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Social science literacy among form four students in Malaysian secondary schools

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An exploratory study was conducted to investigate the social science literacy among form four students in Malaysian secondary schools. The aim of the study was to explore social science literacy in selected social science subjects, namely History, Geography, Moral Education, and Islamic Education as well as the students's general knowledge in the area of social science in Malaysian secondary schools. The study also intended to propose guidelines on standards in social science literacy for secondary schools in Malaysia. The study used quantitative research method. Five sets of questionnaires in the form of objective multiple-choice tests were developed to identify social science literacy in the three domains of knowledge, skills and values in the four selected subjects and general knowledge. The respondents were 16 years old students studying in form four at national secondary schools throughout Malaysia. From the total of 4705 respondents, the number of respondents for Geography was 1031, 1002 for History, 967 for Islamic Education, 704 for Moral Education and 1001 for General Knowledge. Descriptive analyses were used to identify the social science literacy level for each subject and general knowledge. The overall literacy score obtained by the respondents to the General Knowledge questionnaire was 66.5 %, 63.0 % in History , 55.0 %, in Geography, 55.0 %, 71.9 % in Moral Education, 71.9 % and 58.1 % in Islamic Education. Based on these findings, guidelines on standards of social science literacy for Malaysian secondary schools were proposed with the aim of providing guidelines for policy makers and educators in social sciences, including teacher educators.

Keywords: Social science education; social science literacy; Malaysian secondary schools.

Introduction

In the era globalisation and the inevitable use of technologies, there is a greater need for individuals to have better understanding of societies and how people interact with each other, institutions and the environment.

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It has, on the one hand, improved our lives and choices as we create better societies for ourselves and human life, and on the other hand, it has brought about negative impact such as destruction of environment, wars and conflicts. The tremendous changes in social, cultural, political, economic and environment imply a greater need to advance knowledge in social science for "the ideas and information they (social sciences) generate can therefore make a precious contribution to the formulation of effective policies to shape our world for the greater good" (Bokova, 2010, Forward iii in UNESCO, 2010). Furthermore, as said by Hernes in the*World Social Science Report* 2010 (UNESCO, 2010),

> . . . the demand for more social science and bettter social science is likely to increase. This is the result of . . . 'a confluence of crises': that contemporary crises that mutually reinforce one another. The climate is worsening, largely as a result of human activities, and the consequences of this change will be dire for humans. . . . The net outcome of this confluence of crises is that conflicts, old and new, increase and intensify. . . . peoples of the more tightly coupled in the sense that impacts from one country spread wider, faster and stronger than at any time before in human history. . . . The fact that we live on one planet means that there are no safe havens. Wise responses depend on our understanding of how the world works and how it can be changed. (Preface, vi – vii)

Hence, social science education is essential as it educates children, not only on the physical aspects of life and the world, but also open their minds to the diversities of humans living in this world as they figure out their role in the various groups, institutions and society they live in, and subsequently creating a better life for themselves and the societies. However, a key question in the context of social science education is what is social science literacy?

Weber (2010) argued that with numerous international tests such as the Olympics of education to compare students' performances in different subjects the issue of literacy in social science is becoming more urgent. She further argued that social science could refuse to participate in the national comparison studies but "with the price of losing much more importance", or they could participate with the "danger of undermining their goals"(p. 2). Questions raised by Weber were: What competences students do need in this social world to reason about and to act responsibly? What is the foundation of concepts from social science that students need for guidance and understanding their place and role as an individual in society? (Weber, 2011, p. 2).Defining key competencies and key concepts in social science itself posed a challenge for it is taught over a wide spread of subjects in schools such as geography, history, economics, social education, and politics (Weber, 2011).

Similarly in Malaysia, social science at secondary schools are taught in various subjects under the area of humanities such as History, Geography, Basic Economics, Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Moral Education (for non-Muslim students), and Civics And Citizenship Education. History, Islamic Education and Moral Education are core compulsory subjects for both lower (forms one to three) and upper (forms four and five) secondary levels. Yet, Geography is a compulsory subject at lower secondary but an elective subject at upper secondary level. Basic economics is only introduced as an elective subject at upper secondary school level. Civics and Citizenship Education is a compulsory subject at both lower and upper secondary school levels.

The differences in the curriculum of subjects in social science posed complexities, controvesies, and challenges in attempting to define basic sets of concepts, competences and literacy standards in social science for in the knowledge domain social scienceis characterized as loosely structured unlike the "hard sciences" such as physics or mathematics (Weber, 2010). Whilst it is essential to define different competences in the various subjects in social science separately, it is also equally important to look for differences and similarities in competences and the use of concepts, values, and ideologies in social science (Weber, 2010, p. 3). Taylor and Kilpin (2013) stated that the social sciences for secondary schools have six similar pedagogical approaches, namely inquiry-based learning, in-depth understanding ofconcepts based on evidence, interpretations from different sources, critical thinking, views from different perspectives, and relevant thinking of the discipline. They argued for displinary literacy in secondary social science. Taylor & Kiplin (2013, p. 130) defined disciplinary literacy as the "advanced literacy instruction embedded within content area classes" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p.40) that involve the unique language, skills and knowledge of a subject, involves students regularly and critically engaging with disciplinary texts".

It is in this context that an exploratory study on social science literacy was conducted in Malaysian secondary schools.It raised the questions on: what basic knowledge, competences, values that are important for students to understand their roles, relationships, social systems, rules, as well as the environment at local, national and global context? What arerequired to prepare the students to be able to critically evaluate,make decisions,and act responsibly as well as constructivelythat will foster better life for themselves and the society they live in? In other words, what would be the standard of social science literacy that are essential and appropriate in Malaysian secondary schools? It is to be noted that currently much of the information on the students' achievements in these school subjectsare reported in centralised public examination results, namely the Lower Secondary Assessment (known as PMR) and the Malaysian School Certificate (known as SPM). The achievements at both the PMR and SPM examinations are generally related to the understanding of the contents in the curriculum of a subject examined and not necessary on social science literacy.

Research Objectives

The aim of the study was to explore social science literacy in several subjects in social science taught in Malaysian secondary schools at form four level. The social science subjects selected for this study wereHistory, Geography, Islamic Education and Moral Education. In addition, the study also intended to explore Malaysian students' general knowledge in the area of social science. Specifically, the research objectives were to:

i) identify the knowledge on basic concepts in the selected subjects in social science among secondary school students in Malaysia.
ii) identify the basic skills in the selected subjects in social science among secondary school students in Malaysia.
iii) identify the values in the selected subjects in social science among secondary school students in Malaysia.
iv) propose standards in social science literacy for secondary schools in Malaysia.

Research Methodology

Instruments

The study used quantitative research method to explore the social science literacy of Malaysian secondary students studying at form four (aged 16 years). With reference to the national school curriculum (known as KBSM) and the National Education Developmental Plan (2013 – 2025) in Malaysia, the learning outcomes for schools were stated in terms of three learning domains, namely cognitive (knowledge), affective (values) and psychomotor (skills) as in Bloom's taxonomy of learning. Hence, the study of social science literacy in Malaysian secondary schools was in the context of the three domains of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, values and skills or competencesso as to be aligned with the national secondary school curriculum (KBSM) in Malaysia.

Due to the differences in the curriculum of the different subjects in social science, five sets of questionnaires were developed for the four subjects (history, geography, Islamic Education and Moral Education) and general knowledge in social science. The latter was includedas it is important to know the students' general knowledge on the social world that is not specific to any subjects in social science. In addition, it was indicated in the KBSM and education developmental planthat the domains of soft skills (such as critical thinking, ICT skills, creativity, communications, and team work) and noble values of Malaysian society are to be integrated in all school subjects.

However to ensure consistency, similar criteria were used in the construction of the items inall five sets of questionnaires as shown in Table 1. The questionnaires were set in form of multiple-choice objective test and the question items were constructed in the three domains of knowledge, skills and values that were aligned to the national curriculum of the selected subjects. In addition, Bloom's taxonomy of learning outcomes were employed in setting the questions; andeach set of questionnaires were consisted of 36 – 39. These items were asked in Section B of the questionnaires.

Table 1. Questionnaire item constructs on social science literacy

Domain in Social Science Literacy	Number of Question Items In Accordance with Bloom's Taxonomy				Total Question Items
	Knowledge&Understanding	Application	Analysis	Synthesis &Evaluation	
Knowledge	11	5	1	1	18
Skills/Competences	6	5	3	1	15
Values	1	-	-	2	3
Total	18	10	4	4	36

In Section A of the questionnaires, all five setsof questionnaires consisted of similar items on the background of the respondents such as gender, age, parents' educational level, location of school (urban or rural), academic stream in form four (science, arts or technicial& vocational), PMR examination results, and use of different sources of media, including internet.

Pilot tests on the five sets of questionnaires indicated Kunder Richardson-20 (KR-20) value of $0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$ dan $0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$ for all subjects except Islamic Education with a KR-20 value $0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$. In order to obtain greater validity and reliability on the latter, a master teacher in Islamic Education teaching at a secondary school verifiedthe items in the questionnaire and changes were then made accordingly.

Respondents

The respondents consisted of students studying at form four in Malaysian national secondary school. Stratified random sampling was used in the selection of the respondents. The states were divided into six zones, namely north (Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang and Perak), east (Kelant

an, Terengganu and Pahang), central (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur andPutrajaya), south (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka dan Johor), Sabah,dan Sarawak. In each zone, 1200 students were selected according to the location of schools as either urban or rural as determined by the Ministry of Education to answer the five sets of questionnaires, that is, 200 students per set of questionnaires.Out of a total of 6000 questionnaires distributed, 4705 returned questionnaires were used in the study. From the total of 4705 respondents, the number of respondents for Geography was 1031, 1002 for History, 967 for Islamic Education,704 for Moral Education and 1001 for General Knowledge.

Approval from the relevant authorities in the Ministry of Education and schools were obtained prior to the distribution of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers in all six zones throughout Malaysia at the end of October till early November 2013.

Data Analysis

The five sets of questionnaires were analysed separately as the question items were different for all the four subjects and general knowledge in social science. Nonetheless, similar procedures were used in the data analysis for all five sets of questionnaires. Descriptive analyses were conducted using SPSS version 16.0 *for* Windows. The data were presented in form of frequency and percentage. The frequency and percentage for correct and wrong answers to the multiple-choice question items asked on the knowledge, skills and values were first calculated. The percentages of overall literacy and in accordance to the three domains of knowledge, skills and values on the four subjects and General Knowledge were then obtained. The scores were then converted to gradesin accordance to the grades and scores as in the SPM examination results set by the Ministry of Education Malaysia as shown in Table 2. Respondents who received an A+ grade with score of 90 -100 would indicate highest level of social science literacy, whereas those who received grade G with a score of 0 – 39 would indicate lowest level of social science literacy in the subject.

Table 2. Table on overall grade and total score on social science literacy

Grade	Score
A+	90-100
A	80-89
A-	70-79
B+	65-69
B	60-64
C+	55-59
C	50-54
D	45-49
E	40-44
G	0-39

Results and discussion

The exploratory study on literacy in social science in Malaysian secondary schools was to identify the literacy in four subjects (History, Geography, Moral Education and Islamic Education) and General Knowledge in social science among students studying in form four, aged 16 year-old. However, it is to be noted that the study did not intend to make any comparison between the level of social science literacy between the four subjects and general knowledge in social science due to the different curriculum of the subjects taught in Malaysian secondary schools. Subsequently, the data were interpreted independently in the context of the selected subject. However, the results obtained from the foursubjects and General Knowledge can provide an overall understanding on the social science literacy of students and subsequently general guidelines or standards for social science literacy for secondary schools in Malaysia. This paper discussed the overall findings on the social science literacyin for subjects namely History,Geography, Moral Education, and Islamic Education and General Knowledge among Malaysian secondary students studying in form four. It then proposed general guidelines or standard of social science literacy in the context of Malaysian secondary school curriculum.

Social science literacy in Malaysian secondary schools

The overall results on social science literacyin History, Geography, Moral Education, Islamic Education and General Knowledge among the Form Four students in Malaysian secondary schools is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Percentage literacy score in social science subjects and general knowledge of form four students in Malaysian secondary schools

Literacy Domain	GK %	HIST %	GEO %	Moral Ed %	Islamic Ed %
Knowledge	59.2	57.7	58.2	82.3	69.2
Skills	72.7	60.1	52.0	77.0	46.4
Values	72.4	71.3	55.0	56.4	58.8
Overall	66.5	63.0	55.0	71.9	58.1

Note:GK = General Knowledge; Hist = History; Geo = Geography,
Moral Ed = Moral Education;Islamic Ed = Islamic Education

The overall literacy score obtained by the respondents to the General Knowledge questionnaire is 66.5 % (grade B+) with 59.2 % (grade B) in the knowledge domain, 72.7 % (grade A-) in skills domain and 72.4 % (grade A-) in values domain. In the case of History, the overall score obtained by the respondents is 63.0 % (grade B) with 57.7 % in the knowledge domain, 60.1 % in skills domain and 71.3 % in values domain. As for Geography, the overall score obtained by the respondents is 55.0 % (grade C+) with 58.2 % (grade C+) in the knowledge domain, 52.1 % (grade C) in skills domain and 55.0 % (grade C+) in values domain. In Moral Education, the overall score obtained by the respondents is 71.9 % (grade A-) with 82.3 % (grade A) in the knowledge domain, 77.0 % (grade A-) in skills domain and 56.4 % (grade C+) in values domain. In Islamic Education, the overall score obtained by the respondents is 58.1 % (grade C+) with 69.2 % (grade B+) in the knowledge domain, 46.4 % (grade D) in skills domain and 58.8 % (grade C+) in values domain.

As this study did not intend to make any comparison between the level of social science literacy between the four subjects and General Knowledge in social science due to the different curriculum of the subjects and subsequently different sets of questionnaires, the results on the literacy in General Knowledge, History, Geography, Moral Education, Islamic Education are discussed in the following sections.

Social science literacy in general knowledge

The social science literacy in General Knowledge showed that the levels of literacy in skills and values domains are higher than the knowledge domain as shown in Table 3. The lower level of literacy in the knowledge domain in General Knowledge could be due to the current school curriculum which is subject-based, and hence general knowledge may not be given due consideration in the teaching and learning of a school subject. An analysis on 16 items on the knowledge domain in the General Knowledge questionnaire showed that only in three items more than 80 % of the total respondents (n = 1001) answered the questions correctly, namely the questions on Rukun Negara (National Ideology), name of national sportswoman, a current local issue on the intrusion at Lahad Datu, Sabah. On the other hand, less than 40 % of the total respondents only answered

correctly to the items on importance of social science, characteristics of social science, subjects in social science, criteria for membership to Commonwealth, and Malaysia's participation at international organisations. The lack of understanding and knowledge of social science and particularly on global issues would have implications on whether students have sufficient knowledge to evaluate and make wise choices in creating a better world for themselves and the society they lived in.

In comparison to the literacy in the knowledge domain, the skills and values domain showed higher levels of literacy in the General Knowledge questionnaire. This could be expected as the soft skills in the skills domain and noble values of Malaysian society in the values domain are purposefully integrated in all subjects in the national school curriculum (KBSM). Out of 11 items asked on the skills domain, more than 80 % of total respondents answered correctly to five items, namely computer skills in file search, online submission of assignment, ways of effective oral communications, group decision by consensus, and skills in accepting criticisms. On the other hand, only 35 % of the total respondents answered correctly to the item on organisational skills in communication as a secretary of a school club.

In the case of the values domain, more than 80 % of the total respondents answered correctly to five items on values related to patriotism, public-spiritedness, love, courage and empathy. Only 28 % of the total respondents answered correctly to the item related to rationality, that is a rational act when finding a pen drive in the school canteen. The overall results on literacy in the skills and values domain in the General Knowledge questionnaire thus indicated to some extent the effectiveness of the implementation of soft skills and noble values in the KBSM. Literacy in the soft skills and values are important in providing students with competences and valuesto cope with the changes in the borderless world of the 21st century.

Social science literacy in history

The results in this study on the social science literacy in History showed that the levels of literacy in skills and values domains are higher than the knowledge domain as shown in Table 3. This is surprising as History is a compulsory core subject in KBSM since form one and form four students are expected to have basic knowledge of the history content in the history curriculum. The overall literacy score of 57.7 % in the knowledge domain could be due to the lack of understanding on historical facts or that the students would only study or memorise historical facts for the purpose of examination. An analysis on 21 items on the knowledge domain in the History questionnaire showed that in only four items more than 80 % of the total respondents (n = 1002) answered the questions correctly, namely on maritime government, system of government, colonization, and characteristics of history. Less than 50 % of the total respondents gave correct answers to ten items in the knowledge domain. Among them were concept of history, type of work of migrates from India, historical figures from Sarawak, name of Federal Constitution Commission, Head of State in Malaysia, methodology in study of history, and system of inheritance.

The overall literacy score in the skills domain (60.1 %) in the History questionnaire was slightly higher than in the knowledge domain (57.7 %). This could be due to the lack of emphasis being given in developing higher-order thinking skills or competences in the study of history. Out of 11 questions on skills domain in the History questionnaire, more than 80 % of total respondents (1002) answered correctly to two items on chronology by period, and interpretation on importance of history. Less than 50

% of total respondents answered correctly to three items on chronology of western colonization, drawing conclusions, and making imagination statements. The development of higher-ordered thinking skills is emphasised in the National Education Development Plan (2013 – 2025) and hence it is important that skills pertinent to history such as comparison, sequencing, chronology, making connections, making imagination and interpretation need to be given greater emphasis in the history subject in schools.

The overall literacy score in values domain is highest with 71 %, thus indicating that majority of the respondents answered correctly the three items on values related to history, namely nationalism, love for country, and solidarity in protecting the nation.

Social science literacy in geography

The results in this study on the social science literacy in Geography showed that the level of literacy in knowledge domain is highest (58. 2%) as compared to values (55.0 %) and skills (52.1 %) domains as shown in Table 3. The overall literacy in Geography of 55.5 % at Grade C+ could be due to the current implementation of Geography in the national school curriculum. Although Geography is a compulsory subject at lower secondary (form one to form three) it is an elective subject at upper secondary school level (form four and form five). In addition, majority of the respondents in this study did not take Geography as an elective subject in form four. However, it is expected that having learnt Geography at lower secondary school level, the respondents would have knowledge of geographical concepts, skills and values.

An analysis on the 25 items on knowledge domain in the Geography questionnaire indicated that about 80% of the respondents (n = 1031) answered correctly to three items, namely characteristics of an individual who learn geography, region where majority of Muslims in the world live in, and types of heavy industry in Malaysia. Less than 50 % of the total respondents answered correctly to eight items such as items on weather, total population of Malaysia, trading nations with Malaysia, relative position, land size of Malaysia, characteristics of geography, data source in geography, and directions. Only 16 % of the total respondents answered correctly to the item on directions from point 'A' to 'B' in an illustrated map. The results showed that the respondents lacked understanding on the study of geography itself, basic geographical concepts, and even the geography of the country they live in.

The literacy in the skills and values domains to the Geography questionnaire were found to be lower than that in the knowledge domain. Out of 11 items on skills in geography, about 80% of the total respondents (n – 1031) answered correctly to one item, namely interpreting graph. Less than 50 % of the total respondents answered correctly to 6 items, mainly on reading and interpreting information from topographical map, calculating distance and identify process of globalisation and areas of economic activities.

As for the three items on the values domain in the Geography questionnaire, 60 % respondents answered correctly to the value related to responsibility whilst 55 % respondents to the value of proud of the country's biodiversities, and 50 % respondents to the value of empathy to the poverty and hunger in some African countries. With an overall literacy of 55 % among the respondents who answered the Geography questionnaire, it has implications on the understanding of the secondary school students on their role and responsibility as a citizen and having the knowledge, skills and values to create a better world.

Social science literacy in moral education

The Moral Education questionnaire was answered by non-Muslim students who take Moral Education as a compulsory core subject. The results on the social science literacy in Moral Education showed that the levels of literacy in the knowledge domain (82.3 %) is higher than in the skills (77 %) and values (56.4 %) domains as shown in Table 3. The overall literacy on Moral Education of 71.9 % at Grade A- is due to the high score in the knowledge and skills domains. This could be case as similar values in the Moral Education are taught from primary to secondary school levels, that is from year one to year 6 primary and then from form 1 to form 5 secondary. The main difference is in the academic content of the moral situations and issues related to the values.

An analysis on the 18 items on knowledge domain in the Moral Education questionnaire indicated that about 80 % of the respondents (n = 704) answered correctly to 15 items such as items related to diligence, respect, trust, places of worship, religious festivals, family traditions, responsibility towards family, love the environment, responsibility towards society, and child's rights, moral motives, consequences of disobey the law, and importance of social norms. As for the other three items, about 70 % respondents answered correctly to the item on consumer's rights, 68 % respondents on importance of conservations of the environment, and 68 % respondents on importance of values to oneself. Further analysis on the data according to Bloom's taxonomy indicated that more than 80 % respondents correctly answered all 8 items at level 1 and 2 (knowledge and understanding), four out of five items at level 3 (application), one out of two items at level 4 (analysis) and two out of three questions at levels 5 and 6 (synthesis and evaluation). The results thus indicated that the respondents to the Moral Education questionnaire showed to a great extend the respondents' understanding and knowledge of the values as stipulated in the Moral Education curriculum.

The literacy in the skills and values domains to the Moral Education questionnaire were found to be lower than that in the knowledge domain. Out of 15 items on skills in Moral Education that encompass skills in moral reasoning, moral emotions, and moral acting, more than 80 % of the total respondents (n = 704) answered correctly to nine items such as items related to feelings of others (moral emotion), criteria to be considered when making a moral decision (moral reasoning), identifying a moral situation (moral reasoning), identify moral reason (moral reasoning), justification based on justice (moral reasoning), evaluate a moral act (moral reasoning), action based on care (moral acting) and altruistic action (moral acting). On the two other items related to moral emotions, namely sympathy and empathy (moral emotions) , 76 % and 73 % respondents respectively answered the questions correctly. Less than 50 % respondents correctly answered to two items, namely action based on justice (moral action) and contextual action (moral action). The results on the skills domain in the Moral Education questionnaire thus indicated that out of the three dimensions in Moral Education, the respondents seemed to be more able to apply moral reasoning than moral acting and to a lesser extend moral emotions in a given moral situation.

In the three items on the values domain in the Moral Education questionnaire, 82 % respondents answered correctly to the value related to objective value and 70 % on absolute value. However only 17 % respondents correctly answered to the item on universal value which required the respondents to identify what should be the right action from a group of options on performing a task with sincerity, respecting right of others to live in safe environment, and/or obeying rules and laws if it suit your feelings. The lower literacy in the values domain in Moral Education could be the case as making distinctions

between the types and interpretation of values are not included n the Moral Education curriculum,. However such distinction is relevant in Moral Education so as to enable students to better understand and interpret values from different context.

Social science literacy in Islamic education

The Islamic Education questionnaire was answered by Muslim students who take Islamic Education as a compulsory core subject. The social science literacy in Islamic Education showed that the levels of literacy in the knowledge domain (69.2 %) is higher than in the values (58.8 %) and skills (46,4 %) domains as shown in Table 3. The overall literacy in Islamic Education is 58.1 % with grade C+ is unexpected as Islamic Education is a compulsory core subject for Muslim students since pre-school under the national school curriculum. Hence form four students are expected to have the basic knowledge, skills and values in Islamic Education.

An analysis on the 13 items on knowledge domain in the Islamic Education questionnaire indicated that about 80 % of the total respondents (n = 967) answered correctly to 6 items on the knowledge domain in the Islamic Education questionnaire, namely items on the area of Islamic studies, primary source of Islam, Five Pillars of Islam (*Rukun Islam)*, concept of *tawakal,*a good act, and *Khulafa al-Rasyidin.*Only about 50 % respondents correctly answered to the item on manners (*akhlak*) and characteristics of Messenger (*sifatrasul*).What is suprising is that less than 50 % of the respondents correctly answered to three items on Pillars of Inner Faith (*RukunIman*), Prophetic Wisdom (*Hikmahrasul*) and benefits of pray in group (*solatberjemaah)*. Further analysis on the knowledge domain in Islamic Education according to area of Islamic studies indicated that the overall knowledge in the area of al-Quran and *akhlak*(84.9 %) are higher than in area of the life of Prophet Muhammad (*bidangsirah*) (79.1 %), faith (*akidah*) (53.3 %) and obedience to Allah*(ibadah)*(57.1 %). Basic knowledge in Islam should be clearly understood and known by all Muslims so as to avoid any confusion mistakes and misinterpretation of the religious practices.

The study indicated that the literacy on the skills domain in Islamic Education is at low-moderate at 46 %. Out of the 18 items on the skills domain in the Islamic Education questionnaire, more than 80 % of the total respondents correctly answered to only two items on making comparison on the *kitabsuci* and identifying the method of enshrouded corpse (*mengkafankanjenazah*). Less than 40 % respondents correctly answered to 10 items, namely on the application of *solatqasar*, classification of *zakat*recepients, classification of *zakat* rate from *zakat* property, ways of reading al-Quran recitation (*tajweed)*, meaning of verse, concept of trust (*tawakal*), identify types of *hadith*, application of how to cleanse (*carabersuci*) , identify the exact time for *zakat al-fitrah* and purification methods. The low-moderate level of literacy in skills domain could possibly be due to the different and wide-range of skills required in the study of al-Quran, *hadith* and *ibadah*. In addition, as the Islamic Education teachers encountered time constraints in completing wide scope of content in the Islamic Education curriculum, they generally gave less importance in developing the basic skills in Islam such as *tajwid* and reading al-Quran. However, this has implications on the daily Islamic practices of Muslims. The Muslim students should be able to apply their knowledge in their daily life and have the basic skills such as understanding, explaining, identifying, analysing as well ability to relate the various processes holistically.

There were four items in the values domain in Islamic Education question. The results showed that slightly above 70 % respondents correctly answered to the item on the

value o fslave (*hamba)*and gratitude (*syukur)*. However only 56 % respondents correctly answered to the item on the value of *redha* and 31 % respondents to the value of beneficence (*ihsan)*.

Proposed guidelines on social science literacy standards for the transformation of education in Malaysian secondary schools.

The exploratory study on social science literacy in Malaysian secondary schools provides empirical data on the social science literacy of students studying in form four in Malaysian secondary schools as the study involved a total of 4705 students who responded to five sets of questionnaires. 1001 respondents answered the General Knowledge questionnaires, 1002 respondents on the History questionnaires, 1031 respondents on the Geography questionnaires, 704 respondents on Moral Education questionnaires and 967 respondents on Islamic Education questionnaires. The results in this study also revealed some important concern and implications for curriculum developers, educators in schools and teacher educators in social sciences. The curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment in social sciences need to be constantly reviewed, and evaluated so as to keep it relevant to the current changes and the future. In addition, the teacher education programme in producing social sciences teachers should be transformed so as to be prepare teachers who are able to educate to have the essential values, skills and knowledge that will enable the students to make wise choices in creating better life for themselves and the world they currently live in and in the future.

Based on the results of this study, guidelines on social science literacy standards for Malaysian secondary schools are proposed. A roundtable discussion was also organised to obtain inputs from 14 selected external stakeholders who are experts in social sciences, particularly in the four subjects selected in this study. They consisted of lecturers from two local universities, lecturers from two teacher education institution, Ministry of Education officers from Curriculum Development Division, Examination Syndicate and School Inspectorate, and masters and experienced teachers teaching History, Geography, Moral Education and Islamic Education in secondary schools.

The formulation of the proposed guidelines on social science literacy standards for Malaysian secondary schools took into consideration that the standards were based on the results of this exploratory study; social science literacy standards are different for different subjects due to the difference in the curriculum of the subject; and there are some similarities in social science literacy across the different subjects such as general knowledge on social science, soft skills and noble values of Malaysian society. In this context, five sets of guidelines on standards of social science literacy were formulated. One set of guidelines encompasses general standards on social science literacy, and the other four sets on social science literacy that are specific to the four social science subjects, namely History, Geography, Moral Education and Islamic Education. This paper presents the proposed guidelines on general standards on social science literacy as in the following:

Standards on social science knowledge

1. Knowledge on the characteristics, functions, importance, and areas of studies in social science so that social science will be relevant and meaningful to the students in learning social sciences in school.

2. General knowledge on citizenship, local and national issues and problems so as to educate students to be responsible citizens, and participate actively in national development and solutions to current issues
3. General knowledge on external and world affairs so as to widen general knowledge on global issues that have consequences and impact on humanities and the environment.
4. General knowledge on all subjects in social science be related and integrated so that students will have holistic knowledge on social science discipline and subsequently be able to function as an individual with excellent literacy in social science. .
5. Knowledge on the applications of information technologi and communications as essential source in widening understanding in social science knowledge.

Standards on social science skills

1. Soft skills in the school curriculum so as to prepare students to face future in a borderless world.
2. Skills in analysing facts, and solving problems in social science, critically and objectively that are appropriate to context of Malaysian society.
3. Group communication skills so as to improve social communications with diverse social groups and at workplace.
4. Team-work skills so as to develop students to be socially responsible and contribute to the community, society and nation.
5. Skills to objectively interpret information and data from various sources.
6. Skills to weigh or evaluate a social issue or problem from different perspective.

Standards on social science values

1. Noble values of Malaysian society in the school curriculum so as to provide guidance in life as a Malaysia citizen.
2. Practices on the noble values in the students' daily lives for harmonious living and sustainable national development.

Conclusions

This is an exploratory research on social science literacy in Malaysian secondary schools among form four students. It is acknowledged that some other subjects in social science (Basic Economics, Civics and Citizenship Education) and other form levels, and from different types of secondary schools (such as religious schools, residential schools and national type schools, private schools) were not included in this study. On this basis, it is suggested that further studies can be conducted with other social science subjects, at different form levels and types of schools in Malaysia so as to obtain a more comprehensive data on the social science literacy in Malaysian secondary schools.

The instruments used in this study consisted of five sets of questionnaires that were set in form of multiple choice objective questions. It is acknowledged that the objective questions would not be able to assess the subjective perspectives that are important in social science. The autonomous decisions on one's choices in life, judgement on social problems and issues are difficult to be tested with accuracy in the

objective test used in this study. Nonetheless, Bloom's taxonomy on learning outcomes was used in the construction of the questionnaires in this study so as to assess the different levels of literacy in learning. However, not only the instruments used in this study can be further validated, other forms of instruments that can measure the subjectivity in social can be constructed so as to provide greater validity and reliability of the instruments in measuring social science literacy in Malaysian schools.

In conclusion, this study has provided empirical data on the social science literacy of form four students in Malaysian secondary schools. The results clearly indicated that there is an urgent need to review and evaluate the current policies, curriculum and practices of teaching and learning as well as assessment of social science education in Malaysian schools if excellence in social science literacy of the students are to be achieved. The importance of social science should be not be taken lightly by all educators, parents and students if we are to create better life and better world for the current and the future. In short,

> *"It is time to take [applying the discipline of specific field of wider than national concern] seriously, and for that we need social science to take its place in an integrated landscape of science and technology, and policy-makers to listen – among other voices – to what social sciences has to say"Pierre Sané, UNESCO, 2010, p. 6)*

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