**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ KNOWLEDGE OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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# INTRODUCTION

English literature is now an entrenched part of the senior secondary school curriculum in Sri Lanka. The subject has been accorded varying levels of importance by policy makers at different times. It occupied an important position during colonial times but later waned in status until it was removed from the curriculum in the early 1970s. It re-entered the secondary school curriculum in 1990. This absence and later resurgence brought with it its own unique set of challenges, chief among them being the teacher competencies of those who were going to deliver the subject. Benton and Brumfit (1993) in a very early appraisal of literature teaching in ESL contexts observed that teachers may have varying levels of expertise and that teaching conditions would be extremely diverse. Despite these initial concerns there have not been many studies relating to the teaching of English literature and the professional knowledge of the teachers who are involved in the delivery of the subject.

There are many conceptions of teacher knowledge and the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) developed by Shulman (1987) has continued to be influential. Shulman (1987) sees PCK as an important concept of the professional knowledge base of teachers and defines it as unique amalgam of “… the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented and adapted to the diverse interest and abilities of learners and presented for instruction”(Shulman, 1987, p.8). PCK comprises many elements which are knowledge of instructional strategies, orientations to the subject, knowledge of students and knowledge of the curriculum. This research which is part of a larger study on the professional knowledge base of teachers of English literature in the Sri Lankan context, using Shulman’s framework focuses on one particular aspect of this knowledge base, which is the knowledge of instructional strategies in relation to teaching English literature.

Many studies have used the PCK framework to explore teachers’ knowledge of instructional strategies in diverse areas. Some studies have indicated the limitations of teachers’ instructional repertoire in relation to specific concepts in maths and science (Stump, 2005; Boz and Boz, 2008). Many previous research studies have explored various dimensions related to the knowledge of instructional strategies Studies have indicated that there is a connection between teacher’s knowledge of their students and their ability to pick appropriate instructional strategies (Timmerman, 2009; Dreschler and Van Driel 2008). Other studies have indicated the importance of having an adequate content knowledge base to develop effective instructional strategies (Halim and Meerah 2002). In relation to literature specifically McCutcheon and Milner (2002) found that teachers who had in depth knowledge of the subject area could plan more holistic instructional sequences and integrate technology. In a more recent times Romylos and Balfour (2018) in a study of literature teachers in South Africa noted that teacher’s instructional strategies for literature tended to support requirements of formal examinations.

The current study aims to add to the body of research that focuses on instructional strategies of teachers of English literature by focusing of the teaching of a small but diverse group of teachers involved in the teaching of English literature in the secondary school in the Sri Lankan context. The following research question guided the study:

* What are teachers’ knowledge of instructional strategies for the teaching of English literature in the Sri Lankan context?

It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the further development and enhancement of teachers’ professional knowledge and would lead to larger scale research in the area.

# METHODOLOGY

Given the exploratory nature of the study a qualitative research design was adopted. A purposive sample of four teachers of English literature from different types of schools and representing different training back grounds was selected for this research. Data was collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The observational field notes and interview transcripts were analysed qualitatively through a process of thematic analysis.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview and observational data revealed several key aspects of the teacher’s instructional repertoires in relation to the teaching of literature in the Sri Lankan context. The analysis of the observational data indicated that all four teachers were focusing on a text centered mode of literary analysis and implemented a range of instructional strategies that support this approach. The observational data highlighted the dominant instructional strategies used which included extensive questioning strategies and expository teaching of literary elements Teachers also incorporated aspects of mother tongue literature to clarify some culturally unfamiliar texts The findings also show that teachers were also able to integrate some aspects of their general pedagogical knowledge as well as their knowledge of language teaching into their literature instruction. The interview data revealed teachers’ overall approach to instruction and reasons for their choice of instructional strategies. One important finding was that teachers displayed a wider range of instructional strategies in relation to particular topics and genres.

# CONCLUSIONS

It is important to note that teachers were resourceful in bringing in to bear various aspects of their professional experience for the teaching of this subject but that their instructional strategies could be further enhanced. The study reveals that instructional repertoires in literature needs to be further developed and that it should be part of the ongoing professional development of teachers of literature in the Sri Lankan context The study points to the need for developing robust subject knowledge bases that would underlie instructional choices. Teachers should also be given training in developing more student-centered instructional methods that would be help them to put into practice their beliefs in relation to the personal development goals for their students.

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