

Regular Research Paper

Teachers' beliefs in integrating English Language and Literature as a single subject in the proposed competency-based education curriculum

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The study examines the integration of English Language and Literature as a single subject within the Competency-Based Education (CBE). Guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning and Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) framework, this study's main objective was to examine teachers' beliefs on the integration of English Language and Literature as a single subject in the Competency-Based Education Curriculum. The study used a concurrent mixed-methods design. Ninety-six (96) participants undertook the study; they were all teachers from the four main regions of Eswatini. An online survey Google form questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, mainly descriptive statistics. The qualitative data were collected through telephone interviews and focus group discussions, and analyzed using thematic content analysis (TCA). The study revealed a nuanced landscape of teacher beliefs regarding the integration of English Language and Literature within the CBE curriculum. While many educators expressed support for the integration, citing its potential to foster deeper linguistic competence, critical thinking, and contextual understanding, others voiced concerns about the practical challenges of its implementation, particularly in terms of assessment, resource availability, and teacher preparedness. The study has implications for the integration of English Language and Literature within the CBE curriculum.

Key words: Competency-based education, English Language integration, teacher preparedness, curriculum implementation, secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

Competency-Based Education (CBE) has recently gained prominence in curriculum reform because it focuses on developing the practical skills and knowledge essential for real-world success, shifting away from traditional rote learning (Mirza and Teymoori, 2023). Eswatini's

curriculum framework policy dictates that the curriculum should undergo regular reviews to adapt to evolving goals and needs, and must be aligned with teacher training, the expertise of professionals in the field, and the availability of resources (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET],

2018). Reflecting a global trend, many countries, including Eswatini, are revising their curricula to better meet the demands of the 21st century. The MoET (2018) adopted this reform, initially implementing CBE in Eswatini's primary schools in 2019. The goal was to transition from the Objective-Based Education (OBE) curriculum, shifting the focus from memorization to practical and context-specific learning. CBE is scheduled for rollout at the secondary level, starting in January 2026, with Form 1 as the initial implementation and progressively expanding to other levels in subsequent years.

Furthermore, Eswatini has proposed changes to the secondary-level English curriculum. Under CBE, English Language and Literature in English are to be integrated into a single subject, also slated for implementation in January 2026. Scholars generally support the intertwining of Literature and English Language, viewing them as complementary subjects that both explore Language, despite potential differences in their teaching methodologies (Adejimola and Ojuolape, 2013). Integrating Literature into English Language instruction within CBE offers significant pedagogical advantages, as Literature naturally fosters critical thinking, empathy, creativity, and communication skills (Pardede, 2019; van Peer and Chesnokova, 2019), all of which align with CBE's objectives. However, a study conducted in Eswatini revealed teachers' mixed feelings on this integration (Makhubu, 2017).

While many teachers reportedly support the underlying philosophy of CBE, they also express reservations (Sewagegn, 2019). Challenges commonly faced by African nations, including Eswatini, during CBE transitions include insufficient teacher training, time constraints, and a lack of resources, which can impact teachers' perceptions and the implementation of English Language-Literature integration (Okeyo and Mokua, 2023). Nevertheless, some educators welcome this shift, viewing it as a means to enhance the meaningfulness of learning (Dlamini and Dlamini, 2021). Despite substantial research for supporting CBE and curriculum integration, specific gaps in understanding this effort persist within the Eswatini context. Consequently, in this study, we investigated teachers' beliefs regarding the integration of English Language and Literature as a unified subject within Eswatini's CBE Curriculum.

What is CBE and teachers' understanding of it?

CBE is an instructional approach that emphasizes learners' demonstration of approach that emphasizes

learners' demonstration of desired learning outcomes as central to the learning process. Originating in the United States in the 1960s and 70s as a response to concerns about the quality of education (Hodge, 2007), CBE has since become a global trend in educational reform. This learner-centered paradigm marks a departure from the traditional content-based and time-bound approaches, replacing them with personalized, outcome-driven systems that prioritize skill mastery, real-world application, and flexibility (Mirza and Teymoori, 2023).

CBE encourages differentiation in instruction and self-paced progression, facilitating inclusive learning environments. It redefines the role of the teacher from knowledge transmitter to facilitator and mentor. Learners, in turn, become active participants who construct knowledge through experience and apply it in authentic contexts. As Momanyi and Rop (2019: 12) explain that "competency does not mean an expert" but refers to the ability to perform a task to an acceptable standard. In CBE, the emphasis lies on developing 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Moora et al, 2024). Research reveals that teachers have different interpretations and beliefs on CBE, which influence their level of CBE implementation (Deng et al., 2024).

Perceptions and beliefs towards CBE in English teaching and learning

Teachers of English have perceived CBE within the English curriculum as placing an excessive burden on it (Mirza and Teymoori, 2023), possibly due to constraints on time and a shortage of teaching resources (Lukindo, 2016). Some classroom activities require frequent purchases of perishable and non-perishable materials. With bureaucracies of procurement processes in government schools, administrators and teachers may not be able to purchase all the required materials, and this is a challenge, particularly in universal secondary education schools where parents may be resistant to purchasing materials for their children, not because they do not want but because they cannot afford to do so (Atuhura and Nambi, 2024). This lack of resources appears to be impeding the effective implementation of CBE, as teachers find themselves compelled to supplement and adapt textbooks to devise tasks that foster cooperative, collaborative, and autonomous learning.

CBE requires learners to participate in group work, role-play, and class presentations, yet the time allocated for the

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subject is not enough to engage in such time-consuming activities (Atuhura and Nambi, 2024). Regarding assessment, teachers are tasked with regularly evaluating their learners' progress through a diverse range of assessment activities. Therefore, this shift necessitates comprehensive and continuous professional development to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to meet the demands of the new curriculum (Moorá et al., 2024). It is concerning that these constraints affect only English teaching and are likely to influence how teachers perceive and implement English Language-Literature integration under CBE.

English teachers generally believe that the application of CBE in English necessitates a departure from conventional methods of teaching grammar, Literature, and composition. Instead, it calls for approaches that incorporate these elements into meaningful, contextually relevant learning experiences (Moorá et al., 2024). Therefore, the successful implementation of English within the CBE curriculum requires teachers to embrace new instructional strategies, employ varied assessment methods, and integrate technology into their teaching practices. Unquestionably, this signifies that the effective application of CBE in English obliges teachers of English to devise and contextualize tasks and activities that permit learners to practice and improve real-world reading, writing, speaking, and listening communication skills (Mirza and Teymooori, 2023). Consequently, the capacity for learners to construct their learning and gain practical experience appears to furnish them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities required in the 21st century.

Teachers' beliefs and perceptions on integration

Teachers' beliefs significantly influence their classroom practices. They shape their instructional decisions, classroom attitudes, and even learners' own beliefs (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016). Studies examining teachers' perceptions of integrating Language and Literature into a single subject demonstrate generally positive attitudes toward such integration, citing that it enhances learners' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills (Moody, 1971). Also, learners recognized the significant benefits of literary texts, including not only improvements in Language skills, but also critical thinking and cultural awareness. Therefore, understanding this relationship is essential for the effective preparation and implementation of new syllabi. In the context of Eswatini and similar countries, integrating English Language and Literature within CBE faces both support and skepticism.

Studies have shown a range of beliefs on the integration of Literature and Language. Adejímola and Ojuolape (2013: 2241-2242) argue that these two should be treated as a unified subject, given their interdependent nature. Hence, defines "Literature-in-English and the English

Language (as) tools in the hands of each other". While Language is a tool by which Literature establishes an existence, Literature serves as a tool through which Language propagates itself. Hence, Literature has long been recognized by scholars, educators, and researchers as a valuable component in language teaching. Azikiwe (2007) echoes this sentiment, contending that if language instruction is removed from cultural context it becomes incomplete; Literature is what provides that culture. Despite the numerous benefits of literature in language enrichment, some countries provide it with less support than science subjects, owing to its perceived complexity, learners' low reading culture, and limited employment prospects (Kateregga, 2014). Hence, they proposed that the subject should be introduced at lower levels, especially in the primary cycle, where pupils can learn it in their mother tongue; otherwise, the language barrier dissuades learners in Uganda from expressing their feelings and opinions, and arguments with originality (Kateregga, 2014). In the same vein, Literature is not given the attention it deserves at the primary school level in Eswatini, leaving learners deprived of a Literature background and meaningful exposure when they get to the junior secondary level (Ndaba-Dlamini, 2023). It is an undeniable fact that this gap may also affect secondary teachers of English who have to teach these learners Literature for the first time.

Implications for Literature as an integrated subject

The study of Literature as an integrated subject is an interesting issue that has sparked a lot of debate in current research. Oftentimes, Literature is offered as an elective subject, whereby learners are given a choice on whether to do it or not. As many studies argue that English and Literature in English are similar subjects and there is no need to separate them, it is recommended that schools that do not offer the Literature subject should consider having the subject as part of the curriculum to enhance the quality of English Language achievement (Mbáh et al., 2023). It is on this basis that in schools where Literature is an optional subject, there is a need to encourage learners to take it in order for them to improve the quality of English Language achievement (Adejímola and Ojuolape, 2013).

Irrefutably, this means that teachers should be encouraged as well to adopt the methods of teaching both subjects (Omotoyinbo, 2020). This, therefore, calls for curriculum designers to consider making the Literature in English compulsory for all learners, regardless of subject specialisation, at the senior secondary level (Omotoyinbo, 2020).

This commendation has implications, especially in cases where English Language and Literature in English are integrated. On this note, Sun (2021) argues that teachers seem to lack confidence and capability in the implementa-

tion of integration of English and Literature, which calls for a need to explore appropriate approaches to teaching and professional training in terms of workshops, symposiums, seminars, and conferences being organised regularly (Omotoyinbo, 2020).

The role of Literature in enhancing cognitive and affective skills

Literature plays a crucial role in improving critical thinking, an essential life skill that improves the learning of students both inside and outside the classroom. Hence, Parderde (2019) and Widiastuti and Sampoema (2023) argue that critical thinking is a vein supporting individual's success academically, socially, and personally. It is therefore crucial that teachers understand that teaching poems, short stories, drama, and other literary works develops critical thinking in learners by providing them with meaningful and engaging learning experiences. Literary content provides learners with rich discussion material and requires them to form personal judgments. The learning is quite interesting and enjoyable, which naturally stimulates high engagement with the material presented, which makes them go beyond the presented information (Parderde, 2019). Similarly, as ideas and norms are challenged, emotions are evoked as learners empathise and relate texts to current issues in the real world (van Peer and Chesnokova, 2019). Consequently, as learners grapple with the subject, they operate within the parameters of Bloom's Taxonomy hierarchical framework, where they are required to analyse, interpret, evaluate, infer, and explain, enabling them to engage holistically with the material.

Teachers' beliefs on integration based on location and gender

While studies do not reveal the exact percentage of teachers who support the integration of English Language and Literature, many highlight a strong positive teacher attitude toward the benefits of such integration (Krasniqi, 2019). Similar trends are anticipated in Eswatini, pending confirmation through local studies. Although there is a common belief that gender affects language acquisition, a Nigerian study found no such impact on English performance, nor did school location, regardless of whether students studied Literature in English alongside English Language or only English (Mbah et al., 2023). This outcome in Nigeria could be influenced by English being a primary communication tool across diverse tribes, unlike in Eswatini, where Siswati is the main vernacular. Furthermore, urban teachers are generally more supportive of curriculum integration than rural teachers, often due to disparities in resources and professional development (Lavanya et al., 2024). Such a dynamic is

likely present in Eswatini, underscoring the need for equitable training and support. Although urban schools are often perceived to have learners who perform better in English, empirical research shows that learners from both rural and urban settings benefit equally from studying English through Literature (Omotoyinbo, 2020). This suggests that a supportive system is the critical factor enabling learners to achieve similar linguistic, cognitive, and emotional gains, regardless of their school's location.

Theoretical framework

The study was guided by two theories: Sociocultural Learning Theory by Lev Vygotsky and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), developed by Lee Shulman. The sociocultural learning theory emphasizes that learning is deeply rooted in social interaction and cultural context, asserting that cognitive development is not purely an individual process but is shaped through engagement with others and the environment.

According to O'Hara (2007), social interaction in learning occurs first between people (interpsychological) and then within the individual (intrapsychological). Children learn through dialogue, collaboration, and shared activities. Culture plays a central role, as language, symbols, and tools provided by a culture shape thinking and learning, mediating problem-solving.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) identifies the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance, emphasizing that effective teaching targets this zone to extend learners' abilities. Scaffolding refers to temporary support provided by a more knowledgeable person—teacher, peer, or parent—to help learners master new concepts, with support gradually withdrawn as competence increases. Language is both a communication tool and a mechanism for thought; inner speech regulates behavior and aids problem-solving. The second guiding theory, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), was introduced by Shulman (1987). PCK represents the integration of content knowledge (what to teach) and pedagogical knowledge (how to teach) that teachers require to educate students effectively. Content knowledge refers to a deep understanding of subject matter, including facts, concepts, theories, and frameworks (Shulman, 1987). Pedagogical knowledge encompasses general teaching strategies, classroom management, lesson planning, and assessment techniques. PCK also involves specialized knowledge of how to teach specific content in ways that make it accessible to learners, such as addressing common misconceptions, using analogies and examples, and adapting instruction to diverse learning styles and levels (Shulman, 1987). In this study, the two theories converge: the sociocultural theory informs the learning variables, while PCK addresses the teaching variables, providing a comprehensive framework for examining the

interplay between teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Design and procedure

The study adopted a mixed-methods design. Choosing designs is influenced by the type of study, nature of the research questions, and data collection procedure. The mixed method is appropriate because of the triangulation effect it has in corroborating the findings. Also, the instrument has binary data options (yes or no), needing descriptive statistics for analysis. As noted by Johnson and Christensen (2012), “mixed research sees positive value in both the quantitative and qualitative views of human behavior” (p.35). In Social Sciences, humans are very dynamic and have their views influenced by many factors, ranging from personal to cultural beliefs. The use of only quantitative or qualitative research could be limiting at times, yet a full complement of the methods could enlighten the study even better. The mixing of the methods intensifies the understanding of emerging concepts, such as the understanding of Competency-Based Education Curriculum, including beliefs on the integration of the English Language and Literature as a single subject. Overall, the study is 50% quantitative and 50% qualitative.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions. Questions 1 and 2 were quantitative, and questions 3 and 4 were qualitative.

Quantitative questions

1. What proportion of teachers believe in the integration of English Language and Literature into a single subject within the proposed Competency-Based Education (CBE) curriculum?
2. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of the integration of English Language and Literature into a single subject within the proposed Competency-Based Education (CBE) curriculum?

Qualitative questions

3. What are the teachers' understanding of the Competency-Based Education curriculum?
4. What are the teachers' beliefs on the integration of the English Language and Literature as a single subject in the Proposed Competency-Based Education Curriculum?

Participants

For the quantitative section of the study, a total of 96 participants were included, comprising 27 males, 68 females, and one participant who preferred not to disclose their gender. Their ages were distributed as follows: 21–25 years = 6, 26–30 years = 7, 31–35 years = 13, 36–40 years = 32, 41–45 years = 13, 46–50 years = 13, 51–55 years = 11, and 56–60 years = 1, indicating that the majority were between 36 and 40 years old. Participants' qualifications included: Certificate = 4, Diploma = 9, Bachelor's degree = 63, Master's degree = 15, PhD = 1, and 4 with no formal qualifications, showing a range from certificate to doctorate. Teaching experience varied as follows: less than 5 years = 7, 5–10 years = 20, 11–15 years = 17, 16–20 years = 26, 20+ years = 22, and 4 preservice teachers, with most participants having 16–20 years of experience.

Regarding positions, there were 30 Heads of Departments, 5 Vice Principals, 8 Principals, 49 ordinary teachers, and 4 preservice

teachers. Their teaching areas included: English only = 26, Literature only = 10, both English Language and Literature = 52, and 8 not teaching at the time of data collection. In terms of location, 19 participants taught in urban areas, 33 in semi-urban areas, and 44 in rural areas, with the majority teaching in rural schools. Regarding school level, 8 taught at primary schools, 31 at secondary schools, and 57 at senior secondary schools. Concerning school type, 63 taught in public (government) schools, 4 in private schools, 24 in mission schools, and 5 were not attached to a school at the time of data collection, likely due to delayed contract renewal. Overall, most participants were teaching in public schools.

For the qualitative section, twelve secondary school English teachers were purposively selected to reflect diverse educational settings across Eswatini. This included four teachers each from rural, semi-urban, and urban schools, ensuring balanced representation. Participants were drawn from the four main administrative regions—Shiselweni, Manzini, Lubombo, and Hhohho—to capture regional variations in experiences and perspectives regarding curriculum implementation. The teachers had between 2 and over 15 years of professional experience, providing insights across different stages of practice. Data were collected through telephonic semi-structured interviews, each lasting 30–45 min, allowing for focused yet flexible engagement with participants in their respective contexts.

Instruments

Two instruments were employed in the study. For the quantitative component, an online survey was developed using Google Forms and shared via WhatsApp links to English Language teachers' groups across Eswatini. Participants accessed and completed the form through the link, which could be shared among multiple participants. The survey consisted of five sections (A–E):

Section A: Demographics, including gender, age, teaching level, highest qualification, teaching experience, subjects taught, location, and school type (mission, government, or private).

Section B: Questions on the integration of English Language and Literature.

Section C: Questions on pedagogical considerations.

Section D: Questions on implementation.

Section E: Questions on perceived challenges and benefits of integrating English Language and Literature.

For the qualitative component, a semi-structured interview guide was developed in alignment with the study's research objectives. Open-ended questions elicited in-depth responses on teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and expectations regarding the integration of English Language and Literature under the CBE framework.

Validation and trustworthiness of instruments

The survey was pretested with five university students to identify ambiguous items. Subsequently, eight research experts reviewed the instrument for content validity, confirming that all items appropriately addressed the quantitative research questions. The interview guide was reviewed by two curriculum studies experts and one qualitative research expert to ensure clarity, alignment with objectives, and appropriateness. Minor adjustments were made based on feedback. During interviews, probing questions were used to encourage deeper exploration. Interviews were scheduled in advance, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to thematic analysis. Data were repeatedly read, coded, and grouped into categories, which were synthesized into overarching themes. Triangulation of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions further enhanced trustworthiness.

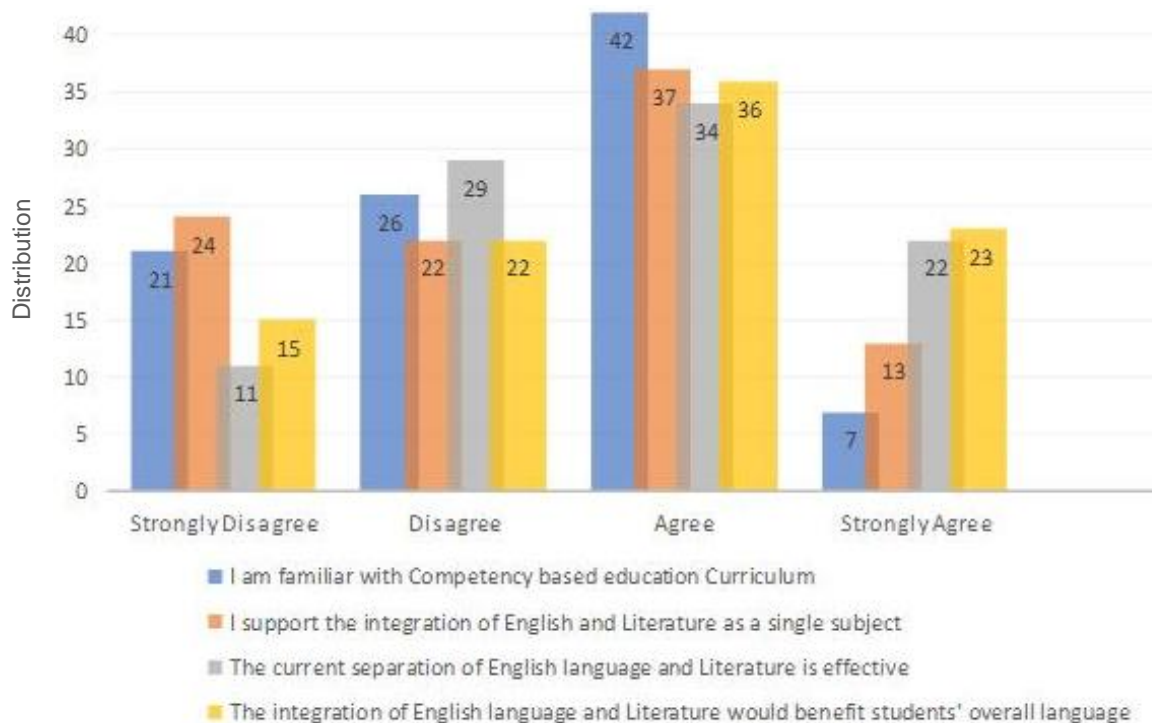


Figure 1. Distribution of responses.

Ethics and data collection

Ethical procedures were strictly followed. Participation was voluntary; participants were informed that they could choose not to access or complete the survey. On average, the survey took 10–20 min to complete, with 96 participants providing consented responses. The voluntary nature of participation was similarly explained to interviewees, all of whom participated without coercion.

Data analysis

A concurrent mixed-methods approach was used, with quantitative and qualitative data analyzed separately and then integrated for interpretation. Quantitative data from Google Forms were exported to Excel and analyzed using SPSS version 22, primarily using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic content analysis (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2019). Interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, coded, and organized into themes, which were interpreted in relation to the study objectives. This dual approach enabled triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings.

RESULTS

Findings from the quantitative data

Research question 1

The main objective of the question was to establish

the proportion of teachers who believe in the integration of English Language and Literature into a single subject within the proposed CBE curriculum.

In Figure 1, the first construct enquired about the participant's familiarity with the Competency-Based Education curriculum. It was necessary to enquire about their familiarity before delving into the questions of supporting the integration. The figure shows that majority of the participants are familiar with the Competency-Based Education curriculum. Also, most of the participants supported the integration of English Language and Literature as a single subject. On the issue of the current status quo, where English Language and Literature are taught separately, the participants recognized the separation as effective. Also, the majority of them agreed that such an integration would benefit students' overall Language.

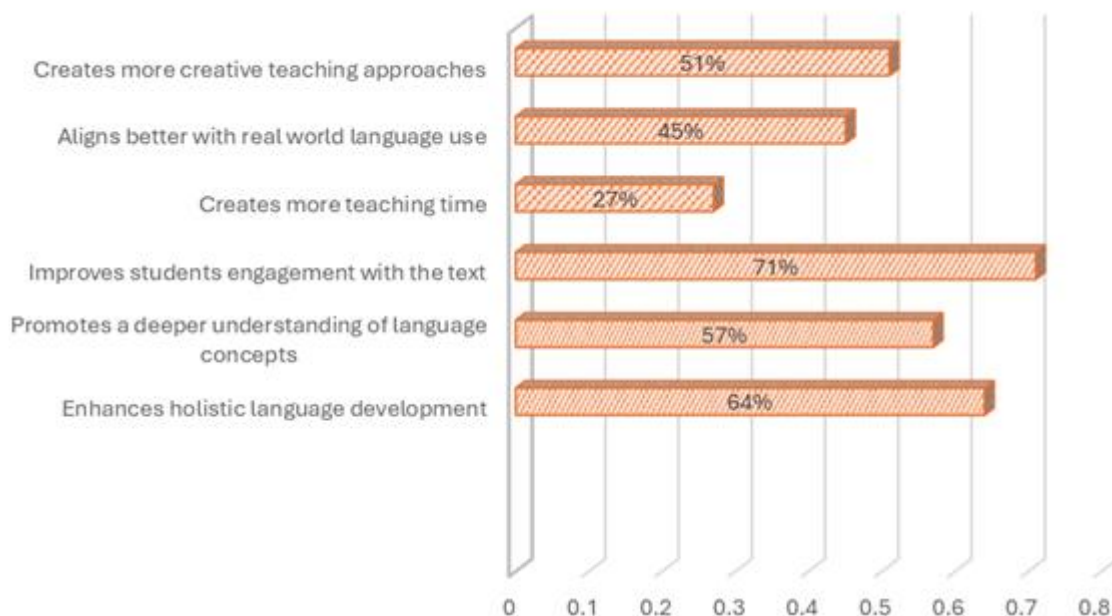
Table 1 shows mainly the mean and standard deviation of the constructs. It should be noted that the mean and standard deviation do not represent a normal distribution. There is a lot of variance in the participants' responses.

Research question 2

The second research question investigated perceived benefits and challenges of the integration of English Language and Literature into a single subject within the

Table 1. Means and standard deviation table.

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev
I support the integration	96	1.00	4.00	2.39	0.98
The current separation of English Language and Literature is effective.	96	1.00	32.00	3.29	4.31
Integration would benefit students'	96	1.00	4.00	2.66	1.00
The integration would improve students' critical thinking skills	96	1.00	34.00	3.19	3.29
The integration would improve the interpretative and analytical schools	95	1.00	23.00	3.14	2.23
Integration would make Language contextual and meaningful	94	100	34.00	3.47	3.87
The integration would enhance students' appreciation of literally work	96	1.00	42.00	3.33	4.06
The integration would improve students' writing skills	96	1.00	23.00	2.9	0.91

**Figure 2.** Potential benefits.

proposed Competency-Based Education curriculum. The main objective of the question was to determine whether the participants envisioned the benefits and challenges of integrating English Language and Literature as a single phase in the CBE curriculum.

Figure 2 shows that most of the participants believe that the integration of the English Language and Literature would improve students' engagement with the texts (71%). That is, students would read more than they do now. The second-ranked benefit is that the integration would enhance holistic language development (64%). Also, it would promote a deeper understanding of Language concepts (57%). The participants further believed that the integration would create more teaching approaches (51%). That is, teachers would explore multiple ways of teaching

the integrated subjects effectively. They also believed that the integration would align better with real-world Language use (45%). In other words, students would use Language in real-life contexts. Lastly, the participants believed that the integration would create more teaching time (27%). Figure 3 shows that the major challenge the participants noted was inadequate teacher training (73%). They also noted that the integration would restrict the coverage of content (69%). That is, the teachers may not cover all the content for both English Language and Literature. Further, the participants believe that the integration would make it difficult to address different students' abilities (62%). They also noted that the lack of appropriate teaching material would be a setback (64%). Further, they believed there could be resistance from administrators or other

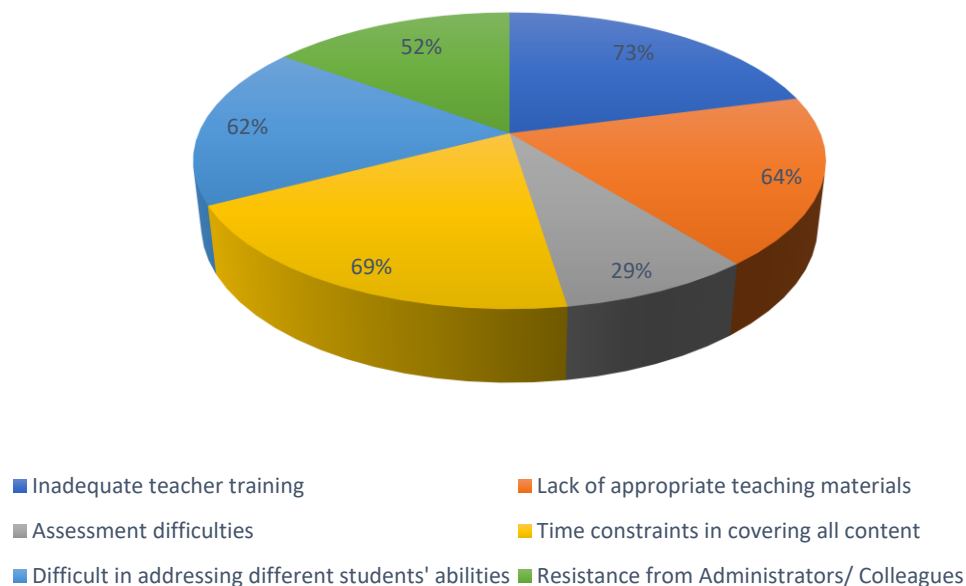


Figure 3. Potential challenges.

colleagues in allowing the integration (52%). The last difficulty they noted was that there would be assessment difficulties (29%). Teachers would not know how to assess students in the combined subject. They foresaw challenges in developing a balanced assessment tool.

Findings from the qualitative data

Research question 3

The third research question established the teacher's understanding of the Competency-Based Education (CBE) curriculum. Responses to this question were collected through telephonic interviews in which the following themes emerged.

Skill-based orientation with equity goals: A prominent theme across participant responses was the understanding of CBE as a skill-oriented and learner-centered curriculum that recognizes multiple intelligences. Teachers, particularly from rural settings, expressed the belief that CBE is designed to promote inclusivity by acknowledging that learners excel in different areas. Teacher 7 (Rural) emphasized:

"What I know is that pupils are taught and assessed according to their skills. For me, CBE is good for those who excel in different practical subjects or specific areas. It

encourages what learners are good at."

This belief was tied to a sense of equity and inclusion, especially for non-academic learners who previously struggled under traditional models. Teacher 7 added:

"Those not good academically were previously disadvantaged. This curriculum includes practical subjects like music, so students will be able to showcase their different skills."

T7 was seconded by T2, T3, T4, T5, T8, T9, T10 who echoed CBE as skill oriented.

Partial and uncertain understanding: The findings reveal that teachers, regardless of the location, are somewhat uncertain about CBE; their knowledge of it is shallow. Despite this recognition of core CBE principles, many teachers, especially in rural and semi-urban schools, exhibited incomplete or second-hand understanding of the curriculum. Their knowledge was often based on informal discussions with colleagues or experiences at the primary level, rather than structured professional development. For instance, Teacher 9 (Rural) admitted:

"I don't know. The idea I have is that a competency-based curriculum is skill-based. I heard from those at primary."

Similarly, Teacher 10 (Semi-Urban) said:

"I have just heard from those at primary talking about CBE – but the only thing I know is that it is skill-based."

Teacher 4 (Urban) also echoed the same sentiments:

"What I heard from my colleagues from primary school is that it is difficult to carry out because they do not understand what CBE is. We once asked them to explain to us, and they failed."

Assessment shifts and inclusivity: Teachers in urban contexts noted that CBE promotes concept mastery rather than traditional grading based on accuracy. Teacher 4 (Urban) seconded Teacher 11 (Urban), who observed:

"I don't know what it is apart from that they are not failing – graded according to concept grasped – accuracy not considered."

This aligns with a formative assessment philosophy, where learners are evaluated on their learning journey rather than summative performance alone. Similarly, Teacher 12 (Urban) emphasized the inclusive progression model within CBE, noting:

"Not sure what it is, but there's normal progression. Goal – every child should journey through education."

Teachers generally recognized that the CBE curriculum emphasizes skills and inclusion. However, a gap in deep understanding, particularly among rural and semi-urban teachers suggests a need for targeted professional development and clearer communication strategies.

Research question 4

The fourth research question established the teachers' beliefs on the integration of the English Language and Literature as a single subject in the proposed Competency-Based Education Curriculum. Themes emerged from their responses as follows:

Recognition of gradual or partial integration: Some teachers noted that the integration of English Language and Literature is already reflected in assessment tasks, particularly in Paper 1. Teacher 7 (Rural) explained:

"I feel it's already there with Paper 1 English Language, which is reading and directed writing where they are also assessed on thoughts and feelings, for this is Literature integrated in English Language."

Similarly, Teacher 12 (Urban) stated:

"Combining the two subjects as one, but I feel they have already introduced that, though in small chunks in Paper 1."

Teacher 4's (Urban) understanding of integration summarizes what other teachers said:

"My understanding of integration is introducing something step by step, basically introducing bit by bit."

Supportive beliefs: Integration as a skill enhancer: Supporters of integration argued that it would enhance Language development, comprehension, and critical thinking. Teacher 8 (Semi-Urban) pointed out:

"Integration is a good idea, because those not doing Literature currently are not doing well. Literature enhances Language skills."

Teacher 5 (Rural) also elaborated:

"I think it is going to work well for them because learning English and studying Literature written in English will make them understand the English culture even more because the Language is more than a subject, it is kind of a culture. I believe it will also improve learners' performance. If we read Literature, learners will be exposed to a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary."

Cautious or conditional support: Some participants expressed support for the integration with reservations, emphasizing that proper planning and implementation are critical. Teacher 10 (Semi-Urban) cautioned:

"Integration is a good idea, but it should be done properly." On this note, Teacher 3 (Rural) claims, "...The English syllabus is too long... Literature syllabus is long as well...it will depend on how they integrate it."

Teacher 11 (Urban) echoed this cautious stance, saying:

"Good idea, but I wonder about the outcomes and the reason for not teaching them separately." In the same vein, Teacher 6 (Semi-Urban) argued, "It is a very good move; however, the learners that we have are not into reading, yet Literature demands that they read a lot of literary texts."

Opposition: Concerns about learner ability and workload: Strong opposition came from teachers who cited low learner proficiency, especially in lower grades, and increased workload as major barriers. Teacher 9 (Rural) shared a critical view:

"Integration is not a good idea. Even right now, I am using Grade 6 English books to teach Form 1 learners... they are

just far from understanding material written in English."

Teacher 12 (Urban) added:

"Not a good idea at all. There's a lot to be covered in the different subjects."

Teacher 1 (Rural) in support of T1 argued:

"These are two separate subjects that need to be treated separately due to the workload, both of them need a lot of work and effort... I think one will lag... some learners are good in English, whereas some have a challenge in Literature in English... it will be difficult to tell the strength of the student... Also, as educators, we've got different strengths. One educator has more strength in Literature than in the English Language."

Affective and cognitive implications: Teachers also considered how integration might affect learners emotionally and intellectually. A majority of the teachers cited that their critical thinking and confidence would be enhanced, while some were uncertain. Teacher 8 (Semi-Urban) felt it could be motivating, explaining:

"Motivated. Integration makes Literature less burdensome. Performance to improve."

In contrast, Teacher 12 (Urban) warned of demotivation, stating:

"Demotivation. Most don't love Literature."

Echoing the same sentiments, Teacher 6 (Semi-Urban) commented:

"I don't want even to anticipate for now what will happen because learners sometimes will have an attitude towards certain subjects." So if they have that attitude, it is obvious there would be no motivation.

Meanwhile, Teacher 7 (Rural) observed that learner response would be highly individual, noting:

"Highly dependent on learner. Those who love Literature will be more engaged, hence boosting their confidence."

The CBE learning approach was noted to improve learners' mindset; hence, Teacher 3 (Rural) noted:

"I think our learners will be confident because they will be learning in groups... learning from their colleagues."

Experience and external factors as a shaping factor:

Across the board, teachers indicated that their views were shaped by their classroom experiences rather than formal

guidance or curriculum documents. Teacher 11 (Urban) affirmed this plainly:

"Teaching experience."

Views were also influenced by external factors, which are those aspects beyond teachers' control. Teachers 1 (Rural) and 5 (Rural) also raised the English as a non-passing subject policy as a major demotivating factor to learners. Furthermore, it was worth noting that a majority of the teachers, including urban teachers, decried the lack of resources. Teacher 1 (Rural):

"...the integration ...under CBE will be very difficult because currently in the working stations that we are at, there are not enough resources for the learners."

Teacher 4 (Urban) further highlighted on the lack of resources for inclusivity and how her training in inclusive education helps her understand the importance of these resources:

"I wouldn't say I am not influenced by resources because there isn't much available from my school such that with inclusive education, it is becoming a challenge. After all, my school is one of the inclusive schools in town... The fact that I have training in inclusive education makes it easier for me to understand CBE."

"On the contrary Teacher 2 (Semi-Urban) was of the view that it is not more resources that are needed, but the approach is what matters.

Teachers' beliefs regarding the integration of English Language and Literature under the CBE model are diverse and context-driven. While some advocate for its academic and motivational benefits, others express concern over learner readiness, content overload, unclear assessment strategies and external factors. All teachers agree that effective professional development, resource allocation, and gradual implementation are essential for successful curriculum integration. The insights call for inclusive dialogue and support systems that engage teachers as partners in the reform process.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that teachers in Eswatini tend to conceptualize CBE as a skills-based, learner-centered approach that values multiple intelligences and promotes inclusivity. Teachers—particularly in rural contexts—emphasized that CBE recognizes learners' strengths in diverse areas such as music, art, and practical skills, echoing global definitions of CBE as a move away from rote memorization toward applied, real-world learning (Mirza and Teymoori, 2023; Moora et al., 2024). This

aligns with Adejmolola and Ojuolape (2013)'s assertion that CBE fosters equitable opportunities by validating different learner pathways.

However, this recognition of CBE's core values was accompanied by a partial and uncertain understanding. Many participants admitted their knowledge was second-hand, gained through informal discussions with primary school colleagues rather than formal training. This reflects Sewagegn (2019)'s observation that while teachers may agree with CBE's philosophy, they often lack the professional preparation to implement it effectively. Such gaps are significant because, as Deng et al. (2024) note, teachers' interpretations of CBE shape classroom practices and ultimately determine the fidelity of curriculum reform.

Urban teachers also noted shifts in assessment philosophy, describing a move toward grading based on concept mastery rather than strict accuracy. This reflects the formative, process-oriented assessment model recommended in CBE Literature and the Eswatini MoET (2018) emphasis on continuous assessment. However, given the uncertainty and inconsistencies in teachers' explanations, these shifts may be occurring more at a perceptual level than through deliberate pedagogical strategy. Teachers who supported the integration emphasized its potential to enhance Language proficiency, comprehension, and critical thinking, arguing that Literature enriches vocabulary, sentence structure awareness, and cultural understanding. These views strongly align with scholarship highlighting Literature's role in strengthening linguistic competence while fostering creativity, empathy, and problem-solving (Parderde, 2019; van Peer and Chesnokova, 2019; Adejmolola and Ojuolape, 2013). In this sense, participants' perspectives mirrored the position that Literature is a vital tool for developing higher-order thinking within Language learning.

Some teachers expressed qualified support, stressing the need for careful curriculum design, manageable workloads, and adequate planning. Concerns over the combined length of syllabi and learners' limited reading habits reflect challenges documented in other contexts, where integration without scaffolding risks overwhelming both learners and teachers (Beane, 1997; Sun, 2021). Teachers opposing integration cited low learner proficiency, particularly among Form 1 students, as a major barrier, mirroring Ndaba-Dlamini (2023)'s concern that limited exposure to Literature in primary school leaves learners unprepared for secondary-level literary study. Some also noted that integration could obscure the identification of learner strengths in each subject, which could disadvantage both students and teachers. Kateregga (2014)'s observation about Uganda—that weak reading cultures and Language barriers can make Literature inaccessible—resonates here, especially in rural Eswatini. Participants predicted both positive and negative emotional outcomes. Supporters argued integration could

boost confidence and engagement, consistent with Widiastuti and Sampoema (2023)'s findings on Literature's motivational effects. Others feared demotivation among learners who dislike Literature, underscoring the need for differentiated approaches (Lavanya et al., 2024). Teachers' beliefs are shaped more by classroom realities—such as resource shortages and the policy that English is not a passing subject—than by official policy documents. While some, like Teacher 4 (Urban), linked their inclusive education training to a stronger grasp of CBE, others saw the lack of resources as a decisive barrier. These findings align with Omotoyinbo (2020)'s and Mbah et al. (2023)'s arguments that equitable training and resourcing are crucial for successful integration, regardless of school location.

These findings confirm that teachers have a broad, philosophical grasp of CBE but lack the depth of training and systemic support necessary for robust implementation—an issue also observed in other African CBE transitions (Okeyo and Mokua, 2023; Atuhura and Nambi, 2024). Both the quantitative and qualitative findings corroborate. The qualitative interviews with the teachers revealed recurring themes of beliefs, benefits, and challenges. These personal accounts provided context and depth to the numerical data, reinforcing the conclusion that while the integration of English Language and Literature appears profitable to students, certain elements of the integration require reinforcement, such as teacher development and the provision of adequate teaching materials. Together, the quantitative metrics and qualitative narratives painted a more comprehensive picture of the educational impact of remote learning. Overall, the findings reveal a nuanced landscape of teachers' beliefs regarding the integration of English Language and Literature within the CBE curriculum.

Conclusion

The study concludes by noting that, while many educators expressed support for the integration, citing its potential to foster deeper linguistic competence, critical thinking, and contextual understanding, others voiced concerns about the practical challenges of implementation—particularly in terms of assessment, resource availability, and teacher preparedness. The convergence of qualitative insights and quantitative data underscored a shared recognition of the pedagogical value of integration, while highlighting the need for targeted professional development and curriculum support to ensure its success. Ultimately, the study affirms that teacher beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping curriculum outcomes, and that meaningful integration requires not only structural alignment but also sustained engagement with educators' perspectives and classroom realities. Both the sociocultural learning theory and pedagogical content knowledge anchored the

parameters of the study. While the sociocultural learning theory explained the learning processes and tenets, the pedagogical content knowledge explained the teachers' level of knowledge necessary to make meaningful teaching.

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