take around 50 periods, which is 30 to 40 minutes long each. Students' knowledge in these modules will then be assessed in the English writing paper in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) and the school-based assessment, which are used for applying the university.

Yet, although the modules have been introduced for 10 years, it is not popular among Hong Kong students. This can be reflected from the report from the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) about the popularity of the modules in the exam. According to HKEAA (2012-2018), the highest percentage of students who chose the questions of the LA modules is only 34.8%; while the average percentage among the exams from 2012-2018 is only 23.9%.

Given the benefits that LA modules can bring to students, it is important for pre-service secondary English teachers to identify the needs of students and reduce the unpopularity of the LA modules. Therefore, this research intends to investigate students' perceptions of the LA modules, including how the modules affects their intrinsic motivation and perceived performance, and thus provides insight on the teaching and learning of NSS LA modules.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Current LA Curriculum

Currently, the four LA modules mentioned above include 'Learning English through Drama', 'Learning English through Short Stories', 'Learning English through Popular Culture' and 'Learning English through Poems and Songs'. The resources used in these modules include both literature with a small 'l' (McRae, 1991) and Literature with a large 'L' (Maley, 2001). The former includes imaginative texts like songs and advertisements, which are shorter and easier for students (Tasneen, 2010) while the latter includes literary pieces like plays and poetry.

In the first module, students will participate in a range of activities such as reading and writing drama texts and producing and performing a play. In the second module, students will learn through reading and writing short stories and practice oral and storytelling skills. In the third module,

students will learn from a variety of texts, such as magazine articles, advertisements and commercials, the content, language and stylistic features involved. In the last module, students will be introduced to the poems and songs and study the feature, structure, language and themes in the texts.

Different from traditional teaching, the modules should not emphasize on the teaching and learning of the linguistic features like the lessons in the compulsory part, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation or the four skills (Cheung, 2017). Instead, the focus should be on providing learners the opportunities to apply these while interacting with the literary texts.

When planning and designing LA lesson activities, CDC (2007) suggested a three-stage framework. The first stage is preliminary discussion before reading the text, for example, a discussion or brainstorming of vocabulary around the theme of the text. Followed by this are activities focusing on the text such as jigsaw reading and comprehension questions. The final stage should include follow-up activities like role-plays and writings. Carless and Harfitt (2013) later supplemented that the modules should be taught through a task-based approach, which is similar to the one CDC suggested with an emphasis on using authentic texts.

Another point teachers should pay attention to during lesson planning is that LA is different from Literature in English, an elective subject in the NSS curriculum (CDC, 2007). The teaching of LA modules should not involve the mastery of literary terms; the learning of the biographical and historical background of the authors and texts; stylistic analysis; literary criticism and producing literary works.

2.2 Implementation of the Current LA Curriculum

Despite the guidelines provided, Carless and Harfitt (2013), Koh (2015) and Cheung (2016, 2017) found that there is a divergence between the proposed framework and the implementation of the LA modules. Carless and Harfitt (2013) discovered from the interviews with teachers that, compared to the aim of letting students apply the four skills, teachers tended to focus on receptive skills, which is the second stage of the suggested framework, to reduce the amount of markings. They also found that teachers preferred the non-LA elective modules than the LA ones.

Cheung's research agrees with Carless and Harfitt's. The teacher participants explained that their LA lessons were mostly about worksheets and exercises. With such type of lessons, students lack the opportunities to exercise their creative thinking skills and productive skills. Her research supplemented to the previous ones that teachers emphasized mainly on the language enrichment aspect among the three reasons of implementing LA but neglected the cultural enrichment and personal involvement aspects.

While the research above mentioned the general gaps of the modules, Koh's research looked into the Popular Culture module. He identified a difference between the texts students regard as popular culture and those listed in the curriculum guide. This caused the contradiction between the actual practice and rationale of this module, which is to encourage creativity through fun and pleasurable activities.

Apart from the general limitations of using literature in English classrooms, which are the high linguistic and content knowledge requirement (Sullivan, 1991), all these gaps mentioned above are caused by a number of major factors.

First, Cheung ascribed the gaps to the exam-oriented education. When teachers need to prepare students for the HKDSE, they have to refer to the marking scheme, which does not assess students' LA learning. Second, both Carless and Harfitt's and Cheung's research suggested that teachers received inadequate training on both the subject knowledge and pedagogy of integrating LA in their teaching. This caused their teaching to be incoherent with the recommended framework. The third factor mentioned in all the research above is students' perceptions of the modules.

2.3 Students' Perceptions of Integrating LA in ESL/EFL Classrooms

Apart from the curriculum and its' implementation, students' perception has a significant effect on curriculum innovations (Carless, 2013). Being one of the innovations and a learner-centred one, the integration of LA in ESL should be implemented and adjusted with reference to students' perceptions.

2.3.1 How Language Arts Change ESL/EFL Students' Perceptions of English Learning

There is some research regarding the integration of LA in ESL/EFL classrooms which implicates the effects of LA modules on students perceptions of English learning which promotes intrinsic motivation of learning English. When students have intrinsic motivation, it means they want to learn English because they are interested in doing so, according to Deci and Ryan (2000). Ng and Ng (2015) also stated that students are intrinsically motivated when they find enjoyment in the tasks.

Generally, using LA in ESL/EFL classroom has positive effects on students' intrinsic motivation. A research conducted in Thailand by Tasneen (2010) investigated grade 5 to 7 students' views on the use of literary texts in ESL/EFL classroom. It found that almost all students agreed that literature is a good resource for English learning and reflected students' positive attitude towards English lessons with the integration of LA. Some research conducted in Hong Kong secondary schools also echo with Tasneen's. In Mok et Al (2006), Carless and Harfitt (2013) and Lin and Cheung (2014)'s research, students expressed that LA made the regular English lesson more relaxing and enjoyable because of the creative and memorable activities. Their research showed that although teachers were not following the framework suggested by CDC as mentioned in 2.2, students still had positive perceptions towards learning English through LAs.

Some research looked into students' perceptions of the use of particular LA genres. In TİMÜÇİN and Aryoubi (2016)'s research, Turkish college students were less anxious in English classes after a series of drama and music activities; In Adam's (2013) research with undergraduates in Saudi Arabia, 74% of the participants said they enjoyed having short stories in their English language enhancement course; In Novio and Catane (2018)'s research, students found poetry made their English for Communication course more interesting; and in Luo (2013)'s research, Taiwanese college students expressed that popular culture materials were 'helpful to learn English in a relaxing way'.

2.3.2 How Language Arts Change ESL/EFL Students' Perceptions of Performance

Research around the use of LA in ESL/EFL classrooms also revealed how LA affects students' perception of performance, or their perceived performance. As pointed out in Alwi and Sidhu (2013), perceived performance refers to how students assess their own performance and it motivates students to be more attentive to their own learning.

Contrary to the effects of LA on students' intrinsic motivation of learning English, there are both positive and negative impacts of LA on students' perceived performance. For positive impacts, the participants of TİMÜÇİN and Aryoubi (2016)'s research reported that they made less mistakes in language lessons after the series of drama activities. The participants of Adam (2013), Hua and Li (2015) and Novio and Catane (2018)'s research also reported that using short stories, popular culture and poetry respectively helped them learn vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. In Luo (2015)'s research, the participants said that their reading, writing and especially speaking skills improved through the integration of popular culture in their college English course.

However, although not many, there were negative voices towards the use of LA. In Hua and Li (2015)'s research in a Hong Kong secondary school, some students responded that using popular culture in English grammar lessons 'don't help much', implying that their perceived performance in English did not improve much after studying the LA modules. In Carless and Harfitt (2013)'s research, they found that students preferred exam practice more and they thought the LA modules

were not related to their examinations. Cheung (2016)'s research also found similar negative perceptions from students that the modules could not effectively prepare them for the HKDSE.

In other words, when it comes to improving language skills and vocabulary, students found integrating LA useful. However, if the goal of the courses or lessons were to prepare for exams, students thought that integrating LA did not help them improve their performance.

Overall, the current published research on the LA modules in NSS English are mostly focused on the situation in foreign countries. Little of the existing research is based on the current LA elective modules in Hong Kong, especially with an emphasis on students' perceptions. There a lack of detailed research on how Hong Kong high school students perceive the LA modules. While students' perceptions are positively related to their achievements (Phakiti, 2013; Bernaus & Gardner, 2008), it is important to narrow this research gap in order to maximize the benefits that the LA modules can bring to Hong Kong senior secondary students.

3. Research Questions

This study intends to investigate the students' perceptions of the four NSS LA elective modules. While research on students' perceptions in the education field are not uncommon, this study will look specifically into the relationship between students' perceptions and their intrinsic motivation and perceived performance. Therefore, this research aims at finding the answers to these questions:

1. How do the LA modules affect students' intrinsic motivation learning English? and
2. How do the LA modules affect students' perceived performance in English?

4. Methodology

To find out the answers to these questions, two research methods were used, one quantitative and one qualitative. The first one was a survey in which students needed to tell to what extent they agree or disagree with a statement. The survey aimed at finding out how the participants perceived the LA module in general. 25 participants per module, which was a total of 100 participants, filled out the questionnaire.

There are 3 parts in the questionnaire in Appendix 4.1-4.4. Part 1 of the questionnaire is designed to collect participant's background information, such as their current level of study, the English LA modules they studied and their current English proficiency.

Part 2 of the questionnaire aims at whether the English LA modules affect their intrinsic motivation of learning English. It is adapted from the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) High School Version (RJ Vallerand et. Al., 1992), which which is a tool for measuring students' motivation in learning, including 3 parts for extrinsic motivation, 3 parts for intrinsic motivation and 1 part for amotivation. The 3 parts about intrinsic motivation contains 12 questions about intrinsic motivation, which includes intrinsic motivation to know more about the subject; to experience stimulation while learning the subject and towards accomplishments in the subject. These questions are adapted to suit the context of this study, which is learning English through LAs.

Questions 1,4,7,10 in Part 2: intrinsic motivation towards accomplishments in learning English

Questions: 2,5,8,11 in Part 2: intrinsic motivation to know more about English

Questions: 3,6,9,12 in Part 2: intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation while learning English

The final part of the questionnaire collects students' perception of performance after studying the English LA modules. It is adapted from Takahashi's (2014) questionnaire designed for measuring English teachers' self-perceived English proficiency, including overall proficiency, the four language

skills, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and pragmatics. However, the question about pragmatics is omitted since it is not listed in the curriculum document as a learning objective of the LA modules. (CDC, 2007).

In order to triangulate the survey data and look deeper into the reasons behind students' perceptions, a second method, which was a semi-structured individual interview (Appendix 5), was used. This interview, consisting of 9 questions, aimed at eliciting more detailed reasons behind students' perceptions. Among the 9 questions, 2 require interviewees to recall their memories of the LA lessons. These 2 questions are followed by questions looking into the 3 sub-categories of intrinsic motivation, as well as questions looking into how they perceive their performance in English after the LA modules. 2 respondents of the questionnaire were randomly selected for each module to participate in the interview, which means a total of 8 participants were interviewed.

5. Findings

The whole data collection process was carried out from February 2020 to March 2020. 100 participants, which consist of 25 participants from each module, returned the survey. At the end of the survey, participants were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. 14 participants expressed their willingness to be interviewed, among which 8 were randomly selected to participate in the interview.

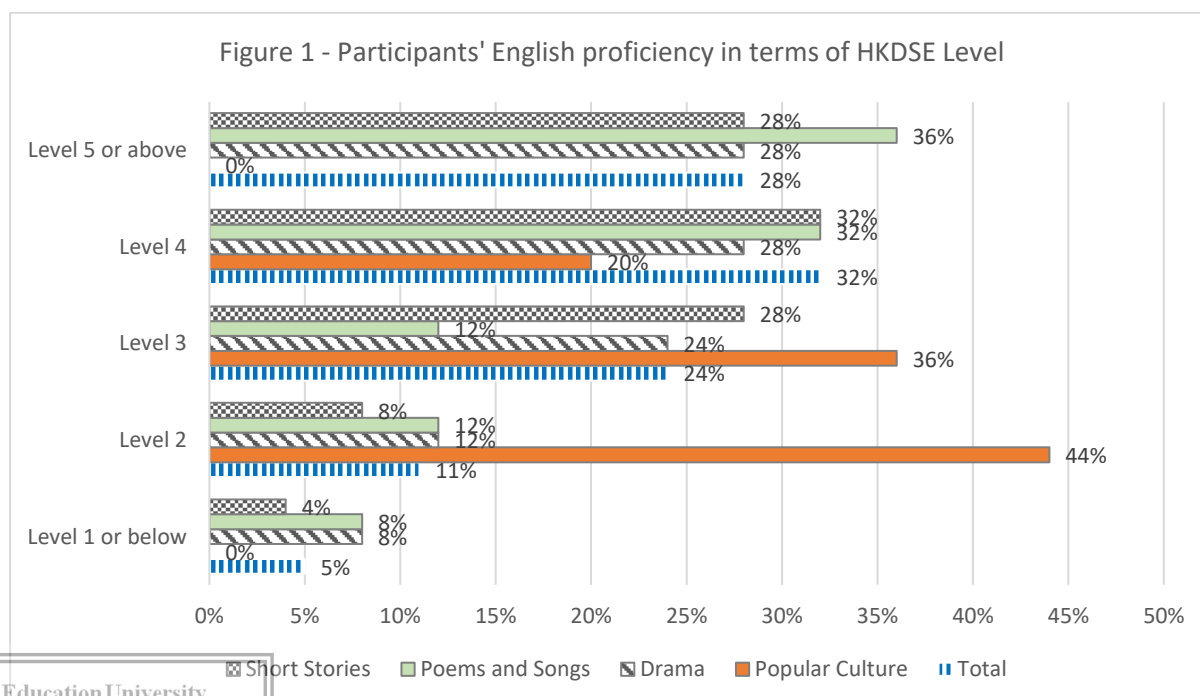
For quantitative analysis, the survey data collected were analysed by Statistic Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to obtain descriptive data for the research.

For qualitative analysis, the 8 interviews were conducted in Cantonese, which were then translated and transcribed in English. The transcripts of the interviews were then shown to the interviewees to ensure the meaning after translation is accurate.

5.1 Participants

Among the 100 participants, more than half of them were 16 to 19 years old (Figure 1), which means they were students studying F.5-F.6, while the rest had already graduated by the time of the research. Their English proficiency was measured in terms of the HKDSE levels, which include 8 levels from undefined to level 5**. Overall, 60% of respondents were at level 4 or above, except for the module Learning English through Popular Culture whose respondents were mostly at level 2 to 3.

As for the interviewees, the modules they studied are stated in table 1.0.



Module	Drama	Popular Culture	Short Stories	Poems and Songs
Student	A & H	B & G	C & F	D & E

Table 1.0 – information of the interviewees

5.2 Effect of the LA Modules on Students' Intrinsic Motivation of Learning English

Table 1.1 below shows the percentage of participants who agreed that the modules increased their intrinsic motivation of learning English. 53.5% of them agreed that using LA modules helped with their intrinsic motivation, especially when it comes to making them want to know more about English. Compared to the other 3 modules, the Drama module received more positive ratings (58.3%), while less than half of the participants of the Short Stories module (45.2%) gave a positive rating.

	Percentage				
	Overall	Popular Culture	Drama	Poems and Songs	Short Stories
Intrinsic motivation towards accomplishments in learning English	49.25	52	51	50	44
Intrinsic motivation to know more about English	57	56	61	61	50
Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation while learning English	54.25	55	63	56	43
Overall intrinsic Motivation	53.5	54	58.3	55.7	45.2

Table 1.1 – Percentage of participants who agreed with the statements about intrinsic motivation

As for the how strong the effects on their intrinsic motivation were, Table 1.2 below shows to what extent they agreed with the statements about the effects of LA modules on their intrinsic motivation on a six-point scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In general, participants agreed that learning English through LA was slightly helpful for their intrinsic motivation with a mean of 2.62, particularly the intrinsic motivation to know more about English (2.68). Among the 4 modules, the Popular Culture module scored the highest mean of 2.74. The Short Stories module, while less than half of the respondents agreed that it had a positive effect on their intrinsic motivation, also scored a mean (2.43) lower than the neutral value (2.50).

	Mean				
	Overall	Popular Culture	Drama	Poems and Songs	Short Stories
Intrinsic motivation towards accomplishments in learning English	2.53	2.62	2.57	2.51	2.40
Intrinsic motivation to know more about English	2.68	2.80	2.73	2.71	2.46
Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation while learning English	2.66	2.81	2.77	2.63	2.43
Overall intrinsic Motivation	2.62	2.74	2.69	2.62	2.43

Table 1.2 – To what extent participants agreed that LA increases their intrinsic motivation of learning English

Overall, the interview data corroborates with the quantitative analysis.

In the interview, students were first asked about the differences between regular English lessons and lessons of the LA modules. Their responses reflected their positive perception towards learning English through language arts. 7 of the interviewees said that the lessons of the LA modules were more interactive and student-centred. In particular, Students A, B, C, F, G and H had similar opinion that the LA modules provided them the opportunities to explore their talent and creativity:

'The lessons in this module allowed us more freedom to showcase our talent' (Student G)

'The lessons were more personalized and enabled us to exercise our creativity.' (Student E)

While most survey respondents agreed that the Drama, Popular Culture and Poems and Songs modules brought them stimulation, which is a component that makes up of intrinsic motivation, the interviewees provided reasons for this. When asked about whether the content and activities of the modules were stimulating, students responded that the content was stimulating because of different reasons:

'Although studying drama scripts were boring, viewing drama is interesting.' (Student A)

'I could escape from the pressure of exam preparation when reading and discussing poems, such as shape poems.' (Student E)

'In this module, the teacher introduced different popular culture in English to us, for example, the style of captions in Instagram posts. These were interesting.' (Student G)

Despite these positive views on the content of these 3 modules, the Short Stories module received rather negative comments from the interviewees that the module was not practical nor helpful to them:

'The structure of the stories is the same, and I don't know how to make a story interesting.' (Student F)

'The English in stories is for exams. It's not daily life English.' (Student C)

Apart from the content, the activities also offered stimulation to students. Students of the four modules agreed that there were interesting parts in the lessons. For example,

'My teacher taught us the words about onomatopoeia in the comic strips unit. He designed a game in which we had one word on our back, and we needed to walk around and help the others figure out the word.' (Student B)

'At the end of the module, we got to perform our drama in front of the whole class. It was fun because we didn't need to sit still.' (Student H)

'When listening to the songs, we didn't need to care about the language, so it was more engaging.' (Student D)

'Our teacher asked us to work in groups and come up with a short story. I liked this part because we exchanged different ideas and perspectives.' (Student C)

In spite of all these interesting activities, all students coincidentally mentioned that the actual writing part was not as stimulating due to these reasons, which may account for the low mean value in the questionnaire:

'When we worked on TV review, there was too much focus on the writing part. It was boring.' (Student B)

'When writing the poem, there was no specific guidance. It felt a little frustrating.' (Student E)

'The teacher marked our scripts strictly. But who cares about grammar when you are on the stage? They don't read your script.' (Student H)

'I didn't like it when I had to write my own story. I couldn't think of any unique ideas to get high marks.' (Student C)

From students' responses above, although writing tasks were perceived to be un motivating, the content and activities of the LA modules could provide them more stimulation while learning English, and thus increase their intrinsic motivation of learning English.

Apart from stimulation, another factor affecting intrinsic motivation is whether they had accomplishments while studying the modules. When asked about whether the modules brought them satisfaction of learning English, students reported that they had made progress in both their English proficiency and personal skills.

'I learnt something about English culture and also improved my IT skills when preparing for presentations, making comic strips and photo essays.' (Student B)

'While preparing for the drama performance, I developed my teamwork skills. I also felt happy and satisfied when the audience clapped after my show.' (Student H)

'I learnt more elements in short stories and had improvements in reading skills.' (Student F)

'From the songs, I learnt some phrases and words that native-speakers use in daily life.' (Student D).

However, interviewees from the Short Stories and Poems and Songs modules also stated that writing tasks sometimes discouraged them in terms of the assessment, decreasing their intrinsic motivation. This may be the reason for the low percentage and mean value of the 2 modules in the questionnaire:

'The assessment criteria of the short stories are unclear and subjective.' (Student C), which is supported by Student F's opinion, *'I still don't know how to get high marks. The assessment criteria are very subjective and demand a lot of ideas.'*

'After writing my poems, I didn't have many opportunities to share my thoughts with the others, which is supposed to be the purpose of writing poems. It shouldn't just be graded and then put in the folder' (Student E)

The last element in intrinsic motivation is whether the modules increase students' desire to learn more about English, which is also the element with most positive responses in the questionnaire. The participants of the Drama, Popular Culture and Poems and Songs module gave reasons for this. They reported that the modules increased their desire to know more about the language and its culture:

'There are many difficult words in drama plays. I want to improve my English to understand the underlying meaning of the plays,' (Student A)

'My teacher provided some feedback to my writing, which encouraged me to search for more. For example, he asked me to google "mixed conditionals", and I found that interesting.' (Student B)

'When I heard some songs or poems I like, I would try to search for more work from that singer or poet.' (Student D)

'When I found that I could actually apply what I learnt in the Popular Culture module, it made me want to learn a little more.' (Student G)

Nevertheless, the issue of unpracticality and subjective assessment in the Short Stories module mentioned before continued to adversely affect students' desire to learn more about English:

'The other modules are more useful for daily life.' (Student B)

'I have no idea how to write a better story and get good grades, so it didn't make me want to learn more about English.' (Student F)

Apart from the desire to learn more about English, the modules also increased students' interest in other aspects of the module:

'It didn't make me want to learn more about English, but other aspects in drama, such as acting skills and stage effect.' (Student H)

5.3 Effect of the LA Modules on Students' Perceived Performance in English

Table 2.1 shows the percentage of students who agreed that the modules improved their perceived performance in English. Overall, among the different aspects of the subject, the participants only agreed that the LA modules helped with their reading (51%), writing (50%), speaking (56%), and especially vocabulary (60% in every module). It is notable that only the Drama modules achieved more than 50% and also the highest percentage in every aspect of the subject.

	Percentage				
	Overall	Popular Culture	Drama	Poems and Songs	Short Stories
Reading	51	36	64	52	52
Listening	48	44	64	52	32
Writing	50	52	56	48	44
Speaking	56	56	68	60	40
Grammar	49	40	56	56	44
Vocabulary	60	60	60	60	60
Pronunciation	49	44	60	56	36
Exam Skills	48	40	60	48	44

Table 2.1 - Percentage of participants who agreed with the statements about perceived performance

Regarding how helpful the LA modules were to their perceived performance in English, Table 2.2 below shows to what extent they agreed with the statements about the effects of LA modules on their perceived performance on a six-point scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The vocabulary aspect received the highest mean of 2.76, while the reading and listening aspect received the lowest mean of 2.46. In most aspects, including receptive skills, writing, grammar, pronunciation and exam skills, the drama module scored the highest mean. The Popular Module outperformed it in speaking and vocabulary, while the Poems and Songs module scored the same as the Popular Culture module in terms of vocabulary.

	Mean				
	Overall	Popular Culture	Drama	Poems and Songs	Short Stories
Reading	2.46	2.40	2.64	2.44	2.36
Listening	2.46	2.40	2.80	2.60	2.04
Writing	2.55	2.56	2.60	2.52	2.52
Speaking	2.61	2.80	2.76	2.64	2.24
Grammar	2.47	2.40	2.64	2.40	2.44
Vocabulary	2.76	2.84	2.64	2.84	2.72
Pronunciation	2.53	2.40	2.84	2.72	2.16
Exam Skills	2.49	2.44	2.76	2.40	2.36

Table 2.2 – To what extent participants agreed that LA improved their perceived performance

In order to find out in what way the LA modules affected students' perceived performance in the subject, interviewees were first asked about whether the LA modules helped them with English. They suggested a range of examples where the LA modules helped with different aspects of the subject. For example, a few interviewees mentioned that the modules improved their reading subskill of inferencing, which is one of the skills that received positive ratings from more than half of the survey respondents:

'My comprehension improved because when we read the drama scripts, we often needed to find out the hidden meaning of the play.' (Student H)

'We had a lot of discussion on what message the poet is trying to say, so my interpretation skills improved.' (Student E)

Apart from this particular subskill, the modules were also beneficial to other areas including vocabulary, grammar, oral fluency, and even literary devices. These areas also received positive ratings from more than half of the respondents:

'When writing short stories, you pay attention to the tenses and use descriptive language to make it livelier.' (Student F)

'We did a lot of mingling activities and presentations, so I became more fluent when speaking English.' (Student B)

'There are literary devices that are seldom seen in regular English texts when studying poems and songs. I knew more about them, such as assimilation and metaphor.' (Student D)

After giving general examples on how the modules affected their perceived performance, students were then asked to explain to which aspect of the language were the modules most and least helpful in respect to improving their performance. The interviewees of the same module all chose the same aspect, which matches with the survey results in general.

Students B and G agreed that their speaking improved the most after studying the Popular Culture module:

'We did a lot of group work and presentations in the module, so we had much practice on our speaking in those lessons.' (Student B).

For the Drama module, the two students echoed that their pronunciation improved particularly in suprasegmental features, such as intonation and sentence stress:

'When we read dialogues aloud, we practised using ups and downs to show our emotions.' (Student A)

As for the Poems and Songs module, the participants supported each other's view that they expanded their vocabulary range during the interpretation of poems and songs:

'There are a lot of idioms and colloquialisms in the songs. We needed to check the meaning of those in order to understand what the song is about.' (Student D).

And lastly, for the Short Stories module, despite their negative feelings towards writing short stories mentioned in earlier sessions, the two responded that their writing skills improved the most because they became more accurate when writing:

'There was a heavy focus on writing. We needed to make sure that the descriptions of the scenes and plots were accurate.' (Student F)

This differs from the questionnaire result, in which vocabulary received the highest score among the different aspects of English.

When it comes to the aspect with the least improvement, the participants' answers proved the survey results. Half of the interviewees agreed on listening, claiming that there was a lack of listening practice in the modules, making it the aspect that benefited the least from the LA modules:

'We merely did any listening activities in the Popular Culture module, and it's very hard to improve listening skills no matter what.' (Student G)

'Short stories have little to do with listening. The teacher didn't really emphasise pronunciation or listening.' (Student C)

Another four participants expressed that grammar, which is the second least benefited aspect according to the survey, was also seldom covered in the LA modules for these reasons:

'The only grammar item I remember was evaluative language for writing TV review. The teacher didn't specifically introduce any other grammar item.' (Student B)

'The focus of the whole thing was not on the script, but the final performance. So, when the teacher gave me feedback on the grammar mistakes in the script, no one would really care about it.' (Student H)

Finally, when asked about whether the LA modules helped with their English examinations, both in-school exams and the HKDSE, the interviewees held a doubtful attitude because of the scarce appearance of the relevant content in the exams:

'Drama seldom appears in papers other than writing.' (Student H)

'There weren't a lot of exam skills covered in this module, not to mention that poems and songs wouldn't really appear in the exams.' (Student E).

Students D and F elaborated on Students H and E's opinion that even if the content of the modules appeared in the exams, they would not choose the question.

'I could choose the other modules in the writing paper because it would be easier to get higher marks.' (Student D).

These comments proved the low values in the survey about the effect of LA on students exam performance. Yet, although they were generally negative towards the helpfulness of the LA modules to their exams, participants of the Popular Culture and Drama modules said that the modules to a small extent benefited their speaking exams in terms of pronunciation and ideas:

'I had more ideas and examples from the Popular Culture module that I could apply in the speaking exams.' (Student G)

'At least my intonation improved, so I would sound more natural in the speaking exams.' (Student A)

6. Discussions

This research aims at examining how Hong Kong high school students perceive the four language arts elective modules in the English language curriculum. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings reflect that three of the modules can increase students' intrinsic motivation and improve students' perceived performance in reading, writing, speaking and vocabulary.

Concerning students' intrinsic motivation in learning English, the findings are similar to Tasneen's (2010) research that using language arts in ESL helps increase students' overall intrinsic motivation. The results also authenticate different research (Mok et Al., 2006; Carless and Harfitt, 2013; Lin and Cheung, 2014; Luo, 2013; TİMÜÇİN and Aryoubi, 2016) that using different LA texts, including popular culture texts, poems and songs, short stories and plays in ESL can increase students' intrinsic motivation because of the stimulation they experienced from the content and activities of the modules.

As for students' perceived performance in English, the results validate existing research that using short stories, poetry and popular culture texts helps students' improve their vocabulary range, reading and speaking (Adam, 2013; Hua and Li, 2015; Novio and Catane, 2018). The results also corroborate previous studies that using language arts has little effect on students' grammar and performance in English exams (Hua and Li, 2015; Carless and Harfitt, 2013; Cheung, 2016).

The results in this research also supplement previous research in these two aspects. First, the results reflect using LA contributes to the increase in intrinsic motivation not only because it provides stimulation, but also because it provides sense of satisfaction and increases students' desire to learn more about English. Second, the findings show that among the different activities in the modules, students all perceive the writing tasks negative due to different reasons, such as a lack of concrete assessment criteria. In addition, the results show that using LA is particularly helpful to the reading subskill of inferencing; while it does little help to students' listening skills.

On the other hand, some findings contradict previous research. From both the quantitative and qualitative data, Hong Kong high school students expressed their negative perceptions of the Short Stories module, which is different from the findings of Adam's (2013) research. Also, the findings are different from existing studies that the LA modules do not help with reading skills (Luo, 2015).

In short, this study adds on the findings of existing papers and provides more detailed description and explanation of local high school students' perception of the four LA modules.

7. Implications

The results implicate some ways to maximise the benefits of the LA modules.

To further increase students' intrinsic motivation of learning English through these modules, it is recommended that the content and language of the module should be linked to daily life situations. Also, teachers should provide sufficient and engaging scaffolding activities for writing tasks. While assessing students' products, the assessment criteria should be concrete and clear so that students know how to produce a satisfactory product. After the writing tasks, there should be more opportunities for students to share their creative work, including poems and songs, drama performance and short stories.

To boost students' perceived performance in more aspects in the subject through the modules, it is suggested that more focus on receptive skills, especially listening, can be introduced. There should also be more activities on analysing the grammar usage in different LA texts. Finally, the exam tasks and the content and language coverage of the LA modules should be more consistent.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this studies look into the effect of the use of language arts on local high school students' intrinsic motivation of learning English and their perceived performance in English. It is found that the Popular Culture, Drama and Poems and Songs modules can increase students' intrinsic motivation of learning English; while the Short Stories module has limited impact on students' intrinsic motivation. In addition, the LA modules can improved students' perceived performance in reading, speaking, writing and particularly vocabulary.

This research provides insights for teachers and curriculum developers into the ways of maximising the benefits of the modules. It is recommended that teachers should provide more opportunities for sharing; set a more concrete assessment guideline; increase the relevance of the content and language to daily life usage and exam tasks; and strike a balance between different language skills and systems.

Nevertheless, there were some limitations while conducting the research. First of all, 44% of the survey participants were 20-25 years old, which means that the content and activities they learnt and experienced may not reflect current practice. Moreover, most of the participants in the Poems and Songs, Drama and Short Stories were higher achievers, while those of the Popular Culture module

were lower achievers, which means the English proficiency of the participants was not balanced. Besides, the sample size was not big enough, with only 100 people participated in the survey and 8 in the interview.

For future research, more research about the Short Stories module can be done in order to maximise its benefits to students. Researchers can also look into how students would like the writing tasks in the LA modules to be taught, so that they would be more engaged in the writing part of the modules, including what and how much guidance they would like to receive and how they would like the writing tasks to be conducted, assessed and concluded.

(6,587 words)

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Appendix 1 – Sample Consent Form and Information Sheet for Participants of 18 years old or above

THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Department of English Language Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Language Arts (LA) in ESL: From the Perspective of Hong Kong High School Students

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research supervised by Dr. Mak, Pauline and conducted by Mr. FENG Sui Sing, who are staff/students of the Department of English Language Education in the Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

INFORMATION SHEET

Language Arts (LA) in ESL: From the Perspective of Hong Kong High School Students

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Dr. Mak, Pauline and conducted by Mr. FENG, Sui Sing, who are staff/students of the Department of English Language Education in the Education University of Hong Kong.

Introduction of the Research

This research intends to investigate Hong Kong senior secondary students' perceptions of the Language Arts (LA) elective modules in the New Senior Secondary English Language. The findings will then be discussed for generating implications on the teaching and learning of the LA modules. As a student who is currently studying or has studied the LA modules, you are invited to share your opinions about your experience.

Methodology of the Research

The number of participants to be included is around 240 secondary 5 to 6 students from the hosting school of my field experience semester, assuming there are around 30 students in each class and 4 classes in each form.

The data collection will be divided into two phases. The first phase consists of an online survey, which aims at finding out students' views about the LA modules. One student from each class will be randomly selected and invited to participate in the next phase. The second phase consists of an interview with a group of four students, which aims at finding out more details contributing to students' views.

The survey in phase one will take around 10 minutes to complete, while the interview in phase two will take around 20 to 30 minutes. The period of participation will be from September 2019 until May 2020.

A compensation of \$10 McDonald's cash coupon will be given to participants being selected for the group interview in phase 2.

There will be no risk participating in this research. Your participation in the project is voluntary. You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher. The result will possibly be disseminated in the honours project presentation in April 2020.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Mr. FENG, Sui Sing at _____ or his supervisor Dr. Mak, Pauline at _____.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

FENG, Sui Sing

Principal Investigator

Appendix 2 – Sample Consent Form and Information Sheet for Schools

THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Department of English Language Education
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (FOR SCHOOLS)

Language Arts (LA) in ESL: From the Perspective of Hong Kong High School Students

My school hereby consents to participate in the captioned research supervised by Dr. Mak, Pauline and conducted by Mr. FENG Sui Sing, who are staff/students of the Department of English Language Education in the Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, our right to privacy will be retained, i.e., the personal details of my students'/teachers' will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My students'/teachers' participation in the project are voluntary.

I acknowledge that we have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature:

Name of Principal/Delegate*:

(Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss*)

Post:

Name of School:

Date:

(* please delete as appropriate)

INFORMATION SHEET

Language Arts (LA) in ESL: From the Perspective of Hong Kong High School Students

Your school is invited to participate in a project supervised by Dr. Mak, Pauline and conducted by Mr. FENG, Sui Sing, who are staff/students of the Department of English Language Education in the Education University of Hong Kong.

Introduction of the Research

This research intends to investigate Hong Kong senior secondary students' perceptions of the Language Arts (LA) elective modules in the New Senior Secondary English Language. The findings will then be discussed for generating implications on the teaching and learning of the LA modules. As a student who is currently studying or has studied the LA modules, you are invited to share your opinions about your experience.

Methodology of the Research

The number of participants to be included is around 240 secondary 5 to 6 students from the hosting school of my field experience semester, assuming there are around 30 students in each class and 4 classes in each form.

The data collection will be divided into two phases. The first phase consists of an online survey, which aims at finding out students' views about the LA modules. One student from each class will be randomly selected and invited to participate in the next phase. The second phase consists of an interview with a group of four students, which aims at finding out more details contributing to students' views.

The survey in phase one will take around 10 minutes to complete, while the interview in phase two will take around 20 to 30 minutes. The period of participation will be from September 2019 until May 2020.

A compensation of \$10 McDonald's cash coupon will be given to participants being selected for the group interview in phase 2.

There will be no risk participating in this research. Please understand that your students'/teachers' participation are voluntary. They have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to your students'/teachers' will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Mr. FENG, Sui Sing at _____ or his supervisor Dr. Mak, Pauline at _____.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

FENG, Sui Sing

Principal Investigator

Appendix 3 - Sample Consent Form and Information Sheet for Participants of 9-17 years old

THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Department of English Language Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Language Arts (LA) in ESL: From the Perspective of Hong Kong High School Students

I hereby consent my child _____ to participate in the captioned research supervised by Dr. Mak, Pauline and conducted by Mr. FENG Sui Sing, who are staff/students of the Department of English Language Education in the Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature:

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Parent / Guardian*:

Date:

**Please delete as appropriate*

INFORMATION SHEET

Language Arts (LA) in ESL: From the Perspective of Hong Kong High School Students

You are invited to participate with your child to participate in a project supervised by Dr. Mak, Pauline and conducted by Mr. FENG, Sui Sing, who are staff/students of the Department of English Language Education in the Education University of Hong Kong.

Introduction of the Research

This research intends to investigate Hong Kong senior secondary students' perceptions of the Language Arts (LA) elective modules in the New Senior Secondary English Language. The findings will then be discussed for generating implications on the teaching and learning of the LA modules. As a student who is currently studying or has studied the LA modules, you are invited to share your opinions about your experience.

Methodology of the Research

The number of participants to be included is around 240 secondary 5 to 6 students from the hosting school of my field experience semester, assuming there are around 30 students in each class and 4 classes in each form.

The data collection will be divided into two phases. The first phase consists of an online survey, which aims at finding out students' views about the LA modules. One student from each class will be randomly selected and invited to participate in the next phase. The second phase consists of an interview with a group of four students, which aims at finding out more details contributing to students' views.

The survey in phase one will take around 10 minutes to complete, while the interview in phase two will take around 20 to 30 minutes. The period of participation will be from September 2019 until May 2020.

A compensation of \$10 McDonald's cash coupon will be given to participants being selected for the group interview in phase 2.

There will be no risk participating in this research. Your child's participation in the project is voluntary. You and your child have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to your child will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher. The result will possibly be disseminated in the honours project presentation in April 2020.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Mr. FENG, Sui Sing at _____ or his supervisor Dr. Mak, Pauline at _____.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

FENG, Sui Sing

Principal Investigator

Appendix 4 - Questionnaire

Part 1: Background information

1. I am _____ years old.

For questions 2-5, please put a ✓ in the appropriate box.

2. I am a

male female.

3. I am currently studying

Form 5 Form 6.

4. My current English proficiency is at HKDSE level

1 or below 2 3 4 5 or above

5. I studied the following New Senior Secondary English Electives:

- Learning English through Popular Culture (Please attempt **Part 2A** if you tick this)
- Learning English through Short Stories (Please attempt **Part 2B** if you tick this)
- Learning English through Poems and Songs (Please attempt **Part 2C** if you tick this)
- Learning English through Drama (Please attempt **Part 2D** if you tick this)

Part 2A: Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about learning English through popular culture. Put a ✓ in the appropriate box (6=Strongly agree; 1=Strongly disagree).

No.	Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1
1	I experienced pleasure while learning English through popular culture.						
2	I experienced satisfaction while learning English through popular culture.						
3	I liked learning English through popular culture.						
4	Learning English through Popular Culture helped me improve my English.						
5	I learnt new things in the Learning English though Popular Culture module.						
6	Learning English through popular culture was fun.						
7	Learning English through popular culture helped me improve my personal skills, such as time management and collaboration skills.						
8	Learning English through popular culture helped me broaden my knowledge about English, such as grammar, vocabulary and culture.						
9	I took part in interesting tasks during the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
10	I accomplished difficult tasks during the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
11	Learning English through popular culture made me want to learn more interesting things in English, such as grammar, vocabulary and culture.						
12	I was stimulated during the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						

No.	Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1
13	My overall English proficiency improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
14	My reading skills improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
15	My listening skills improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
16	My writing skills improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
17	My speaking skills improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
18	My grammar improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
19	My vocabulary improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
20	My pronunciation improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						
21	My performance in tests/exams improved after studying the Learning English through Popular Culture module.						

Part 2B: Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about learning English through short stories. Put a ✓ in the appropriate box (6=Strongly agree; 1=Strongly disagree).

No.	Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1
1	I experienced pleasure while learning English through Short Stories.						
2	I experienced satisfaction while learning English through Short Stories.						
3	I liked learning English through Short Stories.						
4	Learning English through Short Stories helped me improve my English.						
5	I learnt new things in the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
6	Learning English through Short Stories was fun.						
7	Learning English through Short Stories helped me improve my personal skills, such as time management and collaboration skills.						
8	Learning English through Short Stories helped me broaden my knowledge about English, such as grammar, vocabulary and culture.						
9	I took part in interesting tasks during the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
10	I accomplished difficult tasks during the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
11	Learning English through Short Stories made me want to learn more interesting things in English, such as grammar, vocabulary and culture.						
12	I was stimulated during the Learning English through Short Stories module.						

No.	Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1
13	My overall English proficiency improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
14	My reading skills improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
15	My listening skills improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
16	My writing skills improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
17	My speaking skills improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
18	My grammar improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
19	My vocabulary improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
20	My pronunciation improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						
21	My performance in tests/exams improved after studying the Learning English through Short Stories module.						

Part 2C: Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about learning English through drama. Put a ✓ in the appropriate box (6=Strongly agree; 1=Strongly disagree).

No.	Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1
1	I experienced pleasure while learning English through Drama.						
2	I experienced satisfaction while learning English through Drama.						
3	I liked learning English through Drama.						
4	Learning English through Drama helped me improve my English.						
5	I learnt new things in the Learning English through Drama module.						
6	Learning English through Drama was fun.						
7	Learning English through Drama helped me improve my personal skills, such as time management and collaboration skills.						
8	Learning English through Drama helped me broaden my knowledge about English, such as grammar, vocabulary and culture.						
9	I took part in interesting tasks during the Learning English through Drama module.						
10	I accomplished difficult tasks during the Learning English through Drama module.						
11	Learning English through Drama made me want to learn more interesting things in English, such as grammar, vocabulary and culture.						
12	I was stimulated during the Learning English through Drama module.						

No.	Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1
13	My overall English proficiency improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						
14	My reading skills improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						
15	My listening skills improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						
16	My writing skills improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						
17	My speaking skills improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						
18	My grammar improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						
19	My vocabulary improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						
20	My pronunciation improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						
21	My performance in tests/exams improved after studying the Learning English through Drama module.						

Part 2D: Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about learning English through Poems and Songs. Put a ✓ in the appropriate box (6=Strongly agree; 1=Strongly disagree).

No.	Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1
1	I experienced pleasure while learning English through Poems and Songs.						
2	I experienced satisfaction while learning English through Poems and Songs.						
3	I liked learning English through Poems and Songs.						
4	Learning English through Poems and Songs helped me improve my English.						
5	I learnt new things in the Learning English though Poems and Songs module.						
6	Learning English through Poems and Songs was fun.						
7	Learning English through Poems and Songs helped me improve my personal skills, such as time management and collaboration skills.						
8	Learning English through Poems and Songs helped me broaden my knowledge about English, such as grammar, vocabulary and culture.						
9	I took part in interesting tasks during the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
10	I accomplished difficult tasks during the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
11	Learning English through Poems and Songs made me want to learn more interesting things in English, such as grammar, vocabulary and culture.						
12	I was stimulated during the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						

No.	Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1
13	My overall English proficiency improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
14	My reading skills improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
15	My listening skills improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
16	My writing skills improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
17	My speaking skills improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
18	My grammar improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
19	My vocabulary improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
20	My pronunciation improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						
21	My performance in tests/exams improved after studying the Learning English through Poems and Songs module.						

Finally:

Are you willing to participate in a 30-minute interview after filling out the questionnaire? If yes, please leave you contact email. Once selected, you will receive a compensation of **\$10 McDonald's cash coupon** after the interview.

No Yes, my email is _____.

-Please double check if you have attempted all the items, thank you-

Appendix 5 – Interview Questions

1. Tell me about one lesson in the module Learning English through (Popular Culture/Short Stories/Drama/Poems and Songs)* that you remember.

*The interviewer chooses according to the module that the interviewee is studying or studied.

2. How are the learning activities in this module different from the regular English lessons?

3. Is the content in this module interesting to you? Why or why not?

4. Are the learning activities in this module interesting to you? Why or why not?

5. Does studying this module bring you satisfaction? Why or why not?

6. Does studying this module make you want to know more about English? Why or why not?

7. Does studying this module help you improve your overall English proficiency? Why or why not?

8. Which of the following does studying this module help most with? Reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar or vocabulary? How?

9. Does studying this module help you improve your performance in the English tests/exams? Why or why not?