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Teachers' pedagogical approaches and learners' engagement with English literary texts in Secondary Schools, Johannesburg West District

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ABSTRACT

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, it has been the objective of the Department of Basic Education to provide equal, quality education to redress the disparity that characterised the past apartheid government. According to existing literature, quality education can be achieved if teaching and assessment focus on guiding learners to engage critically with knowledge. This study was conducted to explore the pedagogical and assessment strategies used by teachers while teaching Grade 12 English literature in First Additional Language at secondary schools. The aim was to find out if such pedagogical and assessment strategies used can promote learners' critical engagement with content to promote critical thinking skills. As the study is qualitative, it relied on the outcomes based on the value of data collected through observing teachers and learners during English literary lessons, as well as on interviews conducted with selected learners and the teachers to obtain supplementary data to establish perspectives on the teaching and learning of English literary texts in relation to the development of critical thinking in learners. Data collected from the three secondary schools revealed that while the teachers believed that teaching English literature is valuable, the reading aloud instructional strategy and lower-order questions used in teaching English literary texts was contrary to this optimism. This is because according to literature, this combination alone cannot promote higher-order thinking which indicates critical thinking skill. In addition, the uncritical engagement with texts as observed could not help the learners to relate to content to the point of applying the knowledge gained in the English literary classes to other subjects offered in the English language, as well as in their real lives. This means that teaching and learning in the public secondary schools in South Africa still focus on comprehension and the uncritical acquisition of basic knowledge. This also implies that the basic education in the country will continue to produce learned individuals who lack critical thinking skills and, in the larger scheme of things, will continue to lead lives of mediocrity. The fact that the findings from all the three secondary schools revealed a persistent lack of development of learners' critical thinking skills suggests that this problem is widespread across the basic education sector in the Johannesburg area. The recommendation from this study is that teachers should use learner-centred pedagogical strategies, critical reading and higher-order questions to help learners to

think and appreciate English literary content which is viewed as a reflection of society. In this way, learners can become independent thinkers capable of tackling challenges that they face in their communities. The critical acquisition of knowledge and skills would not only improve the quality of education in South Africa, but would also uplift learners' standard of life because a nation that encourages quality education prospers in all areas needed for survival.

Keywords:
Pedagogical Strategies; Assessment Strategies; Critical Thinking; Critical Engagement; Higher-Order Thinking; Lower-Order Thinking; English Literature; English FAL.