



Towards Humanistic Learning Literature in English: Students' Perspectives on Challenges and Opportunities in Mixed Classes at the University of Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

A learning environment that promotes interaction and learners' ownership of their learning is effective. Promoting this learning in literature in a second language benefits not only individual learners but also groups. While the 21st century research has been awash with new ideas on the significance of teaching literature, studies have found that literature in English is more of an opportunity than a challenge to foreign language learners. In this study, the researchers delve into learners' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of learning literature in English in mixed classes at the University of Rwanda, College of Education. Three issues have been focused namely students' background and their interest in literature in English; challenges and opportunities of learning literature in English in mixed classes; and students' perspectives on how the identified challenges can be addressed. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this case study was guided by humanist theory, which emphasizes the learner as central and the teacher as facilitator. With a complement of diverse secondary sources, data was collected through interviews with four participants and a questionnaire administered to a convenient sample of 50 participants selected from 240 students. Through descriptive and thematic analysis, findings revealed that teaching literature in mixed classes offers more opportunities to learners than challenges. Results also highlighted that through mixed-ability classes, students' English language skills improve, while it is generally little before they join higher education. The study recommends that literature should be used as a tool from primary to tertiary levels, especially in countries where English is pragmatically taught as a foreign language. Lecturers in the big literature class should apply humanistic principles so that they can create a supportive learning environment for diverse-ability students.

Keywords: Challenges, Higher Education, Humanistic Approach, Literature, Mixed Classes, Opportunities

I. INTRODUCTION

Students cannot generally be the same in terms of subject background, learning speed, learning ability, motivation (Kaur, 2010) or interest in what they are learning. Effective learning is fueled by those factors besides the instructor-related factors. The literature classroom is more demanding than that. Research has been awash with new ideas on the significance of teaching literature in English, and many studies have more often found literature an opportunity than a challenge for foreign language learners. Three main literary genres viz prose, poetry, and drama, are taken as a good pool for learners of the English language.

According to Chambers and Gregory (2006), teaching literature enhances students' ways of expressing ideas and feelings verbally, in writing, and creatively. Not least, Ihejirika (2014) found out that if the symbiotic relationship between literature and language is harnessed, learners' fluency is inevitably raised. While in the current digital-led century, language holds a vital role, especially English, which is taught as a foreign language to many higher learning institutions in sub-Saharan African countries, research (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020) posits contrarily that students are not engaged beyond vocabulary and grammatical structures to enable them to thrive in a constantly evolving globe. In a similar context, research inquire whether literature has any place in the 21st century and concluded that "if teachers and students cannot see its 'place' in teaching and learning for the 21st century, then we would see its demise into other subject areas or disciplines in the very near future."

From the above research findings, literature in English has become a pool from which language learners can enhance their language proficiency, as supported by Bazimaziki (2022) that through literature in English, students can learn how to do things with language and thrive socially, economically, and politically as well. As highlighted in

Tayib and Hassan (2020), literature promotes the four language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. It enhances students' vocabulary and grammar too. According to Siti et al. (2014), literature promotes literacy while enhancing learners' language proficiency. It is a tool used to train and assist students to cope with social and cultural problems in the real world.

All the above considered, it was found that mixed ability classrooms are found in nearly all schools and are a critical factor in teaching, whereby greater differences may affect classroom dynamics and classroom management (Nusrat, 2017; Al-Subaiei, 2017). In this vein, this study seeks to examine the situation of literature education in the Rwandan higher education context.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Currently, in some parts of the globe, if not many, education systems are being criticized for failing to create well equipped human resources to cope with current issues in the job market. For example, in Ngarukiye et al. (2022), it is claimed that people's perceptions of pedagogical innovations may not always and easily be translated into practice. The study recommends researchers to examine how teacher educators and student teachers creatively adapt elements of Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP) in a more culturally relevant and responsive fashion within the Rwandan context. Elsewhere, Nath et al. (2017) claim that nowadays' education is not good enough to build an employable youth force. They therefore propose a humane learning environment to create graduates who are able to cope with current issues locally, regionally, and even globally.

Along with this challenge, it is believed that monitoring students in a crowded classroom is difficult, particularly engaging them in activities (Fortes & Tchanchane, 2010). Hence, a humanistic approach to education in large and mixed-ability classes claims its place. Teaching literature in larger classes falls into this category. While literature in English is taught in higher education in Rwanda to enable graduates to enhance their communication skills in English besides equipping them with ethical values, critical thinking, and analytical skills (Bazimaziki, 2019), factors such as class size, students' backgrounds, and the teacher's role in engaging students play a significant part for each. A study conducted by Nawi and Norn (2023) highlights that poor learning environments, students' literary basic knowledge, and their language competency, coupled with their attitude and personality, obstruct effective teaching of literature.

Albeit studies conducted on teaching literature in EFL classes, little is discussed on learning literature in mixed classes in higher education in the context of Rwanda. To bridge this gap, this study seeks to explore students' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of learning literature in a class of students from different areas of study.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research were to examine how humanistic approach can fit for teaching literature in English in mixed classes. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Explain how humanistic approach is compatible with literature class;
- ii. Show how non-literary students are interested in Literature in English in higher education;
- iii. Identify students' challenges and opportunities of learning Literature in English in mixed classes;
- iv. Explore students' perspectives to address challenges of learning Literature in English in mixed classes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Humanistic Theory

Humanism has attracted the attention of many scholars, education gurus in particular. Discussion on it reveals its worth in education. Propounded by Carl Rogers, the humanistic theory emphasizes the learning environment as a critical factor for the learner to grow intellectually. The theory posits that within each individual lies an innate desire and motivation to learn in order to progress to a higher level of achievement and self-development. This implies, in other words, positive reinforcement, individualization, and meeting students' uniqueness (Rogers, 1986).

Copson and Grayling (2015) postulate that humanism begins with the human being and assert straight away that the active deployment of his or her senses is the way to gain knowledge. The authors side with the overarching simple meaning of humanism as "a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities." Hence, Nath et al. (2017) claim that a humanistic approach must not be given scant attention in education.

According to educational gurus (<https://www.bing.com/>), the humanist perspective is driven by principles such as student-centered learning, a positive environment, positive influences, holistic development, and students' autonomy. Similarly, Nath et al. (2017) argue that the current education system needs to rethink how to create graduates well equipped with the ability to thrive now and in the future. They therefore view the humanistic approach as an important step forward to overcome the perceived gaps in the education system in particular and in society in general. Humanists believe that in order for individual learners to grow, they need to take initiative and proceed towards their desired end. In so doing, they must overcome the false perceptions of the learning environment. Rogers (1986) stresses the crucial role of a supportive learning environment. He advocates that a growing individual is aware of the progress of ongoing internal change and an acceptance of oneself. He further emphasized that individuals will inevitably experience positive development if they are exposed to supportive environmental conditions.

Johnson (2014) equates humanistic education to the commonly known holistic education. The author asserts that it is an education that enhances academic learning, intellectual growth, the development of basic skills, personal growth, and attention to students' affective dimensions such as self-concept, values, and emotions. Humanistic learning theory is a reaction to a system of inhumane learning in which:

Students are often (a) asked to be passive learners; (b) manipulated by external rewards, competition, and the fear of failure; (c) required to learn in ways that are not natural for them; (d) expected to learn things that have no relevance or connection to their lives; (e) treated simply as a brain and spinal cord without emotions, intuition, creativity, or spiritual dimensions; and (f) pressured to subscribe to traditional views and values of society, ways of knowing, and physical reality.

Recent studies by Aung (2020) and Nath et al. (2017) unravel the humanistic approach to education and conclude that it is primarily a learner-centered education involving teachers not as disseminators but facilitators of knowledge. The authors add that such pedagogy favors active participation and the discovery method to instill in learners self-esteem, taking responsibility for their education, and owning their learning. Humanism places students at the center of the learning process and recognizes their diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities. In such contexts, teachers tailor learning styles and preferences. According to Nath et al. (2017), humanistic education aims to provide a ground for personal development so that learning will continue throughout life in a self-directed manner. It will help learners attain self-actualization, which is the prime focus of education.

Often times, the aim of humanist pedagogy is consistent with the reasons why people learn literature—only that through it, learners identify themselves with the characters and plots they are taught. As it embodies the values of imagination, it helps learners reflect on human experience, whom they are, and the world they live in (<https://articles.outlier.org>). Drawing on the above literature, we can simply say that humanism is, as said in Edwards (2008), a philosophy of thought that emphasizes human means to reason scientifically in pursuit of knowledge. It is readily applied to diverse domains, without exception to literature education.

2.2 Empirical Review

This review highlights some of the studies conducted on mixed-ability classrooms. Both the merits and demerits are considered in a bid to draw from each of the two pools. Generally, a mixed-ability classroom denotes a classroom of students with diverse subject background knowledge, different interest or motivation in it due to diverse reasons at the individual level, distant proficiency in the medium of instruction (MoI), or the like. In Tomlinson (2001), mixed-ability classrooms are referred to as differentiated classrooms where students' commonalities must be acknowledged and built upon in teaching and learning.

Handling such a diversified classroom in terms of learners' abilities is not an easy task. According to Sowton (2021), one of the demerits of a mixed-ability classroom is that stronger students may feel bored and uninterested, while the weaker may get lost. To meet both individual advanced and average learners' needs, the teacher should proactively vary strategies and instructional materials (Ajmal et al., 2024; Tomlinson, 2001). Nusrat (2017) discusses a mixed-ability classroom and finds that it is not easy to handle. He posits that teachers often get challenged and sometimes fail to see the advantages a mixed-ability classroom has to offer. Actually, a mixed-ability classroom promotes peer-to-peer learning. Peers are expected to play four main roles, such as a co-learner, an encourager, an assessor, a supporter, and the students' expectations for each role (Thomas et al., 2011). These roles imply collaborative learning, which engages learners. Invariably, Loes (2022) found that collaborative learning engages students to turn to one another after important concepts are presented in class and successfully share and compare their comprehension of the material. The author terms it "learning cells," whereby learners' partner with one another to exchange the outputs from their readings.

In the context of education, effective interaction between teachers and students is crucial for successful learning outcomes. Classroom interaction includes teacher talk, student talk, and moments of silence, each playing a

unique role in the learning process (Nurhidayatullah et al., 2023). In a literature-mixed class, it is important that the facilitators keep a positive atmosphere. This agrees with one of the principles of humanistic pedagogy, namely supporting the learning environment. In this line, Bhandari (2020) recommends that teachers of mixed-ability classes create a safe atmosphere by supporting and encouraging learners so that none can get lost in a diversity of students' abilities and interests. Developing cooperation and collaboration among learners in such a class is what matters, despite the challenges of the class size. More importantly, Nath et al. (2017) argue that storytelling, discussion, teaching, and directed research are some of the methods through which education can be imparted and learners may benefit. In a literature classroom, the identified methods are crucial, especially when the class size is rather large. By cooperating and collaborating in the literature classroom, students enhance the English language, social development, and interest in the learning of English literature (Faustino & Muneja, 2023). That being, little is discussed about the application of a humanist approach to teaching literature. Hence, the present study sought to look into it with much interest in related challenges and opportunities in mixed-ability classrooms in higher education.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design and Participants

This study employed a convergent mixed-method approach with a descriptive design, utilizing questionnaire and interview as instruments. The participants were undergraduate students from the University of Rwanda-College of Education, who had already completed literature courses in their first year within the Department of Humanities and Languages Education. They belonged to five different language sections and had diverse backgrounds in literature. From 240 students who had studied literature in a mixed classroom, a convenience sample of 50 participants was selected based on their readiness and accessibility. They were willing to participate in the study and were easily accessible during data collection, through a questionnaire involving a 4-point scale: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, SD = Strongly Disagree, and D = Disagree. In contrast to the interviews conducted with four participants, the questionnaire had a 92% response rate, as some students did not return it.

3.2 Instruments

The study used a questionnaire and interview with participant learners. The questionnaire comprises both closed and open questions. All the questionnaire questions were designed to explore students' perceptions about the challenges and opportunities of learning literature in mixed classes, as they had already covered that course before they responded to those questions. Closed questions sought to answer the first two research questions about (1) the interest in literature subjects and (2) the challenges faced. The open-ended questions were used to gain in-depth data about what should be done to teach literature effectively in mixed classes. The results were therefore transcribed and then discussed based on their themes.

3.3 Interview

Further, interviews were conducted with four students. Student one was labeled NJKEE, the second was CHFED, the third was NZFED, and the fourth was CHSNE. Only two questions were the focus of this interview. The first question was concerned with participants' background knowledge and their interest in literature in English. The second question was about the challenges and opportunities and how they grab or cope with them. The information gathered from interviewees was presented verbatim and then analyzed qualitatively based on the aim of the study.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Presentation of Findings

4.1.1 Quantitative Results

Table 1

Respondents' Demographic Information

Respondents' gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
M	30	65.2	65.2
F	16	34.8	100
Respondents' Age			
Between 20-25	17	37	37
Between 26- 30	12	26.1	63
Between 31-35	16	34.8	97.8
Above 35	1	2.2	100
Total	46	100	100
Respondents' Areas of Study			
FED	18	39.1	39.1
SNE	19	41.3	80.4
FEE	6	13	93.5
SEE	1	2.2	95.7
KEE	2	4.3	100
Total	46	100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the participants involved in the current study. Indeed, the number of male participants (65.2%) outweighs the female (34.8%). The majority of them are aged 20–35 (97.8%). Only one of them (2.2%) is above 35, meaning they are old enough to adapt themselves to any learning environment as they are still in the youth category.

Participants areas of study are identified as Foundation of Education (FED) with 39.1%, 41.3% from Special Need English (SNE), 13% from French-English with Education, 4.3% from Kinyarwanda-English with Education (KEE), and 2.2% from Swahili-English with Education.

Table 2

Students' skills and their Interest in Literature in English

STATEMENTS	STUDENTS' VIEWS (N= 46)							
	SA		A		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Literature in English interested me	31	67.4	15	32.6	0	0	0	0
I was not interested in literature because it is not my core subject	0	0	1	2.2	16	34.8	29	63
I did not have any basic knowledge in literature before I joined University	5	10.9	8	17.4	12	26.1	20	43.5
I had learnt literature in English before I joined University	14	30.4	13	28.3	9	19.6	10	21.7

Source: Primary data

The second question concerned participants' interest and their basic skills in literature in English. Table 2 shows that all of them are interested in literature in English since 67.4% strongly agree and 32.6% agree with the statement. Similarly, 69.6% reveal that they had basic knowledge of literature before they joined university, although 41.3% did not learn it before they started university studies.

The third question sought to identify opportunities and challenges students face in literature in the English classroom with mixed-ability learners. Table 3 presents it as follows:



Table 3

Opportunities and Challenges in a Literature in English Classroom with Mixed Combinations

STATEMENTS	STUDENTS' VIEWS (N= 46)							
	SA		A		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Lack of basic literature skills was a challenge for me to learn literature in English	10	21.7	17	37.0	13	28.3	6	13.0
Class size was a challenge for me to learn well literature in English	6	13.0	16	34.8	16	34.8	8	17.4
Big class size was an opportunity for me to learn literature effectively	14	30.4	20	43.5	8	17.4	4	8.7
I liked to learn literature in English in mixed classes	10	21.7	11	23.9	16	34.8	12	26.1
Teaching strategies used were a barrier for me to learn effectively	4	8.7	15	32.6	9	19.6	18	39.1
It was easy for me to learn literature with different combinations	8	17.4	13	28.3	11	23.9	14	30.4
I feared to express myself in Literature in English bigger class	4	8.7	10	21.7	21	45.7	11	23.9
It was hard for me to learn literature because of my little English	4	8.7	14	30.4	11	23.9	17	37.0
My little interest in literature affected my learning in mixed classes	3	6.5	12	26.1	14	30.4	17	37.0
Learning literature in English with different combinations has been an advantage for me to enhance my language skills	27	58.7	12	26.1	4	8.7	3	6.5

Source: Primary data

Mixed classes are more often than not an opportunity than a challenge. In fact, although the majority (58.7%) posit that basic literacy skills affected their learning of literature in English, they mainly (73.9%) found the large class size to be an opportunity rather than a challenge. More importantly, 52.2% reveal that the strategies used in mixed classes are effective, despite that 54.3% found it difficult to learn with students from different combinations. While the majority of students (69.6%) are confident enough to express themselves before a larger class, some others (60.9%) do not like learning in larger classes. However, most participants (84.8%) affirm that such a learning environment has helped them to enhance their little English. Findings in this context corroborate previous studies which conclude that mixed classes are an environment for peer learning whereby co-learners are interdependent and build upon one another’s ideas (McLaren, 2014) to explore, support, encourage, and assess among themselves (Thomas et al., 2011). It is an engaging learning environment through teacher-student and student-student interaction. Definitely, such interdependence among themselves will lead to self-motivation and build self-confidence, especially for the weaker or least interested in the subject.

4.1.2 Qualitative Results

Data Generated from Interview

This section presents the data collected from interview with four students. All the four respondents were labeled ethically for privacy reasons. Only two questions were the foci in this interview. The first question was concerned with participants’ interest and background knowledge in literature in English. The second question was about the challenges and opportunities and how they grab or cope with them. On the first question about students’ interest in literature in English, respondents revealed the following:

NJKEE: “I like literature because it is a good subject. I did not learn it before I joined University of Rwanda. I was recruited by REB (Rwanda Basic Education Board) in collaboration with the HEC (Higher Education Council). Before I came here, I was a teacher at [name of the school] primary school. Literature is good and I like it.”

CHFED: “Literature is a good lesson and I like it so much because we study good things that we don’t know. I did not study it at secondary because I am a primary teacher. I have a scholarship of REB. Now it is good to study literature. It is very important.”

NZ FED: “For me, I like literature lesson well. It is good because I know much vocabulary. I learn to speak and I discuss with others. But it is hard because I did not see it in secondary. We come here after recruitment by REB and Higher Education Council. Literature is really interesting.”

CHSNE: “Literature is not a core subject in my combination but I like it very much. The methodology used is good for me. We learn many interesting things. Many are new to me. I learned it at secondary but it was little. But as you can see here, we are dealing with good books which teach us how to live. It teaches past events which teach us good values and moral lessons. So I am interested in it as other lessons.”

Regarding the second question about challenges faced when they are learning literature in English, participants provided the following information:

NZFED: “The big challenge we have is that we are many in the class. But we don’t have the same level of English and knowledge of literature. We learn with students who followed CBC [Competence Based Curriculum] but we did not study in CBC, it is a problem to learn well. But after class our colleagues help us. They help us to understand when we discuss together.”

CHSNE: “The main challenge I face is to learn in a big class. Of course there are some advantages. We learn from those who followed CBC. They are good at literature. They are not older like us. But in group discussion they help us and slowly slowly we can understand the content.”

CHFED: “The difficulties in Literature subject are not many but we study it in a big class. We are many in class. We share class with different colleagues from other sections. There are students who know it well and they tell us many interesting things that are new to us as they know good books because they learned it well at secondary. So we are many in class but students can work together in that lesson.”

NJKEE: “Of course there are many challenges. The first one is difficulties in English. I did not study in English. We studied secondary in French. But I am trying slowly. Another challenge is [...] we are many in literature lesson. And some students know literature and English very well. They can help us. It is good for collaboration. So there are advantages. There is also a challenge of many works in a short time. But I know much vocabulary and I try to speak and discuss with others.”

From the above information as revealed by participants, learning literature in English in mixed ability classroom has more advantages than challenges. It is found that challenges are perceived at individual level and are rooted in the learners’ educational background, the education system in which they were trained and medium of instruction. Mostly, students recruited from primary education have more difficulties than others. They did not learn literature in English at secondary and are therefore affected when presented in a situation where they could build on what they already learnt. Most of interviewees, however, mention that the big class size is a problem.

4.1.3 How the Identified Challenges can be Addressed

The fourth question was concerned with remedies to the identified challenges. The following information was generated from three open questionnaire questions that were answered by 92% of participants. The questions intended to know how the identified challenges should be mitigated for effective teaching of literature in English.

When asked about what should be done to effectively learn literature in English, participants revealed the role that should be played by the three parties involved directly in learning and teaching such as students, teachers, and the institution. Three themes emerged from participants’ suggestions for mixed-literature classrooms to be more effective. They are presented as follows:

Students’ Role

Participants suggested that there should be peer-to-peer learning, coaching and mentorship, and collaborative learning. One said, “Students should work together in groups to share ideas. They should do their work collaboratively, working together with others and asking for help when it is necessary.” Another said, “We should discuss in mixed groups from different classes the assigned literary works and learn from one another,” Further, “Students should identify their strengths and challenges in the literature subject and know how to handle them.” Another suggested remedy is to enhance reading and research. As one respondent suggested, reading and doing research is another remedy as they said, “we should read more books and do more research to understand literature more and improve our language skills through reading”. Regular attendance to literature clubs will enhance the culture of debate and learning from one another. Mostly, they revealed that they should embrace mixed-ability classes whenever planned. One participant put it this way: “We should welcome ourselves to the mixed classes and collaborate with one another.”

Lecturers’ Role

Participants view that the role of the instructor is a complement to what they (students) are expected to do to own their learning. It was suggested that teachers should apply new methodologies for teaching literature. They said, “Lecturers must use a different methodologies as literature in English enhances performance in other subjects.” This implies that microlearning techniques are a preference. Participants reported that facilitators should apply classroom interaction strategies in a heterogeneous class. Gustiani (2019) supports this idea. He noted that “getting students to work collaboratively and cooperatively maintains engagement with the language content even when students cannot directly interact with every individual by themselves. This way, heterogeneous classes can be an opportunity for

learners to “develop their literary skills based on their literary background knowledge” for each. According to Ismalinda et al. (2023), the facilitator needs to apply questioning techniques that will engage learners and keep them in an interactive environment. Shanmugavelu (2020) and Nuryanti and Fauzi (2024) concur with this note, asserting that proper questioning techniques enhance learners’ motivation while promoting positive, critical, and creative thinking among students and improving the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Participants suggested that lecturers should “assign mixed group works to enhance students’ coaching among themselves. This means to provide well-organized works to keep students busy and “make groups based on the mixed abilities of learners from different combinations” or “make mixed groups from different combinations. Al-Subaiei (2017) noted that “assigning tasks of various levels engages students in the learning process and at personal levels, hence ensuring efficiency and success in the teaching of mixed-ability classes. Varying groups will enhance interdependence and collaboration too. Tomlinson (2001) agrees with it that some students benefit from independent work, while others usually fare best in pairs or triads. Of course, the author opines that “the more the instructor uses many different group configurations over time, the better students experience a diversity of working groups and arrangements.”.

Moreso, respondents suggested that teachers in mixed classrooms should identify students’ weaknesses and strengths, and take necessary action, as one said, “ they should explain more as some of us did not learn literature at secondary.” Added to this, similarly, one revealed that lecturers’ role should be “to consider students’ background or prior knowledge in literature,” while another said that they (facilitators) should “focus on individual differences based on their different backgrounds in literature in English.” This finding is consistent with Felder and Brent’s (2005) finding that the more thoroughly instructors understand the differences, the better chance they have of meeting the diverse learning needs of all of their students. Indeed, the instructor is responsible for knowing his or her students so that they can plan accordingly. Identifying the strong and weak sides of learners is an important for the facilitator to know what to plan for effectiveness. University students without literature background are greatly affected. Going at the same pace as their peers is difficult. However, they will therefore benefit from the stronger. In a similar learning environment, Al-Subaie (2017) suggests the use of different methods in a bid to experiment with different strategies and settle on the most effective ones while focusing on the positive aspects of the classes.

Further, participants revealed that reading can be a remedy for learners to be successful in literature subjects taught in heterogeneous classrooms. They need to be encouraged to read a lot, as they said, “The lecturer should encourage students to read enough and do research, engage learners, especially the weaker than others, and provide recurrent guidance for effective literature club activities.” Through reading, learners will reflect on what they read, think critically, and write about what they have read. By doing this, they will be applying the humanism principle of connecting with others with similar or different beliefs or views. In this vein, according to Kareva (2024), reading, be it by printed copies or e-text, positively influences learning, mainly language skills enhancement. As literature is taught not only to equip learners with literary analysis skills but also language skills, reading is very essential (Bazimaziki, 2019) especially for literature students in higher education.

The Role of the Institution

Participants reported that the institution could provide resources such as ICT gadgets and the internet to enable students access online resources. As they said, “The university should provide ICT tools and the internet to help learners in research” and “provide enough materials. Many are available online, but the internet is still a problem, and others require payments to access them.” Reading materials, especially book hard copies, were also suggested, among other things. Respondents put it that, “The university should avail reading literary materials for all students; avail more novels or story books; and provide new and adequate literature books” and “allocate enough time for literature subjects.” They add that the institution should organize competitions in the literature subject and award the best performers to encourage students to take pride in their language proficiency and boost the culture of reading. They said, “The institution must set competitions and award students who become the best in literature skills, give students opportunities to compete in writing stories and poems competitions, and give rewards. Not least, participants suggested regular training for teachers on Competency-Based teaching of literature in English, promoting the culture of reading through reading campaigns at the institution level, and organizing weekly debates to enhance speaking skills among students.

Some other suggested remedies include supporting literature clubs with the needed facilities and resources and increasing the number of facilitators specializing in literature subjects. “The institution should increase the number of well-equipped lecturers of literature.” In the same light, respondents recommend the institution to reduce the number of students in literature classrooms. They suggested that the institution “should make sure that classes have an

appropriate number of students because sometimes classes are too big." While a manageable class size allows for effective teaching, it is often hard for bigger classes, especially in literature subjects.

Considering the above, it is important to state that effective teaching and learning in heterogeneous classroom depends largely on the responsibility of each part. It is an environment compared to a big family holding together, each keeping in mind what they are responsible for. Tomlinson (2001) contends that in a differentiated classroom, just as in a large family, everyone has to take extra responsibility for both their own well-being and the well-being of others. So, the teacher would lead the students to help them develop routines for the classroom, make major contributions toward solving problems, help one another, and keep track of their assigned tasks for each. The institution, taken in that context as head of the family, is responsible for providing the necessary facilities to create a humane learning environment, as suggested by humanist pedagogy.

4.2 Discussions

In higher education, the need to improve the quality of education is driven by the desire for better learning outcomes and educational experiences for all learners (Ngarukiye et al., 2022). Similarly, what we share in common makes us human, and how we differ makes us individuals (Tomlinson, 2001). In this context, the three questions that guided this study sought to explore students' background and interest in literature in English, the challenges and opportunities of learning literature in English in mixed classes, and students' perspectives on addressing related challenges.

Regarding the first question, it was found that students are very interested in the literature subject. Their interest is grounded in the relevance of that subject as a tool through which learners improve not only reflective and purposeful learning but also are exposed to cultural awareness and critical thinking (Hamid & Aziz, 2020) in cases where suitable literary text illustrates the characters, plots, themes, or the like. This interest is also defined based on the principles of humanistic learning, whereby students must be central and encouraged to take control over their learning, focusing on a specific subject area of interest for a reasonable amount of time that they choose.

For the second question, findings reveal a difference from some other research. While studies confirm that the advantages associated with teaching in mixed-ability classes are often overshadowed by the challenges (Al-Subaiei, 2017, Nusrat, 2017, Tereshchenko et al., 2018, Werner, 2018; Johnston et al., 2022), results in the present study generally reveal few learners bemoaned against teaching literature in mixed-ability classes. Rather, they argued that mixed classes offer more opportunities than challenges. Learning from one another and interacting and collaborating with one another is a leading advantage. Collaborative learning in literature subjects gives learners room for exchanging, coaching, and mentoring among themselves. These findings align with Roselli's (2016) finding that collaborative learning enhances self-learning with others. Learning in this way is advantageous in that it promotes motivation and commitment at both individual and group levels. Consistently, class interactions in such a learning environment enable the students to be more creative and innovative as they learn from each other's unique abilities, resulting in more active and participatory learning (Al-Subaiei, 2017; Nurhidayatullah et al., 2023). This finding agrees with recent research (Quyen et al., 2023) that mixed classes allow comfortable learning based on peer-to-peer sharing, assistance, mutual encouragement, and relevant comments.

Connectedly, the third question sought to look into what should be done to cope with the identified challenges. Findings insinuate that students need to know where they have gaps and address them accordingly. Learning from others who are equipped with different literary background skills will make them do self-evaluation and decide accordingly. Actually, this is consistent with humanistic learners taking ownership of their learning. By identifying their strengths and weaknesses, they make choices and decide what to do so as not to lag behind. Among the many suggested ways of doing it, doing research takes the lead. Because a '*Reading nation is an informed one*', they need to "read more books and do research" to understand the subject and improve their English language skills. The more this takes place, the more likely students will be confident and successful enough to share with their peers from a different class. Consequently, it is more of a benefit than a challenge since learners develop both intra- and interpersonal confidence by reexamining their beliefs and perspectives in the context of the views of other group members (Loes, 2022).

While literature is taught in English, which is a foreign language for participants in this study, a related challenge is inevitable as students are not equipped equally in the language used as a medium of instruction (MOI). In fact, because learning is greatly affected by what learners bring to the class (Nusrat, 2017), lack of skills in the English language does not generally allow some students in mixed classes to learn effectively, in literature in particular. As a remedy, students should be exposed to diverse occasions where they practice English so that they are familiar with that medium. Discussion occasions such as clubs of the English language, writing and reading competitions, debates, and public talks among students are a good remedy. This finding is supported by Al-Subaiei (2017), who posits that

mixed classes constitute an interesting learning environment composed of a rich pool of diverse skills, dispositions, and perspectives. Considering the principles of humanistic learning, the above suggestions agree with learner-centeredness.

Teaching and learning are important components in educational contexts. They are reciprocal and multi-dimensional processes, both affecting each other, whereby teachers and students learn from one another as they build up an environment of learning in a class (Sulidtio et al., 2023). Therefore, the role of the facilitators is another critical factor in a mixed classroom. They are required to motivate and engage students by promoting interactions between them and the learners while bridging the gaps among them. Hofkens et al. (2023) support the idea that, in an educational context, instructional interactions and classroom organization are notable factors that lead to significant and beneficial impacts on students' learning and development. The more interactions, the more effective learning will be, especially in literature, which basically involves discussions, comments, and analyses of literary elements and how they interweave to make meaning.

Findings in this study tally with previous studies (Quyen et al., 2023) punctuating that in mixed ability classes peers can play different roles, such as a co-learner who acts as a supporter, an encourager, and an assessor. Through mutual support, encouragement, and assessment among heterogeneous classroom students, literature learning outcomes cannot fail to be achieved. Be that as it may, when students of different ability levels are exposed to a setting that allows interaction among them, they develop their content knowledge as a result of cognitive conflict (Loes, 2022).

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study has made a considerable contribution to the existing literature on mixed-ability classrooms. Driven by three main research questions related to students' basic skills and interest in literature subjects, challenges and opportunities, and how they can be addressed, the study revealed that students take much interest in learning literature in English. Learning literature in a mixed-ability class offers learners more opportunities than challenges. The identified opportunities in that context include the enhancement of English language skills, which are generally low before they join university. It is also beneficial for students to learn from their peers, as the weaker draw from interactions with the stronger to fill their gaps. In an intellectual diversity literature class, the unveiled related challenges are mainly lack of basic skills in literature and learning difficulties at the individual level. On the whole, the study's aim was inherently achieved as it shed light on the teaching and learning literature in higher education in mixed classes. Findings contribute significantly to the understanding of the context of teaching and learning literature in a learning environment with different ability students.

5.2 Recommendations

In light of these study findings, teachers of literature subjects should therefore apply a variety of engaging strategies or methods to grab the identified opportunities and minimize the related difficulties accordingly. Lecturers in the big literature class should apply humanistic principles so that they can create a supportive learning environment for diverse ability students. Only those students in the humane environment will definitely be transformed into vanguards who will create a conducive environment for living. Finally, as mixed ability classes concern not only literature but also other subjects, further studies should look into related topics to bridge the gaps or complement the findings in the current study. Notwithstanding findings in this study, other courses should be involved in exploring pragmatism in a mixed-ability classroom with a larger population. Research should also carry out a comparative study on similar topics with different programs or thoroughly gauge private and public higher learning institutions in the same setting.

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