

## THE CHALLENGES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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SUBMISSION TRACK	A B S T R A C T
Submitted : 31 January 2023 Accepted : 23 February 2023 Published : 18 March 2023	Learning English is already a challenging task, and when it comes to studying literature in English, the difficulty level increases even further. This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is conducted to identify important challenges in the teaching and learning of English literature. The whole process of conducting this SLR followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. PRISMA is a graphical representation of the complete process of doing a systematic review and meta-analysis, including the search for relevant articles, the filtering of them based on certain criteria, and the assessment of their quality. The results show that the factors can be categorised into three: student-related challenges, teacher-related challenges, and external-related challenges. This paper reports the key gap and limitations in current study that focuses on the challenges in the teaching and learning of English literature.
KEYWORDS	
Challenges, Issue, English Literature, ESL classrooms	
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### Introduction

Literature is an essential component of English language teaching (ELT) and is widely acknowledged as a vital source of authentic content for language development (Kaowiwattanakull, 2021). It offers various benefits to both students and teachers in acquiring English, such as providing rich language input for students to express themselves, motivating students to learn, catering to students with varying learning styles, and exposing students to creative writing and figurative language (Bist, 2018). Literature also serves as an example for its learners of how to effectively use both sentence structure and vocabulary, which are crucial for language learning (Kaowiwattanakull, 2021). The ability of literature in making the teaching and learning of English process easier and better has been reported in various studies, such as Nagayar et al. (2015); Emodi (2017); and Karlsson (2018).

In Malaysia, as one of the initiatives in improving the English education curriculum and students' English language competence, the Ministry of Education (MOE) adopted English Literature into the English language KBSM curriculum in 1999 (Suliman & Yunus, 2014). With this move, all students from Form One to Form Five are required to learn literature components chosen from various genres, including poetry, novels, and short stories that are written by Asian as well as Western writers, that is embedded in the English language curriculum (Nor Hashimah & Che Ton, 2012). According to Teh and Isa (2016), the Malaysian government's aims in integrating literature into the English curriculum are to instil reading habits in students so that they read regularly, improve the students' command of the English language via assigned literary texts, help develop their character, and expose students to various worldviews and cultures (Ahmad Thamrini, 2018). According to Arifatin (2019), the benefits of literature are to lead and allow the reader's imagination to live fully, thoroughly, richly, and with increased awareness in engaging in it. Previously, the students are required to learn the literary texts and their components before they are being tested in major examinations, such as Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR).

Over the years, the role of the literature components in Malaysian English curriculum has changed with the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference

(CEFR) in the current English language KSSM curriculum. The new reform in the English education system that introduces the CEFR through the English Language Education Roadmap 2015- 2025 as the latest policy is to make the Malaysian English language education system on par with the other international systems (Nur Ashiquin et al., 2021) and increase the standard of English in Malaysia (Zainab et al., 2017). CEFR was introduced in stages, starting in 2013 and it is hoped that it can help align the Malaysian English curriculum with international standards (Kaur & Mah, 2022).

The framework emphasises students' language skills and discusses what they can do rather than what they have not accomplished by using six proficiency descriptors (A1-C2) (Wok Zaki & Darmi, 2021). In the current KSSM curriculum, the Literature component is changed to Literature in Action (LiA) and no longer included in the current SPM format. The MOE collaborated with Cambridge English to develop a Standard-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC), which stated that reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, and LiA to be taught in English classes (Hanna Insyirah & Muhammad Hafidzudeen, 2022). LiA focuses on various types of literary texts such as short stories, poems, and novels and its main objective is to instil reading habits and thinking skills among students (Hanna Insyirah & Muhammad Hafidzudeen, 2022).

There have been numerous studies on the teaching and learning of literature in Malaysia in the previous KBSM curriculum, including Siti Norliana et al. (2009); Siti Salina et al. (2014); Marzilah and Sharifah Nadia (2010) to name a few. However, there is little research on the teaching and learning of LiA particularly in the current CEFR curriculum. Although literature and its components are no longer being tested in examinations in the new curriculum, English teachers still need to teach LiA in English lessons, as outlined in the Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP). Hence, it is important to identify the challenges in delivering literature lessons as aligned in the current CEFR curriculum. Data from this SLR could serve to benefit various parties, especially teachers and stakeholders.

### **Problem Statement**

The implementation of literature in the English curriculum more than two decades ago in hopes that it could improve English proficiency among students seems to be ineffective. There is an issue with students' poor proficiency levels in English, even after 11 years of learning the language in both primary and secondary schools (Normazidah et al., 2012). According to Karnine et al. (2022), despite being proficient in English adds value to any professional or highly skilled position, Malaysian students continue to have difficulty learning English as a second language. This situation is worrying because students' overall achievement in secondary schools should be solidified so that they are cognitively mature enough to contribute to society and the nation (Nadesan & Md. Shah, 2020). The decline of English proficiency at the school level could harm the students academically and professionally in the long run. A report by Pemandu in 2016 reported that the unemployment of undergraduate students due to their lack of language ability is one indicator of the decline in the quality of English (Abu Bakar et al., 2021).

Besides that, the teaching and learning of literature received backlash due to its selection of texts, context, and themes as well as language style (Faiza & Azlina, 2020). All these issues related to literature made the teaching and learning of English in general difficult and uninteresting, thus leading to poor English competency among Malaysian students. The issue of poor English proficiency among Malaysian learners has been reported by Nor et al. (2019), in which students generally have their own respective problems in mastering all four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This issue could dampen the nation's aspiration in producing well-rounded individuals that are able to compete and thrive in the globally competitive world. Thus, it is vital to identify the long-standing challenges

that prevent the successful teaching and learning of literature in producing proficient English users from taking place in schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This present systematic literature review seeks to present a synthesis of empirical evidence from related studies discovered over the years on the teaching of English literature, particularly on the challenges. The finding of this systematic review could serve as a reference to English teachers in improving the methods of instruction in teaching literature and its components to their students.

### **Materials and Methods**

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a sort of literature review, in which relevant research on a given research question or topic is identified, critically evaluated, and synthesised using a systematic approach. This current SLR's purpose is to give a comprehensive summary of existing research on the challenges in the teaching of literature in ESL classrooms. The steps for carrying out the current systematic literature review are as follows:

1. Create a specific research question or topic.
2. Create a comprehensive search strategy to locate relevant research.
3. Assess the quality of the studies included in the review.
4. Extract data from the studies included in the review.

Each step 1 until 4 in conducting the present systematic literature review is discussed in detail below.

#### **A. Developing research question**

In this first step, there is one criterion taken into consideration in developing the research question for the current SLR: intervention. This main criterion that guides this current SLR is explained in Table 1.

Intervention	Existing works that address challenges in the teaching and learning of English Literature.
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**Table 1.** Criteria in Developing the Research Question

Based on the past studies on the intervention related to the teaching and learning of English literature, this paper will focus on one main and detailed research question as follow:

*RQ1: What are the challenges faced by English teachers in the teaching of literature in ESL classrooms?*

#### **B. Search strategy**

In conducting the search process in identifying relevant articles that can answer the main research question above, this current study follows clearly defined steps:

##### **1) Search for articles online**

Use Google Scholars to search for journals articles and systematic literature reviews related to this paper by using keywords such as “*Challenges in teaching English Literature*”, “*Teaching English Literature*” and “*Factors of challenges in Literature lesson*”.

## 2) Filter the articles

Inclusion and exclusion criteria are used in a systematic literature review to determine which studies should be included in the review and which should be excluded.

The inclusion criteria define the characteristics of the studies that will be included. It was applied in the advanced setting to narrow down the articles such as keywords “*Malaysia*” and “*ESL classrooms*” and the time frame was set from 2012 until 2022. Other criteria include language, such as the studies published must be in English. The research papers also should contain challenges revolving around the teaching of literature.

Exclusion criteria define the characteristics of the studies that will be excluded from the review. The exclusion criteria applied to this SLR include studies that are not published in English or other languages. Other than that, studies published that exist for more than 10 years are excluded. Studies that are unrelated to the population of the current SLR are also excluded through the elimination of keywords such as “*nursing*”, “*STEM*” and “*ICT*”. Lastly, English studies that are not related to the literature component are omitted such as the keywords “*listening*”, “*speaking*”, “*reading*”, “*writing*” and “*vocabulary*”. The articles that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were shortlisted and reviewed for quality assessment.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Studies related to challenges in the teaching of English literature.</li> <li>Studies written in English only.</li> <li>Studies published between 2012-2022.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Studies not related to challenges in the teaching of English literature.</li> <li>Studies published before 2012.</li> <li>Studies that contain unrelated keywords.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

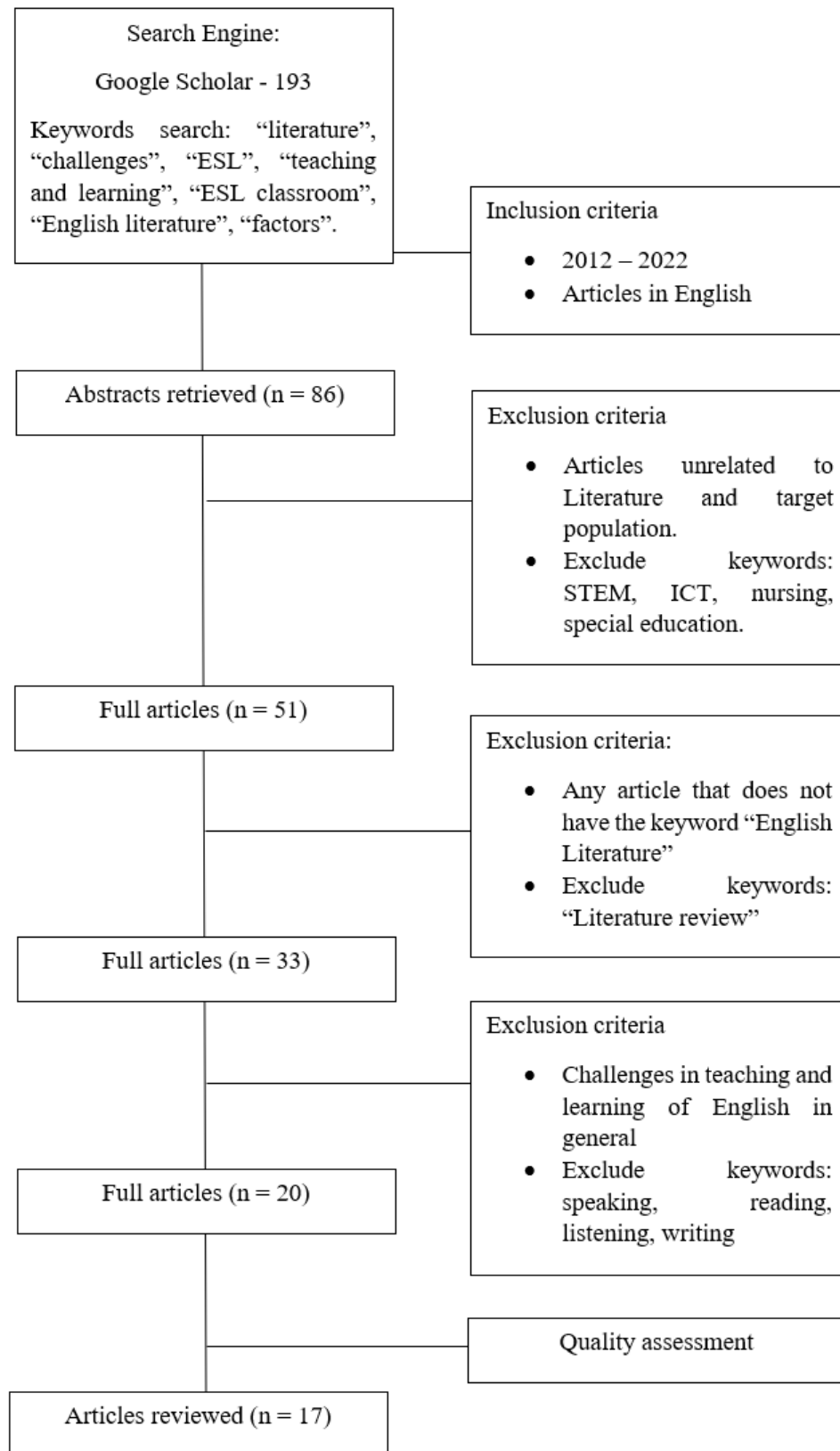
## C. Assessment of quality

After the search process is done, the selected articles are carefully assessed for the purpose of finding the relevant answer for the research question. The articles that do not meet the set criteria will be excluded from the selection. The assessment of the quality process requires the selected articles to fulfil the requirement below:

Question Asked During Quality Assessment Process	Answer
Do the articles clearly report important challenges related to the teaching and learning of English literature in ESL classrooms?	Yes/ No/ Partially

**Table 3:** Question Used in the Quality Assessment Process

The whole process of searching, filtering, and assessing the articles is visualized in Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart in Figure 1 below, which provides a clear, graphic picture of the process.



**Figure 1:** The PRISMA Flowchart of Articles Selection, Filtering, and Quality Assessing Process

After assessing the articles, there is a total number of 17 articles that have fulfilled the criteria and passed the quality assessment. Table 4 shows the categorization of the articles based on their respective types, which are journal article and SLR.

TYPES OF ARTICLES	TOTAL NUMBER
Journal Article	12
SLR	5
Total	17

**Table 4:** The Category and Number of Selected Articles

#### D. Data Extraction

After the process of selecting and finalizing the articles is completed, the chosen 5 SLRs and 12 journal articles are reviewed and extracted. The findings from the 5 SLRs are then analysed and tabulated in Table 5 as follows:

NO	AUTHOR/ YEAR	PURPOSE	FINDINGS
1	Farhanah Mohamad Fikray & Hadina Habil (2022)	Describe the literary teaching approaches used by teachers in the ESL classroom and explore the difficulties encountered while using proper literature teaching approaches in the lesson.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination-oriented system</li> <li>• Large class size</li> <li>• Time constraint</li> <li>• Language competency</li> <li>• Students' attitude</li> <li>• Literary texts selection.</li> </ul>
2	Jennie Awing Ukut & Hanita Hanim Ismail (2022)	Discuss the challenges and possibilities that most teachers have when teaching literature in Malaysian ESL classrooms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of training and guidance.</li> <li>• Time constraint.</li> <li>• Teachers have low proficiency.</li> <li>• Irrelevant literary materials.</li> </ul>
3	Faiza Rostam Affendi & Azlina Abdul Aziz (2020)	Discuss the challenges and teaching approaches of English literature in order to improve instruction methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuitable literary texts.</li> <li>• Culturally foreign texts.</li> <li>• Dislike poetry due to difficult language.</li> <li>• Like short stories with easy to understand language.</li> <li>• Teachers' poor teaching methods.</li> <li>• Teachers have limited knowledge on literary materials.</li> <li>• Exam-oriented method.</li> <li>• Lack confidence and pedagogical training.</li> <li>• Conservative teaching techniques.</li> </ul>
4	Harwati Hashim & Mohamad Asyraf Abd Talib (2019)	Investigate the current issues and challenges faced by secondary school teachers and students in learning and teaching English Literature in Malaysia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers use boring and dull teaching approach.</li> <li>• Teachers are not trained to teach literature and cannot create interesting activities.</li> <li>• Pressure and expectation from examination made teachers abandon creative teaching</li> </ul>



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approaches.</li> <li>Selection of literary texts used in schools are not suitable as they have difficult language level and foreign contents.</li> </ul>
5	Yahya Omar (2017)	Discuss teachers' roles and approaches in teaching literature component and suitable approaches available in teaching English literature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are untrained and incompetent to teach literature.</li> <li>Teachers have limited knowledge on creative teaching methodologies.</li> <li>Students cannot get the writer's message due to low proficiency.</li> <li>Students are too passive and unable to respond critically.</li> <li>The literary texts are culturally and contextually foreign.</li> </ul>

**Table 5:** Summary of 5 Systematic Literature Reviews

Next, the findings from the 12 journal articles are also analysed and tabulated, as shown in Table 6 below.

NO	AUTHOR/ YEAR	PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY	FINDINGS
1.	Eucharia Okwudilichukwu Ugwu (2022)	Investigate the problems of teaching Literature-in-English in 51 public senior secondary school in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State.	Mixed method: 1) Questionnaires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20 teachers and 7090 students in 35 senior secondary schools.</li> </ul> 2) Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20 teachers from each school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low interest in reading and low proficiency in English</li> <li>Shortage of Literature-in-English teachers and instructional material</li> <li>Large classes, poorly equipped libraries</li> </ul>
2.	Leslie Anne N. Gatdula, Abigail C. Gomez, Dynesa W. Rosales, & Sophia Jean O. Sunga (2022)	Investigate the different challenges faced by the students and faculty members in learning and teaching literature.	Quantitative method: 1) Survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>201 students and ten faculty members teaching literature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unfamiliar with the culture and social background.</li> <li>Low language proficiency.</li> <li>Lack of motivation and interest.</li> <li>Unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical structures.</li> </ul>
3.	Ain Suraya Harun & Norhanim Abdul Samat (2021)	Investigate pre-service teachers' readiness and challenges in teaching literature and identify solutions to	Mixed method: 1) Questionnaires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>22 TESL pre-service teachers from a public university.</li> </ul> 2) Semi-structured interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 lecturers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time allocation for literature.</li> <li>Poor time management.</li> <li>Lack in creativity.</li> <li>Students have</li> </ul>

		improve the teaching of literature.		negative attitude towards literature.
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of literature modules available.</li> </ul>
4.	Fatima Rehan Dar, Roshana Kamran & Muniza Asad (2021)	Investigate the challenges faced by teachers and undergraduate students in a world literature course.	Quantitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>436 students and 6 teachers teaching World Literature undergraduate course.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor reading habits.</li> <li>Lack of interest and exposure in literature.</li> <li>Lack of language proficiency.</li> </ul>
5.	Chinar Kamal Tayib & Hazha Salih Hassan (2020)	Investigate the factors underlying the challenges literature teachers face in teaching literature components at the university level.	Mixed method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Questionnaire</li> <li>15 English literature teachers</li> <li>2) Semi-structured interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of training and confidence.</li> <li>Unsuitable teaching methods.</li> <li>Low language proficiency</li> <li>Lack of speaking and reading skills</li> <li>Low motivation.</li> <li>Lack of literature knowledge.</li> <li>Students' cultural prejudice.</li> <li>Insufficient teaching hours.</li> <li>Lack of facilities and materials</li> </ul>
6.	Muhammad Dahiru (2020)	Investigates challenges of teaching Literature-in-English in secondary schools within Yobe and Borno states in north-eastern Nigeria.	Mixed method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Questionnaires</li> <li>2) Interviews (FGD)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of teaching resources and qualified teachers</li> <li>Culturally foreign texts.</li> <li>Ineffective teaching method</li> <li>Struggle to appreciate and analyse the text</li> </ul>
7.	Yulnetri (2018)	Examines the problems faced by High School teachers in using literature to teach English.	Qualitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Interview</li> <li>10 English teachers who had integrated literature in their teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficult language.</li> <li>Students' low proficiency.</li> <li>Untrained teachers.</li> <li>Teaching literature is time-consuming.</li> <li>Students' poor pronunciation skill.</li> <li>Unavailable supporting tools.</li> <li>Lack of good literature resources online.</li> </ul>



				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students' lack of confidence.</li> </ul>
8.	Ceren Işıklı & Aslı Ö. Tarakçıoğlu (2017)	To identify mainly the primary source of problems in EFL contextualized English literature teaching.	Quantitative: 1) Questionnaire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>108 English teachers at state Anatolian High Schools (AHS) in seven regions of Turkey.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low proficiency levels</li> </ul>
9.	Elham T. Hussein & Aida H. Al-Emami (2016)	Identify the most significant challenges to teaching English literature from the perspective of male and female instructors at The University of Hail (UoH)	Quantitative: 1) Questionnaire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 female and 12 male instructors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low language proficiency</li> <li>Unfamiliarity with the cultural and social background of the text</li> <li>Lack of motivation</li> <li>Difficult linguistic</li> </ul>
10.	Noraishah Intan Othman, Parilah M. Shah, Aidah A. Karim, Aminuddin Yusof, Rosseni Din, Nor Azlina Ramli & Nor Syazwani Mat Salleh (2015)	Investigate students' perceptions and challenges in learning English literature.	Quantitative: 1) Questionnaire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>60 Form 5 students from secondary school in Hulu Langat, Selangor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students' lack basic knowledge of literary component.</li> <li>Difficult to understand the underlying meaning.</li> <li>Difficult language.</li> <li>Uninteresting themes/ issues.</li> <li>Students are demotivated to learn due to poor English proficiency.</li> <li>Teachers' weaknesses in giving good explanation on literary texts.</li> </ul>
11.	Siti Salina Mustakim, Ramlee Mustapha, & Othman Lebar (2014)	Evaluate the approaches of five ESL teachers teaching Year 5 students and examines the various challenges faced by them in the teaching of literature.	Qualitative: 1) Classroom observation 2) Semi-structured interview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 teachers from 5 randomly selected schools in Kuala Selangor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uninteresting photocopied materials.</li> <li>Difficult language in texts.</li> <li>Lack of training and supplementary materials.</li> <li>Unsuitable teaching methods.</li> </ul>
12.	Nor Hashimah Isa & Che Ton Mahmud (2012)	Investigate the selection of literary texts needed for Malaysian secondary schools.	Mixed method: 1) Cross-sectional survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>422 secondary school students from Form two to Form five.</li> </ul> 2) Interview:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only certain themes appeal to the students.</li> <li>Text selection should be relatable to students' culture, age, proficiency levels,</li> </ul>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 TESL teachers who learned literature and teach at least ten years in secondary schools.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>and social and emotional development.</li> <li>• Select authors who use simple writing style.</li> <li>• Prefer prose forms with local and foreign content.</li> <li>• Choose Malaysian and Asian context for starters.</li> <li>• Introduce Western literature at the upper secondary level.</li> </ul> |
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**Table 6:** Summary of 12 Journal Articles

## Results and Discussion

All of the results from articles are tabulated in order to answer the research question “*What are the challenges faced by English teachers in the teaching of literature in ESL classrooms?*”. Based on the tabulated data, the challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English Literature can be categorized and discussed based on three categories: students, teachers, and external.

### A. Student-related challenges

There are several recurrent challenges that are related to students found in the past articles and SLRs: attitude, personality, language competency, and basic literary knowledge.

#### 1) Students’ attitude

One of the challenges in the teaching of English literature that is identified in this systematic review is students’ negative attitudes. Students’ negativity towards learning literature can stem from several reasons. Firstly, the highest occurring reason is students’ low motivation to learn foreign literature, which has been mentioned in five articles (Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Gatdula et al., 2022; Dar et al., 2021; Dahiru, 2020; Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016). Students who are not motivated in learning literature might lack the cultural and social background of the literary texts, especially foreign ones, as mentioned by Gatdula et al. (2022), Hussein and Al-Emami (2016), and Dahiru (2020). Specifically, students’ cultural prejudice toward foreign literature (Tayib & Hassan, 2020) can also repel the students from learning literary texts. When they do not have all this background knowledge of what they are going to read, they can feel emotionally, socially, and historically distant from the characters in the literary texts (Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016), which can demotivate them as they cannot relate to the texts.

Next, four articles stated that students who view literature in a negative way are not interested in the literature lesson itself (Ugwu, 2022; Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Ain Suraya & Norhanim, 2021; Gatdula et al., 2022). Ugwu (2022) specifically mentioned that students undervalue the need to learn Literature in English as a school subject, which can negatively influence their attitude towards it. Moreover, negative attitude towards literature among students can also come from within the students themselves, who have low interests in reading and poor reading habits (Ugwu, 2022; Dar et al., 2021). The

students shared that they are not interested in reading itself, which makes them dislike the required extensive reading in their schools that they do not even have the prescribed texts (Ugwu, 2022). Lastly, students who are unaware of the importance of learning literature can be negatively influenced by it (Tayib & Hassan, 2020).

Students' negative attitude towards learning literature is an alarming factor that can pose a huge problem to English teachers because in second language learning, having a positive attitude is crucial as it can help the learners to acquire the target language more quickly compared to those who have a negative attitude (Gardner, 1985, as cited in Istiyani, 2014). In order to curb this problem, teachers themselves need to have a positive attitude and perception towards literature, be inspirational role models to students, and never demotivate those who are struggling to learn literature (Noraishah et al., 2015). Teachers can also help students to have a positive attitude towards learning English literature by explaining to them the long-term benefits that they can reap from learning it (Noraishah et al., 2015). Teachers play a huge role in motivating students to learn literature by making it real and relatable (Yahya, 2017), focusing on the cultural elements, and using a variety of attractive and enjoyable teaching strategies (Ain Suraya & Norhanim, 2021). According to Jannah et al. (2022), motivating pupils may aid them in making better assumptions, performing better, resolving problems, and reducing comprehension anxiety while reading materials.

## **2) Students' personality**

Apart from students' attitudes, their personalities can also become a hindrance in teaching them literature. Some of the approaches in teaching literature, like personal response and moral philosophical approaches, are to make students critically analyse and reflect upon the literary texts through meaningful and in-depth sharing sessions and discussions (Yahya, 2017). Two studies by Farhanah and Hadina (2022) and Yahya (2017) stated that students are too passive and reluctant to take part in their teachers' discussions and activities. Specifically, the students give passive feedback and they are reluctant to critically respond to the questions given by their teachers. Meanwhile, two studies conducted by Yulnetri (2018) and Tayib and Hassan (2020) found that students' shyness and lack of confidence can equally cause a problem for their teachers in the literature classrooms. As literature consists of different genres such as dramas, short stories, poems, and novels, the students can be asked to be physically involved in the activities such as singing, acting, or reciting poem, timid and unconfident students might have difficulty coming out of their shells (Yulnetri, 2018).

In dealing with shy and reluctant students in literature lessons, teachers need to be patient in helping them build their confidence. Teachers should guide the students properly and motivate them on how to speak with confidence during literature lessons (Tayib & Hassan, 2020). To make it less scary and nerve-chilling for the students to orally participate in literature class discussions, teachers can make assign the students in smaller groups so that their participation and interaction can be enhanced (Tayib & Hassan, 2020).

## **3) Students' language competency**

Most of the studies highlighted students' English language competency as the contributing factor behind the issue in English literature lessons (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Yahya, 2017; Noraishah et al., 2015; Yulnetri, 2018; Ugwu, 2022; Isikli & Tarakcioglu, 2017; Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Gatdula et al., 2022; Dar et al., 2021; Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016; Dahiru, 2020). Specifically, students have poor mastery of reading and speaking skills (Tayib & Hassan, 2020). Students who have poor proficiency in

English might face a problem understanding the deeper message and meaning that the writers or poets are trying to convey as they are only able to understand the literal meanings of the works (Yahya, 2017; Noraishah et al., 2015). This is because the language used in literary texts is usually difficult and archaic, which can confuse students with limited vocabulary (Noraishah et al., 2015; Yulnetri, 2018).

In addition to difficulties in reading and comprehending the texts' content, pronunciation issues can discourage low-proficiency students from studying the required literary works because they struggle to even pronounce the English words correctly (Yulnetri, 2018). Furthermore, low-proficiency students might need to refer to dictionaries or search for the words online to identify the meanings and pronunciations, which can take a long time to finish the whole literary text. If teachers need to cater to students with limited vocabulary, it might take up quite a lot of time to finish the syllabus, which is one of the problems faced by teachers in teaching literature (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Ukat & Hanita, 2022; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Yahya, 2017; Ain Suraya & Norhanim, 2021; Yulnetri, 2018). In general, having low proficiency in English can hinder students from critically analysing and appreciating literary texts (Dahiru, 2020).

It cannot be denied that having good language competence is essential in conducting a successful literature lesson because it can help students to comprehend literary texts and actively give their own feedback during question-and-answer sessions or class discussions (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022). In this way, teachers can assess their students' comprehension of the text accurately and efficiently. Thus, in helping students with low proficiency in English to learn literature, teachers need to be alert to the word choice, text length, difficulty levels, and time available when they choose the materials for their literature lessons (Yulnetri, 2018). They can also improvise the materials for literature lessons based on their students' abilities and proficiency levels. Not to forget, teachers need to always guide and motivate low-proficiency students on how to improve their competency (Tayib & Hasssan, 2020).

#### **4) Students' basic literary knowledge**

The last challenge related to students is their basic knowledge of literature. Noraishah et al. (2015) reported that one of the issues faced by 60 Form 5 students in learning the literary text is that they lack basic knowledge of literary components, which is the technical part of the literary texts such as the plots, characters, and settings. Students who do not have a solid foundation in this basic literary knowledge might find it difficult to analyse the literary texts in depth. One reason to explain this is the little exposure to literature in schools (Dar et al., 2021). Thus, in order to overcome this situation, teachers can prepare materials that can assist the students to understand the literature (Noraishah et al., 2015).

### **B. Teacher-related challenges**

There are several past articles that reported on the teacher-related challenges in the teaching of English literature. The recurrent challenges mostly discussed that are related to the teachers are teachers' incompetence and inappropriate teaching methods (Faiza & Azlina, 2020; Ukat & Hanita, 2022; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Yahya, 2017; Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Dahiru, 2020; Siti Salina et al., 2014).

#### **1) Teachers' incompetence**

Teachers are required to be competent in the teaching of English literature because literature plays an important role in supporting students' language development, cultural

understanding, and building their critical and analysis skills. However, one of the most identified challenges in the teaching of literature is teachers' incompetence. A study by Tayib and Hassan (2020) that was done on 15 English literature teachers in English Language Departments from Colleges of Education and Languages found that lack of establishing teachers hinders the process of teaching literature in the classrooms. Dahiru (2020) also reported that teachers are unqualified to teach literature. The participants in his study revealed that most available teachers in the private secondary schools are not competent as they did not specialise in English literature but in English Language teaching.

The main reason of teachers' incompetent in teaching literature can be attributed to the lack of training on the teachers' part (Ukat & Hanita, 2022; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Yahya, 2017; Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Siti Salina et al., 2014). A large proportion of respondents in the study by Tayib and Hassan (2020) strongly agree that teachers' insufficient or lack of training in literature teaching is among serious factors that cause problems while teaching literature. Paran (2008), as cited in Ukat and Hanita (2022), stated that despite the fact that some teachers may have taken literature courses in college, the majority are not familiar with the instructional strategies that enable increased use of literary elements in English-medium classrooms. Besides lacking in training, teachers are also found to be incompetent in teaching literature as they have limited knowledge on literary materials or low mastery to teach literature (Faiza & Azlina, 2020; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Yulnetri, 2018). Yahya (2017) cited a study by The Star (2012) that reported nearly 60% of English teachers failed the Cambridge Placement Test. Teacher's ability to teach the literary component can be called into doubt if they are unable to pass the Cambridge exam (Yahya, 2017).

Another factor that can contribute to teachers' incompetence is lack of self-confidence. Yeoh et al. (2018), as cited by Faiza and Azlina (2020), disclosed that English trainee teachers need more training in teaching literature because they lack confidence and pedagogical training. Tayib and Hassan (2020) supported this statement with the findings of their study where half of the teacher respondents agreed that the absence of self-confidence bring about challenges in literature classes. Teachers who lack confidence in their abilities to teach literature can be demotivated to teach literature. Therefore, it is important to provide teachers with the necessary training and support to help them build their confidence and motivation to teach literature.

## **2) Inappropriate teaching methods**

Another problem with the teaching of literature that derived from the teachers is the use of inappropriate and ineffective teaching methods in the classrooms (Dahiru, 2020; Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Siti Salina et al., 2014). Yahya (2017) emphasised that teachers have limited teaching method knowledge that forces them to rely on whatever approaches previously available. In a research by Tayib and Hassan (2020), majority of the respondents agree that teachers are responsible for the challenges in the teaching of literature due to their inappropriate teaching approach. Noraishah et al. (2015) reported that students are lacking in focus and co-operation in class during literature lesson due to teachers' weakness in giving good explanations and elaboration on the literature text. Several articles also mentioned that teachers still succumb to the old traditional ways of dull and less creative literature teaching and refuse to try new interesting techniques of teaching (Faiza & Azlina, 2020; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Yahya, 2017; Ain Suraya & Norhanim, 2021).



One of the commonly practised traditional methods of literature teaching is teacher-centered learning where the teacher acts as the dominant figure in explaining and translating literary texts to the students without taking students' input (Yahya, 2017; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019). Rochman (2018) also stated that teachers should act as facilitators to develop students' unique traits and potential by providing external guidance. Passive students' participation and teachers' function as sole-distributor of the input in learning process would only cater for instrumental purposes such as examinations. This creates an exam-oriented classroom that is unable to incorporate interesting teaching methods to teach literature (Faiza & Azlina, 2020; Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Yahya, 2017). There is a need to concentrate more on the teachers' involvement in teaching and learning of the literature component of English if teachers are the factor to the decline of certain subjects (Yahya, 2017).

### **C. External-related challenges**

There are several recurrent external challenges in the teaching of literature that were found in the past articles and SLRs, namely text-selection, poor learning environment and infrastructure, and time constraint (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Yulnetri, 2018; Tayib & Hassan, 2020).

#### **1) Text selection**

One of the most found challenges associated with text selection of the literary materials used is the culturally and contextually foreign themes presented in the texts (Gatdula et al., 2022; Dahiru, 2020; Faiza & Azlina, 2020; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Yahya, 2017; Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016; Nor Hashimah & Che Ton, 2012). The selection of texts used in the curriculum may not be inclusive or diverse, making it difficult for students from certain backgrounds to relate to the materials.

Other than the texts being foreign and culturally unsuitable, the difficult language level of literary works used in the text selection can also pose a challenge to the teaching of literature (Tayib & Hassan, 2020; Gatdula et al., 2022; Harwati & Mohamad Asyraf, 2019; Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016; Siti Salina et al., 2014). According to Harwati and Mohamad Asyraf (2019), high level of language used in literary text would cause difficulty for the teachers in teaching literature to students. This statement is agreed by Yulnetri (2018), who stated that some literary texts contain complicated and unfamiliar vocabulary that even teachers found it difficult to explain. In a study conducted by Hussein and Al-Emami (2016) on 22 instructors at The University of Hail, it was found that respondents viewed text-selection issues such as the level of linguistic and stylistic difficulty, influence the productivity of the teaching-learning process. Thus, it is important for the teachers to select a text that does not have too many new and difficult words and grammatical structures (Yahya, 2017).

#### **2) Poor learning environment and infrastructure**

According to teachers, a poor learning environment hinders their capacity to teach students successfully and also interferes with students' ability to focus (Ugwu, 2022). One of the many problems in poor learning environment commonly faced by teachers is the large number of students in a class (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Ugwu, 2022; Tayib & Hassan, 2020). Teachers find it difficult to provide individualized attention to students in a class with a high number of students. In a study conducted by Tayib and Hassan (2020),



the respondents strongly agree that crowded class is one of the serious obstacles literature teachers faced in teaching literature. It might be challenging for teachers to keep track of the lesson's flow in a large-sized class because students' learning styles and personalities differ widely (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022). Ugwu (2022) in his study found that some schools with overcrowded classes are challenging for teachers to manage.

An inadequate infrastructure such as an unequipped library with limited literature resources can impede the learning and study of literature due to limited access to necessary materials. Tayib and Hassan (2020) in their research found that most of the teachers agreed that their libraries are not fully-equipped for students and are short of literature materials. An absence of library would also cause problems such as lack of teaching resources and reading texts materials. Dahiru (2020) supports this statement with his findings that lack of available and appropriate text and resources are the factors for the non-teaching of a Literature-in-English in the targeted school. In a study conducted by Siti Salina et al. (2014), the insufficient materials forced the teachers to resort to photocopying the materials.

### **3) Time constraint**

A number of articles reported that time constraint in one of the external challenges faced by teachers (Farhanah & Hadina, 2022; Ukat & Hanita, 2022; Ain Suraya & Norhanim, 2020; Yulnetri, 2018; Tayib & Hassan, 2020). Limited time allocated in teaching literature can make it difficult for teachers to cover a large amount of material. This would make it difficult for students to fully understand and appreciate the literature. Ain Suraya and Norhanim (2021) in their study revealed that pre-service teachers considered '*having difficulty with the time allocation to teach literature*' to be the most serious problem. Half of the respondents in the study by Tayib and Hassan (2020) agree that the allotted hours for teaching literature are not enough. In implementing interesting literature approaches, the arrangement and preparation of the lessons take a lot of time. Farhanah and Hadina (2022) believe that time constraints hinder the implementation of literature teaching approach in the classrooms. To counter the problem of time constraint in teaching literature, the best solution stated by Ain Suraya and Norhanim (2021) is that teachers are advised to have good time management as students' attention span is not long.

### **Conclusion and Implication for Future Research**

Based on the analysis of the findings extracted, it can be concluded that the main challenges that the teachers might face in teaching literature in ESL classrooms are student-related challenges, which are their attitude, personality, language competency, and basic literary knowledge. Out of these four sub-topics under student-related challenges, it is found that students' language competency in English is mentioned in 11 articles (65%). Learning English is already a taxing task, and when it comes to studying literature, the difficulty level increases even further with its complex vocabulary and intricate grammatical constructions. This issue necessitates action from the education scene's front-liners, the teachers themselves. Teachers, being in close proximity to their students, know their students' needs closely, from their personalities, proficiency levels, and learning styles. All of this information is useful for them to choose the best teaching strategies in teaching the students literature. Teachers need to be able to create interesting and fun ways for students to learn literature meaningfully so that they can reap the most of benefits from it.

This systematic review has certain limitations, as it is based on a review of only 12 journal articles and 5 SLRs obtained from various online academic databases. The study is limited to articles published between 2012 and 2022, which may exclude more recent findings in the field, especially in the current English curriculum in Malaysia. Future researchers could focus more on the new implementation of literature in CEFR or also known as Literature in Action (LiA). Despite its limitations, it is expected that the outcomes of this study will be advantageous for ESL educators and students.

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