

Literature Teaching in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classrooms: The South African Teachers' Experiences

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Abstract—This paper explores the English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' experiences of teaching literature in three high schools in the Pinetown District, South Africa. The interpretivist paradigm underpinned the qualitative case study. It used Ubuntu as an epistemic lens. Eleven high school teachers were purposively sampled, participated in semi-structured interviews, and were observed teaching literature in their grades 10–12 classrooms. The recorded, transcribed and coded interviews were thematically analysed. The findings revealed that ESL literature teachers found literature teaching to be multidimensional. The teachers perceived literature teaching in the ESL environment as a positive experience. For instance, they described it as fantastic, fascinating, life-changing, and enticing and as a journey. However, they also found it to be challenging and intimidating. They also considered the multilingual component of the South African ESL environment and used multilingual pedagogies to enhance comprehension and learner engagement. Teaching literature in the ESL classroom has more significant benefits than challenges posed by the teachers' or learners' backgrounds and linguistic barriers. This paper recommends using Ubuntu as a pedagogical approach in teaching literature in South African ESL classrooms. Furthermore, the learners' voices and the use of literature in teaching other language skills must be strengthened in policy and practice. Technology infusion may also be a relevant resource in using literature to enhance critical thinking and language development in the classroom.

Index Terms—English as a Second Language, literature teaching, multilingual, Ubuntu, Ubuntu

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature in English has historically been an indispensable component of English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms worldwide (Julia & Jeyanthi, 2024). However, it still challenges teachers and learners, especially in the South African multilingual context (Mbambo & Hlabisa, 2024). The benefits of teaching literature in ESL are enormous and central to the holistic development of SL learners. For this reason, Lazar (1993) advocates for literature inclusion in the English curriculum, as language and literature are inextricably linked and complementary. Literature instruction through stories and themes in South Africa has also shaped people's traditions, cultural values, and lifestyles. In this paper, it is essential to discuss what literature comprises. According to Carter and McRae (2016), literature appears not only in books, but also in videos, television, radio, compact discs (CDs), computers, newspapers, and any other multimedia source in which a story or image is configured. Hilda and Pelokazi (2023) assert that unlike conventional storytelling, which predominantly relies on visual elements derived from printed literature, digital storytelling incorporates auditory stimuli that captivate learners' curiosity and engagement, thereby invigorating the narrative process and augmenting the educational experience. El-Helou (2010) perceives literature as having traits that are related to style, expression, and themes that are intricately incorporated. Literature includes the work of writers from multiple backgrounds and languages across the universe. Therefore, it must not be taught exclusively. Instead, it should be integrated into every English language skill and made an essential resource, as Haimbodi and Woldemariam (2019) and Zondi (2025) elucidate. The study was conducted in the Pinetown District in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The Pinetown District is diverse with learners and teachers from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, whose socio-economic characteristics are also different. Most schools that teach English as a second language or *first additional language*, as it is referred to in South Africa, are classified as no-fee schools, because of numerous socio-economic factors.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the ESL teachers' literature teaching experiences in Grades 10–12 classrooms?
- How do ESL teachers mitigate the challenges of literature teaching in Grades 10–12 classrooms?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Literature Teaching and Its Resourcefulness in the ESL Classroom

In the South African public high school curriculum, literature comprises novels, plays, short stories, poetry, and the prescribed literary genres for grades 10 to 12, which are the final grades in South African high schools (DBE, 2011). Figure 1 illustrates these components.

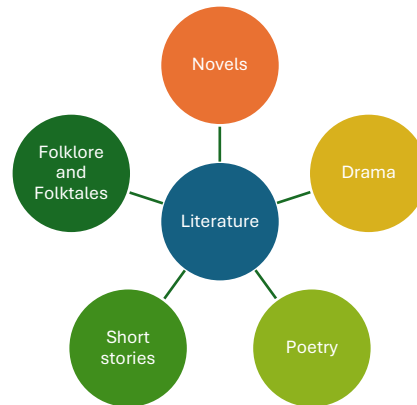


Figure 1. Literature Components in the ESL Classroom

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011) specifies that the objective of reading literature is to develop sensitivity to the specific use of refined, literary, figurative, symbolic, and profoundly significant language. Lazar (1993, p. 14) further substantiated the inclusion of literature in teaching, stating that it:

- is inspirational and authentic,
- has a general educational value,
- is found in various syllabi,
- helps learners to understand other cultures,
- stimulates language acquisition,
- develops learners' interpretative abilities,
- is engaging and fun for learners,
- has status and is appreciated in classrooms,
- increases learners' language awareness, and
- encourages learners to share their thoughts and feelings.

Isro'iyah and Herminingsih (2023) also argue that literary works enhance learners' sense of empathy, self-confidence, and imagination. In addition, the authors argue that these works improve one's critical analysis ability, communication skills, and intellectual capacity, and that they can relieve anxiety due to academic pressure. Ghosn (1998) contends that omitting English literature from the SL classroom would be a grave mistake in circumstances where language competency is always the goal. She also believes that it should be included in SL classes, beginning in those in primary school. Muthusamy et al. (2017) emphasise that literature should be offered early to help learners to improve their language skills. Many academics agree that literature teaches learners to read any literary text using active, focused reading habits to arouse interest, predict events, link ideas, and construct meaning. Furthermore, learners can learn about unfamiliar contexts, traditions, and lifestyles through literature. Fictional works can be used as a resource for knowledge and a tool for moral and ethical development. Literature is essential to achieving this (Isro'iyah & Herminingsih, 2023). Learners may perceive the world and its inhabitants through literature. They perceive the many climes, languages, and tones. Moreover, the literature provides learners with glimpses into olden times or historical events.

The benefits of the literature component of language include intercultural, tolerance, worldview, cognitive, and affective gains and independence (Zaini et al., 2024). To teach and learn literature, teachers and learners, respectively, must develop a positive perception towards studying English literature, regardless of whether one is a native or an ESL speaker. Therefore, literature in the ESL classroom should be a resource of teaching various skills required within and outside the classroom walls. Navigating through it should be blissful, because of its focus on benefits, rather than agonising or worrying, as a result of focusing on challenges. Hilda and Pelokazi (2023) also argue that language teaching has shifted from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness, with an emphasis on novel teaching approaches and techniques. This is important for learner motivation and engagement, as learners take the lead in their literature learning.

Teachers commonly convey their worries and claim that ESL students face the difficulty of inadequate vocabulary. Teachers must identify suitable methodologies that facilitate vocabulary enhancement and linguistic proficiency (Alsyouf, 2020; Zondi, 2025). One potential resolution may involve incorporating poetry as a beneficial tool for vocabulary expansion, as its linguistic elements are readily memorised by learners (Alsyouf, 2019; Alsyouf, 2020). Literature teachers must mitigate the potential for students to develop a negative disposition towards literature instruction by employing

innovative and learner-centred pedagogical strategies. This illustrates the critical need for teachers to implement relevant and successful teaching practices adapted to their ESL classrooms. Additionally, Mustofa (2016) points out that poetry, novels, short stories and plays should be utilised in SL teaching and learning, as they are authentic texts and provide enrichment to the target language, exposure to a wide variety of literary texts, and enhancement of cultural understanding and tolerance.

B. Challenges of Teaching Literature in the ESL Classroom

Teaching English literature in an SL class is challenging for teachers, because literature is linguistically, culturally, and socially unfamiliar to them (El-Helou, 2010). According to Hussein and Al-Emami (2016), when teaching non-native learners literature, teachers should avoid asserting or asking questions about the text's moral and social values, as this may demotivate the learners. Moral and social values may only be discussed during text analysis when learners must comprehend and analyse the material. Calafato (2024) alerts us that most challenges in literature classrooms emanate from a lack of literary competence for both teachers and learners. The argument is furthered by stating that teachers and learners must possess a particular level of literary competence to be successful in studying and analysing their subject matter. This competence may involve, among others, aesthetic and stylistic, empathetic, interpretative, cultural, and discursive competencies (Calafato, 2024). Carter and Jones (2012) elucidate that teachers who teach non-native English speakers recognise the importance of literature in the language classroom, but are concerned about the cultural gaps that literature presents. Muthusamy et al. (2017) found that teachers who teach literature in ESL classes often struggle due to their limited language ability. Some teachers despise literature so much that they never 'concern themselves' with making it fun or trying new ways (Muthusamy et al., 2017). As much as some teachers worry about the complexity of the literature, particularly for low-proficiency learners, they advocate for its use because they believe it improves language skills.

The wonderful experience of teaching in an SL classroom is that learners are from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Teaching and reading literary genres that bring multicultural content and perceptions will encourage teachers and learners to be receptive, open-minded, and tolerant (Isro'iyah & Herminingsih, 2023).

C. Ubuntuogy as an Epistemic Lens

Ubuntuogy, as an epistemic lens, framed this study. This framework was instrumental in foregrounding the African perspectives on literature teaching and analysis in South African classrooms. The extensive use of Eurocentric SL teaching approaches has marginalised African principles and values of learning, as Mthinkhulu (2024) and Ngubane and Makua (2021) argue. In essence, literature in English is primarily informed by Eurocentric perspectives. This Eurocentric lens leads to the dilution of African values, especially in African stories that are taught in ESL classrooms. This paper presents Ubuntuogy as a relevant framework in the ESL literature classroom in the South African context. The adoption of this philosophy further dismantles the notion that African values and principles are irrelevant in the English classroom. Ubuntuogy, in this paper, further promotes African perspectives by analysing literary texts in South African ESL classrooms.

Ubuntuogy, as conceptualised by Bangura (2005, 2017) and Hungwe (2021), advocates for acceptance and the use of local languages to develop critical thinking, personal identity, and cultural and language awareness. Yende (2024) asserts that Ubuntuogy stems from the combination of the term Ubuntu and pedagogy. Ubuntuogy has the power to invoke Africanism in the curriculum by prioritising African values and traditions in the teaching and learning of literature. This is encapsulated in the African saying, 'Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu', which is known in many African languages and societies. Ubuntu embraces community values, respect, and unity. Pedagogy refers to the principles and techniques of teaching (Letseka, 2013, 2016).



Figure 2. Ubuntuogy as a Concept

Ubuntuogy enables learners to relate to and connect with their heritage and cultural norms. This enhances the learners' understanding of literature from their perspectives, as it also incorporates their knowledge and interpretation of the world, rather than focusing solely on the Eurocentric perspectives. This strikes a balance between Eurocentric and African values, instead of perpetuating Eurocentrism. Yende (2024) further argues that Ubuntuogy creates an environment of cooperation, oneness, and the construction of knowledge. The researcher argues that this perspective alludes to the

centrality of Ubuntu and *indigenous knowledge systems* (IKS) in South African ESL classrooms, as Bhuda (2021) also posits.

Carter and Jones (2012) pointed out that European teachers were worried about the cultural differences that literature brought about. They were worried that literature was linguistically challenging and culturally diverse, and, therefore, learners might find it hard to grasp. It was suggested that the chosen literature must be accessible to teachers first and then cater for learners' linguistic differences. Viewing the ESL classroom in the South African context is, thus, relevant and an area to be explored. Omodan and Diko (2021) and Omodan (2022) also emphasise that Ubuntu pedagogy is an epistemic response to Western worldviews. The researcher also argues that using Ubuntu pedagogy is a decolonial stance that aims to equally acknowledge Western and African values in teaching literature. As learners live in a multicultural and globalised context, teachers must explore the worldviews that promote inclusivity, tolerance, and open-mindedness.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach and a case study design to elicit English SL teachers' lived experiences in their natural environment (Cohen et al., 2018). Based on the interpretivist paradigm, the study aimed to understand the reality and truth of teaching literature in the ESL context from the actual practitioners' perspective (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). It used a qualitative open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. These methods were used to the researcher's advantage in eliciting rich data from the teacher participants. The triangulation of these data generation methods enabled the researcher to explore and ascertain the teacher participants' experiences of teaching literature in the SL context of one education district in KwaZulu-Natal, which is one of South Africa's nine provinces. The questionnaire and interview questions were developed based on the study's two research questions: 'What are the ESL teachers' experiences of teaching literature in grades 10–12 classrooms?' and 'How do ESL teachers mitigate the challenges of literature teaching in grades 10–12 classrooms?'

Eleven ESL teachers from three high schools participated in the study. The teacher participants were named numerically from TP1 to TP11 to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The 11 teacher participants were purposively sampled based on their subject knowledge and practice in grades 10 to 12. The three high schools were conveniently sampled, considering their closeness to each other and accessibility within the district (Etikan et al., 2016; Neuman, 2011). They were within a 50-kilometre radius from the researcher and had similar socio-cultural and socio-economic statuses. Each school had an average of four teachers in the phase and approximately 1 300 learners. The semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire data were thematically analysed after the interviews had been transcribed verbatim, data coded, and questionnaire data organised based on similarities and differences (Creswell, 2013; Gibbs, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Newby, 2010). To eliminate bias, the participants were told about confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, pseudonyms were used during interviews and in responding to qualitative questionnaires. The semi-structured interview schedule was developed using the research questions, and eleven questions were asked of the participants. The qualitative questionnaire was also based on the research questions and focused more on the personal and professional teaching experiences. Before conducting research, ethics clearance was sought from the University of the Free State and the Department of Basic Education. The study was explained to teacher participants, who consented to participate. The study was not without limitations. First, the researcher was a teacher in the district and at one of the schools. This might have impacted the responses from the teachers. To ensure that the participants felt free to share their experiences and perceptions, they were constantly reminded of the adherence to research ethics. The researcher used two data generation tools to mitigate the limitations and ensure triangulation of the results. Using only the interviews as a data generation tool would not have caused any bias. Using the qualitative questionnaire to triangulate the data assisted the researcher in analysing data by looking at the similarities and differences. Trustworthiness was also ensured through member checking.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data from semi-structured interviews and the qualitative questionnaire that were used to generate data, thereby answering the two research questions: 'What are the ESL teachers' experiences of teaching literature in Grades 10 to 12 classrooms?' and 'How do ESL teachers mitigate the challenges of literature teaching in Grades 10-12 classrooms?'

Eleven teacher participants engaged in the study, whose findings and their interpretation are presented in this section. Themes were deduced from semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires. After verbatim transcription of interview recordings, key themes were identified and coded manually. The researcher also read through the questionnaires, comparing the 11 responses by reading each of them and then identifying key themes. The following discussion presents the combination and synthesis of data from the two data generation tools and methods.

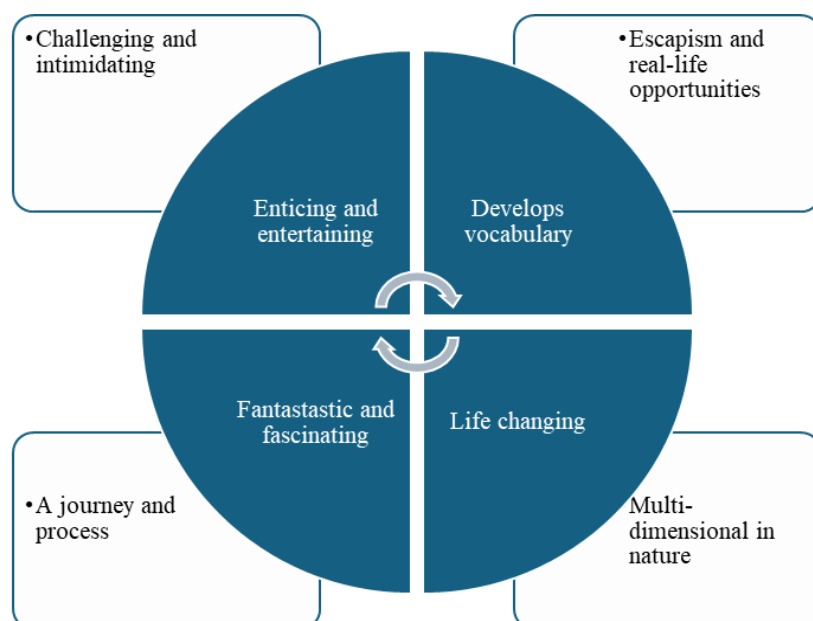


Figure 3. Summary of Themes: Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Literature in the ESL Classrooms

A. Literature Teaching as Fascinating, Fantastic, and Life-Changing

The interview responses from most teachers revealed that teaching English literature is fantastic, fascinating, and life-changing to learners and teachers. Literature teaching is profound for the time teachers and learners interact, and it has future implications. Exposing learners to various writing pieces inspires and enables them to be more skilled future writers. When asked about their experiences of teaching literature in the ESL high school classroom, most participants highlighted that it benefited the learners' and teachers' holistic well-beings.

The following are some of the participants' answers.

TP1: *It is fantastic, as it arouses interest in developing and raising future authors. It assists in learning about future life situations. It is also tricky because of the language used and the complexity of each literature piece. Moreover, the texts are from different eras.*

TP8: *Literature teaching is fascinating and life-changing for both the teacher and learners, because both parties learn to engage with evident themes and learn life lessons. They [learners] must turn the pages with words into a living discussion that mainly transforms their thoughts and perceptions about culture, race, gender, politics, and other issues.*

TP3: *By teaching literature, I am certainly filling the gaps in some of the learners' knowledge.*

TP4: *Literature ignites learners' imagination.*

TP6: *Learners learn a lot from the experiences of the characters in a story. It [literature] motivates them, [by demonstrating] that it [adversity] is not the end of the road. Also, I have always got many life lessons from teaching literature.*

Drawing from their lived experiences, these teachers believe that literature exposure facilitates the learning process, and the complexity and diversity brought by various literary texts are immensely beneficial for ESL learners. Themes or moral lessons deduced from literary discussions and analysis make literature more fascinating and life-changing, because they drive 'holistic development' for learners, as El-Helou (2010) also suggests. In addition to finding literature fascinating and life-changing, TP8 and TP6 also experienced the teaching of literature as an impactful catalyst for change in their personal lives and classrooms. Furthermore, the literature lessons also enable teachers to tackle and explore real-life issues, which the literary content would easily facilitate as a point of departure. These literature lessons also broaden the spectrum by ensuring that the learners' feelings in the ESL classroom are considered, nurtured, and protected. The Westernised literature analysis overlooks this critical element of Ubuntu, but it is a practical aspect for many ESL literature teachers. Therefore, these teachers have experienced the teaching of literature as a double-edged sword. As they read and teach literature to their learners, they also learn life lessons from the various literary texts. These findings coincide with Mustofa (2016), who elucidates that literature's purpose is to teach moral values to the readers. Constant exposure to literature also shakes the teachers' worldviews, which becomes phenomenal and more fantastic through classroom experiences.

B. Blending Literature With Entertainment and Enticement

When asked how they ensured that learners' interest was aroused and that the learners were engaged in the literature learning and analysis, most teachers clearly stated that they had to be the living curriculum and use what learners enjoyed to catch their attention and motivate them to participate. Entertainment is a crucial element in teaching the literature curriculum and cannot be removed from the curriculum (Muthmainnah, 2021).

Some of their responses are as follows.

TP11: *For Drama 'My Children! My Africa!' I invite the actors to school to perform the drama for the learners...and my learners enjoy it all the time. After the performance, they find connecting with content easy and engaging in class.*

TP8: *I change the voices and do all sorts of tricks. Literature is what I do best out of all the papers I teach because I get to have many characters. I get to entertain. It is like edutainment for me.*

TP6: *I enjoy dramatising. Learning should be fun, and learners must be relaxed and comfortable.*

TP9: *Dramatising works well, but it is not a complete solution for the complexity of the literature. Learners are interactive. They participate in the lessons, ask questions, give input, and share opinions. Now, the group that I have is spectacular. Most of the challenges arise when it comes to figurative language. Moreover, they sometimes get too excited and forget the purpose of the session.*

TP10: *I normally use props for [the] introduction of any poem or short story. This creates a vivid picture for learners, entertains them, and enables them to analyse the literature by themselves easily.*

The teachers' love for literature suggests that they would do all they could to make learners love it as well. Learners may sometimes get too excited and forget that a literature teaching session is a lesson and not only entertainment. Therefore, teacher motivation is essential in the ESL classroom, as it positively impacts learner performance (Reeve, 2012). It was also interesting that TP8 referred to literature as a paper, which has assessment or examination connotations. The implication is that he enjoys this aspect more because his learners produce the expected results. Notably, what makes teachers enjoy teaching literature is that learners get enticed and love literature because of their playful characters and how dramatic literature can be during teaching. This is evident in Keshavarzi (2012), who argued that literature creates a conducive environment for English learners to think reflectively about the content and context, form expectations, and reach conclusions. Literature evokes an emotional response from learners, and they get to understand the tone and mood of literary texts. This indicates that teachers find literature teaching enjoyable, as learners are responsive to the literary content and activities. This confirms that learner engagement is essential in ESL classrooms (Bender, 2017), and that a lack of learner engagement would be a source of demotivation for learners (Shah, 2021). What was missing from the teachers' responses was how learner-centred and lesson-centred their lessons were. In addition, there was no explicit discussion on how these entertaining elements improve literary content knowledge and affect assessments.

C. Learners' and Teachers' Exposure to Multidimensional Experiences

Language and literature are not only components of how humans express themselves but also components of life, culture, and history (Lakshmi, 2013). The interview response by TP1, when asked if she enjoyed teaching English literature, revealed that she enjoyed it because it provided her learners with an insight into the experiences from the past and merged them with the current experiences, thereby mirroring life in society (Jabeen & Sarifa, 2022). She noted the following about the literature she taught: *Teaching English literature is a multidimensional experience. As a teacher, I must cover a broad spectrum of communication skills. The joy of teaching the language is heightened when learners understand what has been taught.*

TP1 also asserted that literature promotes creative writing, and she finds using visual media relevant during literature lessons. However, she was concerned that learners in her school were prohibited from using cell phones. She pointed out that visual media *can enable learners to understand the literature using other available visual media*. Therefore, she was of the view that visual media should be accessible to learners, and schools that still have restrictive cell phone policies should reconsider the use of such gadgets, because they have an educational value in literature classes.

What was more exciting about the teaching of literature for TP6 was that through teaching literature, he learned something new all the time, which he shared with his learners. He further outlined that teaching literature has challenges, as much as it is exciting. Some literature genres, especially poems and short stories, sometimes have aspects that are easier to understand when summaries and discussions with other language teachers occur. He stated the following: *I have found other literature [genres], e.g., poetry, to be challenging and to require me to plan for more than usual. I also found other genres to be incredibly difficult at first. Then, I got used to it through practice and experience of teaching the genre. Moreover, I always learn something new from the text itself and from the robust discussions we have with my learners.*

TP2 concurs with TP6 on experiencing the teaching of literature as challenging, but he also emphasises that it is fun, as follows: *Teaching literature is fun. However, it poses a challenge if learners are uninterested. The experience becomes the vital key as it provides room for me as a teacher to address the challenges I experience and for the learners to engage in the lessons successfully.*

TP5 believes that literature enables her to create a rapport with her learners: *I feel you get to learn more about your learners, and you get an insight into their experiences and background, regarding where they come from and how they view the world when they learn literature.*

TP9 responded as follows: *It is easy for the class to be more interactive. This gets them to express certain opinions about issues.*

These findings concur with Hokor (2020). The classroom environment must be a space where new knowledge is constructed, and teachers and learners fully engage. In such knowledge-fertile classrooms, knowledge is transmitted continuously and randomly from teacher to learner, learner to learner, and learner to teacher. Notably, TP9 felt that she enjoyed teaching English literature because of its multiple opportunities. Lastly, the classroom becomes an interactive environment that stimulates critical thinking and self-discovery (Hungwe, 2021).

D. Teachers' Occasional Feeling of Being Equally Challenged and Intimidated by Teaching Literature

In her questionnaire response, TP3 outlined difficulties and hindrances to effectively teaching literature in the ESL classroom, such as overcrowding and a lack of teaching and learning resources. Overcrowding limits the necessary rapport between the teacher and learners. This experience fits West and Meier's (2020) argument that overcrowding contributes to poor academic performance and learner failure. Overcrowding results from inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and a lack of teaching and learning resources. The situation worsens in rural settings, where teaching and learning resources such as textbooks and visual and audio media are unavailable or in limited supply. The unavailability of essential literary texts and Information and Communication Technology resources may seem trivial. However, it has a more significant impact on teaching literature in the ESL environment. This challenge was also noted earlier by Novianti (2016), who stated that a lack of resources often hinders swift progress for learners. Calafato (2024) also highlighted that the hindrances sometimes emanate from teachers' and learners' lack of competence in analysing literature.

TP2 noted that the lack of technology in the literature classroom is the reason learners need more motivation to engage with literary texts. The participant emphasised the following: *[learners] are mostly glued to their cell phones. If you give them a hard copy, you will find that they have not read the text... It then becomes a challenge, mainly if you teach second-language speakers, because they are expected to simultaneously master the language, be eloquent, and read and comprehend the text. It is a challenge for them!*

TP3 responded as follows: *English is a second language for all of us, so it is challenging if the text is Shakespearean. It requires more preparation from me as a teacher. Technology such as YouTube would be helpful, but the school I work at does not have the internet or even projectors.*

TP2 further stated the following: *I find the teaching of literature challenging in the SL classroom because of the learners' disadvantaged backgrounds and language barriers.*

These findings reveal that limitations in language proficiency are often a barrier, especially for European or old texts such as Shakespeare. The daily use of hard copies may be a limitation and may cause learners to lose interest, since they are used to gadgets such as cell phones, which are often prohibited in their schools. Muthmainnah (2021) emphasises that 21st-century learners are tech-savvy and depend on technology for communication and information, so teachers should opt for technology. Therefore, ESL literature teachers need to blend the traditional and contemporary ways of teaching, in order to counter the challenges and intimidation of teaching literature. This embrace of local languages is embedded in the Ubuntu pedagogy, as teachers foreground their teaching in Ubuntu and cultural understanding (Letseka, 2016). Like TP2, TP7 noted that her learners struggled to grasp the literary content easily because they were SL speakers. Moreover, she further asserted that she must "familiarise" herself with the content because she is an SL speaker and understands the learners' challenges more. She responded as follows: *We end up sometimes code-switching for them to understand.*

Her response indicated that code-switching was not a good response, but she had to do it for the learners' benefit.

TP4 also noted the following: *...the unfortunate shortcoming of teaching literature in class is that some learners would not work with you [as a teacher], so it becomes cumbersome when you are ready and they have not read before coming to class.*

For TP5, *"Teaching literature was very intimidating when I started teaching. I felt like I would not be able to know and cope with what to focus on since literature is vast"*.

Novice teachers begin with phobias and doubts, but this seems to deteriorate slightly, but not ultimately. The learners' readiness and motivation to read become an essential yardstick for enjoying literature in the classroom. The use of recent technologies also seems to be an aspired solution. Finally, the teachers felt their job would be easier with learner motivation and dedication, as Shah (2021) argues. Motivation and learner engagement are crucial aspects in the ESL literature classrooms, as Bender (2017) emphasises. Literature is already challenging and intimidating to some learners, so teachers should consider using learner-centred and exploratory approaches in multilingual contexts.

E. Literature Teaching as a Process and Journey

TP5 reflected on her first year of teaching and narrated that she started her teaching journey as a timid literature teacher who later developed confidence as she interacted with the prescribed literature (Cardoso & Lago, 2021). She stated that she felt noticeably confident and perceived the teaching and assessment of the literature as an ongoing discovery:

I became familiar with questioning techniques in literature and how learners are expected to respond. I became more confident in preparing learners for examinations. I am now on a journey of growth in literary analysis. I am comfortable analysing multiple interpretations, learning from my colleagues and learners, and sharing my knowledge with colleagues outside my school.

The participant perceived learners as informative partners rather than empty vessels to be filled with information that they would pour out during examinations. The response indicates that her teaching and expertise have developed over time, although her focus is mainly on ensuring that learners pass examinations or assessments. Assessment performance is essential, but not a primary goal. Otherwise, the teaching of literature would be reduced to performance in examinations. TP11 draws from her exposure to literature as a child and in high school, which positively impacted her love and passion for teaching English literature, as follows:

I enjoyed reading literature from a young age. My teachers did a great job. I draw my passion from past experiences. I also teach literature with a mindset that I want my learners to be inspired and lifelong readers of literature.

In her questionnaire and interview responses, TP11 declared that literature was her favourite aspect of the curriculum. She was optimistic and excited about future endeavours in her teaching of English literature. Therefore, the previous experiences had influenced her later experiences and attitude towards literature or learning about it. TP7 and TP9 also referred to the 'process' as a critical factor in their literature-teaching experience. They stated that the current process and pre- and post-processes form a significant part of their literature-teaching experience. They constantly follow this teaching approach because it works for them, and they understand every literary text more clearly by using it. Furthermore, all the participants emphasised that literature develops and enhances teachers' and learners' English vocabulary, as it is written in different parts of the world (Zondi, 2025). For example, TP 6 stated the following:

I learn new vocabulary weekly, especially when the networks are fairly introduced into the grade. My learners obviously learn even more vocabulary. I actually instruct them to write new words at the back of their exercise books. I learnt this from my former high school teacher, and it works because they use these new words in language and creative writing aspects as well.

Notably, the importance of vocabulary development is locked within the literature aspect and linked to all the language skills that learners must master. This is indeed the purpose of literature in the ESL classroom. However, most participants did not mention this part. This is a grey area that needs some enlightenment. Literature indicates that vocabulary development in literature classrooms is an important objective (Cardoso & Lago, 2021). Moreover, Elvriza and Nurcholis (2025), among others, emphasise the benefits of using literature in an English class. These benefits include enhancing cognitive skills; improving learners' vocabulary and confidence, when they notice that they can read books in English; providing contact with authors and people from different cultures who have lived similar situations in life; and using authentic material. This is the core of Ubuntu pedagogy, as teachers cannot engage in cultural norms and nuances without bringing in the local languages.

F. The Use of Multilingual Pedagogies

As South Africa is a multilingual society with 11 official spoken languages, learners in each SL classroom come from diverse linguistic cultures and backgrounds. Some participants noted that code-switching is central to ensuring that learners master the literary content more efficiently (Shinga & Pillay, 2021). TP7 had mentioned the usefulness of code-switching earlier. TP2 and others concurred that they used code-switching to scaffold the learner's understanding.

Their responses are as follows.

TP2: *In most cases, as I teach, I would use IsiZulu to explain some concepts. The concepts I normally discuss are those that are perhaps not from the South African context, or when I want to incite debate about the African or societal issue.*

TP11: *If the lesson is entirely in English, it would be like being at a cemetery where nobody talks. When I allow them to engage in some discussions using IsiZulu and, for some learners, isiXhosa, then there is a vibe and a vibrant discussion in class.*

TP 9: *Yooh, as much as I do not promote IsiZulu, I allow my learners to discuss it in IsiZulu. Otherwise, not all would understand the Shakespearean sonnet or the short story with complex vocabulary. I also have the bilingual dictionary on my desk just to assist some learners.*

These findings indicate that using multilingual pedagogies, such as code-switching, is common in the classroom. Not all teachers agree with this practice, but they agree that it works. They note that they generally do not pronounce it, possibly because no policy allows them to use multilingual pedagogies. However, their use of a multilingual pedagogy emanates from their understanding that they are teaching in South Africa, where some aspects and terminologies may need cultural or African nuances (Bangura, 2005). Shinga and Pillay (2021) advocate for the use of code-switching as a pedagogical response to learners' linguistic limitations in multilingual contexts. Such an approach provides ESL learners with opportunities to learn the content and be able to interpret it with the language they understand better (Zondi & Mncube, 2024).

G. A Source of Escapism and Coping Mechanisms From Real-Life Situations

TP10 believed that literature *can enable readers to cope with real-life challenges by escaping to another world where they feel emotionally better, stable, and hopeful*. This is facilitated by imagination propelled by literary devices and characterisation in literary texts (Hall, 2020). Literature also brings critical thinking skills and acceptance of the things one cannot change.

TP 8 stated the following: *Literature has an innate power to enable readers to escape into another world where the writer takes them. This enhances the readers' imagination and analysis abilities. Readers discover innovative ideas, opinions, and world views*. This participant perceived literature as a tool for enhancing language development, and that is related to real-life contexts, thereby providing the appropriate choice of words. Hence, it cannot be considered to be only a trivial part of the curriculum (Keshavarzi, 2012). He also believed that literature could change someone through moral lessons from the texts, as Cardoso and Lago (2021) argued.

V. CONCLUSION

Teaching literature in the ESL classroom has more significant benefits than challenges posed by the teachers' or learners' backgrounds and linguistic barriers. Therefore, teachers must be conscious of their experiences and attitudes towards literature and its reach. This study revealed that for teachers, literature provides enormous positivity when they observe it changing their lives and the lives of their learners. The experiences and principles of literature found by this study revealed that it is entertaining and fascinating, develops and enhances vocabulary development, and is a source of moral education and new worldviews. Considering this study's findings, further research may seek to ascertain the learners' literature experiences and how they perform in literature based on the approaches teachers use in the ESL classroom; the teachers' use of technology in teaching literature in the ESL classroom, especially the use of cell phones in underdeveloped areas; and the use of literature not as a literary genre, but as a source of language teaching and creative writing. There is a need for a shift and integration of Ubuntu and African perspectives in teaching literature in South African ESL classrooms. It would be necessary to ascertain whether and how much teachers use literature for this way, and share the results of such approaches. It would also be important to find out how much vocabulary development literature teaching provides for learners in the ESL contexts.

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