Reading Between the Lines: ESL Teachers' Insights on Literature-in-Action

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Abstract
While Literature in Action (LiA) recently introduced in Malaysian secondary schools to enhance student engagement and promote critical thinking through literature, there are limited studies conducted to examine teacher perspectives and implementation challenges. This mixed-method study addresses this gap by exploring the perspectives as well as the challenges faced by English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in secondary schools in Selangor, Malaysia on the recent implementation of LiA. Through the incorporation of questionnaires with Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, as well as semi-structured interviews, this study discovered that educators held contrasting opinions regarding the efficacy and the challenges of LiA implementation. While the majority of the participants acknowledged the LiA potentials to enhance student engagement and critical thinking in their classrooms, several cited practical challenges namely time constraints, limited resources, LiA text suitability and lack of assessment framework. The study also found the belief that LiA curriculum is not subject to examination contributed to students' lack of interest in LiA and resulted in teachers' emphasis on areas directly relevant to examination. Further studies can be conducted identify comprehensive strategies to address these problems and optimise the integration of LiA in ESL lessons. This will establish a conducive learning environment that encourages students' linguistic growth and appreciation for literature.
Keywords: Teaching Literature, Literature in Action (LiA), ESL Classroom, English Literature, Challenges

Introduction
Literature, as a fundamental aspect of cultural legacy, provides a vast reservoir of information that enables learners to delve into the traditions, rituals, and linguistic norms of a particular language (Carter & Long, 1991). The integration of technology into the teaching methods of foreign or second language (L2) education has been widely acknowledged as a driving force for language learning and the enhancement of language skills in many educational settings worldwide. The inclusion of literature in the Malaysian English Language syllabus in 2000 has initially elicited diverse reactions from educators, parents, and students. Nevertheless, a study carried out by Vethamani (2007) revealed a significant change in attitudes, indicating an enhancement in perceptions among educators and students after the thorough implementation of the programme.

The introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into the English language syllabus has brought significant changes in the integration of the literature component. Notably, Literature in Action (henceforth LiA) has been incorporated into the curriculum alongside other language skills lessons, marking a departure from its previous independent component status. Moreover, modifications in examination formats, where the literature component is no longer evaluated in isolation, underscore the evolving landscape of English language pedagogy in Malaysia.

Therefore, this present study is aimed to explore the answers for the following questions:
1. What are the perceptions of ESL teachers towards the recent integration of Literature-in-Action (LiA) in ESL classrooms?
2. What are the challenges faced by ESL teachers during the recent implementation of Literature-in-Action (LiA) in ESL classrooms, in terms of both practical and pedagogical obstacles?

Through the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, this research seeks to elicit comprehensive understandings of the experiences, perceptions, and issues faced by ESL secondary school educators in Selangor, Malaysia during the implementation of LiA, thus contributing to the enhancement of ESL teaching practices. Moreover, the results of this study have the potential to provide valuable insights for policymakers in setting the future direction of LiA in the educational system of Malaysia.

Literature Review
Models in Teaching literature

The power of literature in motivating students to learn English has been emphasised in numerous studies. According to Amer (2003), students' English language skills developed through literature can cultivate empathy and heighten critical thinking abilities. This notion is further supported by Azmi et al (2020); Mahzan et al (2020), whose studies highlight English literature's potential to improve language proficiency, critical and creative thinking as well as cultural awareness.

Educators can now draw upon three innovative models which were introduced in Carter and Long's (1991) seminal work: the Language Model, the Cultural Model, and the Personal Growth Model. Each of these three models offers distinct strategies that can assist to promote student learning, increase their engagement, and ultimately, enrich pedagogical practices to make the most of literature instruction.

The significant needs of language development and enhancement of lexical competence among students, especially in relation to literary works, are greatly emphasised in the first model, the Language Model, which aims to improve the learners' linguistic proficiency by introducing them to extensive and elaborate expressions found in the works of literature. The exposure to diversified language structures and vocabulary used in the literary texts will assist them in improving their linguistic capacity and language ability.

In contrast, the Cultural Model, which places primary emphasis on the cultural understanding and cross-cultural discussions presented in the literary texts, facilitates students' exploration of the socio-cultural backgrounds within the literary works, leading to a more profound understanding of human experiences and cultural customs depicted in the literature.

Meanwhile, the main focus of the Personal Growth Model is to seek enhancement of personal reflection and emotional development of the learners by promoting active

engagement with literature. Unlike the other two models, this model inspires the students to analyse and explore the emotional and psychological elements of literary characters and universal human themes as a way to foster empathy, self-awareness, personal development and emotional intelligence in students.

The three models put forth by Carter and Long (1991) offer a solid theoretical ground for the educators to construct learners-centred literature-based teaching strategies that are responsive to individual needs and goals of the students. By combining elements from various models, educators can design dynamic and holistic literature programmes that hold the potential to significantly enhance language development, cultivate cultural awareness, and foster personal growth in students.

Teaching Literature in Malaysia

The inclusion of the literary component into Malaysia's education system has experienced multiple changes since its introduction. English literature has been incorporated into the educational policy of the National Education Blueprint (2013-2025) in Malaysia as a way to improve language acquisition among the students. Aligning with the national goal of English fluency for all secondary school graduates, this curriculum change prioritises increased exposure to the language, creating a more immersive learning environment, which has the potential to improve student competence, and can be fostered through the integration of literature alongside other traditional language skills lessons.

As described in the Malaysian KSSR curriculum by Kaur and Mahmor (2014), the English literature component at the secondary level serves as a valuable tool to enhance language learning in Malaysian classrooms, specifically emphasising on the study of small 'l' literature.

According to Nurul Farehah & Mohd Sallehuddin (2018), an elaborate reorganisation of English language instruction has facilitated the establishment of the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC) in 2013 that ultimately expedited the adoption of the CEFR framework in Malaysia's education system.

In 2017, the Ministry of Education (MOE) collaborated with Cambridge English, United Kingdom, to develop the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC), to ensure its alignment with the CEFR's emphasis on learner-centred approaches. The SBELC prioritises the integration of the LiA component which encompasses a variety of literary genres, including short stories, poems, dramas, graphic novels, and novels, alongside essential language skills like reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar. LiA's objective is to focus on a diverse range of texts to cultivate a love for reading and stimulate critical thinking skills among students, ultimately fostering a deeper connection with language and literature.

Despite LiA being implemented since 2017, no changes have been made to the selection of literary texts for secondary students. However, starting in 2019, the literature components are no longer assessed in major examinations, including Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) and Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). Instead, students' linguistic competence in reading, writing, listening, and speaking will be evaluated.

Challenges in Teaching Literature

Previous studies have found that teachers encountered numerous persistent challenges faced when teaching literature, especially in Malaysian schools. It is imperative for these challenges which include several aspects such as teacher-related concerns, selection of texts, learning environment, time limitations, and alignment with the curriculum and available

resources, to be addressed and understood comprehensively in order to enhance the effectiveness of literature instruction in ESL classrooms.

A number of studies (Ukat & Hanita, 2022; Faiza & Azlina, 2020; Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Dahiru, 2020; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Yahya, 2017; Siti Salina et al., 2014) agreed that one of the main challenges in teaching literature is teachers' incompetence. Teachers play a crucial role in developing students' language proficiency, understanding cultural references, and enhancing abilities to do critical analysis through literature; hence, insufficient training may impede their ability to teach literature effectively. Research conducted by Tayib & Hasan (2020) and Yahya (2017) suggested that the lack of professional training in teaching literature resulted in a large number of teachers with a limited comprehension of literary materials and instructional methods. Moreover, some educators experience difficulties concerning their confidence and capacity to provide effective education, leading to the exacerbation of the existing problem (Faiza & Azlina, 2020; Yeoh et al., 2018).

Another major obstacle in literature training is the presence of ineffective and outdated teaching methods (Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Dahiru, 2020; Siti Salina et al., 2014). Similarly, Rochman (2018); Yahya (2017) in their respective studies have found that the use of traditional teacher-centred learning methods in Malaysian classrooms inhibits participation and hampers critical thinking among the students. Teachers' dependence on conventional teaching approaches hinders the development of students' individual traits and potential, ultimately creating an exam-oriented rather than exploratory learning environment (Faiza & Azlina, 2020; Harwati & Asyraf, 2019).

There are some considerable difficulties in selecting appropriate literary texts, specifically in terms of their linguistic complexity and cultural significance (Gatdula et al., 2022; Dahiru, 2020; Harwati & Asyraf, 2019). The learners from diverse backgrounds who are unable to connect with the literary texts may feel disinterested and face challenges in understanding (Yahya, 2017). Moreover, the complex vocabulary used in literary texts may surpass the students' lexical proficiency, hence impacting their understanding and enjoyment of the subject (Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016).

Farhanah & Hadina (2022); Ugwu (2022) also found that the unconducive learning environment often jeopardises the effectiveness of literature education, for instance overcrowded classrooms or inadequate resources. A lack of proper infrastructure, including poorly equipped libraries, will restrict access to valuable learning materials, whereas large class sizes will impair the ability to provide individualised attention and customised instruction (Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Dahiru, 2020).

The lack of time allotted for teaching literature is another major obstacle that prevents both comprehensive curriculum covering and the implementation of innovative instructional techniques (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Ain Suraya & Norhanim, 2021). Tayib & Hassan (2020) observed that due the limited time, teachers frequently struggle to meet the curriculum demands with effective pedagogical practices, which leave negative impacts on students' learning experiences.

Conclusively, to effectively tackle the intricate problems related to literary instruction in Malaysian schools, all-encompassing solutions such as curriculum creation, resource supply, teacher training, and facility enhancement must be put into practice. Through identification and mitigation of these challenges, educators can cultivate a more favourable educational setting that supports students' appreciation of literature and enhances their critical thinking abilities.

Due to its ability to illustrate the social and cultural context of the learning environment, socio-constructivism theory provides an indispensable framework for comprehending the dynamics of teaching literature in ESL classrooms. According to this approach, interactions with the environment and other people co-construct knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). This theoretical perspective is closely in line with the issues observed in the teaching of literature, specifically in Malaysian ESL classes, where the intersection of cultural variety and language complexity is common.

In the socio-constructivist framework, the teaching of literature has transformed is more than just imparting the knowledge as it evolves into a collaborative activity that involves negotiation, conversation, and meaning-making between the teachers and the students (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Teachers are responsible for scaffolding students' understanding by exposing them to relevant contexts and chances to generate interactions, rather than just traditionally convey the knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). This approach helps to address the teacher-centred challenges such as incompetence and inappropriate teaching methods since it encourages the teachers to engage in reflective practice and pursue continuous learning (Siti Salina et al., 2014).

The socio-constructivism theory, three models in the literature, and past study findings have been drawn as the foundation in constructing the conceptual framework for this study. Since socio-constructivism theory emphasises on collaborative learning and the co-construction of information achieved through social interaction, it provides a valuable framework for effective literary instruction in this study; meanwhile due to its unique viewpoints of effective pedagogical methods, the three approaches for teaching literature were included to strengthen this framework.
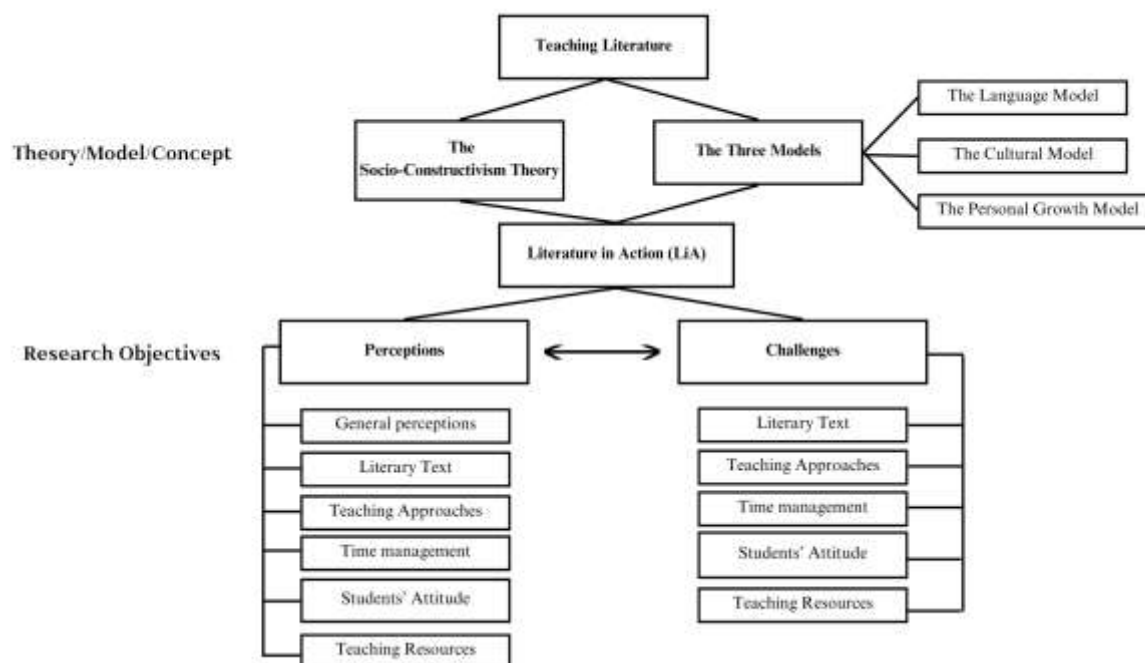
Figure 1: *Conceptual framework*

Methodology
Research Design
To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and perceptions regarding LiA integration in ESL classrooms in secondary schools in Selangor, this study employed a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and the quantitative data garnered from questionnaires, will then be compared, which will enable data triangulation that will enhance the understanding of the findings.

To ensure the questionnaire passed the validity and reliability testing, a number of precautions had been applied. It has also undergone intensive reviews for optimal readability.

Sampling Methods
Fifty ESL teachers with a diversity of backgrounds, teaching experiences and levels of expertise from various secondary schools in Selangor have been invited to take part of this study through purposive snowball sampling. This method starts by contacting a small, eligible group and then grows by means of their recommendations, as explained by (Parker et al., 2018). The sampling for this study consists of educators who are currently teaching ESL to lower secondary in Selangor to maintain study context relevance.

Data Collection
As suggested by Honorene (2017), this study opted for methodological triangulation through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires as the primary data collection methods as it aims to further elucidate the research objectives. Data was collected in two phases where in the first stage, five ESL teachers were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to have detailed discussions regarding their personal views, obstacles, and experiences in integrating LiA. The semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in exploring emerging topics and eliciting detailed responses from participants.

During the second round of data collection, 50 ESL teachers were invited to answer a quantitative survey which was administered through Google Forms in order to learn about their views, experiences, and practices regarding LiA implementation. The questionnaire was made of 28 items. Five of them were used to gain demographic information of the respondents, 19 of them were Likert-Scale items and the rest of the items were open-ended questions. Of the 19 Likert-scale items, three were used to gauge the general opinions of the teachers regarding the implementation of LiA while the remaining items explored specific challenges encountered during instruction. These challenges encompassed literary text selection (3 items), teaching methodologies (3 items), time management (3 items), student attitudes (3 items), and teaching resources (4 items).

Data Analysis

The process of reviewing the data collected for this study was conducted in two phases. In the first stage, the audio-recorded interview was transcribed and a thematic analysis has been meticulously performed to find common themes across all research objectives, shedding light on the difficulties encountered by the teachers during the LiA implementation in their ESL classrooms. The data was then used to guide the construction of questionnaires.

The quantitative data from the Likert-scale responses in this study underwent descriptive analysis using SPSS where the percentage of Likert-scale items were calculated to understand the teachers' perceptions and challenges in LiA implementation.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study was able to find a more thorough and detailed understanding of the difficulties and perspectives related to the integration of LiA in ESL instruction.

Findings

This section presents the key findings from the study. The analysis begins with teachers' general perceptions towards LiA implementation. Next, the discussion will delve into the distinctive challenges that teachers face during LiA implementation. These issues are divided into themes: literary text selection, teaching approaches, time management, student attitudes, and teaching resources. The data will be yielded from two sources: the questionnaire and qualitative data collected through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews.

General Perceptions of Literature in Action (LiA)
Table 1
Descriptive Analysis of Teachers' General Perceptions of LiA integration

Item statistic

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
I believe LiA can be an effective approach for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).	3.70	.463	50
LiA activities make learning English more enjoyable for my students.	3.90	.544	50
Integrating LiA into my lessons has a positive impact on the overall learning experience.	3.50	.505	50

Table 1 shows the quantitative results obtained from three Likert-scale items that examined the teachers' general perceptions of LiA integration in ESL classrooms. Seventy percent of the respondents agreed that LiA can be an effective approach in teaching ESL while 30% remained neutral ($\bar{x}$=3.70). Eighty percent of the respondents agreed that LiA activities increase the enjoyment of learning English for their students while 20% remained neutral ($\bar{x}$=3.90). With an average score of 3.50, half of the respondents indicated a positive impact on the overall learning experience due to the integration of LiA into ESL lessons, while the remaining half remained neutral.

The thematic analysis results of the open-ended questionnaires and interviews found a variety of perspectives, ranging from recognition of the difficulties in implementing LiA to enthusiastic support for it. Teachers highlighted that LiA has potential to enhance the learning experience with some, like Teacher A, observed increased student engagement in creative and critical thinking when students are allowed to explore texts with more freedom and creativity. Additionally, some teachers also viewed LiA as a successful strategy for increasing students' engagement in literary materials and enjoyment with reading.

However, there were some teachers who raised several practical concerns in regards to LiA implementation. Teacher S, for instance, recognised the potential of LiA to promote student participation but faced challenges due to time constraints and the needs to fulfil other professional obligations. Similarly, while Teacher J also acknowledged the LiA's ability to expose the students with a wide variety of literary experiences beyond textbooks, she also grappled with limited time for implementation. Another teacher highlighted the inherent difficulties in ensuring full student participation during LiA activities. Overall, teachers did not express negativity towards LiA itself. These findings suggest that the practical challenges need to be addressed to ensure a successful implementation of LiA.

Perceptions and Challenges Encountered Regarding Literary Texts
Table 2
Descriptive Analysis of Perceptions and Challenges Encountered Regarding Literary Texts
Item statistic

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
The LiA texts are age-appropriate and relevant to my students' interests.	3.30	.647	50
The vocabulary level of the LiA texts is generally suitable for my students.	3.24	.756	50
I find the cultural references in the LiA texts to be appropriate for my students.	3.10	.840	50

Table 2 illustrates the quantitative findings derived from the Likert-scale items. Forty percent of the respondents agreed that the LiA texts are age-appropriate and relevant to their students' interests, while 50% remained neutral and 10% disagreed with the statement ($\bar{x}$=3.30). Forty percent of the participants concurred that the vocabulary complexity in LiA texts aligns well with their students' proficiency levels, while 40% maintained a neutral stance, and 20% expressed disagreement with this assertion ($\bar{x}$=3.20). While 40% of the respondents agreed that the cultural references in the LiA texts are appropriate for their students, 30% of them disagreed and the rest chose to take a neutral stance ($\bar{x}$=3.10).

Upon examining the data obtained from interviews and open-ended questions, the findings showed a wide spectrum of perspectives from teachers regarding the choice of LiA texts. Several teachers commended and expressed a preference for the current LiA literary texts, citing that they are more relevant to students' lives and have the capacity to spark interesting conversations. Others highlighted the texts' appropriateness for their students' proficiency levels. However, some educators expressed their concerns about the difficulties encountered by their less proficient students in understanding some of the language and cultural references in the LiA texts. While one teacher acknowledged the value of the texts, they expressed limitations due to time constraints. Interestingly, another educator emphasised the broader impact that the current literary selection has on language learning, citing student engagement with themes and perspectives that foster personal development and a deeper understanding of the world.

Perceptions and Challenges Encountered Regarding Teaching Methods

Table 3
Descriptive Analysis of Perceptions and Challenges Encountered Regarding Teaching Methods Item statistic

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
LiA activities encourage active participation and interaction among my students to facilitate their language development	3.40	.670	50
LiA lessons allow me to promote creative and critical thinking skills in my students through the cultural references.	4.00	.452	50
My students relate literary texts to their own experiences and understanding.	3.50	.678	50

Table 3 presents the quantitative outcomes derived from the Likert-scale items. Forty percent of the respondents agreed that LiA activities promote active participation and interaction among students, contributing to their language development, while 50% remained neutral and 10% disagreed (x̄=3.40). Moreover, 90% of the participants acknowledged that LiA lessons provide them with the chance to nurture students' creative and critical thinking abilities through cultural references, while 10% remained neutral (x̄=4.00). Similarly, 60% of respondents acknowledged that students connect literary texts with their own experiences and understanding, while 30% remained neutral and 10% of the respondents disagreed (x̄=3.50).

Through insights gleaned from semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, it became evident that teachers hold diverse perspectives and adopt varied approaches when employing teaching methods in LiA, corresponding to the language, cultural, and personal growth models of teaching literature. While the majority of the respondents chose to focus on the cultural aspects of literary texts to encourage students' input on cultural elements within the texts, some, like Teacher S, prioritised language development through LiA which is in line with the language model. Interviews highlighted how students deeply engage with the attitudes and viewpoints depicted in the texts, contributing to the development of their self-awareness, moral values, and broader worldview. Furthermore, teachers emphasised the value of LiA lessons in fostering students' creative and critical thinking skills through cultural references, aligning with the objectives of the cultural model.

However, some of the teachers raised concerns regarding LiA assessment as they expressed the difficulties that they faced in evaluating English proficiency solely through LiA activities due to the lack of specific assessment criteria and alignment with CEFR standards. The absence of a formal assessment framework for LiA further added to these concerns. While teachers have the freedom to mix and match the literature teaching approaches according to their preference, there is a need to address the evaluative challenges for a more effective LiA integration.

Perceptions and Challenges Encountered Regarding Time Management
Table 4
Descriptive Analysis of Perceptions and Challenges Encountered Regarding Time Management

Item statistic

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
The current curriculum allows enough time for me to effectively implement LiA activities.	2.20	1.18	50
I don't have to spend a lot of preparation time to integrate LiA into my lessons due to the available resources and training.	2.70	.789	50
Managing the time required for LiA activities alongside other curriculum demands is a challenge.	4.00	1.28	50

Table 4 above illustrates quantitative findings based on responses received from the Likert-scale items in the questionnaire. Only a minority of the respondents (20%) agreed that the current curriculum allows them to effectively implement LiA activities in their lessons while the majority (60%) expressed their disagreement with the statement ($\bar{x}$=2.20). Similarly, only a small proportion (20%) of teachers agreed that available resources and training save their preparation time for LiA integration while half of the respondents (50%) disagreed ($\bar{x}$=2.70). Most notably, 70% of the teachers agreed that it is challenging for them to manage the time required for LiA activities alongside other curriculum demands ($\bar{x}$=4.0).

The qualitative data yielded from semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions elucidated teachers' significant challenges that hindered effective time management during LiA implementation. The findings identified various factors that contributed to time constraints, particularly the pressure to complete the syllabus within a specified timeframe and the demands of other ongoing programmes and examinations. Despite their positive perceptions towards the integration of LiA, the teachers reported that they struggled with time management as proper preparation is needed to create engaging LiA lessons. In addition, inadequate teaching resources also resulted in the exacerbation of this time management issue. Some educators claimed that busy schedules and being away to attend courses limit their chances to effectively integrate LiA in their ESL lessons.

It can be concluded that while the teachers recognised the potential benefits of LiA in promoting student engagement and interaction, they are still unable to allocate sufficient time for these activities due to competing priorities. This finding underscores the critical need for addressing time constraints and providing adequate support to teachers to facilitate successful LiA implementation.

Perceptions and Challenges Encountered in terms of Students' Attitude
Table 5
Descriptive Analysis of Perceptions and Challenges Encountered in terms of Students' Attitude
Item statistic

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
My students seem more motivated to learn English through LiA activities.	3.60	.495	50
LiA activities have a positive impact on students' engagement in the classroom.	3.50	.678	50
Students with lower proficiency levels struggle to participate effectively in LiA activities.	4.50	8.14	50

Table 5 summarises the outcomes from the quantitative items in the questionnaire regarding the challenges encountered by teachers due to students' attitudes towards LiA integration. A majority of the teachers (60%) agreed that LiA activities helped to increase students' motivation in learning English, with 40% of them choosing to maintain a neutral stance ($\bar{x}$=3.6). Additionally, 60% of the respondents concurred that LiA activities have a positive impact on students' engagement in the classroom, with only 10% disagreed with the statement and 30% of the respondents remained neutral ($\bar{x}$=3.5). Most notably, an overwhelming majority (80%) agreed that students with lower proficiency levels encountered challenges that hindered their active participation in LiA activities, while the rest of the respondents maintained a neutral stance ($\bar{x}$=4.5).

The qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, revealed that teachers acknowledged students' engagement and enjoyment of LiA lessons due to its creative and interactive nature. They claimed that their students specifically expressed their enthusiasm in LiA activities that give them the opportunity to share their opinions and engage in non-conventional learning activities such as role-playing or games. However, educators also pointed out the need to create more dynamic and exciting lessons to sustain student interest, which demands a lot of time and effort. Some of the respondents also expressed their concerns regarding the decline of students' motivation as they struggle to comprehend the texts, posing a challenge in effective literature teaching. This is particularly evident among students with lower proficiency levels, whose active participation may be hindered due to the weak lexical grasp. The absence of LiA contents in examination also contributed to the waning of students' interest in literary texts as they perceive it as something that they do not need to pay attention to. While the educators emphasised the importance of student engagement in creating a dynamic classroom environment, they identified limited materials, time constraints, and students' comprehension difficulties as crucial challenges that need to be addressed first. Despite these challenges, teachers recognized that LiA is capable of enhancing student learning experiences and thus, expressed their commitment to addressing these issues to improve the effectiveness of their instruction.

Perceptions and Challenges Encountered Regarding Teaching Resources

Table 6

Descriptive Analysis of Perceptions and Challenges Encountered in terms of Teaching Resources

Item statistic

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
I have access to sufficient teaching materials and resources to support LiA implementation.	2.50	1.21	50
The available LiA resources are well-designed and easy to adapt for my specific needs.	2.50	.931	50
I received sufficient training or professional development opportunities for implementing LiA in my ESL Classroom.	2.30	1.11	50
I would find pre-designed LiA activities and instructional materials helpful.	4.00	.904	50

The quantitative findings in Table 6 sheds light on the perceptions and challenges faced by the teachers in terms of teaching resources. Sixty percent of the respondents disagreed that they have sufficient access to teaching materials and resources to support LiA implementation, with only 20% of them agreeing while the remaining 20% chose to stay neutral ($\bar{x}=2.5$). Similarly, the majority (60%) of the respondents disagreed with perceived adequacy and suitability of available LiA resources, while 20% agreed and 20% remained neutral ($\bar{x}=2.5$). More than half of the respondents (60%) disagreed with the statement that they have received sufficient training or professional development opportunities specifically for LiA implementation, with merely 20% of them agreeing ($\bar{x}=2.3$). A substantial majority of the respondents (80%) believed that they would benefit from pre-designed LiA activities and instructional materials while another 10% of them disagreed ($\bar{x}=4.0$).

Based on the qualitative findings garnered through the open-ended items and semi-structured interviews, many teachers expressed their concerns regarding the lack of training and briefings that are tailored to LiA implementation in classrooms. Consequently, due to the absence of teaching materials and training opportunities, their ability to effectively integrate LiA activities are hindered. Some teachers claimed that the lack of support and resources required them to "wing" their literature instructions. Another notable challenge faced by the teachers is the difficulty to find reference books and other materials, leading some to abandon the approach altogether. Several respondents expressed their hope to be exposed to comprehensive training and resources as well as materials that align with the syllabus and lesson themes to facilitate the effective implementation of LiA. They suggested that more teachers will be encouraged to conduct LiA lessons if they are able to find readily available materials such as audio-visual aids, workbooks, modules, and prepared lesson plans tailored to LiA.

Discussion

This study investigates the potential of LiA in enhancing English language learning experiences for students in Malaysian ESL classrooms. This section will explore the perceived

benefits of LiA, along with the practical challenges teachers face in implementing it effectively. Finally, the study proposes solutions to address these challenges to assist teachers leverage LiA's full potential.

Positive Perceptions and Impact on Learning

The majority of the respondents in this study acknowledged the potential of LiA activities to create more enjoyable literature lessons and contribute to enhanced overall English learning experience for their students. The heightened student engagement in creative and critical thinking activities during LiA lessons suggest that LiA, upon implementation, is able to achieve its objectives, particularly in stimulating students' critical thinking skills. This is in line with the findings found in the studies by (Azmi et al., 2020; Mahzan et al., 2020).

The study found a mix of teaching approaches to LiA instruction. While most teachers integrated cultural model, some prioritised language development, and others combined all three teaching models.

These findings also align with the socio-constructivist perspective, where learning is viewed as a collaborative process that encourages interaction and meaning-making (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). As a conclusion, LiA holds a promising potential to serve as a valuable tool in tackling the common challenge of student disengagement often faced in traditional literature instruction, as suggested by (Yahya, 2017).

Challenges and Considerations

While the benefits of LiA are acknowledged by the majority of the respondents, some teachers raised a few practical concerns in regards to its implementation in ESL classrooms in Malaysia. The results in Table 2 and Table 4 clearly indicate that the time constraint is the most prevalent problem that needs to be addressed in LiA integration. Interviews and quantitative findings reported that the teachers struggled to manage the time required for LiA activities alongside other curriculum demands, which made it very challenging for them to fully utilise LiA's potential, leading to restricted opportunities for thorough exploration of literary texts. The findings highlight three main time constraints-related challenges that prevent teachers' effective implementation of LiA: 1) attending mandatory professional development, 2) the time investment required for creating lesson plans and materials, and 3) the limited time allocated for ESL lessons within the curriculum. These findings resonate with previous research on time constraints as a barrier to effective literature instruction in Malaysian classrooms (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Ain Suraya & Norhanim, 2021).

Another prominent challenge encountered by teachers is insufficient teaching resources to support the implementation of LiA in ESL classrooms. The respondents reported that they never attended any training related to LiA and teaching materials are scarce. This discovery is consistent with findings from prior research that emphasise the insufficiency of teacher training and resources as a hindrance to effective literature education (Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Yahya, 2017). Some teachers expressed a desire to have more readily available teaching resources, preferably the ones that are related to the current syllabus, to enhance the efficiency of LiA preparation.

On the other hand, data obtained from this study showed mixed feedback regarding the selection of LiA texts. While some teachers preferred current LiA texts due to their increased relatability to students' lives, some others cited challenges in terms of the texts' vocabulary selection and cultural references, particularly for lower proficiency students.

These findings highlight the importance of considering cultural relevance and linguistic complexity when selecting literary texts, a recurring challenge in Malaysian ESL classrooms as reported by (Gatdula et al., 2022; Dahiru, 2020).

The lack of a formal assessment framework specifically designed for LiA activities was another concern raised by some teachers. They expressed anxieties about evaluating English proficiency through LiA lessons, suggesting a need for a more comprehensive evaluation approach that aligns with established language proficiency standards. Apart from that, formal assessment frameworks can also help the teachers to assess the efficacy of their LiA lessons.

Finally, the study identified student interest, attitude, and engagement in LiA lessons as another noteworthy challenge. This appeared to be impacted by the prevailing perception that LiA content would not be assessed in examinations. Consequently, teachers reported that they gave greater attention to language skills like grammar and writing compared to LiA as they view these language skills as a more effective supplementary activity to enhance learning diversity given the de-emphasis of literature in examinations. This is consistent with multiple research that have shown that teachers' teaching approaches are greatly affected by the examination (Omar, 2017; Naser & Aziz, 2017; Ghazali et al., 2009;) as the teachers typically emphasise and concentrate on teaching the students with the goal of preparing them for examinations. As a result, students redirected their attention towards finishing the syllabus and strengthening components linked to exams. This discovery highlights the dominant exam-focused environment in ESL classrooms, where topics that are not immediately evaluated in exams tend to be given a lower priority.

Addressing the Challenges

To ensure effective LiA implementation, the challenges encountered by the teachers need to be addressed. Due to the limited time allocation for LiA activities, it is imperative to offer teachers professional development opportunities on LiA integration and classroom management practices to better prepare them to navigate time constraints more effectively.

Other than that, the selection of LiA texts should cater to the linguistic proficiency across all levels of students. This may involve offering a variety of texts with varying degrees of complexity and cultural references. Additionally, developing teacher training programs on selecting and adapting LiA texts can further enhance their ability to choose appropriate materials for their students.

In addition, a reliable evaluation system for LiA activities that is consistent with recognised language competence requirements needs to be developed to serve as a guideline. This framework should contain a variety of assessment methodologies that go beyond traditional testing formats to accurately quantify the different learning outcomes promoted by LiA activities.

To effectively address resource and training gaps for LiA, a comprehensive approach is needed. This includes in-depth training on LiA pedagogy, techniques, and evaluation, empowering teachers to integrate LiA confidently. Additionally, a well-curated resource bank with lesson plans, materials, and LiA texts would provide crucial support for successful implementation.

Conclusion

For ESL teachers, including Literature-in-Action (LiA) into ESL classes offers both great potential and substantial problems. This study explored ESL teachers' perceptions of LiA

implementation in secondary schools in Selangor, Malaysia, shedding light on various aspects of its effectiveness and feasibility.

This study's sample generally had favourable views about LiA integration, with the majority of them acknowledging that teaching literature through LiA helped to improve students' English learning experiences. LiA lessons have been shown to improve students' critical and creative thinking abilities, which increases their interest in and enjoyment of studying English. These findings align with the socio-constructivist perspective, emphasising collaborative learning processes and interaction in the classroom (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Additionally, LiA was recognized as a means to make literature teaching more enjoyable, potentially creating a more conducive learning environment for students.

However, there were a few challenges identified in this study, alongside the positive perceptions. Time constraints emerged as a predominant issue, with teachers struggling to balance LiA activities with other curriculum demands. This finding resonates with previous research highlighting time constraints as a barrier to effective literature instruction in Malaysian classrooms (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Ain Suraya & Norhanim, 2021). Additionally, concerns were raised about the selection of LiA texts, particularly regarding cultural relevance and linguistic complexity, as well as the absence of a formal assessment framework tailored for LiA activities.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders. Efficient time management strategies within the curriculum, coupled with professional development opportunities for teachers on LiA integration and classroom management practices, can enhance the effective implementation of LiA. Moreover, prioritising cultural relevance and linguistic proficiency in the selection of LiA texts, along with providing comprehensive training programs for teachers, can further optimise LiA delivery.

In conclusion, while LiA holds promise for enriching ESL education, its successful implementation hinges on overcoming the identified challenges. By addressing these challenges through strategic interventions and collaborative efforts, educators can harness the full potential of LiA to enhance students' English proficiency, critical thinking skills, and overall learning experience.

Limitation

This study is limited by its sample size and focuses on a specific region in Malaysia. Future research could explore teachers' perceptions of LiA in other parts of the country and investigate student perspectives on their experiences with LiA activities. Additionally, a longitudinal study could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of LiA on student learning outcomes.

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