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The Integrated Approach to Teaching Literature in English Second Language Classrooms: A Constructivist Lens

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Abstract. This study explores how the integrated approach enhances ESL learners' linguistic and critical thinking skills through literature teaching in South African high schools. Specifically, it explores the teachers' insights and whether an integrated approach is helpful in ESL literature classrooms. Teachers find the literature complex and challenging for the learners and opt to use traditional and teacher-centred approaches to teach literature. This qualitative case study purposefully sampled 12 ESL teachers from three high schools in one South African education district. Participants verbalised their thoughts and experiences through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The recorded, transcribed and coded interviews were thematically analysed. The findings revealed that teachers use various approaches but in silos. Those aware of the positive impact of an integrated approach to literature teaching use it to develop learners' linguistic and critical thinking skills. There is still a lack of a deeper understanding of the benefits of using an integrated approach in the ESL classroom. The findings advocate for using an integrated, learner-centred approach that can develop learners' critical thinking and analysis skills. Also, the advancement of multilingual pedagogies and technology use in literature teaching.

Keywords: Communicative approach; English Second Language; A constructivist lens; Literature; Text-based approach

1. Introduction and background

In South Africa, ESL is locally termed First Additional Language (FAL); this study does not present these terms interchangeably but uses ESL as a global phenomenon. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) as a policy requires the four skills of listening and speaking, reading and viewing, and writing and presenting, as well as language structures and conventions, to be taught in the English curriculum (DBE, 2011). Literature is strategically positioned

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under the reading and viewing skills, but its teaching should be spread across all skills. The CAPS emphasises the process and integrated approach to language teaching. The CAPS further adopted text-based and communicative approaches as foundational approaches to language teaching (DBE, 2011, p.16). The Communicative language approach places less emphasis on grammatical perfection and memorisation of content, but interaction among learners and practical use of the target language (Ergasheva, Shoyimova, & Hamidova, 2025; Salmanova, 2025). In a communicative approach, learners are exposed to activities that improve fluency and accuracy in language use. Using such an approach in the ESL literature classroom allows learners to freely share opinions and engage in real-life issues, which is important to their holistic development and better understanding of the text. These can be integrated with other relevant approaches. Such practice would develop and enhance linguistic and literary competence.

According to Yimwilai (2015), an integrated approach is a multidisciplinary yet highly linguistic approach that blends the approaches that explore fiction and non-fiction, from comprehending the connection between content and form. On the other hand, the text-based approach focuses on using authentic texts that provide a real and purposeful context for learners, as it focuses on a particular genre. This approach is also used to develop communicative competence when learners have to engage with the text and then share perspectives and critique of the text (Rahman, Yusuf & Juhana, 2024). Bustamante (2022) and Fikray and Habil (2022) argue that no single approach would benefit all learners. Therefore, the use of multiple approaches is essential. However, teachers still use teaching approaches in silos, hence a need for an integrated approach in ESL literature classrooms. In South Africa, very little has been done to investigate the use of an integrated approach, especially in ESL literature classrooms, hence the need for this study.

Mercado (2025) emphasises that teaching literature to ESL learners has been challenging for years because teachers typically opt for traditional approaches because they are comfortable with them. These approaches are usually less relevant and fail to arouse learners' interests, which amounts to the teachers' frustration and anxiety (Zondi & Mbatha, 2024). Furthermore, teachers usually use one specific approach, which is less effective, especially in the multilingual South African education system. So, literature teaching is usually a daunting task full of complexities (Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016) for teachers in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom (Mercado, 2025).

This directly impacts how learners learn and whether literature becomes a barrier or a gateway for their learning. Therefore, using an integrated approach to teaching literature in the ESL literature classrooms is paramount to lessening anxiety and enhancing ESL learners' holistic and linguistic development. According to Al Fraidan and Alsubaie (2025), Anxiety also emanates from examinations. Their study examined how test anxiety and vocabulary challenges affected postgraduate female students' performance and perceptions in open-book exams (OBEs) and closed-book exams (CBEs). It was noted that open-ended examinations exerted less anxiety than closed-book examinations. Importantly,

vocabulary challenges were a huge source of anxiety. Literature brings a variety of words that learners do not necessarily understand; it would also be necessary for teachers to ease such anxiety in preparing learners for assessment. Furthermore, Al Fraidan (2025) argues for integrating AI and adaptive testing methods to enhance vocabulary assessment quality, engagement, and personalisation in the hybrid English second language context.

1.1 Literature teaching

Literature teaching is highly instrumental in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms globally, as language and literature are inseparable (Savvidou, 2004). Literature also serves as a linguistic and cultural resource from which teachers and learners draw. This resourcefulness directly develops speaking, reading, listening and writing skills (Choudhary, 2016; Kicha, 2023). These are a cornerstone in the language classroom. Lazar (1993) classifies literature as poetry, short stories, drama and novels. This classification matches the South African curriculum depicted in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) as a guiding curriculum document (DBE, 2011). Later, Carter and McRae (1996) extended the definition and perceived literature as a universal phenomenon, not restricted to texts, but including newspapers, videos, television, CDS, computers, and multimedia platforms where stories and images are created and told.

Literature is a cornerstone for holistic development and critical reasoning (Kohzadi et al., 2014). The teacher is a core facilitator of learning and the mediator of this intricate process, but not the sole source of knowledge (Mercado, 2025). Literature interests and motivates learners in classrooms where appropriate teaching approaches are effective, fluid, relevant and diverse (Magulod, 2018). In such classrooms, ESL learners tend to be critical and analytical. Developing these skills improves the learners' linguistic and writing abilities (Hall, 2020; Zondi & Mbatha, 2024). This study sought to respond to two research questions: What are ESL teachers' insights into the approaches to teaching literature to ESL high school learners? How effective is the integrated approach to teaching literature in ESL classrooms?

2. Literature review and theoretical lens

Figure 2.1 presents the outline of the reviewed literature and shows connections between the effective integration of approaches and creating a conducive and developmental learning and teaching environment in the ESL classroom.

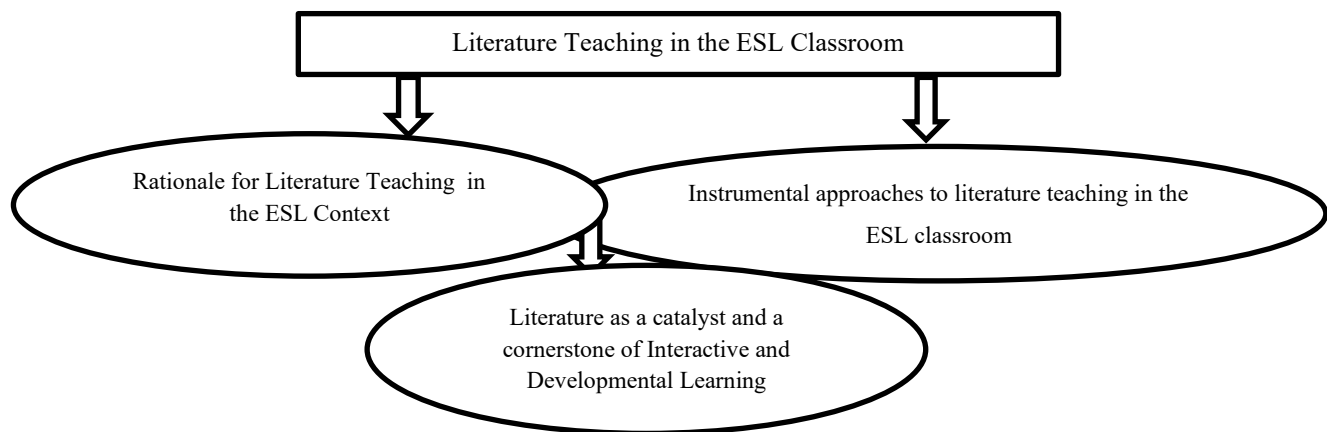


Figure 1: Summary of literature review

2.1 Rationale for Literature Teaching in the ESL Classroom

Language is perceived as a conduit of cultural discourses, so literature is pivotal in developing ESL learners' comprehension of diverse societal and cultural norms (Isro'iyah & Herminingsih, 2023). Mustafa (2016) further posits that learning a second language (SL/ L2) transcends mastering the grammar; it requires mastery of that nation's cultural norms, geography, economic set-up, customs and principles. Literature is, therefore, an enabler that assists learners and teachers in navigating the world through language, visuals, and imagery. The majority of South African learners are English SL speakers. This has implications for literature taught in ESL classrooms. Some literary texts possess English or Western values and philosophies, which must be clarified for learners to understand the context.

Notably, the world is globalised, and English has become a common language for most L2 speakers. Chen & Goh (2011), Farah (2010) and Vaishnav (2024) emphasise that English is globally central for communication and political and cultural purposes, and nations learn English for these purposes (Chen & Goh, 2011; Farah, 2010). Literature teaching in the ESL classroom provides a diverse and rich resource for language teaching (Vaishnav, 2024). However, according to Bustamante (2022), the same diverse classrooms can be problematic for teachers. The findings from his study confirm that teaching literature to high school learners becomes challenging due to comprehension problems among learners, which becomes a barrier for ESL teachers. Some learners lack motivation, and struggling learners mainly depend on their peers.

2.2 Instrumental approaches in the ESL literature classroom

The literature approaches in the CAPS are not specific to what learners should be able to do in the literature classroom. What is specified in the CAPS is that learners must be able to read the whole text, understand the text literally and figuratively, and understand that literature will have various answers to one question (DBE, 2011). However, some generic language teaching approaches are specified in the CAPS. The key approaches are communicative and text-based approaches, including the integrated approach to language teaching (DBE, 2011). Integrating the various language skills requires a simultaneous and integrative teaching approach. The approaches suggested by the CAPS are mainly text-based and communicative. ESL teachers effectively employ numerous approaches in various multilingual and multicultural contexts.

The study by Yimwilai (2015) found that teachers embedded numerous approaches into a lesson; they describe this as an integrated approach to teaching literature. They define this approach as a multidisciplinary yet highly linguistic, which blends the approaches that explore fiction and non-fiction, from comprehending the connection between content and form. This integration of numerous approaches upholds learner-centredness. This approach presents and develops the learners' analysis and interpretation skills. Therefore, they recognise how language is manipulated and the purpose of language use.

Furthermore, Yimwilai (2015) argues that integrating approaches enhances critical reasoning, autonomy, and positive attitude, improving language skills and performance. Haimbodi and Woldemariam (2019) reinforce this and assert that learner participation in English improves through ESL classroom literature, leading to improved high school and tertiary performance. The results from Yimwilai's study and this study are similar in that the integrated approach helps enhance understanding and critical thinking. However, the Thai study focused on university students, while this study focused on a high school context. Both studies show the integrative approach is effective in foreign and second language learning contexts. What is unique about this study is the adoption of multilingual pedagogies and an attempt to use technology to enhance literature understanding and engagement.

2.2.1 Code-switching as a Functional multilingual approach to literature teaching

Multilingual approaches such as code-switching (CS) cannot be overlooked when teaching ESL in the Multicultural South African context. The term code was introduced in linguistics (Wang, 2015). It can be described as a spoken aspect or component that may be a small morpheme or be as complex and comprehensive as the entire language system (Ayeomoni, 2006). In this context, a code may refer to English or IsiZulu as used in the classroom during instruction or the teaching and learning process. Changing or switching from one code to the next is called code-switching. Teachers and learners code-switch for various reasons in multilingual contexts, especially when explaining complicated concepts (Altalhi, 2024). Complex vocabulary, CS may be used for teaching, social, communicative, and emotive purposes (Almansour, 2024).

Teachers have proper and precise strategies for knowing how their learners learn in various contexts and get to understand them as human beings living in those contexts (Stevens, 2011). CS is one of the multilingual pedagogies' teachers use to cope with the diversity and complexities they encounter in multilingual classrooms. Problems will inevitably arise since English is the learners' and teachers' SL, and most learners are less proficient in the language. Probyn (2009) agrees that teachers and learners in rural contexts often smuggle HL into the classroom for social and teaching reasons. This author suggests that school language policies should address this issue and cater to contextual realities to ensure learners master both languages quickly. Language practices should, therefore, be based on the language the learners already know (Jiang et al., 2014). Villaabril, Generalao, Mаметes, and Bacatan (2024) argue that CS is practised in numerous multilingual contexts where learners are from various multilingual

backgrounds. They further postulate that learners mostly experience negative attitudes when switching codes. They may be perceived as inferior users of the target language, which in most cases is English. Therefore, the functional use of CS needs to be correctly executed by teachers in a manner that empowers learners instead of presenting a threat (Zondi & Mncube, 2024).

Van Hell et al. (2015) argue that CS is a highly skilled cognitive control. Jamshidi & Navehebrahim (2013) concur and emphasise that switching from L2 increases the efficiency of information transmitted to the listener at elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. These scholars further suggest that CS should be a natural behaviour in the ESL classroom since the teacher and the learners share a common ground, the L1. Ideally, ESL teachers should view CS as a valid and effective teaching strategy or methodology and an advantage to enhance learners' mastery of the L2 (Jiang et al., 2014). Bensen and Cavusoglu (2013) support this notion by further stating that when teaching specific grammar points, the teacher can shift from English to the learners' mother tongue. Consequently, the learners would concentrate even more.

2.2.2 Text-based and Communicative approaches

The text-based and communicative approaches are the main approaches prescribed by the CAPS (Mohlaba-Tlaka, De Jager, & Engelbrecht, 2017). The text-based approach imparts critical thinking when ESL learners are taught critical text evaluation, including literature texts (DBE, 2011). A text-based approach involves exploring how literary texts work and learning activities such as listening to, close analysis and viewing literary texts. Using this approach, learners delve into practical text evaluation and appreciation of how the text is created. Learners learn autonomy in reading, analysing and interpreting literary texts, and the teacher facilitates the learning process. A literary text is further synchronised with communication as learners effectively engage when writing, communicating, and producing texts (Rustipa et al., 2022).

Therefore, meaningful and effective teaching can only be material when relevant approaches are used to teach literature in the ESL classroom. Brinegar (2022), in outlining the principles of a text-based approach, emphasises that teachers must introduce the text's social and cultural context, prepare learners by initially modelling and deconstructing the text through the grammatical and linguistic analysis; the teacher must also build a sustainable rapport; and develop learners' autonomy towards knowledge construction. The text-based approach is mainly associated with the teacher-centred approach, as the teacher is responsible for scaffolding the known and the unknown. For Van (2009), this approach implies that a teacher has solid knowledge of the genre or literary text. Its purpose is to sensitise the learner to the linguistic and formal structure of the text.

The communicative approach emphasises the learners' exposure to the language through practice and production (DBE, 2011). This approach is not foreign to the ESL classroom and has proven to be user-friendly for ESL teachers. Some of these assumptions are that learners should be exposed to reading literature from a young age, emphasises that, literature is a source of exposure to

diverse cultures and new terminology, as well as semantic and syntactic challenges. Lastly, the approach encourages interaction and engagement, not just responding to questions. Siraj and Farrah (2018) argue that literature benefits are a cornerstone of language learning in the ESL classroom. Therefore, communicative competence also depends on using literature in the classroom. Siraj and Farrah (2018) further assert that, most recently, teachers realised the extensive role of using novels as a resource for linguistic development in ESL classrooms.

Embedded into the above approaches are the language-based and task-based approaches, which propel learners to be attentive to how language is used in the text. The language-based approach is learner-centred and focuses on cloze, dramatisation, poetry reciting, brainstorming and verbal discourse (Carter, 1996; Lazar, 1993). Divsar (2014) maintains that this approach enables teachers to enhance the SL learners' language development. This is essential because the ESL literature classroom is not meant to teach literature exclusively from language; literature is language and is taught and learned through language. On the other hand, Nigar (2018) argues that traditional literature pedagogy in the ESL classroom has not produced optimal results, such as arousing learners' interest (Zondi & Mbatha, 2024) and advocates for using a task-based approach in the ESL classroom. The task-based approach intends to enhance critical language and thinking skills while embedding the love of literature. This teaching approach aims to decrease learner passivity and bring opportunities for active learning through engaging in authentic tasks.

Furthermore, it prioritises completing the task over grammatical rules (Nigar, 2018). This promotes learner-centred classrooms where literary texts are used as a resource and a reference for classroom activities. Integrating these approaches in one lesson and into the teaching and learning of literature creates an ideal learning environment. This integration should be intentional and also evident in assessments, as one of the aims is to enhance learner engagement and performance in literature. When integrated, they no longer portray individual traits and tenets but become one integrated approach to literature teaching. Furthermore, teachers should also think of how this approach can help to ease assessment anxiety, as Al Fraidan & Al-Harazi (2023) posit that assessments come with anxiety that is related to vocabulary. The anxiety is also exacerbated by the difficulty of the examination and teacher expectations (Al Fraidan, 2024). Teachers must ease the anxiety by communicating the expectations.

2.3 Literature as a catalyst and a cornerstone of an Interactive and Developmental Learning Environment

Teachers must instil critical thinking, knowledge construction, reflective learning, and problem-solving skills rather than promoting memorisation for assessment purposes (Schlechty, 2011). For learning experiences to be enhanced, the literature teacher must possess the skill to evoke learners' imagination and diverse worldviews (Grove, 2019). Therefore, the teacher's role cannot be detached from ensuring that learners are effectively engaging and not passive recipients of knowledge (Bender, 2017). Therefore, the teacher is not a leading role player but an engagement facilitator. Davies et al. (2018) study on learners noted that

teachers use entertaining activities and approaches to arouse learners' interest and engage them in fruitful learning activities. Teachers also included problem-solving, personalised learner activities, and awards to motivate learners extrinsically.

Conversely, Bender (2017) perceives ESL learner-centred classrooms as challenging, as they demand absolute preparation, vigilance and learner support. He suggests that teachers must employ an integrated approach that caters to learners' varied learning needs and skills. However, proper planning will ensure success. For learner engagement and performance to occur, learners must be motivated, socially engaged, and self-aware. Teacher expectations and insights are pivotal for learner engagement and enhancing learner performance (Grove, 2019). Motivation is central to learner engagement and is attached to the learner's psychological needs (Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Reeve, 2012). These needs are often neglected in ESL classrooms, especially in the Global South. Notably, motivated learners exude self-confidence and autonomy compared to less-motivated learners. The less motivated ones are often frustrated and less likely to achieve the learning outcomes. It is also noted that 21st-century learners are technologically savvy and greatly depend on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for communication, information and education (Muthmainnah, 2021; Filita & Jita, 2023).

Teachers must, therefore, be trained to use these technologies and guide learners about when and how to use ICT to avoid unnecessary distractions in the classroom (Filita & Jita, 2021, 2023). This is important because Shamshul et al. (2024) assert that teachers often struggle to master educational technology and its use in the classroom. There is a need for a shift from traditional approaches to an integrated approach. Furthermore, ICT should not be perceived as a threat but should also be integrated into teaching, learning, and assessment. The study by Al Fraidan and Al-Harazi (2023) confirms that the use of technology, particularly social media platforms, positively impacted Saudi university students. WhatsApp and Telegram have been the most popular tools for assisting them in preparing for examinations. Lastly, a self-directed learner purposefully engages with the content through knowledge construction, brainstorming, and assessing the learning opportunities (Rautrao, 2021). This is an envisaged ESL learner who is less dependent on the teacher and able to use literature as a resource to learn numerous skills.

2.4 Constructivism as an epistemic Lens

Constructivism is underpinned by the historical works of Bruner, Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky. It champions observation and scientific study in examining how people learn (Ciot, 2009; Liu, 2010). Bruner's school of thought is that people construct knowledge by organising and categorising information using a coding system or discovery learning (Bruner, 1961). Vygotsky (1962) further elucidates that the social environment is pivotal to learning. Sharma and Gupta (2016) and Suhendi and Purwarno (2018) also affirm Piaget's proposal that people learn by engaging and doing, creating schemes, assimilating, and accommodating all forms of knowledge in group activities. Knowledge is constructed by people for

people. Constructivism is knowledge based on authentic experiences, collaborative activities, reflection, and interpretation. Such learning activities expose learners to various conceptualisations and interpretations of knowledge (Efgivia, Rinanda, Hidayat, Maulana & Budiarjo, 2021). So, learners extensively interact with their learning environment and create new meaning (Suhendi, Purwarno, & Chairani, 2021). Drawing from Glasersfeld (1995), these scholars further argue that constructivists position teacher-learner equality in learning to enable the elaboration process of the principles and concepts learned to build meaningful new knowledge.

Considering the above discussion, the teaching-learning process in the ESL literature classroom ought to evoke and clearly integrate the known knowledge to construct new knowledge and learning opportunities. Constructivism is accepted as a suitable theoretical lens for learning at all levels of education. Furthermore, the global north and south encourage teachers to adopt constructivism (Khan et al., 2020). For this reason, the theoretical framework was found to be fit and relevant to this study. In the constructivist learning environment, the teacher becomes a facilitator, a guide, a mediator, and a co-explorer. The theoretical grounding suggests that individuals construct knowledge and meaning from their lived experiences (Bada, 2015; Suhendi & Purwarno, 2018). Therefore, learning is influenced by the context, beliefs and attitudes, so no learner enters the classroom as a *tabula rasa*.

3. Methodology

This was a qualitative case study on the high school teachers' integrated approach to teaching literature in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL). It sought to answer two research questions: What are ESL teachers' insights into the approaches they use to teach literature to high school learners? How effective is the integrated approach to literature teaching in ESL classrooms? The twelve teacher-participants were purposively sampled from three conveniently sampled schools in one district in South Africa. They were invited to partake in the study through the subject meetings. They were purposefully selected based on their practice as ESL teachers within a district. Gender, age and experience were not a prerequisite. Underpinning the study was the Interpretivist paradigm employing the Constructivist Learning Theory (Constructivism) lens.

Data were generated using face-to-face interviews with semi-structured questions. The interview schedule was designed in consideration of the study's research questions (Beck, 2013). This was essential to gather a more profound understanding through probing follow-up questions where the need arose. Key themes were generated and triangulated using the table with research questions and keywords. The similar ideas were grouped and coded according to similarities and differences. The key and constant responses were recorded as central themes. This was to ensure that the themes portray rigour. Ethical processes were considered by ensuring that gatekeeper permission was sought before generating data, the study was explained to participants, and consent was signed before interviewing. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to present data and discuss findings.

4. Discussion and interpretation of findings

This study sought to answer the following questions: What are ESL teachers' insights into the approaches they use to teach literature to high school learners? How effective is the integrated approach to literature teaching in ESL classrooms? The emerging data points to the benefits of using multiple or integrated approaches to literature teaching in the ESL classroom. Figure 4.1 below summarises major themes, followed by verbatim statements and a discussion of findings.

4.1. The gains of integrating literature teaching approaches in the ESL classroom

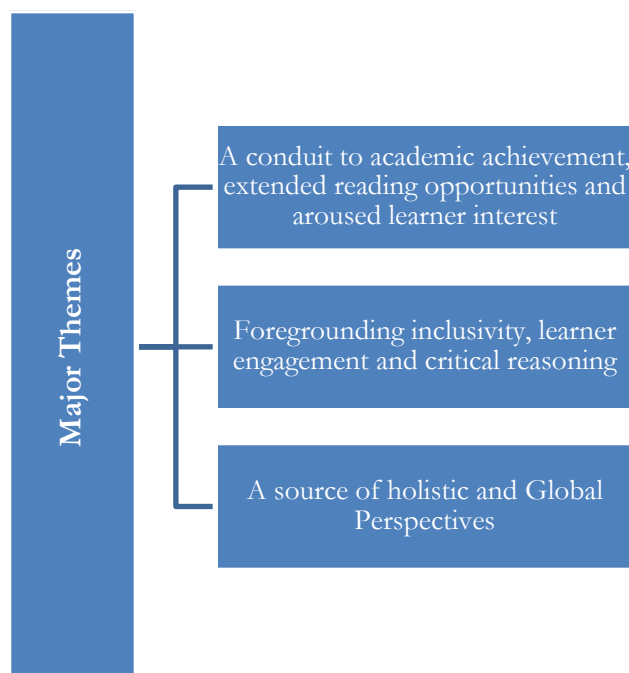


Figure 2: The three significant gains of integrating literature-teaching approaches

4.1.1 Theme 1: Approach integration is a conduit to academic achievement, extended reading opportunities and aroused learner interest

The participants' responses revealed that they employ numerous approaches in their literature classes. This was influenced by the understanding that they taught diverse learners with various capabilities and backgrounds. However, most of them exclusively taught literature content, not as a resource for teaching other language skills. Although the study did not focus on this integration aspect, it was noted with concern. When asked about the approaches they employ, whether they use single or multiple approaches and their effectiveness in ESL classrooms, they stated,

Mrs T: I cannot use one approach. I opt for the trial-and-error method if one does not work for me. Then, whatever approach works, I stick to it. Group work, discussions, and roleplay typically work for me.

Mr S: I mostly use various approaches when teaching literature because I consider it challenging. However, for the other language skills, I rarely use numerous approaches.

Mr P: *Mmhh, sometimes I use many approaches, but I can say that using different approaches has positively impacted my learners' performance in literature. I would assume that even if I do not use literature that much for other skills, those, too, improve...I think so.*

The responses show that the participants mainly use various approaches in teaching literature and draw from the communicative approach to teaching. The data shows that using numerous approaches to teaching literature is advantageous and assists in improving learner performance. Using one approach is limiting, whereas integrating numerous approaches yields better results. What emerged as a salient response was that the participants' integration of approaches is influenced by their consideration of the learners' needs. Notably, literature is still taught exclusively in these classrooms and with the examination or assessment in mind. This gap must be filled by curriculum restructuring and reskilling ESL teachers in literature as a resource for every skill in the ESL classroom. Furthermore, using social media platforms has proven successful in supporting learning and enhancing assessment performance (Al Fraidan & Al-Harazi, 2023). So, available social media platforms should be used to teach and prepare learners for assessments.

These findings revealed that most teachers know integrating approaches is ideal and opt for using multiple approaches to teaching literature. However, these seem to be mainly used exclusively and not seamlessly integrated. The analysis of the responses also implies that participants were considerate of potential gaps in linguistic and social understanding of the literary texts as they teach SL learners as Cheng (2007) suggests. Ms Lu's response concurs with the other participants, saying,

Ms Lu: *Within the lesson, it is important not to exhaust the learners. So, it is essential to use different approaches. So, I would go through the novel, then engage in the creative writing aspects, and we would also have past exam papers to gauge their interpretation.*

Ms TT: *As much as I cannot use the official names of the approaches, I believe what I do in class has had a positive impact. My learners love literature; they read ahead and even read works that are not prescribed. This is because I do not only teach the way I was taught. I expose them to what is happening today and ensure that the text speaks to their daily lives. Then, they have opportunities to read even more without me telling them. I hear this during discussions and when I mark their homework.*

Integration of approaches within a lesson seems to be instrumental in teaching literature. However, participants could not name the approaches; they just generalised them. This shows the lack of understanding of the approaches' strengths and limitations. Using different approaches has motivated the learners to read beyond the four walls of the classroom, and this is captured in Ms TT's interview response. The participants unanimously expressed their commitment to ensuring that the learners' voices, cultural beliefs and opinions are evoked in their ESL literature classrooms, as Vaishnav (2024) contends. Further, blending the themes and principles from the literary text and daily lives motivates the

learners and inspires them to read extensively. What is also noted here is that the approaches are exclusive of technology or social media platforms. This contradicts Al Fraidan & Al-Harazi's (2023) argument that social media platforms help learners with examination preparation.

Additionally, Mr SO said that he sometimes employs teacher-centred approaches, especially when teaching a short story that is boring for learners or lengthy. He would read using voice variations and emphasis to arouse their interest. These findings show that teachers are conscious of the limitations of using one or only the traditional approaches to literature teaching. They blend approaches to suit the needs of their SL learners. Notably, their approaches are mainly learner- and content-centred, which helps ensure that learners develop a critical literature analysis. When asked how much improvement in the learners' performance since they realised the need for multiple approaches, none gave a precise answer, but all agreed that there is some performance improvement. Therefore, I recommend that a future study be done to examine learner performance for various literary genres and the effectiveness of the approaches from the perspectives of learners.

On the contrary, Mrs T, who initially stated that she used the integrated approach, and it works for her. She noted that sometimes the integrated approach is not practical when teaching literature,

Mrs T: I am not sure whether it is me only, sometimes it just works to use what you call the teacher-based method. For example, when I teach the Shakespearean sonnets, I make sure that I take them step by step. I tried to use different materials and resources simultaneously, but it did not work. I believe it was because of the Shakespearean language, whatnot.

Mrs T's response shows that even the integrated approach is imperfect since it sometimes does not yield the expected results. This is also confirmed by Alaye and Tegegne (2021), who caution us that the integrated language approach is not without limitations. They argue that a curriculum focusing on one skill at a time can permit more focused teaching and more intensive learning. The integrated approach may not be well-suited to developing countries due to insufficient materials. The teacher is required to be well-trained and skilled. Teachers may also be expected to devote more time and effort to lesson preparation and developing various materials.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Integration foregrounds inclusivity, learner engagement and critical reasoning

Inclusivity, learner engagement and enhancement of critical reasoning emerged as the key tenets and results of seamlessly integrating approaches into literature teaching. The participants perceived multiple approaches as a scaffold that blends inclusivity, learner engagement, and critical reasoning to develop a holistic ESL learner.

Mr Lil is of the view that the approaches' effectiveness and relevance depend on the nature of learners in the classroom. He stated,

Some of the learners are slow and struggling. So, I explain [the plot] in many ways... to ensure that they understand.'

Ms TT shared similar sentiments about the benefits of using multiple and effective approaches:

It depends on the class and the type of texts I teach. For the Science class, I just flow, and they do not need much of me. The Humanities group mostly need much assistance. I even code-switch sometimes to ensure that no learner is left behind.

These responses portray the lived experiences and the perceptions that literature is relatively challenging for learners who are less proficient in the language (Kicha, 2023), or it is also shown by the subjects they choose at school. This implies that knowledge and understanding of learners' backgrounds and proficiency assist in selecting the best approaches. This aligns with Richardson (2003), who posits that constructivist teachers consider individual uniqueness, backgrounds, group dialogue, direct teaching, text reference, and multiple resources. In this way, the learners are exposed to new and diverse challenges and encouraged to modify their existing belief systems and be reflective (Bada, 2015).

Like Mr Lil's response, Ms Zee claims that genres and learners are different and must be taught using various approaches,

Ms Zee: I use reader-response, pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading approaches, discussions, and other approaches depending on the genre and the nature of the literary activity.'

Ms SK: I need my learners to learn everything about the text with different approaches, not just the story, but the background, social values, language and personal relevance as the learners reflect.

Ms NK: Multiple approaches always work for me because even the quiet learner gets involved, and they are better equipped for examinations because I use various approaches within one lesson.

Ms LU: During my school days, literature learning was boring; I make sure that in my class, we sing, we do not strictly use English, but code-switch just to make sure that everyone is free to share ideas and thoughts

Ms NK: In my early teaching years, I used English only in my class...did it work? my learners still failed, but now I ensure that there is freedom. I am not saying I turn my classes into chaos, lol... but maybe organised chaos.

For these participants, using numerous and varied approaches broadens the learners' scope of understanding, social awareness, and enjoyment of the text. It was noted that learner-centred approaches seem effective in literature teaching, motivating learners to participate and contribute to knowledge creation. Ms LU and MS NK confidently stated that their classes were interactive and entertaining because of multiple approaches, considering the context and the learners' needs. Ms NK concurred by saying that when she started teaching, she was very strict about only using English in the classroom, saying that she reflected that using English only did not work. However, she had to employ a multilingual pedagogy and code-switching, and then the lesson objectives were met.

These findings further portray the actual practice in the classroom where teachers know best what works for them and their learners. Additionally, Mr SO believes that his teaching enhances learners' critical thinking skills,

I use literature to help learners be critical thinkers because I will challenge them to think about the issue from the text and relate it to their daily life experiences. I recently discovered that I could use literature to teach other pieces of writing and language [grammar].

Using multiple approaches for Ms LU and Mr SO ensures that skills are integrated into the literature lesson, leading to their learners developed critical reasoning and holistic development (Vaishnav, 2024).

4.1.3 Theme 3: Integrating literature approaches as a Source of holistic and Global Perspectives

When asked which specific approaches they found useful in their recent literature lessons, the participants shared many related and integrated approaches and how beneficial they were in their classrooms. Ms Lay stated that language-based is another useful approach in her ESL literature classroom. She believes it is necessary and valuable for learners to comprehend and master the language through literary texts, as Rustipa et al. (2022) suggest. For Ms Lay and Ms Lu, the approach they usually use in their ESL literature class is text-based. Ms Lu added that she also uses visual media to enhance the learners' understanding of literature (Anikina & Yakimenko, 2015), especially for the drama *My Children! My Africa!*

After reading the drama and contextualising it [as a class], I also use the visual resources...to cement it further, although I do not think the visuals can substitute the physical text.

Mr LIL, Mr MP and Ms NK outlined the task-based (Nigar, 2018) as their most recently used approach, integrated with the text-based approach. Moreover, the communicative approach also emerged as the favourite approach as the participants emphasised using class discussions and group work to ensure that learners shared their perspectives and understood literature from their perspectives. The choice for these approaches is captured in Ms NK's response,

I use task-based and communicative approaches because I get learners to work, especially those who would not normally do the work. I give them a piece of work for research and do presentations. In this case, they can use any form of Technology to search for relevant content during their presentations. I have found that technology inspires them to come out of their cocoon and learn best.

The above findings also emphasise that hard copies are not enough. However, using visual media and any other form of ICT enhances learners' understanding of literature, as Filita and Jita (2023) also suggest.

Furthermore, Mr SK believes the integration of these approaches is practical mainly because it broadens the learners' worldviews and perceptions:

I tend to entice them and make them think broadly because I always believe that teachers must probe learners, we must make them get out of their

comfort zone..., and they should think out of the box and interrogate what they read.

Mrs T and Ms Zee's response highlighted that she always blends the process with the reader-response approach, ensuring that learners engage in pre-, during- and post-reading activities in their teaching. This is captured in Ms Zee's response:

I usually ask learners to discuss their expectations and predictions; I also encourage them to deduce themes and tap into their background and context as ESL learners. In doing that, they get to a place where they can even author their poems.

The findings revealed that approach integration allows the teachers to foster and encourage learner engagement and present relevant and reflective literary content. The participants' responses further show that they employ various approaches to scaffold learners' comprehension of literary content. This somehow emphasises the central role of the skilled and informed teacher in the learner-centred ESL literature classroom.

This is also emphasised by Fernando and Marikar (2017) that teachers are irreplaceable in the classroom because they are experts in the subject matter. I, therefore, argue that ESL literature classrooms must seamlessly blend learner- and teacher-centred approaches. Furthermore, the choice of approaches is influenced by the need to expose learners to local and global themes and to create holistic individuals.

5. Conclusion

The study sought to explore the use of the integrated approach in the ESL high school classrooms in one South African education district. The teachers' experiences and perceptions were important in identifying the relevant practices and where the gaps are. The findings of this study implore that the teacher's choice of teaching approaches must not be self-serving but be learner-centred and constructivist to plant the love of literature and reading. There is an increasing need for ESL teachers to use literature as a resource to teach the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. In doing so, multilingual pedagogies and ICT should not be excluded as this can arguably enhance language development and literary analysis capabilities.

Lastly, an effective literature teacher must have analytic knowledge, an appreciation of the genre type, a sound command of the techniques of literature teaching, and be skilled in creating a constructive ESL classroom. Ideally, the English teacher must be proficient in the literature content, approaches and principles to effectively conquer the challenges of teaching literature within the ESL classroom context. A single or traditional approach is not worthwhile in developing a competent and holistic ESL learner in the literature classroom. The study recommends that ESL teachers use an integrated approach to literature teaching rather than a single approach.

This is also a call for curriculum developers, subject advisors and university teacher educators to upskill teachers using an integrated approach to literature teaching. Furthermore, the ICT integration should be encouraged, and teachers should be trained to use technology in the classroom effectively. The study was not without limitations. Firstly, the researcher was a teacher in the same district, so that the participants might have withheld some information during interviews.

Secondly, only twelve teachers from three schools were selected, so the study could not be widely generalised. The study only reports on semi-structured interview data, leaving out the comparison of data from other methods. For future studies, the researcher recommends a mixed-method study exploring the teachers' and learners' experiences and actual performance. Also, a larger sample size in more than one district or province could yield different results. There is a huge gap in studies examining the integrated approach in South African ESL classrooms; much more needs to be done.

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