

HOTS INTEGRATION IN A LITERARY CLASSROOM: BENEFITS, CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES

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Introduction

Much emphasis has been placed on developing digital, technological, and computer literacy in today's education, yet textual literacy in relation to higher order thinking skills (HOTS) integration remains under-examined despite its crucial role in facilitating the development of soft skills, including communicative abilities, creativity, and critical thinking. Studies have been published on the importance of teacher training in order to create increased awareness, skills, knowledge, and interest in developing HOTS in learners (Aziz et al., 2017; Li, 2016; Shafeei et al., 2017). In other words, to develop HOTS in a literary class, teachers would not only need to have knowledge of the subject matter, but they also have to know the key components of higher order thinking skills and how these are integrated into the curriculum.

Thinking skills can be classified into lower- and higher-levels, and applying them to studying literature can help students think critically and creatively when learning and understanding literary texts. In this case, both the use and selection of literary texts can drive students to apply critical and creative thinking skills in and outside their classrooms. Through these skills, these students can improve their understanding without being spoon-fed by their teachers. According to Dewey, HOTS is a productive process that moves from reflection to inquiry and then to critical thought processes that, in turn, lead to a "conclusion that can be substantiated"

(cited in Lyons, 2010, p. 484) by more than personal beliefs and images. Thoughts can straighten out entanglements, clear up obscurities, resolve confusion, unify disparities, answer questions, define and solve problems, reach goals, guide inferences, shape predictions, form judgments, support decisions, and end controversies. HOTS includes critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking, which are activated when individuals encounter problems, uncertainties, questions, or dilemmas. The successful application of these skills can lead to explanations, decisions, performances, and products that are valid within the context of the available knowledge and experience and can promote continuous growth in these and other intellectual skills. HOTS is grounded in lower-order skills, such as discrimination, simple application and analysis, and cognitive strategies, and is linked to prior knowledge of the subject matter.

The major focus of this chapter falls on teachers and their role in the teaching of critical and creative thinking skills or HOTS in a literature with a small '1' classroom, specifically on how the application and inculcation of HOTS can be habituated via reading practices of literary texts. The chapter importantly informs how reading advances itself into what the literature has termed as 'critical reading' or reading with HOTS as well as how teachers continue to innovate in their language and literacy classroom towards empowering their learners' critical and creative thinking through reading of literary works.

Reading, Literature and Literacy: The HOTS Connection

Literature as a school subject is closely linked to the teaching of literacy, a skill that has been acknowledged across all educational contexts. The terms used in each of these contexts drive the focus of literacy. From the accuracy of language use to the development of critical thinking, literature serves multiple functions in a language classroom. In this section, we explore the concept of literacy and its connection to literature and the development of HOTS.

Literacy refers to the cognitive skill of understanding the interconnection amongst words, the images they describe, and their implied meanings. In a nutshell, literacy refers to the cognitive and social development of reading and writing skills (Urquhar & Weir, 1998). Across

all social contexts, literacy affects the ability to read various written texts, including grocery lists, emails, and newspapers (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). According to Reder and Davila (2005, p. 173), the act of literacy is “rooted in people’s intimate everyday experiences with text”. Within the L2 teaching and learning context, literacy refers to the development of cognitive and affective skills, with L2 scholars defining such a concept as “... the use of socially-, historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts” (as cited in Herrero & Vandershelden, 2019, p. 188).

Critical thinking and problem-solving are amongst the key competencies needed in the 21st century. Although HOTS is not exactly new, educators continue to face challenges in promoting these skills in a language classroom. One of the main challenges is the educators’ limited knowledge of how best to integrate HOTS in a language and literature classroom (Ganapathy & Kaur, 2014). Despite being able to address most of the requirements specified in their syllabi, educators continue to face challenges in developing their students’ critical thinking skills.

Bloom’s Taxonomy has been widely used in ranking the cognitive domain from the lowest to the highest: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This taxonomy was later revised and labelled Anderson and Krathwohl’s taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001). The revised taxonomy is differentiated by not only the listings, rewordings (from nouns to verbs), renaming of some of the components, and repositioning of the last two levels of the cognitive dimension (remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating – formerly known as ‘synthesis’ in Bloom’s taxonomy), but most importantly, the way “the taxonomy intersects and acts upon different types and levels of knowledge – factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive” (Wilson, 2006, para. 5).

In the literature classroom, lower order thinking skills focus on the acquisition of facts, including recalling plots and settings and identifying the characteristics of principal characters. The lower order questions that a teacher asks in such a context may be related to identifying the characters, plot, and settings of the story, whereas higher order questions may include asking learners to identify the motives behind the actions of the principal characters or devise solutions to the problem identified in the story. HOTS

focuses on the exploration and expression of ideas through open-ended questions and tasks, which encourage students to analyse, synthesise, and produce original writings about the texts they read. In this way, these students actively participate in the literature classroom by questioning, interpreting, connecting, and exploring the text.

It is a widely held view that studies on reading and HOTS started in the 20th century, where researchers contended that reading fundamentally goes beyond comprehension of words and more towards a quest for meaning derivation via thinking or reasoning in the language classroom (Abdullah, 1994; Chamot, 1995; Chitavelu et al., 1995). Nonetheless, Thorndike's 1917 work entitled *Reading as Reasoning* was influential in explaining the dependency on the reader's reasoning and thinking skills to comprehend texts or solve problems by means of deeper processes, or skills like evaluating, inventing, demonstrating, and verifying. Further interpretations on applying thinking to reading situations gained momentum, from reading beyond recall or word identification to critical reading or the use of higher cognitive or analytical processes or skills in reading (Adams & Collins, 1979; Cooper et al., 1985; Parfitt, 1997; Petty, 1956; Robbins, 1977; Russell, 1962; Stoodt, 1989; Thistlewaite, 1990; Turner, 1988; William, 1959). This early research in reading comprehension traces the definition of critical reading back to its alliance with "critical thinking" (Abdullah, 1994).

As pointed out, the term "critical reading" is generally understood to mean the application of critical thinking in reading comprehension. However, the onset of critical reading viewed the construct as involving a set of reading comprehension skills (Crossen, 1948; Dale, 1967; Gans, 1940; Robinson, 1967; Smith, 1965; Sochor, 1959; Wolf et al., 1967). General comprehension skills like understanding explicit and implicit meanings of reading text, assessing validity of content suited to the reader's purpose, deriving exact conclusions, and developing legitimate inferences are important to be learned based on textual clues of the text and background knowledge. Wolf et al. (1967) used the Ohio State Critical Reading Test to investigate reading experts' judgment of the definition of critical reading skills like "literary analysis", "comprehension of underlying elements", "logical analysis", "inference", "finding differences in details", "asking questions", "checking validity",

“checking faulty inferences”, and “analysing structure”. Other definitions of critical reading are as follows:

- A *different* kind of thinking: a higher, more advanced level of reading or “reading between the lines” or beyond literal interpretation and understanding the writer’s intentions (see Cervetti et al., 2001; Lyman & Collins, 1990)
- the ability to interact with the author, to use criteria for judgment and suspend judgment (Robbins, 1977)

According to Robbins (1977), the reader is skilled enough to “interact” with the author or text by suspending judgment before a decision or conclusion is made. Critical reading also suggests how readers interact with the text instead of just extracting meaning from it.

Hence, it is important to note that reading critically comprises more than just skills. It means slowing down and taking the time to reflect on what was read. Within a literature classroom, teachers can initiate discussions with pupils on the meaning behind a character’s actions or how the story’s setting is significant to the overall message. It also means asking more open-ended questions to which there can be multiple correct answers. Hence, reading critically is when the student-reader questions the author against his/her own knowledge and worldview. This is posited in Worden’s (1980) model of critical reading, which states that critical thinking applied in reading is a process that involves not just knowing or learning the skills but having the knowledge by triggering one’s background knowledge, values, attitude, feelings, experiences, beliefs, and external advice.

This is in relation to the fact that researchers and pioneers of critical thinking agree that the concept must involve three crucial aspects, namely, knowledge, skills, and dispositions (see Lai (2011) for a complete literature review on critical thinking). According to Glaser (1941), as cited in Fisher (2001), the critical thinker possesses “... an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one’s experience, knowledge of the methods of logical enquiry or reasoning, and some skills in applying those methods” (p. 3). In other words, when critical reading skills are taught to students, they will eventually become critical thinkers.

As teachers embark on the journey of teaching literature and literacy skills, another important concern is whether literature is being used to develop intensive or extensive reading skills. Extensive reading refers to reading a wide range of texts for pleasure and personal satisfaction. The general rule of thumb is that the reader chooses his/her own text, reads silently at his/her own pace, and is not tested for any aspect of his/her literacy or comprehension (Prowse, 2002). A variation of this type of reading approach is free voluntary reading, where learners choose the texts to read "... because [they] want to" (Krashen, 2004, p. 1). Meanwhile, intensive reading requires the reader to pay close attention to specific aspects of the text and is particularly useful for developing a specific learning outcome in a language and/or literacy classroom. As one of its benefits, intensive reading can promote critical and creative thinking through a set of tasks that accompany the reading (Khonamri & Farzanegan, 2016).

Intensive reading or reading for a purpose allows focus on the process or strategies that the reader employs for comprehension, via analysis, reasoning, and deliberation of the author's words, which parallel critical reader identity in essence. Research also indicates that when comprehension takes place, there is some evidence that readers are actively interacting with the text by constructing the meaning of the text as it should be read (Mohamad Ali, 2017; Spiro et al., 1980). The top-down process of reading defines readers as active recipients of information, bringing with them their own previous understandings and knowledge as they read (Stanovich, 1980). Hence, reading for comprehension involves interactive bottom-up and top-down processing which takes into account the reader's background knowledge to make the reading meaningful.

This is in line with what Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) termed "constructive responsive reading", which views reading as a constructive process in which readers are always changing their responses, perspectives, and understanding to achieve their reading goals. This form of "intensive reading" eventually becomes "strategic" as readers develop an awareness of what they need to do when their approach to comprehending a text, e.g., bottom-up, does not seem to help, thus making them compensate for this by using the top-down approach (Spiro et al., 1980). For example, students need to pay attention to the writing styles and vocabulary in these texts to see whether they are related to the culture and contexts of the authors

by word or context analyses to thoroughly understand their meanings. Teachers could help readers conceive a task, make sense of what they read and what they do when they do not understand via strategies as resources for understanding, and then monitor them by taking actions or employing more strategies (Block, 1986; Mohamad Ali, 2017).

Returning to the issue of disposition in critical reading by Glaser (1941) earlier, Barnett (1997) recommends teachers look for a “critical disposition” in their students. This enables students to give varied responses to reading texts as active learners. Squires (1990), as cited in Barnett (1997), also addresses the critical “stance” or disposition of the reader. The notion of disposition has been addressed by critical thinking theorists as the most important aspect of the identity of the critical thinker, besides possessing the necessary skills and knowledge (Barnett, 1997; Beyer, 1988; Glaser, 1941; Paul, 1984; Siegel, 1988). Hence, teachers must understand that teaching HOTS is not just to complete the syllabus but to appreciate that the activity nurtures a complete reader-based process from the traditional reader to the active reader who questions, investigates, critiques, challenges, and wonders about the text.

Apart from that, previous studies show that extensive reading can enhance the reader’s general confidence and attitude towards the art of literacy and significantly improve his/her reading speed, vocabulary, language competency, and writing abilities (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Maley, 2008). However, for extensive reading to be successful, the reader has to show an organised and structural effort. As a facilitator, the teacher has to ensure that the necessary scaffolding is in place for “reading literature for pleasure” (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009, p. 264). They also need to pay attention to how much of their limited class time is consumed for activities that are not included in their syllabi or exams. Given the low motivation of students to read beyond the required texts, teachers play an important role in ensuring the success of this endeavour.

Literature can be used to develop student’s reading, writing, listening, and speaking competencies. Scholars argue that these skills can be strengthened through focused engagement with works of literature. To enhance students’ reading skills, literature teachers, like their language counterparts, are encouraged to adopt a “...dynamic, student-centred approach towards comprehending a literary work” (Asefa, 2015, p. 1813).

In a reading lesson, the discussion begins at the literal level with direct questions of fact regarding the setting, characters, and plot that can be answered by making references to the text. Such activities necessitate a higher level or order of thinking, which requires the student to make a decision on what to say or do as the outcome. Oftentimes, the decision requires the student to go beyond the page and access some other background information in order to get the answer or solve a problem. When we move from simplistic reading to a more complex one, we are also being critical. Whether the activity requires one to transfer information, think critically, or solve a problem in a puzzle, the skills needed converge into higher-order ones. To facilitate the development of the students' critical and creative thinking skills, it is important to contextualise the issue within the larger discussion of the importance of literary engagement to a reader's cognitive and affective development.

Benefits of Literary Engagement

From fiction to literary works, literature as a corpus has come to embody many types of writings. In simple terms, literature refers to written works that are created based on facts or fiction by using both ordinary and figurative language that capture the imagination and emotion of readers (Eagleton, 1983, 1996; Smith, 2003). Eagleton (1983, 1996) defines the "literariness" of a text based on the way it "...transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech, or to quote Roman Jakobson, the Russian literary critic, for the way it creates an 'organized violence... on ordinary speech'" (p. 1). As a genre, literature can be presented in various forms, including poetry, prose, and drama. Each genre uses a unique format, style, and organisation to deliver its content. Each literary genre also has diverse elements. For instance, poetry can be dramatic, lyrical, and narrative (Turco, 2000). Each categorisation of literature is defined by the techniques, format, and language used by the author.

Diversity is an obvious element of prose. In *The Anatomy of Prose*, Boulton (2014) defines five major types of prose, namely, narrative, argumentative, dramatic, informative, and contemplative. The most popular of these types is narrative, which tells a story from the perspective

of a particular character or narrator, around which the plot and conflict predominantly revolve. Examples of narrative prose include the classics *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, where the former is told from the perspective of a third-person omniscient narrator who merely shares what she observes without being influenced by the story, whereas the latter uses the central character of Jane Eyre as its narrator. To paraphrase the words of 18th-century literary critic Samuel Johnson, the ultimate purpose of literature is to provide readers with an outlet for enjoying or enduring life (Spector, 1997). Literary works use language to express ideas and issues that can affect the minds and hearts of readers. Stories form the basis of all societies. According to Zunshine (2006, p. 5), “Fictional narratives, from Beowulf to *Pride and Prejudice*, rely on, manipulate, and titillate our tendency to keep track of who thought, wanted, and felt what and when”. Literary texts, including poems, short stories, and novels, play a major role in developing students’ critical and creative thinking skills. These skills can be harnessed through activities that allow students to make judgments, decisions, and conclusions by organising, applying, predicting, evaluating, and synthesising available information.

Reading creative texts can drive students to think outside the box and predict what will happen next in the texts they are reading. Students also need to judge whether good or bad things will happen in the story, relate what they are reading to their real-life situations, and imagine themselves as characters in the story. Creative texts can also help students become lifelong learners by granting them the skill of “learning how to learn” or managing their own learning process. Through these skills, students can identify the materials they need, where and how to get these materials, and how to organise their learning with a little scaffolding from their teachers. The significance of the right selection of reading material is echoed in the study by Cirocki et al. (2015) on the critical thinking skills of 160 ESL students in a reading classroom in India and Malaysia. The findings show that more students from India compared to Malaysia preferred to select their own reading material and that the majority of the respondents in both countries attached great value to critical thinking while reading. The research concluded that a critical thinker/reader should be curious, logical, and self-critical; have the ability to identify problems and their

solutions, and distinguish between facts and opinions. Creative texts can help students find and make meaning from their readings and subsequently enhance their comprehension.

Besides that, as readers of literature, our engagement with a work of fiction takes us on an introspective journey into another world. However, in the classroom context, reading literature is taught as a collective experience in which all learners need to participate. As teachers, the primary task is to bridge these two separate experiences, specifically by creating the right scaffolding activities to link the introspective journey each reader has with the text on the one hand and with the collective experience of engaging in the text as a class on the other. More importantly, a teacher of fiction can take advantage of the available spaces to make literature enjoyable for the individual reader through extensive reading activities while helping develop relevant 21st-century learning skills through intensive tasks. In this way, the primary focus of reading literary works, from oral narratives to graphic novels, is to delight and stimulate the imagination of the readers (Thomas, 2011) while expanding their language and reading competencies. Furthermore, with the right scaffolding, reading literature can also be used as part of the academic curriculum to develop literacy and other critical skills, including communication, affective, critical and creative thinking skills, and cultural/multicultural literacies.

Literary or creative texts have several important roles in the development of HOTS. Tung and Chang (2009, p. 291) define literature reading as “a complex process that requires students to recall, retrieve and reflect on their prior knowledge and experiences to construct meanings of the text”. They list several capacities that students demonstrate when they are reading literary texts, namely, “differentiating facts from opinion, understanding the literal and implied meanings of the text and the tone of the narrator, locating details related to the key issues, establishing connections between events and actions, observing moral reasoning, making fair-grounded judgments and applying what they have previously learned to other domains or their real-world contexts”. These processes require students to find unwritten answers in their literary texts that can help them go beyond the four walls of their classrooms. In literature, no answer can be considered right or wrong if supported by evidence. This

feature underscores the importance of literature in the development of HOTS by giving students the freedom to answer without the fear of being incorrect.

Literary texts also invite students into the world of problem solving (Khatib & Alizadeh, 2012) by formulating hypotheses and performing analysis. Literature also develops students' awareness of their surroundings by exposing them to vital issues. According to Khatib and Alizadeh (2012), studying literary texts activates and enhances emotional intelligence. They also state that literary texts help students apply their classroom experiences to real-life situations. This argument is supported by Tung and Chang (2009), who find that investigating literary texts can expose students to multiple perspectives, which in turn will compel them to think and rethink their ideas and actions. These texts also help language teachers foster their students' "cultural, linguistic and interpretive skills", thereby helping them overcome their negative attitudes towards the targeted culture and introducing variety in their lessons (Khatib & Alizadeh, 2012). Such benefits are particularly important for multiracial students who need to adapt to a different context of learning.

Literary texts have been shown to not only enhance the overall literacy level of students but also improve their thinking skills (Gouthro & Holloway, 2013). Works of fiction that are authentic, enjoyable, and motivating can also increase students' cultural awareness and knowledge of the patterns of the target language and subsequently foster their critical thinking skills by exposing them to conflicting views. Studying fiction also helps students differentiate facts from opinion, understand literal and implied meanings, develop moral and well-grounded judgments, and relate what they have learned to real-world situations.

Literary texts allow students to foster HOTS. Teachers could formulate an appropriate teaching and testing method to maximise students involvement in their lessons and subsequently transform them into active participants in classroom activities (Pardede, 2019). Students' learning experiences not only boost their confidence but also help them formulate crucial strategies that they can apply in other real-life contexts.

Learning literature enriches the linguistic and cognitive skills of students and helps them understand human nature (Lazar, 1993). Reading literature can also help students improve their critical thinking and develop their analytical skills. Scaffoldings are essential in developing the students' critical thinking abilities. For instance, questioning skills can help students elaborate on their ideas. One way is to ask questions out loud while reading. This was discussed by Smith (2006), who suggests the importance of doing 'think-aloud mysteries' during a reading activity. According to him, teachers can initially model think aloud mysteries for students to hear, then get students to practise them, and finally write the think-aloud mysteries. Modelling presents a vital way for teachers to show their students how they can interact with texts (Fisher et al., 2008). By putting forth probing questions like "Can you elaborate more on that?", or "How do you know that is true?", students will be more critical of the text compared to just answering a yes or no question.

Literature reading also allows readers to recall, retrieve, and reflect upon their knowledge and experiences to make meaning out of their texts. Literary works provide readers with a certain context that facilitates their reasoning and helps them interpret their own situation (Qamar, 2016). By reading literary texts, students are exposed to real language use and familiarise themselves with the linguistic form and communicative function of their target language. The use of literary texts in the English classroom "...help(s) to stimulate students' imagination, to develop their critical thinking and increase their emotion awareness" (Lazar, 1993, p. 19). Furthermore, reading literary texts also trains the emotional intelligence of students (Chu, 2005). Literature can efficiently develop one's language proficiency, knowledge, and understanding of a certain culture. Therefore, fostering HOTS by using literary texts in the English classroom helps students develop their thinking capabilities whilst mastering the learning content at the same time. These skills can empower students to develop new ideas, create solutions, and expose themselves to a whole new level of education without depending on their teachers. However, despite the many benefits of using works of literature in developing critical and creative thinking skills, teachers are still facing numerous challenges which at times appear daunting. The following section expands on this issue.

Challenges Faced by Literature Teachers

The study of literary texts has become an important part of English language teaching and learning that not only allows students to enjoy the language aesthetically but also provides them with an opportunity to develop and practise their thinking skills both creatively and critically. Nonetheless, in reality, there are teachers who are limited by summative assessment to provide their students with the necessary intensive and creative class activities. In his study of English as a second language classroom in Thailand, Puthikanon (2009) found that many instructors still adopted the utilitarian approach in their teaching pedagogy. These teachers focused on helping their students pass the national entrance examinations by teaching them grammatical rules and vocabulary instead of focusing on developing the students' critical thinking skills. The same situation is also observed in Malaysia, where language and literature teachers focus their time and energy on helping their students pass the exams, thus limiting their attention to a more proactive role in creating activities that could develop their students' thinking skills.

However, studies also indicate that teachers are facing critical challenges in implementing HOTS in the language and literature classroom. A review by Ganapathy and Kaur (2014) suggests that teachers lack the pedagogical knowledge and expertise to innovate their teaching practices for the purpose of integrating HOTS in their lessons which may not "...concur with the HOT questions posed in their examinations and assessments" (Ganapathy & Kaur, 2014, p. 81).

Shafeei et al. (2017) investigated the question types used by teachers of English as a second language (ESL) as well as the challenges faced by the teachers in incorporating HOTS elements in their teaching. The findings indicate that ESL teachers preferred lower order thinking skills (LOTS) questions in contrast to referential questions (HOTS) due to their lack of knowledge of HOTS questions and students' low English proficiency. This study has shown that more HOTS training need to be given to ESL teachers prior to teaching the students in language classrooms. The same call for training is echoed in the study by Aziz et al. (2017) who examined English language (L2) teachers' awareness and practices in promoting HOTS in the English language classrooms in Malaysia. Data

were collected from practising L2 teachers through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and structured observations. The findings reveal that HOTS implementation in the L2 classroom is limited and hindered by students, pedagogical, and institutional factors. The study shows that a successful HOTS implementation requires an approach that involves all parties, i.e., teachers, students, and administrators.

Studies from different contexts illustrate the need for a proper training in order to facilitate teachers of English in engaging HOTS in their respective classes. Li (2016) conducted a study to find out Chinese teachers' understanding of thinking skills in EFL classrooms in China. Analysis based on 473 self-completed questionnaires, four focus group interviews with 18 teachers, classroom observation, and three video-based reflections indicated the teachers' difficulty in defining thinking skills due to very little understanding of the concept. However, an overall positive attitude was reflected towards integrating thinking skills in reading classes. Singh and Shaari (2019) conducted a content analysis on selected English reading comprehension examination items for Standard 6 students in Malaysia based on the levels of cognitive skills listed in Bloom's Taxonomy. The findings indicate that most reading comprehension questions in the English examination papers needed further revisions in order to achieve the standard of HOTS that has become part of the new curriculum and national education policy. This alludes to the need for training on HOTS among teachers to come up with HOTS items.

In the HOTS context, teachers must search and find suitable materials and propose activities that allow students to use HOTS in the classroom. The teacher's active role is a major influence in inculcating HOTS among students to ensure student participation in class activities. This is supported by Tyas et al.'s (2020) research on the role of teachers and the textbook in cultivating HOTS among students. The study asserts the importance of the teacher in guiding and assisting the students in understanding HOTS questions in texts, as well as explaining to them the answers that are relevant to HOTS. The study lends implications to the need for teacher training as well as content analysis of texts and the nature of the questions provided in textbooks. Teachers need to think outside the box when it comes to adopting textbook questions, particularly the low-cognitive ones.

The previously cited studies indicate teacher training as one of the important driving factors in developing HOTS among students. Nonetheless, the paradox lies in the fact that while studies have shown that explicit instruction on HOTS or critical thinking skills benefited students' reading comprehension, the teachers faced challenges in implementing HOTS in classrooms due to the lack of training, knowledge as well as the lack of emphasis on HOTS in classrooms at all educational levels (primary and secondary schools and tertiary), suggesting that there is a pressing need for the issue to be addressed. There is also a need to address teacher interest and beliefs in the subject, as they may also refuse to change for personal reasons. They frequently view a curriculum change as something that requires them to perform additional work on top of their already overloaded schedule, thereby forcing them to spend additional time, energy, and money to meet such demand. Teachers may also refuse to accept any change that calls for sacrifices yet may not lead to monetary returns or other rewards. Hence, teachers need to believe in the importance of HOTS to deliver an effective HOTS lesson, as it will shape their work and all activities that they do in the classroom practices (Kusumastuti et al., 2019).

Cultivating HOTS in students is an internal process that develops over time and requires students to exert additional effort in making reflections, solving problems as a group, answering teachers' questions, and interacting with their peers. Given that these processes need to be performed simultaneously, Tan and Siti Hajar Halili (2015, p. 43) state that "teachers may face challenges in planning HOTS-filled lessons that need to be completed in one or two class periods". As a result, teachers are not adequately equipped to deliver HOTS to their students.

Teachers also have to deal with students' negative attitudes towards their classroom sessions, especially their English lessons, given that they are intimidated by the idea of reading foreign texts or are uninterested in learning a new language (Al-Mahrooqi & Roscoe, 2012). This situation tends to emerge especially when these students have low proficiency in the language. In the worst-case scenario, some students may feel inferior to other students, and they may assume that their opinions and beliefs are irrelevant. The same students may feel that they are not being

acknowledged by their teachers in the class. Therefore, when these students are asked to participate in classroom activities, they might not be motivated to participate. Unless teachers are creative enough to devise an appealing teaching method that challenges thinking, students' HOTS may not develop as expected. In the following section, we propose an approach that studies indicate may be able to overcome some of the challenges in delivering a HOTS lesson in a language classroom.

Approaches to Using Literature in a Language Classroom: Developing Schema with Questions

To solve the challenges faced by teachers in fostering HOTS in an English classroom, we propose the use of literary texts to facilitate learners' imagination and curiosity. Creative texts can be used to trigger students' schemata and inspire them to aim for HOTS development. Teachers would have to possess strong background knowledge of the subject matter and the know-how of HOTS integration in teaching before they can use the texts to stimulate their students' creative and critical thinking skills (Othman & Mohamad, 2014). The images and plot in a literary work can trigger analytical thinking amongst students when they compare their real-life situations based on their own background knowledge or schema with the one presented in the text.

A considerable number of past studies have agreed on the role of readers' schemata or prior knowledge in L2 readers' comprehension processes (Carrell, 1987; Chen & Graves, 1995; Floyd & Carrell, 1987; Lee, 1986; Levine & Haus, 1985). To better understand this, Down (2000) classifies the reader or critical reader as "a contributive reader who brings everything she's got to the table; personal experience, prior reading, imagination, comprehension aids and the text itself" (p. 8). Harmful effects on comprehension may happen when readers bring inaccurate, inadequate, or mismatched background knowledge to written texts (Lipson, 1984). In addition, while the evaluation of text is an important part of HOTS, the assessment of the accuracy, completeness, and compatibility of one's own prior knowledge and beliefs in relation to the text is equally justified. This means that when the student delves into the literary texts, he/she goes through a process of reading the text and stepping away from

it, deliberately adding his/her own thoughts to a “virtual text” in his/her mind, thus blending them with the author’s (Mohamad Ali, 2017). When this happens, the reader has conscious metacognitive control of the reading material. The activation of prior knowledge here assures that the reader keeps his/her understanding in check with the information provided in the text. This leads to the valuable checking or monitoring of one’s prior knowledge in the critical reading process.

As discussed, when learners are exposed to using their prior knowledge, they are not bound by only one schema. Instead, it can activate more schema for critical reading. This is mentioned by Shirley (1979) in her critical reading taxonomy of skills used for literary texts in the reading classroom. Fehl’s taxonomy describes the use of the reader’s background knowledge to distinguish fact from opinion or fiction, make hypotheses, identify and analyse the literary forms used by the author (in fiction, historical fiction, non-fiction, biography, autobiography, myth or legend, fable/fantasy, folk tales), as well as evaluate one’s thinking and reading against the attitude and behaviour of the reader.

These dynamic processes of schema activation, modification, selection, and creation describe the reader’s continuing valuation of the text or author (Abdullah, 1994). Ultimately, when students activate their HOTS when exploring the logic behind a certain occurrence in the text or when formulating a solution to a problem, they are forming “critical schemata” in their minds, which Abdullah (1994) calls “a disposition which differentiates him or her, i.e., the critical reader, from the normal or passive reader” (p. 46). Abdullah (1994) formulated a theoretical model of Critical Reading Thinking (thereafter CRT) ability in her study to investigate the CRT ability of Singaporean secondary school pupils in their L1 (Malay). The framework, based on the critical thinking theory of Ennis (1964) and the schema theory of reading comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Rumelhart, 1980), examines CRT as a construct involving the skills, knowledge, and disposition of the reader towards the process of reading comprehension of text.

In this sense, the inculcation of critical reading using creative texts helps nurture lifelong learning, self-determination, and positive learning attitudes amongst students. For example, when presented with a short story that is foreign to the student, or texts with an information gap,

they can be encouraged to search for information on the web to figure out the missing information. By doing so, independent learning can be initiated. This would also expand their perspectives on the topic at hand. Conducting instructional activities that allow these students to discuss and interact with one another can accelerate the development of their critical thinking skills.

Another crucial approach to fostering HOTS through creative texts is through the art of questioning. Teachers are to emphasise the exploration of ideas by asking open-ended questions and encouraging expressions of individual ideas. They may ask open-ended questions about the moral values depicted in the novel that students have read. This type of question encourages these students to evaluate a text. In order to answer the questions, the students would have to analyse the events in the text critically. Various pedagogical approaches can be used by the teacher to get students to be critical of the text. To encourage students' participation, the teacher can ask the students to read aloud followed by a discussion to undo blocks. Students should be given the opportunity to be active learners in the class to get them to ask questions, interpret, connect, and explore ideas and information. All these are to trigger their HOTS. Teachers only serve as facilitators who guide and prompt their students to be critical thinkers and wise decision makers.

Many authors have suggested the use of higher order questions when it comes to critically reading a text. Open-ended HOTS questions pose a better understanding of the concealed meanings and dimensions of the text, either socially, culturally, or linguistically. Examples of these questions are as follows:

For what purpose and for what audience is this intended?

What knowledge and attitudes does the author presume of the audience?

Are you convinced by the evidence presented by the author to support the claims made?

Does your own experience support the conclusions reached by the author?

Do you share the author's point of view?

(Hedge, 2003, p. 213)

Molden (2007, pp. 52–53) gives a more comprehensive list of critical questions to be used during critical reading classes to have students analyse the literary text in a better way:

- What is this text about? How do we know?
- Who would be most likely to read and/or view this text and why?
- Why are we reading and/or viewing this text?
- What does the composer of the text want us to know?
- What are the structures and features of the text?
- What sort of genre does the text belong to?
- What do the images suggest?
- What do the words suggest?
- What kind of language is used in the text?
- How are children, teenagers or young adults constructed in this text?
- How are adults constructed in this text?
- Why has the composer of the text represented the characters in a particular way?
- Are there “gaps” and “silences” in the text?
- Who is missing from the text?
- What has been left out of the text?
- What questions about itself does the text not raise?
- In whose interest is the text?
- Who benefits from the text?
- Is the text fair?
- What knowledge does the reader/viewer need to bring to this text in order to understand it?
- Which positions, voices, and interests are at play in the text?
- How is the reader or viewer positioned in relation to the composer of the text?
- How does the text depict age, gender, and/or cultural groups?
- How does the text construct a version of reality?

- Whose views are excluded or privileged in the text?
- Who is allowed to speak? Who is quoted?
- Why is the text written the way it is?
- Whose view: whose reality?
- What view of the world is the text presenting?
- What kinds of social realities does the text portray?
- What is real in the text?
- How would the text be different if it were told in another time, place, or culture?
- What kind of person, and with what interests and values, composed the text?
- What view of the world and values does the composer of the text assume that the reader/viewer holds? How do we know?
- What different interpretations of the text are possible?
- How do contextual factors influence how the text is interpreted?
- How does the text mean?
- How else could the text have been written?
- How does the text rely on intertextuality to create its meaning?

Studies have shown that questioning is one of the most popular methods of teaching HOTS when paired with literary texts (Daud et al., 2018; Dhanapal, 2008; DiYanni & Borst, 2017; Sidhu et al., 2010). Teachers can ask higher order questions that help expand the thoughts and reasoning of students. One important contribution to education in terms of this is derived from the famous Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom et al., 1956). This framework consists of characteristics of cognitive practice in classrooms in terms of higher order thinking skills as manifested via mental actions for teaching and assessment (Aghaei & Mirzaei Rad, 2018). The mental actions, e.g., "comprehension" at the lowest and "evaluation" at the highest, as well as application, analysis, and synthesis, are consistently implemented to represent critical thinking (Kennedy et al., 1991) or higher order thinking (Ennis and Weir 1985). The

taxonomy typically employs questioning as one of the skills, popularly known as Socratic questioning. Questions can be ranked according to the level of thought required for the response.

Mohamad Ali (2017) investigated English language students' critical reading strategies via think-aloud protocols as they attempted reading comprehension questions. Students were asked HOTS or probing questions based on the given texts. The findings show that inference was a primary strategy which showed how background knowledge and knowledge of formal schemata or the question format played important roles in the students' reasoning and comprehension in critical reading and thinking. The reasoning strategies used like interpretation, elaboration, comparing and contrasting, hypothesis generation/prediction, evaluation, and questioning importantly show that the students were more aware of what they were doing cognitively and metacognitively, as they responded to the higher order thinking questions, i.e., "why" or "how" via the think-aloud method. The study also found that the learners displayed more criticality, e.g., usage of the reasoning strategies in their native language rather than their second language. This demonstrates that students' literacy can impact their cognitive reasoning abilities in critical reading. The study also shows that pairing think-aloud with HOTS questions helps demonstrate students' reading performance and cognitive processing strategies that can be hidden and not directly assessed when compared to writing.

Another study on using questions was conducted by Idek and Othman (2019) on 30 Form Four ESL students' HOTS using the SOLO (Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes) Taxonomy as the framework for designing questions that can foster higher order thinking skills. The results reveal that their performance was enhanced as a result of using reading comprehension strategies that demonstrated their abilities to think more critically. It was also discovered that the students needed more support to progress from a multi-structural level of thinking to a relational level. Both studies have major implications for the need to maximise students' exposure to HOTS by getting them to familiarise themselves with the process of generating and exploring ideas.

Conclusion

HOTS requires students to actively participate in the learning process. Hove (2011) argues that those students who master the ability to think critically and insightfully have better academic achievements. As a result, this new generation of learners can become highly productive members of their societies. The ability to read critically – to examine a text, appreciate its reason, assess its evidence, infer it imaginatively, and state probing questions – is indispensable for higher order thinking (DiYanni, 2017). Skills in critical reading build students' self-confidence, enhance their understanding of the world, and permit their positive educational development. Hence, for literature with a small 'l' or language classroom, the possible contributions of HOTS or critical reading are abundant. For language learners, reading literary texts in a critical manner allows opportunities to enhance their linguistic skills, grammatical accuracy, and fluency via discussions (Wallace, 2003).

To comprehend literary texts, students need to be able to analyse and evaluate the available information, including themes, characters, plots, settings, conflicts, moral values, and literary devices. They should also ask questions to further understand these texts. These encourage the development of HOTS in a classroom that uses literary texts as a vehicle for language learning. For L2 learners, the exposure to new cultures through the literary texts would also encourage them to question and query.

A classroom environment that allows for active learners' participation can promote a healthy culture of knowledge seeking and inquiry building. Such an environment subsequently nurtures the quality of thinking which can be derived from critical reading practices (Song et al., 1999). Thus far, the application of HOTS in reading does not only mean the combination of critical thinking and reading comprehension skills, but also good language use, background knowledge, and disposition, which add to the philosophy of critical reading-thinking or CRT for both the teacher and students (Mohamad Ali, 2017).

When it comes to reading materials, many researchers contend that literary texts are an important medium and basis for students to develop their thinking skills, especially in an English classroom. Learning English literature can also help students learn English as a second language.

However, teachers need to be aware of their role in helping students foster their HOTS. They will not be able to achieve the intended outcomes if they lack the creativity and knowledge of appropriate pedagogical approaches. Therefore, teachers must be given the necessary training to upgrade their skills and capabilities to produce students with the desired thinking skills.

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