

**LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY: THE USE OF LITERATURE  
TEXTS TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH FAL  
CLASSROOMS**

by

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**SUPERVISOR, DR. B. BADAL**

**17 NOVEMBER 2025**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to Jesus Christ, of Nazareth

## **SPIRITUAL DEDICATION**

I thank God for guiding me and my supervisor, Dr. Bernice BadaL, during the entire process of compiling this study. He gave me a supervisor with divine patience to assist me whenever I struggled.

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### **LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY: THE USE OF LITERATURE TEXTS TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to an originality-checking software and that it meets the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative case study critically examined how English First Additional Language teachers exercised agency in developing learners' communicative competence through literature-based instruction in three township schools in the Tshwane North District of Gauteng. Grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of teacher agency, the research explored the intricate interplay between teachers' conceptualisations of communicative language teaching, their enacted classroom practices, and the personal and systemic constraints that shaped their pedagogical decisions.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, a biographical summary sheet, and document analysis (learner books, SA CAPS document, and annual teaching plan ATP) involving six EFAL teachers across three schools. The findings revealed significant variability in teachers' understanding and implementation of communicative language teaching principles, as well as in their manifestations of agency. While some educators demonstrated resilient agency by creatively adapting resources, integrating literary texts to promote emotional engagement and critical thinking, and encouraging peer collaboration, others exhibited constrained agency by rigidly adhering to prescribed curricula under pressure from policy bureaucrats and systemic inequities. This dichotomy highlights the tension between innovation and compliance within restrictive educational environments.

Drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the study confirmed that teacher agency was not an inherent trait, but a dynamic phenomenon shaped by the interplay of personal beliefs, environmental conditions, and behavioural factors. The absence of supportive structures, such as collaborative learning communities and context-sensitive training, further limited opportunities for teachers to enact transformative practices, perpetuating cycles of stagnation and inequity in township schools.

A central theme emerging from the study was the underutilisation of literary texts as a transformative pedagogical tool for enhancing communicative competence. Despite its potential to bridge linguistic, cultural, and emotional dimensions of learning, literary texts were often reduced to vehicles for grammar drills, reflecting a misalignment with communicative language teaching's emphasis on meaningful interaction and authentic communication. Systemic barriers, including overcrowded classrooms, resource

shortages, governance failures, and inadequate professional development, stifled opportunities for innovation, perpetuating cycles of reform stagnation and inequity.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on teacher agency in multilingual, under-resourced contexts by highlighting the urgent need for systemic reforms and context-sensitive interventions. It concludes that teacher empowerment through targeted professional development, equitable resource allocation, and supportive leadership is essential to overcoming structural inequities and to supporting learner-centred practices aligned with the goals of communicative language teaching. By addressing these challenges, policymakers and school leaders can unlock educators' transformative potential, paving the way for meaningful educational outcomes and sustainable reform in South African township schools.

## **KEY CONCEPTS**

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory; Communicative Approach; Communicative Language Teaching; Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement; English First Additional Language; Literature-based instruction; Quintile One Township Public Schools; Teacher agency; Teacher Perceptions; Township schools

## **ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

### **COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE**

29 October 2021

Dear Ms Dolphina Mmatsele Nkosi

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**Ethics Approval from 29 October 2021 to 29 October 2026**

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Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of

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The *low risk application* was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

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6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.

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This serves to confirm that the Doctoral Thesis entitled: ***Locating a space for teacher agency: The use of literature texts to develop communicative competence in English FAL classrooms.***

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has been professionally edited by one of our accredited English mother-tongue language editors. The accuracy of the content of the final work remains the authors' responsibility.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr MC Steyn'.

*Dr MC Steyn*

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# Table of Contents

<b>CHAPTER ONE: THE STUDY AND ITS CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY .....	2
1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	8
1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES .....	11
1.4.1 Aim of the study .....	11
1.4.2 Objectives of the study .....	11
1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	12
1.7 RATIONALE .....	13
1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	15
1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	17
1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS .....	21
1.11 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....	27
1.11.1 Ontological orientations.....	28
1.11.2 Epistemology .....	29
1.11.3 Research design .....	30
1.13 QUALITY MEASURES.....	43
1.13.1 Validity and reliability.....	43
1.13.2 Credibility .....	44
1.13.3 Transferability .....	46
1.13.4 Ethical considerations .....	46
1.13.5 Informed and voluntary consent .....	47
1.13.6 Confidentiality and anonymity of research participants.....	48
1.13.7 Protecting participants from harm.....	49
1.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	51
1.16 CONCLUSION.....	55
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>57</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	57
2.2 INTRODUCING THE TERRAIN.....	58
2.3 GLOBAL TRENDS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING .....	61
2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING CONTEXT, A SITE OF INEQUALITY, IDEOLOGY, AND IMPERATIVE CHANGE .....	64
2.4.1 English First Additional Language teaching context, navigating linguistic complexity, structural inequity, and the illusion of communicative intent.....	67

2.5	CURRICULUM CONSTRAINTS FOR ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE, THE ILLUSION OF STRUCTURE AND THE EROSION OF TEACHER AGENCY .....	71
2.6	TEACHER AGENCY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING, NAVIGATING CONSTRAINT AND ENACTING POSSIBILITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN EFAL CLASSROOMS .....	75
2.7	THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND AGENCY .....	78
2.8	THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING, FROM CONCEPT TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE.....	81
2.9	THE ROLE OF LITERARY TEXTS IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE .....	85
2.9.1	Literature and cultural understanding .....	87
2.9.2	Literary texts as tools for improving communicative competence .....	91
2.9.3	Literature texts as a rich source for contextual knowledge .....	94
2.10	SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE REVIEW.....	96
2.11	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	97
2.11.1	Teacher agency, a dynamic interplay of beliefs, decisions, and actions .....	99
2.11.2	Triadic reciprocal causation model and its application to teacher agency .....	102
2.12	CONCLUSION.....	109
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>		<b>111</b>
3.1	INTRODUCTION .....	111
3.2	ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER .....	112
3.3	PARADIGMATIC AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES .....	116
3.3.1	Ontology and epistemology .....	117
3.3.2	Ontology, the nature of reality and its implications.....	118
3.3.3	Epistemological considerations .....	121
3.3.4	Meta-theoretical paradigm: constructivist/interpretivism .....	122
3.4	RESEARCH DESIGN .....	125
3.4.1	Qualitative research design, a constructivist lens .....	126
3.4.2	Case study research design.....	128
3.5	ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH .....	131
3.5.1	Advantages of the ethnographic case study approach .....	133
3.5.2	Challenges and limitations of ethnographic research.....	134
3.6	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	135
3.6.1	Strengths of qualitative research, advancing depth, context, and authenticity .....	136
3.6.2	Limitations of qualitative research .....	139
3.7	PARTICIPANT AND SITE SELECTION.....	142
3.7.1	Participant profile, a diverse and experienced cohort of EFL educators .....	145

3.8	DATA COLLECTION METHODS .....	147
3.8.1.	Participant information sheet.....	149
3.9	SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS .....	151
3.9.1	Strength of semi-structured interviews .....	153
3.9.2	Limitations of semi-structured interviews.....	155
3.10	AUDIO RECORDING AND TRANSCRIPTION .....	155
3.11	PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION.....	158
3.12	DOCUMENT ANALYSIS.....	160
3.12.1	Data analysis methodology .....	163
3.12.2	Qualitative content analysis.....	164
3.13	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	167
3.13.1	Informed consent and voluntary participation .....	168
3.13.2	Protecting participants from harm.....	169
3.14	QUALITY MEASURES.....	171
3.14.1	Transparency and audit trails: mapping the research journey.....	171
3.14.2	Credibility, ensuring fidelity to participants' realities .....	172
3.14.3	Validity: methodological alignment and construct fidelity .....	173
3.14.4	Dependability and confirmability: ensuring consistency and objectivity.....	174
3.14.5	Authenticity and transferability, contextual depth and scholarly relevance.....	174
3.15	CONCLUSION.....	176
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....</b>		<b>179</b>
4.1	INTRODUCTION .....	179
4.2.	THE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLING CONTEXT .....	180
4.2.1	Resource constraints and infrastructure challenges .....	181
4.2.2	Distinctive institutional profiles.....	182
4.2.3	Shared systemic challenges.....	183
4.3	PARTICIPANT PROFILES.....	184
4.4	ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	199
4.4.1	Theme One: Teachers' beliefs and practices: The fracture between ideology and enactment .....	205
4.4.2	Theme Two: Teachers' understanding of communicative language teaching: Misconceptions and theoretical gaps.....	210
4.4.3	Theme Three: Classroom observation: The chasm between belief, knowledge, and pedagogical enactment .....	215
4.4.4	Theme Four: Professional development: Aligning theory and practice in a system of fragmented support .....	219
4.4.5	Theme Five: Teacher agency: Harnessing literature as a resource for improving communicative competence .....	223

4.5	CONCLUSION.....	229
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS .....</b>		<b>232</b>
5.1	INTRODUCTION .....	232
5.2	EMERGING THEMES AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS.....	234
5.2.1	Theme One: The epistemological chasm: Teachers’ conceptual knowledge of communicative language teaching and communicative competence.....	235
5.2.2	Theme Two: Classroom Observations: The Chasm Between Belief, Knowledge, and Enactment.....	239
5.2.3	Theme Three: Teachers’ perceptions of literature as a tool for developing communicative competence .....	242
5.2.4	Theme Four: The Interplay of Teacher Agency, Systemic Constraints, and Enabling Factors .....	250
5.2.5	Theme Five: Manifestation of teacher agency: A Spectrum of Resilience, Constraint, and the Absence of Collaboration .....	258
5.3	CONCLUSION:.....	263
<b>CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS .....</b>		<b>267</b>
6.1	INTRODUCTION .....	267
6.2	REFLECTIONS ON THE PURPOSE, CONTEXT, AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY .....	268
6.3	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY, RECONCEPTUALISING AGENCY AND REDEFINING POSSIBILITY IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION .....	272
6.3.1	Theoretical significance, reframing teacher agency as a relational and contextual phenomenon .....	273
6.3.2	Policy and practical significance: A blueprint for empowering educators .....	274
6.4	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	276
6.5	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	278
6.5.1	Recommendations for the Department of Basic Education.....	279
6.5.2	Redefining the role of external managers: from compliance to collaboration ..	281
6.5.3	Recommendations for teachers, cultivating voice, agency, and adaptive expertise 284	
6.5.4	Recommendations for future research .....	286

6.6 CONCLUSION.....	287
REFERENCES.....	289
APPENDICES .....	333
Annexure A: ACCEPTANCE BY SUPERVISOR.....	333
Annexure B: RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	335
Annexure C: GDE APROVAL LETTER.....	336
Annexure D1: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	337
Annexure D2: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	339
Annexure E: LESSON OBSERVATION PROTOCOL.....	341
Annexure F: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS AFTER LESSON OBSERVATION.....	343
Annexure G1: SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER.....	345
Annexure G2: SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER.....	347
Annexure H: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR MINORS.....	353
Annexure I: LESSON OBSERVATION PROTOCOL .....	356
Annexure J: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS AFTER LESSON OBSERVATION.....	358
Annexure K: WRITTEN CONSENT .....	361
Annexure L: LESSON OBSERVATION PROTOCOL .....	362
Annexure M: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS AFTER LESSON OBSERVATION.....	364
Annexure N: CONTACT SUMMARY FORM.....	366
Annexure O: CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION OF THE SCHOOL.....	367
Annexure P: FOLLOW UP SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS (communicative language teaching).....	381

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Research strategy .....	111
Table 4.1: Summary of key findings linked to socio-cognitive theory .....	197

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory: Reciprocal Determinism in EFAL Teacher Agency.....	20
Figure 4.1: Khensi’s Educational Profile and Philosophy.....	182
Figure 4.2: Andi’s Educational Approach Overview.....	184
Figure 4.3: Factors Influencing Hluli’s Educational Impact.....	186
Figure 4.4: Kea’s Teaching Approach.....	189
Figure 4.5: Survival-Oriented Instruction Impacts Learner Engagement.....	191
Figure 4.6: Dissonance between Ideology and Practice in Education.....	193

## ACRONYMS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CA	Communicative approach
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CC	Communicative competence
CLT	Communicative language teaching
CPD	Continuous professional development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DH	Departmental Head
EFAL	English as a First Additional Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FAL	First additional language
FET	Further Education and Training
GET	Gauteng Department of Education
GTE	General teaching efficacy
HL	Home Language
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LoTL	Language of Teaching and Learning
LSRW	Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing
LTSM	Learning and teaching support material
MT	Mother tongue
NCS	National curriculum statement
PLC	Professional learning community
PTE	Personal teaching efficacy
SA	South Africa
SCT	Social cognitive theory
SGB	School governing body
SSIs	Semi-structured interviews
TA	Teacher agency
TPP	Teachers' pedagogical practices

# CHAPTER ONE: THE STUDY AND ITS CONTEXT

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the thesis by presenting the framework of the study and the background of English language teaching and learning in Quintile One township public schools<sup>1</sup>. The focus of the study is linked to the research questions, with key concepts, namely the communicative approach, communicative language teaching, communicative competence, and teacher agency, serving as central to directing this research. Therefore, it provides the context for the area under investigation and the challenges of teaching English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) in South African public schools, particularly in township contexts. It then introduces the research problem, aims and objectives, research questions, sub-questions, rationale, methodology, and definitions of key terms. These sections orient the reader to the structure of the thesis and outline the chapters that follow, thereby guiding the reader through the study.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Communicative Approaches (CA), particularly within the context of South African public township schools, while also offering insights relevant to private schooling contexts and broader educational settings. Furthermore, the investigation aims to raise awareness among teachers in township schools of the potential to implement CLT approaches using literary texts to

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<sup>1</sup> Quintile One schools are schools in South Africa that are highly subsidized by the government. The quintiles range from 1-5, with Quintile One representing the poorest schools. These schools exist in the poorest areas where most of the community members, parents and guardians of learners are unemployed and the area often serves as a crime hotspot. More funding is allocated to these schools because they are in townships which were created during apartheid era, were historically disadvantaged and continue to lack resources (DBE, 2011).

Township schools are schools located in black residential areas which were previously created by the apartheid government in South Africa. These schools historically only admitted black children according to Neluvhola (2007:14) as cited by Komala (2020).

enhance English language competence. In the context of this study, literature incorporates poetry, prose, and drama. By foregrounding literature as a pedagogical resource, the study seeks to demonstrate how communicative language teaching strategies can support the development of learners' communicative competence, which remains the goal of language learning.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The background of the study is deeply rooted in the socio-educational realities of South African township schools, where systemic inequities perpetuate cycles of educational disparity (Govender, 2018). South Africa's linguistic landscape is a microcosm of its broader socio-political history, characterised by the coexistence of 11 official languages and the dominance of English as a hegemonic language. This multilingual reality maintains deeply entrenched inequities that continue to shape educational outcomes. As Bourdieu (1991) argues, language is not merely a tool for communication but a vehicle of power. In South Africa, English occupies a privileged position as the language of education, business, and global connectivity. Consequently, it becomes imperative for future citizens to participate meaningfully within a global context (Bhaskar & Soundiraraj, 2013).

However, the privileging of English has created a paradox in terms of access and proficiency for EFAL learners. While English is seen by many as a pathway to economic prosperity and social mobility, it also marginalises indigenous languages and perpetuates systemic inequalities. This dynamic is particularly evident in township and rural schools where learners have limited exposure to the target language.

Therefore, the challenges faced by EFAL learners in South African township schools are emblematic of these broader linguistic and socio-economic disparities. Township schools are characterised by overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, inadequate professional development, and rigid accountability frameworks, all of which hinder the effective implementation of communicative language teaching principles (Govender, 2018; Long et al., 2017). EFAL learners in these contexts often navigate multilingual

environments with limited exposure to the target language, as townships in general remain linguistically homogenous, with predominantly black populations.

This situation highlights the need for contextually relevant and learner-centered approaches to developing meaningful communicative skills in English. As Nunan (1998) aptly points out, the relationship between grammar and context lies in the “appropriate use of grammar choices” tailored to the purpose and situational demands of communication. However, teachers in resource-constrained environments struggle to embed language instruction within meaningful contexts that resonate with learners’ lived experiences (Pillay, 2016). Learners in these contexts navigate multilingual environments where indigenous languages, Afrikaans, and English intersect in complex ways. Thus, their access to standard English remains constrained. This constraint stems from a lack of immersion in environments where the target language is typically acquired naturally.

Additionally, the lack of exposure to the target language is compounded by the socio-economic realities of township life, where poverty, overcrowded classrooms, and limited resources influence the acquisition of communicative competence (Ebersöhn, 2014; Spaul, 2012; Fleisch, 2008). Consequently, learners struggle to acquire the contextual understanding necessary to use English meaningfully in diverse communicative settings, a challenge highlighted by scholars such as Badal (2013) and Mohlabi-Tlaka (2016). These scholars argue that many students complete the Further Education and Training (FET) phase without mastering the skills required for higher education or professional success.

Against the backdrop of the challenges discussed above, the teaching of literature, as outlined in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) (DBE, 2011), involves developing background knowledge, engaging in close reading of texts, making inferences, developing language skills, and cultivating a culture of reading for imaginative purposes.

Within this context, CAPS attempts to standardise English language instruction across diverse linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. Since its introduction in 2011, CAPS and its implementation have been critiqued by scholars who refer to it as

'teacher-proof curriculum' (Harrop-Allin & Kros, 2014; Msibi & Mchunu, 2013; Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012). This term implies that teacher competence is irrelevant to achieving improved learner outcomes, effectively homogenising teacher voice and disregarding the nuanced realities of classroom practice (Taylor, 2013). Therefore, such curricula are constructed on the assumption that implementation can occur without deviation from policy imperatives. This fosters fidelity to the curriculum dictates and a culture of compliance.

Heightened regulation and monitoring have intensified these struggles, pushing teachers toward compliance-oriented behaviours and diminishing their professional autonomy. Prominent scholars, such as Badal (2024) and Apple (2011), have warned against the dangers of 'teacher-proof' reforms, cautioning that these mechanisms attempt to control educators, undermine individual and collective agency, and perpetuate systemic inequities. Carter (1993:8) further critiques this approach by arguing that: "it silences teachers' voices, replacing them with policymakers and administrators who operate within a network of power that enforces remote control over teaching practices". This dynamic not only disempowers educators but also stifles innovation and meaningful pedagogical adaptation.

The homogenisation inherent in CAPS creates significant tensions, particularly in township schools where learners' linguistic repertoires and lived experiences are at odds with the prescribed curriculum. As Nunan (1998) points out, the relationship between teaching the language and the context lies in the appropriate use of pedagogical choices tailored to the purpose and situational demands of communication. However, teachers in resource-constrained environments struggle to embed language instruction within meaningful contexts that resonate with learners' socio-cultural realities. This gap leaves learners ill-equipped to navigate intercultural dilemmas or transfer language skills to real-world situations, perpetuating cycles of educational disparity (Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012).

Thus, literature texts and instruction emerge as a critical yet underutilised avenue for bridging these divides. Literary texts offer a unique opportunity to connect linguistic instruction with emotional, cultural, and social dimensions of learning, which aids the

development of both communicative competence and critical engagement (Cummins, 2001).

Scholarship highlights that teachers often reduce literary texts to vehicles for teaching themes, characterisation, and plot, aligning narrowly with the format of assessments rather than harnessing their potential to promote communicative competence (Badal, 2013). This test-centric approach prioritizes surface-level analysis over meaningful engagement, thereby limiting learners' opportunities to use language authentically. By focusing solely on examinable elements, educators remain fixated on issues of performativity (Ball, 2003). Scholars such as Sithebe and Moore (2015) have documented how these constraints exacerbate the challenges faced by educators, leaving them disempowered and demotivated.

CAPS prescribes a communicative approach as a mandated approach for teaching EFAL and the means of communicative competence to prepare learners for higher education and the world of work (DBE, 2011). The teaching of these skills must be underpinned by the communicative approach. The communicative approach is a broad philosophical orientation towards language teaching, with an emphasis on real communication rather than a mere focus on grammar and form Richards&Rodgers (2014). Theorists in this tradition believe that language is primarily a tool for communication; thus, learners need to know how to use language in context. While the communicative approach provides the theoretical foundations, communicative language teaching is a specific methodology or set of classroom practices derived from the communicative approach. communicative language teaching represents the implementation of the principles of the communicative approach through strategies and activities designed to promote communication. The theoretical foundations of the communicative approach and communicative language teaching are elaborated in Chapter Two.

However, CAPS falls short in providing educators with a clear explanation of the theoretical underpinnings, practical implications, or specific goals of this approach. While the policy document emphasizes the importance of exposing learners to real-life communication and integrated language skills, it provides limited guidance on how

teachers can effectively implement these principles within diverse and resource-constrained contexts. This lack of clarity leaves educators grappling with ambiguities about the purpose and application of the communicative approach, often resulting in superficial adherence to its tenets. As Richards (2006) critiques, the absence of a strong theoretical and practical framework undermines teachers' ability to move beyond traditional, grammar-centric methodologies. Consequently, this impedes the transformative potential of communicative language teaching. The gap between policy prescription and classroom practice persists, leaving teachers ill-equipped to support authentic communicative competence among learners (Badal, 2018).

Communicative competence (communicative competence), the ability to use language effectively and appropriately across diverse social and academic contexts, is a cornerstone of second-language acquisition (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman & Palmer, 1996). It encompasses not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, and strategic interaction, skills essential for learners to engage meaningfully in society and succeed academically (Savignon, 1972).

However, teacher-centred approaches that prioritise grammar over proficiency fail to equip learners with the skills necessary for real-world communication. As Sadiku (2015) argues, CAPS divides EFAL instruction into the four language skills, listening and speaking, reading and viewing, writing and presenting, and language structures. This compartmentalisation often results in fragmented teaching practices that neglect the interconnectedness of these skills. The communicative approach, particularly when employed as a pedagogical strategy with literary texts, provides a more comprehensive framework for facilitating holistic meaning-making and contextual understanding. However, teacher agency is a key factor in acknowledging the interconnectedness of the four skills of language learning, which are reading, speaking, writing, and listening.

Teacher agency, as conceptualised by Biesta (2015 and Priestley (2013), is a dynamic and context-sensitive phenomenon that reflects educators' capacity to act purposefully within the constraints and opportunities of their professional environments. Biesta and

Priestley emphasise that teacher agency is not an inherent trait but rather emerges through the interplay of personal beliefs, environmental factors, and structural conditions. These scholars aptly argue that teacher agency is deeply embedded in the contexts in which educators operate, suggesting that agency arises from the interaction between teachers' internal motivations (e.g., beliefs, values, and goals) and external factors such as policy mandates, resource availability, and sociocultural dynamics

In South Africa, an emerging field of research on teacher agency in the implementation of CAPS has been developing (Badal, 2018; Govender, 2018; Harrop-Allin & Kros, 2014; Mohlabi-Tlaka, 2016; Msibi & Mchunu, 2013; Pillay, 2016; Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012). This area of study focuses on contextual constraints, with little known about the methodological approaches that teachers use and the resources that they draw upon to instil communicative competence in learners. Thus, it becomes imperative to examine teachers' knowledge of the communicative approach, communicative competence, and the application of communicative language teaching principles in their teaching contexts, with a focus on investigating how teachers navigate challenges and adapt their practices to suit their specific contexts.

This study aims to highlight how teachers teach EFAL, what influences guide their practices, and how their knowledge of communicative language teaching influences their teaching. The value of this study lies in its potential to identify ways to support teachers in bridging the gap between conceptual knowledge and practice. This merging of knowledge helps equip learners with the communicative competence and sociocultural awareness needed to thrive in a multilingual, interconnected world.

The background to this study highlights the importance of teaching English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) in South African township schools. Although widely acknowledged, significant challenges persist in translating policy ideals into classroom practice. When teachers implement communicative language teaching methodologies to promote communicative competence, they often face systemic constraints, including resource inequities, overcrowded classrooms, and rigid curricula. These barriers not only hinder effective EFAL instruction but also raise critical questions about

how teachers navigate contested terrains to exercise agency and align their practices with educational goals.

These tensions between policy aspirations and classroom realities highlight a deeper concern: while communicative competence is positioned as a central goal of EFAL instruction, the capacity of teachers to implement communicative language teaching principles is often constrained by their working conditions. This raises the research problem of how teachers negotiate such constraints, assert their professional agency, and use available tools, such as literature texts, to create meaningful opportunities to support learners' communicative competence in township classrooms.

### **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The persistent challenges faced by EFAL teachers and learners in South African public schools highlight a critical gap in learners' communicative competence. Communicative competence is a cornerstone of language acquisition and academic success (Makoe, 2014; Thuketana & Makgabo, 2022). Despite CAPS' emphasis on attaining high levels of proficiency, in EFAL, empirical evidence suggests that learners are often promoted to higher grades and even graduate from Grade 12 without acquiring the communicative skills necessary for meaningful engagement in real-life contexts or academic environments (Badal, 2018; Mohlabi-Tlaka, 2016). This disjuncture between policy aspirations and educational realities highlights systemic shortcomings that perpetuate cycles of underachievement and inequity.

Learners who fail to acquire communicative competence often face significant challenges in tertiary education and the workplace, where effective communication is a prerequisite for success (Khanyile, Usadolo & Mdletye, 2025). In tertiary settings, students are expected to engage in academic discourse, articulate ideas coherently, and participate in collaborative learning environments. These tasks require fluency, sociolinguistic appropriateness, and strategic interaction (Van Schalkwyk, 2008). However, many EFAL learners enter the higher education phase poorly equipped with

the requisite literacy skills, as noted by Gruhn and Weideman (2017) and Jordaan (2011). As a result, they struggle with comprehension, critical engagement, and academic performance.

Similarly, in the workplace, communicative incompetence impedes individuals' ability to convey meaning effectively, adapt language use to diverse contexts, and interact confidently in professional settings (Canale & Swain, 1980; Khanyile et al., 2025). This misalignment between learners' linguistic capabilities and real-world demands underscores the urgent need for interventions that promote authentic communicative competence during foundational phases of schooling.

The problem arises when learners who enter the FET phase frequently exhibit deficiencies in foundational language skills, indicating inadequate preparation in earlier phases. These inherited challenges exacerbate the already daunting responsibilities of FET teachers, who must navigate overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and rigid accountability frameworks while striving to implement effective teaching strategies aligned with communicative language teaching principles (Nel & Müller, 2010). Scholars such as Engelbrecht (2016) and Nel and Müller (2010) argue that intervention at the secondary level, particularly through the adoption of communicative language teaching methodologies, could mitigate these issues by equipping learners with the linguistic and sociocultural competencies required for academic success and workplace communication.

However, despite its value, communicative language teaching remains underutilised in South African classrooms. Scholars note that this underutilisation is due to multifaceted constraints, including reduced teacher autonomy, inflexible curriculum policies, resource scarcity, and insufficient professional development (Pillay, 2016; Mthembu, 2017; Maseko, 2018). A significant impediment to the adoption of communicative language teaching is teachers' understanding and application of its principles (Nunan, 1999; Richards, 2006; Doeur, 2022; Nam, 2023). Without adequate knowledge of the communication process or pedagogical strategies underpinning communicative language teaching, educators struggle to create classrooms conducive to the development of communicative competence.

Furthermore, the diversity that is characteristic of South African classrooms demands that teachers assume multiple roles, adapting their practices to meet learners' unique needs while promoting inclusive and supportive learning environments (Engelbrecht, 2016). Yet, systemic reforms such as CAPS have increasingly prioritised prescriptive, teacher-proof curricula over empowering educators as agents of transformative practice (Msibi & Mchunu, 2013). This trend raises critical questions about the extent to which teachers can exercise agency within restrictive systems and harness innovative methodologies to address contextual challenges.

Within these constraints, teachers continue to exercise varying degrees of professional agency, adopting strategies to negotiate, resist, or adapt policy ideals in ways that align with learners' needs. One such underexplored strategy is the creative use of literature texts to develop communicative competence in EFAL classrooms. However, little is known about how teachers in township schools conceptualise and enact their agency through literature-based approaches, or how these practices can expand the space for communicative, learner-centred instruction. This gap in knowledge highlights the need to explore the relationship between teacher agency, literary texts, and the development of communicative competence in EFAL classrooms.

Given these challenges and the identified gap in understanding how teachers navigate them, this study seeks to explore the ways in which teachers exercise agency in EFAL classrooms. It examines how literary texts may serve as tools for improving communicative competence despite systemic constraints. To address this concern, the study is guided by the following aims and objectives.

## **1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.4.1 Aim of the study**

This study explores how teachers in township schools navigate systemic constraints while implementing communicative language teaching principles and developing communicative competence among learners in EFAL classrooms.

### **1.4.2 Objectives of the study**

The study seeks to:

- To examine teachers' beliefs and understandings of communicative competence and communicative language teaching in the context of EFAL instruction.
- To investigate how teachers' beliefs about language teaching align with their classroom practices.
- To explore the use of literature texts as pedagogical tools to promote communicative competence in EFAL classrooms.
- To identify gaps between teachers' theoretical knowledge of communicative language teaching and their classroom practices.
- To examine how literary texts enhance learners' contextual understanding of language use.
- To identify the systemic, contextual, and pedagogical challenges that influence teachers' ability to integrate literature texts and communicative language teaching principles.
- To investigate the personal, behavioural, and environmental factors that shape teachers' pedagogical choices.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To guide the study, the following research questions were formulated:

**Primary research question:** How do EFAL teachers in township schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles?

Sub-question 1: What are EFAL teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching and its relevance to their teaching contexts?

Sub-question 2: How do EFAL teachers' conceptions of the communicative approach inform their classroom practices?

Sub-question 3: How do teachers use literary texts to improve learners' communicative competence?

Sub-question 4: How do teachers exercise agency in navigating contested terrains while aligning their practices with curriculum goals?

## 1.6 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study explores how EFAL teachers' knowledge and understanding of communicative language teaching influence their teaching and learning. Moreover, it investigates their classroom practices for evidence of communicative language teaching and the development of communicative competence among their learners. A conducive learning environment depends on the agency of the teacher and the ability to adopt the methodologies prescribed by the DBE. Therefore, the exploration of teachers' adoption of methods and demonstration of agency has the potential to reveal multi-layered issues that need to be addressed.

This raises the question of whether teachers in South Africa are sufficiently conscious of the importance of communicative language teaching and possess the knowledge and skills to adopt this method effectively. The overarching purpose of this study is to

critically examine how EFAL teachers' knowledge and understanding of communicative language teaching shape their instructional practices and, by extension, influence the development of communicative competence among learners.

Furthermore, the study examines the extent to which teachers' classroom practices align with communicative language teaching principles and assesses their effectiveness in promoting learners' communicative competence. A conducive learning environment hinges not only on systemic support but also on teachers' agency to adapt and implement approaches prescribed by the DBE.

This study examines whether EFAL teachers in South Africa are sufficiently aware of the transformative potential of communicative language teaching and possess the requisite skills to implement it effectively. Scholars such as Cappy (2016) and Long et al. (2017) argue that teachers' professional identity and socio-political awareness are central to shaping their willingness to adopt innovative strategies. Thus, without targeted interventions to address gaps in knowledge and practice, educators may continue to perpetuate traditional, grammar-centric methodologies that contradict the core objectives of communicative language teaching.

This study, therefore, positions itself as a critical exploration of the interplay between teacher agency, contextual realities, and pedagogical innovation. This intersection seeks to identify pathways for advancing equitable and inclusive education within EFAL classrooms.

Having outlined the purpose of the study, it becomes necessary to justify why such an investigation is both timely and significant. The rationale for this research lies in addressing the persistent gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities in South African EFAL education, while foregrounding the crucial role of teacher agency in bridging this divide.

## **1.7 RATIONALE**

The rationale for this study arises from the persistent gap between South Africa's language-in-education policies and the realities of classroom practice in EFAL

contexts. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) prescribes the use of the communicative approach to promote learners' communicative competence. However, township schools in particular face systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, shortages of learning resources, and rigid assessment-driven curricula that often limit teachers' ability to enact communicative, learner-centred pedagogy. These constraints create a tension between the aspirational goals of communicative language teaching and the traditional, content- and grammar-focused approaches that dominate many EFAL classrooms. Investigating how teachers navigate these tensions is essential to understanding the possibilities and limitations of implementing communicative language teaching in real-world educational contexts.

At the heart of this study is the recognition that teachers are not merely passive implementers of policy but active agents who interpret, adapt, and mediate curriculum directives in relation to their specific contexts. Teacher agency, therefore, becomes a critical factor in determining the extent to which communicative competence can be realised in EFAL classrooms. By examining teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices, the study seeks to highlight how professional identity, pedagogical choices, and socio-political awareness shape classroom realities.

Furthermore, the exploration of literature texts as instructional tools offers an under-researched yet potentially powerful strategy for integrating communicative practices, as literary materials provide authentic, context-rich opportunities for learners to use English meaningfully. Despite the extensive body of scholarship addressing challenges in EFAL classrooms, there remains a critical gap in understanding how teacher knowledge and agency can be optimised to enhance communicative competence through innovative and holistic teaching methods.

While numerous studies have highlighted systemic constraints such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and rigid curricula (Govender, 2018; Long et al., 2017), few have critically examined the role of teacher agency in adopting communicative language teaching principles to support contextual meaning-making and authentic communication among learners. This study seeks to address this gap by examining

how EFAL teachers in township schools navigate these constraints to implement literature-based instruction that aligns with communicative language teaching goals.

Teachers' decision-making must be guided by clear educational aims that prioritise learner engagement and transformative learning experiences (Campbell, 2012). In resource-constrained environments, where access to diverse materials is limited, literature emerges as a powerful vehicle for developing communicative competence. Literary texts offer learners opportunities to engage with authentic language use, interpret implied meanings, and explore cultural nuances embedded within narratives (Harmer, in Bouazid, 2010). However, realising this potential depends on teachers' capacity to act agentically, optimising available resources to create meaningful learning experiences.

This study is therefore significant on multiple levels. Theoretically, it contributes to scholarship on teacher agency and communicative language teaching by situating these concepts within the unique multilingual and socio-political context of South Africa. Practically, it offers insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and practitioners seeking to bridge the gap between policy ideals and classroom realities. By foregrounding the role of teacher agency and exploring innovative uses of literature texts, the study aims to identify pathways for more inclusive and effective EFAL instruction. In doing so, it seeks to empower teachers as central actors in shaping equitable educational outcomes and enhancing learners' communicative competence in diverse, resource-constrained classrooms.

## **1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The significance of this study can be understood on three interrelated levels, theoretical, practical, and policy oriented. At the theoretical level, it contributes to scholarship on teacher agency and communicative language teaching within the South African EFAL context. At the practical level, it highlights the need for teacher support in devising strategies to promote communicative competence through literature texts

and offers insights for teacher mentoring and classroom practice. At the policy level, it provides evidence to guide curriculum design and systemic support, ensuring that teachers are better equipped to bridge the gap between policy ideals and classroom realities.

Theoretically, this study contributes to scholarship on teacher agency and communicative language teaching by situating these concepts within the multilingual and socio-political realities of South Africa. Much of the existing literature on communicative language teaching and teacher agency originates from contexts in the global North. This study, by contrast, foregrounds the perspectives of EFAL teachers working in township schools. In doing so, it broadens the academic conversation by offering insights into how teachers negotiate systemic challenges while striving to develop communicative competence among their learners.

Practically, the study is valuable for teachers, teacher educators, and school leaders. Investigating how teachers use literature texts to foster communicative competence highlights creative, context-appropriate strategies that can be adopted even in resource-constrained environments. The findings can inform professional development programmes by showing how teachers exercise agency to adapt policy directives, integrate communicative practices, and create more engaging, learner-centred classrooms.

At the policy level, this study provides evidence to inform the DBE and related stakeholders in strengthening curriculum design, teacher support, and resource provision. By documenting the lived realities of EFAL teachers and the tensions between policy and practice, it underscores the need for systemic reforms that recognise teachers as active agents in shaping language education. Ultimately, the study seeks to advance equitable and inclusive EFAL instruction, ensuring that learners are better equipped with the communicative competence needed to thrive in academic, social, and global contexts.

To examine how teachers exercise agency in EFAL classrooms, this study is framed by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. This theory emphasises the dynamic interaction between individual cognition, behaviour, and contextual factors. It provides a useful

lens for understanding how teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices shape, and are shaped by their teaching environments. Social cognitive theory highlights the concepts of self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism, which are central to exploring how teachers negotiate constraints, make pedagogical choices, and use literature texts to promote the development of communicative competence. The following section outlines the principles of Bandura's theory and explains their relevance for investigating teacher agency in EFAL contexts.

## **1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977, 1986, 1999, 2001), which provides a lens for understanding how teachers exercise agency in navigating the challenges of EFAL instruction. Social Cognitive Theory emphasises the concept of reciprocal determinism, the idea that human behaviour is shaped by a dynamic interaction between personal factors (such as beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes), behavioural practices, and environmental influences. In the context of this study, teachers' beliefs about communicative language teaching, their instructional methods, and the systemic conditions of township schools mutually influence one another. This interaction highlights the ways in which teachers adapt and assert agency despite systemic and pedagogical constraints.

A key construct within Social Cognitive Theory is self-efficacy, defined by Bandura (1997) as individuals' belief in their capacity to organise and execute the actions required to manage prospective situations. For teachers, self-efficacy influences their confidence in implementing communicative language teaching principles, experimenting with literature texts, and facilitating communicative competence in resource-constrained classrooms. Teachers with strong self-efficacy are more likely to adopt innovative, learner-centred practices. Those with lower self-efficacy may instead revert to traditional, grammar-focused methods. Investigating teacher self-efficacy, therefore, provides insight into the extent to which teachers feel capable of enacting the transformative aims of communicative language teaching.

Individuals navigate contested terrains by making sound judgments about their capabilities, anticipating the effects of different actions, and regulating their behaviour in response to socio-structural opportunities and constraints (Bandura, 1977). This theoretical lens is particularly relevant in contexts characterised by systemic inequities, where teachers must exercise agency to innovate and adapt within restrictive environments (Lasky, 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). By emphasising the reciprocal relationship between teachers' beliefs, decisions, the environment, and others' actions, Social Cognitive Theory highlights the centrality of agency in overcoming contextual challenges and engaging in transformative teaching practices. Teachers' practices are not set in isolation but are influenced by professional networks, policy directives, and exposure to training or mentoring. In South Africa, DBE policies promote communicative language teaching, but teachers' enactment of these methods depends on how effectively they observe, internalise, and adapt pedagogical models within their own contexts. This underscores the importance of understanding how teachers draw on both external inputs and internal beliefs when choosing instructional strategies.

A critical dimension of this framework is the concept of teacher agency, which extends beyond compliance with external mandates to encompass educators' capacity to act as active agents of change. As Cong-Lem (2021) argues, teachers are not merely passive implementers of policy but can reinstitute their creative energies and professional autonomy to achieve meaningful educational outcomes. This perspective aligns with Cachero's (2025) assertion that actualising their goals for teaching depends on teachers' ability to navigate systemic constraints while augmenting available resources. In EFAL classrooms, where learners often exhibit low proficiency levels and diverse linguistic backgrounds, teacher agency becomes a pivotal factor in bridging the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

The Triadic Reciprocal Causation Model of Social Cognitive Theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) elucidates how individuals perceive their self-efficacy to demonstrate agency by emphasising the dynamic interplay between cognitive and behavioural characteristics of the individual and environmental influences. This bidirectional framework demonstrates that while humans may respond mechanistically and

reactively to external prescriptions, they also possess the capacity to act proactively and generatively when confronted with perceived constraints.

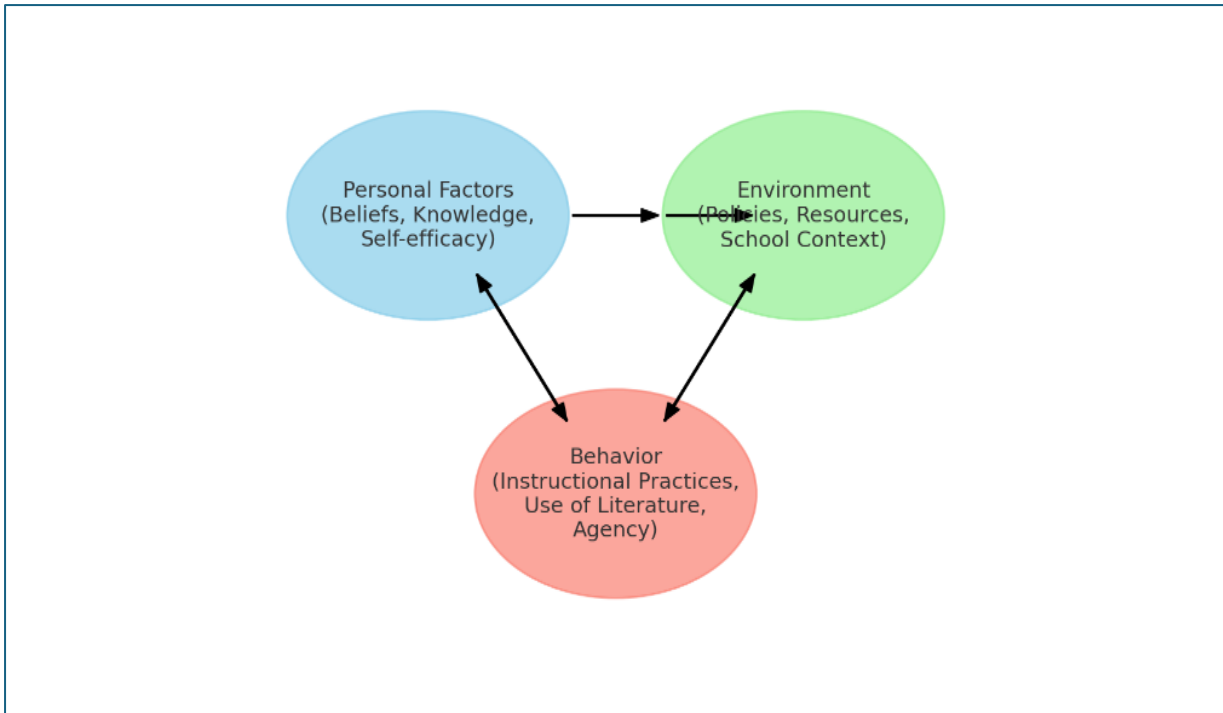
Furthermore, the model highlights teachers' characteristics, which challenge notions of homogenisation within prescriptive systems. It argues that individuals, even under conditions of constraint, retain the ability to influence their environment, thereby enabling a mutualistic relationship between the individual and systemic reforms. This bidirectional interplay underscores the role of choice and deliberation in navigating restrictive paradigms. Within prescriptive change frameworks, teachers can draw on their capacities to interpret and mediate regulations, resulting in diverse manifestations of constructed teacher agency.

The interplay of reciprocal factors further highlights the complexity of teacher agency in multilingual and under-resourced settings. Bandura's theory theorises that those environmental conditions, such as supportive leadership, collaborative learning communities, and equitable resource allocation, significantly influence teachers' self-efficacy and willingness to adopt innovative methodologies (Bandura, 1999). Conversely, systemic barriers, such as rigid accountability frameworks, excessive administrative demands, and insufficient professional development, can undermine teachers' confidence and stifle creativity. This tension is particularly evident in township schools, where educators often grapple with competing priorities and the demand for syllabus coverage alongside the imperative to develop communicative competence among learners (Govender, 2018; Long et al., 2017).

Thus, Social Cognitive Theory frames agency as the capacity to make intentional choices and regulate one's actions within enabling or constraining environments. This aligns with the study's focus on how EFAL teachers exercise professional agency through their instructional decisions, particularly in integrating literature texts to enhance communicative competence. By applying Social Cognitive Theory, this study can capture the interplay of individual, behavioural, and contextual factors that shape teacher agency, revealing both the barriers teachers face and the strategies they employ to navigate them.

Thus, integrating literature-based instruction within the communicative language teaching framework offers a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of theory and practice. Literary texts not only serve as a linguistic resource but also as a vehicle for connecting language learning to learners' lived experiences, thereby enabling emotional engagement, cultural awareness, and critical thinking (Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1972). However, realising this potential requires teachers to move beyond traditional, grammar-centric approaches and embrace strategies that prioritise authentic communication and contextual meaning-making. By situating teacher agency within the broader ecological context of EFAL education, this study seeks to illuminate how educators can enhance their knowledge, skills, and contextual understanding to overcome systemic inequities and promote communicative competence in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Through this lens, the theoretical framework provides a foundation for addressing the research questions and advancing the discourse on educational reform in South Africa. It also defines agency as an evolving process shaped by teachers' self-efficacy, professional experiences, and the contexts within which they work. It offers a powerful lens for analysing how EFAL teachers' knowledge and practices reflect or resist communicative language teaching principles, and how these choices impact the development of learners' communicative competence.



**Figure 1.1: Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory: Reciprocal Determinism in EFAL Teacher Agency**  
(Adapted using AI)

## 1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following section provides definitions of crucial terms and concepts in this study.

### Township schools

Township schools refer to educational institutions situated in mainly black residential areas, formerly established by South Africa's apartheid government. Historically, these schools were designated exclusively for black learners (Neluvhola, 2007, as cited in Komala, 2020).

### Quintile one schools

The SA government divided all schools into quintiles 1-5 and township schools fall under quintiles 1-3, which are non-fee-paying schools because they were previously disadvantaged and remain under-resourced. These schools have the highest allocation of state funds as part of the government's strategy to promote equality in

resource distribution. However, a wide gap persists between urban schools and township schools. One of the recommendations of this study is for the DBE to strive to bridge this gap in resource distribution. The environments of these schools remain unequal in terms of resource provision, delivery, and application (Bloch, 2006; Business Week, 2010; Monyooe, 2005; Pretorius, 2012; Waghid, 2004).

### **Approach**

An approach can be conceptualised as a systematic framework or methodology that guides the teaching and learning process. In educational, it refers to a “coherent set of principles, techniques, and strategies designed to facilitate learner engagement and achievement” (Waite, 2012:38). Beyond its technical dimensions, an approach encompasses philosophical and ethical underpinnings that shape educators' understanding of how learning should occur and the role of teaching in supporting this process (Kramer, 2005:1). By aligning with curriculum objectives, an approach serves as a blueprint for instructional practices, delineating the structure and content of the syllabus while providing a comprehensive framework to achieve intended educational outcomes (Mohlabi-Tlaka, 2016).

### **Communicative Competence (communicative competence)**

Communicative competence is assumed to be the fundamental system of information and skills essential for communication. It is the knowledge that a language speaker must acquire to communicate within any speech community (Hymes, 1972). For instance, a speaker must consider if their language use is appropriate, in addition to conforming to grammatical and linguistic rules. Knowledge and proficiency are co-elements of communicative competence. Knowledge refers to what one knows about the language and the characteristics of communicative language use, whereas proficiency refers to how well one can apply this knowledge in real communication. Richards and Rodgers (2001:156) further define it as the “ability to use the linguistic system efficaciously and correctly”. Communicative competence requires speakers to negotiate meaning in diverse situations (Savignon, 2001: 236).

In township schools, literature texts serve as valuable tools for improving communicative competence, particularly since English is often restricted to classroom use during designated English periods. Within the context of EFAL, effective communication is a central objective that can be advanced through the communicative approach. The integration of literature in EFAL classrooms not only supports the development of communicative competence but also promotes literary competence, enabling learners to internalise the language of literature and transform linguistic structures into meaningful communicative expressions.

### **Communicative approach**

The communicative approach, as defined by the DBE (2011), emphasises that language learning should provide learners with extensive exposure to the target language and ample opportunities to practice and produce language through communication for both social and practical purposes. This approach argues for a natural and informal process of language acquisition, seamlessly integrated into classroom practices. Within this framework, literacy skills such as reading/viewing and writing/presenting are cultivated in an organic manner. Thus, learners enhance their reading proficiency through extensive engagement with texts and develop writing abilities through consistent practice (DoE, 2003: 47).

Central to this pedagogical philosophy is the principle that successful language acquisition is achieved when learners engage in meaningful communication, where the exchange of real meaning takes precedence over rote memorisation or mechanical drills. Furthermore, the communicative approach prioritises the contextualisation of language instruction, ensuring that topics are presented within authentic and relatable contexts. This helps learners to gain deeper linguistic and communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This learner-centred methodology emphasizes the importance of interaction, authenticity, and purposeful language use in developing communicative proficiency.

### **English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

EFL refers to the Instruction of English to speakers whose native language is not English. A foreign language is not spoken in the country where it is taught, meaning

there is no environmental input or reinforcement. Technology, therefore, becomes necessary to provide reliable input through audio and video and to facilitate real communication. The purpose of foreign language teaching is not to perfect an acquired language, but to initiate the acquisition process (Anastassiou & Andreou, 2023).

### **Native Language / Mother Language / First Language (L1) /Home Language**

The first language (L1), also commonly referred to as the native language or mother tongue, denotes the language acquired naturally and spontaneously in early childhood through immersion in the primary linguistic environment, typically within the family. According to Hatch (1983) and Lightbown and Spada (2013), L1 acquisition occurs without formal instruction and is largely complete by the preschool years. While some conceptualizations suggest prenatal sensitivity to the ambient language (Moon, Cooper, & Fifer, 1993), the mother tongue is most accurately defined as a sociocultural and environmental acquisition that occurs within the home.

In this study, mother tongue refers specifically to the dominant language of the learner's household, the primary medium of familial communication and cultural transmission. Home language, according to the DBE (2010), refers to the language most regularly spoken at home by a learner. It differs from theoretical definitions of mother tongue because it may be an adopted language, for instance, when a family chooses English as the home language.

### **Native speakers of English**

A native speaker of English is a person who has spoken the language from earliest childhood. The term refers to someone who has used English functionally since early childhood, even if that person is not of English origin. It does not necessarily mean the speaker's only language, but rather that it has been the primary medium for concept formation and communication. Alpetekin (2002:57) suggests that a native speaker's identity is shaped by language use or language presentation. As members of a particular speech community, native speakers act in explicit ways and understand others' conduct in relation to shared communicative norms.

It can therefore be assumed that the identity of a native English speaker encompasses a range of language behaviour shaped by socialisation. These behaviours distinguish them from other users of English whose linguistic practices do not reflect the same shared norms (Badal, 2013).

### **Second Language**

A second language (L2) is intentionally learned or acquired through formal learning and is not innate. In South Africa, English serves as both a target language and a language of learning and teaching (LoLT). For instance, some individuals have two or even more first languages (L1s), depending on their circumstances. In this classification, a second language is simply the additional language present in a person's everyday life, with the first language being the native language (Alpetekin, 2002).

### **Multilingual speaker**

A multilingual speaker is someone who speaks more than one language. Oksaar (1982) defines multilingualism as any degree of competence in two or more languages. These languages can be acquired simultaneously with the mother tongue in early childhood. Children who acquire them are referred to as simultaneous multilinguals or polyglots (Nordquist, 2025). It is common for such learners to be more proficient in one language than another. In township contexts, most children acquire multiple indigenous languages during childhood. Teachers, therefore, face challenges in implementing a communicative approach in such multilingual classrooms.

### **First Additional Language (FAL)**

The first additional language (FAL), according to the DBE (2011:8), refers to “a language that is not a native language to the learner but is used as a medium of teaching and learning.” It is a compulsory language subject that learners must study. Although not the mother tongue, FAL is used for communicative purposes in society. Thuzini (2011) suggests that FAL is any language acquired after a first language. Learners begin acquiring FAL in the lower grades of primary schools. CAPS introduces FAL as a compulsory subject in Grade 1 in all South African schools (DBE, 2011).

Teachers are expected to use a combination of teaching methods when teaching FAL to accommodate diversity arising from multilingualism and varying levels of proficiency (Singh, 2009).

### **Learner**

In South Africa, the educational system commonly refers to students as learners, a term that, according to Waite (2012), denotes an individual acquiring knowledge or skills in a particular subject. In this study, the term refers specifically to school-going individuals learning English as a FAL.

### **Teacher Agency**

Teacher agency, according to Ferrari and Taddei (2017), refers to teachers' ability to act deliberately and constructively in managing their professional growth and driving educational reform. In this study, teacher agency refers to teachers' capacity to act purposefully and constructively to shape both their own professional development and their learners' educational experiences. It encompasses teachers' ability to make choices, take stances, and enact practices that reflect their professional judgment and beliefs (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2013). Understanding teacher agency involves examining the interplay between autonomy, professional practice, and sociocultural context (Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

### **Public School**

Public schools are government schools, subsidised by the state and staffed by state-employed teachers (Zinth, 2005). Zinth further defines a public school as "a school that derives its support, in whole or in part, from money raised by a general state, county, or district tax." In South Africa, Pretorius (2019) defines a public school as one that is controlled and subsidised by the state.

### **Ex-Model C Schools**

These schools were created in the 1980s and early 1990s. They received substantial state funding, including staff salaries paid on state scales, but charged additional school fees. Today, most rely primarily on high parent fees with minimal state subsidy.

They are situated in former white residential areas and remain relatively well resourced (Kanyopa, 2018; Top Dog Education, 2017). Some are struggling depending on management, while others are successful, and many still provide excellent education

### **Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT)**

LoLT refers to the language used by teachers to teach school subjects, excluding the mother tongue, where applicable. In South Africa, English is used as the LoLT across many subjects (Smith, 2019), especially in township schools. From Grade 4 onwards, learners are required to transition from learning in their home language to English as the LoLT (DBE, 1997). This makes Grade 4 a critical transition year, as it marks the shift from mother tongue/home language instruction to English-medium instruction. EFAL then becomes the medium through which most subjects are taught. (Lepheana & Linake, 2025).

## **1.11 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This section outlines the methodological framework that underpins the study, providing an account of its philosophical foundations, research design, and procedural rigour. It begins by articulating the study's ontological and epistemological stance, clarifying the assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality that inform the inquiry. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the research adopts a qualitative approach to capture teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, and pedagogical practices as they integrate literature into communicative language teaching.

The discussion then outlines the research design, including participant selection, the study context, and the rationale for using narrative inquiry as the primary methodological lens. Data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis are described with due attention to ethical considerations and contextual sensitivity. The process of thematic data analysis is explained, with particular emphasis on strategies for ensuring coherence, depth, and interpretive credibility.

Finally, the section addresses the trustworthiness of the study by discussing validity, reliability, dependability, and transferability, aligned with qualitative research standards.

### **1.11.1 Ontological orientations**

Ontology, as the philosophical study of existence and reality, provides the foundation for understanding the contextual and experiential dimensions of this research. Richards (2003) defines ontology as the nature of our beliefs about reality, while Sol and Heng (2022) expand on this by describing it as a researcher's perspective on how reality is perceived and constructed. In the context of this study, reality is defined as the conditions, experiences, and practices that occur within schools, with a particular focus on teachers' implementation of the communicative approach, also known as communicative language teaching, as prescribed by CAPS.

The ontological assumptions underpinning this study acknowledge the existence of multiple subjective realities, reflecting the diverse experiences of teachers and learners in South African township schools. This belief in socially constructed reality informs the choice of a qualitative research methodology that emphasises the exploration and understanding of these subjective experiences. The study, therefore, aligns with a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which recognises that reality is contextually dependent and shaped by interactions between individuals and their environments (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

### **1.11.2 Epistemology**

Epistemology, as the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of knowledge, plays a pivotal role in shaping the methodological and analytical approaches of this research. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) define epistemology as the systematic

examination of the nature, sources, and validity of knowledge, while Juma (2019) underscores its role as a discipline-specific theory of knowledge that guides research design and interpretation. Keser and Koksal (2017:295) further argue that researchers must articulate a clear epistemological stance to ensure coherence in their studies, asserting that “it is vital for researchers to have an underlying philosophy and to shape their studies within the boundaries of a framework”. This assertion aligns with the present study, which examines teachers’ epistemological beliefs about the communicative approach and its implementation through communicative language teaching to foster communicative competence among learners.

From an epistemological perspective, this study explores the knowledge imparted by teachers during lessons and the strategies they use to help learners achieve communicative competence. It critically examines teachers’ beliefs about the communicative approach, communicative language teaching, and relevant curriculum policies, such as CAPS, to determine whether theoretical knowledge aligns with practical application. Drawing on Lemos’s (2007) principle that true belief must be epistemically justified to constitute knowledge, the study employs classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure that findings are rigorously validated. These methods align with the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the co-construction of meaning and the contextual validation of knowledge.

By adopting this epistemological lens, the study interrogates how teachers’ beliefs about language teaching and learning influence their instructional practices. For example, it investigates whether teachers prioritise communicative activities, such as debates and role-plays, over traditional grammar-focused exercises, and how these choices impact learners’ linguistic and sociocultural competencies. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of how epistemological beliefs shape teaching effectiveness and the development of communicative competence in diverse educational settings.

### **1.11.3 Research design**

The research design, as articulated by Creswell (2014), serves as the intellectual scaffolding that bridges the conceptual abstraction of a research problem to the empirical rigour of data collection and analysis. It is not merely a procedural blueprint but a dynamic and strategic framework that aligns the study's objectives with its methodologies, ensuring coherence, relevance, and efficiency in addressing the research questions. This structured approach is indispensable for optimising resource allocation and achieving meaningful outcomes, particularly in complex educational investigations where variables are multifaceted and interdependent.

As Kerlinger (1986) asserts, a research design is a comprehensive plan that encapsulates the study's objectives, purposes, and methodologies while exerting maximum control over extraneous variables. It reflects the researcher's philosophical stance, integrating theoretical underpinnings with practical considerations such as time, location, financial resources, and the researcher's capacity (Hakim, 2000). Thus, the research design acts as both a structural anchor and a theoretical compass, guiding the study through potential challenges and ensuring alignment with its overarching goals.

Kothari (2004) aptly describes the research design as a 'master plan,' detailing the architecture of the investigation from data collection strategies to analytical frameworks. By addressing logical rather than logistical issues (Yin, 2003), the research design ensures both internal and external validity, thereby enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings. In this study, the selection of an ethnographic qualitative case study design underscores a commitment to uncovering the intricate dynamics of teachers' beliefs, actions, and pedagogical practices within their unique sociocultural contexts. Ethnographic case studies are particularly effective in qualitative research because they prioritise meaning-making through participants' narratives, experiences, and perspectives (Miriam, 1998).

This approach aligns seamlessly with the study's aim of exploring how teachers navigate structural constraints and implement the communicative approach to foster

learners' communicative competence. By emphasising participants' voices and subjective realities, the design not only supports the study's objectives but also ensures an authentic representation of their lived experiences.

Castleberry and Nolen (2018) argue that qualitative approaches offer invaluable insights into how individuals interpret and engage with their environments, making them particularly suited for investigations into socially constructed phenomena. This perspective resonates deeply with the present study, which seeks to explore the nuanced interplay between teachers' perceptions, classroom practices, and the broader educational reforms they navigate. By prioritising participants' narratives and contextual specificities, the ethnographic case study design provides a rich, multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In this way, it transcends the limitations of quantitative methods that often reduce complex human experiences to numerical abstractions.

#### **1.11.3.1      *Qualitative case study***

The research design adopted for this study is a qualitative interpretivist case study, informed by the research questions, conceptual framework, and overarching objectives of the investigation. This approach is particularly suited to exploring how individuals perceive, interpret, and construct meaning in response to phenomena within specific contexts (Hester & Francis, 2000:19). Qualitative research offers nuanced insights into complex social processes. It enables an in-depth examination of teachers' interpretations of communicative language teaching principles and their capacity to address the challenges posed by multilingual learners in EFAL classrooms. By situating the inquiry within the natural settings where teaching occurs, this methodology facilitated a deeper understanding of how educators navigated structural constraints and exercised agency to act in the best interests of their learners.

Qualitative studies emphasise sustained, contextually rich investigations that uncover subtle, often less overt dimensions of individual and collective understandings (Gay & Airasian, 2003:13). This aligns with ethnographic traditions, which involve observation,

description, and interpretation of phenomena within their natural environments. As Wiersma (2000:15) argues, ethnographic research requires immersive engagement with participants and settings, enabling the generation of data that is both relevant and deeply contextualised. This approach is particularly pertinent to educational research, where the complexities of teaching and learning cannot be fully captured through quantitative or decontextualised methods. The design was selected because of its ability to highlight the interplay between teachers' perceptions, practices, and the sociocultural dynamics of their working environments.

The study aimed to investigate how teachers' contextual meanings and challenges manifested in their instructional practices, particularly their use of literary texts to teach language features and communicative competence. Accordingly, the adoption of an ethnographic case study design provided an apt framework for examining teacher agency across three distinct school settings. This approach enabled a comparative analysis of teachers' perceptions and practices, shedding light on the variability in their capacity to implement communicative language teaching -aligned strategies despite shared systemic constraints. Ultimately, the methodology revealed the importance of context in shaping educational outcomes and highlighted the transformative potential of teacher agency in resource-constrained environments.

### **1.11.3.2      *Participant and site selection***

The participants in this study were purposefully selected from three public high schools located within a township in Gauteng, South Africa. These institutions are classified as Quintile One (non-fee-paying) schools within the Tshwane North District (D3), a region characterised by significant economic disadvantage. This context created a complex educational environment that underscores the difficulties faced by both educators and learners in achieving meaningful educational outcomes.

The selection of participants and sites was guided by purposive sampling, a method that ensures the chosen individuals and settings are well-suited to address the research problem and highlight the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 156).

Initially, the study cohort consisted of two participants each from five schools in an urban school district in Gauteng. However, unforeseen circumstances necessitated a reduction in the sample size. Two schools withdrew after a violent incident in which the principal of one school was severely wounded on the premises. This tragic event caused widespread trauma among teachers and students, leading to significant disruptions in schooling. Consequently, participants from both the affected school and a neighbouring institution withdrew. The study therefore proceeded with three schools and six teachers, all of whom were supervised by a common district facilitator. Despite the reduced sample size, the data collected provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of teacher knowledge and practice within township schools in the specified district.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the chosen participants and settings generated rich, detailed insights into the phenomenon (Maree, 2007, 85). While diversity in human and economic resources is often desirable in research, this study prioritised the examination of a specific phenomenon, teacher agency and capacity within constrained environments. The selected schools shared similar contextual characteristics, including comparable learner demographics, teacher profiles, and environmental conditions. This consistency provided a framework for analysing teacher perspectives, practices, and their responses to systemic challenges. This approach not only enhanced the reliability of cross-case comparisons but also offered a focused lens for understanding the interplay between individual agency and structural constraints in township schools.

### **1.11.3.3      *Data collection methods***

Data collection represents the systematic gathering and measurement of information on variables of interest. Kabir (2016) defines data collection as the process by which researchers answer research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes. In qualitative research, data is typically non-numerical and expressive, often capturing feelings, emotions, and subjective perceptions (Adosi, 2020). This study employed

qualitative methods to gather data on teachers' perceptions of the communicative approach and communicative language teaching, their professional philosophies, and their experiences with curriculum reforms.

Qualitative data, as Mahajan (2017) notes, provides unprocessed materials that become meaningful only after systematic analysis. For this study, data collection focused on capturing teachers' lived experiences, particularly their feelings of exclusion from the curriculum reform process, frequently characterised as a top-down approach (Badal, 2018). Teachers' reflections on their agency in implementing CAPS-prescribed approaches and promoting communicative competence highlighted the persistent gap between policy and practice.

To achieve the study's objectives, a multi-method qualitative strategy was employed, integrating complementary instruments that collectively enabled a nuanced, contextually grounded understanding of EFAL teachers' pedagogical realities. Central to this approach were semi-structured interviews. These interviews struck a deliberate balance between methodological focus and interpretive openness, guiding discourse around key themes such as perceptions of communicative competence and experiences with curriculum reform. At the same time, participants were invited to elaborate on personal insights, challenges, and contextual nuances (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). These interviews yielded rich, narrative data, illuminating both how teachers understand the communicative approach and the tensions they face in enacting it within resource-constrained, policy-driven environments.

Complementing these interviews were biographical and professional summary sheets that systematically captured essential demographic, educational, and career-related information, thereby situating each participant's voice within a broader socio-professional context (Sutton & Austin, 2015). These profiles helped identify patterns related to experience level, qualification pathways, and institutional affiliations. They enabled a more textured interpretation of how professional identity shapes pedagogical decision-making.

Furthermore, document analysis was employed for triangulation. It involved systematic examination of curriculum policy documents, annual teaching plans

(ATPs), lesson plans, and school-based instructional materials (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By analysing these texts, the study uncovered subtle ways in which teachers interpreted, adapted, or resisted curriculum mandates, thereby revealing the dynamic interplay between prescribed policy and classroom practice (Bowen, 2009).

Together, these instruments formed an integrated methodological triad, enhancing the credibility, depth, and transferability of the findings while rigorously documenting and meaningfully interpreting the complexity of teachers' lived experiences.

#### *1.11.3.3.1 Biographical and professional summary sheet*

Biographical and professional summary sheets are valuable instruments in qualitative research. They help ascertain the interest and suitability of potential participants while also gathering critical personal, biographical, and professional data. These documents provide a structured yet flexible means of capturing essential information about participants' backgrounds, teaching philosophies, and prior experiences, integral to understanding their perspectives and practices within the study's context Misa (2025) By eliciting details such as educational qualifications, years of teaching experience, pedagogical approaches, and attitudes toward specific methodologies, these instruments offer an initial lens through which researchers can assess participants' alignment with the study's objectives (Cresswell, 2013).

In this study, the biographical and professional sheets were instrumental in engaging with teachers and establishing rapport. They facilitated an exploration of participants' attitudes toward the research focus, specifically their perceptions of the communicative approach in teaching EFAL. This methodological choice enabled the identification of participants who demonstrated an interest in the communicative method or exhibited nuanced perspectives on its application in multilingual classrooms. Furthermore, the sheets provided a preliminary understanding of how teachers conceptualised their roles within the broader educational ecosystem, thus offering insights into their professional identities and self-efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 1996; Wheatley, 2005).

The use of this method also enabled the researcher to contextualise participants' responses within their unique professional trajectories. For instance, veteran teachers with extensive experience might harbour entrenched assumptions about their self-efficacy, which can influence their receptiveness to innovative methodologies, such as communicative language teaching. Conversely, less experienced educators might exhibit greater openness to adopting new strategies but lack the confidence or resources to implement them effectively. By capturing such variations, the biographical and professional sheets served as a foundation for subsequent data collection methods, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of participants' backgrounds and predispositions.

The sheets functioned as a tool for reflexivity, allowing the researcher to identify potential biases or gaps in participants' self-representations. As Favre and Knight (2016) argue, educators often rely on 'false mastery experiences,' whereby they overestimate or underestimate their proficiency in implementing reforms. By cross-referencing the information provided in these sheets with data from interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study moderated the risk of over-reliance on participants' self-reported capabilities, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. Thus, the biographical and professional sheets not only facilitated participant selection and rapport-building but also enriched the study's analytical depth by providing a contextualised understanding of teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and professional identities.

#### *1.11.3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were a cornerstone of the data collection, offering participants the flexibility to shape the depth and intensity of their narratives while ensuring alignment with the research objectives. This methodological approach, as articulated by Fontana and Frey (2005), strikes a balance between structured inquiry and open-ended exploration, enabling researchers to delve deeply into participants' lived experiences while maintaining focus on the study's central concerns. In the

context of this research, semi-structured interviews provided a platform for teachers to articulate their perceptions, challenges, and decision-making processes as they navigate the complexities of policy changes, particularly the implementation of communicative language teaching principles in EFAL classrooms.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and preserve the richness of participants' responses. This meticulous documentation enabled a comprehensive analysis of recurring themes and nuanced variations in teachers' understandings and practices. By allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences in their own words, the semi-structured format captured the complexity of their roles as both implementers of policy and agents of change within their unique educational contexts. This approach also highlighted the interplay between individual agency and systemic constraints. It shed light on how teachers navigated structural inequities while striving to meet learners' diverse linguistic needs.

The use of semi-structured interviews also aligns with qualitative research traditions that prioritise depth over breadth. This emphasises the importance of understanding phenomena from the participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2013). This methodological choice was particularly suited to exploring the dynamic nature of teacher agency. It allowed for an in-depth examination of how educators interpreted and responded to the demands of curriculum reforms. The interviews created a dialogic space where participants could articulate their thoughts freely. As a result, they generated rich, contextually grounded data that highlighted both opportunities and challenges associated with implementing communicative language teaching-aligned practices in resource-constrained environments.

Ultimately, this approach highlighted the importance of listening to teachers' voices as a means of bridging policy intentions with meaningful classroom implementation.

#### 1.11.3.3.3 *Lesson observations*

Lesson observations are widely used as a data-collection instrument to capture teachers' pedagogical practices and contextual understandings in their natural settings (Berliner, 2005). This method was particularly motivated by the need to compare teachers' articulated beliefs and descriptions of their practices, as communicated during interviews, with their actual classroom behaviours. The observation protocol was designed to align with key features of communicative language teaching, including teacher and learner roles, group work, role-plays, and student-centered teaching approaches. Respondents were observed over a period of 08 months, with 12 lessons per teacher. To deepen the inquiry, a follow-up interview protocol was developed to focus on how teachers' knowledge of communicative language teaching influenced their observed classroom practices. This dual approach enabled the triangulation of data, thereby enhancing the study's validity and reliability (Creswell, 2013).

The use of lesson observations aligned seamlessly with the theoretical and methodological paradigms underpinning this study, particularly its constructivist and interpretivist frameworks. Observations provided a unique opportunity to situate participants within their real-life teaching contexts, enabling the researcher to examine how they applied the communicative method and leveraged literary texts to develop communicative competence and contextual understanding of language. As Pecheone and Chung (2006) assert, observations provide a more direct evaluation of teaching practices, enabling researchers to delve into the nuances of instructional decision-making and examine the factors influencing pedagogical choices.

The observation protocol encompassed several dimensions, including the physical classroom environment, available resources, teachers' instructional strategies, and their capacity to demonstrate transformative teaching behaviours. Each teacher was observed for approximately five lessons. The selection followed the school calendar to minimise intrusion and preserve the authenticity of the teaching-learning process.

Both grammar-focused and literature-based lessons were included to investigate whether teachers adopted a holistic or discrete approach to language instruction.

To address potential challenges associated with the “observer’s paradox,” as articulated by Allwright and Bailey (1991:70), where participants may alter their behaviour due to the presence of an observer, the classroom observation process was structured into three distinct stages. These stages included pre-observation discussions, actual observations, and post-observation follow-up interviews. Pre-observation discussions familiarised teachers with the research focus and alleviated anxiety or discomfort, thereby ensuring a more natural teaching environment. During the observations, detailed field notes were taken to document the roles of both teachers and learners, interactions within the classroom, and the integration of communicative language teaching principles. Post-observation interviews provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practices, clarify observed behaviours, and discuss their rationale for specific instructional decisions.

This iterative process not only enhanced the depth and richness of the data but also ensured that the findings were grounded in both observed realities and participants’ self-reported insights. Through this methodological rigour, the study aimed to showcase the complexities of teachers’ agency and their ability to navigate systemic constraints while striving to implement communicative language teaching-aligned practices effectively.

#### *1.11.3.3.4 Document analysis*

Document analysis was a critical component of this study. It provided a mechanism for triangulation and enabled an in-depth examination of teachers’ cognitive rationale and instructional decision-making processes. As Yin (2003:87) asserts, “for case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources.” This methodological approach ensured that the data collected from multiple sources were cross-verified, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings.

The documents analysed included formal assessment programmes for each grade and term, assessment rubrics and rating scales, teachers' planning documents, learners' exercise books, internal and external moderation tools, and ATPs. These documents were examined to validate the perspectives shared during interviews and observations, and to highlight teachers' preparation practices and conceptualisations of the communicative language teaching approach.

Teachers' planning documents and learners' exercise books were particularly instrumental in corroborating and augmenting evidence gathered through other data collection methods. For instance, these documents provided tangible insights into how teachers translated their theoretical understanding of communicative language teaching into practical classroom activities, and how they assessed learners' communicative competence. By examining assessment rubrics and rating scales, the study evaluated whether teachers prioritised communicative goals over traditional, grammar-centric objectives. Similarly, internal and external moderation tools offered a lens on how teachers' instructional practices align with broader institutional expectations.

This systematic scrutiny of documents not only facilitated triangulation but also enriched the depth and nuance of the analysis, ensuring that the study's conclusions were grounded in a comprehensive, multifaceted dataset (Creswell, 2012). As Yin (2003) argues, integrating document analysis into qualitative research enhances the rigour of the inquiry by providing supplementary evidence that strengthens the overall validity of the findings.

## **1.12 DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative content analysis served as the primary method of analysis, following systematic procedures outlined by Krippendorff (2004) and Forman and Damschroder (2008). This approach allowed for a rigorous examination of textual data to uncover patterns, themes, and insights that highlighted participants' experiences and practices (Yin, 2003). The process began with transcribing recorded data into written form, allowing the researcher to engage deeply with the material through repeated listening

and reading. This immersion facilitated familiarity with the data and ensured clarity in interpreting participants' responses. As Forman and Damschroder (2008:39-41) point out, the fundamental objective of content analysis is to systematically categorise textual data to make sense of it, with a focus on emergent themes rather than preconceived theoretical frameworks.

The transcription phase was followed by coding, a critical step in qualitative analysis defined by Creswell (2007:251) as the "process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data." This involved manually reducing the volume of data by selecting relevant segments while discarding extraneous information. Field notes were also used to capture not only what participants said but how they responded, including their tone, emphasis, and non-verbal cues (Samuel, 2009:20). These observations enriched the data analysis process, providing additional layers of context and nuance. The coding process followed an iterative cycle. The process began with open coding to identify initial categories, continued with axial coding to group these categories into broader themes, and concluded with selective coding, which distilled the data into core themes that addressed the research questions (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

A grounded theory approach guided the coding process, aligning with the constructivist paradigm that underpins this study. Grounded theory, as articulated by Charmaz (2006), emphasises the importance of constructing theories from the data itself, rather than imposing external frameworks. This inductive methodology allowed for the emergence of themes directly from participants' narratives, ensuring that their voices remained central to the analysis. Holton (2007) emphasizes the reflexive nature of grounded theory, which requires researchers to remain attuned to the complexities of the phenomenon under study while critically reflecting on their role in shaping the findings. This reflexivity was integral to maintaining the study's credibility and trustworthiness.

The coding process unfolded in three distinct stages: data reduction, data organisation, and interpretation. The process was done manually by reducing data, organising it, and then interpreting it to create themes. During the data reduction

phase, raw data were condensed, integrated, and transformed to highlight pertinent information while acknowledging divergent perspectives (Sarantakos, 2002). This stage involved identifying key segments of text that aligned with the research questions and objectives. In the data organisation phase, emerging themes were identified and grouped, facilitating the recognition of patterns and significant features within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006:82). Finally, the interpretation phase synthesised these themes, clustering related data points to elucidate connections and relationships in participants' meaning-making processes. It moved beyond surface-level descriptions to provide deeper explanatory insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Through this structured framework, the study achieved a distilled, abstract representation of the data, aligning with Holton's (2007:268) assertion that grounded theory provides explanatory insights crucial to understanding complex phenomena. The focus was not on generating generalisable findings but on capturing the intricacies of participants' experiences and how they navigated systemic constraints while exercising agency. This nuanced approach ensured that the analysis extended beyond mere data collection to offer a comprehensive interpretation of teachers' lived realities and their efforts to achieve communicative competence through literature-based instruction. Ultimately, the qualitative content analysis unpacked the complex interplay between teacher agency, contextual factors, and pedagogical innovation in EFAL classrooms.

### **1.13 QUALITY MEASURES**

Ensuring quality in qualitative research rests on the principles of openness, transparency, and methodological rigour (Creswell, 2012). These principles establish the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the findings (Yin, 2003). Transparency requires maintaining a "clear audit trail", a detailed record of all decisions, procedures, and interpretations undertaken during the research process (Maree, 2007, 122). This audit trail not only enhances the trustworthiness of the study

but also allows other researchers to follow the logical progression of the inquiry, thereby facilitating verification and replication if necessary (Maree, 2007).

In this study, meticulous attention was paid to maintaining a comprehensive audit trail, beginning with the purposive selection of participants and sites to ensure that the collected data were rich in interpretative depth and aligned with the research objectives. Each stage of the research process, starting from data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, to the subsequent stages of data coding, thematic analysis, and interpretation, was systematically documented. This documentation includes field notes, interview transcripts, observation protocols, and reflective memos, all of which contribute to a transparent and traceable account of the study's trajectory (Maree, 2007).

### **1.13.1 Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability were strengthened through triangulation, a method widely regarded as one of the most effective approaches to enhancing the trustworthiness of research findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Triangulation involves deliberately integrating multiple data collection methods, instruments, and sources to cross-validate findings and mitigate potential biases (Creswell, 2012). As Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) articulate, triangulation strengthens the validity of inquiry by providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Similarly, Denzin (2018) emphasises that triangulation enhances credibility and dependability by employing diverse methods and data sources to explore the topic from multiple angles.

In alignment with these principles, this study employed a range of data collection instruments and methods, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and biographical summaries, to ensure triangulation. Each method was carefully selected to complement the others, thereby

addressing the research questions from various perspectives and enriching the depth and breadth of the analysis.

The use of multiple data sources not only enhanced the validity and reliability of the study but also facilitated a more holistic understanding of teachers' decisions and behaviours within their unique educational contexts. By triangulating data from diverse instruments and methods, the study minimised researcher bias and ensured that the findings were both credible and transferable. This multifaceted approach aligns with the recommendations of scholars such as Patton (2002), who argue that triangulation is essential for constructing a coherent, defensible narrative in qualitative research. Ultimately, integrating triangulation into the study's design demonstrates a commitment to producing rigorous, insightful, and impactful findings that advance understanding of teacher agency and communicative language teaching in resource-constrained environments.

### **1.13.2 Credibility**

Credibility was carefully addressed in this study through the strategic implementation of methodological practices designed to enhance the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings. One such practice was member checking, a technique wherein the researchers' interpretations of the Data were validated against participants' perspectives (Brenner, 2006:368). This iterative process ensured that participants reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations, field notes, and transcriptions of informal conversations. By engaging participants in this validation process, the study not only enhanced the credibility of the findings but also enabled a collaborative relationship that prioritised participants' voices as central to the research narrative (Maree, 2007).

Furthermore, the study adhered to the principle of thick description, a methodological approach that involves providing rich, detailed accounts of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012). As Maree (2007) states, thick descriptions enhance

credibility by capturing the intricate layers of meaning embedded in the social context. In this study, thick description was achieved through an in-depth exploration of the case's nuanced details, including the interplay between personal, environmental, and behavioural factors that shaped participants' experiences and practices.

To further ensure confirmability, the study maintained a meticulous audit trail, documenting every step of the research process with precision and transparency (Krefting, 1991). This included detailed records of data collection methods, coding procedures, thematic analyses, and interpretive decisions. By creating a transparent and traceable account of the research process, the study enabled other researchers to verify the logical progression of the inquiry and assess the rigour of its findings. Additionally, contextual data was carefully analysed to capture both overt behaviours and the contextual understandings that gave meaning to participants' actions (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2009).

This dual focus on observable phenomena and latent meanings underscored the study's commitment to producing credible, insightful, and defensible findings that contribute to the discourse on teacher agency and communicative language teaching in resource-constrained environments.

### **1.13.3 Transferability**

Transferability is a critical quality measure in qualitative research. It affirms validity by enabling readers to assess whether the findings apply beyond the specific context in which the data were generated (Jonker & Pennink, 2010, p. 141). In this study, particular attention was paid to documenting processes, decisions, and contextual nuances. This ensured a transparent and detailed account of the study's design and execution.

However, it is important to acknowledge the unique socio-political, historical, and educational dynamics of the South African context, which may limit the direct applicability of the findings to other settings. The complexities of township schools,

systemic inequities, and the interplay of multilingualism and resource constraints create a distinctive environment that may yield different outcomes when compared with other national or international contexts.

While the principles of teacher agency, communicative competence, and literature-based instruction explored in this study hold potential relevance for similar under-resourced or multilingual educational systems, the results of replication may vary depending on local conditions and systemic factors. Thus, while the study provides valuable insights into the interplay between teacher agency and contextual realities, its transferability must be considered within the broader framework of contextual variability and educational diversity.

#### **1.13.4 Ethical considerations**

Ethical measures constitute the moral and epistemological foundation of all research involving human participants, ensuring that scholarly inquiry is conducted with integrity, transparency, and respect for individual rights, dignity, and well-being (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, where data collection often entails intimate engagement with participants' lived experiences, professional identities, and institutional contexts, the imperative to adhere to rigorous ethical standards is particularly pronounced.

As Babbie (2020) cautions, ethical lapses not only risk causing psychological, social, or professional harm to participants but also compromise the credibility of the research, erode public trust in academic inquiry, and violate the fundamental principle of do no harm. The importance of ethical considerations in research is underpinned by Strydom (1998:24), who defines ethics as,

*a set of moral principles which are subsequently widely accepted, and which provide rules and behavioural expectations regarding the most appropriate conduct towards experimental subjects, respondents, employees, sponsors, other researchers, assistants, and students.*

This definition highlights the multifaceted nature of ethical responsibility, emphasising the need for researchers to uphold integrity and respect throughout all stages of the research process. The following ethical principles are therefore emphasised in this study, informed and voluntary consent, confidentiality and anonymity of research participants, and protecting participants from harm.

### **1.13.5 Informed and voluntary consent**

Informed and voluntary consent is a foundational ethical principle in research. It ensures that participants are fully aware of the nature, purpose, and implications of their involvement before agreeing to participate (Maree, 2007). In alignment with this principle, detailed information about the proposed study was provided to participants before they gave their consent. This included a comprehensive explanation of the research objectives, methodologies, potential risks, and benefits, thereby enabling participants to make informed decisions regarding their participation (Burns, 1997).

Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of involvement, with explicit assurances that participants would not be subjected to coercion or undue pressure to participate. Participants' rights were rigorously upheld throughout the research process by ensuring that their welfare remained a paramount consideration. Ethical guidelines dictate that individuals must feel empowered to express their views freely and without fear of intimidation or repercussions (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, participants were assured of their autonomy and were encouraged to express any concerns or questions they may have had about the study.

Consent was obtained for each specific activity undertaken during the investigation, reinforcing transparency and respect for participants' agency. Furthermore, participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage, should they choose to do so, without facing any negative consequences or discomfort.

This commitment to ethical integrity reflects the study's adherence to principles of respect, beneficence, and justice, as outlined by Burns (1997) and in the Belmont Report (1979). By prioritising informed and voluntary consent, the study not only safeguarded participants' rights but also reinforced the research's credibility and ethical integrity.

### **1.13.6 Confidentiality and anonymity of research participants**

The principles of research ethics were upheld throughout all stages of the study, with emphasis on ensuring participants' confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were explicitly assured that their identities would remain protected and that all data collected would be treated with the utmost confidentiality. To uphold these standards, pseudonyms were employed in place of participants' real names, and no identifying information appeared in research materials, digital files, or storage devices (Sarantakos, 2000). This deliberate anonymisation process safeguarded participants' privacy and mitigated any potential risks associated with their involvement in the study.

Additionally, all data was securely stored on a password-protected device, accessible only to the researcher, ensuring the integrity and confidentiality of the information. These measures align with established ethical guidelines that emphasise protecting participants' rights and maintaining trust throughout the research process. By prioritising confidentiality and anonymity, the study not only complied with ethical standards but also reinforced its commitment to maintaining a safe and respectful environment in which participants could share their experiences and perspectives.

### **1.13.7 Protecting participants from harm**

Protecting participants from harm was a fundamental priority, ensuring that their well-being remained paramount throughout the research process. As voluntary participants

engaged in freely sharing information and dialogues, they were safeguarded against potential negative exposure or consequences arising from their involvement. This commitment to participant protection aligns with established research standards and ethical guidelines, which emphasize that participants' needs and rights must always take precedence over the objectives of the study (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 8).

To achieve this, a relationship of trust and collaboration was cultivated, creating an environment where participants felt respected, valued, and secure in their contributions. Their dignity was preserved through careful attention to minimising psychological, social, and emotional risks, as outlined by Mack et al. (2005:9). This included ensuring that sensitive topics were approached with care, avoiding undue pressure or discomfort during interactions, and maintaining strict confidentiality of shared information. Furthermore, participants were assured that their involvement would not result in adverse repercussions, whether personal, professional, or social.

By adhering to these rigorous ethical safeguards, the study not only upheld the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence but also reinforced its credibility and integrity as a scholarly endeavour committed to the ethical treatment of human subjects. Thus, research standards and ethics governed all interactions, consistently placing participants' needs above those of the study (Mack et al., 2005:8-9).

#### **1.14 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study was deliberately limited in scope. It focused exclusively on the implementation of the communicative approach within the FET phase in the Tshwane North district of Gauteng province. As such, the findings are context-specific and cannot be generalised to reflect the broader realities of all public schools across South Africa. The research involved a purposive sample of only six participants from township-based public high schools, whose experiences and practices reflect a particular subset of the nation's highly diverse educational landscape. This limited

sample size precludes claims of representativeness, particularly given the heterogeneity of South Africa's schooling system, which encompasses urban, rural, and schools from quintile one to five, each with distinct socio-economic, cultural, and pedagogical dynamics.

Furthermore, the study does not extend to an analysis of teacher-led assessments, which could have provided additional insights into the alignment between instructional practices and evaluative measures in developing communicative competence. While this omission may be viewed as a limitation, it reveals the need for future research that integrates assessment practices as a critical dimension of understanding teacher agency and pedagogical efficacy.

Despite these limitations, the study's design and findings offer a foundation for replication in other contexts, both within and beyond South Africa. Although the outcomes of such replications may vary due to differing contextual factors, certain recurring themes, such as the interplay between systemic constraints and teacher agency, are likely to emerge. This adaptability highlights the study's potential to inform broader discussions on educational reform and the role of literature-based instruction in developing communicative competence.

By acknowledging these limitations, the research not only delineates its boundaries but also identifies pathways for further inquiry, emphasising the iterative and cumulative nature of scholarly investigation in the field of education.

## **1.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the problem, research questions, theoretical framework, and research methodology have been outlined. Each section set out the processes guiding the study. The rationale was explained, situating the study within broader scholarly debates. It is believed that the development of an integrated approach to language learning was the most effective way in South African schools to encourage conceptual

and contextual fluency. The data, however, indicated the extent to which this was possible and the factors influencing its adoption.

## **Chapter One, Orientation of the Study**

Chapter One established the foundation of the study by presenting the research topic within its broader academic and socio-educational context, emphasising the challenges of teaching EFAL in South African township schools. It highlights systemic inequities, resource constraints, and the demands on educators who strive to support communicative competence, while underscoring the need for educational reform and greater teacher agency. The chapter articulates the study's rationale, addressing gaps in scholarship on how EFAL teachers navigate contextual challenges while implementing communicative language teaching principles through literature-based instruction. Central to this is the main research question: *How do EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles?* This was explored through subsidiary questions that examined teachers' understandings of communicative language teaching, their instructional practices, and the role of contextual factors in shaping their agency. By synthesising the research topic, background, rationale, and questions, the chapter outlines the study's aim and objectives, as well as its potential contributions to theoretical and practical advances in language education.

## **Chapter Two, Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Chapter Two provided a critical synthesis of relevant literature, situating the study within both international and national contexts and offering a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities associated with improving communicative competence through literature-based instruction in EFAL classrooms. It explored the theoretical foundations of the communicative approach and communicative language teaching, the role of literary texts in language education, and the systemic constraints that shape teacher agency in resource-constrained

environments. The discussion was anchored in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, including its Triadic Reciprocal Causation Model, which explains the interplay among personal, behavioural, and environmental factors that influence teachers' pedagogical decisions. By integrating theoretical and empirical perspectives, the chapter established a foundation for understanding how EFAL teachers might use literature to promote communicative competence while addressing structural inequities within South Africa's educational landscape.

### **Chapter Three, Research Strategy**

Chapter Three outlined the comprehensive research strategy, providing a detailed account of the research paradigm, data collection and analysis methods, quality assurance measures, ethical considerations, and overall research design. Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, the study employed qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, to capture the complexities of teacher agency and communicative language teaching in EFAL classrooms. Rigorous quality assurance measures, including triangulation, member checking, and maintaining a clear audit trail, were employed to ensure the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the findings. To ensure trustworthiness, several quality assurance strategies were implemented, including triangulation, member checking, and the maintenance of a comprehensive audit trail. The audit trail consisted of detailed documentation of methodological decisions, interview guides, field notes, coding frameworks, and analytic memos developed during the data analysis process. These records enabled the researcher to systematically track how interpretations were developed and refined, thereby enhancing the transparency, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical considerations were prioritized through informed consent, confidentiality, and safeguarding participants' well-being. The chosen research methods were justified by their alignment with the study's objectives and theoretical framework. This chapter, therefore, established a strong methodological foundation for addressing the research

questions and interpreting the findings within the broader context of educational reform.

#### **Chapter Four, Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Chapter Four presented the analysis and interpretation of the collected data, aiming to authentically present the findings by identifying and synthesising common emerging themes. Grounded in the study's theoretical framework, this chapter used a systematic qualitative content analysis approach to interpret participants' narratives, classroom observations, and document analyses. Through coding and thematic clustering, the chapter uncovered recurring patterns that highlighted teachers' conceptions of communicative language teaching, their instructional practices, and the systemic factors that influenced their agency. These themes were contextualized within Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, emphasizing the interplay between personal attributes, environmental constraints, and behavioural outcomes. By aligning the findings with existing literature, the chapter not only highlights the challenges faced by EFAL teachers in township schools but also demonstrates opportunities for transformative practice and provides a nuanced understanding of how literature-based instruction can be harnessed to enhance learners' communicative competence.

#### **Chapter Five, Discussion of Findings**

Chapter Five extended the analysis by synthesising the study's findings with the scholarship reviewed in Chapter Two. It generated new knowledge and contributed to the broader academic discourse on teacher agency and communicative language teaching. This chapter interpreted the data within the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, highlighting the interplay between personal, behavioural, and environmental factors that shape EFAL teachers' instructional practices in township schools. By aligning the study's emergent themes, such as the role of self-efficacy, the integration of literature into communicative activities, and the challenges posed by systemic constraints, with contemporary research, the chapter revealed the complexities of implementing communicative language teaching

principles in resource-constrained environments. Furthermore, it explored how resilient agency manifested in educators' efforts to prioritise learners' psychosocial needs alongside academic goals and offered insights into transformative teaching practices. Through this synthesis, the chapter not only addresses gaps in current scholarship but also provides actionable recommendations for policy and practice, emphasising the need for systemic reforms and targeted professional development to empower teachers and enhance learners' communicative competence.

## **Chapter Six, Conclusions and Recommendations**

Chapter Six synthesized the study's conclusions by revisiting the central research question posed in Chapter One and offered a comprehensive response grounded in the findings presented in Chapter Four. This chapter not only consolidated insights from the data but also situated these conclusions within broader theoretical and empirical frameworks on teacher agency, communicative language teaching, and systemic constraints in South African township schools. Building on these insights, the chapter proposes recommendations to address identified gaps, including targeted professional development, equitable resource allocation, and systemic reforms to support educators in effectively implementing communicative language-teaching-aligned practices. By aligning these recommendations with Social Cognitive Theory and contemporary scholarship, the chapter highlighted the interconnectedness of individual agency and structural enablement, emphasising the urgent need for policy interventions that empower teachers to enhance learners' communicative competence through literature-based instruction in resource-constrained environments.

### **1.16 CONCLUSION**

Chapter One introduced the study by situating it within the broader framework of EFAL teaching and learning in South African township schools, emphasising the challenges educators face in using literary texts to develop communicative competence. It

outlined the research problem, which centred on the gap between policy mandates for communicative language teaching and the practical realities of implementing these principles in under-resourced contexts.

It also defined key concepts, including the communicative approach, communicative language teaching, communicative competence, and teacher agency, which were critical to understanding the study's focus. Additionally, the chapter provided an overview of the study's aims, objectives, research questions, and sub-questions, while addressing the rationale and limitations of the research.

By situating the study within systemic inequities and resource constraints, the chapter highlighted the urgent need for reforms that empower teachers to navigate contested terrains effectively, guiding the reader into the structure and purpose of the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a comprehensive and critical engagement with the theoretical and empirical literature pertinent to this study, while situating the research within the broader discourses on the communicative approach, communicative language teaching (communicative language teaching), teacher agency, and communicative competence (communicative competence). Accordingly, it undertakes a review of existing scholarship on communicative competence, its foundational principles, and its practical applications in teaching English as an additional language (EFAL), particularly within resource-constrained contexts such as South African township schools. By critically analysing these dimensions, the chapter addresses the central research question: *how do EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles?*

The discussion explores the significance of teacher agency in optimising the potential of literary texts as pedagogical tools for inculcating communicative competence, while also mapping the theoretical terrain underpinning the study. Drawing on seminal works by scholars such as Savignon (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), and Bandura (1999), the chapter highlights the dynamic interplay between systemic constraints, individual agency, and pedagogical innovation. Furthermore, it underscores the transformative potential of literature-based instruction within the framework of communicative language teaching by emphasising how literary texts can bridge linguistic instruction with the incorporation of the emotional, cultural, and social dimensions of learning.

Finally, the chapter outlines the study's theoretical framework, grounded in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977, 1986, 1999, 2001). This theory provides a lens for understanding how teachers navigate structural constraints, exercise agency, and implement learner-centred practices in EFAL classrooms. By synthesising theoretical and empirical insights, the chapter establishes a solid foundation for the study, emphasising the critical roles of teacher agency and literature-based instruction

in advancing learners' communicative competence in multilingual, under-resourced settings. Through this scholarly and argumentative exploration, the chapter not only contextualises the research within existing literature but also sets the stage for addressing the identified gaps in knowledge and practice.

## **2.2 INTRODUCING THE TERRAIN**

The landscape of English language teaching has undergone significant transformations over the past several decades, driven by evolving pedagogical paradigms and an increasing global emphasis on communicative competence. Whether in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL), or in EFAL contexts, the role of the teacher has shifted from that of a mere transmitter of linguistic knowledge to a facilitator of learning and an agent of pedagogical innovation (Gilbert, 2021). This repositioning reflects a broader movement toward learner-centred education, where the development of authentic communication skills, critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness is prioritized over rote memorization and grammatical accuracy.

Central to this shift is the concept of teacher agency, which relates to the capacity of educators to exercise professional judgment, adapt curricula, and innovate within their classrooms despite structural constraints. In EFAL settings, literature emerges as a particularly potent tool for enacting such agency. Literary texts offer rich, contextually embedded language use that can stimulate meaningful interaction, elicit empathy, and provoke critical dialogue. When harnessed effectively, literature becomes more than a vehicle for language instruction; it functions as a dynamic site for transformative pedagogy that enables teachers to cultivate communicative competence across the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

However, in the South African context, the realisation of this pedagogical vision is significantly influenced by systemic challenges. The CAPS statement (DBE, 2011, 11) nominally supports the development of communicative competence, with objectives

such as “using language creatively and effectively” and “engaging in sustained oral communication.” Yet, there are no concrete methodologies or instructional frameworks to guide teachers in implementing these goals. As a result, educators often default to traditional, transmission-based approaches that prioritise content coverage and grammatical correctness over interactive, meaning-focused language use (Govender, 2018; Pillay, 2016).

These challenges are exacerbated by overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and an assessment-driven culture that privileges formal accuracy over functional fluency. Mendelowitz (2014) aptly points out that such conditions constrain teachers’ ability to experiment with innovative practices, while Calvert (2016: 53) observes that many educators become complicit in reproducing rigid pedagogies, either due to a lack of confidence or insufficient professional support. This disjunction between curriculum intent and classroom reality underscores a critical gap; while teachers are expected to be “high-level knowledge workers” and agents of innovation (Schleicher, 2018:36), they are rarely afforded the autonomy, training, or resources necessary to fulfil this role.

Moreover, there is a notable scarcity of local research on the integration of communicative language teaching principles in South African EFAL classrooms, particularly in township schools. While Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely adopted and studied in international contexts such as the United States, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea where structured teacher training, sustained professional development, and well-resourced curricula support its implementation (Savignon, 1972; Badal, 2019) the South African educational context presents a different set of conditions. In many South African schools, particularly in township and rural contexts, teachers often encounter structural constraints such as large class sizes, limited instructional resources, and insufficient training in communicative methodologies. Furthermore, although national curriculum policies, such as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), refer to communicative and learner-centred approaches, these principles are not always accompanied by the theoretical grounding or practical training necessary for effective classroom implementation. As a result, the adoption of CLT in South Africa remains uneven and

under-theorised, with limited empirical research examining how communicative approaches can be adapted to the specific sociolinguistic and educational realities of the country.

A limited number of studies have explored the implementation of communicative approaches to language teaching within the South African context. For example, Engelbrecht (2016) and Mulaudzi (2016) examined the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in South African classrooms and highlighted the complexities associated with its implementation. Mulaudzi's (2016) findings are particularly pertinent to the present study, as they identify several factors contributing to the ineffective adoption of CLT and communicative approaches in South African schools. These factors include limited teacher training in communicative methodologies, insufficient understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT, large class sizes, and contextual constraints that hinder the use of learner-centred pedagogies. Such challenges suggest that while communicative approaches are widely promoted in curriculum policies, their practical implementation remains problematic, particularly in under-resourced schooling environments. Consequently, there remains a need for further research that examines how communicative approaches can be meaningfully implemented in diverse South African classrooms, especially in township schools where contextual realities may significantly influence pedagogical practices. Although literary texts are recognised globally as a valuable resource for language learning, few studies in the South African context explore their potential to holistically develop communicative competence. This gap in the literature highlights the urgent need for context-sensitive research that bridges theory and practice. As Farrugia (2021:11) asserts, "Change needs an active understanding and creative thinking to couple the appropriate response." By investigating how teachers navigate the tensions between policy mandates and pedagogical realities, and how they can harness literature to promote authentic communication, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced, practical, and empowering vision of EFAL teaching.

The discussion thus far underscores the complexity of language education in multilingual, resource-constrained environments. To further contextualise these challenges and opportunities, the following section examines global trends in

language teaching, tracing the evolution of the communicative approach, the role of literature in language acquisition, and the implications of these trends for teaching practice in South Africa. This international perspective provides a critical benchmark against which local practices can be understood, evaluated, and transformed.

### **2.3 GLOBAL TRENDS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

The global landscape of language education has undergone a significant transformation over the past five decades, largely due to the rise of communicative language teaching. Since its emergence in the 1970s, this approach has become the dominant paradigm in second- and foreign-language instruction worldwide (Richards, 2006). As Chang (2011) observes, communicative language teaching is not merely a method but the prevailing mode of language teaching across diverse educational systems. He explains that this proliferation reflects a collective acknowledgement that language is far more than a system of grammatical rules but is a dynamic, socially embedded tool for meaning-making and interaction. Thompson (2003:37) augments this view by arguing that language “refers to the complex array of interlocking relationships which form the basis of communication and social interaction.” This conceptual shift from form-focused to function-driven pedagogy marked a watershed moment in language teaching by positioning authentic communication at the heart of the learning process.

By the 1990s, communicative language teaching had gained widespread international adoption, particularly in EFL contexts, where the demands of globalization and cross-cultural communication necessitated a shift away from rote memorization and mechanical drills (Liao, 2000; Ying, 2010). Traditional approaches, such as grammar-translation and audiolingualism, which prioritized linguistic accuracy and structural mastery, were increasingly criticized for their failure to equip learners with the ability to use language meaningfully in real-world contexts (Long, 2009). In contrast, communicative language teaching foregrounded fluency, learner autonomy, and interaction, advocating for classroom practices that simulate genuine communicative

situations (Wei, Lin, & Litton, 2018). As Savignon (2002) explains, communicative language teaching represents a “universal effort” to harmonise linguistic theory with practical application, adapting flexibly across cultural and educational settings to support language proficiency and sociocultural competence.

This evolution reflects a broader pedagogical reorientation toward learner-centred education (Adinew, 2015), where teachers are reconceptualized not as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators of interactive, experiential learning (Gilbert, 2021). In this model, literature, which has long been recognized for its linguistic richness and cultural depth, has emerged as a powerful medium for communicative language development. Literary texts provide authentic language input, stimulate critical engagement, and create opportunities for discussion, debate, and creative expression, thereby integrating all four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Badal, 2019; Savignon, 1972). In countries such as the United States, Japan, and South Korea, literature is strategically embedded within language curricula, supported by structured teacher training, pedagogical resources, and institutional frameworks that enable effective implementation (Chang, 2011; Khan, 2016).

However, despite the global dominance of communicative language teaching, its implementation remains uneven, as it is significantly shaped by contextual realities. A growing body of research reveals a persistent gap between policy ideals and classroom practices. Studies by Razmjoo and Riazi (2006), Bataineh, Bataineh, and Thabet (2011) in Yemen, Jin & Yoo (2019) in the United States, and Wong (2012) consistently report that many teachers continue to rely on grammar-focused, teacher-centred methods, often due to systemic constraints or lack of confidence in their own communicative competence. This disjunction is not merely logistical; it is deeply rooted in teacher-related factors such as linguistic proficiency, self-efficacy, and professional knowledge (Canale & Swain, 1980). Non-native English-speaking teachers frequently report anxiety about their spoken fluency and cultural command of the language, which can inhibit their ability to facilitate authentic interaction (Choi, 2000; Han, 2016; Lee, 2018; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014; Li, 2020). When teachers lack confidence in using English communicatively, they are more likely to retreat to familiar, control-oriented practices that prioritize grammatical accuracy over meaningful dialogue.

Christianto's (2019) study in Indonesia illustrates this tension; while teachers acknowledged the value of communicative language teaching in improving learners' communicative competence, they struggled to implement it due to large class sizes, rigid curricula, and insufficient professional development. Similar findings were reported by Daflizar (2013) and Yanti (2019), who identified a consistent gap between teachers' theoretical understanding of communicative language teaching and their practical application. In contrast, studies by Khan (2016) and Chang (2011) revealed more successful integration of communicative language teaching where teachers operated in resource-rich environments with institutional support and access to training. This contrast reveals a critical insight: the successful implementation of communicative language teaching depends not only on teachers' beliefs, but also on the structural conditions that enable or constrain their agency.

This global evidence starkly contrasts with the South African context. While countries such as South Korea and Japan have institutionalized communicative language teaching through comprehensive teacher education and curriculum design, South Africa's CAPS (DBE, 2011) pays lip service to communicative principles. Although CAPS promotes objectives such as "using language creatively and effectively" and "engaging in sustained oral communication," it offers no methodological guidance or pedagogical frameworks to support these goals (Mendelowitz, 2014; Govender, 2018). As a result, teachers who are already burdened by overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and high-stakes assessment regimes often default to transmission-based models that prioritize content coverage over communicative practice (Pillay, 2016; Calvert, 2016:53).

Moreover, unlike in many EFL contexts where communicative language teaching is supported by targeted professional development, South African EFAL teachers often lack the training and confidence to facilitate literature-based, interactive lessons that demand improvisation, cultural interpretation, and spontaneous language use (Badal, 2018; Nel & Müller, 2010). When literary texts contain idiomatic expressions or culturally nuanced references, teachers with limited fluency may struggle to mediate meaning effectively, leading to superficial or fragmented engagement. This reality not only undermines the potential of literature as a tool for communicative competence but

also reinforces a cycle of dependency on textbook-driven instruction and grammar-focused assessment.

The synthesis of available global studies thus reveals a dual imperative: communicative language teaching cannot succeed without both teacher capacity and systemic support. While South African teachers are expected to function as “high-level knowledge workers” and agents of innovation, as Schleicher (2018:36) observes, they are rarely afforded the autonomy, resources, or professional development necessary to fulfill this role. The gap between policy aspiration and pedagogical reality is not unique to South Africa, but it is exacerbated by the country’s history of educational inequality and its multilingual, under-resourced schooling system.

This critical comparison highlights the importance of context-sensitive research that transcends the importation of global models and instead examines how communicative language teaching principles can be meaningfully adapted to local realities. As Farrugia (2021:11) reminds us, “Change needs an active understanding and creative thinking to couple the appropriate response.” The following section builds on this foundation by examining the role of literature in communicative language teaching, exploring how literary texts can be optimized not only as linguistic resources but as catalysts for dialogue, critical reflection, and transformative learning in the South African EFAL classroom.

## **2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING CONTEXT, A SITE OF INEQUALITY, IDEOLOGY, AND IMPERATIVE CHANGE**

The South African education system operates within one of the most linguistically diverse yet ideologically stratified environments in the world. With eleven official languages, the country’s linguistic landscape is not merely a reflection of cultural plurality but a direct product of historical power relations and post-colonial policy decisions. As McKay (2009) argues, the social context of language education is never neutral. It is shaped by deliberate political choices that elevate certain languages while

marginalizing others. In South Africa, English has been institutionally anointed as the de facto LoLT, a marker of economic mobility and national integration, despite being the first language of only a small minority (approximately 9.6%) of the population (Stats SA, 2022). This symbolic and functional privileging of English constitutes not just a linguistic hierarchy but a form of linguistic imperialism. It privileges one language and its cultural capital at the expense of others (Phillipson, 1992). The consequences of this are neither incidental nor benign; they are deeply embedded in the daily realities of learners, particularly those in township and rural schools who must navigate the gulf between their home languages and the dominant medium of instruction.

This linguistic disjuncture creates a dual burden for learners. They must acquire English as an EFAL subject while also mastering increasingly complex academic content through it. As Kapp (2004) observes, the transition from basic language proficiency to the sophisticated linguistic demands of secondary and tertiary education remains one of the most critical, yet under-supported, challenges in South African schooling. The implications are stark. International assessments such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) consistently reveal that learners from low-income communities, who are disproportionately EFAL speakers, perform significantly below international benchmarks (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena & Palane, 2016). These outcomes are not simply a reflection of individual learner deficiency, but rather a manifestation of systemic educational failure. They stem from unequal access, under-resourced schools, and pedagogical models that fail to account for multilingualism as a cognitive and cultural asset.

CAPS (DBE, 2011) pays lip service to communicative competence, calling for learners to “use language creatively and effectively” and “engage in sustained oral communication.” As the previous section on global trends demonstrated, such aspirational goals are meaningless without the pedagogical frameworks, teacher support, and institutional conditions necessary for their realization. While countries such as Japan, South Korea, and the United States have embedded communicative language teaching into their systems through structured teacher training and curricular alignment (Chang, 2011; Khan, 2016). South Africa remains caught in a paradox. It prescribes communicative outcomes while perpetuating rigid, uncommunicative

pedagogical practices. In this context, CAPS functions more as a prescriptive checklist than as a curriculum. It demands outcomes without enabling the processes that lead to them (Badal, 2018).

The structural barriers are well-documented, overcrowded classrooms West & Miller (2020), Moloi & Chetty (2018), Spaul (2012) and Meier & Marais (2012), underqualified or underconfident teachers Spaul (2013), (2015), Taylor & Taylor (2013), limited access to teaching materials (Anjani, 2023), and high-stakes examinations that prioritize textual reproduction over critical engagement (Govender, 2018; Zimmerman, 2010; Pillay, 2016). These constraints are not merely logistical; they are ideological. They reinforce a colonial model of education in which knowledge is transmitted rather than co-constructed, and in which the teacher's role is to control rather than facilitate. As Calvert (2016, 53) notes, many teachers become complicit in this system, not out of resistance to change, but because they are denied the agency, training, and trust to innovate. The result is a perpetual cycle of transmission-based instruction. Here, literature, despite its potential as a vehicle for dialogue, identity exploration, and language in use, is reduced to a source of grammar drills, plot summaries, and exam-driven analysis.

This reality stands in sharp contrast to the global trajectory of language teaching, where communicative language teaching has evolved into a dynamic, context-responsive framework that positions teachers as facilitators and learners as active meaning-makers (Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2002). In South Africa, however, the gap between global theory and local practice is not just wide but is actively widening. The systemic undermining of teacher proficiency in spoken English, particularly in multilingual classrooms, further complicates efforts to implement communicative practices (Nel & Müller, 2010; Lee, 2018). When teachers themselves lack confidence in using English fluently or in interpreting culturally nuanced texts, they retreat to safe, controlled methods such as grammar-translation, rote learning, and textbook dependence. These methods prioritize accuracy over authenticity. In this way, the very teachers expected to be “agents of innovation” (Schleicher, 2018:36) are disempowered by the conditions in which they work.

Within this constrained terrain, a radical possibility remains: the transformative potential of literature-based pedagogy. As argued in earlier sections, literature offers more than linguistic input. It provides a space for critical engagement, emotional resonance, and intercultural dialogue. When teachers are empowered to exercise agency, literary texts can become sites of resistance, reflection, and reimagination. They allow learners not only to acquire language but also to assert their identities and interrogate social realities (Christie, 2008; Probyn, 2006). However, this potential remains largely unrealized in the FET phase, where the pressures of matriculation and curriculum coverage eclipse opportunities for meaningful interaction.

The evidence is clear: pedagogical innovation cannot succeed without addressing the structural inequities that define South African education. But equally, no structural reform will be effective without recognizing the central role of the teacher as a knowledge worker and change agent. What is needed is not another top-down policy directive, but a dual transformation. This requires systemic investment in teacher mentoring, resource provision, and curriculum flexibility, coupled with a professional culture that trusts and supports teacher agency. Only then can literature move from being a marginalized component of the EFAL curriculum to becoming a central instrument for improving communicative competence, critical literacy, and social equity.

In this light, the integration of literature into EFAL classrooms is not merely a pedagogical choice; it is a strategic approach. It is a political and ethical imperative. It challenges the status quo, reclaims the voices of teachers and learners, and offers a pathway toward a more just and inclusive education system. The following section builds on this argument by further exploring the EFAL teaching context.

### **2.4.1 English First Additional Language teaching context, navigating linguistic complexity, structural inequity, and the illusion of communicative intent**

In South Africa, most learners engage with English not as a second language, but as a First Additional Language (FAL). This designation underscores the profound linguistic and cognitive distance that many must overcome to achieve functional proficiency. For many students, particularly in township and rural schools, English functions as a de facto foreign language (Rao, 2019). It is layered on top of multiple home languages and embedded within complex sociolinguistic ecologies. This reality underscores a central paradox in South African education: English is simultaneously a school subject, the primary medium of instruction (LoLT), and the dominant language of assessment, higher education, and socio-economic mobility. Yet, it remains the first language of only a small minority (Rudwick, 2020). The implications of this paradox are profound. They constitute a systemic linguistic burden that exacerbates inequality and places unsustainable demands on both teachers and learners.

The multifaceted role of English in South African schooling transforms language learning into a high-stakes endeavour. As Tosky and Scott (2014) observe, English is the gatekeeper to academic progression and economic participation. It dominates universities, the corporate sector, and digital spaces. In the information age, where the ability to “organize information into knowledge” has become a fundamental survival skill, functional literacy in English is existential (Tarun & Shailaja, 2025). Yet literacy rates remain alarmingly low, particularly among learners from historically disadvantaged communities. PIRLS data reveal a system that fails to deliver on its promise (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena & Palane, 2017). The inability to perform competently in English does not merely limit academic achievement; it reproduces cycles of marginalization by denying learners access to the very tools needed for upward mobility and civic participation.

This context demands a pedagogical approach that prioritizes authentic communicative competence: the ability to use language meaningfully, appropriately,

and fluently across diverse contexts. As Hymes (1972) originally conceptualized, and as later elaborated by Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence encompasses not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, and strategic capacity. Ellis (1996) reinforces this, arguing that the goal of second language acquisition is effective communication in real-world situations. This theoretical consensus aligns with global shifts in language pedagogy, where communicative language teaching has become the dominant paradigm in both EFL and ESL contexts (Richards, 2006; Chang, 2011).

In South Africa, this alignment remains largely rhetorical. The curriculum asserts that FAL learning should enable learners to “acquire the language skills necessary to communicate accurately and appropriately, taking into account audience, purpose, and context” (DBE, 2011:9). On the surface, this objective resonates with the core tenets of communicative language teaching and the broader construct of communicative competence. Yet, as Badal (2018) notes, this vision is rendered symbolic rather than substantive. CAPS fails to define “communicative competence” in practical terms or to provide strategies for encouraging interaction. Instead, it offers vague directives such as teaching grammar “in the context of the above skills and as part of a systematic language development programme” (DBE, 2011:11). These explanations remain contextualized and ultimately unactionable.

This disconnect is further exposed in CAPS’s treatment of the communicative approach. The policy asserts that “learners learn to read by doing a great deal of reading and learn to write by doing much writing” (DBE, 2011: 16), echoing the experiential tenet of communicative language teaching. However, as Howatt (1984, 279) distinguishes, this reflects the “weak version” of the communicative approach: communicative activities are incorporated into a predominantly structural syllabus, rather than reorienting pedagogy around meaning-making and interaction. The strong version of communicative language teaching, in contrast, demands a fundamental shift in classroom dynamics, from teacher-centred instruction to learner agency, from grammatical drills to task-based communication, and from textual reproduction to creative expression. CAPS aligns with the former while institutionalizing the latter,

thereby creating a policy-practice chasm that teachers are expected to bridge without support.

This tension is particularly acute in the FET phase, where learners must simultaneously develop linguistic proficiency and master increasingly complex academic content. As Dos Santos (2020:104) argues, curriculum design in such diverse contexts must be grounded in theories and methodologies that empower teachers to adapt instruction to learners' social, cultural, and linguistic realities. Yet, CAPS provides a rigid, one-size-fits-all framework that fails to account for South African's classroom heterogeneity. Teachers are thus caught in a double bind. They are expected to foster creativity, critical thinking, and communicative fluency while working within a system that prioritises content coverage, standardised testing, and grammatical conformity (Pillay, 2016; Govender, 2018).

Structural constraints compound this challenge. Overcrowded classrooms, underqualified or underconfident teachers, and limited access to literary and digital resources all undermine the realization of communicative goals (Grussendorff et al., 2014; Sithebe & Moore, 2015). As highlighted earlier, teacher proficiency and self-efficacy are crucial determinants of the implementation of communicative language teaching (Choi, 2000; Lee, 2018; Christianto, 2019). In multilingual classrooms where English is neither the learners' nor the teachers' home language, the difficulties multiply. When literary texts contain idiomatic expressions, cultural allusions, or nuanced discourse features, teachers with limited fluency may struggle to mediate meaning effectively. The result is superficial or fragmented engagement, reinforcing a pedagogy of avoidance in which complex texts are reduced to grammar exercises, theme identification, or plot summaries (Nel & Müller, 2010).

The South African FAL classroom, therefore, is a site of struggle for language instruction. It is a contested terrain where global pedagogical ideals collide with local realities of inequality, under-resourcing, and historical disadvantage. While CAPS articulates aspirational goals, it fails to provide the epistemological clarity, methodological scaffolding, or institutional support necessary for their realization. The burden of innovation and adaptation thus falls disproportionately on teachers, who are

expected to function as “high-level knowledge workers” and agents of change, but are rarely afforded the autonomy, training, or trust to do so (Schleicher, 2018:36; Calvert, 2016:53).

This gap between policy rhetoric and pedagogical reality reveals an urgent need to reimagine an EFL teaching approach that is both theoretically grounded and contextually responsive. If communicative competence is to be more than a curricular platitude, it must be operationalised through concrete strategies, sustained professional mentorship, and a pedagogy that values multilingualism as a resource rather than a deficit. Literature, with its potential to integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing within meaningful, culturally resonant contexts, offers a powerful vehicle for this transformation. However, its effective use depends on a systemic commitment to teacher empowerment and curricular reform.

The following section builds on the argument made here. It focuses on the fact that the current system fails both teachers and learners by maintaining a system that creates an illusion of structure at the expense of teacher agency.

## **2.5 CURRICULUM CONSTRAINTS FOR ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE, THE ILLUSION OF STRUCTURE AND THE EROSION OF TEACHER AGENCY**

CAPS (DBE, 2011) present itself as a comprehensive framework designed to ensure curricular coherence, equitable access, and the improvement of learners’ “full range of cognitive abilities” (Grussendorff et al., 2014:17). On the surface, its detailed ATPs, fortnightly breakdowns, and prescriptive lesson structures (DBE, 2011) appear to offer clarity and consistency, especially in a system marked by historical disparities and uneven teacher capacity.

However, beneath this veneer of rigour lies a deeply problematic reality. CAPS functions less as an enabling curriculum and more as a mechanism of control. It prioritizes performativity over pedagogy and standardization over responsiveness

(Ramatlapanana & Makonye, 2012; Msibi & Mchunu, 2013). In the context of EFAL, where learners bring diverse linguistic repertoires and varying levels of proficiency, this rigidity becomes a limiting factor that actively hinders the development of authentic communicative competence.

As established in the previous section, global trends in language teaching have long moved toward learner-centred, context-responsive models grounded in communicative language teaching. In these models, meaning-making, interaction, and fluency take precedence over grammatical accuracy and textual reproduction (Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2002). However, in South Africa, CAPS institutionalizes a contradictory logic. It endorses the Communicative Approach while structurally undermining its implementation. The curriculum mandates outcomes such as “using language creatively and effectively” and “engaging in sustained oral communication” (DBE, 2011, 11), but provides no methodological guidance, practical examples, or space for teacher innovation.

Instead, it imposes a template-driven pedagogy. This includes fortnightly plans, standardized assessments, and rigid sequencing. These mechanisms reduce teaching to a series of measurable, assessable tasks, each aligned with a specific cognitive level in Bloom’s taxonomy (Coenders & Voogt, 2012). In this environment, the teacher is not a facilitator of learning but a curriculum technician, tasked with delivering content rather than responding to learners’ emergent needs.

This performative climate, as Campbell (2012) notes, severely constrains teacher agency. Agency is the capacity to make professional judgments, adapt materials, and design meaningful learning experiences. While scholarship on teacher agency envisions educators as reflective, creative, and autonomous knowledge workers (Gilbert, 2021; Biesta, 2015), CAPS positions them as implementers of a pre-determined script. Lesson plans are no longer sites of pedagogical innovation but bureaucratic documents that must align with assessment rubrics and pacing guides.

As a result, opportunities for authentic language use, such as group discussions, role-plays, or learner-generated texts, are often sacrificed in favour of grammar drills, exam

preparation, and textual analysis that prioritize content coverage over communicative depth (Pillay, 2016; Govender, 2018).

The consequences of this structural inflexibility are particularly acute in EFAL classrooms, where learners require intensive, scaffolded support to navigate the cognitive and linguistic demands of academic English. Grussendorff et al. (2014) argue that the prescriptive nature of CAPS undermines the very conditions necessary for deep language acquisition. It promotes superficial engagement rather than sustained, meaningful interaction. Learners are taught to produce grammatically correct sentences, but rarely to use them in contextually appropriate, socially meaningful ways.

This distinction is central to Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence. As Corder (1982: 92) argues, second language teaching must extend beyond grammatical competence to include the "information rules" and "speaking rules" of the target language, as well as the sociocultural norms that govern when, how, and why language is used. CAPS offers no guidance on how to teach these pragmatic dimensions, nor does it create opportunities for teachers to integrate real-life communication, cultural context, or learner voice into their instruction.

Moreover, the curriculum operates under unrealistic assumptions about resource availability and classroom conditions. While CAPS prescribes activities such as group work, project-based learning, and engagement with literary texts, it fails to acknowledge that many schools lack basic resources, including textbooks, libraries, and digital infrastructure (Taylor & Coetzee, 2013).

In under-resourced township and rural schools, teachers are expected to deliver a "communicative" curriculum without the necessary tools. Coenders and Voogt (2012) found that teachers struggling with communicative language teaching cited large class sizes, lack of materials, and poor learner proficiency as key barriers. Yet the curriculum offers no differentiated pathways or alternative strategies for such contexts. Instead, it demands uniformity, thereby exacerbating inequity by holding all schools to the same standard, regardless of their material or linguistic realities.

This disjuncture between policy and practice is further compounded by the absence of authentic language input. As Widdowson (2003:112) argues, language learning requires exposure to “the natural conditions of actual language use.” This entails spontaneous, interactive, and contextually embedded communication. CAPS, however, treats language as a set of discrete skills to be “built-in” (Skehan, 1996:19) through mechanical repetition, rather than acquired through meaningful interaction. Grammar is taught in isolation, vocabulary is decontextualized, and literature is reduced to plot summaries and exam-focused analysis. The result is a transactional model of language learning, where learners memorize forms without understanding functions, and where communication is rehearsed rather than lived.

This critique is not merely logistical. It is also epistemological and ideological. CAPS reflects a colonial legacy of education as transmission rather than transformation. It values control over creativity, compliance over critical thinking, and standardization over diversity. In this framework, multilingualism is not harnessed as a cognitive and cultural resource but treated as a deficit to be corrected through English monolingualism (Probyn, 2008).

Teachers who might otherwise use learners’ home languages or cultural knowledge as bridges to English are discouraged from doing so. This discouragement arises not explicitly from policy, but from the implicit logic of a curriculum that equates linguistic purity with academic success. The implications for teacher agency are profound. When educators are denied the autonomy to adapt, improvise, or innovate, they become complicit in a system that prioritizes compliance over competence (Calvert, 2016, 53). As Anto, Coenders, and Voogt (2012) found, many teachers do not relate lessons to learners’ lived experiences, contextualize vocabulary, or provide opportunities for collaborative practice. This disengagement is not a failure of will. Rather, it is a rational response to structural constraints and a lack of understanding of communicative language teaching.

Thus, the central argument of this section is that CAPS is incompatible with the principles of communicative language teaching. It creates the illusion of structure while eroding the conditions necessary for meaningful language acquisition. To claim that

the curriculum supports communicative language teaching while denying teachers the time, resources, and autonomy to implement it is to perpetuate what Biesta (2009) calls 'learnification.' This is the reduction of education to measurable outcomes at the expense of democratic, transformative learning.

This section has explored the disjuncture between the ideology and practice of CAPS. It critiqued the lack of theoretical and practical demonstration of the communicative approach methodology. The following section discusses the importance of enhancing teacher agency.

## **2.6 TEACHER AGENCY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING, NAVIGATING CONSTRAINT AND ENACTING POSSIBILITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN EFAL CLASSROOMS**

Teacher agency is not a peripheral attribute of effective teaching; it is an epistemological and ethical core of transformative pedagogy, particularly in contexts defined by systemic inequity and curricular rigidity. In South African EFAL classrooms, where learners navigate the dual challenge of acquiring English while engaging with complex academic content, teachers are positioned at the fulcrum of educational possibility. They are expected to cultivate communicative competence, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, yet they operate within environments characterised by overcrowded classrooms, under-resourced schools, and a prescriptive curriculum that often prioritises form over function (Pillay, 2016; Govender, 2018; Grussendorff et al., 2014).

In this context, teacher agency emerges not as a luxury but as a necessary act of resistance, adaptation, and professional integrity.

Scholarly conceptualizations of teacher agency have evolved beyond notions of individual autonomy to embrace a relational and contextually embedded understanding. Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015: 138) define it as "the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively in relation to their professional work,"

emphasizing that agency is not exercised in isolation but is shaped by the interplay between personal dispositions and structural conditions. It is, as Barker (2008) argues, the “socially constituted capacity to act” emblematic of a dynamic negotiation between policy mandates, institutional constraints, and the lived realities of learners.

This relational view positions teachers not as passive implementers of curriculum, but as knowledgeable agents who interpret, adapt, and sometimes subvert official directives to meet the needs of their students (Badal, 2018; Appadoo-Ramsamy, 2023).

In the global literature, teacher agency is increasingly recognized as a critical dimension of professionalism, particularly in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) contexts where the demands of communicative language teaching require pedagogical flexibility and innovation (Kang, 2017; Nguyen & Bui, 2016). However, as Weng et al. (2020) observe, while there is growing interest in teacher agency, a significant gap remains in research on how teachers enact change within the specificities of language classrooms. This gap is particularly acute in multilingual, postcolonial contexts, such as South Africa, where the challenges are not merely pedagogical but deeply sociopolitical.

In South African township schools, teacher agency often takes on a covert, survival-oriented form. Teachers must navigate not only curriculum constraints but also the broader social ills of poverty, crime, and inequality that directly impact the learning environment (Badal, 2018). In such conditions, agency is not expressed through grand innovations, but through micro-resistances: the quiet adaptation of lesson plans, the use of learners’ home languages as cognitive bridges, or the prioritization of emotional safety over content coverage.

As Badal (2018) found, proactive teachers often walk a fine line between compliance with bureaucratic demands and fidelity to their pedagogical convictions. They engage in what Priestley et al. (2012) describe as “finding space to manoeuvre” within tightly prescribed systems. In a constrictive environment, teacher agency becomes the primary mechanism through which curriculum mandates can be transformed into meaningful learning experiences. Without it, communicative language teaching

remains a symbolic aspiration, which is disconnected from the “natural conditions of actual language use” (Widdowson, 2003:112).

Scholarship on teacher agency in South Africa underscores the interdependence of individual initiative and structural enablement. Pillay (2016) and Long et al. (2017) highlight how teachers perceive themselves as mediators between systemic constraints and learners’ needs, often improvising in the absence of resources or support. Appadoo-Ramsamy (2023) adopts a post-humanist lens, arguing that agency is co-constructed through interactions with non-human actors, policies, textbooks, and digital tools. This suggests that agency is not solely an individual trait but an emergent property of the teaching environment.

Similarly, Cappy (2016) and Govender (2018) stress that teachers’ capacity to act as agents of change is profoundly shaped by access to professional development, collaborative networks, and supportive leadership. A critical insight from these studies is that agency is not uniformly distributed. It is constrained by historical legacies of apartheid, ongoing resource inequities, and the marginalization of multilingualism in the classroom (Cappy, 2016). However, where enabling conditions exist, such as PLCs, reflective practice, and a strong sense of professional identity, teachers demonstrate remarkable capacity for innovation (Goddard et al., 2007; Long et al., 2017).

Educators who see themselves as agents of social justice, for instance, are more likely to challenge linguistic hierarchies and critique the hegemony of English, even within the confines of CAPS (Cappy, 2016).

This synthesis reveals a central paradox. While teacher agency is essential for meaningful language education, it is often expected to flourish in the absence of the very conditions that make it possible. Therefore, the cultivation of teacher agency must be accompanied by systemic investment in professional development, collaborative structures, and equitable distribution of resources. Agency cannot be mandated; it must be nurtured.

The argument raised here emphasizes that teacher agency is both essential and constrained, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of how this agency can be supported and realized.

The following section explores the significance of professional mentoring in fostering teacher agency for transformative teaching.

## **2.7 THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND AGENCY**

As explained previously, teachers are not merely implementers of the curriculum. They are epistemic agents, knowledge producers, ethical decision-makers, and transformative actors positioned at the nexus of policy, pedagogy, and lived classroom reality (Biesta, 2015; Kennedy, 2015). In South African EFAL classrooms, learners navigate complex linguistic, cognitive, and socio-economic challenges; therefore, the role of the teacher transcends instruction. Their role becomes a moral and political act of mediation, empowerment, and resistance (Grubb, 2007).

However, as the previous section on curriculum constraints demonstrated, the current educational landscape is dominated by the rigid, performative logic of CAPS, which systematically undermines this potential by reducing teachers to technicians of content delivery rather than architects of meaningful learning (Anto, Coenders & Voogt, 2012; Grussendorff & Booyse, 2014). In this context, professional development emerges as a critical lever for restoring teacher agency and reimagining pedagogical possibilities.

Teacher agency, as a theoretical and practical construct, refers to teachers' capacity to make informed, reflective, and intentional decisions that shape teaching and learning in ways that respond to local needs, values, and contexts (Priestley et al., 2015). Crucial in all this, though, as the investigators here so realistically show us, is the crucial role of teachers in their classrooms and the decisions and choices they make about language use, both their own and their learners' (Menken & García, 2010). Teachers' language policies have the authority to affirm or undermine the language

and intellectual resources learners bring to the classroom, and thereby to empower or constrain them as citizens of a multilingual world (Menken & García, 2010). It is not autonomy in isolation, but relational agency revolving around a dynamic interplay between individual will and structural conditions (Priestley, 2011). As Wang et al. (2014:431) articulate, teacher professionalism comprises three interdependent dimensions: professional knowledge, teacher autonomy, and responsibility, with responsibility reflecting the ethical commitment to learners' holistic development. Agency, therefore, is not merely about what teachers do, but why and how they do it. It is the ability to navigate, negotiate, and sometimes resist prescribed curricula in ways to prioritize learner engagement, linguistic authenticity, and critical consciousness (Farrugia, 2021; Biesta, 2009).

However, agency cannot be assumed or mandated; it must be cultivated, supported, and sustained. As Bandura (1989) argues, individual agency is profoundly shaped by sociocultural factors, which include access to resources, institutional trust, and opportunities for collaboration (Wong, Athanases, & Banes, 2017). In under-resourced EFAL classrooms, where teachers face overcrowded conditions, limited materials, and high-stakes assessments, the exercise of agency is often constrained not by lack of will but by systemic disempowerment (Govender, 2018; Pillay, 2016). Without institutional support, even the most well-intentioned educators may default to transmission-based methods, not because of pedagogical preference, but as a survival strategy within a system that values compliance over creativity (Calvert, 2016, 53).

This context makes professional development indispensable. Professional development should not be conceived as a one-off workshop or a top-down training exercise, but as an ongoing, context-sensitive, and collaborative process that builds both teacher knowledge and professional identity (Cappy, 2016; Long et al., 2017). Effective professional development addresses not only what teachers need to know, such as the multidimensional nature of communicative competence, which encompasses fluency, sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, and strategic interaction (Canale & Swain, 1980), but also how to enact this knowledge in classrooms where English is often a third or fourth language (Sithebe & Moore, 2015).

As Badal (2018) and Long et al. (2017) argue, many teachers lack a coherent understanding of communicative language teaching, often reducing it to “more speaking” or “group work” without grasping its foundational principles of meaning negotiation, authentic interaction, and learner-centredness.

This gap between theory and practice is not unique to South Africa. Global studies reveal a persistent disconnect. Rempe, Mavuso, and Shumba (2016) found that theoretical learning does not easily translate into classroom practice. While teachers may believe in communicative language teaching, they often fail to implement it due to linguistic insecurity, lack of confidence, or absence of practical models (Chang, 2011; Christianto, 2019; Daflizar, 2013). Huang (2017) identifies a troubling pattern; many teachers claim to use communicative language teaching while relying almost exclusively on textbooks, grammar drills, and teacher-dominated instruction practices that contradict communicative principles. This suggests that teacher knowledge is often shaped by personal experience and implicit beliefs rather than by formal training or theoretical understanding (Day, 2017). As Schunk and Dibenedetto (2016:35) state, “Gaining power through goal-directed actions [agency], and self-efficacy is an integral means for becoming more empowered.” This means that agency is not static, but it is achieved through successful experiences, reflective practice, and supportive environments.

Therefore, professional mentors must move beyond content delivery to incorporate reflective praxis, defined as a cycle of action, reflection, and transformation (Garavan, 2010). It must create spaces where teachers can experiment with literature-based communicative language teaching activities, receive feedback, and co-construct knowledge with peers. One of the most effective mechanisms for this is the Professional Learning Community (PLC), a collaborative structure in which educators engage in sustained dialogue, shared planning, and collective problem-solving (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). In EFAL contexts, PLCs can serve as incubators for innovation, enabling teachers to adapt literary texts for communicative tasks, integrate learners’ home languages, and design assessments that value meaning over mechanical accuracy (Frost & Durrant, 2002). However, as Jang and Tsai (2013) and Van Breda, (2019) point out, the absence of such structures in many

South African schools leaves teachers isolated, reinforcing a culture of individual struggle rather than collective growth.

While teachers must take responsibility for their professional growth, the educational system bears an equal, if not greater, responsibility to create the conditions in which agency can flourish. This includes equitable access to resources, clear implementation guidelines, supportive leadership, and opportunities for peer collaboration (Cappy, 2016; Long et al., 2017). As Farrugia (2021:17) asserts, teachers' primary motivation is often the success of their learners, not abstract policy goals. When professional development is aligned with this motivation, when it is grounded in real classroom challenges and offers tangible strategies, it becomes not just relevant, but transformative. Ultimately, professional mentoring is not a fix for teacher deficiency, but it is a recognition of teacher potential. It is how educators can reclaim their role as knowledge workers, innovators, and agents of change in a system too often defined by constraint (Schleicher, 2018). Without such investment, calls for communicative competence, critical thinking, and learner-centred pedagogy remain empty rhetoric without the pedagogical infrastructure to realize them.

The following section examines the pedagogical frameworks that can empower teachers to translate their agency into effective classroom practice. It moves from the "what" and "why" of agency to the "how," offering a vision of EFAL instruction that is theoretically grounded, contextually responsive, and fundamentally transformative.

## **2.8 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING, FROM CONCEPT TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE**

The evolution of language pedagogy over the past half-century has been defined by a decisive shift from structuralist, form-focused methodologies to approaches centred on meaningful, contextually grounded communication. At the heart of this transformation lies communicative language teaching, a paradigm that emerged in the 1970s as a direct response to the limitations of grammar-translation and audiolingual

methods, which prioritized linguistic accuracy over functional use (Richards, 2006; Crystal, 2006).

Communicative language teaching redefined the goal of language instruction not as the mastery of isolated grammatical rules, but as the development of communicative competence, the ability to use language effectively, appropriately, and fluently in real-world interactions. As Richards and Schmidt (2002:90) assert, communicative language teaching is “an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence, and which seeks to make meaningful communication the focus of all classroom activities.” This foundational principle positions communicative language teaching not merely as a teaching method, but as a transformative educational philosophy rooted in constructivist and sociocultural understandings of learning (Rogoff, 2003).

The theoretical underpinnings of communicative language teaching are anchored in a critical re-evaluation of language itself. Chomsky’s (1965) distinction between linguistic competence (implicit grammatical knowledge) and performance (actual language use) laid the groundwork for understanding language as a rule-governed cognitive system. However, this model was soon challenged for its neglect of the social, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions of communication. Habermas (1970) and, more influentially, Hymes (1972) argued that linguistic competence alone is insufficient for effective interaction. Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence, asserting that speakers must not only generate grammatically correct sentences but also know when, how, and with whom to use them, what he termed the “rules of use.” This shift reframed language learning as a sociocultural practice, where appropriateness, context, and intentionality are as crucial as grammatical accuracy.

Building on Hymes’ foundation, Canale and Swain (1980) established a seminal, multidimensional model of communicative competence comprising four interrelated components:

1. Grammatical competence (knowledge of syntax, vocabulary, and morphology),
2. Sociolinguistic competence (understanding of register, tone, and cultural appropriateness),

3. Discourse competence (ability to construct coherent spoken and written texts), and
4. Strategic competence (capacity to employ communication strategies to overcome breakdowns).

This model provides a comprehensive framework for language teaching, one that aligns closely with the stated objectives of South Africa's CAPS, which calls for learners to "use language creatively and effectively" and "engage in sustained oral communication" (DBE, 2011:11). However, as earlier sections demonstrated, the curriculum fails to operationalise these goals, leaving teachers without the theoretical clarity or methodological tools to implement them (Mendelowitz, 2014; Govender, 2018).

Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) further refined this model by placing discourse competence at its core, arguing that linguistic, sociocultural, and strategic competencies converge in the ability to produce and interpret coherent, contextually appropriate communication. Their framework highlights the dynamic and interactive nature of language use, underscoring the need for pedagogy that integrates cultural knowledge, real-life tasks, and authentic materials (Lavadenz, 2011). In multilingual, post-colonial contexts such as South Africa, where learners must navigate complex linguistic ecologies and unfamiliar cultural references, this holistic view is essential.

Despite the theoretical consensus on communicative competence, its practical application remains fraught with challenges, particularly in under-resourced, high-stakes educational environments. While communicative language teaching has been widely adopted in EFL contexts such as Japan and South Korea (Butler, 2011; Ozsevik, 2010), its implementation in South African EFAL classrooms is often superficial or absent. Teachers may claim to use communicative language teaching, yet their practices frequently remain teacher-dominated, grammar-focused, and text-bound (Huang, 2017; Coenders & Voogt, 2012).

This disjunction between belief and practice is not due to resistance, but rather to a confluence of systemic and individual constraints, including large class sizes, a lack of materials, rigid curricula, and, critically, insufficient professional development (Christianto, 2019; Daflizar, 2013). Moreover, many teachers lack a coherent

understanding of the core principles of communicative language teaching. As Day (2017) observes, teacher knowledge is often shaped more by personal experience than by formal training, leading to misconceptions such as equating communicative language teaching with “more speaking” or “group work” without understanding its emphasis on meaning negotiation, authenticity, and learner autonomy (Chang, 2011; Butler, 2011). Without targeted support, teachers often default to transmission-based methods that prioritize content coverage over communicative depth, perpetuating a cycle of transactional language learning where communication is rehearsed, rather than a lived experience (Fleisch, 2008).

This gap between theory and practice underscores a fundamental principle: communicative competence cannot be taught through non-communicative means. As Tarvin (2015) defines it, “communicative competence is the ability to use language, or to communicate, in a culturally appropriate manner in order to make meaning and accomplish social tasks with efficacy and fluency through extended interactions”. It is the capability to understand and to be understood in a foreign language, a goal that demands immersive, interactive, and contextually rich pedagogy. It is also defined as “a competence to communicate”. Ahmed & Pawar (2018) add that it encompasses both knowledge of language and the skills to apply such knowledge in interaction, while Ahmed (2023) emphasizes that it is the primary goal of language learning, which can be achieved through communicative language teaching activities in EFAL classrooms.

Communicative language teaching classroom practices, such as role-plays, problem-solving tasks, storytelling, and collaborative projects (Kayi, 2006; Gor & Vatz, 2009), are designed precisely to simulate these conditions, positioning the teacher not as an authority figure but as a facilitator of learning (Rahimi & Asadollahi, 2011). However, as Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) and Jin and Yoo (2019) found in Asian EFL contexts, the implementation of communicative language teaching is hindered less by teacher resistance than by structural misalignment, large classes, exam-driven curricula, and inadequate teacher training. The same holds true in South Africa. Teachers are expected to be “agents of innovation” (Schleicher, 2018:36), yet they are rarely afforded the autonomy, resources, or confidence to innovate (Calvert, 2016:53).

One powerful pathway to this transformation lies in the strategic integration of literary texts. Literature offers a unique convergence of linguistic authenticity, cultural depth, and emotional resonance. These qualities are essential for engaging with all four dimensions of communicative competence. A well-chosen novel, poem, or play does not merely expose learners to vocabulary and grammar; it immerses them in real-world discourse, complex social interactions, and nuanced cultural contexts. When taught through a communicative lens, literary texts become more than content; they become sites of dialogue, critical engagement, and identity exploration.

The following section examines how literature can serve as a catalyst for authentic language use in the EFAL classroom. It argues that when teachers are empowered with the theoretical understanding and practical strategies to harness literary texts communicatively, they can transcend the constraints of CAPS and create learning environments where language is not just taught but lived.

## **2.9 THE ROLE OF LITERARY TEXTS IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

While substantial literature on integrated approaches to teaching language skills in South Africa, few studies, to my knowledge, address the use of literary texts as resources for the contextual understanding of English. This argument is closely aligned with Basiga (2009, 25), who states,

*It is one of the best teaching methods that can be used to teach language structures using literary texts. Teaching language structures using literary text occurred with the introduction of the communicative language teaching approach. Literary texts are considered one of the most effective materials to develop learners' communication skills through critical, investigative, and communicative activities.*

Literary texts have long been used in educational settings, regardless of the subject being taught (Gabrielsen, Blikstad-Balas & Tengberg, 2019).

However, despite the centrality of reading as a core skill in education, issues persist with students' reading comprehension, which refers to their ability to interpret and make meaning from texts (Magnusson, Roe & Blikstad-Balas, 2019). This underscores the importance of employing didactic tools that enhance learners' understanding. When learners comprehend what they read, they not only acquire the intended knowledge but also a greater motivation to learn, creating a reciprocal relationship between understanding and the desire to learn.

Thus, literature plays a critical role in the education of English FAL learners, offering exposure to language structure among other key skills. Antika (2017) argues that literature empowers learners by liberating them from the constraints of standard sentence structures and limited lexis, allowing them to experience the full potential of language. This is particularly significant in the context of EFAL classrooms, where literary texts provide a diverse range of grammatical structures and distinctive forms of discourse, enriching learners' linguistic repertoire.

Literature offers a powerful and multifaceted resource for achieving the communicative goals outlined in CAPS. Unlike contrived textbook dialogues, literary texts immerse learners in rich, authentic language and offer insights into the cultural and situational distinctions of English. By engaging with literature, learners connect linguistic forms to meaningful contexts, improving their ability to interpret and produce language effectively (Antika, 2017).

In the context of this study, these insights highlight the transformative potential of literature. For EFAL learners in South Africa's FET phase, literary texts offer a unique avenue to bridge linguistic gaps and address cultural diversity. Teachers who exercise agency in their use of prescribed texts can modify lessons to enhance both the linguistic and cultural dimensions of learning. For example, incorporating culturally relevant texts or global literary works into English FAL classrooms enables learners to explore diverse perspectives, develop empathy, and engage critically with language. This approach not only aligns with the CAPS curriculum's emphasis on communicative competence but also addresses the unique challenges of South African classrooms, where linguistic diversity and resource limitations require innovative teaching

methods. Literature, when used effectively, becomes a didactic tool that supports deep comprehension, motivates learning, and equips learners with the skills needed to navigate future texts and contexts (Antika, 2017).

Accordingly, Hall (2020:2) argues:

*In ELT historically, as the communicative language teaching movement gathered momentum in Western countries from the 1970s, literature often came to be seen as less relevant and useful in classrooms.*

Similar to the stance taken by the CAPS curriculum developers, literature is taught for appreciation rather than the value it has the potential to provide to second and foreign language learners. However, Hall (2020:3) counters that

*Literature can be used to engage and motivate students, to get them to notice and work with language forms expressively, to explore new personal and imaginative worlds, and to communicate authentically.*

Similarly, Heath (1996:776) emphasizes that literature can create natural repetition, allow reflection on language and how it works, and encourage attention to audience response on the part of learners.

### **2.9.1 Literature and cultural understanding**

Cultural understanding plays a vital role in the development of the communicative process. It provides learners with the context and tools needed to decode texts, facilitating the formation of knowledge (Magnusson et al., 2019:45; Tornberg, 2023). The use of literature in classrooms thus offers a dual benefit: it enhances both communicative competence and cultural awareness. By engaging with literature, learners gain insights into other cultures, broadening their perspectives and fostering empathy. Rahayu (2011:1) also states that, “understanding cultures leads readers to learn about the ties that unite people everywhere. People who come to understand and value various cultures are more likely to understand that people throughout the

world share the same emotions, experiences, and problems”. This cultural engagement, in turn, supports learners’ comprehension of texts and aids in the development of their communicative skills. Moreover, Mavhiza, (2023) highlights that some literary texts act as authentic representations of the target language culture, conveying its aesthetic, historical, and social dimensions. This authenticity is crucial for EFAL learners, as it situates their language learning within real-world contexts, helping them grasp the nuances of culture and language use. For learners in South African FET classrooms, where English is often a second or third language, this exposure helps bridge the gap between linguistic theory and meaningful application.

Rosenblatt’s (1998) transactional theory highlights the transformative power of literary engagement. She argues that readers bring their unique social, cultural, and educational histories into text interaction, shaping interpretation through personal and collective experiences. This interaction encourages a dynamic process of agreement, disagreement, and meaning-making, which she terms “evocation.” Such engagement is vital in EFAL classrooms, as it enables learners to connect deeply with texts, discover their own perspectives, and develop their voice—a crucial component of communicative competence. Furthermore, Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory underscores the intrinsic link between language, social interaction, and cognitive development. Wertsch (1994) argues that literature, as a medium of language, serves as a bridge between interpersonal communication and intrapersonal understanding. For EFAL learners, engaging with literary texts becomes a pathway to self-discovery, identity development, and a deeper understanding of their place within social and cultural contexts. Without this notion of sense of place, learners risk disconnection from meaning-making processes.

In the context of EFAL Classrooms within South Africa’s FET phase, literature transcends its traditional role as a mere pedagogical instrument and emerges as a transformative medium for developing communicative competence. Communicative competence, defined as the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in diverse social contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1983), encompasses not only mastering grammatical accuracy and vocabulary but also pragmatic, sociocultural, and critical dimensions of language use. In this regard, literature serves

as a dynamic resource that facilitates learners' linguistic proficiency, critical engagement, and identity negotiation, key components of communicative competence. The integration of authentic, culturally resonant literary texts into EFAL curricula is pivotal for supporting learners' communicative abilities. Such texts expose students to a variety of linguistic structures and discursive practices while simultaneously situating language within meaningful cultural frameworks. By engaging critically with these texts, learners are encouraged to reflect on their own lived experiences and cultural identities, thereby engaging both personal voice and intercultural awareness (Badal, 2013). This process underscores the importance of teacher agency, as educators must thoughtfully select and adapt literary materials to align with the sociocultural realities of their learners, particularly in township school settings where access to diverse resources may be limited. Teachers thus act as mediators who bridge the gap between abstract linguistic knowledge and contextualised language use, ensuring that literature becomes a conduit for meaningful communication rather than an alienating artifact.

Scholars in ESL/EFL contexts widely support the use of literature in English language teaching, citing its value as authentic material that encourages cultural and linguistic enrichment, as well as personal engagement (Hismanoglu, 2005; Collie & Slater, 1990). The global role of English as a language of communication further underscores the importance of acquiring these skills. However, there is an ongoing debate regarding the suitability of literary texts for second/foreign language learners. Critics such as McKay (1982) and Savvidou (2004) argue that the linguistic complexity of literary texts, often characterized by unconventional syntax and advanced lexical structures, can impede comprehension and effective language learning. For instance, poetic language often deviates from everyday communicative norms, complicating the meaning-making process. Robson (1989) similarly argues that such complexities offer limited value in improving functional language competence. Despite these challenges, proponents emphasise that addressing lexical and syntactical deviations in literary texts can enrich learners' communicative repertoires, thereby elevating their linguistic awareness and proficiency (Jackson, Howard, & Schwieter, 2021). While Shakespearean drama may be too advanced for many learners, texts with language

closer to standard English can be strategically selected based on learners' proficiency levels. Teachers play a crucial role in navigating this balance, using their knowledge and agency to demystify linguistic complexity and inspire learners to engage with diverse forms of language. By integrating these challenges as opportunities for practice and acquisition, literary texts can serve as powerful tools for language development, promoting both functional and creative competencies in learners.

The CAPS document (DBE, 2011:16) asserts that the primary objective of teaching literature is to expose learners to a “special use of language” characterized by its literary, figurative, and symbolic nature. While this goal highlights the value of literature in instilling linguistic sensitivity, it is vague and restrictive in its scope. By not explicitly emphasizing reading skills and strategies for deeper engagement, the document risks promoting a superficial approach to literature. Teachers may interpret this guideline as de-emphasising the importance of meaning-making and critical analysis, particularly since CAPS explicitly states that “literary interpretation is essentially a university-level activity” and is not required for FET learners (DBE, 2011:17). This position is problematic, as critical interpretation is foundational for academic success in tertiary education. The lack of emphasis on developing this skill at the FET level contributes to the struggles many South African learners face in their first year of university, where they are expected to engage in higher-order thinking and scaffold knowledge independently. Without prior training in critical analysis, learners often struggle to navigate complex texts, synthesize information, and construct coherent arguments — skills essential for academic discourse and communicative competence.

In the context of this study, which explores the use of literary texts for communicative competence in EFAL classrooms, the CAPS approach undermines the potential of literature as a tool for promoting deeper cognitive and linguistic engagement. Literature, when taught effectively, offers rich opportunities for learners to practice critical thinking, interpretive skills, and nuanced communication. By engaging with the symbolic and figurative elements of texts, learners can enhance their ability to analyse meaning in context, a critical component of communicative competence as outlined by Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980). Furthermore, teaching critical interpretation at the FET level aligns with the broader goals of communicative

language teaching, which prioritizes meaningful interaction and real-world application of language skills. Encouraging learners to question, interpret, and discuss literary texts not only improves their linguistic proficiency but also prepares them for the demands of tertiary education and beyond. CAPS's dismissal of critical interpretation as unnecessary at this stage reflects a missed opportunity to integrate higher-order thinking into the language curriculum, ultimately limiting learners' academic and communicative potential.

For transformative teaching in South African classrooms, it is imperative to challenge this narrow view of literature's role. Teachers must exercise agency to go beyond CAPS guidelines, incorporating strategies that encourage critical engagement with texts. Professional development initiatives should equip teachers with the tools to scaffold learners' interpretive skills, enabling them to approach literature not only as a linguistic artifact but as a medium for critical inquiry and personal growth. In this way, literature becomes a bridge to both academic success and the communicative competence learners need to thrive in diverse contexts.

### **2.9.2 Literary texts as tools for improving communicative competence**

Literary texts such as poetry, drama, and prose offer unparalleled opportunities for the development of both linguistic and sociocultural competencies within EFAL classrooms. These texts serve as authentic representations of language use, presenting learners with diverse cultural narratives and complex communicative scenarios that align closely with Hymes' (1972) seminal concept of communicative competence and its subsequent elaboration by Canale and Swain (1980). Communicative competence encompasses not only grammatical accuracy but also pragmatic appropriateness, sociocultural awareness, and the ability to navigate varied discourse contexts (Alptekin, 2002). Literary texts, therefore, emerge as indispensable tools for developing these multifaceted dimensions of language proficiency.

Poetry, with its condensed linguistic structures and emotive power, introduces learners to rich vocabulary, figurative language, and rhythmic patterns that enhance linguistic dexterity. For instance, Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali's poem *An Abandoned Bundle* exemplifies how literary devices such as metaphor, imagery, and tone can be employed to explore themes of poverty and resilience within the South African context. This engagement not only refines learners' linguistic skills but also deepens their sociocultural awareness by connecting them with issues pertinent to their lived experiences. Such exposure resonates with Morrow's (1977) definition of authentic texts as stretches of real language produced for real audiences and designed to convey meaningful messages. By engaging with poetry, learners encounter natural language use, which Krashen (2016) argues provides essential comprehensible input for language acquisition.

Drama further amplifies communicative competence by immersing learners in dialogues that mirror real-life interactions. Plays such as John Kani's *"Nothing but the Truth"* offer fertile ground for practicing oral communication skills, including intonation, pronunciation, and turn-taking. Through role-playing activities, learners internalize these pragmatic features while simultaneously grappling with socio-political themes such as reconciliation and identity. This dual focus on linguistic and sociocultural dimensions promotes critical thinking and empathy by equipping learners to navigate complex social landscapes. As Halliday (1985) argues, cohesive ties and functional uses of grammatical forms embedded in such texts facilitate comprehension and contextual understanding, thereby enhancing learners' ability to communicate effectively across diverse settings.

Moreover, prose, such as short stories or accessible novels, extends learners' engagement with extended narratives that build reading comprehension and analytical skills. Can Themba's *The Suit*, for example, invites exploration of narrative structure, character development, and moral dilemmas, providing ample opportunities for written and oral expression through discussions, summaries, and creative writing tasks. These activities encourage learners to connect personal experiences with broader cultural and historical contexts, reinforcing both linguistic and sociocultural competencies. Spack (1985) underscores this point, asserting that literature

showcases the full range of linguistic resources, including causal verbs, conjunctions, and prepositions, which aid in constructing coherent and meaningful communication.

Literature is not merely an aesthetic artifact but also a cultural and linguistic resource that embodies acts of communication (Hall & Hord, 2020). The act of communication inherent in literary texts involves the deployment of language for varied purposes, extending learners' expressive capabilities beyond routine vocabulary (Alwi, Iqbal & Safitri, 2023). Colston (2015) challenges the notion that literary texts inherently employ more figurative language than other genres, arguing instead that their creativity lies in the innovative use of familiar linguistic devices. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) insights into metaphors in everyday language and Carter's (2004) observations about the creativity of ordinary discourse, it becomes evident that literature mirrors and magnifies the creative potential of language itself. For ESL learners, gaining a nuanced understanding of how language operates in literary contexts enhances their confidence and competence in using the target language for creative expression.

However, the efficacy of literature as a pedagogical tool hinges significantly on teacher proficiency and instructional approach. Jakobson (1960) argues that literary language often draws attention to itself by offering innovative "affordances" for learning how to use language appropriately in various contexts. Yet van Lier (2000) cautions that if taught by educators lacking proficiency or confidence in communicative language teaching, literature risks becoming a source of intimidation rather than empowerment. Badal's (2019) findings highlight this disparity, while some Home Language (HL) teachers harnessed the potential of literature to spark lively debates and discussions, ESL teachers often fell short due to unresolved challenges related to teachers' language proficiency and beliefs about literature. Consequently, learners may remain confined to rote analyses of literary devices without grasping their contextual relevance or applicability to real-world communication.

Features of conversation embedded in literary texts, including dialect, sociolects, professional registers, and stylistic variations, provide valuable models for learners to emulate in verbal and written forms of communication (Hall & Hord 2020). Modern literature frequently foregrounds these elements in highly contextualized ways, making

them conducive to learning (Hall & Hord, 2020). Teachers who adeptly draw learners' attention to these socio-cultural and sociolinguistic nuances enable students to adopt and expand their communicative repertoires. Thus, literature serves not only aesthetic and intellectual purposes but also practical ones, equipping learners with the linguistic and cultural resources necessary for effective communication.

Thus, the integration of literary texts into EFAL classrooms represents a strategic investment in learners' holistic development of communicative competence. By exposing learners to authentic language use, diverse cultural narratives, and complex communicative scenarios, literature bridges the gap between linguistic knowledge and contextual application. However, realizing its full potential requires teachers who are proficient in communicative language teaching methodologies and committed to supporting learner agency. When harnessed effectively, literature transforms into a dynamic vehicle for empowering learners to articulate their voices, engage meaningfully with others, and assert their identities in increasingly globalized and multicultural societies. As such, it stands as a cornerstone of comprehensive language education, particularly in township school settings where access to diverse linguistic and cultural resources may otherwise be limited.

### **2.9.3 Literature texts as a rich source for contextual knowledge**

Globally, the compartmentalization of grammar and literature in educational settings has been a persistent trend, with Cushing and Giovanelli (2019) highlighting this issue in UK schools. This artificial separation undermines the potential of literature to serve as a dynamic medium for contextualizing grammar and language use. In South African EFAL classrooms, where learners often encounter limited exposure to "culturally transmitted behaviour patterns" (Greenberg, 1957), literature emerges as a critical gateway to authentic language application. By embedding grammatical structures within their communicative purposes through literary texts, learners acquire both linguistic precision and cultural competence, essential components for meaningful communication in diverse contexts. Scholars such as Mart (2016) emphasise that

literature introduces learners to communicative functions and linguistic elements, while Lewis (2000) underscores the challenge of engaging learners with texts that diverge significantly from their cultural experiences. This challenge is particularly pronounced in South African township schools, where learners frequently struggle with tasks requiring cultural contextualization (Badal, 2013). Immersing learners in culturally resonant texts bridges this gap, enabling them to navigate the sociocultural dimensions of language use effectively. Such immersion not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also promotes intercultural understanding, aligning with the broader goals of communicative competence.

Traditionally, grammatical competence was considered sufficient for effective communication. However, contemporary pedagogical approaches advocate for an integrated model that combines grammar, structure, meaning, and context (Richards, 2006). While CAPS (DBE, 2011) endorses integrated teaching, its reliance on discrete methodologies, such as chronological or thematic analysis, limits holistic learning opportunities. Communicative language teaching, by contrast, aligns seamlessly with the need for integrated instruction, positioning literature as a portal for teaching grammar and language skills in authentic contexts. This approach not only enhances comprehension but also fosters communicative competence, addressing the distinct linguistic challenges encountered by South African learners.

Despite its transformative potential, integrating literary texts into South African EFAL classrooms is fraught with significant challenges. A primary obstacle lies in selecting materials that cater to learners' varying proficiency levels and interests. For many South African learners, English serves as a third or fourth language, and their exposure to it outside the classroom is often minimal. Overly complex texts, such as Shakespearean plays or highly idiomatic poetry, may alienate rather than engage learners, leading to frustration and disengagement. Additionally, the sociocultural relevance of prescribed texts remains a critical concern. Many texts in the CAPS curriculum reflect Western-centric perspectives or outdated narratives that fail to resonate with learners' lived experiences. For instance, narratives that neglect South Africa's socio-political realities risk reducing learners' motivation and hindering the development of communicative competence.

Another significant barrier stems from teacher preparation. Many educators lack the training necessary to adapt literary texts for diverse proficiency levels, leaving them ill-equipped to scaffold learners' understanding or harness literature as a tool for communicative language teaching. The rigid adherence to the CAPS Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) exacerbates this issue, often prioritizing syllabus coverage over meaningful engagement with texts (Badal, 2019). Consequently, teachers may overlook opportunities for critical thinking, empathy, and cultural awareness through literature. To address these multifaceted challenges, teachers must exercise professional agency and adopt a learner-centred approach to text selection and adaptation (Schweisfurth, 2019). This entails choosing texts that strike a balance between linguistic accessibility and cultural relevance (Gaybullaeva & Xalilova, 2024), such as South African short stories or contemporary African poetry, which reflect learners' environments while exposing them to the complexities of English language use.

Considering the foregoing discussion, it becomes evident that literature holds immense potential as a catalyst for developing communicative competence in EFAL classrooms. However, realizing this potential requires a paradigm shift from viewing literature as a static repository of aesthetic value to embracing it as a dynamic resource for linguistic, cultural, and critical engagement. Central to this transformation is the role of teacher agency, which serves as a pivotal force in reimagining how literary texts are selected, adapted, and used within diverse classroom contexts. Fossgreen (2024) emphasises that teachers must be empowered to exercise their professional judgment in crafting learner-centred approaches that align with students' proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences.

## **2.10 SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section has synthesized scholarship on communicative language teaching, the communicative approach, teacher agency, and communicative competence. It emphasises the significance of the communicative approach in EFAL classrooms and the critical role of teacher agency in leveraging literary texts to improve teaching and

learning. The review also underscored the shift towards learner-centred approaches, positioning teachers in EFL, ESL, and EFAL contexts as key agents in developing communicative competence.

The discussion highlighted the opportunities literature texts create for fostering critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness among learners in the South African learners, while also acknowledging the systemic challenges teachers face in implementing the CAPS curriculum. In addressing these tensions, the literature demonstrates the importance of conceptualizing teacher agency as a means of navigating structural constraints and enhancing pedagogy. The arguments presented support the study by linking theories of teacher agency and communicative competence to the research questions, and by affirming the value of an integrated approach to language teaching.

This synthesis therefore lays the groundwork for the next section, which elaborates on the theoretical framework guiding this study.

## **2.11 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study investigates the use of literary texts to develop communicative competence in EFAL classrooms within township schools, with a focus on teacher agency as a critical lever of educational transformation. Grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977, 1986, 1989, 1993, 1999, 2001), this theoretical framework provides a lens for understanding how teachers navigate structural constraints, exercise autonomy, and encourage learner-centred practices.

My interest in Bandura's (1989) Social Cognitive Theory emerges from the belief that teachers in dire situations, such as the context of this study, must be able to navigate both personal and environmental challenges, which can potentially suppress their agency. Accordingly, Bandura asserts that "people can effect change in themselves and in their situations through their own efforts" (1989:1175). This principle highlights

the idea that individuals can transform themselves and their environments by actively negotiating internal and external challenges.

Social Cognitive Theory emphasises the reciprocal relationship between personal characteristics, behaviours, and the environment (Bandura, 1986), while also acknowledging the proactive, agentic role of individuals (Bandura, 2001). Furthermore, it acknowledges that diverse environments present varying levels of complexity, requiring differing scopes and expressions of personal agency (Bandura, 1977). A central concern that emerges prominently in the literature is the focus on teachers' perceptions of their value as key contributors to educational change processes, a perspective firmly supported by the framework of Social Cognitive Theory.

The suitability of this framework is supported by scholars in the field (Muro & Jeffrey 2008). Nabvi and Bijandi (2012:6) argue that Social Cognitive Theory “has become perhaps the most influential theory of learning and development.” Thus, the theoretical framework is structured around key concepts from Social Cognitive Theory, such as triadic reciprocal determinism and self-efficacy, which provide an apt lens for understanding the dynamic interplay between personal, behavioural, and environmental factors in language teaching.

Scholars such as Betz (2007) and Green and Peil (2010) support Bandura's model of triadic reciprocity and argue that human behaviour is characterized by triadic, dynamic, and reciprocal intersections of personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants. This perspective aligns with scholarship that emphasizes teachers' active role in shaping educational outcomes using prescribed methods, even within rigid or resource-constrained educational systems. Hence, the choice of theoretical framework was motivated by the need to explore how teachers can effectively utilise literary texts to promote communicative competence by exercising agency in their practice through negotiation of the triadic factors.

Accordingly, the study aims to showcase the transformative potential of teacher agency in advancing EFAL education. The following sections elaborate on the key tenets of the theory concerning the study's focus, which discusses the dynamic nature

of teacher agency and its role in bridging policy intentions with meaningful classroom implementation.

### **2.11.1 Teacher agency, a dynamic interplay of beliefs, decisions, and actions**

Teacher agency has emerged as a significant area of international research in the fields of teaching and teacher education (e.g., Billett, 2014; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lasky, 2005; März & Kelchtermans, 2013; Priestley, Edwards & Priestley, 2012). Broadly defined, teacher agency refers to the capacity of professionals to exercise authority in their work environments. This includes the ability to make decisions, take stances, and influence their teaching practices (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Ketelaar et al., 2012; Lasky, 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Cong-Lem (2021) in a systematic review, concludes that teachers are not merely policy actors but they are active agents in implementing changes to actualize their own goals for teaching. This actualization involves reinstating their creative energies and professional autonomy (Fannie, 2019).

Teacher agency is central to this study and is defined by Bandura (2000) as the capacity for “self-motivated and self-directed” action. In the context of this study, agency refers to teachers’ ability to make informed decisions and enact deliberate actions to enhance learner outcomes despite systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and low learner proficiency levels. Similarly, Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson (2015) expand on this definition by emphasising that agency arises from the interaction between teachers’ beliefs, professional contexts, and situational contingencies. The findings of a study conducted by Vu (2021) revealed that working in low-resourced, policy-constraining contexts in Vietnam, teachers revealed that they were exercising agency for the benefit of learners and their own well-being. They organized available resources to act upon their beliefs and capacity, indicating that even in dire conditions, teachers can exercise agency on behalf of learner interests.

This study focuses on three interconnected dimensions, (i) teachers' agency in shaping their work practices (personal factors), (ii) their engagement with structural constraints (environmental factors), and (iii) teachers' influence on educational reforms (behavioural factors) (Bandura, 1986). These dimensions are examined within the context of South African EFAL classrooms, where teachers face systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and learners with low proficiency levels. Accordingly, agency theorists argue that teacher agency involves the capacity to harness available resources to address challenges strategically to achieve specific goals (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). This conceptualization suggests that agency is context-sensitive and requires teachers to navigate structural factors such as resource diversity, curriculum requirements, and unique classroom challenges. Campbell (2012) further asserts that decision-making by teachers must be guided by clear educational aims and a commitment to enhancing the learner experience. Within this discourse, the effort to implement a communicative approach despite its marginal emphasis in CAPS exemplifies teacher agency. It reflects teachers' proactive strategies to balance structural limitations with their educational philosophies and goals.

In township schools, where crime and poverty further exacerbate educational inequities, teacher agency becomes even more crucial. Teachers must mediate between rigid policy frameworks such as CAPS and the diverse needs of their learners. This mediation requires technical expertise, reflective decision-making, and adaptive expertise to ensure teacher knowledge and engagement. While CAPS monitors a focus covering the syllabus (Badal, 2019), teachers can draw on their agency to prioritize communicative competence through innovative methods such as using literary texts as tools for interactive learning.

Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (1986), a core tenet of teacher agency, is crucial to understanding teacher agency in critical contexts, as it speaks to teachers' confidence in their ability to execute specific tasks successfully. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy influences goal setting, motivation, and persistence, making it a key determinant of instructional effectiveness. This construct is central to understanding teacher agency, as high self-efficacy enables educators to navigate challenges and

overcome structural inequalities. Teachers with strong efficacy beliefs are likely to adopt innovative strategies, persist in the face of obstacles, and prioritize their learners' needs. In contrast, teachers with low self-efficacy, who perceive themselves as lacking in knowledge, would only do what is necessary and lament the structural constraints that influence their work (Edwards, 2005).

Bandura (1993) identifies four key sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, physiological and emotional states, vicarious experiences, and social persuasion. These sources significantly influence teachers' behaviour in educational contexts. Mastery experiences are closely tied to an individual's teaching history; positive experiences enhance efficacy beliefs, while negative experiences reduce them. In the context of educational reform, teachers who receive only partial training or are instructed to strictly adhere to the curriculum without sufficient support may experience what is termed "negative mastery," leading to decreased motivation, heightened anxiety, and lowered expectations for their performance (Bantwini, 2010; Mulaudzi, 2009; Smit, 2001). Such challenges can hinder their ability to enact reforms effectively or move beyond what is mandated.

Veteran teachers may sometimes harbour faulty assumptions about their self-efficacy due to inaccurate perceptions of their capabilities. These assumptions can lead to either overestimation or underestimation of their capacity (Pajares, 1996; Wheatley, 2005). As a result, teachers might believe they are aligning with policy intentions while unknowingly relying on "false mastery experiences," which fail to reflect genuine proficiency in implementing reforms (Favre & Knight, 2016). This disconnect underscores the importance of accurate self-assessment and ongoing professional development to ensure that teachers' self-efficacy aligns with their actual performance and contributes positively to educational transformation. Mastery experiences, which involve successfully navigating challenges within the environment, are central to sustaining agency (von Glasersfeld, 1995). Such mastery reinforces teachers' confidence in their ability to enact change, thereby enhancing their sense of efficacy and agency.

Vicarious experiences involve learning through observation of others, particularly when individuals model behaviours for observers (Bandura, 1993). When the role model demonstrates competence, the observer feels empowered to emulate those behaviours. Conversely, if the model is perceived as ineffective, it can undermine the observer's confidence. Teachers navigating ambiguous reform contexts often compare their perceived abilities to teach under new conditions with the behaviours modelled by trainers or mentors (Favre & Knight, 2016). This comparison can either heighten or weaken their self-efficacy, depending on the quality of the modelled behaviour. Conversely, if teachers are merely provided information about the reform in a top-down fashion, with modelling being scarce or ambiguous, then teachers are bound to experience confusion and negative mastery.

Modelling is closely aligned with social persuasion. Bandura (1977) argues that social persuasion refers to feedback from superiors, colleagues, or other stakeholders that can either strengthen or weaken teachers' beliefs about their capacity to perform specific tasks. For instance, feedback from heads of department (HODs) or curriculum facilitators monitoring fidelity to reform initiatives may create uncertainty or reduce teachers' motivation to engage proactively if it is perceived as unsupportive or overly critical. In the context of the current educational regime, teachers' affective states are related to monitoring and fidelity to external dictates (Badal, 2018).

Consequently, Bandura (1989) points out that individuals' beliefs in their capacity to exercise control over their actions are the driving force behind their motivation to act. Empirical evidence supporting this claim shows that teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to adopt innovative practices and persevere in the face of challenges (Bandura, 1994; Ross, 1998). However, significant changes to teaching practices and contexts are often mandated by new reforms, which can challenge teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. If teachers perceive these changes as requiring substantial shifts in their roles or skills, they may reevaluate their ability to meet the demands of the reform (Ross, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 1998).

### **2.11.2 Triadic reciprocal causation model and its application to teacher agency**

This study conceptualizes the educational environment as the curriculum policy landscape, encompassing policy-making, development, interpretation, monitoring and enactment. Within this framework, Social Cognitive Theory highlights the reciprocal relationship among personal characteristics, behaviours, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986), while also recognizing the active, agentic role of individuals in shaping their realities (Bandura, 2001). This cyclical interplay highlights how individuals are both shaped by and, in turn, shape their environments, a phenomenon Bandura (2006) terms reciprocal determinism.

The concept of reciprocal determinism asserts that while the environment influences individual actions, individuals also possess the capacity to alter their environments through intentional actions (Bandura, 2001). Personal characteristics such as perceptions, beliefs, and expectations are rooted in cognitive processes and play a pivotal role in shaping behaviour. These characteristics, in turn, are influenced by environmental feedback and self-evaluations of one's ability to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 2006).

The three components of the triadic reciprocal causation model, personal determinants, environmental factors, and behavioural elements are explored individually below, with an acknowledgment of their interconnectedness. While each component is discussed separately for clarity, these factors overlap and interact in complex ways. For instance, teachers' perceptions and beliefs do not operate in isolation but are deeply intertwined with environmental influences and behavioural responses. Similarly, the environment is not viewed as structurally deterministic; instead, it interacts dynamically with personal and behavioural factors to shape teacher agency.

### **2.11.2.1 Personal Determinants**

Personal determinants include teachers' beliefs, emotions, and expectations, which influence their actions (Bandura, 1986) and responses to policy mandates. For example, when externally imposed policies challenge teachers' beliefs about effective teaching practices, they may experience a loss of self-esteem, which can potentially lead to resistance or rejection of the policy. This illustrates the link between teacher beliefs, emotions, and behaviour in relation to the enactment of reforms (Sherin & Drake, 2009). Furthermore, external environmental factors, such as exclusion from decision-making processes, can exacerbate feelings of disempowerment, further influencing teachers' agency (Badal, 2018). These personal determinants are incubated in the mind and manifest as teacher philosophies (Burhauser & Lesaux, 2017), which are discursive constructions embedded in policy texts, power relations, and broader social contexts. Examining these reciprocal relationships reveals how school-level and classroom-level factors interact with teachers' beliefs about their capabilities.

Consequently, Bandura (1999:3) argues that people's actions emerge from the "dynamic interplay of personal and situational factors." He highlights the potential for individuals to identify threats to their well-being and take appropriate action accordingly. Teachers are not "mere automatons undergoing actions devoid of any subjectivity, conscious regulation, phenomenological life, or personal identity" (Bussey & Bandura 1999:3). Thus, teachers evaluate internally and navigate their way through tensions to "make sound judgements about their capabilities, anticipate the probable effects of different events and actions, ascertain socio-structural opportunities and constraints and regulate their behaviour accordingly." These belief systems, assumptions, and evaluations manifest in constructed behaviours.

### **2.11.2.2 Environmental Factors**

The environment comprises the macro- and micro-social contexts in which teachers operate, including institutional structures, policy frameworks, and interpersonal dynamics (Rubenstein, Ridgley, Callan, Karami & Ehlinger, 2018:100). Environmental factors shape teachers' opportunities for agency by either facilitating or constraining their ability to act. For instance, exclusionary practices in policy-making can marginalize teachers, limiting their capacity to contribute meaningfully to educational reforms. Conversely, supportive environments that value teacher input can enhance agency by encouraging collaboration and shared decision-making. The interplay between environmental factors and personal determinants highlights the importance of creating inclusive spaces that support teacher agency.

Several school-level variables have been linked to teachers' self-efficacy, including organisational structure, principal leadership, school climate, and decision-making processes (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). The study conducted by Zondo and Adu (2024) also identified conflicts among teachers and school managers as one variable. For instance, teachers who perceive a positive school atmosphere and a strong emphasis on academic achievement report higher levels of both personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and general teaching efficacy (GTE) (Moore & Esselman, 1992). Similarly, schools with a strong sense of community have been shown to significantly predict high efficacy levels (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991).

Principal leadership also plays a critical role in shaping teacher efficacy. Principals who advocate effectively within the district, provide resources, and shield teachers from disruptive factors while granting them autonomy over classroom decisions create an environment conducive to enhancing efficacy (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Additionally, when principals model appropriate behaviours and reward performance-based outcomes, both dimensions of teacher efficacy, personal and general, are enhanced. Furthermore, principals who inspire a shared sense of purpose among staff contribute to higher levels of collective efficacy (Hipp & Bredeson, 1995).

Greater freedom to make classroom-level decisions and participation in school-wide decision-making are associated with higher performance scores (Moore & Esselman, 1992). Conversely, perceived barriers to teaching, such as excessive role demands or inadequate support, diminish teachers' efficacy beliefs (Webb & Ashton, 1987). Other school practices, including collaboration with colleagues, parent involvement, and coordinated approaches to student behaviour, also positively correlate with teacher efficacy (Rosenholtz, 1989). The factors discussed above relate to how environmental factors influence self-efficacy beliefs and contribute to teacher agency, whether positive or negative.

Bandura (1993) demonstrated that teachers' collective belief in their school's ability to achieve academic goals was as predictive of school performance as their individual efficacy beliefs. This makes teacher agency both a personal and structural phenomenon, shaped by educators' dispositions and the broader socio-political context.

### **2.11.2.3      *Behavioural determinants***

Behavioural determinants refer to the behaviours teachers adopt, often shaped by affective conditioning in response to particular stimuli (Bandura, 1986). This assumption is based on the notion that teachers can be trained or inculcated to behave in certain ways in certain contexts. In the current policy regime, teachers are inducted into a regime of compliance and conformity, which is measured by performance. Thus, many teachers do not demonstrate "motivational, self-reflective, self-reactive, creative or directive influence on the process" of teaching (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, 3). However, Bandura (1999:2) states that individuals are capable of exerting control over their "thought processes, motivation, affect, and actions." Individuals are meant to be "self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by external events" (Bussey & Bandura, 1999:154).

Teacher agency involves making informed decisions and taking deliberate actions to improve learners' outcomes. According to Rogers and Wetzel (2013), agency refers to the ability to act purposefully and reflectively, striking a balance between adhering to external mandates and embracing pedagogical philosophies. In South African township schools, where crime and poverty exacerbate educational inequities, teacher agency becomes especially crucial. Educators must mediate between rigid policy frameworks, such as the CAPS, and the diverse needs of their learners. Thus, teachers need to recognise their capacity to innovate, adapt, and influence learners' outcomes despite systemic constraints.

#### **2.11.2.4      *Interplay of reciprocal factors***

While the discussion above has isolated each determinant for analysis, it is crucial to acknowledge that these factors are dynamically intertwined. For example, teachers' beliefs about their professional roles (personal determinants) may be shaped by environmental influences such as policy mandates and institutional norms. These beliefs, in turn, inform their behavioural responses, such as support for policy changes or resistance to reform. Similarly, environmental factors such as exclusion from decision-making often trigger emotional responses, including frustration or disempowerment, which influence teachers' willingness to engage with policy initiatives.

For example, an EFAL teacher with strong pedagogical training (personal factor) may feel confident implementing communicative language teaching strategies (behavioural factor) even in overcrowded classrooms (environmental factor). Conversely, inadequate resources or restrictive policies may limit teachers' willingness to innovate, highlighting the importance of addressing systemic barriers to agency. An understanding of these interactions enables researchers to identify factors that empower teachers and improve learner outcomes. Thus, the triadic model highlights the complexity of teacher agency, suggesting that no single determinant operates in isolation.

A distinguishing feature of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is its focus on cognition, which enables individuals to construct realities, self-regulate, and embed information into actionable behaviours (Bandura, 1986). This aligns closely with the notion of teacher agency examined in this study. Teacher agency is conceptualized as a discursive construction embedded in personal characteristics, policy texts, power relations, and social contexts. It emerges from teachers' cognitive processing of environmental stimuli and manifests as responses to policy mandates, support for change, or resistance to reform. By drawing on Social Cognitive Theory, this study highlights how teachers navigate the interplay between personal, environmental, and behavioural factors to assert their agency and adopt transformative behaviours.

The exploration of teacher agency within the framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (including the triadic causation model) underscores its critical role in navigating the complexities of educational reform and supporting meaningful learning outcomes. This study argues that teacher agency is not a static attribute but a dynamic interplay of personal, environmental, and behavioural factors, each influencing and being influenced by the others in reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978).

Teachers' self-efficacy, a cornerstone of Social Cognitive Theory, serves as a determining factor in teachers' ability to enact agency effectively. Scholarship confirms that high self-efficacy empowers educators to adopt innovative strategies, persist in the face of structural constraints, and advocate for learner-centred practices, even when policy frameworks such as CAPS rigidly enforce compliance. Conversely, low self-efficacy, often stemming from inadequate training or unsupportive environments, limits teachers' capacity to navigate reforms, leading to frustration and a decline in motivation. This dichotomy underscores the pressing need for professional development programs that not only enhance technical competencies but also foster reflective decision-making and adaptive expertise among educators.

Moreover, the triadic reciprocal causation model elucidates how personal beliefs, environmental conditions, and behavioural responses interact to shape teacher agency. For instance, exclusionary practices in policy-making can marginalise teachers, constraining their agency, while supportive institutional structures that value

collaboration and shared decision-making can amplify it. The interdependence of these factors highlights the importance of creating inclusive spaces where teachers can exercise autonomy and make meaningful contributions to educational transformation. Additionally, the influence of vicarious experiences and social persuasion further emphasizes the role of modelling and constructive feedback in amplifying teachers' confidence and efficacy beliefs.

This study also aligns with broader scholarly discourse on the significance of aligning teacher agency with international best practices. Insights from transnational perspectives on teacher agency, as discussed by Biesta and Priestley (2013), highlight the value of exposing educators to global standards and pedagogical strategies. Such exposure not only enhances the awareness of universal benchmarks but also equips teachers with tools to address local challenges more effectively. By integrating these insights into the EFAL context, this research reinforces the argument that teacher agency is instrumental in bridging the gap between policy intentions and classroom implementation, particularly in resource-constrained settings. Accordingly, teachers who manifest the characteristics of agency are able to harness the potential of literary texts to develop communicative competence in their learners.

## **2.12 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the study's focus, situating the research within the broader context of the communicative approach/communicative language teaching, teacher agency, and teachers' capacity for proactive behaviour in using literary texts for communicative purposes. The discussion critically examined the role of literary texts in supporting communicative competence in EFAL classrooms, particularly within the South African educational landscape. By synthesizing existing scholarship on communicative language teaching methodologies, the importance of teacher agency, and the transformative potential of literature, this chapter demonstrates the need for an

integrated approach that aligns pedagogical practices with learner-centered outcomes.

The analysis highlights several key insights. First, the effective implementation of the communicative approach offers a strong framework for improving learners' linguistic, sociocultural, and critical thinking skills. However, challenges such as limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and rigid policy frameworks constrain teachers' capacity to capitalize fully on these methodologies. This highlights the crucial role of teacher agency in mediating between structural constraints and the diverse needs of learners. Teachers who possess high self-efficacy, reflective capacity, and adaptability are more likely to navigate these challenges and facilitate meaningful engagement with literary texts.

Second, the integration of literature into language teaching is shown to be a powerful tool for promoting communicative competence. Literary texts provide authentic language input and serve as vehicles for exploring cultural nuances, emotional intelligence, and higher-order thinking skills. When used creatively through activities such as debates, role-plays, and collaborative projects, literature can bridge the gap between language learning and real-world communication. However, the dismissal of critical interpretation in frameworks such as CAPS reflects a missed opportunity to cultivate learners' analytical and interpretive abilities, which ultimately limits both academic progress and communicative potential.

Ultimately, the theoretical underpinnings of communicative competence and teacher agency, as explored through Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, offer a lens for understanding how educators can leverage their agency to effect meaningful change. The triadic reciprocal causation model elucidates the interplay between personal, environmental, and behavioural factors, emphasizing the dynamic nature of agency. By strengthening teachers' self-efficacy, promoting reflective practices, and exposing them to transnational perspectives and best practices, educational stakeholders can empower teachers to act as agents of transformation in their classrooms.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter provided a comprehensive synthesis of the theoretical framework and literature underpinning this study, emphasizing the transformative potential of literary texts in enhancing communicative competence within EFAL classrooms. Building on this foundation, the present chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to address the central research question: How do EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles? This inquiry is situated within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which serves as the meta-theoretical framework guiding the study (Chafe, 2024). The selection of this paradigm reflects its alignment with the study's aim to explore the socially constructed nature of knowledge and the intricate interplay between teachers' experiences, contextual realities, and teacher pedagogical practices (TPP) (Gemink, Fokkens-Bruinsma, Pauw, & van Veen, 2021; Badal, 2018). As Brown and Dowling (2001) assert, research within this paradigm seeks to generate nuanced insights into specific fields, activities, or practices, thereby highlighting the complexities inherent in human interactions and educational processes.

Adherence to principles of good research practice, including the generation of credible and reliable knowledge through systematic planning and rigorous methodological procedures (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001), forms the foundation of the study. These principles guided every phase of the study, from the design and data collection to the interpretation and analysis. Hence, I reflexively engaged with McMillan and Schumacher's (2001) advice on ethical considerations and the systematic collection of data, ensuring the study's integrity and relevance. The research question i: How do EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles? was central to all planning and methodological decisions. By situating the research within the

constructivist/interpretivist framework, this study aimed to uncover the contextual and experiential factors that shape EFAL teachers' practice, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of their pedagogical approaches.

Following this, the chapter details the research procedures implemented throughout the investigation. It then elaborates on the tools used for data collection and the approaches adopted for data presentation and analysis. This chapter also demonstrates how the investigation's results will ultimately be achieved in relation to the study's purpose (Sileyew, 2019). Finally, the chapter concludes with a comprehensive discussion of the study's validity and reliability, emphasizing the measures taken to ensure the rigour and credibility of the findings.

### **3.2 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is central to the success and integrity of the study. It encompasses a broad range of strategic, ethical, and personal responsibilities essential for upholding qualitative standards and ensuring the credibility of the research process and findings (Creswell, 2018). Key responsibilities include facilitating a deep understanding of the context and participants under investigation, carefully contextualization the data, ensuring ethical practices throughout the research process, contributing to analytical rigour, and effectively and ethically communicating the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Each aspect influences the research design, implementation, and outcomes, emphasizing the importance of the researcher's engagement, reflexivity, and adherence to rigorous ethical principles (Wilson, 2009). By conscientiously fulfilling these responsibilities, the quality and impact of the study are strengthened, generating valuable insights that contribute meaningfully to the field (Creswell, 2018).

Reflexivity is central to the qualitative researcher's role, requiring critical examination and explicit acknowledgment of the biases, values, and personal experiences that shape their interpretations (Creswell, 2018). These factors may include gender,

cultural background, historical context, and socioeconomic status, which inevitably influence the researcher's perspective and interaction with the study (Creswell, 2018:260). Additionally, practical considerations such as gaining access to research sites and addressing ethical challenges are integral components of this role. Navigating these complexities requires a balance of self-awareness, ethical sensitivity, and methodical planning. Bearing this in mind, I conducted this research with utmost integrity and ethical considerations in mind.

In this study, I occupy a dual position, both as an insider and an outsider. My status as an observer examining the lived experiences of participants aligns with Denzin and Lincoln's (2000:3) characterization of the researcher's role in qualitative inquiry. Acknowledging my proximity to the phenomenon under investigation is relevant globally, particularly in second- and foreign-language teaching contexts. Accordingly, I made a deliberate effort to suppress bias through reflexivity. Winter (2000) highlights the risk of compromising research quality if a qualitative researcher denies their influence on the study. Guided by this perspective, I critically examined my assumptions, perspectives, and potential subjectivities throughout the research process. This ongoing self-reflection helped minimise biases and ensured a more objective and credible approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

I also took cognizance of the fact that maintaining ethical integrity, according to Nandaniya (2025), serves as the foundation of scholarly investigation. Integrity remained a paramount concern throughout this study. All actions adhered to established ethical standards. Nandaniya (2025) further argues that educational institutions have a vital role in promoting this integrity within their research communities. This includes obtaining necessary ethical clearances and ensuring compliance with principles of informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and the right of participants to withdraw at any stage (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani & Shoghi, 2014). Additionally, I prioritized building trust and rapport with participants by creating and maintaining an environment conducive to open and honest dialogue. This approach enabled participants to share their narratives freely and authentically, ensuring that their voices were accurately and respectfully represented in the study.

By actively engaging in reflexivity and ethical rigour, this research exemplifies a commitment to maintaining the highest standards of qualitative inquiry. The deliberate alignment of methodological choices with ethical considerations strengthened the study's credibility, providing meaningful insights into the lived experiences of teachers and the broader field of second and foreign language teaching. Sanjari, et al., (2014) further suggest that the relationship and intimacy formed between researchers and participants in qualitative research can raise a variety of different ethical concerns; therefore, as a qualitative researcher, I ensured respect for the privacy of participants, established an honest and open relationship, and avoided misrepresentations.

Table 3.1 below presents an outline of the research strategy used in this study.

**Table 3.1: Research strategy.**

Research question	How do EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles? 1. What are teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching and its relevance to their teaching contexts? 2. How do EFAL teachers' conceptions of the communicative approach inform their practices? 3. How do teachers use literary texts to improve learners' communicative competence? 4. How do teachers exercise agency to navigate contested terrains and align their practices with curriculum goals?
Purpose of the study.	To explore how teachers in Quintile One township schools navigate systemic constraints when implementing communicative language teaching principles and communicative competence among learners in EFAL classrooms.
Meta-theoretical paradigm	Constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm.
Research design	Interpretive case study design.
Sampling - Participant selection/ sampling technique.	Sampling method – Purposeful sampling. Number of participants - 2 teachers per school x 3 schools
Data collection instruments.	Primary data: In-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews; observations.

	Secondary data: Document review (Learners' books, educators' preparation documents, and the CAPS document), researcher's reflexive journal, and field notes.
Data documentation	Verbatim transcripts of audio recordings, researcher journal, and field notes.
Data analysis	Content/thematic analysis
Ethical considerations.	Informed and voluntary consent Protection of participants from harm Confidentiality and anonymity of research participants The professional conduct of the researcher.
Quality criteria of the study.	Transferability, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity.

Following the outline provided in Table 3.1, this section explains the research design in relation to the study's objectives and context. The description covers the research site, population, sample, instruments, and ethical safeguards, while also clarifying the rationale for selecting the qualitative, interpretive case study design.

The choice of the methodological paradigm is directly informed by the central research question: how EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles. A qualitative, interpretive-constructivist paradigm was selected because it provides the most appropriate lens for examining teachers' lived experiences and the socially constructed nature of their pedagogical practices.

Constructivist/interpretivist philosophies view knowledge as socially constructed through human interaction and meaning-making (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This aligns with the study's aim of understanding how teachers actively construct and negotiate their professional practices within the constraints of CAPS and the realities of township schooling.

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in the understanding that knowledge is not passively received but actively interpreted through lived interactions in real educational contexts (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). This makes it well-suited to capturing how teachers' beliefs, experiences, and constraints shape their enactment of communicative language teaching.

The chosen orientation also reflects the study's focus on communicative language teaching, a teaching approach where teachers and learners jointly construct knowledge through authentic, classroom-based interactions. In this context, the interpretivist and constructivist dimensions complement one another:

Interpretivism underscores that teachers' and learners' actions can only be understood by situating them within their unique social, cultural, and educational contexts. This study, therefore, interprets teacher agency in relation to the structural constraints of Quintile One schools and the teachers' own professional identities.

Constructivism emphasizes that both teachers and learners construct knowledge collaboratively through interaction, reflection, and the negotiation of meaning. Within EFAL classrooms, this view supports the integration of literature as a medium through which communicative competence is jointly constructed.

In summary, the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm emphasizes collaboration, reflection, and engagement, making it a powerful framework for investigating how EFAL teachers exercise agency and adapt communicative language teaching principles under challenging conditions.

### **3.3 PARADIGMATIC AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

Ontology and epistemology represent the philosophical foundations of research, shaping how knowledge is understood, related to, and pursued through methodological strategies (Patel, 2015). By being aware of the philosophical assumptions, researchers can strengthen the quality of research and facilitate its originality (Patel, 2015). The subsections below outline how these approaches inform this study.

### **3.3.1           Ontology and epistemology**

Ontology and epistemology are foundational pillars within research philosophy, serving as critical lenses through which researchers conceptualize and conduct their inquiries (Scotland, 2012). In educational research, these philosophical underpinnings shape not only the design and methodology of a study but also the interpretation of its findings. Keser and Koksal (2017) emphasise that researchers must adopt a clear philosophical stance to ensure coherence and consistency throughout the research process, from formulating questions to analyzing data. This alignment is particularly crucial in studies that explore complex phenomena, such as teachers' beliefs, instructional practices, and the implementation of pedagogical frameworks, including communicative language teaching.

The ontological and epistemological perspectives adopted in this study reflect a deliberate effort to ground the inquiry within a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which aligns with the study's objectives of understanding the socially constructed realities of teachers and learners in South African township schools. In this context, ontology addresses the nature of reality and existence, while epistemology examines the origins, nature, and validation of knowledge. Together, these concepts provide a robust framework for examining how teachers navigate structural constraints, interpret curriculum policies, and apply communicative language teaching principles in ways that enhance learners' communicative competence. By situating the study within a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, I aimed to explore the dynamic interplay between subjective realities, contextual factors, and instructional practices, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in language teaching and learning.

### **3.3.2 Ontology, the nature of reality and its implications**

The selection of constructivism as the philosophical foundation for my study is informed by Guba's (1990) discussion of the paradigm, which argues that social actors continuously engage in the process of interpreting and assigning meaning to phenomena within their environments. This ontological perspective emphasizes that social reality is not static but instead a dynamic construct shaped by the interactions and negotiations among individuals (Crotty, 2003). Consequently, my engagement with participants was grounded in this understanding, ensuring that the interpretive inquiry effectively captured the complexities of teachers' perceptions and instructional practices. By adopting this stance, my study acknowledged that teachers' realities are co-constructed through their interactions with contextual factors, including institutional policies, environmental stimuli, and socio-cultural dynamics. These considerations also aligned with the theoretical framework of this study.

Constructivism aligns with the premise that teachers operating within a specific educational context are profoundly influenced by their surroundings, both in their pedagogical decisions and their interpretations of communicative language teaching principles. As Biggs (1996) asserts, knowledge is not only individually constructed but also socially mediated, with prior knowledge serving as a scaffold for new understandings. This perspective resonates with the study's focus on how teachers use literary texts to support learners' contextual understanding of language use. The constructivist paradigm thus provides a strong framework for examining how educators navigate their contexts, drawing on personal experiences and collaborative interactions to construct knowledge and refine their instructional strategies.

Consequently, the application of social constructivism to explore teachers' knowledge construction in the context of communicative language teaching and their methods for contextualized language use is central to this study. This ontological lens enabled an in-depth investigation into how teachers conceptualized the communicative approach, adapted their practices to learners' diverse backgrounds, and utilized literary texts to promote contextual meaning-making.

Accordingly, this study assumes that teachers working in particular environments are shaped by the policies, stimuli, and socio-contextual contexts surrounding them, which influence their perceptions and instructional practices when using literature to enhance learners' contextual understanding.

The constructivist paradigm aligns with my belief that knowledge can be both gained individually and through interactions with others, and that previous knowledge influences the acquisition of new knowledge (Biggs, 1996).

### **3.3.2.1      *Ontology in the context of research design***

Ontology fundamentally addresses questions such as “What exists in the world?” and “How can these entities be categorized and understood?” (Wilson, 2009). It examines different types of existence, including physical objects, abstract concepts, and social structures, while also providing insights into the relationships between various layers of reality. These principles guided the identification of ontological assumptions that shape the definition of research problems, data collection methods, and the interpretation of findings.

In this study, the ontological stance acknowledges the coexistence of multiple realities, each shaped by unique sociocultural contexts. This perspective aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that knowledge develops through observation, reinforcement, and reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behaviour, and environment. Teachers construct their understanding of reality based on these contexts, which reflects the constant negotiation between personal behaviour and environmental influences.

According to Social Cognitive Theory, teachers require a sense of agency to exercise control over key events in their professional lives, despite the challenges they encounter. The theory further assumes that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals, and self-evaluations of progress are among the dominant variables affecting this sense of agency. Human development is inherently tied to social, political, and cultural

inputs, emphasizing the importance of context in shaping perceptions, conceptions, and attitudes.

This ontological framework challenges the notion of a singular, objective reality, arguing instead that individuals construct multiple realities informed by their experiences and social contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In research, this view aligns with a relativist ontology, which rejects the existence of one absolute truth and instead acknowledges the coexistence of diverse realities constructed by both participants and researchers.

### **3.3.2.2 *Ontological perspectives on the communicative approach***

The ontological assumptions underpinning this study are particularly relevant to the communicative approach to language teaching. My belief in the existence of multiple subjective realities informed the selection of a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, which aligns with the philosophical underpinnings of the study. Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, this research investigates how teachers' instructional practices are influenced by their unique sociocultural contexts and how these practices, in turn, impact learners' communicative competence.

This ontological perspective highlights the dynamic interplay between individuals and their sociocultural environments, reflecting the broader implications of sociocultural theory in educational research. By recognizing that reality is socially constructed and contextually dependent, the study provides a framework for understanding the nuanced relationship between teachers' perspectives, instructional practices, and contextual influences.

This approach deepens understanding of how subjective realities shape the implementation of the communicative approach. It contributes to the broader discourse on effective language pedagogy in diverse educational settings, where unique contexts profoundly impact teachers' pedagogical practices as suggested by Gemmink et al. (2021). Ontology and epistemology together provide the philosophical

scaffolding for this research, influencing every stage of the inquiry process. By adopting a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, the study aligns with a relativist ontology and an epistemology that emphasizes the co-construction of meaning and the contextual validation of knowledge.

This alignment ensures that the research design, data collection methods, and analytical strategies remain coherent and consistent with the study's objectives. Understanding these foundational concepts is essential for addressing complex educational questions, particularly in contexts characterized by systemic inequities and resource constraints. As Keser and Koksal (2017) emphasize, a clear philosophical framework is not only a guiding principle but also a critical factor in ensuring the validity and rigour of research outcomes.

Through this ontological and epistemological lens, the study offers valuable insights into the implementation of the communicative approach and the development of communicative competence in South African township schools. In doing so, the study contributes to both theory and practice in language education.

### **3.3.3 Epistemological considerations**

Teachers and learners inhabit multiple realities, which may be both similar and divergent, but all require interpretation. This interpretation is particularly evident when language is used in context, requiring learners to apply both grammatical and social rules. However, this expectation is often challenged in the case of FAL learners, who frequently acquire grammatical forms in isolation from their communicative contexts.

It is for this reason that the qualitative interpretive research paradigm was chosen for this study. This choice reflects the principle that clarifications of how interpretations are made, understandings are invoked, and meanings are constructed emerge in lived situations (Radnor, 2002).

The epistemological premise of this paradigm advances that reality and knowledge are inextricably linked; thus, the knower and the known are inextricably intertwined

(Crotty, 2003). This implies that researchers and participants are collaboratively engaged in a dialogue and meaning-making process, resulting in the co-construction of knowledge.

### **3.3.4. Meta-theoretical paradigm: constructivist/interpretivism**

The selection of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm for this study stems from the nature of the research questions, insights gained from the literature review, and the study's theoretical framework (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Research methodology is rooted in philosophical underpinnings that shape the research trajectory (Bryman, 2016). This paradigm represents the epistemological and ontological beliefs of the researcher, reflecting assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

#### **3.3.4.1 *Constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and knowledge creation***

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm emphasizes that reality is socially constructed and continually shaped by interactions between individuals and their environments (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). It views knowledge as dynamic and co-created, aligning with the study's focus on the communicative approach in teaching. Sol and Heng (2022) argue that epistemology, our understanding of knowledge, is grounded in real-life interactions, which aligns with the paradigm's emphasis on authentic, socially embedded learning experiences.

In the context of this study, the paradigm supports the examination of the communicative approach, where teachers and learners collaboratively construct knowledge through natural interactions in real-world scenarios. This aligns with the core principles of interpretivism and constructivism. Interpretivism recognizes that individuals actively interpret and make sense of their experiences based on unique cultural, historical, and personal contexts (Ryan, 2018). It rejects the notion of an

objective reality, emphasizing that truth and knowledge are subjective and socially situated. This perspective is particularly relevant to understanding teachers' diverse interpretations and practices related to the communicative approach.

Constructivism asserts that individuals construct knowledge through engagement with their environments, emphasizing active, learner-centred, and collaborative approaches. Constructivist classrooms encourage reflection and the co-construction of understanding, which is critical for promoting communicative competence (Fien & Huggerford, 2001).

#### **3.3.4.2 *Interpretivist and constructivist approaches to research***

The interpretivist-constructivist paradigm is characterized by its anti-positivist, humanistic, and naturalistic nature (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013), which challenges the positivist reliance on the scientific method (Cohen et al., 2017). Merriam (2016) and Schwandt (1994) note that these terms are often used interchangeably to describe research that seeks to understand the world through participants' subjective experiences.

This paradigm is particularly suited to exploring the complexities of teaching practices, where multiple realities and interpretations coexist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study supports the exploration of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices related to implementing the communicative approach. It assumes that teachers operate in social contexts where their experiences are both unique and interconnected (Taylor & Bogdan, 2015).

By immersing in participants' realities, the researcher seeks to interpret the meanings derived from their perspectives, aligning with Schwandt's (1994) view that understanding the world of meaning requires interpretation. The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm offers a suitable framework for understanding the socially constructed nature of teaching and learning practices. By emphasizing engagement,

collaboration, and reflection, it offers valuable insights into how teachers perceive and implement the communicative approach in diverse educational settings.

This paradigm enables the researcher to interpret the lived experiences of participants, ensuring that the study captures the complexity of teaching practices and contributes to the broader discourse on communicative language teaching. Following Schwandt (1994), O'Sullivan (2015), and Cousin (2013), the researcher's voice and positionality are acknowledged, further enriching the interpretive process. The intertwining of relationships with research motives challenges the investigator to carefully consider their own positionality within the research context (Genishi & Glupczynski, 2006: 670).

Ultimately, the adoption of this paradigm underscores the study's commitment to exploring the nuanced realities of teachers and learners, thereby developing a deeper understanding of effective language pedagogy. One of the strengths of the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm is its emphasis on collaboration and active engagement, where researchers draw on multiple perspectives (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022).

In the context of education, this aligns with learner-centred approaches that encourage learners to construct their understanding through interactions and reflections. Constructivist classrooms emphasize collaborative learning, hands-on activities, and critical thinking, allowing learners to connect new knowledge to their existing experiences. Similarly, teachers play an active role in facilitating meaningful learning by designing lessons that are culturally relevant and contextually grounded (Miller, 2019). This is particularly relevant in studies exploring the use of communicative approaches in teaching, where the dynamic interplay between teachers, learners, and authentic materials encourages the improvement of communicative competence.

However, the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm is not without challenges. The immersive nature of this research approach increases the potential for researcher bias, as the interpretation of participants' experiences is inevitably influenced by the researcher's values and assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). To mitigate this, scholars such as Cousin (2013) advocate for reflexivity, encouraging researchers to be transparent about their positionality and its influence on the research process.

Additionally, the paradigm's emphasis on subjectivity and multiple realities requires rigorous analytical methods to navigate and synthesizes diverse viewpoints effectively.

Hence, the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm offers a robust and adaptable framework for research that aims to comprehend the intricacies of human experiences and interactions. Its focus on subjective realities, active engagement, and collaborative knowledge creation makes it particularly valuable in educational research, where understanding the perspectives of teachers and learners is key to implementing effective teaching strategies. By embracing the dynamic and multifaceted nature of knowledge, this paradigm enables the production of meaningful insights that contribute to both theory and practice.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This section describes the research design adopted by the study. It sets out the study's plan, including the processes and procedures that inform participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. All ethical considerations and standard research practices steered the choice of design. This choice was guided by the research problem, theoretical framework, and study purpose to ensure a holistic understanding of the problem.

This study employed a bounded qualitative case study design, grounded in social constructivism and ethnography, to explore the intricate interplay between individuals' lived experiences and their constructed realities (Hammersley, 2012). This methodological approach facilitated an in-depth examination of participants' unique perspectives, enabling a nuanced understanding of how they navigated and interpreted their sociocultural and professional contexts.

The research aimed to elicit teachers' insights into their conceptual understandings and sociocultural realities, particularly how these dimensions are reflected in their constructed behaviours within educational settings. As Coimbra and Martins (2013) assert, educational case studies typically concentrate on specific instances, such as

classrooms, curricula, educational projects, or individual learners and teachers, to reveal broader systemic dynamics. In alignment with this perspective, the phenomenon under investigation is situated within a bounded system while remaining interconnected with the wider educational context (Yin, 2009). Case studies, by definition, delineate a bounded unit of analysis, which may encompass individuals, groups, institutions, or policies, thus providing a focused lens for examining complex phenomena (Yin, 2012).

Miles and Huberman (1994:25) further elaborate that a case study involves “a phenomenon of interest occurring in a bounded context,” serving as the unit of analysis. This boundedness ensures clarity and coherence in the research process while allowing for the exploration of intricate connections between the micro-level experiences of participants and the macro-level structures that shape their realities. By situating the study within this framework, the research not only adheres to rigorous methodological standards but also captures the depth and complexity of teachers’ narratives as reflections of their agency and sociocultural embeddedness.

### **3.4.1 Qualitative research design, a constructivist lens**

Qualitative research is fundamentally concerned with understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to complex social or human phenomena (Creswell, 2014). This methodological tradition avoids rigid quantification, favouring open-ended inquiries which generate rich, context-specific data reflecting participants’ individuality, culture, and lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and participant engagement help to capture the nuanced viewpoints of participants, providing a depth of insight unattainable through traditional quantitative approaches (Merriam, 2009; Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015). This emphasis on subjectivity and contextual relevance aligns with the constructivist worldview, which posits that reality is socially constructed, and knowledge emerges through interactions and shared experiences (Lincoln et al., 2011).

The inductive nature of qualitative research is grounded in several key assumptions: (i) reality is inherently subjective and context-dependent, (ii) variables are interwoven and not easily isolated, and (iii) the researcher seeks to uncover insider perspectives (Rovai et al., 2014). These principles resonate with the objectives of this study, which aims to explore how teachers perceive and implement communicative approaches in their teaching practices. By foregrounding teachers' lived experiences, beliefs, and actions, the study aligns with the paradigm's emphasis on meaning-making and context, offering profound insights into the complexities of pedagogical practices and the role of literature in developing communicative competence among multilingual learners.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) and Merriam (2010) assert that qualitative research extends beyond numerical data, delving into the intricacies of human behaviour, motivations, and experiences. In the context of this study, this approach is particularly salient, as it seeks to unravel the socially constructed realities of classroom interactions and educational practices. The constructivist foundation of qualitative research acknowledges the influence of cultural, social, and contextual factors on teaching and learning processes. By prioritising the subjective experiences of teachers and learners, this investigation provides a nuanced understanding of how educational reforms are perceived, enacted, and adapted within specific pedagogical contexts.

Furthermore, the qualitative approach adopted in this study ensures that participants' voices remain central to the research process. Through interviews, observations, and narrative analysis, the study captures the intricate dynamics of teachers' instructional practices and their use of literary texts to promote communicative competence. This focus on participants' perspectives not only enriches the understanding of the phenomenon but also ensures that the findings remain grounded in the lived realities of those directly involved in the educational process.

Therefore, the qualitative research design selected for this study is not merely a methodological choice but a deliberate philosophical stance. It reflects a commitment to exploring the complexities of human experience within their natural settings, prioritising depth over breadth and authenticity over abstraction. By situating the

investigation within the constructivist paradigm, the study underscores the transformative potential of teacher agency in navigating structural constraints and implementing innovative pedagogical strategies. This approach not only advances theoretical understandings of communicative competence and teacher agency but also offers practical insights into how educators can harness literary texts to enhance learners' linguistic, sociocultural, and critical-thinking skills in diverse educational contexts.

### **3.4.2. Case study research design**

A well-conceived research design is not merely a procedural blueprint; it is the epistemological and methodological foundation upon which the integrity of a study rests. As Mouton (1996:75) asserts, research design is essential for the effective “planning, structuring, and executing” of inquiry, particularly when the phenomenon under investigation is complex, contextually embedded, and resistant to reductionist analysis. In this study, a qualitative case study design was employed to explore the intricate dynamics of EFAL teaching in South African township schools. This approach was selected to deliberately capture the lived realities, pedagogical decisions, and contextual constraints that shape how teachers conceptualize and enact communicative competence in their classrooms.

Case study research, as defined by Yin (2018), is particularly well-suited for investigating how and why phenomena occur within real-world settings, especially when the boundaries between context and intervention are not clearly defined. In the domain of language education, where linguistic, cultural, institutional, and affective factors converge, the case study offers a powerful means of generating thick, interpretive descriptions (Geertz, 1973; McLeod, 2024) that illuminate the complexity of teaching and learning. As Queirós, Faria, and Almeida (2017) observe, case studies excel in analyzing multifaceted situations characterized by numerous interrelated variables, making them ideal for examining the interplay between policy, pedagogy, and practice in multilingual, under-resourced classrooms.

This study focused on six EFAL teachers across three township schools, each serving as a bounded case within a broader, purposively selected sample. This design enabled an in-depth exploration of how teachers' understandings of communicative competence, shaped by their professional experiences, linguistic backgrounds, and systemic pressures, translate into classroom practice. Rather than seeking statistical generalisability, the case study prioritised analytical generalisation (Yin, 2012), aiming to produce transferable insights into the conditions that enable or constrain the implementation of communicative language teaching in the South African context.

One of the principal strengths of the case study design lies in its capacity to uncover causal mechanisms and relational dynamics. Wabwoba and Ikoha (2011) argue that case studies are uniquely positioned to answer "how" and "why" questions, allowing researchers to trace the processes through which teacher beliefs, curriculum mandates, and learner needs interact. In this study, this meant examining how teachers negotiate the tension between CAPS' aspirational goals and the performative realities of overcrowded classrooms, rigid lesson plans, and limited professional support. By focusing on these processes, the design facilitated a deeper understanding of the micro-politics of pedagogy, including the ways in which teachers exercise agency, adapt materials, and make daily decisions that either reinforce or resist dominant educational norms.

Methodologically, the case study design enabled triangulation across multiple data sources, enhancing the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis (e.g., lesson plans, learners' workbooks, and curriculum materials). This multi-method approach, as Yin (2012) advocates, enables cross-verification of evidence, thereby reducing the risk of misinterpretation and providing a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon. For instance, discrepancies between teachers' stated beliefs about communicative language teaching and their observed classroom practices revealed critical insights into the gap between policy intent and pedagogical reality, a disjuncture that would have remained invisible through a single-method approach.

Furthermore, the qualitative case study aligned closely with an ethnographic research strategy, which emphasizes prolonged engagement, contextual immersion, and interpretive depth (van den Berg, 2002:613). Ethnography, characterized by observation and qualitative interpretation (Wiersma, 2000:15), provided a framework for understanding not only what teachers do, but also why they do it, the meanings they attach to their roles, the challenges they navigate, and the identities they construct as educators in a linguistically diverse system. As van den Berg (2002) notes, such an approach offers critical insights into how teachers in multilingual classrooms construct knowledge, manage complexity, and respond to the socio-educational demands placed upon them.

Despite its strengths, the case study design has limitations. A primary critique is its susceptibility to researcher subjectivity. Wabwoba and Ikoha (2011) caution that the interpretive nature of qualitative data collection and analysis can lead to varied interpretations of the same phenomenon. To mitigate this, I maintained a reflexive journal, engaged in peer debriefing, and ensured transparency in data coding and thematic development. While Asenahabi (2019) argues that non-experimental designs may describe what happened without fully explaining why, the depth of contextual inquiry in this study allowed for the identification of recurring patterns and underlying structural causes, such as resource inequity, lack of professional development, and curriculum rigidity, shaping teacher practice.

Another commonly cited limitation is the lack of statistical generalisability. Case studies, by their nature, focus on small, context-specific samples, making broad extrapolation difficult (Marczyk et al., 2005). However, as Stake (1995) reminds us, the goal of case study research is not generalisation in the positivist sense, but theoretical and contextual insight, the identification of principles, patterns, and possibilities that can inform understanding in similar settings. The findings from this study, grounded in three township schools, offer transferable lessons for other under-resourced, multilingual EFAL contexts where teachers grapple with similar tensions between policy and practice.

Ethical considerations were also central to the design. The intimate, narrative-rich nature of case studies necessitates a high degree of sensitivity to confidentiality, informed consent, and participant autonomy (Queirós et al., 2017). I ensured that all participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, that their identities were protected, and that they retained the right to withdraw at any stage. The interpretivist orientation of the research further demanded that I approach participants not as data sources, but as knowledge co-constructors, whose perspectives were central to the validity of the inquiry.

Ultimately, the qualitative case study design proved indispensable for achieving the study's central aim, understanding how teachers, operating within a constrained yet dynamic system, conceptualize and support communicative competence through literature-based instruction. It allowed for the emergence of rich, nuanced narratives that reveal the complexity of teaching in a post-colonial, multilingual context, narratives that are not only academically valuable but also pedagogically actionable. While the design does not offer universal solutions, it provides a contextually grounded, human-centred account of the possibilities and limitations inherent in EFAL education.

This methodological choice was both pragmatic and philosophical in nature. It affirmed the value of understanding education as a lived, socially constructed process that cannot be captured through numbers alone and instead requires interpretation through the voices, actions, and reflections of those who enact it daily.

### **3.5. ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH**

Ethnographic research is distinguished by its holistic, immersive, and contextually grounded methodology, designed to uncover the lived realities, cultural practices, and social interactions that shape human behaviour within natural settings. As Nurani (2008) asserts, ethnography prioritizes the study of participants in their everyday environments, enabling researchers to generate authentic, nuanced, and deeply contextual insights. In this study, ethnographic principles were central to the inquiry,

providing a framework for understanding how EFAL teachers in South African township schools conceptualize and enact communicative competence within the constraints of CAPS. By embedding the research in the natural ecology of the classroom, the study avoided the artificiality of controlled conditions, thereby enhancing its ecological validity (Nurani, 2008) and ensuring that findings were not only rich but also representative of real-world pedagogical practice.

A defining feature of ethnographic research is its focus on the natural setting, where phenomena are studied in situ rather than in abstract or contextualized forms. In this study, Data was collected directly within the schools where teachers worked, allowing for authentic observation of instructional strategies, classroom dynamics, and teacher-learner interactions. This immersion enabled the researcher to witness how literature-based tasks were implemented, how communicative activities were facilitated (or not), and how systemic pressures influenced pedagogical decision-making. As Charmaz (2006) emphasizes, understanding individual behaviour requires attention to the broader social, historical, and institutional contexts in which it is embedded. In this study, teachers' practices were examined not in isolation, but as responses to the interplay of policy mandates, resource limitations, and multilingual classroom realities, offering a holistic understanding of the forces shaping EFAL instruction.

Participant observation was a cornerstone of the methodological approach. By actively engaging in the research environment, attending lessons, observing teacher-student interactions, and documenting classroom routines, the researcher gained direct access to the tacit knowledge, unspoken norms, and practical challenges that define daily teaching life. This aligns with the core ethnographic principle of immersive observation, which provides unparalleled insight into participants' lived experiences (Nurani, 2008). For instance, observing how teachers used literary texts as authentic materials for communicative language teaching revealed not only their pedagogical intentions but also the structural barriers, such as time constraints and lack of learner engagement, that limited their effectiveness.

The prolonged engagement of one academic year further strengthened the study's depth and credibility. Unlike short-term observations that risk capturing only surface-

level patterns, extended immersion allowed for the identification of consistent practices, evolving strategies, and subtle shifts in teacher agency over time. As Charmaz (2006) notes, such sustained presence enhances the reliability of ethnographic insights by enabling researchers to distinguish between transient occurrences and enduring patterns. This temporal depth was crucial in a context where teachers often navigate fluctuating conditions, learner attendance, administrative demands, and curriculum changes, making long-term observation essential for accurate interpretation.

Another feature of this ethnographic inquiry was its flexible, emergent design. Rather than adhering to a rigid protocol, the study allowed for methodological adaptability in response to emerging themes and contextual realities. As Caulfield (2022) argues, flexibility is not a weakness of ethnography but a necessary strength in complex, unpredictable environments. This openness enabled the researcher to pivot when new questions arose, such as how teachers negotiated linguistic diversity or responded to learner disengagement, thereby ensuring that the inquiry remained responsive to the lived realities of the classroom.

The study employed an ethnographic case study design, a methodological hybrid that combines the depth of ethnography with the focused specificity of case study research. As Caulfield (2022) suggests, this approach is particularly effective for examining localized educational practices, especially in under-researched or structurally complex settings. By concentrating on three township schools and six EFAL teachers, the research provided a nuanced, micro-level analysis of how communicative competence is understood, taught, and challenged in practice. This aligns with Nunan's (1992) concept of holism, which advocates for a comprehensive exploration of individual actions within their broader institutional, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts. The result was a thick description—a rich, interpretive account that captures not only what teachers do, but also why they do it (Geertz, 1973).

### **3.5.1 Advantages of the ethnographic case study approach**

The primary strength of ethnographic research lies in its ability to provide direct, unmediated access to cultural and social practices. As Khan (2018) observes, immersion allows researchers to uncover insights that are often invisible in interviews or surveys. In this study, for example, observing how a teacher scaffolded a discussion on a short story revealed more about their understanding of communicative competence than any self-reported narrative could. The researcher observed moments of improvisation, hesitation, and adaptation, as well as subtle pedagogical decisions, which highlight the gap between policy ideals and classroom realities.

The method's multi-method flexibility further enhanced data richness. By integrating participant observation, semi-structured interviews, field notes, and document analysis (e.g., lesson plans, learners' workbooks), the study achieved methodological triangulation, increasing the trustworthiness and depth of the findings (Miller, 2016). This comprehensive approach provided a holistic view of how teachers interpret and apply communicative competence, while also illustrating how their decisions are influenced by curriculum demands, learner diversity, and personal beliefs.

### **3.5.2 Challenges and limitations of ethnographic research**

Despite its strengths, ethnographic research presents significant challenges. One of the most prominent is its time-intensive nature. A full academic year of immersion across three schools required meticulous planning, sustained commitment, and considerable personal and logistical resources. The depth of data generated, while a strength, also posed analytical challenges, necessitating rigorous coding and thematic development.

Another critical concern is the potential for observer bias. As Hammersley (2006) cautions, the researcher's presence and participation can influence both the setting and the interpretation of data. To mitigate this, I maintained a reflexive journal, engaged in peer debriefing, and regularly revisited raw data to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in evidence rather than assumption. While complete objectivity is unattainable in interpretivist research, these strategies helped preserve analytical integrity.

Ethnographic research, with its emphasis on culture, context, and lived experience, was uniquely suited to this study's aim of exploring how EFAL teachers navigate the complexities of communicative language teaching in South African township schools. By prioritizing immersion, prolonged engagement, and thick description, the method provided a comprehensive, authentic, and critically reflective account of pedagogical practice. While challenges such as time demands, observer bias, and limited generalisability were acknowledged, the depth and richness of the insights far outweighed these constraints. This approach not only illuminated the interplay between teacher agency, curriculum mandates, and learner needs but also made a meaningful contribution to broader debates on the implementation of communicative competence in multilingual classrooms. As Savignon (1983) and Woods (1996) have long argued, understanding language teaching requires more than measuring outcomes; it demands seeing through the teacher's eyes. This ethnographic case study achieved precisely that, offering a powerful testament to the value of contextually grounded, humanistic inquiry in educational research.

### **3.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

"Research methodology is the path through which researchers need to conduct their research" Sileyew (2019). It outlines how investigators formulate a problem, define their purpose, and present outcomes from the data collected during the investigation period (Sileyew, 2019).

The methodology adopted by this study is qualitative, which is fundamentally oriented toward interpretive understandings of social phenomena within naturalistic contexts. This approach offers a rich and nuanced lens for examining human behaviours, beliefs, and cultural dynamics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Rooted in interpretivism and constructivism, this methodological paradigm emphasizes the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants, privileging subjective experiences and contextual intricacies over generalized, decontextualized truths.

As Van der Merwe (cited in Garbers, 1996) asserts, qualitative inquiry serves not only to describe but also to refine theoretical frameworks by deepening conceptual understanding, an aim that resonates profoundly with the present study's focus on investigating how EFAL teachers conceptualize communicative competence and how these conceptualisations inform their pedagogical practices.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) characterize qualitative research as a "naturalistic and interpretive tradition" in which researchers immerse themselves in the lived worlds of participants to uncover the meanings embedded in everyday actions and interactions. This immersive approach enables access to the tacit, often unspoken assumptions that shape educational practice, making it particularly well-suited for exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena such as language teaching in multilingual classrooms.

In such settings, pedagogy is not merely a technical application of methods but an embodied, culturally situated practice shaped by institutional policies, sociolinguistic realities, and teacher agency. By foregrounding context and meaning-making, qualitative research provides a methodological space where the complexity of EFL instruction can be explored in its full sociocultural depth.

### **3.6.1 Strengths of qualitative research**

The epistemological and methodological strengths of qualitative research are manifold, offering unique advantages in studies that aim to understand the intricacies

of educational practice. A central strength of qualitative research lies in its capacity to elucidate how individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences (Maxwell, 2004). This focus on meaning-making was pivotal in the present study, as it enabled an exploration of how EFL teachers' beliefs about communicative competence are shaped by, and in turn shape, their immediate educational contexts. In addition, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) state that one advantage of qualitative research is that it focuses on naturally occurring events in real-life settings, such as classrooms, providing researchers with authentic insights into practice.

Factors such as school-level language policies, student linguistic diversity, and sociocultural expectations significantly influence pedagogical decision-making; yet, these dimensions are often obscured in quantitative paradigms that prioritize measurable outcomes over interpretive depth. As Maxwell (2004) notes, qualitative inquiry allows researchers to trace the causal pathways between context, perception, and action, thereby illuminating the sociocultural mechanisms underpinning teaching practices.

Qualitative research is inherently adaptive, allowing researchers to modify data collection tools and procedures in response to emergent insights (Hammersley, 2007). This flexibility was instrumental in the present study, where semi-structured interviews and observations facilitated rich, participant-driven narratives. As Kvale (2007) observes, open-ended formats empower participants to articulate their experiences in their own terms, often revealing unanticipated themes. For instance, when discussing communicative competence, some teachers framed it through the lens of exam preparation rather than authentic communication, prompting the researcher to rephrase follow-up questions to better align with participants' professional and cultural understandings. Such responsiveness, as Kim, Polidano, and Lee (2017) emphasize, is a hallmark of qualitative research, enabling the evolution of research questions and methods in real-time to enhance the relevance and depth of findings.

One of the most distinctive features of qualitative research is its ability to produce "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973), a concept further elaborated by Denzin and Lincoln (1989), who underscore the value of detailed, contextually embedded narratives in

capturing the lived realities of participants. Unlike quantitative methods that reduce complexity to numerical abstractions, qualitative approaches prioritize depth over breadth, yielding data that reflect the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of experience (Patton, 2002). In this study, multiple sources, including in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, were employed to construct a comprehensive picture of teachers' pedagogical reasoning and classroom enactment. This multi-layered data collection enabled a nuanced understanding of the interplay between teachers' beliefs about communicative competence and their instructional choices, thereby offering a holistic view of EFL pedagogy that transcends surface-level observations.

A key advantage of qualitative research is its compatibility with methodological triangulation, the use of multiple data sources, methods, or investigators to cross-validate findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1978). By integrating interviews, classroom observations, and field notes, this study ensured a multidimensional perspective on the research problem. Thus, discrepancies between teachers' self-reported practices and actual classroom behaviours were identified through observational data, prompting deeper inquiry during subsequent interviews. As Patton (2002) argues, such triangulation strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative findings. Furthermore, Creswell (2014) highlights that triangulation not only enhances internal validity but also enriches the interpretive depth of the study, providing a stronger and contextually grounded analysis.

At its core, qualitative research is deeply humanistic, emphasizing direct engagement with participants to capture their emotions, motivations, and lived realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This relational dimension was central to the present study, as sustained interactions with teachers fostered trust and encouraged candid reflections on their challenges, aspirations, and pedagogical dilemmas. Through narrative accounts, the research accessed the affective and ethical dimensions of teaching, such as frustration with curriculum constraints or pride in student progress, offering insights that extend beyond technical descriptions of practice. Eberle, Guillin, and Zimmer (2019) affirm that such empathetic engagement is essential for understanding the

subtle, often intangible aspects of educational experience, including identity, agency, and resilience.

### **3.6.2. Limitations of qualitative research**

While qualitative research offers profound methodological advantages, it is not without its limitations, which must be critically acknowledged and strategically addressed.

#### **3.6.2.1 *Subjectivity and researcher bias***

A persistent critique of qualitative research centres on its subjective nature, as the researcher serves as both the primary instrument of data collection and the interpreter of meaning (Worthen & Sanders, 1987). In this study, my role as researcher inevitably influenced data interpretation, potentially introducing bias through preconceived notions about communicative competence or teaching effectiveness. Moreover, participants may have engaged in socially desirable responding, presenting idealised versions of their practices rather than candid reflections. To mitigate these risks, the study employed reflexive journaling and peer debriefing, allowing for continuous self-examination and external validation of interpretive processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### **3.6.2.2. *Limited generalisability***

Due to its focus on context-specific, in-depth exploration, qualitative research typically does not aim for statistical generalisability (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). The findings from six EFAL teachers, while rich and insightful, are not intended to be representative of all EFAL educators. Instead, the study contributes to transferability, the extent to which findings can be meaningfully applied to similar contexts, by

providing thick descriptions that enable readers to assess applicability to their own settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **3.6.2.3      *Time and resource intensiveness***

Qualitative research demands considerable time and effort, particularly in data collection, transcription, and thematic analysis (Creswell, 2014). This study involved a year-long engagement with schools, including multiple interview sessions, classroom observations, and iterative data analysis. The labour-intensive nature of coding and interpreting complex, multi-source data posed significant challenges, requiring meticulous organization and sustained intellectual engagement. As Creswell (2014) notes, the analytical process in qualitative research is not linear but recursive, involving constant movement between data, codes, and emerging themes.

### **3.6.2.4      *Ethical complexities***

Ethical considerations are particularly salient in qualitative research due to the intimate and prolonged interactions between researchers and participants (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality was especially challenging given the small number of participants and the detailed nature of the data. For instance, describing specific classroom incidents risked inadvertently identifying individuals or institutions. To address this, pseudonyms were used and identifying details were altered or omitted in accordance with ethical guidelines (Kaizer, 2009). Additionally, informed consent was obtained at multiple stages, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time (Grinyer, 2002).

Moreover, the ability to reproduce findings under similar conditions is inherently limited in qualitative research due to its context-bound and interpretive nature (Mwita, 2022). The dynamic, evolving design of qualitative studies, while a strength in terms of responsiveness, complicates replication. Each research context is unique, shaped by

the interplay of participants, researcher positionality, and situational factors, making exact replication neither feasible nor necessarily desirable. However, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue, qualitative research prioritizes dependability demonstrated through audit trails and transparent methodological reporting over replicability, ensuring rigour without sacrificing interpretive depth.

This study is attentive to issues of researcher positionality, power relations, and contextual constraints within the South African township schooling context. Recognising that knowledge is socially constructed, the researcher acknowledges that interpretations are shaped by their positionality and engagement with participants. Particular attention was given to the power dynamics embedded in educational reforms and professional development structures, where teachers often occupy positions with limited decision-making authority. By situating the analysis within the broader socio-historical realities of township schooling—including resource constraints, linguistic diversity, and systemic inequalities—the study seeks to provide a contextually grounded understanding of teacher agency and professional learning.

Despite its limitations, qualitative research provided a firm and indispensable methodological framework for this study. Its strengths, including methodological flexibility, the generation of rich, contextually embedded data, capacity for triangulation, and a human-centred focus, were essential for addressing the complex, multifaceted nature of EFAL teachers' conceptualisations of communicative competence. While challenges related to subjectivity, generalisability, and resource demands were acknowledged, they were systematically addressed through reflexive practice, ethical rigour, and methodological transparency. Ultimately, qualitative research enabled a deep, interpretive engagement with the lived realities of teaching, yielding insights that not only advance theoretical understanding but also inform practical improvements in EFAL pedagogy. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) affirm, qualitative inquiry remains a vital tool for exploring the "messy, complex, and deeply human" dimensions of education.

### **3.7 PARTICIPANT AND SITE SELECTION**

Participants in this study were purposively selected from five Quintile One public high schools in a township in Gauteng, South Africa. Although participants from two schools ultimately withdrew due to traumatic events that occurred within their institutions, the research proceeded with data from three schools and six teachers. While this adjustment reduced the sample size, it did not compromise the reliability or validity of the findings. The remaining participants operated within comparable educational contexts, guided by a unified monitoring system and syllabus, ensuring continuity and consistency in the data. The homogeneity of the educational framework across the schools mitigates the potential impact of the withdrawals.

According to Yin (2018), when cases are selected within similar bounded systems, such as schools adhering to the same curriculum and policy mandates, the transferability of findings is preserved. In this study, all schools followed CAPS, which standardises teaching practices and learning outcomes in South African schools (DBE, 2011). This alignment ensured that the experiences of the remaining participants remained representative of the broader educational environment. Furthermore, the similarity in monitoring processes across the schools supported the rigour of the research. As Charmaz (2006) emphasizes, maintaining consistent oversight mechanisms strengthens the comparability of findings in qualitative studies. The consistency in teacher evaluation and oversight practices across the schools enabled the researcher to focus on key pedagogical themes without introducing significant variability.

The withdrawal of participants, while unfortunate, also highlights the ethical responsiveness of the research design. Ethnographic research often encounters unforeseen challenges, including participant attrition due to external factors (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). In such cases, the researcher's ability to adapt while preserving methodological integrity is crucial. By focusing on the remaining participants, the study was able to delve deeply into the interplay between teaching

practices and institutional culture, resulting in a thick and contextually rich analysis (Geertz, 1973). Ultimately, the alignment of the schools' operational frameworks, the standardized syllabus, and the overarching monitoring systems bolsters the transferability of the study's findings within its defined context. As Stake (1995) notes, the value of case studies lies not in their representativeness but in their ability to provide insights into broader patterns through in-depth examination. By adhering to this principle, the research maintains its scholarly rigour and contributes valuable perspectives on developing communicative competence in EFAL classrooms.

Quintile One schools are non-fee-paying institutions, situated in underprivileged areas and characterized by overcrowding, insufficient resources, and inadequate facilities, such as libraries and access to native English speakers. These systemic challenges directly impact both teaching and learning, contributing to low pass rates and limiting learners' access to critical educational tools. The schools in this study were located in the Tshwane North district, a context that reflects systemic inequalities in South Africa's education system.

Within this study, School A, although comparatively better resourced through sponsorship from BMW, and School B were both classified under Section 58B as underperforming schools. Their finances were also placed under district administration, meaning that funds were managed by the district rather than by principals or school governing bodies (SGBs). As a result, schools only received their operational allocations twice a month, creating significant administrative and operational difficulties. This arrangement adversely influenced teachers' ability to attend professional development workshops, restricted the timely procurement of textbooks and learning resources, and complicated the reimbursement processes associated with using LTSM and "ring-fenced" funds earmarked for school maintenance (Oppolzer, 2019). Furthermore, learners also encountered difficulties attending oral moderations, as requests for transport funding had to be made directly to the district. These constraints also impacted the implementation of School Improvement Plans (SIPs), which aim to address curriculum coverage weaknesses by providing additional lessons to at-risk learners.

Merriam (1998:61) underscores the rationale for purposeful sampling, stating that it enables researchers to select participants from whom “the most can be learned” to gain in-depth insights into the phenomenon under study. This approach aligns with the study's objective of understanding the capacity and agency of teachers in implementing the CAPS curriculum and developing learners' communicative competence. Purposive sampling, as Neuman (2011) and Rowley (2012) explain, allows the selection of participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research question, ensuring the collection of rich, meaningful data.

This study purposively selected participants from different schools to facilitate comparisons across and within contexts (Creswell, 2013). The inclusion criteria focused on teachers experienced in teaching English using the CAPS curriculum in township schools. This decision ensured the study captured data from individuals with first-hand experience in navigating the challenges of under-resourced educational environments while implementing curriculum reforms. Teachers were approached through school governing bodies (SGBs) and principals, and their participation was voluntary. Although the selected participants do not represent the entire teaching community, their narratives provide valuable insights into collective experiences and perspectives, as evidenced by their frequent use of the plural “we” during interviews.

All the teachers were native speakers of indigenous South African languages and spoke Black South African English, reflecting the multilingual realities of the township schools (Nkosi, 2009). This linguistic diversity added depth to the study, highlighting the interplay between teachers' linguistic identities and their pedagogical practices. According to Maree (2007), purposive sampling is particularly suited for generating “rich information” about the phenomenon under investigation. This approach was essential in this study, where similar school contexts were selected to examine the capacities and agency of teachers operating within comparable socio-economic and institutional constraints.

### **3.7.1 Participant profile: a diverse and experienced cohort of EFL educators**

The present study involved six EFL teachers purposively selected from three public secondary schools in a multilingual South African context, representing a range of academic qualifications, teaching experiences, and professional backgrounds. This diverse cohort was selected to ensure variation in pedagogical perspectives and institutional contexts, thereby enriching the depth and transferability of the findings. Each participant is presented below with attention to formal qualifications, subject specialisations, and cumulative teaching experience, all of which contribute to the contextual grounding of their conceptualizations of communicative competence.

The first participant, Khensi, is a female educator with 37 years of teaching experience, making her one of the most seasoned practitioners in the sample. She holds a Teaching Diploma, a Bachelor of Arts (BA), and a BA Honours degree, all in Sepedi. While her formal academic specialization is in an indigenous South African language, she has completed tertiary-level coursework in English, qualifying her to teach English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) at the secondary level. Her qualifications and experience as a chief moderator and examiner in grade 12 matric papers afforded her appointment as a departmental head in EFAL. Her extensive experience and deep familiarity with the South African education system provide a valuable longitudinal perspective on shifts in language policy and pedagogy.

Also teaching at the same institution is Andi, a male educator with 17 years of experience in the classroom. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education (BAEd), which has equipped him to teach across disciplines. Andi currently teaches Grade 11 Geography and Grade 12 English, reflecting his dual subject specialization. Like his mentor and head of department, Khensi, he is also a Grade 10 Paper Three examiner. His cross-disciplinary background offers a unique vantage point on the integration of language and content, particularly in relation to communicative competence in academic contexts.

At School B, Hluli, a female teacher with 27 years of teaching experience, holds a Teaching Diploma, a Bachelor of Arts degree, and an Honours degree in Educational Management. Her advanced qualification in educational leadership, combined with her extensive classroom experience, positions her as both a practitioner and an emerging instructional leader. Her insights are particularly valuable in understanding how institutional expectations and leadership roles intersect with language teaching practices. She also serves as a departmental head, providing perspectives from both classroom teaching and leadership.

Also based at School B is Kea, a female teacher with seven years of teaching experience. She holds a Bachelor of Technology (BTech) in Education and a Bachelor of Education (BEd), reflecting a contemporary, vocationally informed teacher education pathway. As a relatively early-career educator, Kea brings a fresh perspective shaped by recent teacher training curricula and evolving pedagogical expectations, offering a generational contrast to more experienced participants.

At School C, Mzi, a male teacher, holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with majors in English and Sports Science. He has accumulated eight years of teaching experience, although this includes a period of resignation and subsequent re-entry into the profession. His academic background in English situates him as a subject specialist, while his interdisciplinary training underscores the multifaceted roles often expected of teachers in under-resourced schools. His intermittent career trajectory also introduces a dimension of professional re-engagement, potentially influencing his pedagogical identity and instructional choices.

Completing the cohort is Kele, a female teacher at the same school with 27 years of uninterrupted teaching experience. She holds a Teacher's Diploma in Education, a qualification typical of earlier teacher training frameworks in South Africa. Although she does not hold a full undergraduate degree, her longevity in the profession and sustained engagement with language instruction have afforded her a wealth of practical knowledge and resilience in navigating systemic challenges.

Collectively, the participants represent a diverse spectrum of generations, academic backgrounds, and experiential perspectives. Their qualifications span traditional

diploma-based training and contemporary degree programs, while their teaching experience ranges from early-career to near-retirement stages. This heterogeneity enhances the study's analytical depth, enabling a nuanced exploration of how differing professional trajectories, educational backgrounds, and institutional contexts shape EFAL teachers' conceptualizations and enactments of communicative competence. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) emphasise, such purposive variation is essential in qualitative research to capture the complexity of social phenomena within their natural settings.

### **3.8 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

The study employed triangulation as a methodological strategy to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, using multiple data collection methods to capture a comprehensive understanding of the research context. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, biographical and professional summary sheets, document analysis, and lesson observations.

Triangulation, as defined by Creswell (2012:259), involves the process of corroborating evidence from diverse sources, thereby ensuring accuracy and rigour in the study's outcomes. By drawing on multiple data sources, individuals, and processes, triangulation minimized the risk of bias and strengthens the credibility of the research. Follow-up visits to the schools enabled member checking, clarification, and validation, ensuring that interpretations remained aligned with participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2012).

Qualitative data, as Mahajan (2017) notes, provide unprocessed materials that are meaningful only after systematic analysis. For this study, data collection focused on capturing the teachers' lived experiences, particularly their feelings of exclusion from the curriculum reform process, which had often been characterized as a top-down approach (Badal, 2018). Teachers' reflections on their agency in implementing CAPS

prescriptions and encouraging communicative competence highlighted the gap between policy and practice.

To achieve the study's objectives, a multi-faceted qualitative data collection strategy was adopted, integrating complementary instruments that collectively enabled a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of EFL teachers' pedagogical realities. Central to this approach were semi-structured interviews, which struck a deliberate balance between methodological focus and interpretive openness, allowing the researcher to guide discourse around key themes such as perceptions of communicative competence and experiences with curriculum reform, while simultaneously inviting participants to elaborate on personal insights, challenges, and contextual nuances (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). These interviews yielded rich, narrative data that illuminated not only how teachers understood the communicative approach but also the tensions they navigated in enacting it within resource-constrained and policy-driven environments.

Complementing these interviews were biographical and professional summary sheets, which systematically captured essential demographic, educational, and career-related information, thereby situating each participant's voice within a broader socio-professional context (Fink, 2013). These profiles proved instrumental in identifying patterns related to experience level, qualification pathways, and institutional affiliations, thereby enabling a more nuanced interpretation of how professional identity influences pedagogical decision-making.

Furthermore, document analysis served as a critical triangulation mechanism, involving systematic analysis of CAPS policy documents, lesson plans, and classroom materials (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Labarrete, 2021). By analysing these texts, the study uncovered how teachers interpreted, adapted, or resisted formal curriculum mandates, revealing the dynamic interplay between prescribed policy and classroom practice (Bowen, 2009).

Together, these instruments formed an integrated methodological set, enhancing the credibility, depth, and transferability of the findings while ensuring that the complexity

of teachers' lived experiences was rigorously documented and meaningfully interpreted.

### **3.8.1. Participant information sheet**

The participant information sheet is a key document provided to individuals who have agreed to participate in a study. It contains detailed information about the nature, purpose, and procedures of the research (Fajimi, 2025). Its primary aim is to clarify what the study entails, what participation involves, and what rights and protections are afforded to participants (Fajimi, 2025).

The document is designed to ensure transparency and to empower participants to make an informed decision about whether they wish to participate or withdraw before signing the informed consent form. Only relevant professional information, such as academic qualifications and career background, was requested to contextualize their participation.

The participant information sheet in this study included the following elements: the research topic; the purpose of the study; the name of the institution requiring the outcomes; the name and contact details of both the lead researcher and the research supervisor; a clear explanation of what would happen to the participant's data; assurances of anonymity; and explicit commitments to protecting participants from harm

#### **3.8.1.1. *The role of participant information sheets in qualitative research***

Participant information sheets, often conceptualized as biographical or professional summary instruments, occupy a pivotal yet frequently under-theorized role in qualitative research design. Far from being mere administrative tools, they function as both methodological and ethical scaffolds, enabling researchers to gather structured,

context-rich data while simultaneously fulfilling foundational ethical obligations (Hamed, 2021).

These instruments facilitate the systematic collection of demographic, educational, and professional information, which includes age, gender, race, linguistic background, academic qualifications, years of teaching experience, and subject specializations. This information situates participants' narratives within broader sociocultural, institutional, and historical frameworks. In studies examining subjective phenomena such as pedagogical beliefs and instructional decision-making, this contextual grounding is indispensable, as it enables a more nuanced understanding of how identity, experience, and professional socialization shape educational practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this study, the biographical and professional summary sheets were strategically employed not only to profile EFAL teachers in Grades 10–12 but also to explore their professional philosophies and dispositions toward learner-centred pedagogies, particularly the communicative language teaching approach. By eliciting reflections on their familiarity with, training in, and perceived efficacy of communicative language teaching, the sheets provided preliminary insights into teachers' openness to pedagogical innovation, thereby informing both sampling logic and interview design.

Beyond their methodological utility, participant information sheets served as a critical conduit for ethical engagement, embodying the principles of informed consent and participatory transparency central to qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2014). As Denzin (2011:241–242) emphasises:

*ethical research practice requires more than procedural compliance; it demands that participants are fully apprised of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and anticipated benefits, allowing them to make autonomous, informed decisions about their involvement.*

The above advice was taken into consideration; therefore, the sheets distributed in this study included comprehensive descriptions of the research objectives, data collection methods (e.g., interviews, observations), confidentiality protocols, voluntary

participation clauses, and contact details for the researcher, the institution, and the ethics review board.

This transparent communication promoted trust and rapport, mitigating power imbalances inherent in researcher-participant relationships and reinforcing the study's ethical integrity. Moreover, by inviting participants to reflect on their own teaching philosophies and engagement with curriculum reform at the outset, the instrument functioned as an epistemological entry point, activating self-awareness and positioning teachers not merely as subjects of inquiry but as reflective agents in their professional contexts.

The integration of biographical detail with attitudinal and philosophical self-assessment enabled the identification of emergent patterns across the cohort, such as correlations between years of experience and resistance to pedagogical change, or between formal training in communicative language teaching and confidence in implementing communicative tasks. These preliminary insights enriched the subsequent phases of data collection, allowing for more targeted and context-sensitive interview probing. As Hamed (2021) points out, such instruments enhance methodological rigour by ensuring that the interpretive analysis is anchored in a well-documented understanding of participants' positionalities.

Thus, the biographical and professional summary sheets transcended their administrative function to become a dynamic, dual-purpose tool, one that simultaneously advanced methodological depth and upheld ethical accountability. In doing so, they laid a strong foundation for the study's interpretive framework, ensuring that the exploration of teachers' conceptualizations of communicative competence was both contextually grounded and ethically sound.

### **3.9 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary and most instrumental method of data collection in this study, functioning as a dialogic space where EFAL teachers'

conceptions, experiences, and pedagogical reasoning regarding communicative language teaching were explored in depth and contextually grounded detail (Adams, 2018).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face, which allowed me, as the investigator, to seek new understandings, ask questions, and evaluate phenomena from different viewpoints. Interviews are commonly used to investigate problems by gathering information and helping researchers address them (McNamara, 1999). They allowed me to explore the in-depth current working atmosphere, significant issues, and consequences. They also provided opportunities for refining data collection efforts and examining systems and procedures in three selected schools.

Interviews were also employed when transcribed records or printed text revealed limitations, or when triangulating data with other school-based sources, such as the ATP, learners' books, issued district literature resources, and prescribed books. Guided by a flexible interview protocol centred on the integration of literature texts to increase communicative competence, this method enabled a balance between thematic consistency and conversational openness, allowing the researcher to probe emergent insights while maintaining alignment with the study's objectives (Jamshed, 2014).

As Berg (2007, 96) asserts, interviews afford participants the opportunity to "speak in their voice and express their thoughts and feelings," a principle central to qualitative inquiry that prioritises subjective meaning-making. This resonates with Kvale's (2003) and Dörnyei's (2007) emphasis on interviews as a conduit for generating rich narrative data, offering access to the intricate web of beliefs, motivations, and contextual constraints that shape teaching practice. Kvale (1996:174) further conceptualizes the interview as "a conversation whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the lifeworld of the interviewee," underscoring its role not merely as an information-gathering exercise but as a co-constructed interpretive process.

In this study, the semi-structured format facilitated such dialogic engagement, enabling teachers to articulate their lived realities, which ranged from pedagogical frustrations

to moments of instructional innovation, within the socio-institutional constraints of township schools.

### **3.9.1 Strength of semi-structured interviews**

The strength of this method lies in its ability to uncover dimensions of experience that are inaccessible through observational or survey-based tools. As Alshenqeeti (2014), Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2006) argue, interviews uniquely access personal perceptions, professional identities, and tacit knowledge, making them indispensable for examining complex, context-dependent phenomena such as the implementation of communicative language teaching in under-resourced settings.

The open-ended nature of the questions allowed participants to elaborate freely on their teaching philosophies, challenges in learner engagement, and responses to curriculum mandates, thereby revealing the interplay between policy expectations and classroom realities (Adosi, 2020). Moreover, the format facilitated a deep probing into what Bowden (2003) identifies as essential for unpacking the layered understandings of educational phenomena, enabling the researcher to follow up on nuances, contradictions, and emotional undercurrents in real-time. Furthermore Sileyew (2019) states that the advantage of using open-ended interviews as a method of investigation is that it allows participants to raise matters that the interviewer may not have anticipated.

All interviews with six teachers were conducted face-to-face at the schools and were recorded and transcribed. Rowley (2012) emphasizes that interviews are not neutral exchanges, but rather social interactions imbued with emotional and relational dynamics. In this study, participants' tone, hesitations, and nonverbal cues provided additional interpretive layers, enriching the data with affective and attitudinal depth. Indeed, as Rossetto (2014) observes, qualitative interviews can function as reflective or even therapeutic spaces, allowing teachers to process professional disappointments and affirm their agency.

To ensure methodological rigour and feasibility, two one-hour interview sessions were conducted with each participant. The first session focused on eliciting narratives around communicative language teaching, literature use, and pedagogical challenges, while the second served a critical member-checking function. Transcripts were shared with participants to verify accuracy and authenticity, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A pilot phase involving four time teachers refined the interview guide through iterative feedback, resulting in the consolidation of overlapping items, the elimination of redundancies, and rephrasing for clarity, practices aligned with best practices in qualitative design (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). While Walford (2007, cited in Hamza, 2014) cautions that interviews alone are insufficient for capturing the full complexity of social life due to memory limitations or socially desirable responding, this study mitigated such risks through methodological triangulation, integrating biographical profiles and classroom observations to cross-validate self-reported data (Ho, 2006, & Robson, 2002).

To further enrich the data, two follow-up post-observation interviews were conducted with each participant. These sessions allowed teachers to reflect critically on their instructional practices, providing detailed explanations of their lesson formats, pedagogical decisions, and the rationale behind their choices. The iterative nature of these interactions not only deepened the researcher's understanding of the participants' perspectives but also facilitated triangulation by cross-referencing their narratives with observational data (Creswell, 2013). Open-ended questions were carefully designed to encourage participants to freely express their beliefs, conceptualisations, and experiences without undue influence from the researcher. These questions probed various dimensions of teachers' professional lives, including their teaching philosophies, interpretations of communicative language teaching, and the processes through which they acquired and applied knowledge related to communicative competence.

Thus, the semi-structured interview emerged not only as a primary data source but as a reflexive, ethical, and epistemologically robust mechanism for centring teachers' voices in the investigation of communicative competence in South African EFAL contexts.

### **3.9.2 Limitations of semi-structured interviews.**

Adams (2015) cautions that semi-structured interviews are lengthy, time-intensive, laborious, and slow. He further notes that they require the researcher to be smart and strategic in conducting them. Interviewers need to be clever, penetrating, self-assured, and quick, as well as knowledgeable about the study they are investigating and the relevant issues.

In this study, the process was relatively smooth due to the small number of participants, and the interview was conducted promptly after the initial contact time. However, the process of formulating interview questions, setting up the interviews, steering the interviews, and analysing the interviews is not as quick and easy as one might assume. The time and effort required to conduct all stages thoroughly were extensive.

Semi-structured interviews typically require the demanding task of analyzing a large volume of notes and, in many cases, multiple hours of transcriptions (Adams, 2015).

### **3.10 AUDIO RECORDING AND TRANSCRIPTION**

Transcription, as Duranti (2006) defines, is the systematic process of converting recorded spoken language into written text, enabling the detailed examination of linguistic patterns, interactional dynamics, and contextually embedded meanings. Far from being a mere technical or mechanical step in qualitative research, transcription functions as a critical interpretive act that mediates between oral discourse and analytical scrutiny, thereby shaping the very data that researchers seek to interpret (Lapadat, 2000; Jaffe, 2007). In this epistemological sense, transcription is not a neutral reproduction of speech but a socially and cognitively mediated process. This

process involves deliberate decisions about what to include, omit, or reframe, such as repetitions, pauses, intonation, interruptions, slang, or non-verbal cues. These choices inevitably reflect the transcriber's interpretive stance, theoretical orientation, and methodological priorities, underscoring the inherently subjective nature of the process (Bokhove & Downey, 2018). Therefore, transcription plays a foundational role in constructing the textual data from which themes, patterns, and social realities are derived, aligning with the broader aims of qualitative inquiry to explain, generalise, and identify recurring phenomena through systematic analysis (Bryman, 2016).

In this study, all semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure comprehensive data capture and to facilitate rigorous thematic analysis. The transcriptions served as primary analytical documents, transforming ephemeral spoken interactions into stable, inspectable texts that could be coded, compared, and interpreted across cases (McMullin, 2021). However, achieving an analytical purpose required a balance between fidelity to participants' original utterances and readability of the final text. While full verbatim transcription preserves linguistic authenticity, which includes false starts, repetitions, and colloquial expressions, such raw data can hinder clarity and analytical coherence. Therefore, minor grammatical adjustments were made to enhance readability without altering the semantic meaning, and redundant repetitions were selectively streamlined to improve the flow while retaining the essence of the participants' intended messages. This approach reflects Oliver, Serovich, and Mason's (2005) recommendation that researchers navigate the tension between linguistic accuracy and textual clarity, ensuring that transcriptions remain both authentic and analytically tractable.

Nonetheless, the interpretive challenges of transcription are compounded in multilingual and socio-culturally diverse settings, where accents, code-switching, idiomatic expressions, and regional dialects pose significant obstacles to accurate representation (Bokhove & Downey, 2018). In this study, several participants naturally integrated elements of indigenous South African languages into their English speech, necessitating careful contextual interpretation to preserve meaning without misrepresenting their voices. Moreover, the absence of non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, and vocal intonation, in written transcripts risks flattening the

emotional and performative dimensions of communication, potentially distorting the affective contours of participants' narratives (Duranti,2006). To partially mitigate this limitation, observational notes taken during interviews were integrated into the transcription process, providing contextual annotations that enriched the interpretive depth of the textual data.

Ethical considerations further complicate the transcription process. While audio recordings preserve the authenticity of participants' voices, the act of transcription raises concerns about representational accuracy, confidentiality, and participant agency. In response, this study adopted a member-checking protocol in which finalised transcripts were returned to participants for review, correction, and approval. As Mero-Jaffe (2011) observes, this practice empowers participants by granting them editorial control over how their words are represented, thereby enhancing the credibility and ethical integrity of the research. However, it also introduces potential tensions, as some participants expressed discomfort with the starkness of verbatim transcripts, particularly when recounting emotionally charged experiences. This occurrence highlights the delicate balance between transparency and sensitivity in qualitative representation.

Ultimately, transcription in this study was neither a passive nor a purely technical endeavour, but a reflexive, ethically informed, and epistemologically significant practice. As McMullin (2021) contends, the transcription process is integral to the construction of knowledge in qualitative research, demanding methodological rigour, cultural sensitivity, and sustained critical reflection. By treating transcription as an interpretive act rather than a mechanical step, my study ensured that the voices of EFAL teachers were not only preserved but meaningfully and responsibly rendered within the analytical framework, thereby upholding the core qualitative commitment to representing the complexity, nuance, and humanity of lived experience.

### 3.11 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation is a foundational methodological pillar in qualitative research, offering unparalleled access to the lived, embodied realities of social and educational practices within their natural contexts. As Patton (1990:203) compellingly asserts, “Observation can give you their point of view in a way not possible from other types of data,” highlighting its unique capacity to capture the tacit, interactional, and environmental dimensions of human behaviour that often elude self-reporting instruments. Observational findings are considered durable in validity because the investigator can collect in-depth information about specific behaviours (Sileyew, 2019). He further notes that during the observations, a deeper understanding of the study area enables the researcher to better understand participants in their natural working environment.

In this study, participant observation was strategically employed as a constructivist, context-sensitive method to investigate how six EFAL Teachers in township schools conceptualised and enacted the communicative approach in their daily pedagogical practices. Conducted with full transparency and informed consent from all stakeholders, including teachers, learners, school principals, and district authorities, the observations were overt and ethically grounded, aligning with the principles of respect, confidentiality, and procedural integrity emphasised by Creswell and Creswell (2018). This ethical rigour ensured that participants were fully aware of the research purpose, their rights to withdraw, and the measures taken to protect their identities, thereby promoting trust and collaborative engagement throughout the research process.

Rooted in the naturalistic tradition of qualitative inquiry, participant observation offers ecological validity by situating data collection within authentic classroom environments, rather than artificial or decontextualized settings (Patton, 1990). Observing teachers' practices allowed the researcher to witness the dynamic interplay between curriculum mandates, pedagogical decision-making, and learner engagement; phenomena are often filtered or rationalised in retrospective interviews.

While the primary analytical lens focused on the teacher's role, the method inherently captured multiple vantage points, including learner responses, peer interactions, and classroom affect, thus echoing Larkin, Shaw, and Flowers, (2019) argument for the importance of multi-perspectival awareness in classroom research. This holistic view enabled a nuanced understanding of how communicative language teaching principles, particularly the integration of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), were operationalised (or constrained) within the socio-material realities of under-resourced schools.

To ensure methodological consistency and analytical depth, a structured yet flexible observation protocol was developed, that drew on and adapted established instruments from second language acquisition research, including those by Eveyik (2003), Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2017), Razmjoo and Riazi (2000), Spada (2014), Spada and Lyster (1997), and Tigist (2012). These adapted checklists facilitated systematic documentation across five key domains, (i) Classroom Environment which assessed physical layout, resource availability, and affective climate; (ii) Instructional Practices which examined whether grammar and literature lessons were taught in isolation or integrated holistically; (iii) Communicative Activities which identified the frequency, type, and quality of interactive tasks designed to foster authentic language use; (iv) Teacher and Learner Roles which evaluated the degree of learner-centredness, student agency, and dialogic exchange; and (v) Assessment and Feedback which observed how formative feedback was delivered and whether it aligned with communicative language teaching's emphasis on meaning over mere accuracy. Each teacher was observed across a minimum of five lessons, encompassing both grammar and literature instruction, to ensure a comprehensive and representative view of their pedagogical repertoire while minimising observer-induced reactivity through low-intrusion techniques.

Crucially, observation did not operate in isolation but was embedded within a broader interpretive framework. Post-observation reflective sessions were conducted with each EFAL teacher, creating a dialogic space where observed practices could be discussed in relation to their previously articulated beliefs from interviews. This iterative process, informed by Pecheone and Chung's (2006) assertion that

observation enables a “direct evaluation of teaching,” allowed for the examination of alignment or dissonance between espoused theory and enacted practice. For instance, discrepancies between a teacher’s stated commitment to learner-centred methods and their actual reliance on teacher-dominated instruction prompted deeper inquiry into institutional constraints, assessment pressures, or pedagogical habitus.

Thus, the combination of structured documentation with reflexive engagement, participant observation in this study, transcended mere description to become an interpretive and critical practice. It revealed not only what teachers did, but how and why they made specific pedagogical choices within complex, resource-limited environments. The method thus provided a vital counterpoint to interview data, enabling methodological triangulation and enhancing the credibility, depth, and authenticity of the findings. As Pecheone and Chung (2006) affirm, such direct engagement with practice is essential for bridging the gap between educational theory and classroom reality. In sum, participant observation proved indispensable in illuminating the situated, embodied, and often contested enactment of communicative competence through literature, offering rich, contextually grounded insights that significantly advance understanding of EFAL pedagogy in diverse, multilingual classrooms.

### **3.12 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS**

Document analysis emerged as a critical methodological component in this study, serving as both a contextual anchor and a mechanism for triangulation, as well as a means of examining the complex interplay between curriculum policy, pedagogical planning, and classroom practice in the implementation of the communicative approach within EFAL instruction.

As a qualitative research method, document analysis is the systematic identification, evaluation, and interpretation of textual materials to extract contextually grounded insights that illuminate institutional frameworks, professional practices, and

stakeholder perspectives (Dalglish, Fernandes, & Miller, 2020). Unlike data derived from interviews or observations, which are interactionally produced and temporally bounded, documents offer stable, enduring records of intended policy, planned instruction.

In this study, a purposive selection of documents was analysed to capture multiple levels of the educational process, including CAPS, teachers' lesson plans, and learners' exercise books. CAPS served as the foundational policy text, articulating the official vision for language teaching, including the integration of the four language skills and the promotion of communicative competence.

Through close reading and thematic coding, the analysis of CAPS enabled an understanding of the curriculum goals, prescribed methodologies, and expectations for literature-based instruction. Teachers' ATPs, in turn, represented the curriculum in practice, revealing how educators interpreted, adapted, or resisted policy directives within their specific institutional and pedagogical contexts. As Bowden (2009) notes, lesson plans are not neutral administrative tools but discursive artifacts that reflect teachers' professional judgment, pedagogical beliefs, and responses to structural constraints.

Finally, learners' books provided evidence of how the curriculum is experienced by learners. These texts revealed the actual engagement of students with communicative tasks, their linguistic development, and the nature of feedback provided by teachers, thus closing the loop between policy, planning, and practice.

A primary strength of document analysis was its capacity to support methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of qualitative findings (Denzin, 1978). By juxtaposing teachers' self-reported practices in interviews with the instructional strategies documented in their lesson plans and the activities evidenced in learners' work, discrepancies and congruences were identified. These offered critical insights into the realities of teacher agency and curriculum enactment.

For example, while some teachers verbally expressed commitment to learner-centred, communicative methodologies, their lesson plans often revealed a predominance of grammar-focused drills and teacher-led instruction. There was also limited integration

of interactive tasks. Such disjuncture highlights the gap between espoused beliefs and enacted practices. It also highlights systemic barriers, such as assessment pressures, class sizes, or resource limitations that influence pedagogical decision-making (Pecheone & Chung, 2006). As Patton (2002) argues, these inconsistencies are not methodological weaknesses but rich data points in themselves, revealing the tensions inherent in reform-oriented education systems.

Furthermore, document analysis enabled a critical examination of how literature texts, which are central to the EFAL curriculum, were used (or underutilised) to promote communicative competence. The analysis revealed that while CAPS promotes literature as a vehicle for critical thinking and language use, EFAL ATPs often treated literary texts as vehicles for grammar and comprehension exercises. They were seldom used as catalysts for discussion, debate, or creative expression. Learners' books further confirmed this trend, with minimal evidence of extended writing, peer dialogue, or personal response tasks aligned with communicative language teaching principles.

Despite its strengths, document analysis had its limitations. It was inherently constrained by the availability, completeness, and authenticity of documents, and it risks privileging official narratives over lived realities. Moreover, as Jaffe (2007) cautions, interpretation is always mediated by the researcher's theoretical lens and positionality. To mitigate these concerns, the study integrated document findings with interview and observation data, ensuring that textual interpretations were contextualised and cross-validated. Future research could further enhance validity by incorporating participant validation of document interpretations, thereby promoting a more collaborative and reflexive analytic process.

However, document analysis proved to be a powerful, multi-layered methodological tool that revealed the often-invisible pathways through which policy becomes practice. By critically engaging with CAPS, ATPs, lesson plans, and student work, the study highlighted the nuanced, contested, and contextually embedded nature of communicative language teaching in South African EFAL classrooms, contributing to

a more comprehensive and critically informed understanding of pedagogical transformation in multilingual educational settings.

### **3.12.1 Data analysis methodology**

The analytical process followed a structured yet iterative approach, informed by the principles of thematic content analysis as described by Elo and Kyngäs (2008, cited in Lawal, 2019), which emphasises both inductive theme generation and deductive alignment with research questions. This approach enabled the systematic coding of documents across categories, including communicative task design, skills integration, agency, and feedback quality, ensuring rigour and transparency in interpretation. Lawal (2019) emphasizes that data analysis in qualitative research is not about generating theory, but about deriving meaningful, context-sensitive insights from raw data—a principle that guided the interpretive engagement with each document.

### **3.12.2 Qualitative content analysis**

The data analysis employed a rigorous and reflexive qualitative content analysis framework, integrated with the inductive logic of grounded theory, to ensure a systematic, transparent, and contextually grounded interpretation of the rich, multi-sourced data. This methodological synthesis enabled a deep engagement with participants' narratives, observational records, and documentary evidence, facilitating the transformation of raw, unstructured data into coherent, meaningful themes that illuminate the complexities of EFAL teachers' pedagogical agency within the context of communicative language teaching.

As Forman and Damschroder (2008) emphasise, the analytic process begins with the meticulous transcription of audio-recorded interviews and observation sessions, a foundational step that not only converts spoken discourse into analysable text but also initiates the researcher's immersive engagement with the data. This iterative process of listening, re-listening, reading, and re-reading promotes what Creswell (2012) describes as data familiarity, a critical prerequisite for identifying nuances, emotional undercurrents, and emergent patterns that might otherwise remain obscured.

Transcription served as the gateway to coding, which is the core analytic activity through which textual data were segmented, labeled, and organized into meaningful units of analysis (Creswell, 2007). Coding was both a selective and interpretive act. It involved identifying salient excerpts while simultaneously requiring the researcher to make deliberate decisions about relevance, redundancy, and representativeness (Creswell, 2007). Extraneous or off-topic segments were categorised as contextually peripheral, ensuring analytical focus on phenomena directly aligned with the research questions, while still preserving the integrity of participants' narratives (Sarantakos, 2002). Field notes, which captured not only verbal utterances but also non-verbal cues, affective expressions, and reflective moments during observations (Samuel, 2009), were integrated into the coding process, enriching the textual data with embodied and contextual dimensions that enhance interpretive depth.

To ensure methodological coherence and theoretical sensitivity, the analysis was structured according to the principles of constructivist grounded theory, as articulated by Charmaz (2006) and further elaborated by Bryant and Charmaz (2007). This approach privileges an inductive, iterative movement from specific data instances to abstract conceptual categories, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Holton (2007) describes coding as a process of abstraction and condensation that distils voluminous qualitative data into analytically powerful constructs (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). In this study, initial open coding gave way to axial coding, enabling the clustering of related codes into broader thematic categories, such as curriculum interpretation, pedagogical adaptation, and teacher agency under constraint. This progression reflects the grounded theory imperative to move from description to conceptualisation, ensuring that findings are firmly rooted in participants' lived experiences.

The analytic process unfolded in three interrelated stages, each building upon the previous stage to ensure rigour and coherence:

#### **3.12.2.1      *Data reduction***

This initial phase involved the systematic organisation and refinement of the dataset to focus on content directly relevant to the research objectives. As Sarantakos (2002) states, data reduction is not about simplification but about transformation through condensing vast amounts of narrative and observational data into manageable, analysable units without sacrificing contextual richness. While peripheral discussions were acknowledged and categorised as such, the core narratives were preserved in their fullness, honouring the integrity of participants' voices while ensuring analytical precision.

### **3.12.2.2      *Data organisation***

In this stage, coded data were systematically grouped into thematic clusters, following the thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process of clustering enabled the identification of patterns, contradictions, and recurring motifs across participants and data sources. For instance, repeated references to curriculum misalignment, learner resistance, or resource scarcity coalesced into higher-order themes that reflected structural and pedagogical challenges in the implementation of communicative language teaching. This organisational phase laid the conceptual groundwork for deeper interpretation, ensuring that emerging themes were both empirically grounded and theoretically resonant (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

### **3.12.2.3      *Interpretation***

The final and most critical stage involved synthesising, naming, and theorising themes to construct a coherent narrative of the phenomenon under study. As Charmaz (2006) asserts, interpretation in grounded theory is not merely about attributing meaning, but about constructing explanations that offer plausible, context-sensitive accounts of why certain practices persist, how teachers navigate institutional constraints, and how their professional identities are negotiated within reform-oriented environments. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that this stage transcends description to insight, revealing the latent dimensions of participants' experiences.

In this study, interpretation was informed by a priori coding (Stemler, 2001), where preliminary data examination guided the development of an initial coding framework, later refined iteratively to accommodate emergent insights. This hybrid approach balanced structure with flexibility, ensuring both methodological rigour and openness to discovery.

The integration of qualitative content analysis with grounded theory provided a robust, reflexive, and epistemologically coherent framework for data analysis. By

systematically categorising organising, and interpreting multimodal data, the study foregrounded the voices of EFAL teachers while constructing a nuanced, contextually embedded understanding of how they interpreted, adapted, and enacted communicative language teaching within the complex realities of South African township schools. As Stemler (2001) affirms, such methodological rigour ensures that findings are not only rich and detailed but also analytically defensible.

Ultimately, this approach enabled the study to move beyond mere description to meaningful interpretation. Accordingly, the interpretation centred not only on what teachers did, but also on how and why they did it, thereby contributing valuable insights to the evolving discourse on language pedagogy, teacher agency, and curriculum enactment.

### **3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical clearance was formally obtained from the University's ethics committee, the DBE, and the relevant district authorities to ensure compliance with ethical standards in conducting the study in schools and engaging with human participants.

This study, which investigated the use of literary texts to develop communicative competence in EFAL classrooms, engaged with sensitive dimensions of pedagogical practice, including teachers' instructional decisions, classroom interactions, and curriculum interpretation.

Given the potential vulnerability associated with being observed, recorded, and analysed, a strong ethical framework was essential to ensure that the research process was not only methodologically sound but also ethically defensible. Guided by the principles articulated in the Belmont Report 1979, which identifies respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, this study implemented a comprehensive ethical protocol that governed all phases of data collection, analysis, and dissemination. These principles were operationalised through concrete measures related to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and participant welfare, ensuring alignment with

national and institutional ethical guidelines, including those of the South African DBE and the host university's research ethics committee.

The following sections detail the key ethical strategies employed, emphasising how they maintained a research environment grounded in trust, transparency, and mutual respect.

### **3.13.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation**

Informed consent is a foundation of ethical research, serving as both a procedural requirement and a relational practice that affirms participants' autonomy and their right to self-determination (Creswell, 2013). It is an ongoing, dialogic process through which participants are fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and their rights (Kvale, 2007). In this study, informed consent was meticulously implemented to ensure that all participants, six EFAL teachers from three township schools, participated voluntarily and with a clear understanding of their role.

To facilitate comprehension, a detailed participant information sheet was developed and disseminated in accessible language. This document outlined the research objectives, data collection methods (including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis), the anticipated duration of involvement, potential risks (e.g., discomfort discussing professional challenges), and benefits (e.g., contributing to pedagogical discourse). As Munhall (2012) and Scott (2013) emphasize, clarity and accessibility in communication are essential for ensuring that consent is truly informed, particularly in contexts where power imbalances exist between the researcher and participant. This ensured that consent was fully informed and voluntary.

Crucially, consent was obtained for each distinct research activity. Teachers provided written consent not only for interviews but also for classroom observations and the use of instructional documents such as lesson plans and learners' workbooks. This granular approach reinforced the voluntary nature of participation and aligned with

Beauchamp and Childress's (2013) principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, ensuring that participants retained control over the extent and nature of their engagement. Moreover, participants were explicitly informed of their unconditional right to withdraw from the study at any time, without providing justification or facing adverse consequences, which served as a safeguard central to the study's ethical integrity (Munhall, 2012). This provision was reiterated at multiple touchpoints, including during pre-observation briefings and post-interview follow-ups, reinforcing the study's commitment to participant agency.

To further protect privacy, participants were assured that audio recordings would be used solely for research purposes, stored securely, and destroyed after transcription. These assurances addressed potential concerns about surveillance or professional judgment, fostering a climate of trust that encouraged candid and reflective participation.

### **3.13.2 Protecting participants from harm**

Beyond procedural compliance, ethical research demands a proactive commitment to minimising harm, whether emotional, social, or professional, that may arise from participation. This study prioritised participant welfare through a multi-layered strategy designed to protect identity, preserve dignity, and mitigate risks associated with disclosure.

Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained throughout the research process. As Mohajan (2017) cautions, confidentiality ensures that participants' identities are not disclosed in published findings, while anonymity goes further by ensuring that no identifying information is collected or retained. In this study, all participants were assigned pseudonyms (e.g., Khensi, Hluli, Mzi), and any potentially identifying details such as school names, learner identities, or specific classroom features were systematically altered or omitted in transcripts, field notes, and reports. Furthermore, all digital data, including audio recordings, transcripts, and observational

notes, were stored on a password-protected memory device, accessible only to the researcher, in accordance with institutional data protection policies (Sarantakos, 2017)

The principle of beneficence, which relates to maximizing benefits while minimizing harm, was operationalized through relational ethics. As Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) argue, ethical research extends beyond compliance with rules to include cultivating a relationship of trust and mutual respect. To this end, the researcher established rapport through respectful dialogue, active listening, and sensitivity to participants' emotional and professional concerns. For instance, during interviews, teachers were given space to express frustrations about curriculum mandates or resource constraints without fear of judgment. Post-observation debriefs were conducted in a non-evaluative tone, emphasising collaborative reflection rather than critique.

Additionally, the study acknowledged the potential for institutional harm, where findings might be misinterpreted or used to hold teachers accountable in punitive ways. To mitigate this risk, all interpretations were contextualised within systemic constraints (e.g., overcrowded classrooms, limited training), and no individual was portrayed as deficient. Instead, the focus remained on structural and pedagogical challenges, aligning with the principle of justice by ensuring that the research did not disproportionately burden already marginalised educators.

Thus, ethical considerations were not an afterthought but a constitutive element of the research design. By embedding principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and harm reduction into every stage of the study, the research not only protected participants but also enhanced the quality and credibility of the findings. As the Belmont Report (1979) reminds us, ethical research involves more than avoiding wrongdoing; it requires doing right by those who make knowledge possible. In honouring the voices, experiences, and vulnerabilities of EFAL teachers, this study upheld the highest standards of scholarly integrity while contributing to a more humane and just approach to educational research.

### **3.14 QUALITY MEASURES**

The credibility and scholarly value of qualitative research centres on the rigorous application of quality measures that uphold the integrity, depth, and authenticity of the findings.

Unlike quantitative paradigms, which emphasise statistical reliability and generalisability, qualitative research is evaluated by alternative criteria, namely, the framework of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This framework encompasses credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity. These elements collectively ensure that the research process remains transparent, the interpretations are grounded in data, and the findings resonate with the lived realities of participants.

In this study, which investigates how EFAL teachers conceptualise and implement communicative competence through literature-based instruction, such quality measures were systematically embedded throughout the research design, data collection, and analysis to safeguard methodological rigour and epistemological coherence.

#### **3.14.1 Transparency and audit trails: mapping the research journey**

Transparency is a foundational principle of qualitative rigour that requires researchers to document every phase of the inquiry in a manner that allows for external scrutiny and interpretive accountability (Maree, 2007:122).

This principle is operationalised through the creation of an audit trail, a comprehensive, chronological record of decisions, methodological choices, analytical reflections, and emergent insights. In this study, the audit trail included detailed logs of sampling rationale, interview protocols, observation checklists, coding procedures, and reflexive journal entries. By systematically documenting the evolution of the research process,

the study ensured that its trajectory was not arbitrary but traceable, thereby enhancing both transparency and methodological legitimacy.

Furthermore, transparency was reinforced through the strategic use of triangulation, a fundamental feature of qualitative validation. As Greene et al., (1989:256) define it, triangulation involves the deliberate convergence of multiple data sources, methods, or theoretical perspectives to counteract bias and strengthen the validity of interpretations. Denzin (2018) expands this concept to include methodological, data, investigator, and theoretical triangulation, all of which were partially employed in this study. Specifically, methodological triangulation was achieved through the integration of semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. Data sources included CAPS, teachers' lesson plans, learners' workbooks, and verbatim interview transcripts. This multi-faceted approach enabled cross-verification of findings, allowing discrepancies between a teacher's self-reported use of communicative activities and their absence in observed lessons to be identified and explored, yielding deeper insights into the gap between policy aspiration and classroom reality. By triangulating across methods and sources, the study enhanced its internal validity and minimised the risk of researcher bias or selective interpretation (Denzin, 2018).

### **3.14.2 Credibility, ensuring fidelity to participants' realities**

Credibility refers to the degree to which the research findings accurately reflect the phenomena under investigation and are faithful to participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To establish credibility, this study employed several methodological safeguards. First, member checking, a process through which participants review and validate the accuracy of transcripts, interpretations, and preliminary findings, was systematically implemented. Following each interview and observation cycle, transcriptions and field notes were shared with participants for feedback, allowing them to confirm, clarify, or

correct the recorded data (Brenner, 2006). This collaborative verification process not only enhanced data accuracy but also empowered participants as co-constructors of knowledge, reinforcing the ethical and epistemological integrity of the study.

Second, the study employed thick description, a concept rooted in Geertzian ethnography (1973) and emphasised by Maree (2007) as essential in case study research. Thick descriptions provided rich, contextualised accounts of classroom dynamics, including physical environments, pedagogical interactions, affective tones, and institutional constraints. By detailing not only what occurred but also how and why it occurred within specific socio-educational contexts, the study enabled readers to assess the plausibility and depth of the findings, thereby strengthening interpretive credibility.

### **3.14.3 Validity: methodological alignment and construct fidelity**

While the term validity is often associated with quantitative research, it remains relevant in qualitative inquiry as a measure of whether the research tools and processes effectively capture the phenomena they intend to investigate (Burns, 1999).

In this study, methodological validity was strengthened by deliberately aligning research instruments with the study's objectives. Each data collection method, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, was chosen because of its capacity to access distinct yet complementary dimensions of communicative language teaching (communicative language teaching). For instance, interviews accessed teachers' beliefs and rationales, observations captured enacted practices, and documents revealed policy-practice alignments. As Mohajan (2017) asserts, the congruence between research questions and data collection tools is paramount to validity. This alignment, combined with triangulation, ensured that the study did not rely on a single, potentially skewed perspective but instead constructed a multi-dimensional understanding of communicative language teaching implementation.

#### **3.14.4 Dependability and confirmability: ensuring consistency and objectivity**

Dependability and confirmability address the consistency and neutrality of qualitative findings, ensuring that results are not merely artifacts of researcher subjectivity. Dependability refers to the stability of data and interpretations over time, akin to reliability in quantitative research (Krefting, 1991).

To enhance dependability, this study maintained a standardised yet flexible protocol for data collection and analysis. Observation checklists and interview guides were consistently applied across participants, while allowing for the emergence of new themes. Coding procedures were documented and applied systematically, with regular reviews to ensure coherence.

Confirmability, on the other hand, concerns the extent to which findings are shaped by the data rather than by the researcher's preconceptions or biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To safeguard confirmability, the study employed peer debriefing, a process through which an independent scholar reviewed the research design, data, and interpretations to challenge assumptions and identify potential distortions. Additionally, reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process, allowing the researcher to document personal biases, positionalities, and evolving interpretations. These practices, combined with the comprehensive audit trail, ensured that the findings were not idiosyncratic but were instead anchored in the empirical evidence provided by participants.

#### **3.14.5 Authenticity and transferability**

Authenticity refers to the genuineness of the research and its resonance with participants' lived experiences. In this study, authenticity was ensured by centring teachers' voices, honouring their professional expertise, and representing their challenges and strategies without judgment or oversimplification.

By conducting research in naturalistic settings and allowing participants to define the meaning of their practices, the study upheld the principle of authenticity as a form of ethical and epistemological fidelity (Maree, 2007).

Transferability, distinct from statistical generalisability, refers to the extent to which findings may be meaningfully applied to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While this study was situated within the unique socio-linguistic and institutional landscape of South African township EFAL classrooms, its insights into teacher agency, curriculum enactment, and the challenges of implementing communicative language teaching hold potential relevance for similar multilingual, under-resourced educational environments. As Bwalya and Kalu (2017) emphasise, transferability is not assumed but enabled through thick, contextual description. This practice was strictly adhered to in the study. By providing detailed accounts of school contexts, teacher backgrounds, and pedagogical constraints, the study equips readers to assess the applicability of its findings to their own settings. This extends its scholarly utility beyond the immediate case.

Thus, the quality measures implemented in this study, transparency, triangulation, credibility, validity, dependability, confirmability, authenticity, and transferability, collectively constituted a robust framework for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. These criteria were integrated into the fabric of the inquiry, guiding every decision from design to dissemination. By adhering to these principles, the study not only produced credible and meaningful insights into the complexities of communicative language teaching but also contributed to the broader discourse on methodological rigour in educational research.

### 3.15 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a rigorous, reflexive, and contextually grounded methodological framework that underpinned the investigation into how EFAL teachers in South African township schools utilize literature texts to cultivate communicative competence.

Situated firmly within the qualitative research paradigm, the study was not merely designed to describe pedagogical practices but to interpret the complex interplay of agency, policy, identity, and classroom reality that shapes the enactment of communicative language teaching (communicative language teaching) in multilingual, resource-constrained environments. The deliberate epistemological alignment with constructivist and interpretivist traditions enabled access to the lived, subjective experiences of teachers, those who are often positioned as implementers of policy but whose professional wisdom and resistance were central to curriculum transformation (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012).

The methodological coherence of the study was anchored in a triangulated design that integrated semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. This multi-method approach, as Denzin (2018) asserts, is not merely additive but synergistic, allowing for the cross-verification of data and the illumination of dissonances between policy intent, pedagogical belief, and classroom practice. For instance, discrepancies between teachers' espoused commitment to learner-centred instruction and the teacher-dominated pedagogies observed in classrooms were not treated as anomalies but as critical data points, revealing the structural constraints, assessment pressures, and institutional habitus that mediated pedagogical agency. Such insights would have remained obscured in mono-method designs, underscoring the analytical power of methodological triangulation in uncovering the layered realities of educational practice.

Purposive sampling was employed with precision to select participants whose diverse qualifications, career trajectories, and institutional contexts provided a rich and representative tapestry of EFAL teaching in township schools. This strategy aligns with Maree's (2007) emphasis on transparency and intentionality in qualitative inquiry,

ensuring that data saturation was achieved through contextual depth and variation. The resulting cohort, comprising educators from early to veteran stages, with nearly four decades of experience, provided a generational and experiential spectrum that enriched the study's interpretive scope.

Ethical integrity was a constitutive dimension of the research process. Informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw were rigorously upheld, reflecting a deep commitment to the principles of respect for persons and beneficence as articulated in the Belmont Report (1979) and operationalised by scholars such as Munhall (2012) and Mack et al. (2005). The use of pseudonyms, secure data storage, and member checking not only protected participants but also fostered a collaborative research relationship in which teachers were positioned as knowledgeable agents and co-constructors of meaning rather than as subjects of scrutiny. This ethical praxis reinforced the study's credibility and ensured that the research process itself embodied the values of equity and dignity it sought to investigate.

Data analysis was guided by the principles of qualitative content analysis and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), allowing themes to emerge inductively from the data rather than being imposed a priori. This inductive logic, combined with systematic coding and constant comparative analysis (Krippendorff, 2004), enabled the identification of salient patterns, such as the instrumentalisation of literature for grammar instruction, the negotiation of curriculum mandates, and the resilience of teacher agency under constraint. The integration of member checking, audit trails, peer debriefing, and thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) further fortified the study's trustworthiness, ensuring that findings were rich, nuanced, defensible, and transparent.

Thus, this methodological chapter does more than recount procedures; it makes an argument for the indispensability of qualitative inquiry in understanding the human dimensions of educational reform. In a context where language policy is often top-down and standardized, this study demonstrates how qualitative methods can centre teacher voice, expose the gap between policy rhetoric and pedagogical reality, and reveal the quiet acts of resistance and innovation that define effective teaching. By

foregrounding context, meaning, and agency, the research does not only advance theoretical understanding of communicative competence but also contribute to a more humane, responsive, and critically informed approach to language education in post-apartheid South Africa. As such, the methodological rigour detailed here is not an end, but a means to produce knowledge that was not only credible, but also emancipatory.

Having established a rigorous and ethically grounded methodological framework, the study then presents and interprets the findings. The following chapter details the emergent themes derived from the analysis of interview transcripts, classroom observations, and document reviews, offering a nuanced account of how EFAL teachers in South African township schools conceptualise and implement communicative competence through literature-based instruction. By foregrounding teachers' voices and situated practices, this chapter has illuminated the complex interplay between policy expectations, pedagogical realities, and professional agency, setting the stage for a critical discussion of the implications for language teaching and curriculum practice.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter explained the methodological underpinnings of this study, which is a qualitative case study design. This design is underpinned by an interpretive paradigm of an ethnographic nature and a qualitative methodology. Through the actions of purposive sampling, prolonged engagement, and multi-sited data collection, the research allowed access to the lived experiences, pedagogical decisions, and contextual negotiations of EFAL teachers in South African township schools. This methodological grounding enabled a thick, contextually nuanced inquiry into the complex interplay between policy, practice, and professional agency.

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, structured around its dual research objectives:

- To examine how EFAL teachers in multilingual, under-resourced contexts conceptualise and enact the Communicative Approach in their classrooms, and
- To explore the nature and expression of teacher agency in the design and implementation of literature-based activities that promote communicative competence through culturally and socially relevant pedagogy.

The analysis was grounded in qualitative content analysis, a systematic approach that facilitates the identification, coding, and thematic organisation of patterns across diverse data sources. The data sources included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentary evidence such as lesson plans, learner workbooks, and curriculum alignment records. This multimodal dataset enabled methodological triangulation (Badal, 2018:166), which contributes to the trustworthiness and analytical depth of the findings by cross-verifying insights across different forms of evidence.

The presentation of results begins with a descriptive account of the research context and participant profiles, situating the findings within the socio-educational realities of

three township schools. This is followed by a thematic analysis of how teachers understand communicative competence. This knowledge ranges from narrow, grammar-centric interpretations to more holistic, interactional conceptions, and how these understandings manifest (or falter) in classroom practice. The chapter then turns to the central theme of teacher agency, examining how educators navigated systemic constraints, adapted prescribed curricula, and harnessed literary texts as tools for innovation, critical engagement, and linguistic empowerment.

The following section presents a detailed description of the study's context and participants, thereby setting the stage for the thematic exploration of communicative practice and teacher agency in promoting communicative competence among learners.

## **4.2. THE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLING CONTEXT**

The three schools used in this study are Lethabo, Atlegang, and Selematsela High Schools. They are located in a historically disadvantaged township in Tshwane North, Gauteng. This space was deliberately constructed under apartheid-era spatial planning to enforce racial segregation and socio-economic marginalisation. These institutions are not neutral educational sites but rather embodiments of enduring structural inequality, where the legacies of systemic exclusion continue to dominate and shape the daily realities of teaching and learning.

In this context, English functions not as a first language but as a second or third language for both learners and educators. English is also a language of aspiration, assessment, and alienation, often acquired under conditions that are linguistically, cognitively, and emotionally stressful (Sithebe & Moore, 2015). The broader socio-educational environment is marked by pervasive unemployment, widespread dependence on social grants, low parental literacy, and high levels of household instability, often headed by single parents.

These conditions are compounded by psychosocial vulnerabilities. Learners regularly navigate daily exposure to crime, substance abuse, and violence, while their journeys to and from school are frequently fraught with risk, including theft, physical assault, and sexual harassment. As one teacher poignantly observed,

*“This is normal for us, and it does not seem like it would change” (Mzi).*

This normalisation of crisis is not merely anecdotal, but reflects a deeper pathology in which educational institutions operate under conditions of chronic instability, where survival often supersedes pedagogical ambition.

#### **4.2.1 Resource constraints and infrastructure challenges**

The material conditions of these schools are emblematic of the spatialised inequities that continue to define South African education. While all three institutions face infrastructural challenges, the disparities between them reveal the uneven distribution of resources and institutional support.

Lethabo High School, for instance, benefits from a corporate partnership with BMW, which facilitated the installation of solar panels. This critical intervention occurs within a national context of persistent load shedding. The solar-powered infrastructure provides a measure of operational continuity, shielding the school from the full impact of electricity outages that disrupt teaching and learning nationwide.

In stark contrast, Atlegang and Selematsela High Schools lack alternative energy sources, rendering them acutely vulnerable to national power failures. Classrooms fall into darkness, digital tools become unusable, and lesson continuity is routinely compromised. These disruptions are not incidental; they are symptomatic of a broader infrastructural deficit that disproportionately affects historically marginalised communities. As Taylor and Coetzee (2013) aptly point out, under-resourced schools often lack even basic teaching materials, let alone the technological infrastructure necessary for twenty-first-century pedagogy. In such environments, the implementation of communicative language teaching, which relies on interactive,

dynamic, and often technology-aided activities, becomes not just difficult but structurally improbable.

Compounding these material constraints is a crisis of governance. School Governing Bodies (SGBs), which are mandated to ensure transparency and accountability, have in some cases become sites of institutional corruption and fiscal malfeasance. Atlegang and Selematsela High Schools are currently under district administration due to allegations of embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, and other irregularities. These governance failures are not isolated incidents; they reflect a broader pattern of institutional decay that undermines educational quality and erodes trust in the system. When financial resources are diverted from textbooks, libraries, or teacher development to personal enrichment, the consequences are felt directly in the classroom. Consequently, staff are demoralised, learners are disengaged, and pedagogical activities are compromised.

#### **4.2.2 Distinctive institutional profiles**

Despite operating within the same township, each school presents a distinct configuration of strengths, challenges, and institutional cultures.

Lethabo High School distinguishes itself through a culture of order, punctuality, and academic rigour. The school enforces a strict disciplinary code and prioritises science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education in alignment with national development goals. Weekly staff briefings and prayer meetings foster a sense of collegiality and shared purpose. However, this administrative stability comes at a cost. The school's hierarchical management structure places an overwhelming emphasis on syllabus coverage, with Heads of Department (HODs) required to submit weekly progress reports to district facilitators. While this ensures compliance, it also reinforces a performative culture in which bureaucratic accountability supersedes pedagogical innovation. Teachers report that excessive reporting consumes valuable instructional

time, leaving little space for reflective practice or experimentation with communicative approaches (Govender, 2018).

Atlegang High School presents a paradox. It is resource-rich yet institutionally fragile. The school boasts a well-equipped library, yet the facility remains underutilised, symbolising the chasm between availability and functionality. Chronic instability in leadership, which is marked by the untimely deaths of successive principals, has resulted in prolonged periods of weak administration, undermining long-term planning and instructional continuity. This leadership vacuum has contributed to poor academic outcomes, with only 30% of learners achieving a bachelor's pass in English. Although policies on discipline and punctuality exist, they are inconsistently enforced, and learner misconduct, staff disunity, and infrastructure decay are further exacerbated by vandalism.

Selematsela High School, despite facing the most severe challenges, demonstrates remarkable resilience. The school maintains a 90% pass rate, a testament to the perseverance of its educators and learners. Yet, this academic success unfolds against a backdrop of extreme danger. The school is plagued by criminal infiltration, with SGB members implicated in financial misconduct and acts of violence against school leadership. Gang-related shootings near the premises have become routine, and teachers describe a pervasive sense of despondency. The entanglement of educational governance with criminal and political networks exemplifies the broader township dynamic, in which schools are not insulated from but are deeply embedded within the socio-political pathologies of their communities (Pillay, 2016).

### **4.2.3 Shared systemic challenges**

Despite their differences, the three schools share a range of systemic challenges that continue to constrain teaching and learning. A recurring issue is the deprofessionalisation of English as a subject. Because it is compulsory, English is often perceived as a language that “everyone can teach.” As a result, schools appoint

educators without adequate subject-specific training or linguistic proficiency. This misconception undermines the complexity of teaching English as EFAL, in which learners require not only grammatical instruction but also support in developing sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies (Canale & Swain, 1980).

This pedagogical challenge is amplified by broader systemic failures, including SGB corruption, teacher demoralisation, learner disengagement, and the normalisation of dysfunction. In such an environment, CAPS, with its aspirational goals of “using language creatively and effectively” (DBE, 2011:11), becomes a distant ideal. Teachers are expected to cultivate communicative competence, but they work within a system that prioritises content coverage, standardised testing, and bureaucratic compliance over interactive, meaning-focused instruction (Mendelowitz, 2014; Calvert, 2016).

The influence of historical marginalisation, infrastructural neglect, and governance failure creates a context in which teacher agency is not only limited but actively suppressed. As Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) argue, agency is not an individual trait, but a relational capacity shaped by structural conditions. In these schools, teachers are not merely under-resourced; they are overburdened by crises that extend far beyond the classroom. Their professional identity is not defined by innovation, but by survival.

Yet, even within this constrained terrain, moments of pedagogical resistance and creativity do emerge. Some teachers exercise agency by using literature as a tool for communicative engagement, critical dialogue, and cultural relevance. Their practices reveal not only the resilience of the human spirit but also the transformative potential of education, even in the most adverse conditions.

### **4.3 PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

#### ***Khensi***

Khensi is a veteran female educator with 37 years of teaching experience. She embodies the complex interplay between longevity, professional identity, and

pedagogical adaptation in South Africa's evolving educational landscape. Khensi holds a Teaching Diploma, a Bachelor of Arts, and an Honours degree in Sepedi, as well as tertiary-level studies in English. Her academic profile reflects a deep commitment to linguistic and cultural education. As an EFAL teacher in a historically disadvantaged township school, Khensi brings a wealth of institutional memory and classroom experience to her practice. Her experience is both a strength and, in certain respects, a site of tension between past and present pedagogical paradigms.

Her teaching philosophy ostensibly aligns with learner-centred ideals and emphasises active participation through question-and-answer sessions and structured textbook engagement. She articulates a belief in interactive pedagogy, stating that learners must be "drawn into the lesson" through dialogue and guided inquiry. However, in practice, her methodology remains rooted in traditional instructional forms. These include textbook-driven content delivery, teacher-led discussions, and the use of outdated technological tools such as overhead projectors. She admitted that she identifies as "an old teacher... [using] technology of older days". This self-reflexive admission highlights her awareness of shifting educational expectations while also underscoring her distance from current innovations.

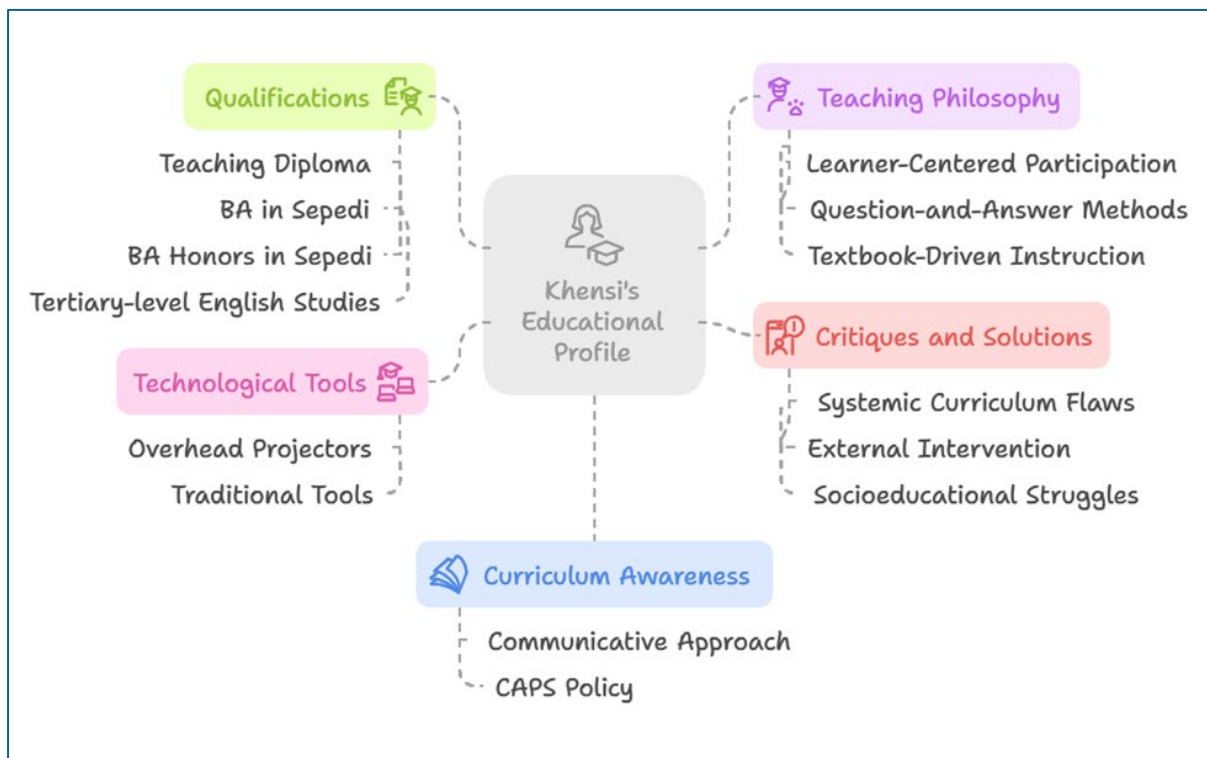
What distinguishes Khensi from her peers is her unusual awareness of curriculum policy. She is the only participant in the study who explicitly acknowledges the inclusion of the Communicative Approach in the CAPS. This awareness, however, does not translate into pedagogical enactment. While she recognises the policy's aspirational language and its calls for creativity, critical engagement, and communicative competence, she interprets these goals as structurally unattainable within the realities of her school.

Her critique is incisive when she identifies systemic flaws in curriculum design, resource inequities, and the socio-educational challenges faced by learners navigating poverty, violence, and linguistic dissonance. However, Khensi frames the possibility of change not through teacher agency, but through external intervention. For her, transformation is contingent upon top-down support, curriculum reform, institutional

resourcing, and administrative leadership. This orientation positions her as a critical observer rather than an active agent of change.

This behaviour aligns with what Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) describe as structurally mediated agency: the understanding that professional action is constrained by and dependent on broader systemic conditions. While she resists the notion of passive compliance, her vision of innovation remains bounded by the availability of external scaffolding. This reveals a gap between policy consciousness and pedagogical self-efficacy.

This disjuncture is emblematic of a broader tension in South African EFAL education: the coexistence of policy awareness and practical inertia. As Badal (2018) and Govender (2018) observe, even when teachers understand the principles of communicative language teaching, their ability or willingness to implement them is often impeded by contextual constraints and a lack of professional development.



**Figure 4.1: Khensi's Educational Profile and Philosophy**

(Adapted using Napkin AI)

Khensi's case reveals this paradox acutely. While she sees the flaws in the system and identifies the prescribed solution, she does not perceive herself as a central actor in its actualization. Her story sets the stage for contrasting portraits of agency, highlighting the variability and complexity of teacher practice in the face of systemic adversity.

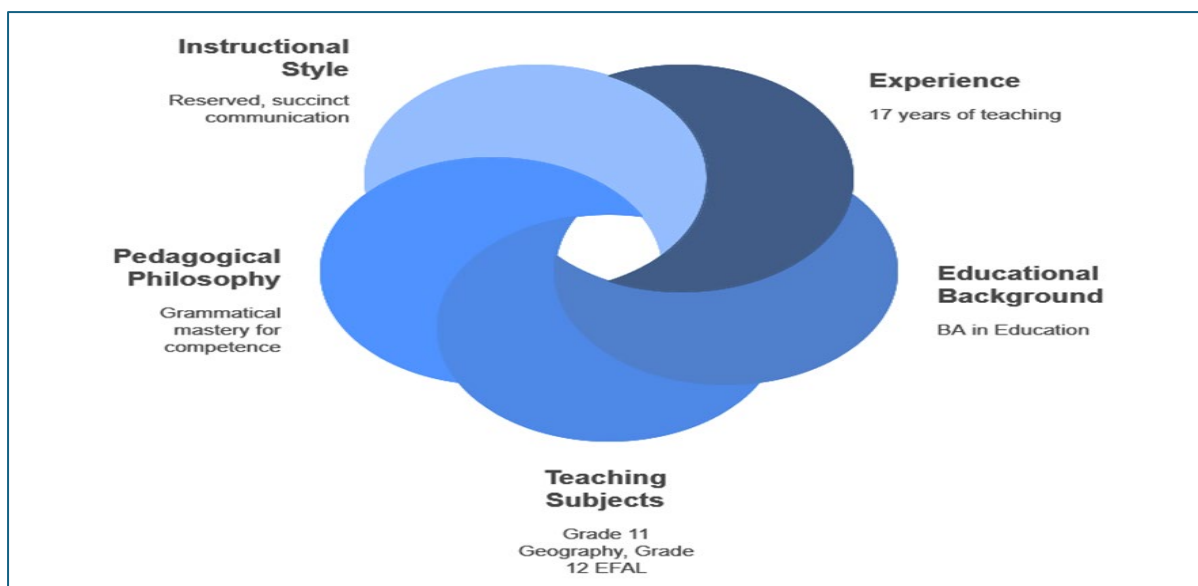
### ***Andi***

Andi is a male educator with 17 years of teaching experience. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education, and teaches Grade 11 Geography and Grade 12 EFAL in a township school shaped by systemic constraints and linguistic complexity. His professional identity reflects a structuralist orientation to language learning, in which grammatical accuracy is not regarded as a component of communicative competence but rather as its foundational prerequisite. He articulates this belief clearly, "Confidence and fluency require mastery of basic language rules." This perspective aligns with a traditional, form-focused pedagogy and the legacy of audiolingualism and grammar-translation methods, which prioritise linguistic correctness over functional use of language (Richards, 2006; Long, 2009).

Hence, Andi's instructional philosophy reflects a linear model of language acquisition. In this model, learners must first internalise grammatical structures before engaging in meaningful communication. In practice, this translates into a classroom environment where language is treated as a system to be mastered rather than a tool to be used. While this approach offers a sense of pedagogical control, particularly in a context where learners exhibit wide-ranging proficiency levels, it fundamentally contradicts the principles of communicative language teaching, which holds that fluency and confidence emerge through communication rather than after it (Savignon, 2002; Richards & Schmidt, 2002). As Widdowson (2003) argues, treating language as a set of discrete rules to be "built in" (Skehan, 1996), rather than as something acquired through authentic interaction, risks producing learners who are grammatically correct but functionally inert.

A striking feature of Andi's practice is his underutilisation of literary texts, despite evidence that his learners express interest in poetry, a genre rich with linguistic, emotional, and cultural resonance. Literature, as a vehicle for authentic language input and critical engagement, offers a powerful opportunity to integrate all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) within meaningful, contextually grounded tasks (Badal, 2019; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). Yet, Andi does not harness this potential. His reticence to incorporate literature into his EFAL instruction reflects a broader instrumental view of language, prioritizing grammatical competence over sociocultural and expressive development.

This instructional restraint is mirrored in his communication style. It is succinct, directive, and minimally elaborative. He offers little insight into his pedagogical reasoning, suggesting either a lack of reflective practice or a belief that teaching methodology is self-evident and not subject to critique or adaptation. This limited articulation of pedagogical intent suggests a gap in metacognitive awareness or a lack of engagement with the broader theoretical and contextual debates surrounding communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). As Day (2017) observes, teacher knowledge is often shaped more by personal experience than by formal training or theoretical understanding, leading to deeply held, yet unexamined, beliefs about how language is best taught.



**Figure 4.2: Andi's Educational Approach Overview**

*(Adapted using Napkin AI)*

Andi's approach also reveals a tension between policy and practice. While CAPS advocates the Communicative Approach, calling for learners to "use language creatively and effectively" (DBE, 2011), Andi's adherence to a grammar-first model suggests a misalignment with these goals. His stance represents either pedagogical conservatism or a rational response to the challenges of large classes, limited resources, and high-stakes assessment regimes that prioritise textual accuracy over interactive fluency (Coenders & Voogt, 2012; Pillay, 2016).

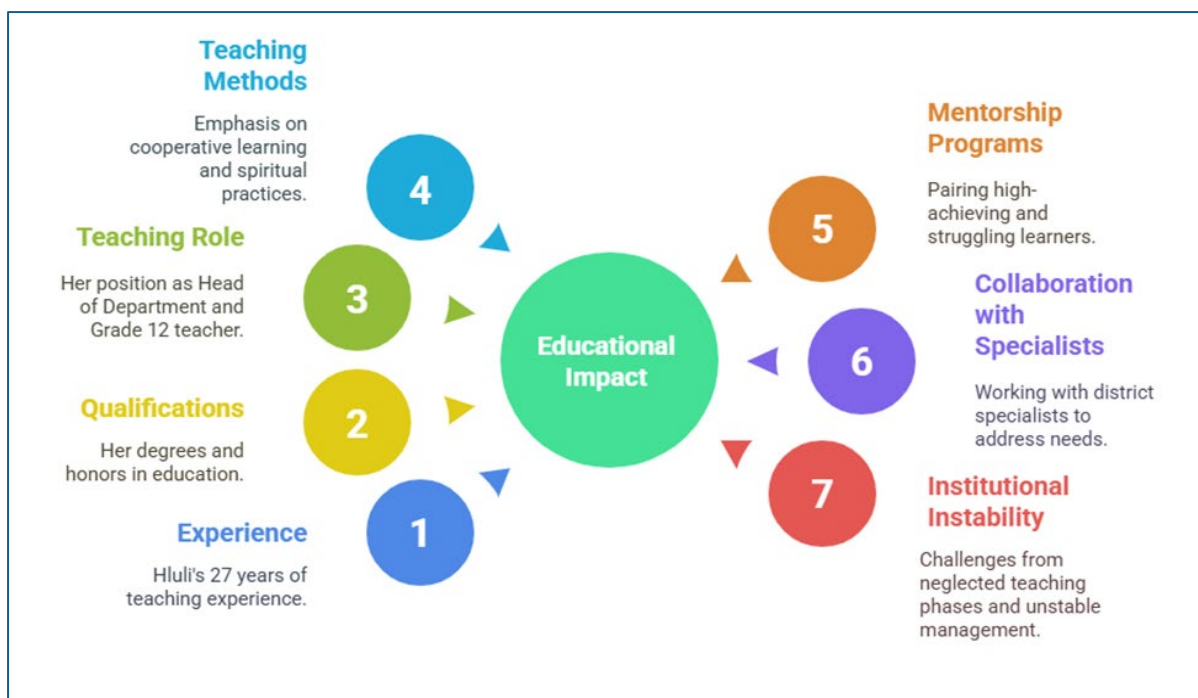
### **Hluli**

Hluli is a female seasoned educator with 27 years of teaching experience. She embodies a rare mix of pedagogical dedication, institutional leadership, and moral commitment to her learners. She holds a Teaching Diploma, a Bachelor of Arts, and an Honours degree in Educational Management. She serves as both Head of Department (HOD) and Grade 12 EFAL teacher. This dual role positions her at the nexus of curriculum leadership and frontline instruction. Her professional identity is grounded in formal qualifications and a transformative vision of education that integrates academic rigour, social support, and affective care. In a context where

survival often supersedes innovation, Hluli's practice emerges as a model of relational pedagogy, one that seeks to cultivate not only linguistic proficiency but also learner resilience, responsibility, and a sense of community.

Central to Hluli's pedagogical philosophy is cooperative learning, which she implements through structured peer mentorship programmes that pair high-achieving learners with those experiencing academic difficulty. This strategy aligns with Vygotskian principles of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning is co-constructed through social interaction and scaffolded support (Rogoff, 2003). By encouraging peer-to-peer communication, Hluli creates opportunities for authentic language use. She stimulates dialogue that is spontaneous, contextually grounded, and functionally meaningful, thereby advancing the goals of communicative language teaching in ways that transcend traditional, teacher-dominated instruction (Richards, 2006). Her classroom functions as a microcosm of learner-centred interaction, where students negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and develop strategic competence via collaborative engagement.

Beyond the academic, Hluli integrates spiritual and emotional support into her teaching practice, beginning each day with collective prayer with her learners. This ritual, while rooted in personal belief, functions pedagogically as an expression of care. It acts as a daily affirmation of dignity, belonging, and hope in a system that often marginalises township youth. As Biesta (2009) argues, education is not merely about qualification or socialisation, but also about the formation of selfhood, agency, and ethical responsibility. Hluli's prayers, mentorship initiatives, and consistent advocacy for her students reflect this deeper educational purpose, positioning her not only as a teacher but also as a moral agent in a context marked by psychosocial vulnerability and institutional neglect.



**Figure 4.3: Factors influencing Hluli's Educational Impact**

*(Adapted using Napkin AI)*

Her leadership extends beyond the classroom. Hluli actively collaborates with district specialists, subject advisors, and school management to identify and address systemic support needs. This collaborative practice demonstrates what Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) term relational agency, characterised by professional action enacted through networks of collaboration and shared responsibility. She seeks to bridge the gap between policy and practice, advocating for resources, professional development, and curricular coherence. In this regard, she embodies the ideal of the teacher as a high-level knowledge worker, an innovator, strategist, and change agent (Schleicher, 2018:36).

However, despite her proactive leadership and pedagogical vision, Hluli's agency is profoundly constrained by institutional instability. The school's senior management has experienced prolonged turnover, with acting principals and inconsistent leadership that undermine long-term planning and instructional coherence. This administrative fragility is compounded by systemic neglect of the General Education and Training (GET)

phase, resulting in learners entering Grade 12 with significant linguistic and cognitive deficits. As a consequence, Hluli is often forced into a remedial mode, diverting energy from advanced communicative tasks to foundational literacy support. This reality limits her ability to implement the full scope of communicative language teaching principles.

### **Kea**

Kea is an early-career educator with seven years of teaching experience. She embodies the promise of a new generation of EFAL teachers in South African township schools. She holds a BTech and a Bachelor of Education (BEd). She is part of a cohort that has been formally trained in both technological integration and pedagogical theory. Kea is equipped with digital literacy and a commitment to learner-centred education.

Her self-description as a “guide” rather than an authority figure aligns with the facilitative role central to communicative language teaching, where the teacher’s function is understood to scaffold interaction, promote autonomy, and create spaces for meaningful language use (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). This orientation reflects a clear break from traditional, transmission-based models and signals an alignment with constructivist and sociocultural understandings of learning (Rogoff, 2003).

Kea reports using digital tools to support teaching and learning, including WhatsApp group chats, online quizzes, and shared documents, to enhance syllabus coverage and maintain learner engagement beyond classroom hours. In a context where physical resources are scarce and learner attendance is often inconsistent, her use of technology demonstrates adaptive resilience, a strategic response to systemic constraints.

Moreover, her pedagogical approach draws inspiration from her mentorship with Hluli, an experienced HOD who models cooperative learning and affective leadership. Inspired by this relationship, Kea incorporates peer collaboration and group-based tasks into her instruction, reflecting an emerging commitment to interactive, socially mediated learning.

However, a critical divide emerges between her technological fluency and her pedagogical application. While Kea employs digital platforms extensively, their use remains largely instrumental rather than communicative. Group chats remain primarily used for disseminating content, posting assignments, and monitoring task completion. These functions reinforce compliance rather than encourage dialogue, negotiation, or creative expression. As a result, opportunities for authentic language use, such as debating ideas, co-constructing narratives, or engaging in reflective discussion, were underexploited. This reflects what Lavadenz (2011) identifies as a key limitation in EFAL instruction: tools and activities that prioritise coverage over communicative depth. In this instance, technology becomes a conduit for efficiency, rather than a catalyst for transformation.

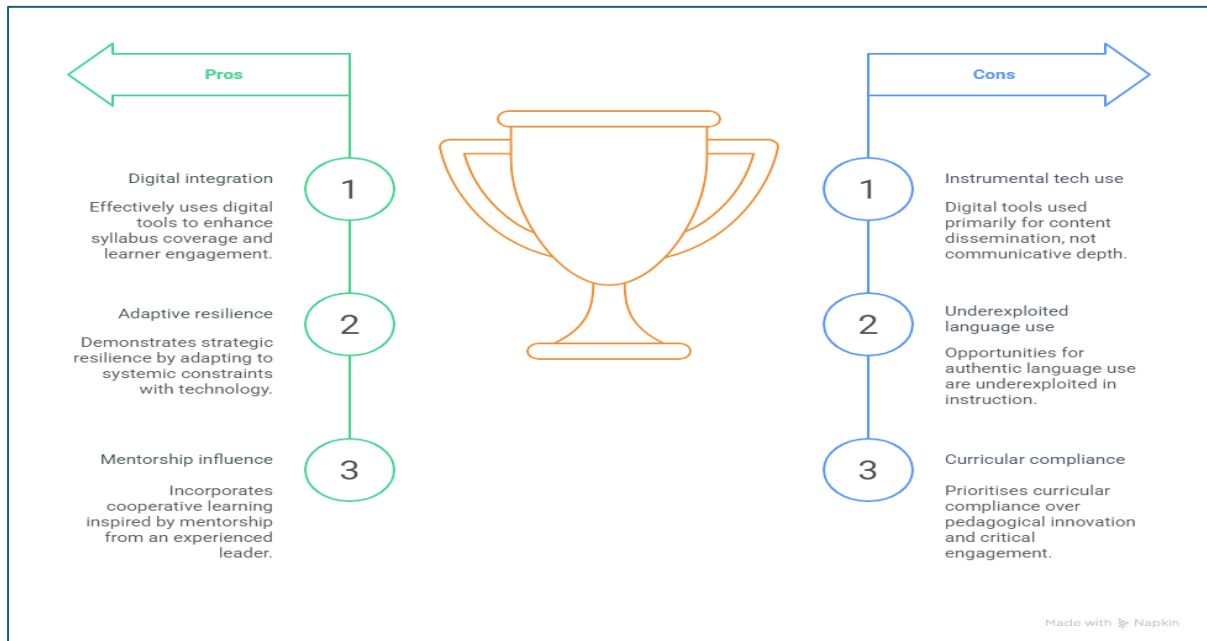
This orientation is further evidenced in Kea's emphasis on task completion and syllabus progression, which often take precedence over pedagogical innovation or critical engagement with literary texts. While she recognises the value of literature in increasing cultural awareness and language proficiency (Badal, 2019), she does not integrate it into communicative tasks that demand interpretation, debate, or personal response.

Her practice reveals a pragmatic prioritisation of curricular compliance, shaped by the performative demands of the ATP and the high-stakes nature of Grade 12 assessment. As Coenders and Voogt (2012) observe, even teachers committed to interactive methods often retreat to content-driven instruction when pressured by time, accountability, and learner variability.

Kea's teaching philosophy, therefore, illustrates a defining tension for early-career educators and is emblematic of the conflict between transformative ideals and systemic demands. She possesses the formal knowledge, technological capacity, and mentorship support to innovate, but operates within a context that rewards conformity, measures success through test outcomes, and offers limited space for pedagogical experimentation.

Her experience highlights findings by Day (2017) and Hoang (2017) that teacher knowledge is often shaped more by immediate classroom demands than by theoretical

training, resulting in a gap between their beliefs and practices. Furthermore, her reliance on technology as a managerial tool rather than a communicative medium highlights a broader issue in contemporary EFAL education: the misalignment between digital capability and pedagogical purpose.



**Figure 4.4: Kea's Teaching Approach**

*(Adapted using Napkin AI)*

As Butler (2011) and Jin and Yoo (2019) argue, the mere presence of technology does not guarantee the implementation of communicative language teaching. Without a clear vision of how it supports interaction, collaboration, and meaning-making, digital tools risk reinforcing traditional, teacher-centred paradigms under a modern guise.

**Mzi**

Mzi is an EFAL teacher with eight years of classroom experience. He brings a distinctive trajectory to his role, shaped not only by formal academic training in English and Sports but also through a brief interlude in the business sector before returning to the profession. This biographical shift reveals a deeper tension between professional

idealism and the stark realities of teaching in a historically marginalised township school. Mzi's journey represents a re-entry to education marked by cynicism, fatigue, and a profound sense of systemic betrayal.

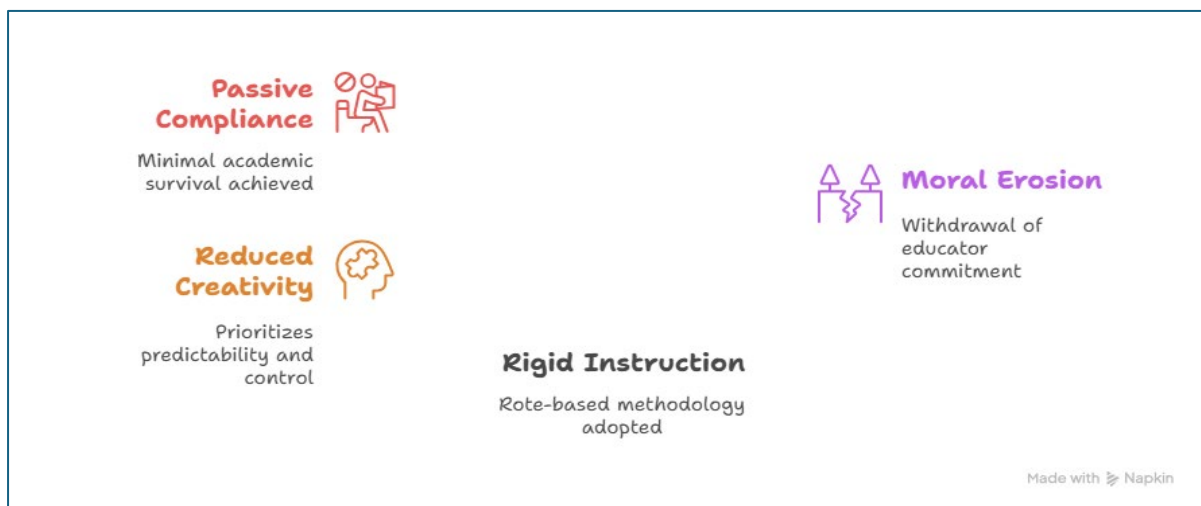
His pedagogical approach reflects a survival-oriented instruction. In response to the overwhelming challenges of learner absenteeism, substance abuse, and institutional neglect, Mzi adopts a rigid, rote-based methodology centred on drilling, repetition, and exam-focused content coverage. While this approach appears at odds with the communicative, learner-centred ideals promoted by CAPS, it functions as a rational adaptation to an environment where predictability and control take precedence over creativity and exploration. As Coenders and Voogt (2012) observe, many teachers in under-resourced contexts default to transmission-based methods because they perceive interactive strategies as unmanageable in classrooms marked by instability and disengagement.

Accordingly, Mzi acknowledges the limitations of his practice. He critiques the systemic conditions that erode his capacity to teach meaningfully, such as excessive workloads, chronic resource shortages, and the pervasive impact of drug use on learner behaviour and attendance. He speaks candidly about unaddressed misconduct, administrative apathy, and the emotional toll of teaching in a context where educational aspirations remain undermined by social pathologies. He, therefore, expresses disillusionment with the system, noting its failures toward both students and teachers. He points out that the promise of transformation through education rings hollow when schools operate without basic infrastructure, consistent leadership, or psychological support for students navigating trauma and poverty.

This sense of abandonment that he portrays is emblematic of what Biesta (2009) describes as the moral erosion of the teaching profession, a gradual withdrawal of commitment that emerges when educators feel their agency is neither recognised nor supported. Mzi's retreat into procedural, exam-driven instruction is not a sign of pedagogical indifference but a symptom of institutional disempowerment. His classroom functions as a site of containment rather than cultivation, where the primary

objective is not communicative competence, but rather passive compliance and minimal academic survival.

Mzi emphasises that he does not celebrate rote learning but laments its necessity. This tension positions him as a critical realist who perceives the gap between policy rhetoric and lived reality with painful clarity. His experience highlights a central finding of this study: teacher agency is not simply a matter of individual will, but a function of structural enablement (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). Without institutional trust, professional respect, and material support, even well-qualified and experienced educators such as Mzi retreat into defensive teaching, which becomes a mode of practice prioritising endurance over innovation.



**Figure 4.5: Survival-Orientated Instruction Impacts Learner Engagement**

(Adapted using Napkin AI)

### **Kele**

Kele, is a veteran educator with 27 years of teaching experience and a Teaching Diploma. Unlike the other participants, Kele is distinguished not by formal advanced qualifications but by a profound critical awareness of the ideological dimensions of language teaching. She explicitly critiques the hegemony of English as a medium of instruction and as a mechanism of epistemic and cultural domination that systematically disadvantages Black learners. She articulates a clear understanding of how linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) shapes academic trajectories, privileging

those with access to English-rich environments while marginalising those for whom English is a distant, often alienating language. Her stance aligns with transformative and decolonial pedagogies that call for a re-examination of language policy and curriculum design in post-colonial contexts (Pillay, 2016; Cappy, 2016).

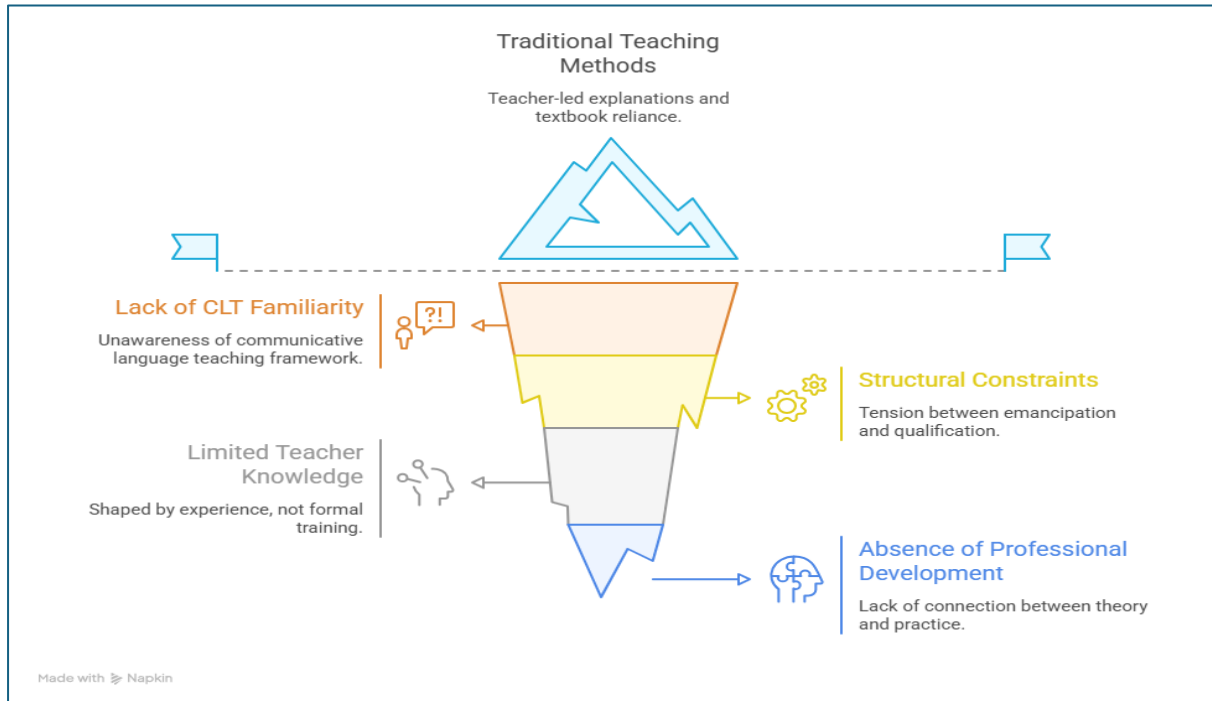
This ideological clarity is evident in her practice of activating prior knowledge through pre-lesson discussions, where she invites learners to share their lived experiences, cultural references, and insights from their home language. These moments represent a rare instance of epistemic inclusion that showcases an effort to bridge the gap between the learner's world and the formal classroom, thereby supporting cognitive engagement and validating multilingual identities. Such practices align with Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is a socially mediated process rooted in prior experience and cultural context (Rogoff, 2003).

In these dialogic spaces, Kele demonstrates a commitment to learner-centredness by creating spaces for voice, relevance, and connection. However, despite this critical orientation, her pedagogical practice remains firmly rooted in traditional, transmission-based methods. Once the initial discussion concludes, her instruction reverts to teacher-led explanations, textbook reliance, and grammar-focused exercises. Her classroom dynamics are characterised by limited learner interaction, minimal use of authentic materials, and an absence of structured communicative tasks, which are the hallmarks of communicative language teaching.

Kele shares her lack of familiarity with communicative language teaching as a defined pedagogical framework with most of the cohort in this study. This gap in professional knowledge prevents her from translating her critical philosophy into transformative practice.

This dissonance between ideological critique and pedagogical enactment is not a personal failing, but a structural one. Kele's case exemplifies what Biesta (2009) describes as the tension between emancipation and qualification, as seen in her desire to liberate learners from oppressive systems, while being constrained by the very structures she seeks to challenge. Her awareness of English hegemony is advanced, but her pedagogical and conceptual understanding has not evolved.

As Day (2017) observes, teacher knowledge is often shaped more by personal experience and implicit beliefs than by formal training or theoretical engagement. Without access to sustained professional development that connects critical theory to classroom application, even the most socially conscious educators may struggle to operationalise their ideals.



**Figure 4.6: Dissonance between Ideology and Practice in Education**

(Adapted using Napkin AI)

Having established the context and participant profiles, the study now turns to its empirical core. The following section, Analysis of the Data, presents a detailed examination of the findings drawn from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. It aims to explore how the theoretical principles of communicative language teaching and teacher agency are navigated, enacted, and constrained within the lived realities of EFAL teachers in three Tshwane township schools.

The analysis that follows goes beyond description to critically examine how policy, practice, and teacher commitment shape the pursuit of communicative competence through literary texts in an inequitable system.

#### 4.4 ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study employed a triangulated methodological approach, comprising semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, to investigate EFAL teachers' agency in utilizing literature texts to promote communicative competence among their learners in township schools.

Interview questions were designed to initiate discourse around teachers' teaching philosophies, knowledge, and application of the Communicative Approach and communicative language teaching principles in multilingual township schools. Iterative coding and thematic analysis were employed, revealing intersecting themes that highlight the relationship between teachers' beliefs, contextual constraints, and curricular demands. Emergent findings reveal systemic challenges, power structures, and pedagogical realities that impact the implementation of communicative language teaching in resource-constrained, socio-politically complex environments, such as township schools.

Throughout the interviews, teachers consistently expressed concerns about their context, feelings of alienation from their work, and a sense of abandonment due to the lack of support from their primary external contact, the district facilitator. Considering their plight and their hope that such a study might create awareness of their contextual complexity, I listened and acknowledged their voices, although I am intimately familiar with these conditions, having experienced them myself. Hence, much of the data became very repetitive, and synthesis became challenging. Moreover, teacher responses to the actual questions were limited as teachers remained focused on their contextual challenges. This means that some candidates provided more narratives relating to the interview questions than others who spoke little or did not offer much data relevant to the questions.

While there is a significant feeling of resentment and despair about their contextual realities in township schools, differentiation was found among teachers in terms of their attitudes and motivation. Some tried their utmost to serve the community that is in dire need of governmental interventions not only in the educational space but in society

more broadly. Teachers cited this wider neglect as breeding disinterest and deviant behaviour, which they described as their main impediments to transformative teaching.

The analysis of the data in this study was not merely a process of categorisation, but an interpretively critical endeavour. The process involved uncovering the complex interplay between teacher beliefs, systemic constraints, and pedagogical possibilities in the contested terrain of South African township schools. The data collection process revealed a striking pattern. While the interview protocol was designed to elicit insights into teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and application of communicative language teaching principles, the discourse consistently ruptured the boundaries of the interview protocol. Teachers' most urgent narratives did not centre on pedagogy, but on survival, overcrowded classrooms, absence of district support, crumbling infrastructure, and the daily trauma of teaching in communities ravaged by poverty, crime, and social disintegration. As one participant lamented, "We are left to carry the burden of a nation's failure." This affective dimension of the data reveals the extent to which systemic neglect has eroded not only teaching conditions but also teacher identity and professional morale.

Although this emotional and institutional weight manifested in the data as repetition, departure, and resistance to the formal questions posed, I had to offer them the space to be heard. Some participants offered rich, reflective narratives that directly engaged with the questions. Others spoke sparingly; their silence itself became a form of testimony to the undercurrents that shape their voices. Thus, the data highlighted the psychological toll of working in a system that demands transformation while offering neither resources nor space for teacher voice (Badal, 2018). As Biesta (2009) argues, when teachers feel their agency is neither supported nor respected, their withdrawal from professional discourse becomes a rational response.

This section presents the distilled findings through five emergent themes, which are outlined in Table 4.1, alongside their key findings and their theoretical connections. These are *Theme 1: Teachers' Beliefs and Practices – The Fracture Between Ideology and Enactment*, covering teachers' beliefs and practices; *Theme 2: Teachers' Understanding of Communicative Language Teaching – Misconceptions and*

*Theoretical Gaps*, focusing on teachers' understanding of communicative language teaching; *Theme 3: Classroom Observation – The Chasm Between Belief, Knowledge, and Pedagogical Enactment*, analysing the disjuncture between beliefs, knowledge, and interpretation; *Theme 4: Professional Development – Aligning Theory and Practice in a System of Fragmented Support*, examining how professional development aligns theory and practice; and *Theme 5: Teacher Agency – Harnessing Literature as a Resource for Communicative Competence*, considering how literature is used as a supplementary resource for communicative language teaching.

**Table 4.1: Summary of key findings linked to socio-cognitive theory**

Theme	Key Findings	Link to Theory
<p><b>Theme 1:</b> Teachers' Beliefs and Practices – The Fracture Between Ideology and Enactment. “Teacher agency” is a professional capability to “make free or self-directed decisions” (Campbell 2012: 183) .</p>	<p>Discrepancies between stated beliefs (e.g., learner-centred ideals) and enacted practices (e.g., teacher-centred methods).</p> <p>Reliance on traditional, transmission-based pedagogies.</p> <p>Systemic disempowerment that limits reflective practice.</p>	<p><b>Personal Factors:</b> Beliefs about teaching and learning processes.</p> <p><b>Behavioural Factors:</b> Enacted pedagogies shaped by tradition.</p> <p><b>Environmental Factors:</b> Policy pressures, e.g., compliance with the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP).</p>
<p><b>Theme 2:</b> Teachers' Understanding of Communicative Language Teaching – Misconceptions and Theoretical Gaps</p>	<p>Limited theoretical understanding of Communicative Language Teaching.</p> <p>Conflation of Communicative Language Teaching with superficial “engagement.”</p> <p>Piecemeal, inconsistent implementation. Lack of methodological guidance.</p> <p>Prioritisation of survival and compliance.</p> <p>Lack of external support or facilitator guidance.</p>	<p><b>Personal Factors:</b> Misconceptions about Communicative Language Teaching principles.</p> <p><b>Behavioural Factors:</b> Fragmented instructional strategies.</p> <p><b>Environmental Factors:</b> Weak professional development and inadequate training on Communicative Language Teaching.</p>
<p><b>Theme 3:</b> Classroom Observation – The Chasm Between Belief, Knowledge, and Pedagogical Enactment</p>	<p>Compliance-oriented teaching.</p> <p>Exclusive reliance on prescribed materials.</p> <p>Conformity to performative accountability systems.</p>	<p><b>Personal Factors:</b> Low self-efficacy in addressing pedagogical challenges.</p> <p><b>Behavioural Factors:</b> Reliance on control and directive methods.</p>

Theme	Key Findings	Link to Theory
	<p>Structural barriers, e.g., load-shedding, water cuts, and lack of resources.</p> <p>Learner-related complexities: drug use, absenteeism, low proficiency.</p> <p>Systemic pressures: ATP-driven syllabus completion over pedagogical innovation.</p> <p>District-level monitoring prioritises compliance rather than pedagogy.</p> <p>Principals are uninformed about Communicative Language Teaching principles.</p>	<p><b>Environmental Factors:</b> Township realities (crime, poverty) and rigid policy demands.</p>
<p><b>Theme 4:</b> Professional Development – Aligning Theory and Practice in a System of Fragmented Support</p>	<p>Teachers negotiate between compliance (ATP adherence) and adaptive pedagogy (e.g., mentorship, tech use).</p> <p>Limited professional agency.</p> <p>Examples of adaptive strategies: spiritual practices, cooperative learning (Hluli), digital integration (Kea).</p> <p>Persistent management of deficits rather than innovation.</p> <p>Systemic constraints, such as SGB corruption and a lack of monitoring culture.</p> <p>Lack of relevant workshops and sustained follow-up. Absence of Professional Learning Communities.</p>	<p><b>Personal Factors:</b> Perceived efficacy to innovate.</p> <p><b>Behavioural Factors:</b> Adaptive versus compliant practices.</p> <p><b>Environmental Factors:</b> Weak institutional support and fragmented community dynamics.</p>

Theme	Key Findings	Link to Theory
<p><b>Theme 5:</b> Teacher Agency – Harnessing Literature as a Resource for Communicative Competence</p>	<p>Lack of a coherent theoretical framework for using literature.</p> <p>Fragmented and inconsistent use of literary texts. Rigid adherence to the ATP.</p> <p>Transmission-based teaching that sidelines communicative goals.</p> <p>Inability to align literature with Communicative Language Teaching principles.</p> <p>Absence of facilitator or district-level guidance.</p>	<p><b>Personal Factors:</b> Underdeveloped strategies for integrating literature into communicative pedagogy.</p> <p><b>Behavioural Factors:</b> Reliance on traditional, teacher-centred methods.</p> <p><b>Environmental Factors:</b> Lack of institutional and district-level support.</p>

#### **4.4.1 Theme One: Teachers' beliefs and practices: The fracture between ideology and enactment**

Emergent data of teachers' beliefs and practices revealed a profound and persistent disconnection or fracture between their espoused pedagogical philosophy and classroom enactment. This fracture was not merely individual but structurally produced across all teachers' enactment of the curriculum.

While almost all the participants articulated philosophies aligned with learner-centred, interactive, and communicative pedagogy, their actual instructional practices remained deeply entrenched in traditional, transmission-based models. This misalignment, as Borg (2003) and Basturkmen (2012) explain, represents a systemic phenomenon that reflects the overwhelming pressure of curriculum mandates, resource constraints, and institutional performativity (Ball et al., 2012). In the township schools under investigation, this fracture illustrates the tension between teacher agency and structural constraint.

A recurring motif across interviews was a lack of clarity about the roles of both teachers and learners in a communicative classroom. As Richards (2006) explains, communicative language teaching requires a reconfiguration of classroom dynamics, shifting the teacher's role from authority to facilitator, and the learner's role as from passive recipient to active participant. However, participants expressed uncertainty about this transformation. Some admitted their unfamiliarity with communicative language teaching and the Communicative Approach, while others became defensive, offering minimal responses and redirecting the conversation toward their contextual challenges.

As one teacher confessed:

*"I didn't know these were prescribed methods... I thought I was doing enough."*

This lack of professional knowledge, particularly regarding the sociocultural and interactional dimensions of communicative language teaching, undermined teachers' capacity to translate their beliefs into practice (Ellis, 1994).

The following profiles vividly highlight this dissonance, revealing how deeply held philosophies are reshaped, constrained, or abandoned in the face of systemic exigencies.

Khensi articulated a philosophy of reciprocal teaching, positioning learning as a collaborative process:

*“I do not believe in only imparting knowledge; learners must also receive and show participation. It is a two-way process, not just imparting, imparting, and imparting.”*

She further justified her approach by asserting:

*“When learners talk, I get to know if they understand what I am teaching...”*

These statements reflect a clear alignment with the principles of communicative language teaching, which value dialogue, feedback, and co-construction of knowledge (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

However, her practice contradicted her rhetoric. Despite her emphasis on mutual engagement, her methodology relied on overhead projectors and question-and-answer routines:

*“In my teaching, I use the overhead projector and the question-and-answer method. I ask questions, and they answer, so in this way, they are talking...”*

This contradiction exemplifies what Ellis (1994) describes as the persistence of traditional methods when teachers lack a deep understanding of the sociocultural foundations of communicative language teaching. The mere act of “talking” does not constitute communication. It is the quality, purpose, and context of interaction that define communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Khensi’s reliance on controlled, teacher-initiated exchanges reveals a superficial engagement with interaction, one that maintains the teacher’s control while offering the illusion of participation. Her case reveals a critical finding, namely, that awareness of policy and methods is not sufficient. Teachers require ongoing pedagogical training and clear guidelines to implement transformative practices.

Andi’s responses were brief but philosophically unyielding. His belief that grammar rules form the foundation of all language learning shapes all his actions.

He framed grammatical mastery as the non-negotiable foundation of language learning:

*“Competence and fluency require mastery of basic rules. If one is not confident with grammar, one cannot construct sentences or engage in dialogue...”*

This pragmatic belief justified his transmission-oriented approach to teaching as well:

*“Teachers teach learners by imparting knowledge; learners must master grammar to succeed... I put the exercises on the board, and the learners must write them out grammatically correct...”*

As evident in the quotes above, Andi’s philosophy reflects a linear, structuralist model of language acquisition, aligned with the grammar-translation method and contradicting the holistic, meaning-focused goals of communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). His practice centres on explicit grammar instruction and passive task completion. This method exemplifies what Savignon (1983) critiques as the isolation of linguistic competence from communicative use.

What is missing from teachers’ knowledge is the recognition that learners may produce grammatically correct sentences, but they need opportunities to use them in authentic, contextually appropriate ways.

Andi’s adherence to this model, despite its incompatibility with CAPS’s stated goals, illustrates the persistent disjuncture between curriculum policy and classroom reality.

Mzi’s teaching philosophy is unapologetically pragmatic. Both Andi’s and Mzi’s beliefs centre on knowledge acquisition.

However, Mzi introduces the goal of discipline into his narrative. He describes his method as drilling for comprehension and discipline:

*“I drill content and structures until they know it. Learners participate by answering questions, which keeps them focused and prevents misbehaviour. It also helps them to pass...”*

Mzi’s approach aligns with the audiolingual method, which prioritises accuracy through repetition and habit formation (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). For Mzi, drilling is not merely instructional but also disciplinary and performative, designed to maintain order and ensure pass rates. His practice reflects Borg’s (2003) ecological model, in which

environmental constraints take precedence over personal efficacy in shaping pedagogical decisions. The imperative to “pass” surpasses the goal of “communicate, which reduces language learning to a mechanical process of memorisation and reproduction.

Mzi’s admission that this method ensures an acceptable pass rate reveals the instrumental logic of survival teaching, a mode of instruction that prioritises compliance over creativity, and assessment outcomes over authentic learning.

Kele reports that her philosophy centres on activating prior knowledge through a process she describes as:

*“I start from the known to the unknown. Learners guess answers based on clues I provide, ensuring they arrive at the correct response.”*

Her approach suggests a constructivist orientation, where learning builds on existing cognitive frameworks. However, her practice is dominated by a relentless focus on syllabus coverage:

*“I ensure that I cover all the content that is prescribed by the ATP. This is my focus.”*

Kele further justifies this compliance by stating:

*“I use the ATP to deliver the lessons and stay on par with it, or else I will have to explain why I am behind...”*

Kele’s narrative reveals a critical dissonance. While she espouses a philosophy of guided discovery, her actions are dictated by external accountability mechanisms. The ATP functions not as a guide, but as a mandatory script, which compels teachers to prioritise content delivery over communicative development (Coenders & Voogt, 2012).

Her reliance on the ATP reflects Li’s (2001) critique of policy implementation in contexts where teacher agency is suppressed by rigid monitoring. The constant refrain of “coverage” among all participants, instead of “teaching” or “learning,” signals a profession in survival mode, where the primary objective is not transformation but task completion and endurance.

Similarly, Hluli stands out for her progressive, learner-centred philosophy:

*“I don’t like to spoon-feed learners. Students should work on their own, correct mistakes from the board, and learn from peers.”*

She also implements mentorship programmes and collaborative learning, which embody the relational agency described by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015). However, her innovative practices are curtailed by systemic pressures:

*“I have to follow my facilitators’ demands to finish the syllabus, so we find ourselves teaching all the time, but our learners and management are always watching us for the pass rate... the learners must pass. It does not matter if they can read or write...”*

Hluli’s admission highlights the constraints on her agency. With her years of experience, contextual and subject knowledge, and vision for transformative teaching, she is forced to compromise her ideals for the sake of compliance. Her experience underscores a central argument of this study: agency is not the absence of constraint, but the struggle to act meaningfully within it.

Unlike Khensi and Hluli, who are late-stage career teachers, Kea is a tech-savvy early-career educator who reports using digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, to distribute assignments and maintain contact with learners. Unfortunately, her focus remains on syllabus completion:

*“I use WhatsApp to give learners many home activities just to be on par.”*

As Hluli’s mentee, Kia explains that she also adopts peer mentoring, pairing high-achieving learners with those at risk of retention. This is a practice aligned with Vygotskian scaffolding. However, her use of technology is instrumental rather than communicative. Digital tools are often used for task management, rather than facilitating dialogue, debate, or creative expression.

Her case shows a broader trend that digital integration without pedagogical transformation reinforces traditional practices under a modern guise.

Collectively, the data reveal that the gap between belief and practice is not a matter of individual deficiency, but rather one of systemic disempowerment. Teachers operate within a context where CAPS mandates communicative goals but provides no methodological guidance (Mendelowitz, 2014). Moreover, district monitoring appears

to prioritise syllabus coverage over pedagogical innovation (Govender, 2018), ignores teacher knowledge, and marginalises learners' social-cultural and linguistic needs in favour of assessment outcomes. As one teacher poignantly observed, "learners are often illiterate when they exit the secondary school phase."

This outcome is linked to a system that demands transformation while marginalising teacher input. Thus, the findings challenge the idealised notion of the autonomous, innovative teacher. Instead, they present a profession navigating institutional hierarchy, where even the most well-intentioned educators are compelled to prioritise survival and compliance over preferred pedagogy. Accordingly, communicative language teaching remains a performative gesture, rather than a transformative reality for teachers in township schools.

The findings in this theme indicate a crucial need for teachers to acquire a strong theoretical understanding of the various approaches that would enable them to become transformative teachers of learners who do more than just pass and exit the system. Therefore, the above analysis sets the stage for the next theme: Teachers' understanding of communicative language teaching, misconceptions and theoretical gaps, which explores how teachers' knowledge of communicative language teaching, or lack thereof, influences their pedagogical practices and capacity to become agentic.

#### **4.4.2 Theme Two: Teachers' understanding of communicative language teaching: Misconceptions and theoretical gaps**

The data analysed in this theme involve a critical interrogation of participants' conceptualizations of communicative language teaching and communicative competence.

This section builds on the previous theme by focusing on teacher knowledge that is implicitly derived from their responses and analysis. The data analysed in this theme reveal a pervasive misunderstanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the approach. Despite CAPS policy mandates, teachers often demonstrate fragmented or superficial understandings of communicative language teaching, conflating it with isolated oral activities or grammatical drills, instead of recognizing its integrative, sociocultural

framework, which calls for authentic communication and learner-centred approaches grounded in the context of real-world use.

Of the six participants, only two indicated that they were aware of the approach as referenced in the CAPS document. However, both admitted that they had not read further or enquired independently, relying instead on the district facilitator for knowledge and direction. Some candidates displayed vague or faulty notions of learner engagement. Other participants collapsed communicative language teaching to simplistic ideas such as “learner engagement” or “speaking skills,” neglecting its core principles of contextualised meaning-making and learner autonomy.

The participants’ responses are captured below,

*“Communicative approach, I think the communicative approach is about learners being competent, learners being participative, learners talking, and learners engaging in the lesson. They should communicate with the educator throughout the lesson. Learners engage in the lessons and communicate with the educator throughout the lesson. I think that is the way I understand it. They must always participate and talk. Not only participate in the action, but they must also engage in their own talk. Engaging, engaging, engaging. The Communicative approach is there in the CAPS policy... learners must talk more than the educator. The educator speaks less, and the learners say more...” (Khensi)*

Khensi’s narrative demonstrates a partial grasp of the core principles of communicative language teaching, particularly learner participation, interaction, and the teacher’s role as a facilitator. She argues that learners should be “competent,” “participative,” and actively engaged in talking and communicating with the educator, which aligns with the focus of communicative language teaching on meaningful interaction and developing communicative competence. Her acknowledgement that “learners must talk more than the educator” demonstrates awareness of the learner-centred character of communicative language teaching, where the teacher guides rather than dominates the lesson. However, Khensi does not address the need to balance fluency and accuracy, nor does it incorporate diverse communicative activities such as role-plays and problem-solving tasks, or explore the role of self-reflection and error correction in language learning. Overall, her explanation touches on the essence

of communicative language teaching but lacks a nuanced understanding of its practical applications. Her narrative should also be evaluated in light of her previous admission that she employs the question-and-answer method in her practice. However, in contrast to her colleagues, she is the most knowledgeable in this approach.

*“CA is about learner communication, as the conversation is between the teacher and the learner.” (Mzi)*

Mzi’s statement reflects a partial understanding of the Communicative Approach because it equates communication with teacher-learner exchanges. While communication is central to communicative language teaching, the approach prioritises peer interaction, authentic tasks, language socialisation, and the teacher’s role as a facilitator rather than the sole conversational partner. A deeper understanding would include diverse communicative activities and the learner-centred nature of the approach. His response suggests that he inferred the meaning of the communicative approach only from the word “communicative,” as he did not expand even when probed.

*“I have heard of the Communicative Approach. I know that this approach relates to the interaction between the teacher and the learner in terms of giving feedback.” (Kea)*

Kea’s narrative demonstrates some awareness of the Communicative Approach by recognising the role of interaction and feedback in language teaching. However, her understanding seems to remain limited, focusing primarily on teacher-learner dynamics and feedback provision in communicative language teaching. A holistic understanding would recognise the learner-centred nature of communicative language teaching, the importance of learner-to-learner interaction, the use of authentic communicative tasks and materials, and the integration of multiple language skills.

*“Just like I indicated earlier, the basics or the starting point are the basic rules of the language itself, which is grammar. If somebody is not conversant with the basic rules, then most definitely he or she will have a problem or difficulty in expressing himself or herself in this queen’s language.” (Andi)*

Andi's response reflects a traditional, grammar-focused view of language learning, stressing grammatical accuracy as a prerequisite for communication. While grammar is important, this perspective contradicts the Communicative Approach, which prioritises meaningful interaction, fluency, and communicative competence. Communicative language teaching does not exclude grammar but integrates grammar into communicative activities rather than isolating it as the starting point of communicative events. He remained unwavering in his conviction that grammar was the foundation, as evident in his previous responses.

Additionally, teachers' understanding of communicative competence was sought, as this is central to this study. When asked to define communicative competence, most teachers admitted they had "never heard of this before." Those who attempted a response simply repeated their earlier descriptions of the Communicative Approach. Thus, their responses were limited and often speculative. Teachers' understanding of communicative competence remained narrowly confined to grammatical accuracy or functional speaking, disregarding its sociolinguistic and discursive dimensions (Savignon, 1983). For example, Khensi described communicative competence as learners' ability to "speak freely", while Andi framed it as fluency achieved through "debates or class discussions." Kele also described communicative competence as learners' ability to "speak," while Kea reduced it to "delivering messages successfully," and Mzi framed it as "workplace-ready communication." None of the teachers acknowledged the complexity of communicative competence, which encompasses "negotiation of meaning, contextual awareness, and strategic language use" (Savignon, 1983:8–9). This misalignment reflects a broader systemic issue: professional development workshops prioritise syllabus compliance over pedagogical innovation. As Jacobs and Farrell (2003:24) note, "lack of change stems from the difficulty of translating theory into practice," particularly when teachers receive only cursory training on communicative language teaching.

The analysis presented in this section reveals a profound and systemic disjuncture between teachers' stated beliefs, their theoretical knowledge, and their stated classroom practices. Despite articulating philosophies aligned with learner-centred, communicative pedagogy, teachers' instructional methods remained overwhelmingly rooted in traditional, transmission-based models. This misalignment is not merely a reflection of individual shortcomings but symptomatic of deeper structural failures. This

gap may be attributed to the absence of coherent professional development, the rigid enforcement of syllabus coverage through the ATP, and a lack of institutional support for pedagogical innovation (Coenders & Voogt, 2012; Govender, 2018). As Richards (2006) notes, the role of the teacher in a communicative classroom is redefined from transmitter to facilitator, a shift that requires not only knowledge of communicative language teaching principles but also confidence, autonomy, and enabling conditions. However, in the township schools under study, these conditions are largely absent, resulting in compliance rather than transformation.

This gap between ideology and enactment underscores a critical insight: policy mandates without pedagogical scaffolding will inevitably remain symbolic. The CAPS curriculum's call for communicative competence, while aspirational, lacks the methodological clarity and supportive infrastructure necessary for implementation (Mendelowitz, 2014). Teachers such as Khensi, who demonstrate awareness of the Communicative Approach, still default to question-and-answer routines. Others, such as Andi and Mzi, justify grammar drills and rote learning as necessary for improving pass rates, revealing how systemic pressures can override pedagogical ideals. Even Hluli, whose mentorship and collaborative practices reflect a progressive stance, acknowledges that external monitoring and syllabus demands constrain her ability to foster authentic communication. These findings collectively affirm Borg's (2003) ecological model, suggesting that teacher cognition and action are inextricably shaped by environmental constraints.

To further interrogate this belief-practice divide, the following theme, Classroom observation: The chasm between belief, knowledge, and pedagogical enactment, moves beyond self-reported data to examine the lived reality of pedagogical enactment. By analysing direct observations of teaching practices alongside lesson plans and learner engagement, this section provides empirical evidence of how theoretical gaps and systemic pressures manifest in the classroom. It reveals not only what teachers say they do, but what they actually do. This is a critical lens through which to assess the feasibility of communicative language teaching in under-resourced, high-stakes environments. This observational analysis is essential for understanding the complex interplay between teacher agency, curriculum mandates, and the material conditions of teaching, ultimately exposing the tensions between policy ambition and pedagogical possibility in South African EFAL education.

#### **4.4.3 Theme Three: Classroom observation: The chasm between belief, knowledge, and pedagogical enactment**

The relationship between teachers' espoused beliefs and their actual classroom practices has long been a central concern in educational research (Borg, 2003; Basturkmen, 2012).

Participants in this study articulated philosophies aligned with learner-centred, communicative pedagogy (discussed in a previous theme). Their narratives emphasised participation, interaction, and the primacy of learner voice.

However, direct classroom observations revealed a profound and systemic disjuncture between rhetoric and reality. Despite claims that learners should "talk more than the teacher," the observed lessons consistently adhered to a traditional, transmission-based format. Learners retrieved textbooks, listened to teacher-led explanations, and responded to comprehension-style questions in a tightly controlled, teacher-dominated atmosphere. These practices, far from embodying the interactive, meaning-driven ethos of communicative language teaching, reduced language learning to decontextualised drills, rote memorisation, and grammatical dissection. These activities prioritise form over function and compliance over creativity.

This disjuncture is not incidental but is structurally produced. Teachers justified their adherence to conventional methods by citing external mandates:

*"We teach according to the lesson plan provided by the DBE in the CAPS. Every step is specified, so we follow the steps." (Kele)*

*"Facilitators focus solely on ATP coverage, not teaching methods." (Mzi)*

These statements reveal a compliance-oriented environment in which district-level monitoring prioritises syllabus completion over pedagogical innovation (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In this context, the ATP does not function as a flexible guide but rather as a rigid script for teachers to follow. Thus, teachers feel compelled to conform to a performative logic that rewards coverage over communicative development. The result

is a compliant enactment of the curriculum, where the appearance of teaching supersedes its substance.

This contradiction is clearly evident in the case of Hluli, who had articulated a progressive, learner-centred philosophy:

*“I don’t spoon-feed learners. Students work on their own, correct mistakes on the board, and learn from peers.” (Hluli)*

Classroom observations revealed the exact opposite. Hluli resorted to direct instruction, guiding learners step-by-step through predetermined answers. This reversal aligns with Bandura’s (1997) ecological model, which explains that environmental constraints override personal efficacy in shaping instructional decisions. Hluli’s experience is not unique, but it is emblematic of a broader phenomenon in which even the most committed educators are compelled to abandon transformative ideals under systemic pressure.

A further constraint on pedagogical innovation is the exclusive reliance on prescribed materials. All observed teachers used only the textbooks and literature texts provided by the DBE, without supplementing them with authentic, culturally relevant, or interactive resources. When questioned about this dependency, teachers cited contextual barriers:

*“We cannot separate language and conventions ... These textbooks are provided, so we use them thoroughly.” (Khensi)*

This reliance on a single, static source limits opportunities for creativity, critical engagement, and exposure to diverse linguistic registers. Moreover, it reinforces a fragmented approach to language teaching, in which grammar, vocabulary, and literary analysis are taught in isolation rather than integrated into meaningful communicative tasks (Lavadenz, 2011). When probed about alternative materials, such as free community newspapers, teachers reported no access. This revealed the material deprivation that defines township schooling. The absence of supplementary resources is compounded by socio-economic realities:

*“Learners refuse to bring magazines to school, which could bring variety to reading. This is due to their poor socio-economic background.” (Mzi)*

This narrative revealed how poverty extends beyond the learner's home and infiltrates the classroom. This circumstance constrains pedagogical possibilities and reinforces a culture of scarcity. Teachers are not merely educators; they are managers of deficit, forced to navigate a system that demands innovation while offering only the tools of reproduction.

The most glaring example of this disjuncture emerged during oral assessment tasks. While communicative language teaching positions speaking as a dynamic, interactive process, the observed oral lessons were rigid, performative, and devoid of feedback. Learners delivered prepared speeches or read from texts while teachers sat passively at their desks, marking performance without engaging in dialogue or mediation. Post-observation clarification revealed that teachers felt compelled to work in this manner.

As

*"We are required to test their speaking ability, so what you saw me doing is giving them topics that they prepare and speak on." (Mzi)*

*"Sometimes, orals are so boring because the learners don't like talking, but they must talk for their marks." (Kea)*

These practices reflect assessment-driven instruction, in which communication is reduced to a mechanical act of delivery, and are evaluated for accuracy rather than meaning. In contrast, Khensi demonstrated a more varied approach:

*"I give them different types of tasks such as debates, speeches, and group work tasks. This helps them to speak on different topics." (Khensi)*

While her report indicates a more communicative orientation, even Khensi's efforts remained constrained by time, class size, and the overarching imperative of completing the syllabus. The failure to integrate these tasks into broader literary or cultural contexts further limits their transformative potential. This contradicts Scarino and Liddicoat's (2009) argument that language learning should be embedded in viewing, interpretation, listening, and communication.

The observed classrooms are not isolated pedagogical spaces; they are embedded within a complex web of socio-educational challenges that profoundly shape teaching and learning. Teachers consistently reported that overcrowded classrooms, often exceeding 50 learners, created an inhospitable environment for the collaborative,

interactive practices central to communicative language teaching. Behavioural issues, exacerbated by substance abuse and truancy, further undermined instructional coherence:

*“We have more than 50 learners in our classrooms. These students do not want to work and often disrupt the lessons. We try to engage them, but they remain uninterested.” (Khensi)*

*“In the environment they live in, there are a lot of taverns where they can access alcohol. They can access drugs and alcohol; hence, some of them come to school drunk. How do we teach in these conditions?” (Kele)*

*“It is so hard to establish discipline at the beginning of the lesson. The learners need to settle down first before we can even start the lesson.” (Andi)*

These narratives reveal a crisis of classroom management that consumes instructional time and energy, leaving little space for pedagogical innovation. The emotional and psychological toll on teachers is immense, as they are expected to function as educators, counsellors, and disciplinarians in environments marked by trauma and instability. Teachers reported that they are overwhelmed by learner disengagement, which is further compounded by low proficiency in English and fear of peer ridicule:

*“Learners felt shy or embarrassed to speak in front of their peers, who teased them and distracted them from performing.” (Kele)*

Emergent data revealed that in this context, oral tasks became sites of anxiety instead of spaces for empowerment. Teachers focused on correcting poor grammar for assessment purposes instead of improving confidence or fluency. Kea’s observation that learners view the English class “like torture” revealed the alienating nature of instruction when it is divorced from relevance, agency, and affective support. Moreover, institutional priorities reinforced control over creativity,

*“The principal of the school would reprimand teachers if the class is not working quietly.” (Kele)*

This statement reveals a disciplinary logic that values silence and compliance above dialogue and inquiry. As a result, teachers resorted to assigning work “to keep them

quiet,” a strategy that ensures order but sacrifices engagement, which can appear to others as noise.

The classroom observations in this study revealed a gap between belief and practice, exposing the mechanisms that produce this gap. Teachers' practices revealed that they often fail to implement communicative language teaching, not solely due to a lack of will or knowledge. Instead, they operate within a system that systematically undermines agency, creativity, and communicative pedagogy. The convergence of overcrowded classrooms, resource scarcity, rigid curriculum enforcement, and socio-psychological challenges created an environment in which transmission-based teaching is not a choice, but a necessity.

However, even within this constrained terrain, moments of resistance and innovation emerged in the form of Hluli's mentorship programmes or Khensi's use of debates. These instances, though isolated, affirm that agency is not extinguished but negotiated within structural limits (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). The challenge, therefore, is not to blame teachers for their practices, but to reimagine the conditions that make transformative teaching possible.

This leads directly to the next critical theme of this study, Professional development, Aligning theory and practice in a system of fragmented support. The findings thus far revealed that without context-sensitive, sustained, and collaborative professional development, even the most well-intentioned teachers cannot bridge the gap between policy aspiration and classroom reality. The following section argues for a reconceptualisation of professional development, moving from top-down training to support reflective practice, collaborative inquiry, and teacher-led innovation. Only through such systemic support can the disjuncture between teacher belief and practice be transformed into a coherent, communicative, and empowering pedagogy.

#### **4.4.4 Theme Four: Professional development**

Emergent findings from this study revealed a persistent gap in teacher training, coupled with a systemic failure to align policy aims with pedagogical realities.

While CAPS advocates for the Communicative Approach and the development of communicative competence, the mechanisms designed to support its implementation, particularly professional development workshops and district-level facilitation, reinforce a culture of compliance over innovation. The data showed that professional development, as currently structured, functions less as a vehicle for professional growth and more as a bureaucratic checkpoint prioritising syllabus coverage and adherence to the ATP. Thus, it fails to support deep pedagogical understanding or methodological fluency. This performative logic, as Coenders and Voogt (2012) observe, undermines the very principles it claims to support, leaving teachers ill-equipped to translate theoretical constructs such as communicative language teaching into meaningful classroom practice.

A striking finding was the near-total absence of substantive engagement with communicative language teaching theory and methodology in formal professional development. Only two of the six participants reported any exposure to training on the reform itself, while the others described workshops that focused exclusively on content delivery, meeting deadlines, and administrative compliance. This narrow focus reflects a broader trend in South African education, in which teacher development is reduced to instrumental efficiency rather than to epistemic empowerment (Cappy, 2016; Long et al., 2017). As a result, teachers operated with partial, fragmented, or entirely absent knowledge of the theoretical foundations of communicative language teaching (Adejumo, 2021). Therefore, teachers were unaware of its emphasis on interaction, authenticity, learner autonomy, and the integration of language skills, leaving them reliant on outdated or misinterpreted instructional models.

Teachers were frank in their admission of their lack of knowledge. Andi's candid admission,

*"I am happy to hear about these things from you. It is the first time that I am hearing about CA, communicative language teaching, and communicative competence." (Andi)*

This was not an isolated case, being symptomatic of a system that assumes pedagogical knowledge without providing it. His response was both revealing and poignant. While he expressed genuine openness to learning, "I am happy to hear about these things from you," he immediately followed with a pragmatic concern, "but

I am not sure whether it will work in our schools.” This statement encapsulates a central tension in township education: the disjuncture between theoretical aspiration and contextual feasibility.

Teachers are expected to implement progressive, learner-centred pedagogies in environments characterised by overcrowding, resource scarcity, and socio-psychological instability. Without a professional development structure that is context-sensitive, iterative, and practically grounded, even the most willing educators are left to navigate this disjuncture alone. Kele’s frustration further highlights this failure,

*“After the workshops, we are left alone. We need more follow-ups to learn more about these approaches. I wonder if we can use these methods here. We need some examples.” (Kele)*

Her use of “we are left alone” is not merely descriptive, but also affective and political, conveying a profound sense of abandonment by the very institutions meant to support them. This sentiment echoes across all participant narratives, revealing a systemic pattern of isolation that undermines teacher agency and professional confidence. As Jang and Tsai (2013) and Stucky (2019) aptly point out, the absence of collaborative structures, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), leaves teachers without the necessary networks for shared problem-solving, reflective practice, or sustained innovation.

Khensi’s response reflects a different but equally significant dimension of the problem, which is underpinned by the illusion of knowledge. She initially believed she understood communicative language teaching, stating,

*“I thought I knew a lot about the Communicative Approach, communicative language teaching, and communicative competence, but I see now that I do need more knowledge.” (Khensi)*

This revised self-assessment becomes a powerful moment of epistemic humility and reveals the dangers of assuming that familiarity with a term equates to mastery of its application. Her critique is direct and damning:

*“Facilitators need to speak more about this teaching approach. Facilitators never mention or make teachers aware of the use of the CAPS document,*

*which has this vital information, and they need to train us more on how to use it.” (Khensi)*

This critique and demand highlight a critical failure in the dissemination of policy. The CAPS document, despite its inclusion of the Communicative Approach, remains a silent directive, and its pedagogical implications remain unexplained, unmodelled, and unmonitored. The collective narrative is clear: professional development as currently delivered does not bridge the gap between theory and practice, it widens it. Moreover, teacher voices reported that workshops are infrequent, lack follow-up, and fail to provide the theoretical grounding, practical strategies, or contextual examples needed for effective implementation. Teachers are not merely undertrained, but they are misinformed, unsupported, and forced to improvise in a vacuum. As Day (2017) argues, teacher knowledge is shaped more by personal experience than formal training, leading to the reproduction of traditional methods even when they contradict policy goals. This creates a cycle of performative compliance, where teachers “cover” communicative language teaching in name but not in practice.

Moreover, the absence of authentic materials and supplementary resources due to poverty, lack of access, and over-reliance on prescribed textbooks further entrenches this cycle. How are teachers expected to teach communicative competence through interaction and real-world tasks if they are denied the tools to do so? As Lavadenz (2011) asserts, authentic materials and contextualised tasks are essential for developing true communicative proficiency. However, in township schools, such resources are not just scarce; they are structurally absent.

The analysis presented in this section reveals that professional development in South African township schools is not a catalyst for change, but a mechanism of continuity. It perpetuates traditional, transmission-based pedagogies under the guise of reform. The lack of sustained, context-sensitive, and collaborative professional development has left teachers with partial knowledge, fragmented understanding, and profound uncertainty about how to implement communicative language teaching in their classrooms. Their calls for “more workshops,” “regular follow-up,” and “examples” are not requests for more top-down instruction, but pleas for support, dialogue, and co-construction of knowledge. This finding challenges the assumption that policy mandates alone can drive pedagogical transformation. As Jacobs and Farrell

(2003:24) remind us, “lack of change stems from the difficulty of translating theory into practice.” Without professional development that is reflective, collaborative, and grounded in the lived realities of township classrooms, communicative language teaching is likely to remain a symbolic gesture rather than a transformative practice.

The discussion of the current theme leads directly to the next theme, Teacher Agency: Harnessing literature as a resource for improving communicative competence. If professional development has failed to equip teachers with the tools to implement communicative language teaching, how do they navigate this deficit in practice? The following section explores how, despite systemic neglect, some teachers exercise agency by using literary texts as dynamic, culturally resonant resources for instilling authentic communication, critical engagement, and linguistic empowerment. It examines how literature becomes a site of resistance, creativity, and pedagogical innovation and a space where teachers, even without formal training, attempt to reclaim the communicative potential of language teaching. This analysis shifts the focus from what is absent to what is possible, offering a vision of agency that emerges not from institutional support but from professional commitment and pedagogical imagination.

#### **4.4.5 Theme Five: Teacher agency: Harnessing literature as a resource for improving communicative competence**

The integration of literary texts into EFAL instruction has significant potential to develop learners' communicative competence. Literary texts offer authentic language input, rich sociocultural contexts, and opportunities for critical engagement and meaningful interaction (Widdowson, 1990; Long, 1985).

Literature transcends mechanical grammar and vocabulary instruction by inviting learners to engage with language in its most dynamic and expressive form. However, the realisation of this potential is not automatic, as it is contingent upon teacher agency. Teacher agency refers to educators' capacity to interpret, adapt, and creatively implement curriculum mandates in ways that respond to learners' needs and contextual realities (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). This final theme explores

how, despite systemic constraints and theoretical gaps, some teachers exercise agency by harnessing literature not merely as prescribed content, but as a transformative tool for communicative language development.

Once again, the data revealed a profound disjuncture between the potential that literary texts encapsulate and their actualisation. While all participants acknowledged the value of literature in teaching life lessons, social issues, and emotional expression, their strategies for harnessing its communicative potential were often underdeveloped, misaligned with communicative language teaching principles, or constrained by a lack of professional knowledge and institutional support. As noted in earlier sections, many teachers demonstrated a limited understanding of communicative language teaching and communicative competence, reducing the former to “speaking more” and the latter to grammatical accuracy or functional fluency (Savignon, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Without a coherent theoretical framework, their use of literature remained fragmented, often reverting to traditional, transmission-based methods such as comprehension questions, plot summaries, themes, characterisation, and grammar extraction.

This gap is pedagogical, epistemological, and structural. Teachers’ inability to align literature with communicative goals stems from a confluence of factors, including inadequate professional development, rigid adherence to the ATP, and the absence of facilitator guidance on how to use literature for interactive, learner-centred instruction (Mendelowitz, 2014; Govender, 2018). As one teacher admitted:

*“I do not know about communicative competence.” (Participant)*

This admission highlights a systemic failure to equip educators with the tools to translate policy into practice. In this context, the prescribed literature texts are potentially rich in linguistic and cultural content but become sites of missed opportunity, reduced to vehicles for content coverage rather than catalysts for dialogue, creativity, and meaning-making. However, within this constrained terrain, moments of agency emerged in acts of pedagogical resistance, adaptation, and innovation, revealing the resilience and creativity of teachers striving to make language learning meaningful.

Khensi demonstrates a notable degree of agency in her use of literature, particularly through her emphasis on role play:

*“I do so much role play using the prescribed literature texts.” (Khensi)*

This approach aligns with communicative language teaching principles, as role play simulates real-world communication, allowing learners to negotiate meaning, experiment with language, and develop fluency in contextually appropriate ways (Kayi, 2006). Moreover, Khensi also uses literature to teach life lessons and address social issues, connecting the text to learners’ lived experiences, a practice that encourages critical engagement and relevance. She asserts:

*“The stories allow me to teach them about social issues. When learners answer questions I ask during the lesson, they [develop] communicative competence.” (Khensi)*

While this statement reflects a belief in the communicative value of literature, it also reveals a conceptual gap: the assumption that answering teacher-led questions equates to the development of communicative competence. As Canale and Swain (1980) argue, communicative competence encompasses not only grammatical and discourse competence but also sociolinguistic appropriateness and strategic interaction. These dimensions are absent from Khensi’s explanation. Moreover, her repeated use of “I” in “I normally do role play” suggests a teacher-centred rather than learner-centred approach. True communicative engagement requires learner autonomy, where students design, lead, and reflect on their own activities. Without such empowerment, role play risks becoming a performative exercise rather than a space for authentic communication.

Kea’s approach is marked by an intuitive sensitivity to the affective dimensions of literature:

*“Literature can be used because it deals with emotions... I will relate it to the way the author of that poem felt... I try to engage learners as much as possible and also give them a chance to express their feelings.” (Kea)*

This focus on emotion aligns with communicative language teaching’s emphasis on personalisation and meaningful interaction (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). By encouraging learners to connect the text to their own feelings, Kea encourages the development of empathy, self-expression, and sociolinguistic awareness. However, her practice remains under-theorised and unstructured. While she values emotional

expression, she does not elaborate on how these expressions are integrated into broader communicative tasks, such as debates, collaborative writing, or peer feedback. As a result, opportunities for learners to develop strategic competence or discourse coherence are limited. Furthermore, Kea does not address how she ensures equitable participation, particularly in large, multilingual classrooms where quieter learners may remain passive. Her narrative, while promising, underscores a critical need for pedagogical scaffolding, which includes structured tasks that guide learners from personal reflection to interactive communication.

Andi's philosophy, as previously established, is rooted in a grammar-first ideology:

*"Without the basic use of grammar, it will be totally difficult for a learner to express himself or herself... I use the literature texts to teach grammar." (Andi)*

While literature can indeed provide authentic examples of grammatical structures, Andi's exclusive focus on grammar extraction contradicts the core tenets of communicative language teaching, which prioritise meaning over form and view grammar as integrated within communicative tasks rather than a prerequisite (Richards, 2006). His approach reduces literature to a textbook for linguistic analysis, stripping it of its narrative, emotional, and cultural richness. This instrumentalisation of literature reflects what Biesta (2009) calls the "learnification" of education, whereby learning is reduced to measurable outcomes at the expense of transformative engagement. Andi's belief that grammatical mastery must precede communication not only misrepresents communicative language teaching but also stifles learner confidence, as it reinforces the fear of error that many learners already experience (Kele, "learners felt shy or embarrassed to speak").

Hluli uses literature as a diagnostic tool to assess learners' prior knowledge:

*"Literature lessons serve as a platform to find out what learners know... I am able to achieve whatever goals or targets I have set for my learners." (Hluli)*

Hluli's strategy reflects a constructivist orientation, where new knowledge is built upon existing understanding (Rogoff, 2003). However, her narrative focuses almost exclusively on her role as an assessor and goal-setter, with little mention of how learners are encouraged to use language meaningfully during literature lessons. Without subsequent opportunities for discussion, debate, or collaborative

interpretation, the potential of literature to support and interaction remains underutilised. Her teacher-centred framing is also evident in the words “assists me a lot” and “I am able to achieve,” which reveal a missed opportunity to cultivate learner autonomy and shared ownership of the learning process.

Notwithstanding her lack of knowledge of communicative language teaching, Kele expresses a theoretically sound view of literature’s potential:

*“Literature texts can be effective in teaching communicative competence because one can do anything concerning English as a subject itself. You can express yourself either way confidently and fluently.” (Kele)*

Her recognition of literature as a versatile and expressive medium aligns with the emphasis on creativity and self-expression in communicative language teaching. However, her narrative is abstract and lacks grounding in specific pedagogical strategies. When probed further, Kele was unable to articulate how she structured communicative tasks, assessed fluency, or encouraged learner-led activities. This gap between vision and practice highlights a broader issue: awareness without implementation. As Day (2017) argues, teacher knowledge is often shaped more by personal experience than by formal training, leading to well-intentioned but unstructured approaches.

Mzi stands out for his ambitious and forward-thinking vision:

*“We can use speech sessions, debates, and research to come back and exchange our findings. Genres should be carefully chosen; drama is one of them, and learners can easily act out the characters.” (Mzi)*

His ideas about debates, research projects, and dramatic enactments are good examples of communicative language teaching activities that promote interaction, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. However, as classroom observations and follow-up discussions revealed, these activities were not implemented. When probed about this omission, Mzi cited contextual constraints, prescribed texts, large classes, and behavioural issues as barriers. This disjuncture between aspiration and enactment underscores a central finding of this study: teacher agency is not merely a matter of will, but of structural enablement. Without institutional support, professional

development, and access to flexible resources, even the most innovative ideas remain unrealised.

The findings of this theme revealed a paradox. Literary texts, with their immense potential to foster communicative competence, were simultaneously one of the most underutilised and misused resources in EFAL classrooms. Teachers such as Khensi, Kea, and Mzi demonstrated glimmers of agency through their attempts to use literature for interaction, emotional engagement, and critical thinking. However, their efforts were consistently curtailed by systemic barriers, a lack or weak versions of communicative language teaching knowledge, rigid curriculum enforcement, and insufficient professional development.

The recurring pattern is clear: when literature is not integrated into a coherent communicative framework, it becomes another tool for content delivery rather than a vehicle for transformation. Teachers who prioritized grammar (Andi), diagnosis (Hluli), or even role-play (Khensi) often failed to create the conditions for authentic, learner-driven communication. Their practices reflect what Borg (2003) describes as the ecological constraints of the teaching environment, where personal beliefs are overridden by institutional demands.

However, the presence of compliant agency in teachers who attempt to innovate, who imagine debates and dramas, who value emotional expression, suggests that the potential for change is not extinguished. It is suppressed but not absent. The path forward, therefore, is not to blame teachers for their shortcomings, but to reimagine the conditions that make transformative teaching possible. This requires a dual transformation, systemic investment in context-sensitive professional development that equips teachers with the theoretical and practical tools of communicative language teaching, and a pedagogical culture that trusts and supports teacher agency. Only then can literature fulfil its promise, not as a prescribed text, but as a living, communicative, and emancipatory force in South African EFAL education.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this chapter reveals the disjuncture between the transformative potential of literary texts and their actualisation within the pedagogical realities of South African township EFAL classrooms. While the theoretical promise of literature as a vehicle for authentic language use, critical engagement, and sociocultural awareness is widely acknowledged (Widdowson, 1990; 1986; 2003; Long, 1985), the empirical findings reveal weak understanding, constrained agency, and systemic inertia. Teachers' narratives, classroom observations, and document analyses collectively expose a complex interplay between aspiration and constraint, where well-intentioned efforts to develop communicative competence are repeatedly undermined by epistemological gaps, structural barriers, and misalignment between policy and practice.

A central argument emerging from the data is the pervasive fragmentation of teachers' conceptualisations of communicative competence. Despite the CAPS curricula's commitment to communicative competence, teachers consistently reduced this multidimensional construct, which encompasses grammatical accuracy, sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) to narrow, often contradictory substitutions. For some, communicative competence is synonymous with grammatical mastery, a view epitomised by Andi's assertion that fluency is impossible without prior grammatical control. This stance fundamentally contradicts the principles of communicative language teaching, which prioritise meaning over form (Richards, 2006). For others, such as Kea, communicative competence is conflated with emotional expression, where the value of literature lies in its ability to evoke feelings, but without structured tasks to channel this into meaningful interaction. Khensi's belief that communicative competence is achieved through answering teacher-led questions further illustrates this conceptual impoverishment, where the mere act of "talking" is mistaken for authentic communication. This lack of a coherent, operational understanding of communicative language teaching, as noted by Huang (2017) and Day (2017), represents a systemic

deficit in professional knowledge, one that renders the policy mandate of CAPS a symbolic gesture rather than a pedagogical translation.

Accordingly, the epistemological gap is reflected in practice. The persistent tension between traditional, teacher-centred methodologies and the learner-centred, interactive goals of communicative language teaching is starkly evident. While teachers such as Hluli and Kea articulated philosophies of learner independence and collaborative learning, classroom observations revealed a retreat to transmission-based instruction, characterized by spoon-feeding and rigid adherence to the Annual Teaching Plan. This disjuncture, as Hluli reported, is driven by the performative logic of the system, where syllabus coverage and pass rates are prioritised over communicative development, and where district facilitators monitor compliance, not pedagogy (Coenders & Voogt, 2012). The result is a ritualised enactment of curriculum, where even progressive teachers are compelled to abandon their ideals in the face of external pressures, embodying Bandura's (1997) ecological model, where environmental constraints override personal efficacy.

The role of literature in this context is particularly telling. While its potential to provide authentic language input and encourage critical thinking is recognised, its use is frequently instrumentalised and constrained. Andi's practice of using literature solely to teach grammar and Kele's focus on it as a diagnostic tool for prior knowledge exemplify how the text is subordinated to traditional goals. Even when teachers such as Khensi and Mzi envision innovative uses such as role plays, debates, and dramatic enactments, these remain aspirational, unimplemented, and unsupported. Moreover, the absence of diverse communicative activities, such as learner-led discussions or collaborative projects, severely limits opportunities for learners to develop strategic competence or engage in the negotiation of meaning (Savignon, 1983), a capability central to true communicative proficiency.

These challenges are not only pedagogical, but also structural. The findings confirm that large class sizes, resource scarcity, learner disengagement, and socio-psychological trauma create an environment where the very conditions for communicative interaction are compromised, "some of them come to school drunk" (Kele). In such contexts, the demand for innovation becomes an unrealistic expectation, placing the burden of transformation on individual teachers while the

system fails to provide the necessary support. Additionally, the lack of sustained, context-sensitive professional development is a critical failure. As the data highlights, professional development workshops focus on syllabus compliance, not pedagogical depth, leaving teachers such as Andi hearing about communicative language teaching for the first time from a researcher. “I am happy to hear about these things from you” [Andi]. This profound neglect of teacher knowledge and agency, as Cappy (2016) and Long et al. (2017) argue, represents the primary barrier to reform.

However, within this constrained terrain, the findings also offer grounds for cautious optimism. The very fact that teachers such as Khensi, Kea, and Mzi can articulate visions of role play, emotional engagement, and debate reveals a latent potential and a desire for change. Their recognition of literature’s power to teach life lessons and social issues demonstrates a critical consciousness that can be nurtured. This suggests that the path forward is not one of wholesale rejection of current practices, but of systemic empowerment. Ultimately, the integration of literature and communicative language teaching is not just a pedagogical issue; it is a moral and political imperative. It is about redefining language education not as a mechanism of exclusion, but as a practice of critical global citizenship, where learners are empowered to communicate, think critically, and navigate the complexities of an interconnected world.

The findings presented in this chapter set the stage for a deeper, more interpretive engagement with the data. Chapter 5, Discussion and Analysis of Findings will move beyond description to offer a critical synthesis of the study’s outcomes. It situates the empirical evidence within the broader theoretical frameworks of teacher agency, communicative competence, and the socio-political context of South African education (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995). This chapter argues that the challenges identified are not isolated incidents but manifestations of a deeper structural crisis in the education system. It explores the implications of these findings for policy, teacher education, and curriculum design, offering a transformative vision for how literature can be harnessed to develop communicative competence in multilingual, under-resourced classrooms. The discussion confronts the uncomfortable truths revealed by the data, and charts a course for meaningful, systemic change.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a critical discussion and interpretive analysis of the findings from a qualitative case study examining how EFAL teachers in township schools in Gauteng exercise agency in enhancing learners' communicative competence through literature-based instruction. Situated within the complex and often contradictory landscape of post-apartheid education reform, the study examined the gap between policy aims and pedagogical reality, a chasm that continues to shape the lived experiences of educators in historically marginalized communities. The analysis was framed through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1989; 1999; 2001), which theorises that human agency emerges from the dynamic interplay between personal factors (beliefs, knowledge, self-efficacy), behaviour (instructional practices), and environmental influences (curriculum mandates, resource constraints, institutional culture). This triadic model provides a powerful heuristic for understanding how teachers navigate, resist, and sometimes transform the conditions under which they teach.

At the heart of this inquiry was the central research question *How do EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement Communicative Language Teaching principles?* This question was epistemological and political, challenging the assumption that curriculum reform is a linear process of policy dissemination and teacher compliance. Therefore, the study positioned teachers as knowledgeable agents whose decisions were shaped by a confluence of ideological, contextual, and structural forces. This overarching question was supported by four interrelated sub-questions that deepened the analytical scope of the study.

The first sub-question: *What are teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching and its relevance to their teaching contexts?*

This sub-question explored the conceptual foundations of teachers' pedagogical practice. It examined how educators interpreted, framed, and internalised the principles of communicative competence, and how these interpretations shaped their

views of EFAL teaching in township classrooms. The findings revealed a landscape marked by fragmented understanding, frequent misinterpretation, and, in many cases, a profound dissonance between policy rhetoric and classroom reality. These results support Day's (2017) and Huang's (2017) arguments that teacher knowledge is often shaped more by personal experience and implicit beliefs than by formal training, leading to the reproduction of traditional, transmission-based teaching models.

Second sub-question: *How do EFAL teachers' conceptions of the communicative approach inform their practices?*

This sub-question moved beyond teachers' beliefs and perceptions to examine classroom enactment. It interrogated how their theoretical understanding was translated into pedagogical action and uncovered a persistent tension between the learner-centred ethos of communicative language teaching and the teacher-dominated realities of township classrooms. This disjuncture, as Borg (2003) and Basturkmen (2012) observe, is not a failure of individual will but a reflection of systemic inertia in systems that demand transformation while offering only the tools of reproduction.

Third sub-question: *How do teachers use literary texts to improve learners' communicative competence?*

This sub-question investigated pedagogical strategies in practice. Literature, with its authentic language input, cultural resonance, and affective power, is widely recognised as a valuable resource for communicative language development (Widdowson, 1990; Long, 1985). However, the findings revealed that this potential remained underutilised or narrowly applied. Teachers frequently reduced literature to grammar extraction, plot summary, or thematic recall rather than using it as a springboard for interactive, meaning-making tasks. The degree to which literature was harnessed for communicative purposes depended heavily on teachers' access to training, resources, and professional support (Frost & Durrant, 2002; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

Finally, the fourth sub-question: *How do teachers exercise agency to navigate contested terrains and align their practices with curriculum goals?*

This sub-question addressed the core theoretical concern of this study, teacher agency. Drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and scholarship on agency, the analysis highlighted that agency is not an inherent trait but a relational and contextually mediated capacity. Teachers' ability to innovate and adapt is shaped by structural conditions such as overcrowded classrooms, resource scarcity, governance failures, and rigid curriculum enforcement. These factors act as powerful constraints on transformative practice. However, as Ali (2013) and Cappy (2016) argue, enabling factors such as supportive leadership, collaborative learning communities, and a strong sense of professional responsibility foster resilience and creativity even in the most adverse conditions.

Overall, this chapter interpreted the findings through a critical, context-sensitive lens, synthesising empirical data with scholarship from Eastern, Western, and African educational contexts. In doing so, it situated the South African township school as a microcosm of global tensions between standardisation and responsiveness, between compliance and creativity, and between policy and practice. The discussion revealed that implementing communicative language teaching is not a technical challenge, but a socio-political one, requiring more than workshops and directives. It demands a reimagining of teacher development, curriculum design, and the very purpose of language education in a multilingual, post-colonial society.

The following sections interrogate these themes in depth, starting with a critical analysis of teachers' conceptualizations of communicative language teaching and communicative competence. Each section weaves together empirical evidence, theoretical insights, and contextual nuance, ultimately arguing for a paradigm shift that moves from a deficit model of teacher capacity to a transformative vision of teacher agency.

## **5.2 EMERGING THEMES AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

The exploration of teacher agency in engaging with communicative competence through literature-based instruction in township EFAL classrooms revealed a complex and often contradictory landscape. Guided by the central research question, *How do*

*EFAL teachers in Quintile One schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles?* This analysis synthesized the empirical data into a series of interconnected themes that highlight the disjuncture between policy aspirations and pedagogical realities. These themes interrogate the epistemological, structural, and ideological forces that shape teachers' practices. Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1989, 1999, 2001), which posits a dynamic interplay between personal factors, behaviour, and environmental influences, the findings revealed that teacher agency emerges from the constant mediation of personal and behavioural traits by the socio-material conditions of the teaching environment.

The synthesis of data gathered through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis was distilled into five primary themes introduced in Table 4.1, which also summarises their key findings and theoretical linkages. Together, they form a critical narrative of systemic failure, professional resilience, and transformative potential.

### **5.2.1 Theme One: The epistemological chasm: Teachers' conceptual knowledge of communicative language teaching and communicative competence**

This theme addressed teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching and its relevance to their contexts. The analysis of the data indicated a serious deficit in teachers' conceptual understanding of communicative language teaching and communicative competence. This deficit constituted the foundational barrier to the realisation of the aim of the CAPS curriculum. The theme highlighted an epistemological chasm between policy aspirations and classroom realities in township classrooms. This finding aligns with Adinew (2015), Ying (2010), and Salam and Luksfinanto (2024), who report that teachers' knowledge is evident in their selection of teaching activities. In this study, these selections consistently indicated a limited and fragmented understanding of the core principles of communicative language teaching.

Despite CAPS mandating the Communicative Approach, the data showed that most participants operate with a superficial, fragmented, or fundamentally misconstrued grasp of its principles. Their conceptualisations were frequently reduced to simplistic notions, such as the idea that communicative language teaching simply means "learners talking more" or "participation" ("Learners must talk more than the educator" [Khensi]). While this reflects a surface-level awareness of the need for interaction, it fails to engage with the holistic, multidimensional nature of communicative competence as defined by Canale and Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), which integrates grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Moreover, the belief that "competence and fluency require mastery of basic rules" [Andi] directly contradicts the communicative language teaching principle that fluency is developed through communication rather than only after it (Richards, 2006). Thus, teachers' philosophies often reflect a linear, structuralist model of language acquisition that prioritises accuracy over meaning and positions grammar as a gatekeeper to communication, thereby stifling learners' willingness to experiment with language. This gap in knowledge was pedagogical and political, rendering the CAPS policy mandate symbolic rather than lived.

Closely linked to the deficit in conceptual knowledge is the persistence of misconceptions that actively undermine the implementation of communicative language teaching. The data showed a profound disjuncture between the learner-centred ethos of communicative language teaching and the teacher-dominated reality of the classroom. For example, reliance on drilling for comprehension and discipline is encapsulated in the statement. "I drill content and structures until they know it," [Mzi], which aligns with the audiolingual method prioritising habit formation and accuracy over meaningful interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This approach was justified as necessary for improving pass rates and maintaining classroom control, exemplifying how systemic pressures can override pedagogical ideals.

Similarly, a focus on syllabus coverage encapsulated in "I ensure that I cover all the content that is prescribed by the ATP. This is my focus," [Kea] reveals a compliance-oriented environment where the primary goal was content delivery, not communicative development. Teachers' reliance on the ATP as a script, reinforced by district monitoring, echoes Li's (2021) critique of policy implementation in contexts where teacher agency is suppressed by rigid accountability mechanisms. The constant

refrain of “coverage” among participants underscores a culture of performativity, where the appearance of teaching supersedes substance, and where the transformative goals of communicative language teaching were sacrificed for the sake of bureaucratic compliance. This signal compromised instructional quality (Webster, 2017).

However, the data also indicate that teachers’ understanding of communicative competence was not only superficial but also misaligned with its established theoretical framework. Richards (2006:4) describes communicative competence as a complex, multidimensional construct that encompasses the ability to use language for various purposes, adapt to different settings and participants, produce and comprehend diverse text types, and maintain communication despite linguistic limitations. This definition, supported by Brown (1994), Celce-Murcia (1997), Littlewood (2014), and Savignon (1997), positions communicative competence as a holistic goal that transcends mere grammatical accuracy. By contrast, the teachers in this study did not articulate this complexity. Their narratives were largely devoid of any recognition of sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, or strategic competence, reducing communicative competence to a narrow focus on oral proficiency and grammatical correctness. This reductionist view equates communication with speaking and contradicts the tenets of communicative language teaching, which emphasise conveying meaning effectively in authentic contexts.

This conceptual impoverishment is well-documented internationally. Studies by Liao (2010) and Nam (2023) similarly document how the lack of a deep, operational understanding of communicative language teaching leads to classrooms with few authentic opportunities for language use. In this study, the consequences of this gap were evident during data collection, where many participants, instead of engaging with the theoretical underpinnings of communicative language teaching, foregrounded their systemic challenges. While valid, this response obscured the deeper issue of a lack of pedagogical knowledge.

The root of this deficit lies in the systemic failure of professional development. The data show that teachers’ knowledge of communicative language teaching often came from workshops that cascaded information without a solid theoretical foundation. As one teacher stated, “I have heard about it but do not understand how it works” [Hluli]. This statement encapsulates policy dissemination without pedagogical depth (Karalis,

2016). This finding confirms Sato's (2002) critique, which is echoed by Chang (2011), Dalflizar (2013), Khan (2016), and Yanti (2019), who identify a disconnect between the policy transmission and the development of teacher expertise.

This lack of conceptual grounding was compounded by a dichotomy in teacher beliefs. On one hand, some teachers explicitly prioritise grammar accuracy as the primary goal, treating communicative competence as a secondary outcome. This adherence to a grammar-first ideology, which reflects a linear, structuralist model of language acquisition, directly contradicts Richards' (2006) assertion that grammar should be integrated into communicative activities rather than serve as a prerequisite. This divergence aligns with global studies by Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) and Christianto (2019), which show that institutional pressures and personal beliefs often anchor teachers in traditional, form-focused instruction.

On the other hand, all the participants, regardless of their primary focus, conflated communicative language teaching with oral proficiency, a misconception that led them to believe that simply having learners answer questions in class constituted authentic language use. This preoccupation with speaking, while a component of communicative competence, is insufficient without integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing into cohesive, communicative tasks, a principle emphasised by Brumfit and Carter (1986) and echoed by Badal (2013) and Savignon (1972). Failure to integrate the four skills reflects a fragmented approach to language teaching that runs counter to the holistic aims of communicative language teaching.

The consequences of this knowledge gap were severe. Bandura (1977) argues that negative mastery erodes self-efficacy and diminishes problem-solving capacity. The data show that teachers were not merely unaware of communicative language teaching; some were openly frustrated about their lack of knowledge, placing the blame on district officials and facilitators. This reaction, while indicative of system failure, also reveals a relinquishing of professional agency. Teachers position themselves not as knowledge producers, but as passive recipients of externally constructed policy, a finding that aligns with Bantwini (2009). While Vu (2024) reports that teachers who proactively seek knowledge, this study did not find teachers demonstrating this type of agency. Instead, teachers waited to be "developed" by

facilitators, confirming a dependency that undermines the transformative potential of communicative language teaching.

Thus, the failure to implement communicative language teaching reflected a systemic crisis of knowledge and confidence rather than individual unwillingness. Ambiguity within CAPS, coupled with the lack of practical guidance for implementation, created a vacuum that was filled with misconceptions (Butler, 2011; Chang, 2011). In poorly resourced, print-scarce township contexts (Nkosi, 2009; Stoffelsma, 2019), these conditions hinder learner-centred teaching and deprive learners of the potential to develop communicative competence. The following section examines how these conceptual deficits manifested in practice, with particular attention to the enactment observed in classrooms.

### **5.2.2 Theme Two: Classroom Observations: The Chasm Between Belief, Knowledge, and Enactment**

The preceding analysis of teachers' conceptual knowledge of communicative language teaching and communicative competence highlighted a critical deficit in theoretical understanding. This theme, which addresses the second sub-question of the study, moved beyond teachers' beliefs and knowledge to examine the empirical reality of pedagogical enactment as confirmed through classroom observations, follow-up interviews, and document analysis. The central finding was the existence of a profound disjuncture between their espoused philosophies of learner-centred education and the entrenched practices of teacher-dominated, transmission-based instruction. This disjuncture was attributable not only to the teachers' omissions but also to the inevitable outcome of a system that mandates transformative goals while providing only the tools of reproduction and compliance.

The most compelling evidence of this disjuncture came from direct classroom observations, which revealed a stark contrast between teachers' espoused beliefs and their actual practices. While teachers claimed, "I don't spoon-feed learners" [Hluli], observations revealed her reliance on direct instruction and spoon-feeding, a reversal that aligns with Bandura's (1997) ecological model, where environmental constraints

override personal efficacy. This disjuncture was not unique to Hluli; it was systemic, reflecting the overwhelming pressure of large class sizes, behavioural issues, and the imperative of syllabus completion.

Hence, while some teachers articulated progressive ideals such as commitment to peer learning or advocacy for reciprocal teaching, observed classroom practices remained overwhelmingly rooted in a traditional, didactic format. Learners retrieved textbooks, listened to teacher-led explanations, and responded to comprehension-style questions. Attempts to engage learners in identifying grammatical forms lacked contextualization, reducing language learning to decontextualized drills and rote memorization. Furthermore, the reliance on prescribed textbooks, as noted in the statement “These textbooks are provided, so we use them thoroughly” [Khensi], further limited opportunities for creativity and authentic communication. This dependence on a single, static source, coupled with the absence of supplementary materials due to poverty and lack of access, reinforced a fragmented approach to language teaching, where grammar, vocabulary, and literary analysis were taught in isolation. Consequently, teachers explained their mechanistic adherence to routine in statements such as, “We teach according to the lesson plan provided by the DBE in the CAPS. Every step is specified, so we follow the steps” [Kele]. This admission revealed a compliance-oriented environment where the imperative of syllabus coverage takes precedence over the goals of meaningful communication. This finding resonates with the work of Coenders and Voogt (2012), who argue that the lack of teacher autonomy in designing materials and activities severely limits the implementation of communicative language teaching. The ATP appeared to function as a mandatory script that compels teachers to conform to a performative logic that rewards content delivery over communicative depth.

This disjuncture was not unique to this study; it is a global phenomenon. Scholarship reveals that curricular reforms often lack the necessary support structures for effective implementation (Borg, 2009), and this study provides compelling evidence of that failure. Some teachers adhered steadfastly to teacher-centred methodologies, a divergence that reflected not only a lack of alignment with communicative goals but a deep-seated resistance to the decentring of the teacher’s authority. These findings confirm those of Calvert (2016), who concludes that in many South African

classrooms, the focus remains on content delivery and adherence to national syllabi, often at the expense of addressing learners' linguistic needs.

Oral assessment tasks, intended to measure speaking ability, were particularly revealing. Learners delivered prepared speeches or read from texts while teachers sat passively, offering no feedback or mediation. As Kea admitted, "Sometimes, orals are so boring because the learners don't like talking, but they must talk for marks." This practice reflects assessment-driven instruction, where communication is reduced to a mechanical act of delivery, evaluated for accuracy rather than meaning, and stands in sharp contrast to Scarino and Liddicoat's (2009) assertion that language learning should be integrated into acts of viewing, interpretation, listening, and communicating. Additionally, a critical manifestation of this disjuncture was the misuse of the question-and-answer method as a proxy for communicative practice. While some teachers claimed to use questioning to "establish learners' prior knowledge" or "encourage interaction," the type of questions used revealed a fundamental misunderstanding of the principles of communicative language teaching. All six participants relied almost exclusively on display questions, which were designed with predetermined answers, serving to evaluate knowledge rather than stimulate inquiry (Phothongsunan, 2020). This practice, which aligns with traditional teaching methodologies (Khan, 2015), stands in stark contrast to the use of referential questions that elicit personal opinions and unpredictable responses (Phothongsunan, 2020). The conflation of display questions with communicative competence reflects a fragmented and instrumental understanding of communicative language teaching, where interaction is reduced to a mechanical exchange rather than a dynamic process of meaning negotiation. This was further exemplified in oral lessons, where teachers, claiming to "test their speaking ability" [Mzi], sat passively while learners delivered prepared speeches, again reducing communication to a mechanical performance. This practice stood in sharp contrast to the communicative language teaching ideal, which emphasizes communication as a dynamic, interactive process and underscores the assessment-driven logic that dominates these classrooms.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) posits that the environment can override personal factors, which may account for the disjuncture observed in the data. Some teachers espoused a strong belief in learner-centred pedagogy (personal factor) or expressed high self-efficacy when placed in an environment that rewards compliance

and punishes deviation, such as being reprimanded for a noisy classroom; however, they found that environmental pressure overrode their personal beliefs. The teacher then modified their behaviour (practice) to align with the environment, to preserve the self. Accordingly, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains that a teacher's classroom practice is not a simple reflection of their beliefs. Instead, it was the emergent outcome of a constant negotiation between what the teacher believes and knows, what they feel capable of doing, and the realities of the world they teach in. The findings of this study revealed that many teachers articulate progressive philosophies but enact traditional methods. This finding was attributed to environmental constraints (large classes, rigid curriculum, lack of support) overpowered the personal factors (beliefs in communication), especially when self-efficacy was low due to a lack of training and resources.

This section, therefore, challenges the assumption that policy mandates alone could drive pedagogical transformation. The findings align with those of Dalflizar (2013), Christianto (2019), and Yanti (2019), who also found a persistent gap between teachers' understanding of communicative language teaching and their ability to implement it effectively. However, the disjuncture between belief and practice was attributed not only to teacher failure, but to a systemic one, rooted in the absence of sustained, context-sensitive professional development.

The preceding discussion established a profound disjuncture between the theoretical premise of communicative language teaching and its practical enactment in the township classroom, a gap rooted in systemic constraints and a critical deficit in teachers' conceptual knowledge. The next theme presents corroborating evidence from direct classroom observations to consolidate this belief–practice gap before the analysis turns to teachers' use of literature.

### **5.2.3 Theme Three: Teachers' perceptions of literature as a tool for developing communicative competence**

Unlike the previous section, which revealed the failure of current practices to realize the potential of communicative language teaching, the next theme explores how,

despite these constraints, some teachers attempted to reclaim pedagogical space through the strategic use of literary texts. It examined the latent potential and persistent limitations in teachers' efforts to harness literary texts for communicative goals, revealing both the resilience of teacher agency and the enduring power of structural inertia. This analysis moved beyond the critique of what is absent to explore the glimmers of hope that existed by offering a nuanced portrait of how literary texts, when guided by a deeper understanding, hold transformative potential even in the most challenging contexts.

The integration of literary texts into EFAL teaching and learning held significant promise for improving communicative competence. This integration offered authentic language input, rich sociocultural contexts, and opportunities for critical engagement and meaningful interaction (Widdowson, 1990; Long, 1985). Literature, by its very nature, transcends the mechanical teaching of grammar and vocabulary, inviting learners to engage with language in its most dynamic and expressive form. However, the realisation of this potential is not automatic; it is contingent upon teacher agency, which is defined as the capacity of educators to interpret, adapt, and creatively implement curriculum mandates in ways that respond to learners' needs and contextual realities (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). This theme, therefore, analysed the data to explore the nature of teachers' agency in optimising the potential of literary texts to support the development of communicative competence. It examined how teachers, such as Khensi, who used role-play, and Kele, who expressed an optimistic view of literature's versatility, attempted to bridge the theory-practice divide. It also confronted the limitations of these efforts, particularly the lack of specificity in their strategies and the persistent reliance on teacher-led instruction over the development of learner autonomy. This analysis argued that while there was a latent potential to use literature as a dynamic medium for communicative practice, achieving this vision requires more than incremental adjustments; it calls for a paradigm shift. This shift necessitated the empowerment of educators with the tools, confidence, and professional development to transform the prescribed text from a source of content into a platform for authentic, transformative language experiences.

The principles of constructivism emphasise that learning is fundamentally a process of cognitive construction and meaning-making through social interactions (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, the utilisation of literature emerges as a critical pedagogical tool for

improving communicative competence, particularly in contexts where learners have limited exposure to the target language. Hence, the theoretical foundation for this exploration is grounded in a wealth of scholarly research. Research widely acknowledges that literary texts, with their authentic language, rich sociocultural contexts, and emotional depth, offer a unique medium for engaging learners in meaningful interaction (Widdowson, 1990; Long, 1985). In multilingual contexts such as South Africa, where exposure to the target language outside the classroom is often limited, literary texts can provide invaluable access to diverse registers, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances essential for developing communicative competence (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). As Appleman (2015) argues, connecting literary narratives to learners' socio-cultural realities deepens engagement, inculcates empathy, and enhances critical thinking, thereby enriching the language learning process. A communicative language teaching classroom, by its very nature, is dynamic and interactive, and literary texts are ideally positioned to embody this, serving as an "integral part of learning and instruction embedded in the social and cultural context of the classroom" (Gipps, 1995:376). Such perspectives underscore the importance of social engagement as a mechanism through which language is not merely learned but also functionally applied in authentic settings. In such environments, learners are encouraged to use language as a tool for communication rather than merely as an object of study, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Yet, despite the evident alignment between the principles of communicative language teaching and the affordances of literature, this dynamic has not been adequately addressed in the discussions to date.

The data from this study revealed a significant gap between this potential and its actualisation. While the prescribed literature texts represented a valuable tool that could provide opportunities for communicative events, they were consistently underutilised for communicative language teaching purposes. While all participants acknowledged the value of literature in teaching life lessons, social issues, and emotional expression, their strategies for harnessing its communicative potential were underdeveloped, misaligned with communicative language teaching principles, or constrained by a lack of professional knowledge and institutional support. As discussed in earlier sections, many teachers demonstrated limited understanding of communicative language teaching and communicative competence, reducing the

former to “speaking more” and the latter to grammatical accuracy or functional fluency (Savignon, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Without a coherent theoretical framework, their use of literature remained fragmented, often reverting to traditional, transmission-based methods such as plot summaries, comprehension questions, characterisations, and grammar drills.

This gap was pedagogical, epistemological, and structural. Teachers’ inability to align literature with communicative goals stemmed from a confluence of factors that became an iterative pattern in this study. However, the absence of facilitator guidance on how to use literature for interactive, learner-centred instruction (Mendelowitz, 2014; Govender, 2018) was the most frequently cited complaint. As one teacher admitted, “I do not know about developing communicative competence,” [participant] highlighting a systemic failure to equip educators with the tools to translate policy into practice. In this context, the prescribed literature texts, while potentially rich in linguistic and cultural content, became sites of missed opportunity, reduced to vehicles for content coverage rather than catalysts for dialogue, creativity, and meaning-making.

Moreover, the absence of a conceptual understanding of communicative language teaching had direct pedagogical consequences. Teachers failed to integrate the four language skills —listening, speaking, reading, and writing into cohesive, communicative tasks, a practice supported by scholars such as Brumfit and Carter (1986) and Badal (2013). Instead, language instruction remained fragmented, with grammar, literature, and orals taught in isolation. This contradicts the very essence of communicative language teaching, which views language as a holistic, context-driven system (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). This finding highlighted the need for teachers to become aware of the continuum of learning, which ensures a progression of skills rather than mere snapshots of discrete skills taught in compartments, as per the ATP. This feature is described by scholars as sustained language development (Van Lier, 2004). Moreover, almost all participants admitted that they did not fully understand how to integrate literature into communicative activities and, therefore, into communicative competence. This lack meant the rich possibilities offered by literary texts were not utilised. When probed, teachers stated that they lacked autonomy to select materials, and therefore relied solely on prescribed textbooks that often lacked relevance to learners’ lived experiences. This rhetoric has its place in broader discussions of relatable texts for African learners, but with respect to the principles of

communicative competence, such as grammatical accuracy, sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, and strategic competence, the prescribed literary texts can be ideal in resource-poor environments that are print-free (Nkosi, 2009).

The study demonstrated how teachers' reliance on scripted lessons created monotony and lessons that failed to inspire interest, except for Khensi and Hluli, who attempted to connect literature with learners' lived experiences. The prescribed literature texts, which could serve as rich, authentic materials for communicative events (Littlewood, 2014), were often underutilised and misdirected. Instead of being used to spark debate, critical reflection, or creative expression, they were typically reduced to form-focused exercises, plot or theme summaries, and grammatical dissection, activities that prioritise form over function (Richards, 2006) and contradict the core objectives of communicative language teaching. The consequences of this knowledge gap were profound. As Bandura (1977) argues, negative mastery erodes self-efficacy and diminishes the capacity to solve complex problems. Teachers' frustration about not knowing terms such as the Communicative Approach, communicative language teaching, or communicative competence was not a sign of resistance, but of disempowerment. Their repeated emphasis on resource scarcity, "obtaining or constructing resources is not our responsibility," reveals a deeper truth: they did not see themselves as agents capable of adapting to their context. Yet, as Richards (2006) contends, in resource-constrained environments, it is precisely the teacher's responsibility to innovate, to design materials, and to adjust instructional practices to meet learners' needs.

Thus, the lack of attention to literature's role in promoting social engagement within the communicative language teaching framework suggested a missed opportunity to address the psychosocial dimensions of language learning. As Truebridge (2016) argues, powerful, caring mindsets underpin resilient teaching practices, enabling educators to create inclusive environments that support both academic and emotional development. By neglecting to integrate literature into communicative activities, teachers inadvertently limited learners' opportunities to practice language in ways that reflect real-world contexts, thereby undermining the very goals of communicative language teaching.

Consequently, it was evident that perceived self-efficacy played a dominant role in teachers' use of literary texts for more than the analysis of plots, themes, and characters, the elements that are tested in exams. Efficacy beliefs influence whether teachers can plan strategically for the outcomes they want to achieve, their resilience in adverse conditions, and how much effort they are willing to exert for the task (Bandura, 2000:75). The study shows that some teachers recognised literature's potential to stimulate emotional engagement, cultural awareness, and critical thinking, while others merely followed the scripted lesson plans. Teachers such as Khensi and Hluli integrated texts creatively, encouraging learners to reflect on characters' experiences and relate them to real-life contexts. Others, such as Andi, treated literature primarily as a vehicle for grammar drills, explaining that using grammar correctly is a determinant of learner success. However, Richards (2006:9) emphasises that "Grammar was no longer the starting point in planning language courses within a communicative approach; new approaches to language teaching were needed." Teachers focused on grammar through vocabulary extraction and sentence-level accuracy rather than holistic comprehension or communicative practice. This approach contradicts the principles of communicative language teaching, which advocate for meaning-focused interaction over form-focused correction (Lu & Ng, 2013). Moreover, the teachers who focused on grammar did not incorporate this element into oral proficiency and communicative confidence (Richards, 2006). A core feature of communicative language teaching is that it promotes authentic interaction in the language under study (Ellis et al., 2019). However, teachers reported that this remained a challenge in their classes because learners' proficiency in speaking the language was poor and many lacked the confidence to speak in front of their peers. This finding has been reported in many EFAL countries (Humphries, Burns, & Tanaka, 2015; Jin & Yoo, 2019).

The findings confirmed that many teachers, despite the constraints, recognised the transformative potential of literature to engage learners beyond linguistic foci, acknowledging its value in developing critical thinking, emotional engagement, and cultural awareness. This signalled a readiness for change and a fertile ground for innovation, as noted by Cappy (2016) and Long et al. (2017), who underscore the importance of teachers' professional identity in shaping their willingness to adopt new strategies. Khensi's use of role-play, Kea's focus on the emotional dimensions of texts,

and Hluli's implementation of peer-mentorship programmes represented micro-resistances against the dominant culture of transmission. These strategies align with communicative language teaching principles, as role play simulates real-world communication, allowing learners to negotiate meaning, experiment with language, and improve fluency in contextually appropriate ways (Kayi, 2006). Khensi also uses literature to teach life lessons and social issues, connecting the text to learners' lived experiences, a practice that supports critical engagement and relevance. Moreover, the focus on emotion aligns with communicative language teaching's emphasis on personalisation and meaningful interaction (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). By encouraging learners to connect the text to their own feelings, Kea encouraged empathy, self-expression, and sociolinguistic awareness. However, her practice remained under-theorised and unstructured. While she valued emotional expression, she did not elaborate on how these expressions are integrated into broader communicative tasks, such as debates, collaborative writing, or peer feedback. As a result, opportunities for learners to develop strategic competence or discourse coherence were limited. Furthermore, Kea did not address how she ensures equitable participation, particularly in large, multilingual classrooms where quieter learners may remain passive. Her narrative, while promising, highlights a critical need for pedagogical scaffolding that aligns with structured tasks, guiding learners from personal reflection to interactive communication.

Teachers such as Kele recognised the versatility of literary texts as expressive media, aligning with the emphasis on creativity and self-expression in communicative language teaching. However, her narrative was abstract and ungrounded in specific pedagogical strategies. When probed, she was unable to articulate how she structured communicative tasks, assessed fluency, or encouraged learner-led activities. This gap between vision and practice highlights a broader issue: awareness without implementation. This finding confirms Day's (2017) finding that teacher knowledge is often shaped more by personal experience than by formal training, leading to well-intentioned but unstructured approaches.

The main finding of this theme was that literature, with its immense potential to inculcate communicative competence, was one of the most underutilised and misused resources in EFAL classrooms. Teachers such as Khensi, Kea, and Mzi demonstrated glimmers of agency by attempting to use literature for interaction, emotional

engagement, and critical thinking. However, their efforts were consistently curtailed by personal and systemic barriers, a lack of knowledge in communicative language teaching, rigid enforcement of the curriculum, and insufficient professional development. The recurring pattern was clear: when literature was not integrated into a coherent communicative framework, it became another tool for content delivery rather than a vehicle for transformation. Teachers who prioritise grammar (Andi), diagnosis (Hluli), or even role-play (Khensi) often fail to create the conditions for authentic, learner-driven communication. Their practices reflect what Borg (2003) describes as the ecological constraints of the teaching environment, where personal beliefs were overridden by institutional demands. However, teachers' failure to move beyond teacher-led instruction, as evidenced by their repeated use of "I" to describe their role, highlighted a persistent adherence to traditional, transmission-based models that prioritise content delivery over learner autonomy and interaction. This study therefore argues that the underutilisation of literature is not only a pedagogical shortcoming but also a structural and epistemological failure. Teachers did not fail to innovate because they lacked passion; they failed because they lacked the knowledge, confidence, and support necessary to do so. The absence of a clear pathway from policy to practice, coupled with limited access to diverse, culturally relevant texts and the rigid enforcement of the ATP, created an environment in which the rich possibilities offered by literary texts remained, unfortunately, unrealised.

This led directly to the next critical theme, The Interplay of Teacher Agency, Systemic Constraints, and Enabling Factors. The section that follows explores the socio-structural landscape that shapes teacher agency. It will examine how factors such as overcrowded classrooms, resource inequities, and rigid curricula function as both powerful constraints and potential catalysts for resilience and innovation. This analysis argued that sustainable change in EFAL education requires a dual transformation, addressing the root causes of constraint while actively cultivating the conditions for agency to flourish. Only by understanding this complex interplay can we reimagine a system that truly empowers teachers to develop communicative competence through the transformative power of literature.

#### **5.2.4 Theme Four: The Interplay of Teacher Agency, Systemic Constraints, and Enabling Factors**

The preceding analysis revealed a complex and dynamic interplay between teachers' characteristics and systemic enabling and constraining factors, shaping the nature and extent of teacher agency in South African township schools. This theme, which addresses the fourth sub-question of the study, moved beyond a simple dichotomy of constraint versus freedom to examine teacher agency as a negotiated, contextually mediated process. Drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that agency arises from the dynamic interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors, this section argues that teacher agency was not a fixed trait but a fluid, responsive capacity constantly shaped by the socio-material conditions of the teaching environment.

The data revealed a deeply entrenched tension within the rigid framework of the CAPS: while ostensibly promoting the communicative approach, the ATP imposed a highly prescriptive structure that severely limited teacher autonomy and curricular authority. Teachers consistently reported feeling constrained by this inflexible curriculum, which prioritized compliance over creativity and left little room for incorporating progressive pedagogical approaches. This finding resonates with the insights of Mkhize (2016), Mthembu (2018), Naicker (2019), and Spaul (2015), who argue that the rigid adherence to the ATP undermines teachers' capacity to innovate. Teachers' narratives highlighted a pervasive, compliance-oriented environment that stifled creativity and reinforced traditional methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

In alignment with the theoretical framework of this study, the data highlighted a complex interplay between personal dispositions (beliefs, self-efficacy), systemic barriers, and environmental conditions that collectively shaped teacher agency. Drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, it was evident that the interaction between personal, behavioural, and environmental factors either supported or undermined teachers' capacity to act agentically (Bandura, 1977). Across all research questions, a recurring theme emerged: the tension between systemic barriers and structural conditions that constrain teachers' ability to develop learners' communicative competence. Key systemic barriers included overcrowded classrooms, load shedding,

socioeconomic challenges, and governance failures. These issues limited teachers' capacity to innovate. As Biesta and Tedder (2007) argue, teacher agency is contingent upon the contexts within which educators operate, making contextual issues foundational to understanding their potential for agency.

The environmental conditions across the three schools studied revealed striking similarities, characterised by resource scarcity, inadequate material and technical support, and heightened accountability pressures. Despite these challenges, teachers navigated their professional responsibilities with limited guidance, creating a paradoxical situation in which they could exercise some autonomy but were simultaneously constrained by systemic inequities. Teachers reported overcrowded classrooms with more than 50 learners, making interactive pedagogy nearly impossible. This aligns with the findings of Butler (2011) and Jin and Yoo (2019), who highlight that such conditions render communicative language teaching activities almost impracticable. Teachers also expressed frustration over the impossibility of providing individual attention to learners in need, with many prioritising mere survival amidst escalating school violence and deviant behaviour. These findings corroborate those of Appadoo-Ramsamy (2023) and Govender (2018), who concluded that environmental factors, such as heightened accountability and inadequate professional support mechanisms, negatively influence teachers' capacity to implement communicative language-teaching-aligned practices. Agency studies in South Africa further underscore teacher frustrations regarding their inability to exercise agency effectively. Pillay (2016) and Long, Zhu, Wang, and Jordan (2017) identify overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and rigid accountability frameworks as significant barriers to transformative agency. Moreover, Cappy (2016) aptly points out that historical legacies of apartheid and ongoing inequities continue to limit teachers' capacity to engage in transformative teaching, perpetuating cycles of disparity and educational stagnation.

Scholarship in South Africa has long drawn attention to the creation and maintenance of disparities within the education system and their far-reaching repercussions. It is disheartening to note that the narratives emerging from this study echo those documented in earlier research. For instance, Taole (2015), Marais (2016), and du Plessis and Letshwene (2020) report that contextual factors, such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training, and limited access to literary and teaching materials,

exacerbate the challenges educators face. Scholars such as Christie (2008), Fleisch (2008), and Kallaway (1984) have extensively documented the persistent shortcomings of the South African education system, including overcrowded classrooms, underqualified teachers, and a lack of essential resources, all of which directly hinder the acquisition of linguistic skills (see also Mncube, Ajani, Ngema, Mkhasibe, 2023). Furthermore, these challenges are compounded by the demands of the CAPS policy, which often fail to accommodate the realities of under-resourced schools and diverse linguistic ecologies. Despite the formal end of apartheid and the advent of democracy, inequalities in the education system remain deeply entrenched. The findings of this study also confirm those of Mohlabi-Tlaka, de Jager, and Engelbrecht (2017), Zimmerman (2017), Desai (2016), and Schunk and Zimmerman (2000), highlighting the enduring legacy of systemic inequities.

The above deliberations align closely with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which argues that interactions among personal, behavioural, and environmental factors can either support or hinder learning and behaviour. In the context of township schools, these challenges create a reciprocal effect wherein the lack of resources and support amplifies negative behaviours and attitudes, ultimately undermining the quality of education. Teachers' self-efficacy was significantly diminished by environmental considerations such as resource scarcity, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate leadership. Consequently, both teachers' motivation and learners' confidence in their ability to acquire communicative competence were adversely affected.

Supportive leadership, conspicuously absent in teacher narratives, could mitigate these challenges. Access to culturally relevant materials and to collaborative learning communities might also alleviate some of the pressures educators face. However, in most cases, principals prioritised silence and compliance over interactive learning, thereby discouraging communicative language-teaching activities such as group discussions. Findings suggest that school leadership often hinders teachers' efforts by failing to provide supportive, facilitative structures for professional development. While studies such as Burkhauser and Lesaux (2017) and Timberlake, Burns, Thomas, and Barrett (2017) document diverse teacher behaviour in supportive environments, participants in this study experienced fear and insecurity because interactive classes were perceived as indicative of poor classroom management. In contexts where teachers believe they cannot articulate or demonstrate agency, they default to

compliance. This phenomenon aligns with Bandura's (2000) principle that teachers exercise agency when they believe they can bring about change, especially in contexts that offer opportunities to manifest agentic actions.

The study therefore concluded that teachers' efforts to translate their understanding of communicative competence into classroom practice were frequently hindered by the disconnect between prescribed curricula and innovative approaches. Despite their best intentions, many educators found themselves constrained by rigid standards, overwhelming workload pressures, resource shortages, and governance failures. This finding aligns with Mthembu's (2018) conclusion that support from higher levels, such as school principals or district leadership, is one of the most critical factors in enhancing teachers' agency. Similarly, Kiyomi & Christian (2018) advocate for support programmes that provide space for teacher agency, enabling educators to address learners' contextual needs and identify appropriate resources and activities. The findings of the study corroborate the research by Khan, Hussain, Ismail, and Alghazali (2020), which shows that leadership incompetencies affect teachers' performance in their creative work behaviour. A gap is identified in leadership research in South African education, particularly in township schools.

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for systematic support from managers and district officials. Empowering teachers through targeted interventions, such as improved governance, equitable resource allocation, and professional development opportunities, is crucial for promoting learner-centred education that fosters critical thinking and meaningful learning, as stipulated by the CAPS policy. Without such measures, the entrenched inequalities plaguing South Africa's educational landscape will persist, perpetuating cycles of stagnation and inequity. By addressing systemic barriers and fostering enabling environments, policymakers and school leaders can unlock educators' transformative potential, paving the way for meaningful educational outcomes and sustainable systemic reform.

Overall, teacher agency in the implementation of communicative language teaching is not an isolated, individualistic phenomenon, but a complex, dynamic process that emerges from continuous, reciprocal interaction among personal dispositions, behavioural choices, and powerful environmental influences. This theme, drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, synthesised the study's findings to present a

critical examination of the interplay between systemic constraints and enabling factors that collectively shape the capacity of EFAL teachers in township schools to act as transformative agents. The central argument was that while individual resilience and professional belief were necessary, they were insufficient to overcome a system that was structurally designed to prioritise compliance over creativity, coverage over communication, and control over collaboration. Thus, the data revealed a deeply entrenched tension between the rigid, top-down framework of the CAPS and the potential for innovative, learner-centred practice. CAPS, despite its nominal commitment to communicative competence, functioned in practice as a mandatory script through its inflexible ATP. This prescriptive structure, which mandated every step of instruction, severely constrained teacher autonomy and curricular authority. As Kele stated, “We teach according to the annual teaching plan (ATP) provided by the DBE in the CAPS. Every step is specified, so we follow the steps,” a statement that exemplifies the compliance-oriented environment that pervades these schools. This finding was not an anomaly; it is a systemic feature, resonating with the work of Mkhize (2016), Motala (2017), Mthembu (2018), Naicker (2019), and Spaul (2015), who have all documented how the rigid adherence to the ATP undermines teachers’ capacity to innovate. The consequence was a perpetual cycle of transmission-based instruction, where the teacher’s role was reduced to that of a technician, delivering content rather than facilitating learning. This reality directly contradicts the learner-centred ethos of communicative language teaching and aligns with Calvert’s (2016) observation that teachers often adhere to the syllabus at the expense of addressing their learners’ diverse and urgent needs.

This constraint was further exacerbated by a confluence of systemic barriers that collectively eroded the conditions for agentic action. The study conducted by Zondo, and Adu (2024) also identified overcrowded classrooms, misbehaving learners, and a lack of resources as some of the challenges faced by teachers. Overcrowded classrooms, often exceeding 50 learners, made the implementation of interactive, communicative activities such as group discussions or role-plays not just difficult, but structurally impracticable (Butler, 2011; Jin & Yoo, 2019). Teachers reported being unable to provide individual attention, manage noise levels, or create safe spaces for dialogue, particularly in the face of socio-psychological challenges such as substance abuse and school violence. These environmental conditions, characterised by

resource scarcity, inadequate material and technical support, and heightened accountability pressures, created a reciprocal effect where the lack of resources amplified negative behaviours and attitudes, ultimately undermining the quality of education. As Biesta and Tedder (2007) argue, teacher agency is fundamentally contingent upon the contexts within which educators operate. The findings confirm those of Appadoo-Ramsamy (2023) and Govender (2018), who conclude that factors such as heightened accountability and inadequate professional support mechanisms directly and negatively affect teachers' capacity to implement communicative language-teaching-aligned practices.

The data further revealed that teachers' narratives were saturated with a sense of curricular destabilisation and professional disempowerment. While many expressed frustrations at the "push for conformability and performativity" that crippled their capacity to innovate, the major finding was that this frustration did not translate into proactive agency. Instead, many teachers seemed content to comply, lacking both the knowledge to advance proactively and the stimulus to "go the extra mile." This resignation to compliance, rather than a challenge based on professional authority, echoes the findings of Blignaut (2007), Chetty (2015), and Mnisi and Mchunu (2013). The behaviours demonstrated by the teachers confirm a culture of survival, where the daily work life is consumed by the need to manage discipline, cover content, and meet external mandates, leaving little cognitive or emotional space for pedagogical innovation.

This theme, however, also acknowledges the presence of enabling factors that, in theory, could support resilience and agency. Scholars such as Gao and Gu (2022) argue that "resilience begins with teacher beliefs," while Bernard (2004:113) emphasises the innate resilience latent within every human being, which must be nurtured through supportive environments. This conceptualisation aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that resilience emerges from the interplay of personal factors and environmental support. Yet, the data showed that these enabling factors were systematically absent. The lack of supportive leadership, access to culturally relevant materials, and collaborative learning communities prevented the nurturing of this resilience. In most cases, principals prioritised silence and compliance over interactive learning, actively discouraging communicative language teaching activities. This absence of a facilitative and supportive structure for

professional development left teachers isolated and demoralised, unable to co-construct knowledge or engage in the shared problem-solving that is essential to transformative change (Badal, 2018).

The study, therefore, concluded that the disconnect between prescribed curricula and innovative approaches was the primary barrier to the development of communicative competence. Despite their best intentions, many educators were constrained by rigid standards, overwhelming workload pressures, resource shortages, and governance failures. Weng et al. (2020) assert that support from higher levels, such as school principals or district leadership, is one of the most critical factors in enhancing teachers' agency. Similarly, Kiyomi and Christian (2018) argue for support programmes that provide space for teacher agency, enabling educators to address learners' contextual needs. The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for systematic support from managers and district officials. Empowering teachers through targeted interventions, such as improved governance, equitable resource allocation, and professional development opportunities, is crucial for promoting learner-centred education as stipulated by the CAPS policy. Without such measures, the entrenched inequalities plaguing South Africa's educational landscape will persist, perpetuating cycles of stagnation and inequity. By addressing systemic barriers and fostering enabling environments, policymakers and school leaders can unlock educators' transformative potential, paving the way for meaningful educational outcomes and sustainable systemic reform.

The analysis revealed a complex and dynamic ecosystem that significantly influenced EFAL teachers' capacity to act as transformative agents. Drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, this theme demonstrates that teacher agency is not a fixed trait but a relational, contextually mediated phenomenon arising from continuous, reciprocal interactions among personal dispositions, behavioural choices, and environmental influences. The findings confirm that the highly prescriptive nature of the CAPS, with its scripted ATP, functioned as a primary systemic constraint, severely limiting teacher autonomy and curricular authority. This compliance-oriented environment, where facilitators focus solely on syllabus coverage rather than pedagogical innovation, created a culture of performative adherence that stifled creativity and reinforced traditional, teacher-centred methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The data further highlighted how environmental factors collectively eroded teachers' self-efficacy, leading to a compliance-oriented and constrained expression of agency. As Buchanan (2015) argues, when ecological conditions fail to provide adequate support, educators become disempowered and demotivated. This was evidenced by teachers who made minimal effort to deviate from prescribed norms, attributing their lack of adaptive expertise to systemic issues, which heightened stress and a pervasive sense of helplessness. In these contexts, individuals who perceived themselves as powerless were less likely to engage in proactive problem-solving or creative adaptation (Bandura, 2001), thereby hindering the integration of literary texts into meaningful, communicative events.

Conversely, the presence of enabling factors, such as supportive leadership, access to culturally relevant materials, and collaborative learning communities (PLCs), could potentially mitigate these challenges. However, the absence of such structures, as highlighted by Goddard et al., left teachers isolated and demoralised, preventing the co-construction of knowledge (Badal, 2018) and the collective problem-solving necessary for transformative change. This interplay underscores that sustainable educational reform requires more than top-down mandates; it necessitates a dual transformation that addresses the root causes of constraint while actively cultivating the conditions for agency to flourish.

This led directly to Theme Five, Manifestations of Teacher Agency, which discusses the specific forms of agency demonstrated by the participants, moving beyond the analysis of constraints to examine the diverse ways in which teachers navigate, resist, and sometimes transcend the limitations of their environment. It explored the spectrum of agency, from resilient innovation to constrained compliance, and argued for a reconceptualisation of teacher agency as a dynamic interplay between individual initiative and systemic enablement. By synthesizing the findings with the theoretical framework of Social Cognitive Theory, this theme presents a nuanced portrait of how teachers, despite overwhelming odds, strive to reclaim pedagogical space and communicative competence through the transformative power of literature.

## **5.2.5 Theme Five: Manifestation of teacher agency: A Spectrum of Resilience, Constraint, and the Absence of Collaboration**

The preceding analysis has revealed that teacher agency in the implementation of communicative language teaching was not a monolithic or static phenomenon, but a dynamic, contextually mediated process shaped by the continuous, reciprocal interaction between personal dispositions, behavioural choices, and powerful environmental influences. This final theme synthesised the study's findings to present a critical examination of the distinct forms of agency demonstrated by EFAL teachers in their attempts to use literature as a tool for developing communicative competence. Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1989; 1999; 2001), this analysis argued that the interplay of systemic constraints and enabling factors produced a spectrum of agency, ranging from resilient innovation to constrained compliance, with a critical absence of collaborative agency that undermines the potential for systemic transformation.

### **5.2.5.1 *Constrained agency: The triumph of compliance over creativity***

A dominant and pervasive form of agency identified in this study was constrained agency, characterised by passive adherence to prescribed curricula, retreat from professional risk-taking, and a prioritisation of survival over innovation. This was not a lack of agency, but a specific type deliberately focused on avoiding negative consequences. The interplay between personal dispositions (e.g., low self-efficacy), behavioural patterns (e.g., strict adherence to rigid curricula), and environmental influences (e.g., lack of support systems) created a feedback loop wherein constrained agency perpetuated itself. According to Bandura (2001), when individuals perceive themselves as powerless to effect change, they are less likely to engage in proactive problem-solving or creative adaptations. In this study, teachers operating under such conditions, such as Andi, Mzi, and Kele, often did not recognise opportunities to integrate literary texts meaningfully or implement learner-centred strategies that could transcend content-focused instruction. This approach, which prioritised grammatical accuracy over interaction and focused on rigid structures such as tense usage, aligns

with Hymes' (1972) critique of form-focused language teaching, which privileges linguistic precision at the expense of communicative effectiveness.

Thus, constrained agency was a rational response to a system that rewarded compliance and punished deviation. As Kele stated, "We teach according to the lesson plan provided by the DBE in the CAPS. Every step is specified, so we follow the steps" [Kele], a statement that exemplifies the compliance-oriented environment pervading these schools. This finding was not an anomaly; it was a systemic feature, resonating with the work of Mkhize (2016), Motala (2017), Mthembu (2018), Naicker (2019), and Spaul (2015), who documented how the rigid adherence to the ATP undermines teachers' capacity to innovate. The consequence was a perpetual cycle of transmission-based instruction, where the teacher's role was reduced to that of a technician, delivering content rather than facilitating learning. This reality directly contradicts the learner-centred ethos of communicative language teaching and aligns with Calvert's (2016) observation that teachers often prioritize adhering to the syllabus over addressing the diverse and urgent needs of their learners. Teachers were destabilised, disenchanting, and deprofessionalised, with many defaulting to lengthy discussions of their struggles against environmental and leadership constraints. Truly agentic teachers "are empowered and have voice and autonomy in their day-to-day professional practices" (Moola & Nolan, 2020, 68). This form of teacher empowerment was not in evidence in this study.

#### **5.2.5.2      *Resilient teacher agency, innovation amidst adversity***

In stark contrast to constrained agency, a small but significant number of teachers demonstrated resilient agency, characterised by adaptability, innovation, and a deliberate effort to empower learners despite overwhelming structural barriers. This form of agency was rooted in strong personal factors such as a deep belief in their professional identity and high self-efficacy, which enabled them to partially overcome environmental constraints. A defining characteristic of resilient agency observed in this study was the prioritisation of learners' psychosocial needs alongside academic goals. Teachers such as Hluli and Khensi used literature texts to bring real-life scenarios into the classroom, enabling learners to identify with characters' experiences and develop

empathy. As Appleman (2015) notes, making real-life connections between literary narratives and learners' own lives encouraged deeper engagement and emotional growth. Thus, Hluli related the struggles faced by characters in prescribed books to learners' own experiences, encouraging a sense of relevance and connection.

These educators demonstrated a proactive approach to their professional responsibilities, implementing mentorship programmes and encouraging peer learning. Their actions align with Bandura's (1989) assertion that resilience is strengthened through positive interactions with one's environment, demonstrating and reflected a high degree of self-efficacy and a commitment to learner autonomy. This resilience, however, was not a product of systemic support but of individual fortitude. As Gao and Gu (2022) argue, "resilience begins with teacher beliefs," while Bernard (2004:113) emphasises the innate resilience latent within every human being, which must be nurtured through supportive environments. Yet, the data showed that these enabling factors were systematically absent, making resilient agency an exceptional, rather than a normative, response.

### **5.2.5.3 Collaborative agency: A critical omission in the professional ecosystem**

The most critical finding of this theme was the near-total absence of collaborative agency within the schools and districts studied. This underscored a significant gap in the professional ecosystems available to educators. Bandura's (1999:4) seminal assertion that individuals must navigate contested terrains by "making sound judgments about their capabilities, anticipating the probable effects of different events and actions, ascertaining sociostructural opportunities and constraints, and regulating their behaviour accordingly" provides a theoretical lens for this omission. The lack of collaborative agency was particularly evident among participants such as Andi, whose reliance on narrow activity types and traditional methodologies stifled the communicative potential of literature-based instruction.

The absence of PLCs, peer observation, or collaborative planning left teachers isolated and demoralised (Jang & Tsai, 2013; Stucky, 2019). This isolation prevented the co-construction of knowledge, a process Badal (2018) describes as essential, where teachers are “influenced and constructed by sociocultural practices and gain knowledge through collaboration.” Instead of a culture of shared inquiry, a culture of individual struggle emerged. The behaviours demonstrated by the teachers supported the principles of Bandura’s (1991; 2001) theoretical framework of teacher agency, which proposes that intersecting features of individuals' traits, behaviour, and the environment interact to determine the agency enacted. Through teachers’ revelations of external conditioning by policy and policy agents, it became apparent that agency was shaped by both internal and external dictates. The absence of collaborative agency not only impeded transformative practice but also reinforced existing inequities within the educational system, preventing the collective problem-solving necessary for sustainable change.

#### **5.2.5.4. *The generation of new knowledge: Absence as evidence and the epistemology of constraint***

As discussed above, the lack of PLCs emerged as one of the most troubling revelations of this study, and this absence itself was a powerful source of new knowledge. By identifying the complete absence of these collaborative structures across all three schools, the research illuminated a fundamental flaw in the professional ecosystem of township education. This finding confirms and extends the work of scholars such as Goddard et al. (2007), who define PLCs as cooperative groups of educators who work collaboratively to enhance teaching and learning practices. The study’s data showed that without these communities, teachers were deprived of the very mechanisms necessary for collective problem-solving, shared reflection, and the co-construction of pedagogical knowledge.

The absence of PLCs generates new knowledge by demonstrating that the failure to implement communicative language teaching was not solely due to individual teacher deficits but was systemically produced by the lack of a supportive, collaborative

infrastructure. As the data showed, teachers such as Hluli and Khensi who exhibited resilient agency did so in isolation, relying on their own initiative rather than on a network of peers. This isolation prevented the spread of innovative practices and reinforced the notion that professional growth was a solitary endeavour, rather than a collective one. The study thus contributes new knowledge by arguing that teacher agency was not just a personal attribute, but a collective capacity that was actively suppressed by the absence of collaborative structures. The lack of PLCs directly contributed to the teachers' deficient understanding of communicative competence. As the data revealed, many teachers expressed unfamiliarity with communicative language teaching and the Communicative Approach. Without a foundational understanding of these methodologies, they were unable to recognize the value of literature as a tool for teaching communicative competence. This gap in knowledge was not accidental; it was a direct consequence of the absence of a collaborative environment in which teachers could learn from one another.

PLCs provide a space for vicarious learning (Bandura, 1977), where teachers could observe peers successfully implementing new strategies, such as using literature for debates or role-plays. In the absence of such communities, teachers had no access to these models, and their understanding of communicative language teaching remained abstract and ungrounded. The findings align with Badal's (2018) contention that knowledge is socially constructed. Without PLCs, there was no forum for the co-construction of pedagogical insights, leaving teachers to rely on outdated or misinterpreted models of instruction. This explained why teachers such as Andi prioritise grammar over interaction, as they had no collaborative space to challenge and refine their beliefs. Therefore, the absence of PLCs also severely limited teachers' ability to optimise available resources. The study found that schools relied exclusively on prescribed textbooks, with no access to supplementary materials such as magazines or newspapers. In a PLC, teachers could have pooled their limited resources, shared ideas for creating low-cost teaching aids, or collaboratively created contextually relevant materials. Frost and Durrant (2002) argue that PLCs serve as vital platforms for addressing the diverse linguistic needs of learners, which is particularly crucial in multilingual, resource-constrained contexts.

Without these communities, teachers remained isolated and unable to draw from shared expertise. This isolation is compounded by the fact that the absence of PLCs

was tied to teachers' perceptions of collective efficacy, the belief that collaborative action can lead to meaningful change. As Jang and Tsai (2013) and Huri, Sahae, Prince, and Srivastava (2024) emphasise, collaborative learning communities promote shared visions and collective responsibility for learner success. By neglecting to establish such communities, schools forfeited a powerful mechanism for building resilience and enabling teachers to navigate contested terrains more effectively. The absence of PLCs was a critical barrier to achieving communicative competence in EFAL classrooms. It left teachers ill-equipped to address the complexities of language teaching, particularly in multilingual and resource-constrained contexts. The findings of this study resonate with Bandura's (1999) argument that individuals require sociostructural support to navigate complex environments effectively. This missing dimension of collaborative agency perpetuated cycles of isolation and stagnation, limiting teachers' capacity to innovate and adapt. This underscores the urgent need for policymakers to establish PLCs as a fundamental component of the educational system, thereby empowering educators to overcome systemic inequities and a culture of innovation.

### **5.3 CONCLUSION:**

This chapter presented a critical discussion and interpretive analysis of the findings from Chapter Four, offering a theoretically grounded, contextually nuanced, and politically charged examination of the implementation of communicative language teaching in South African township EFAL classrooms. Guided by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977; 1986; 1999; 2001), the analysis interrogated the dynamic interplay between personal factors (teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and self-efficacy), behaviour (instructional practices), and environmental influences (the socio-material conditions of the teaching environment) in shaping teacher agency and the realisation of communicative competence.

The discussion situated the study within the broader scholarly landscape, engaging with the theoretical frameworks and empirical findings presented in Chapter Two. It highlighted both points of convergence and critical divergence with existing research, particularly in how this study revealed the epistemological gap between policy and

practice in a uniquely South African context. While global studies identify similar challenges in bridging the gap between teachers' understanding of communicative language teaching and its implementation, this research demonstrated the systemic nature of knowledge production in a post-apartheid educational system, where reform is mandated but not adequately supported.

The analysis was structured around the primary research question, *How do EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles?* This inquiry was unpacked through five interconnected themes that collectively revealed a landscape of profound disjuncture. The data showed a widespread and systemic deficit in teachers' understanding of communicative language teaching and communicative competence. Their conceptualisations were often reduced to simplistic notions of "speaking more" or grammatical accuracy, failing to grasp the holistic dimensions of communicative competence as defined by Canale and Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995). This lack of depth and intentionality, as Richards (2006) argues, resulted in learners having few authentic opportunities to use the target language in real-life situations. The findings confirmed that many teachers conflated communicative language teaching with oral proficiency, reducing a complex pedagogical framework to a narrow focus on speaking skills. This faulty assumption, combined with a weak grasp of learner-centredness and interactional focus, reflected a superficial understanding of communicative language teaching principles. As Sato (2000) and Chang (2011) have noted, this is often the result of professional development that cascades information without a solid theoretical foundation, leaving teachers to operate on misconceptions rather than operational knowledge.

Moreover, the data exposed the chasm between belief and enactment. Despite espousing learner-centred philosophies, classroom observations revealed a persistent adherence to traditional, teacher-dominated methods. The reliance on display questions, comprehension exercises, and rigid adherence to the ATP ("We follow the steps specified in the CAPS" [Kele]) underscores a compliance-oriented environment that stifles innovation. This disjuncture aligns with Borg's (2009) observation that curricular reforms often lack the necessary scaffolding for effective implementation, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Butler, 2011; Jin & Yoo, 2019).

While all participants acknowledged the value of literature for teaching life lessons and social issues, their strategies for harnessing its communicative potential were often underdeveloped. Literature was frequently reduced to a source of grammar drills or plot summaries, rather than being used as a catalyst for authentic interaction, critical thinking, and creative expression (Widdowson, 1990; Long, 1985). The failure to integrate the four language skills into cohesive, communicative tasks (Brumfit & Carter, 1986) reflected a fragmented approach to language teaching that contradicted the integrative ethos of communicative language teaching. Hence, the analysis identified two dominant forms of agency: resilient agency, exemplified by teachers such as Hluli and Khensi who adapted materials and encouraged peer learning despite constraints, and constrained agency, where teachers such as Mzi and Kea prioritised syllabus coverage and compliance as a protective mechanism against systemic pressures (Bandura, 2001). Critically, the study revealed the near-total absence of collaborative agency, with the lack of PLCs (Goddard et al., 2007) leaving teachers isolated and demoralised (Jang & Tsai, 2013; Stucky, 2019). This absence of a supportive, collaborative environment prevented the co-construction of knowledge and the collective problem-solving necessary for transformative change (Badal, 2018).

The overarching conclusion of this chapter was that the failure to implement communicative language teaching was not a failure of individual teachers but a systemic one. The CAPS policy, while nominally supportive of communicative competence, was poorly constructed and lacks the practical guidance necessary for its realisation. Teachers operated within a context of overcrowded classrooms, resource scarcity, and rigid accountability, which eroded their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and led to a retreat into traditional methods. The lack of sustained, context-sensitive professional development further exacerbates this crisis, leaving teachers to navigate the complexities of reform without adequate support. This context created conditions where teacher deprofessionalisation prevented efforts to seek knowledge and strategies independently. South African teachers have become dependent on external provision and are unable to find pathways to empower themselves. This is a consequence of a curriculum that outlines their work and monitoring that ensures compliance with bureaucratic prescriptions.

The discussions in this chapter lay the groundwork for the final chapter, which builds on these findings to provide recommendations for policy, teacher education, and

curriculum design. Chapter Six also reflects on the limitations of the study and articulates its theoretical and practical significance, arguing for a paradigm shift that empowers educators to transcend the limitations of compliance and embrace the transformative potential of literary texts and communicative language teaching in the development of meaningful communicative competence.

## CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter concludes the inquiry into the complex interplay between policy, practice, and professional agency in the teaching of English as EFAL in South Africa's historically disadvantaged township schools. The preceding chapters have laid a comprehensive foundation, from the global evolution of communicative language teaching to the entrenched realities of the local educational terrain; from the theoretical underpinnings of teacher agency and Social Cognitive Theory to the empirical findings of a qualitative case study that examined the lived experiences of six EFAL educators. Chapter 4 presented the raw data, while Chapter 5 offered a critical, interpretive analysis and argued that the failure to realise the goals of communicative competence was not only a failure of individual teachers but also results from systemic issues rooted in a profound epistemological chasm, environmental constraints, and the almost total absence of collaborative support structures. This chapter moves beyond analysis to a structure that achieves four critical objectives.

First, the chapter articulates the theoretical, practical, and policy significance of this study. It argues that the research makes a unique contribution to the discourse on teacher agency in under-resourced, multilingual contexts, offering a nuanced understanding of how agency is not an inherent trait, but a dynamic and relational capacity shaped by the interplay of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1977). This reframing has profound implications for how we conceptualise educational reform.

Second, the chapter offers a candid and scholarly examination of the research's limitations. A transparent acknowledgment of methodological and contextual boundaries is essential for the integrity of the study and for guiding future inquiry.

Third, it presents a series of evidence-based recommendations for key stakeholders, policymakers, district officials, school leaders, teacher educators, and the teachers themselves. These recommendations are not abstract ideals but concrete, actionable steps derived directly from the study's findings, designed to bridge the gap between

the current state of compliance and the aspirational goal of transformative, learner-centred education.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a powerful synthesis that reiterates the central argument of this thesis: the future of EFAL education in South Africa depends on a paradigm shift away from a top-down, compliance-driven model toward a collaborative, context-sensitive, and agency-empowering ecosystem. This shift is not merely desirable; it is an ethical and pedagogical imperative for a nation committed to equity and excellence in education.

While the critical course of the chapter has been outlined above, this section provides a more comprehensive and reflective synthesis of the study's foundational purpose, its specific socio-educational context, and its key empirical findings. It serves as an interpretive lens that reorients the reader, situating the research within the broader theoretical and policy landscape. By revisiting the central research question and re-examining the data through the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, this section aims to crystallise the core argument of the thesis, that the implementation of communicative language teaching in township schools was fundamentally constrained by a systemic interplay of epistemological, structural, and environmental factors. It underscores the disjuncture between policy aims and pedagogical reality, setting the stage for the recommendations that follow by reaffirming the study's contribution to understanding teacher agency in a context of profound inequity.

## **6.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE PURPOSE, CONTEXT, AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

This study was conceived as a necessary intervention into a persistent and troubling paradox within South African education, namely the coexistence of a progressive, learner-centred curriculum policy and a pedagogical reality defined by transmission-based, teacher-dominated instruction. The central inquiry, *How do EFAL teachers in Quintile One township schools interpret and implement communicative language teaching principles?* involved a critical examination of the mechanisms that either enable or obstruct educational transformation in one of the nation's most challenging

schooling contexts. The findings presented in the preceding chapters confirmed that the implementation of communicative language teaching, as mandated by CAPS, is significantly compromised by a complex interplay of epistemological, structural, and systemic factors.

The purpose of this research was to move beyond the superficial critique of teacher practice and conduct a deep, contextual inquiry into the lived realities of educators tasked with imparting communicative competence in environments of profound inequity. The study's context included three historically disadvantaged township schools in Tshwane North, which formed the crucible in which the promises of post-apartheid educational reform were tested. These schools operate within a landscape of systemic neglect characterised by overcrowded classrooms, governance failures, resource scarcity, and the daily psychosocial trauma of poverty, crime, and substance abuse. In this environment, the CAPS mandate for communicative competence, with its emphasis on authentic interaction and learner autonomy, appeared as a distant, unattainable ideal.

These findings illustrate how teachers' perceived agency shaped their willingness and capacity to adopt or avoid transformative practices. The negotiation of interacting variables, including environmental constraints such as overcrowded classrooms, resource inequities, and governance failures, as well as internal characteristics like self-efficacy, resilience, and professional identity, highlights the complex nature of teacher agency. Therefore, the analysis revealed that the primary barrier to the realisation of communicative language teaching was a systemic deficit in teachers' conceptual knowledge. Despite the policy's mandate, most participants demonstrated a fragmented or fundamentally misconstrued understanding of communicative language teaching and communicative competence.

Their conceptions were often reduced to simplistic notions of learners merely speaking the target language or achieving grammatical accuracy, contrary to the holistic, multidimensional construct articulated by Canale and Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), as well as other significant theorists. As Richards (2006) argues, without a foundational understanding of the tenets of communicative language teaching, teachers cannot harness the communicative potential of literary texts. This misalignment not only undermines the transformative potential of communicative

language teaching but also perpetuates traditional, teacher-centred methodologies that prioritise superficial engagement over substantive communicative practice.

Such discrepancies raise questions about the adequacy of professional development programs and systemic support mechanisms in equipping educators with the sophisticated understanding necessary to implement communicative language teaching principles effectively. As the data show, training workshops were focused on syllabus coverage and compliance, while cascading information without a solid theoretical foundation (Sato, 2000; Chang, 2011). This lack of depth often led to the reproduction of traditional, grammar-centric models (Day, 2017; Huang, 2017), rendering the policy mandate of CAPS a symbolic gesture rather than a lived reality.

This conceptual deficit was further compounded by environmental constraints that actively hindered the translation of belief into practice. Moreover, the rigid adherence to the ATP functioned as a mechanism of compliance, leaving little room for pedagogical innovation. Scholars argue that a compliance-oriented environment stifles creativity and reinforces traditional methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Classroom observations confirmed this disjuncture with teachers resorting to “spoon-feeding” and direct instruction, a reversal that aligned with Bandura’s (1997) ecological model, where environmental constraints override personal efficacy.

The study also highlighted a significant gap between the potential of literary texts to promote authentic communication and their actualisation in the classroom. While the prescribed literature texts represented a valuable tool that could provide opportunities for communicative events, they were underutilised for communicative language teaching purposes. Teachers acknowledged the value of literature for teaching life lessons and social issues, yet their strategies for harnessing its communicative potential remain limited.

Literature was frequently reduced to a source for grammar drills and plot summaries, rather than being used as a catalyst for debate, critical thinking, and creative expression (Widdowson, 1990; Long, 1985). However, the findings confirm that many teachers, despite the constraints, recognised the transformative potential of literature to engage learners beyond linguistic foci, acknowledging its value in igniting critical thinking, emotional engagement, and cultural awareness. This signals a readiness for change and a fertile ground for innovation, as argued by Cappy (2016) and Long et al.

(2017), who underscore the importance of teachers' professional identity in shaping their willingness to adopt new strategies.

Additionally, the absence of collaborative agency, particularly through the lack of PLCs, further exacerbates this crisis, leaving teachers isolated and demoralised (Goddard et al., 2007; Jang & Tsai, 2013). The absence of meaningful support and oversight from district supervisors, who neglected to evaluate the implementation of the prescribed communicative approach, maintained a pervasive belief among teachers that striving toward communicative competence was neither a priority nor an expectation.

This systemic omission not only perpetuated teachers' limited understanding of the approach but also engendered a sense of apathy toward its application in literature-based instruction. By failing to hold educators accountable for aligning their practices with the goals of communicative language teaching, the system reinforced a culture of compliance and disempowerment.

Hence, the study found that teachers operated within a context of overwhelming constraint, where their self-efficacy was eroded by resource scarcity, rigid accountability, and a lack of support. The culture of constraint revealed a deeply entrenched tension between systemic constraints and enabling factors, which collectively shaped the nature and extent of teacher agency.

The study revealed that the educational environment, encompassing school spaces, district monitoring, professional development initiatives, and curriculum policies, converged to diminish teachers' professional authority and alienated them from engaging in innovative pedagogical practices. Some participants openly critiqued policy officials for failing to provide adequate guidance while inundating them with work that they perceived as unnecessary and incongruent with their contextual realities. This critique underscored a pervasive sense of disempowerment and frustration among educators.

While certain teachers expressed heightened resentment, others voiced complaints in a manner that appeared subdued, suggesting a complex interplay between resistance and compliance. This ambivalence reflected the broader tension between systemic pressures and individual agency, as articulated by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that environmental factors significantly shape self-efficacy beliefs and

behavioural regulation (Bandura, 1977). These findings echo those of Mkhize (2016), Motala (2017), Mthembu (2018), Naicker (2019), and Spaul (2015) and reveal an enduring puzzle that remains unresolved.

This reflection on the purpose, context, and findings of the study reaffirms the central argument: the persistent gap between the policy-driven vision of communicative competence and its classroom enactment in township EFAL schools was not a failure of individual teachers but a systemic one. The data revealed a complex interplay of epistemological deficits, rigid curricular mandates, and the absence of collaborative structures, all of which converged to constrain teacher agency.

The study therefore identified the levers for change, particularly the critical role of professional development and the transformative potential of literature as a communicative tool. This leads directly to the next section, Significance of the Study, which argues that this research makes a vital contribution to both theory and practice. It demonstrates how the findings not only deepen our understanding of teacher agency within Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory but also offer a compelling, evidence-based framework for policymakers and educators committed to dismantling the barriers to transformative, learner-centred education.

### **6.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY, RECONCEPTUALISING AGENCY AND REDEFINING POSSIBILITY IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

This study makes a multifaceted contribution to the fields of language education, educational policy, and teacher development, both within the specific context of South Africa and within the broader global discourse on educational reform in under-resourced and multilingual settings. Its significance lies not only in documenting the challenges faced by EFAL teachers but in offering a framework for understanding and addressing them.

By situating the implementation of communicative language teaching in township schools within Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977; 1986; 1989; 1999; 2001) and through a nuanced analysis of teacher agency, this research transcends a deficit

model of teacher practice and provides a powerful, evidence-based argument for systemic change.

### **6.3.1 Theoretical significance, reframing teacher agency as a relational and contextual phenomenon**

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study lies in its framing of teacher agency. It moves beyond the simplistic dichotomy of “agentic” versus “non-agentic” teachers, arguing instead that agency was a dynamic, relational, and contextually mediated process. Drawing on Bandura’s (1977) triadic reciprocal model, the study demonstrated that agency was not an inherent trait, but an emergent property of the continuous interaction between personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy, professional identity), behaviour (e.g., instructional practices), and environmental influences (e.g., CAPS, ATP, resource scarcity).

This reframing was crucial because it shifts the explanatory power from the individual to the system, revealing that what was often perceived as teacher resistance or apathy represents a rational response to overwhelming structural constraints. The identification of distinct forms of agency, resilient agency (exemplified by teachers such as Hluli and Khensi who innovate despite constraints), constrained agency (the norm, where teachers prioritise compliance and survival), and the critical absence of collaborative agency, provides a sophisticated analytical lens for understanding the spectrum of teacher behaviour.

This contribution was particularly valuable in the South African context, where the legacy of apartheid and ongoing inequities have created a professional landscape characterised by disempowerment. By highlighting that agency was not simply about willpower but about the availability of sociostructural opportunities (Bandura, 1999), this study offers a more compassionate model for analysing teacher behaviour, one that is essential for designing effective interventions.

Furthermore, the study deepens the theoretical understanding of communicative competence in multilingual contexts. It affirms the models of Canale and Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) among others, which integrate grammatical,

sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies, and argues that the failure to achieve communicative competence was not due to a lack of policy, but to a lack of contextualised implementation.

The study highlights that communicative competence cannot be taught in isolation; it necessitates pedagogical approaches that are responsive to learners' linguistic and cultural realities, a point reinforced by Hymes' (1972) emphasis on sociolinguistic appropriateness. By highlighting the underutilisation of literature, a rich and authentic resource, as a tool for instilling these competencies, the research contributes to the scholarship on communicative language teaching by identifying a critical gap between theory and practice in resource-constrained environments.

### **6.3.2 Policy and practical significance: A blueprint for empowering educators**

The significance of the CAPS policy in this study emerges as its most urgent contribution. It served as a powerful critique of the current state of curriculum reform in South Africa. The CAPS policy, while aspirational, is shown to be poorly constructed and fundamentally disconnected from the realities of township classrooms. The study's findings demand a paradigm shift in educational policy, one that moves away from rigid, prescriptive frameworks, such as the ATP, that focus narrowly on pass rates, towards more flexible, enabling models that support teachers' curricular authority. As Schleicher (2018:265) argues, teachers need a deep understanding of the processes involved in designing a curriculum, not just of its product. This study provides the evidence to support such a shift.

The research highlights that sustainable reform necessitates more than policy documents; it requires systemic investment in equitable resource allocation, enhanced governance, and the creation of supportive environments. The findings align with global studies, such as those by Christianto (2019) and Wong (2012), which recommend that the failure of communicative language teaching is often due to large class sizes and institutional pressures. However, this study uniquely exposes how these global challenges were amplified by South Africa's specific history of inequality.

By linking the failure to implement communicative language teaching to the broader “entrenched inequalities plaguing South Africa’s educational landscape,” the study elevates the issue from a pedagogical concern to a matter of social justice. Therefore, it calls on policymakers to recognise that empowering teachers was not a luxury, but a necessity for achieving the nation’s educational goals.

The policy revision discussed above had practical significance. This study provides a clear, evidence-based blueprint for empowering educators in township schools. The findings directly challenge the current top-down, compliance-driven model of curriculum implementation. By identifying the absence of PLCs as a primary barrier to innovation, the study offers a concrete, actionable solution: the establishment of collaborative structures where teachers can co-construct knowledge, share best practices, and build collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2007; Badal, 2018).

This is not a call for more isolated workshops, but for a fundamental shift towards a culture of collaboration and peer support. Moreover, it also provides a critical diagnosis of the failures of professional development. It shows that training that focuses on syllabus coverage and content delivery (Chang, 2011; Sato, 2000) was ineffective for supporting communicatively aligned teaching. Instead, the research calls for context-sensitive, sustained, and collaborative professional development that equips teachers with the pedagogical knowledge and self-efficacy to innovate.

This includes training on how to use literature for authentic communicative events, how to manage large, multilingual classrooms, and how to integrate the four language skills. The study’s emphasis on the need for teacher-mentors further strengthens its practical relevance, offering a sustainable model for building capacity from within the profession.

Accordingly, the significance of this study lies in its ability to transform a narrative of failure into a roadmap for hope. It provides a powerful, scholarly, and deeply human account of the challenges and possibilities in EFAL education. By reframing agency, redefining the role of literature, and demanding systemic change, it offers a vision of a future where every EFAL teacher in a township school is not a technician of compliance, but a confident, collaborative, and transformative agent of change.

In summary, this study contributed to theory, policy, and practice by offering a transformative framework for understanding teacher agency and advocating systemic

change. It is important to recognise that its findings were not without boundaries. The very depth and context-specificity that lend this research its significance also define its scope.

However, a transparent and scholarly examination of the study's limitations was not a diminishment of its value, but a necessary act of intellectual integrity. It provided a crucial counterpoint to the preceding discussion of significance, ensuring that the study's conclusions were interpreted with the appropriate nuance and humility.

The following section, *Limitations of the Study*, addresses the methodological and contextual constraints, including the sample size, the duration of data collection, and the potential for researcher influence, thereby situating the study's findings within the realistic parameters of qualitative inquiry. This acknowledgment ensures that the study's powerful call for transformation remains grounded in a clear understanding of its own context and reach.

#### **6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Every research endeavour, regardless of its rigour, operates within boundaries that define its scope, depth, and generalizability. A candid and scholarly acknowledgment of these limitations provides a transparent framework for interpreting the findings, guides future research, and prevents the overstatement of conclusions. This qualitative case study, while offering a rich, in-depth understanding of teacher agency in the implementation of communicative language teaching, was also subject to several methodological and contextual constraints that must be explicitly acknowledged.

The most significant limitation concerned the sample size and scope. The study focused on six EFAL teachers across three township schools in a single district in Gauteng. While this purposive sampling allowed for an intensive, contextual inquiry, it inherently limits the generalisability of the findings. The experiences and practices of these six participants, though deeply illuminating, cannot be statistically extrapolated to represent the entirety of EFAL teaching in South Africa, or even across all township schools. As Marczyk et al. (2005) point out, case studies often prioritise depth over

breadth, and their findings are best understood as contextually grounded insights rather than universal truths. The insights gained were rich and detailed, but they remained specific to the participants and the unique socio-educational environment of the schools studied.

A related limitation concerned the duration of the data collection period. The eight-month timeframe, while allowing for prolonged engagement and the development of trust, constrained the study's ability to capture the full evolution of teacher agency. Teacher beliefs, practices, and responses to systemic pressures are not static; they evolve over longer periods. An extended longitudinal study might reveal shifts in practice, the long-term impact of professional development (or its absence), or the cumulative effects of contextual challenges in ways that a shorter study could not. The data, therefore, provided a powerful but necessarily synchronic snapshot of a dynamic process, rather than a diachronic account of its development.

Another methodological limitation concerns the potential for researcher influence and bias. As an interpretive qualitative study, the research was deeply embedded in the researcher's perspective. Despite efforts to maintain reflexivity through journaling and peer debriefing, the act of selecting, interpreting, and presenting data was inherently subjective. The researcher's own background as an educator in a similar context may have influenced the formulation of interview questions, the interpretation of teacher narratives, and the emphasis placed on certain themes over others. While this insider knowledge provided valuable contextual understanding, it also created a risk of empathic bias, where the researcher's desire to advocate for teachers might have led to an over-interpretation of resilient agency or an under-emphasis on pedagogical shortcomings.

Moreover, the study's focus on literary texts as a specific resource for improving communicative competence, while a strength in terms of depth, also constitutes a limitation in terms of comprehensiveness. The analysis did not explore the use of other authentic materials, such as news articles, films, or digital media, which could offer different pathways to communicative practice. This narrow focus, although aligned with the research question, means the findings pertain specifically to the integration of literature, rather than the broader spectrum of communicative language teaching activities.

Finally, the study's findings were bound by the specificity of its context. The research was conducted in historically disadvantaged, Quintile One schools, which face a unique confluence of challenges that are not universal across the South African education system. While the themes of constrained agency, knowledge gaps, and the need for systemic support are likely to resonate in other under-resourced contexts, the intensity and nature of these challenges may differ in schools with greater resources or different governance structures. Therefore, the extent to which the findings may be transferred to other educational settings, such as rural schools or more affluent urban schools, requires careful consideration and further investigation.

However, these limitations do not invalidate the study's findings; rather, they provide a necessary context for their interpretation. They underscore that the study's primary contribution lies in its analytical and theoretical insights, rather than in generalization. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between teacher agency and systemic constraints in a specific, high-stakes environment. By acknowledging these boundaries, this study invites future research to build upon its foundation, to explore these dynamics in different contexts, and to deepen our collective understanding of how to empower educators towards authentic communicative competence in all learners

The discussion in this section provides a powerful foundation for the recommendations that follow, which are designed to address the root causes of this failure and empower educators in reclaiming their agency in the pursuit of meaningful, transformative education.

## **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Considering the intricate dynamics uncovered by this study, which revealed the interplay between contextual educational ecosystems and systemic regulations, it was imperative to propose recommendations that address both external agents and teachers. This dual focus underscores the necessity for collaboration across all levels of the educational landscape to foster alignment between policy mandates and the realities of classroom practice. The findings highlight a significant disconnect between

external regulations and the contextual constraints faced by educators, revealing an urgent need for systemic reforms that empower teachers while holding external bureaucrats and school management accountable. The following recommendations were structured to address these critical gaps, with a particular emphasis on enhancing teacher agency, promoting context-sensitive practices, and building collaborative ecosystems.

### **6.5.1 Recommendations for the Department of Basic Education**

The DBE, as the primary architect of national education policy, holds the greatest responsibility for creating the enabling conditions necessary for the successful implementation of curriculum reforms. The current CAPS, while well-intentioned in its mandate for communicative competence, fails to provide the practical guidance and pedagogical clarity required for teachers to enact its communicative goals. This gap between policy aspiration and classroom reality is not a failure of individual educators, but a systemic one, rooted in the inadequacy of the policy document itself and the structures that support its implementation. To bridge this chasm, the DBE needs to undertake a comprehensive and transformative set of actions.

First and foremost, the DBE must undertake a fundamental revision of the CAPS policy document for EFAL. The current document is characterised by ambiguity and offers only limited, abstract guidance on the Communicative Approach and communicative language teaching. A revised policy must move beyond vague exhortations to "use language creatively and effectively" (DBE, 2011: 11) and provide clear, detailed, and operational explanations of the principles of communicative language teaching. This includes explicit guidance on integrating the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), the strategic use of authentic materials, and the importance of promoting learner autonomy. Crucially, the revised document must transition from theoretical pronouncements to practical application by incorporating concrete examples of communicative activities, model lesson plans, and assessment rubrics that are explicitly aligned with the multidimensional construct of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). This revision must be a collaborative effort, informed by the lived experiences and insights of practicing teachers and language

education experts, to ensure its relevance, feasibility, and contextual sensitivity. As Li (2001:163) argues, language teaching methods must take into account the specific political, economic, social, and cultural factors of a country. South Africa's unique multilingual context demands a policy that is more than a mere importation of Western pedagogical models.

Second, the DBE needs to overhaul its approach to professional development, which is currently a critical point of failure. The existing model, characterised by one-off, top-down workshops focused on content delivery and compliance with the ATP, is fundamentally misaligned with the goals of communicative language teaching. The DBE should establish a national framework for sustained, context-sensitive, and collaborative professional development that is directly linked to the revised CAPS. This framework must shift the focus from "what to teach" to "how to teach." Workshops should provide in-depth, practical training on communicative language teaching methodologies, the use of literature for communicative events, and evidence-based strategies for managing large, multilingual classrooms. This professional development must be sustained and iterative, replacing the current model of isolated events with a continuous cycle of learning that includes follow-up sessions, coaching, and peer observation. Most importantly, it must be collaborative. The DBE should actively promote and fund the creation of regional PLCs, where teachers can share experiences, co-construct knowledge, and engage in collective problem-solving (Goddard et al., 2007). These communities should be facilitated by trained teacher-mentors, practicing educators with deep pedagogical expertise, rather than district officials whose primary role has been monitoring for compliance.

Third, the DBE must radically revamp the ATP. The current ATP, with its rigid, day-by-day prescriptions, functions as a disciplinary script that severely constrains teacher agency and innovation. As Kele stated, "We teach according to the lesson plan provided by the DBE in the CAPS. Every step is specified, so we follow the steps," a practice that stifles creativity and reinforces traditional methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The DBE should transform the ATP from a prescriptive mandate into a flexible, thematic guide. It should outline broad themes, key literary texts, and essential skills for each term, but grant teachers the professional autonomy to design their own lesson sequences, activities, and assessments. This shift would empower teachers to be

responsive to their learners' diverse needs and interests, supporting a culture of professional trust and innovation rather than one of passive compliance.

### **6.5.2 Redefining the role of external managers: from compliance to collaboration**

A critical recommendation for external managers is to move beyond compliance-centric frameworks that stifle teacher agency and innovation. The study revealed that rigid accountability mechanisms, such as tick-list evaluations and excessive administrative demands, often left teachers feeling disempowered and demotivated. To address this issue, bureaucrats should adopt a more collaborative approach to monitoring and evaluation, one that strikes a balance between accountability and flexibility. For example, performance assessments could incorporate qualitative measures that recognise teachers' efforts to adapt curricula to their specific contexts, rather than penalising deviations from prescribed lesson plans. Additionally, district officials should provide sustained support through mentorship programmes, collaborative learning communities, and equitable resource allocation, enabling teachers to navigate challenges effectively. By maintaining a culture of trust and collaboration, external managers can create conditions that empower educators to enact transformative practices aligned with the goals of communicative language teaching.

The pursuit of educational goals requires a dynamic interplay between internal and external efforts to address the multifaceted challenges faced by educators. Internally, teachers must cultivate resilience, self-efficacy, and innovative strategies to navigate contextual constraints and meet the diverse needs of learners. This includes engaging in reflective practice, seeking out professional growth opportunities, and adapting resources to create meaningful learning experiences. Externally, systemic support, such as equitable resource allocation, context-sensitive professional development, and supportive leadership, is crucial for creating enabling environments that empower teachers to effectively enact their agency. By aligning internal initiative with external enablement, educators and policymakers can collaboratively dismantle barriers, promote transformative teaching practices, and achieve equitable educational outcomes.

Fourth, the DBE must recognize and value teacher contextual expertise. One of the most pressing recommendations for external bureaucrats is the recognition and valuation of teachers' contextual expertise as a cornerstone of effective educational reform. The study revealed that teachers possess intimate knowledge of their learners' socioeconomic, cultural, and psychosocial realities, yet this expertise was often marginalised in favour of rigid, top-down mandates. As argued by Bandura (1999), individuals navigate contested terrains by drawing from their understanding of sociostructural opportunities and constraints. Therefore, policymakers and district officials must initiate initiatives that integrate teachers' contextual insights into curriculum development and implementation processes. For instance, involving teachers in policy mediation and curriculum design can ensure that reforms are not only theoretically sound but also practically feasible within diverse educational contexts. By valuing teachers as contextual experts, bureaucrats can create a more inclusive and responsive educational system that addresses the unique needs of learners in township schools and beyond.

The study highlights the transformative potential of positioning teachers as agents of change, rather than merely implementing prescribed curricula. Scholars such as Cappy (2016) and Long et al. (2017) emphasize the significance of teachers' professional identity and socio-political awareness in influencing their willingness to adopt innovative strategies. To unlock this potential, external managers must shift away from deficit-based perspectives that blame teachers for systemic failures and instead cultivate enabling environments that empower educators to innovate. This can be achieved through targeted professional development programmes that equip teachers with the skills and confidence to adapt the curriculum and optimise available resources, experiment with pedagogical strategies, and promote learner engagement. Furthermore, bureaucrats should incentivise and recognise instances of resilient agency, where teachers creatively navigate systemic constraints to achieve meaningful learning outcomes. By reframing teachers' roles as central actors in educational reform, policymakers can harness their capacity to challenge inequities and promote social justice within their classrooms and communities.

The prolonged marginalisation of teachers, coupled with external control over their curricular authority and professional status, has entrenched a compliance-oriented mindset that prioritises external goals such as curriculum coverage and pass rates

over transformative pedagogical practices. This systemic devaluation of teachers' roles as contextual experts-maintained perceptions of reduced agency, leaving educators feeling ill-equipped to influence their work meaningfully. The frequent use of terms such as "implement" and "comply" in teacher narratives starkly contrasts with the absence of words such as "innovate," "change," "adapt," or "adjust," underscoring a pervasive orientation toward conformity rather than creativity. In this context, actively contributing to their environments through agentic actions was perceived not as an opportunity for transformation but as a deviation from the norm, a risky act of going "against the tide" of compliance.

While external support systems are undeniably critical, the study also highlights the potential for teachers to draw on their own resources to seek knowledge and strategies that can help them overcome challenges in resource-constrained environments. Teachers who actively engage in self-directed learning and reflective practice demonstrate a higher degree of resilience and agency, as highlighted by Vu (2024), who found that some educators proactively sought innovative solutions rather than passively awaiting external interventions. For instance, teachers could use open educational resources (OERs), online PLCs, or collaborative networks beyond their immediate contexts to co-construct knowledge and share best practices. This internal drive to expand one's pedagogical repertoire not only supports adaptability but also empowers educators to transcend the limitations imposed by rigid curricula and systemic inequities. As Fullan (2003) aptly argues, teachers must see themselves as agents of change to enact transformative actions. However, this notion was conspicuously absent in the narratives of participants, who describe themselves as being mired in a perpetual struggle against both internal and external challenges. Consequently, they remained relegated to the fringes of educational reform, passive observers rather than active architects of meaningful change. By cultivating a mindset of continuous growth and embracing their role as lifelong learners, teachers can mitigate the impact of insufficient external support and take ownership of their professional development. This shift from dependency to self-efficacy aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that individuals regulate their behaviours based on their beliefs about their capabilities to effect change (Bandura, 1989). Encouraging teachers to adopt this proactive stance is essential for promoting transformative practices and achieving meaningful educational outcomes; otherwise,

they remain relegated to the fringes of educational reform, passive observers rather than active architects of meaningful change.

Finally, the DoE must try to narrow the gap in funding between township schools, inner-city schools, and independent schools to promote educational equity. Even though schools are divided into quintiles, and most township schools fall under quintile one, which are highly subsidized, inequalities are still evident and need to be addressed. According to Kennemer and Knaus (2019), there must be a fair distribution of resources across all SA schools. The unfair distribution of resources persists even in this post-apartheid era; hence, the schools under this study are referred to as resource-constrained environments.

### **6.5.3 Recommendations for teachers, cultivating voice, agency, and adaptive expertise**

While the primary responsibility for systemic change lies with the DBE, school leadership, and district officials, the recommendations for external stakeholders must be met with a parallel and equally vital commitment from the teachers themselves. This study documented the profound constraints of the township educational environment. However, within these constraints, a crucial space remains for individual and collective action. The final and most transformative recommendation is therefore for teachers to proactively reclaim their professional voice, assert their curricular authority, and adapt their expertise. This is not a call for teachers to shoulder the burden of systemic failure, but an invitation to move from a position of passive compliance to one of resilient and proactive agency.

The data revealed a pervasive culture of "contextualised compliance. This compliance-oriented mindset, while a rational response to systemic pressure, led to the marginalisation of the teacher's role as a contextual expert and diminished professional authority. To break this cycle, teachers are encouraged to adopt proactive strategies. First, teachers must acquire and deepen their pedagogical knowledge. The study found a critical deficit in teachers' understanding of communicative language teaching and communicative competence. Teachers are urged to move beyond

waiting to be "trained" by external facilitators and to take ownership of their professional learning. This means actively seeking out knowledge through independent study of communicative language teaching literature, engaging with online educational resources, attending voluntary workshops, and critically reflecting on their own practice. As the research showed, a lack of knowledge led to negative mastery and eroded self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). By proactively building their knowledge, teachers can transform themselves from mere implementers into informed, confident practitioners.

Additionally, teachers must adapt their practices to suit their contexts. In the face of a rigid ATP, teachers must cultivate what has been termed "adaptive expertise." This is the ability to apply knowledge flexibly and creatively to novel and complex situations. Rather than seeing the ATP as an unbreakable script, teachers can use it as a flexible guide. This means finding small, manageable ways to innovate within the prescribed framework. For example, a teacher can use a prescribed literary text not just for plot summary, but as a springboard for a role-play, a debate, or a creative writing exercise that encourages authentic communication. This requires a shift in mindset from "covering content" to "achieving communicative goals (Truebridge, 2016)

The absence of PLCs is a significant constraint, but it is not insurmountable. Teachers are encouraged to take the initiative to create their own informal PLCs. This could be as simple as a regular meeting with a colleague to share lesson ideas, co-plan a unit, or observe each other's teaching. By collaborating, teachers can co-construct knowledge (Badal, 2018), build collective efficacy, and find the support and encouragement needed to take pedagogical risks. This collaborative effort can be a powerful counterforce to the isolation and demoralisation identified in the study.

The study found that teachers relied exclusively on prescribed textbooks, citing a lack of autonomy in material selection. While systemic support for resources is essential, teachers are encouraged to begin innovating with what is available. This could mean using local newspapers, song lyrics, or community stories as authentic materials. It could mean designing simple, low-cost activities that promote interaction. By taking small steps to source or create supplementary materials, teachers begin to reclaim their curricular authority and demonstrate that innovation is possible, even within constraints.

The recommendations for teachers are not a substitute for systemic reform, but a necessary complement to it. True transformation will only occur when external enablers (revised policies, supportive professional development, and equitable resources) are met with internal drivers (proactive knowledge acquisition, adaptive expertise, and collaborative action). By finding their voice and exercising their agency, teachers can become the central architects of a more dynamic, communicative, and empowering EFAL classroom.

#### **6.5.4 Recommendations for future research**

While this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of teacher agency and systemic constraints, several avenues remain unexplored. Future research should investigate the long-term impact of systemic reforms on teacher agency and learner outcomes, particularly in under-resourced contexts. Comparative studies across different phases, subjects, and geographic regions should reveal how contextual factors shape agency in diverse educational settings. Additionally, longitudinal inquiries are necessary to examine whether interventions aimed at enhancing teacher agency result in sustained changes in practice and improved communicative competence among learners. Finally, further exploration of collaborative agency within PLCs could shed light on the role of peer support in enabling innovation and resilience. By addressing these gaps, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of how systemic enablement and individual initiative intersect to drive meaningful educational transformation.

The recommendations outlined above call for a paradigm shift in how external agents and teachers collaborate to address systemic inequities and support transformative teaching practices. By valuing teachers' contextual expertise, empowering them as agents of change, and moving beyond compliance-centric frameworks, policymakers and school leaders can create enabling environments that unlock the full potential of educators. Simultaneously, future research must continue to interrogate these dynamics, providing evidence-based insights to inform policy and practice. Through sustained collaboration and systemic reform, it will be possible to dismantle

entrenched barriers and achieve equitable, learner-centred education that promotes communicative competence and social justice in South African classrooms.

## **6.6 CONCLUSION**

This study revealed the need for a paradigm shift in how teacher agency is conceptualised and supported within South African educational ecosystems. By addressing systemic inequities, promoting enabling environments, and empowering educators to act as agents of change, meaningful progress toward achieving communicative competence and inclusive education can be made. Although large-scale educational reforms have often been driven by top-down initiatives and external mandates, this study underscores the centrality of teacher agency as a catalyst for meaningful educational transformation. Teacher agency, when heightened, contributes to transformative practices that enrich learners' educational experiences and safeguard their interests.

However, the findings revealed significant variations in how teachers construct and exercise their agency within restrictive environments dominated by “the intentions of others” (Bakhtin, 1986:294). These variations highlight the complexities teachers faced in navigating contexts where systemic constraints overshadowed their capacity to act intentionally and innovatively. The prevalence of passive compliance among participants reflected a detrimental erosion of their proactive engagement with educational reforms, ultimately hindering their ability to demonstrate core properties of agency such as intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflection (Bandura, 2001).

Consequently, the study highlighted the urgent need to reconceptualise teacher agency as a dynamic interplay between individual initiative and systemic enablement. By addressing structural inequities and enabling supportive environments, policymakers and school leaders may empower teachers to reclaim their voice and engage meaningfully in educational reform. Only through such efforts will educators be able to move beyond passive compliance toward practices characterised by

intentionality, innovation, and transformative impact, ultimately promoting equitable and inclusive learning environments that prioritise learners' needs and aspirations.

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## APPENDICES

### Annexure A: AI tools

#### 1. Declaration

I declare that the AI tools used in this assignment were employed ethically and responsibly. I take full accountability for the final content and confirm that it reflects my own understanding and academic effort.

Signature, \_\_\_\_\_

Date, \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Nature of Use

Tick all that apply:

- Brainstorming ideas
- Drafting content
- Editing or proofreading
- Generating code or data
- Translating text
- Creating images or visual content
- Other, \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 2, AI Tools Used

Which AI tools did you use in the creation of this assignment? (Checkboxes — select all that apply)

- ChatGPT
- Microsoft Copilot

- Grammarly
- Google Gemini
- DALL·E
- Other, (Short answer field)

## Annexure B: RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



### THE COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES

### RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Hereby, I Dolphina Mmatsetla NKOSI, ID number 6502280452086, in my personal capacity as a researcher, acknowledge that I am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the

- Unisa Research Policy
- Unisa Ethics Policy
- Unisa IP Policy
- SOP for Risk Assessment

And that I shall conform to and abide by these policy requirements

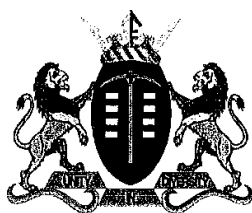
I furthermore declare that I Did Not Plagiarise I Have Referenced All Material used in The Research Paper.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Dolphina Mmatsetla NKOSI", written over a faint horizontal line.

SIGNED, \_\_\_\_\_

Date, \_\_\_\_\_ 29/09/21 \_\_\_\_\_

## Annexure C: GDE APPROVAL LETTER



### **GAUTENG PROVINCE**

Department: Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

#### **GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER**

Date:	14 October 2021
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2022– 30 September 2022 2021/309
Name of Researcher:	Nkosi DM
Address of Researcher:	571 Block H Soshanguve 0152
Telephone Number:	0127992306 / 0783891118
Email address:	<a href="mailto:dolphinankosi28@gmail.com">dolphinankosi28@gmail.com</a>
Research Topic:	Locating a space for teachers agency: The use of literature texts to develop communicative competence in English FAL classrooms
Type of qualification	PhD
Number and type of schools:	3 Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Gauteng North

#### **Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research**

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

*M. Tshabalala 15/10/2021*

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

1

*Making education a societal priority*

#### **Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management**

7<sup>th</sup> Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: [Faiith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za](mailto:Faiith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za)

Website: [www.education.gpg.gov.za](http://www.education.gpg.gov.za)

**Title of Research, LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY, THE USE OF LITERATURE TEXTS TO TEACH COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN ENGLISH FAL CLASSROOMS.**

**The Communicative Approach (CA)**

- What are your perceptions of the CA?
- How were you prepared in terms of its adoption?
- Does your current approach/method of teaching serve the FAL learners?
- What are your beliefs about the prescribed method of teaching English?
- If your answer to the above question is NO, please explain how you deal with the conflict between your beliefs and the CAPS policy's expectations.
- Do your beliefs align with the current CAPS curriculum?
- How would you describe your role in the decision-making processes about approaches to teaching English in FAL classrooms?
- What do you understand about the term communicative competence?
- To what extent do you use this approach?
- What is your conception of teaching English in context?
- Do you teach English in context?
- If your answer is YES to the above explain how.
- If your answer is NO, explain why.
- What factors influence your adoption of the CA?
- Do you use literature texts to teach grammar, contextual meaning making and language in context?
- Explain your answer for the above question.

## **Teacher agency in the development of communicative competence**

- What is your teaching philosophy?
- Do you reflect on your practice?
- Do you fully understand the underlying philosophy of the National Curriculum Statement?
- Do you have goals for your learners and work towards achieving them? Provide examples.
- Do you feel free to change the curriculum and adapt it to your students' needs? Explain
- Are you forced to comply with all the specifications? Explain
- Tell me about your idea of accountability?
- How do you hold yourself accountable to your learners?
- Did you attempt to make meaning of the CA on your own. If yes, explain how. If NO explain why.
- Do you feel free to make decisions in terms of the approaches you could use in your classrooms?
- To what extent do you manipulate the resources to achieve teaching goals?
- Do you consider the prescribed texts to be an important resource for your teaching of the language?
- Can literary texts be used to teach other aspects of English? How?
- Have you ever considered using them? If so, How?

## Annexure D2: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL



**Title of Research, LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY, THE USE OF LITERATURE TEXTS TO TEACH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH FAL CLASSROOMS.**

### **The Communicative Approach (CA)**

- What are your perceptions of the CA?
- How were you prepared in terms of its adoption?
- Does your current approach/method of teaching serve the FAL learners?
- What are your beliefs about the prescribed method of teaching English?
- If your answer to the above question is NO please explain how you deal with the conflict between your beliefs and the CAPS policy's expectations.
- Do your beliefs align with the current CAPS curriculum?
- How would you describe your role in the decision-making processes about approaches to teaching English in FAL classrooms?
- What do you understand about the term communicative competence?
- To what extend do you use this approach?
- What is your conception of teaching English in context?
- Do you teach English in context?
- If your answer is YES to the above explain how.
- If your answer is NO, explain why.
- What factors influence your adoption of the CA?
- Do you use literature texts to teach grammar, contextual meaning making and language in context?
- Explain your answer for the above question.

## Teacher agency in the development of communicative competence

- What is your teaching philosophy?
- Do you reflect on your practice?
- Do you fully understand the underlying philosophy of the National Curriculum Statement?
- Do you have goals for your learners and work towards achieving them? Provide examples.
- Do you feel free to change the curriculum and adapt it to your students' needs? Explain
- Are you forced to comply with all the specifications? Explain
- Tell me about your idea of accountability?
- How do you hold yourself accountable to your learners?
- Did you attempt to make meaning of the CA on your own. If yes, explain how. If NO explain why.
- Do you feel free to make decisions in terms of the approaches you could use in your classrooms?
- To what extent do you manipulate the resources to achieve teaching goals?
- Do you consider the prescribed texts to be an important resource for your teaching of the language?
- Can literature texts be used to teach other aspects of English? How?
- Have you ever considered using them? If so How?

## Annexure E: LESSON OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

**Name of School:**

**Name of teacher:**

**Date:**

**Class:**

**Number of learners:**

**Lesson duration:**

**Type of lesson:**

**Classroom resources**

1. Is there an alignment between teacher reports of practice and teaching practice?
2. Evidence of expressions of agency using the Communicative approach in practice?
3. Is there an alignment between CAPS mandates and teacher practice?
4. Evidence of goal orientated teaching?
5. Does the teacher reflect on practice?
6. Evidence of the use of literary texts to teach communicative competence?
7. Does the teacher's practice reveal stated teaching philosophy and methodology?



Chalkboard/ Whiteboard	Desk and chair for each learner	Duster and chalk	Identifiable resources in classroom, pictures, posters, books	Teacher resources	State of classroom	Data Projector Teacher laptop computer
Comments						

## Annexure F: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS AFTER LESSON OBSERVATION



### Questions that will arise after the lesson observation

#### Document analysis

##### 2.1.1 Teacher Preparation File

Teacher draws up their own lessons or uses those provided for literature lessons?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.2. Does the teacher use resources/literature books provided or substitute with their own work?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.3. Teacher methodology clear in planning?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.4. Does teacher demonstrate understanding of the CA in practice?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.5. Is there evidence of teacher understanding and agency in the use of the prescribed CA approach?

\_\_\_\_\_

## 2.2. Learner's work

### Analysis of students' documents

Criteria	Classwork notebooks	Learner portfolios	Teachers' supporting resources	Comments
Alignment with CAPS in terms of the implementation of communicative approach to teach English FAL				
Teacher innovation/resource materials used				

## Annexure G1: SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER



Request for permission to conduct research at Amogelang Secondary School, Senthibele Secondary School, and Lethabong Secondary School.

### **LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY, THE USE OF LITERATURE TEXTS TO TEACH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH FAL CLASSROOMS**

Mrs Thea Coetser  
Tshwane North Education District  
Wonderboom Junction 0066  
Private Bag X 945  
Corner Lavenda and Lavenda West Road  
012 543 4302 / 083 5645 146  
[www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za)

Dear Mrs Coetser

I, Mrs Dolphina M. Nkosi, am conducting research under the supervision of Dr B. Badal, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Studies, towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Languages, Linguistics and Literature at the University of South Africa.

We hereby invite you to participate in a study entitled: *Locating a Space for Teacher Agency: The Use of Literature Texts to Teach Communicative Competence in English FAL Classrooms*.

**Purpose of the Study:** The study aims to collect valuable information that will contribute to scholarship on the use of literary texts to develop communicative competence among Township English as Further Additional Language (FAL) learners. The research will also provide insight into the extent to which prescribed literary texts are used for this purpose and, based on the findings, recommendations will be made.

**Selection of Schools:** Your school has been selected as one of three township schools in your district in Gauteng where English is offered as a Further Additional Language.

Nature of Participation: The study will involve the collection of data through interviews, classroom observations, and the analysis of teachers' preparation files and other relevant teaching documents.

#### Potential Benefits

- Teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on their practice, particularly with regard to the development of communicative competence.
- The findings will contribute to academic scholarship and provide the Gauteng Department of Education with evidence regarding the need for further training in the communicative approach.
- Participation may encourage teachers to explore new ways of using literary texts beyond the traditional focus on literary features, instead employing them as a resource for developing communicative competence in learners—an essential aspect for FAL learners.

Risks and Time Commitment: There are no foreseeable risks in participating. Teachers will only be asked to commit a small amount of their time, and classroom access will be arranged at their convenience.

Feedback Procedure: Feedback will be provided in a one-on-one meeting between the researcher and the participant. A presentation of findings to all English teachers in the school can also be arranged, during which pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' anonymity.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. Your contribution will be of great value to both the academic and teaching communities.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs Dolphina M. Nkosi - Researcher

**Annexure G2: SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER**

Request for permission to conduct research at Aogelang Secondary school

**LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY, THE USE OF LITERATURE TEXTS  
TO TEACH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETANCE IN ENGLISH FAL CLASSROOMS.**

10/9/21

Mr N.K. Hans  
Amogelang Secondary school  
Soshanguave 0152  
012 712 0033 / 082 558 9434  
e-mail [hanstso92@gmail.com](mailto:hanstso92@gmail.com)  
[hans101@webmail.co.za](mailto:hans101@webmail.co.za)

Dear Mr Hans

I, Mrs Dolphina M. Nkosi, am conducting research under the supervision of Dr B. Badal, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Studies, towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Languages, Linguistics and Literature at the University of South Africa.

We hereby invite you to participate in a study entitled: *Locating a Space for Teacher Agency: The Use of Literature Texts to Teach Communicative Competence in English FAL Classrooms.*

**Purpose of the Study:** The study aims to collect valuable information that will contribute to scholarship on the use of literary texts to develop communicative competence among Township English as Further Additional Language (FAL) learners. The research will also provide insight into the extent to which prescribed literary texts are used for this purpose and, based on the findings, recommendations will be made.

**Selection of Schools:** Your school has been selected as one of three township schools in your district in Gauteng where English is offered as a Further Additional Language.

**Nature of Participation:** The study will involve the collection of data through interviews, classroom observations, and the analysis of teachers' preparation files and other relevant teaching documents.

**Potential Benefits**

- Teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on their practice, particularly with regard to the development of communicative competence.
- The findings will contribute to academic scholarship and provide the Gauteng Department of Education with evidence regarding the need for further training in the communicative approach.

- Participation may encourage teachers to explore new ways of using literary texts beyond the traditional focus on literary features, instead employing them as a resource for developing communicative competence in learners—an essential aspect for FAL learners.

Risks and Time Commitment: There are no foreseeable risks in participating. Teachers will only be asked to commit a small amount of their time, and classroom access will be arranged at their convenience.

Feedback Procedure: Feedback will be provided in a one-on-one meeting between the researcher and the participant. A presentation of findings to all English teachers in the school can also be arranged, during which pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' anonymity.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. Your contribution will be of great value to both the academic and teaching communities.

Yours sincerely,

Yours sincerely



Mrs Dolphina M. Nkosi - Researcher

### **Annexure G3: SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER**

Request for permission to conduct research at Lethabong Secondary school. Do same throughout

#### **LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY, THE USE OF LITERATURE TEXTS TO TEACH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETANCE IN ENGLISH FAL CLASSROOMS**

Mrs M Molope  
Lethabong Secondary school  
Soshanguve 0152  
012 799 8120 / 082 830 6923

Dear Mrs M Molope

I, Mrs Dolphina M. Nkosi, am conducting research under the supervision of Dr B. Badal, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Studies, towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Languages, Linguistics and Literature at the University of South Africa.

We hereby invite you to participate in a study entitled: *Locating a Space for Teacher Agency: The Use of Literature Texts to Teach Communicative Competence in English FAL Classrooms*.

**Purpose of the Study:** The study aims to collect valuable information that will contribute to scholarship on the use of literary texts to develop communicative competence among Township English as Further Additional Language (FAL) learners. The research will also provide insight into the extent to which prescribed literary texts are used for this purpose and, based on the findings, recommendations will be made.

**Selection of Schools:** Your school has been selected as one of three township schools in your district in Gauteng where English is offered as a Further Additional Language.

**Nature of Participation:** The study will involve the collection of data through interviews, classroom observations, and the analysis of teachers' preparation files and other relevant teaching documents.

#### **Potential Benefits**

- Teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on their practice, particularly with regard to the development of communicative competence.
- The findings will contribute to academic scholarship and provide the Gauteng Department of Education with evidence regarding the need for further training in the communicative approach.

- Participation may encourage teachers to explore new ways of using literary texts beyond the traditional focus on literary features, instead employing them as a resource for developing communicative competence in learners—an essential aspect for FAL learners.

Risks and Time Commitment: There are no foreseeable risks in participating. Teachers will only be asked to commit a small amount of their time, and classroom access will be arranged at their convenience.

Feedback Procedure: Feedback will be provided in a one-on-one meeting between the researcher and the participant. A presentation of findings to all English teachers in the school can also be arranged, during which pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' anonymity.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. Your contribution will be of great value to both the academic and teaching communities.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs Dolphina M. Nkosi - Researcher

### **Annexure G3: SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER**

Request for permission to conduct research at Senthibele Secondary school. Do same throughout

#### **LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY, THE USE OF LITERATURE TEXTS TO TEACH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETANCE IN ENGLISH FAL CLASSROOMS**

Mr Ledwaba M  
Senthibele Secondary school  
Soshanguve 0152  
012 9439283

Dear Mr Ledwaba

I, Mrs Dolphina M. Nkosi, am conducting research under the supervision of Dr B. Badal, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Studies, towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Languages, Linguistics and Literature at the University of South Africa.

We hereby invite you to participate in a study entitled: *Locating a Space for Teacher Agency: The Use of Literature Texts to Teach Communicative Competence in English FAL Classrooms*.

**Purpose of the Study:** The study aims to collect valuable information that will contribute to scholarship on the use of literary texts to develop communicative competence among Township English as Further Additional Language (FAL) learners. The research will also provide insight into the extent to which prescribed literary texts are used for this purpose and, based on the findings, recommendations will be made.

**Selection of Schools:** Your school has been selected as one of three township schools in your district in Gauteng where English is offered as a Further Additional Language.

**Nature of Participation:** The study will involve the collection of data through interviews, classroom observations, and the analysis of teachers' preparation files and other relevant teaching documents.

#### **Potential Benefits**

- Teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on their practice, particularly with regard to the development of communicative competence.
- The findings will contribute to academic scholarship and provide the Gauteng Department of Education with evidence regarding the need for further training in the communicative approach.
- Participation may encourage teachers to explore new ways of using literary texts beyond the traditional focus on literary features, instead employing them as a resource for developing communicative competence in learners—an essential aspect for FAL learners.

Risks and Time Commitment: There are no foreseeable risks in participating. Teachers will only be asked to commit a small amount of their time, and classroom access will be arranged at their convenience.

Feedback Procedure: Feedback will be provided in a one-on-one meeting between the researcher and the participant. A presentation of findings to all English teachers in the school can also be arranged, during which pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' anonymity.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. Your contribution will be of great value to both the academic and teaching communities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Nkosi', written in a cursive style.

Mrs Dolphina M. Nkosi - Researcher

## **Annexure H: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR MINORS**



### **REQUESTING PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

Dear Parent

Your \_\_\_\_\_ <son/daughter/child> is invited to participate in a study entitled\_ Locating a Space for Teacher Agency, The Use of Literature Texts to Teach Communicative Competence in English FAL Classrooms.

I am undertaking this study as part of my doctoral research at the University of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to investigate English as a Further Additional Language teachers' conceptions and applications of the Communicative approach in teaching English in multilingual contexts.

The possible benefit of the study is to assist in reflecting on their use of the communicative approach as a teaching method to improve the communicative competence of learners who attend school in previously challenged township schools. It may lead them to seek knowledge about the different methods and uses of literary texts to help second language learners understand English better and promote a better understanding of how the English language works.

I seek permission to include your child in this study because his/her school was selected for the study. I expect to have approximately 100 other learners participating in the study.

I will be recording the lesson myself and will undertake to be a silent observer so that the lesson is not disrupted in any way. I will also record from the back of the classroom so that their identities are obscured. The focus of the study will be the teacher's teaching methods.

I will observe all COVID-19 protocols by constantly placing myself 2m away from any learner or teacher, I will always wear a mask, and sanitise regularly. I will not engage with any learner as I am merely observing.

If you allow your child to participate, I shall request that/they be present in class while lessons are being recorded. The arrangement for the day will not be disrupted as it will

be during normal teaching time. Your child will be attending normal day-to-day lessons while video recordings are taking place. While lessons are recorded, there will be minimal risks as I will strive to be as uninformative as possible.

I am kindly asking your permission to allow your child to be part of this research activity.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. His/her responses will not be linked to his/her name, your name, or the school's name in any written or verbal report based on this study. Such a report will be used for research purposes only.

There are no foreseeable risks to your child from participating in the study. As mentioned earlier, I will observe all COVID-19 Protocols (as a teacher myself, I am aware of all regulations regarding contact with learners in schools); I will not intrude on the lesson and merely observe while recording, and I will record from the back to obscure learners' identities. Learners and teachers will also be wearing masks and sanitizing regularly.

Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in the study; however, the possible benefit to education is that I will be able to report to the Department of Education on how teachers use the prescribed method of teaching English in their classrooms and what some of the challenges faced by teachers and learners are.

Neither your child nor you will receive any type of payment for participating in this study. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not affect him/her in any way. Similarly, you can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

The study will take place during regular classroom activities with the prior approval of the school Principal and your child's teacher. However, if you do not want your child to participate, an alternative activity will be available. He/she will be given a class activity according to the Annual Teaching Programme.

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study, and you and your child will also be asked to sign the Permission Letter and Assent form, which accompanies this letter. If your child does not wish to participate in the study, he or she will not be included, and there will be no penalty. The information gathered from the study and your child's participation in the study will be stored securely on a password-locked computer in my locked office for five years after the study. Thereafter, records will be deleted.

If you have questions about this study, please ask me or my study supervisor, Dr Bernice Badal, Department of English studies, College of Education, University of South Africa. My contact number is 0783891118 and my e-mail is [dolphinankosi28@gmail.com](mailto:dolphinankosi28@gmail.com). The e-mail address of my supervisor is [badalb@unisa.ac.za](mailto:badalb@unisa.ac.za), and her contact number is, 012 429 2825

Permission for the study has already been given by the GDE/Principal/SGB and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

You are required to decide whether to allow your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study.

You may keep a copy of this letter.

**Name of child,**

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian's name (print)\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian's signature:\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely

Researcher's name (print)      D. M. Nkosi

Researcher's signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_

## Annexure I: LESSON OBSERVATION PROTOCOL



**Name of School:**

**Name of teacher:**

**Date:**

**Class:**

**Number of learners:**

**Lesson duration:**

**Type of lesson:**

1. Is there an alignment between teacher reports of practice and teaching practice?
2. Evidence of expressions of agency using the Communicative approach in practice?
3. Is there an alignment between CAPS mandates and teacher practice?
4. Evidence of goal orientated teaching?
5. Does the teacher reflect on practice?
6. Evidence of the use of literary texts to teach communicative competence?
7. Does the teacher's practice reveal stated teaching philosophy and methodology?

**Classroom resources**

<b>Chalkboard / whiteboard</b>	<b>Desk and a chair for each learner</b>	<b>Duster and chalk</b>	<b>Identifiable resources in the classroom, pictures, posters, books</b>	<b>Teacher resources</b>	<b>State of the classroom</b>	<b>Data Projector Teacher laptop computer</b>
<b>Comments</b>						

## Annexure J: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS AFTER LESSON OBSERVATION



### Questions that will arise after the lesson observation

#### Document analysis

##### 2.1. Teacher Preparation File

Teacher draws up their own lessons or uses those provided for literature lessons?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.1.2. Does the teacher use resources/literature books provided or substitute with their own work?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.3. Teacher methodology clearly evident in planning?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.4. Does the teacher demonstrate understanding of the CA in practice?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.5. Is there evidence of teacher understanding and agency in the use of the prescribed CA approach?

\_\_\_\_\_

## 2.2. Learner's work

### Analysis of students' documents

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Classwork notebooks</b>	<b>Learner portfolios</b>	<b>Teachers' supporting resources</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Alignment with CAPS in terms of the implementation of communicative approach to teach English FAL				
Teacher innovation/resource materials used				

Alignment with stated philosophy and practice				
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**Annexure K: WRITTEN CONSENT**



**WRITTEN ASSENT**

I have read this letter that asks me to be part of a study at my school. I have understood the information about the study, and I know what I will be asked to do.

I am willing to be in the study \_\_\_\_\_

Learner's name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Learner's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness's name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Witness's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_


(The witness is over 18 years old and present when signed)

Parent/guardian's name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name (print) D. M. Nkosi

Researcher's signature: 

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Annexure L: LESSON OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

**Name of School:**

**Name of teacher:**

**Date:**

**Class:**

**Number of learners:**

**Lesson duration:**

**Type of lesson:**

**Classroom resources**

1. Is there an alignment between teacher reports of practice and teaching practice?
2. Evidence of expressions of agency in practice?
3. Is there an alignment between CAPS mandates and teacher practice?
4. Evidence of goal orientated teaching?
5. Does the teacher reflect on practice?
6. Evidence of teacher accountability in practice?
7. Does the teacher's practice reveal stated teaching philosophy and methodology?



Chalkboard/ whiteboard	Desk and chair for each learner	Duster and chalk	Identifiable resources in classroom- pictures, posters, books	Teacher resources	State of classroom	Data Projector Teacher laptop/ computer
<b>Comments</b>						

**Annexure M: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS AFTER LESSON OBSERVATION**

**1. Questions that will arise after the lesson observation**

**2. Document analysis**

**2.1. Teacher Preparation File**

Teacher draws up own lessons or uses those provided.

Comment \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.1.2. Teacher uses resources provided or substitutes with their own work?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.1.3. Teacher methodology clearly evident in planning?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.1.4. Does the teacher comply with CAPS?

Comment \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.1.5. Are there evidence of alternate methods and approaches used to teach?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 2.2. Learner's work

### Analysis of students' documents

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Classwork notebooks</b>	<b>Learner portfolios</b>	<b>Teachers' supporting resources</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Alignment with CAPS in terms of stipulated activities				
Teacher innovation/resource materials used				
Alignment with stated philosophy and practice				

**Annexure N: CONTACT SUMMARY FORM**



**Contact type:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Purpose,** \_\_\_\_\_

**Person,** \_\_\_\_\_

**Site,** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date,** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Description of meeting.

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2. Issues and themes that emerged from the contact?

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3. Summary of purposes achieved or shortcomings.

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4 Any salient, illuminating or important information that came up in this contact?

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5. Concerns of researcher and participants that emerge from contact.

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## Annexure O: CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION OF THE SCHOOL



The observation checklist provided contextual data on the selected schools and assist in the compilation of the school's profile.

### 1. Type of building

1. Building	
2. Prefab	
3. Other	

### 2. School Building

1. Number of blocks	
2. Number of storeys	

### 3. Physical condition of school buildings and furniture

<b>Physical resources</b>	<b>Type of structure</b>	<b>Maintenance of school</b>	<b>Condition of facilities</b>
<b>1. Roof</b>			
<b>2. Windows</b>			
<b>3. Walls</b>			
<b>4. Doors</b>			

<b>5. Furniture</b>			
<b>6. Floors</b>			
<b>7. Bathrooms</b>			
<b>8. Ceilings</b>			
<b>9. Other</b>			

**4. Facilities for professional staff**

1. Male staff	
2. Female staff	
3. Visitors	

**5. Facilities for learners**

1.Males	
2. Females	
3. Other	

**6. Power supply available**

	<b>School</b>	<b>Classrooms</b>	<b>Fields</b>	<b>Other</b>
1. Electricity				
2. Generators				
3. None				

**7. Attempts made to beautify and enhance the environment**

1. Buildings	
2. Gardens	

## 8. Safety features

1. Physical structures	
2. Staff and learners	

## 9. Administration and management area

1. Offices for management	
2. Offices for administration	
3. Visitors area	



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**12. Reporting Structures**

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**13. Sporting Facilities/fixtures**

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**14. Extra lessons program**

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**15. Are all teachers (including language teachers) remunerated for offering extra classes as part of school improvement plan?**

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**16. Cultural activities**

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**17. School management (Bell times, teacher and learner arrival and departure, staff meetings, assemblies, disciplinary codes)**

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**18. Staff development e.g. attending workshops.**

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**19. Are teachers motivated to attend workshops by claiming transport money after attending?**

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**20. Visibility of monitoring**

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**21. Electronic resources**

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**22. Support staff**

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**23. Culture of school**

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**24. Visibility of collegiality and cooperation**

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**25. Other**

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**Annexure P: FOLLOW UP SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS (communicative language teaching)**

**Title of Research, LOCATING A SPACE FOR TEACHER AGENCY, THE USE OF LITERATURE TEXTS TO TEACH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH FAL CLASSROOMS.**

1. How can literature be used as a communicative language teaching tool in teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL)
2. Which specific methods would you use to encourage communicative language teaching between learners in teaching literature?
3. Which roles do both teachers and learners play in communicative language teaching methods and/or strategies?
4. What types of communicative language teaching activities do you normally employ, if any with your learners for communicative language teaching purposes and why?
5. How do you involve learners in communicative language teaching activities related to specific active learning skills or strategies in EFAL?