



**UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL**  

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**INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE TEACHING OF POETRY: A  
CASE STUDY OF TOWNSHIP ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS**

**BY**

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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE**

**DEGREE OF**

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION STUDIES  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

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**JANUARY 2021**

## DECLARATION

I, Smangele Precious Mtetwa (206504728), declare that:

- The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated is my original work.
- This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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  - b) Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced.
- The work described in this thesis was carried out in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal under the supervision of Dr AB Mthembu (Supervisor)

Student: Smangele Precious Mtetwa: (206504728)

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As a Supervisor I agree/do not agree to the submission of this dissertation:

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## ABSTRACT

This research study sought to understand the experiences of high school teachers in teaching poetry to English second language learners in township schools. In understanding these teachers' experiences the study utilised Vygotsky's social constructivism theory which is the lens in which the study was viewed. The study employed a qualitative approach within the interpretative paradigm and a qualitative case study was conducted with educators in the Pinetown district in KwaZulu Natal. Interviews and questionnaires were used in this qualitative study to gain insights on teachers' experiences and a thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the generated data. The study found that teachers have varied experiences that are unique to each individual which are both negative and positive. The study revealed that teaching poetry comes with challenges even for teachers who seem to love poetry. It further revealed that the experiences displayed by teachers were rooted in numerous factors from their past, the manner they were taught poetry, the classroom and beyond the classroom. These factors thus influenced, sometimes unwittingly, the methods they chose to use when teaching poetry and the negative attitude they held towards poetry and the teaching thereof. Some of the contributing factors to the negative attitude were self-doubt, inadequate tertiary education training and in-service professional development, inability to interpret and appreciate poetry, complex language used in poetry, and the nature and calibre of the learners, time constraints and curriculum needs. The findings revealed that ESL teachers, even those who appeared to love poetry, were uncomfortable with teaching the genre. They were unsure of the best approach because of its unique use of language. The study further found that teachers were not confident enough to teach poetry in grade 12 because of the nature of examination which is set at national level. As far as their distaste for this genre is concerned, the study found that it emanated from their past experiences with the genre. The teachers revealed that High school and tertiary education did not prepare them well enough for the proper appreciation and the teaching of this genre. Therefore, this study concludes that in order to improve on the issue of language barrier and resistance to poetry from both teachers and learners, the Department of Education, among other things, should ensure that teachers do introduce poetry at the early stages of the learners' education in order to familiarise the learners with this genre.

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATP:	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS:	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DoE:	Department of Education
ESL:	English Second Language
FAL:	First Additional Language
FET:	Further Education and Training
GET:	General Education and Training
HOD:	Head of Department
LoLT:	Language of Learning and Teaching
MKO:	More Knowledgeable other
NSC:	National Senior Certificate
ZPD:	Zone of Proximal Development

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Jehovah for making this journey possible for me. My sincere gratitude goes to the following that have been there for me throughout this journey.

- My supervisor, Dr ASB Mthembu, your patience has kept me on my feet. Thank you for being a pillar throughout this study. Your guidance and positive criticism has helped me grow academically. Your guidance from the beginning till the end is appreciated.
- My parents Musawenkosi and Lindiwe Mtetwa, thank you for the sacrifices you have made to make sure I am educated. Both of you are the best parents I could ever ask for, your support throughout my studies has been amazing, thank you.
- My beautiful daughters Nolfefe and Khwezi Mtetwa, both of you warm my heart and you complete me. May God bless you with health and all that you both desire.
- Special thanks to my friends Ntando Ntshingila, Ndumi Zibane and Dudu Mcwabe for not giving up on me and all your encouraging messages.
- My sincere gratitude to Thobani Gumede for being there for me when I needed you the most, thank you for always being my pillar of strength.
- A special thanks to the educators who were part of this study, you have been great.
- To everyone who has been part of this journey, I thank you so much and appreciate all that you have done.

## DEDICATION

To  
My support system and my adorable princesses

Mom and Dad

My daughters Nolfefe and Khwezi Mtetwa

You guys just complete my world

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In almost all native language speaking schools in South Africa, English as a second language subject is compulsory and should be passed for entry to tertiary education. Teaching English as a subject involves a lot of dynamics, especially in the Further Education and Training Phase (FET) in high school because it is divided into 3 papers in the examinations. Paper 1 assesses the learners' language skills, paper 2 assesses the understanding of literature and paper 3 assesses the learners' creative writing skills. All these 3 papers are essential because they build a learner's all round understanding of English as a language. Therefore, this study is invested in understanding the teaching of poetry that is assessed in paper 2.

Teaching and learning of poetry in the FET phase in high school is a requirement in fulfilling the curriculum requirement of paper 2 in FET grades. However, for grade 12, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document allows schools to choose two genres from the four (4) that are available, namely; novels, drama, short stories and poetry. With reference to the Department of Education (DoE, 2011), each genre constitutes 50% of paper 2 (English First Additional Language literature paper) that is written by learners in both mid-year as well as end of the year examinations in the FET phase. It also forms part of the learners' matric pass requirement, thus forming a third of the learners' annual mark. However, Poetry is the most avoided genre where teachers prefer other genres to poetry (Khatib, 2011). This is a common scenario for many schools that I cluster within the Pinetown District. Khatib (2011) states that, teaching poetry to ESL learners has always been a very challenging task. There have been assumptions that English teachers believe poetry is too difficult for ESL learners to cope with and therefore it might be out of their reach.

The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (2011) for English language explains that the main reason for reading literature in the classroom is to develop in learners a sensitivity to a special use of language that is more refined, literary, figurative, symbolic, and deeply

meaningful than much of what else they may read. However, Newfied and D'abdon (2015) argue that, poetry occupies a limited scope in basic education in South African Schools because it is considered as too difficult, elitist, or distant from the concerns of everyday life. Even so Rorty, (2007) states that, poetry is a genre in the English curriculum that has immense tradition, academic, historical, cultural, and has critical value. It has been regarded as the foundation in society's imaginative, moral and intellectual progress.

Poetry is a genre in English that seems to have a need to be taught differently than other sections in English and available literature points out various experiences teachers encounter when teaching poetry. These experiences highlight that poetry somehow has more demands than other sections in paper 2. Khatib (2011) notes that many teachers' attitudes in teaching poetry have changed in the previous years and most English second language (ESL) teachers strongly believe that a well-chosen approach to the teaching of any form of literature does have some benefit for their learners. There are however, a small number of teachers that support the inclusion of a new methodology to teaching poetry in their curriculum. Some teachers are always ready to teach short-stories, novels, plays and even essays, but very disinclined to teach poetry because they are aware that using the old method they struggle to make poetry come alive for their learners. Therefore, if the methods currently in the poetry classes is not effective and successful it is sensible trying to experiment with other methods and determining whether they yield significant educational levels.

This dissertation will focus on exploring the experiences of poetry teachers in the FET phase in high school. Ultimately, the study will shed light on the rationale behind the manner in which poetry is taught and the pedagogical theories that influence the teachers' classroom practice during poetry teaching. This study will thus explore the teachers' experiences of poetry teaching in a township high school and other related phenomena that occur in their ESL classroom during poetry teaching.

## 1.2 Research Context

This study was conducted with sixteen teachers in five township high schools in Mpumalanga Township, Hammarsdale in KwaZulu Natal where English language is taught as a First Additional Language. These schools are located in a semi-rural township community. The schools are located in a community that is racially categorized as black African. The community in which the schools are located is faced with different social and economic challenges such as inadequate resources like libraries within the community and in the schools. In school, learners have to share textbooks because there is not enough to provide for individual learners. All the teachers in these five schools speak IsiZulu as a home language and English as a second language. The participants teach poems that are prescribed by the Department of Education in respect with the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which requires teachers to teach 6 poems in grade 10 and grade 11, and 10 poems in grade 12. These teachers cannot choose new poems that interest them but have to follow the requirements of the CAPS document. It is also the responsibility of a teacher to find copies of the poems and teaching resources needed since the department only provides the list of poems to be studied.

## 1.3 Rationale and Motivation

For more than a decade I have taught English language to second language high school learners in township schools. I have also marked the Senior Certificate and the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination in the in the previous years to date. The department of education has allocated four genres where teachers can select two that they will teach for assessment. As a marker and senior marker for English First Additional (ENGFA) paper 2 at the NSC marking centre I have noticed that there is a minimal number of schools that teach poetry. Even from the teachers who are appointed as markers, there is always a small percentage that teaches poetry to their grade 12 learners. Poetry seems to be avoided by a lot of teachers and therefore, it was important to understand what teachers experience when teaching poetry.

For me, teaching poetry is not the same as teaching other sections in English because there is always a need to be uniquely equipped for poetry lessons. To be equipped means having the

ability to create a productive lesson and be ready for questions that will be posed by learners, especially the inquisitive ones. Then at the end of each lesson learners should be able to interpret the poem and respond to questions on the poem and understand the language devices used in that particular poem. It is important that learners are able to critique a poem while understanding the intention of the writer. This is only possible if the poem is understood.

There is no doubt that poetry forms an integral part in the high school curriculum (Young, 2016). Hence, as English teachers we have a pivotal role to promote the value of poetry and its use in the classroom. However, there are always challenges that I encounter when I teach poetry that are only unique to poetry lessons. My learners have always confessed that they do not find poetry interesting and that it is also difficult to understand. Probably, their responses could be influenced by how I approach the lessons which to some extent derives from how I was taught poetry during my schooling years. However, my experiences do not represent the experiences of all English teachers. Focusing on teachers' experiences therefore stems from my personal experiences and the prominence of poetry in the curriculum. Therefore, there is a need to explore the teaching of this genre and the experiences of the teachers who teach it.

#### 1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore ESL teachers' experiences with the teaching of poetry in high school township classrooms and the methods they use to make their lessons a success. The problems associated with poetry teaching can never be comprehensively dealt with unless the experiences of the teachers who teach it are adequately explored. Therefore, the study sought to discover the teaching methods the teachers use or prefer for their learners and the reasons for using those methods. Poetry cannot be ignored as a subject because it forms a fundamental part in the English curriculum and it is a valuable section in the English examination paper 2.

The nature of poetry is unique. It is an influential art form whose value is well documented. As such, the teaching and learning of poetry thus becomes an essential part of any secondary

education curriculum. However, high school ESL teachers have different feelings and views about making poetry study a priority. Their experiences of teaching poetry also differ. Some may say their experiences of teaching it are positive and valuable whereas others would confess they simply teach it because they are obliged by the curriculum. Documented evidence suggests that even when poetry is taught in the classroom today, its teaching practice is weaker than other sections in English language lessons (Xerri, 2014).

One of the issues with poetry teaching in ESL classrooms today is that it is increasingly focused on preparing learners for passing standardized tests. This de-motivates teachers who have to teach within the limitations of the assessment system. The negative effects of an assessment driven curriculum that has requirements, restrictions and standardized education leave little teaching time to explore the vast poetic art. Apart from poetry being part of the curriculum, there is evidence that some English teachers see no worth in teaching poetry as some say it is an abstruse art-form (Benton, 2000).

Ray (1999) states that many teachers have failed personal experience towards the subject of poetry, while there are those who are discouraged by their learners' poor reactions to the genre. Meyer (2013) states that, other studies have discovered that the teachers themselves do not feel educated enough, they somehow lack foundational content knowledge or they feel ill-prepared to teach poetry.

Unfortunately, the attitude of English teachers towards poetry and their experiences with poetry teaching are often diverse (Young, 2016). This study therefore attempted to make sense of township ESL teachers' experiences of teaching poetry. It also looked at the strategies they choose to use and the rationale in choosing those strategies.

### 1.5 Location of the Study

The study was conducted in five (5) township high schools in Mpumalanga Township, Hammarsdale in KwaZulu Natal where English is taught as a First Additional Language. These schools are located in a semi-rural township community .They are situated in a poverty stricken community that is racially categorized as black and African. The community in which the schools are located is faced with different social and economic challenges such as inadequate resources like libraries within the community and in the schools. In schools, learners have to share textbooks because there are not enough to provide for each learner. All the teachers in these schools speak IsiZulu as a home language and English as a second language.

### 1.6 Understanding what is poetry

Poetry is a genre taught in schools which contains devices that are different from other literature set works studied in high school. Blue (2016) relates to poetry as a linguistic device and distillation of sense and sound. Poetry and poetic encounters provide the audience with odd ways of viewing and responding to the world. Poetic devices have a sense of opening portals to inventions and significant meaning for learners. Therefore, beyond learning proper linguistic conventions and writing techniques, learners require unrestricted environments to fully ignite their imagination. Hanratty (2008) also states that poetry gives learners the opportunity to discover higher realms and explore beyond the world that is determined by market forces and profit motive. It allows the soul to breathe and the spirit to be enlarged. It can therefore be stated that poetry is a genre in English language teaching that has traits of assisting learners with their critical thinking skills and certainly cannot be rejected especially in high school. Therefore, a study of this nature becomes both necessary and appropriate.

### 1.7.1 Research Objectives and Questions

#### Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore ESL teachers' experiences of teaching poetry to ESL high school learners in a township high school.
2. To explore township high school ESL teachers' poetry teaching methods.
3. To understand why township ESL teachers use the teaching methods they use when teaching poetry.

#### 1.7.2 Questions

1. What experiences do township ESL teachers have about teaching poetry to high school ESL learners?
2. Which strategies do township high school ESL teachers use when teaching poetry in their ESL classrooms?
3. What is the rationale behind the township ESL teachers' use of these methods when teaching poetry?

### 1.8 Overview of the research process

This study explored the experiences of English teachers teaching poetry to ESL learners in high school. The study was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm because the aim was to understand the personal world of human experiences. A case study design was then employed to obtain insights into individual teachers' classroom experiences. Sixteen (16) teachers were sampled and 4 of them were interviewed while 12 were given questionnaires. The 4 interviewed teachers were from 2 different schools, 2 from each school and the questionnaires came from the other 3 schools with 4 teachers from each school. Data was generated from a purposive sample of ESL high school teachers using two instruments; interviews and semi structured questionnaires. A detailed discussion on this research process is found in the third chapter.

### 1.9 De-limitations

The sample size of this study is not big enough to qualify it to make overarching findings and conclusions about the phenomenon it was exploring. The exploration of the teachers' experiences of teaching poetry to high school ESL learners in a township high school is what this study sought to achieve. This means that the evidence gathered in this study cannot be justifiably generalised. By its very nature the study precludes the experiences of those teachers who were not participants in this study. Even though some of the findings of this study may be extrapolated in various other contexts it must be borne in mind that those contexts were never part of the location of the study.

### 1.10 Organisation of the dissertation

The division of the study into five chapters is listed and briefly outlined below.

#### **Chapter 1**

This chapter introduces the topic under research, and elucidates the background, the purpose and the rationale of the study. It presents the main objectives and an overall research approach and the organisation of dissertation has been outlined in this chapter.

#### **Chapter 2**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and literature review on township ESL teachers' experiences with teaching poetry to ESL learners in high school. An overview of Vygotsky's social constructivism theory is explained to understand how it underpins the study. Furthermore, the literature review looks at existing studies done on this research topic internationally, within the African continent and locally in South Africa.

#### **Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter that outlines the research process undertaken on this qualitative study that is informed by the interpretative paradigm. It discusses the research design, the research paradigm, research approach and the chosen methodology to generate data including the process that was used for data analysis. The location of the study, limitations and sampling strategies are also clarified. The chapter further addresses the issues of trustworthiness, validity and credibility.

## **Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 presents the generated data and its analysis. This is done through the presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion of the research findings. The discussion is done against the backdrop of the research questions and the reviewed literature.

## **Chapter 5**

This chapter, being the final one of the study, presents the outline of findings and the subsequent conclusion of the study. The significance of study is then provided with a view to highlighting germane aspects of this topic that require further research in the future. It is in chapter five that the implications of the study for the teaching of poetry in township high schools also provided.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework which is the guiding foundation of this study. The purpose of this research was to explore and understand township ESL teachers' experiences of teaching poetry and further understand the methods they use when teaching it. In seeking to explore their experiences with the genre it was suitable to apply the theory of social constructivism which looks at how individuals make meaning through their social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). This chapter further reviews relevant literature on teachers' experiences with the teaching of poetry, the methods they use and the rationale behind using those methods.

#### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

In order to explore and discover township high school ESL teachers' experiences on teaching poetry, it was necessary to approach this study through a theoretical lens because such lenses are the grounding base of research studies. A theoretical framework is utilised to establish or situate one's research, which is to show origin of the research (Maree and Westhuizen, 2007). The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' experiences with teaching poetry to ESL learners in high school.

The study is guided by Vygotsky's social constructivism theory which suggests that knowledge is primarily constructed in a social context and is then internalised and used by individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study I used social constructivism approach as a lens to view township high school ESL teachers' experiences with teaching poetry.

The findings presented in this study offer one of the multiple ways in which the investigated phenomenon could be construed. Social constructivism is a division of constructivist thought, which states that knowledge is individually constructed through one's experience (Schreiber and Valle, 2013). Thus, according to Vygotsky (1978) learning does not take place within the individual only, but it is also a social and collaborative activity where individuals create

meaning through interactions with one another. Therefore, the meaning of poetry and understanding poetry for teachers is seen through their social interaction with their learners, other teachers, Heads of department (HOD) and subject advisors. Amineh and Asl (2015) maintain that social constructivism is one of the theories of knowledge in sociology and communication, which examines the knowledge and understanding of the world that are developed in cooperation by individuals. Roth (2000) also states that the foundations of an individual's knowledge are found in their communications with their surroundings and other people before their knowledge is internalised.

Drawing from my understanding of social constructivism as a framework, it was used to voice the experiences of the participants since their experiences are created and developed by the social interaction with their learners and their colleagues. The study applies social constructivism to understand ESL teachers' perspectives and their experiences in teaching poetry and the approaches they use to teach it in high school. Through the lens of social constructivism, the study sought to explore the experiences of teachers who are teaching poetry to ESL learners in high school. The most important elements in social constructivism are the assumptions that human beings rationalise their own experience by creating a model of the social world and the belief in the language as the essential system through which humans construct reality (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009).

Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) is a theory that has gone through constant development in recent years and has been developed and supported by various social constructivist scholars like John Dewey (1998) and Kenneth Gergen (1995). The main principle behind social constructivism is that individuals construct knowledge through social interaction which results to social process (Gergen, 1995).

Social constructivism theory proposes that mental constructions of reality are based on individual's experiences and views that the environment and the participants are inseparable and interact to influence each another. It further acknowledges that knowledge is a construction between individuals or among members of a group of people. The process of the study was therefore a process of a higher level of interaction between individual participants and their learners during poetry lessons.

The interviews conducted represented social interaction. In the interview phase, the interviewing researcher dialogued and interacted with the selected experienced English teachers to share their experiences with teaching poetry. Individual interviews provided the participants with the opportunity to share their experience and perspectives on their roles as English poetry teachers with the researcher. They explored efficient ways of teaching poetry in their current curriculum.

Social constructivism in this study is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed. Through interviews and questionnaires, the researcher navigated the teachers' experiences with the aim to highlight those responses that speak to the research questions. These help centre the experiences developed from interacting with their learners and their peers in the classroom and within a school setting. For this study it is important to also focus on how these teachers' experiences influence their teaching strategies because this study also looked at the strategies and methods these teachers use and the rationale in using those strategies and methods.

Vygotsky (1978) states that the primary focus of social constructivism is the role of the individual's experience and the key components of the individual's experience depend on the role of social factors. The two primary social factors considered by (Vygotsky, 1978) are situations and interactions. Situations refer to the surroundings in which an experience takes place. Then again, interaction is the chief principle of interpreting an experience in any educational state.

Taking into account Vygotsky's view on social constructivism, one can conclude that situations and interaction played a prominent role in education and knowledge construction. This openly meant that in order to explore the participants' experiences it was best to ask them as they were the best interpreters of their own experiences. They had better knowledge of their classroom situations and how they interacted with their learners and their colleagues who also taught poetry to ESL learners. In pursuing social constructivism as a research theory,

one can uncover how reality is constructed through human activity (Kukla, 2000). Ernest (1999) proclaims that social constructivists believe that knowledge is a human product and it is socially and culturally constructed. Therefore, the teacher participants create meaning in their interactions with their learners and with the environment that they teach in. McMahon (1997) also articulates that social constructivists view learning as a social process. It is a process that does not only take place within an individual, neither is it an unreceptive development of that which is shaped by external forces. Therefore, the study used this lens to understand how the participants create meaningful learning when they are engaged in the teaching of poetry. This involves how the teachers present their poetry lessons and how they create their learning space and the rationale behind how they conduct their poetry lessons.

With regards to the nature of these township teachers, social interaction with knowledgeable members of their society was crucial and in this case the society was their colleagues, the department of education officials, and their learners as well. In the absence of social interaction with more knowledgeable others, it would be difficult to acquire knowledge about the pedagogy of poetry. The department of education provides teachers with quarterly workshops to capacitate them to become more skilled in their teaching. Therefore, with these workshops, they become more knowledgeable in teaching the genre. As a result, the learners also develop their thinking abilities and experiences by interacting with their teachers who would have been skilled within their workshop meetings.

Lev Vygotsky (1978), regarded as the father of social constructivism, strongly believed that knowledge is constructed through dialogue and interaction with others. This dialogue is primarily intermental, which suggests that meaning takes place between teachers and learners, among learners, between teachers or even between the reader and the text. Therefore, teaching and learning is centred on dialogue. Those experiences which participants could describe from their interaction with their ESL poetry learners were used as data for this study.

Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) believed, culture of learning gives the learner the cognitive tools for their development. This model however, places the teacher in an active role while the learner's mental abilities would develop naturally through numerous paths of discovery. In the same view, Woolfolk (2010) states that social constructivism approach considers the social context in which learning occurs and elaborates the importance of social interaction and negotiation in learning. Social negotiation and interaction in this study refers to the collaboration that occurs when ESL teachers share ideas with other colleagues within their school or with neighbouring schools or with their ESL subject advisors. This presupposes that the participants as role players in the classroom created and led the lesson and used methods that would enhance learners' mental abilities. This is a place where teachers guide their learners effectively which also provides them the ability to develop their teaching potential to the fullest. Social constructivism strongly highlights that reality is not something that individuals can discover because it does not pre-exist preceding to their social interaction (Amineh & Asl, 2005). Therefore, social constructivism emphasizes that the teachers make meaning through their interactions with other individuals, their colleagues, and their learners in their social environment and their classrooms. It is this meaning making process that becomes part of their experiences. Learning, according to Vygotsky (1978) is best understood in light of others within an individual's world.

Vygotsky believed that teaching creates a learning process that leads to developmental process. Therefore, whilst teachers teach they also develop based on their classroom experiences which mean they move to higher level of full development level or zone which also pulls their learners also to develop to their higher potential. This constant interplay between the individual and others is described by Vygotsky as Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is an intellectual potential of an individual when provided with support from a knowledgeable adult or more advanced other. This interplay was continuous between and among the participants themselves as they would share their experiences of poetry teaching and ideas on how to develop their poetry pedagogy. During this particular assistance process, an individual is regulated by a more knowledgeable other (MKO) peer or an adult. This regulation refers to cues and scaffolding provided by a more knowledgeable other peer or adult. The individual, by means of assistance, is now able to move through a series of steps

that eventually lead to self-regulation and intellectual growth. This is the reason why the teachers' experiences were never static since their own classroom practice was never static. The sharing of their poetry teaching experiences among themselves meant that their classroom practice was never the same each time they went to class. The teachers admitted that their peers who had less challenges in teaching poetry and displayed more knowledge in the genre and the teaching thereof assisted in capacitating others in team teaching which enhanced their teaching methods and changed the nature of their experiences. This experience was to fold in the sense that whilst the teacher participants were benefiting from it as it took place between them and their fellow colleagues, the participants were also trying the same strategies out with their learners during poetry lessons. This enhanced the quality of their poetry teaching experience. Vygotsky stresses the importance of ZPD because it allows for measurement of the intellectual potential of an individual rather than what the individual has achieved. Therefore, for social constructivists, the process of knowing has at its roots social interaction (Von Glaserfeld, 1991). This directly means that an individual's knowledge of the world is linked to their own personal experiences and mediated through interaction with others. Therefore, teachers' experiences with teaching poetry result from their social interaction with their colleagues and their learners whom they teach poetry.

For learners to move to a higher level of ZPD, they need to be assisted by the teacher's instruction. This requires the teacher to properly guide the learners through working together and sharing ideas with other peers. As a challenging genre, the teachers reported that the experience of teaching poetry became more manageable when shared among colleagues and that inevitably influenced how both the teachers and their learners experienced poetry in the long run.

Vygotsky's ZPD in this study represents participants who were experiencing challenges in teaching poetry to their full potential. Thus, in order for them to move to a higher zone of poetry teaching ability, it then depended on their intellectual growth and their ability to self-regulate. They had to exercise their ability to respond to ongoing teaching demands in a manner that is tolerable and sufficiently flexible to their teaching methods. Consequently, their poetry teaching experiences were equally impacted. Therefore, ZPD in this context was a process that was bound to develop the quality of their poetry teaching experience. They

became better when they interacted meaningfully with other educators or subject advisors who were prepared to share their poetry teaching skills and knowledge. These teachers eventually moved to a higher zone of understanding and developed multiple teaching methodologies in teaching poetry. This clearly demonstrates that human mental activity is a case of social interaction. Therefore, an understanding of human knowledge largely depends on the understanding of social experience and the force of the cognitive process which develops from social interaction.

In exploring the participants' experiences, this study also looked at the methods used when teaching poetry. Therefore, this study also looked at another essential concept in social constructivism which is scaffolding. Yang and Wilson's (2006), literal sense of scaffolding is referring to a support structure erected around a building under construction. When the building is strong enough then the scaffolding can be removed and the building remains stable and strong. Likewise, Vygotsky (1978), refers to scaffolding as support provided by others such as parents, peers, teachers and even sources which enables learners to perform increasingly well. However, scaffolding in this study refers to the support offered by fellow teachers from the same school, neighbouring schools or subject advisers.

Scaffolding among teachers' plays a role in developing their poetry teaching strategies since most teachers voiced that teaching poetry could be challenging especially when they found the poem difficult to teach. Since these teachers believed in team teaching, they believed in developing one another in order to positively influence their experiences of poetry teaching. The subject advisor from the department of education also provided support for these poetry teachers in enriching their knowledge with the provision of latest study materials to assist with their poetry teaching. The teachers then went back with new information and new experiences to scaffold their own learners and create new experiences. This then helped them view their experiences with the scaffolding they would have received and what contribution and impact it would have had on their teaching experiences and their teaching methods.

Hammond and Gibson (2001) as cited by Yang and Wilson (2006), interpret scaffolding as a high challenge and high support. Precisely, teachers have to set tasks which challenge learners to perform beyond their current potential. To capacitate learners in achieving the tasks, teachers also have to provide support measures which make it possible for students to perform at different levels. Yet scaffolding in this study applies also to the teachers' growth

in the genre. As part of their experiences, teachers reported that if the learners' tasks were not challenging enough, learners would become bored and unmotivated. Having bored and uninterested learners during poetry lessons was one of the challenging experience that teachers voiced out which contributed negatively to these teachers' attitude towards teaching poetry. Furthermore, lack of support from the teachers in assisting their learners resulted in their learners being frustrated by the genre to a point where some would even decide to give up as a result of their hatred of this genre. Therefore, scaffolding enabled learners to achieve great leaps forward in their learning. In the same view, some of the teachers in this study received external support from their co-workers, teachers from other schools, schools departmental heads and subject advisors to capacitate them in reaching higher realms in their lessons. Rice and Wilson (1999) state that social constructivism allows the teacher to take a role of a guide and a facilitator. Therefore, these teachers, being aware of their negative experiences in the poetry class, were willingly working on overcoming them in order to improve their experiences of teaching poetry.

A social constructivist classroom is opposed to the traditional view that a learning process is where learners are involved in repeating or miming new information. However, social constructivists believe that teaching practices assist learners to internalise and reshape and transform new information. The teachers' role in this case was to create experiences within which learners would learn and then guide the class through towards positive experiences in the form of scaffolding. The execution of all this inevitably became the core of the teachers' poetry teaching experiences. This model puts a responsibility on a teacher on guiding the learners through specific experiences or activities. This then allowed learners to construct their own knowledge through exploration under the teachers' guidance. Moreover, Brown (1999) states that another role of the teacher in this knowledge exploration is to redirect the focus and rationale of the lesson. Therefore, the teachers in this study were able to influence their poetry teaching experience by sharing their own individual experiences of the teaching of poetry. Employing social constructivism helped the participants to understand the methods that they were using when teaching and preparing learners during poetry lessons. It also facilitated the understanding of how they ensured that the lesson was successfully achieved.

Social constructivism states that individuals create their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those things. Therefore, the study looks at teachers' experiences from their classroom lessons as they reflect on what those were and how they dealt with them. Social constructivism suggests that reality is constructed by individuals, therefore, the researcher needs to analyse these particular discourses. This therefore, highlights that interactions provided opportunities for poetry teachers to scaffold their own understanding and pedagogy through reflecting on their experiences of their classroom practice. This was engendered by shared interrogation with their learners and their peers (Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

## 2.3 Literature Review

### 2.3.1 Introduction

This review looks into the available literature in order to further understand the scope of work and research that have been covered on this topic. It is important to note that this topic has not been widely researched in South Africa and as a result, literature available is very limited. However, this study seeks to contribute to the development of literature on this subject of township high school ESL teachers' experiences with poetry pedagogy within the South African education context.

Available literature on teachers' experiences with poetry varies. These various responses create interest in exploring teachers' experiences from a township school point of view. The variation of reactions regarding township teachers' experiences of teaching poetry is a phenomenon that is certainly worth exploring.

### 2.3.2 The importance of poetry pedagogy in the classroom

Poetry teaching is a fundamental part of any high school curriculum. In that regard teachers of English as a second language (ESL) have a crucial role in promoting the value of poetry and its use in the classroom (Young, 2016). Poetry as a genre taught in schools contains devices that are different from other literature set works studied in high school (Newfield & D'Abdon, 2015). Blue (2016) relates to poetry as a linguistic device and distillation of sense and sound. Poetry and poetic encounters provide the audience with unusual ways of seeing and responding to the world. Poetic devices have a sense of opening portals to inventions and significant meaning for learners.

To me poetry is a text type that has the ability to enhance critical thinking and evokes thoughts and feelings. I would agree with Pollart (2011) in that poetry is an art form where language is skilfully and creatively crafted into comprehensive text that emulates feelings and thoughts. Therefore, beyond learning appropriate linguistic conventions and writing techniques, learners require unlimited environments to fully ignite their imagination (Blue, 2016). There is no doubt that poetry forms an integral part in the high school curriculum. Hence, English teachers have a pivotal role to encourage the value of poetry and its use in their classrooms.

It is imperative to look at studies on why poetry should be taught and what value it holds in an ESL teacher's teaching experience. Available literature voices the importance of poetry pedagogy in high school ESL classrooms which illustrates why poetry is currently taught in classrooms today. Cope & Kalantzis (2000) state that poetry could contribute to enhancing language competence and literacy levels, becoming a tool for development of the multi-literacies required in personal, working and public lives. Newfield & D'Abdon (2015) also add that poetry can turn classrooms into dynamic and vibrant environments, liberating poetry from textbooks and arousing learners in having an appetite for language. It can also contribute to the development of a classroom that has a democratic culture, where learners feel less marginalised and more invested in their literature. Manning (2016) further articulates that poetry can afford a space for youth to enrich relationships through learning that can enable them to transform their struggle into strength and to develop as citizens who perceive themselves in a positive light. Therefore, the teaching of poetry goes beyond the classroom, it also builds and nurtures the learners' all-round academic growth in understanding English. Hopkins (2015) states that, poetry provides an excellent stimulus in enhancing reading and nurtures a love of words. It can be a great tool to use with learners who are slow readers, those who struggle to get through a novel or long text but who can understand and enjoy the message contained in the poem. They can read them and gain from them devoid of experiencing any discomfort whatsoever. Roberts (2007) points out those learners need poetry and art specially to make sense of the world around them, to reflect and resolve conflict in their lives.

Poetry plays a pivotal role in any school curriculum (Xerri, 2014). However, CAPS does not indicate poetry single-handedly on how it should be taught in high school. It simply puts it under the umbrella of the study of literature which includes all set works studied in the high school curriculum. This directly means that the CAPS document does not recognise poetry as a special genre which may require special attention which is different from other genres in ESL literature study. However, CAPS clearly indicates that the focus for reading literature in the classroom is to widen learners' understanding to a special use of language which is more distinguished, literary, figurative, symbolic, and deeply more meaningful than much of what else learners may read.

The CAPS document (DBE, 2011) was introduced to schools by the DoE in 2011 with the intention to improve the education system and learning in order to achieve at least 50% pass rate in Science, mathematics and Languages by year 2030 as part of the National Development Goal. Therefore, the CAPS document serves as a handbook that teachers need to use as a guide to teach according to the requirements of the curriculum. Newfield & D'Abdon (2015) point out that poetry has clear implications for curricula, pedagogies and assessment practices. It broadens the spectrum of opportunities for the selection of text that includes both spoken word/stage poetry and praise poetry and poems by popular youth poets. Poetry becomes a range across these different forms of reception, it becomes a capacious genre.

Documented literature states that the teaching of poetry is essential. It has consistency in building academic skills that are required in the current education policy objectives. Poetry as language art is likely to be validated through literature being extremely valuable to high school education. The teaching of poetry then somehow has a meaningful contribution towards learners' language and communication skills. Such integration increases language awareness which is likely to build their vocabulary and thus possibly enrich how they interpret the poem during their poetry lessons. Poetry and language are embedded and intertwined, one cannot separate the two in teaching and learning in the classroom. South African schools are rich in language diversity however English remains a primary method of communication with learners in most South African schools. Therefore, language plays a significant role in the teaching of poetry and ironically it is one of the barriers teachers are faced with when

teaching poetry. However, poetry as a language art is validated throughout the literature as being exceptionally valuable to ESL high school learners.

While scholars have documented enlightening literature that proves that the study of poetry in the classroom is beneficial as it can encourage numerous useful skills in learners, it is significant to highlight the value of poetry in classrooms today. Any school curriculum that side-lines poetry in favour of so called useful subjects is misleading. It is disconcerting that a number of schools continue to allocate a small portion of a term to the study of poetry rather than considering that learners experience the genre regularly (Pike, 2000). Stables (2010) concurs with this observation adding that teachers can easily fall into a trap of seeing poetry as not having much importance than other subjects like science and mathematics. Moreover, Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) argue that the teaching of poetry is not very effective in most South African ESL classrooms. Their study displays that most secondary township school learners had no interest in literature and teachers had to deal with the absence or resistance with a breakdown in the culture of learning poetry. Scherff and Piazza (2005) also found that poetry was seldom taught to high school learners. Cummins (2009) further concurs with the observation and maintains that although poetry is positively incorporated in the curriculum, there is less attention afforded to learners' creativity with language. If there is little opportunity to associate a learner's love of playing with language with what they are given to learn about poetry in class, then that which they already have could become irrelevant and devalued in the classroom.

Similar sentiments are shared beyond South African schools as Weaven and Clark (2011) argue that if the education systems expose learners to the study of poetry in depth, its value would be reclaimed and it will not go unnoticed. Dymoke (2012) states that in England and New Zealand poetry could be seen as an increasingly unfamiliar text especially for learners. Dymoke further states that New Zealand curriculum lacks direct reference to poetry in the assessment objectives which could ultimately lead to a cultural impoverishment of poetry. On the contrary, in England poetry is becoming ever more synonymous with assessment. These extreme situations according to Dymoke undermine the place of poetry in the curriculum and the most sensitive effect of such an approach is that learners' creative engagement with poetry is impoverished.

### 2.3.3 Poetry teachers' Experiences with the curriculum needs

Numerous studies from different scholars all over the English speaking world (Dymoke & Hughes 2009; Weaven & Clark 2011; Dymoke 2012; Benton 2000; Pike 2000 and Newfield & Maungedzo 2006) have found that teachers who teach poetry have a range of emotions and experiences on the subject of poetry and the teaching thereof. According to research, teachers are consistently demoralized by the boring poetry in many school's curricula and the analytical routine in which they are required to teach in a manner to prepare learners for standardized tests. Benton (2000) further observes that one of the issues with poetry in English classrooms today is that teaching it in high school is gradually more focused on teaching to the goal of passing standardized assessment, which dis-empowers teachers who have to teach within the boundaries of the assessment system. There is no doubt that an educational policy can have a negative impact on literature if it fails to acknowledge indigenous literature and focus on an approach that is assessment driven. The effects of an evaluation driven curriculum that has requirements, restrictions and standardized education leave little teaching time to explore poetic art. Apart from poetry being part of the curriculum, there is evidence that some English teachers see no worth in teaching poetry as some say it is a complex art-form (Benton, 2000).

Newfield & D'Abdon (2015) note that the current conceptions of poetry in basic education in South African ESL high schools are restricted and narrow, disallowing poetry to fulfil its potential as an art form and a pedagogic tool. As a result, in the poetry section of the final examination paper 2 in South Africa, learners are merely asked short questions on the poem. Most of these questions require basic meaning of the poem and figures of speech. None of the questions allow learners to express their own interpretation of the poem in a sentence or two. Consequently, the required interpretation is fixed to what examiners want and expect from learners' responses. As one of the NSC English First Additional Language P2 markers, I have experienced relying on an examination memorandum that has fixed answers that do not allow the learner to interpret the poem differently from what the examiner requires.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2013) reported that a majority of learners could not respond to questions that require their understanding of how figurative language was

used. Their responses revealed how they were taught the poems in class. Newfield & D'Abdon (2015) further argue that, the national list of poems prescribed by the DBE is part of the problem that contributes to failure in teachers implementing successful lessons in class. The prescribed poems do not appeal to the youth and none of them are by young or popular contemporary poets. Janks & Paton (1990) note that in the years leading to 1990, the education departments did not prescribe poems and other literature set work from South African repertoire. Even though this is more than a decade later, the curriculum developers do not seem to have taken into account the needs, interest, motivation, cultural background and language level of the learner. Furthermore, one might argue that there is no need to change the curriculum since poetry is an old art form that tackles different aspects of life which remain relevant today regardless of the time it was written and will continue to be relevant to generations to come. Much as such an argument seems valid, there still remains a need for curriculum developers to include work of poetry that appeals to the young learners in the ESL classroom.

Poetry as an art form can be out of context when it gets prescribed for learners whose background and current challenges and expectation no one has bothered to consider. Therefore, it would be beneficial for both teachers and learners to be introduced to more poems written by South African writers because they would relate to a familiar landscape that learners can connect with. Ernert (2015) opines that when teachers teach poetry, there is an over emphasis on structure and language convention which makes the main focus to be on the poem's implication rather than appreciation. Hence, teachers should be mindful that poetry is an art form to be appreciated, not a body of information to be imparted. Nonetheless, Newfield & D'Abdon's (2015) study on *Reconceptualising Poetry as a Multimodal Genre* concurs with the experience shared by some scholars that the curriculum compels teachers to teach within the confines of passing learners with less focus on exploring the genre. Kennedy & Gioia (1994) also points out that learners detest for poetry stems from their past bad experiences with learning poetry, incompetent teachers, the print and the nature of its presentation on books, the unfamiliar diction, conventions and its associations to things that are worlds apart and also the confusing questions that follow the reading of the poem. Gordon (2004) concurs with Newfield & D'Abdon (2015) and raises a concern that the inclusion of poetry in the school curriculum as a printed mode may encourage a pedagogy

that does not recognise the potential of poetry to make meaning in a variety of models. Therefore, poetry ends up being taught as a set of procedures and rules with a terminology that relates to measurement of stanzas and lines, identification of forms and elements. This results in poems becoming riddles to which only the teacher can answer (Newfield & D'Abdon, 2015).

Furthermore, the curriculum is one of the external factors that come to play when teachers try to advocate for the teaching of poetry in the classroom. The standardized curricula and the assessment culture in the education system have a negative effect on the teaching of poetry and can discourage teachers altogether. For Example, Wilson's (2010) study in England in which he surveyed 33 teachers shows that the lack of time for poetry in the curriculum may be the reason it is less confidently taught in English classes. Wilson further notes that these teachers could be losing their professional development and confidence which can create new doubts and an educational environment that does not benefit the learner. I concur with Wilson's claims with reference to my experience in marking the National Senior Certificate English First Additional Language Paper 2 examination for the past 4 years where only a few teachers admit to choosing other genres because they lack confidence in teaching poetry. Their insecurity goes as far as wanting to avoid marking the poetry section in the marking centre and these are clear indications that poetry is a challenge for many teachers. It can be argued that forced or imposed standardized pedagogical practices can demoralize high school English teachers and prevent them from teaching poetry effectively (Wilson,2010). English teachers in different parts of the world lament the loss of creativity in the culture of test preparation. Nevertheless, Newfield and D'Abdon (2015) further advise that poetry should be reconceptualised, taught and assessed in a way that takes a complete range of contemporary poetic practice and production into account, rather than relying just on a particular practice and a single kind of product. This suggests that poetry could play an important role in the learning of English in multilingual and bilingual contexts. Literature illustrates that the needs of the curriculum are a factor contributing to internal doubts and negative attitude teachers have when teaching poetry. Therefore, the demand of the curriculum and the culture of assessment play a role in negative teaching experiences and discourages teachers altogether.

#### 2.3.4 Teachers' Negative experiences of poetry teaching

Evidently, there is a variety of issues that arise from poetry pedagogy. According to Lockward (1994) among other issues, one other reason teachers avoid teaching poetry stems from the fear that they lack skills and confidence which normally results in learners getting bored. As a result, they suspect that their lack of confidence is killing rather than instilling a love for poetry in their learners. Reilly (2012) states that the reluctant attitude among teachers is unfortunate because for learning to occur, teachers need to always update their teaching strategies to suit the learners needs. Benjamin (2012) and Baart (2000) further state that teaching poetry to high school learners is challenging and different from poems studied in primary school where more focus is on rhymes and rhythms. Laura (2002) also reveals that the word 'poetry' frightens most teachers away especially those in secondary schools.

The experiences of most teachers in relevant literature have shown that they are not fond of poetry which results in them saving it for the end of the year hoping they could have an excuse not to teach it (Reilly,2012). Benton (1999) also observed that teachers in England unconsciously destroy poetry to some extent in the manner in which they help learners understand. Similar claims were stated in Jocson (2005) that most teachers in United States focus on the technical aspects rather than the meaning of poetry. Their methods make learners master figures of speech such as metaphors making the teaching and learning of poetry not only boring but also laborious. Likewise, Hughes (2007) affirms that most teachers in the United States have acknowledged a discomfort with teaching poetry. However, some admitted that they enjoy teaching it or actively reading poetry. On the other hand, some shared their experiences of having gone through all the school years without having been exposed to poetry. As a result, they had no model to emulate. Hughes (2007) further states that a number of teachers admitted that they felt uncomfortable when they had to teach poetry because, inter alia, their vocabulary was poor which contributed to their resistance in teaching poetry. Benton (1992) noted that limited knowledge and skills can lead to inappropriate pedagogies being employed in the classroom. Lewis (1955) stated that people are always doubtful and a little afraid of things they do not fully understand and instead of admitting it they find reasons which are complimentary to themselves. That is the kind of attitude still that is popular with teachers when their poetry teaching experiences are explored. Lockward (1994) further suggests methods that have worked that teachers can use to achieve success in their poetry lessons. According to Lockward, a teacher should avoid

deciding on giving their own interpretation on the poem, rather allow learners to take possession of the poem. Therefore, they should not impose a single interpretation since most poems can be read in a variety of ways. Lockward further warns against testing using multiple choice questions which is not an ideal method to assess learners' understanding of a poem, as it is regarded as a traditional method which is not very effective.

#### 2.3.5 Learners' attitude and contribution to teachers' experiences

One other factor that comes to play on teachers' experiences is the reaction of the learners during the poetry lessons. Learners in many countries tend to show a negative attitude towards poetry and resistance from learners and their lack of interest in poetry can cause teachers to avoid teaching poetry in class (Benton,2000). This factor can be a negative influence that plays a role in the learners' negative perceptions of the genre as well as their sense of low self-efficiency when it comes to understanding poetry (Mulholland & Wallace, 2001). Furthermore, Hennessey & McNamara (2012) note that when learners show some sort of resistance to poetry and the teaching thereof, it may not just be a negative experience but a barrier to a teacher's positive experience.

Literature also highlights that a suitable approach can always contribute to a successful lesson with less effort in making and keeping learners interested (Khatib, 2011). According to Chemwei and Nyandusi (2008) in the previous years, research in language education has revealed that most learners' admiration of poetry is affected negatively by the manner in which teachers approach it. A number of instructional methods that English teachers make use of in poetry classrooms are typically teacher-centred. This traditional method disallows students to play their roles in the classroom discourse. Therefore, the teacher dominates the lesson by talking and questioning while the learners are passive (Kiboss, 2000). Xerri (2013) notes that anxiety created by the constraints of the curriculum that assessors are expecting a particular kind of response to a poem is one of the main factors among others which lead to some teachers using a restrictive kind of pedagogy when teaching poetry. However, Short, Stewin and Stewart (1991) suggest that, efficient teaching highly relies on the extent to which the teacher is able to create a positive learning space in which learners are well motivated to learn and gain knowledge from the lesson. This is considered so because a enthused learner and a positive classroom atmosphere are a powerful combination that immensely enhances

the teaching and learning process (Short, Stewin and Stewart,1991). The manner in which the language classroom is organised is very important if learners' interest in learning is to be sustained.

#### 2.3.6 Teachers' past experiences and their influence on current teaching experiences

Literature further points out another factor that is connected to how teachers teach poetry which is their past personal experiences that did not shape them to be encouraged and have interest in poetry. According to Ray (1999), an analysis of teachers in England uncovered that a majority did not often engage with poetry in their personal time and some stating that they only read poetry when they accidentally come across it or when they were forced to teach it. These teachers' negative experience with poetry in their past has created some kind of intellectual confusion. Some of these teachers admitted that they never learnt poetry in their English classrooms. Similar sentiments are echoed by Lockward (1994) when he states that most teachers admitted that they had never had an English teacher who taught poetry. As a teacher myself, I have learnt that it is important to present a positive attitude in the classroom. Learners can easily fall in and out of love with the lesson due to the attitude the teacher brings in class. Therefore, they can easily switch off from a lesson which can be disturbing and the results can then be disheartening. Parr and Campbell (2006) argue that a poor attitude that teachers have can somehow be passed on to their learners and subsequently, it can be further passed on from one generation of learners to the next which may lead to a defunct cycle of poetry teaching and learning. Benton (1992) also asserts that the anxiety of teachers can be transferred to learners creating a dull mood in the classroom rather than enjoyment. Moore (2002) concurs as he states that some of his participant's African American teachers stated that none of the English studies in university prepared them to effectively teach poetry. Although university training was adequate, most participants still experienced many reservations when they had to teach poetry.

One of the common experiences teachers have with teaching poetry is self-doubt and discomfort which can be damaging. Therefore, it can be argued that the discomfort and hostility teachers have can lead to self-doubt and anxiety which are not positive elements required in a productive poetry lesson. Moreover, Moyana (1991) conducted a study in Zimbabwe and the results demonstrated that even those teachers who personally enjoyed and loved poetry did experience some difficulties when teaching poetry Furthermore, Suter

&Busiene(2013) found that, among other things in Kenya, most institutions that offered teacher training education failed to cater to all the needs of the revised curriculum. This suggests that more teachers go through an experience of being confronted by the needs of the curriculum while they are not well capacitated from their teacher training institutions. Overton (2008) shared the same sentiments stating that in higher education institutes the teaching of poetry is diminishing in importance. This, according to Overton, can explain how learners in secondary schools are less familiar with understanding the technical terminology that is connected to learning poems. Elsewhere, Overton points an experience that a graduate who acquired dismissive attitude is likely to pass on the same attitude as a teacher. Therefore, having someone good to emulate can contribute to creating more teachers who can rekindle the importance of poetry in schools.

#### 2.3.7 Teachers' Experiences with language used in poems

The subject of language that is used in poems is another issue raised in literature. Parmar and Barot (2013) observe that some of the challenges in poetry pedagogy arise from the heterogeneous socio-economic background of the learners. The reality that the language of teaching and learning is not the ESL learner's home language becomes a barrier for both the teacher and the learner. As a result, the teacher has to put in extra time explaining and code switching the interpretation of the poem into the learners' home language. The language barrier in teachers' experiences is one factor that cannot be ignored among ESL poetry teaching challenges (Tin, 2011). It cannot be ignored that poetry and language are intertwined and in South African schools there is diversity in languages. However, English remains the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) for learners in most South African schools. Therefore, language plays a significant role in the teaching of poetry.

Poetry as a language art is validated throughout the literature as being exceptionally valuable to high school education. Some of the prescribed poems are written in old Shakespearian English and are to be taught to learners who speak English as a second language. Parmar & Barot (2013) point out that some challenges in teaching ESL learners stem from their socio-economic background. The language of instruction could become a barrier that might influence the attitude that learners or teachers have towards certain poems. Vasuthavan & Kunaratnam (2009) conducted a study in Malaysia where they discovered that poetry is not a

favoured genre for ESL learners because of its unusual use of language. Nnolim (1990) noted that the distaste for poetry could possibly be due to its language and language used in poetry is gradation, not explicit, connotative rather than denotative, figurative rather than literal, allusive rather than direct, symbolic rather than plain. These are not usually expected from the language used in a novel or any prose narrative but only in poems. Language in poems challenges the intellect more than is the case in prose. Hence, prose is more popular with teachers and learners. As a result teachers are heavily dependent on study notes when they teach poetry to be consistent with the needs of the curriculum. The constitution of The Republic of South Africa diversely accommodates eleven official languages, however, English is still regarded as the language of teaching and learning in many schools. Conversely, the Department of Basic Education (2002) in South Africa recognises cultural diversity and maintains that teachers and the school should provide assistance and supplementary learning of first additional language. However, this statement cannot be fully feasible in schools today due to the time allocated for poetry. Moreover, the standard of questioning in the exams leaves little room for interventions.

#### 2.3.8 Teachers' positive experiences of poetry teaching

There are a number of pedagogical practices endorsed by teachers who have positive experiences of teaching poetry. Some teachers commend poetry as a useful genre in assisting reluctant learners and those who struggle with learning. The diversity of poetry helps make it accessible to learners' individual needs. Teachers can easily teach a poem based on length, difficulty and subject matter and can also encourage reticent learners to read aloud (Perfect, 1999). According to the experiences of these teachers, a positive attitude can make poetry lessons scholarly, authentic, cultural and engaging (Hanratty, 2008). Hanratty (2008) observed positive attitudes from some teachers in Northern Ireland where some teachers endorsed poetry as valuable and considered it as a stimulating genre. These teachers felt that while poetry rewards may be mysterious, it can still reveal all kinds of great benefits. The teachers' experiences in Hanratty's study determine that the inclusion of poetry in the curriculum should be endorsed because it makes teaching and learning more thought provoking and can be a catalyst for excellent teaching. Wilson (2010) also displays how poetry teachers have improved their efficiency and confidence which has opened broader opportunities to test their own beliefs and pedagogical practices, allowing them to be more

innovative and passionate in offering interesting and critically analytical lessons to their learners.

Likewise, Hennessy, Hinchion & McNamara (2010) found that teachers in Ireland who used mixed-method approach in their poetry lessons responded positively. These teachers displayed an optimistic reaction to their experiences stating that poetry has the ability to enrich learners' minds and it has contributed to their new owned confidence in teaching poetry. The mixed-methods approach gave these teachers the platform to encourage passionate engagement and a permanent love of poetry in their learners.

Similarly, Stickling, Prasun & Oslen (2011) observed teachers in the United states who showed a positive attitude towards poetry and its use in their classrooms. Their findings showed positive visual change for these teachers as poetry seemed to revive their love and interest for teaching poetry thus enhancing their experience of teaching this genre. This somehow reawakened some strategies in their experience that they had successfully used in their previous lessons. These teachers' responses showed that their positive attitude had a great connection with their childhood experiences and the strategies they use to keep their learners in the mood.

In light of the teaching of poetry and the experiences teachers have, the scope of available literature concerning poetry is enlightening. Literature widely acknowledges poetry as a valuable art form and teaching it is still relevant to classrooms today. Teachers' experiences with poetry teaching expressed have uncovered a variety of viewpoints that are brought to the fore in this review. It is certain from available literature that English teachers' experiences of teaching poetry potentially support the continued teaching and learning of this genre regardless of the difficulties inherent in teaching it. This contributes to poetry having a critical value in the curriculum.

### 2.3.9 Teachers' experiences of Pedagogical practices that have worked in poetry classrooms.

The current CAPS document does not stipulate any pedagogical approaches for poetry. This means there are no fixed guidelines for teachers on what methods to employ when teaching poetry. The teaching of poetry is a requirement in the FET phase in high school. Therefore, this section sets out to look into various methods that have kept the teaching of poetry alive

in the classroom. Poetry lends itself to self-expression and varied interpretations. Hence, the methods that teachers use when teaching poetry become important.

Hanauer (2004) suggests that when teaching poetry in the classroom it is imperative to select and utilize material that is more relevant or slightly connected to the learners' own lives and experiences in order to create personal interest for poetry among learners. He also points to the connection between today's popular music and poetry that the use of popular music could be a good entry point for getting learners interested in poetry since the lyrics of the songs have similarity with older poetry in their rhyme and structure. Popular music is influential because it has the ability to communicate experiences and emotional states which are meaningful to its audience, including the youth.

Chemwei & Somba (2014), suggest that an effective classroom environment is one in which the learning and teaching process vary according to factors such as the role of the teacher and that of the learner, and the nature of the instructional processes. The teachers through their experiences, shared the same sentiments in using cooperative learning approach when teaching poetry. Their comments commended cooperative learning approaches as a great contribution to their positive experiences with poetry. There is a general consensus in their comments that using cooperative learning created a better appreciation of poetry in their classrooms.

Lennox (2014) suggests that poetry lessons should include rhymes because it strengthens oral and written language abilities and enriches knowledge, understanding and skills in the interrelated strands of language. On the contrary, not all poems studied in high school have rhymes. Some poems are narrative poems that do not apply the skills of using rhymes.

Kellem (2009) suggests two main pedagogical approaches that work when teaching poetry, which are stylistic approach and reader- response approach. The stylistic approach refers to analysing a poem in terms of lexicon, syntax and the number of turns occurring between possible interlocutors in the discourse. Alternatively, reader-response approach refers to the teaching of poetry that holds an idea that poetry should be studied from the reader's perspective instead of the author's materials.

Hanauer (2004) also suggests two approaches different from Kellem's (2009) which are formalist and conventionalist theories. Formalist refers to studying the formal features of the poem and the latter is associated with conventions of reading connected with poetry. The poetic purpose of the text refers to formal characteristics of the text under study. Accordingly, the formal characteristics of the poem display a system of similarities in stress patterns or similarity in grammatical grouping. On the other hand, the differing view is that of the conventionalist approach. The view assumes that the reader constructs the fictional state and the coherence within the text to read. It means that poetry is a socially mediated genre and, therefore meaning is personally constructed not linguistically.

Literature shows that many teachers present encouraging responses in discussing their positive experiences with having their learners involved in their learning processes that include having them write, critique and share poetry. In a solicitation of recommended methods for poetry teaching, the work of Haugh, Murray, Elle, Bach, Basden, Chisolm, Crow, Easterling, Federenko, Gorey, Longway, Matthews and Trammell (2002) uncovers a great range of positive ideas from educators. One teacher suggested dedicating one day in a month to having students creatively write and critique each other's poetry work. Another teacher advised asking students to write extensively about a new poem at least two times in a week, allowing them to critique whatever they notice, and as years progress the teacher will find that each child has improved at poetry analysis. High school English teachers also championed a constructive venture that included allowing learners to write short, imagist poems in a manner of modernists, write poems in groups to start poetry and writers club or to use poetic formulas for construction.

Working together to write and gather poetry is one of the confirmed pedagogical practices that recurs in teacher's experiences. Haugh et al. (2002) noted teacher success when they allowed learners to work collectively in generating anthologies of favourite poems. This is echoed by Keddie (2012) who interviewed several teachers in Australia. The often marginalised students in these teachers' classes were encouraged to write poetry to share their lives and to assemble it into a collection, the teachers revealed that the teaching method promoted a sense of powerful political agency. They also shared that their experience with poetry had been a useful tool for investigating and moving beyond difficult knowledge. A similar positive response in a New Zealand secondary school also revealed that English

teachers had their learners engage in a school-wide competition. In their small diverse school, most teachers interviewed reacted positively to implementing creative writing lessons followed by a competition. Though having a learner compete is traditionally viewed as a negative force in education, however, according to the teachers' experiences in this particular study, it was found that the experience was overwhelmingly affirmative, especially when the competition side of the lesson was less emphasized (Locke, 2013).

Newfield &Maungedzo (2006) suggest a multimodal approach that effectively worked in a South African school where learners were reluctant to study poetry. A multimodal approach in ESL context changes the way the teacher approaches the genre because the teacher takes learners through a journey of exploration and innovation when remaking poetry in different modal forms. Using multimodal pedagogy exempts a range of modes and language to be permitted in the exploration of poetry. Multimodal approach does not have to have a predetermined programme rather it unfolds in a fluid of dynamic ways that are fuelled by the desire to arouse learners' interest in poetry so that they would engage in some meaningful work (Newfield &Maungedzo, 2006).

Literature reveals another popular mode of poetry teaching in teachers' experiences which is performance or spoken word poetry. There are many aspects of oral poetry that make it appealing to English teachers, including its ability to live in their classrooms and to engage students personally and academically (Tamalavage, 2008). Performance or oral poetry has the desired ability to relate critically to students' cultures (Jocson, 2005). A number of studies reveal that many teachers have found great pleasure in pushing poetry into spoken realms. Tamalavage (2008) writes about her success lessons that encourage her learners to recite poems out loud. She affirms that besides making the mood in her classroom more animated during formal poetry units, performing poetry has assisted her students to learn more about characterization, structure, tone, mood and other poetic devices the writer intended, and has prompted the desire in her students for further investigation and critical thinking.

Similar sentiments shared by an American pedagogical theorist Ladson-Billing (1995) in a 3-year study and observation successfully showed teachers of African American students that when the students were encouraged to perform rap and hip-hop songs, they became more interested and connected to the lesson. It was also discovered that the practice also opened gates for the merging of academia with cultural competence.

### 2.3.10 Conclusion

The scope of available literature concerning the experience of teachers with poetry and its pedagogy is enlightening. Numerous scholars widely acknowledge the value of poetry and its relevance to the modern age. However, the experience with poetry expressed by teachers reveals different viewpoints coming to the fore. There are varied feelings towards teaching and learning as we can certainly assert that there is no era without its dark spots. The effects of the CAPS on teaching is highlighted as one of the contributing factors to teachers' experiences. It is apparent that the teachers' social interaction with poetry in their classrooms gives birth to different experiences, opinions and emotions about the genre as they create meaning from social construction with their learners and their peers. Learning does not take place within the individual, however, it is also a social and collaborative activity where individuals create meaning through interactions each other (Vygotsky, 1978). Some of the experiences are a result of the teachers' past experiences which reveal that bad or good experiences can influence the teachers' approach to the lesson. While there are numerous pedagogical practices endorsed by teachers and scholars, it clearly reveals that poetry is a genre that requires a unique skill because it cannot be compared to other sections in the English language curriculum.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this research study is to explore how high school teachers of English as a Second Language in selected township high schools have experienced their teaching of poetry. The study also seeks to establish the reasons why high school teachers are not so keen on teaching poetry. In doing so the study has also considered the various strategies that these teachers employ when teaching poetry. This chapter outlines the processes that were followed in generating data and analysing the experiences of teachers teaching poetry in township high schools. The chapter covers the research design, the chosen paradigm, the research approach and the selection of participants. Furthermore, the chapter also discusses the methods that were used to analyse the qualitative data that was generated in the study. Finally, issues of trustworthiness are also addressed.

#### 3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm purposefully sets the context for a researcher's study (Ponterotto, 2005). This qualitative study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm. According to Neuman (2007) an interpretivist sought to determine the meaning of events or practices by placing meaning within a particular social context. The study explored meaning from the experiences of teachers teaching poetry to ESL learners in township high schools. Since it is common knowledge that research findings are not out there waiting to be discovered by the researcher, it becomes necessary for the researcher to create them through the interpretation of data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The main focus of this study was to understand the subjective world of an individual's experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) by getting inside the person with a view to understanding his/her experiences from within. The fundamental nature of the interpretive paradigm, according to Christiansen (2010), is to investigate and explore the realities of events that occur naturally, in an environment with real people's behaviour. Interpretive research is subjective in nature. It aims at interpreting individual specificities with an intention to understand actions and meanings rather than causes. This type of research pins its focus on micro-concepts such as individual's perspectives and personal constructs (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). An interpretivist aims to understand the social world and meaning which

form human behaviour and to recognise multiple interactions as equally valid. The researcher in this study explored the experiences of ESL high school teachers in teaching poetry. Considering that the study is underpinned by social constructivism it was important to note that the participants seek to understand the ESL classroom they interact with their learners in and develop meaning based on their experiences. The meanings developed by participants are varied, states Creswell (2013,) and therefore the researcher interprets the complexity of views from the generated data. Check & Schutt (2012) describe interpretive paradigm as an idea that reality is socially constructed and the purpose of social scientists is to understand what meaning individuals provide to reality.

### 3.3 Research Design

This study adopted a case study research design. A case study design is a strategy for doing research that allows for empirical inquiry which investigates a particular phenomenon within a real-life context using various sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). A qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a range of data sources. This ensures that the situation is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which permit for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Stake, 1995). The role of the researcher is to interpret, describe and understand the case being studied (Rule and John, 2001), with the intention to understand what it is like to be an ESL poetry teacher for high school learners. This is the reason case studies are descriptive in nature and can possibly be used for further research (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). Using a case study to approach this research was meant to capture the realities that are socially constructed by participants through their lived experiences and their thoughts about a particular situation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Rule and John (2011) emphasize that using a case study is a research methodology that is manageable than a large-scale survey.

Using a case study allowed me to study a particular instance with a great deal of depth as opposed to having to look at several instances superficially. I was able to focus on the experiences of the participants of teaching poetry to their high school ESL learners and this was the aim of this study. "Case study provides rich insights into particular situations, events, organisation, classroom or even persons" (Rule & John, 2011, p.1). In this study, the chosen

research design was able to provide valuable insight into the nature of the teachers' poetry teaching experiences, their espoused poetry pedagogy, and the reasons behind their choice of this particular pedagogy. Since the "case" is the unit of analysis, the research questions had to relate to this unit of analysis (Rule & John, 2014, p.19). Jupp (2006, p.20) explains that the "case" in a case study, "can be an individual person, an event, or a social activity, group, organisation or institution." The case in this study is the ESL teachers' experiences of teaching poetry to high school learners. Yin, as cited in Darke, Shanks & Broadbent, (1998, p.7) concurs that this kind of research design is a fitting research strategy where a contemporary phenomenon is considered in its natural context with a view to understanding the dynamics that are present in single settings. Rule & John, (2011) further argue that a case study might generate evidence that is astute and useful to make an argument. It is therefore this process of conducting an investigation of a case that is referred to as a case study together with the conclusion that such investigation comes out with (Rule & John, 2011). The case involved four plus twelve ESL teachers of poetry to high school learners from five township high schools bringing to sixteen the total number of participating teachers.

A case study methodology provides the necessary tools to the researcher to study phenomena that are multifaceted within their contexts (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Darke, Shanks and Broadbent (1998) believe that a case study should be used in situations where the experiences of individuals and the contexts of actions are critical. It was therefore necessary for this study to use this design as it dealt with teachers' poetry teaching experiences in their ESL language classrooms. In such contexts, rich data and appropriate results are likely to emerge as a result of the fertile ground offered by the research design. In this type of research, the researcher had to understand, describe and interpret the case (Rule & John, 2001, p.11). It was then clear that in order to capture the reality of the participants' lived experiences of their poetry teaching, this type of research design had to be used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, as cited in Bertram & Christiansen, 2014,).

### 3.4 Research Approach

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that a research methodology is determined by the nature of the research question and the subject being explored. Therefore, the research design used

in this study should be seen as an instrument to answer the research question. This study was aimed at exploring and understanding teachers' experiences with the teaching of poetry to ESL high school learners. The study did not intend to provide a universal truth about the topic under research but rather to explore a particular way of constructing meaning on the phenomenon being explored. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What experiences do township high school ESL teachers have about teaching poetry to ESL learners?
2. Which strategies do township high school ESL teachers use when teaching poetry in their high school ESL classrooms?
3. What is the rationale behind using these strategies when teaching poetry?

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study because this approach reinforces interpretation and understanding of meaning as well as the intentions underlying human reactions. The purpose in selecting a qualitative approach for this study was that qualitative research is intended to understand phenomena rather than quantify and measure them. Secondly, this approach was chosen because of its potential to discover and allow the researcher to explore the themes that are identified and issues in great depth and detail (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Qualitative methods are inductive and subjective in nature (Creswell and Miller, 2000) and were thus appropriate for this study. The study aimed to discover multiple truths from the experiences of high school teachers about teaching poetry to ESL learners in the context of their interaction with their learners during poetry lessons in accordance with the social constructivist principles adopted for this research.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) a qualitative study is a multifaceted research method linking an interpretive approach to the subject matter. The multifaceted nature of qualitative research allowed the researcher to develop a holistic depiction of the phenomenon in question. This approach offered an importance on process and meaning that were thoroughly examined, but not measured in terms of quantity, frequency or amount. Qualitative studies naturally produce wealth of comprehensive data about a much smaller number of participants. From the qualitative data that was generated, detail through direct quotation and careful description of situations, interactions, events and observed behaviours were provided (Labuschagne, 2003).

The descriptive nature of a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to provide a detailed description of the experiences of the participants concerned, which sustained the theoretical assumptions on which this study is based (Meyer, 2001). Furthermore, the descriptive nature of the study will allow the readers to fully understand the meaning attached to the experience, the distinct nature of the research problem and the impact of the problem being explored or investigated (Meyer, 2001).

The principal rationale of this study was to understand, describe and present the experiences, of ESL teachers of teaching poetry to ESL high school learners in South African township schools. This can be fully understood from the point of view of participants who were part of the phenomenon being studied. In this qualitative study, inquiry was influenced by a chosen paradigm that guided the research and process. It was also influenced by the values that inhered in the context (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

### 3.5 Population and Sampling

Research participants were selected because they were willing to provide information that was rich and which would be able to challenge and enhance the researcher's understanding (Crabtree and Miller, 1992). The initial purpose of the study was to sample four teachers from two different schools. However, due to circumstances that are explained in detail in 3.5.1 then added an additional sample of 12 participants. The study then sampled 16 participants from five high schools that were initially identified using purposive sampling. From the 16 participants 4 were interviewed and the other 12 were given questionnaires that were similar to the interview questions. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), in purposive sampling, the participants are selected for inclusion in the study according to the specific characteristics or knowledge they have. Sarantakos (2005) further posits that the importance of purposive sampling is that respondents are knowledgeable in the area of interest for the study and are suitable for the study.

The researcher approached potential participants that met the criteria for inclusion in the study (Marshall, 1996). The first four interview participants were known to the researcher as they worked within the same circuit, and the twelve questionnaire participants were from the neighbouring schools and all fulfilled the following criteria which required them to be:

- English second language speakers
- Teaching ESL in a township school in high school
- Teaching poetry in their curriculum and have teaching experience of at least 1 year

### 3.5.1 Motive to Add More Participants

Selecting a small sample of 4 teachers from 2 different schools was initially appropriate for this qualitative study since the researcher aimed to discover in-depth information of the socio-educational context (Patton, 2002). However, when circumstances changed and the participants were no longer available for classroom observation and participating in a focus group interview, it became necessary to add the other twelve participants later. The 4 initial participants were no longer available for classroom observation and focus-group interview due to the feeling that the researcher would be invading their space and felt uncomfortable to be observed while teaching. The researcher had to find more participants who would be willing to respond to questionnaires in order to generate enough data on the phenomenon being researched. The 12 were given questionnaires only and none could be interviewed due to the distractions caused by Covid 19. South Africa was under lockdown and schools were closed which became more difficult to have an interview session with more participants. As a result, altogether the study consists of 16 individuals from five schools but within the same location. Their pedagogy was guided by the same curriculum.

### 3.5.2 Description of participants

The study consists of a total of sixteen (16) participants from five (5) different schools within the same school district. Four of the sixteen participants were interviewed. They came from two (2) of the five (5) schools. This meant there were two (2) teachers from each of the two schools. Then the twelve (12) participants that were given questionnaires came from the other three (3) schools with four (4) participants from each school. As detailed in chapter 3, the two (2) schools with the four (4) teachers that were interviewed were the initial focus of the study with hope that they would be available for classroom observation and focus-group interviews. Unfortunately, due to challenges explained in this chapter, it was then necessary to gather more data from more teachers in the neighbouring schools. All the participants were purposefully selected to suit the requirements of this study based on their experience of teaching poetry in their grades in high school. A brief summary of data generation tools is

provided below. For purposes of confidentiality, the participants are referred to as Teacher A to D for interviews and the questionnaire participants are referred to as Teacher 1 to 12.

### 3.6 Data Generation Strategies

Generating data requires tools in the research process. In this qualitative study the researcher used in-depth semi structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaires.

#### 3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

This study initially utilized in-depth face-to-face interviews with the first four participants (Appendix E) to generate the necessary data. Interviews were adopted because the researcher had interest in gaining insights of the teachers in teaching poetry and their experiences. This was appropriate for my study since interviews are important for exploring and describing peoples' perceptions and understanding that which might be unique to them. Interviews allow the researcher to explore and seek clarity particularly when seeking to understand a participant's viewpoint (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Furthermore, the interviewer has the freedom of developing each situation in whatever direction she wants (Rao,2005). This approach helped the researcher to probe deep into the phenomenon thereby understanding the attitudes and behaviour of the individuals who were involved in the context that was under researched (Rao, 2005).

Interviews are a flexible device for generating data, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used; verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). According to Kvale (1996), an interview is an exchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. Greeff (2002) suggests that interviews are a predominant instrument of data collection in a qualitative study. Hennink, Hutter& Bailey (2011) consider in-depth face-to-face interviews as a conversation with a particular purpose in making meaning and partnership between the interviewer and the interviewee, and it is a knowledge producing conversation. Potter (1996) concurs that, interviews are helpful tools for generating data in a qualitative study. The intention for using interviews to generate data was to enable participants to discuss their interpretation of how they had experienced their teaching of poetry and to explore factors influencing the methods they were using in their classrooms.

All the four (4) selected teachers were individually interviewed at their work places. The interview meetings favoured both the researcher and the participants, hence, interviews were conducted after working hours during their slot for matric study and extra-curricular

activities in their schools. All the four participants were audio- recorded with their consent. Using an audio-recorder gave the researcher advantage to re-visit the recordings and transcribe them so that nothing was left out from their responses when analysing data.

### 3.6.2 Questionnaires

This study also used a semi-structured questionnaire (appendix F) since it consists of close-ended and open-ended questions (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The close-ended type of questions confines respondents to a list of answer choices from which they have to choose as they answer. The usefulness of close-ended questions becomes manifest in their ability to prescribe a variety of responses from which participants can choose. For the open-ended type, respondents are given freedom to be detailed in their answers. Here, there are no specific categories or other answers to choose from (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The combination of these two methods should yield data that is rich.

It must be noted that the use of questionnaires in this study was necessitated by the sudden unavailability of the initial four participants for classroom observation. The absence of observations would have compromised both the quantity and quality of the data finally generated. Thus, it became necessary that more participants should be sought with a view to complementing data. In order to maintain a sense of uniformity, credibility and triangulation, the same questions that were used in the interviews were used in the questionnaires.

### 3.7 Methodological Problems / Limitations of the study

There were limitations experienced when this study was conducted and it is important to consider them when interpreting the results of this qualitative study. The initial research design had to be amended due to participant's unwillingness to allow the researcher into their classrooms for lesson observations. These participants were also not available for focus group discussions which they had been briefed about earlier and had agreed to the idea. I therefore resorted to recruiting a new cohort of participants with a view to augmenting the data that would no longer be generated through observation and focus group discussions. The twelve additional participants were then brought in so that more data would be generated to supplement that which would have been generated with the four initial participants through focus group discussions and lesson observations. The situation got even worse with the twelve additional participants when it became clear that the researcher would not be able to interview and observe them due to the advent of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, despite

these limitations, the study was able to proceed and find answers to the questions it had initially set out to answer

### 3.8 Data analysis

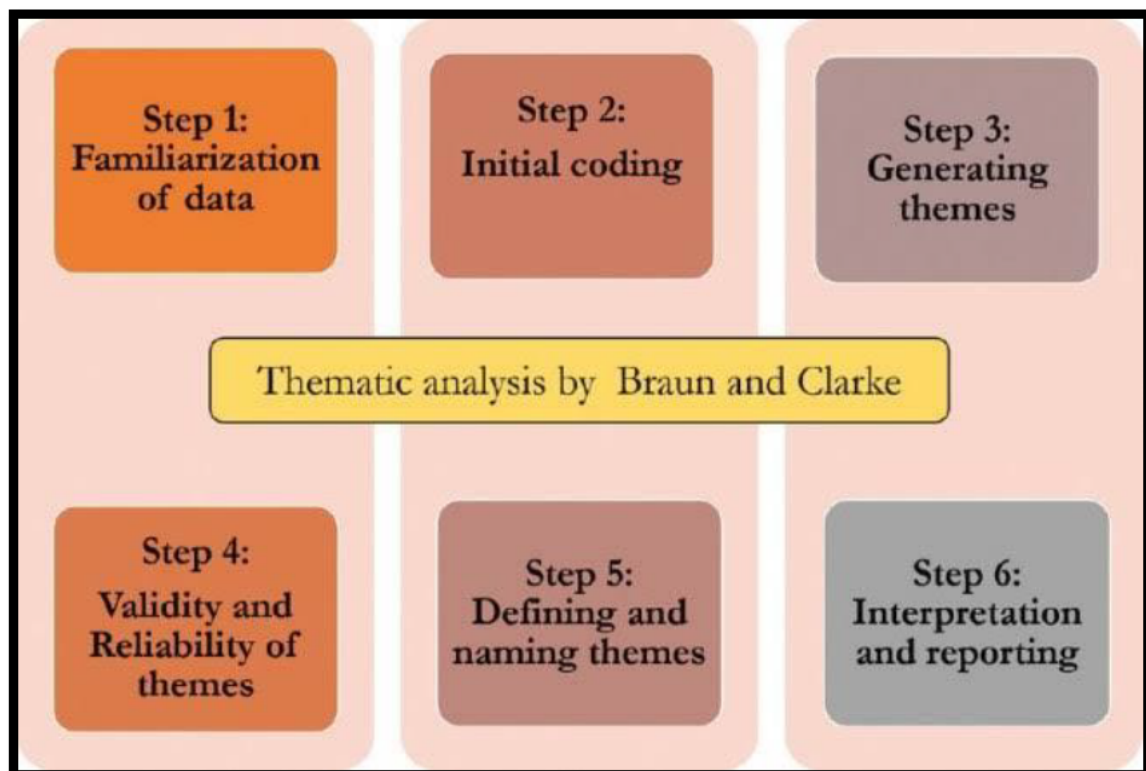
Mouton and Marais (1991) define data analysis as a process whereby a phenomenon is unpacked into its component in order to be better understood. This research study employed thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse data that was generated from the four plus twelve participants. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) analysis of qualitative data involves organizing, categorizing, accounting for and explaining the data. It also involves making sense of data in based on the participants' definitions of situations, noting patterns, themes, categories and regulations. The data analysis process includes three steps, which are "scanning and cleaning the data; organizing the data; and re-representing the data" (Vithal and Jansen, 2012). In observing the above mentioned data analysing strategy, I read the data that was generated, checked for any incomplete data, organised the data according to themes (Thematic Analysis), compared the data and then re-represented the data.

In doing so I was breaking up the data into controllable themes, trends, patterns and relationships in order to understand the key elements of the data (Mouton, 2005, p. 108). Thematic analysis is measured as the most appropriate form of analysis for any study that seeks to determine the problem using interpretations. It provides a systematic element to data analysis. It enables the researcher to associate an analysis of the frequency of the theme with one of the whole content. This was done in order to confer accuracy and intricacy and enhance the research's whole meaning. Therefore, thematic analysis offered an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely (Marks and Yardley, 2004). Thematic analysis made it easy for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns(themes) within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this stage, a meaning making process was embarked upon that involved the use of codes. Coding is not just labelling, it is identifying connections and patterns. "It leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137).

According to Braun and Clarke, 2006 qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying relationships among the categories. Qualitative data analysis is in fact a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the

generated data. I then studied the chosen issues in depth and attempted to understand the different categories of information that were emerging from the data (TerreBlanche, Durrheim& Painter, 2006). In the analysis phase I repeatedly reflected on the questions asked during the interviews and in the questionnaires and the responses given by the participants, so that including irrelevant data can be avoid including which would not meet the objectives of the study. The analysis followed the 6 stages of thematic analysis stated in Braun and Clarke (2006):

Figure 1: The model below shows the stages to the thematic analysis process.



The data analysis process in this study followed the audio recordings of the four participants. They were listened to several times for accurate translation and transcription. This was the first step of data analysis where I got to become familiar with the data. It was an important stage where I got an overview of the generated data in this study. Then, data from interviews and questionnaires was coded because the questions on both tools were similar which made it easier to analyse all data generated using thematic analysis. Here, sections of text were highlighted, together with sentences and/or phrases and they were also coded in order to describe their content. When I was satisfied that the codes aligned with the research questions and therefore were fit for purpose, the data driven coding was followed by focusing

on identifying patterns of meaning. In this stage, I reviewed the codes created and identified patterns among them, and started creating themes.

After themes were generated, they were named. Defining and naming themes involved formulating exactly what was meant by each theme and discovering how it could assist in understanding data. This process involved categorising the themes and searching for similarities and differences in how the participants attached meaning to their situations. I then integrated the different constructions.

### 3.9 Trustworthiness, Validity and Credibility.

Korstjens and Moser (2018) describe trustworthiness as referring to the degree to which the finding of the study can be trusted. They further argue that quality standards employed in a quantitative study such as generalising ability, objectivity, internal validity, and reliability are not fit to evaluate qualitative research quality. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that in order for interpretivists to meet the trustworthiness criteria they need to take note of four considerations: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest a qualitative research regards itself with the extent to which final results are consistent (credibility) and that the research truthfully measures that which it was intended to measure (validity).

In a qualitative study validity is determined by data obtained from the participants to the extent of being constantly checked and verified to an extent where the data analysis process becomes self-correcting (Gibbs, 2000) and the researcher has the ability to continue, to stop or to modify the research process (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson and Spiers,2002).

Validity in a qualitative study can provide the reader with sufficient detail to enable them to interpret the meaning and context of what is presented (Popey, Rogers and Williams, 1998). Therefore, validity is largely dependent on the transparency with which data generation and analysis procedures are presented. Qualitative study centres on better understanding the phenomenon being studied and doing so the analysis process aims at ensuring that the results capture what the study participants say based on their experiences. This understanding of validity lends itself to the theoretical framework of this study (social constructivism). It also

does not seek the ultimate truth but rather focuses on identifying the constructions by the participants concerning the phenomenon being researched. During the data generation phase I conducted additional data generation from 12 more teachers through questionnaires in order to ensure that the meaning constructed in the initial interviews was also present in these additional questionnaires.

Credibility is enhanced when the researcher gives description in detail and interprets their experience as initial researchers (Williams, 2009). Check and Schutt (2012) define credibility as a way of showing the truthfulness of the findings of the research being done by the researcher. I ensured that the research findings would be truthful through the questioning technique that the researcher used.

According to Shenton (2004) transferability means that findings of a certain study can be used for other situations. Transferability therefore relies on the level of similarity between two contexts. I provided enough information about the context of the research in order for a reader of the research findings to be able to transfer the study findings (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability refers to the ability of a study to be auditable if another researcher were to follow the decision trail used by the primary researcher with a view to arriving at similar results. According to Shenton (2004) dependability in research is whereby the results obtained in the study can be the same for many times as long as the same methods and same participants are still used in the study. In ensuring dependability, the researcher ensured every component of bias was exposed. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher used an audio tape to ensure accuracy which enabled the researcher to transcribe every word verbatim. Shenton (2004) further argues that under dependability, all the steps used in research should be reported in detail so that future researchers may have an opportunity to repeat the study even if they use it for a different purpose.

The last criterion for trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability ensures that steps and experiences used in research are those of the participants and not those of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). In ensuring this, the researcher made sure that the data collected in the study reflected the experiences and ideas of the participants and not the characteristics of the researcher. I, as the researcher, was able to state the reasons why I chose to use certain methods and techniques over others (Shenton, 2004).

Finally, methodological triangulation, which promotes the use of several data generation methods such as interviews and questionnaires, was also used in this study in order to ensure trustworthiness. Triangulation was achieved by asking the same questions in more than one way (Bertram and Christensen, 2014).

### 3.10 Ethical Issues

In order to display its understanding of the significance of ethics in conducting research and to acknowledge some limitations around conducting research, the university prioritises protecting the dignity of the research participants (Silverman, 2009). Gate keeper permission was sought from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC). I then approached the Provincial Department of Basic Education for permission to conduct this research in some of its schools that were selected. The principals of the selected schools were also consulted in order to first introduce the research, explain the purpose and nature thereof and to request for permission to work with the teachers and the learners in the school (Appendix B1 & B2). Similarly, consent letters/forms (Appendix D) were issued to all the participants that were recruited, requesting their permission to take part in the study. To re-establish rapport and to keep participants motivated to cooperate and provide the researcher with desired information, it was necessary to go over the consent letter and further explain the purpose of the study. An informed consent form gives the essential information about the research study to the participants (Polonski, 2014). The consent forms also assist with the information regarding the purpose of the study and also give details on the role of the participants and all the positive and negative aspects concerning the study (Moolman, 2018). Participants taking part in the study were then informed that they reserved the right to withdraw as and when they wished to. They were also guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. These participants were informed that all information and documents that were related to the research would be handled in the strictest confidence and confidentiality. I also explained that in order to uphold the ethical principles of research, the study would not use real names of schools and participants but rather pseudonyms for all the participants. Finally, participants were also informed that all data would be stored in the office of the researcher's supervisor in a locked

cupboard for five years, as required by the university. Thereafter, all data would be destroyed, print data by shredding and tapes by incineration.

### 3.11 Conclusion

This Chapter outlined how the study was conducted. I discussed the research design and the paradigm that are relevant to this study. The chapter then gave the rationale behind these choices. Thereafter, the chapter further discussed the epistemology associated with the selected paradigm, the research approach, and the data generation methods that were used in this study. Finally, the chapter explained the data analysis methods that were utilised to analyse the qualitative data generated in this study. The purpose of this study was to understand the participants' experiences of teaching poetry to ESL learners in township high schools thereby illustrating one way in which the concepts under investigation are constructed by teachers in the same context. The next Chapter details the analysis process and describes the findings of the research.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter three discussed the methodology used in this research project. It described the use of interviews and questionnaires in the generation of data. It is important to use generated data and analyse it in addressing discussions that respond to the three research questions which are the foundation of this study. This chapter therefore presents and discusses findings of this research whose objective was to explore township ESL teachers' experiences with poetry pedagogy. The data was generated from selected township high school ESL teachers teaching poetry in South Africa.

#### 4.2 Interviews overview

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with four of the sixteen township high school ESL teachers. The four teachers were from two different schools which are within the same school district in KwaZulu Natal. The four interviews were conducted separately on separate days with participants made aware that their identities would be protected through the use of alphabet pseudonyms. Each of the participants was allocated an alphabet from A to D and was reminded that the information they provide during the interviews was to be used only for the primary purpose of the study. The data generated will be destroyed within five years of completion of the study.

#### 4.3 Questionnaires overview

Then the questionnaires were given to the other 12 teachers who were also teaching poetry to ESL high school learners and all the participants were made aware that their identity would be protected by the use of pseudonyms. The questions in the questionnaires had a lot of similarities with those that were used in the interview sessions. This was meant to get more participants involved in the same conversation without direct interviews. It was important to have more teachers involved in this research in order to achieve a credible sample that would yield sufficient data for this study. The questionnaire had a section that required participants to disclose their age and the years of their poetry teaching experience in order to possibly determine if there was a correlation between their experiences of teaching poetry, their age and their professional teaching experience.

#### 4.4 Presentation of findings

The presentation of findings is underpinned by the interpretation of the transcripts and questionnaires by means of thematic analysis in sequence with the objectives of the study. Each interview was transcribed and analysed individually to reach an understanding of every participant. The questionnaires were also interpreted and analysed in the same manner. While conducting thematic analysis, common themes were identified focusing specifically on the research questions under enquiry. The presentation of the findings results from teachers' declared experiences of teaching poetry. To fully understand teachers' interpretation of their experiences it was important to code their responses and separate them into themes. The themes were derived from the participants' explanations of their experiences as they discussed their interaction with poetry in their classrooms. The following are the five themes that emerged:

Theme 1: Teachers' attitude towards poetry and its effect on the learners

Theme 2: The role of poetry in the ESL classroom

Theme 3: Pedagogical practices in the ESL poetry class

Theme 4: Challenges with poetry pedagogy in the ESL class

Theme 5: Teachers' personal experiences of poetry learning

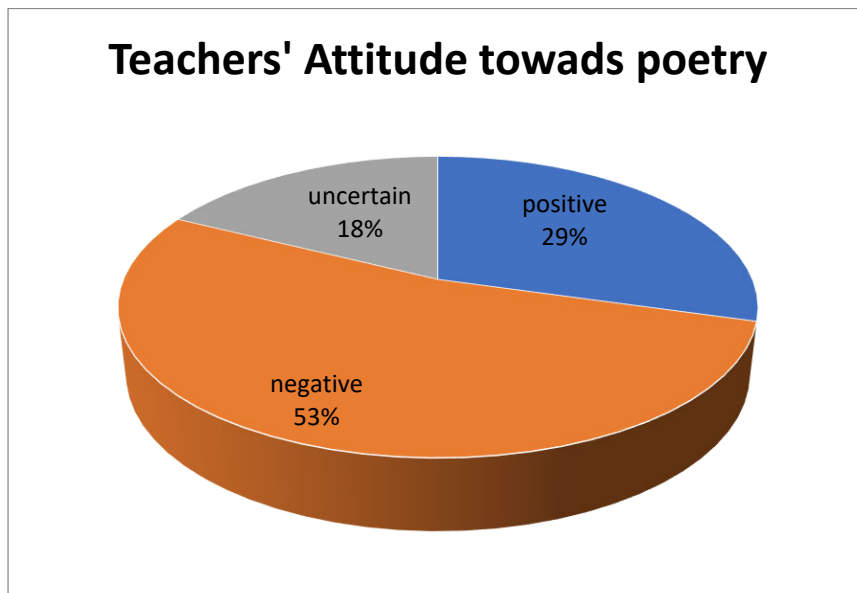
The themes are presented in relation to the broader motive of this study which is to understand township high school ESL teachers' experiences that are a result of their social interaction with their learners within a working environment of poetry teaching. The meaning of knowledge revealed in this study is largely dependent on the social context, that which moulds participants and provides an environment in which construction of knowledge and experience occurs. This analysis lends itself to Creswell's (2009) assumption on social constructivism that it is the fundamental generation of meaning which is always socially arising in and out of interaction with human community.

##### 4.4.1 Theme 1. Teachers' Attitude towards poetry and its effect on the learners

One of the questions that the participants had to respond to had to do with their attitude towards poetry. Some of the questions further explored the teachers' classroom practice

during poetry lessons. The first question was to explore their personal feelings about the genre and whether they love it or not. The questions asked were to better understand what they make of their poetry teaching experiences and their feelings about teaching this genre to their ESL learners. Their attitude towards poetry therefore became the first important theme that emerged. The figure below shows the participants' responses to the first question.

Figure 2: Teachers' attitude towards poetry and the teaching thereof



Positive responses were expressed in such terms as *fascinating, interesting, and exciting to teach*. Negative responses were conveyed in words such as *challenging, it is a struggle, not my favourite, I am not a fan, has too much work, I do not like it, it is hard to understand*. Uncertain responses were those who chose not to respond to the question by leaving it blank. From the above results, it is reasonable to conclude that poetry is not a popular genre among township high school ESL teachers. The participants' responses reveal that there are more teachers who have a reluctant attitude towards the genre. It is a concerning reality because poetry occupies a space in the curriculum and these teachers have to play their part in teaching the genre despite their personal negative attitude. The teaching of poetry has long been recognised as one of the aspects of the English curriculum which presents teachers with specific pedagogical challenges (Dymoke, 2000).

The participants are currently teaching poetry as part of their current curriculum. The Department of Education (DOE) prescribes the poems to be studied. Grade 10 has to study 6

poems and in grade 12 there are 10 poems to study. However, the current curriculum is flexible so the school can choose a different genre instead of poetry in grade 12 which is what most teachers choose to do. Most participants only teach poetry up to grade 11. In grade 12 they then opt for other genres leaving out poetry. Regarding this issue, the participants' responses varied when they were asked if they loved poetry as a genre. The participants' responses revealed that even though they all teach the genre within the same school district, they did not share the same classroom experiences.

Teacher A sought to make clarity in her discussion that the emotion she has towards poetry is not at all 'love' rather it was 'like'. Her expression revealed that being a teacher does not mean teaching what you love, rather it is doing what is best for the requirements of the curriculum and the interest of the learner. She said:

*"I would not say I love it, yes I just like it... for me I wouldn't even see myself at one day writing a poem..." (Teacher A)*

It was then important to understand that Teacher A had a mild feeling of attraction towards poetry. This also means that Teacher A does not disregard poetry altogether. Similarly, Teacher D shared the same sentiments with Teacher A about her feelings towards the genre. She said:

*"To be honest I am not sure how I feel about poetry, but whatever that feeling is, it is not love. And I would not say I hate it also. It's just that it does not get me excited". (Teacher D)*

Teacher D's honest feeling also shows that she does not disregard poetry as she does not hate it, however it does not get her excited. Reaction from Teacher A and Teacher D reveals that they both have a lukewarm attitude towards poetry. Their responses were not surprising as Dymoke (2009) notes that poetry contains text which seems to present the most individuals with many challenges. Teacher B and Teacher C were also asked the same question and their attitude towards poetry was that of 'love.' They both responded that they did love poetry and had a lot of passion for it. Teacher B and Teacher C both find poetry '*fascinating and interesting*'(Teacher C). However, Teacher B had reservations that it also had to depend on the type of poem and the wording used in that particular poem. She said:

*“Yah I can say I have passion for it but at times it depends on the type of the poem and the words they use”. (Teacher B)*

All the participants shared their honest feelings on the genre and their responses do share some commonalities although they varied. The interviews with the participants and questionnaires revealed that poetry is not very popular among teachers and it does not give them the excitement they should have when teaching it. Even among those who claimed to love it they had their preferences which reveal that teaching poetry is not like teaching any other section in the English subject. Moyana (1991) has the same opinion that poetry is not a popular subject, in a study that was conducted in Zimbabwe on the difficulties in teaching poetry revealed that teaching it was difficult even to those teachers who enjoy it personally. It was then important to understand why teachers feel the way they do towards poetry. The participants then further elaborated with justification why they felt the way they did about the genre. What transpired from Teacher A’s response of just ‘liking’ poetry was that she believed that her learners’ reaction to poetry did somehow contribute to her own response to poetry. She expressed that she felt that with the learners she had, she always had to ‘*put more effort*’ to accomplish her poetry lesson. This, she said, was because her learners did not have the proper historical background on the poems she was currently doing in class. Teacher A felt that in order for her learners to understand a poem, they required a brief historical background as a background to the lesson. The historical background she mentioned is that of South African history which most of her learners are not exposed to while most of grade 10 poems are on the subject of events that took place before 1994 during the apartheid era. Her concern was that there is a lot of time spent on each lesson because each lesson requires a lot of innovation on her part.

*“...one of the main reasons that I have had as an encounter especially with the learners that I am currently teaching is that, with a lot of ehhh historical background that our learners have never been exposed to, they seem not to grasp why people write what they write, so it’s like you have to explain a lot, build mental pictures for them to try and see what you are trying to say to them. And for the fact that with poetry you cannot exclude images so it’s like you have to put more effort and that also takes time so by the time the lesson is finished you have not accomplished everything that you have planned for the lesson because you had spent more*

*time trying to build on the historical background so that by the time you get to the gist of whatever that you wanted to do it's like ok they just... you know..."(Teacher A)*

Teacher D had the same feeling about poetry as Teacher A that she just liked poetry. Her justification showed self-doubt because she felt that she always needed extra assistance to analyse each poem and she felt that she had to make extra preparations for her poetry lessons. Poetry lessons according to her seemed to take away the confidence she had when teaching other sections and it seemed this was a factor that brought about frustration on her preparations for each lesson. She also felt it was time consuming which is what Teacher A also expressed.

*"Well poetry has never been my favourite subject matter, I have been teaching for a while now but I have never been able to just analyse the poem at first glance, I find help from the internet or notes. I just hate that I always have to go through that with just poetry, while other sections are just smooth sailing. Think about it, if it makes me feel like that imagine what it does to these kids. That is why I fully equip myself when I go to class, and I never allow my attitude towards poetry get in the way of how I teach it. The issue of me and poetry is personal".(Teacher D)*

The two teachers' negative attitude towards poetry is rooted in its art form and the teaching strategies required when teaching it. It is clear that it brings about challenges when teaching it resulting in these teachers not being fond of it. Trump and Miller (1979) also suggests that poetry requires more creativity than to teach any other type of literature. This is mostly because high school learners reject the study of poetry according to Newfield & Maungedzo (2006) study in a high school in Soweto South Africa. Both teachers felt poetry needed more preparation compared to other sections in the English curriculum. Such preparation is very important in poetry pedagogy. This is echoed by MacDougal (2008) suggesting that poetry pedagogy requires one to establish prior knowledge about the poem, have a discussion on the characteristics of the poem, then go through literary analysis where learners identify and analyse the poetic elements.

On the other hand, Teacher B appeared to have love for poetry but there was a clause in her response which stated that her love depended on the type of the poem she would be teaching at that particular time. Her response revealed that even though she loved poetry she had

doubts in terms of her personal knowledge of understanding poetry. She preferred shorter poems to longer ones and stated that some words used were not easy to understand as they needed clarity before teaching the poem. Teacher B said:

*“Ehhh... because I prefer certain poems because its gets difficult if it a long poem with no stanzas and it has difficult words and the words need more clarity”.*(Teacher B)

Teacher C also claimed to love poetry personally however she stated that it is a different scenario when she has to teach it because of the reception she gets from her learners. She stated:

*“I feel as a teacher I am motivated but once you get to class, given that it’s English First Additional language sometimes the reception from the learners is not as I would expect”.*

It is evident that there are a lot of challenges teachers encounter with poetry pedagogy. It would seem that the nature of the reception they receive from learners is important to their teaching because it can influence the direction the lesson eventually assumes. The teachers give the impression that their learners are to blame, to an extent, for the way they teach and for the attitude they harbour because, according to the teachers, the learners’ negative attitude takes away the excitement of teaching poetry. On the contrary, Kennedy and Gioia (1994) argue that learners’ negative response to poetry stem from their dire experience with poetry, ineffectual teachers, the print and the very nature of its presentation in books. The responses from teachers show that a productive poetry lesson requires their learners to cooperate.

Since the participants expressed, justified and admitted their personal feelings about poetry, it became necessary to establish how they felt about teaching it. This question was to get a sense of whether their personal feelings about the genre influenced their professional sense of responsibility which is to teach poetry to township high school ESL learners regardless. This question was meant to elicit insights on how they felt about interacting with their learners during poetry lessons.

Out of the 16 teachers, only 4 seemed to enjoy teaching the genre without any problems. Responses revealed that the teachers generally found teaching poetry difficult because of its nature and they felt it required intense understanding before they could teach it. Teacher 4

who professed love for poetry said: *“Teaching it is a different story because now you don’t just read it for interest sake but you have to understand it in a deeper level and be able to make your learners understand it, which is not easy”*. Others simply responded with no enthusiasm and passion for teaching it in their classrooms. Teacher 6 admitted that she only taught poetry as per curricular requirement, otherwise she would not if she had a choice. More teachers are less inclined to teach poetry in their ESL classrooms. Even those who left blank spaces for other questions in questionnaires did comment on how challenging and difficult it is to teach poetry. More teachers felt that their learners contributed to failed lessons because they found poetry boring. Their responses show a lot of self-doubt and low self-confidence when it comes to poetry teaching. However, there were a few of those who enjoyed teaching it and had great ideas on how to execute their lessons in a productive way. While others expressed that their pedagogy is largely depended on the type of poem, they felt that each lesson was not the same because of the poem itself, for most of their lessons, was the arbiter of how they felt about teaching it. Their responses also show that their learners’ attitude towards each lesson was also largely dependent on the type of poem. The participants stated that they preferred teaching poems that were on the subject of love and relationships because they felt that their learners responded better to love and relationship poems because they could somehow relate to them. Shakespearian sonnets that are on the subject of love are most common on their list of preferred poems. What was also gathered from the participant’s responses was that their learners generally preferred sonnets over other forms of poems because they are short with only 14 lines and are believed to be easier to understand because each sonnet could either be an English sonnet or an Italian sonnet which are well understood by these teachers even when they teach it. Teacher D admitted that teaching poetry is not her forte however, her feelings do not interfere with her responsibility to teach it. She said:

*“...I don’t have a straight feeling of how I feel about teaching it and not forgetting that teaching poetry is not my line of interest. But I try not to let that interfere with the lesson because some learners enjoy poetry apart from those who dislike it. At the end of the day poetry has to be taught and they must be ready for assessment”*.(Teacher D)

Teacher D expressed that her negative attitude towards poetry does not interfere with accomplishing her purpose of teaching poetry. Teacher B on the other hand expressed that

she loved poetry but also admitted that it was always necessary to plan her lessons so she could understand the poem before simplifying it for her learners. She said:

*“I feel that I’m loving it because I have to prepare first before I teach it. I have to understand it. I have to go through the poem and try to understand it and put it in a simpler way that learners can understand”.*

Ten participants mentioned that teaching poetry is their responsibility despite the negative attitude they have towards teaching it. They displayed their ability to see the importance of separating their personal feelings from their professional responsibility. What was gathered from the teachers’ responses is that they valued their classroom responsibility despite their personal opinions about the genre.

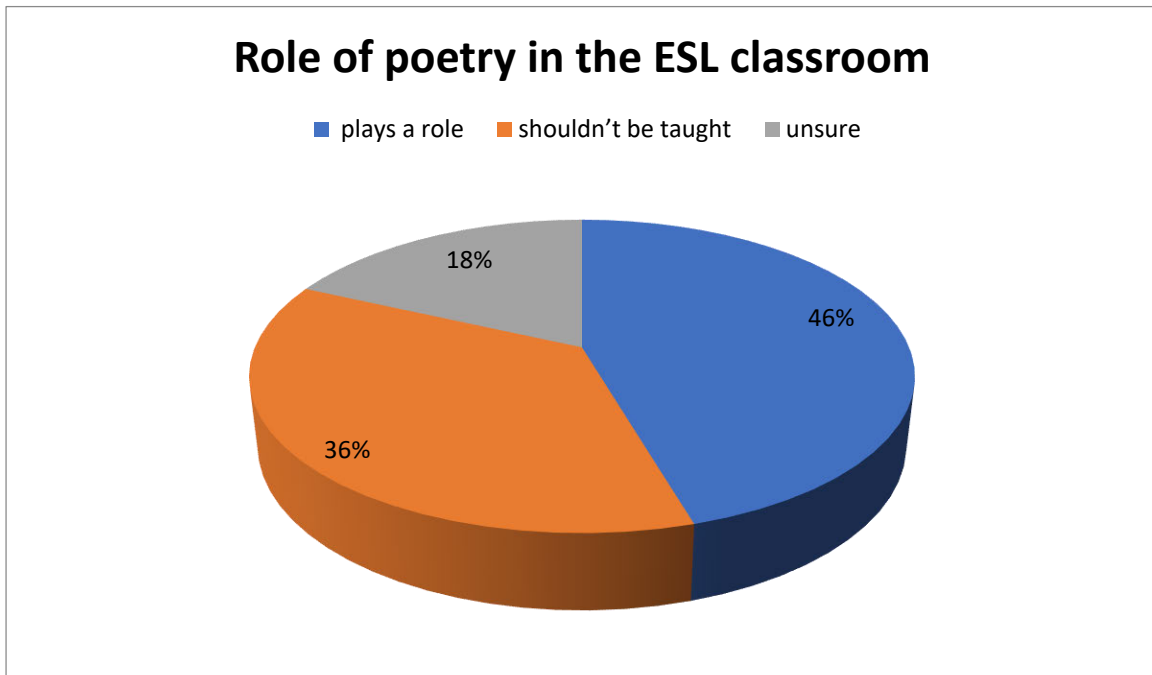
#### 4.4.2 Theme 2: The Role of Poetry in the ESL Classroom

Teachers play a fundamental role in inspiring learners to take pleasure in poetry and the way they approach poetry in class can assist in stimulating either a lifelong passion for the genre or an equally intense rejection of it (Xerri, 2013). There is no doubt that documented literature approves of the role of poetry in high school and CAPS clearly indicates that the focus for reading literature in the classroom is to develop learners’ sensitivity to a special use of language. Therefore, it was important to gather the views of the teachers on the role of poetry since they are on the forefront of presenting poetry in their ESL classrooms. The participants were very honest in sharing their feelings about the role that poetry plays in the language classroom. Since poetry is compulsory in their curriculum, it was then imperative to understand the role that poetry plays in their learners’ learning progress. The researcher was hoping to learn whether they respected the genre in a professional and academic sense. The researcher was interested to determine their views on the role of poetry in their classrooms. The role of poetry in the classroom then became the next important theme of this study. The teachers were asked why they teach poetry.

The participants did not have a lot to share on this topic. However, some did express at least some conviction that poetry plays a role in developing reading skills and critical thinking in their classrooms and does hold a valuable position in the language classroom. However, others felt it should not be part of the curriculum with others preferring that they should decide on the poems they want to teach.

The figure below shows the results from the questionnaire responses on the role of poetry in their ESL classrooms.

Figure 3: Teachers' personal attitude towards the role of poetry in the ESL classroom



Out of the 12 questionnaire respondents, 46% (5) felt that it is important that poetry is taught in their classrooms because they stated it has the ability to stimulate the mind and helps learners express themselves in a creative way while developing their critical thinking skills. Some stated that it enriches their language skills and enhances their imagination and thinking capacity. On the other hand, 36% (4) teachers felt that it should not even be part of the curriculum because it causes a lot of confusion amongst learners and teachers. They expressed that English as a subject can survive without learners being taught poetry. Their responses were concerning because some teachers admitted to skipping certain parts of the curriculum if they are not comfortable with teaching it. This pattern can cause a setback for teachers who are yet to teach those learners in the next grades. Khatib (2011) did argue that some teachers are ready to teach short-stories, novels and drama but very hesitant to teach poetry because they are well aware that their methods cannot make poetry come alive for their learners. It is evident from the 36% that that expressed this notion that they prefer other sections in the subject to teaching poetry. This shows that they do not see the role of poetry

in their English lessons. It is clear from the respondents that they lack the correct tools or information necessary for the execution of their lessons without these challenges that they face. There is a lot of discomfort that is evident when teachers have to discuss topics on this genre because 18%(2) of the respondents did not respond to this question and that also reveals uncertainty from those respondents that they are not sure themselves about the role poetry plays in their lessons.

In the interviews, Teacher A expressed that learners should not be deprived of the knowledge they can gain from exploring the genre. She further stated that learners should be exposed to the genre so they can decide whether they love it or not. Although teacher A does not love poetry, she displayed some warmth towards teaching it.

Teacher D also expressed that poetry has the ability to assist in enhancing critical thinking in learners. She mentioned that the language used in poems is not what you will find in everyday language use, therefore, learners are able to improve their reading and speaking skills through poetry. She had this to say:

*...besides the fact that it is a curriculum requirement, it does assist learners to become critical thinkers. The language used in poetry is not what you speak every day and there is always some emotions attached to that particular poem. So I teach poetry to assist my learners in elevating their reading skills and their analysis skills and to create critical thinkers. And I try to relate the poem to their current life because poetry is never too old, it always relates to something current...*

Teacher C also expressed that the rationale in teaching poetry is to assist learners with comprehension, vocabulary and improving language usage. She said:

*In poetry, the meaning is always hidden and learners have to be able to understand and comprehend and also learn language usage, the different words, the different vocabulary. Learners will be able to improve their own language by finding different meanings from the poem.*

After listening to the participants' interviews, it was noticeable that only three had a similar reaction towards respecting the value of poetry in their classrooms. They expressed a sense of recognition for the role of poetry even to those who were not too fond of teaching it.

Despite their less positive attitude, they did appear to value and respect the teaching of poetry in their classrooms. The participants articulated a number of diverse academic skills that they believe poetry could potentially enhance in their learners' academic performance in language studies. What transpired from the teachers' responses were that respect for poetry does not go hand-in-hand with their opinion about the genre. Since 12 of the participants were less inclined to enjoy teaching poetry, they nevertheless attributed great worth to its pedagogical properties in the classroom. It is therefore clear that teachers from this study espouse the significance of poetry in their classroom.

#### 4.4.3 Theme 3: Pedagogical Practices in the ESL poetry class

ESL teachers make a number of decisions in their language classrooms that contain the activities that their learners might possibly find pleasure in, which are more effective and would provide learners with the necessary skills that they could use for future academic and communicative purposes (Barkhuizen,1998). Since the participants have expressed varied attitudes towards the genre and the teaching thereof, some have abundant love for poetry and others are less inclined to enjoy poetry. However, with their diverse attitudes some had a general belief that poetry pedagogy holds a valuable position in enhancing their learners' academic performance. It is apparent that teaching poetry involves a lot of dynamics different from other sections in teaching English. I was then interested to understand how these teachers teach poetry in their classrooms. It was important to explore how they teach poetry and which methodologies, strategies and activities they used that were meaningful in their poetry pedagogy and the rationale in using those strategies. Even among those who did not like or enjoy teaching poetry, they did have strategies that they used in their classrooms since poetry is in their English curriculum. Thus, pedagogical practices in the ESL class became the next important theme that emerged.

The data gathered from the interviews and questionnaires revealed that teachers shared diverse pedagogical practices as each teacher had his / her own unique methods that were effective in their ESL poetry class. Some of the methods overlapped as being effective among all participants. The teachers had these strategies and relevant rationale for using them in their poetry lessons.

The most common method that overlapped among the participants was **academic drilling of concepts**. Teacher A and Teacher D mentioned that a poem is well understood when learners

are well taught about the historical background of the poem and of the writer. This method assists learners to fully understand the writer's intention and relate to the poem. Teacher D stressed that going through historical background helped her and made an example of teaching one of the South African poems called *Shantytown* written by an *Anonymous* writer. She said:

*"There is a poem we are doing in grade 11 'Shantytown' and the writer remained anonymous and I had to explain why the writer did not want to be known. I had to take them through South African history because these kids know nothing about where South Africa comes from. So when they understand that, they understand the poem, they understand the writer's intentions and they understand why he remained anonymous".*

Teacher A shared the same idea and stressed how important it was to go through historical background since her learners were not well exposed to the South African history. She expressed that when she was teaching *Handcuffs* written by Mbuyiseni Mtshali, she had a challenge and had to explain what happened during the apartheid era and how that relates to the poem. She mentioned that learners get confused because their knowledge of South African history is limited. The participants also spoke of having learners unpack the poem line by line, looking at meaning, plot, imagery and tone. Learners working together further breakdown the poem by providing a summary of literary devices. Respondent 4 stated that her learners needed to do research on their own about the writer and independently define new vocabulary before she went through the poem with them line by line. The participants had a strong belief that unpacking the poem line by line helps learners understand the poem in a broader sense. With all of these ideas of teaching poetry, CAPS (2011) states otherwise about unpacking text line by line. According to the CAPS document 'line by line' analysis of any text is destructive yet teachers continue to do so hoping that their learners will have a clear or better understanding of the poem. This reveals that there will be clashes with the requirements of the curriculum and what teachers believe is the best in their pedagogical practices. Teacher C mentioned having learners working on worksheets in responding to questions and identifying figures of speech. The participants stressed that in order to determine that the learners have understood the content of the poem, they are given assessment where they can work individually, in pairs or in groups, depending on what is to

be assessed. These participants are certain that this strategy of teaching poetry contributes a lot to how their learners perform in their Paper 2 examination which is literature based.

Another one of the most popular strategies among the four participants was **Independent reading** where they stated that they provide their learners with a copy of the poem to be studied. Each learner receives a copy for reading individually before engaging in the class lesson. Some participants stated that they gave the poem for reading at home and others would give learners 10 to 15 minutes in class for them to read independently. The rationale behind this according to the participants was to give the learners an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the layout of the poem, the vocabulary used and identifying the themes and figures of speech in the poem. The participants' rationale is echoed by Khatib (2011) stating that there is much pleasure of poetry that lies in the creative reading because it creates imaginative involvement with the content of the text. Teacher C also mentioned that this exercise allows learners to become independent readers and to have the ability to apply their analysis skills independently. Teacher C also said:

*“And since they have smart phones I allow them to Google information and words that are unfamiliar to them. So they know poetry lessons require dictionaries because if they identify words they do not know they write them down and write their meaning. And also figures of speech, they identify and try to link its use to the poem”.*

Teacher C expressed the need for learners to use all the digital platforms that are available to them to assist them with vocabulary and the figures of speech that apply to that particular poem. Teacher D also expressed that independent reading allows her to have a proper lesson because learners already have an idea of what the poem is about. She said:

*“...what I do I always give the poem for home work, they take it home and go over it and try to make sense of it at home. So when I start my lesson the poem is not new to them...”*

Teacher A shared the same ideas but she preferred to do independent reading in class with her learners. She stated that poetry is a genre that requires one to read it at least twice in order to understand the meaning that is portrayed by the writer. She further mentioned that

a poem requires “a certain listening skill and reading skill” as she raised concerns that the learners she has have a limited vocabulary. She had this to say about independent reading:

*“... the way poetry is written you cannot just read once and say now I can understand what the poem is about in fact like how you define your theme, like the main idea of what the poem is all about so it takes a certain listening skill and reading skill, so reading once is not enough. So mind you, the learners that we have do not also relate in terms of their vocabulary is so limited. So I first start by asking them to read the poem twice at least. I provide the copy of the poem and just let them read for themselves individually, just to try and figure out what do they think is happening in that poem before I can even read it for them...”*

The participants mentioned that they make copies of the poem because they do not have enough poetry textbooks to give to each learner. Therefore, it was important to make copies so that each learner has access to the text.

Teacher A and Teacher B applied a method where a **Teacher reads for the class**, among others. Teacher A felt that even if the learners have read the poem independently it was important that she reads the poem to her learners. She expressed that her reading gives life to the poem by using the proper tone so they can identify the poetic devices and the rhyming schemes as she reads the poem out loud. She said:

*“...when I’m reading for them they can even get to hear the tone, and everything like some poetic devices and the rhyming schemes and all that, because when they are just reading on themselves they wouldn’t know all these things until I demonstrate it to them as to, ‘when you read this certain part or this certain stanza, this is how you would attack it and then all those poetic devices”.*

Teacher B stated that she does her own research on the poem first and understand the vocabulary that is used in the poem before she reads it for her learners. She mentioned that she does not let her preconceived idea of the poem over-rule her learners understanding of the poem. As she reads the learners will then share their interpretation of the poem. She said:

*“...I first prepare, do my own research, write down the vocabulary and simplify it. And what I must do first is not preconceive the meaning, I just read it and give the learners*

*the chance to come up with their way of understanding, their own interpretation and there is no wrong or right interpretation according to my understating.”*

Teacher D mentioned that despite the learners reading the poem there is a need to read for them as a teacher in order to create images in their minds about the poem. Teacher D stressed that she asks them to close their eyes so they can listen to the tone and punctuation used in the poem. She stated:

*“...sometimes I ask them to close their eyes and I would read it to them in a manner that they build mental pictures on what the poem is about...”*

Poetry relies a lot on imagistic and emotionally resonant language (Emert, 2015). Although teachers stated the important of developing learners reading skills through poetry, however they still felt they have a responsibility to read the poem themselves to create imagery through the tone they use and punctuation when they read. This strategy is what Dressman and Fraust (2009) refer to as reader oriented approach which appears to be an effective approach to poetry because it puts an emphasis on the reader who reads the poem comprehensively, makes sense of it, interpret the poem bearing in mind basic poetry principles. On the other hand, Xerri (2013) opposes this kind of teaching stating that a teacher will not assist learners develop their own personal response to the poem and will merely compel them to accept the opinion of an expert reader. As a result, this can serve as a model to make learners passive and it can lead them to consider reading as if it were kind of detective work.

Another method that the teachers embraced as effective was **group work**. The teacher participants stated that group work anatomy works perfectly because of the numbers they have in their classroom. In the township schools the smallest number in class is 40 learners. However, teachers have more than just that, even up to 80 learners in one classroom and that is a norm in these schools. They also mentioned that when their learners work in groups it encourages co-operative or collaborative learning while enforcing interactive skills in literature. Similarly, Rogoff (1990) claims that peer interaction fosters imagination and exploration which leads to insightful solutions and problem solving. When peers work together they often motivate one another and channel the choice of activities.

Teacher C expressed that using group work in her classroom encourages her learners to belong together, learn from one another and be responsible for each other's success. The collective contribution in the group depends on each learner sharing ideas. She had this to say:

*"...they are able to learn from each other and not just from me, because what Thembi has to say might be different to Vusi. Vusi might have his own interpretation on what the poem is about. So when we share these ideas you are able to come at a consensus as a class to say what are the things that are found in this poem, what does this poem talk about as a class, instead of just saying 'read on your own, understand on your own' because that might not necessarily be in line or close to the actual meaning of the poem".*

Teacher D expressed the same sentiments and that group work assists the learners to learn from one another and be able to have discussions about the poem. Piaget (1972) echoes the participants' claims on group work stating that only when learners have the ability to discuss problems as equals, and they are likely to take into account new ways of thinking. The teacher stated that the learners in their groups analyse the poem by identifying the meaning of the poem, the figures of speech and the emerging themes. She said that she then gives them key questions to work on as a group to check if they have a basic understanding of the poem. She said:

*"...I then put them into groups where they share their finding then one member from the group would present on the findings of the group to the whole class, will then have a class discussion on the poem, the meaning, the themes, the tone and figures of speech. I'll then give them questions to check their understanding. But sometimes if the poem relates to their current lives I would ask them pre-reading questions and I'll ask them to analyse the poem based on key questions that I would have designed then I will analyse it with them".*

Teacher B also said she used group work as one of her teaching methods, she expressed that learners are more attentive when they work in groups in analysing the poem. She said:

*"I group them because I want them to be attentive, normally 10 in a group because I have large numbers in my class, smaller groups do not work in a class with 78 learners.*

*One from the group will write the important points from the group while they are discussing it. It makes it easy for them to analyse the poem”.*

Three of the interviewed participants’ and ten questionnaire respondents embraced group work because it assisted the teachers with managing large numbers they have in class. This teaching method seemed to enable interaction between the teacher and her learners and support among her learners. The interviews revealed that having learners work in groups enables them to come to an understanding of the ideas they have about the poem which could then result in teachers plan for the next phase in their unit of poetry.

Among the other methods that teachers used in their classrooms, Teacher A also mentioned **demonstration for understanding**. Teacher A was the only participant who used demonstration for her lessons. She mentioned that using this method assists her in making her lesson interesting and learners are able to build a mental picture about the poem. She expressed that when teaching poetry one has to be flexible and in most cases learners understand things better when they visualise them. This approach takes care of those who are not high flyers in her class. The same sentiments are shared by Mayer (2008) suggesting that learners learn more deeply from a combination of pictures and words than words alone. Teacher A had this to say:

*“...with **The Handcuffs** I had tried to bring in the handcuffs physically in the classroom and I had to ask them ‘What do you think this is for?’ it’s for people that are prisoners, and why should people be put to prison? They have done something bad and all of that. And then now I’m taking that to say now I want to explain the freedom side of it, so if you are handcuffed you cannot say you are experiencing freedom. So now I’m trying to bring the political side that I could not bring in before I could demonstrate using the handcuffs. I think for me I believe that also being an educator you need to be flexible, I cannot say I have achieved what I have achieved knowing very well that only 2 learners understood, maybe the 98 that feel left out it’s because they relate more to the use of visual aids, so I do not disregard that in my lessons so I try as I reflect that ok if this didn’t work what else can I try and bring in so that at least there is a balance”.*

The teacher participants in this study described their positive experiences with poetry pedagogy. They shared methods that they had tried and believed to work in their classrooms.

Listening to their responses was illuminating and encouraging. According to the participants, the pedagogical methods they applied in their classrooms were to create engagement and interest from their learners. Their methods and activities exposed learners to the genre and created appreciation for the genre.

#### 4.4.4 Theme 4. Challenges with poetry pedagogy

Regardless of the positive insights of effective teaching practices that teachers claim they were employing in their poetry lessons, what transpired from our discussions with the participants was that they experienced barriers in attempting poetry pedagogy. Like with all experiences in teaching, the positive comes along with the negative. Therefore, in their responses, the participants mentioned the stumbling blocks in effecting poetry positively. Graves (1992) argues that poetry is a valuable tool for thought. However, teaching the genre can be a challenging experience for many teachers. It is on the bases of this experience that these challenges were explored. There were a number of reasons that the participants brought to the fore which influenced them in avoiding teaching poetry and experiencing discomfort when teaching the genre. It was then apparent to discuss the next important theme that emerged which was the challenges with poetry pedagogy.

*Overcrowded Classes:* The participants indicated that overcrowding was one of the challenges. However, it is not a challenge that is unique to the teaching of poetry but for most lessons. A workable ratio in a classroom according to the participants is 1:35, however, that is not the case in reality. These teachers have 1:56 up to 1:80 learners in each class and it is their responsibility that all of these learners in their numbers get the attention they require. Overcrowded classrooms are what teachers pointed out as one of the challenges in the teaching of poetry in the ESL classroom. When the teaching environment is not conducive it causes them anxiety and a sense of doubts in making their lessons a success. They stated that most of their group work helps them to create a workable teaching and learning environment. An environment that is conducive to teaching and learning plays an integral part in the education of learners. As Chemwei and Somba (2014) suggest that a classroom is a unique social educational and communicative environment, each classroom should not be seen as just a mere aggregate of pupils. However, a classroom is unique and has characteristics and properties that go beyond that individual learner who is part of the class. It is evident that the numbers will always be a stumbling block in the proper execution of a poetry lesson. It is

however enlightening that these teachers try to create a workable environment despite the numbers they have. A teacher has to create his/her own healthy teaching environment, as Romongo and Kiboss (1997) suggest that an effective environment is one in which the teaching and learning vary according to the nature of the environment, the role of the teacher, the role of the learner and the nature of the instructional process.

*Learners' Resistance:* Another challenge that was common with all the participants was the resistance from their learners. The participants pointed out that learners have trepidation and apprehension about the genre. Considering all the different genres that learners come in contact with when studying English, poetry seems to be the only genre that is mostly associated with negative feelings (Blake 2008; Burdan 2004). As Teacher C expressed that her learners always have a negative attitude towards poetry. They would say, *"poetry is difficult and boring"* without even attempting to understand it. The resistance that learners have can cause a long-term effect if they are not motivated to change. Likewise, Dymoke (2009) warns that the idea that learners have that poetry is a difficult medium can lead potential readers to reject its advances. Teacher C was also concerned about how her learners used to shy away from being critical and being fully involved in the poem. Instead, they would make excuses to avoid being analytical and resist reading and working on a poem. She said:

*"...They don't enjoy poetry, because they do not like reading and they are not analytical so in that way they just give it a first glance and they would just think on the surface what the poem is about. But that in-depth, that in-depth analysis they do not have it because they do not engage in reading at all, so and they also have this mentality of saying poetry is boring, poetry is difficult. So whenever they writing it's just for the sake of writing but not in terms of saying that it's something that they enjoy. If it was optional I'm sure they would say they don't want to do poetry".*

Teacher B also expressed that there was a lot of negative attitude she was receiving from her learners because of their preconceived ideas about poetry that it was *"boring"*. Teacher B had the following to say:

*"...you can see in their faces that they are bored. They have an attitude even if you ask them to read out loud".*

Teacher B further pointed out that her lessons are more difficult with weak learners, her lesson flows better when she is teaching smart learners. She said:

*"... dealing with weak learners it becomes more difficult even though you can give more time for them to read because they have that negative attitude towards poetry, the spelling they cannot spell some cannot pronounce. The lesson become difficult if the poem is difficult for them because they have that attitude and do not want to answer questions because they did not understand the poem. But when I am dealing with smart learners that understand the poem the lesson just flows. So weak learners make my lesson difficult and the more successful ones make it easy".*

Learners' resistance is certainly a concern among the teacher participants. Teacher D pointed out that the excitement she gets from her learners when she teaches drama and short stories is absent when she teaches poetry. She mentioned that it is a concern because they do not engage in the poetry lesson as much as they do when doing drama or a short story and they are not as inquisitive as they are with short stories. She had this to say:

*"...when we are doing a short story or drama they are always yearning to know what happens in the end, they get excited and ask questions. It is a different story with poetry the excitement is not the same. They do not ask a lot of questions; they do not engage a lot in poetry lesson. With stories they would even name each other with names of the characters if they do something similar to that character in class. Then as the teacher you know that they enjoy stories than poetry".*

Teacher A and Teacher D pointed point that a winning lesson is a lesson that has learners involved and fully engaged because that makes them grasp the concepts easily. Kiboss (2000) echoes teacher A & D when they state that the nature of learning activities should not depend on a single individual, it primarily depends on both the learner's and teacher's contribution and participation in the teaching and learning process.

The participants were also concerned about learners who could not read at high school level and this setback caused minimal comprehension skills. Their learners had a comprehension problem and their vocabulary was thus limited which made it difficult for them to be productive in the poetry classroom. Teacher C had this to say:

*“My challenges, firstly some of my learners do not know how to read so obviously when you do not know how to read you can then not comprehend because you are unable to read. And also the learners’ vocabulary is very limited and because they have such a limited vocabulary they find certain words difficult, they cannot identify simple English words because they are unfamiliar with them because they do not read”.*

Teacher C and Teacher B believe that poetry should be introduced in the early grades which will create a workable foundation and that will ease the load on high school teachers and learners will be familiar and less hesitant towards the genre. Teacher C said:

*“...they do not read and the fact that poetry is introduced at a very late stage you know, unlike if poetry was maybe introduced in grade 7 or maybe grade 4 they would be familiar with it and wouldn’t be hesitant or have an attitude towards poetry. So since it is introduced in grade 10 or grade 11 they will already think that ‘oh this is something new’ and that something new is difficult and that builds on an attitude towards saying they not going to even attempt poetry and try to understand it. But if they were familiarised with poetry and its different language at an early stage I’m sure they wouldn’t have a problem”.*

What transpired from the teachers’ responses is that a solid poetry foundation is not built in the lower grades? They believe the learners’ foundation is a contributing factor to the lack of poetry appreciation in learners. It therefore comes across as an issue where the blame is shifted, the incompetence of learners is blamed on the previous teachers whom they believe did not fully execute their duty in laying a solid foundation. Likewise, research in language education has displayed that learners’ appreciation of poetry is negatively affected by the way teachers approach it (Chamwei and Nyandusi, 2008).

*Language Barrier:* English is taught as a second language in most township schools in South Africa and that is the context in which this study was conducted. Failure to understand and speak English is one of the barriers teachers pointed out. Teacher B felt it was necessary to code switch from English to isiZulu in her lessons in order to ensure that everyone understood what was being communicated. She also pointed out that her learners lacked proficiency in English and they struggled to respond in the language of instruction which made them end

up stuttering and switching to isiZulu. Cummins (2000) holds the same opinion about code switching that it can enhance the learning of the target language. Teacher B had this to say:

*“...the language switching where they would want to interpret English into isiZulu and they stammer a lot when they respond to questions, most are not that fluent...”*

Cummins (2000) suggests overcoming the language barrier is paramount to code switching in order to accommodate the lesson and the target language. On the contrary, Teacher C expressed a different opinion about code switching. She argued against code switching stating that when learners want to use isiZulu to respond, it hinders their improvement or knowledge and the ability to master the language fully. She argues that there should be more practices in reading and in articulating the language. Teacher C strongly believes that code switching takes away the learners' ability to be fluent in the language of instruction. In the same vein, Relenala (2013) also argues against bilingual education, insisting that learners will not understand a second language nor will be fluent in both languages. On the other hand, The Department of Education in South Africa does recognise language and cultural diversity and maintains that the school and its teachers should provide as much assistance and supplementary learning of an additional language as possible (Department of Education, 2002). It is fair to state, whether they code switch or not, if teachers are confident and know what they are doing when teaching poetry, then they will be secure in their capabilities. That will definitely yield positive results in the whole English subject.

*Curricular restraint:* The teacher participants in this study remarked on the demands of the curriculum while there is inadequate time allocated. The teachers raised concerns that the English Second Language curriculum consists of three separate exam papers, namely; Paper 1 which assesses the learner's ability to comprehend and understand language, Paper 2 which is literature with set works including poetry and Paper 3 which is creative writing. All the three papers are equally important and they all call for equal attention on contact time. Nevertheless, according to teachers, teaching poetry seems to take up more space on contact time than other sections in their curriculum because poetry needs more time, learners require enough time to be creative thinkers and be critical in each poetry lesson. Teacher A asserts that the time allocated for poetry on the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) overlaps because each lesson requires a lot of explanations and each lesson requires to build mental pictures in order

to assist learners to grasp concepts. She expressed that getting through poetic devices and the need to lay a foundation of the historical background takes time. She said:

*“...for the fact that with poetry you cannot exclude images so it’s like you have to put more effort and that also takes time so by the time the lesson is finished you have not accomplished everything that you have planned for the lesson because you had spent more time trying to build on the historical background so that by the time you get to the gist of whatever that you wanted to do then there is no time left”.*

Teacher D also felt poetry takes up a lot of teaching time and that there is a lot expected to be done in a single lesson and that sometimes takes away time to do remedial work with weak learners. She stated:

*“...to be honest the work that needs to be done is a lot and there is not enough time to prepare learners for 3 papers. The department gives so much work but the work does not match the time. I also allow them to see me one on one for clarity but in class I cannot explain one thing over and over”.*

Time is certainly of the essence even to teachers who get pleasure from poetry. Teacher B who enjoyed teaching poetry admitted that since she sets her own grade 10 paper 2 examinations she makes her own pedagogical choices and sometimes teaches 4 poems out of the 6 that are documented in the ATP. She simply claimed *“there is just no time to get through all of them.”* She noted that with the poems she teaches she does so towards the standardized examination, stressing the important elements the learners will be assessed on such as symbolism, imagery, in-depth detail and other important poetic devices. When teachers find themselves having to teach towards achieving the examination, it raises concerns and it is disheartening. Sedgwick (2003) argues that teachers are unable to teach poetry as creatively and passionately as they would like to because of the pressure of examinations and it is a dangerous state of affairs. Ofsted (2007) echoes the same sentiments stating that the examination pressure dampens teachers’ enthusiasm for teaching poetry and consequently their focus on technical analysis can lead to a dull and repetitive teaching.

From the interviews it becomes clear that the participants felt they had a lot of work to do in their teaching cycle which adds a lot of pressure because they have little time allocated to

accomplish their pedagogical practices, particularly doing justice to the teaching of poetry which requires more time than other aspects of the curriculum do.

*Self-Doubt:* Although the participants are qualified English teachers some did express self-doubt on their pedagogical practices and understanding of the genre. Many of the questionnaire respondents displayed personal discomfort and a lot of self-doubt in their personal knowledge and understanding of this genre. This led to most of them disliking it and having negative experiences in their poetry class. They are less inclined to teach it because of their uncertainty in teaching poetry. Teachers portrayed distaste for the genre which often stems from them finding poetry complex, stating that it is difficult finding a correct or workable method that can build enough confidence in their pedagogical practices. The responses from questionnaires included expressions like;

*I cannot make my lessons more fun, there is a lot of explaining required, I struggle to find simpler way to explain, there is a lot involved in a single poem, some poems are difficult to understand, and sometimes I don't know what I am doing.*

Such responses display, among other things, fear and hostility that can lead to more anxiety and doubt. Likewise, Benton (2000) argues that teachers do not feel educated enough or feel generally ill-prepared to teach poetry. While others are filled with doubt about their abilities in effective pedagogical strategies, one respondent commented that her solution is to teach poetry through academic discussion of poetic terms and devices, further admitting that it is important to do a full study of each poem before each lesson. Teacher B in the interview expressed how poetry can be difficult to analyse because of the complex words that require the use of a dictionary. She acknowledged her love for poetry even though she felt that some poems can be difficult to teach. Teacher D also shared the same sentiments, she also felt that some poems can be intimidating because of their content and wished that the department could let them choose their own poems to teach. In that way, they would select poems that they fully knew and understood and they could bring life in their poetry classrooms. She said:

*“It would have been better to teach the poems we selected than these random poems the department gives us.”*

She expressed that she doubted her own poetry analysis without using aid from the internet and study guides. She expressed her frustrations of having to prepare for each poetry lesson

that required a different approach from other sections she taught in the subject. Benton (1999) expressed that poetry is the section of the curriculum where teachers feel most uncertain about their knowledge and uncomfortable about their methods. Furthermore, teachers' anxiety can be transferred to learners creating a lesson with less enjoyment because anxiety invades both the teacher and the learner. On the contrary, some of the participants had a bit more confidence in their abilities to teach poetry than others. Like Teacher A who felt that her pedagogical practices were able to get learners excited even those who were labelled as weak learners. She said her use of demonstration made her lessons come to life. She had confidence that she was making a difference in each lesson. Her response displayed confidence and appreciation for the genre.

#### 4.4.5 Theme 5: Teachers' personal experience of poetry learning

It was important to explore and understand whether the teachers' pedagogical practices were influenced by scholarly knowledge or experience with learning poetry from high school, university, the department of education or from their peers. Understanding the participants' knowledge of poetry was the final theme that emerged from the interviews.

##### *Academic Influence (High School and/or University)*

*High School:* The participants were asked of their experience with poetry in high school and at teacher training institution. This was to gather whether their knowledge and practices were linked to their school experience. They certainly had varied responses which were mostly due to the age differences in terms of the time at which they attended school. It was interesting to discover that teacher C was the youngest with just a few years of experience but was only exposed to poetry in grade 11. Considering her age and her schooling timeline, poetry was part of her curriculum but her response showed that she was deprived of the opportunity in grade 10. Chances are, her teacher may have simply chosen not to teach poetry to her grade 10 class for reasons best known to herself. The English exam papers from grade 10-11 are not set internally which allows the examiners (teachers) to set what they have taught, unlike with Grade 12 where it is mandatory to complete all the prescribed set works. Teacher A and Teacher D both did not have memory of learning poetry in high school, they both claimed maybe it was not memorable. They both had nothing to share about their high school experience with poetry. However, Teacher D did mention she remembered doing a Shakespearian drama *Othello* and a novel called *Shades* but did not remember any poems

she did in high school. On the other hand, Teacher B's experience was different from the rest of the participants. She expressed that it was hard to forget because they were forced to learn poetry. She said:

*"The way poetry is taught today is different from the way we were taught. In high school we were forced to know the poem, we had to memorise liking it or not. But now learners are not forced".*

Teacher B pointed out that the teaching and learning in the classrooms today was very different from the past. Today learners are liberated to explore their education whereas, as learners, they were forced to stick to the teacher's rules since education was still more teacher centred.

The participants' responses to learning poetry in high school were varied and none of their high school poetry influences seemed to have affected how they teach poetry today. All the participants had concerns and challenges in teaching the genre. Their distaste for poetry according to Ray (1999) could be inherited from their past intellectual confusion as many teachers in her study have admitted that they never understood poetry that was done in their English class. Similarly, Lockward (1994) discovered that many high school teachers expressed that they had no encounter with an English teacher who taught the genre effectively, and as a result, had no role model to emulate. Parr and Campbell (2006) also argue that a compound of negative experiences can be particularly troubling because teachers' poor attitude towards poetry can be passed down from one generation of a teacher to the next which could lead to a cycle of poetry animosity. Therefore, literature has shown that a teacher who was taught poetry well in high school is likely to be less hostile and have less anxiety towards teaching the genre.

**Tertiary Influence:** The four participants did undergo professional training in a teacher education institution. It was important to understand how much of what they learnt in teacher training institutions influenced their pedagogical practices. The participants were trained on the genre however; they had varied responses on how they were trained. They had this to say:

**Teacher A :** *"It wasn't like in the broader sense of the word 'to teach poetry' but you had to be flexible so that all the genres are studied. It wasn't something that you were drilled and the*

*'know how' are all there for you to know. I think for me as an individual educator there are some things that you don't wait for someone else to make it happen for you, because you are personally passionate about delivering something that you even go all out and you educate yourself. I think some of the things that I deliver in the classroom are self-taught based on how poetry is as I understand it".*

**Teacher B:** *"You know that in university the lecture doesn't go deep into detail, they just give assignments, they don't give you insights on the teaching of poetry. They give you an assignment where you work hard on your own to analyse the poem. So if the university taught me how to teach poetry it would be better".*

**Teacher C:** *"Yes were taught how to teach poetry in terms of the methodology, the strategies, the meaning and the reason why in terms of how do we then conduct poetry lessons in class in order for them to be effective and efficient".*

**Teacher D:** *"In university I learnt how to analyse the poem not precisely how to teach it. We did poems as part of our assignments nothing much on the teaching it. Even in method classes nothing much was done on poetry. You know, you making me notice that I am supposed to be confused about teaching poetry... funny that I wasn't taught myself".*

Teacher C was the only participant who was taught the 'how to' part of teaching poetry. She expressed that there is a lot that she uses in her classroom that is part of her training at tertiary. The other participants did use certain effects from their university experiences however, their interviews revealed that the method part of 'how to' was not in depth. They portrayed that it was shallow and abstract. The questionnaire respondents also felt that what was taught was not enough to confidently teach poetry with some stating that they were not taught altogether. The responses from the participants suggested that some teacher training programmes have some shortcomings in fully equipping English teachers with confidence in the teaching of this genre. Certo, Apol, Wibbens and Hawkins (2012) argue that pre-service teachers do not have enough, compelling experiences with poetry in their teacher training education. Similarly, Moore (2002) stated that a high school English teacher admitted that neither his English major nor methods prepared him to teach poetry effectively. It is evident from these interviews that despite the reality that participants formally studied English modules in university, training on the genre was minimal. Poetry continues to date to be part

of the high school curriculum which displays its value in the education sector. Rorty (2007) states that poetry is a genre in the English curriculum that has immense tradition, academic, cultural, historical and has critical value. It has been regarded as the foundation in society's moral, imaginative and intellectual progress. Therefore, one can assume that teaching poetry should be one of the fundamentally required aspects of learning for undergraduates or teacher training especially in the languages. However, the interviews and questionnaires revealed that, that is not the case.

**Team teaching:** The participants were asked if interacting with their peers in team teaching played a role in developing their teaching skills. The participants expressed that they had a strong belief that more learning and development comes from team teaching. They had this to say:

**Teacher A:** *I think it would work because when I teach drama I've noticed that there is one educator whom we relate with a lot from other schools especially when it comes to teaching something you are not good at, and then you just have to humble yourself as say 'I think you do better, you are best at what you do with your learners how about I come and sit in on your lesson. Or maybe ask you to just come and do a little bit of that with my learners. And I notice that sometimes when learners see a different or a new face they respond in a different way than they would have responded when you were teaching them... so I do believe in team teaching.*

**Teacher B:** *Yes, team work is master of teaching. It does not mean that I do not know, but when I work with my colleagues everything flows, it just flows easily.*

**Teacher C:** *Yes, because you can work as a team to improve on each other's weaknesses and learn from each other's strengths. And it can be really helpful when it comes to poetry because what I know might be useful to someone other teacher who might also help me with something also. So yes team teaching works for me.*

**Teacher D:** *Yes a lot, you know we teach differently and it is ok to ask your peer to tackle a lesson for you. And even learners get excited to see a different face. I do it a lot when I know my peers can assist here and there. After all it is about the learner not our ego, team teaching works and I would encourage others to adopt it also.*

It is evident from the above interview responses that teachers believe in scaffolding each other to improve their teaching skills and developing new ways of teaching poetry. The participants further expressed that since poetry is challenging to teach, peers can enlighten where there is no clarity and they build each other's strengths through team teaching. This movement of team teaching, to an extent, motivates teachers to seek assistance from their peers who seem to have a more reasonable knowledge of the genre.

**Departmental Influence:** The policy document (Department of Education, 2010) states that poetry should be taught, not poems. According to the document, teachers should ensure that learners read enough poems in class and that they read and write poems as well. Teachers have a major role in changing the dynamics of their classrooms. Teacher education and teacher professional development programmes provided by the DOE need to enable teachers who teach English as a subject to enhance their pedagogical knowledge. The participants were asked whether the CAPS document and the DOE provide enough learning to assist the pedagogical development. Their responses revealed that the CAPS document only provides guidelines on what needs to be taught and assessment guidelines but not much on 'how to' teach. Therefore, the CAPS document does not assist teachers on the methodology that they can employ in their lessons. In contrast, the participants stated that the department of education does render workshops that, to an extent, assist teachers even though they raised concerns that it was not enough. They had this to say about the provision from the DOE:

**Teacher A:** *"I think there is a lot of paper work and workshops, not necessarily based on how good you can be in the classroom. So for me I wouldn't say the department is proving enough workshops to workshop us as teachers in terms of upping our game with regards to poetry. So you just teach the way you know how because at the end of the day I think the department is only interested in how well the learners have performed so you have to figure that one out on your own most of the times".*

**Teacher B:** *"I can say yes, because they try to arrange workshops even through the workshops don't go deep in teaching of poetry they focus mostly in grammar, but they do try to help us here and there".*

**Teacher C:** *"I wouldn't say much help; they do give us teaching schedules on what to teach. But sometimes when you get to class it is difficult to implement because of the kind of learners*

*we have, because our learners have different reading abilities so whatever you do in class must be applicable to them”.*

**Teacher D:** *“Not much on poetry, because the study materials they provide does not have much on poetry. However, we do have a lot of workshops that are more beneficial on other aspects of the subject not poetry. And to be honest the department just dishes out work and time frame and it is ridiculous to do all that is required in the school hours, that is why we have morning classes to try and cover up work before the exams”.*

The above responses from the interviews and questionnaires display that there are a lot of pedagogical practices that need to be addressed by the DOE to ease the township high school ESL teachers’ anxiety regarding the teaching of poetry. There is a need for a constant re-modelling, upgrading and re-shaping of these teachers’ professional knowledge as their knowledge can be weakened overtime. Therefore, productive ESL teacher development workshops that will skill township high school ESL teachers on new workable methodologies could significantly fill in a lot of gaps. Haugh, Murray and Bach (2002) established that educational workshops can play a critical role in grounding novice teachers and even ‘old’ teachers in teaching poetry, by equipping and capacitating them with new strategies and approaches. This can ultimately assist them gain confidence and develop love for the genre. A lot of responsibility also has to come from their professional teacher training institutions. However, the department prescribes poems to be studied and it leaves teachers uncertain when they do not have the methods to teach those poems. Teacher D raised a concern that the department only *‘dishes out work and time frame.’* Frustration is one of the emotions teachers have when teaching the genre and it is clear that they appreciate the support they get from the DOE. However, they feel there should be more assistance provided for poetry because it is the only genre that seems be problematic in Paper 2.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings from the collected data and it was clear that even though teachers had varied experiences, there were shared similarities. The teachers’ experiences displayed that there is a gap that needs to be bridged between the genre and their perceptions of the genre. The study also revealed that the teachers teaching methods seem to differ. It was clear that the rationale is that each individual uses what works for him/her. There were frustrations that aroused from the teachers’ experiences which displayed a

disconnect between the CAPS requirements and how teachers needed to utilise the document. This chapter further shed light and assisted in understanding the teachers' experiences about the phenomenon of their experience of poetry pedagogy. The participants provided the researcher with vast informative and rich experiences which certainly assisted in understanding more about the genre. Some of the experiences were aligned with documented literature on the topic, which was not a surprise. However, some experiences were elements that were new and unexpected but very enlightening.

The interview data presented more information and insight than the questionnaires. One laments the fact that it was not possible to interview the rest of the teachers due to the advent of the Covid 19 pandemic and some questions in the questionnaires were left blank by the respondents. From the analysis, one can conclude that teachers in this study have mixed feelings about the genre. It was inspiring to learn that the major obstacle that is suppressing the teachers comfort in teaching poetry is the perfect strategy or method to use in their poetry lessons. Teachers' negative attitude stems mostly from an unsuccessful poetry educational history and a failure in finding a method that works. Therefore, if teachers start applying methods that work in their lessons then they will definitely bridge the gap between teachers and their distaste for poetry.

The teachers' pedagogical practices are inspiring although it was evident that they do not always work efficiently due to crowded classrooms. Although they try to accommodate the numbers in class, it is disheartening to learn that some productive methods cannot be feasible in such an environment. Overcrowded classrooms are a norm in township schools and it is the responsibility of the teacher to venture into new ideas that will result in productive teaching and learning. When teachers spoke of learners' resistance, it was not a surprise and this resistance was not simply rooted only in learners' failure to find poetry lessons inspiring, but it also comes from the language barrier. Language barrier is one of the major obstacles that can stand between a learner and the teacher.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This study aimed at exploring high school teachers' experiences with teaching poetry to ESL learners in township schools. The findings from this study respond to the research questions that yielded the themes discussed in chapter 4. The themes addressed the experiences accumulated by ESL high school poetry teachers which addressed the dynamics and challenges that exist in their poetry classrooms. The study further explored the strategies they used and the rationale behind using such methods for their poetry lessons. Employing social constructivism was instrumental in providing a broader understanding of the teachers' experiences. The presented discussion and recommendations have been drawn from the generated data. The findings in this chapter are presented in response to the three critical research questions:

1. What experiences do township high school ESL teachers have on teaching poetry to ESL learners?
2. Which strategies do township ESL teachers use when teaching poetry in their high school ESL classrooms?
3. What is the rationale behind using these strategies when teaching poetry?

Recommendations for effective poetry teaching are also presented in this chapter.

#### 5.2 Main findings

##### 5.2.1 Sub question 1:

What experiences do township high school English teachers have on teaching poetry to ESL learners?

Variations of experiences were presented by the teachers, however most of their experiences shared some common traits and they stemmed from different factors within their teaching space and social interaction in the classroom. The study found that the teachers' experiences influenced the way they taught and the methods they used. It was evident that teachers do not appreciate teaching poetry as compared to other sections in the subject curriculum. Findings show that their distaste for the genre stems from a number of elements that are related to fear of the genre, self-doubt and the diction used in poems among other things. The study found that all this can easily result in negative attitudes towards the genre and a

lack of enthusiasm to teach the genre. Those who seemed to like the genre also admitted that they were not confident enough to teach it. Actually, they had their preferences which were teaching certain poems that were easy for them to understand and teach. These teachers suggested that sonnets relating to love and relationships were more appreciated by them and their learners. The study found that most of the teachers do not teach poems in grade 12 they only prefer teaching poetry in grade 10 and 11 because they set their own tests while grade 12 exams are set nationally. They fear that an external exam will expose their inability to teach the genre. The fact that these teachers avoid the teaching of poems in grade 12 verifies my experience at the NSC marking centre for ENGFA paper 2 that there is always a small percentage of teacher markers who study poetry in grade 12 at their schools. This is a concern because teachers are unaware that they are depriving learners of the ability to appreciate poetry for its language art form. Parr and Campbell (2006) also argue that a compound of negative experiences can be troubling because teachers' poor attitude can be passed on to their learners. Therefore, if more teachers avoid teaching the genre and lack the necessary strategies and methods of making the poetry lessons creative and appealing to the learners, learners will continue to find poetry dull and uninspiring.

It was also evident that the teachers seemed to blame their negative experience of teaching poetry on their learners. They expressed that their learners generally do not appreciate poetry since they find it uninteresting and difficult to understand. As a result, their learners displayed negative attitudes to both the teachers of poetry and to being taught poetry. Learners do not show interest in poetry lessons which makes it difficult for teachers to get the lesson across. On the whole, the ESL teachers thus blamed their unsuccessful poetry lessons on learners. However, according to Short, Lewin and Mc Cann (1991), effective teaching and learning depend on the degree to which the teacher is able to create a learning environment in which learners are motivated to learn. Short et al. (1991) highlight the fundamental element of teaching where a teacher has to create a learning space that is satisfactory to learners to avoid having a class of uninterested learners. However, teachers continue to have an inability to create a positive poetry lesson because of the challenges they have with the genre. Keeping their learners interested was a challenge on their list of experiences and it stemmed from the uncertainty they have with the methods they use in

their poetry class. There are a number of possible reasons behind the ESL poetry teachers' inability to create lessons that are appealing to the learners.

Most teachers claimed that their tertiary education and experience with poetry did not equip them with the necessary tools to teach poetry in high school. Certo, Apol, Wibbens and Hawkins (2012) echo the teachers' claims stating that pre-serviced teachers do not have enough, compelling experiences with poetry in their teacher training education. Furthermore, Suter and Busiene (2013) also found that most universities that offer teacher education fail to cater to all the needs of the revised curriculum. It is apparent from literature and the participants that tertiary does the minimal in preparing teachers who can have a productive poetry lesson. The teachers' unpleasant experience with poetry draws as far back as their high school days. They expressed that they did not have teachers who provided them with explicit knowledge of poetry that was enough for them to develop love for the genre. Therefore, they did not have anyone to emulate while some did not even have the memory of being taught poetry in high school. According to the teachers in this study, some were only introduced to the genre in grade 11. Lockward's (1994) study also discovered that a number of high school teachers expressed they had never had an English teacher who taught poetry effectively and therefore had no role model to emulate. Therefore, it would appear that the teachers' past experiences with poetry influences the way they teach and the perceptions they hold about poetry and its teaching. It is clear that the negative cycle created about poetry is still being passed on to the next generation if nothing is done to turn the tide.

The challenge of language as a barrier also emerged from the findings in this study. The language that is used in poems is seen to be too complex. There are difficulties in understanding the meaning of the poem in order to interpret it to simpler terms that are friendly for learners. This is due to the Language of Learning and Teaching which is not mother tongue for both teachers and learners. However, some teachers stated that they code switch when they detect a stalemate in their lessons. They stated that most of their learners struggle with English generally and poetry makes it more difficult for learners to grasp the language used in poems. The language used in poems is one of the factors that do not encourage teachers to teach poetry with confidence. The study further gathered that the CAPS document was not assisting teachers on issues of methodology regarding the teaching of poetry. Nnolim (1990) noted that the distaste for poetry could be due to language used in

poetry which is not the language that one can find in novels or any other prose narrative. Nnolim (1990) noted that poems use language that is connotative rather than denotative, figurative rather than direct, symbolic rather than plain.

Curriculum restraints were found to be one of the negative experiences for teachers because there is a lack of alignment between the CAPS requirements, the ATP and the available contact time allocated for teaching poetry. Teachers felt the curriculum demands do not consider the complexity of the genre especially since there is a barrier in the language used in the poems. The LoLT and the learners' mother tongue make it difficult for the township high school ESL learner to grasp abstract poetic concepts within the allocated time frame.

It is apparent from the teachers' experiences that although they admit to their challenges, they seem to have a major problem with presenting good poetry lessons because they were never efficiently taught how to teach the genre and the departmental workshops they sometimes attend do not capacitate them enough with enriched methods that they can confidently use in their poetry lessons. The methods they use are methods that they believe work for them although they do not fully endorse them because they still struggle with having productive poetry lessons while using their own teaching methods.

#### 5.2.2 Sub question 2:

Which strategies do English teachers use when teaching poetry in their high school ESL classrooms?

The aim was to understand their experiences on the methods teachers use when they teach poetry. It was clear from the findings that each teacher used a method that he/she believed worked for that particular poem. Some of their strategies shared similarities however, it was clear that their strategies focused more on structure, meaning of words and figures of speech. Their methods did not contain elements that made a poem memorable and pleasurable to learn because their approach was rather technical. What was gathered was that their methods were mainly meant to prepare their learners for the examinations. None of the teachers stated that they asked learners to write and recite their own poems. Their lessons deprived learners of an opportunity to explore poetry as a genre that can be enjoyed. Most of the teachers' strategies do encourage more participation from the learner which could possibly yield good results. Tamalavage (2008) shared her success lesson that encouraged her

learners to recite poems out loud. She affirms that the mood in her class became more animated and learners could easily learn new concepts.

The methods they used included; drilling of concepts where the teacher instils what he/she believes is a foundation of a poetry lesson. It is also believed that the history that underpins a poem should be taught for better understanding of the poem. Teachers stated that teaching poetry contributed to improving independent reading skills in learners. Learners are asked to read and try to make sense of the poem independently before the poem is taught. Learners are also asked to read aloud in class, but some teachers stated that they prefer reading the poem themselves to their learners so that it sounds the way it should be recited. They stated that they read the poems better than their learners because they pay attention to the punctuation and the advantage that they studied the poem before going to class. Group work was also one of the strategies teachers used because it assisted learners to be able to share their interpretation and understanding with peers. Group work was a popular method among the teachers because of the large numbers they have in their classes. However, it was alarming that one teacher stated that she puts her learners in a group of 10. It seemed unrealistic for the purpose of doing group work to have 10 learners in one group. It was also understandable that the teachers did state that they do not have a uniform method but they try out their own methods which could possibly yield good results. Teacher A was the only teacher who stated that she made her lessons practical by demonstrating to assist her learners in visualising what was portrayed in the poem.

It was clear that teachers juggled a few methods. They did not display exploring other ventures besides what they already knew and what they have been utilising in their teaching experience.

### 5.2.3 Sub question 3:

What is the rationale behind using these strategies when teaching poetry?

The study found that factors that influence the teachers to teach poetry the way they do are based on their past experiences and their everyday experiences. Teachers expressed that they use what works for them for that particular poem with consideration of the calibre of learners they have in their class.

It was evident from the study that teachers' designed methods that only prepared their grade 10 and 11 learners for examination. Since they set their own tests and exams, they teach with examination expectations in mind. Their teaching methods are more technical and the teacher is more active than her learners.

Teachers stated that the demands of the curriculum do not provide them with enough time to teach poetry the way they should. The concern was that the subject has 3 exam papers with paper 2 requiring that two genres be studied. Basically, the CAPS requirements are not practical for them because their load is not feasible resulting in them leaving out certain poems because of the time allocated for the subject. Teachers also stated that they use their own methods because the CAPS document does not provide them with the "how to" of teaching poetry and the professional workshops do not seem to assist much. The CAPS document and the professional development workshop do not offer a clear pedagogical framework that could enhance literacy and engagement in the ESL poetry class.

Generally, it became clear that teachers are very uncertain with how to approach the genre. What transpired was that they taught mainly concepts that would assist learners in passing their exams. Teacher C stated that *"sometimes I do not know what I am doing"*. Teachers' negative attitude and self-doubt were found to be another leading factor that has impacted on how teachers approach their poetry lessons. The participants did not mention methods that are explicit and creative but their lessons were more on trying to make learners understand the poem rather than making them develop a love for the genre. Most teachers preferred to teach poems that are simpler to understand. They also had a sense of preference of poems that are culturally relating to love and relationships and are shorter in length, such as the sonnets.

The participants also felt that their tertiary education and high school experience contributed to how they approach their poetry lessons. Teachers did not have a positive history in their education that contributed to their poetry lessons. They expressed that in high school they were not taught poetry in a manner that created a lasting effect that they could use in their classroom. Their tertiary education did not equip them with complete tools that are unique to teaching poetry.

Language is another factor that is a stumbling block for teachers to achieve a productive poetry lesson. English is not the home Language of most township schools, yet it is the language of learning and teaching. Many learners find difficulties in understanding the poetry lesson and responding to oral questions and text based questions. As a result, more time is spent on a single poem which takes up more than the allocated time in the ATP.

However, they recommended team teaching as one of the methods that teachers stated as contributing in improving the way they teach. Team teaching is able to pull them to the zone of maximum achievement as observed by Vygotsky in the constructivist theory of this study. Teachers expressed that working with their peers does enlighten their own way of teaching poetry in an ESL township high school class.

### 5.3 Recommendations

- The study found that fear and self-doubt that teachers experienced with poetry pedagogy stems from uncertainty in understanding the genre and the 'how to' of teaching it. Teachers are uncertain of their current methods that they employ in their classes. There should be in-service training and professional development provided for English ESL teachers on the teaching of poetry from grade 8 to 12. There should also be pre-service training that is implemented vigorously in tertiary institutions which should be refined in their in-service professional development workshops. In-service workshops should capacitate teachers with uniform approaches that are aligned with the requirements of the CAPS curriculum to ensure exceptional and quality learning and teaching of poetry. Teachers should also improve themselves and utilise resources and information from digital media to make their lessons more interesting.
- To improve the teaching of poetry the school should provide teachers with adequate teaching resources and the Head of Department (HOD) could provide support for English teachers from grade 8 to 12. The HOD should ensure that English teachers are provided with enough resources that could assist in their poetry lesson. Have constant liaison with the subject advisor for support that can uplift teachers' confidence when teaching poetry.
- To improve on the issue of language as a barrier and that of resistance from learners, the subject advisors and the HOD's in the General Education and Training (GET) phase

should ensure that teachers do introduce poetry at early stages of the learners' education. Tin (2011) notes that poetry helps learners to expand their vocabulary, grammar and language skills. Hence, Learners will not have to struggle with poetry text if they are familiarised with it as early as primary school, for example. They would be well grounded in vocabulary, grammar and language when they reach high school and there would be less uncertainty among teachers.

- The alignment of the CAPS requirements and the ATP should be reviewed to improve the work load and the allocated time. The allocated time and CAPS requirements put teachers under severe time constraints since they have to teach work that is divided into three exam papers. The CAPS document should work as a guide along with the ATP in assisting English teachers, not as a stumbling block in pursuing their lessons. It vitally significant to remember how essential it is for each learner to achieve full education that gives them an opportunity to be accepted in any tertiary education.

## Conclusion

The study was conducted to understand township high school ESL teachers' experiences of poetry pedagogy. It was evident that there is a link between teachers' attitudes towards poetry and how they teach it. Their attitude is passed on to their learners creating a cycle of distaste for poetry. Other factors that influenced their teaching was inadequate teacher training and in-service professional development, the CAPS requirements and insufficient allocated time in the ATP. Addressing these factors can contribute to having more teachers who appreciate teaching poetry. Although poetry is viewed as a complex genre, it plays an immense role in developing critical thinking in learners. Poetry should not be a neglected genre in all grades from GET to FET phase in schools. Issues concerning poetry teaching in South African township schools should be addressed in order to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to provide quality poetry teaching. Therefore, learners can be well equipped to conceptualise the genre, thus township schools can have a long-term positive outcome in poetry teaching and learning.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A1: Request Letter School 1

P.O BOX 8630  
Linkhills  
3652

The Principal  
P.O BOX 287  
Hammarsdale  
3700

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL**

My name is Smangele Mtetwa and I am a Masters student registered with the University of Kwazulu Natal. As part of the requirements for my studies I am expected to conduct research on a topic of my choice within the broader English Language Education. So my research topic is: **Exploring teachers' experiences of teaching poetry to English First Additional Language learners: a case study of three grade 11 teachers in Township schools.**

My research will involve classroom observations and conducting interviews with both the teachers and learners who will be part of the various English lessons that I will observe with a view to gathering research data.

This letter serves to make a formal request to use your school to carry out the necessary research for my studies. Data collection will take place in the form of audio/video-recorded interviews, classroom observations and focus group discussions. The data will be handled with extreme caution and confidentiality. When appropriate in the end, it will be destroyed.

Your prompt response in this regard will be highly appreciated. For more information about my study please contact my supervisor, A.S.B. Mthembu, 031 260 3478, e-mail [mthembua@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthembua@ukzn.ac.za).

I can be contacted on [REDACTED] e-mail address: [smangelemtewa@gmail.com](mailto:smangelemtewa@gmail.com)

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours Faithfully

Smangele Mtetwa

[REDACTED] / E-mail [smangelemtewa@gmail.com](mailto:smangelemtewa@gmail.com)



APPENDIX A2: Request Letter School 2

P.O BOX 8630  
Linkhills  
3652

The Principal  
P.O BOX 287  
Hammarisdale  
3700

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL**

My name is Smangele Mtetwa and I am a Masters student registered with the University of Kwazulu Natal. As part of the requirements for my studies I am expected to conduct research on a topic of my choice within the broader English Language Education. So my research topic is: **Exploring teachers' experiences of teaching poetry to English First Additional Language learners: a case study of three grade 11 teachers in Township schools.**

My research will involve classroom observations and conducting interviews with both the teachers and learners who will be part of the various English lessons that I will observe with a view to gathering research data.

This letter serves to make a formal request to use your school to carry out the necessary research for my studies. Data collection will take place in the form of audio/video-recorded interviews, classroom observations and focus group discussions. The data will be handled with extreme caution and confidentiality. When appropriate in the end, it will be destroyed.

Your prompt response in this regard will be highly appreciated. For more information about my study please contact my supervisor, A.S.B. Mthembu, 031 260 3478, e-mail: [mthembua@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthembua@ukzn.ac.za).

I can be contacted on [REDACTED]; e-mail address: [smangelemtewa@gmail.com](mailto:smangelemtewa@gmail.com)

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

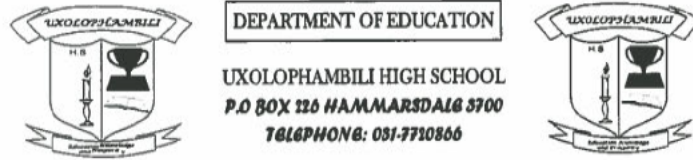
Yours Faithfully

Smangele Mtetwa

[REDACTED] / E-mail [smangelemtewa@gmail.com](mailto:smangelemtewa@gmail.com)



APPENDIX B1: School ONE Principal's Permission Letter




To the University of KwaZulu Natal Research Office

This letter serves as a response to the Request from Miss S.P Mtetwa to do her research in our school. We are clear and understand the purpose of her study and we will gladly allow her to pursue her research in our school.

Regards

P.G Mthembu

  
\_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL  
KZN Department of Education  
Uxolophambili High School  
PO Box 126 Hammarisdale, 3700  
10 -06- 2017  
Phone: (031) 772 0866  
Sign: 

APPENDIX B2: School TWO Principal's Permission Letter



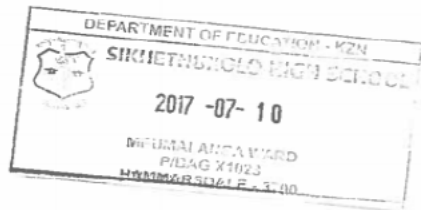
**SIKHETHUXOLO HIGH SCHOOL**  
P/Bag X1023                      Tel. Nr: 031 - 774 0441  
HAMMARSDALE                Fax Nr : 031 - 774 0388  
3700  
Email: sikhethuxolo1gmail.com



To the University of KwaZulu Natal Reseach Office

This letter serves as a response to the Request from Miss S.P Mtetwa to do her research in our school. We are clear and understand the purpose of her study and we will gladly allow her to pursue her research in our school.

Regards  
B.T Shangase



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**VISION WITH ACTION**

## APPENDIX C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



17 January 2018

Ms Smangele Precious Mtetwa (206504728)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Mtetwa,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0746/017M

Project Title: Exploring teachers' experiences of teaching poetry to English First Additional Language learners: A case study of three Grade 11 teachers in Township High Schools

In response to your application received 09 June 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisors: Mr ASB Mthembu  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymam@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymam@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Franchising Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

## CONSENT FORM

I..... (fullname of participant)  
hereby confirm that I understand the nature of the research project conducted by Miss  
Smangele P Mtetwa. I consent to participate in the research project. I understand I have a  
right to withdraw from the project at anytime, I should desire.

Signature of participant

Date

.....

.....

I hereby consent to:

Audio- recording my interview	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Video – recording my interview	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>

Signature of participant

Date

.....

.....

### Interview Schedule

1. What would you say about your personal feeling about poetry?  
\*Do you love it? Why?
2. How do you feel about teaching poetry?
3. Why do you think there is a need to teach poetry in classrooms today?
4. How do you teach poetry? Which strategies do you use?
5. How do you normally prepare your learners for a poetry lesson?
6. How would you describe your poetry lessons?
7. Why do you teach it the way you do
8. Were you taught poetry while you were in high school?  
\*How were you taught?
9. How much of what you were exposed to as a learner in a poetry class has influenced the way you teach it now?
10. Were you taught how to teach poetry as part of your teaching degree curriculum?  
How much of what you were taught is part of your poetry teaching strategies?
11. Would you say your learners love or enjoy poetry? Why / why not / How do you know?
12. What remedial measures do you use if they do not understand during the lesson?
13. In your experience, what would you say are your learners' main challenges when you are teaching poetry?
14. What are your challenges when you teach poetry?
15. What challenges do you think are generally experienced by ESL teachers when teaching poetry?
16. What kind of help do you receive from the Department regarding the teaching of English in general and poetry in particular?
17. What does CAPS have to say about the teaching of poetry?
18. What poetry teaching manuals, teacher's guides or books do you use for your poetry lessons? Are they helpful?
19. Is team teaching one of the strategies you use when you teach poetry? Why / why not?
20. Are there any other experiences you would like to share about your poetry teaching that was not discussed here?

## Questionnaire

Fill in the questionnaire to the best of your ability

- Age \_\_\_\_\_
- How long have you been teaching poetry \_\_\_\_\_

21. What would you say about your personal feeling about poetry?

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\*Do you love it? Why?

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22. How do you feel about teaching poetry?

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23. Why do you think there is a need to teach poetry in classrooms today?

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24. How do you teach poetry? Which strategies do you use?

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25. How do you normally prepare your learners for a poetry lesson?

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26. How would you describe your poetry lessons?

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27. Why do you teach poetry the way you do?

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28. Were you taught how to teach poetry as part of your teaching degree curriculum? How much of what you were taught is part of your poetry teaching strategies?

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29. Would you say your learners love or enjoy poetry? Why / why not / How do you know? \_\_\_\_\_

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30. In your experience, what would you say are your learners' main challenges when you are teaching poetry? \_\_\_\_\_

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31. What are your challenges when you teach poetry?

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32. What challenges do you think are generally experienced by ESL teachers when teaching poetry?

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33. What kind of help do you receive from the Department regarding the teaching of English in general and poetry in particular?

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34. Is team teaching one of the strategies you use when you teach poetry? Why / why not?

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35. Are there any other experiences you would like to share about your poetry teaching that was not asked here?

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# *Mvelase & Associates*

8 A Tedder road

Winston Park

3610

16 January 2021

## To whom it may concern

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis: **High School Teachers' Experiences with the Teaching of Poetry: A Case Study of Township English Second Language Teachers'** by Smangele Precious Mtetwa (Student No: 206504728) has been edited by me for language.

Should you require any further information, do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards

Mandla Mthembu

mandla.mthembu@aeegroup.co.za



## All Chapters no frills

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### ORIGINALITY REPORT

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Daniel Xerri. "Schools as "Poetry-Friendly Places": Michael Rosen on Poetry in the Curriculum", Arts Education Policy Review, 2014  
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Khatib, Mohammad. "A New Approach to Teaching English Poetry to EFL Students", Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 2011.  
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Inyang, GB. "Linguistic " Stylistic Technique and the Effective Teaching and Learning of Poetry in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools", African Research Review, 2009.

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**Instructor**

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