

# Connecting the self, community and the world through literature in GE curriculum

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# Outline

1. GE and literature at CIE
2. Literary Appreciation
3. Reading Contemporary Worlds
4. Study on students' attitudes towards GE literature courses

# GE at HKBU

GE CORE	Units	GE DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENTS	
English Language	6	<b>Arts (GE Literature)</b>	
Chinese Language	3	Business	
Numeracy	3	Communication	
Public Speaking	3	Science	
PE	2	Social Sciences	
IT	3	Interdisciplinary	
History & Civilization	3		
Values & Meaning of Life	3		
Total:	26	Total:	12 units

# GE at CIE

- CIE is unique in offering English literature GE courses at sub-degree level
- Students have a choice of two GE literature courses:
  1. Literary Appreciation
  2. Reading Contemporary Worlds

# GE at CIE

## Why GE literature?

- Moves beyond “functional”, “communicative” approach in learning English
- “Higher literacy” that requires
  - Reading stamina
  - Sensitivity to tone/register in language
  - Vocabulary building
  - Figurative language
  - Reflection on one’s own thoughts/behaviours and one’s connection to one’s community and the world (Cultural model)

(Carter & Long, 1991)

# GE at CIE

## An Uphill Battle

- Relevance to students' disciplines?
- Frustration with new vocabulary
- Fear of Reading (ESL students)
- Lack of reading stamina

# Literary Appreciation

- Offers a ‘taster’ of main literary genres:
  - Short stories
  - Drama
  - Poetry
- Requires students to employ basic literary theory, e.g.:
  - Marxism
  - Feminism
  - Psychoanalysis

- ILO:

“Students should be able to articulate the relationship between literary issues and modern everyday society”

# Reading Contemporary Worlds

- Based on short stories
- High level of autonomy in terms of reading choices and assessments
- No formal literary theory
- Students required to make connections between the stories and their own discipline

- ILO:

“Discuss contemporary and enduring issues in human society and how they are expressed in short stories”



# Reading Contemporary Worlds

## Assessments

Set readings:

5 short stories



Used in teaching

Used for :

- in-class writing
- mid-term test

Reading pool:

Approx. 30 short stories



Student chooses 5

Used for:

- poster forum
- 3-minute close reading
- group portfolio

# The Study

## Purpose

To investigate how English literature GE courses enable students to :

- Empathise with people outside of their own cultural background
- Understand the relationship between individuals and society
- Reflect on their own relationship with society

# The Study

140 respondents.

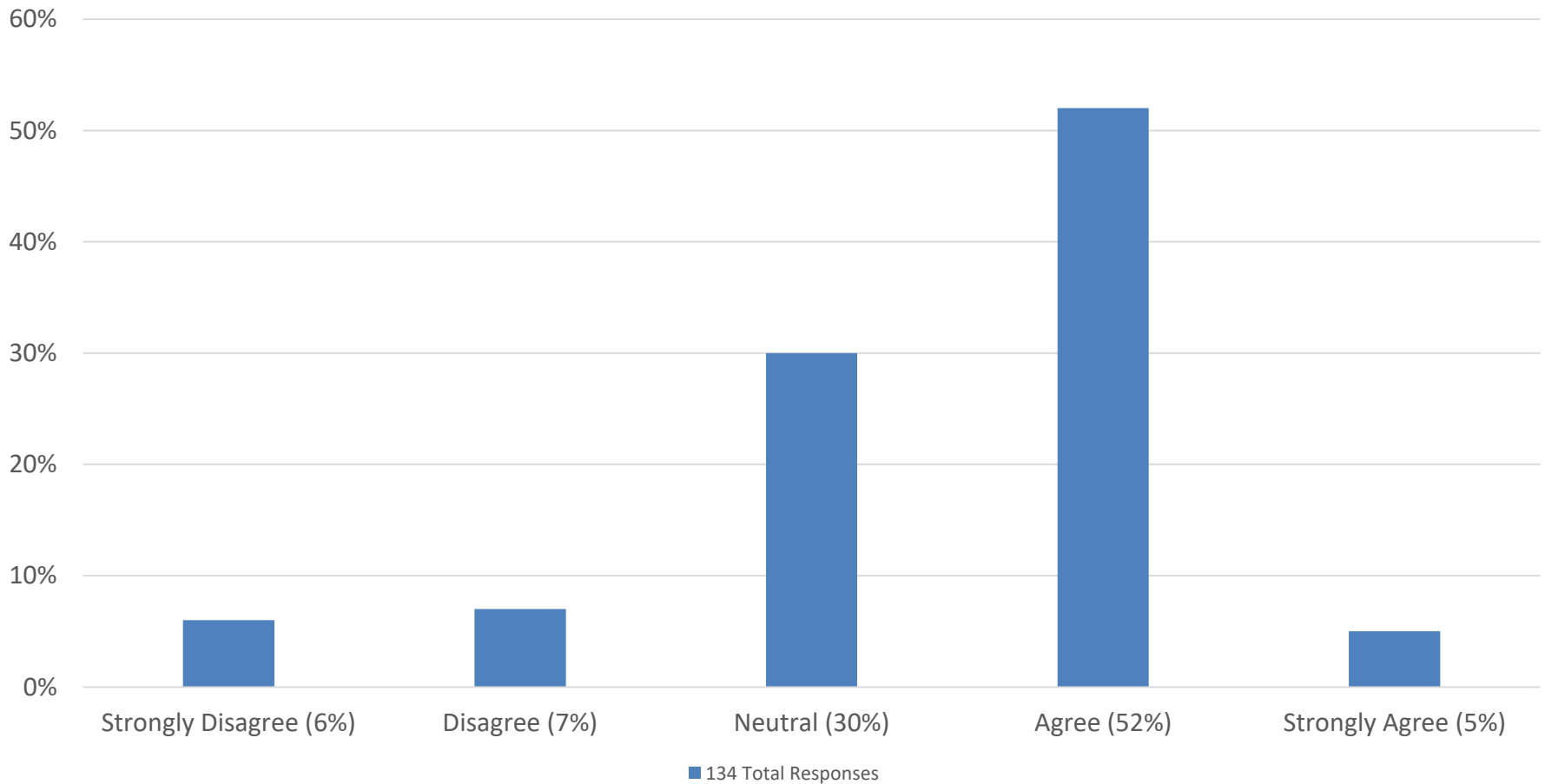
Breakdown by academic division:

Arts & Languages	7%
Business	23%
Communication	22%
Applied Science	21%
Social Sciences	25%

# The Study

## Reflecting on self and community

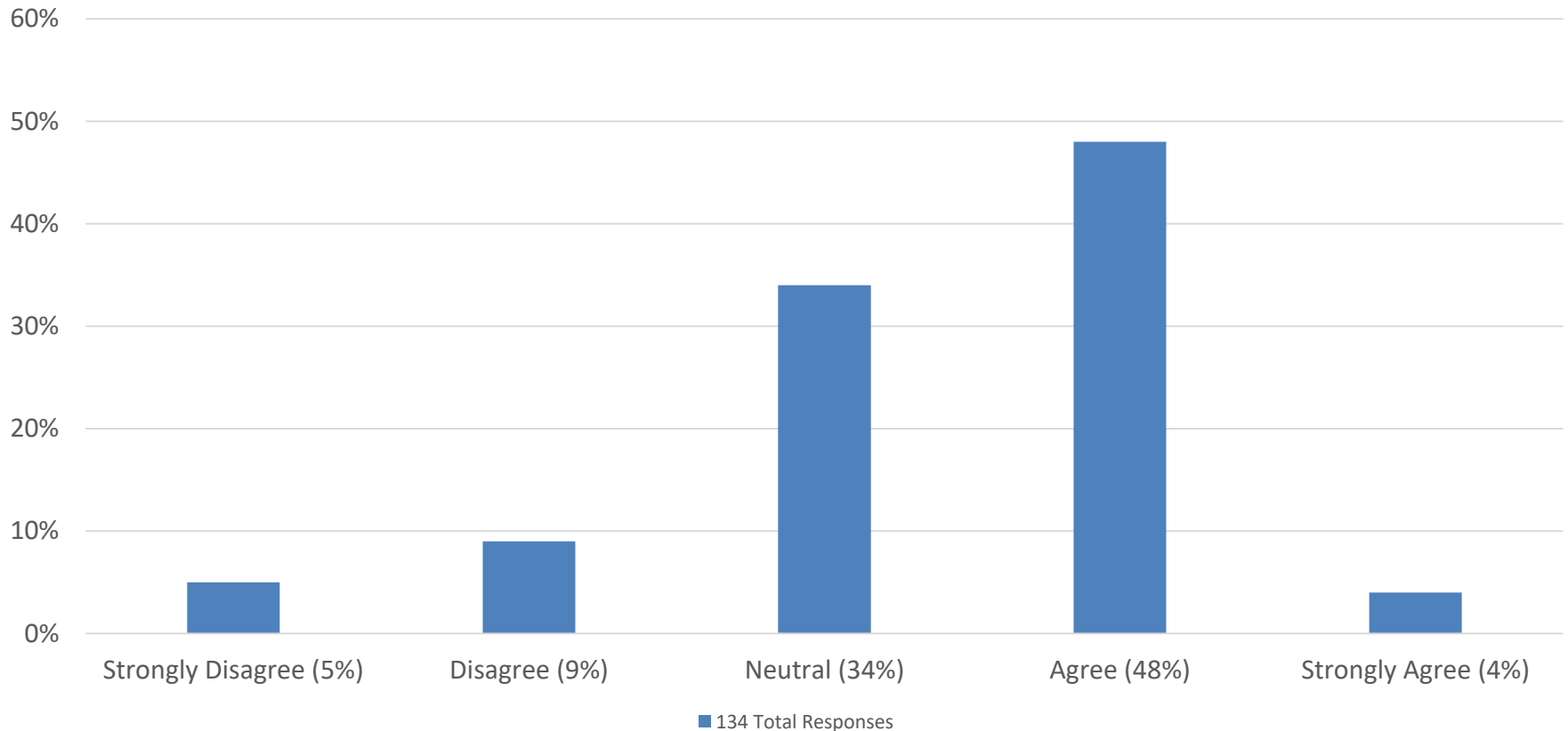
Do you feel you have a better understanding of the relationship between individuals and society?



# The Study

## Reflecting on self and community

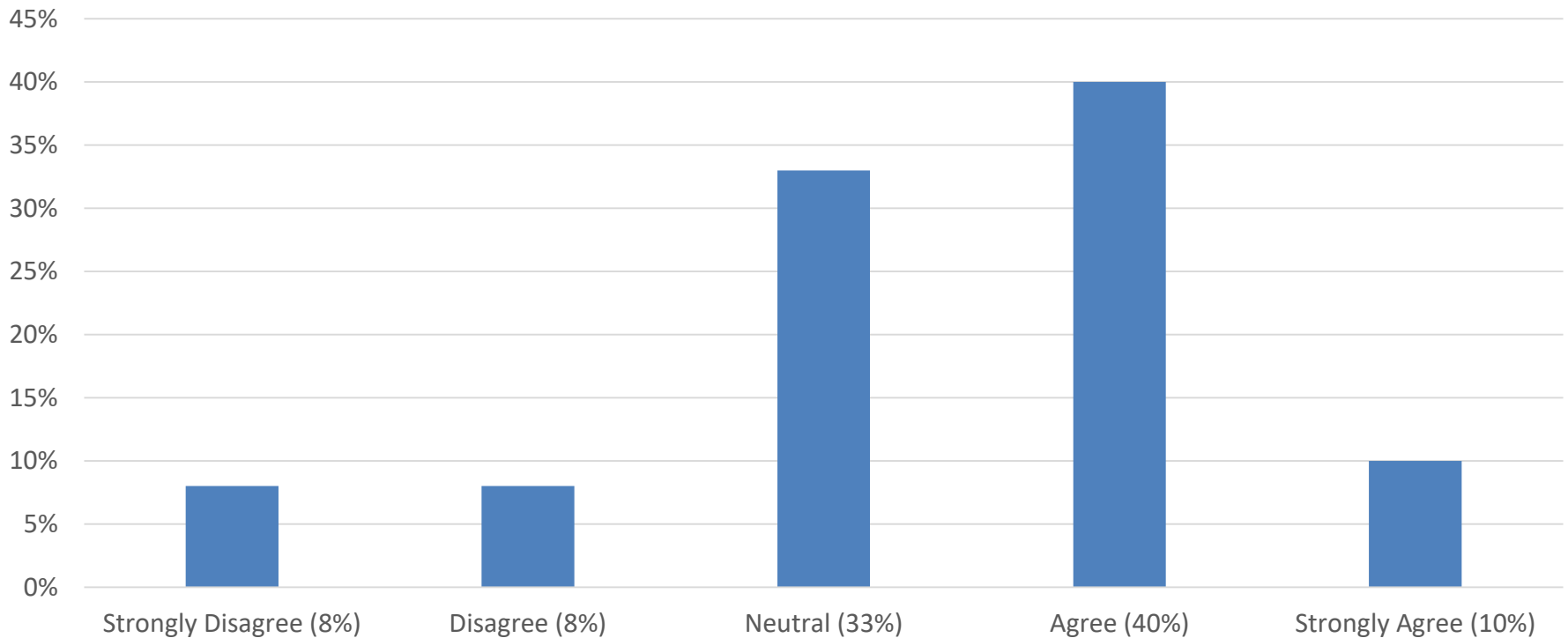
Do you think you have a better understanding of how people think and behave in different contexts and situations?



# The Study

## Connectedness beyond one's own community

Do you think that by reading about people and communities from other cultures, you feel that there are similarities between your own community and communities described in the literature?

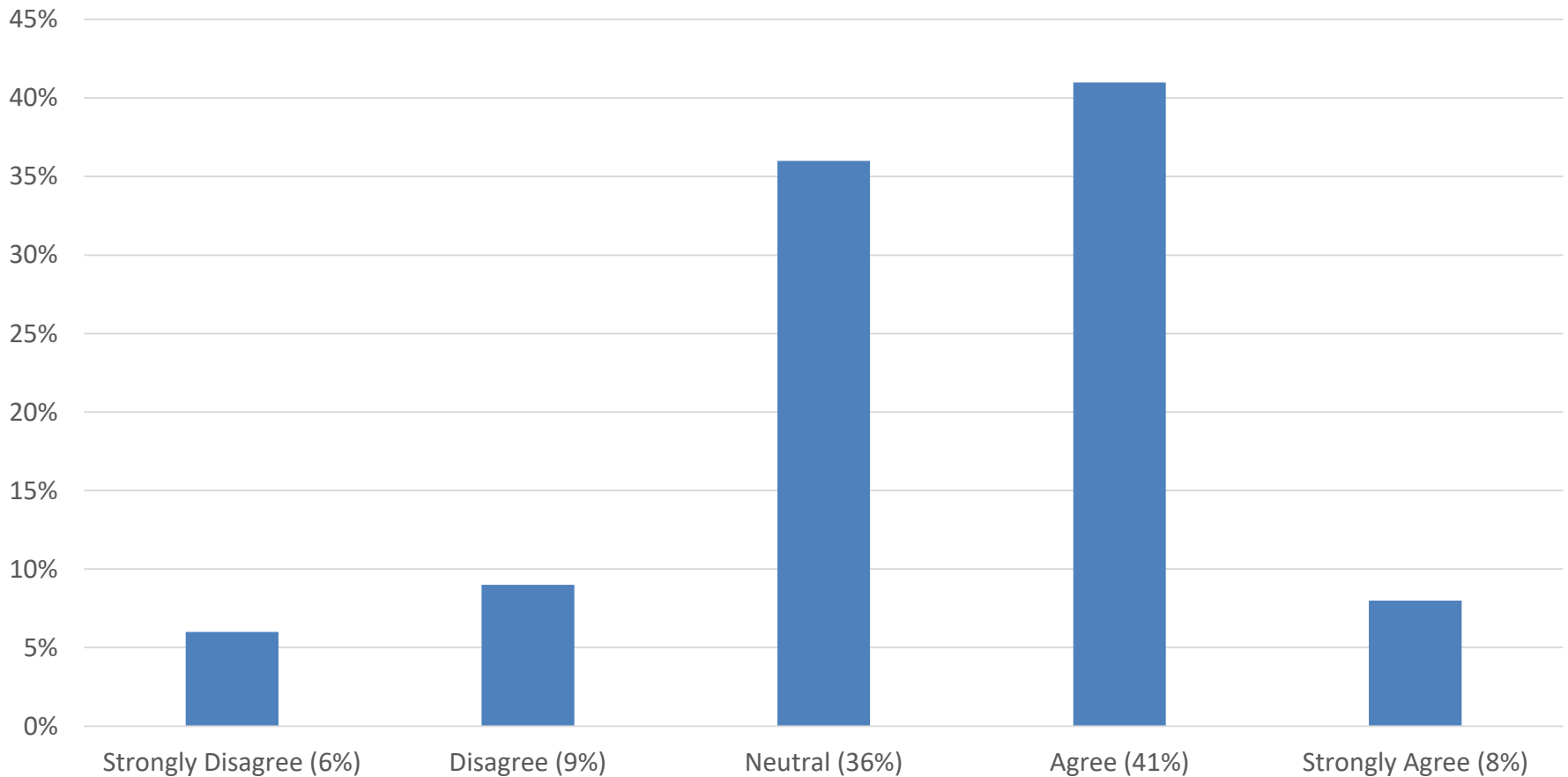


■ 134 Total Responses

# The Study

## Connectedness beyond one's own community

Do you feel connected to the world outside Hong Kong?



■ 134 Total Responses

# The Study

## Connectedness beyond one's own community

### Analysis of an older culture:

Motherhood has always been labeled as “women’s bounden duty”, especially in the old feudal society of China when a woman was expected to sacrifice everything for her children. However, in *Thunderstorm*, Fan Yi’s desire for humanity freedom outweighs the responsibilities and dignity of the divine role of mother when she hysterically shouts to Chung, her biological son: “...after all these years my spirit is still not dead. Your father may have made me have you, Chung, but my heart – my soul is still my own. (Pointing to Ping) He’s the only one that’s ever possessed me body and soul.”



# The Study

## Connectedness beyond one's own community Comparison with an overseas culture:

Kate Keller processes the features of obedience and vulnerability of a traditional women. As Kate Millett (1970), a famous American feminist stated in *Sexual Politics*: “Patriarchy’s chief institution is the family.”, in *All My Sons*, the main source of Kate Keller’s oppression comes from her family role as a wife. Kate has known the truth of the crime that it is Joe who has sent the cracked airplane parts to military from the very beginning, but she chooses to conceal the truth.

# The Study

## English proficiency and reading stamina

Question	% positive responses
Do you feel that your English vocabulary have increased after taking the literature course?	55%
Do you feel your English writing skills e.g. organization, language use, have improved.	50%

Question	Responses
Estimate how many news words in English you now recognize and understand	56%: 40 or more
How many times would you say you read each of the five stories that you used in your assignment for RCW students?	83%: 3 or more times

# The Study

## Findings

- More than half are ready to go beyond just reading the story for fun/study and to:
  - reflect on their own thoughts and behavior
  - reflect on their own community
- Students are less able to:
  - Identify similarities between their own communities and other communities about which they read
  - Students are less able to identify connections between themselves and the wider world

# References

Carter, R & Long M. (1991) *Teaching Literature*. Essex & New York: Longman UK