

Towards A Transformative Literary Pedagogy: A Case of a University in Limpopo, South Africa

Mabunda M. Thompson

*Department of English Studies, University of South Africa, South Africa
E-mail: emabunmt@unisa.ac.za*

KEYWORDS Literary Art. Literary Curricula. Teacher Training. Pedagogic Practices. Social Transformation

ABSTRACT Teacher training institutions in post-apartheid South Africa must empower student-educators with pedagogic practices to teach literature critically. However, there is evidence that suggests inadequate training of student-educators in relation to the teaching of literature to learners. The inadequate training is witnessed through the poor academic performance of learners in English literature classes. This study sought to investigate whether the teaching of literature to student-educators at a university in Limpopo (UiL), South Africa, could be said to be preparing students with pedagogic practices necessary to empower learners with skills to contribute to social transformation. The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach that followed a qualitative, case study research design. It employed a group-administered narrative-questionnaire, and a narrative-interview with student-educators and a lecturing staff, respectively. The findings of this study suggest that the students have acquired an in-depth understanding of the pedagogic practices necessary to teach literature in the classroom context.

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in apartheid South Africa were used to determine one's social-economic status, and to undermine cultural interests of certain sections of the population (Gamede 2024; Mabunda 2021). In post-apartheid South Africa, it would seem necessary for HEIs to be geared towards facilitating the process of social transformation. Nkabinde (2024) also argues that student-educators in HEIs, on the one hand, should be seen as agents tasked with the responsibility of facilitating the socio-political changes underpinned by principles of social cohesion, racial and cultural inclusivity and tolerance. Literary curricula, on the other hand, should become one of the possible means with which to expose and challenge the injustices of the past (Gamede 2024; Nkabinde 2024; Mabunda 2021; Gamede 2019). To achieve this, this study argues that ministries of higher education and HEIs must ensure that the necessary educational tools, namely, policy statements and effective literary and critical pedagogy, are put in place to facilitate and contribute effectively to the process of social transformation.

Problem Statement

The poor academic performance in English literature at school level reveals evidence of inadequate training of student-educators at teacher

training institutions. This problem needed to be addressed to create a more favourable teaching and learning environment populated with teachers who possess adequate scholastic aptitude to engage critically with literary texts, and who hold the needed knowledge, skills, values and enlightened attitudes.

Research Aim

This paper sought to investigate whether the teaching of literature to student-educators at a university in Limpopo (UiL) could be said to be preparing students with pedagogic practices necessary to empower learners with knowledge and skills to contribute to social transformation. To achieve this, the study set out three critical questions:

1. How do student-educators show their mastery of the knowledge and understanding of the role of literary art in education and society?
2. What kind of knowledge do student-educators manifest in their understanding of the role of literary art in education and society?
3. How do student-educators relate their understanding of the role of literature in the teaching of critical literacy to learners?

Objectives of the Study

This study's primary objectives were to:

1. Contribute to the need for critical opinions that respond to the call for critical pedagogic practices in the teaching of literary art.
2. Pave the way for social cohesion and thus contribute to the quest for a new sense of national identity in post-apartheid South Africa.
3. Provide an understanding of the importance of social cohesion and cultural diversity in the context of a democratic South Africa and the world in general.

Literature Review

The apartheid system has subjected the majority of South Africans to the kind of education and curricula, modelled towards socio-political and economic reproduction. School curricula were designed to restrict African students from access to the kind of literacy that would prepare them as critical citizens (Mabunda 2021; Holmarsdottir 2005). This restrictive mechanism led to the emergence of a relatively new discipline of curriculum philosophy, whose essence was to study what was taught in schools and to what purpose (Balfour 1998; Prinsloo 2002; Singh 2003; Mabunda 2009).

From this philosophical discipline, several studies within the field of literary curriculum development were conducted by various scholars, and have revealed that the kind of literary curricula offered to African schools were designed with the intention in mind, to socialise black learners through literary art for the benefit of the ruling elite, and at most, was facilitated by the appreciation of the Western culture at the expense of African reality (Gamede 2024; Mabunda 2021). In their findings, researchers such as Reid (1982), Wright (1990), Balfour (1998), Prinsloo (2002), Singh (2003), Mabunda (2009), Mabunda (2021), Betti (2020), Ndlovu (2024) and Gamede (2024) have argued for pedagogic practices to be geared towards giving all forms of knowledge by ensuring rationality, critical thinking and the ability to appreciate the cultural relevance and the lived experiences of students.

To account for the above, Balfour (1998) conducted a project based on pedagogical principles of inclusion and access for learners' lived experience in the classroom. He does so by using South African short stories to address the previously

excluded themes from the South African national narrative, to evoke issues such as patriarchy, capitalism, cultural diversity, gender stereotyping and 'taboo topics' such as sexual molestation. In his findings, Balfour indicates that pupils have responded to the selected text in a very systematic and perplexing ways although their background knowledge to the chosen text was very limited. His findings further reveal that although the topics addressed in such short stories are relevant in addressing the issues that affect the majority of South African citizens, teachers would still not see any reason for making their learners aware of such societal problems.

A similar study was conducted by Gamede (2024) and focused on ways in which literary art is taught and learned at the secondary school level. Unlike Balfour (1998) who focuses on short stories, Gamede uses poetry to investigate the teaching of literary art by paying a particular attention to the use of the Cultural Heritage approach of the apartheid education system. While Gamede (2024) focuses on ways of teaching literature at the secondary schools level, Balfour (1998) employs literary analytical approach by engaging learners to reading and analysing the selected texts. In each case, studies show that the pedagogic practices used under apartheid still dominated the teaching of literary art to learners in post-apartheid schools.

Although the above studies provide a rich background knowledge of teacher-learner experiences in the teaching and learning of literature respectively, and the kind of literacy embodied within the school curricular, they do not provide an in-depth insight as to the origin of the nature of the pedagogic practices employed in the teaching of such literary art to learners. Furthermore, they fail to highlight whether or not teachers were equipped with adequate skills to teach learners certain topics that are culturally considered taboo and politically sensitive to engage with in class (Mabunda 2021). In particular, none of the above studies interrogated the extent to which teachers of literature were (un)able to deal with the literary curriculum designed for their learners (Nkosi 2011; Shupak 2015; Ndlovu 2024; Gamede 2019), and neither do such studies reveal why certain topics deemed by some as politically and socially offensive were not considered relevant for teaching regardless of the impact such topics

have on the everyday lives of both teachers and learners beyond the classroom. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the above studies have thrown a great deal of light on the kind of literacy, literary curricular, subject-content, as well as the kind of pedagogy embodied within school curricula.

Critical Literary Pedagogy

Driven by the need to design critical literary pedagogy accountable to the community of both teachers and learners, this paper calls for literary curricula and pedagogic practices to be geared toward developing in learners a sense of critical spirit, thereby ensuring rationality, critical thinking and the ability to reason in various ways, and being able to appreciate the cultural relevance and the lived experiences of learners in the classroom. To achieve this, the paper argues that literary curricula should prepare all learners from all classes in ways that would enable them to receive critical literacy in its fullest sense, and to help them gain a proper understanding of their environment, their culture and its systems. Furthermore, the teaching of literature should be able to develop the potentialities of each learner, to the ability that the educated individuals are able to realise themselves, make judgments and think critically (Balfour 1998).

It is the researcher's belief that such pedagogic practices will enable both teachers and learners alike to challenge docile literary curricula and syllabi that largely ignore cultural diversity, social cohesion, sexist, racist and other forms of discriminatory attitudes and practices often witnessed in society (Freire 1993; Mgwashu 2008; Mabunda 2021; Sheik 2021). This will also assist in avoiding what Mones' (2007) *Lost in Translation* refers to as the "the paradox of indirect knowledges", by which the author means the intergenerational transmission of spoken and unspoken 'bitter' knowledges from the people who were there (during apartheid), to the children who were not. In other words, it is the researcher's belief that the teaching of literary art should hold the potential to challenge certain socio-historical ideologies and political practices that are perpetuated through various means and mediums including literary curricula in schools (Cloete 2008; Jansen 2008, Hall 2008; Seepe 2008; Fourie 2008; Van Damme 2015).

Against the need to interrogate the role of literary curricula in post-apartheid South African schooling and challenging "the paradox of indi-

rect knowledges" as highlighted above, this paper argues that while there are other greater social environments such as the home, the places of worship and the social circle that can potentially facilitate the process of transformation, teacher-training institutions remain ideal sites for fostering social integration and cultural diversity. In this regard, the post-apartheid teacher of English, largely through the medium of literature, needs to create and equip the learners' cultural world and endow them with the kind of cultural heritage and the sense of identity that will enable such learners to develop as a whole person (Fusch et al. 2018). In this way, the teaching of literature should prepare a post-apartheid South African child to reach an understanding of the complexities of politics and discriminatory attitudes which dominated South Africa in the past decades. The teaching of literature must incite learners to think about the experiences and feelings of other people who exist(ed) outside and beyond their daily awareness (Balfour 1999).

To achieve this, this paper proposes the pedagogic practices and literary texts that are capable of ensuring that learners as readers are equipped with imaginative insight so as to allow the contemplation of possible human experiences which the learners themselves have not met outside their immediate environment and use such a contemplation to reflect on their own lived experiences. The researcher argues that the pedagogic practices in the teaching of literary art must be seen as one of the critical means of ensuring that student-educators who major in English are able to offer in the classroom context knowledge and skills that would make learners understand and respond to the socio-political changes that take place around them. One way of doing this, the researcher would like to suggest, is the need for teacher-trainees to hold an in-depth understanding of how literary art as a social expression makes for an effective teaching tool in inculcating knowledge about cultural diversity and social cohesion.

To achieve the above, this paper suggests that the texts selected for teaching both at schools and universities should be able to lay historical evidence of their making and their time (Balfour 1998; Mabunda 2021). It is further argued that such a critical literacy must present the learner and the teacher with opportunities to negotiate

meaning, understand cultural diversity and what these mean in the lives of South Africans. In the same way, Kissack (2000: 365) calls for literary curriculum planners in South Africa to incorporate into school syllabi works which challenge, to use his exact words, "...the ethos of contemporary liberal multicultural values". He further argues that such works are relevant in post-apartheid South African schooling as they possess the ability to stimulate educational debates in an inherently cultural conflictual society.

Once incorporated into school curriculum, teachers, Kissack (2000) continues, can critically interrogate and challenge the texts that offend contemporary norms. He advances his argument by referring to the relationship between literature and society. For Kissack (2000), literature is a product of culture, and its very existence is influenced by its historical context, which then suggests that literary art embodies, represents and affects the values and predilections of its formative cultural environment. Kissack's thinking is also shared by Said (1984: 4-5) who argues that, "[literary] texts are worldly...they are events, and even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of social world, human life and...historical moments in which they are located and interpreted...The realities of power and authority—as well as the resistances offered by men, women and social movements to institutions, authorities and orthodoxies—are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to the readers, that solicit the attention of critics."

The above background establishes a strong relationship between culture and literature. It further presents literature as a product of social events, historical moments, realities of power and related authorities. These, according to Said (1984), are the socio-political and historical realities that form the basis for the existence of literary texts. This understanding could be taken to suggest that literature is a product of actual social events and socio-historical politics that exist in a given society. If this is arguably the case, then, the teaching of literature to student-teachers becomes important in that it equips them with the necessary knowledge to understand the role literature can play in exposing and confronting socio-political dialectics that shape(d) the society within which they find themselves (Marx 1976).

To better understand how social events, historical moments, realities of power, resistance, movements, and authorities become the basis for the existence of literary art, it is necessary to consider Marx's (1975) concept of dialectics. Marxism provides two strands of materialism, that are, dialectical and historical materialisms. While the former focuses on how things are, how they have come to be the way they are over time and, more importantly, on the relations of production and the consequent class relationships and struggle, the latter claims that the current state of affairs of a given society cannot be understood independently of the historical conditions that shaped its current outlook.

The above two strands of materialism are equally important in the context of this report because they, firstly, establish the interconnectedness between the socio-historical ideologies that informed literary pedagogy and syllabi and, secondly, provide the basis from which the pedagogic practices in the teaching of literary art at the selected university could be critiqued and analysed and, lastly, pave ways for students as prospective teachers and their prospective learners to confront current socio-political attitudes, beliefs and practices that dominate South Africa. This interconnectedness is also revealed by Furst (1992) who describes literary art as a representation of an actual historical situation at a given historical moment through its careful use of a broadly mimetic approach. This view is further advanced by Marx (1975) who argues that literature reveals a variety of ideological elements that form the basis of the social structure. In other words, literature, through the use of language as its medium, becomes a social expression in which the writer presents his or her experiences about social reality.

Within the context of this paper, Marx's argument is an important one, for it offers an understanding of how the teaching of literary art can become a means of exposing and examining the historical conditions, by which certain practices within the South African society were/are legitimated. This paper therefore argues that literary art needs to be seen as an important teaching tool geared towards inculcating a critical spirit and awareness concerning socio-historical politics as processes contributing to social transformation. This should enable teacher-trainees and

their learners as agents of social change to realise that there is a need to interrogate socio-political and historical issues that may be seen as offensive to others in order to confront the negative impact such issues have had on the South African society.

This critical initiative will also assist in challenging the contemporary debate regarding the type of literature to be included in the literary curriculum from elementary to the tertiary level (Kissack 2000). Central to the debate is the argument that the literary text to be included in the literary curriculum should exclude texts that make central issues of racism, sexism, classism, homophobic utterances and xenophobic issues, as they may be seen as morally offensive and insensitive to other identities. This argument emanates from a general belief that people of colour, women of all races, foreigners and other vulnerable groups have suffered oppression, prejudice, exclusion and exploitation in the hands of the powerful (Butler 2023). This, as a consequence, makes curriculum and syllabus planners exclude literature that they deem offensive in their attempts to adhere to the ideals of comprehensive inclusivity.

However, Kissack (2000: 367) argues that if curriculum planners adopt this view, then "...their practice of comprehensive inclusivity and reluctance to offend any particular identity" ignores the fact that literature is a product of a conflictual society, and that "...educational exposure to the constituents of [a conflictual society] should reflect that controversial and antipathetic quality". He further argues that "...the very presence of diversity, difference or contrary sentiment is a stimulus to rigorous and systematic thinking, which I assume is central to the education of critical individuals in liberal democratic society".

It is through this type of educational exposure to the constituents of a conflicted society that, this study argues, a teacher should become a liberating individual whose sole responsibility is to ensure that teaching and learning are human experiences with profound social consequences. The interrelatedness between the teacher, education and society will therefore bring about social pedagogy in which both individuals and society are constructed (Ndlovu 2024; Gamede 2024; Mabunda 2009). To facilitate this relationship, South African educators, the researcher wants to argue, need to understand the importance of critical literacy—a clear

understanding of the nature and the extent of the problems education is intended to solve. For curriculum designers whose primary concerns are to bridge the gap between different cultures, a wider perspective is required to understand the conception of cultural diversity and cultural conflicts (Ndlovu 2024; Gamede 2024; Betti 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Guided by the purpose of this investigation, this study adopted a mixed-methods research approach that followed mainly a qualitative, case study research design, and employed a group-administered narrative-questionnaire and a narrative-interview issued to teacher-trainees and a lecturing staff, respectively. This research approach would facilitate access to a deeper understanding of the pedagogic practices used in the teaching of literary art to teacher-trainees.

Context of the Study

The context within which this study was located was a university in Limpopo (UiL). The university was selected for the purposes of data collection, first, due to its socio-political and historical background that saw its establishment and, second, because it was convenient for the researcher as he resides in the Limpopo province.

Data Collection

For the purposes of data collection, this investigation used a group-administered questionnaire designed for the 10 final year student-teachers. The questionnaires contained 6 long questions which, in the main, dealt with the respondents' knowledge of literature in relation to its role in, and relationship with, society (Betti 2020; Ndlovu 2024; Gamede 2024). The questions allowed for the respondents to relay their understanding of the role literature can play in addressing various social ills that dominate post-apartheid South Africa.

Apart from the use of questionnaires, this study also conducted an interview with the only one lecturing staff who was responsible for teaching literature to teacher-trainees. The use of questionnaires and interviews helped uncover the innermost views and students' understanding of

the texts and pedagogic practices in the teaching of critical literacy to learners. The study further analysed documentary evidence such as *Learning Guides* and other related study materials designed for the literature modules to triangulate generalised responses made by the interviewees.

Population Sample

Within attempts to investigate the nature of knowledge relating to the teaching of literary art and determining whether students have mastered the necessary pedagogic practices to meet the outcomes as set out in the literature modules at the chosen university in Limpopo, this study used a sample of 10 final year teacher-trainees. Such a sample was chosen in terms of the following characteristics like an area of specialisation, year of study, as well as gender. In other words, five female and another five male participants were purposefully selected to make up a sample of 10 in total. The reasons for selecting this category of students, that is, final year students, included that these students were expected to have satisfied the learning outcomes in terms of mastering the teaching methodologies in the literature class. Also, the issue of gender was important as it established a balanced perspective regarding their individual understanding of the role of literature in society as well as establishing their mastery of the pedagogic practices necessary for teaching literature to learners.

Data Presentation

The study designed a thematic framework to code and categorise the themes identified in the questionnaires and the narrative interviews. The use of a thematic framework was important, for it offered the critical framework of the relationship between literature and society, the texts as cited by the respondents to support their understanding of such a role, and the coded themes emanating from the data on the ground. Most important-

ly, for the purposes of data analysis, pseudonyms were created to easily interpret the responses offered by the students. Below are the themes identified from the analysis of the questionnaires distributed to the student-participants (Table 1).

Social (In)justice

In addressing these questions, the respondents were required to offer not less than 15 line detailed sentences in their responses. As a starting point, the respondents were asked to offer an explanatory response to this question: *How does literature (literary works) affect your perceptions towards society?*

Responses to this question presented various themes relating to social diversity and other related challenges. In response to this, Jane, one of the respondents at the university in Limpopo (UL), had this to say,

"It [literature] moulds the way I see the society around me, and it also betters my reasoning when engaging with people around."

This line of thinking is also shared by Dolly who claims that:

"[Literature] affects me in a positive way as I am able to understand different things about different people. I get to understand how different people live, do things differently, their culture, etc. But most of the time it makes me question if my society is doing things correctly..."

Clearly, these responses give a clear understanding that the respondents see literature as a textual representation of society—one that serves as a lens through which they can understand certain attitudes and practices inherent in society. These views also relate to Eagleton's (1983), Culler's (1997), McNeil's (2000), Althusser's (1984), Kohn's (2000) and Benjamin's (1973) understanding that literature can be seen as a direct representation of society that functions as a medium through which various socio-political ideologies and cultural beliefs and practices may be exposed, challenged and/or validated.

Table 1: The thematic framework to code qualitative data

<i>Critical framework</i>	<i>Coded themes</i>
Literary art as a representation of social reality	Social (in)justice
Literature as an entertaining piece	Relevance and In(significance)
Literary art as an effective teaching tool for language teaching and learning	Analytical and language skills

In addition to the above question, the respondents were asked to either agree or disagree with the claim that, *Literature (literary work) is important in that it serves as a tool that represents social reality.*

To address this, respondents were required to provide examples to show how this is achieved (or not) by citing any literary texts prescribed for them in their fourth-year of study. To respond to this, Mary argues that, *“literature represents social realities such as love and abuse of women and children, how culture and money [are] used to oppress women, [and] how people value marriage more than their careers.”*

Although the respondents were also requested to base their responses on any literary text prescribed to them in their 4th year of study, the above respondents could not relate their responses to a particular work of art.

In addition to the above, Suzy claims that authors, *“...are more focused on writing about their lives, the context they live in, and mostly contextualise their writing by reflecting on their society or environment they live in. For example, the poem ‘Hanging’ by Malika Ndlovu (2010) reveals the truth about human nature and how we respond to situations like that.”*

Similarly, Dolly held the same perspective when she pointed out that, *“Most...writers write about the things that are real, things that they have come across in their lives, things they see happening in their communities. Most [writers] write about how they feel about the things they are writing about.”*

Moreover, Grace had put it more eloquently, *“Literature authors write about challenges that are faced by societies, and [they] also write about social challenges that they experienced themselves. Most literary works are themed around social issues faced by society. Authors represent social reality in their work. For example, the book ‘No Longer at Ease’ by Chinua Achebe represents social issues that are currently [happening] in...Nigeria. The book talks about the changes brought about by colonialism in their society.”*

Clearly, the above responses seem to suggest that literary works represent social reality, and can thus be seen as a social expression that is used as its medium language to convey messages to the reading community. This view is fur-

ther amplified by the respondent's reference to Achebe's (1960) *‘No Longer At Ease’* and the issues it raised about colonialism, oppression and other forms of social ills inherent in many colonies.

To further understand whether the respondents' possess any knowledge regarding the role of literature in society, they were asked to respond either by agreeing or disagreeing, and to offer clear examples by referring to specific texts prescribed for them, with the claim that, *“social ills such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, gender violence, human rights violation, children and women abuse, human trafficking, etc. can be easily addressed through the teaching of literature to learners in the classroom context.”*

Responses to this question would allow the researcher to determine whether the respondents would be able to relate the role of literature in society to its function as an effective teaching tool capable of equipping learners with knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the process of social transformation in South Africa. In response to this question, Suzy had this to say, *“Literature addresses issues that are always happening in our daily lives. So, the issues mentioned above can be addressed in [the] teaching [of] literature, whereby we take a certain short story/poem/novel, read and reflect and then try to contextualise [them] by referring [to issues] around us... Learners will realise what needs to be done when [they are] facing certain issues.”*

This understanding is shared by Ben who added that, *“...literature is useful [in] address[ing] the social ills and the negative effects they have on people and the [other related] consequences that arise therefrom. So literature will help [learners] avoid such pitfalls and the resultant consequences [in order] to become responsible citizens.”*

While these responses acknowledge the important contribution literature can make in addressing various social issues, what is important is the respondents' ability to show how learners can benefit from teaching literature in the classroom context.

Relevance and (In)significance

In addition to the above questions, the respondents were requested to either agree or disagree (and to offer clear examples by referring

any texts prescribed for their literature modules) with the claim that, *"The knowledge I acquired through the literature module has equipped me as a prospective teacher with the necessary skills and teaching methodologies to empower learners with intellectual tools to deal with social challenges in society."*

This was designed primarily to determine whether the respondents have acquired the necessary skills and pedagogic practices the literature module has sought to inculcate in them. This question received quite interesting responses. For example, Suzy revealed that, *"...What I have learnt, especially on poetry and short stories has given and equipped me with much more knowledge that I can share with my learners once I am employed at school...The disadvantage is that I was only doing drama and novels in my high school level."*

This response to the question goes beyond the university level in that the respondent was never introduced to other forms of literature such as poetry prior to university education. This lack of background knowledge appears to be common amongst many respondents. For example, in response to the same question, Grace bemoans (important to note in the above response is the claim that), *"No, I don't agree with the statement. Literature has many genres and sometimes are fantasies, which are not reality. Some of the literary works are personal experiences of the author and are not reliable [to] utilise...in the real world [to] face and solve social challenges. Literature is for enjoyment and even [our] prescribed [texts] are used to increase vocabulary and the world of reading. It is not so that I can deal with social realities..."*

Grace has not acquired the purported knowledge gained from the learning of literature as some of the prescribed texts she read were *"...fantasies, which are not reality"*. As such, such literary genres could not be used as effective tools to empower learners with skill to contribute to social transformation as they, to use her exact words, *"...are not reliable [to] utilise...in the real world [to] face and solve social challenges"*. Central to Grace's response is that this literary genre was important only insofar as it increased her vocabulary, as it was prescribed, and taught only for "enjoyment". Although it is possible that Grace could simply possess a narrow, almost false-un-

derstanding of literature and its purpose in general, the issue of using literature as a language resource whose only significance was to improve communication skills and vocabulary is shared by many respondents. For example, Ben reveals that, *"I learned to use various language structures and conventions critically and correctly. This also helped me when communicating with other people in real life situations."*

Analytical and Language Skills

It is important to note that the respondents also highlighted certain aspects of the literature module which they have found to be challenging. To establish this, a question was raised, *"Which aspect(s) of the literature module have you found difficult to understand? Provide reasons."*

In response to the question, Jane responded that, *"I do not understand how to identify a theme in a short story"*. Jane's response can be juxtaposed with the response (to the previous question as presented in the preceding paragraph) that she gave when she claimed that, *"I can now teach literature better than other teachers at school, especially poetry. I find it easier than other teachers"*. This lack of ability to identify themes in literary texts is worrying, especially because this is the same respondent who claimed that she can now teach literature better than any other teacher at school. If this is the case then, one wonders how such a teacher would be able to teach short stories, novels and poetry (all of which deal with themes) to learners without herself being able to identify themes.

To the same question, Johnny points to the language used in literary texts as one of the aspects of the English literature module he has found difficult. He revealed that what he finds difficult is, *"The grammar part because at times the language used in literature can be difficult to understand as [it is] used in [a] figurative [way], more especially in the poems, [which use] poetic elements or devices."*

The issue of difficulty in understanding poetry appears to be a challenge to almost all the respondents. In addition to language difficulty in accessing poetry as a literary genre, for instance, Grace adds that, *"...sometimes it is hard to understand the message of the poem and to analyse its features"*. Suzy also echoes the same sen-

timents, *"It is not easy for me to analyse poems line by line. The only [aspect of the poem] I am good at is summarising, and outlining figures of speech. So, it is not easy to choose poems and teach them to my learners since I do not have full understanding."*

Suzy's response is not surprising given that this is the same respondent who, in the preceding question, claims that her disadvantage was that she was never taught poetry at school until now that she is at university. Moreover, another respondent also confesses that, *"poetry [is difficult], I believe [it] is because I never studied poetry at my secondary level. So I still find it difficult"*.

These responses are interesting because the Department of Basic Education's (DoBE) CAPS of 2011:12 states that, *"The main reason for reading literature in the classroom is to develop in learners a sensitivity to a special use of language that is more refined, literary, figurative, symbolic, and deeply meaningful than much of what else they may read... [It] is to show learners how...language can be used with subtlety, intelligence, imagination, and flair... Such work might involve examining the presence or absence of imagery; [the] kind of imagery [that] is being selected by the writer and why; sentence structures and paragraphing, or the layout of poems; choice of words, continuing motifs through the text; the use of symbol, sound, and colour where appropriate."*

It is therefore not clear how these respondents could have progressed through secondary school level to university education without being taught poetry and its special use of language. It is also not clear whether teachers themselves simply opted not to teach poetry due to their lack of knowledge of this literary genre as poetry is part of the literary curricula for school learners or whether the DoBE gives them an option to choose any literary genre that interests them as teachers. It would be interesting to see how these respondents as prospective teachers would cope with teaching poetry to their students if they themselves possess no knowledge in this type of literature.

Lastly, the respondents were asked to reveal aspects of the literature module which they enjoyed the most. To do this, this question was presented, *"Which aspect of the literature module have you found helpful and/or insightful as a prospective teacher?"*

The issue of language was further taken up by Grace who also attested, *"Language—it helps [me] as an individual to develop communication skills, such as reading...writing and presenting, listening and speaking, and language conventions which are all helpful in the outside world. [i] utilise them in our everyday world."*

Similarly, Johnny added that, *"The conventions and language structure as [they] involve all aspects of languages, in particular it can [provide] the solution [to the language challenges] that I faced in English..."*

Interestingly, it is important to also record that this is the same respondent who bemoaned that he found language in literature to be too difficult to understand, especially poetry, as it tends to employ certain poetic devices and other related elements. It is certainly not clear how what was once cited as a weakness has suddenly become a strength for Johnny.

Also, while Ben claims, on the one hand, that, *"[A] critical analysis of the story helped me to understand them critically and deeply"*, Suzy contends, on the other hand, that, *"The fact that I gained more knowledge in understanding literature by reading and reviewing short stories, analysing and responding positively on the questions set...helped me a lot."*

To the same question, Marx pointed out that, *"Class discussions, dialogues provide one with multiple perspectives of looking at issues and they promote a comprehensive development of reading, writing, listening and speaking."*

On the basis of the above, it is clear that literature has equipped most of the respondents more in terms of improving their language and effective communicative skills than empowering them with the knowledge and pedagogic practices necessary for critical thinking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: *How do students show their mastery of the knowledge and understanding of the role of literary art in education and society?*

The critical analysis of data revealed that the students showed their understanding of the role literature can play in education and society. To show this, the students were able to demonstrate in their responses that literature is capable of rep-

resenting social realities and, in the context of education, literature makes students understand how the teaching and learning of literary art could be used to deepen students' understanding of how certain practices and ideologies shape(d) the societies (Gamede 2024; Nkabinde 2024; Ndlovu 2024). This issue is also made clear by Ben in the following extract, "...literature is useful [in] address[ing] the social ills and the negative effects they have on people and the consequences that arise therefrom. So literature will help [learners] avoid such pitfalls and the resultant consequences [in order] to become responsible citizens."

Clearly, the quotations provided show students' mastery of knowledge and understanding of the relationship between literature and society, and how education could play an important role in equipping students with pedagogic practices necessary to empower learners to become responsible citizens who can contribute to the process of social transformation in societies. Similarly, Gamede (2024) argues that literature teachers should possess an adequate understanding of the role of literature in society. He further contends that once equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach literature in class, teachers would be in a better position to mould their learners into becoming critical citizens who would contribute meaningfully to the processes of social transformation in society.

Research Question 2: *What kind of knowledge do students manifest in their understanding of the role literary art can play in education and society?*

The findings of the investigation showed that the respondents possessed knowledge of literature in relation to its role in society. Notably, one of the respondents claimed that, "*The short stories that we were assigned [to do], for example, 'The Suit', helped me to use my imagination and go back in days of apartheid [and understand] how the neighbourhood used to live. Literary works helped me as a person to get informed about things [I] would not [have] know[n].*"

As such, the kind of knowledge the students at the university in Limpopo presented was such that they possessed knowledge that demonstrated, to a considerable extent, an understanding of the role literature plays both in education and in society. This suggests that the teaching of liter-

ary art at the university in Limpopo served as a means to foster the students' in-depth understanding of how certain ideologies influence the ways in which a community of readers is able to view the world. This knowledge has a lot in common with Ndlovu's (2024), Betti's (2020) and Gamede's (2024) understanding that literary art as a product of social reality cannot be divorced from a variety of human experiences which it seeks to represent.

Research Question 3: *How do students relate their knowledge of the role played by literary art in the teaching of critical literacy to learners?*

The findings of this study revealed that the respondents were able to relate their understanding of the role of literature in society, thereby demonstrating how literary art is able to assist learners to understand certain issues that take place in society. For example, Clara, one of the respondents, revealed that, "*[In] teaching gender violence I can [use] 'Beauty's Gift', where women had no say about their sexual life, [and] men used to take control of everything... Learners in class can be taught about gender issues... Also, literature engages learners to be open about these issues*". Another respondent claimed, "*...What I have learnt, especially in poetry and short stories has given and equipped me with much more knowledge that I can share with my learners once I am employed at school...*"

The students' understanding of the relationship between literature and society and how such a relationship could be of benefit to their learners showed that the respondents would use their acquired knowledge to equip learners with the necessary skills to be able deal with the issues raised in some literary texts once they are at school. Clearly, these respondents demonstrate their understanding of literature as a source for critical thinking, reasoning and problem solving—one that is necessary to instil in teachers and learners alike a sense of resolve and tenacity to challenge certain unjust practices, beliefs and socio-political ideologies that are prevalent in South Africa and beyond (Chauke 2023; Nkabinde 2024; Gamede 2024).

In determining the extent to which the pedagogic practices used in the teaching of literature to teacher-trainees at UiL could be said to be contributing to the processes towards social transformation, there is enough evidence to suggest

that the students have acquired an in-depth knowledge about the interrelationship between literature, society and education. There is also adequate evidence to suggest that the students have acquired knowledge of how literature could serve as an important tool in inculcating critical spirit, thinking and reasoning to their learners.

Based on the responses of the participants, one can arguably conclude that the pedagogic practices in the teaching of literature to teacher-trainees at UiL were capable of preparing students with knowledge and skills to empower learners to contribute to the process of social transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to determine whether the teaching of literary art to teacher-trainees at the university in Limpopo could be said to be preparing students with knowledge and pedagogic practices to empower learners with skills for social transformation. The paper argued that teachers must be seen as agents charged with the responsibility of facilitating the development of positive attitudes in learners towards different races, religions, sexualities, nationalities and ethnic groups. Furthermore, it insisted that teachers should be seen as trained citizens and professionals who possess knowledge and skills to provide an equitable critical pedagogy—a critical approach in their teaching practices that will allow learners in the classroom context to take a critical stance in society and give them the necessary tools and power to take social responsibility to improve their own lives and that of their community in general.

The results of the investigation showed that the students possessed adequate understanding of the relationship between literature and society. On the basis of the responses, one can arguably claim that the pedagogic practices in the teaching of literature to teacher-trainees at UiL were capable of preparing students with knowledge and pedagogic practices to empower learners with skills to contribute to the process of social transformation. Such a successful training of students could also be attributed to the full involvement of the academic staff both in the teaching of the literary content to students, and in the follow-up process (by the same academic staff) of assessing the students during teaching practice period in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, the author recognises that this study was limited to investigating whether the teaching of literary art to teacher-trainees at UiL could be said to be preparing students with knowledge and pedagogic practices to empower learners with skills for social transformation. As such, the study acknowledges that more research is needed to investigate whether these students can apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired at university in their teaching of literary art to learners in schools. The second recommendation is that while this study was limited only to the pedagogic practices in the teaching of literary art at the selected university, more research is needed to investigate how such pedagogic practices are implemented in other teacher-training institutions in line with the requirements of Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement issued by the Department of Basic Education. The third recommendation refers to the need for further investigation into the type of literary curricula and syllabi for teacher-trainees in institutions of higher learning. This will assist curriculum specialists responsible for the selection of literary texts for secondary school learners. The last recommendation refers to the need for further research to examine the effectiveness of the pedagogic practices in the teaching of literature at the school level in order to add to the knowledge base regarding how teachers make use of literature to inculcate critical thinking skills to contribute to social transformation.

NOTES

This research paper is developed from a doctoral dissertation completed by the author, Mabunda M.T., and submitted to the University of Johannesburg in 2021.

REFERENCES

- Achebe C 1960. *No Longer at Ease*. London: Penguin.
- Althusser L 1984. *Essays on Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Balfour JR 1998. *Between Reception and the Deep Blue Sea: The Formulation and Reception of an Experimental Syllabus for Language in KwaZulu-Natal Schools*. Conference Paper, Unpublished. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Benjamin W 1973. *Illuminations*. London: Jonathan Cape.

- Butler I 2023. *Integrating Language and Literature in English Studies: A Case Study of the English 100 Course at the University of North-West*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Betti MJ 2020. *A Comprehensive Introduction to Linguistics*. Diwaniya: Nippur.
- Chauke OR 2023. *The Stereotypical Portrayal of Female Characters in the Drama*. Master's Thesis, Unpublished. Thohoyandou: University of Venda.
- Cloete N 2008. Citizenship, Racism and Campus Culture. *Sunday Times, Weekly*, March 23, 2008. P. 6.
- Culler J 1997. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: University Press.
- Department of Basic Education 2011. *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement*. Pretoria: Government Publishers.
- Eagleton T 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Basil Blackwell.
- Fourie F 2008. Reflections on the Reitz Incident Implications. *Sunday Times, Weekly*, March 23, 2008. P. 7.
- Freire P 1993. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.
- Furst L 1992. *Realism*. New York: Longman.
- Fusch P, Fusch GE, Ness LR 2018. Denzin's paradigm shift: Revisiting triangulation in qualitative research. *Journal of Social Change*, 10(1): 2-16.
- Gamede SS 2024. *An Investigation of the Strategies Used in the Teaching of IsiZulu Home Language Poetry in the FET Phase in the Pine town District*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Richards Bay: University of Zululand.
- Gamede SS 2019. *Exploring Grade 10 isiZulu Home Language Teachers' Strategies When Teaching isiZulu Novels in The Pine Town District*. Master's Thesis, Unpublished. Richards Bay: University of Zululand.
- Hall M 2008. Looking for Consensus. *Sunday Times, Weekly*, March 23, 2008. P.14.
- Holmarsdottir HB 2005. *A Study of the Implementation of Language-in Education Policy (LiEP) in Three South African Schools*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Jansen J 2008. Bitter Knowledge. *Sunday Times, Weekly*, March 23, 2008. P. 9.
- Kissack M 2000. Context, Representation and Critique: Some reflections on the selection of literary syllabi. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 8(3): 365-377.
- Kohn A 2000. *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Mabunda MT 2009. *Literary Art and Social Critique: Teaching Literature for Social Transformation in South Africa*. Master's Thesis, Unpublished. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mabunda MT 2021. *Teachers' Role in Using Literature to Contribute to the Process of Social Transformation: A Case of Two Selected Universities in Post-apartheid South Africa*. Ph D Thesis, Unpublished. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.
- Marx K 1976. *A Reader*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Marx K 1975. *Communist Manifesto*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- McNeil LM 2000. *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Testing*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Mgwashu EM 2008. Academic literacy in the mother tongue: A pre-requisite for epistemological access. *Alternation*, 18(2): 159-178.
- Mones N 2007. *Lost in Translation: A Novel*. New York: Random House.
- Ndlovu T 2024. Putting the human at centre: Human Rights and Literary Studies in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 3(2): 107-122.
- Ndlovu ML 2010. Hanging. In: M Xaba (Ed.): *Our Words, Our Worlds: Writing on Black South African Women Poets*, 2018. Durban: UKZN Press.
- Nkabinde DN 2024. *Critical Pedagogy and the Teaching of Literature in Grade 11 English Home Language in Pretoria*. Master's Thesis, Unpublished. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.
- Nkosi ZP 2011. Exploring gender stereotypes in secondary school literary texts: A case of Jija Secondary School in Nkandla District, in South Africa. *South African Journal of African Languages*, 33(2): 133-142.
- Prinsloo J 2002. *Possibilities for Critical Literacy in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished: Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.
- Reid J 1982. *English Literature in South African Senior Schools: A Critique of Set Books*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Said E 1984. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. London: Faber.
- Singh R 2003. *Investigating and Developing an Approach to Critical Literacy by Using South African Short Stories*. Master's Thesis, Unpublished. Durban: University of Natal.
- Seepe S 2008. *Towards an African Renaissance: The Role and Vision for Higher Education*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Sheik A 2021. *Decolonisation and the African Dilemma Tale: A Feast of African Superheroes, Magicians and Beautiful Princess*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Shupak G 2015. *Literature for Social Change: Writing, Criticism and Teaching in Neo-Liberal Canada*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Guelph: University of Guelph.
- Van Damme P 2015. Inequality is Still Rife in South Africa's Education System. Politicsweb. From <<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=966273&sn=Marketingweb+detail>> (Retrieved on 18 March 2023).
- Wright J 1990. *Methods in Philosophy of Education*. London: Routledge.

Paper received for publication in December, 2024
 Paper accepted for publication in August, 2025