

Literary Flourishing in TESOL: A Conceptual Framework for Wellbeing-Oriented Literature-Based EFL Pedagogy

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Abstract

Background:

This conceptual review proposes Literary Flourishing in TESOL as an interdisciplinary framework for humanizing literature-based English language education. This article addresses the continued prevalence of instrumental TESOL paradigms, where literature is frequently relegated to supplementary reading, cultural content, or a means of vocabulary and comprehension practice.

Methodology:

The proposed PERMA-LIGHT model expands on the PERMA dimensions of wellbeing, which include positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, by incorporating literary, humanistic, and transformative dimensions such as literary empathy, identity formation, global and intercultural understanding, humanistic growth, and transformative reflection. The article also outlines WOLBEP, or Wellbeing-Oriented Literature-Based EFL Pedagogy, as a pedagogical framework comprising emotional engagement, narrative immersion, reflective meaning-making, dialogic interaction, transformative response, and flourishing reflection.

Findings:

The review asserts that literature-based TESOL can foster linguistic competence, emotional wellbeing, empathy, identity formation, resilience, intercultural understanding, and reflective agency. The article provides a model for curriculum design, literature-based pedagogy, teacher education, and future research on language education that fosters flourishing.

Conclusion:

The review concludes that literature-based TESOL should be repositioned from a supplementary language resource to a wellbeing-oriented pedagogy that develops linguistic competence together with empathy, identity formation, intercultural understanding, and reflective growth.

Originality:

The originality of this article lies in conceptualising Literary Flourishing in TESOL and operationalising it through the PERMA-LIGHT model and WOLBEP framework. These frameworks integrate wellbeing, literary pedagogy, and transformative learning into a unified conceptual approach for flourishing-oriented language education.

Keywords	:	<i>TESOL; literature-based pedagogy; positive psychology; wellbeing education; transformative learning.</i>
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1. INTRODUCTION

TESOL is increasingly being asked to address learners' linguistic competence and their social, emotional, intercultural, ethical, and identity-related development. Contemporary applied linguistics views language learning as socially situated, affectively mediated, and shaped by interactions among learners, teachers, institutions, and broader ideological contexts. This expanded view challenges narrow models of English language teaching that focus solely on grammatical mastery, vocabulary growth, test preparation, or communicative performance.

The positive shift in second and foreign language education underscores the necessity to re-examine TESOL. Positive psychology has shifted language learning research from an excessive focus on anxiety, deficits, and failure to an emphasis on enjoyment, resilience, engagement, well-being, and human flourishing (Dewaele et al., 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). Negative emotions are not being dismissed. Research indicates that foreign language anxiety, enjoyment, and boredom interact in complex ways and can influence achievement, motivation, classroom participation, and learner confidence (Botes et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2023; Teimouri et al., 2019).

Literary texts provide a unique response to this challenge by highlighting voice, imagination, ambiguity, emotion, perspective, conflict, and human complexity. Research on literature in language education has linked it to linguistic enrichment, cultural knowledge, authentic language exposure, aesthetic response, personal growth, and interpretive competence (Carter, 2007; Hall, 2005; Paran, 2008). Recent empirical studies have revitalized this discussion by investigating literature in school textbooks, teachers' beliefs and practices, literary competence, aesthetic competence, and learner response in EFL settings (Calafato, 2024; Calafato & Hunstadbråten, 2025; Calafato & Simmonds, 2022; Calafato & Gudim, 2022; Luukka, 2023).

The role of literature in TESOL is often explained through distinct theoretical perspectives. Reader-response theory explains the learner's active transaction with the text, narrative theory explains how stories organise human meaning and identity (Bruner, 1990), and humanistic pedagogy emphasizes learners' dignity, voice, agency, and freedom (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 2014). These perspectives are infrequently synthesised with recent positive psychology, wellbeing education, multilingualism, multimodality, and transformative learning into a single framework for literature-based TESOL.

This article suggests Literary Flourishing in TESOL as a conceptual framework for promoting literature as a driving force behind both linguistic growth and human flourishing. The article introduces the PERMA-LIGHT model and the WOLBEP pedagogical framework. The model aims to expand literature-based TESOL beyond the issue of how literary texts enhance English proficiency to a more comprehensive inquiry: how literary engagement can foster learners' linguistic competence, emotional balance, reflection, empathy, intercultural awareness, and ethical responsiveness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Positive Psychology, Emotions, and Flourishing in Language Education

Positive psychology focuses on the factors, events, and methods that allow individuals and communities to flourish (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman, 2011). Research in language education has led to a productive agenda on topics such as positive emotions, engagement, resilience, grit, enjoyment, wellbeing, and teacher-learner flourishing (Dewaele et al., 2023; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). This orientation is crucial for TESOL because foreign language learning entails vulnerability, risk-taking, public performance, self-evaluation, and identity negotiation.

The PERMA model conceptualizes flourishing by five dimensions which are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). In a TESOL classroom, these dimensions are pedagogically relevant because positive emotions can reduce students' fear of participation, engagement sustains effortful language use, relationships support interaction, meaning connects language with personal and social purposes, and accomplishment strengthens students' confidence. Research on engagement reveals that effective language learning encompasses behavioural, cognitive, emotional, social, and agentive aspects, rather than merely attending classes or participating in activities (Guo et al., 2023; Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Sulis, 2022).

Wellbeing-oriented TESOL must steer clear of a simplistic focus on happiness at the same time. Research on emotions experienced while learning a foreign language indicates that emotions such as enjoyment, anxiety, boredom, resilience, and achievement interact with one another (BOTES et al., 2021; Botes et al., 2022, 2024; Dewaele et al., 2023; Teimouri et al., 2019). Literary Flourishing conceives of wellbeing as learners' increasing ability to interact with challenge, ambiguity, emotion, and complexity through meaningful language use.

Literary Pedagogy, Reader Response, and Literary Competence

Literary pedagogy in TESOL has been theorised through language-based, cultural, personal-growth, stylistic, reader-response, and critical-literacy approaches (Carter, 2007; Hall, 2005; Paran, 2008). These approaches show that literature can support vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, discourse sensitivity, intercultural knowledge, aesthetic experience, personal response, and critical interpretation. However, a flourishing-oriented approach argues that literature should also be understood as a medium for emotional, ethical, relational, and identity-related growth.

This argument is central to reader-response theory, as it defines reading as a transaction between the reader and the text, as opposed to a one-way extraction of meaning (Rosenblatt, 1994). In TESOL, learners' linguistic repertoires, cultural memories, emotions, and lived experiences are legitimate resources for interpretation. Studies on literary response and competence in EFL contexts have found that learners' aesthetic competence, response patterns, and interpretive profiles influence their engagement with literary texts in the classroom (Calafato & Hunstadbråten, 2025; Calafato & Simmonds, 2022).

Research on literature in language education suggests that teachers and materials significantly influence the role that literature plays in the classroom. The positioning of literature as a source of authenticity, cultural knowledge, moral reflection, creativity, or language practice is influenced by teacher beliefs, textbook design, and curricular priorities (Calafato, 2024; Calafato & Gudim, 2022; Luukka, 2023). Literary Flourishing expands on this literature by making wellbeing, empathy, identity formation, and transformative reflection deliberate learning objectives rather than secondary consequences.

Narrative, empathy, intercultural understanding, and ethical imagination

Narrative theory explains why literature has distinctive educational power. Narratives organise experience through temporality, character, conflict, perspective, emotion, and transformation (Bruner, 1990). They allow readers to simulate social worlds, encounter unfamiliar perspectives, and reflect on motives, choices, consequences, and values (Oatley, 1999). Experimental work on literary fiction and theory of mind has also contributed to debates on how literary reading may support social cognition and perspective-taking (Kidd & Castano, 2013).

Narrative engagement in TESOL can foster intercultural understanding as learners employ English to navigate and comprehend differences, ambiguities, and human complexities. Developing intercultural competence in language education encompasses more than a bank of knowledge about other cultures, and involves being able to interpret different meanings, derive one's own interpretations through introspection, and engage ethically with people from other backgrounds (Galloway & Numajiri, 2020; Prabjandee, 2020). Literary texts offer dialogic spaces in which learners can compare cultural perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and discuss issues of power, identity, inclusion, exclusion, and social possibility (Abednia & Crookes, 2019; Freire, 1970).

In this article, the concept of literary empathy encompasses more than just sentimental identification with fictional characters. This refers to a disciplined ability to interpret another's perspective, examine textual evidence, and respond thoughtfully. This links literature-based TESOL with ethical imagination, critical literacy, intercultural communication, and humanistic education (Hooks, 2014; Oatley, 1999).

Applied Linguistics, Multilingualism, Multimodality, and Transformative Learning

Contemporary applied linguistics understands language learning as multilingual, multimodal, socially situated, and identity-mediated (Canagarajah, 2012; Group, 2016; Kress, 2009). This orientation is important for EFL contexts because learners often engage in English through local languages, cultural practices, digital media, school expectations, and imagined futures. Literature-based TESOL can therefore draw on learners' full linguistic and semiotic repertoires rather than treating English as detached from local meaning-making.

Recent studies on Global English and translingual scholarship have reinforced this multilingual orientation. Research in TESOL has increasingly questioned native-speaker norms, standard-language ideologies, and only corrective feedback methods, advocating for pedagogies that value communicative effectiveness, linguistic diversity, learner autonomy, and contextual responsiveness (Galloway & Numajiri, 2020; Lee, 2023; Prabjandee, 2020).

The rise of digital multimodal composing also expands what counts as a literary response. Learners can respond to literature through written interpretation, performance, visual design, digital storytelling, multimodal adaptation, and collaborative production. Recent work in second language writing and multimodality has proposed process-based and genre-based approaches to assessing multimodal composing, highlighting the need to attend to meaning, design, language, genre, and reflection (Hafner & Ho, 2020; Jiang et al., 2022; Jiang & Hafner,

2024; Kessler & Marino, 2023). These insights are directly relevant to WOLBEP because transformative responses can include creative, reflective, and multimodal production.

Transformative learning theory describes how literary engagement can progress from comprehension to reflective change. Transformative learning involves examining assumptions, revising one's frame of reference, and developing more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). Transformation in Literary Flourishing is not considered to occur automatically, but rather is facilitated through a pedagogical process that incorporates emotional engagement, narrative immersion, reflective meaning-making, dialogue, creative response, and flourishing reflection.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article uses a conceptual review design. A conceptual review does not aim to exhaustively aggregate empirical findings in the manner of a systematic review; rather, it synthesises theoretical traditions to clarify, extend, or construct a concept (Jaakkola, 2020). This design is appropriate because Literary Flourishing in TESOL is proposed as a new integrative construct requiring conceptual mapping across positive psychology, wellbeing education, literary pedagogy, narrative theory, reader-response theory, applied linguistics, multimodality, and transformative learning.

The synthesis occurred in four stages. Key constructs initially identified included flourishing, positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, literary response, empathy, identity, multilingual meaning-making, multimodal production, humanisation, and transformation. The contribution of each theoretical domain was then examined in relation to TESOL. Conceptual overlaps were mapped to explore how literature can act as a catalyst for language development and human flourishing. The synthesis was organized into the PERMA-LIGHT model and the WOLBEP pedagogical framework.

4. FINDINGS

Literary Flourishing as an Integrative Construct

The first conceptual finding is that Literary Flourishing in TESOL can be defined as a literature-based language learning orientation in which literary engagement supports linguistic development, emotional wellbeing, reflective meaning-making, intercultural empathy, identity formation, resilience, and transformative reflection. This definition integrates the wellbeing orientation of positive psychology (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Shao et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021), the aesthetic and pedagogical value of

literature in language education (Calafato, 2024; Hall, 2005; Paran, 2008), the transactional nature of reading (Rosenblatt, 1994), and the humanistic-transformative purpose of education (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 2014; Mezirow, 1991).

The construct addresses a gap in TESOL theory. Literature has long been recognized as useful for language learning, but its contribution is often explained through input, vocabulary, culture, stylistics, or appreciation (Carter, 2007; Hall, 2005; Luukka, 2023). Literary Flourishing reframes literature as a pedagogical medium through which learners can practise English while also learning to feel, reflect, interpret, question, relate, and imagine more deeply.

The conceptual architecture of Literary Flourishing in TESOL is presented in Figure 1. The model identifies literary engagement as the key pedagogical driver that fosters connections between language learning, wellbeing, empathy, identity formation, intercultural understanding, and transformative reflection. The framework is structured into four levels: theoretical underpinnings, the PERMA-LIGHT conceptual framework, WOLBEP pedagogical implementation, and anticipated learner achievements.

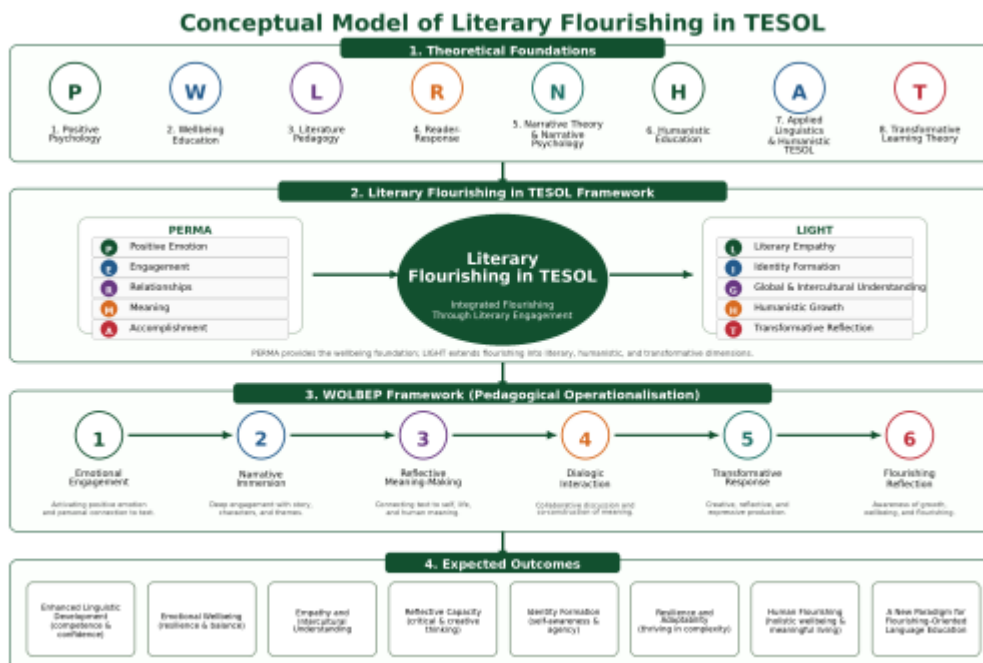


Figure 1. Conceptual model of literary flourishing in TESOL and WOLBEP pedagogical operationalization.

The PERMA-LIGHT Model

The second conceptual finding is the PERMA-LIGHT model. The PERMA model serves as the foundation for wellbeing, with LIGHT expanding flourishing into literary, humanistic, and transformative contexts. The PERMA model comprises positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). Research on language education has supported these dimensions, which include enjoyment, anxiety, boredom, resilience, and engagement (BOTES et al., 2021; Dewaele et al., 2023; Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Sulis, 2022; Teimouri et al., 2019).

The LIGHT programme encompasses literary empathy, identity formation, global and intercultural understanding, humanistic growth, and transformative reflection. Empathy in literature is grounded in research on narrative and literary response (Kidd & Castano, 2013; Oatley, 1999; Rosenblatt, 1994). Language learning is shaped by socially situated and multilingual perspectives on identity formation (Canagarajah, 2012; Group, 2016). Research on intercultural competence and Global Englishes pedagogy promotes global and intercultural understanding (Galloway & Numajiri, 2020; Prabjandee, 2020). Humanistic growth embodies the ethical and learner-centred focus of humanistic education, as espoused by (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 2014). Transformative reflection, grounded in transformative learning theory, views literature as a means of challenging assumptions and envisioning alternative realities (Mezirow, 1991).

Table 1. PERMA-LIGHT model of literary flourishing in TESOL

Dimension	Conceptual meaning	TESOL implication
Positive Emotion	Enjoyment, curiosity, and affective safety in literary engagement.	Supports confidence and willingness to participate.
Engagement	Behavioural, cognitive, emotional, social, and agentic involvement.	Sustains effortful reading, discussion, and production.
Relationships	Dialogic interaction, peer response, and shared interpretation.	Builds collaborative language use and classroom belonging.
Meaning	Connection between texts, self, culture, and social life.	Makes English learning personally and socially significant.
Accomplishment	Visible progress through interpretation, performance, writing, or adaptation.	Strengthens learner agency and linguistic confidence.
Literary Empathy	Perspective-taking through characters, voices, and narrative worlds.	Supports intercultural and ethical understanding.

Identity Formation	Reflection on self, voice, experience, and imagined futures.	Connects English learning with learner agency and self-awareness.
Global and Intercultural Understanding	Cultural differences and multiple viewpoints.	Supports global English and intercultural communicative competence.
Humanistic Growth	Recognition of learners and others as a whole person.	Rehumanizes TESOL beyond test performance.
Transformative Reflection	Critical examination of assumptions and perspectives.	Links literature-based TESOL with reflective change.

WOLBEP as Pedagogical Operationalization

The third conceptual finding is **WOLBEP**, or **Wellbeing-Oriented Literature-Based EFL Pedagogy**. WOLBEP translates PERMA-LIGHT into six recursive classroom stages: emotional engagement, narrative immersion, reflective meaning-making, dialogic interaction, transformative response, and flourishing reflection. The framework is consistent with engagement-oriented language pedagogy (Guo et al., 2024; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Oga-Baldwin, 2019), literature-based (Calafato, 2024; Hall, 2005; Paran, 2008), multimodal composing (Hafner & Ho, 2020; Jiang et al., 2022; Kessler & Marino, 2023), and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Formal analysis is preceded by learners' emotional engagement, which activates their curiosity, feeling, and personal connection. Narrative immersion engages learners by carefully considering plot, voice, character, setting, conflict, imagery, and theme within the literary world. Reflective meaning-making involves learners in connecting textual evidence to their own experiences, life, culture, and universal human significance. Dialogic interaction positions interpretation as a social process in which learners negotiate meanings and justify their claims. Transformative responses move learners from interpretation to creative, reflective, critical, or multimodal production. Ultimately, flourishing reflection requires learners to reflect on their learning in linguistic, emotional, social, ethical, and personal terms.

Table 2. WOLBEP pedagogical operationalization

Stage	Pedagogical function	Sample classroom enactment
Emotional Engagement	Activates curiosity, affect, and personal connection.	Use images, key quotations, music, questions, or predictions before reading.
Narrative Immersion	Builds deep engagement with the story, characters, language, and themes.	Read, listen, perform, annotate, or visualize key moments in the text.

Reflective Meaning-Making	Connects text to self, life, culture, and human meaning.	Use response journals, sentence frames, concept maps, and evidence-based reflection.
Dialogic Interaction	Supports collaborative meaning-making and intercultural dialogue.	Conduct paired discussion, group interpretation, debate, or literature circles.
Transformative Response	Turns interpretation into creative, reflective, or multimodal production.	Rewrite a scene, create a digital story, perform a monologue, or compose a reflective essay.
Flourishing Reflection	Makes growth, wellbeing, empathy, and language progress explicit.	Use reflection prompts on language learning, empathy, identity, resilience, and future action.

Implications for TESOL Curriculum, Teaching, Assessment, and Research

For curriculum design, Literary Flourishing suggests that literature should not be positioned only as optional enrichment after language objectives have been achieved. Instead, literary texts can be used as core resources for integrated language development, intercultural learning, reflective writing, speaking, multimodal production, and wellbeing-sensitive pedagogy (Calafato & Gudim, 2022; Hafner & Ho, 2020; Luukka, 2023). Curriculum designers can therefore select texts not only for linguistic level and genre but also for emotional resonance, cultural plurality, ethical complexity, and potential for dialogic response.

The framework transforms the teacher's role from text explainer to learning designer for educational purposes. Teachers facilitate emotional entry, guide narrative engagement, support evidence-based interpretation, structure dialogue, scaffold creative production, and make reflective processes transparent. Incorporating grammar, vocabulary, discourse, pronunciation, reading, writing, and speaking into meaningful literary experiences does not diminish linguistic rigour; rather, it enhances it (Carter, 2007; Hall, 2005; Paran, 2008).

WOLBEP recommends that literature-based TESOL assessments evaluate students' skills in comprehension, textual evidence, interpretive reasoning, language accuracy, communicative clarity, creativity, intercultural awareness, reflective depth, and multimodal design. Studies of digital multimodal composing, such as those published by (Hafner & Ho, 2020; Jiang et al., 2022), highlight the importance of examining compositional processes in conjunction with genre, language, and design features.

Feedback and assessment should therefore be seen as collaborative and interactive processes rather than just correction. Recent research on second language writing emphasizes the

importance of feedback literacy, student engagement with feedback, and integrating response practices with sociocultural, translingual, and global English perspectives (Crosthwaite et al., 2022; Lee-Goldman & Petruck, 2018).

For research, the framework invites empirical testing. Future studies can examine how WOLBEP affects vocabulary development, reading comprehension, speaking confidence, reflective writing, learner engagement, empathy, wellbeing, identity formation, and intercultural understanding. Design-based research, classroom action research, mixed-methods intervention studies, and longitudinal case studies would be particularly suitable because they can capture both language and human development outcomes.

5. DISCUSSION

Theoretical contribution and originality

This conceptual review proposes Literary Flourishing in TESOL as an interdisciplinary framework for humanizing literature-based English language education. The article responds to instrumental TESOL paradigms in which literature is often positioned as supplementary reading, cultural content, or a vehicle for vocabulary and comprehension practice. Its main contribution is the formulation of Literary Flourishing in TESOL as an original integrative construct that links literary engagement with linguistic development, emotional wellbeing, empathy, identity formation, intercultural understanding, resilience, and reflective agency. The article develops two connected conceptual contributions. First, the PERMA-LIGHT model extends the PERMA dimensions of wellbeing--positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment--into literary, humanistic, and transformative dimensions: literary empathy, identity formation, global and intercultural understanding, humanistic growth, and transformative reflection. Second, the article proposes WOLBEP, or Wellbeing-Oriented Literature-Based EFL Pedagogy, as a pedagogical operationalisation consisting of emotional engagement, narrative immersion, reflective meaning-making, dialogic interaction, transformative response, and flourishing reflection. Through analytical interpretation, this article demonstrates how literature-based EFL pedagogy can serve as a wellbeing-oriented pathway for curriculum design, teacher education, classroom assessment, and future empirical research in flourishing-oriented language education.

Pedagogical, curricular, and assessment implications

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Research implications and future directions

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6. CONCLUSION

This conceptual review proposed Literary Flourishing in TESOL as an integrative framework for rehumanizing literature-based English language education. The article argues that literature

should not be treated merely as supplementary reading material or as a vehicle for language practice. Literature can become a pedagogical medium through which learners develop linguistic competence and human flourishing together.

The PERMA-LIGHT model expands positive psychology into literature-based TESOL by linking positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment with literary empathy, identity formation, global and intercultural understanding, humanistic growth, and transformative reflection. The WOLBEP framework operationalises this model through emotional engagement, narrative immersion, reflective meaning-making, dialogic interaction, transformative response, and flourishing reflection.

The proposed solution involves integrating Literary Flourishing into TESOL curriculum design, teacher education, classroom assessment, and empirical research. Teachers can start by re-designing literature-based lessons to incorporate activities that link language learning with emotional engagement, interpretation, dialogue, creative responses, and reflective growth. The framework institutionally supports wellbeing-oriented, humanistic, and globally responsive TESOL curricula that prepare learners to know more English, as well as to become more reflective, empathetic, resilient, and meaningfully connected individuals.

DECLARATION OF THE GENERATIVE AI

The author utilised AI-assisted tools, including TRINKA, to support academic phrasing, reference mapping, and template-based formatting during the preparation of this manuscript. The author thoroughly reviewed and edited the output, assuming full responsibility for the final content, argumentation, citations, and references.

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