

**STORIES, SYNTAX, AND SEMANGAT: TACKLING ESL CHALLENGES WITH LANGUAGE ARTS IN MALAYSIA**Flora Crispina Nathan<sup>1</sup>\*Dorothy DeWitt<sup>1</sup>Lim Jia Wei<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** This study investigates ESL teachers' challenges in Malaysian primary schools when incorporating Language Arts (LA) into English instruction. Drawing on interview data and classroom observations, the research explores how six primary school teachers perceive the effectiveness of LA in supporting language development. The findings revealed that teachers hold positive attitudes toward LA but struggle with time constraints, varying student literacy levels, curriculum pressures, and a lack of professional training. Despite these obstacles, the teachers adopted creative strategies such as scaffolding, peer collaboration, and multimedia tools to enhance engagement and comprehension. The study concluded that literature-based instruction like LA, when well-supported, can be a powerful tool for holistic language learning. Recommendations included targeted teacher training and curricular flexibility to maximize the dual benefits of LA for language and emotional development.

**Keywords:** Challenges, English as a Second Language (ESL), language arts, social-emotional learning.

**INTRODUCTION**

English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in Malaysia faces exceptional challenges, particularly when navigating the tension between institutional expectations and students' needs (Ag-Ahmad et al., 2025). As the demand for effective language learning increases, teachers are increasingly urged to adopt innovative pedagogical strategies such as incorporating multimedia and visual aids, promoting interactive learning, and creating supportive environments that help underscore the multifaceted nature of second language acquisition (Ye, 2024). One such strategy is the use of children's literature, termed Language Arts (LA) here in Malaysia, which has been distinguished as valuable as it helps teachers, librarians, publishers, curriculum planners and others to decide on material for use in the educational situation and in helping the young to develop a sense of culture and identity (Roehl, 2018). Additionally, LA offers a meaningful context for developing social and emotional learning (SEL), helping and supporting students' mental and physical health needs, navigating emotions, relationships, and ethical decision-making through story-based engagement. Kurdi and Hamad (2024) affirm that these SEL competencies are important for young learners' overall development. Despite its proven benefits, many ESL teachers encounter significant challenges when incorporating the literary genres of LA into their classrooms, especially in primary schools where students are more motivated to read when they are exposed to literature because they love reading good stories and are interested in finding out what happens next rather than being concerned about the language (Jais & Ismail, 2023).

In Malaysia, ESL teachers often face the dual challenge of delivering effective language instruction while catering to students' diverse needs. As educational reforms continue to integrate the 21st century into the curriculum, it requires teachers to have knowledge and resources to foster classroom practices (Haryani et al., 2021). LA, with its rich vocabulary and engaging narratives, offers a promising avenue for language learning while exposing students to its sentence structures and language patterns. However, Ahmad (2024) states that the potential significant challenges, including time constraints, insufficient resources, and inadequate professional training, pose threats to effective implementation. Time constraints are prevalent in Malaysian classrooms, where teachers struggle to plan and execute differentiated lessons alongside heavy workloads (Ismail & Aziz, 2019; Lavania & Nor, 2021).

### *Statement of Problem*

This study strives to fill the gap by investigating the challenges faced by ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools when utilizing LA as a medium for language instruction. As Cheng (2007) stresses, while literature can be used as a tool to promote literacy and proficiency in the language, one should never lose sight of the fact that literature is meant to be enjoyed. Therefore, examining the experiences, perceptions, and strategies of ESL teachers, the research aims to shed light on the difficulties encountered in literature-based teaching and provide recommendations for overcoming these obstacles. Cheng (2007) further points out that while there is nothing wrong with exploiting a literary text via comprehension questions, it is a case of underexploiting the literary richness of the text; hence, understanding the complexities surrounding the use of LA in ESL teaching is crucial for improving instructional practices and supporting the professional development of ESL teachers. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What challenges do ESL teachers face when incorporating LA into their English language teaching?
2. How do ESL teachers perceive the effectiveness of LA in supporting English language learning among primary school students?
3. What strategies do ESL teachers use to overcome challenges in implementing literature-based instruction?

By addressing these questions, this study provides empirical insights into the practical and pedagogical challenges faced by ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools. It also highlights the perceived value of LA in language instruction and the adaptive strategies teachers employ to enhance its implementation. Moreover, the results of this study have the potential to provide policymakers with valuable insights for setting the future direction of LA in the Malaysian educational system.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *The Role of Language Arts in ESL Instruction*

LA has been recognized as a valuable resource in language education. Shanmugavelu and Sundram (2020) reiterate that language arts are a new component designed to create appreciation and enjoyment amongst students as they learn the language. In the context of ESL education, LA offers more than just a reading practice; it serves as a medium for developing comprehension skills, listening abilities, and speaking fluency. As supported by The Roadmap (2015-2025), in the language arts module, students are trained to appreciate and demonstrate understanding of texts, read and sing songs, rhymes, and poems, and produce creative works for enjoyment. Students are encouraged to plan, prepare, and take part in performances based on stories, poems, and novels. Adding children's books to ESL education is an effective technique for acquiring new vocabulary (Griffin, 2023).

Furthermore, LA often features engaging and relatable stories that were passed down from one generation to another, enriching young people with values, beliefs, imagination, and creativity, and further motivating them to connect with the English language (Pulimeno et al., 2020). For ESL students, the stories in picture books, folktales, and simple novels to which they are naturally drawn provide highly motivating and engaging instruction (Ghosn, 2013). By reading or listening to these stories, students are exposed to diverse cultures, perspectives, and experiences, and vicariously experience the entire spectrum of human emotions, both those they have already faced and those they have not yet encountered (Ghosn, 2013).

In addition to its linguistic and cultural benefits, LA serves as a vehicle for fostering Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in ESL classrooms. Stories and poems designed for children foster self-understanding, empathy, and language appreciation (Afash, 2024). SEL as defined by CASEL (2020), promotes the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Incorporating LA that explores diverse emotions helps children understand that others have feelings that may differ from their own, a foundational element of empathy. There is a natural affinity between ELA content and SEL objectives, and that SEL lens would promote and improve student engagement while facilitating mutually beneficial impacts (Storey, 2019).

### *Challenges in Using Language Arts in ESL Classrooms*

Curriculum misalignment is a significant obstacle to the integration of literature-based instruction in ESL classrooms since it is not subject to examination, contributing to students' lack of interest in literature and resulting

in teachers' emphasis on areas directly relevant to examination (Rahim & Aziz, 2024). In many educational contexts, particularly in Malaysia, national curricula often emphasize exam preparation, grammar mastery, and textbook-driven content. Awang and Aziz (2024) affirm that Malaysia's rigorous focus on standardised testing and high-stakes exams places subjects like literature in a precarious position, as they are often perceived as less "practical" in comparison to subjects with direct applicability to exams, such as mathematics or science. As a result, the literature component is no longer assessed in examinations (Rahim & Aziz, 2024). This high-stakes academic environment pressures teachers to "teach to the test," as they feel immense pressure, and their instructional planning and classroom practices are impacted by the tests (Timmer, 2012). Consequently, the benefits of using LA are often underutilized. This disconnect between curriculum expectations and the pedagogical potential of literature underscores the need for curricular reforms (OECD, 2024) as it is a significant driver of student performance and well-being.

One of the most pressing challenges in primary ESL classrooms is addressing language proficiency among students, as they lack motivation, self-confidence, and vocabulary knowledge, in addition to experiencing anxiety and inhibition (Aziz & Kasinathan, 2021). While some learners are just beginning to acquire basic words and simple sentence structures, others are ready to use more complex language and engage in extended communication; thus, translating this into principles and practices that influence what educators do is another matter entirely (Scott & Balthazar, 2013). According to El Deen (2023), learning a second language is accompanied by both positive and negative feelings; therefore, this gap can lead to frustration for beginners, who may feel lost during lessons, and boredom for advanced students, who may not feel sufficiently challenged. Literature-based language learning is increasingly recognized for its capacity to enhance linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and critical thinking in learners (Hossain, 2024). Culturally appropriate texts are essential because they allow students to connect with the material personally, which can significantly enhance engagement and comprehension (Ghosn, 2002). This pedagogical approach aligns with theories of communicative language teaching, contextual feedback, and literacy development, which stress the importance of meaningful language use in real-world contexts (Hossain, 2024).

Furthermore, many ESL teachers in Malaysia report a lack of training and guidance in teaching literature effectively (Ukat & Ismail, 2022). While children's literature is promoted in many language curricula, the vast majority of teachers are unaware of the instructional approaches that support further use of literary components in the English classroom (Ukat & Ismail, 2022). The absence of specific pedagogical strategies to support literature-based teaching often results in inconsistent or ineffective use of LA literary genres in the classroom, as teachers do not employ a variety of teaching methods (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015).

To be the most effective version of themselves, teachers must manage numerous tasks efficiently to achieve high-quality outcomes (Santi, 2024). The teachers in primary schools are tasked with numerous subjects, duties, and responsibilities, leading to reduced time for teaching students. Thompson et al. (2024) explore how heavy workloads, exacerbated by additional responsibilities outside of teaching, reduce teachers' available time for lesson preparation and student engagement. This workload intensification creates time poverty and can limit opportunities for literature-based activities, leading to superficial engagement with books rather than deeper, more thoughtful interaction with the material. Awang and Aziz (2024) assert that, as teachers strive to meet exam-related expectations, subjects that do not directly contribute to these outcomes can find themselves allocated less classroom time.

#### ***Support for Teachers Using Language Arts***

Research also highlights teachers' multifaceted challenges, and recognizing these challenges is the initial step in addressing them (Ag-Ahmad et al., 2025). Tayib and Hasan (2020) and Yahya (2017) suggested that the lack of professional training in teaching literature has resulted in a large number of teachers with a limited comprehension of literary materials and instructional methods. Professional development programs focused on integrating LA into ESL teaching can significantly enhance teachers' confidence and effectiveness. As Raudyatuzzahra (2023) states, the success of teachers in implementing children's literature in the young learners' class depends on a teacher's readiness and skills. Incorporating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into these professional development initiatives is crucial, as SEL constitutes a powerful tool for professional teacher development. Teachers need an understanding and knowledge of social, emotional, and cognitive processes, as well as research findings on SEL. There is a need to implement SEL approaches earlier and incorporate SEL principles within the teacher education programmes (Matschek-Jauk & Reicher, 2021). Furthermore, SEL-informed collaborative learning communities

among ESL teachers play a pivotal role in fostering knowledge sharing among educators and professionals. These communities encourage openness, mutual respect, and emotional support. As such, educators within these communities share insights, best practices, and resources, creating an environment for proper continuous learning (Admiraal et al., 2021).

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This case study was conducted to explore the challenges faced by ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools when using LA to teach English. By focusing on teachers' insights and reflective practices, this research generated rich, context-specific findings that contributed to enhancing literature-based teaching (LA) in ESL classrooms. Data is collected through classroom observations and interviews. A total of six primary school ESL teachers were recruited from urban schools in the Petaling Perdana district in the state of Selangor, Malaysia.

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were in-service ESL teachers currently teaching English at the primary school level in Malaysia. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to provide highly relevant and comprehensive information, ensuring those included had experience incorporating LA into their teaching practice. Purposive sampling is a non-probability method where participants are chosen based on predetermined criteria or objectives (Schreuder et al., 2001).

Table 1

*Selection Criteria for Purposive Sampling of Participants*

<b>Academic Qualifications</b>	<b>Professional Experience</b>	<b>Contextual Knowledge</b>	<b>Personal Preference</b>
At least a Master's degree in the relevant field (e.g., TESL and Education)	Minimum of 5 years in their respective disciplines	Familiarity with the teaching of LA and its relevance and support in teaching ESL.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporating LA into their timetables and teaching practices</li> <li>• Willingness to participate</li> </ul>

### *Data Collection*

A face-to-face in-depth interview (30 minutes) followed by classroom observations (1 hour) was conducted to understand teachers' views on their teaching challenges, opinions, and opportunities in teaching LA. Participants were informed that the classroom observations were not a performance evaluation; rather, the goal was to observe what was happening in their classrooms. Therefore, they were instructed to continue their usual practices on the observation days. The observed participants received a formal permission letter before the observation. The recordings were transcribed for detailed analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

The data for this study involved classroom observation sheets and interviews consisting of teachers' audio-taped recordings. Data collection and analysis were done simultaneously. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture all responses and nuances. The researcher employed thematic coding to identify recurring themes and patterns in teachers' challenges and opinions about teaching LA. The themes were categorized to distinguish between different aspects of teachers' challenges and strategies relevant to the research questions.

## RESULTS

### *Teachers' Positive Attitudes Toward Using Language Arts*

Teachers widely supported incorporating LA, emphasizing that stories helped students engage emotionally, build vocabulary, and relate to characters. One teacher said, "LA really helps the kids engage with English. It's not just

about the language; the stories open up new worlds for them. They can relate to the characters, making learning fun” (Interview, 30th May 2022). In a Year 5 class, students responded enthusiastically to a read-aloud session, laughing at humorous scenes and discussing characters' feelings. (Observation, 20th June 2022). In another lesson, students acted out parts of the story and shared personal reactions, showing clear emotional involvement. (Observation, 28th June 2022).

The teachers displayed a strong interest in incorporating LA activities into ESL teaching, acknowledging their ability to enhance the significance and enjoyment of language acquisition. They also pointed out that narratives enabled students to form emotional ties with characters, which boosts motivation and helps with language retention. These emotional bonds facilitated the cultivation of SEL skills, especially self-awareness and social awareness, as students contemplated the feelings and experiences of the characters. Observations in the classroom supported this: students were visibly engaged with the texts during read-aloud sessions, demonstrating empathy for the characters and a richer emotional connection to the material. In these instances, students were not merely acquiring language; they were exercising perspective-taking and honing their emotional literacy. LA also promoted a sense of community and inclusion within the classroom, nurturing relationship-building skills through shared narrative experiences and group discussions.

#### ***Student Engagement and Varying Literacy Levels***

One teacher found student engagement varied significantly due to differences in literacy proficiency. “Some students are excited to read the stories, but others find them too difficult to follow” (Interview, 14th July 2022). They responded by scaffolding content and adjusting materials to meet students at different levels. In a Year 3 class, some students disengaged during a story activity due to difficulty understanding the plot. The teacher introduced visuals and simpler vocabulary to re-engage them (Observation, 18th July 2022). Another class used a picture walk before reading, which visibly improved attention and understanding for lower-level students (Observation, 1st August 2022).

While numerous students expressed excitement during LA lessons, the teachers observed that differing levels of English proficiency created obstacles. Some students found it hard to understand the texts and became disengaged. These situations required students to engage in self-management, such as controlling frustration and staying focused when encountering challenges. In response, teachers showed social awareness and empathy by modifying their instruction to accommodate the diverse needs of students, simplifying texts, utilizing visuals, and providing peer assistance. In several classrooms, these methods resulted in noticeable improvements in participation and confidence among previously hesitant learners. The choices made by these teachers exemplified responsible decision-making, as they altered lessons to guarantee emotional and cognitive accessibility. By catering to students' levels, the teachers contributed to a secure and inclusive atmosphere that fostered language development and emotional resilience.

#### ***Time Constraints and Curriculum Pressure***

Teachers expressed concern that rigid curriculum demands left little time for rich literary engagement. “We are given so much to teach, and sometimes there's just no time to use children's books the way we want” (Interview, 10th August 2022). In a Year 6 classroom, only 10 minutes were devoted to reading, followed by grammar drills. Reflection activities were skipped (Observation, 19th August 2022). Another teacher ended a discussion abruptly to meet pacing guide requirements (Observation, 25th August 2022).

Teachers frequently expressed concern that the rigorous curriculum requirements would leave them with little time to implement LA meaningfully. Teachers were frequently compelled to skim texts or stop using SEL-promoting interactive and reflective exercises as a result. Teachers who expressed frustration did so because they were self-aware and understood the emotional toll that trying to strike a balance between institutional expectations and pedagogical values takes. This problem was supported by observations made in the classroom, where story-based lessons were frequently interrupted and students were not given time to discuss character motivations or emotional themes. Due to the pressure to put content before connections, students had fewer opportunities to practice making responsible decisions, grow in empathy, or consider moral quandaries in LA. The results demonstrate how systemic limitations can restrict language development and the possibility of creating meaningful SEL experiences through LA.

### *Lack of Training and Professional Development*

Teachers felt unprepared to integrate LA meaningfully due to insufficient training. “I was never trained on how to use stories effectively in class. I just learned through trial and error” (Interview, 4th July 2022). In some classes, LA was used superficially (e.g., fact-recall questions only) (Observation, 12th July 2022). However, in a well-facilitated Year 5 lesson, a teacher engaged students in a discussion on character motivation and moral choices (Observation, 28th July 2022).

Teachers stated that they were not formally trained in the effective use of literature to support SEL and language instruction. Many developed strategies through peer collaboration or personal experimentation. Despite their awareness of the emotional and educational power of literature, teachers frequently felt insecure due to this lack of professional preparation. This demonstrated teachers’ self-awareness and willingness to develop despite systemic constraints. According to observations, teachers who had prepared their lessons were more likely to have meaningful conversations with their students about the choices and feelings of characters, which helped the students develop their self-awareness, empathy, and moral reasoning. These observations showed that well-prepared teachers were more likely to engage students in meaningful discussions about characters’ decisions and emotions, thereby promoting self-awareness, empathy, and moral reasoning among students. Teachers who lacked training tended to focus more on surface-level comprehension. These differences underscore the importance of professional development that explicitly links LA pedagogy with SEL strategies. Teachers’ desire for structured support reflects responsible decision-making and a commitment to fostering academic and emotional development in their classrooms.

### *Strategies for Overcoming Challenges*

Teachers used various creative strategies: simplifying texts, adding visuals, integrating multimedia, and choosing SEL-rich themes “I picked themes where we can talk about emotions or moral decisions. What would you do if you were the character?” (Interview, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022). A teacher used a diorama of the story “The Jungle Book,” followed by vocabulary discussion and character journaling. Students reflected on emotions and values (Observation, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022). Another class role-played alternate endings to a story about bullying, prompting empathy and peer collaboration (Observation, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2022). In a Year 4 classroom, pair reading and peer teaching were used to support weaker readers, promoting shared learning (Observation, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022).

Despite facing constraints, teachers demonstrated creativity and adaptability in making LA accessible and emotionally engaging. To support SEL, numerous books with strong moral or emotional themes were chosen, texts were simplified, and multimedia tools were employed. Books about friendship, kindness, and tenacity, for instance, were frequently used to start conversations about feelings and moral judgment. These methods helped students become more socially conscious as they consider other people’s viewpoints and become more self-aware as they analyze their feelings and values. To help students practice cooperation and communication, teachers also encouraged group reading, role-playing, and literature circles. Students gained confidence and emotional insight as a result of these interactions, according to observations. As they attempted to meet academic and emotional needs with limited resources, teachers’ deliberate use of SEL themes and inclusive instructional practices showed responsible decision-making. They were successful in positioning literature as a tool for holistic development.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this research uncover key insights into the experiences and obstacles encountered by ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools while utilizing LA to instruct English. These findings emphasize the challenges of incorporating LA into the ESL classroom and stress the necessity for specific assistance for educators. Importantly, although the application of LA can improve language learning as well as social and emotional learning (SEL), educators indicated a demand for professional growth to incorporate these resources effectively. Tackling these gaps can promote more inclusive and emotionally nurturing classroom settings, enabling students to cultivate academic abilities alongside essential emotional skills such as empathy and self-awareness.

The teachers in this study consistently expressed a positive attitude toward the use of LA in their ESL classrooms, recognizing its potential to foster language acquisition and engage students. This aligns with previous research that highlights the benefits of cultivating empathy, creativity, and language skills, thus benefiting their moral

development and critical thinking (Ye, 2022). As noted by one teacher, the engaging nature of stories helps students connect with the language on an emotional level, making learning both meaningful and enjoyable. Stories also reflect culture and can help readers form a cultural identity and gain insight into the cultures of others (Roehl, 2018).

One of the primary challenges identified in this study was the difficulty of engaging students with varying literacy levels. This challenge reflects a broader concern in ESL classrooms, where students often possess differing language proficiencies when encountering a gap in their second language ability (Ye, 2022). Teachers in this study employed various strategies to address this challenge, including simplifying texts, using visual aids, and encouraging peer support through group reading activities. These strategies align with suggestions in the literature for differentiating instruction as it changes how students are taught, considering their needs (Umar & Aziz, 2024). At its most basic level, Tomlinson (2017) defines differentiated instruction as teaching in the classroom while providing students multiple opportunities to absorb information, understand ideas, and express what they learn. Additionally, when students collaborate, they participate in shared discussions, solve issues, and complete cooperative activities, causing greater mutual understanding and social relationships (Li, 2025). Hence, peer learning and collaborative learning have been found to promote student engagement and improve language outcomes. These approaches enhance academic skills and foster SEL competencies such as empathy, self-regulation, and collaboration. Developing a sense of community and emotional support through peer interactions and cooperative learning helps them build confidence and resilience in their language learning journey.

The issue of time constraints and the pressure to meet curriculum requirements was another major challenge reported by teachers. In many primary schools, the ESL curriculum is dense, covering a broad range of topics within a limited timeframe; as such, this leads to inconsistency between the intended national curriculum and actual classroom realities (Sahib & Stapa, 2021). Due to these time constraints, there is often little room for deeper exploration of literature-based lessons, and teachers cannot adequately prepare their worksheets (Sidhu et al. 2010). Teachers in this study felt pressured to rush through lessons to cover the necessary material, which limited their ability to integrate LA meaningfully into their teaching, as they have much to offer in disseminating and sharing these practices (OECD, 2021).

To tackle this issue, teachers should advocate for more adaptable scheduling and modifications to the curriculum, as curricula can possess implicit or "hidden" roles that influence the educational experience beyond the clearly defined objectives. The temporal organization of school practices determines the educational functions of the curriculum, and their time inflexibility and non-linearity constitute a functional part of a hidden curriculum that allows for the use of LA without compromising other educational goals (Leek et al., 2024). By investing more time in literature-focused instruction, such as LA, students can immerse themselves more profoundly in the emotional and social themes present in the narratives, thereby improving their ability to comprehend and regulate their feelings while fostering significant relationships with their peers.

Teachers' success in implementing LA in the young learners' class depends on the readiness and skills of the teacher; hence, a significant finding of this study was the lack of professional development regarding the use of LA in ESL teaching. Many teachers expressed a desire for formal training on how to integrate literary genres in their lessons effectively. Although many teachers are skilled at teaching English, the specific pedagogical strategies for using literature to enhance language learning often remain unexplored, as teaching literature to young learners takes effort (Raudyatuzahra, 2023). Teacher professional development programs focusing on literature-based teaching strategies are crucial for enhancing the quality of education and fostering effective teaching strategies (Samundeeswari, 2024). Such professional development can enhance language learning and emotional growth in students as well as incorporate SEL into their teaching by promoting empathy, self-regulation, and social awareness.

Despite the challenges, the teachers in this study demonstrated resilience, creativity, and self-efficacy in overcoming the obstacles they faced. They adapted their teaching strategies, simplified texts, utilized multimedia resources, and remained dedicated to teaching to support their students' learning. Teacher resilience has emerged as an alternative perspective aimed at understanding why teachers persevere in the face of challenges encountered in their profession (Paller & Quirap, 2024). This collaborative approach helps teachers enhance their practice and fosters a sense of community and mutual support, which is crucial for professional growth and SEL development.

## IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK DIRECTION

### *Implications*

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the use of LA in ESL classrooms. There is a need for professional development opportunities focused on literature-based teaching strategies, enabling teachers to develop the necessary skills to integrate LA into their lessons effectively. School administrators and policymakers should also advocate for more flexibility in the curriculum, allowing teachers the time required to explore literature in depth without the constraints of an overly rigid schedule. Finally, fostering a collaborative culture among teachers is crucial. Schools should encourage teachers to share resources, lesson plans, and strategies for using LA effectively, creating a supportive and resource-rich environment that benefits both teachers and students.

### *Limitations of the Study and Future Work Direction*

This study explored the challenges faced by ESL teachers in Malaysian primary schools when using LA as a tool for teaching English. However, it focused on a single district in Selangor, Malaysia. Therefore, future research should include other districts in the state to provide a broader perspective on incorporating LA in English Language teaching. Additionally, the study involved only six participants (teachers). Future research could involve more teachers from various districts and backgrounds to ensure the findings are more robust. Furthermore, this study focused solely on teachers as participants; hence, future work should also include students' perspectives for a more comprehensive understanding. Moreover, the study utilized just one qualitative method. Future research could explore quantitative or mixed methods to understand its broader applicability and impact better. By addressing these limitations and exploring new directions, future research can provide deeper insights into the effective use of LA as a tool that enhances the teaching of English.

## CONCLUSION

Despite these challenges, the teachers in this study demonstrated creativity and resilience by employing various strategies to engage their students and utilise available resources to the fullest. The teachers' experiences highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development and collaboration among educators to overcome barriers to effective LA teaching. This study emphasized the need for a more supportive teaching environment. Policy changes that enhance access to resources, allocate more time for literature-based activities, and provide targeted professional development help address the challenges faced by ESL teachers in Malaysia. In conclusion, the successful implementation of LA in ESL classrooms requires thoughtful planning, teacher training, and systemic support. Therefore, addressing the challenges identified in this study, educators and policymakers should enhance the effectiveness of LA instruction, promote SEL competencies such as empathy and self-awareness, and ultimately improve language learning outcomes for ESL students.

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