

# THE ONLINE STUDY OF LITERATURE IN ISRAELI TEACHER-EDUCATION COLLEGES: FRAMEWORK AND GUIDELINES

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## Abstract

Studying literature online has become common in teacher-education colleges since the increase of online learning in the higher education arena. The aim of this study was to identify the primary components of online literature lessons as perceived by preservice teachers (PSTs). Using a qualitative, multiple case study approach, data from a heterogeneous population of 90 PSTs attending three Israeli teacher-education colleges were retrieved, using discussions, questionnaires, and interviews. Thematic-cognitive data analysis yielded three major themes related to technological aspects, teachers' knowledge, and PSTs' subjective experiences of an online literature lesson. Based on these findings, a theoretical model was constructed for developing guidelines for teaching literature online. Given that there is no existing framework for conducting literature lessons online, this study contributes to the literature by extending the resources available for understanding and researching pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for teaching literature.

Keywords: e-learning literature, teacher-education, preservice teachers, learning and teaching, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Many studies focusing on distance learning, which has become more relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, have emphasized cognitive, social, and emotional aspects pertaining to the learner (Lyman-Hager, 2020, Russel, 2020; Yu, 2020). While most studies that deal with learning literature online have focused on the teacher's perspective (Lancashire, 2020, Beach et al., 2016; Uscinski, 2011) and have mostly dealt with asynchronous lessons (Manzollilo, 2016), the current study aims to examine this experience from the PSTs' perspective and from a holistic perspective, encompassing both synchronic and asynchronous online lessons.

The study of literature has its own characteristics, as its focus on texts differs from that used in other disciplines *in the humanities*. This is because studying literature has its own conventions: "These conventions include modes of reading, interpretive and critical tools, ways of combining; all belonging to a disciplinary world different in its goals, methods, and tools from other textual worlds like history and social sciences" (Poyas, 1999). Poyas' argument seems to echo the assumption of Mancilla and Gardner (1997), which likewise emphasizes that historical texts differ from literary ones due to the conventions, tools, and methods that build the cohesion of the literary world, which are distinct from the real world. The reader must understand the role of language in the creation of literary worlds, decipher the focus in the work that emerges from the point of view of the author and deal with the ambiguous nature of the literary text, in the effort to comprehend the broader and more complete meaning of the text.

These aspects of literature studies involve interactions that occur in a face-to-face learning context (Lotan & Miller, 2016); mainly through discussions, which are the core of the literature-learning process. However, the transition to online learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has created processes of disruptive innovation (Christensen et al., 2015) that deserve our attention. The online learning of literature during the pandemic emphasized the need to address the pertinent pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), as described in the theoretical background.

### 1.1 *Theoretical framework*

#### 1.1.1 *Aesthetic reading*

According to Rosenblatt (1985), the reading of literature is an aesthetic transaction that takes place between the reader and the text, which involves the reader's evocation of personal experiences and internal processes, by "...adopting an aesthetic

stance," (p. 102) i.e., focusing on the aesthetic aspects of the text. By contrast, non-literary texts are considered to involve efferent transactions between the reader and the text, in which the text serves to convey information. Moreover, interpretation of the literary text involves appropriation, in the sense of understanding the text from within the reader's world and in a manner that the meaning attributed to the text becomes an inseparable part of the reader's self (Ricoeur, 1980). However, the reading of literature is not always a completely voluntary act, but rather it is one of the required disciplines studied in schools and in academic institutions. Through the study of literature, the learner encounters a unique textual world with its disciplinary conventions, which differ from those of texts found in other disciplines, such as history and in the field of social sciences (Mancilla & Gardner, 1997; Poyas, 1999).

Given that the focus of this study is on PSTs who will become literature teachers and will teach according to the curriculum, it is important to note that the Israeli curriculum for teaching literature at the elementary-school level seeks to select works that will constitute a meaningful experience for the reader. The reading of literature at school was specifically meant to provide aesthetic experiences that would allow students to gain a better understanding of themselves and of the other, develop their imagination and intellect, as well as a love of reading, literary awareness, and the ability to assess literary works (Israel Ministry of Education, 2003, Language Arts, 56).

In the Israeli curriculum, students' encounters with texts also include the aspect of language skills (Israel Ministry of Education, 2003), as is the case in Sweden, the US, Australia, and other countries (Flood et al., 2003; Liberg et al., 2012). However, the focus of the literature curriculum for middle and high school levels is on the literary encounter (Israel Ministry of Education, 2000). Among academic institutions and particularly teacher-education colleges, the teaching of literature is perceived as continuing the aesthetic approach in the vein of reader-response theory, with an emphasis on the notion of a dialogue among the students involved in the reading process (Poyas & Elkad-Lehman, 2016).

### *1.1.2 Social constructivist approaches to studying literature in the classroom*

To shed light on the issue of studying literature online, we first present the reader-response approach, which is the common approach in literature studies in Israel. Throughout the world, the various approaches used in the teaching of literature are rooted in educational and literary theories (Sumara, 2002). Thus, for example, the constructivist approaches to teaching and interpreting literature developed simultaneously with reader-response theories (Poyas, 2006; Poyas & Elkad-Lehman, 2016). In the last three decades, the reader-response approach has received even greater emphasis, given the reinforcement of constructivist theories of knowledge construction, knowledge relativity, and the creation of knowledge (Solomon, 2000). This trend is manifested also in other branches of the school curricula in Israel (De-Malach, 2008; Elkad-Lehman, 2001; Poyas, 2006; Poyas & Shalom, 2002).

The literary dialogue or discourse has several goals (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2007). In a nonmutual dialogue, the teacher seeks to examine the students' knowledge or present them with a literary interpretation that they would be unable to attain on their own (Scholes, 1985). By contrast, the collaborative dialogue deconstructs the hierarchy between teacher and students, allowing room for both to experience a freedom of consciousness. In the latter type of dialogue, there is no single accepted interpretation of the work (Chinn et al., 2001); rather, the interpretation is constructed anew with each reading and emerges from the unique dialogue through which it is revealed. The literary analysis becomes a voyage of self-and group discovery, in which the teacher is not in possession of the necessary knowledge, but serves as a guide and mediator (Schrijvers et al., 2019). This is also the approach presented in the Israeli literature curriculum: "The social interaction with peers and the mediation of the teacher contribute to the construction of a personal textual world for each reader" (Israel Ministry of Education, 2003, Language Arts: 56).

Finally, combining the goals of aesthetic reading along with the social constructivist approaches within the context of an online environment, which entails an additional set of technopedagogical demands (Rapanta et al., 2020), adds another level to this already complex task. Within the framework of collaborative dialogue, learners must develop a personal interpretation and present it to their peers (Levine, 2019), yet at the same time, they must rethink their interpretation in light of the interpretations presented by each of their peers (Renshaw, 2004). In this sense, the process of learning literature through a collaborative dialogue is productive, as it enhances learners' emotional and intellectual involvement (Murphy et al., 2009; van Peer et al., 2007). At the same time, *teaching* literature through collaborative dialogue requires PSTs to develop a particularly high level of discipline-specific pedagogical knowledge.

### 1.1.3 *Literary knowledge: from the literary text to curriculum development for the online classroom*

The various approaches to the teaching of literature raise the question of the pedagogical knowledge required of literature teachers. Shulman (1986) presented a classification of teachers' knowledge, comprising content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and PCK. Shulman claimed that PCK is pivotal to the teaching practice. Since this concept was introduced, it has been adopted by various researchers in theoretical and empirical studies (Evans et al., 2015; Rapanta et al., 2020). As Evans et al. (2015) argued, explicit presentation of PCK, PK, and CK enhances teachers' professional knowledge. Indeed, through ongoing research, Shulman's distinction between CK and pedagogical knowledge has been refined both in terms of its relation to specific disciplines (Ball et al., 2008) and in response to the global development of technologies (McMaster et al., 2019). More specifically, accelerated technological development has led to the establishment of a new concept, namely, technological PCK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), which is applicable to both routine and crisis

situations (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). In the field of literature, studies devoted to PCK-related questions have identified obstacles in the teaching of literature using traditional methods (Mills, 2011), as well as opportunities to advance the teaching of literature in the spirit of current trends, such as social-emotional learning (Shechtman & Abu Yaman, 2012).

In contrast to CK and PCK, curricular knowledge, particularly that dedicated to the study of literature curricula, is a field that is still developing. While the professional literature has presented models for constructing curricula (Hansen et al., 2019; Levin & Baratz, 2019), these have yet to consider the framework of the online literature lesson. Furthermore, the pedagogical potential that is inherent to the digital environment has rarely been studied in the context of literature teaching (Lotan & Miller, 2016). This is an issue that encompasses the notions of CK, PK, and PCK, and is relevant today, more than ever. In this manner, the current empirical investigation of literature PSTs' input regarding their experience of online teaching and learning is expected to extend the framework of PCK into the field of literature teaching.

#### 1.1.4 *E-learning literature*

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an influx of theoretical studies focused on online learning, which is addressed in this section in the context of e-learning literature. The sudden shift to constant online learning, necessitated by the rapid spread of the 2020 pandemic, emphasized the need to investigate online teaching and learning (Martin et al., 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The current study was conducted in Israel, which is considered one of the leading countries in the world in terms of Internet accessibility (Schejter & Lee, 2007). Given the transition to constant online learning in the academic years of 2021–2022, the Israeli government conducted a survey to compare students' attitudes regarding online learning during the pandemic with their prepandemic attitudes regarding regular, face-to-face learning. The findings of this survey were as follows: 41.7% reported a decline in their motivation to study as a result of the transition to online learning, and 10% were considering discontinuing their academic studies because of this transition to online learning. The percent of responders who strongly agreed with the statement that the quality of discussions conducted in online lessons was diminished relative to face-to-face teaching (44.2%) was lower than the percentage of responders who strongly disagreed (or agreed to a limited extent) with this statement (55.8%). As regards the issue of social interaction with other students, 77.7% reported a lower level of social interaction with peers in the online environment compared to that experienced during routine classroom learning, and 45.2% reported a decline in active participation in the online classroom compared to their participation in face-to-face lessons. Finally, more than half of the participants (57%) reported a decline in their ability to concentrate in online lessons compared to their concentration abilities in face-to-face learning (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

It should be noted that Israeli society is characterized by a digital divide, between those who have access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and are technologically literate and those who lack such access and knowledge (Barak & Josifun, 2021; Barzilai-Nahon, 2006, Goldshmidt, 2020). In fact, Israel is considered one of the least egalitarian countries among the OECD countries (OECD, 2020). In 2018, the Council for Higher Education outlined its plan for promoting digital teaching as a way to reduce gaps in Israeli society (Israel Council for Higher Education, 2018). Nevertheless, according to a recent OECD report, the majority of education systems in OECD countries are not prepared to benefit from the affordances available through online learning, due to the lack of preparedness of teachers and schools, as well as the lack of technological access (OECD, 2020).

In Israel, empiric research on literature teaching began developing only in the late twentieth century. A meta-analysis of studies concerning the learning and teaching of literature published between 2005 and 2017 found approximately only 100 such studies (Poyas, Elkad-Lehman, 2022); however, none of them addressed the issue of online literature teaching. Nine additional studies were published in Israel between 2017 and 2022, and again, none of them deals with teaching literature in an online environment.

By contrast, in the global research literature, there is an abundance of studies about teaching literature, both online and face-to-face. Some of these discuss the essence of a literary text and how to teach it creatively (e.g., Griffiths, 2013; Kähkölä, & Rättyä, 2021), other studies consider the status of literature in the context of language arts (e.g., Kabel, 2021), while still others examine the various aspects of teaching literature online (e.g. Elf & Koutsogiannis 2020; Lee, & Ogawa, 2020).

More than a decade ago, when considering the integration of ICT into the field of teaching in Israel, Hauptman (2010) presented a major critique about the use of technology in the field of literature study, which was based on the view that the face-to-face meeting between teacher, learners, and text is exceptionally important in the field of literature. This approach entails a preference for in-class learning and ignores the advantages of a hybrid teaching environment (Thalheimer, 2017). Given the nature of literary textual conventions and the pivotal role of the interactive discussion in deciphering the literary work in any classroom, the recent move to the online environment has created a need to identify the essential components of the online literature class. While an online learning environment presents challenges, as well as possibilities, the major challenge in teaching literature lies in the need to combine textual analysis with interpretive discussions, to provide the PSTs and their future students with a complete learning experience. Yet, there is a paucity of professional research on integrating subject-specific PCK into online literature lessons. Hence, the current study aims to fill this knowledge gap and identify the components that can serve as a framework and provide guidelines for the teaching of literature online.

### *1.2 The research questions*

To extend the framework of PCK through an empirical investigation of literature PSTs' online experiences, the following questions were formulated:

- 1) What are the characteristics of an online literature lesson, as perceived by PSTs?
- 2) How do PSTs perceive the difference between the online literature lesson and the literature lesson conducted in the physical classroom?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### *2.1 The research context*

The focus of this study is on the features that are characteristic of online literature learning as perceived by PSTs enrolled in three different teacher-education colleges in Israel in the year 2020, when online learning became the only viable option.

In the US and Europe, literature studies are part of language arts and cultural studies, in the broad sense. This includes imparting language and literacy skills, developing an understanding of the aesthetic dimension, and encouraging discussions about morals, based on the literary works (Hasson, 2018). In higher education institutes in Israel, however, the field of language and that of literature are studied in separate departments. Studying to become a literature teacher can be through schools of education that are affiliated either with a university or with a teacher-education college. Literature PSTs undergo three years of studies that address general education and pedagogy, discipline-specific studies, and after the first year, also a practicum that is conducted twice a week at a local school, where they observe classes taught by experienced teachers and also experience hands-on teaching within the specific discipline. During the fourth year, they work as novice teachers while attending a weekly workshop where they share and discuss their teaching-related experiences and dilemmas.

### *2.2 The research approach*

To gain insight into the subjective needs of online literature learners, a qualitative research approach was selected (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2009). The methodology selected for the study was a multiple case study, which is a collection of specific cases from which insights can be garnered (Stake, 2013). In this methodology, a single topic is examined repeatedly using several cases to demonstrate its manifestations (Yin, 2009). The main advantage of using a multiple case study is that the researcher is able to analyze the data within each situation and across different situations while addressing the similarities and differences between the cases (Stake, 1995). Thus, the findings generated from a multiple case study are considered highly reliable (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

In our study, the shared topic was the transition to learning and teaching literature online, as experienced by 90 literature PSTs in various stages of their studies and attending three different teacher-education colleges. Thus, the literature lessons were considered separate cases, due to differences in terms of contents, participants, lecturers, and pedagogical approaches. Accordingly, the research tools described below asked the PSTs to share their thoughts and feelings regarding a specific lesson they experienced. However, in all cases, the focus of their observations was on the components of the online literature lesson. The examination of specific cases to demonstrate their various manifestations is aligned with the goal of the multiple case study. This approach affords an in-depth analysis, allowing for a broad overview of the issue (Creswell, 2007, p. 97).

### *2.3 Participants*

Ninety PSTs from three teacher-education colleges participated in the study. This study sample represented a cross-section of Israel's multicultural society, as it included secular and ultra-Orthodox Jewish PSTs, among them new immigrants, from both rural settlements and large urban centres, as well as Arab PSTs (primarily from local Bedouin settlements). Specifically, 75% of the participants were Jewish and the remaining 25% were Bedouin Arabs; 65% of the PSTs were from the country's geographic periphery and 35% were from the central metropolitan area. Most of the PSTs were female (85%). Five of the PSTs were under the age of 20 (mean age 18.7); 59 of the PSTs were between the ages of 20 and 30 (mean age 22); 17 PSTs were between the ages of 30 and 40 (mean age 35); six PSTs were between the ages of 40 and 50 (mean age 45), and three were older than 50 (mean age 51). The distribution of participants according to their year in the study program was as follows: 41% were in their first year, 26% were in the second year, 27% were in the third year of the program, and 6% were in the final fourth year. Their distribution according to the program track was as follows: 45 of them were studying to become elementary-school literature teachers and the other 45 were studying to become literature teachers in middle schools.

PSTs were selected as the target population for this multiple case study because they would be able to provide an authentic voice and contribute to significant insights (Cohen et al., 2020). Furthermore, they constitute a particularly interesting and meaningful population, as their experiences are likely to influence their future mode of teaching.

### *2.4 Data collection*

Three data collection instruments were used: (a) documentation of telephone conversations held with the PSTs at the beginning of the semester when the system was initially transitioning to online learning; (b) anonymous questionnaires which were distributed to them via email in midsemester; and (c) semistructured interviews



(Shkedi, 2010) that were conducted at the end of the semester over the ZOOM online platform with 12 of the 90 PSTs. Four PSTs from each college were selected randomly after their expressed willingness to participate in the interview.

Based on the selected research approach and using these three tools, we sought to learn about PSTs' perceptions of what characterizes an online literature lesson. In their responses, the PSTs relied on prior online learning experiences, but they were instructed to think about one specific online literature lesson as they responded using the different research instruments. In the phone conversations, PSTs were asked to share their thoughts and feelings about the topic of learning literature online as experienced during one particular online literature lesson, from any perspective they saw fit. No further guidance or instructions were provided. The questionnaires required the PSTs to describe a positive and negative case of an online literature lesson, share an insight that they had garnered as a result of this experience, and indicate the mode of learning they preferred (online versus face-to-face). Finally, in the semistructured interviews, several questions were posed with the intent of understanding the PSTs' perspective of what they considered important elements of a literature lesson in general and of an online literature lesson in particular. Based on the 'big questions' (Joselson, 2015) we formulated two questions:

- 1) What do you like about literature lessons?
- 2) What elements do you think are important to the learners in an online literature class?

Occasionally interviewees were asked to elaborate on specific topics ("small questions"), such as the lesson structure or their attitude towards the pedagogical approaches that were used. Given that these were semistructured interviews, the PSTs were given ample time to consider their responses and freely express their attitudes (Leiblich et al., 1995).

The ethics committees of the three colleges approved the study. In addition, participants gave their informed consent, after the researchers gained the participants' trust and promised to maintain anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study and in their oral and written reports while maintaining mutual and collaborative relationships with the participants (Dushenik & Tsabar-Ben-Yehoshua, 2016). Thus, for example, in the final stage of the interview, the participants were told that if they were interested, they could receive the transcripts of the interviews and change their responses. Finally, it should be noted that the researchers are lecturers in the field of literature at each of the three colleges, respectively. To avoid bias during the interviews, each researcher interviewed the students of one of the other researchers on the team. The PSTs knew that one of the researchers involved in the study was a lecturer at their college, but they did not know specifically who it was.

### *2.5 Data analysis*

The information collected from the three data sources was analyzed using the thematic-cognitive method. To this end, a noninvasive, open content analysis was

conducted (Shkedi, 2010), which is comprised of several stages, to enable the researcher to draw meaningful distinctions and generalizations (Weber, 1985). Content analysis renders thematic categories, which are identified in conjunction with the research literature.

The analysis conducted in this study involved the following stages: first, each researcher read the transcripts separately, then they read them jointly while identifying keywords and sentences that revealed various aspects of teaching literature online. The process of selecting and analyzing the keywords and sentences involved going forwards and backward through the transcripts repeatedly, so as to maintain the principles of validity and reliability (Yosifon, 2016, 197).

### 3. FINDINGS

Content analysis of the findings revealed three themes that were mentioned by PSTs as components of online literature lessons. The three themes that will be elaborated on and exemplified in the next section are (a) technology, (b) knowledge and (c) experience, whereby each theme was comprised of two subthemes. One of each of the subtheme pairs refers to a basic component (e.g., convenient access to the necessary technological infrastructure, ability to manage the technology for participation in the course) and the second subtheme of the pair is an elaboration of this basic component. The examination of the themes and subthemes is conducted from a comprehensive and theoretical perspective, followed by a review of the findings' practical implications for the learning and teaching processes. The three themes are presented here vis-a-vis the components of the online literature lesson, detailing the way the components are manifested in each theme.

#### 3.1 A. *Technology*

The analysis revealed that one of the components that the PSTs mentioned in referring to the online literature lesson is related to its technological aspects. The theme of technology included two subthemes: technological orientation and components of the technological environment.

##### 3.1.1 A.1. *Technological Orientation*

When asked about the online literature lesson, PSTs mentioned their own technological orientation as a factor that affected their ability to participate in and benefit from the online lesson. The first pattern that emerged from the data analysis was related to those who lacked a sense of technological orientation and, consequently, felt at a loss during the online lesson: "People like me, who have a hard time in a regular face-to-face class, find themselves at a loss on the ZOOM platform and I said to myself: 'wow—I worked hard for three years and now in the fourth year I'm losing it [because of] being on the ZOOM platform.'"

Emili (this and the following are all pseudonyms), a student in her third year of studies, linked technological orientation with the technological infrastructure available in her environment:

As a student, I pose a problem now because I don't have a computer; I don't have Internet access; so, today there was a lesson, but I didn't manage to connect... That's what I find the most troubling... I'm so bad at this... I really don't like this.

Additional PSTs who described themselves as having no technological orientation noted the difficulty of coping with technological access issues in an environment with poor technological resources: "I don't have a computer at home and I have to go over to the neighbor's in order to participate in the real-time online lessons." Another PSTs said, "My computer broke down and I can't participate in lessons or hand in assignments."

A second pattern that emerged in the context of technological orientation was related to the issue of technological or computer literacy:

I have an aversion to technology and I am dealing with it (giggles) [...] For the online lesson, one needs to really get the hang of it; otherwise, it becomes very difficult to get involved and someone like that might just drop the class altogether. (Lea, a second-year student)

This description emphasizes that the learner needs to feel involved and that this feeling serves as a necessary component for coping with the technology-related difficulties encountered in the context of online learning.

Finally, some PSTs described themselves as proficient in the realm of technology. However, they noted the absence of the human element that characterizes the online learning of literature: "Personally I'm the kind of person who is very comfortable with computers and technology and everything and I can tell you that the human element is very much missing from these lessons—I much prefer face-to-face learning."

In the following example, Ruth, a third-year PST, used a different construct to describe her experience: she first explained the way she coped with online learning, and only then did she refer to her level of computer literacy:

All told, the recorded lessons are okay but I miss the witty exchanges and the sharing of new ideas; it feels like being behind a glass display window where you can't touch the object at hand. Although I am proficient in using technology, I don't like it [the experience].

To summarize, although three patterns of technological orientation were identified, even those who defined themselves as technologically proficient made it clear that they preferred to study literature in a face-to-face framework.

### 3.1.2 A.2. *The components of the technological environment and its impact*

Within this subtheme, two features were identified as characteristic of the online learning environment and its impact on learners. The first feature is the absence of immediacy in the lecturer's responses. This is particularly noticeable in the asynchronous lessons which preclude any synchronous interaction, as demonstrated by the comment made by Susan, a third-year PST:

They [the lecturers] send you prerecorded lessons [...] So who can you talk to? Who can you share your opinion with?... It's just not the same experience. On the course website, it takes a while until you receive a response, so there's no point; you cannot enjoy the added advantage that you get when you are in a face-to-face lesson.

Helen, who is a second-year PST, also related to the fact that responses lack immediacy, which is a negative feature of online learning, not only in the asynchronous lessons but also in the synchronous lessons:

One thing, for example, that bothered me [...] in the lesson was that I and another student reacted, but the lecturer did not respond. Each time I waited for the teacher's response but none came. When you're not in a physical classroom and you want to say something [...] you don't always get a reply and that is disappointing.

Helen described reacting to something that was asked or said during the lesson, and she was disappointed that her response was not acknowledged in any way by the lecturer. Although she did not explain why she needed the lecturer's response, it seems that it was important to her.

The second feature that the PSTs described was related to the hierarchical dimension of learning in synchronous lessons, which stems from the technological constraints of the online learning environment. In these types of lessons, it appears that the lecturer is at the top of the hierarchy and in control, as is evident from the description by Kim, a third-year PST:

On the ZOOM platform, the lecturer can mute the students, so that there is no option of developing a discussion. Literature is not an exact science; the interactions and the student's experience in the lesson are much more important and significant for grasping the literary significance. Unfortunately, these aspects are absent from the distance learning framework.

This PST's use of the word "mute" is related to the mute button that is on the ZOOM platform; however, it appears to suggest—albeit indirectly—a metaphorical silencing, which is part of the students' experience in the online lesson. In this respect, in the online lessons, the lecturer's relative power, as compared to the subordinate status of the learners, is more obvious. Although the *mute* function serves a technical purpose, and students have the option to press "unmute," the interpersonal dynamic is very different from that of a physical classroom, where the lecturer can only request silence and hope that students will respectfully abide by this request.

### 3.2 *B. Knowledge*

This theme includes two components of knowledge: CK which focuses on knowledge related to the discipline of literature, and pedagogical knowledge, which relates to the teaching of literature and is an elaboration of the former.

#### 3.2.1 *B.1. Content Knowledge*

Carla, who is a PST in her third year of studies, explained her opinion regarding the component of CK in the context of teaching literature online: “I would be happy if the teaching were more intense and we could delve deeper into the literary realm; we need more time to gain a comprehensive understanding, whether of literary terms or theories.” Perhaps here too, the “intensity” that the participant mentions might be lacking in either the physical or the online classroom; however, in the online environment, its absence is more perceptible to the students.

Other PSTs related to the knowledge component necessary for successfully passing the course: “If there is an exam, I think I have all the material I need [...] because it’s all organized in presentations and also I take notes all the time, so I don’t think I’ll have a problem.” Another participant said, “There are many complex topics that are more difficult to understand when you’re not in a face-to-face class, but the material can still be conveyed clearly through explanations and prerecorded lessons.” It appears that in comparing the two learning environments, PSTs found it more difficult to comprehend and process CK, which consists of knowing the material that is part of the literature discipline, when it is conveyed in an online lesson. This may be related to the fact that in an online lesson, the dialogue between the lecturer and the learners is conducted in a less natural way, which emphasizes the absence of physical interaction (Schiavio et al., 2021).

#### 3.2.2 *B.2. Pedagogical content knowledge*

The other type of knowledge that the PSTs referred to was the pedagogical knowledge for teaching literature. The participants referred to general PCK and to online pedagogies, particularly:

When the topic of study is how to teach literature [online], one does not expect to be taught about the literary work. I want to learn about strategies, techniques, and how to convey literature [...]; The point of teaching literature is not the literary text but how to convey [its significance] to others.

Belinda, a third-year PST, related to the need to acquire pedagogical tools and strategies for teaching literature online. In Israel, the academic program for PSTs includes a practicum held in the professional field (i.e., kindergartens or schools). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the practicum took the form of online teaching. It appears that Belinda addressed the issue of the pedagogical knowledge of online literature teaching as part of her practical training. This need was expressed by other students as

well: “I want to learn strategies, techniques, how to teach literature online”; “What concerns me is how to teach [literature online]; I’m not interested in the material that will be taught.” The participant’s emphasis on the need to specialize in *online* literature teaching (rather than in literature teaching per se) stemmed from the circumstances at that time, namely, the forced transition to online learning due to the corona epidemic.

As mentioned, PSTs referred to PCK in both synchronous and asynchronous online lessons. They described the type of modeling they witnessed in synchronic online lessons and mentioned, in particular, the need to adapt teaching methods to the online synchronous lesson.

Some lecturers begin the lesson with some kind of assignment or exercise and we spend approximately 15 minutes completing the assignment, and with this, they are satisfied that there was an active component to the lesson, and then they lecture for the rest of the period. I won’t even attend such classes. I really do not want to become that kind of teacher.

The description, which was presented by Sharon, a second-year PST, demonstrates her dissatisfaction with the online pedagogy used, critiquing the lecturer and rejecting this type of teaching model.

Other PSTs noted their preference for asynchronous online lessons as a pedagogical knowledge component in teaching literature online.

I enjoyed the asynchronous lessons much more... What really helps me is that I have time to take notes; I can pause the recording and summarize what was said, which I cannot do in a regular class [...]. I feel that I am able to attain a deeper understanding of the lesson when it is presented asynchronously.

It appears that the different pedagogical models used to teach literature online have a profound effect on the learners. The diversity of learners’ needs is crucial when studying online; consequently, there is a need for a hybrid model that can combine the advantages of synchronous and asynchronous online literature lessons, as well as face-to-face literature lessons.

### 3.3 C. Experience

The theme of PSTs’ experiences garnered during online literature lessons is comprised of two subthemes. The first is related to the interpretive discussion that takes place in the literature class, which involves textual analysis, and the second subtheme concerns the added value of literature studies and the appropriation of the literary work.

#### 3.3.1 C.1. Interpretive discussion

The PST participants noted that the main deficiency of the online literature lesson was related to the interpretive interaction that ought to take place when analyzing

the literary work and text. Amanda, a second-year student, described the give-and-take of the interpretive discussion, involving input from several students and reactions from others, through which learners experience the construction of a literary interpretation, which is aided by the instructor's mediation.

It's true that the lecturer tries to direct the discussion towards a certain point that he or she wishes to make, but it's not a process of dictating information to the students. Rather, the lecturer develops a discussion in which all the learners are welcome to contribute their views and together we arrived at a comprehensive interpretation.

The input from Beth, a third-year PST, emphasized the contrast between the animating experience of the interpretive discussion and the absence of vitality in the online lesson:

The absence of social interaction is very much missed... And especially in literature classes—this is not a science, where you work according to a specific formula. Here you are challenged to think about what the person speaking is trying to convey. This process inspires the learners to think and re-examine the text in a constructive process. Now, what is going to challenge and inspire you when you're thinking alone?

As she described her contribution to the interactive process of interpretation, Beth emphasized the vitality of the learning experience: "I always have something to contribute to the class discussion and I feel revitalized by the learning process." Other students also noted the inspiration gained from the class discussion that constitutes the interpretative process in literature lessons and some even stated that they felt helpless without it: "I miss having this interaction with the group, where every student expresses an individual opinion and then from there we go on to develop new ideas;" "It just doesn't work when you're on your own, because in the literature class, we have to discuss together the ideas and interpretations offered and consider several views."

Thus, the component of the interpretive discussion of the text emerged as a major component of the learning experience in the literature class, which was patently missing from the online lesson.

### 3.3.2 C.2. *Personal Appropriation of the literary text*

In addition to the interpretive discussion, the PSTs mentioned other factors that helped "upgrade" the literary discussion in class and enable them to assimilate the literary text, i.e., to arrive at a personal interpretation of the literary text: "When you study literature, the meaning comes from you, from inside." Edna, who is a fourth-year PST, referred to the experience of appropriating the text as a process that begins in a collective effort and culminates in a personal interpretation:

What is fun about literature is that it is very open-ended; every person can understand things differently and bring a different interpretation. It's true that there is a common basis but what is constructed on top of it is personal; it is a destination towards which the text leads you-- personally.

The intimate and existential dimension described by Edna regarding the process of appropriating the literary text recalls the multiple interpretive voices that are attributed to the literary text, a notion that is echoed also in the descriptions provided by other PSTs. Rachel is a third-year PST who described these multiple voices as an element unique to the discipline of literature:

It allows each and every participant to express a personal opinion or worldview. That is, every person can interpret [the text] differently. Someone else might read the text and understand something completely different from what I discern from the text because we approach things differently and that's okay. In other words, as long as you can prove your claim [by referring to the text], your interpretation is [sustainable and thereby] correct; that is something that is not true of other disciplines.

To summarize, the appropriation of the literary text is a process that involves the existential personal dimension on the one hand, and the multiplicity of voices on the other hand, and it is this process that the PSTs identified as a unique feature of the discipline of literature. As in the two prior themes presented, also in the theme of experience, the PSTs perceived the online literature lesson to be comprised of an elementary level and an expanded level; however, their descriptions suggest that in the online environment their experience of appropriation was noticeably diminished.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The main contribution of the current study is in expanding our knowledge in the field of literature research regarding the components of the online literature lesson. This is important, as there is very little knowledge in the area of the humanities on this topic (Hoffman, 2010; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study examining PSTs' perspectives on online learning, both synchronic and asynchronous lessons, in the context of the literature discipline, which is known for its distinctive qualities (Mancilla & Gardner, 1997; Poyas, 1999). In addition to the theoretical phase, the practical contribution is the identification of the components of the online literature lesson that can serve as a basis for developing pedagogical guidelines for teaching literature online. This is an issue that merits the consideration of future studies, as well. Forming pedagogical guidelines is important; it echoes former research that was conducted in Israel and which exposed the relationships between literature teachers' attitudes and literature teaching strategies (Elkad-Lehman & Gilat, 2010). It will be important to explore the universal context of the findings, especially in aspects of different populations of students in higher education (e.g., students attending teacher training colleges versus students attending universities).

An in-depth review of the findings of the current study, specifically the six components associated with three different themes, provides insight into the internal links among the parts that together comprise the themes. As described, each theme consists of two subthemes, whereby one of the subthemes concerns the basic characteristics of the theme, thus addressing the elemental aspects of the theme, and



the other subtheme constitutes an elaboration of the first subtheme. Figure 1 provides an integrative visual model of the study's findings.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

The model proposed herein serves as a theoretical framework for the development of more detailed practical pedagogical guidelines for teaching literature online. The model consists of three tiers that indicate the themes relevant to the online literature lesson; each tier consists of two parts that represent the two subthemes identified. In each pair of subthemes, the one on the left is the fundamental subtheme and the one on the right constitutes an elaboration of the fundamental subtheme.

Hence, based on the PSTs' perspectives, it seems that an online literature lesson should be based on a grasp of the complementary and extrapolative relationships among all six components, which are essential for the learning process. Furthermore, the responses of the participating learners indicated that the technological component affects both the knowledge and the experiential component, as is visually represented in Figure 1 by the tiered structure of the model. Finally, because the PSTs expressed a variety of opinions regarding the online literature lesson, the suggested model seems to constitute an overall infrastructure with various nuances to be determined by the individual teacher (e.g., technology orientation versus lack of technology orientation).

#### *4.1 The aspects of technology, knowledge, and experience in e-learning literature*

The issue of technological orientation and literacy highlights the technological gaps that characterize the student body (Barzilai-Nahon, 2006). However, despite differences in learners' technological abilities, the participants in the study did not address the existing link between technological accessibility and literacy and demographic variables, such as age, religiosity, or geographic place of residence (peripheral versus central regions). Furthermore, the majority of participants indicated that they preferred to study literature in a face-to-face framework instead of online. This finding seems to align with the observation that the majority of school systems in OECD countries are not sufficiently prepared to take advantage of the wide variety of options available through digital learning (OECD, 2020). The findings of the OECD report and those of the current study underscore two main issues: the preparedness of teachers and schools, as well as the lack of access to technology. Moreover, the participants made clear their need for immediacy in interactions with the teacher as part of an active hermeneutic discourse, which is not always available in the virtual sphere. This claim coincides with the findings of a previous study, which emphasized the importance of face-to-face meetings in literature lessons in order to create the experience of literary exegesis (Hauptman, 2010).

Regarding the connection between the technological, knowledge, and experiential components in online literature lessons, it should be noted that the findings of

the study reilluminate the existing knowledge about the teaching of literature. Thus, the constructivist approaches, in general, and the reader-response approach, in particular (De-Malach, 2008; Poyas & Elkad-Lehman, 2016; Poyas & Shalom, 2002), are based on a communal construction of knowledge, produced through a process involving an interactive dialogue that takes place between the lecturer and the learners (Chinn et al., 2001; Schrijvers et al., 2019), as well as among the learners (Levine, 2019; Renshaw, 2004). These interactive components must be featured in both face-to-face and online literature lessons.

The findings of the current study align with those of other studies, which claim that the teaching of literature through communal dialogue enhances the intellectual and emotional involvement of the learners (Murphy et al., 2009; van Peer et al., 2007). In addition to supporting this research trend, the current study provides a new emphasis on the importance of immediacy in the dialogic communication between teacher and learner and demonstrates that the online platform does not support the type of communication which is crucial for the learning of literature. Thus, according to the learners' perceptions, the spontaneous hermeneutic discussion is an essential component of the online literature lesson, which by definition is lacking in the online learning environment, whether the lesson is presented synchronously or asynchronously.

Thus, for example, the fact that the online platform does not allow for more than one person to speak at a time (regardless of the group's size, whether in the plenary or break-out rooms) constitutes a technological barrier that has both pedagogical and experiential implications for the learner. Hence, when conducting a discussion via the ZOOM platform, for the sake of auditory clarity, the teacher, should first mute all of the participants and then select one designated speaker at a time, who may then express an opinion regarding the question at hand. Learners who wish to participate in the discussion must abide by this convention and await their turn. However, given these circumstances, the learning experience necessarily lacks the element of spontaneity, which prohibits the development of a naturally occurring discourse (Kupferberg, 2016). As mentioned, the word "mute" in this context refers to the function as labeled on the platform; nevertheless, students appear to attribute also a metaphoric meaning to this action, which prevents the development of the kind of spontaneous and constructivist spoken discourse that exists in the face-to-face learning framework. Although there are many ways of silencing participants, the PSTs' responses revealed that the act of silencing the participants using the mute button is perceived as an imposition that precludes the principle of hermeneutic reciprocity, which is so essential to the literary spoken discourse. As a result, the teacher tends to revert to the traditional role, as the conveyor of knowledge (Mills, 2011). In sum, the technical act that the digital platform entails acquires a broader significance, as the learners perceive a shift in the teacher's role and performance. Hence, there is an urgent need for pedagogical and technological solutions that can enhance the immediacy that is inherent to the interpretive dialogue, to re-establish in the online environment the spontaneity that facilitates learners' interpretive discourse.

Regarding the link between CK and PCK, and based on the dimension of the practicum that is part of the PSTs' learning process, it appears that the findings of the study highlight the PSTs' perceived need to strengthen both their content knowledge and their PCK; yet the online environment underscores the importance of understanding of the link between the two. In a manner that demonstrates that pedagogical knowledge develops from and is a corollary of literary content knowledge. Consequently, online teaching methods must be adapted to suit the online interpersonal dynamics between the teacher and the learners, while increasing lecturers' awareness of their modelling role.

Furthermore, it appears that the learners wish to preserve certain elements of the face-to-face lesson, specifically that of the spontaneous discussion, as it leads to both positive activation and positive academic feelings that promote learning (Greenspan & Nevo, 2015). These findings raise the following questions: "Who should be responsible for training lecturers and students to accept and assimilate the necessary changes in the teaching/learning process?" "Who should assist the lecturers in adjusting their lessons to the online pedagogical principles without eliminating the very components that preserve students' emotional experience in the literature class?" These are issues that ought to be considered in future studies.

The literary text has numerous layers and an in-depth understanding of the literary work involves an aesthetic experience (Rosenblatt, 1985), which is expressed through an emotional connection, empathy for the characters described, and identifying with at least one of the characters (Felski, 2008; Rudin & Sacerdoti, 2016). The PSTs in this study referred to this component as "emotional experience." Findings also indicate that this component is essential not only for a learning experience but also for creating a sense of belonging. Finally, the findings of the current study revealed that the emphasis in the online literature class should be on the social and emotional aspects of literature studies (Shechtman & Abu Yaman, 2012) because these aspects help create feelings of vitality and belonging. In this sense, the current study echoes the notion of "academic feelings," which refers to the variety of emotions evoked in the academic context (Pekrun, et al., 2002; Pekrun, 2016). The concept describes the array of emotions evoked in an academic context, some of which are related to the emotional attitude towards the learning and teaching processes (Greensfeld & Nevo, 2015). Focusing on emotions in learning is reminiscent of the study of Russell (1980), who presented a multidimensional model to demonstrate the relationship between emotions and activation. Regarding the emotional aspect, Russell found two polar possibilities: a sense of pleasure expressed as positive emotions of joy and satisfaction, in contrast to a sense of displeasure expressed as negative emotions of sadness and dissatisfaction. The current study's findings suggest that the online literature lesson that emphasizes social and emotional learning (SEL) could lead to positive academic feelings, which in turn create positive motivation for learning (Russell, 1980).

In view of all of the above, the current findings constitute a strong and coherent foundation for developing guidelines for planning and teaching online literature

lessons. According to the practical principles and the theoretical framework presented here, the development of such guidelines should include the six identified components, reflecting both the tiered and extrapolative relationships between them, as shown in the model that emerged from the data analysis. In this sense, the contribution of the current study is not only practical but is related also to the theory of curricular knowledge in literature. Although this field is still developing (Hansen et al., 2019; Levin & Baratz, 2019), its focus to date has been solely on the face-to-face learning framework rather than on the online literature lesson (Bush, 2020, Lotan & Miller, 2016).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to identify the components of an online literature lesson. Analysis of the data revealed six interrelated components that are linked to three major themes: technology, knowledge, and experience. The focus on PSTs presented a range of authentic voices and led to important insights regarding the teaching of literature online and particularly the experiential dimension. However, the current study has several limitations. The research sample refers only to the perspectives of PSTs; efforts should be made to use a richer sample in future studies that will also include lecturers and inservice teachers. Nevertheless, through the analysis, we identified components that occurred in each of the cases, a finding that is supported by the triangulation of analytic methods and data sources. Finally, most of the PSTs participating in the current study were female, reflecting a gender imbalance common in the teaching profession and especially in literature teaching.

We believe that the analysis of the data regarding the PSTs' experience has allowed us to map components of the online literature lesson, which, in turn, extends our understanding of PCK in the literature arena. The three major themes and the six interrelated components shed light on the importance of integrating PCK models (e.g., Ball et al. 2008) into the teaching of literature online, as it appears to be the most crucial aspect of effective teacher-education programs (Opoku et al., 2020). To conclude, the current study's theoretical contribution involves the expansion of curricular knowledge in the field of literature, and its practical contribution is in providing concrete guidelines for teaching literature online so that the interpretation process can be experienced in its entirety, despite the barrier of the computer screen.

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