

Arousing Learner Interest and Engagement in a Multilingual Classroom Context: English Second Language Teachers' Experiences and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to learners of different basic schooling phases is arguably an interesting yet enigmatic phenomenon, which features a variety of factors such as language diversity, curriculum, policy, and cultural factors. This paper sought to explore the experiences and the strategies employed by ESL teachers to aid learners navigate through linguistic diversity in English Second Language classroom contexts. From the interpretivist epistemological stance, the researchers inferred qualitative data through semi-structured interviews from ten (10) purposively sampled high school ESL teachers from one district in Durban. Data was thematically analysed through the Social Constructivist Theory. The study's findings indicated that the primary approach used by ESL teachers in linguistically diverse classrooms was various languages in English literature classrooms. Furthermore, the study discovered that using various languages arouses learners' interests and enhances learner involvement in classroom-based activities. In this regard, the researchers concluded that learners are more engaged and motivated to learn to read, analyse and respond to texts in a multilingual classroom than in monolingual classrooms. The researchers further recommend that teachers use strategies beyond the textbook and policy documents to capture the learner's attention. Using various teaching approaches, codeswitching, and translanguaging are effective strategies teachers and the Department of Education should not shy away from.

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a linguistically and culturally diverse country with twelve official languages. This language diversity has been the epicentre and the principal cause of language contestations since the advent of democracy in South Africa. While the apartheid system is arguably attributed to the language contestations, the role of the South African Schools Acts and other recent political initiations, such as the Use of Official Languages Act of 2012, in subverting the apartheid influence in multi-cultural education and school settings cannot be overlooked. However, the use of one language in the education setting to assist learners and teachers in navigating through the linguistically diverse classroom and school settings has been bedevilling for the past two decades. While Kretzer and Kaschula advocate for the implementation of the Language in Education Policy stipulations in defining and devising a language

policy at the micro level, taking into consideration the local sociolinguistic situation, the question of what, besides the language policy, can pragmatise the elevation of language equity, in linguistically diverse contexts, at the macro-level is still worth asking.¹ Drawing from Alstad and Sopenan's² epistemological view of language use at the micro-level³ as the preliminary foundation for the advancement of multilingualism at the macro-level,⁴ the researchers sought to explore the strategies used by ESL teachers to aid learners in circumnavigating through language diversity, initially from the classroom context, and subsequently outside of the classroom context, in the societal setting.

English classrooms have become the epicentre wherein numerous repertoires converge.⁵ In this regard, English teachers are bound to develop English reading and writing skills concomitantly with non-native English-speaking learners' interest(s) to learn and develop the knowledge of ESL. Furthermore, English reading and writing skills can be used as resources for enhancing individual learners' language identities. The diversity of language identities within one English learning environment has, even though not ostensibly so, given rise to the need for acknowledging and harnessing the benefits of English instruction in a two-fold way. Firstly, The benefit of using English as the "common language"⁶ for linguistically diverse learners and, secondly, the benefit of developing the command of English as the lingua-franca across the curriculum have been benefits which scholars attribute to the use of English in linguistically diverse classroom situations.⁷ Figure 1 below diagrammatically illustrates the two-fold benefits of English instruction in classroom situations with multiple language identities.

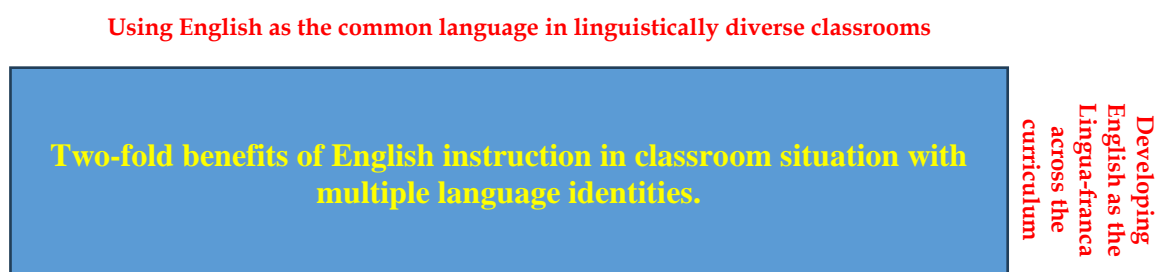


Figure 1: Two-fold benefits of English instruction in classroom situations with multiple language identities⁸

These benefits arguably call for the scholarly exploration of strategies employed by or employed by ESL teachers to arouse learners' interest in ESL learning while steering multilingualism and the development of African indigenous repertoires. Hence, the present study seeks to address the following research question: What strategies are used by ESL teachers to aid learners in navigating through language diversities in English ESL classrooms? What distinguishes the present paper from the preceding studies that investigated the strategies used in teaching ESL is that it explores the methods and approaches of teaching ESL within the context of multilingualism, which is prevalent in the South African schooling setting because of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

¹ Michael M Kretzer and Russell H Kaschula, "Language Policy and Linguistic Landscapes at Schools in South Africa," *International Journal of Multilingualism* 18, no. 1 (2021): 105–27.

² Gunhild Tomter Alstad and Pauliina Sopenan, "Language Orientations in Early Childhood Education Policy in Finland and Norway," *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy* 7, no. 1 (2021): 30–43.

³ The linguistically diverse micro-level contexts, in this paper, denotes the language diversities at school and at classroom levels.

⁴ The language use at macro-level, in this paper, denotes the use of language outside of classroom situations, in these societal discourses.

⁵ Susan Coetzee-Van Rooy, "Being English in Multilingual South Africa," *World Englishes* 40, no. 1 (2021): 98–120.

⁶ The term "common language" denotes the common communication, learning or assessment medium, which is operationalized as the language resource, by learners of various language identities in the formal schooling setting.

⁷ Wira Jaya Hartono et al., "Artificial Intelligence (AI) Solutions In English Language Teaching: Teachers-Students Perceptions And Experiences," *Journal on Education* 6, no. 1 (2023): 1452–61.

⁸ The diagram illustrates the two-fold benefits of English instruction in classroom situations with multiple identities. Based on: The effectiveness of role-playing method as a media to improve student reading skills: Experimental research. *Pedagogy. By Hartono, H. (2023). Indonesian Journal of Teaching and Learning Research, 1(1), 1-10.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using Literature as the Language Resource in the Multilingual Classroom

Language learning and its relation to culture and social interaction are discussed, to a greater extent, from the Vygotskian Socio-cultural theoretical stance.⁹ While several other scholars have featured language learning within the context of culture and social interaction.¹⁰ Using one language to connect persons of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds has been discussed to a limited extent. Instead, scholars have advocated for the fluidity of language use in linguistically diverse situations, for example, translanguaging,¹¹ code-switching,¹² and code-mixing.¹³ Nonetheless, according to researchers' subjective perspectives, language learning, cultural diversity, and language diversity are interwoven within the context of multilingual English classroom situations. Hence, English has to be taught as a Second Language to create the space for learners to engage in discourses with their counterparts of different language backgrounds. In this regard, a specific aspect of English is used to develop and enhance interaction and English language command in multilingual classroom situations.¹⁴ While there is scholarship on the different activities used by different ESL teachers to develop non-native English speakers' ESL interactional and writing skills (see the findings from the quantitative study which was conducted by Ge et al.,¹⁵ Peng et al. in the graph, in Figure 2 below),¹⁶ the literature that discusses the specific English aspect within which the activities are contextualised is limited.

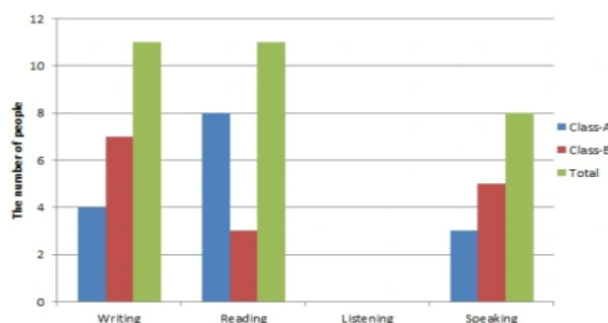


Figure 2: Different activities used by different ESL teachers to develop non-native English speakers' ESL interactional and writing skills.¹⁷

Nonetheless, Kicha scholarly claims that the literature aspect in ESL classes encourages more thoughtful and purposeful language learning can be used to affirm the importance of literature teaching and learning in developing language skills through the activities posited by Peng et al.¹⁸

⁹ L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹⁰ Kim, Bo La. "Multicultural education in Asia and the role of language teaching: Focusing on South Korea." *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics* 24, no. 1 (2020): 67-83; Asta Cekaite and Lorenza Mondada, *Touch in Social Interaction: Touch, Language, and Body* (Routledge, 2020); Asta Cekaite and Lorenza Mondada, "Towards an Interactional Approach to Touch in Social Encounters," in *Touch in Social Interaction* (Routledge, 2020), 1–26..

¹¹ Ofelia Garcia and Li Wei, "Translanguaging, Bilingualism, and Bilingual Education," *The Handbook of Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, 2015, 223–40.

¹² Nangamso Mtsatse and Celeste Combrinck, "Dialects Matter: The Influence of Dialects and Code-Switching on the Literacy and Numeracy Achievements of IsiXhosa Grade 1 Learners in the Western Cape," *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 72 (2018): 21–37.

¹³ S Thara and Prabakaran Poornachandran, "Code-Mixing: A Brief Survey," in *2018 International Conference on Advances in Computing, Communications and Informatics (ICACCI)* (IEEE, 2018), 2382–88.

¹⁴ M. Christison and D. E. Murray, *What English Language Teachers Need to Know Volume III: Designing Curriculum* (Routledge, 2021).

¹⁵ Jianqiao Ge et al., "Cross-Language Differences in the Brain Network Subservicing Intelligible Speech," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 10 (2015): 2972–77.

¹⁶ Peng Peng et al., "Examining the Mutual Relations between Language and Mathematics: A Meta-Analysis.," *Psychological Bulletin* 146, no. 7 (2020): 595.

¹⁷ The graph illustrates different activities used by different ESL teachers to develop non-native English speakers' ESL interactional and writing skills. Based on "Effects of homework motivation and worry anxiety on homework achievement in mathematics and English" by Hong, Mason, Peng, & Lee (2015).

¹⁸ Peng et al., "Examining the Mutual Relations between Language and Mathematics: A Meta-Analysis"; Leni Kicha, "A Systematic Review: Local Literature in Integrated Skills for English Teaching," *Journal of English Language Teaching, Literature and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2023): 59–66.

While the conceptualisation of literature within the epistemes of language skills' development may seem to be bedevilling, according to Shen, literature is the portrayal of the culture of the people using that language.¹⁹ Hence, in researchers' subjective views, developing language skills within the context of learners' culture is in line with language learning within a specific context. Celce-Murcia states that it is sometimes difficult to draw the difference between language and culture because both [language and culture] are used to signal important information about society.²⁰ Literature in the ESL classroom often involves in-depth themes, complex plots, and multidimensional character development, which is centred around, yet not entirely based on, culture, to aid learners to improve not only critical thinking abilities and independent thinking but also to relate and contextualise language and language skills within the context of culture for certain people. From the contextualisation of literature within culture, the researchers argue that literature can be used to enhance interaction and ESL development in multilingual classroom settings.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement is the guideline for and towards using literature as a resource in multilingual classroom settings.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is considered a guideline that details how teachers should enact the curriculum according to the envisaged aims stipulated by the Department of Basic Education, 2011. It [the CAPS document] further outlines that literature is fundamental and central in simultaneously improving four language skills: Listening and Speaking, Writing and Presentation, Reading and Viewing and Language structures and Conventions. In other words, through novels, drama, short stories and poetry, learners develop what is called the “wholisticity” of language understanding through the simultaneous development of four language skills (see the diagram in Figure 3 below).

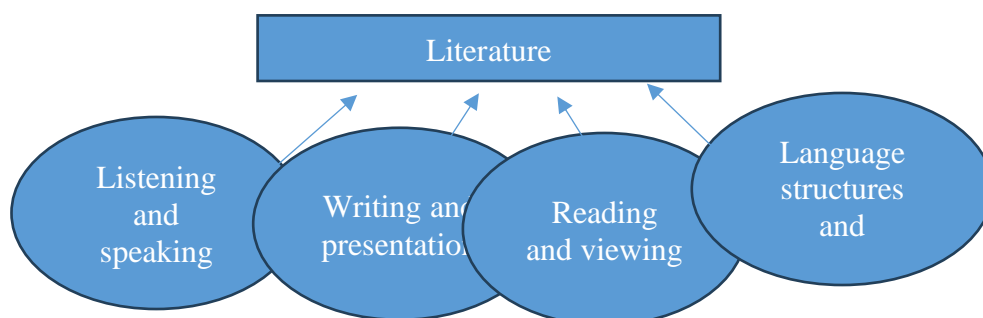


Figure 3: “Wholisticity” of language understanding through the simultaneous development of four language skills.²¹

Emanating from the view of the role of literature in the holistic development of language skills, Lazar claims that literature teaching should aim at motivating learners to enjoy reading and relate the texts they read to their respective contexts.²² Arguably, Lazar, even though not evidently, advocates for learner-centredness and stimulation of problem-solving and critical thinking through literature teaching and learning.²³ On the other hand, Cardoso and Lago parallel literature teaching and learning to language skills development and self-directed learning.²⁴

¹⁹ Qi Shen, “Commentary: Directions in Language Planning from the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Multilingua* 39, no. 5 (2020): 625–29.

²⁰ M. Celce-Murcia and E. Olshtain, *Discourse and Context in Language Teaching: A Guide for Language Teachers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marianne Celce-Murcia, “An Overview of Teaching Grammar in ELT,” *Teaching and Learning English Grammar*, 2015, 3–18.

²¹ The diagram shows the wholisticity of language understanding through the simultaneous development of four language skills. Base on “Genre-based approach to IsiZulu home language education as a means to successful English first additional language education (Doctoral dissertation).” Winfred Nonhle Zabathembu. Mthembu-Funeka, “Genre-Based Approach to IsiZulu Home Language Education as a Means to Successful English First Additional Language Education” (2009).

²² Gillian Lazar, *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²³ Lazar, *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers*.

²⁴ Anna Carolyna Ribeiro Cardoso and Neuda Alves do Lago, “Literature in EFL Classes: Four Teachers’ Experiences in Brazil,” *Revista Investigações* 34, no. 2 (2021): 1–22.

The researchers argue that the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement of 2011 lays out the guideline which symbolically merges Lazar's and Cardoso and Lago's claims in the context of literature teaching and learning because, according to the CAPS, literature learning and teaching seeks to engage learners, challenge them to change or adapt their worldview and get them to understand and embrace the cultural and language diversity within the classroom.²⁵ With the importance of literature teaching and learning having been laid out, it is fundamentally vital to review the literature on the ESL teachers' experiences of using literature as a resource for enhancing multilingualism in classrooms.

ESL Teacher's Experiences of Using Literature as a Resource for Enhancing Multilingualism in Classrooms

Even though the experience of teaching literature has been, according to literature, an exciting one for ESL teachers across the globe, there is an apparent indication that Second Language learners find (learning ESL) challenging because of language barriers. Nonetheless, besides the language barriers, according to ESL teachers, literature teaching and learning is resourceful in enabling learners to read any piece of literature using active and focused reading habits to arouse ESL learning interest, form predictions, connect ideas, and draw meaning from texts.

Arousing learners' interest is, in the researchers' view, central to the learning of ESL because learners with different language identities might find it hard to comprehend texts written in ESL. Hence, teachers might need to employ certain strategies to arouse their interest, build positive attitudes towards ESL and keep them engaged in ESL lessons.²⁶ That is realizable through, but not limited to, the teaching of literature. The subtopic below reviews the literature on ESL teachers' strategies to arouse learners' interest and engagement.

ESL Teachers' Strategies to Arouse Learners' Interest and Engagement

According to Shah, lack of active learner engagement, lack of motivation, and interest in learners are in direct proportion, particularly regarding ESL.²⁷ Hence, learners' interests cannot be excluded in discussions pertaining to the lack of motivation and learner engagement. The findings of the study, which was conducted by Davies et al., wherein data which sought to address the question of "What are the strategies by ESL teachers to keep the learners engaged?" was inferred from ten purposively sampled ESL teachers, indicated that teachers employ fun and exciting approaches to keep learners engaged.²⁸ Amongst those approaches were lessons which included problem-solving activities and awards as a form of extrinsic motivation. Teachers also claimed to use practical and personalised learner-centred activities to keep learners engaged. While the findings of this study are significant, the question of "Was the aspect of literature used in an attempt to keep learners motivated, interested and engaged?" is still worth asking, particularly given the significant role played by literature in developing and enhancing language skills of learners of various language identities.

The teaching of ESL, particularly the aspect of literature, can also be viewed from the Vygotskian Social Development theoretical perspective.²⁹ The Social Development Theory, the theoretical stance upon which the present paper is underpinned, is discussed in the following section.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper is underpinned by the Social Development theory, introduced in the 1920s by Lev Vygotsky. The theory has been used in voluminous contexts and scholarly works as the framework for cognitive development in children. Amongst the key roles of cognitive development, according to Vygotsky, is social interaction, which can happen between children and adults, and between children and

²⁵ Lazar, *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers*; Cardoso and do Lago, "Literature in EFL Classes: Four Teachers' Experiences in Brazil."

²⁶ Chittra Muthusamy et al., "Methods Used in Teaching and Learning of Literature in the ESL Classroom and Adult Learners' Attitude," *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research* 4, no. 2 (2017): 17–25.

²⁷ J. Shah, "Engaging Students in the ESL Classroom," in *Engaging Learners In the Twenty-First Century*, ed. T. S. Sanjayan (Taran Publication, 2021), 59–61.

²⁸ Lucy Davies, Douglas Newton, and Lynn Newton, "Teachers' Pedagogies and Strategies of Engagement.," *International Journal for Talent Development and Creativity* 6 (2018): 169–80.

²⁹ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

knowledgeable peers.³⁰ For Vygotsky, social interaction (or language) and culture collaboratively play a crucial role in the process of cognitive development.³¹ In other words, Social interaction, in Vygotsky's view, means that a more competent member of a certain cultural community **externalises** learned processes, which are then **internalised** and learned by a less competent member.

The Social Development theory posits that the more knowledgeable other (typically a teacher or instructor) possess the consummate amount of knowledge and skills related to a particular task. Hence, he or she [the knowledgeable other] can help a child to learn new concepts and tasks only if the concepts or tasks do not exceed the ³²Zone of Proximal Development. **In other words, the knowledgeable other can only assist the learner in the region that is between learners' ability to complete a task with guidance or collaboration and the ability to solve it alone.** The assistance is realisable through social interaction (language) and by scaffolding the learner from the lower level to the advanced level of abstraction.

This theory is pertinent to this intellectual piece because Vygotsky believed that speech, language, and writing are tools developed from culture. These tools first help children to communicate their needs and later to develop higher-order thinking skills. As indicated in the literature review above, culture, language and social interaction are intertwined and are equally resourceful in developing learners' critical thinking and decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

Through a qualitative research approach, the study was designed to evaluate the experiences and strategies employed by ESL teachers to aid learners navigate through language diversity and their interest in learning ESL. Ten (10) high school ESL teachers from the selected district in Durban were purposively sampled. The selected participants have taught ESL for a period exceeding ten years and have experienced different waves of curriculum reform. Prior to the collection of data, researchers obtained ethical clearance from the institution of their affiliation.

During the process of collecting data, participants were made aware of anonymity and confidentiality. Researchers further indicated to participants that their participation was on a voluntary basis, and they were not deprived of their right to withdraw from the study at any given time should they wish to do so. Likewise, all participants signed forms, indicating their consent to participate in the study. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the selected participants.

It (data) was transcribed, carefully sifted, and thematically analysed to address the question: "What are the strategies used by ESL teachers to aid learners navigate through language diversities in ESL classrooms." Data was initially coded to observe patterns, and it was, thereafter, arranged according to different themes. These themes were then used as findings in the discussion and presentation of the results.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The themes presented diagrammatically in Figure 4 emerged from the data. It might seem as though the themes presented below are discretely related. Nonetheless, the relation between the themes represented in the diagram below is arguably highly significant. Hence, the findings from one theme overlapped with the other theme. Amongst other causes of the overlap between the themes is that all [themes] addressed the research question, which animated the present study.

³⁰ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

³¹ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

³² The **zone of proximal development** is the difference **between a child's current level of development and his or her potential level of development**, where full cognitive development is achieved through social interaction.

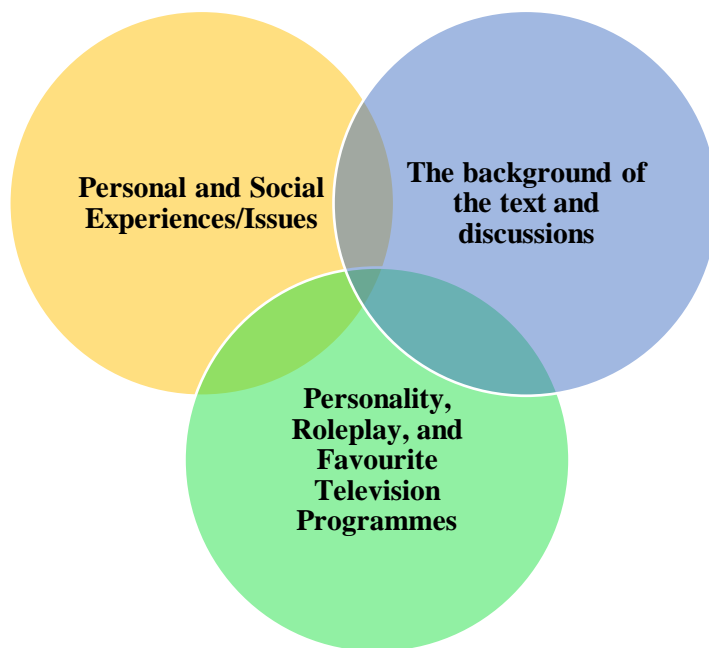


Figure 5 : The interlink between the themes that emerged from the study

Each of the above themes is substantiated by verbatim words to present the findings that emerged from the study.

The Background of the Text and Discussions

According to **Ms Lee**, the background and the context of the text have to be elaborated prior to delivering the new knowledge of the genre. In her view, giving the background and contextualising the genre aids in engaging learners in the lesson. Her words are presented verbatim below:

By contextualising the text, learners seem to get engaged in the lesson, and once they feel that they are connected, it makes them appreciate, empathise, and understand the characters and the emotions around the plot of the story.

On the other hand, **Mr S** asserted that, in addition to contextualising the text, he makes use of visuals, and in this regard, in his view, his learners seem to have a better understanding of the text (see his verbatim words below).

In using visual texts and video clips to constantly ensure that the learners are (and they remain) interested and engaged in (classroom) robust discussions.

Ms Jay indicated that she uses learners' favourite television programmes as the resource and subsequently asks learners to share knowledge of and about characters from the television programme (their words are presented verbatim below).

I use TV programmes in my lessons and ask my learners, "What is your favourite television show? Why is it your favourite?" hence, as they watch the play, they [learners] are expected to fill in the information sheets they will use as a reference during a discussion in class the next day. The information sheets help them to capture who the characters are, what this story is about? and where it is taking place. That is how I have been trying to spark interest.'

Mr Leu believes that discussions are important while contextualising the text and using TV programmes, and discussion remains instrumental in the classroom.

By opening a discussion before we even read the story, talking about abortion and adoption, and asking questions like: Would we ever adopt a child? Then we talk about culture. Would you ever date someone who is of a different race? I am arousing that interest by doing that. I engage in most of these discussions using their home language. My learners come from different religious

and cultural backgrounds, and the prescribed literature brings diverse cultural and religious ideologies [together]. So, I use that which they are accustomed to in unpacking what they may be unfamiliar with. You cannot discuss culture and religion without using the languages connected to that, which is the home language.

Personality, Roleplay, and Favourite Television Programmes

Mrs Zee indicated that she uses more of her personality in the classroom, and she believes that learners' interest is aroused by modelling her personality (see her verbatim words below).

I would say I use myself! I am the tool because they are already interested when I get to class and break down whatever genre we are doing. I get into character. Roleplaying or dramatisation works very well for me in my literature classes. I also allow them to role-play any excerpt I selected from the text. In most cases, they choose excerpts for the role; it is even better when they take the initiative. I allow them to roleplay in English but codeswitch or use the home language during the analysis and discussion of the roleplay.

Also, for **Ms Lee**, the teacher's personality is integral in keeping learners interested in the lesson (see her verbatim words below).

I think I mostly rely on my personality, and I always make sure that my lessons are fun. That is the one thing that I depend on.

Furthermore, for **Mr San**, exaggeration and changing voices when speaking, which are also part of his personality, help in drawing learners' interest into the lesson.

I exaggerate! Even the voice and the movements. No learner can sleep when I am teaching. That is guaranteed! I try to be interesting, energetic, and as fascinating as possible. I sing a funeral song if the story or chapter has a scene where someone dies. In an African context, I would sing a song like Hamba nhliziyo yami uye ezulwini akukho ukuphumula. In contrast, if the text is English, I would sing a song like Nearer My God to Thee... then they would sing along. That excites them and easily master the content of the literature.

Personal and Social Experiences/Issues

For **Ms Tee**, learner engagement is aroused by using [their] personal and social experiences to discourse and converse their feelings about critical issues.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Literature in a second or additional language may not be accessible to learners. Furthermore, teachers in the ESL classroom may need to find ways to enhance learner involvement and interest in the literature being taught. The researchers were interested in finding out how teachers ensured that they aroused the learners' interest in their ESL classrooms while helping learners navigate through language diversities in the ESL classrooms. The findings show that teachers used various strategies in this regard.

The Background of the Text and Discussions

In her interview response, **Ms Lee** stated that for every genre, she made sure that she started by unpacking the background: the 'where' and 'why' the text was written and how it is relevant to them as learners in the ESL context. Then, she would help learners understand how the text relates to them and their context. She felt that this keeps her learners interactive and interested in the text,

'And once they feel that they are connected, it makes them appreciate, empathise, understand the characters and the emotions around the plot of the story.'

She felt that this helps to create a link and a hook between where they are currently in their lives and how the past has shaped their current situation. **Ms Lee's** response implies that if learners get

interested in and can relate to the background and history, they can relate to the characters and their challenges.³³

Mr S, who also believes in using discussions and exploring the background of the text, stated that teenagers are visual beings, and he, therefore, uses visuals to stir discussions and enhance learner understanding. He uses visual texts and video clips to constantly ensure that the learners are interested and engaged in robust discussions.

In addition, **Ms Jay** and **Ms Nay** use the learners' favourite television programmes by asking learners to share their knowledge of the characters and plot and then share their feelings about what is happening at that time in a particular programme. **Ms Jay** would then associate this with the text to be read in class. She noted the questions she asked, such as,

'What is your favourite television show? Why is it your favourite?' She also takes her learners to watch plays. She noted, *'As they watch the play, learners are expected to fill in the information sheets they will use as a reference during a discussion in class the next day. The information sheets help them to capture who the characters are, what this story is about? and where it is taking place. That is how I have been trying to spark interest.'*

Ms Tee also added that she uses various class and group discussions to ensure that learners are actively involved and feel in charge of the learning process. This fits with Vygotsky's social constructivism, which emphasises that learning occurs through engagement with the adult (teacher), peers (other learners) and the world. **Mr Leu** also believes that discussions work well for his classroom. He uses discussions to incite learners' previous knowledge and imagination or prediction. This also helps him identify perspectives and any elements of bias or stereotypes that must be addressed. He stated,

'by opening a discussion before we even read the story, talking about abortion, adoption, and asking questions like: Would we ever adopt a child? Then we talk about culture. Would you ever date someone who is of a different race? I am arousing that interest by doing that. I engage in most of these discussions using their home language.'

Mr Leu felt that this strategy works as it arouses his learners' interest and allows them to participate comfortably during the lessons.³⁴

Hutchison who values cultural constructivism, emphasises that teachers must be sensitive to different cultural perspectives and further draws from³⁵ who argued that persons with similar worldviews and cultural backgrounds easily reach common ground. It is important to note that.³⁶

Mr Leu also considers culture to be one of the essential aspects of his class when teaching literature. He stated,

'My learners come from different religious and cultural backgrounds, and the prescribed literature brings diverse cultural and religious ideologies. So, I use what they are used to to unpack what they may be unfamiliar with. You cannot discuss culture and religion without using the languages connected to that, which is the home language.'

Personality, Roleplay, and Favourite Television Programmes

Using personalities and roleplay to capture the learners' interest was also a central theme. The participants noted that teenagers want the lessons to be amusing, so teachers must constantly ask questions that stir debates and interactions and introduce role play and dramatisation. This is also emphasised by, who states that combining education and entertainment yields excellent learning experiences.

Mrs Zee confidently stated that her personality is essential in the classroom, which is one strategy she uses to arouse learner interest,

³³ Cardoso and do Lago, "Literature in EFL Classes: Four Teachers' Experiences in Brazil."

³⁴ William N Bender, "20 Strategies for Increasing Student Engagement," 2017; Anita Grove, *The Teacher's Role in Student Engagement* (Gardner-Webb University, 2019).

³⁵ McNamara, DR. "Paradigm Lost: Thomas Kuhn and Educational Research." *British educational research journal* 5, no. 2 (1979): 167-73.

³⁶ Charles B Hutchison, "Cultural Constructivism: The Confluence of Cognition, Knowledge Creation, Multiculturalism, and Teaching," *Intercultural Education* 17, no. 3 (2006): 301-10.

'I would say I use myself! I am the tool because they are already interested when I get to class and break down whatever genre we are doing. I get into character. Roleplaying or dramatisation works very well for me in my literature classes. I also allow them to role-play any excerpt I selected from the text. In most cases, they choose excerpts for the role; it is even better when they take the initiative. I allow them to roleplay in English but codeswitch or use the home language during the analysis and discussion of the roleplay.'

Like **Mrs Zee**, **Ms Lee** also believes that her personality is central to teaching literature and keeps learners interested,

'I think most of the time I rely on my personality, and I always make sure that my lessons are fun. That is the one thing that I depend on.'

It was evident in the analysis of the interview responses that participants' personalities and minimising tensions and seriousness are essential tools to keep learners captivated and involved. This is also evident in the analysis of **Mr San**'s response:

'I exaggerate! Even the voice and the movements. No learner can sleep when I am teaching. That is guaranteed! I try to be interesting, energetic, and as fascinating as possible. I sing a funeral song if the story or chapter has a scene where someone dies. In an African context, I would sing a song like Hamba nhliziyo yami uye ezulwini akukho ukuphumula. In contrast, if the text is English, I would sing a song like Nearer My God to Thee... then they would sing along. That excites them and easily master the content of the literary text.'

Like **Mr San**, **Mrs Tan** added,

'I arouse their interest by demonstrating in most cases when I am reading. It works for me; the learners love it.'

Mr San and **Mrs Tan** are confident that their personalities keep learners awake and interested in the lesson. Similarly, **Ms Nay** also believes in using the learners' favourite television programmes to introduce the text and themes evident in the text. She specified,

'Before reading a text, I ask learners questions about their favourite programme. You find the discussion lively because everybody would like input on what they watched. They enjoy different programmes, including IsiZulu, Sesotho or IsiXhosa-based. I would allow them to share these in the Home language so that the content is well captured. This also helps them to be more comfortable and livelier.'

These participants seem to believe their methods to keep the learners captivated are effective. Moreover, the learners in these classes would possibly feel comfortable sharing their views without the fear of being judged because the focus is on the characters on television and not them as individuals. So, they learn outside the classroom and link the text with what they encounter on television daily.

Personal and Social Experiences/Issues

Ms Tee and **Mr M** believe in learner engagement and allowing learners to use their personal and social experiences and freely share their thoughts and feelings about controversial issues.³⁷ **Ms Tee** emphasised,

'For me, it is more about making sure that learners are an important part of the lesson because they will not be interested if they are not. I would ask questions that require them to draw from what they know and what is relevant to them.'

This is in line with the constructivist learning environment suggested by Bada, which emphasises that constructivist learning is transferable to new real-life situations; constructivism provides people with ownership of the learning process; they are engaged in questions, explorations and assessments; learning activities are authentic, based on real-world issues and engage people; and constructivism promotes

³⁷ Grove, *The Teacher's Role in Student Engagement*.

negotiation and communication skills by creating a learning environment that emphasises collaboration and exchange of idea.³⁸ These elements were noted in the above discussion, considering how participants aroused their learners' interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that teachers use strategies that are beyond the textbook if they are to capture the learner's attention. Using various teaching approaches, codeswitching, and translanguaging are effective strategies teachers and the Department of Education should not shy away from. It is further recommended that future studies focus on the use of dramatisation and personality, including the use of social networks to arouse learner interests in the English as Second Language class.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to explore the experiences and strategies employed by ESL teachers to aid learners in navigating through linguistic diversity in ESL classroom contexts. The findings have revealed that literature is a source of edutainment in the ESL classroom. It brings a sense of liberty and rapport as it allows the teacher and learners to dramatise yet learn life principles and morals from characters depicted in literary texts. These moral values also inculcate cultural tolerance and appreciation of universal values. Once the teacher has made the literary lesson enjoyable and learner-centred, learners will be enticed to enjoy literature more. Multilingual classrooms encourage interaction and self-discovery, motivating learners to enjoy literature and do well in assessments. This is an important yardstick for the Department of Education.

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³⁸ Steve Olusegun Bada and Steve Olusegun, "Constructivism Learning Theory: A Paradigm for Teaching and Learning," *Journal of Research & Method in Education* 5, no. 6 (2015): 66–70; Ziling Xu and Yeli Shi, "Application of Constructivist Theory in Flipped Classroom-Take College English Teaching as a Case Study," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 8, no. 7 (2018): 880–87.

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